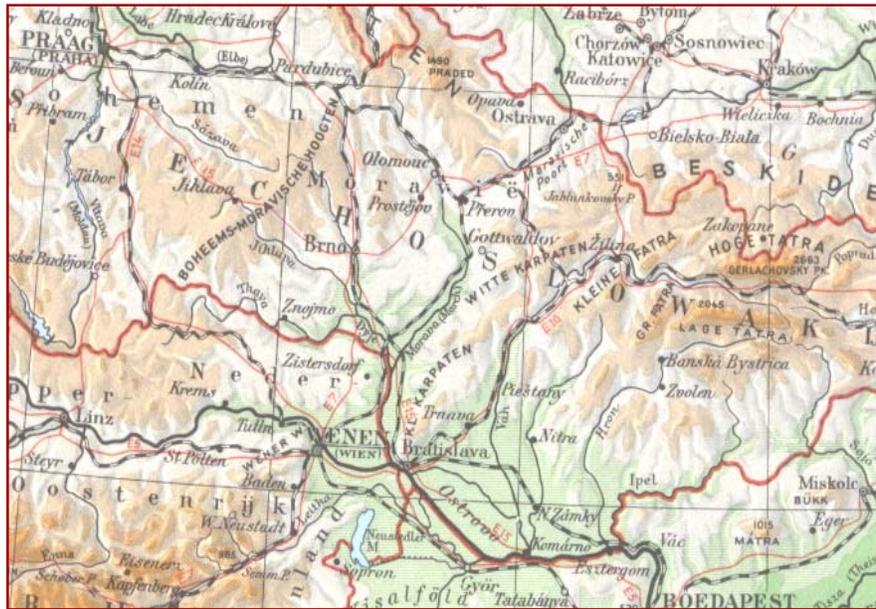


Central European Cross-roads:

Social Democracy and National Revolution in Bratislava (Pressburg), 1867-1921



Kruispunt in Midden Europa:

Sociaal-democratie en nationale revolutie
in Bratislava (Pressburg), 1867-1921

Pieter van Duin

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Sociaal-democratie en nationale revolutie in Bratislava (Pressburg),
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(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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Pieter Cornelis van Duin
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Promotoren: Prof.dr. A.F. Heerma van Voss
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For Zulinka

Preface

This study of social democracy and national revolution in multiethnic Bratislava (Pressburg) is partly a detailed analysis of the revolutionary events of 1918-1919 (chapters 5-8), partly an examination of the longer period 1867-1921 (chapters 2-4, 9). The latter is to provide a broader historical context to the relatively short period of revolutionary national-political change. The study thus combines two perspectives in terms of historical time, but it also combines two spatial dimensions – the microcosm of the city of Bratislava and the wider world of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the former Habsburg Empire. A third way in which the study aims to be ‘multidimensional’ is its attempt to integrate social, political, ethnocultural, and psychological aspects of the historical process. The short-term time perspective, roughly covering the period between October 1918 and March 1919, is largely based on primary sources, in particular newspapers. The longer-term perspective is based on an interpretative synthesis of what I consider the most important literature in the Slovak, Czech, German, English, and other languages, supplemented by primary source material of my own. I hope that my objective of integrating the ethnopolitical, social, and other aspects of the subject matter has been, at least in part, successful. Historians of East Central Europe, especially perhaps Western European social historians with their traditionally non-political focus, have to be aware that overlooking the significance of politics, the nation, and the state is about the worst mistake they could make when probing the history of the social democratic movement of this multiethnic region.

Students of East Central European history are usually faced with certain limits to their knowledge of the different regional languages and other, related deficiencies. I have perused primary and secondary sources in almost half a dozen languages, while in addition it was possible to consult the relatively large body of Hungarian, Czech, and Slovak historical publications in Western languages. Nevertheless, there may be certain imbalances in this study, for example with regard to my account of the evolution of the social democratic movement in pre-1918 Pressburg, since there is little material on the movement’s local Magyar element. However, the role of the Budapest leadership of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party – as well as the policies of the Hungarian authorities – is abundantly documented, and it would seem that the position of the Magyar social democrats in Pressburg was in line with the party leadership. Although the analysis of the role of the local Slovak and German social democrats predominates, chapter 9 also looks at the position of the Magyar social democrats, who after 1918 became part of a national minority in Slovakia. The position of the Germans deserves special attention. While both the Slovaks and the Germans were victims of the pre-1918 Magyarisation policy, only the Slovaks wholeheartedly supported the Czechoslovak national revolution of 1918-19. The Germans in Slovakia initially rejected the new state but their attitude gradually became more pragmatic (though it always remained critical), and in the long term their ethnocultural position improved under the new regime. Before 1918 the Germans were the dominant element in the Pressburg working-class movement, but like the Slovaks they were marginalised in Hungarian politics and society and subjected to the pressure of denationalisation. After 1918 they remained dominant in local labour politics and marginal in the wider society, while the Slovaks were elevated to a position of unprecedented social and political power. The Germans, indeed, occupied a sociologically interesting ambiguous position in local Pressburg society both before and after 1918. Immediately after the Czechoslovak occupation of the city the German social democrats assumed a wait-and-see attitude to the new regime, but this was interrupted by strong opposition in February 1919, the analysis of which is an important aspect of this study. The role of the German social democrats in both Hungarian and Czechoslovak history has too often been treated as a marginal subject by Slovak and Hungarian historians. This is a historiographical error, and therefore, but also because of its intrinsic sociohistorical interest, it deserves more serious

attention. An examination of the German social democratic perspective is important in order to attain a deeper understanding of the changing pattern of interethnic relations in prerevolutionary, revolutionary, as well as postrevolutionary Pressburg/Bratislava. Arguably, the Germans' politically marginal position and their fate as 'losers of history' lends a certain 'non-hegemonic objectivity' to their point of view in questions of social and ethnic relations. But on the other hand they were also imbued with a degree of cultural chauvinism, as was usual among many German-speakers in Central Europe.

As is the case with so many other studies in East Central European history, this book has to face the issue of the 'correct spelling' of controversial place-names and national-political terms. The spelling of 'Czechoslovakia', without a hyphen (as in 'Czecho-Slovakia'), was official usage during the entire period of existence of the 'First Czechoslovak Republic' of 1918-1938. I will use this form in all cases where reference is made to the state and its official institutions, or where the post-1918 context is neutral. In the case of quotations where the original spelling was 'Czecho-Slovak', this is retained. I also sometimes use this form with regard to the period before 1918, for example where the loose expression 'Czecho-Slovak cooperation' or 'Czecho-Slovak solidarity' is used (but not in the case of a stronger term like 'Czechoslovak movement'). After 1918 there were political groups and individuals in Slovakia who tended to use the form with the hyphen, especially during the first years of the Republic's existence. Slovak nationalists wanted to express by this that such a thing as a 'Czechoslovak nation' did not exist and that the Czechs and Slovaks – seen as two separate nations – should be equal partners in the common state, within which Slovakia should be accorded political-administrative autonomy. Other critics of Czechoslovak centralism and supporters of national autonomism, in particular the national minorities and their newspapers, often used the form with the hyphen as well (though not consistently), but after 1919 the official spelling 'Czechoslovak' was increasingly adopted. Last but not least, many present-day Slovak historians are using the form with the hyphen; their apparent wish to see the First Republic as a state of two equal nations leads to a mode of spelling which is arguably unhistorical (although this wish itself is not). As against this, figuring among the most convinced supporters of administrative and ethnopolitical 'Czechoslovakism' were the Slovak social democrats (already before 1918) and the 'Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party' established in December 1918. The original Czech Social Democratic Party was called 'Czechoslav' (*Československá*; after 1918 this became *Československá*, 'Czechoslovak'), expressing a broadly defined Czech ethnic perspective and 'expansionist' aspirations vis-à-vis the Slovaks, who were seen by leading Czech social democrats as a branch of the Czechoslav nation. Indeed, when after 1918 the Slovaks were absorbed into the Czech-dominated Social Democratic Party, it only had to change one letter in its official name.

The ethnic pluralism and social distance between different linguistic and national groups, both in pre-1918 Hungary and the Habsburg Empire and in the post-1918 Czechoslovak Republic, was a remarkable phenomenon despite all the social interaction that was going on as well. The extreme ethnolinguistic diversity of the pre-1918 Hungarian state, which starkly contradicted its aspiration to be a unitary Magyar national state, was illustrated by the existence of an enormous number of parallel place-names, for example different Magyar, Slovak, and German names for the various towns of 'Upper Hungary' (Slovakia). Although only the Magyar names had an official status, the German and Slovak names were more frequently used by the non-Magyar population. Thus, before 1919 Bratislava was known as 'Pozsony' in Magyar (the official Hungarian name), 'Pressburg' in German (the most widely used name), and 'Prešporok', 'Prešpurk', or 'Bratislava' (the name used by some Slovak patriots) in Slovak. In addition, during the revolutionary months of 1918-19 the new name 'Wilsonov' or 'Wilsonstadt' (after the American President) was proposed by some American Slovaks, which was supported by some of the non-Slovak Pressburgers, too. In March 1919, however, 'Bratislava' became the new official name of the city. It would be wearisome and impractical constantly to repeat the parallel names

of ‘Pressburg’, ‘Pozsony’, and ‘Bratislava.’ Therefore, I will use the name that is most appropriate in the given context. I will mostly use the old German name ‘Pressburg’, the most popular one and most generally used by a majority of Pressburg citizens, when discussing the period before March 1919, the new name ‘Bratislava’ for the period thereafter. Sometimes, especially during the period of transition, the two names are used alternately and alongside each other. The Magyar name ‘Pozsony’ I will only use when referring to official documents or quotations. Furthermore, the word ‘Hungarian’ has a state-political and territorial meaning, referring in the pre-1918 context to the multinational Kingdom of Hungary, ‘Historical Hungary’ which comprised all people and nationalities of the Hungarian state. ‘Magyar’, on the other hand, has a more specific ethnonational and linguistic meaning, referring to the dominant group of the ‘ethnic Hungarians’ and their language. In the Magyar language itself this distinction was not made, both denotations being referred to as *magyar*. But the Slovak language distinguished between the territorial-political *uhorský* (Hungarian) and the ethnic *maďarský* (Magyar), as did the German language between *ungarländisch* (Hungarian) and the ethnic *ungarisch*, *magyarisch*, or *madjarisch*. The Magyars’ attempted conflation of the two concepts lies at the heart of many of the problems probed in this study. Finally, when referring to the region or subregions of Central and Eastern Europe, I will alternately use the terms ‘Central Europe’, ‘East Central Europe’, or ‘Eastern Europe’, depending on the context or the argument of the moment. I do not believe that one of them is invariably better or should be standardised to the exclusion of the others, as is sometimes argued by certain authors. The truth is that the use of this type of geographical terminology has always been diverse and still varies a lot in the literature. There is no consensus on it, and perhaps it is not necessary to reach one.

I would like to thank all those who in one way or another have played a part in making this study possible, and who have helped by their comments or assistance to make it become what it finally turned out to be. I wish to mention the staff of the University Library, the Municipal Archive, and the Slovak National Archives in Bratislava; the staff of the *Verein für Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* and the Austrian National Library in Vienna; and the staff of the University Library in Leiden, the Netherlands. Without Zuzana Poláčková this study would never have been undertaken; without Lex Heerma van Voss and Hans Renner it would probably not have been completed the way it was. Of the historians and others whose active participation in endless debates has been especially useful, I would like to mention Natália Krajčovičová, Miro Kvasnička, Stanislav Sikora, Peter Zelenák, József Kiss, Slavomír Michálek, František Fundárek, and Jana Fraštická. I also want to thank my father Piet van Duin, my mother Titia van Duin, and my brother Thomas van Duin for the very useful assistance they have given on various occasions. Other persons whose help I highly appreciated are Jan Pieter Spreij, Ivo Poláček, and Marjolein Morée.

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Abbreviations

Note: for social and political movements and institutions I have mostly used the English translation, except in some cases where an original abbreviation is more or less standard. Where the English version is used, the original name is not always added.

CSR	Czechoslovak Republic (<i>Československá Republika, ČSR</i>)
CSSDP	Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party (Slovak: <i>Československá sociáldemokratická strana robotnícka</i>)
GWP	Hungarian General Workers' Party
HNC	Hungarian National Council
HSDP	Hungarian Social Democratic Party (Magyar: <i>Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt</i>)
KSČ	<i>Komunistická strana Československa</i> (Communist Party of Czechoslovakia)
NN	<i>Národné noviny</i>
NVP	Non-Voters' Party
OSČ	<i>Odborové sdružení československé</i> (Czechoslovak Trade Union Association: official Czech name of the social democratic trade union federation)
PJZ	<i>Pressburger Jüdische Zeitung</i>
PZ	<i>Pressburger Zeitung</i>
RN	<i>Robotnícke noviny</i>
SNA, MP	Slovak National Archives, Collection Minister Plenipotentiary etc.
SNA, PR	Slovak National Archives, Collection Police Administration etc.
SNA, SD	Slovak National Archives, Collection CSSDP
SNC	Slovak National Council
SNP	Slovak National Party
SPP	Slovak People's Party
VGA	<i>Verein für Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung</i> (Vienna)
VGA, P	<i>VGA Archives, Parteistellenarchiv</i>
WG	<i>Westungarischer Grenzbote</i>
WV	<i>Westungarische Volksstimme</i>

Part I: contexts, 1867-1918

Defining the issue

If the First World War was an unprecedented Armageddon in European history, the inauspicious beginning of the bloody twentieth century, the war's political consequences were at least as cataclysmic, especially in Russia and Central Europe. While Russia had to experience the coming to power of the Bolsheviks in 1917, Central Europe entered a period of national revolution and state-political fragmentation following the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in October-November 1918, which led to the formation of a number of national or quasi-national successor states including Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the territorially much reduced republics of Austria and Hungary. The process of state-political transformation in East Central Europe was accompanied by the rise of the ideology of national 'self-determination', significant shifts in the regional interethnic power structure, and waves of mutual hostility between different ethnonational groups.¹ The proclamation of the Czechoslovak Republic on 28 October 1918 soon led to new outbursts of ethnic hatred and political violence between Czechs and Germans in Bohemia and Moravia and between Slovaks and Magyars (ethnic Hungarians) in 'Upper Hungary'/Slovakia. This mutual ethnopolitical hostility was also expressed by various social democratic parties representing different national groups. Already before 1914 relations between different national social democratic organisations in the Habsburg Empire had become increasingly antagonistic, although in theory there continued to exist an all-Austrian party in the 'Cisleithanian' part of the Dual Monarchy and an all-Hungarian party in multinational 'Historical Hungary'. Of course, the illusion of 'socialist internationalism' had been one of the first victims of the outbreak of total war in 1914, and within the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire the war led to further tensions between the different social democratic party groups and a final disintegration of the Austrian and Hungarian umbrella organisations in 1918. With the Czech social democrats having already broken away from the all-Austrian party before the war, and the Slovaks withdrawing from the Hungarian party soon after it, the two Slav social democratic 'brothers' formed a united 'Czechoslovak' party in December 1918. The German and Magyar social democrats in a multinational city like Pressburg, who after 1918 found themselves representing national-minority workers in the new Czechoslovak Republic, refused to join the Czechoslovak party and maintained a separate party that until the end of 1920 constituted a loose political unity of the two ethnic groups. The extent to which national antagonism disrupted the social democratic movement in the former Habsburg Monarchy during 1918-19, was almost a phenomenon *sui generis*.

The importance of the 'national question' and ethnic nationalism for the labour history of East Central and South East Europe – and, of course, for labour history in general – has even today hardly begun to be appreciated by Western European historians writing on 'international' or 'European' labour history, even when other social factors and identities than class, notably

¹ See for the revolution, particularly its sociopolitical aspects, F.L. Carsten, *Revolution in Central Europe 1918-1919*, Berkeley 1972; Gábor Vermes, 'The October Revolution in Hungary: From Károlyi to Kun', in *Hungary in Revolution, 1918-19*, ed. Iván Völgyes, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1971, pp. 31-60; for its national- and state-political consequences, Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars*, Seattle 1977; for the specific character and meaning of the revolution in Slovakia, Ismo Nurmi, *Slovakia - a Playground for Nationalism and National Identity. Manifestations of the National Identity of the Slovaks 1918-1920*, Helsinki 1999; also Dušan Kováč, 'Rok 1918 v slovenských dejinách', in *Českoslovenství - středoevropanství - evropanství. Úvahy, svědectví a fakta k 80. výročí vzniku Československa 1918-1998*, ed. Stanislava Kučerová, Brno, 1998, pp. 106-15.

ethnicity, are integrated into the wider picture as well.² This is partly because these regions, and the nations living in them, are often overlooked by labour historians who are mainly acquainted with the ‘core regions’ of the Western world, and because language barriers are a formidable obstacle to integrating ‘Eastern European’ labour history into a broader, truly ‘international’ and multifaceted comparative perspective.³ Eastern European labour historians themselves have perhaps insufficiently been in touch with international historiographical developments, and the problem is made worse by the fact that, today, the number of such historians is in fact very small. In part, however, the limited attention paid to the question of ethnic nationalism in labour history also has to do with the fact that, for Western European historians, its significance seems difficult to understand, hailing as they do from societies where it usually did not play a decisive historical role – in stark contrast to historians from Central and Eastern Europe, who would never fail to grasp and stress the fundamental importance of the national question for the social and labour history of their regions.⁴ In the field of nationalism studies, of course, the picture is somewhat different, but to date its overlapping with the field of social and labour history has been rather limited. A major objective of this study is to help extend the historiographical segment where the study of nation and ethnicity and the study of labour history overlap. An attempt is made to bring together in one analysis issues like ethnic stratification, national oppression, ethnic aspects of labour organization, and the rise of national antagonisms within the social democratic movement. My understanding of the meaning of nation and nationalism – in particular as far as the concrete problematic of this study is concerned – is informed especially by those social scientists and historians of nationalism who have stressed the link between the older phenomenon of ethnic and cultural identity and the modern phenomenon of nationalism, i.e., the politicised concept of the ethnic nation. In my view it is difficult to take a different approach when dealing with a region like East Central Europe, where particularly among small nations like the Slovaks and the Czechs nationalism began as an ethnocultural movement, with cultural nationalism gradually developing into political nationalism, which also influenced a mass political movement like social democracy.

Of the historians and social scientists who, in my view, have most convincingly explained the rise of nationalism and the process of nation-building in Central and Eastern Europe – the region to which I want to confine myself when making these brief general observations on nationalism⁵ – I want to mention in particular Anthony D. Smith, Miroslav Hroch, and Karl W. Deutsch, all of whom have stressed the ‘objective’ reality of the cultural and ethnic nation (notably of language, the principal basis of ethnic and national identity in this part of Europe), as

² See, e.g., Marcel van der Linden and Lex Heerma van Voss, ‘Introduction’, in *Class and Other Identities. Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Writing of European Labour History*, eds Lex Heerma van Voss and Marcel van der Linden, Oxford, 2002, esp. p. 21, where ‘nation’ as a sociopolitical factor, or an ‘alternative’ identity to class, is briefly mentioned but not systematically examined.

³ See however *The Formation of Labour Movements 1870-1914. An International Perspective*, eds Marcel van der Linden and Jürgen Rojahn, 2 vols, Leiden, 1990, in particular Jiří Kořalka in collaboration with Berthold Unfried, ‘The Czech Workers’ Movement in the Hapsburg Empire’, pp. 321-46; Keith Hitchins, ‘Hungary’, pp. 347-66; Keith Hitchins, ‘Rumania’, pp. 369-92; Mira Bogdanović, ‘Serbia’, pp. 421-38. In this work contributions on the labour movement among the Slovaks and the non-Serb nationalities of the former Yugoslavia – the Croats, Slovenes, and others – are unfortunately not included.

⁴ It must be feared that this contrast in terms of ‘sensitivity to the national question’ helps to perpetuate the relatively limited degree of historiographic communication and coordination between historians from ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ Europe.

⁵ I do not want to engage in a general theoretical discussion of ‘the origins and meaning of nationalism’ detached from the concrete historical context I am concerned with at this place. This is not relevant for the purpose of this study, which tries to describe how, and explain why, national consciousness and national aspirations were a principal factor in the evolution of the social democratic movement in Slovakia, Hungary, and East Central Europe; within this context some interpretive perspectives are examined. In fact, it is a legitimate question how far a ‘theoretical’ treatment of ‘nationalism’ in general is useful at all.

against the primacy of a ‘constructed’ reality (an ‘imagined community’ created by nationalist ideologists) propounded by a ‘subjectivist’ school of researchers, without denying the importance of these ideologists. In addition, Otto Bauer should be mentioned, an important contemporary thinker on the national problems faced by the social democratic movement in Austria-Hungary. Smith has pointed to the long-term survival of ethnic communities with a ‘distinctive shared culture’, which were subsequently, mostly during the nineteenth century, ‘politicised’, i.e., turned into political communities and modern nations by the agitation of a successful nationalist intelligentsia. He refers, *inter alia*, to the example of the Slovaks, who during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century were merely an ethnic community, or a group of akin ethnic communities, and who initially possessed little sense of political community and solidarity, which had to be developed by an educated class who could ‘communicate it to other strata and regions in the community’. What followed was ethnic mobilisation and struggle to defend the Slovak language and nationality, in this case against the dominant Magyars and the Hungarian ruling class.⁶ Hroch stresses that nationalism – the political movement armed with the concept, the ‘imagination’, of the national community – was in fact not the ‘primary formative factor’ and the nation not just ‘derivative’. On the contrary, he argues that the nation is a ‘constituent of social reality of historical origin’, and nationalism a phenomenon derived from the existence of this nation. But Hroch understands very well that what remains to be explained is the transformation of the ‘pre-nationalist’ ethnic nation into the nationalist, the modern political or ‘politicised’ nation, and this is precisely what he has been foremost in doing. He has shown the different ways in which the national intelligentsia of various small European nations has created, through a process of ‘national agitation’ and increasing ethnic mobilisation, ‘modern national consciousness’, which could assume different ideological forms and which was the precondition to the rise of mass national movements and modern nations. He also analysed the social composition of different national movements, especially of their leading groups during the first stages of national agitation. In the Slovak case, for example, the national intelligentsia included a significant clerical element during the nineteenth century, especially Protestant pastors, while in addition to this ‘patriotic clergy’ other nationalist groups were Slovak students and teachers and, increasingly, a secular petty bourgeoisie of lawyers, physicians, and small entrepreneurs.⁷ As chapter four of this study will show, the Slovak social democrats were another important sociopolitical group agitating for the defence of Slovak cultural and national identity.

Despite his critical attitude to the phenomenon, Ernest Gellner, another analyst of nationalism of Czech origin, likewise stresses its objective and ‘functional’ character, the fact that it is, or was, all but universal, an inevitable part of the modernising world. He argues that the nation is based on shared culture, which means ‘a system of ideas and signs and associations and

⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford 1986, pp. 26-8, 30, 154-7 for the quotations and arguments; see for a similar perspective J. Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism*, Chapel Hill 1982; see Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*, 2nd edn, London 1983 for an attempt to make sense of different theoretical perspectives on ‘nationalism’.

⁷ Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe. A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 3, 98-106; see for the Slovak intelligentsia Ján Hučko, *Sociálne zloženie a pôvod slovenskej obrodeneckej inteligencie*, Bratislava 1974. Hugh Seton-Watson has argued that in Eastern Europe the intelligentsia, both secular and clerical, constituted a special social stratum that played its own, highly important, political role, the Slovak clergy being a good example of this; see Hugh Seton-Watson, “‘Intelligentsia’ und Nationalismus in Osteuropa 1848-1918”, *Historische Zeitschrift* 195, 1962, p. 334 for the Slovaks. In this sense, of course, the ‘ideological constructionism’ – but even more the cultural, political, and practical organisational role – of ethnic nationalists was crucial, and many of them, especially those who stressed the ‘folkish’ element and the importance of cultural and educational advancement of the people, had a profound influence on small-nation socialists as well. However, they could never have been successful without the existence of real cultural and historical foundations to their agitation work.

ways of behaving and communicating’, and that ‘nations are the artefacts of men’s convictions and loyalties and solidarities’.⁸ This general insight may also help us to understand that, in the age of ‘mature’ nationalism of the early twentieth century, the distinction between ‘civic-political nations’ (those of Western Europe) and ‘ethnic-cultural nations’ (like Germany or the small East Central European nations) was of diminishing importance. Nations with a political-revolutionary origin like France incorporated linguistic and cultural identity, in some circles even racial notions, as part of their self-perception, while nations with an ‘ethnic-nationalist’ origin like the Czechs incorporated historical and political notions – such as the idea that they were the successors to the medieval Bohemian Kingdom and to the freedom-loving Hussites – into their national self-definition. There can be no doubt that such ethno-ideological notions, hallmarks of the imagined community, were of great significance in the formation of nationalist movements and modern nations – or rather of their special ideological character and historicising self-image. However, this study is not primarily concerned with the origins of nationalist ideology or the national idea, but with examining the ‘objective’ historical context and ‘hard facts’ of the ethnolinguistic antagonisms between different national groups making up the multiethnic social democratic movement of Austria-Hungary, especially in the early twentieth century. What was most important in this context was the difference between dominant, powerful nations and subordinate, relatively powerless nations, and the ways in which this interethnic political constellation influenced the development of the working-class movement. When a series of national revolutions occurred at the end of the First World War in 1918, leading to a sudden and shocking change in the interethnic power structure of Central Europe, this was followed by an unprecedented amount of highly ‘subjective’ nationalist and demagogic rhetoric, also on the part of different social democratic parties. Indeed, the analysis of this biased and moralistic political rhetoric is one of the principal subjects of this study of national revolution. But this does not change the fact that what was finally most important, was the real, ‘objective’ character of historical change, the post-war reality of the transformation of power structure, of the pattern of interethnic relations, and, above all, of the status of different national languages.

Hroch, who is after all (or had to be in communist Czechoslovakia) a Marxist of sorts, has criticised Karl W. Deutsch’s interpretation of nationalism – which argues that nationalism is primarily an issue of intensification, differentiation, and transformation of social communication – for underestimating the role of class in the formation of modern nations; otherwise he seems to value, at least implicitly, Deutsch’s approach.⁹ Hroch observes that in industrialised areas a process of national disintegration, of assimilation of minority or immigrant workers, tended to prevail, frustrating the efforts of national movements – including, it should be noted, national-minority social democrats – to protect the language and identity of ethnically non-dominant workers. But Deutsch did not ignore the question of social class and national assimilation, paying attention, for example, to national assimilation in smaller regions, usually the result of changes in the use and position of specific languages and of new forms of social communication.¹⁰ The question of language, of the social and political position of different languages in multiethnic regions, was of paramount importance for the rise of nationalism, resistance to national assimilation, and national conflict in East Central Europe, and this, of course, is what makes

⁸ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford 1983, p. 7.

⁹ Hroch, *Social Preconditions*, pp. 184-5; Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication. An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality*, Cambridge, Mass., 1966.

¹⁰ Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication*, p. 163. Although Deutsch refers to Otto Bauer (see pp. 19-20), he does not mention Bauer’s (indeed little-known) analysis of national assimilation among the working class, only his concept of the nation as a ‘community of fate’, i.e., of character and culture, which he criticises for its alleged failure to explain the nation’s origin (in language and communication). However, for Bauer, who was both a Marxist and a Central European, to understand the nation as a historical community of language and communication was a matter of course.

Deutsch's approach to the problem particularly relevant for historians and analysts of this region. In Deutsch's sociological terminology, nationality is the alignment of large numbers of individuals and different social groups through channels of social communication. From this perspective it is easy to understand that, if a multiethnic state or society experiences large-scale economic and social change, a process of intensification and 'homogenisation' of social communication occurs, leading to the assimilation of many of those who belong to non-dominant language groups. This does not mean that, in any given historical situation, the latter necessarily submit to this tendency without resistance. Especially where the process of economic and social change was not powerful enough to assimilate a significantly larger number of people than the minorities' middle classes, as was the case in Hungary, the 'plebeian masses' of the minority nations, even if led only by small groups of nationalists, might pose an insuperable obstacle to the programme of national assimilation.

The case of Hungary during the period 1867-1918 provides a notable example of an oppressive 'official' nationalism (nationalism from above, imposed by the state) entering into confrontation with a number of defensive counter-nationalisms, viz., the national movements of the Slovaks, the Romanians, the Serbs, and others. The fact that Hungarian (Magyar) nationalism itself retained some of its defensive anti-Austrian flavour did not change this situation, but rather strengthened the Magyars' resolve to fight their national war on two fronts – against the Austrian dominance in the Dual Monarchy on the one hand, against the aspirations of the subordinate nationalities in Hungary on the other. The term 'official nationalism' was coined by Hugh Seton-Watson, an important historian of modern Eastern Europe,¹¹ and is also used by Benedict Anderson, whose concept of 'imagined community' has become popular with all those who are keen to stress the subjectivist, 'constructionist', ideological character of nationalism and the process of nation-building.¹² But more interesting than looking at the general distinction between 'subjectivist' and 'objectivist' approaches to nationalism, or even the difference between 'official' and 'defensive' nationalism, is the posing of sociohistorical questions relating to concrete examples of national oppression, national assimilation, and the rise of nationalism among the working class. In this regard the observations of Otto Bauer are still of some importance, especially as far as the historical national problems of Austria-Hungary are concerned, the multinational state that deserves perhaps more attention from social and labour historians. Some of Bauer's ideas are discussed in greater detail in chapter four. They are concerned with the social, cultural, and psychological meaning of the nation in Central Europe, the problem of working-class nationalism and national divisions, and the economic, political, and cultural conditions promoting or discouraging national assimilation among different sections of the multiethnic working class. Bauer noted, among other things, that the crucial group of skilled workers, the pioneers of labour organisation, of workers' education and socialist literacy, were also the ones who were most attached to their national language and national culture. The case of the Czech workers and the Czech social democrats, not only in the Czech heartlands of Bohemia and Moravia, but also in Vienna with its large Czech immigrant working class, was for Bauer the

¹¹ Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States. An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*, London 1977, p. 148 for 'official nationalism', pp. 157-69 for the Hungarians/Magyars, pp. 169-74 for the Slovaks.

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1991, pp. 101-10 for his discussion of Hungarian 'official nationalism', which was partly rooted in the Magyar opposition to the Habsburgs however, not only in the desire to denationalise the non-Magyar nationalities. Remarkably enough, Karl W. Deutsch is not mentioned in Anderson's book at all, nor other proponents of a more 'objectivist' approach to nationalism such as Hroch. The need for an analysis of real social, political, and cultural positions of ethnic groups, not just of nationalist 'myth-making', is especially relevant in the context of studies that are concerned with conflicts between 'mature actors' like governments and social and political mass movements (including both nationalist and social democratic movements).

most significant example of this, and he had few illusions about the willingness of Czech organised workers – in contrast, perhaps, to some groups of unskilled and unorganised workers in predominantly German cities like Vienna – to abandon their national language and identity and to assimilate to the dominant German language and nationality.¹³ What we must understand above all is that in East Central Europe, with its patterns of national inequality and its complicated, often antagonistic interethnic relations, national feeling was the result of – and part of – linguistic and cultural identity and even popular historical consciousness. Leading socialists and organised skilled workers participated in the national culture of their ethnic groups and regarded national inequality as another form (in addition to class exploitation) of social oppression. This is why many convinced socialists could also be ‘progressive nationalists’, especially those belonging to the small and weaker nations of Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time, it was difficult for socialists belonging to the dominant nations, particularly the Germans and the Magyars, to abandon the idea that their nations were superior in terms of cultural and social development. Although he was in many ways more sensitive and intelligent than many of his German comrades, this also applied to Otto Bauer, who relished the idea of the great historical role and cultural importance of the German nation.

Otto Bauer, Austrian social democratic leader, renowned ‘Austro-Marxist’ theoretician (not least with regard to the national question), and from November 1918 foreign minister of the ‘Republic of German Austria’, warned the Czechs on 4 December 1918 that if they went too far in their expansionist policy and hostile behaviour towards the Germans of Bohemia and Moravia, they might provoke a deep historical resentment among ‘the great German nation of 70 million people’ by whom they were surrounded on three sides and who might want to take revenge ‘in the future’.¹⁴ Bauer, whose views sometimes had a prophetic quality, was nevertheless the first Austrian social democratic leader who had unreservedly accepted the right to national self-determination of the Slav nations, but he demanded the same right for the Austrian and Bohemian Germans. After the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy, the Austrian social democrats became the leading political force in the Austrian republican government and called for *Anschluss* of the ethnic-German territory to the new republican and democratic Germany. They also claimed Austrian sovereignty over the ethnic-German areas in what became Czechoslovakia, but were unable to enforce this demand. Meanwhile, the Hungarian social democrats had similarly become a prominent factor in the post-Habsburg government of Hungary led by Count Mihály Károlyi. Like their ‘bourgeois-democratic’ allies in the new government and the overwhelming majority of Magyars of all social classes, they wanted to maintain the territorial integrity of ‘Historical Hungary’, i.e., the old Hungarian Kingdom also known as the ‘Lands of the Crown of St Stephen’. The political outlook of the Hungarian social democrats with regard to the national question was less realistic than that of the Austrian social democrats; they did not want to go further than granting minority rights or a form of cultural autonomy to the non-Magyar nationalities, including the Slovaks, within a territorially intact greater Hungary. At an Extraordinary Congress of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party in Budapest on 13 October 1918, the Hungarians tried to persuade non-Magyar delegates to sign a Party Manifesto supporting the territorial integrity of a future democratic Hungary that would guarantee national-minority rights. The Slovak and other non-Magyar social democrats refused to do this, because they had already passed the stage where they could be satisfied with promises about autonomy given by Magyar politicians. The Slovaks actually did not even bother to attend the congress or to

¹³ Otto Bauer, ‘Die Bedingungen der nationalen Assimilation’, *Der Kampf* 5, no. 6, March 1912, pp. 246-63; see also Otto Bauer, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie*, Vienna 1907.

¹⁴ ‘Provisorische Nationalversammlung für Deutschösterreich. Stenographisches Protokoll zur 7. Sitzung (Berichterstattung). Wien, 4. Dezember 1918... Staatssekretär Dr. Bauer’, in *Aussenpolitische Dokumente der Republik Österreich 1918-1938 (ADÖ). 1. Selbstbestimmung der Republik: 21. Oktober 1918 bis 14. März 1919*, eds Klaus Koch, Walter Rauscher, and Arnold Suppan, Vienna, 1993, document 65, p. 252.

be officially represented at it; only an ‘unofficial’ Slovak delegate (one not representing the official Slovak Party Committee) from the heavily Magyarised city of Košice attended the Congress, and even he refused to support the Hungarian Party Manifesto. The Slovak social democratic newspaper *Robotnícke noviny* (Worker News) explained that the moment had come for the Slovak social democrats to discuss the future of the Slovak nation with the other Slovak political parties, and that only the Slovak National Council (then in the process of formation) could rightfully speak for the Slovak nation and its aspirations. It was one of the decisive moments in the final parting of the ways of the Magyar and Slovak social democratic movements.¹⁵ By this time the Slovak social democrats were openly coming out in support of the creation of an independent Czechoslovak state and were heavily leaning on the Czech (‘Czechoslav’) Social Democratic Party, by whom they were effectively absorbed in December 1918. The new Czechoslovak party was a loyal state-supporting political force, and it proved impossible to reconcile its orientation with that of the German and Magyar social democrats, who always kept a highly critical attitude to the Czechoslovak Republic.

The dramatic transformation of the interethnic power structure in Central Europe and its effects on the social democratic movement can be studied particularly well when looking at what happened at the local level. In this connection the city of Pressburg (Bratislava) is a significant case in point.¹⁶ The events in Pressburg during the last few months of 1918 and the first months of 1919 provide crucial information for deepening our understanding of the complex pattern of relations between different national groups and different social democratic organisations in Central Europe, particularly in the urban multiethnic context. The Pressburg social democratic movement, especially its ethnic-German component, played a major part in the unfolding of events in the city, which was occupied by Czechoslovak forces only during the first days of January 1919, and which experienced the following month a general strike led by the German and Magyar social democrats. Pressburg was an old multiethnic city located at the crossroad of three ethnolinguistic regions (German, Slovak, and Magyar) in the northwestern part of the Kingdom of Hungary, and only at a small distance from the Habsburg imperial metropolis Vienna. Traditionally, the German-speaking population was the dominant social, economic, and cultural element in the city, but by 1900 there were a growing number of Magyar-speakers as well as a substantial number of Slovaks. According to the Hungarian census of 1910 (notorious for its tendency to inflate the proportion of Magyars in the country), German-speakers – probably including the majority of the city’s considerable Jewish community that made up more than ten percent of the total population – represented about forty-two percent of Pressburg’s 78,223 inhabitants, Magyar-speakers forty percent, Slovak-speakers some fifteen percent.¹⁷ Although the policy of ‘Magyarisation’ was implemented by all possible means, the atmosphere in the city was one of small-scale cosmopolitanism, with a population that was accustomed to a multilingual and multiethnic microcosm. At the same time, however, nationalism among the different nationalities was on the rise, not only among the dominant Magyars, but also among the Slovaks and some of the Germans. It can be argued that Pressburg, although a smaller city than Vienna or Budapest, was sociologically even more interesting and actually more complexly structured than its larger Austro-Hungarian sister-cities. Whereas Vienna and Budapest, despite their heterogeneous

¹⁵ *Robotnícke noviny* (RN), 17 October 1918; see also Vladimír Lehotský, ‘Prvá svetová vojna (1914-1918)’, in *Dejiny Bratislavy*, eds Darina Lehotská and Ján Pleva, Bratislava, 1966, p. 326; Pavel Hapák, ‘Robotnícke hnutie a otázka rozpadu Uhorska’, in *Dejiny Slovenska IV (od konca 19. stor. do roku 1918)*, ed. Pavel Hapák, Bratislava, 1986, p. 475 ff.

¹⁶ For an interesting essay on Bratislava and its different historical names in the German, Magyar, and Slovak languages, see Ľubomír Lipták, ‘Bratislava as the Capital of Slovakia’, in Ľubomír Lipták, *Changes of Changes: Society and Politics in Slovakia in the 20th Century*, Bratislava 2002, esp. p. 95.

¹⁷ Dušan Provozník, ‘V prvom desaťročí v ČSR’, in *Dejiny Bratislavy*, eds D. Lehotská and J. Pleva, p. 350; see chapter three for further statistical data and analyses.

population, were more distinctly dominated by the German and Magyar nationality respectively, Pressburg had a more intricate 'trinational' character and a more subtle social equilibrium between the three major ethnocultural groups. While the Magyars were dominant politically and the local Germans economically, the Slovaks constituted a sizeable proportion of the working class. All groups were involved in a diffuse struggle over ethnic and social positions in the city, and over the question of whose culture was to dominate it now and in the future.

The social democratic movement in Pressburg was the most important in early twentieth-century Hungary after that of the metropolis Budapest, which contained about half of all organised social democratic workers in the country.¹⁸ While the classical German skilled-worker element formed the backbone of the labour movement in Pressburg, there was also an increasing participation of Magyar and Slovak workers and of social democratic leaders from the non-German nationalities. From the mid-1890s there gradually emerged a regional 'West Hungarian' Social Democratic Party organisation centred on Pressburg, which enjoyed a degree of autonomy from the Budapest headquarters; by the mid-1900s it had assumed a distinct organisational form and began to hold its own regional conferences. In the West Hungarian party German-speakers, who constituted a major element of the population not only in the city of Pressburg but in four western counties (Pressburg/Pozsony, Wieselburg/Moson, Ödenburg/Sopron, and Eisenburg/Vas) bordering on Austria, played a leading role. Arguably, this made it easier for both the Germans and the Slovaks in the Pressburg social democratic movement to withstand, at least to some degree, the pressure of Magyarisation, which in various ways was brought to bear also on the organisations and institutions of the local labour movement, both by the local Hungarian authorities and by the predominantly Magyar party leadership in Budapest. Simultaneous with the consolidation of the West Hungarian party organisation, a separate 'Slovak Nationality Committee' was formed in 1904 by disaffected Slovak social democrats who wanted to intensify the organisational and propaganda efforts among the relatively neglected Slovak working class, and who were determined to launch a permanent Slovak social democratic newspaper, an undertaking that the Budapest party leadership – who were in control of the party's finances – had thus far not been showing much enthusiasm for. This lack of support was one reason why the Slovaks decided after 1900 to choose Pressburg instead of Budapest as their political and organisational centre. The proximity of Vienna, whose local Czech social democratic movement gave indispensable financial and political support to the Slovaks, no doubt played a crucial role in this decision, but in addition the somewhat different social atmosphere of Pressburg, and the different ethnic composition of the Pressburg labour movement compared with Budapest, must have been important reasons for taking this step as well. In 1905 the Slovak Committee in Pressburg even tried to establish a separate Slovak Social Democratic Party on the Czech autonomist model. But for financial and other reasons this step proved too ambitious and the Slovaks had to content themselves with their special Nationality Committee, which seems to have been tolerated by the Hungarian party to forestall a more serious separatist crisis.

In Budapest the tendency of assimilating Slovak, German, and other non-Magyar trade unionists and party members was much stronger than in 'German-dominated' Pressburg,¹⁹ although a small number of Slovak and other minority-worker societies, especially for cultural and social purposes, continued to exist in the Hungarian capital as well. While the Hungarian party leadership paid lip-service to the objective of interethnic solidarity, national equality, and

¹⁸ Miloš Gosiorovský, *Dejiny slovenského robotníckeho hnutia (1848-1918)*, Bratislava 1958, p. 153.

¹⁹ The image of Pressburg as a city with a 'German spirit' was widespread in Budapest and caused the Hungarian parliament to have its doubts on the wisdom of supporting the project of a second railway line between Pressburg and Vienna, which might strengthen the German cultural influence of Vienna and the German character of Pressburg and weaken the position of Magyardom; see on this Eleónora Babejová, 'Obraz Bratislavy v diskusii uhorského parlamentu o elektrickej dráhe do Viedne', *Historický časopis* 51, no. 1, 2003, pp. 101-12.

non-Magyar minority rights, there was in reality only limited support for autonomous non-Magyar social democratic activities. Indeed, sometimes it was openly admitted that the working-class movement was a ‘school of Magyarisation’ and assimilation of the other nationalities, a development that was seen by some as inevitable or even desirable.²⁰ But even among the German minority, which was more dispersed, less geographically concentrated than the other nationalities (apart from the Jews), there was a growing if limited number of people who wanted to resist the process of Magyarisation and to keep their own cultural identity. Some of them, including some Pressburg Social Democrats, also showed occasional sympathy for the national aspirations of the other non-Magyar minorities. Nevertheless, many Germans – but also Slovaks, Croats, Serbs, Romanians, and, perhaps most of all, Hungarian Jews – more or less accepted the necessity of (at least a degree of) assimilation to Magyarism as a precondition for improving their chances of upward social mobility in Hungarian society, particularly in the urban centres. However, in some Hungarian cities, especially where Germans, Slovaks or others managed to keep their hold on important social and economic positions, the pressure of Magyarisation was somewhat less effective and the tendency or ability to resist stronger. Pressburg, thanks to its sizeable German population and, perhaps, the proximity of Vienna, was one of these cities, even if the statistical proportion of Magyar-speakers was constantly growing and the mode of ‘resistance’ usually far from spectacular. This does not mean that the non-Magyar population of Pressburg or other multiethnic Hungarian cities did not possess a sense of Hungarian patriotism. On the contrary, traditional Hungarian patriotism, with its historical, inclusive, supra-ethnic, state-political connotations, was a notable feature of social and political attitudes in a city like Pressburg. But both Slovaks and Germans tended to combine – and some of them increasingly to replace – this with a consciousness of their own ethnic and cultural identity. Indeed, the more Hungarian patriotism had become an ethnic-Magyar nationalism, the more it had become intolerant and chauvinistic, the less it could rely on the undisputed loyalty of the non-Magyar ethnolinguistic population groups.

The fact that the structure of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party, although heavily focused on Budapest, allowed after 1900 for the existence of relatively autonomous regional organisations and Nationality Committees, facilitated in combination with the social and cultural preponderance of the German element in Pressburg the defence and building of ethnic positions in the city’s labour movement. If this held true for the Germans, it must to some extent also have applied to the Slovaks, despite all the pressure of Magyarisation. It is therefore a plausible hypothesis that, in a city like Pressburg, a national group with a weak sociopolitical position like the Slovaks could benefit from the strong position of the Germans in that, by being part of the German-dominated multiethnic labour movement and by creating Slovak-language islands in organisations like the Workers’ Educational Society, they could more successfully resist policies of denationalisation. Thus, Pressburg’s trinational pattern of interethnic dynamics also helped to shape the history of the local social democratic movement. Even if many Pressburg Germans, like the politically dominant Magyars, tended to look down upon the ‘primitive’ Slovaks, the presence of independent German employers and of a German-dominated labour movement some of whose leaders were sensitive to ethnic issues were factors making life somewhat easier for the Slovaks from a national point of view. Indeed, the cultural orientation of Pressburg’s German labour movement towards Vienna rather than Budapest, evidence of its reluctance to accept certain Magyarisation policies and complete Magyar hegemony in the Hungarian Social Democratic Party, and a degree of understanding for the national-cultural aspirations of the Slovaks were all factors setting the Pressburg social democratic movement somewhat apart from

²⁰ Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, p. 222.

the rest of Hungary.²¹ It meant that the pattern and atmosphere of ethno-political relations within the social democratic movement of trinational Pressburg had its own special flavour, as it was more difficult than elsewhere for one group to dominate the others. This relative openness and ‘multiculturalism’ in terms of interethnic power structure may have made the Pressburg movement unique in Hungary, or at least significantly different from many other cities including Budapest. But at the same time there was unmistakably also a degree of friction and mutual antagonism between the different national groups making up Pressburg’s social democracy. This was expressed in the form of increasing Slovak organisational separatism, a lack of interest, perhaps even fear, among local Magyar and German social democratic leaders actively to support the mobilisation of Slovak workers by means of their own Slovak-language press and propaganda (thereby strengthening the impression of the Slovaks that the party leaders were neglecting them), and a growing tendency among different social democratic groups, especially the Slovaks, to seek cooperation with democratic middle-class groups of their own nationality when addressing issues of ethnocultural and national importance. For the relatively weak Slovak social democrats the process of increasing national differentiation and political regrouping also meant the need to seek a closer alliance with the much stronger Czech social democrats, who around 1910 gained a virtually independent status within the Austrian social democratic movement even in the field of trade unionism. For the German social democrats in Pressburg and the rest of Hungary it similarly meant a growing interest in issues of German cultural autonomy and ethnic self-preservation, although in contrast to the Slovaks most of them remained loyal to the Hungarian State even during the last months of 1918. The Magyar social democrats in Pressburg – who unlike the Germans and the Slovaks typically did not have their own local newspaper before 1919 – seem to have felt most closely linked to the Hungarian party leadership in Budapest. Some of them tended to support the Hungarian fatherland as late as 1919, that is, until the start of the ‘White Terror’ in August that year. The general hypothesis underlying this study is that the history of social democracy in Pressburg, both before, during, and after the period of national revolution, was shaped by a contradictory dynamics of interethnic coexistence and cooperation on the one hand, and increasing national tensions, fragmentation, and mutual alienation on the other hand.

The aim of the present study, then, is to present an analysis of the historical development and the complex political role of the multinational social democratic movement in Pressburg/Bratislava, with particular though not exclusive emphasis on the years of Central European crisis and national revolution 1918-19. It was during the period of national revolution that a whole range of painful issues concerning the relations between the different national groups in the local social democratic movement suddenly became far more manifest. Until 1918 the Pressburg movement, despite the trend of growing national separatism, had managed to preserve some semblance of interethnic unity; in 1918-19 this illusion was shattered. Instead of helping to ‘resolve’ the national question in the social democratic movement after the disintegration of Austria-Hungary and the formation of the Czechoslovak Republic, the revolutionary events of 1918 merely transformed the interethnic power structure in the region, the city, and the movement. The result was a new phase of national strife within the context of the new Czechoslovakia, a state that was almost as multinational as the old Austria-Hungary, and in particular within the sharply divided social democratic movement. In Pressburg this was expressed in the form of political protests against the new rulers, strikes, and a campaign of

²¹ Thus, for a number of years the Slovak social democratic newspaper *Slovenské robotnícke noviny* (Slovak Workers’ News), established in 1904, and the Slovak section of the Pressburg Workers’ Educational Society, established in 1905, were housed in the German-dominated *Arbeiterheim*, and significantly the suggestion made by the Hungarian Social Democratic Party leader Manó Buchinger in 1910 that the Slovak Nationality Committee be removed from Pressburg to Budapest was rejected by the Slovaks. See Fraňo Ruttikay, *Robotnícka žurnalistika v sociálnom a národnom hnutí Slovákov (1897-1918)*, Martin 1980, pp. 213, 216.

moral-political rhetoric, focusing on issues like ‘self-determination’ and ‘Czech imperialism’, with demagogic overtones. It is necessary, however, to place the dramatic events of 1918-19 in the broader context of the evolution of the Hungarian and Pressburg social democratic movement of the previous decades. The contextualisation of the national revolution of 1918-19 must embrace an understanding of the peculiarities of Hungarian politics and society, the character of Pressburg as a trinational Central European crossroad, and the complex nature of the national question as it affected the Hungarian and Pressburg social democratic movement. Pressburg was a ‘crossroad’ in a double sense.²² It was the place where the ethnic territories of the three major national groups of northwestern Hungary met and overlapped in an urban setting – while in addition to the Germans, the Slovaks, and the Magyars the city also contained Jews, Czechs, Croats, and other ethnic minorities. But Pressburg was also the city that during the turbulent months of 1918-19 had to decide in a more protracted and dramatic way than many other places in Central Europe where it belonged or wished to belong, and what its identity – or the identity of particular groups in the city – was supposed to mean. The fact that at the end of 1918 some prominent individuals tried to attain an internationalised autonomous status for the city – something like that of Danzig/Gdansk – was partly an expression of disorientation and despair, partly a positive attempt at political reorientation based on a proud tradition of urban patriotism. The position and identity of Pressburg as a crossroad in a double sense is what ultimately determined the historical fate of the city, including the confusion and the political and ethnic tensions prevailing during the months of national revolution. It was also a crucial determinant of the social history of Pressburg and its multiethnic labour movement during the entire period 1867-1921.

For Pressburg’s social democrats the eruption of national revolution in 1918 was an even more dramatic experience than for other social and political groups; after all, they had to uphold an ideology of ‘internationalism’ and class solidarity, if only within their own Austro-Hungarian domain. After the catastrophe of the First World War, the outbreak of national revolution and new waves of ethnic strife were another set-back for those social democrats in Pressburg and Central Europe who wanted to restore a sense of interethnic working-class unity. From the viewpoint of Magyar and German social democrats the Czechoslovak occupation of Pressburg and the formation of a Czechoslovak State that incorporated large Magyar and German minorities were acts of ‘Czech Imperialism’, and especially during the first year of the state’s existence they found it difficult to accept the new political reality. It is interesting to observe how the relatively sophisticated German social democratic press reacted to the national-revolutionary transformation of 1918-19. I will pay special attention to the German press in Pressburg to show how the important German social democratic movement, but also other political groups among the Germans and the Magyars, reacted to the dramatic events particularly of the first two months of 1919, when the new rulers tried to consolidate their hold on the city. It would seem that after December 1918 the German social democrats – more easily so than the Magyars – were able to face the new inescapable reality in Pressburg thanks to a strongly developed common sense. This was partly the result of their classical socialist-evolutionary ideology that claimed to regard state-political changes as a matter of secondary importance, but also of their new identification with the ethnic-German rather than the Hungarian state identity and, perhaps, of the reputed Pressburg mentality of pragmatism and ‘opportunism’. Nevertheless, in February 1919 the German and Magyar social democrats launched a general strike to protest against the policies of the new Czechoslovak regime, which allegedly refused to keep some of the promises made immediately after the occupation of the city and had begun to take what looked like arbitrary and repressive measures. After the bloody events of 12 February 1919, when at least six people were killed by

²² A crossroad or crossroads can be understood as an intersection of two or more roads, as well as a critical point where a decision has to be made.

Czech soldiers and some two dozen wounded, the German social democratic press started a campaign of moral rhetoric and political denunciations that may have further discredited the Czechoslovak authorities in the eyes of many Pressburg citizens. The memory of the February events was bound to play a lasting role in the subsequent history of the city, and the explanation of the blood-bath given by the Czechoslovak authorities in Pressburg, which was strongly coloured by propaganda, did not help to improve the situation. After 1919 the Czechoslovak government succeeded in consolidating the new regime in Slovakia, among other things by granting minority rights to the Germans and the Magyars. But these substantial minority groups (some five percent and twenty percent of the population of Slovakia, respectively) had been incorporated into the new state against their will, and they were often referred to as ‘national minorities’ and by implication had the status of a kind of second-class citizens vis-à-vis the ruling ‘Czechoslovak nation’. This, in combination with the memory of the bloodshed in Pressburg and other places in Czechoslovakia during the months of national revolution, was bound to result in a permanent sense of alienation among the minorities. As citizens of the Czechoslovak Republic the minorities benefited from the democratic character of the state and freely participated in its political life, but they also keenly felt its ‘ethnocratic’ dimension. No doubt national-minority status was especially difficult to accept for people who until recently had been members of politically or culturally dominant nations.

This study aims to be a contribution to the historiography of the national revolution in Central Europe after the First World War, as well as to the history of the social democratic movement in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Czechoslovakia. Like all historians trying to address controversial issues in Central European history, I am faced with certain problems that are specific to the region. Thus, although the social democratic movement was in many ways an ‘international’ (interethnic) one, especially before 1918, its historiography is fragmented along national lines; the same holds true for the historiography of the national revolutions of 1918-19. It is mainly Austrian historians who have studied the pre- and post-1918 Austrian social democratic movement, Hungarians the Hungarian/Magyar movement, Czechs the Czech/Czechoslovak, and Slovaks the Slovak movement. The important role of the ethnic-German social democratic movement in Hungary is a neglected topic, because the Germans of pre-1918 Hungary or post-1918 Slovakia are apparently seen – and wrongly so – as a group that was only of marginal importance. In addition, of course, they have largely disappeared from the scene after the Second World War, which did not favour the historiography of this tragic but interesting ethnic group either.²³ The degree of (attempted) integration of different national perspectives and research activities is limited, while the problematic of the national revolutions of 1918-19 and that of the history of the Central European labour movement are fields of study that overlap only to a limited extent. At least as important is another problem – the perhaps inevitable problem of incomplete knowledge of the different Central European languages among most historians of this multicultural region, a circumstance that obviously sets certain limits to the amount and type of publications and primary source material they are able to study.²⁴ Related to this is the creative

²³ While on the German labour movement in Bohemia and Moravia there are at least a few major and minor studies, this is not the case with regard to the history of the German labour movement in Hungary and Slovakia. See for example *Kapitoly z dejin sociálnej demokracie na Slovensku*, eds Stanislav Sikora, Viliam S. Hótar, Ivan Laluha, and Boris Zala, Bratislava, 1996, where almost no attention is paid to the important German social democrats of Pressburg. Another group whose historiography is very incomplete – and, needless to say, for similar and even more tragic reasons – are the Jews of Pressburg/Bratislava; their history partly overlaps with that of the city’s old German population.

²⁴ The Czech historian Jiří Kořalka, for example, has noted that a problem of Central European historiography is its practitioners’ insufficient knowledge of the various regional languages – ‘how many Czech historians can read Hungarian?’, he asks – and that in all Central European countries the development of broader historiographical perspectives beyond one’s own national history must be accompanied by obtaining a wider knowledge of the different Central European languages. See Jiří Kořalka, ‘Probleme einer böhmischen,

challenge of trying to balance and integrate the different (often nationally biased) perspectives on contested historical questions. Last but not least, there is the problem of the relative weakness in former communist countries of modern sociohistorical perspectives on issues like the one addressed in this study. Official ‘Marxist-Leninist’ ideology, which claimed to possess a ready-made interpretive framework, had a negative influence on the writing of innovative sociohistorical work, the consequences of which can still be seen today in a country like Slovakia.²⁵ This does not mean that, for example in Czechoslovakia, no useful research was done between the 1950s and 1980s. On the contrary, as every student of ‘Eastern European’ history knows, it is rewarding, if sometimes wearisome, to work one’s way through the communist-era literature and to sift the useful material from the ideological humbug. In addition, of course, one has to go back to the sources where they still exist.

In this study I have done two things in terms of method and research strategy, which I hope in combination have enabled me to make a satisfactory analysis of the subject matter. Firstly, I have analysed the Slovak but also the Hungarian, Czech, Austrian, and German historiography on the social democratic movement in Hungary and Slovakia (and, to some extent, in the Habsburg Monarchy as a whole), focusing on the role and position of the Slovaks and the Hungarian Germans and on the region of Pressburg/Pozsony/Bratislava. Secondly, I have looked selectively at the German- and Slovak-language primary source material (mainly newspapers and printed sources, but also some archival material), quite comprehensively for the period of national revolution 1918-19, more selectively for the earlier and later years. I hope that this differentiated approach helps to create a somewhat balanced picture of, on the one hand, the broad evolution of the multiethnic social democratic movement in Hungary and trinational Pressburg – including the political and social conditions in which this happened – during the longer period 1867-1921, and, on the other hand, the revolutionary and immediate postrevolutionary events in Pressburg between October 1918 and March 1919 that cover a relatively short period of time and are analysed in much greater detail. While the focus of my research is on the Slovak and German national groups within the broader multiethnic Hungarian social democratic movement, the predominantly Magyar party leadership is part of the story as well, especially where the period before November 1918 is concerned. Before 1918, it was especially the Slovak social democrats that reacted to the allegedly ‘chauvinistic’ and pro-Magyar policies of the Budapest party leadership, although occasionally there were German opposition voices as well. After 1918, it was the German and Magyar social democrats in Slovakia who reacted to Czechoslovak measures that seemed to forcibly transform the ethnopolitical power structure of Pressburg and to threaten the existing socioeconomic positions of the Magyar and German working class. Both dimensions – the old grievances of the Slovaks, the new grievances of the Magyars and Germans – are important to examine in order to understand the dynamics of group relations in the city. Therefore, while the focus of the more

tschechischen oder tschechoslowakischen Geschichte’, in *Probleme der Geschichte Österreichs und ihrer Darstellung*, eds Herwig Wolfram and Walter Pohl, Vienna, 1991, p. 243.

²⁵ The topic of labour history itself is often associated with communist ideology, and studied by only a handful of people. For some observations on the state and development of sociohistorical research in Slovakia, see Dušan Kováč, ‘Probleme der sozialhistorischen Forschung zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert in der slowakischen Historiographie’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 34, 1994, esp. pp. 126-9, where the author notes that the ‘disproportion’ between the amount of literature and the level of knowledge in the field of labour history is the ‘greatest paradox’ in Slovak historiography, and that ‘in society the history of the working-class movement is strongly compromised and it does not enjoy a great popularity in the scientific community’; also Dušan Kováč, ‘Die Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung und die Sozialgeschichte in der slowakischen Historiographie seit 1945’, *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen* 23, 2000, pp. 100-10, where this paradox is mentioned again, even with regard to social history in general; further Stanislav Sikora, ‘Die Sozialdemokratie in der Slowakei: Ein Forschungsbericht’, in *ibid.*, pp. 111-20; Gabriela Dudeková, ‘Sociálne dejiny 19. a 20. storočia na Slovensku – bilancia a nové impulzy’, *Historický časopis* 52, no. 2, 2004, pp. 331-46.

detailed research is on the years of national-political transformation 1918-19, I want to integrate this period of revolutionary change into a longer-term analysis of the development of social democracy and interethnic relations. There is also an additional chapter on postrevolutionary developments in Bratislava and Slovakia during the years 1919-21 looking at the political and electoral successes and the subsequent disintegration of the social democratic movement, and at the problematical relationship between the German-Magyar and the Czechoslovak social democrats. I hope that the fact that I have chosen – in addition to primary sources – to base much of my analysis on material from Slovak publications, has not resulted in biased interpretations. In fact, I believe that this is not the case, and my analysis of the revolutionary and postrevolutionary developments after 1918 aims to do full justice to the viewpoint of the German and Magyar social democratic and other critics of the new Czechoslovak regime. I have tried all along to fairly answer the following basic questions: what were the nature and consequences of the tension between integrating and differentiating tendencies in Pressburg's multinational social democratic movement; why did the tendency towards national separatism eventually prevail?

In chapters 2-4 I will examine the broader historical context – or rather different more specific contexts – to the question of national conflict and national revolution: the structure of prerevolutionary Hungarian politics and society, the particular sociopolitical and multiethnic environment of Pressburg, and the national problems of the Hungarian social democratic movement. Chapter two analyses the development of Hungarian society and political life during the period between the Austro-Hungarian 'Compromise' (*Ausgleich*) of 1867 and the end of the Dual Monarchy in 1918. It will be argued that the backward 'semi-feudal' character of Hungarian society, the country's weakly developed democratic culture and highly restricted franchise in comparison with Austria, and the chauvinistic policies and narrow outlook of the ruling gentry, middle classes, and even a major proportion of the broader Magyar population were all key factors influencing the development of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party as well. Although the metropolis Budapest became an important economic and cultural centre, the level of social and economic development in Hungary as a whole was not sufficient to render the objective of creating a greater Magyar national state through assimilation of the other nationalities a realistic proposition. The Magyars were never even a majority of the overall population of 'Historical Hungary', while the Slovaks, Romanians, Serbs, and others were increasingly preoccupied with their own national aspirations, which also deeply influenced their social democratic labour movements. Chapter three focuses on the urban microcosm of Pressburg, whose ethnic structure and social atmosphere was different from that of Budapest. The demographic and economic growth of the city, the emergence of modern political movements, and changes in the city's ethnolinguistic structure as a result of the Magyarisation policy were principal determinants of the social and political conflicts in the period between 1867 and 1918. While the economic and political struggles of Pressburg's working class tended to unite people of different nationalities on issues like universal suffrage and better wages and working conditions, the ways in which workers belonging to different national groups responded to policies of national oppression and forcible assimilation could be quite diverse. Given the specific ethnic make-up of Pressburg's social democratic movement and the influence exerted by the Czechs and Germans of nearby Vienna, tensions between different nationalities both within and outside Pressburg's social democracy had their own local flavour and political consequences, with certain limits set to the process of Magyarisation. In chapter four a detailed analysis will be made of how the national question in Hungary, which was different in some respects from the national question in the Austrian half of the Empire, helped to shape the development of the social democratic movement. Although the Hungarian Social Democratic Party claimed it rejected national as well as social oppression, it proved unable, perhaps unwilling, to deal with the problems resulting from the oppression of the non-Magyar nationalities, nor with the agrarian question in the semi-feudal countryside. It preferred to focus on the growing working class in the major cities, and even here

some important social groups – in particular workers belonging to national minorities like the Slovaks – were often neglected. The party tended to believe that its principal task was to help Hungary ‘complete her bourgeois-democratic revolution’, and that the achievement of universal suffrage and full democracy, or even of socialism itself, was a necessary precondition to ‘resolving the national question’. Even if this analysis was in part correct (fighting for democracy was essential), the party tended to draw the wrong strategic conclusions from it, believing that the highly sensitive and politically dangerous national problem should – as far as this was possible at all – be evaded. As a result, it confined itself to making formal statements on the equality of all nationalities in Hungary, without seriously addressing the concrete social, cultural, and political manifestations of national oppression. It was inevitable that some minor concessions be made to the non-Magyar social democrats in the field of internal party organisation, but the real significance of the national question was never seriously analysed and within the Hungarian party the influence of a man like Otto Bauer always remained limited. Arguably this type of thought and behaviour was convenient for party leaders who were influenced by Magyar nationalism themselves. But about this they did not always have to be explicit, because the party’s refusal to resist the trend of Magyarisation could be rationalised in terms of the ‘Marxist’ theory that the formation of large national units, including a modern and more homogeneous greater Hungary, promoted economic and social development and, therefore, historical ‘progress’. The final result was that in 1918 the Hungarian Social Democratic Party opposed the aspiration of ‘national self-determination’ of the Slovaks and other non-Magyar nationalities if this meant – which it did – complete state independence from Hungary.

In chapters 5-8 the events occurring in Pressburg during the revolutionary months of 1918-19 will be analysed in detail. Chapter five will look at the reactions of the city’s population to the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy and ‘Historical Hungary’ and the prospect of their incorporation into the Czechoslovak Republic. Probing the German-language press enables us to reconstruct the social, political, and ethnic consciousness and the shifting perspectives of Pressburg’s predominantly German- and Magyar-speaking population in this situation of growing confusion and uncertainty.²⁶ During the increasingly chaotic revolutionary period after October 1918 the Wilsonian slogan of ‘self-determination’ was raised by practically all the national and political groups and also led to a new movement among the Hungarian Germans to assert their national identity and cultural rights. In western Hungary there emerged a broad multiparty German national-democratic movement in which the social democrats played a prominent role and which demanded national-cultural, institutional, and even territorial autonomy for the relatively compact German-speaking region comprising parts of four Hungarian counties. The Pressburg Germans were part of this movement, but the impending Czechoslovak occupation of the city and Pressburg county meant that they would be cut off from the rest of German West Hungary. The majority of the Germans eventually accepted the occupation as inevitable, and began to support the idea of striving for cultural autonomy within the framework of the Czechoslovak State. Chapter six looks at how Pressburg was taken over by Czechoslovak troops, the important political role of the German social democrats – whose workers’ council and armed guard controlled the city during the interval between Hungarian and Czechoslovak rule –, and political developments during the first weeks under the new regime. The German social democrats wanted a peaceful transition, rejected calls to put up resistance to the Czechoslovak army, and actually went so far as to suppress and disarm groups of Magyar Bolsheviks, the so-

²⁶ Unfortunately the year 1918 of the German social democratic newspaper *Westungarische Volksstimme* is missing among the historical newspaper collections in Bratislava and elsewhere, which makes it more difficult to reconstruct some of the details of the role played by the social democrats during the critical last months of 1918. But the fact that some other German newspapers for these months have survived enables us to follow developments among the Pressburg population as a whole, including the activities of the local German social democrats.

called 'Red Guards', who said they wanted to fight 'till the end'. The Czechoslovak authorities were happy with the 'constructive' attitude of the German social democrats and other German political groups and made promises to respect the position of the German language in Pressburg, to protect the jobs of the Hungarian government employees, etc. Unfortunately some of these promises were not kept in the eyes of the German-Magyar labour movement, and during the course of January 1919 censorship measures and a number of other restrictive steps were taken culminating in the closing down of Pressburg's somewhat refractory Elisabeth University. Chapter seven describes how the initial atmosphere of hope turned into hatred as tension between the local Czechoslovak authorities and the 'non-Czechoslovak' population of Pressburg reached a climax during the first week of February. On 4 February 1919 the provisional Czechoslovak government administration led by the Slovak political leader Vavro Šrobár was transferred to Pressburg – which was to become the Slovak capital Bratislava – from the town of Žilina, and this historic event was to be accompanied by a series of festivities. The German and Magyar social democrats, however, as well as the bulk of the city's population, saw no reason to participate in these celebrations. Instead, a general strike was called by the Pressburg social democratic movement, which eventually led to the bloody incidents of 12 February. The strike was not supported by the Slovak social democrats and became another landmark in the mutual alienation between the different national groups. Chapter eight follows up the story after the February events by looking at the two elements of protest and pragmatism, both of which were characteristic of the attitude of the Pressburg social democratic movement. The German social democratic newspaper *Volksstimme* was severe in its condemnation of the local Czechoslovak authorities and its denunciation of the Czechoslovak State itself. It continued its campaign of moral rhetoric and political attacks on 'Czech Imperialism' and the 'anti-worker policies' of the government, but at the same time it was pragmatic enough also to seek some sort of accommodation with the Bratislava authorities in order to survive as a relevant political factor and to make the best of what had become a very difficult situation.

Chapter nine addresses the further development of the multiethnic social democratic movement in Bratislava and Slovakia from 1919 to 1921. The first Czechoslovak general election in April 1920 showed that among all national groups the social democrats were the strongest political force. Czechoslovakia's democratic institutions and relatively liberal national-minority policies allowed the German, Magyar, and other minority social democrats to freely participate in political life, and to seek cooperation with other groups, including the Czechoslovak social democrats, if there was any political will to do so. However, following the communist-social democratic split in the second half of 1920, which seriously weakened the social democratic movement, the German social democrats in Slovakia – unlike the remnant of Magyar social democrats, if only in 1926 – did not join the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party but the German Social Democratic Party of Bohemia and Moravia, which consistently refused to merge with the allegedly 'chauvinistic' Czechoslovak party. Thus, the multinational and ethnocentric character of the Czechoslovak Republic continued to be reflected in the ethnic fragmentation of its social democratic parties and indeed of all other parties except (or so it seemed) the communists. In the Czechoslovak parliament in Prague, German and Magyar social democratic MPs from Bratislava always displayed a critical attitude to the Czechoslovak state and its minority policies, but during the 1920s their political influence declined. Meanwhile, the Slovak social democrats in the Czechoslovak party were increasingly marginalised as well, losing much of their electoral support base after 1920 due to the communist defection and the negative consequences of their 'Czechoslovakist' pro-government and pro-centralist stance. With both the German and Magyar and the Slovak social democrats being relegated to the margins of political power in Slovakia, the importance of the movement in Czechoslovakia as a whole declined as well, especially outside its major Czech, Bohemian-German, and the relatively few Slovak strongholds. The Czechoslovak Republic itself remained a democratic state with an ethnocentric

dimension. This was the result of the Central European national revolution of 1918-19, which transformed the interethnic power structure and deeply affected the social democratic movement across multinational Central Europe.

In ‘darkest Hungary’

In 1944 an intriguing little book entitled *In Darkest Hungary* was published in the series ‘Left Book Club Editions’ in London. Its author was the little-known G. Pálóczy-Horváth, but the introduction was written by none other than Michael (Mihály) Károlyi, the exiled former president of the short-lived democratic republic of Hungary that existed from November 1918 to March 1919. Károlyi explains that the book was written by Pálóczy-Horváth in collaboration with a Hungarian peasant and that the author ‘unfolds before us the history of the disinherited Hungarian peasantry, thus shedding light upon a sombre landscape. Indeed, in this book the Chinese wall is blasted behind which the world of feudal Hungary lay hidden’.²⁷ The style and manner of presentation of the book does indeed suggest that it is a man of the common people who is speaking to us, informing the reader about the social, economic, and political conditions in the Hungarian countryside. But there is also a general understanding of the course of Hungarian and European history, which betrays the hand of a Hungarian intellectual or educated political figure. The book is written more or less from the standpoint of ‘agrarian socialism’, in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hungary a political rival of social democracy, and also from a Magyar (ethnic-Hungarian) perspective. Among other things, mention is made of strikes of Magyar agricultural labourers in central Hungary in 1897 and 1905-6, which were defeated by the landowners with the help of Slovak, Romanian, and Serb strike-breakers. ‘These foreigners were actually paid the wages we were asking for’, says the unknown peasant co-author of *In Darkest Hungary* – ‘Do you understand our lords? We don’t’.²⁸ Perhaps it would be wrong to say that the book is characterised by Magyar chauvinism given the sense of injustice, social exclusion, and class antagonism transpiring through its pages. However, it is suggested by the author himself that there existed a strong national consciousness among the Magyar agricultural proletariat and poor peasantry, indeed, that these social classes were suffering from a kind of wounded pride because of their political exclusion from a nation that was entirely dominated by the gentry and aristocracy.²⁹ The Hungarian ruling class (‘our lords’) is even accused of ‘treason’ for their constantly importing ‘foreign workers’ (in fact, fellow-Hungarian workers from other ethnic groups, mostly poor migrants and seasonal labourers) and for having ‘chased to America... 1,500,000 Hungarians’. It is argued that if they had not done this, ‘there would not have been a mixed population problem in Hungary, or at least the problem would have been much smaller’.³⁰ This claim is rather bizarre, because among the emigrants leaving for America from Hungary there were disproportionately large numbers of Slovaks, Ruthenians, and other non-Magyars.³¹ If these statements by the authors of *In Darkest Hungary* reflected the true feelings of a significant section of the Magyar proletariat, it must be concluded that in Hungary

²⁷ Michael Károlyi, ‘Introduction’, in G. Pálóczy-Horváth, *In Darkest Hungary*, London 1944, p. 5.

²⁸ Pálóczy-Horváth, *In Darkest Hungary*, pp. 88-90, and p. 88 for quotation.

²⁹ Thus we read on p. 90: ‘Is it strange that we did not feel we belonged to the Hungarian nation? After all, this nation constantly defended herself against us by importing Rumanians, Poles and Serbs. We – the people – were the enemies of the nation.’ The nation had been usurped by, and was immorally identified with, the ruling class and its interests.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³¹ J. Puskás, ‘Emigration from Hungary to the United States before 1914’, in *Études historiques hongroises* 1975, 2 vols, vol. 2, pp. 90-1; Julianna Puskás, ‘Overseas Emigration from Hungary and the National Minorities, 1880-1914’, in *Ethnicity and Society in Hungary*, ed. Ferenc Glatz, Budapest, 1990, pp. 284-5, 296-9; Tibor Frank, ‘From Austria-Hungary to the United States: National Minorities and Emigration 1880-1914’, *Nationalities Papers* 24, no. 3, 1996, pp. 409, 416. These publications show that more than two-thirds of those who left Hungary between 1899 and 1913 were non-Magyars, the percentage of Slovaks lying between twenty-five and thirty-three percent of the total.

exploitation and class oppression did by no means eliminate national pride and national consciousness among the poor and the working class.³² Indeed, even less than among the Magyars was this the case among workers and peasants belonging to ‘nationalities’ (national minorities) like the Slovaks or the Romanians, who were constantly made aware of their national identity by the Hungarian policy of harsh national oppression.

In Darkest Hungary illustrates the complex relationship between social, ethnic, and political factors in multinational Hungary during the era of Austro-Hungarian ‘Dualism’ following the Compromise of 1867. In this chapter I will try to identify some of the principal features of the ‘semi-feudal’ society of Dualist Hungary in order to understand the social and political conditions in which the Hungarian social democratic movement emerged. I will pay attention to questions of social structure and political regime and, in particular, to the consequences of national inequality, forcible assimilation and denationalisation (‘Magyarisation’), and political repression. I will try to show how these problems influenced both the Magyars and the subordinate ‘nationalities’ and how they helped to shape the outlook and political strategy of Hungarian social democracy. The course of developments during the period 1867-1918 culminated in the revolutionary crisis of 1918. Although it is possibly too simple to say that the political crisis and national revolution of 1918 were the inevitable outcome of a half-century of escalating national and social conflicts, the final collapse of multinational ‘Historical Hungary’ would never have happened without these earlier events. The last year of the First World War was the crucial moment when the manifold social and political contradictions in Hungary came inexorably to a head, making revolutionary upheaval almost predictable. When investigating the trend of developments during the decades preceding the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy and Historical Hungary I found it especially useful to look at the material in the still highly instructive work of R.W. Seton-Watson, ‘Racial Problems in Hungary’ (1908), as well as other publications of this remarkable Scottish contemporary historian of early twentieth-century Eastern Europe. The undiminished importance of Seton-Watson’s book on Hungary is shown, among other things, by the fact that a new Slovak translation was published in the 1990s. Another important contemporary analyst of the complexities of old multinational Hungary who still deserves our attention is the critical Hungarian social scientist (and politician) Oszkár Jászi, whose publications cannot fail to inform any serious student of the subject.³³

Multinational post-Compromise Hungary was a peculiar social and political formation in which an essentially traditional social class, the Magyar middle nobility (‘gentry’) and aristocracy who claimed to represent the historical interests of the state and of the dominant Magyar nation, ruled supreme. The Hungary ruled by this gentry class has often been defined as ‘semi-feudal’.³⁴ This definition may seem somewhat vague and unsatisfactory, but should convey the crucial fact

³² The Hungarian historian Ernő Kabos points out that the agrarian socialist movement, which had influence even among some urban workers, gradually shifted to the right and to a nationalist position; see Ernő Kabos, ‘The Links between the Social Democratic Party of Hungary and the Trade Unions from 1890 to 1914’, in *Studies on the History of the Hungarian Trade-Union Movement*, eds E. Kabos and A. Zsilák, Budapest, 1977, p. 51.

³³ Apart from the publications of Seton-Watson and Jászi, which have a special quality, my understanding of the course of Hungarian and Slovak history is informed by three types of historical literature: works on the general history of the Habsburg Monarchy (especially those by Robert Kann); works on the modern political and social history of Hungary in Western languages and Slovak (e.g., those by Ignóus, Pamlényi, Sugar, Hoensch, and the different Hungarian writers on labour history); and works on the history of Slovakia and the Slovaks (a wide range of Slovak publications). Their full titles will be given in the notes below or in the following chapters. The Slovak translation of Seton-Watson’s classical work ‘Racial Problems in Hungary’ was published under the title *Národnostná otázka v Uhorsku*, Bratislava 1994.

³⁴ The term was used already by contemporary Hungarian social democratic leaders like Zsigmond Kunfi, and is even used by cultural historians; see, e.g., William M. Johnston, *The Austrian Mind. An Intellectual and Social History 1848-1938*, Berkeley 1972, p. 342.

that the country's social structure and political order were a strange mix of the atavistic and the quasi-modern. Apart from a small number of large aristocratic landowners who successfully modernised their agricultural production, the traditional nobility – a sizeable stratum representing more than five percent of the total Hungarian and almost 12.5 percent of the Magyar population, including the numerous impoverished lower nobility – was an economically declining class that during the nineteenth century developed a modern 'national-liberal' ideology associated with the revolution of 1848 and the name of the Hungarian revolutionary leader Lajos Kossuth.³⁵ The virtual absence of a modern middle-class among the Magyars – most urban social positions and modern economic activities were controlled by German-speakers and Jews – meant that the Magyar middle and lesser nobility, the traditional champion of Hungary's political autonomy, took on the task of fighting for constitutional reform and national independence instead of the bourgeoisie. Indeed, those among the nobility who lost their economic basis looked to national politics for an alternative career. As a Hungarian-American historian described it: 'After the Napoleonic wars the lesser nobility was rapidly losing its foothold in the agrarian economy, and the offspring of declining landed families began to look to the administrative and political institutions of the national state as instruments that might save their ranks from economic ruin and social degradation.'³⁶ The revolution of 1848-9 brought a formal liberation of the peasants (much against the will of many landowners), short-lived Hungarian independence from the Habsburg rulers, and above all bloody conflicts with the non-Magyar nationalities who resisted the Magyar refusal to recognise their cultural and national rights. The fact that the dominant Magyar gentry, which by the mid-nineteenth century had absorbed almost all non-Magyar noble elements, refused to grant the other nations what it claimed for the Magyar nation itself, led to a natural alliance between the non-Magyars and the Habsburgs. However, in 1867 Austria, which had been seriously weakened by the lost war of 1866 against Prussia, was forced to accept a restructuring of the Habsburg Empire known as the *Ausgleich* (Compromise). This made the Kingdom of Hungary – whose institutions had never been fully brought under control by the Habsburgs – an autonomous and equal partner to the other Austrian Crown Lands, which were directly controlled by Vienna. It was the end of the Habsburg attempts to create a centralised state, which now became a 'Dual Monarchy'. It soon became clear that this arrangement, even if it did not go far enough in the eyes of the more extreme advocates of Hungarian independence, created favourable conditions for the Magyar project of transforming multinational Hungary into a unified Magyar national state. While the social position of the majority of the peasantry remained almost as bad as it had been before their official liberation in 1848, the leaders of the non-Magyar nationalities could be relentlessly attacked now that Vienna had effectively withdrawn from the Hungarian domestic political arena. The so-called 'liberal gentry' of Hungary – 'liberal' on account of its long history of struggle against Habsburg absolutism and for Hungarian 'constitutional freedoms' – would show itself in its true colours of an arrogant and short-sighted ruling class that had adopted the modern phraseology of nineteenth-century nationalism in order to legitimate its claims to class domination and national supremacy. This does not mean that the chauvinistic language and often megalomaniac rhetoric of Hungarian 'patriotism' expressed by the Hungarian ruling and middle classes were not a matter of deep conviction. Indeed, Magyar nationalism was inculcated on the broader population by the chauvinist press and 'patriotic education' so vigorously that also many ordinary Magyar workers and peasants were influenced by it as well. Even Magyar democrats, radicals, and socialists found

³⁵ See Jörg K. Hoensch, *A History of Modern Hungary 1867-1994*, London 1996, pp. 36-7 for the nobility; for the revolution of 1848, see Istvan Deak, *The Lawful Revolution. Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians 1848-1849*, New York 1979.

³⁶ Andrew C. Janos, 'Nationalism and Communism in Hungary', *East European Quarterly* V, no. 1, 1971-2, pp. 75-6.

it difficult not to believe that the Magyars were a more civilised and advanced nation than the other nationalities in multinational Hungary. By the second half of the nineteenth century it was generally accepted by the great majority of those belonging to, or identifying with, the dominant Magyar nation that in Hungary there could be only one politically recognised nation – the Magyar nation. What remained to be done was to make the whole of Hungary coincide with the Magyar nation by assimilating the non-Magyar ‘nationalities’, who were seen as essentially non-political ethnolinguistic (‘ethnographic’) minorities whose historical fate it was to become part of the modern Magyar nation.³⁷

After the Compromise of 1867 the relatively liberal atmosphere of the 1860s began to give way to a more repressive climate. It is true that in 1868 the Hungarian government was forced to reconfirm the autonomous status of Croatia-Slavonia in the so-called ‘Croatian Mini-Compromise’. For historical, constitutional, and linguistic reasons Croatia was the only part of multinational Hungary where a policy of Magyarisation and complete Magyar control was acknowledged to be impossible. The number of Magyars in Croatia-Slavonia was too insignificant, the tradition of Croatian constitutional autonomy too strong; the Croats had their own parliament and, in contrast to the other ‘nationalities’, even an independent social democratic party. However, the Hungarian government did all it could to reduce the political leverage of the Croats to a minimum and to influence the legal and political decision-making process in the country. In the same year 1868 the autonomous status of Transylvania was liquidated, and thereafter the policy of Magyarisation was relentlessly pursued in all regions of ‘Hungary proper’ (i.e., unified Hungary exclusive of Croatia-Slavonia) where national minorities were living, that is, with regard to the Slovaks, the Germans, the Ruthenians, the Romanians, and the Serbs. The Hungarians were fond of producing highly optimistic statistical figures showing the progress of assimilation and Magyarisation. By omitting Croatia from the picture and only looking at Hungary proper, the Hungarian statisticians could boast a Magyar majority by 1900. The census of that year showed that 51.4 percent of Hungary’s population of 16,721,574 were Magyar-speakers (i.e., people who reported that they regarded Magyar as their mother tongue); by 1910 this had risen to 54.6 percent, which apparently led to great enthusiasm in some Hungarian patriotic circles. But in the Kingdom of Hungary as a whole, that is, including Croatia, the Magyars were not even a majority in 1910; the census of that year showed that they represented only 48.1 percent of the total population of Historical Hungary.³⁸ In the urban centres, however, the policy of Magyarisation was more successful than in the country as a

³⁷ Perhaps the best survey of Hungarian history during the period 1867-1918 is Hoensch, *History of Modern Hungary*, pp. 20-84; an impressive analysis is Oscar Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, Chicago 1929, pp. 298-343; see also Paul Ignatus, *Hungary*, London 1972, chaps. 4-6; Ervin Pamlényi ed., *A History of Hungary*, London, 1975, chap. 7; Peter F. Sugar gen. ed., *A History of Hungary*, Bloomington, 1990, chaps. 14-15; Robert A. Kann, *Das Nationalitätenproblem der Habsburgermonarchie*, 2 vols, Graz 1964, esp. vol. 1, pp. 135-46, 274-86; Robert A. Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire 1526-1918*, Berkeley 1974, pp. 351-564; David W. Paul, ‘Slovak Nationalism and the Hungarian State, 1870-1910’, in *Ethnic Groups and the State*, ed. Paul R. Brass, London, 1985, pp. 115-59; Owen V. Johnson, *Slovakia 1918-1938: Education and the Making of a Nation*, Boulder 1985, chap. 1; Stanislav J. Kirschbaum, *A History of Slovakia: The Struggle for Survival*, New York 1996, chap. 7; Dušan Kováč ed., *Na začiatku storočia 1901-1914 [Slovensko v 20. storočí. I]*, Bratislava 2004.

³⁸ R. W. Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems in Hungary*, 2nd edn, New York 1972 (1st edn 1908), p. 3; László Szarka, *Slovenský národný vývin - národnostná politika v Uhorsku 1867-1918*, Bratislava 1999, p. 308; Ladislav Deák, ‘The Slovaks in the Hungarian Statistics’, in *History and Politics: Bratislava Symposium III*, ed. Dušan Kováč, Bratislava, 1993, pp. 93, 97; Július Mésároš, ‘Deformácie vo využívaní údajov sčítania ľudu v novodobých maďarsko-slovenských sporoch’, *Historický zborník* 6, 1996, pp. 123-35. The figures given by different authors are not always the same, and as a result of census manipulation and intimidation their reliability is a vexed question. Note that the term ‘Hungary proper’ originally referred to Hungary exclusive of both Transylvania and Croatia-Slavonia, but after Transylvania’s administrative unification with ‘Hungary proper’ in 1868, the term assumed a new meaning – only exclusive of Croatia-Slavonia.

whole. In 1900, when the 8,588,834 Magyars represented 51.4 percent of the population of Hungary proper, there were 2,784,726 Romanians (16.7 percent), 1,991,402 Slovaks (11.9 percent), 1,980,423 Germans (11.8 percent), and smaller groups of Serbs, Ruthenes, and others. The number of Jews, many of whom were understandably keen to embrace the Magyar nationality in order to enhance their social acceptability and upward mobility, was 851,378, i.e., more than five percent of the total Hungarian population. This was an important source the Magyarisers could draw on, especially in the expanding cities. In the urban centres, indeed, no less than 74.8 percent of the population was reported to be of Magyar nationality in 1900, although there were some important exceptions to the overall picture of Magyar dominance. The Magyar preponderance had a lot to do with the seemingly successful assimilation of urban Germans and Jews, traditionally important social groups in the towns of Hungary. In Budapest, which in 1900 had a population of 716,476, of whom 79.3 percent were Magyars, there were nevertheless 101,682 German-speakers and 24,720 Slovaks. In Pressburg (61,527 inhabitants in 1900) more than fifty percent were German-speakers; the same held true for the west Hungarian town of Ödenburg/Sopron (30,628 inhabitants) and the southeastern town of Temeschburg/Temesvár/Timisoara (49,624 inhabitants).³⁹ The criterion for establishing nationality in Hungary was based on a flexible definition of mother tongue, viz. (in 1910), ‘the language the person in question considers his own, the language he masters best and uses most willingly’. This rather subjective criterion – almost as subjective as the criterion of ‘language of communication’ used in the Austrian census – meant that many people whose mother tongue was actually not Magyar, but who deemed it wise to ‘acknowledge’ it to be (especially those who were employed by the government, or who were otherwise economically dependent or easily intimidated), were reported to be of Magyar nationality. There were tens of thousands, perhaps several hundred-thousand Slovaks, Germans, and others who could be regarded as so-called ‘statistical Magyars’, people whose mother tongue was Slovak, German, or Romanian, but who were registered as Magyars because in addition to their native language they had a relatively good knowledge of the Magyar language and were in one way or another pressurised to declare that they ‘preferred’ to speak it.⁴⁰ This does not change the fact that there was also a good deal of sociologically ‘natural’ or ‘spontaneous’ assimilation of non-Magyars who wanted to rise on the social scale, especially in the cities.⁴¹ Indeed, there were those – Jews, Germans, Slovaks (who

³⁹ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, pp. 3, 13-4; cf. Szarka, *Slovenský národný vývin*, p. 308.

⁴⁰ László Katus, ‘Multinational Hungary in the Light of Statistics’, in *Ethnicity and Society in Hungary*, ed. F. Glatz, p. 112, quoting a report on the census of 1880; Deák, ‘Hungarian Statistics’, pp. 95-8; Ján Svetoň, *Slováci v Maďarsku. Príspevky k otázke štatistickej maďarizácie*, Bratislava 1942, pp. 10-14; from the ethnic-German perspective Erich Fausel, *Das Zipser Deutschtum. Geschichte und Geschehnisse einer deutschen Sprachinsel im Zeitalter des Nationalismus*, Jena 1927, p. 109; Egbert K. Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei in den Jahren 1918-1929. Ein Beitrag zur Nationalitätenproblematik*, Munich 1971, p. 63. A Hungarian historian explains: ‘In the case of bilingual populations, the declaration of mother tongue is a result of choice: it can be the language learned from parents during childhood, or another one, learned later in life, in school or in some other place’; see István Hoóz, ‘Nationality Statistics and the Possibilities of Reforming Them’, *East European Quarterly* XXVII, no. 4, 1993, p. 417. Another Hungarian historian writes that the term mother tongue referred to ‘the language acquired at the kindergarten, at school, in social life. Thus the category of mother tongue was suitable to mark eventual changes in language usage during the lifetime of an individual’; see Katus, ‘Multinational Hungary’, p. 112. In Austria, census results could be controversial as well, but they were not always manipulated to the advantage of the Germans: in Trieste the results of the census of 1910 were falsified in favour of the Italian majority, which led to loud protests by the Slovene and German minorities. See Sabine Rutar, ‘Die slowenische Sozialdemokratie in Triest (1896-1918)’, *Südost-Forschungen* 57, 1998, p. 169.

⁴¹ See, e.g., Zsuzsanna Pázmándi, ‘Impacts of Urbanization on the Assimilation of Hungarian and German Minorities in Slovakia and Vojvodina’, in *Regio: A Review of Minority and Ethnic Studies*, ed. Zoltán Fejős, Budapest, 1994, pp. 114-29, where a similar but reverse process of assimilation is observed for the period after 1918. Estimates of the level of assimilation in Dualist Hungary vary. According to Hoensch, some 700,000 Jews, 600,000 Germans, 200,000 Slovaks, and 100,000 Croats, many of whom belonged to the middle class,

were denounced as ‘renegades’ or ‘Magyarones’ by nationally conscious Slovaks) – who voluntarily, even enthusiastically, embraced Magyardom and the Magyar language.

It is likely, therefore, that a significant number of ‘Magyars’ in the Hungarian statistics were by no means people of clear-cut Magyar nationality or Magyar loyalty. That many people in multilingual Hungary spoke two, sometimes even three languages, was another interesting sociological fact defying simple classifications – even if the growing politicisation of national identity increasingly encouraged people to define themselves in terms of one national identity to the exclusion of others. On the one side Magyarisers tried to turn bilingual people into Magyars, on the other side non-Magyar patriots tried to win (or keep) them for the Slovak, the Croat, or the Romanian national movement. In circles of the Hungarian administration, the Magyar ruling strata, and all ‘patriotic Hungarians’, wishful thinking was a well-known phenomenon. The very fact that the Magyar language – in contrast to Slovak or German – did not distinguish between ‘Hungarian’ as a state-political or territorial concept and ‘Magyar’ as an ethnonational or linguistic concept (both being referred to as *magyar*), may have encouraged Magyar politicians to think in terms of the two being, or at least having to be, identical and conterminous. The exaggerated Magyar urge to prove the success of the assimilation policy was also an indication of uncertainty, of feelings of political insecurity on the part of the Hungarian State and many individual Magyars, who felt they were surrounded by large masses of people belonging to the Slav, Romanian, and German nations.⁴² If in Historical Hungary as a whole the Magyars were not even a majority by 1910, it was clear that a lot of assimilatory work remained to be done and that ruthless policies would have to be pursued in order to achieve the great unitary mono-ethnic Magyar State that Magyar nationalists were dreaming of. Awareness of the need for drastic measures had already been acute by 1870, when the ‘softer’ attitude of old-style Hungarian liberals like József Eötvös and Ferenc Deák was becoming less popular. These two men were the principal authors of the ‘Law on Equal Rights of the Nationalities’ (afterwards known as the ‘Nationalities’ Law’) of 1868, which in theory granted Hungarian citizens belonging to the non-Magyar nationalities certain cultural and linguistic rights. The ‘nationalities’ were not recognised as corporate national entities, but even the modest ‘concessions’ made by the law to ethnolinguistic minorities of citizens were only made on paper and never put into practice. Like almost all Magyar politicians, Eötvös and Deák strove for assimilation of the non-Magyar nationalities, but unlike others they wanted to accomplish this by ‘humane methods’ of social persuasion, by making the embracing of Magyar culture and nationality an attractive option, and by making certain tactical concessions to some of the linguistic demands of the non-Magyars. The Nationalities’ Law emphasised the political unity of Hungary and defined the concessions that

were Magyarised during the half-century 1867-1918; see Hoensch, *History of Modern Hungary*, p. 31. According to Szarka, the number of assimilated Slovaks during this period was 300,000 to 400,000; see László Szarka, ‘Staatliche und nationale Integrationsfaktoren in der Entwicklung der Slowaken in Ungarn zur Zeit des Dualismus’, in *Ethnicity and Society in Hungary*, ed. F. Glatz, p. 231. See also Emil Niederhauser, ‘The national question in Hungary’, in *The national question in Europe in historical context*, eds Mikuláš Teich and Roy Porter, Cambridge, 1993, p. 261, where yet other figures are given derived from various Hungarian publications. It is clear however that especially among the Hungarian Jews the movement of assimilation to Magyardom was a powerful phenomenon, for which there were several reasons, including the opportunity to enter new social and economic positions in modernising Hungary, with its weak middle class, and the relatively liberal (or pragmatic) attitude to the Jews of many Hungarian politicians. According to Hugh Seton-Watson, the ‘Magyar statesmen showed their liberalism by their attitude to the Jews, but betrayed it by their policies to the non-Magyars’; see Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States. An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*, London 1977, p. 168. But of course they were just as ‘liberal’ towards those Christian non-Magyars who like the Hungarian Jews opted for assimilation, for their liberalism was primarily a function of the Magyar national project.

⁴² See, e.g., George Barany, ‘Hungary: From Aristocratic to Proletarian Nationalism’, in *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, eds Peter F. Sugar and Ivo J. Lederer, Seattle, 1969, pp. 259-309.

could be made to the minorities in such a way that this unity was not endangered. The two most important concessions were the right of non-Magyar nationalities to enjoy primary and secondary education through the medium of their own mother tongue, and the right to use their language in local administration. But these 'rights' were not upheld in practice, because it was always argued by the Hungarian government of the day that the implementation of these minority language provisions would jeopardise the fundamental and more important aim of maintaining the unity of Hungary. The Nationalities' Law of 1868 was merely used as a piece of decorum to make the outside world believe in Hungary's liberal intentions. The reality was that shortly after 1868 there followed a series of repressive measures aimed at non-Magyar educational, cultural, and political institutions that shocked the victims as well as the small number of critical observers reporting on them. The nature of Magyar 'liberalism' and of the Hungarian political order was such that R. W. Seton-Watson felt urged to write that 'the non-Magyar nationalities are the victims of a policy of repression, which is without any parallel in civilised Europe'.⁴³

The Slovaks were among the first victims of the new brutal denationalisation and repression policies of post-Compromise Hungary. In 1874 the three Slovak gymnasiums established by the Slovak Lutheran and Catholic Churches in the 1860s were closed down by the Hungarian authorities, followed in 1875 by the Slovak cultural institute *Matica slovenská*, whose property was simply confiscated. Hungarian Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza of the ruling Liberal Party responded to the request that at least the *Matica's* property be returned to its rightful owner, the Slovak nation, with the memorable statement: 'There is no Slovak nation.' During the 1870s even voluntary associations like Slovak temperance leagues and Slovak choral societies were dissolved. The argument for the government's arbitrary behaviour was that the Slovaks were under the influence of dangerous 'pan-Slav' activities, which had become a standard allegation that may have resulted in part from a genuine Magyar fear of Slav nationalism both in Hungary and the rest of the Monarchy, in part from the increasing tendency to justify political repression with arguments bordering on paranoia. In 1879 a law was passed prescribing that Magyar was a compulsory subject in all primary schools. A law from 1891 laid down that non-Magyar kindergartens had to teach elementary Magyar to the children. The ultimate objective of Hungarian school policy was that Magyar should become the sole language of instruction at all secondary and primary schools; this was gradually implemented in the course of the following years. While Slovak-language secondary schools were liquidated almost at one blow, the network of Slovak primary schools was slowly strangled. The first to go were the state primary schools with Slovak as a language of instruction; this was followed by the gradual reduction to a pitiful minimum of the number of church schools where Slovak children had found a last refuge. By 1905 the number of primary schools where Slovak was a language of instruction had fallen to 241, down from 1821 in the year 1869, and this was even before the infamous Education Act of 1907. This law, by further restricting the use of non-Magyar languages in the lower classes of primary schools and demanding that non-Magyar children master the Magyar language after four years at school, represented the epitome of the forcible Magyarisation of the Hungarian school system – a system that also included political control of teachers and schoolmasters.⁴⁴ One cannot

⁴³ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, p. 204; see also Béla Bellér, 'Die ungarische Nationalitäten-Schulpolitik von der Ratio Educationis bis heute', in *Ethnicity and Society in Hungary*, ed. F. Glatz, p. 437ff.

⁴⁴ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, appendix 7, p. 437; Dezső Korbuly, 'Nationalitätenfrage und Madjarisierung in Ungarn (1790-1918)', *Österreichische Osthefte* 13, no. 2, 1971, pp. 157-8; Friedrich Gottas, 'Zur Nationalitätenpolitik in Ungarn unter der Ministerpräsidentenschaft Kálmán Tiszas', *Südostdeutsches Archiv* XVII-XVIII, 1974-5, p. 85ff.; František Bokes, *Dejiny Slovákov a Slovenska od najstarších čias až po prítomnosť*, Bratislava 1946, pp. 315-8; Paul Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert der Karpatendeutschen in der Slowakei*, Stuttgart 1992, p. 101; Elena Mannová, 'Ideové smery. Kultúrny a spoločenský život', in *Na začiatku storočia 1901-1914*, ed. D. Kováč, pp. 238-43; I. Dolmányos, 'Kritik der Lex Apponyi (Die Schulgesetze vom Jahre 1907)', in *Die nationale Frage in der Österreichisch-Ungarischen Monarchie 1900-1918*, ed. Péter

overestimate the importance of education as a means of promoting the objective of Magyarising Slovak, German, Romanian, Serb, and Ruthene children, even if the most significant result was anti-Magyar hatred instead of assimilation of entire ethnic groups. When in 1887 another Education Bill was discussed by the Hungarian Parliament, an exceptional Magyar MP, Lajos Mocsáry of the oppositional Independence Party, had the courage to protest against the prevailing chauvinist atmosphere. He criticised the expulsion of Slovak students from Hungarian gymnasiums (usually for ‘pan-Slav activity’, but even reading Slovak books or speaking Slovak in public could be defined as such), the artificial Magyarisation of ancient Slav and Romanian place-names, and the fact that the Hungarian courts rejected all petitions (often the only means of protest left to non-Magyar citizens) drawn up in non-Magyar languages, which he said was a contravention of the Nationalities’ Law. Mocsáry described the complete Magyarisation of Hungary as a ‘Utopian idea’. He said: ‘The Government must never forget that it is governing a polyglot country, that it is equally a Government for Magyars, Slovaks and Serbs, that... there are citizens of various races among whom not only the burdens but also the rights must be divided equally.’ He knew that the government preferred to forget this. ‘But the Government sees a strong power in the Chauvinist movement, and therefore dares not oppose it... No wonder, then, that in this country every man takes upon himself to infringe and exploit the law, and that we in this house can say in the very face of Government and Parliament, that the laws are not observed, that the Act of 1868 exists solely on paper and is not executed in any single point.’ Prime Minister Tisza replied that Mocsáry was making himself the prophet of those who ‘are filled with hatred against the Magyar race and the Magyar state’. The fact that in 1886 eleven Slovak students had been expelled from a gymnasium at Leutschau/Levoča in eastern Slovakia, Tisza explained by saying that they were guilty of reading a Slovak newspaper that ‘agitated against the State’ and singing a song that ‘fostered hatred of the Magyars’ – such a spirit ‘could not be tolerated’ in Hungarian institutions.⁴⁵ Similar cases of expulsions of Slovaks from various high schools in Hungary occurred in 1894, 1896, 1900, and 1907. As a result of his criticism Mocsáry was forced to resign from the Independence Party and ostracised from Hungarian politics. His comments on Hungarian national-minority policy and state repression are an important piece of evidence on the trend of Magyar politics in the late nineteenth century. It is also obvious that the oppositional Independence Party – which advocated complete Hungarian independence from Vienna – was no less chauvinistic than the ruling Liberal Party.

During the 1890s Magyar chauvinism and political repression reached new heights. Slovak and other non-Magyar meetings were usually prohibited and the Slovak and Romanian press actively persecuted. In 1896 Hungary celebrated its so-called ‘Millenium’ in commemoration of the fact that one thousand years ago, allegedly in the year 896, the original Magyars had arrived in the Carpathian Basin and not long after had founded the Hungarian state.

Hanák, Budapest, 1966, passim, where many examples are given of protests by Slovaks and others against the 1907 law. A notorious Magyariser in Upper Hungary, the distinguished historian and sociologist Béla Grünwald, also a member of parliament, asserted in 1883 that ‘the secondary school is like a big engine which takes in at one end hundreds of Slovak youth who come out at the other end as Magyars’; see Jászi, *Dissolution*, p. 329; Július Mésároš, ‘Uhorský režim a Slováci po vyrovnání’, in *Slovensko. 1. Dejiny*, ed. Ján Tibenský, Bratislava, 1978, pp. 558, 580. But Magyarising secondary school students was not deemed enough, and the systematic Magyarisation of the primary schools shows how far the Hungarians actually wanted to go. Grünwald’s publications were extremely chauvinistic and even had a touch of racism; it was people like him who used to say that ‘the Slovak is not a human being’.

⁴⁵ Quotations in Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, pp. 174-5; see also *ibid.*, p. 213, and Jászi, *Dissolution*, pp. 324, 339. According to Mocsáry, there was ‘a system in the dementia of Magyar chauvinism like in the system of the insanity of Hamlet’; see Jászi, *Dissolution*, p. 324. See on Mocsáry also ‘Biographies’, in *History of Hungary*, ed. Pamlényi, p. 622. It should be noted that around 1900 the English term ‘race’ also had the meaning of ‘nation’ or ‘ethnic group’; this must be kept in mind when reading contemporary authors like Seton-Watson. However, some Magyars really seemed to believe that their nation represented a special race.

In 1895 the new Hungarian Prime Minister Desző Bánffy declared that ‘without Chauvinism it is impossible to found the unitary Magyar national state’, and that assimilation of the non-Magyars was essential for the future of Hungary; he advocated pushing ‘blindly forward’ with this project.⁴⁶ Here we have an example of a leading Magyar politician taking pride in using the term ‘chauvinism’, which was not at all regarded as negative. Interestingly, the ‘liberal’ Bánffy was not only afraid of the national minorities and the socialists, but also of the new Hungarian People’s Party, a movement of Political Catholicism advocating social and political reforms. In a letter to the foreign minister of Austria-Hungary he wrote that the party was even more dangerous than the Christian Socials in Austria, because its ideology led to ‘agrarian socialism’ and would encourage ‘nationalist tendencies’ among the nationalities.⁴⁷ The Millennium of 1896 enormously enhanced Magyar self-confidence and national arrogance, but also led to animosity between Magyars and non-Magyars and a strengthening of non-Magyar resistance in several parts of Hungary. In the southern city of Novi Sad, for example, the Serb population openly refused to participate in the celebrations, and the political leaders of the different non-Magyar nationalities began to seek closer cooperation to make their opposition to Hungarian repression policies more effective.⁴⁸ The year 1896 also witnessed a general election that surpassed all previous elections as far as the level of administrative corruption, violence, and intimidation was concerned, practices that were normal in Hungarian elections. Another policy enthusiastically pursued was the Magyarisation of family names and place-names, official policy since the 1880s. After 1896 this policy was more systematically enforced, with the Hungarian Minister of the Interior instructing county and municipal authorities in 1898 to ‘invite’ all local officials to adopt Magyar names. Similar pressure was brought to bear upon schoolmasters, post office employees, railway officials, etc., whereby promotion was made dependent on their compliance.⁴⁹ Growing numbers of people with German, Jewish, or Slovak names, at first mainly government employees and those belonging to the middle class but increasingly also people belonging to the lower middle classes, the ‘labour aristocracy’, and even ordinary workers, adopted brand new Magyar names that were usually a Magyar ‘translation’ or bastardisation of their original names. The compulsory Magyarisation of all Hungarian place-names, many artificially fabricated, was another example of what has been described as ‘historical vandalism’ and ‘Magyaromania’.⁵⁰ Some people in Hungary dared to protest against these measures, for example a delegation of Germans (‘Saxons’) from Transylvania, otherwise not known for their oppositional inclinations, who met with abuse on the part of the government and the Hungarian Parliament.

At the end of 1904 a protracted political crisis began that was due to the escalating conflict between the ruling Liberal Party and a ‘Coalition’ of Hungarian opposition parties led by the Independence Party. In the general election of January 1905, the Liberals, who had ruled Hungary for more than three decades and who were confronted with accusations that they were too soft on defending Hungarian national interests vis-à-vis Austria, suffered a historic defeat. The principal demand of the opposition parties was the introduction of Magyar instead of German as the language of command and communication in all army units in Hungary. Forced on the defensive and faced with the nationalist demands of the Coalition parties that he knew Emperor Franz Joseph and the Austrian government would never accept, the Liberal Prime Minister Géza Fejérváry – who led an ‘unconstitutional’ minority government after the lost election – and the new Minister of the Interior József Kristóffy, in alliance with Franz Joseph

⁴⁶ Quoted in Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, p. 182.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Peter Haslinger, *Hundert Jahre Nachbarschaft. Die Beziehungen zwischen Österreich und Ungarn 1895-1994*, Frankfurt 1996, p. 50.

⁴⁸ Milan Krajčovič, *Slovenská politika v strednej Európe 1890-1901. Spolupráca Slovákov, Rumunov a Srbov*, Bratislava 1971, chap. 5.

⁴⁹ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, p. 187 and appendix 26.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 188-9.

himself, put forward a proposal for the introduction of universal suffrage in Hungary similar to the scheme soon to be carried out in Austria, which in 1907 experienced its first general election on the basis of universal manhood suffrage. In July 1905 Kristóffy even received a delegation of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party, some of whose leaders were willing to support him if he proved serious about introducing universal suffrage, a crucial social democratic demand. The minister gave a speech to the visiting social democrats explaining his belief that the introduction of universal suffrage was the only way for Hungary to get out of its social and political dead-lock. However, when the Coalition leaders withdrew their more extreme nationalist demands – including the introduction of Magyar as the army’s language of command in Hungary – and made peace with Franz Joseph in secret negotiations, the emperor withdrew his support for the scheme of universal suffrage in Hungary. The threat of introducing universal suffrage had fulfilled its purpose of intimidating the Coalition parties, to whom the idea was apparently even more distasteful than to the Liberals. In April 1906 a Coalition-dominated interim cabinet was formed, and the next month there followed another general election that again resulted in a victory of the Coalition parties, foremost among whom was the Independence Party.⁵¹ Since expectations of franchise reform had been raised in Hungary, the new Coalition Government made promises to introduce it in the future and submitted a Universal Suffrage Bill. However, neither the government nor parliament accomplished anything the following years, which led to a fragmentation of the Independence Party with only the left wing seeming to be serious about franchise reform. The final passing of a new franchise bill in 1913 by the Liberals, who had returned to power in 1910 under a new name, only meant a minor broadening of the franchise, which remained restricted to about one-third of adult men.⁵² In July 1910, a prominent member of the Hungarian parliament expressed a widespread ruling-class opinion when he said: ‘If we (Magyars) let the sovereignty out of our hands, we can never recover it. No serious man in this country can be a supporter of Universal Equal and Secret Suffrage.’⁵³ Indeed, the post-1906 Coalition Government soon surpassed the Liberals, several of whom went over to the Coalition parties, in the intensity of its suppression of the political activities of the national minorities as well as the socialists. It was clear that both Magyar political camps, with the exception of a few Independence Party democrats, agreed on the need to suppress the different opposition forces potentially threatening the supremacy of the Magyar political and social elite. In 1909 this led to a number of democratically minded MPs seceding from the mainstream Independence Party. Some of them were regarded by the Social Democratic Party as allies in the struggle for universal suffrage and social reform.

In July 1906 Coalition MPs heard with satisfaction former premier Bánffy argue in the

⁵¹ See on the crisis of 1905-6, e.g., D. Nemes, ‘Die Regierungskrise im Jahre 1905-1906 und der Kampf der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Ungarns um das Wahlrecht’, in *Études historiques hongroises* 1975, vol. 2, pp. 147-206; Peter F. Sugar, ‘An Underrated Event: The Hungarian Constitutional Crisis of 1905-6’, *East European Quarterly* XV, no. 3, 1981, pp. 281-310; F. Tibor Zsuppán, ‘Die politische Szene Ungarns’, in *Die letzten Jahre der Donaumonarchie. Der erste Vielvölkerstaat im Europa des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Mark Cornwall, Vienna, 2004, pp. 108-12.

⁵² In 1901 the number of registered voters was about one million. The population of ‘Hungary proper’ was 16.7 million in 1900, one half of whom must have been men, while the proportion of men from the age of twenty-four (an electoral qualification) may have been about half of that, i.e., about four million. Cf. Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, appendix 11, p. 467, where a figure of six percent is given denoting the proportion of the total population who were enfranchised. What matters, however, is the proportion of enfranchised men from the age of twenty-four, which in the light of the figures given above must have been around twenty-five percent. Indeed, according to a report from 1918, under the franchise law of 1913 (which resulted in a modest broadening of the franchise) about one-third of adult men had the vote, but ‘only in theory’, the number who really had the chance to vote being always smaller as a result of factors like electoral corruption and intimidation. See Oscar Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Hungary*, 2nd edn, New York 1969 (1st edn 1924), p. 9.

⁵³ Quoted in R.W. Seton-Watson, *Corruption and Reform in Hungary. A Study of Electoral Practice*, London 1911, p. 30.

Hungarian parliament once again that securing the ‘national State’ had to take precedence over defending the ‘legal State’, and that Hungary’s interests demanded the erection of the first ‘on the most extreme Chauvinistic lines’. In October 1907 this toughest of Hungarian elderly statesmen commented as follows on the different views of Magyars and non-Magyars regarding the national question: ‘In a peaceful manner this question cannot be solved. An understanding cannot be reached between us; for we wish the unitary Magyar national state, while they wish the polyglot State, with equal rights of the nationalities.’⁵⁴ Bánffy explained that several provisions of the Nationalities’ Law had been abrogated by new laws passed after 1868. In 1908 Kálmán Széll, another former prime minister, tried to outdo Bánffy and declared: ‘We have only one single categorical imperative, the Magyar state idea, and we must demand that every citizen should acknowledge it and subject himself unconditionally to it. From this point of view we, all politicians of Hungary, are intransigent... I shall tell why. Because Hungary has its age-old, holy, and legitimate rights to strengthen the idea of such a state. The Magyars have conquered this country for the Magyars and not for others. The supremacy and the hegemony of the Magyars is fully justified...’⁵⁵ Perhaps the national-political creed of the Hungarian ruling class could not be better illustrated than by this statement. But the other side of this megalomania was the Magyar ‘fear psychosis’, as Oszkár Jászi has described it, an almost cultivated paranoia regarding the threat posed by the other nationalities. In November 1906 Gyula Andrassy, Minister of the Interior in the Coalition Government, described the aims of the non-Magyar political leaders – 26 Slovaks, Romanians, and Serbs had been elected to parliament six months before, despite all the restrictions, corruption, and intimidation – as ‘dangerous, anti-national and hostile to the State’. In May 1907 Andrassy admitted that in his view the national problem in Hungary was a question of applying ‘brute force’, another remarkable statement. This was also evident in the Hungarian parliament itself, where the deputies of the national minorities were usually shouted down by the Magyar majority and treated as traitors. In June 1908 Kálmán Széll addressed the Annual Conference of the chauvinistic ‘Magyar Cultural Associations’, describing the ‘unitary Magyar State’ as the principal aim ‘intransigently’ promoted by every Hungarian statesman and politician. He said: ‘Every citizen is equal before the law, with the single limitation regarding language, which is demanded by political unity and the unity of administration and justice.’⁵⁶ Everyone in Hungary who understood the meaning of these words had to conclude that they were meant as a legitimation for the policy of denationalisation and political persecution, which was continued and even intensified by the Coalition Government. Sándor Wekerle, the prime minister of the new government, openly declared in June 1906 that he could not fulfil the linguistic clauses of the Nationalities’ Law. There was no reason to have any illusions about the trend of Hungarian government policy after the election of May 1906.

The twenty-six MPs of the non-Magyar nationalities, of whom there were never so many as during the period 1906-10 – even if they were only an insignificant fraction (six percent) of parliament⁵⁷ –, were soon reduced to near-silence by a new wave of repression and intimidation.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, p. 197.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Jászi, *Dissolution*, p. 321.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, p. 199. Jászi wrote about the Magyar Cultural Associations (which promoted the process of Magyarisation all over Hungary) that their ‘haughty nationalistic declamations filled the air with an atmosphere of chauvinistic megalomania’, and that they had a ‘pathological state of mind’; see Jászi, *Dissolution*, pp. 322, 336.

⁵⁷ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, p. 194; Hoensch, *History of Modern Hungary*, pp. 27, 66. The Lower House of the Hungarian parliament had 453 seats, 40 of which were reserved for the delegates of autonomous Croatia; of the 413 deputies representing Hungary proper, the 26 national-minority MPs elected in May 1906 represented a unique high point never repeated again; see also note 46. For the Slovak participation in the elections of 1905 and 1906, see Bokes, *Dejiny Slovákov a Slovenska*, pp. 304-12; Michal Potemra, ‘Uhorské volebné právo a voľby na Slovensku v rokoch 1901-1914’, *Historický časopis* 23, no. 2, 1975, pp. 201-39; J. Butvin, ‘Vzostup národnopolitického hnutia’, in *Dejiny Slovenska IV (od konca 19. stor. do roku 1918)*, ed. Pavel Hapák,

In November 1906 Ferdinand Juriga, one of the seven Slovak MPs and a Catholic priest representing the Slovak People's Party (SPP), was sentenced in Pressburg to two years' imprisonment. His political offence was officially 'incitement against the Magyar nationality' in newspaper articles, in which he had attacked Magyar chauvinists and had defended himself against the charges of treason and disloyalty they had brought against him.⁵⁸ Other Slovak MPs (whose immunity was not respected), newspaper editors, priests – including the leader of the SPP Andrej Hlinka, who was sentenced in two consecutive trials to three-and-a-half years' imprisonment –, and even ordinary citizens were charged with similar offences and sent to jail, fined, or threatened with suspension from their jobs. Slovak and other non-Magyar political leaders and members of parliament were forced to create a system of 'straw men' when writing newspaper articles – young Slovaks or Romanians would take responsibility for articles against which the public prosecutor was likely to take action, regarding it as an honour to go to prison. In the year 1907 alone, the Slovak Catholic newspaper *Ludové noviny* (The People's News) was confiscated twenty times, while Slovak newspapers published in the United States were banned altogether. Several Slovaks were imprisoned without trial, and judicial action against all kinds of often ludicrous 'political offences', including of course the perennial 'pan-Slavism', reached unprecedented levels. During the years 1906-8, 560 Slovaks (the majority being ordinary workers and peasants who in one way or another had shown sympathy for Slovak national leaders) were sentenced to a total of ninety-one years and seven months' imprisonment.⁵⁹ But the most shocking incident of all, which became notorious throughout the Habsburg Monarchy and the rest of Europe, was the massacre in the Slovak village of Černová, where in October 1907 fifteen villagers were killed by Hungarian gendarmes. They were protesting against the fact that their priest, the imprisoned Hlinka, was not given permission to consecrate their new church. Slovak national political meetings, but also meetings of other opposition parties like the social democrats, were often forbidden on the basis of petty or non-existing regulations. In October 1907, for example, a meeting in support of universal suffrage in the Slovak town of Holíč was prohibited on flimsy, incomprehensible grounds. Where permission was given for a meeting, police officers could dissolve it at any moment or stop the speaker from continuing his speech. Indeed, it happened that a speaker was not allowed to use the word 'Slovak' and instead used the word 'Chinese' when referring to the Slovak people in order to avoid police interference. It also happened that Slovaks who had returned from America would speak English at public meetings in order not to be understood by local officials.⁶⁰

The struggle for democratic freedoms and universal suffrage arguably had the potential of forging a united front of the Hungarian social democrats and democratic political groups among the non-Magyar nationalities. There were instances of political contact between the two sides, but this did not develop into a systematic form of cooperation that could overcome the often existing mutual suspicion between Magyars and non-Magyars. Repression by the Hungarian government and divide-and-rule policies also played a part in this. In the autumn of 1907, for example, a joint mass meeting in support of universal suffrage was planned in Pressburg at which both social democratic leaders and non-Magyar parliamentary deputies should speak. However, permission to hold the meeting was refused by the authorities with the argument that in addition to Magyar and German speeches, speeches in Slovak (meant for the large number of Slovak workers in

Bratislava, 1986, pp. 262-71; Milan Podrimavský, 'Vyvrcholenie politickej krízy. Koaličná vláda 1905-1910', in *Na začiatku storočia 1901-1914*, ed. D. Kováč, pp. 165-8.

⁵⁸ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, p. 196. According to Potemra, 'Uhorské volebné právo', pp. 215, 235, there were six Slovaks (not seven, as Seton-Watson suggests) elected to parliament in 1906, five for the Catholic SPP and one for the largely Protestant Slovak National Party (SNP).

⁵⁹ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, p. 309.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 282-3. See for the Černová massacre and its political context Roman Holec, *Tragédia v Černej a slovenská spoločnosť*, Martin 1997.

Pressburg) had been announced.⁶¹ The Hungarian government was obviously afraid of the prospect of political cooperation between Slovak nationalists and the social democrats. But apart from factors like the prevailing political and ideological friction between the two groups, the relentless suppression of Slovak national aspirations by the authorities, and fear on the part of the social democrats of an intensification of the repression against themselves, there were other and perhaps even more important reasons why the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (HSDP) was looking for other allies than the national minorities in the struggle for democracy. These reasons were partly rooted in the perceived political implications of the undemocratic system and the distribution of power in Hungary, in the belief that only a strategic alliance with Magyar democratic forces on the 'official' Hungarian political scene could lead to a successful struggle for 'the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution'. Partly, they were also rooted in subtle forms of Magyar chauvinism and in a lack of trust in the political intentions of the leaders of the national minorities. Since the leadership of the HSDP largely consisted of Magyars and the social and political distance between them and the leaders of the non-Magyar nationalities was considerable, it was perhaps not surprising that the strategy of the Social Democratic Party was focused on seeking allies among Magyar bourgeois-democratic and radical middle-class groups, even progressive personalities among the gentry and democratic elements in the Independence Party. These people were mainly concentrated in the Hungarian capital, which reinforced the Budapest-centric orientation of the HSDP. The evolution of Hungarian social democratic political strategy will be further examined below. First, something more needs to be said about the Hungarian electoral and political system and its social background.

It is important to understand the true nature of the Hungarian political system and the social and political consequences of the narrow franchise, which – in contrast to Austria – remained almost unchanged during the era of Dualism. Hungary's electoral law of 1874 was no more backward than similar laws in other European countries including Austria, but unlike the Austrian half of the Habsburg Empire Hungary did not reform its franchise qualifications during the following decades and, therefore, ended up with one of the most undemocratic electoral systems in Europe. The franchise qualifications were so complicated that even the official organ of the Hungarian government once described the existing franchise as the 'confusion of Babel'. In January 1905 Albert Apponyi, the politician who two years later introduced the notorious Education Act of 1907, described Hungary's electoral system as 'belonging to the realm of fables' and 'the laughing-stock of the world'.⁶² If these mouthpieces of official Hungary could make such statements about one of the basic institutions of Hungarian political life, it is difficult to exaggerate its shortcomings. The qualifications for the franchise were based on property, taxation, profession, official position, and ancestral privileges, all of which were highly restrictive. As already noted, this resulted in a proportion of enfranchised adult men that cannot have been much more than twenty-five percent even during the last Hungarian general election in 1910. The electorate was mainly composed of the numerous Magyar nobility, the urban middle classes, and the wealthier sections of the peasantry. In the national-minority regions peasants, tradesmen, and educated men provided a number of voters who could elect a limited number of non-Magyar deputies. The urban and rural working classes and the poor peasantry were largely unrepresented in parliament, with the exception of a small artisan and petty-bourgeois element. Indeed, it has been estimated that less than six percent of the working class and only thirteen percent of the 'small trading class' were enfranchised, while almost sixty percent of the electorate were landowners possessing more than eight acres of land.⁶³ Of the 413 seats representing Hungary proper in the parliament elected in 1910, only forty-one (less than ten percent) actually

⁶¹ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, p. 282.

⁶² Quoted *ibid.*, pp. 250, 273.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

represented the towns and cities.⁶⁴ This state of affairs was quite different from the situation in Austria, where in 1907 the first general election based on universal manhood suffrage resulted, among other things, in a large social democratic representation (eighty-seven deputies of five nationalities) in the Austrian *Reichsrat*.⁶⁵ The narrow franchise in Hungary, however, meant that during the entire existence of the Dual Monarchy not a single Hungarian social democrat made it into parliament, although in 1906 two ‘agrarian socialists’ were elected. In the general election of 1910 the HSDP put up candidates in 104 districts, but as the party leadership bitterly observed in its annual report for 1910-11, ‘given the present-day class franchise, our party could of course not expect to get votes.’ Nevertheless, some of its candidates got several hundred votes, and the election campaign was considered a good opportunity to make propaganda.⁶⁶ Only on the local level – in a small number of municipalities where they enjoyed an exceptional popularity even among part of the enfranchised inhabitants – did the Hungarian social democrats achieve some modest electoral successes, although the local franchise was severely limited as well. In 1911, thirty-four social democrats were elected to five town councils in the greater Budapest area⁶⁷; in Pressburg the first social democrat entered the town council only in 1914. Another factor that probably influenced the political fate of social democracy in Hungary was that a potentially radical group like the intelligentsia was mainly recruited from the Magyar gentry and assimilated Jews and Germans. Relatively few among this often somewhat haughty social group – and this was another difference with Austria – were inclined to support a non-mainstream party like the social democrats, whose leaders were almost exclusively self-educated men of working-class origin with a certain aversion to students and intellectuals. Those intellectuals who tried to play a role in the HSDP sometimes displayed a condescending and tactless attitude to the party’s working-class leadership, who in turn made it clear that they would not follow the lead of ‘salon socialists’ and ‘professional students’.⁶⁸ But the consequent weak presence of intellectual figures in the party leadership meant that it did not show much creativity in dealing with an issue like the national question, in contrast to Austria where several social democratic thinkers made important contributions to the analysis and attempted resolution of this problem. However, it was not only the narrow franchise or the backward social structure and gentry lifestyle dominating Hungarian social and political life that impeded the rise of social democracy. At least as important were the unfair and corrupt electoral practices and the various methods of political intimidation, manipulation, and repression, some of which have already been mentioned in connection with the persecution of politically active Slovaks.

Both the non-Magyar nationalities and the socialists were treated as political outcasts who should not be tolerated on the official political scene or in the gentry-dominated Hungarian parliament. We are relatively well informed about the different tricks and devices used during

⁶⁴ Seton-Watson, *Corruption and Reform*, p. 38.

⁶⁵ See, e.g., Lothar Höbelt, “‘Wohltemperierte Unzufriedenheit’”. Österreichische Innenpolitik 1908-1918”, in *Die letzten Jahre der Donaumonarchie*, ed. M. Cornwall, p. 70.

⁶⁶ *VGA, P*, Box 127, File 791: ‘Bericht der Leitung der sozialdemokratischen Partei Ungarns über ihre Tätigkeit vom 16. März 1910 bis 15. März 1911’ (Annual Report of the HSDP leadership for the period from 16 March 1910 to 15 March 1911), p. 9.

⁶⁷ *VGA, P*, Box 127, File 791: ‘Bericht über den ungarischen Parteitag 1912’ (Report on the Hungarian Party Congress of 1912), p. 19. According to Wilhelm Böhm, there were 247 socialist municipal-council members shortly before the First World War (out of a total of more than 150,000 in the whole of Hungary); see Wilhelm Böhm, *Im Kreuzfeuer zweier Revolutionen*, Munich 1924, p. 21.

⁶⁸ W.A. Owings, ‘The Roles of the Intellectuals in the South Slav and the Hungarian Social Democratic Movements: A Comparison’, *East European Quarterly* XVII, no. 1, 1983, p. 115; Tibor Süle, *Sozialdemokratie in Ungarn. Zur Rolle der Intelligenz in der Arbeiterbewegung, 1899-1910*, Cologne 1967, p. 108, where the Hungarian party leader Jakab Weltner is quoted who complained in 1905 that ‘the student... thinks himself a born leader’. See also Rudolf L. Tökés, *Béla Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The Origins and Role of the Communist Party of Hungary in the Revolutions of 1918-1919*, New York 1967, chap. 1.

elections to prevent the small number of non-Magyar voters from electing their own representatives. Gerrymandering, the art of manipulative delimitation of electoral districts, reached a state of perfection in Dualist Hungary. Furthermore, there was usually only one polling booth in each constituency, and if unwanted voters yet made their appearance – sometimes after a long journey –, various methods were used to keep them away from the polls, which often led to violent scenes. In the Hungarian general election of 1896, thirty-two people were killed. In Slovak and Romanian districts several hundred troops were present ‘to maintain order’ in a way that was advantageous to the local potentates. The latter, often local officials like the public notary, the mayor, or the head of the district administration, were responsible for preparing the electoral rolls, which made falsification and other forms of administrative corruption easy and attractive; names were arbitrarily omitted, voters disqualified on absurd or illegal grounds, etc. Perhaps worst of all, there was no secret ballot and there were separate entries to the polling booth for rival parties. To vote by public declaration before a mainly Magyar and ruling-clique electoral committee required some courage and could be a matter of ‘to be or not to be’. In many localities in provincial ‘darkest Hungary’ daily life was controlled by the local gentry and ‘patriotic’ officials, and revenge by means of acts of petty tyranny was an easy matter. It was significant that the idea of secret ballot was fiercely rejected by Hungarian politicians, who used arguments that appeared to be derived from the social code of the nobility. According to Count Gyula Andrassy, who laid before parliament a sham ‘franchise reform’ proposition in 1910, secret ballot ‘conflicts with the views, the customs and the moral feelings of society... It weakens the true moral principle that it is every man’s duty to have the courage to express his opinions freely.’⁶⁹ The general election in May 1906 saw in several constituencies in Slovakia the usual acts of intimidation, violence, the annulling of votes on trivial grounds, illegal disqualification of voters (for example because they were said to have an imperfect knowledge of the Magyar language), and other devices to thin the ranks of undesirable (in this case mainly Slovak) voters. Election meetings were frequently prohibited or dissolved, and even non-Magyar MPs could be prevented from addressing their constituencies by the whim of a local official.⁷⁰ The last general election in Dualist Hungary in 1910 saw an even more vicious campaign of violence and corruption than before, during the course of which the government ‘virtually disenfranchised its Non-Magyar opponents at the point of the bayonet’.⁷¹ As a result, the number of non-Magyar deputies in the Hungarian parliament declined from twenty-six to eight. Milan Hodža, a Slovak candidate in the 1910 election (and a future prime minister of Czechoslovakia), commented in despair: ‘Even though 90 per cent. of the electors should decide for you, you still won’t be elected!’⁷² After the election István Tisza, son of the former Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza, declared in parliament that they ‘must welcome with patriotic joy the fact that the elections virtually wiped out the nationalist agitators from public life’. István Tisza, who was destined to play an important and tragic role in the years to come, gave another revealing speech about the foundations of Magyar national politics. He said, ‘our Non-Magyar fellow-citizens must first of all reconcile themselves to the fact that they here belong to a national state, which is not a conglomerate of different races, but which one nation has conquered and founded, upon which one nation has stamped the ineradicable impress of its individuality, a nation whose individual

⁶⁹ Quoted in Seton-Watson, *Corruption and Reform*, p. 31.

⁷⁰ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, pp. 253-67 passim.

⁷¹ Seton-Watson, *Corruption and Reform*, pp. 6, 80-112.

⁷² Quoted *ibid.*, p. 38. In 1896 only one non-Magyar candidate was elected, in 1901 five. The political crisis of 1905-6, pitting Magyar against Magyar, temporarily created a bit more space for non-Magyar electoral participation, so that ten non-Magyar ‘nationalists’ were elected in 1905 and twenty-six in 1906. In addition to the latter, twelve ‘loyal’ Transylvanian Saxons were elected, who usually acted as tools of the government and supported one of the major Magyar parties. See Scotus Viator [R.W. Seton-Watson], *Politische Verfolgungen in Ungarn*, Vienna 1908, p. 12; Jászi, *Dissolution*, p. 334; Hoensch, *History of Modern Hungary*, p. 66.

importance and character must attain to full expression in the State'. He added that 'they must treat agitation and the agitators with pitiless severity', which was followed by applause and acclamation on the part of the great majority of deputies. Indeed, he regretted that 'so little is done against the agitators' and said that he could not 'imagine any proper racial policy in Hungary, unless we strengthen in the field of police and of criminal law the power of the Magyar state towards these agitators'. His promise that he would 'never make compromises' with 'nationalist parties' (i.e., parties representing the national minorities), which was again followed by stormy applause, he was to keep after becoming Hungarian prime minister in 1913; indeed, he was destined to become the grave-digger of Historical Hungary.⁷³ It was perhaps remarkable that, despite the farcical nature of Hungarian elections and the whole political system of the country, there were some local exceptions to the general rule of corruption and manipulation. In the city (and even the county) of Pressburg there seems to have existed a relatively fair system that allowed for elections to be conducted in an orderly and impartial manner, at least in comparison with other localities in Hungary. The existence of German urban administrative traditions may have had something to do with this.

The social structure and political system of Hungary imposed considerable constraints not only on the national minorities but also on opposition forces like the social democrats. Like the non-Magyar nationalities, the social democrats and other socialist groups were severely handicapped by the fact that Hungary, always proud of its 'constitutional' and legal traditions, did not have a proper law of association. Matters like the right of association and assembly were 'regulated' by a ministerial order from 1875 and subsequent government decrees. All voluntary associations had to obtain government approval of their right to exist and could be arbitrarily dissolved at ministerial order; public meetings could be arbitrarily prohibited and political offenders detained, sometimes without trial.⁷⁴ Much of what has been said above regarding the weak application of the rule of law was the result of this fundamental flaw in Hungarian legislation and public administration. It made the whole climate in which political mobilisation and labour organisation occurred highly uncertain and unpredictable. Even the by-laws of trade unions – which were not allowed to contain references to strikes or political action – often failed to meet with government approval, and over and over again trade unions and other worker organisations were ordered to dissolve. Nevertheless, many trade unions were tolerated, at least among urban workers, and even the so-called 'free organisations' – unofficial and actually unlawful Social Democratic Party groups operating within the trade unions – were tolerated as long as they did not openly act in a political or revolutionary way. An official party membership structure with local party branches, however, was forbidden. Only a general political platform represented by a loose party leadership that could be closely watched by the authorities was conditionally allowed. These 'quasi-legal' or 'semi-legal' conditions enabled the authorities to harass Social Democratic Party leaders, 'free organizations', and trade union activists whenever they wanted. Another consequence was that the trade unions were the only properly organised and the principal units of the social democratic movement, although the 'free organisations' played a crucial role in the background.⁷⁵

⁷³ Quotations in Seton-Watson, *Corruption and Reform*, pp. 187-9; Jászi, *Dissolution*, p. 321.

⁷⁴ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, pp. 159, 274-5; Ferenc Pecze and Leonard Bianchi, 'Spolkové a zromaždovacie právo v Uhorsku za dualizmu so zreteľom na robotnícke a národnostné hnutie', *Historický časopis* 11, no. 3, 1963, pp. 389-405; Tibor Erényi, 'The Activities of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary during the First Decade of the Century', in *Studies on the History of the Hungarian Working-Class Movement (1867-1966)*, ed. Henrik Vass, Budapest, 1975, p. 70; Kabos, 'Links', p. 47.

⁷⁵ Erényi, 'Activities', pp. 69-71; Kabos, 'Links', pp. 47-60; Tökés, *Béla Kun*, pp. 6-7, who speaks of 'free associations'; Eugen Varga, *Die sozialdemokratischen Parteien. Ihre Rolle in der internationalen Arbeiterbewegung der Gegenwart*, Hamburg 1926, pp. 245-6. The structure of the Hungarian social democratic movement will be further discussed in chapter 4.

The uncertainty in which labour organisers and social democrats had to work caused R.W. Seton-Watson to comment in 1908 that the ‘treatment of the Social Democrats in Hungary during the last ten years has no parallel west of the Vistula’.⁷⁶ The strikes and protests of the agrarian proletariat in the late 1890s was responded to with a policy of terror, while the social democrats in the urban centres were heavily clamped down upon as well. People were intimidated, expelled from their place of residence, or sent to jail because of ‘political agitation’. The socialist press was persecuted and new measures were approved by parliament making worker organisation and strikes, particularly by agricultural labourers, almost impossible. Nevertheless, the labour movement survived, especially in the cities, and by 1905, when the repression temporarily diminished as a result of Hungary’s protracted political crisis, there followed a strong resurgence of the socialist movement embracing both the agrarian socialists and the social democrats and reaching a climax in 1907. By 1906-7, the total number of trade union members in Hungary exceeded the level of 100,000, a considerable proportion being agricultural labourers. In June 1907 the Association of Agrarian Labourers, supported by the agrarian socialists but also loosely associated with the HSDP, was reported to have 72,562 members. But shortly thereafter several hundred branches were dissolved following a new wave of repression, and by December 1907 the organisation had only 11,910 members left.⁷⁷ It was obvious that the organisation of agricultural workers was an erratic and dangerous affair and that it was difficult to maintain membership levels. Once again, hundreds of agricultural labourers were sentenced to terms of imprisonment, and fresh measures were taken against the socialist press. During the critical year 1907, with its campaigns for universal suffrage and unprecedented working-class mobilisation, more than two hundred socialist meetings were prohibited. The Coalition Government, which refused to keep its promise to introduce franchise reform, instead increased the persecution of the social democratic movement by means of censorship, confiscation of newspapers, and expulsion of labour organisers from their place of residence, the latter mode of punishment being a popular police measure in Hungary. There followed action after action against social democratic and agrarian socialist newspapers for ‘incitement to class hatred’ and similar offences. The newspaper of the eccentric ‘Socialist Count’ Ervin Batthyány, an advocate of Kropotkinite anarchism who unlike the social democrats developed a programme of peasant liberation, was suppressed as well, with Batthyány fleeing to Britain. When in October 1907 the Magyar social democratic newspaper *Népszava* (The People’s Voice) published an article on the Černová massacre criticising the brutal attitude of the government towards the Slovaks, the author was sentenced to two months’ imprisonment because of ‘incitement to class hatred’ and ‘instigation against the Hungarian nation’. In 1906 in another typical incident Trajan Novák, the secretary of the HSDP in the city of Temesvár (Temeschburg/Timisoara), unsuccessfully tried to visit a nearby village to discuss the establishment of an agricultural labourers’ organisation. He was ordered to leave by the village notary and the local landlord’s agent on the ground that he was interfering with the workers who were doing their harvesting work. When he refused to leave, he was sentenced to a month in prison and later, when he described the incident in the local social democratic newspaper, another action was brought

⁷⁶ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, p. 279. According to Erényi, the social democratic movement was to be conducted ‘in legality but under strict police supervision’, kept from entering parliament, and prevented from organising certain important categories of workers (those in state-owned factories, miners, railway workers) or ‘inciting’ the agrarian proletariat and the small peasantry. Most of these prohibitions were ‘successfully enforced’; see Erényi, ‘Activities’, p. 57. Kabos, perhaps more appropriately, speaks of a ‘semi-legal’ situation; see Kabos, ‘Links’, p. 60. Seton-Watson’s judgement was even more severe than that.

⁷⁷ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, p. 280; Tókécs, *Béla Kun*, p. 6; Hoensch, *History of Modern Hungary*, p. 70; Erényi, ‘Activities’, p. 72. By 1911-12, the organisation was growing again, but it does not seem to have regained the unique level of mobilisation of 1907; see *VGA, P*, Box 127, File 791: ‘Bericht über den ungarischen Parteitag 1912’, p. 19.

against him that made him decide to leave the country. In August 1907, commenting on yet another incident whereby a leading social democratic worker had been expelled by the police from his home town because of his political activities, *Népszava* wrote: ‘The proletariat have no fatherland, for the patriots have robbed them of it. And yet they are expected to love this country. Here no law exists to protect the weak; and yet we are to love the fatherland of our oppressors. They possess the right of association; we do not. They are protected by the law in their economic efforts; we are persecuted, sabred or shot!’⁷⁸ The author of this article was sentenced to one year in prison because of ‘incitement to class hatred’.

The fundamental democratic deficit of semi-feudal Hungary and the systematic containment and repression of the working-class movement had some important consequences for the political strategy of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party. It would seem that, despite occasional protests against the oppression of the Slovaks and the other ‘nationalities’, the party considered it too dangerous to openly side with national-minority politicians in opposing Hungary’s undemocratic social and political order. Even if there had been the political will to do so – but in fact there is very little evidence that this was the case –, the additional risks involved in terms of exposing the social democratic movement to intensified police and government repression would probably have been considered too great. That building an alliance with democratic national-minority politicians may have entailed this kind of political risk is shown by some of the incidents described above. From the standpoint of the Magyar leadership of the HSDP a more sensible strategy must have seemed to be to seek cooperation with Magyar democratic political forces. Although *Népszava* would write from time to time – as the article quoted above illustrates – that the working class had ‘no fatherland’ given the oppression and exploitation it was subjected to, there is plenty of evidence that the party leadership had in fact a genuine Greater Hungarian and Magyar national consciousness. *Népszava*’s complaint about the proletariat having been ‘robbed’ of its fatherland, which may remind us of similar agrarian socialist statements quoted from *In Darkest Hungary* at the beginning of this chapter, suggests that it was actually considered a workers’ right to have a fatherland with which they could identify. What had to be done was to democratise and socialise the fatherland, appropriate it for the proletariat. Therefore, the struggle for universal suffrage and democratic freedoms, often defined in Marxist jargon as the ‘completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution’ or the ‘establishment of bourgeois-democratic conditions’, was seen as a crucial stage on the road towards socialism. Given the specific political realities of Hungary it was not entirely surprising that in the eyes of the Hungarian social democratic leadership this struggle could be most effectively conducted by means of a strategic alliance with other Magyar democratic forces. Moreover, these forces were strategically concentrated in the Hungarian capital Budapest, whereas the national minorities were predominantly located on the country’s periphery. The potential allies that the social democrats were most interested in were the progressive factions of the Independence Party that were breaking away from that party by 1908-9, as well as groups of Magyar radical democrats.⁷⁹

An important factor that also helped to shape the cautious and ‘pragmatic’ strategy of the Hungarian social democrats was the tricky agrarian question and the difficult issue of labour organisation in the countryside. The organisation of agricultural workers and impoverished peasants was a dangerous affair, both in the peripheral non-Magyar regions and in the central Hungarian Plain. The risk of brutal repression in the semi-feudal countryside, especially on the

⁷⁸ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, pp. 312-3 for quotations and the examples of repression; Owings, ‘The Roles of the Intellectuals’, p. 117 for Batthyány.

⁷⁹ Cf. Erényi, ‘Activities’, pp. 62-3, 77-80. Erényi describes the political outlook of the HSDP as an evolutionist two-stages perspective: first the ‘establishment of bourgeois-democratic conditions’, then the gradual and peaceful realisation of socialism.

larger estates that were virtually cut off from the outside world, was much greater than in the relatively open urban environment. Although even in the cities the social democrats had to take care not to provoke government repression of their semi-legal organisations, in the country landowners and local officials often had a free hand in suppressing organisations of agricultural labourers and poor peasants. It is true that the HSDP had many painful experiences with unsuccessful attempts at labour organisation in the countryside. Social democratic fear of landowner retaliation and state repression encouraged the party to steer clear of too risky entanglements in the countryside and to focus on building the labour movement in the major cities. Only intermittently, when political and social circumstances seemed more favourable than was usually the case, efforts were made to gain a foothold among the agrarian proletariat. Indeed, it would almost seem as though there was a kind of silent agreement between the Hungarian government and the social democrats – which was sometimes broken by the latter – that the party would be tolerated in the cities if, as a *quid pro quo*, it assumed an attitude of reticence with regard to the affairs of the countryside. Moreover, the party was unable to develop an effective agrarian programme in the first place. Most of its leaders were doctrinaire Marxists of sorts and, as far as the country was concerned, wanted to deal exclusively with the agrarian proletariat, which was seen as the rural counterpart of the urban working class. There was a small number of ideologically more flexible leaders who understood the importance of supporting the aspirations of the marginal peasants and the demand of dividing up the large estates. The radical redistribution of the land could actually be seen as an aspect of the bourgeois-democratic revolution that the party argued it wanted to promote. But on the other hand such a programme slowed down the process of rural proletarianisation that was seen as the precondition to agrarian modernisation and, ultimately, collectivisation and socialism. In contrast to the trend of progressive concentration of capital in industrial production, a programme of land redistribution was bound to create a new class of increasingly conservative small peasants, who were deeply mistrusted by the social democrats. On 26 July 1907 *Népszava* wrote: ‘The peasantry is reactionary in the true sense of the word: it would like to destroy capitalism, restore... the “good old days”. The peasant... wants to destroy everything that is modern...’ Thus, the social democrats’ preoccupation with the proletariat and their mistrust of the peasantry prevented them from applying the strategic ‘bourgeois-democratic perspective’ to the agrarian question. While this perspective was applied to industrial and urban society and to the idea of transforming the political system as a whole, there was no desire to apply it to the agrarian sector if this meant the transformation of the rural proletariat into a new peasantry. This, in combination with disagreements over whether or not to support the sometimes impulsive and ‘unrealistic’ wage demands of rural strikers, led to a series of defections from the HSDP of those who supported the programme of rural struggle for land redistribution. The social and political movements thus originating were described as ‘agrarian socialism’.⁸⁰ They supported the often spontaneous struggles of agricultural workers and the aim of transforming them into peasants by a programme of land distribution. Although they did not succeed in becoming permanent organisations and usually disintegrated after a few years of intense activity, their appearance showed what the political consequences were of the rigid and orthodox way in which the HSDP was addressing the agrarian question. The party was caught in a dilemma over the struggles of the agrarian proletariat. Getting involved in the social struggles of the countryside might provoke repression that could also threaten its urban position; being too cautious might lead to a loss of influence outside the cities and an uncontested dominance of the agrarian socialists in the country. The

⁸⁰ See for the rise of the agrarian socialist movement and its relationship to social democracy, e.g., Imre Nagy, *Robotnicke hnutie a “agrárny socializmus” v Uhorsku na konci XIX. Storočia*, Bratislava 1951, esp. pp. 32-47; Peter Hanák, *Der Garten und die Werkstatt. Ein kulturgeschichtlicher Vergleich Wien und Budapest um 1900*, Vienna 1992, pp. 185-201. For the quotation from *Népszava* see Tökés, *Béla Kun*, pp. 5-6.

party's inability to resolve this dilemma and the shortcomings of its rural programme contributed to its political immobility and relative isolation.

By 1910 the size of the Hungarian rural proletariat had grown to almost four million people, composed of day-labourers, seasonal workers, and impoverished peasants with only marginal holdings.⁸¹ The aspirations of many of the politically conscious among them were not aimed at socialist collectivisation, but a fair and just redistribution of the land by dividing up the large estates of the Hungarian nobility. Even most of those who owned small holdings, which helped to provide for at least some of their daily needs, were forced to work for wages during part of the year. Hungary's labour laws intended to keep the rural proletariat under strict control. The Agricultural Labour Law of 1876 curtailed the legal equality of rural workers and placed them under the authority of their masters; its successor, the 'slave law' of 1898, further extended these provisions. The so-called 'whipping-bench law' of 1906 gave rural workers greater protection against exploitation, but also sanctioned disciplinary measures including corporal punishment. These measures made labour organisation among rural workers difficult, and yet there were moments when their mobilisation could suddenly assume huge proportions. It was especially at these moments that the weakness of the rural policy of the HSDP became evident. When in 1897 strikes of agricultural workers broke out, the majority of the HSDP leadership refused to support what it regarded as extreme wage demands of the day-labourers. By the 1890s it had also become obvious that the party's aim of abolishing private landed property was not supported by the small and marginal peasantry or indeed the agricultural workers originally belonging to it. What the impoverished peasants wanted was a few hectares of land. It was perhaps typical of these men that when they were in the (often only temporary) position of wage earners, they could make unexpectedly radical demands. The social and political attitudes and complex position of the rural proletariat, overlapping as it did with the poor peasantry, used to the rhythm of seasonal labour, and less 'disciplined' than the urban organised workers, did not easily fit in with the 'rational' and Marxist concepts of urban socialists. In the eyes of the social democrats, rural workers must have looked like an unpredictable mass of spontaneously acting men incapable of disciplined organisation and inclined to make impulsive, unrealistic demands. In 1897 the refusal of the HSDP unconditionally to support the demands of rural strikers, in combination with more fundamental disagreements over rural policy, led to a break-away from the party and the formation of the 'Independent Socialist Party of Hungary' led by István Várkonyi, a former rural labourer. Várkonyi's agrarian socialist ideas and his call for dividing up all landed property of more than 50 hectares appealed to the rural proletariat and the poor peasantry alike. Nevertheless, his party did not become a success, but in 1900 a similar movement called the 'Reorganised Social Democratic Party' founded by Vilmos Mezőfi continued the effort to create an agrarian socialist movement in Hungary. This was made easier by the neglect of rural problems by the 'official' social democrats, who continued to view peasant demands for land reform as a regressive rather than a progressive phenomenon. In 1906 Mezőfi and another agrarian socialist leader were elected to parliament as the only Hungarian socialists who ever made it into this exclusive pre-1918 institution, probably thanks to a measure of support from enfranchised middle peasants who were in favour of social reform. This is also suggested by the fact that in 1906 yet another peasant party, the 'Independent Socialist Peasants' Party of Hungary', was founded by András Áchim, himself a wealthy peasant but also a radical reformer who advocated universal suffrage and land reform and who was murdered in 1911. The epithet 'socialist' had a populist and sometimes even 'chiliastic' meaning in the context of the Hungarian agrarian parties, all of which had a programme of radical land distribution in favour of the peasantry and rural population. Whereas the mobilisation of the rural proletariat and the marginal peasantry remained a delicate affair, the more stable social group of the middle peasants immediately above them

⁸¹ Hoensch, *History of Modern Hungary*, p. 40.

could possibly play a part in an alliance for democratic reform. This was another factor influencing the political strategy of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party. The party was disinclined to support the economic demands of the peasantry, but it welcomed them as a political ally in the democratic camp.⁸²

By 1909, shortly before Historical Hungary's last general election in June 1910, the most progressive faction of the Independence Party led by the democratically oriented landowner Gyula Justh and, for a brief period, I.N. Szabó (another radical peasant leader) began to oppose the Coalition Government more consistently. The Justh-led party faction, which the future Hungarian leader Mihály Károlyi joined a few years later, represented a small democratic segment of the Hungarian gentry, some radical peasants, and part of the urban middle classes. Under Justh's leadership the party adopted a democratic programme demanding universal suffrage and the abolition of feudal privileges; in the election of 1910 it won 15.8 percent of the vote.⁸³ According to Oszkár Jászi, Justh was the only Magyar politician in the Hungarian parliament at the time who 'tried to soften and counterbalance the spirit of growing chauvinism'. Apart from Justh, only 'a very small group of the Hungarian Socialists' and the Sociological Society of Budapest (of whom Jászi himself was a prominent representative) 'acknowledged the fatal gravity of the nationality problem'.⁸⁴ But it was not the national problem that attracted most attention from the democratic political forces in Hungary, but the struggle for universal suffrage and other political reforms. In 1911 the parliamentary opposition also demanded an anti-militarist government policy – for the social democrats additional proof that cooperation on the basis of a broad Magyar democratic alliance was possible. That year saw the beginning of an alliance of the HSDP, Justh's Independence Party, and 'bourgeois radicals' like Jászi in the struggle for universal suffrage. On 4 March 1912 – five years after the introduction of universal suffrage in Austria – a general strike was organised to support the demand for universal suffrage in Hungary. Since October 1907, when some 200,000 people in Budapest participated in a social democratic demonstration against the withholding of universal suffrage from the Hungarian people, there had been no similar attempt at political mass mobilisation. In May 1912 the opposition led by Justh and Károlyi decided to boycott parliament and to stir the Budapest population into action in protest at the unsatisfactory Electoral Reform Bill and Defence Bill submitted by the government. On 23 May 1912, 'Bloody Thursday', a mass demonstration was held and street fighting erupted in Budapest in which eight people were killed. The political struggle was also massively supported in Pressburg. On 4 March 1912, the day of the general strike, Pressburg saw its largest mass meeting ever, and after 'Bloody Thursday' the city experienced another two weeks of protests culminating in another mass demonstration against the government and for universal suffrage. In January 1913 the government presented a new Franchise Bill, but it still excluded the great majority of the working class and the Hungarian population. Although protest action had been planned, this time the HSDP failed to organise mass protests or strike action.⁸⁵ The party was afraid of more bloodshed. The Austrian social democratic newspaper *Arbeiter-Zeitung* reported that the Hungarian party leadership feared that the government would damage the party,

⁸² Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 69-72; Hanák, *Der Garten und die Werkstatt*, pp. 185-201; Erényi, 'Activities', pp. 64-7; Kabos, 'Links', p. 51.

⁸³ Hoensch, *History of Modern Hungary*, p. 67; 'Biographies', in *History of Hungary*, ed. Pamlényi, p. 617.

⁸⁴ Jászi, *Dissolution*, p. 340. See for the so-called 'second reform generation' of radical intellectuals around Jászi, e.g., Tőkés, *Béla Kun*, pp. 16-21.

⁸⁵ *VGA, P*, Box 127, File 791: 'Bericht der Leitung der sozialdemokratischen Partei Ungarns über ihre Tätigkeit vom 16. März 1912 bis 15. März 1913' (Annual Report of the HSDP leadership for the period from 16 March 1912 to 15 March 1913), pp. 7-13 for the events of 23 May 1912. See also T. Erényi et al., *Dějiny maďarského revolučného dělnického hnutí*, Prague 1974, pp. 75-80; Vladimír Lehotský, 'Boj bratislavského robotníctva od nástupu imperializmu (1900-1914)', in *Dejiny Bratislavy*, eds Darina Lehotská and Ján Pleva, Bratislava, 1966, p. 262 for events in Pressburg in 1912.

this 'strongest army for universal suffrage', by committing 'mass murder' if the mobilisation of the working class was resumed.⁸⁶ The party increasingly developed the strategy of seeking peaceful cooperation with the other democratic forces in Budapest. It received some support from the radicals around Jászi, who edited the journal of the Sociological Society, *Huszadik Század* (The Twentieth Century), and who actively supported programmes of workers' education. In June 1914 Jászi united a number of radical democratic groups and individuals in a new 'Civic-Radical Party', which demanded more democratic freedoms, a broad-based franchise, radical land reform, and other social and political reforms.

The outbreak of war in August 1914 initially led to an outpouring of Hungarian patriotism and Magyar national passions similar to what happened in the other belligerent countries. The idea that the disgrace of 1849, when the revolutionary Hungarian army was finally defeated by the Russians, could now be revenged by a victorious war against 'Russian barbarism' caused an outburst of enthusiasm that was also shared by many Hungarian (and Austrian) social democrats.⁸⁷ Austro-Hungarian and German social democrats saw the Russian autocracy as the archenemy of socialism; this helped to justify their decision to support the 'defensive' war effort of the two Central Powers against 'Czarist barbarism' and the Russian enemy.⁸⁸ The central organ of the Hungarian Trade Union Council wrote in October 1914 that 'the war has stopped the class struggle. Rich and poor, employers and workers are fighting shoulder to shoulder'.⁸⁹ In Hungary anti-Serbian and anti-Russian propaganda, violent Magyar chauvinism, and a wave of brutal persecution of 'pan-Slavists' among the mistrusted non-Magyar nationalities led, as a Slovak historian described it, to an atmosphere of 'anti-Slav hysteria' overseen by the 'strong hand' of the government of István Tisza. It is true that there were expressions of sympathy for the Serbs and the Russians even among ordinary Slovaks, and by October 1914 some six hundred Slovaks had been imprisoned for 'political offences'.⁹⁰ However, it would be wrong to believe that the majority of Slovaks were actively opposing the war or abandoning their traditional loyalty to the Habsburg Monarchy. It is probably true that most ordinary people among the national minorities in Hungary remained loyal even to the Hungarian state, at least up to the end of 1917 or the beginning of 1918.⁹¹ The Slovak historian Dušan Kováč has argued that, although contemporary documents and press reports claiming that the Slovaks – the common people rather than political figures, though – were among the bravest fighters for King, Emperor, and the Hungarian Fatherland were largely producing stereotypes, 'one cannot deny their real foundation,

⁸⁶ *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 5 March 1913.

⁸⁷ In this connection the idea of 'Central Europe', seen as a bulwark of European civilisation against Russian autocracy and barbarism, was of some significance as well, for instance for Oszkár Jászi, who wrote that he 'clung to the symbol of "Mitteleuropa" only so long as Russia of Tsarist autocracy was the ally of the Entente Powers'; see Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, p. 2. The attitude of the German, Austrian, and Hungarian social democrats was much the same; see, e.g., Julius Braunthal, 'Otto Bauer's Lebensbild', in *Otto Bauer. Eine Auswahl aus seinem Lebenswerk*, ed. Julius Braunthal, Vienna, 1961, pp. 23-4.

⁸⁸ See L.L. Farrar, Jr, 'Reluctant Warriors: Public Opinion on War during the July Crisis 1914', *East European Quarterly* XVI, no. 4, 1983, pp. 420-1; T. Erényi, 'Die Frage der Revolution und der Reform in der Arbeiterbewegung Österreich-Ungarns um die Jahrhundertwende', in *Études historiques hongroises* 1975, vol. 2, p. 58. Against this background the Austrian *Arbeiter-Zeitung* of 2 August 1914 could call the war 'the Czar's World War', and the edition of 5 August proclaimed its hope for victory in this 'holy cause of the German people' (which included the Germans of Austria); quoted in Farrar, Jr, p. 421. *Népszava* of 3 August 1914 similarly called the war 'the Holy cause of the nation'; see István Deák, 'The Decline and Fall of Habsburg Hungary, 1914-18', in *Hungary in Revolution, 1918-19*, ed. Iván Völgyes, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1971, p. 12.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Varga, *Die sozialdemokratischen Parteien*, p. 248. See for the Hungarian working-class movement during the First World War, Erényi et al., *Dějiny maďarského revolučního dělnického hnutí*, pp. 86-144.

⁹⁰ Marián Hronský, *The Struggle for Slovakia and the Treaty of Trianon 1918-1920*, Bratislava 2001, pp. 18-9, 35.

⁹¹ Cf. Hoensch, *History of Modern Hungary*, p. 81.

especially during the first years of the war'.⁹² But after two years of exhausting war conditions, growing disaffection emerged among all national groups in Hungary. Large numbers of people began to realise the war's futility, and the broad unity and collaboration born of a sense of patriotic duty began to fall apart. Democratic opposition groups, including bourgeois radicals and social democrats, began to express doubts about the policies and quality of the military leadership and to voice complaints about the dire consequences of the disruption of economic life. As war-weariness and hunger among growing numbers of people increased, the longing for peace and support for pacifism grew. From the middle of 1915 Jászi's Radical Party began to support the peace movement, which was gaining popularity all over Europe. In July 1916 the reorganised Independence Party, now led by Mihály Károlyi, began to advocate peace and political reforms. By 1917 the longing for peace became a mass phenomenon in the Habsburg Monarchy. On May Day 1917 there were large demonstrations in Austria and Hungary, and trade union membership exceeded the figure of 200,000 for the first time in Hungarian history. At the same time, the political aspirations of the non-dominant nations in the Dual Monarchy came increasingly to the fore. Thus, from the end of 1917 the idea of national self-determination and growing opposition to the war moved into the centre of Slovak political life, crippled though it was by war conditions. On 3 January 1918 the Slovak newspaper *Národné noviny* (National News), the organ of the relatively conservative and cautious Slovak National Party, wrote that 'the Slovaks are opening their eyes'. On 2 February it demanded implementation of the right to national self-determination, democracy, and the reopening of the three Slovak gymnasiums and the cultural institute *Matica slovenská*, all of which had been brutally closed down in the 1870s.⁹³ In January 1918 there were massive strikes of ammunition workers in Austria and Hungary. After the conclusion of the Peace of Brest-Litovsk between the Central Powers and Russia in March 1918, large numbers of Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war of all nationalities returned from Russia. Like the workers who had remained at home they began to express demands for social and political change, and this, in combination with the grievances of the increasingly desperate general population, threatened to create a revolutionary situation. In May 1918 mutinies broke out in Hungarian army units, followed by more strikes including a general strike in June that lasted nine days and could only be ended after mediation of the HSDP leadership. During the spring and summer of 1918 the number of desertions from the army increased and at least twenty-five revolts and mutinies by returnees from Russia in new 'replacement units' occurred, in which Slovaks and soldiers from the other Slav nationalities played a leading part.⁹⁴ Among striking workers economic demands were increasingly accompanied by political demands, while the national minorities began to openly support the demand for national autonomy or even state independence made by their political leaders in exile, such as the Czechs Tomáš G. Masaryk and Edvard Beneš and the Slovak Milan R. Štefánik.

At the massively attended May Day celebration of 1918 in the northern Slovak town of Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš, the first public declaration was made in Slovakia itself demanding 'the unconditional recognition of the right to self-determination of all nations', including 'the Hungarian branch of the Czechoslovak nation [*kmeň*]'.⁹⁵ This resolution was the joint product of

⁹² Dušan Kováč, 'Rok 1918 v slovenských dejinách', in *Českoslovenství - středoevropanství - evropanství. Úvahy, svědectví a fakta k 80. výročí vzniku Československa 1918-1998*, ed. Stanislava Kučerová, Brno, 1998, p. 107.

⁹³ *NN*, 3 January 1918 quoted in Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, p. 37; *NN*, 2 February 1918 quoted in *Sociálne a národné hnutie na Slovensku od Októbrovej revolúcie do vzniku československého štátu (Dokumenty)*, ed. Eudovít Holotík, Bratislava, 1979, document 50, pp. 106-7.

⁹⁴ Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, p. 43. See for the strikes and protests in Hungary during the period January to June 1918, Erényi et al., *Dějiny maďarského revolučního dělnického hnutí*, pp. 122-36.

⁹⁵ *Sociálne a národné hnutie*, ed. E. Holotík, document 97, pp. 170-1, and p. 171 note 1. The term *kmeň* means as much as 'tribe', in the sense of branch of the greater family of Slav nations.

the influential Slovak nationalist Vavro Šrobár and local social democratic leaders, and its adoption at a mass meeting organised by the Slovak social democrats was proof of the good relationship between the latter and progressive nationalists like Šrobár. Both the group of nationalists around Šrobár and the Slovak social democrats were supporters of the idea of Czecho-Slovak (even ‘Czechoslovak’) unity, as the Mikuláš resolution clearly showed. Word of the declaration spread beyond Slovakia and was used by the Czechoslovak leadership abroad as proof of the political will of the Slovak people to gain their independence together with the Czechs. From May 1918 representatives of all Slovak political groups began to openly support a Czechoslovak state orientation – even if the concrete understanding of this idea was different among the different groups – as the most practical and desirable option to realise the programme of Slovak self-determination. The leaders of the Slovak Nationality Committee in the HSDP entered a period of deepening conflict with the central party leadership as they began to support the policy of Slovak national unity whose aim was national liberation and Czechoslovak statehood. At the beginning of June the Slovak social democratic newspaper *Robotnícke noviny* (Worker News) declared its support for the idea of national multi-party cooperation and reactivation of the Slovak National Council, a political organ that had been established already on previous occasions – the last time shortly before the beginning of the war in 1914 – to further Slovak national aims.⁹⁶ With regard to the future of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the summer of 1918 brought a break-through on the level of international diplomacy as well as on the home front. The Entente governments decided to recognise the Czechoslovak National Council in Paris as a belligerent ally, which was made possible, among other things, by the fact that tens of thousands of Czechs and Slovaks, deserters from the Austro-Hungarian army and former prisoners of war in Italy, France, and Russia, were fighting in ‘Czechoslovak Legions’ on the Allied side. Gradually ‘the destruction of Austria-Hungary’ became a popular slogan in the West and among growing numbers of people in the Habsburg Monarchy itself. That it also became an almost generally accepted idea among the Allied leaders, is shown by the fact that most of the territorial claims of the Czechs and Slovaks, the South Slavs, and the Romanians were endorsed by them. The older proposals for a democratic and federalist reconstruction of the multinational empire were now seen as outdated – history had taken another leap forward. This seemed to be the case also in other, social-revolutionary ways. It has been argued that a revolutionary overthrow of the Dual Monarchy by radicalised workers, peasants, and soldiers was prevented by ‘its disintegration into western-style democratic nation states’.⁹⁷ However, the social-revolutionary dimension was by no means absent in the Monarchy’s final collapse. In fact, the events in the autumn of 1918 were a complex revolutionary process in which national, social, and military aspects all played a part.

By October 1918 the reactionary Hungarian government led by Count István Tisza – in contrast to the more pragmatically acting government of Austria and the attitude of the last Habsburg Emperor Karl himself – was still resisting the demands of all those who insisted that only an immediate peace, a policy of political and social reforms, and substantial concessions to the non-Magyar nationalities might save ‘Historical Hungary’. In a revealing memorandum written by some reform-minded Hungarian government officials and university professors, the hopeless condition of Hungary was analysed and subjected to a devastating critique. In October it

⁹⁶ *Robotnícke noviny* (RN), 6 June 1918, responding to the suggestion of the Slovak weekly *Slovenský týždenník* of 31 May 1918 that the social democrats should be represented in the Slovak National Council on the basis of the ‘principle of parity’ with the Slovak National Party. On 23 May 1918 *Robotnícke noviny* had already observed that the May Day meeting in Liptovský Sv. Mikuláš had forced the SNP to pay more serious attention to the Slovak social democrats. See for the renewal of Slovak political life in 1918, the various problems and controversies the Slovaks were faced with, and the important role of Šrobár, Marián Hronský, ‘Problémy národnooslobodzovacieho hnutia Slovákov v roku 1918’, *Historický časopis* 23, no. 1, 1975, pp. 11-47.

⁹⁷ Hoensch, *History of Modern Hungary*, p. 81.

was presented to the King-Emperor and some leading Austrian politicians. The memorandum was entitled, 'The situation in Hungary: a warning from a group of anxious patriots who stand apart from the politics of the day'. It claimed that the Hungarian people was 'one of the most forlorn and neglected in Europe', that the country's labour legislation was hopelessly backward, and that there was 'no other country, except Roumania and pre-revolutionary Russia, with so reactionary a franchise as Hungary'.⁹⁸ It further observed: 'With the social problems of the country its racial difficulties have become more acute. The world war has inflamed the racial discord. The ruling classes have done their utmost to ferment this discord, as it is all to their good if the masses, instead of trying to heal or relieve their sufferings and to expose war-time abuses, lay the blame for their ruin at the door of their non-Magyar fellow-citizens. The chauvinist press is taking care that the fires of this unlucky hatred are kept up. Public opinion in Hungary is being poisoned by unbridled nationalist demagogy, directed now not only against Austria but also against the nationalities in our own country, of which nearly all have made enormous sacrifices of their life-blood in the defense of the fatherland'. Although there had been 'frequent cases of treason', this was mostly among the group of non-Magyar nationalist intellectuals and not surprising given 'the atmosphere of ignorance and hate' in wartime Hungary. However, 'the chauvinists have held the whole working and middle class of the national minorities responsible, and have visited the sins of a few individuals on the whole public by draconic punishments, internments, confiscations of property, emergency decrees and the closing of schools, although these nationalities were just as patriotic and as loyal to the dynasty as the Hungarian people'. Although the Magyar authors of the memorandum may have underestimated the spontaneous chauvinism of the Magyar masses and overestimated the degree of 'loyalty' of the non-Magyars, or what was left of it by October 1918, their analysis of the condition of Hungary was remarkably honest. It was noted that the shortsighted policies of the Hungarian authorities had 'rendered social and national differences insupportably acute'. 'The mass of the people have the feeling that the country belongs not to the people but to a few tens of thousands who hold the power and misuse it, and that all the institutions of the state are at the service only of the short-sighted policy and the selfishness of these few, while the suffering millions pay.'⁹⁹ Perhaps the most courageous admission made in the memorandum was that 'the harried and oppressed national minorities look more and more for salvation to the Entente, with its promise to extend to them the right of self-determination of peoples'. It was concluded that, 'if universal suffrage is not introduced now in Hungary, the peripheral Hungarian territory inhabited by other nationalities will be in a condition of chronic unrest which will defeat every constructive effort'.¹⁰⁰ With this last observation the group of critical Magyar officials and intellectuals (which included Oszkár Jászi) that was responsible for this devastating report showed a sense of realism bordering on the prophetic.

But neither realism, nor even a tiny bit of political intuition, were qualities existing among the bulk of Magyar politicians. On 5 October 1918 the Habsburg Monarchy at long last accepted the famous 'Fourteen Points' of the American president Wilson proclaimed on 8 January 1918, whose point number ten referred to the right to autonomous development of the different nations of the Monarchy. Back in January, the demand of self-determination had not yet meant the break-up of the empire, but Wilson's reply to the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry of 18 October made it clear that by then 'the situation had changed', that the Czechoslovak National Council had been recognised by the Allies as the legitimate representative of the Czechs and Slovaks, and that the nations of the Monarchy should now themselves decide how they conceived of their rights and aspirations. In other words, the governments of Hungary and Austria had to negotiate directly with the representatives of the rebellious nationalities. When on 21 October this letter

⁹⁸ Quoted in Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, pp. 6, 8-9.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

became known in Vienna and Budapest, its contents was formally accepted by the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister Gyula Andrassy, who seems to have understood that the threat of disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian army as well as the political home front had reached a critical stage. Nevertheless, although Hungary stood at the threshold of revolution and political representatives of the national minorities were claiming the right to self-determination, refusing to let the Hungarian authorities decide their fate any longer, many Hungarian politicians continued to believe in the inviolability of Hungary's political and territorial integrity. From 16 to 23 October 1918 the old Hungarian parliament held its last sessions. It was Mihály Károlyi, who rapidly became Hungary's most popular opposition leader, who made a last attempt to wake up the deputies to their duty to act realistically and to start a policy of serious reforms, a 'new democratic orientation', and a new approach to the issue of the nationalities. But it was to no avail, and Károlyi and his supporters were even physically attacked. Hungary's new Prime Minister Sándor Wekerle (who had replaced István Tisza) spoke on behalf of the old Magyar political class when he asserted: 'Since we dealt humanely with each of our nationalities, we think that by accepting Wilson's principles, we will not come into conflict with our traditional approach to the nationalities. We will have to pay attention to satisfying the claims of our nationalities, as far as the maintenance of our state unity allows this.' Former Prime Minister Tisza said they could surely hope that the problem of the 'foreign-language population' of Hungary would be solved. He also declared: 'There is no more audacious falsification of history than the Czecho-Slovak... The Czecho-Slovak question is nothing other than a Czech attempt at robbery.'¹⁰¹ It has been argued (especially by Slovak historians) that, despite all the differences between democratic reformers like Károlyi and old reactionaries like Tisza and Wekerle, all Magyar politicians agreed on the need to preserve the territorial integrity of Hungary and to solve the question of the nationalities by making only such concessions as would keep them within the Hungarian State. They interpreted the principle of self-determination in this sense, i.e., in favour of Hungary as a historical, political, and territorial whole, and they believed they could convince Wilson and other Allied statesmen of their point of view.¹⁰² While this argument is probably largely correct, it should not be forgotten that Hungarian politicians like Károlyi and Jászi were simply pursuing a dream and could not change the course of events. They were soon confronted with the harsh new realities in Central Europe produced by the radical change in the region's power structure. The self-confident behaviour of the Czechs and other regional Entente allies must have made the Hungarians' endeavours appear quixotic, even if they managed for a while to delay the final Czechoslovak occupation of Slovakia.

On 19 October 1918 it happened 'for the first time and the last time' that Slovak was spoken in the Hungarian parliament beside the official Magyar that all Hungarian MPs were required to speak – though only in the form of quotations from Slovak national poets who had predicted the rebirth of the Slovak people. Ferdinand Juriga, a Catholic priest from the Pressburg region and a deputy of the Slovak People's Party, defying a storm of recriminations, ridicule, and insults by Magyar deputies, denied the right of the Hungarian government and the Hungarian parliament to speak on behalf of the Slovak people and said that 'only the Slovak National Council has the right to represent the Slovaks at the peace conference', which was expected to convene shortly. He declared that 'the Slovak nation demands complete freedom to decide about its institutional state position and about its relationship to other free nations'.¹⁰³ On 22 October,

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, pp. 25-6; see also Böhm, *Im Kreuzfeuer zweier Revolutionen*, p. 35.

¹⁰² See, e.g., Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, p. 26.

¹⁰³ Quoted *ibid.*, pp. 27-8; see also Marián Hronský, 'Ferdinand Juriga', in *Muži deklarácie*, ed. Dušan Kováč, Bratislava, 2000, p. 117. Juriga's speech, including the interruptions by other deputies, has been reproduced in Slovak translation in *Sociálne a národné hnutie*, ed. Ľ. Holotík, document 220, pp. 365-85. One of his

when Wilson's letter of 18 October had become widely known in Budapest, Károlyi presented to the Hungarian parliament 'ten points' which he said any future Hungarian government must pursue. One of them was that the new government 'immediately begin to negotiate with the citizens of non-Magyar language, on the basis of equality and brotherhood'. About the question of the union of the Czechs and Slovaks he said that the Hungarians should recognise 'the Czech independent state', but not 'its rights to Hungary'. Károlyi's refusal to accept that the Slovaks should join the Czechs in a common state was significant and showed the limits of the concessions he was prepared to make, even though his associate J. Hock remarked more realistically that 'the Entente will decide'.¹⁰⁴ At least as interesting were the statements made by the independent MP and left-wing journalist László Fényes, who acted as a kind of unofficial spokesman for the Hungarian social democrats, who were not represented in the Hungarian parliament. His speech was anti-capitalist as a good socialist speech should be, but rather vague and contradictory – though in a revealing way – on the national question. He said that the only way to preserve the integrity of Hungary was 'to deal with the nationalities as equal factors and leave it to them whether they want to remain with us'. But he also blamed the Hungarian governments of the past forty years for not having succeeded in Magyarising the country, arguing they had maintained a corrupt and oppressive administration that had only provoked the opposition of the nationalities. He said: 'It is a great humiliation for Austria-Hungary that we have to negotiate with the Czechoslovak National Council as if with an equal partner, as it says in Wilson's note. But we must accept it...'¹⁰⁵ During the first half of October both Károlyi and the HSDP had begun to offer proposals of national autonomy to Slovak political leaders in return for their support for the principle of maintaining the territorial and political integrity of Hungary. The HSDP Manifesto published on 8 October 1918 and the Extraordinary Party Congress on 13 October called for maintaining Hungary's historical integrity. The Slovak social democrats, who supported the movement for a Czechoslovak state and participated in the formation of the Slovak National Council, refused to sign the Manifesto and boycotted the Hungarian Party Congress.¹⁰⁶ During the last week of October the stage was set for a dual revolution in Hungary. On the one hand, there were the Magyar democratic forces including the supporters of Károlyi, Jászi, and the social democrats, who were carried to power by a revolutionary wave in Budapest. They were destined to put an end to the old semi-feudal Hungary, if more in a political and symbolic than a permanent socioeconomic sense, and to lay the fragile foundations for a democratic revolution with strong social and nationalist overtones. On the other hand, there were the political leaders of the Slovaks and the other non-Magyar nations of multinational Hungary, who demanded independence or – as in the case of the two million Germans – at least national autonomy, and who resolutely threw off the yoke of Magyar supremacy. The revolutionary process of 1918-19 in Hungary and Slovakia was extremely complicated, with political, national, social, military, and diplomatic aspects constantly interacting with each other. At this stage it is necessary to distinguish between developments on the Hungarian side, notably in the capital Budapest, and developments in Slovakia – although in a city like Pressburg they closely overlapped.

On 25 October 1918 the Hungarian National Council (HNC) was formed by Károlyi and his democratic supporters with a twelve-point programme largely conceived by Jászi, including democratisation of Hungary's political institutions, social reforms, and a new policy vis-à-vis the non-Magyar nationalities. The HNC was a platform uniting Károlyi's Independence Party, the

quotations of Slovak national poetry hinted at the position of Pressburg: 'Bratislava, Bratislava, here dawns glory for the Slavs; when Slovak graves open, they create for us new life.'

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, pp. 28-9.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted *ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁶ *RN*, 10 October 1918, 17 October 1918; see also Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, pp. 30-1. For Károlyi's somewhat questionable account of his attempted negotiations with leaders of the Slovak National Party, see Michael graf Károlyi, *Gegen eine ganze Welt. Mein Kampfum den Frieden*, Munich 1924, pp. 387-90.

HSDP, Jászi's Radical Party, and a few other groups. It rather naively expected that President Wilson's Fourteen Points, which declared national self-determination to be the universal right of all nations, would not necessarily endanger the territorial integrity of Hungary but actually 'place it on the safest foundation'. At the same time, the HNC was willing to respect the right to self-determination of 'the Kingdom of Hungary's nationalities'.¹⁰⁷ The last days of October saw huge masses of returned soldiers congregating in Budapest, the prelude to an inevitable revolution. Five years later Jászi wrote they 'were precipitated into a whirlpool of hatred and exasperation'. Since August 1918 there had been an 'irresistible growth of the influence of these "magnetic fields" over the masses in Budapest'. There was a growing fear of anarchy as the enormous weight of these popular masses, vis-à-vis whom all 'who seek to guide or control them' were faced with their own 'impotence', made itself felt. As Jászi observed: 'Revolutions are born, not made.'¹⁰⁸ Jászi has also given us an interesting analysis of the different political forces participating in the Hungarian national-democratic revolution, this compound of nationalist (anti-Austrian and Greater Hungarian), democratic, and socialist motives. He writes among other things that many leading social democrats were until the moment of revolution preoccupied with making opportunistic deals with government ministers of the old regime (especially regarding franchise reform), instead of helping to establish an alternative political organ like the National Council that could have tried, if not to control, then at least to canalise some of the accumulating revolutionary energy that was about to break free. As a result the HNC was only formed at the last moment, when the revolution was already starting: 'The responsibility for this ruinous delay in the constitution of the National Council rests chiefly upon the right-wing Socialists, who thought fit to block, for petty tactical reasons, the formation of this all-important organ.' On the other hand an individual like Ervin Szabó, an influential Marxist critic who tried to expose the 'opportunist tactics' of the HSDP leadership, reacted in a surprisingly constructive way and, for all his Marxist ideology, supported Jászi's plan to unite all democratic forces in a new national organisation. Apparently, it was not in the last place due to Szabó's efforts that the left-wing minority in the HSDP around Zsigmond Kunfi, subsequently followed by the rest of the party, decided to participate in the formation of the HNC. This was important, because the HSDP was the only well-organised political force among the different opposition parties. This was true, even though – as Jászi described it – it showed 'great defects' like a 'doctrinaire spirit with bureaucratic tendencies', a bizarre combination of revolutionary phraseology and tactical opportunism, 'moral indifference' in the choice of political means, and a tendency to place the personal interests of its leaders above the political interests of the broader movement. According to Jászi, the party's leaders had always shown 'hatred of the intellectuals'; as already noted, this was one of the differences between the Hungarian and Austrian Social Democratic Parties. Ervin Szabó, who was forced to leave the party in 1910, had long denounced its leaders' intolerance and 'bureaucratic-centralist' attitude, their 'pseudo-revolutionary opportunism', and their 'moral Nihilism'. Most of the social democratic leaders 'would probably never have moved a finger for revolution if the unexpected initiative of a section of the soldiers, students and workers had not suddenly brought matters to a head'.¹⁰⁹ If Jászi is right, it would seem that the HSDP leadership was suffering from a serious condition of political immobility, from which it was only woken up by the spontaneous revolutionary events in Budapest and elsewhere. This immobility was also

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Hoensch, *History of Modern Hungary*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁸ Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, pp. 17-9. Jászi's remarkable book was first published in German in 1923 (*Magyariens Schuld – Ungarns Sühne*), and translated in English the following year.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 19, 21-2. See for an account of these developments from a social democratic point of view (where the role of the HSDP is described in a more positive way) Böhm, *Im Kreuzfeuer zweier Revolutionen*, pp. 45-60. See for Ervin Szabó also Tökés, *Béla Kun*, p. 10ff.; 'Biographies', in *History of Hungary*, ed. Pamlényi, p. 627. See for the problematical relationship between the Hungarian social democratic leaders and Hungarian intellectuals Owings, 'The Roles of the Intellectuals', pp. 109-18; Tökés, *Béla Kun*, chapter 1.

demonstrated by its inability to fully understand the national-political aspirations of the Slovak and other non-Magyar social democrats, who in turn refused to support the aim of preserving Historical Hungary.

In addition to the ill prepared but well-organised social democrats, there were the even less effective parties of Károlyi and Jászi and a few other groups. Károlyi's Independence Party contained relatively few middle-class and peasant elements, but largely consisted – as Jászi put it – of romantic 'adventurers' with a gentry background. It was not the party itself that was useful, but the personalities of Károlyi and some of his associates. Jászi's Radical Party was a very heterogeneous conglomerate comprising, *inter alia*, 'moderate representatives of trade and industry', a group of Marxists who for various political, social, and tactical reasons were unable or unwilling to join the HSDP, and a group of 'free Socialists' (including Jászi himself) who were 'alive to the errors and inadequacies of Marxist orthodoxy'. In contrast to the Marxists, the 'free Socialists' believed that in Hungary the land question was the primary sociopolitical factor, not modern industry. They were in favour of decentralisation and free cooperation rather than 'State Socialism', and did not believe in the class struggle but in 'a just and reasonable compromise between the working class and the working middle class'. Other political organisations participating in the revolution were the Peasant Party of I.N. Szabó, the Christian Social Party led by A. Giesswein, and the small Democratic Party, a representative of 'Jewish denominational interests'.¹¹⁰ But the immediate cause of the revolution in Budapest was the relentless pressure of the masses of returned soldiers; it was them who, together with groups like the ammunition workers and university students, really made the revolution of 30-31 October 1918. While former Prime Minister Tisza was murdered by a group of soldiers, Károlyi as the chairman of the HNC was generally accepted as the new Prime Minister and leader of the country. Jászi has argued that the Hungarian Revolution was a military and a national (anti-Austrian, anti-aristocratic) revolution first, only secondly a social revolution.¹¹¹ This is probably true, but social motives and class hatred played a significant part in it and demands for political and social reform, both urban and rural, were closely linked. It is obvious that the national motive continued to be important during the entire revolutionary period 1918-19. Magyar nationalism was a notable aspect of the consciousness of the revolutionary masses, who like Hungary's political leaders fiercely resisted the dismemberment of the old state and the 'imperialist' demands of the Entente and the victorious new nation-states, especially Czechoslovakia and Romania. It was not only the failure of the Károlyi government to carry out a comprehensive scheme of land reform and other radical social measures that created an opportunity for Bolshevism in 1919, but the fact that the Hungarian government was forced to accept one Entente demand after the other, adding national humiliation to social discontent. The interesting thing about the Hungarian revolutionary (and counter-revolutionary) process is this peculiar mixture of social and national motives. The phenomenon finally resulting from this has been described as 'national Bolshevism', which shaped the tragic last phase of the Hungarian Revolution that lasted from March to August 1919.

After October 1918, the Hungarian Revolution was faced with the challenge to carry out its first political and social reform measures and to find a compromise – if such a thing could be found at all – with the separatist nationalities. Neither of these political challenges was successfully met. When the Károlyi Government came to power on 31 October 1918, it announced as its priorities the proclamation of the independence of 'the territories of the Hungarian Crown' (the republic was only proclaimed on 16 November); the introduction of

¹¹⁰ Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, pp. 22-4.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29. A historian like Carsten tends to argue the opposite; see F.L. Carsten, *Revolution in Central Europe 1918-1919*, Berkeley 1972. The truth is that the revolution in Hungary – as well as the revolution in Slovakia – was a mix of 'social' and 'national' factors, with the group of returned soldiers undoubtedly playing a crucial part in both respects.

universal suffrage (but a general election was never held); democratic rights including the right of association and assembly (which also benefited the communists, who soon began to pursue their own agenda); social welfare measures (perhaps the most successful part of the government programme, especially in the cities); and radical land reform (which was never implemented).¹¹² The government also decreed the formation of national guards and citizen militias to help keep order in a country that continued to be afflicted by chronic unrest, violence, and looting. In Budapest the situation was so bad that the social democratic leader Zsigmond Kunfi made a desperate appeal in a speech on 2 November: ‘We must have peace in our country! And if we are to have peace there must be an end of looting. I will not be the leader of robbers and looters. We must burn into everyone’s brain that whoever says a word to suggest the predatory and subversive ideas which would reduce our heavy labours to futility, is a traitor, an abettor of war, an enemy to the rule of the people, an ally of the system we have destroyed and an *agent provocateur* in its interest.’¹¹³ In the territories largely inhabited by the non-Magyar nations, including Upper Hungary/Slovakia, the Hungarian authorities lost control during the first week of November. The Slovak people were in the grip of a feverish revolutionary bonfire of looting and destruction that seemed to be their final revenge for the long-standing oppression and exploitation by the Magyar nobility, the Hungarian State, and – tragically – ‘collaborating’ social groups like the Slovak ‘village Jews’, who were seen as symbols and exponents of the social and political system of old Hungary.¹¹⁴ It has been argued that ‘the great sociopolitical changes in Europe had nowhere so much the character of discontinuity as in Slovakia’. In Slovakia there was no historical state-political tradition, or act of national renewal or national unification, as among the Czechs, the Poles, the Romanians, and the South Slavs, but only something completely new.¹¹⁵ The Károlyi Government’s last-minute attempt to persuade the Entente Powers to conclude a separate peace with independent Hungary, and to persuade the non-Magyar nationalities to remain within Hungary with promises of autonomy, were doomed to failure. However, the perhaps somewhat confusing terms of the Armistice of Belgrade of 7 November 1918 gave the Hungarian government the impression, or the argument, that the demarcation lines between the Allied armies (including the Czechs, Romanians, etc.) and the Hungarians bore no relation to future state boundaries. In other words, that the settlement of Central Europe’s new frontiers was an open question that could only be decided by the future peace conference, and that pending that

¹¹² Later Károlyi wrote that his government was ‘prevented from accomplishing’ its land reform programme ‘because the Socialist Ministers sabotaged it’; they ‘regarded the peasantry as a counter-revolutionary element and threatened to resign’ if the government proceeded with it. See Michael Karolyi, *Memoirs of Michael Karolyi: Faith Without Illusion*, New York 1957, p. 145. According to Böhm, *Im Kreuzfeuer zweier Revolutionen*, pp. 148-53, the HSDP supported, even initiated, a programme of agrarian reform that included land redistribution as well as a system of cooperatives, but this led to disunity within the party with the left wing finally refusing to support it. See also Gábor Vermes, ‘The October Revolution in Hungary: From Károlyi to Kun’, in *Hungary in Revolution*, ed. I. Völgyes, pp. 45-6, 52-3.

¹¹³ Quoted in Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, p. 42.

¹¹⁴ Pieter van Duin, ‘November’s Brutal Bonfire: Anarchy and Anti-Semitism in the Slovak Revolution of 1918’, paper presented to the Slovak-Hungarian Historical Conference, Péter Pázmány Catholic University, Piliscsaba (Hungary), June 2001; Ismo Nurmi, *Slovakia – a Playground for Nationalism and National Identity. Manifestations of the National Identity of the Slovaks 1918-1920*, Helsinki 1999, pp. 36-76 passim; Richard Georg Plaschka, Horst Haselsteiner, and Arnold Suppan, *Innere Front. Militärassistentz, Widerstand und Umsturz in der Donaumonarchie 1918*, 2 vols, Vienna 1974, vol. 2, pp. 285-9; Eudovit Holotík, ‘Der Zerfall Ungarns: Die Rolle der slowakischen Volksbewegung’, in *Die Auflösung des Habsburgerreiches. Zusammenbruch und Neuorientierung im Donaauraum*, eds Richard G. Plaschka and Karlheinz Mack, Vienna, 1970, pp. 408-13. ‘Social anti-Semitism’ was rife among the Slovak social democrats as well; as late as 1921 the social democratic leader Ferdinand Benda recalled the old regime as one of ‘Jewish-Magyarone great estate owners’, suggesting that all Hungarian landowners had been Jews. See SNA, SD, File 311: May Day brochure of the CSSDP, 1921.

¹¹⁵ Kováč, ‘Rok 1918 v slovenských dejinách’, p. 106.

decision, the Hungarians had the right to keep the administration in those non-Magyar territories they still controlled in their own hands. This was not the interpretation of the Czechs, the Slovaks, the Romanians, the Croats, and the Serbs, however, who seized and ‘liberated’ large areas of the Hungarian State that they claimed were on ‘their side’ of what were to become the new state frontiers.¹¹⁶

Károlyi, Jászi (who became ‘Minister for Nationalities’), and the Magyars in general grew increasingly embittered by what they saw as the ‘treacherous behaviour’ of the Entente and its refusal to restrain its Central European allies. Jászi, who claimed that he soon understood that the maintenance of Hungarian political and territorial integrity was an illusion, now tried to ‘save’ the principle of the plebiscite as the most legitimate means to carry into effect the right to self-determination and to decide the political fate of disputed territories.¹¹⁷ But this solution was not supported by the Czech and Slovak political leaders with regard to Slovakia, or by the Romanians with regard to Transylvania. The result was a propaganda war on all sides and a real war for possession of Slovakia between November 1918 and January 1919. Since the Károlyi Government did not succeed in replacing the old administration in the Slovak counties with more progressive officials, and indeed did not even seem to control the activities of the chauvinistic Hungarian National Propaganda Bureau, the struggle for Slovakia assumed a dramatic and violent character. At the end of October Magyar and Slovak pro-Hungarian (‘Magyarone’) circles in Upper Hungary/Slovakia began to publish declarations in favour of the integrity of Hungary and against the Czechoslovak State. On the other hand, on 30 October 1918 the Slovak National Council (SNC), meeting in the town of Turčiansky Svätý Martin, published the historic ‘Martin Declaration’, which proclaimed the Slovak nation to be a ‘part of the united Czecho-Slovak nation’ and which demanded for the Slovaks the ‘unlimited’ right to self-determination, including full independence.¹¹⁸ Károlyi, chairman of the HNC and about to become Hungarian Prime Minister, sent a congratulatory telegram to Martin conveying the ‘brotherly love’ of the Magyar nation and Hungarian acceptance that the SNC should decide what policy was in the best interest

¹¹⁶ Cf. Hoensch, *History of Modern Hungary*, pp. 85-6; Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, pp. 37-8, 54-5; Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, pp. 99-108. The controversies about these questions continue until today.

¹¹⁷ Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, p. 57. He writes that ‘the infinite baseness’ of the Hungarian administration during the war ‘had heaped up such a fatal store of embitterment among our national minorities, that the idea of reconciliation and mutual accommodation could win no support for the time being’. In realising this, Jászi was virtually alone among Hungarian politicians, most of whom seem to have continued to believe that it was possible to persuade the Slovaks and other nationalities to accept autonomy within the framework of Hungary. In fact, the only national group who accepted this were the Germans. Nevertheless, Jászi himself continued to advocate the idea of a multinational ‘Danubian federation on the Swiss model’, comprising the former Historical Hungary or even Austria-Hungary. See on this J. Galántai, ‘Oszkár Jászi’s Conceptions on Federalism During the First World War’, *Études historiques hongroises* 1975, vol. 2, pp. 311-26; Péter Hanák, ‘Der Donaupatriotismus von Oszkár Jászi’, *Österreichische Osthefte* 25, no. 3, 1983, pp. 324-37.

¹¹⁸ *Sociálne a národné hnutie*, ed. E. Holotík, documents 230-34, pp. 399-408. These documents, as well as later proclamations by the SNC, show that the written forms ‘Czecho-Slovak’ and ‘Czechoslovak’ (state, nation, etc.) were used alongside one another by the leading Slovak political figures of the moment, among whom there existed a degree of confusion and disagreement about the Slovak position in the new state. However, the Martin Declaration spoke of ‘Czecho-Slovak’ nation, in contrast to the Prague Declaration on the Foundation of the Czechoslovak State of 28 October 1918, which spoke of ‘Czechoslovak’ nation and ‘Czechoslovak’ state. See *Dokumenty slovenskej národnej identity a štátnosti*, gen. ed. Miroslav Pekník, 2 vols, Bratislava, 1998, vol. 1, documents 158-61, pp. 503-14. In this collection of documents the Slovak introductory text to the Prague Declaration typically speaks of ‘Czecho-Slovak’ state. Similarly, a Slovak historian like Hronský (see, e.g., *Struggle for Slovakia*, pp. 51-2) often uses the spelling ‘Czecho-Slovak’ even when the source he refers to speaks of ‘Czechoslovak’. Both during the First Czechoslovak Republic and in recent years the use of the form ‘Czecho-Slovak’ by Slovak politicians, historians, and others seems to express their wish to see Slovakia as an autonomous part of the state and the Slovaks as a separate nation. But this does not change the fact that the official name of the inter-war state was ‘Czechoslovak Republic’ and that there existed an official ethnopolitical category ‘Czechoslovak nation’.

of the Slovaks. He also informed the SNC that the HNC believed that ‘the Slovak and Magyar peoples are dependent on each other’, that they ‘must seek conditions for a more beautiful future and... brotherly cooperation’. The Slovak reply to Károlyi, signed by Matúš Dula, the chairman of the SNC, was friendly but also insisting on their newly defined position of independence and equality: ‘Today, for the first time, the representatives of the Magyar nation addressed the representatives of the Slovak nation as brother to brother... The free Czecho-Slovak nation wants to be a good neighbour and brother to the Magyar nation.’¹¹⁹ The use of the phrase ‘good neighbour’ was a significant indication that the SNC was already regarding the Slovaks and the Magyars as belonging to two different sovereign states. The hope of the Károlyi Government that an agreement could be worked out to institute Slovak autonomy within the framework of Historical Hungary was simply an illusion. Nevertheless, the Magyar (and part of the German) population in Slovakia, including the inhabitants of the city of Pressburg, as well as the Hungarian government itself continued to believe that the Hungarian State and its historical territory could be kept intact. This was partly the result of the social, political, and psychological distance between Slavs and Magyars and of the mutual lack of knowledge of the feelings and perceptions of the other side, partly of the general confusion and misunderstandings regarding the international situation, partly of the Magyar tendency of wishful thinking and unwillingness to acknowledge unpleasant realities. The final result was Hungarian mobilisation ‘against the Czechs’ and a protracted political and military struggle for Slovakia, of which the struggle for the possession of Pressburg was a key element. Hungarian propaganda was chiefly directed against ‘Czech Imperialism’, with Jászi himself speaking of the ‘boundless’ and ‘frenzied’ imperialism of the new states.¹²⁰ At the same time, the Károlyi Government tried to woo the Slovaks and to detach them from the Czechs with initiatives like the ‘Proclamation to the non-Magyar nations of Hungary’ of 22 November 1918, which again presented proposals for national autonomy within the Hungarian State.

The Slovak, German, and Magyar social democrats were all part of this national-political struggle of words and weapons. The Slovak social democratic leader Emanuel Lehocký, who participated in the historic meeting of the SNC on 30 October 1918, declared that in the present situation his party wanted to cooperate with the other Slovak political forces and to forget about their differences for the time being.¹²¹ The German and Magyar social democrats in Pressburg and other cities in Slovakia were faced with a completely new situation, created by the revolution of the Slovak people and the formation of the Czechoslovak State. At the end of this survey of the historical evolution of ‘darkest Hungary’ between 1867 and 1918 it may be concluded that the persistent democratic deficit – also in the field of interethnic relations – of semi-feudal and pseudo-liberal Hungary had important political consequences. The oppression of the non-Magyar nationalities, especially under war conditions, meant that Hungary was heading towards a

¹¹⁹ *Sociálne a národné hnutie*, ed. E. Holotík, documents 236-37, pp. 409-10; Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, pp. 32, 55.

¹²⁰ Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, pp. 37, 57; Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, pp. 109-10. According to Hronský, Jászi was nonetheless the only Hungarian politician who enjoyed some degree of trust among the Slovaks. This is confirmed by Juriga’s statement on 19 October 1918, during his speech in the Hungarian parliament, that Jászi was ‘a Magyar who objectively understands the national question in Hungary’, something that was seen by Slovaks as an exceptional quality for Magyar political figures. See *Sociálne a národné hnutie*, ed. E. Holotík, document 220, p. 377; see also Milan Podrimavský, ‘Oszkár Jászi a národnostná otázka’, *Historický časopis* 20, no. 1, 1972, pp. 65-88. However, Jászi’s and the Károlyi government’s proposals for Slovak autonomy within Hungary were not attractive to most Slovak leaders; see Milan Krajčovič, ‘Károlyiho vláda v Maďarsku a jej vzťah k Slovensku’, in *Slovensko a Maďarsko v rokoch 1918-1920*, ed. Ladislav Deák, Martin, 1995, pp. 32-45; Natália Krajčovičová, ‘Konceptia autonómie Slovenska v maďarskej politike v rokoch 1918-1920’, in *ibid.*, pp. 46-55.

¹²¹ Minutes of the first, preparatory meeting of the Committee of the Slovak National Council on 29 October 1918, in *Sociálne a národné hnutie*, ed. E. Holotík, document 231, pp. 400-1.

political implosion or a violent revolution that could be triggered by an unexpected domestic or international crisis. The refusal of the Hungarian dominant class to reform the atavistic political and social system meant that the Hungarian Social Democratic Party was urged to look for Magyar non-working-class allies in the struggle for universal suffrage and other democratic reforms. From an orthodox Marxist-evolutionary perspective this was seen as a *conditio sine qua non* for further social and political ‘progress’, which possibly (but not necessarily) included a transformation of the relations between the different national groups. The question of franchise reform became an obsession of Hungarian social democratic leaders, who were probably keen to enter parliament themselves, and this may explain their ‘opportunistic’ behaviour in 1918 as described by Jászi. As we shall see in chapter four, another significant feature of the outlook of the HSDP was its unwillingness to address the concrete problems associated with the ‘national question’, even though these problems also arose within the social democratic movement itself. As we have seen in this chapter, the ‘agrarian question’ was too much for the party as well, and it never succeeded in becoming a decisive factor in the social struggles of the Hungarian countryside. On the one hand, this was easy to understand, because it was especially in rural society that Hungary’s semi-feudal conditions were most conspicuously entrenched and social oppression most severe. Intervention in the social relations of the country entailed the risk of provoking stronger repression of the social democratic movement as a whole, including the urban labour organisations. But on the other hand, the movement’s cautious rural policy and its unwillingness to support the programme of land redistribution meant that it was bound to remain largely confined to the urban environment. Of course, this was in keeping with Marxist orthodoxy, which stressed the singular importance of the urban working class and tended to neglect rural society. Thus, the national and agrarian questions – which in many parts of Hungary were almost identical – were subordinated to the strategy of promoting democratic change from within the urban milieu (i.e., Budapest), and even this reformist ‘Magyarocentric’ policy was only hesitatingly pursued by a party that had become bureaucratic and immobile on the eve of the 1918 revolution. When the revolutionary events began to unfold and everything in ‘Historical Hungary’ began to move, social democrats of different nationalities were plunged into an epoch of unprecedented activity. Because Marxist determinism had badly prepared them for the challenges that lay ahead, the revolutionary period of 1918-19 was full of new political experiences and experiments. The consequences of the national and democratic revolution for trinational Pressburg were at least as momentous as for Budapest. In Pressburg the situation was even more uncertain than in Budapest, for the city was claimed by the new Czechoslovak State and the majority German and Magyar population were unwilling to accept this. However, we shall first examine the city’s evolution during the Dualist era 1867-1918.

Pressburg: a multiethnic crossroad

In multinational pre-1918 Hungary, the city and county of Pressburg had a special position. Until the revolution of 1848 Pressburg was the place where the Hungarian Diet, the country's historical estates-parliament, used to meet, and although the political importance of the city declined thereafter, it remained in many ways Hungary's most sophisticated city after Budapest. Pressburg's prestige was based on its historical importance, on the fact that, along with Szeged, Temesvár, and a few other places, it was one of the larger provincial cities in Hungary, and on the cultural level of its predominantly German-speaking population. Pressburg, with its large number of print shops, was known around 1900 as the 'city of industry and intelligence'. Pressburg was located at the crossroad of three ethnic territories, with its own multinational population reflecting this reality. To the west and southwest lay predominantly ethnic-German regions, including the German-speaking western fringe of Hungary (which comprised major parts of the counties of Wieselburg, Ödenburg, and Eisenburg) and the Austrian province of Lower Austria. To the north and northeast lay overwhelmingly ethnic-Slovak areas, including at least half of the county of Pressburg itself, of which the city was the administrative centre. To the east and southeast lay predominantly Magyar areas interspersed with German and Slovak enclaves, but the policy of Magyarisation had begun to lead to an increase in the number of Magyar-speakers in traditionally German or Slovak population centres in parts of Pressburg county. The whole of Hungary had been for centuries an intricate multilingual patch-work in which ethnic boundaries were often difficult to draw, especially in mixed areas around the imprecise language frontiers and in the urban centres, where people were often used to speaking more than one language. For all that, it was understood by the different ethnic groups that particular towns and regions – for instance the German-speaking city of Pressburg, or the Slovak northern part of Pressburg county – had historically been dominated by one nationality or another, and that changes occurring in ethnolinguistic structure were increasingly the result of the new state-sponsored Magyarisation policy rather than spontaneous cultural or population movements. But it was also understood that, especially in many of the Hungarian cities, multiethnic and multilingual coexistence continued to be the order of the day, with different national groups often holding different social and economic positions. The city of Pressburg was a perfect example of this complex multiethnic Central European society. On the one hand, the traditional dominance of the German element in Pressburg was accepted as a historical fact; on the other hand, the coexistence of different ethnic groups in Pressburg's urban microcosm was regarded as a matter of course as well. Nevertheless, this local 'natural order' was threatened by the new late nineteenth-century Magyarisation and denationalisation policies, as a result of which some Hungarian cities – like certain cities in Austria – were turned into battle-grounds of conflicting ethnonational aspirations. Although in these struggles the non-Magyar nationalities in Hungary were in a weaker position than the non-German nationalities in Austria – the latter having more political and cultural rights –, it would be wrong to assume that they submitted to the trend of Magyarisation without resistance.

In this chapter I want to attempt an analysis of the major interethnic and sociopolitical developments in Dualist-era Pressburg. I will look at the changing ethnic and social structure of the city; its demographic and economic growth from the second half of the nineteenth century; ethnolinguistic shifts resulting from Magyarisation and repression policies and their influence on ethnic relations and on social and political conflicts; the emergence of mass political movements in the city, in particular social democratic and nationalist movements; and the specific positions of the different ethnic groups that participated in the building of Pressburg's multinational labour movement. Among the more concrete issues discussed are the extent and meaning of national

assimilation in Pressburg; changes in the city's administrative and power structure; school policy and cultural and political repression; German and Slovak resistance to Magyarisation; and key aspects of the history of Pressburg's working-class movement. The central issue within this broad context is the ambivalent relationship between the interethnic solidarity of organised labour that undoubtedly existed in the city to some extent, and on the other hand the equally real-existing tensions and conflicts between Pressburg's different national groups that helped to shape the working-class movement as well. The ultimate question is what were the social and ethnopolitical consequences of this contradictory pattern of relations. This question is not easy to answer and also has to be seen in relation to various 'external' factors influencing the labour movement from outside, e.g., differences in political and social power between the different ethnic groups in Pressburg, the impact on the local labour scene of international and Hungarian political developments, and of course the consequences of the First World War. It is important to realise that interethnic antagonism between different groups of workers in a city like Pressburg was not simply an inevitable phenomenon, but the result of specific developments typical of the age of Dualism and of different responses of different ethnic groups to local policies of assimilation and repression.

In 1850-1 almost seventy-five percent of Pressburg's 42,238 inhabitants were German-speakers (including a substantial number of Jews), with the Slovaks (eighteen percent) in second place, and the Magyars (7.5 percent) in third. During the period 1850-1918, especially after 1867, this ranking of Pressburg's three major ethnolinguistic groups changed to the disadvantage of the Germans and the Slovaks and the advantage of the politically dominant Magyars. By 1890, when the city's population had increased to 52,411, the proportion of German-speakers had declined to less than sixty percent, that of the Slovaks to 16.6 percent, while the proportion of Magyar-speakers – now the second largest group according to the official Hungarian census – had risen to almost twenty percent of the city's population; among the few percent representing other nationalities, Czechs and Croats were the most numerous. In 1900, when Pressburg had 65,867 inhabitants – showing a notable acceleration in population growth during the 1890s –, German-speakers made up 52.2 percent, the Slovaks 14.6 percent, and the Magyars 30.5 percent of the population. After 1900 the proportion of German-speakers even fell below fifty percent. The last pre-war Hungarian census of 1910, according to which Pressburg had 78,223 inhabitants, showed a German percentage of about forty-two, a Magyar percentage of 40.5, and a stagnating Slovak percentage of nearly fifteen. These figures suggest – indeed, they appear to prove convincingly – that it was mainly the Germans who were the 'statistical victims' of Magyarisation, to a notably lesser degree the Slovaks. This is borne out even more clearly by the absolute figures. The number of German-speakers in Pressburg scarcely increased between 1850 (31,509) and 1910 (32,790). The number of Slovaks, whose proportion of the total population declined only slightly, increased from 7,584 in 1850 to 11,673 in 1910. The growth of the number of Magyar-speakers from 3,145 in 1850 (7.5 percent) to 10,433 in 1890 (twenty percent) to 31,705 in 1910 (40.5 percent) was spectacular indeed, and seeming proof of the success of local assimilation and Magyarisation policies.¹²²

¹²² Emil Portisch, *Geschichte der Stadt Pressburg-Bratislava*, 2 vols, Bratislava 1933, vol. 2, pp. 593-4; Andrej Savojský, 'Obyvateľstvo hlavného mesta Bratislavy', in *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska*, Basel, 1943, p. 111; Ján Svetoň, 'Od maďarizácie k reslovakizácii Bratislavy', in *Slovenská Bratislava*, ed. Alojz Fiala, 2 vols, Bratislava, 1948, vol. 1, pp. 268-70; Dušan Provazník, 'V prvom desaťročí v ČSR', in *Dejiny Bratislavy*, eds Darina Lehotská and Ján Pleva, Bratislava, 1966, p. 350; Egbert K. Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei in den Jahren 1918-1929. Ein Beitrag zur Nationalitätenproblematik*, Munich 1971, p. 19; Paul Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert der Karpatendeutschen in der Slowakei*, Stuttgart 1992, pp. 8, 34; Richard Marsina, 'Pressburg im Wandel der Geschichte', in *Städte im Donauraum. Bratislava-Pressburg 1291-1991*, ed. Richard Marsina, Bratislava, 1993, p. 11. Some of the relevant figures are not identical in the different sources, where sometimes

But although the success of Magyarisation in Pressburg and the conclusion that the city's Germans were its main victims may seem obvious, on closer examination things turn out to be more complicated. Firstly, the Hungarian statistics cannot be taken at face value. A substantial number of 'Magyarised' individuals must be considered 'statistical Magyars', i.e., people who for various reasons, including opportunism, social pressure, and administrative manipulation, were reported – or coerced to report themselves – to be of Magyar nationality. The latter was rather flexibly defined as the acknowledgement of Magyar as one's preferred mother tongue, providing ample room for subjective and manipulative classification. Secondly, the stagnation of the number of German-speakers in Pressburg in comparison with other ethnic groups must have been to some extent the result of demographic factors like family size and migration. Old-established town dwellers like the Pressburg Germans had on average smaller families than the mostly non-German newcomers from the predominantly Slovak and Magyar countryside.¹²³ Furthermore, there was probably at least as much out-migration of German-speakers (including numbers of Jews) from Pressburg to Vienna as German in-migration.¹²⁴ Thirdly, part of the increase in the number of Magyar-speakers was the result of urbanisation and in-migration from the countryside, of which more will be said below. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to draw the conclusion – even if it is, to some extent, a superficial one – that the policy of Magyarisation in Pressburg was relatively successful, especially with regard to the German population. Various non-Magyar social groups in the city must have been inclined, or have deemed it wise, to follow the trend of assimilation to the Magyar nationality. The advance of the Magyar language is also shown by other official figures. Whereas in 1890 about forty percent of Pressburg's inhabitants could speak Magyar, by 1910 this had officially increased to almost seventy-three percent. However, in 1910 an even greater proportion, more than seventy-five percent, could speak two or three languages, which suggests that German was still the most important language of interethnic communication in the city.¹²⁵ These figures can be interpreted as evidence not only of the rise of the Magyar language, but perhaps more subtly, as an indication that many Pressburg citizens were able to produce a Magyar face in public while keeping to their non-Magyar mother tongue in private and in their ethnic milieu. It has been estimated that more than one-third of all marriages in Pressburg between 1880 and 1914 were ethnically mixed, and that the level of exogamy among the city's Slovaks was even 50-60 percent.¹²⁶ If this enhanced the process of ethnic assimilation in one way or another, it also encouraged a 'multicultural' outlook among a significant part of the Pressburg population. To some extent it may have counteracted the trend of 'nationalisation of the masses' produced by the rise of modern nationalism, which in Pressburg occurred most notably among the dominant Magyars, but gradually also among the other ethnic groups. The multicultural component in the outlook and the social environment of many Pressburg citizens – many of whom may have seen themselves as 'local patriots' if anything – and their knowledge of different

errors must have been made. According to Portisch, the city's population in 1890 was 56,048 if the military is included, but even so the increase in population growth during the 1890s is remarkable.

¹²³ Eduard Winter, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei und in Karpathorussland*, Münster 1926, p. 15; Jörg K. Hoensch, 'Die Entwicklung eines Gemeinschafts- und Volkstumsbewusstseins unter den Karpatendeutschen in der Zwischenkriegszeit', *Südostdeutsches Archiv* 30-31, 1987-8, p. 116.

¹²⁴ Monika Glettler, 'The Slovaks in Budapest and Bratislava, 1850-1914', in *Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe, 1850-1940. Vol. 8: Ethnic Identity in Urban Europe*, ed. Max Engman, Aldershot, 1992, pp. 296-8.

¹²⁵ Elena Mannová, 'Ethnic Identity and the City (Bratislava in the 19th Century)', unpublished paper, 1995, p. 3; Elena Mannová, 'Transformácia identity bratislavských Nemcov v 19. Storočí', *Historický časopis* 43, no. 3, 1995, p. 438; Svetoň, 'Od maďarizácie k reslovakizácii Bratislavy', pp. 274-5. According to Alois H. Pichler, editor of the *Pressburger Zeitung (PZ)*, almost eighty percent of the Pressburg population could speak German as late as 1919; see *PZ*, morning paper, 16 February 1919.

¹²⁶ Mannová, 'Ethnic Identity', p. 3; Mannová, 'Transformácia', p. 438; Svetoň, 'Od maďarizácie k reslovakizácii Bratislavy', pp. 274-5; Glettler, 'The Slovaks', p. 315.

languages (German, Magyar, and perhaps Slovak) may have protected them against the more extreme demands of Magyar, or any other, nationalism. And even if this held true only to a limited extent, it would have enabled them to show different faces in different situations, in other words, to define their 'identity' in situational, contextual terms. This made their ethnocultural and national-political position flexible and Janus-faced, defying simple classification and providing space for ethnic survival strategies and 'playing the ethnonational game'. It has been observed that especially 'the Pressburg German' – also known by his nickname of *Kraxelhuber*, that is, the opportunist and somewhat provincial Pressburger – had a great ability to adapt to the situation of the moment and the powers that be.¹²⁷ If this quality made him a born pragmatist, sceptic, and Pressburg particularist, it may actually have been an expression of his adroitness in handling complex and potentially embarrassing ethnopolitical situations. The multicultural outlook or 'opportunism' of the Pressburger should not be exaggerated or misinterpreted. It served to protect his German culture and identity against the new policy of systematic Magyarisation. It was a defensive posture of one national group (the Germans, or the Slovaks) towards the pressure exerted by another. If we realise this, we understand it is necessary to probe somewhat deeper and to ask more specific questions about the meaning of assimilation and Magyarisation in Pressburg.

There are several open questions with regard to the impact and nature of the 'Magyarisation process' in Pressburg. Which social and ethnic groups were the most vulnerable or susceptible to linguistic, cultural, and ethnopolitical assimilation, and which groups the least? How deep did the transformation of Germans or Slovaks into Magyars really go? How serious should this 'assimilation' and 'denationalisation' be taken? What was its sociopolitical 'logic'? What were the consequences of state-imposed Magyarisation policies for the control over social and political positions and for interethnic relations in the city? Although the statistics analysed above – and indeed much of the conventional wisdom on the subject – suggest that it was especially the Pressburg Germans who were exposed to Magyarisation, there are arguments and evidence that the extent of German Magyarisation was less dramatic than would appear at first glance. It is revealing that historians have been rather vague and contradictory in their comments on the process of Magyarisation in Pressburg, and that many of its crucial details remain elusive and basically unexamined. The Slovak historian Dušan Provazník, for example, has argued – somewhat against the evidence – that 'due to their economic strength, the Germans were not subjected to Magyarisation to the same extent as the Slovaks'. At the same time, however, he writes that 'although the German population was relatively independent, it did not resist the influence of Magyarisation, which markedly manifested itself among the weakest social strata'.¹²⁸ But it would seem that the degree to which particular social strata were vulnerable or susceptible to Magyarisation was – apart from the group of government employees – not exclusively dependent on their economic or social position, but at least as much on the dominant ethnocultural and national-political outlook of the milieu to which they belonged. It is doubtful that, as Provazník suggests, the lower non-Magyar strata were more vulnerable to the pressure of assimilation than the middle classes, given that the latter were socially and politically more ambitious than the former; indeed it seems more likely that it was the other way around. The

¹²⁷ See, e.g., Gertrud Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen Pressburgs. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Umbruchperiode 1918/20*, Munich 1942, p. 10; J.J. Skalský, 'Vývin mesta Bratislavy po stránke národnostnej, administratívnej a politickej', in *Zlatá kniha mesta Bratislavy*, Bratislava, 1928, pp. 17-9, where the Pressburgers are described as obedient and not given to oppositional tendencies, light-minded, particularist, opportunist, and indeed 'nationally indistinct'. These ascribed characteristics were largely stereotypes and, after 1918, they were underscored for political reasons by Czechoslovak leaders like Vavro Šrobár, while some of the German 'old Pressburgers' themselves were playing on these notions as well because they believed they were useful in developing an ethnic survival strategy. In subsequent chapters this question will be elaborated on.

¹²⁸ Provazník, 'V prvom desaťročí', pp. 350-1.

‘lower’ social position of the working class must have insulated it – though perhaps to a lesser extent than the peasantry – from much of the social, political, and psychological pressure exerted by the Magyarisers, who seem to have concentrated their efforts above all on winning over the educated and middle-class strata of the non-Magyar nationalities. Moreover, there was a degree of resistance to Magyarisation policies not only among the Slovaks, but also among working-class and middle-class Germans in Pressburg that is often overlooked.

Another Slovak historian, Darina Lehotská, may have exaggerated, too, when she wrote that both the Pressburg Germans and the local Slovak petty bourgeoisie ‘were subjected to denationalisation to a considerable extent’, and that the shifts in the population census for Pressburg were not the result of natural increase or migration of Magyars, but mainly of the policy of Magyarisation of non-Magyars, pressure during the taking of the census, and ‘persecution’.¹²⁹ It has been shown by other historians that there was in fact a substantial in-migration into the city from counties largely inhabited by Slovaks and Magyars, especially during the decades of substantial population growth 1890-1910, and that this accounted for at least eighty percent of the increase of Pressburg’s population.¹³⁰ Of course, this cannot entirely explain the shifts in the ethnolinguistic structure of the city. But since there was apparently relatively little German in-migration during this period, while the increase of the predominantly lower-class Slovak population was slightly lower than that of the total population, there must have been a considerable in-migration of Magyars, not only of Magyar government employees, but also of the Magyar lower classes. Between 1890 and 1910 the statistical Magyar-speaking population of Pressburg tripled, and Magyar in-migration may have accounted for a considerable proportion (perhaps not much less than half) of Magyar population growth given the lower in-migration of the other ethnic groups. Although this does not change the fact that a major part of the increase in the Magyar-speaking population must have been due to the Magyarisation policy (if the official statistics are taken at face value), migration to Pressburg was clearly an important factor as well, diminishing somewhat the significance of Magyarisation. Many of the newcomers, mainly Magyars and Slovaks, joined the expanding industrial working class of Pressburg, a major proportion of whom were living in the new industrial districts on the outskirts of the city, where different nationalities lived side by side.¹³¹ It is difficult to establish to what extent this residential mixing led to ethnic assimilation in one way or another, or to a pattern of multiethnic and multilingual coexistence. In Pressburg there also existed a measure of residential separation of the different ethnic groups, which affected part of the working class as well. Examples of this were the German working-class population living in the largely German settlements of Oberufer (Prievoz) on Pressburg’s eastern outskirts, and Engerau (Petržalka) south of the river Danube.¹³²

Questions relating to the problem of ethnic relations, assimilation, and multilingual coexistence have to be investigated more thoroughly if the complex social world of Pressburg and its labour movement is to be understood. The need for this is underscored by the contradictory and often badly underpinned claims made by different historians. Thus, in contrast

¹²⁹ Darina Lehotská, ‘Slovenské národné hnutie pod tlakom maďarizácie’, in *Dejiny Bratislavy*, eds D. Lehotská and J. Pleva, p. 271.

¹³⁰ Glettler, ‘The Slovaks’, p. 296; Mannová, ‘Ethnic Identity’, p. 4; Svetoň, ‘Od maďarizácie k reslovakizácii Bratislavy’, p. 270; Ladislav Tajták, ‘Slovenské vysťahovalectvo a migrácia v rokoch 1900-1914’, *Historický časopis* 23, no. 3, 1975, p. 394, showing that between 1900 and 1910 alone Pressburg received more than 9,500 in-migrants. In the county of Pressburg in 1900 the Slovaks made up more than fifty-one percent of the population, followed by the Magyars as the second largest and the Germans as the third largest group; see Ján Svetoň, *Die Slowaken in Ungarn. Beitrag zur Frage der statistischen Madjarisierung*, Bratislava 1943, pp. 20-1; Glettler, ‘The Slovaks’, pp. 298, 302.

¹³¹ Glettler, ‘The Slovaks’, pp. 306-7; Mannová, ‘Ethnic Identity’, p. 4. According to Glettler (p. 307), 43.3 percent of the Slovaks, 36.5 percent of the Germans, and 34.7 percent of the Magyars lived in the industrial outskirts of Pressburg.

¹³² Winter, *Die Deutschen*, pp. 3, 19.

to the suggestions made by Provazník, Lehotská argues that it was mainly middle-class and petty-bourgeois strata that were affected by the Magyarisation process, not primarily the non-Magyar working class. She is probably closer to the truth than her Slovak colleague, but more evidence is needed to support whatever claims are made about the subject. Not only Slovak, but also other historians are divided on interpreting issues of assimilation and ethnic identity and how they affected the working class and other social groups in multiethnic cities like Pressburg. According to Jörg K. Hoensch, around 1900 the urban petty bourgeoisie and German industrial workers in Pressburg were exposed to a continually increasing Magyarisation pressure, ‘to which they submitted without great resistance’. Elsewhere he writes that Slovak and German workers were ‘quickly caught up in the process of Magyarisation’ in the Hungarian cities, particularly in Budapest.¹³³ But it is important to distinguish between the situation in Budapest and the rather different situation in Pressburg, where the Magyars never became an absolute majority of the population, not even according to their own statistics. If in the capital Budapest the labour movement became a ‘school of Magyarisation’, this does not mean that the same held true for Pressburg, where there may have existed a relative immunity to the impact of Magyarisation among the working class. Other historians, indeed, are more cautious in their statements and tend to stress that it was mainly (part of) the German middle classes and upper strata who were assimilated by Magyardom, while the lower strata, including the traditional petty bourgeoisie, tended to stick to the German language. They also point to the strengthening of the non-Magyar national movements after 1900, which to some extent counteracted the process of Magyarisation and also influenced the working-class movement.¹³⁴ Indeed, one historian of the Pressburg Germans and their ‘national consciousness’ has argued that the German workers were in fact the ‘least ethnically weakened’ class of the local German population.¹³⁵ This contention may be closer to the truth than those observations that tend to overstate the dramatic effects of the assimilation and Magyarisation policies by pointing to the spectacular shifts in the census figures and similar, easily misinterpreted, statistical material. In so far as Hungarian denationalisation policies were rigid and far-reaching – and they undoubtedly were in many ways –, they actually generated at least as much resistance, both of a subtle and a more open kind, as submission. If we try to understand the complexity of Magyarisation and the reactions to it and to probe deeper into the social history of Pressburg, especially of its German and Slovak population elements, we may arrive at a more cautious and sceptical interpretation of the official statistical trends. As already noted, the apparent significance of assimilation is also reduced somewhat when looking at the factor of in-migration; this is especially important with regard to Pressburg’s expanding working class. The rising number of Magyar-speakers – and of Slovak-speakers – around 1900 was to some extent the result of lower-class migration and urbanisation, and the impact of Magyarisation was not so dramatic as to significantly affect the identity of large numbers of working-class Germans and Slovaks. A closer look at the attitudes and experiences of the broader German and Slovak population of Pressburg may help to test these hypotheses.

From a purely economic point of view, many Pressburg Germans had the theoretical option to resist the trend of Magyarisation to a considerable extent because of their relatively independent position and entrenched social status. This held true for German entrepreneurs, tradesmen, and artisans, and for those wage earners who were employed by the numerous bigger and smaller German employers in the city and region of Pressburg. However, from an ethnopolitical and sociopsychological point of view the German position was much weaker,

¹³³ Hoensch, ‘Die Entwicklung’, p. 116; Jörg K. Hoensch, *A History of Modern Hungary 1867-1994*, London 1996, p. 38.

¹³⁴ Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 25; Ruprecht Steinacker, ‘Zur Rolle der Deutschen in den Anfängen der ungarländischen Arbeiterbewegung’, *Südostdeutsches Archiv* 17-18, 1974-5, pp. 146, 148; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, p. 23.

¹³⁵ Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, p. 17.

because in Hungary the German sense of ethnic identity was mainly local and non-political, i.e., focused on the German language and culture in its local context, not on any kind of open opposition to Magyar domination or Hungarian nationalism. In contrast to the Magyars and the Slovaks, the dispersed German population of Upper Hungary hardly had a collective national consciousness in a modern political sense. The Pressburg Germans, like the Germans of other Hungarian regions, were imbued with a traditional local patriotism on the one hand (reinforced by their ethnic identity), and a supra-ethnic or non-ethnic Hungarian state patriotism on the other. Although the Pressburg Germans were reputed to be more ‘sceptical’, liberal, and Vienna-oriented than, for example, the more notoriously pro-Hungarian Germans of the northern region of the Zips (Spiš), they too found it difficult to think of themselves in other terms than German-speaking Hungarians, or indeed simply ‘Pressburgers’, German citizens of Pressburg. It has been argued that the Germans’ sense of Hungarian citizenship (*Staatsangehörigkeit*) and political nationality suppressed any consciousness of a separate ethnonational identity.¹³⁶ However, from the end of the nineteenth century, Magyarisation pressure could not prevent the Germans from developing at least a more defensive ethnolinguistic consciousness, even if most of them refused to go further than articulating a ‘dual’ ethnic-German and political-Hungarian sense of identity. In post-1867 Pressburg, where the Germans oscillated between majority and minority status (dominant in the city, but not in Hungary as a whole), there were clearly tensions and an ambivalent relationship between Germans and Magyars.¹³⁷ Although many Pressburg Germans appeared to follow the trend of Magyarisation, and although their social and cultural organisations frequently stressed their Hungarian patriotism and loyalty to the Hungarian Fatherland, many were also keen to keep their own language and the intimacy of their own ethnocultural world. They protected their ‘internal’ somewhat submerged German identity by using the Magyar language in their external contacts with the authorities, publicly demonstrating their loyalty to the Hungarian state, and showing their goodwill in other crucial situations, for example by reporting their nationality to be Magyar when a census was taken.¹³⁸ The Pressburg Germans felt threatened by the Magyarisation process, which was accompanied by anti-German rhetoric, and felt they had to defend themselves against allegations of disloyalty or insufficient patriotism. Therefore, they pre-emptively employed Hungarian patriotic phraseology and kowtowed to the demands of the growing force of Magyar nationalism. This defensive pattern of behaviour of the Germans can be well observed when looking at the world of Pressburg’s voluntary associations, not all of which were exclusively German but many of which were traditionally dominated and led by German-speakers. From the 1870s pressure by the Magyarised local administration of Pressburg caused an increasing number of German associations to present their official name, their by-laws, and sometimes even their minutes of meetings in Magyar as well as German. At public meetings and festivities organised by predominantly German clubs

¹³⁶ Dušan Kováč, ‘Das nationale Selbstverständnis der deutschen Minderheit in der Slowakei’, *Österreichische Osthefte* 33, no. 2, 1991, pp. 270-1.

¹³⁷ Peter Salner, ‘Migration und Akkulturation im 20. Jahrhundert’, in *Ethnokulturelle Prozesse in Gross-Städten Mitteleuropas*, ed. Daniel Luther, Bratislava, 1992, p. 18; Elena Mannová, ‘Selbstinszenierung des deutschen Bürgertums in Bratislava im 19. Jahrhundert’, in *Stabilität und Wandel in der Grossstadt*, eds Zuzana Beňušková and Peter Salner, Bratislava, 1995, p. 30; Mannová, ‘Ethnic Identity’, p. 6.

¹³⁸ See, e.g., Winter, *Die Deutschen*, p. 12, for examples of Germans reporting their nationality as Magyar; Hoensch, ‘Die Entwicklung’, p. 116, for Germans defending their social space by ‘making arrangements’ with the authorities. The majority of the Pressburg Jews were German-speakers as well, even though a growing number of them assimilated to Magyardom; see, e.g., Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 18. It has been argued that, despite the enthusiasm of many Jews for Magyardom, their reporting Magyar nationality in the census was – as in the case of the Germans – often mainly a formality, because many identified with their religion above all, particularly in Orthodox-dominated Pressburg and Upper Hungary; see Mannová, ‘Ethnic Identity’, p. 12; Ivan Kameneč, ‘Historická retrospektíva formovania židovskej národnosti v moderných slovenských dejinách’, *Sociológia* 24, no. 1-2, 1992, pp. 25-30.

and associations it had become common practice by 1900 to begin with a brief introductory speech in Magyar; this was followed by the bulk of the programme in German and concluded again by some final statements in Magyar. In this way acceptance of the demands of linguistic and sociopolitical Magyarisation was publicly demonstrated, but at the same time there was ‘a certain hidden resistance’ to it.¹³⁹ Expressing a ‘dual identity’ was a way of defending one’s ethnic space. Open resistance by articulating an alternative national identity was another but far more dangerous option.

In addition to the general trend of assimilatory pressure and overall Magyarisation, there was the question of the reorganisation of local administration after 1867. The Pressburg Germans, the old masters of the city, were forced on the defensive in various ways, also with regard to the institutional and administrative structure of the city, whose traditional autonomy was reduced after 1867 and whose bureaucratic life was gradually Magyarised. This sapped the political power of the Germans and paved the way for more aggressive Magyarisation policies aimed at German organisations like the *Deutscher Schulverein* (which tried to promote German-language education) or cultural institutions like Pressburg’s predominantly German City Theatre. The local administration of a traditionally German city like Pressburg had for centuries been shaped by its status as one of Hungary’s ‘Royal Free Towns’, privileged cities protected by the king against the local nobility that enjoyed a number of special rights, including judicial and administrative autonomy. This situation changed after the *Ausgleich* of 1867, when the now domestically independent Hungarian government began to apply its new powers to unify and centralise the country’s administration, seen as a precondition to enforcing the policy of Magyarisation. Magyar became the official language on all administrative levels, which enabled the Magyar minority and ‘Magyarone’ (pro-Magyar) Germans in Pressburg to gradually take control of crucial positions in the city, which was regarded as the political centre of northwest Hungary. The judicial autonomy of Royal Free Towns like Pressburg was ended in 1872, when the city’s municipal courts were dissolved and its judicial organs placed under the control of the Ministry of Justice in Budapest. In 1876 the administrative privileges of Hungary’s forty-seven Free Towns were further reduced and they were incorporated into the counties, through whose newly created administrative committees, all dominated by Magyars, local administration was more effectively coordinated with central government and the latter’s bureaucratic grip strengthened. In 1886 there followed another municipal administration law, which more or less abolished the old Free Towns but accorded a measure of autonomy to a select twenty-six cities, including Pressburg, with so-called ‘municipal rights’, which were closely circumscribed. These cities with municipal rights, or ‘municipal towns’, had in theory the same autonomous status as the counties. But their chief administrative official was the sheriff (*Obergespan*; *župan*) of the county in which they were located, i.e., the same individual who was in charge of the nobility-dominated county itself and who was appointed by the government (and therefore also known as ‘government commissioner’). With the help of the county sheriff and other local officials the powerful Ministry of the Interior could often overrule the decisions of municipal towns and counties. Nevertheless, there continued to exist a degree of representative government and administrative autonomy in the municipal towns, who were in theory in charge of their own affairs. The mayor, the police chief (only until 1890), and some other officials on the municipal executive committee (‘magistracy’) were elected by the town council, although their decisions had to be confirmed by the county administration. Indeed, from the 1890s there was a gradual strengthening of central government control over the counties and municipal towns. As in the case of the county assembly, one-half of the membership of the town council was elected in local elections, the other half being selected from among the highest tax-payers (the so-called ‘virilists’). Like the

¹³⁹ Mannová, ‘Selbstinszenierung’, pp. 34-5; Mannová, ‘Ethnic Identity’, p. 7; Elena Mannová, ‘Vereine im Adaptationsprozess der Immigranten’, in *Ethnokulturelle Prozesse*, ed. D. Luther, pp. 26-7.

parliamentary franchise, the municipal franchise excluded the bulk of the lower classes, although the franchise reform of 1913 led to a minor extension of the electorate, which proved beneficial to the Pressburg social democrats. It was also of some importance that, unlike the parliamentary elections in the districts of Pressburg county, voting in the elections for the Pressburg town council occurred by secret ballot.¹⁴⁰ No doubt this contributed to the relative soundness of Pressburg's municipal administration.

Unlike most other cities in Hungary, and despite the process of Magyarisation, Pressburg managed to keep some administrative space for the German language. In Pressburg as late as the early twentieth century schedules of taxation and certain other important documents were drawn up not only in Magyar, but also in German, the city's historical administrative language. This was an exceptional situation in Hungary, as was the procedure of secret voting in Pressburg's municipal elections. In other municipalities in the county of Pressburg, as well as in the county assembly, the language rights of the non-Magyars, in particular those of the Slovaks, were not recognised, despite the fact that the Nationalities' Law prescribed that local councils had to accept a second administrative language if at least twenty percent of their members wanted this, in which case the latter had the right to speak and to demand that the minutes of council meetings be drawn up in their own language. The reality was that Slovak members of local councils in overwhelmingly Slovak communities who dared to use their own language were treated as being guilty of the political crime of 'pan-Slavism', and that the councils' minutes were drawn up in Magyar only. In October 1893 Count Josef Zichy, sheriff of Pressburg county, proposed in the county assembly to officially prescribe that all communities in the county should use the Magyar administrative language only; apparently the reason for this was the refusal of some non-Magyars to acknowledge the exclusive status of Magyar. Indeed, a Slovak member of the county assembly protested against Zichy's proposal, which nonetheless was accepted. When he made an appeal to the Hungarian Minister of the Interior to intervene, this was rejected. However, there were other occasional protests. In January 1908 a Slovak member of the local council in the predominantly Slovak town of Myjava demanded that the council's minutes be drawn up in Slovak in addition to Magyar. But the local executive official appointed by the county assembly protested against this 'unpatriotic attitude' and warned that, if necessary, local administrative autonomy could be suspended by the government, which certainly would not tolerate its 'misuse for Pan-Slav propaganda'.¹⁴¹ In the city of Pressburg, with its strong German population and its more entrenched form of municipal autonomy, such blatant intimidation was less common, but more subtle – and if need be less than subtle – means of imposing Magyar domination were practised nonetheless. It would also seem that there was a difference between the way the Magyarised Pressburg authorities treated the Slovaks and the way in which they dealt with the Germans. The post-1867 administration of Pressburg was dominated by Magyars and Magyarised Germans, and although some of the latter displayed the typical fanatical behaviour of converts and renegades, they often also retained links with the German community. Although anti-German rhetoric was strong among some of the active Magyarisers, this context – and the Germans' strong economic and social basis – may have made life somewhat easier for the German Pressburgers, for example

¹⁴⁰ On local administration, particularly in Pressburg, see R.W. Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems in Hungary*, 2nd edn, New York 1972 (1st edn 1908), pp. 240-3; Portisch, *Geschichte*, pp. 506-7, 522, 563-4; Dušan Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave 1918-1929*, Bratislava 1969, pp. 55-6; František Bokes, 'Politicko-administratívny vývin v porevolučnom období a bitka pri Lamači (1866)', in *Dejiny Bratislavy*, eds D. Lehotská and J. Pleva, pp. 226-7; András Gergely, 'Das ungarische Komitat im 19. Jahrhundert', in *Settlement and Society in Hungary*, ed. Ferenc Glatz, Budapest, 1990, pp. 216-8; Vladimír Horváth, 'Pressburger Bürger in der inneren Stadt (1740-1916)', in *Städtisches Alltagsleben in Mitteleuropa vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts*, eds Viliam Čičaj and Othmar Pickl, Bratislava, 1998, p. 226; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, pp. 18, 25; Hoensch, 'Die Entwicklung', p. 115; Hoensch, *History of Modern Hungary*, p. 49.

¹⁴¹ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, pp. 152-3, 246-8; Glettler, 'The Slovaks', p. 299.

in the field of traditional German-language education or social life. The Slovaks, however, especially those who had the courage to openly remain loyal to their national-cultural identity, were subjected to a policy for which the term 'persecution' was hardly an exaggeration. This can be seen when looking at local school policy and different forms of social and political repression in Pressburg.

Historically, most prominent schools in Pressburg were institutions where the language of instruction had for long been German, especially secondary schools and higher educational institutions. Since most schools were run by the churches (usually Catholic or Lutheran), which were relatively tolerant with regard to ethnicity, there were primary and secondary schools catering for children of all nationalities. There were also theological institutions where students had to learn the relevant liturgical and vernacular languages – e.g., Czech and Slovak in the case of Slovak Lutheran theology students – in order to be able to serve their future religious communities as pastors. In the course of the nineteenth century the amount of Magyar-language instruction at secondary schools increased, and especially after 1867 the number of Magyar primary schools began to grow as well, a process that was actively promoted by the Hungarian government. While this development was especially detrimental to the Slovaks (and especially painful for the nationally conscious among them), it also increasingly affected German-speakers, many of whom were forced to face the new reality that knowledge of the Magyar language was a precondition for social mobility. Nevertheless, it would seem that the number of primary schools in Upper Hungary/Slovakia with German as the language of instruction continued to be relatively significant until 1907. In 1904-5, there were fifty-seven in Slovakia as a whole, including eight in Pressburg county (of which six were Lutheran). By 1907-8, the number of German primary schools in Slovakia had declined to twenty-five, by 1912-13 to nineteen. In Pressburg county there were only three left in 1912-13 (all Lutheran). Meanwhile, the number of Magyar primary schools was growing all the time.¹⁴² Thus, until the early years of the twentieth century the Germans managed to keep their position to some extent, even though the Hungarian school laws of 1879, 1883, and 1891, which forcibly promoted the Magyar language, had led to a weakening of the German school system and a general negligence of the German language already before 1900. But even the infamous Education Act of 1907, which aimed to destroy the basis of non-Magyar education by suppressing it also in the lower classes of church-run primary schools, was not able to prevent that in a small number of schools German education survived and that several hours per week were reserved for improving knowledge of the German language itself. It has been argued that this had some effect in counteracting denationalisation, especially in those cases where the local priest or pastor, teachers, and key individuals in local administration held together.¹⁴³ In contrast to this, the position of Slovak-language education, especially in a city like Pressburg, was hopeless. On the eve of the First World War thirteen percent of the population of Pressburg was illiterate, and no doubt the Slovaks were disproportionately represented among this group.¹⁴⁴ By this time the situation had become even more difficult for the non-Magyars in Pressburg's secondary schools. Already around 1870 it was demanded of secondary school teachers that they know Magyar; this led to numbers of German teachers leaving their posts and

¹⁴² Soňa Gabzdilová, 'Problémy a východiská vzdelávacieho procesu nemeckej menšiny na Slovensku v období rozpadu Rakúsko-Uhorska a vzniku ČSR', in *Stredoeurópske národy na križovatkách novodobých dejín 1848-1918*, eds Peter Švorc and Ľubica Harbuľová, Prešov, 1999, p. 324. See for some other relevant data Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, p. 100; František Bokes, Vladimír Lehotský, and František Kalesný, 'Kultúrny život Bratislavy v období 1848-1918', in *Dejiny Bratislavy*, eds D. Lehotská and J. Pleva, p. 285. In ethnically mixed areas, especially cities, some schools had parallel classes with different languages of instruction, but there may also have been a tendency for schools to be for one ethnolinguistic group only, or to give instruction in one (increasingly the dominant Magyar) language only.

¹⁴³ Winter, *Die Deutschen*, pp. 13, 25, 31; Hoensch, 'Die Entwicklung', p. 115.

¹⁴⁴ Bokes et al., 'Kultúrny život', p. 285.

their replacement by Magyars. A few secondary schools were able to avoid complete Magyarisation for some time and to preserve a limited domain for the German language, but by 1912-13 there was not a single secondary school left in Upper Hungary/Slovakia with German as the language of instruction. Slovak had disappeared from all secondary schools already by the 1880s and, apart from the Lutheran Theological Academy, even ceased to be taught as a voluntary subject; the situation for the Slovaks in Pressburg's primary schools was hardly better.¹⁴⁵ The virtual elimination of the Slovak language from the field of education in Pressburg was accompanied by intimidation and repression of nationally conscious Slovak students and intellectuals. To some extent the Pressburg Germans were confronted with these realities as well. It is necessary to pay some more attention to this, because it shows how in Pressburg national and cultural oppression was an important factor helping to shape the social and political atmosphere in the city.

In the 1870s the flourishing secondary schools and higher educational institutions of Pressburg, some of which were centres of Slovak national activity, became targets of the new state-imposed Magyarisation policy, whose repressive character became increasingly obvious. During this period the Slovaks were still the second largest population group in the city and, traditionally, a certain percentage of students and of the Pressburg intelligentsia were Slovaks, especially in educational institutions like the prominent Lutheran Lyceum, after 1883 the Lutheran Theological Academy. At this school a 'Czecho-Slovak Society' had existed for a number of years. In 1874 a new national-cultural society of Slovak students, *Zora* (The Morning Star), was formed, against which action was taken by the Pressburg school inspector on account of its alleged 'pan-Slavism', which he said should be 'rooted out'. Both 'pan-Slavism' and 'pan-Germanism' were now declared enemies of the Hungarian Fatherland by the directorate of the Lutheran Lyceum, who obviously deemed it necessary to follow the trend of cultural and political Magyarisation. These allegations were made for the simple reason that some Slovak and German students at the Lyceum had made it clear that they wanted to remain loyal to their ethnolinguistic culture and identity, which they said was not in conflict with their status of Hungarian citizens. They did not accept that at the Lyceum and later at the Lutheran Theological Academy, where Magyar had become the single language of instruction, it was even prohibited to speak Slovak or German after classes. Similar problems arose in the 1870s at Pressburg's Catholic Theological Seminary and at the city's Law Academy, where there were a number of Slovak nationally conscious students as well, some of whom even founded a Slovak Lawyers' Association. In the 1880s the Slovak national movement in Pressburg – if this is what the small and weak 'movement' largely consisting of students could be called – was hit by an even more serious wave of political persecution, resulting in purges of educational institutions and a series of expulsions of Slovak students. In 1882 the members of *Zora* began to be expelled from the Lutheran Lyceum; some of them were destined to become prominent Slovak writers and political figures. The same thing happened at the Catholic Seminary, where 'pan-Slav' novices were expelled, and at the Law Academy, where by 1908 only five Slovak students were left. The repression of the 1880s affected Slovak students at schools all over Hungary and followed the earlier closing down of three Slovak gymnasiums in the 1870s. What was left in Pressburg of organised groups of Slovak students and intellectuals after the 1880s, was hardly more than a few individuals meeting in private homes and living in a state of fear. Some of the expelled students went to study at Czech schools in Prague, from where they tried to maintain correspondence with the remaining Slovak students in Pressburg. But this correspondence was regarded as a political threat and prohibited by the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior, which tried to intercept and suppress it. At Pressburg's schools conversation in Slovak was enough to provoke suspicion. A spying system was put in place aimed at those who were suspected of opposing the idea of the

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 283; Gabzdilová, 'Problémy', p. 324.

unitary Magyar national state; such 'pan-Slav agitators' lost their stipendium and were expelled.¹⁴⁶ The oppressive climate of Magyar chauvinism and political persecution in the field of education continued during the 1890s. Only after 1900 there slowly emerged a little more space for social and cultural activities on the part of the Slovak intelligentsia and other Slovaks in Pressburg, which led to the formation of a new Slovak cultural society called *Slovenský vzdelávací spolok* (The Slovak Educational Society). An important factor that helped to make possible this modest revival of Slovak national activity in Pressburg during the early years of the twentieth century was the rise of the Slovak social democratic movement and, arguably, local social democracy as a whole. But before we look in detail at the Pressburg labour movement, it is necessary to say something more about the Magyarisation and cultural repression policies aimed at the Pressburg Germans.

It is characteristic of nineteenth-century Central Europe and in particular of Central European ethnocultural politics that, beside key issues like school policy and the status of different languages, a cultural institution like the theatre was seen as a national symbol as well. Perhaps the theatre, a prominent centre of Central European cultural life, was even second to none in its public importance not only as a cultural but a national symbol. It was, therefore, to be expected that the Magyarised local authorities of Pressburg should make an attempt to weaken the traditional position of the German theatre and to strengthen the status of the Magyar language and Magyar culture also in the field of theatre production. Thus, there arose a very Central European controversy, which reached its first climax in the late 1880s. In 1886 the new City Theatre was opened in Pressburg, which could happen thanks to the financial support of the German population and which seemed to confirm the traditional status of German culture in the city. However, the event urged Magyar nationalists and certain individuals in the local administration to start a campaign against the dominant position of the German Theatre in Pressburg. It was demanded that the time reserved for German theatre performances should be reduced and the number of Magyar-language performances increased. From 1890 this campaign was conducted by an 'association for the support of the Magyar Theatre' led by the sheriff of Pressburg county himself. As a result of this pressure the number of hours available for German theatre presentations was systematically reduced during the following two decades, and the Pressburg City Theatre finally became an almost exclusively Magyar institution. It was an excellent example of how the Germans became victims of the Magyarisation policy in the cultural field. The local Germans, many of whom seem to have refused to attend the Magyarised Theatre, were left with only a limited amount of time for German performances and, like the Slovaks, largely had to content themselves with amateur theatre presentations in private circles. Even more dramatic was what happened in Budapest. In 1889 the German Theatre in Budapest, once described as 'the most powerful bastion' of the German community in the city, was destroyed by a fire, reportedly to the delight of an excited Magyar crowd. No permission was given for its reconstruction, and in 1894 a Magyar deputy declared in the Hungarian parliament: 'To God's help we owe the burning of the German theatre.' In 1896, the year of the chauvinistic Hungarian 'Millenium' festivities, further measures were taken to reduce the activities of German theatre companies at various places in Hungary, while Slovak theatre performances were forbidden altogether. By 1900 German theatre productions had largely disappeared from the cultural scene in many Hungarian cities. In some places, such as Pressburg, they could not be suppressed completely, but they were reduced to an absolute minimum. In 1902 it happened for the first time that a Slovak theatre piece was performed in the City Theatre, but such occasions

¹⁴⁶ Lehotská, 'Slovenské národné hnutie', pp. 264-73 passim; Gletler, 'The Slovaks', pp. 304-5, 308, 313; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, pp. 25, 31, 95; Konštantín Čulen, *Slovenské študentské tragédie*, 2 vols, Bratislava 1935, vol. 1, pp. 81-117, 139-286 passim.

were exceptional.¹⁴⁷ It is difficult to overestimate the cultural and symbolic importance of the theatre in multinational Hungary, also in the ranks of the labour movement. It is interesting that the Slovak social democrats protested against the attacks on the Pressburg German Theatre as well. When in 1914 Hungarian nationalists demanded that the few remaining German presentations in the Pressburg City Theatre should be terminated altogether, the Slovak social democratic newspaper *Robotnícke noviny* protested against this and demanded that performances be allowed in all languages, including Slovak.¹⁴⁸ In Pressburg and in Central European cities generally, theatre was politics, not only for the middle classes, but also for the working class.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century other cultural institutions of the Pressburg Germans were attacked as well, in particular the *Deutscher Schulverein*, which tried to promote and protect German schools. Its members were denounced by Magyar nationalists as ‘Germanisers’ and enemies of Hungary and at one point the society was forced to dissolve, although it was revived at a later stage. As early as 1869 the German newspaper *Pressburger Zeitung* had tried to explain the difficult ambiguous position of the Hungarian Germans: ‘We have two souls in our breasts, we speak German and feel German, but we are and remain Hungarians.’¹⁴⁹ It was not always easy to combine these two ‘souls’ when concrete German interests had to be defended, but many Pressburg Germans tried to do just that. While German societies who knew how to play the game with the Hungarian authorities generally managed to survive, those who articulated specific German interests in sensitive areas like education or the press, especially when not acting in a sufficiently reticent way, were often attacked by Hungarian newspapers, politically marginalised, or even silenced. The absence of proper legislation providing for the normal functioning of voluntary associations was a serious handicap that constantly threatened their existence, and that offered the government virtually unlimited possibilities to arbitrarily act against them. The atmosphere of intolerant Magyarism in all areas of public life led to attacks not only on non-Magyar associations, but even on individuals representing institutions like the Catholic Church. Soon after 1867 complaints were levelled against certain German Catholics in Pressburg who allegedly resisted the introduction of the Magyar language in both school and church. One of them was the influential local priest Karl Heiller, apparently a convinced German in the ethnocultural sense of the term who found it difficult to accept the new post-Compromise trend of forcible Magyarisation. Until his death in 1889 he seems to have been a rallying point for a quiet form of resistance to the Magyarisation policies in the city. Heiller belonged to a small group of prominent ethnically conscious Germans that also included the German politician Edmund Steinacker, the one-time mayor of Pressburg Heinrich Justi, the president of the Pressburg Chamber of Commerce Theodor Edl, the journalist Karl Koller, and a few others. Steinacker was the founder of the Hungarian-German People’s Party, which unsuccessfully participated in the general election of 1910. He was also one of the advisers of the Habsburg Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand in the field of Hungarian political and national problems. The aggressiveness of the Magyarisers, indeed, some of whom were German renegades who had completely converted to the ideology of the greater Magyar national state, triggered some critical reflection on the position and future of the ethnic Germans in Hungary. The anti-German cultural policy of Dualist Hungary provoked a defensive German consciousness

¹⁴⁷ Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*, pp. 290-1; Portisch, *Geschichte*, pp. 500, 521-2; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, p. 142; Anna Grusková, ‘“The Soul Remained Jewish.” Bratislava Theatre between the Wars, Arthur Schnitzler and the Reflection of Jewish Identity’, in *Collective Identities in Central Europe in Modern Times*, eds Moritz Csáky and Elena Mannová, Bratislava, 1999, pp. 111-2. Interestingly, the *Pressburger Jüdische Zeitung (PJZ)* of 5 February 1909 carried an enthusiastic article informing its readers that ‘also the Jews’, if as yet principally in Vienna and Budapest, were organising ‘their own theatre societies’.

¹⁴⁸ Bokes et al., ‘Kultúrny život’, p. 293.

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in Portisch, *Geschichte*, p. 500. See for the *Deutscher Schulverein*, e.g., Dušan Kováč, ‘Nemecko a uhorskí Nemci do prvej svetovej vojny’, *Historický časopis* 34, no. 4, 1986, p. 515ff.

among part of the Germans in Hungary and even abroad. An observer like the Consul of the German Empire in Budapest noted in 1893 in a letter to Berlin that ‘Magyar Chauvinism fights against everything German’.¹⁵⁰

This chauvinism was bound to cause a reaction. When in 1896 the Hungarians celebrated their Millennium, some Germans wanted to boycott the festivities. In the Transylvanian city of Klausenburg (Kolozsvár, Cluj) a Honvéd (Hungarian army) monument was besmirched with anti-Magyar slogans by Germans or Romanians, and apparently there was some sympathy for actions like this among part of the German population in Hungary. A German newspaper in the western Hungarian town of Neusiedl am See, near Pressburg and the Austrian border, thought it necessary to appeal to the local German population not to boycott the Millennium festivities. It also wrote they should recognise that they were part of the Hungarian *Staatsvolk* and warned them ‘not to flirt with neighbouring peoples of the same race’.¹⁵¹ This was clearly a reference to the existence of German-national tendencies in western Hungary, a region that became the home of a strong German national movement in 1918. This movement must have had its roots in the preceding period, and it would seem that Hungarian policies caused a more self-conscious German reaction after 1900. From the experience of Magyar intolerance and cultural oppression of the ethnic Germans there emerged a new German national consciousness and a small defensive national ‘movement’ supported by a hard core of middle-class individuals. As we shall see below, some of the leaders of the Pressburg labour movement were, in their own way, part of this defensive German movement as well. But while German national consciousness was on the rise during the years immediately before the First World War, it was only the war that led to its final breakthrough among the German minority in Hungary. Both the limited scale of the movement before 1918, government repression, and the Hungarian loyalties of many Germans prevented it from becoming a serious movement earlier than that. Edmund Steinacker, one of its foremost proponents, was sentenced to prison in 1901 for writing an article explaining the difference between the concepts of ‘Hungarian’ and ‘Magyar’. This was hardly surprising, because it was the fundamental aim of the Hungarian government to equate the territorial and civic-political notion of the Hungarian nation with the ethnolinguistic notion of the Magyar nation. Those who disconnected the two concepts by giving expression to a German or Slovak ethnonational consciousness separate from the traditional Hungarian patriotism, were denounced or persecuted as ‘traitors’. Defensive explanations by Germans or Slovaks arguing for a duality and combination of Hungarian State patriotism and non-Magyar ethnolinguistic identity were mistrusted and rejected by most Magyar politicians. The reticence, often based on fear, of many Germans in Hungary to express their ethnic identity and appear ‘unpatriotic’ was described in 1905 by the ethnic-German university professor Roland Steinacker (the son of Edmund Steinacker) as ‘a kind of hypnosis’. The ethnonational consciousness of Germans like Edmund and Roland Steinacker was later described by yet another member of the Steinacker family as the conviction that *Staatsangehörigkeit* alone was not decisive for defining one’s national identity, that the Hungarian Germans should also keep their nationality in an ethnic and cultural sense. The belief or claim that loyalty to the one did not exclude loyalty to the other enabled people like Edmund Steinacker to reject the allegation that those Germans who opposed complete Magyarisation were traitors.¹⁵² But tragically any alternative vision of Hungary as a kind of multicultural or

¹⁵⁰ Letter of the German *Generalkonsul* in Budapest, Count Monts, to the German *Reichskanzler*, Count Caprivi, 12 December 1893, quoted in Berthold Sutter, ‘Die innere Lage Ungarns vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg in der Beurteilung deutscher Diplomaten’, *Südostdeutsches Archiv* 13, 1970, p. 190. See further Dušan Kováč, *Nemecko a nemecká menšina na Slovensku (1871-1945)*, Bratislava 1991, pp. 20-2, 29-30.

¹⁵¹ Quoted in Jakob Michael Perschy, ‘Am Vorabend der Urbanisierung. Neusiedl am See um 1900’, in *Städtisches Alltagsleben in Mitteleuropa*, eds V. Čičaj and O. Pickl, p. 328.

¹⁵² Portisch, *Geschichte*, pp. 499-500, 522; Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, p. 53; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, pp. 26-9, 67; Winter, *Die Deutschen*, p. 13; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*,

multinational state was seen as high treason by the country's rulers.

Although socially, economically, and culturally the Germans continued to be a prominent element of the Pressburg population and also dominated the local working-class movement, it would be wrong to overlook the role of the other ethnic groups. Another important ethnic (or religious) group in the city, beside the Slovaks and the Magyars, was the Jews. By 1910 Pressburg had a large and diverse Jewish community of more than eight thousand people, of whom a considerable proportion, perhaps a majority, belonged to the Orthodox community. While there was a strong tendency for Hungarian Jews to identify with Hungarian nationalism and to assimilate to the Magyar nationality, especially in the capital Budapest, this tendency was weaker in traditionally German Pressburg. In Pressburg the majority of Jews seems to have continued to speak and identify with the German language, in particular the strong Orthodox community. Of the 140,467 Jews living in Upper Hungary/Slovakia in 1910, 41.5 percent were classed as Germans in the Hungarian census. Pressburg and western Slovakia was the centre of this German-speaking Jewish population, while eastern Slovakia had a larger number of Yiddish-speaking Jews. Interestingly, Pressburg became the centre of an increasingly dynamic Zionist movement, with the religious Zionist *Misrachi* (*Mizrahi*) movement playing a leading role.¹⁵³ Perhaps this could be seen as another expression of the Orthodox dominance in Pressburg, where even the incipient Zionist movement was dominated by religious rather than secular Jews. It meant nevertheless that the foundation was laid for a modern Jewish national identity and Jewish nationalism, which further complicated the intricate multinational structure of Pressburg. In September 1908 the *Misrachi* Zionists began to publish a bimonthly German-language newspaper, the *Pressburger Jüdische Zeitung* (*PJZ*). It was explained that the paper was founded 'to create a Jewish public opinion', to defend 'Jewish historical and economic interests', and to awaken Jewish public life from its present 'senile' condition and regenerate Jewish 'spiritual and moral idealism'. 'Our intelligentsia has almost completely lost its connection with spiritual Judaism as a result of its regrettable desire for assimilation', it was argued. But this was no plea for old-fashioned Orthodoxy, for the paper announced that its founders' goal and slogan was 'to be modern Jews'.¹⁵⁴ Thus, the Pressburg *Misrachi* movement set out to propagate a modern sense of Jewish nationhood based on historical religious and cultural values; it was modern and conservative at the same time. In December 1908 the *PJZ* published an article by Viktor Weil arguing that the Jews were a nation not only because they had 'a common historical past and a common national ideal' (which was revived by Zionism), but also because of their special 'physical and mental characteristics'. The latter were 'still quite striking' despite their partial disappearance under the influence of new 'climatic and nutritional conditions'. Perhaps more convincing was the claim that the 'hidden motive' of those Jews who opposed Zionism was 'the incorrect view that support for the idea and propagation of the national character of Jewry is damaging the interests of the Hungarian State'. People with such 'ultra-loyal concerns' could rest assured: Zionism did not want to offend the interests of the state.¹⁵⁵ But interestingly the *PJZ* was not afraid to criticise the anti-social behaviour of members of the Magyar gentry, unlike some

pp. 29-31; Hoensch, 'Die Entwicklung', p. 118; Ruprecht Steinacker, 'Roland Steinacker und die Gründung des Burgenlandes', *Südostdeutsches Archiv* 14, 1971, p. 179; Kováč, 'Nemecko a uhorskí Nemci do prvej svetovej vojny', pp. 514-5, 528.

¹⁵³ Livia Rothkirchen, 'Slovakia: I. 1848-1918', in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia. Historical Studies and Surveys*, 3 vols, Philadelphia, 1968, vol. 1, pp. 79-80. Early Zionism in Hungary was strongest in the north, and Pressburg was the site of the first Hungarian Zionist Congress in 1903 and the headquarters of the Hungarian Zionist movement. The *Mizrahi* movement was founded in 1901, and in 1904 held its first World Congress in Pressburg. See Rothkirchen, 'Slovakia: I', p. 79; *The New Standard Jewish Encyclopedia*, 5th edn, New York, 1977, p. 1354.

¹⁵⁴ *PJZ*, 2 October 1908.

¹⁵⁵ *PJZ*, 31 December 1908.

other newspapers and political groups. In February 1909 the paper published an article describing how in a tavern in a provincial town not far from Budapest some military officers had assaulted and severely wounded a Jewish man. This incident was said to demonstrate not only the ‘boundless recklessness of certain circles of the nobility’, but indeed that ‘the much praised social equality of the Jews in Hungary’ was in fact not based on the truth.¹⁵⁶ The Hungarian Jews themselves were criticised as well. When in November 1909 L. Lebowitsch, the leader of the *Misrachi* organisation in Hungary, gave a lecture at Pressburg’s *Ahawat Zion* society, he said it was a shame that part of the Hungarian Jews did not consider the broader Jewish interest but spoke out against the immigration of ‘foreign’ (including Austrian) Jews to Hungary, many of whom were expelled by the government even though they had lived for years in the country. He also observed that the Jewish opponents of Zionism belonged to both the liberal ‘Neologists’, who used the argument of their Hungarian patriotism to justify their opposition, and the traditional Orthodox, who rejected Zionism as ‘utopian’ or as dangerous to their religion because part of the Zionists were not religious. Lebowitsch dismissed both arguments and stressed that the *Misrachi* Zionists were religious themselves, indeed ‘more loyal to Jewish religious law’ than the ‘so-called Orthodox’, many of whom indulged ‘questionable’ practices.¹⁵⁷

Thus, all the major arguments underpinning the idea and the movement of Jewish nationalism were already spelled out at this stage. The Jews of Hungary were not seen as social equals by a major part of gentile Hungarian society¹⁵⁸; Jewish Hungarian patriotism was either based on illusions or could be combined with Jewish nationalism; the latter was an old, historic idea that was now revived by the pluralist Zionist movement; Zionism and religion did not contradict one another, of which the *Misrachi* movement was convincing proof; Jewish nationalism was an idea it was also necessary to foster for moral reasons, for otherwise some Jews failed to come to the support of other Jews; the Jews were not only a distinct historical, cultural, and religious group, but even had specific racial characteristics, which was further evidence of their being a separate nationality. In the context of early twentieth-century Central Europe, where nationalism was on the rise among all national groups and anti-Semitism was a notable feature of social and political life, it was no surprise that the nationalism of other groups was imitated by part of the Jews as well. The German language was seen as a useful tool to propagate the Jewish national idea, more so than the much more isolated Magyar language. But the latter was increasingly used by Hungarian Zionists as well, if only to try and persuade the growing group of Magyarised or semi-Magyarised Jews in Budapest. The Pressburg protagonists of the Committee of Hungarian Zionists, the *Misrachi* movement, and other Zionist and Jewish-national organisations had to fight an uphill struggle as long as they were opposed by mainstream Jewish Magyarists, on the one hand, and Orthodox anti-Zionists on the other. In addition, the Zionist movement was opposed by the Hungarian government, and some Zionist organisations, for example the local Zionist Students’ Association *Judea-Holič* in Slovakia, were even dissolved. As Livia Rothkirchen has noted, ‘it seemed that the Hungarian Government, suspicious of the Slovak national movement, was wary of all groups of nationalist complexion. This attitude became even more pronounced during World War I, when Zionist activity in Slovakia practically came to a standstill.’¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless there gradually emerged, not in the last place because of the enthusiasm of younger-generation Zionist activists in Pressburg and elsewhere in Hungary, a political basis for the idea of modern Jewish nationalism. Thus Jewish nationality could become an alternative identity to ‘Magyarism’ or ‘Germanism’ – or indeed to

¹⁵⁶ *PJZ*, 5 February 1909.

¹⁵⁷ *PJZ*, 12 November 1909.

¹⁵⁸ For the development of anti-Semitism in Hungary, see Rolf Fischer, *Entwicklungsstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn 1867-1939. Die Zerstörung der magyarisch-jüdischen Symbiose*, Munich 1988, esp. parts 1-3.

¹⁵⁹ Rothkirchen, ‘Slovakia: I’, p. 79.

Slovak or Czech national identity – in a city like Pressburg. After 1918, this tendency was strengthened in the new Czechoslovak Republic, where Jewish nationality was officially recognised as a national-political identity and a statistical category.

The Pressburg Magyars became the politically dominant and most privileged section of the city's population after 1867, although this does not mean that the Magyar working class in its entirety benefited from this as well. A new Magyar administrative and middle-class stratum began to assert itself in the political, social, and cultural life of the city, in the local press, in Pressburg's voluntary associations, and in other ways. A significant part of this new ruling class was the group of assimilated Germans, who saw an opportunity to move up in the social scale and to enter the ranks of the Hungarian bureaucracy, the Magyar intelligentsia, and even the gentry and wealthy upper middle-class strata. In the social life of Pressburg the higher-class Magyars (old and new) were an ethnic group that tended to create its own 'national camp' in the world of middle- and upper-class clubs and associations, which embraced a variety of social, cultural, and national-political activities. However, a major part of the Magyar and (semi-) Magyarised population remained integrated in older multiethnic associations with their traditional economic, social, and cultural functions. Although some of these associations could not escape Magyarisation, the German language continued to be important in Pressburg's social life, even in higher Magyar circles and rather exclusive societies like the local Magyar National Casino. As against this, the position of the other important ethnolinguistic group in Pressburg, the Slovaks, was totally different. In many ways they were hardly visible as a separate group at all. Slovak workers played a part in the emerging labour movement, which was multiethnic in its composition and outlook, especially during the earlier decades of its existence. Slovak middle-class elements (in the free professions, the clergy, intellectuals, small entrepreneurs) were either assimilated, voluntarily or forcibly, by the expanding Magyarism, or – if they managed to acquire a higher education and at the same time remain loyal to Slovak national aspirations – had to withdraw into the small and isolated circles of Slovak nationalist students and others. In this situation of weakness of the Slovak national movement, the importance of the Slovak labour movement greatly increased from a national-political point of view. For in addition to the many social, cultural, and political problems the Slovak working-class movement was faced with, it had to address ethnic issues as well. Apart from the defence of basic economic interests, Slovak labour organisers had to face the problem of the integration and support of Slovak newcomers to Pressburg, and were involved in many other activities that were important in the context of the social and cultural formation and the ethnic defence of the Slovak working class.¹⁶⁰ In this way the political vacuum created by the Magyarisation policy and the repression of Slovak national activity was, at least in part, filled by the Slovak component of the Pressburg social democratic movement. Rather than impelled by political or ideological motives, the 'national aspect' of the activity of Slovak social democracy was a 'natural' sociopolitical function. Indeed, it can be argued that the existence of a multiethnic labour movement in Pressburg in which the Slovaks participated as well – one that was dominated by Germans instead of Magyars – made it both possible and necessary for the Slovak social democrats to play an active role in the movement for Slovak national emancipation. The relative weakness of the middle-class Slovak national movement in Pressburg made their fulfilling this function uniquely important.

Even though the Slovaks were not always highly visible in Pressburg, and by no means prominent as a politically organised ethnic group, they played a notable part in the social history of the city, particularly in the history of the local labour movement. They made up a significant proportion of the working class of the city and its immediate surroundings. 'Pressburg is Slovak in the morning, Magyar at noon, and German in the evening', as the saying went. At the morning markets Slovak traders and peasants from the suburbs and the immediate hinterland of the city

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Mannová, 'Ethnic Identity', pp. 8-10.

dominated the urban scene. At noon Magyar-speaking office workers and government employees were omnipresent in the city centre. In the evening the city was returned to the old German population of burghers, workers, and tradesmen who would frequent its many taverns and café's. It has also been noted that, unlike the other two languages, Slovak was almost exclusively heard in Pressburg's markets, the new working-class suburbs, and around the outlying factories.¹⁶¹ But the proportions of Germans and Magyars belonging to the proletariat were considerable as well, with the Germans predominating among the older classes of industrial and commercial workers. It has been estimated that around 1900 about half of the German population of Pressburg belonged to the blue-collar working-class, while many other Germans were tradesmen, fishermen, white-collar employees, etc. The Germans were disproportionately represented among the skilled and more educated sections of the working class, while both Magyars and Slovaks were largely concentrated in the lesser skilled strata. In the skilled trades the Magyars seem to have been important only among the boot- and shoemakers. The Slovaks were strongly represented among the poorer groups of artisans (especially the brick makers, masons, and other building workers), but otherwise mainly among the lesser skilled industrial workers as well as the agricultural labourers on the outskirts of the city. In 1910 there was only one out of a total of fifty-seven industrial branches in Pressburg that did not employ Slovaks, which clearly shows the degree to which they had become part of the urban working class. Almost half of all Slovaks were employed in the manufacturing and construction industries; building and construction was traditionally an industry employing large numbers of them all over Hungary, including the capital Budapest. While both Slovaks and Magyars had a strong presence among the unskilled workers and day labourers of Pressburg, the former seem to have outnumbered the latter in this diffuse field of employment. The degree of proletarianisation in Pressburg was already considerable around 1870, by which time wage earners and their families seem to have made up the majority of the city's population. By 1900 37.5 percent of all wage earners in Pressburg were employed in various kinds of large-scale as well as small-scale industrial production. There were more than fifty modern manufacturing plants in the city, but like in other Central European cities small workshop production continued to be important as well. In 1910 the number of industrial and building workers in Pressburg – the broad segment of the blue-collar working-class population among whom labour organisation was strongest – amounted to more than sixteen thousand. There were large factories with several hundred workers in the chemical, metal, textile, food, building materials', and other industries. The largest production plant in Pressburg was the dynamite works of Nobel, which employed some three thousand workers on the eve of the First World War.¹⁶² It was among this expanding multiethnic working class that the social democratic movement began to sink roots during the last third of the nineteenth century.

As far as the working-class movement was concerned but also in other ways, Pressburg was 'a kind of gateway' between the western and eastern parts of the Dual Monarchy; after Budapest it was also the most important centre of the Hungarian labour movement.¹⁶³ As was the case with so many other working-class movements in Europe and elsewhere, mutual benefit

¹⁶¹ Lehotská, 'Slovenské národné hnutie', p. 274; Bokes et al., 'Kultúrny život', p. 295.

¹⁶² František Bokes, 'Hospodársky vývin Bratislavy v období 1848-1918', in *Dejiny Bratislavy*, eds D. Lehotská and J. Pleva, pp. 231-3; Vladimír Lehotský, 'Začiatky robotníckeho hnutia', in *ibid.*, p. 238; Vladimír Lehotský, 'Boj bratislavského robotníctva od nástupu imperializmu (1900-1914)', in *ibid.*, p. 252; Lehotská, 'Slovenské národné hnutie', p. 264; Provazník, 'V prvom desaťročí', p. 351; Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 13-6; Winter, *Die Deutschen*, p. 45; Hoensch, 'Die Entwicklung', p. 116; Glettler, 'The Slovaks', pp. 302-4; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 19. Interesting details on individual factories and industries in Pressburg can also be found in Portisch, *Geschichte*, pp. 596-607. For Pressburg's economic and social structure after 1918, see Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 34-54.

¹⁶³ Pavel Hapák, 'Zu den Anfängen der Arbeiterbewegung in der Slowakei (die Jahre 1848-1890)', *Historica* 14, Prague, 1967, pp. 108, 110.

societies creating systems of social insurance – covering sickness, disability, or unemployment – were an important starting point for the Pressburg labour movement. The late 1860s and early 1870s were the years when the typographers and other highly skilled workers began to consolidate this type of mutual aid society besides other economic and social activities. This also brought the establishment of the more broad-based Pressburg General Workers' Sick Fund (*Pressburger Allgemeine Arbeiter-Krankenkassa*) in 1873.¹⁶⁴ In all these activities the influence of the early labour movement in Vienna, less than 70 kilometres away, was considerable. Indeed, in the subsequent history of the social democratic movement in Pressburg the influence of Vienna was always important. This held true not only for the German worker organisations and leading German personalities of the movement, but also for the Slovak and Czech – much less the Magyar – organised labour groups that existed in both cities.¹⁶⁵ Also of crucial importance in the unfolding of the multiethnic labour movement in Pressburg was the Workers' Educational Society *Vorwärts* (Magyar: *Előre*; Slovak: *Napred*), established in 1869 by a number of leading socialists. While the society had officially only cultural and social functions (a condition for getting government registration), it soon evolved a democratic platform and socialist ideology, calling for political and civic rights for the working class, freedom of speech, of the press, and of assembly and association, decent education for the people, and even for 'self-determination' (cultural autonomy) for the different national groups. This led to problems in officially registering the society, because the Hungarian authorities wanted to prevent the politicisation of worker organisations and pursued a non-tolerance policy with regard to political tendencies in voluntary associations, refusing to legalise labour organisations whose by-laws went beyond purely economic, educational, or social objectives. Hungarian law divided all voluntary associations into a number of narrowly defined categories: charitable, economic, educational societies, etc. Political labour organisations at grass-roots level were not legalised or even tolerated, although public meetings organised by a well-known and easily monitored party leadership were sometimes permitted if they were reported twenty-four hours in advance and were held under police supervision. As a result, there arose an uncertain twilight situation in which some labour organisations were, strictly speaking, illegal but tolerated as long as they exercised a measure of self-restraint. *Vorwärts* eventually gained acceptance from the authorities by registering as a cultural and educational society and keeping an independent status vis-à-vis the rest of the socialist labour movement. According to its by-laws of 1872, the majority of its members were Germans and, therefore, the society was constituted in the German language (also the language of its educational activities). However, it was added that, if necessary, the German by-laws would be translated into other languages of the country as well. The status of *Vorwärts* as an educational society by no means reduced its political importance for the Pressburg labour movement. The society invited prominent speakers from Vienna and elsewhere (also socialists) to address its meetings on topical political and cultural issues, and organised all kinds of activities promoting the broadly interpreted objective of workers' education, which of course included a good deal of

¹⁶⁴ The organised printers and typographers are described by Elena Mannová as a skilled elite who consistently kept distance from the rest of the working class. But Vladimír Lehotský shows they were also part of the broader working-class movement, if only because of the leading role of individual printing workers in the Pressburg labour movement. Cf. Mannová, 'Transformácia', p. 447; Vladimír Lehotský, 'Počiatky robotníckeho socialistického hnutia a boj o politické osamostatnenie robotníctva v Bratislave (1867-1900)' (Ph.D. diss., Komenský University, Bratislava, 1969), pp. 20-1, 46. Interestingly, the Pressburg printing workers also organised their own library. In 1899, all of its 715 books, except one, were German; in 1910, out of 941 books, sixty-four were Magyar and apparently none Slovak; see Mannová, 'Transformácia', p. 447.

¹⁶⁵ As Paul Wittich, an early twentieth-century Pressburg German social democratic leader, stressed in an interview in 1951-2, the Pressburg working-class movement was influenced 'by Prague and Vienna'; see SNA, SD, File 206: interview with Wittich, December 1951, January 1952. Of the two cities Vienna was the most important. Even the Czech social democrats who came to the support of the Pressburg Slovaks usually operated from Vienna, where they had their own organisations, rather than from Prague.

socialism. Before the opening of the *Arbeiterheim* in the 1890s, the Pressburg building in the *Donau-Gasse* where various social democratic and trade union organisations had their offices, the meetings of *Vorwärts* were usually held in premises belonging to the well-known Pressburg brewery *Stein*.¹⁶⁶ Although German-speaking workers always predominated, *Vorwärts* stressed its ‘international’, ‘cosmopolitan’, ‘democratic’, and ‘non-confessional’ orientation, as its first chairman already put it in 1869. The society provided opportunities for the Pressburg Slovaks, whose social and political life was otherwise very limited, to participate in the social and cultural activities of the early working-class movement. Slovak participation entered a new phase, when a separate Slovak section (*Napred*) was established in 1905. This made it easier to organise special meetings and activities in the Slovak language, the importance of which cannot be overestimated. Interestingly, *Vorwärts* also set an example to the Pressburg trade unions – many of which were following the same policy by the 1890s – in deciding that independent craftsmen, including those who had only one assistant, could become members of the organisation as well.¹⁶⁷

By the late 1870s the demand for universal suffrage had become a principal agitation issue of the Hungarian working-class movement in Pressburg and Budapest, its two major centres. Around the same time the first socialist newspapers began to be published in Pressburg, with the authorities continually searching for newspaper articles that could be interpreted as posing a danger to the security and political order of the Hungarian State, providing legal arguments for the suppression of the socialist press. It is interesting that in court cases against the editors of socialist newspapers in the early 1880s the latter were sometimes defended by the Slovak lawyer Michal Mudroň, a former leader of the Slovak students’ organisation ‘Czecho-Slovak Society’. This was, perhaps, an indication that there was a potential for a common struggle for democratic political goals, in particular universal suffrage, of the non-Magyar national movements and the working-class movement.¹⁶⁸ Meanwhile, in Hungary the formation of a stable social democratic party proved a difficult process and was successfully completed only in 1890 with the help of the Austrian party. The fact that two separate social democratic parties were established in the two parts of the Dual Monarchy illustrated the degree to which independent Hungarian statehood had become a reality after 1867. The year 1890 also saw the first May Day celebration in Pressburg, which led to the proclamation of a state of emergency by the nervous local authorities; this could not prevent the holding of a number of smaller meetings outside the city centre. The new Hungarian Social Democratic Party (HSDP) adopted the

¹⁶⁶ When the labour organisations moved into the *Arbeiterheim* building, which belonged to the brewery as well, an agreement was made that, for every beer sold at social functions, a little extra should be paid to help cover the rent. See SNA, SD, File 206: interview with Wittich, 1951-2.

¹⁶⁷ Hapák, ‘Zu den Anfängen’, pp. 108-12, 115; Lehotský, ‘Začiatky’, pp. 238-41, 243; Vladimír Lehotský, ‘Rozmach robotníckeho hnutia a protiopatrenia buržoázie (1870-1900)’, in *Dejiny Bratislavy*, eds D. Lehotská and J. Pleva, p. 250; Vladimír Lehotský, ‘K niektorým otázkam z dejín robotníckeho hnutia v Bratislave v období Bánffyho teroru (1895-1900)’, *Bratislava* 6, 1970, p. 272; Karol Goláň, ‘Prvé roky robotníckeho hnutia na Slovensku (Vznik Robotníckeho vzdelávacieho spolku Napred)’, *Historický časopis* 5, no. 2, 1957, pp. 165-84 passim; Karol Goláň, ‘Robotnícke hnutie na Slovensku v rokoch 1867-1900’, *Historický časopis* 10, no. 1, 1962, pp. 4-17 passim; Karol Hanzlíček, *Spomienky na začiatky robotníckeho hnutia v Bratislave*, trans. Pavel Hapák (Bratislava 1970), pp. 17-35, 53-67 on *Vorwärts*, pp. 138-40 on the Slovak section *Napred* (by P. Hapák); Glettlér, ‘The Slovaks’, pp. 312-3; Mannová, ‘Transformácia’, pp. 447-8; Mannová, ‘Vereine’, p. 27; Mannová, ‘Ethnic Identity’, p. 10; Elena Mannová, ‘Intoleranz in Vereinen, Vereine in intoleranter Umgebung’, in *Ethnokulturelle Prozesse*, ed. D. Luther, p. 82; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, p. 186; Tivadar Ortway, *Ulice a námestia Bratislavy. Mesto Františka Jozefa*, Bratislava 2005, pp. 122-4.

¹⁶⁸ Karol Goláň, ‘Ku vzniku prvého robotníckeho časopisu na Slovensku’, *Historický časopis* 7, no. 4, 1959, pp. 545-56; Lehotský, ‘Rozmach’, pp. 245-7; Lehotský, ‘Počiatky’, p. 65, who writes that Mudroň briefly cooperated with the Hungarian labour movement and also was an electoral candidate for the opposition Hungarian Independence Party, because both movements wanted to fight for universal suffrage. See for Mudroň also Darina Lehotská, ‘Zástoj Dr. Michala Mudroňa v kultúrno-politickom živote slovenskom’, in *Slovenská Bratislava*, ed. Alojz Fiala, 2 vols, Bratislava, 1948, vol. 1, pp. 290-342.

‘Hainfeld Programme’ of its Austrian sister party, which according to a Slovak historian ‘was unsatisfactory because it ignored the task of the proletariat in the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution and did not solve the national and peasant questions’.¹⁶⁹ More concretely phrased, the party tended to concentrate its agitation on one part of the democratic programme (universal suffrage and democratic freedoms – to that extent the criticism quoted above was wrong), but failed to address other aspects of it (the national and agrarian problems, which were crucial in the Hungarian situation). The Austrian and Hungarian social democratic parties went the same way as the German party and evolved a classical evolutionary-socialist ideology that conceived of the march towards socialism in terms of small incremental steps forward on the basis of strengthening democracy and the organised working class. In Hungary, with its backward sociopolitical conditions, this concept was bound to meet with serious difficulties given the minority position of the urban working class and the country’s multinational peculiarities. The struggle for democracy and social reforms overlapped with the struggle of the non-Magyar nationalities for national freedom, and with the struggle of millions of peasants of all nationalities for a piece of land and sheer survival. These issues were difficult for Marxist or semi-Marxist socialists to conceptualise, as was a problem like anti-Semitism. In May 1887 there were demonstrations in Pressburg against the Jews in connection with fresh accusations of ‘ritual murder’. The problem was that ‘part of the workers’ participated in them as well, even if they used the opportunity to draw attention to their low wages and bad working conditions.¹⁷⁰ There is not much evidence that the Pressburg labour movement deemed it necessary to systematically combat anti-Semitism in the ranks of the working class.

Nevertheless, at the Second Congress of the HSDP in 1893 a delegate from Pressburg reported on the progress made in their city, where the trade unions (mainly of skilled workers) were growing fast and developing different functions to help strengthen the organisation and social position of the working class. Besides defending basic economic interests, the unions were engaged in practical education, social activities, providing unemployment benefit, functioning as labour exchanges, and promoting the struggle for elementary rights in the workplace.¹⁷¹ The labour movement in Pressburg, like elsewhere in Hungary, developed along three lines: the educational and cultural activities organised by *Vorwärts*, which enrolled men and women from all occupational and national groups; the economic, social, and quasi-political functions performed by the trade unions; and the activities of the slowly emerging and loosely structured local Social Democratic Party, which provided the leadership, much of the propaganda, and the ‘official’ face of the broader movement. The party leadership, both in Budapest and a city like Pressburg, was treated by the government as a more or less legal organisation as long as it exercised a degree of (difficult to define) self-constraint in its political agitation and mobilisation of the workers. The local party headquarters in the *Arbeiterheim*, with its small number of well-known officials, could easily be watched by the authorities and the police, and many Pressburg labour organisations and even factories and workshops contained police informers.¹⁷² The grass roots organisations of the social democratic movement were mistrusted the most, and it was forbidden to set up local party branches because the Hungarian government was always afraid of

¹⁶⁹ Lehotský, ‘Rozmach’, p. 249. The first ‘error’ was not long after corrected by the party when it began to stress the primacy of the struggle for democratic reforms (see chapter 4); the second and third were to remain its permanent weakness. Incidentally, the same ‘Marxist’ historians who would criticise the party for ‘ignoring its bourgeois-democratic task’, also castigated it for its ‘reformism’ and ‘opportunism’.

¹⁷⁰ Lehotský, ‘Počiatky’, p. 69; Karol Goláň, ‘Organizačný rozmach robotníckeho hnutia v Bratislave v prvej polovici deväťdesiatych rokov 19. storočia’, *Historický časopis* 6, no. 4, 1958, p. 526; *Westungarischer Grenzboten (WG)*, 27-29 May 1887.

¹⁷¹ For details on the rise of the trade unions in Pressburg, see Hanzlíček, *Spomienky*, pp. 81-92; Goláň, ‘Organizačný rozmach’, p. 532ff.

¹⁷² Lehotský, ‘K niektorým otázkam’, pp. 269-73.

mass political movements. The result was that the trade unions, through the illegal party groups known as ‘free organisations’ operating inside them, became a kind of de facto branches of the HSDP. A trade union membership card was often also regarded as a party membership card, and party fees – needed to make the party function as a coordinated organisation led from the centre – were collected through the trade unions, whose representatives invariably constituted the majority of the delegates at HSDP congresses.¹⁷³ Of course, this meant that the unions had to take care not to appear too political and to observe the fine distinction between the ‘political’ sphere and the ‘economic’. They focused primarily on their economic and social tasks and represented only themselves at party conferences, leaving most of the political propaganda to the ‘official’ party leadership and the unofficial free organisations. Thus, although the great importance of the trade unions gave the HSDP a rather ‘trade-unionist’ character not unlike the British Labour Party, the reasons why and the conditions in which this happened were rather different. The political and functional relationship between the two ‘wings’ was different too – in Hungary it was in most cases a political core of convinced socialists who established and led the various trade unions, while in Britain it was the unions who created the party.

The somewhat obscure, semi-legal status of the Hungarian social democratic movement and its nontransparent organisational structure make its internal functioning, including the many conflicts afflicting the movement up till 1918 (about issues ranging from interethnic relations to party democracy), sometimes difficult to understand. The party and the wider movement went through many ups and downs both as a result of government repression and of internal struggles, as did the social democratic press, which was closely monitored by the authorities. In Pressburg different social democratic newspapers (all of them German before 1904) came and went, many of them being prohibited for being too ‘political’.¹⁷⁴ It was only in 1902 that a permanent German-language newspaper, the *Westungarische Volksstimme*, was finally established in the city.¹⁷⁵ The paper was edited by the remarkable social democratic leader Heinrich Elkán Kalmár (Kohn), a man of many political and organisational talents, of German-speaking Pressburg Jewish background, and interestingly enough a defender of the German language against the rising threat of Magyarisation. The centre of the Slovak – and, of course, the Magyar – social democratic press was as yet Budapest (where a German paper was published as well). From the late 1890s the first steps were made by Slovak social democrats in Budapest, supported by local Czechs, but hardly by the HSDP leadership, to establish a Slovak-language newspaper. These early endeavours failed in the end, and it was only in 1904 that a permanent Slovak social democratic newspaper could be established – not in Budapest but, significantly, in Pressburg. As the HSDP developed into a complex all-Hungarian movement, its regional structures in Pressburg and western Hungary were consolidated as well. The relative autonomy of the West Hungarian party organisation was promoted by a number of factors. One of them was the proximity of Vienna and the regular and lively communication between the social democrats and organised workers of Pressburg and Vienna. Delegations of Vienna railway workers and others would visit their comrades in Pressburg and vice versa, discussing problems of labour organisation or expressing their ‘international solidarity’. In March 1898 the mayor of Pressburg was warned by the Hungarian Minister of the Interior that the Vienna social democrats were planning to meet in Pressburg to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the revolution of 1848. In Vienna this celebration had been prohibited by the police, but in Hungary and Pressburg the

¹⁷³ Lehotský, ‘Rozmach’, pp. 248-50; Eugen Varga, *Die sozialdemokratischen Parteien. Ihre Rolle in der internationalen Arbeiterbewegung der Gegenwart*, Hamburg 1926, p. 246.

¹⁷⁴ Lehotský, ‘K niektorým otázkam’, pp. 267-76.

¹⁷⁵ In Budapest a German social democratic newspaper, the *Volksstimme*, was already published for more than two decades as a central party organ alongside the Magyar paper *Népszava*; see Hartwig Gerhardt, ‘Deutschsprachige sozialistische Presse in Ungarn 1870-1924’, *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung (IWK)* 13, no. 2, 1977, pp. 177-81.

commemoration of the revolution was seen as a respectable tradition.¹⁷⁶ Another factor encouraging the emergence of autonomous party structures and political practices was the predominantly German character of the Pressburg labour movement and its relative isolation, also culturally and psychologically, from the capital Budapest. In 1898 a circular of the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior pointed to the existence of twelve social democratic organisations in Pressburg, an illustration of the dynamics of the Pressburg labour movement and the intense observation it was subjected to. One objective of the Pressburg party was to have representation on the town council. In 1899 Alois Zalkai, the editor of several short-lived social democratic newspapers, was elected to the town council, but because he had just left the party and, allegedly, was involved in ‘political intrigues’, he was not recognised as a social democratic representative. Only in November 1914, three months after the beginning of the world war and eighteen months after the passing of a new franchise bill that brought a modest increase in the number of municipal voters, the Pressburg social democrats finally succeeded in having one of their leaders, Paul Wittich, elected to the town council. This happened despite the fact that, as a result of administrative confusion or corruption, 1558 of the 9648 voters had not been properly registered. As a candidate for the Theresienstadt ward, an urban area largely inhabited by working-class and lower middle-class people from different ethnic and religious groups (including a large Jewish population), Wittich presented an election programme containing three crucial demands. First, a progressive income and property tax helping to ensure an existential minimum for the people; second, a strengthening of the administrative autonomy of the city, including the elimination of political control by the county and central government; third, abolition of the system of automatically according seats to the ‘virilists’. The social democratic candidate was elected, but it seems that the more progressively inclined non-socialist political groups in the city deemed it wise under war conditions to grant the social democrats a political concession, and that they did not put up their own candidates in Theresienstadt.¹⁷⁷

After 1900 the Pressburg social democratic movement came into its own. The early years of the twentieth century were a period of great worker militancy, strike movements, and also of increasing political maturity of the non-Magyar national groups in the city. Already in the 1890s it was observed that all national groups among the Pressburg working class were beginning to participate in strike action. In July 1891 Pressburg ‘bourgeois’ newspapers like the *Pressburger Zeitung* and the *Westungarischer Grenzboten* wrote that strikes were ‘a modern sickness brought to the city by foreigners who are inciting the other workers, especially the poor, primitive Slovaks...’¹⁷⁸ But this kind of explanation for a new social problem could not be upheld for long, and ten years later strikes and political worker action had become an almost normal phenomenon. In December 1900 a mass meeting was organised by the social democrats where the ‘rotten conditions’ in the system of municipal representation and local government were attacked. The meeting called for cooperation of the workers and small tradesmen (which was apparently seen as a precondition for creating a broad-based reform movement on the local political level), universal suffrage, a pension system, proper health care, better education, and housing projects for the workers. On May Day 1902 resolutions were adopted at mass meetings calling for the eight-hour working day, universal suffrage, and world peace. At a meeting called by the Pressburg Trade Union Council on 31 August 1902 some 3,000 workers were present to demand universal suffrage; apparently three ‘chairmen’ were elected representing the three national groups in the labour movement and the educational society *Vorwärts*. This demonstrated that political

¹⁷⁶ Lehotský, ‘K niektorým otázkam’, p. 276.

¹⁷⁷ Lehotský, ‘Rozmach’, pp. 250-2; Lehotský, ‘K niektorým otázkam’, pp. 267-8, 270, 276; Vladimír Lehotský, ‘Prvá svetová vojna (1914-1918)’, in *Dejiny Bratislavy*, eds D. Lehotská and J. Pleva, pp. 321-2; *PZ*, morning paper, 22 and 26 November 1914; evening paper, 26 November 1914.

¹⁷⁸ Quoted in Lehotský, ‘Počiatky’, p. 105a; Goláň, ‘Organizačný rozmach’, p. 531.

demands, especially universal suffrage with its great potential for mass mobilisation, were becoming increasingly important and that even the trade union movement had the courage openly to come out in support of them. In 1903, the Tenth Congress of the HSDP adopted a new programme featuring these fundamental democratic demands, but the party still proved unable to produce a serious analysis of the national and agrarian questions. The working out of a party policy on these issues would have been helpful in a city like Pressburg, where three national groups were participating in the labour movement and where the relations between them were not always as smooth as socialist internationalists may have wanted. In 1902, for example, a special meeting was held where Paul Wittich spoke out against the ‘artificial division of the workers’, an indication that not all was well in the field of interethnic relations. Wittich argued: ‘What we want to achieve first of all is the well-being of all workers, and only thereafter we ask them what language they speak.’¹⁷⁹ This type of statement suggests that the social democratic leadership in Pressburg shied away from making a more serious analysis of the problems of multilingual and interethnic coexistence. Nevertheless, they tried their best to build a multiethnic labour movement in the city and in this connection also provided a degree of protection to the Slovaks. Indeed, as we will see below, some German leaders of the Pressburg labour movement opposed the policy of Magyarisation, especially in so far as it threatened the normal functioning of institutions like the General Workers’ Sick Fund, an example of a social institution that was of vital importance for the non-Magyar working class. Magyarisation and the ‘national indifference’ (the attitude of refusing to pay attention to issues of national inequality) of the HSDP leadership were seen as a problem especially by Slovak social democratic leaders. The failure of the HSDP Congresses of 1901-4 to give adequate support to the Slovak social democratic press – which according to Slovak delegates was necessary to counteract the debilitating effects of national oppression in Hungarian society and public life – became a Slovak grievance that finally led to national fragmentation of the party. When in October 1904 the Slovaks, with crucial financial and political support from the Czech social democrats in Vienna, started their Pressburg newspaper *Slovenské robotnícke noviny* (Slovak Worker News), and the following year even established a separate Slovak Social Democratic Party, it became clear that national tensions in the Hungarian labour movement had reached a critical level.¹⁸⁰ These developments were also an expression of the new self-confidence of the Slovak social democrats, especially in Pressburg.

After 1900 Slovak workers began to participate more actively in the labour movement in Pressburg and became more assertive in expressing themselves at meetings and in demonstrating their ethnic and political presence. It would seem that the more self-confident attitude of Slovak workers and Slovak social democrats was the result of a process of political maturing that included an increased awareness of both their national and their social oppression. The economic basis for this was the fact that ever larger numbers of Slovak workers were entering the major factories of Pressburg, in some of which the Slovaks made up a proportion of the workforce that was at least as high as that of the overall Slovak population in the city (15-20 percent or more). After 1904 the Slovak social democratic press helped to broaden the horizon of Slovak workers in Pressburg and the rest of Hungary, and to draw their attention to the international character of the struggle for democracy and socialism, which also embraced the different Slav nations. Although the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1905 may have been exaggerated by Slovak and other historians in the recent past, there is evidence that the events in Russia contributed to

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Lehotský, ‘Boj bratislavského robotníctva’, p. 255. Wittich’s disinclination to pay special attention to ethnic problems is also shown by other evidence. According to Viliam Hotár, at the HSDP Congress in 1901 Wittich refused to support the proposal to help publish a Slovak newspaper (though possibly for financial rather than political reasons). See Hotár’s elaborate name index in *Kapitoly z dejín sociálnej demokracie na Slovensku*, eds Stanislav Sikora et al., Bratislava, 1996, p. 486.

¹⁸⁰ Lehotský, ‘Boj bratislavského robotníctva’, pp. 254-6; Jozef Hanák, *Slováci v Prešporku 1825-1918*, Bratislava 2005, pp. 108-10.

the new self-confidence of the Slovak working class and the Slovak social democrats in Pressburg and elsewhere. In Central Europe the revolutionary events in Russia were followed with interest, causing enthusiasm among part of the social democrats and other democratic political forces and strengthening the national pride of small Slav nations like the Slovaks, who saw the Russians both as fellow-workers and Slav brothers.¹⁸¹ Perhaps it was no coincidence that it was in the revolutionary year 1905 that the Slovak social democrats decided to hold a separate conference in Pressburg expressing their wish to be taken more seriously and to have a greater degree of political autonomy, even their own party. Although the following year they were forced by various circumstances (notably, the impossibility to collect their own funds from the trade unions, whose Slovak members remained under the control of the all-Hungarian leadership) to reunite with the HSDP, the Slovak social democrats had made their point and kept their special Nationality Committee for propaganda among the Slovak workers, which ensured a certain autonomy within the party. They also continued to hold their own conferences.

On 27 August 1905 a mass meeting took place in Pressburg, organised by the Slovak social democrats in collaboration with other Slovak political groups and representatives of the Slovak intelligentsia. This historic meeting was attended by approximately four thousand workers, peasants, and other Slovaks from Pressburg and surroundings. There were speeches by the Slovak national leaders Milan Hodža and Ferdinand Juriga and by the social democratic leaders Emanuel Lehocký and Ján Pocisk. Another prominent speaker was a Czech social democratic leader from Vienna (Dvořák), who spoke at length about the strikes and revolution in Russia and its meaning for the proletariat of Austria-Hungary. The meeting adopted a resolution calling for universal suffrage and 'political and national equality', evidence that the combination of democratic and national demands began to be more consciously expressed by both the Slovak social democrats and other Slovaks in Pressburg. Although in the setting of relatively liberal Pressburg the labour movement was not exceedingly concerned with national and interethnic issues, there could be no doubt that the national question had a growing influence at least on the Slovak section of the movement. But in Pressburg, where the organised workers had a strong sense of interethnic solidarity and a tradition of joint strike action, the social democratic movement managed as yet to balance the need for working-class unity and the trend of growing national emancipation and separatism. Perhaps the best example of this was the educational society *Vorwärts*, which continued to play an important part in the life of organised workers. The lectures, courses, and discussions organised by the society were initially attended by workers (and others) of all nationalities in Pressburg. However, in the important year 1905, when the Slovak social democrats asserted their desire for greater prominence and autonomy, they also formed their own section of the society *Napred*, where Slovak lecturers could be invited, Slovak writing courses be given, etc. A separate Magyar section and a women section were formed as well. The different sections of *Vorwärts*, other cultural groups (worker choirs, theatre groups), various trade unions, and other organisations affiliated to the social democratic movement mostly

¹⁸¹ The Slovak social democratic press was keenly interested in Russian developments, and both the Slovak and Czech working-class movements had Russophile traits in a socialist sense: the struggle of the Russian people against oppression was seen as particularly important for the international revolution and the whole of Europe. See Ema Panovová, 'Ruská literatúra v slovenských časopisoch koncom 19. a na začiatku 20. storočia', in *Z dejín československo-slovanských vzťahov*, ed. Jozef Hrozičnik, Bratislava, 1959, pp. 315-22; Vladislav Šťastný, 'K otázke rusofilství českého dělnického hnutí a jeho názorů na slovanskou otázku v posledních desetiletích 19. století', in *ibid.*, pp. 411-22. On the other hand, there is evidence that the Russian revolutionary events of 1905-7 were downplayed by the HSDP and the Magyar Left because they were seen as reactionary peasant uprisings. See Rudolf L. Tőkés, *Béla Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The Origins and Role of the Communist Party of Hungary in the Revolutions of 1918-1919*, New York 1967, p. 37n.34.

held their meetings in different rooms of the *Arbeiterheim*.¹⁸² This nerve centre of the activities of the Pressburg labour movement symbolised the broad unity of social democracy notwithstanding the different ethnolinguistic and sociocultural cleavages that existed as well. On special occasions like 'Red Sunday' or May Day, the movement would make an effort to demonstrate its unified character. On 'Red Sunday' 1913, for example, the social democrats 'agitated' in the streets of Pressburg with the local German newspaper *Westungarische Volksstimme*, the Budapest Magyar newspapers *Népszava* and *Nőmunkás* (The Woman Worker), and the Slovak newspaper *Robotnícke noviny*.¹⁸³ As late as 1 May 1918, the three national groups made their contributions to a joint cultural and political programme. Two German worker choirs were singing *Weltfriede*, which was followed by speeches in Magyar and German, a recitation of Slovak poems, and a German theatre performance. But it was also significant that Slovak worker theatre groups cooperated with amateur actors from among Pressburg's Slovak students, and that Slovak worker choirs in Pressburg had close contacts with Czech and Slovak choral societies and other co-ethnic working-class cultural groups in Vienna.¹⁸⁴ The Slovak social democrats in Pressburg were consciously defending their ethnic identity and national language. But among the German workers there were examples of resistance to denationalisation in Dualist Hungary as well.

One of the areas of social life in Pressburg where the policy of Magyarisation directly affected the life of the working class and the labour movement, was social insurance. In 1891 sickness insurance was made obligatory by the Hungarian government for the occupational groups of craftsmen and industrial workers, which led to the creation of a state-supported insurance administration system, especially in the major Hungarian cities.¹⁸⁵ In principle, the local sick funds were supervised by autonomous elected councils consisting of worker and employer representatives. In practice, however, it was sometimes difficult for the organised social democratic workers in Pressburg and other places to get reliable representatives elected to the councils, which as a result often proved ineffective vis-à-vis the predominantly Magyar government bureaucrats who ran the sick funds on a day to day basis. The social and psychological distance between the administrators and the workers could be considerable, especially in cities with a large non-Magyar population like Pressburg. With the advance of the Magyar language in all fields of government administration and public life, it became increasingly obvious to some of the German labour leaders in Pressburg that it was not in the best interest of the German workers to have to communicate with sick-fund officials in Magyar. This made matters even more difficult for the non-Magyar workers, who were often faced with an insensitive bureaucracy anyway. The Pressburg sick fund was one of the biggest in Hungary and important in the life of the working class. Therefore, the Social Democrats, led by Heinrich

¹⁸² Lehotský, 'Boj bratislavského robotníctva', pp. 256-9; Lehotská, 'Slovenské národné hnutie', p. 276; Bokes et al., 'Kultúrny život', pp. 291-4; Glettler, 'The Slovaks', pp. 310-1; Július Mésároš, 'Na prahu nového storočia', in *Slovensko. I. Dejiny*, ed. Ján Tibenský, Bratislava, 1978, p. 611.

¹⁸³ 'Annual Report of the Pressburg Organisation of the Social Democratic Party for the period from February 1913 to February 1914', *Westungarische Volksstimme (WV)*, 21 February 1914. It is significant that while in Pressburg both a German and a Slovak social democratic newspaper were published, there was no local Magyar paper; the Magyar social democrats were apparently satisfied with reading *Népszava* and other publications from Budapest. It was symbolic of the unproblematic way in which the Pressburg Magyars fitted into the nation-wide HSDP organisation, in contrast to the other two groups with their stronger ethnic and regional autonomist needs.

¹⁸⁴ Bokes et al., 'Kultúrny život', pp. 293-4.

¹⁸⁵ See for a general outline of the development of social insurance institutions and the General Workers' Sick Fund in Hungary Keith Hitchins, 'Mutual Benefit Societies in Hungary, 1830-1941', in *Social Security Mutualism. The Comparative History of Mutual Benefit Societies*, ed. Marcel van der Linden, Bern, 1996, pp. 359-83. Unfortunately this essay tells us little about language issues and problems of democratic control in the sick funds. See also Tibor Erényi, 'The Activities of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary during the First Decade of the Century', in *Studies on the History of the Hungarian Working-Class Movement (1867-1966)*, ed. Henrik Vass, Budapest, 1975, p. 57; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, pp. 168, 192-3.

Kalmár, tried to get more influence on the way it was run in an attempt to reform it and to turn it into a more democratic, effective, and worker-friendly institution. It was probably no coincidence that the leading spirit in this undertaking was Kalmár, who was not only secretary of the Pressburg party organisation, editor of the *Westungarische Volksstimme*, party theoretician (a ‘pupil’ of the Austrian social democratic leader Victor Adler), indeed ‘head and soul of the movement’, but a sensitive man who was genuinely interested in the well-being of the working class. It has been observed that for Kalmár the working-class movement ‘was also a cultural movement’, which may explain his interest in questions of language, ethnicity, and national identity in addition to other cultural issues.¹⁸⁶ Kalmár, who sometimes organised visits of groups of Pressburg workers to Vienna, or to other cities in western Hungary with a large German population, opposed the Magyar policy of weakening and destroying German culture in Pressburg and other regions in Hungary. As a prominent and extremely active social democratic leader he was more than once expelled from Pressburg and forced to move to other places in Hungary. As a result of this Hungarian police policy he came to know well the different German areas in the country; he would be expelled from one place and move to the next, meanwhile engaging in political and cultural work, often among German social democrats. Thus, in the late 1890s Kalmár was forced to leave Pressburg and lived in Budapest for some time, where as a German-speaker who knew relatively little Magyar he worked for the German social democratic newspaper *Volksstimme*, which was published alongside *Népszava*. Not long after he could return to Pressburg, but in 1914 he moved to Budapest again, this time to become the main editor of the *Volksstimme* and the national leader of the German social democrats in the HSDP, who became increasingly vocal in defending German cultural interests. After the First World War, Kalmár played a prominent role in the multi-party German national autonomy movement that tried to cooperate with the Károlyi Government.

In 1912 the Pressburg social democrats succeeded in becoming the strongest political group among the different worker representatives on the supervisory council of the Pressburg sick fund. Kalmár was even elected chairman of the sick fund’s board of administration – the supervisory council had the competency to do this – and promised to use his position to carry out a drastic reform of the institution, which had become alienated from its working-class clientele. His election was regarded as an offence by the Pressburg Magyar bureaucracy and the Hungarian government, because he was known as a defender of the German language as well as a staunch social democrat; moreover, he proved successful in carrying out his reform policy. Intrigues were started against him by those who felt threatened by a man who was not only a leader of the social democrats but a proponent of what was seen as the ‘German movement’, i.e., the group of German-speakers who tried to protect the position of the German language in Hungary. The overriding concern of the Magyar bureaucracy was to prevent the emergence of a situation where the German workers of Pressburg would no longer hesitate to conduct their verbal and written communication with the sick fund in German instead of Magyar. This would mean a consolidation or even strengthening of the position of the German language and a threat to the

¹⁸⁶ Karl Weiss, *Heinrich Kalmár*, Bratislava 1931, pp. 58, 86. This work is not a proper biography but is based on a rather random collection of memoirs and biographical sketches written by different people in different languages. It gives an impression of the person and the socialist Kalmár, but also makes it clear that a biography of this interesting man has yet to be written. According to Roland Steinacker, ‘Kalmár was a sincere defender of German cultural interests and the German language; this was rather exceptional among Hungarian Jews, most of whom exchanged the German for the Magyar language’; quoted in Ruprecht Steinacker, ‘Roland Steinacker’, p. 182. See for Kalmár also the Pressburg *Volksstimme*, 6 February 1919; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 99. Further *Slovenský biografický slovník*, 6 vols, Martin, 1986-94, vol. 3, pp. 27-8, where it is observed that Kalmár condemned the policy of forcible Magyarisation, criticised the HSDP leadership for its ‘attitude to the German workers’ and its ‘disinterest in the work of the national minority elements’ of the movement, and defended several times the HSDP’s Slovak Nationality Committee.

Magyarisation policy. Kalmár indeed increased his popularity in Pressburg by according the German language its rightful place in the sick fund administration, reorganising and modernising the whole institution, introducing new medical facilities directly benefiting the workers, etc. When Kalmár declared in 1913 that ‘the time must come when the German territories [in western Hungary] will belong together and have a German-language administration’, it became even more urgent for the Hungarian authorities to act against this dangerous ‘German rebel’.¹⁸⁷ In 1914 the government presented a plan for another reorganisation of the Pressburg sick fund that was meant to neutralise the influence of Kalmár and the German social democrats. It also started a press campaign denouncing Kalmár and attacking his position as chairman of the board of administration. Government ‘experts’ were sent from Budapest to end the administrative autonomy of the Pressburg sick fund, assisted by police officers who took over the board of administration, which along with the supervisory council was dissolved and replaced with government officials. To protest against these arbitrary measures groups of workers entered the sick fund building, raising a black flag to mourn the loss of democracy and administrative autonomy. Kalmár lost his post, and the Pressburg social democratic movement perhaps its last illusions about the nature of the Hungarian regime.¹⁸⁸ In July 1918, shortly before the final collapse of this regime, the administrative autonomy of the Pressburg sick fund was partly restored by a government that desperately tried to keep some political legitimacy. A representative of the organised workers became chairman of the supervisory council, another one vice-chairman of the board of administration.¹⁸⁹ Kalmár’s aims and activities underscore the truth of the claim that ‘within the organised German working class of Hungary there existed an ethnic consciousness and a will to keep their own identity’.¹⁹⁰ There are good reasons to question the conventional wisdom prevailing in Slovak and Hungarian historiography that the Hungarian Germans, including the German social democratic labour movement, were an easy prey to the Magyarisation policy.

Meanwhile, the broader political and economic struggles of the Pressburg labour movement continued, reaching a high point during the years of political turbulence 1905-7. We have seen that the year 1905 was important for several reasons, including the rise of a new self-confidence of the Slovak social democrats. In 1905 Pressburg also saw the First Congress of the West Hungarian regional party organisation, the contours of which had gradually begun to arise during the preceding years.¹⁹¹ The congress stressed the importance of the struggle for universal suffrage and turning the ‘bourgeois parliament’ into a ‘people’s parliament’, which suggests there was a wide belief in the possibility of gradual sociopolitical change. At the same time, the years 1905-7 were marked by unprecedented strike waves, with the Pressburg building workers playing a leading part in an increasingly militant and broad-based labour movement. At the Second Congress of the West Hungarian Party in 1906, it was argued that it was necessary to seek closer contacts with the agricultural labourers of the region, pointing to a major weakness of the Hungarian working-class movement. In 1907 the Hungarian authorities began to intensify repression again, and judicial measures were taken against newspapers that supported the strikers, especially if their language had a more explicit political character. Heinrich Kalmár, editor of the

¹⁸⁷ Weiss, *Heinrich Kalmár*, p. 89. In April 1912 Kalmár argued at a conference of the HSDP’s German Nationality Committee (established in 1904-5 along with the Slovak, Romanian, and Serb Committees) that the German industrial workers in Pressburg, Temesvár, Pécs, western Hungary, and the Zips region were not in the process of being Magyarised, but actually in a position to maintain their German language and identity; see the Budapest *Volksstimme*, 11 April 1912.

¹⁸⁸ Weiss, *Heinrich Kalmár*, pp. 86-90, 97.

¹⁸⁹ *PZ*, morning paper, 6 July 1918.

¹⁹⁰ Steinacker, ‘Zur Rolle der Deutschen’, p. 148.

¹⁹¹ Ladislav Tajták, ‘Vznik oblastných organizácií Sociálnodemokratickej strany Uhorska na Slovensku a jej organizačný vývin’, *Historický časopis* 34, no. 6, 1986, pp. 851-84.

Westungarische Volksstimme, was sentenced to two months in prison and later to another three months because of a rather political speech he made at a mass meeting in Pressburg. Paul Wittich, the other prominent leader of the German social democrats in Pressburg, was sent to prison for a speech calling for the abolition of the existing franchise system.¹⁹² Magyar social democratic leaders in Pressburg, for example Ferenc (Franz) Fehér, were punished for making political statements as well, and in 1908 Emanuel Lehocký, editor of the Slovak social democratic newspaper *Slovenské robotnícke noviny*, was sentenced to two months imprisonment. Nevertheless, the working-class movement won some minor concessions from the government, such as an improvement in the obligatory social insurance system, which was extended in 1907 to cover also disability caused by accidents in the workplace (but agricultural workers remained excluded). The growing sophistication of the Pressburg labour movement was demonstrated by its demand for recognition of a system of shop stewards in the city's workshops and factories. When after 1910 the movement began to recover from the years of repression 1908-10, political demands resurfaced as well. In 1912 the struggle for universal suffrage reached another climax in Hungary. On 4 March 1912, the day of a national general strike to support the demand for franchise reform, Pressburg experienced its largest mass meeting ever. When on 23 May 1912 eight people were shot in Budapest, this led to a protest movement in Pressburg lasting for two weeks and culminating in another mass demonstration against the government and for universal suffrage. The adoption at the beginning of 1913 of a new franchise bill that still excluded the great majority of the working class led to preparations for a new general strike, but it never took place because the HSDP leadership felt it was too dangerous. For this it was criticised at a special party conference in Pressburg in February 1913, attended by eighty-five delegates representing eighteen organisations, including three delegates of the Slovak Nationality Committee (from Pressburg, Budapest, and even Vienna), who took an active part in the rather acrimonious debates. An important meeting confirming the growing self-confidence of the Slovak social democrats – both as a section of the HSDP and a left wing of the Slovak national movement – took place in April 1914, when they held their Fourth Slovak Committee Congress in Pressburg. In addition to delegates from various places where the Slovaks had their own political branches, the congress was attended by representatives of the Hungarian Trade Union Council, the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party, and the HSDP's West Hungarian party organisation. By this time all of them considered it necessary to pay serious attention to the views of the Slovak social democrats. It was indicative of the direction in which things were moving that a major issue discussed at the congress was the national question.¹⁹³

The Slovak social democrats, who were keenly aware that they belonged to the most marginalised and oppressed national group in Pressburg, were becoming less willing to accept their lower status in Hungarian society and in the Hungarian social democratic movement. Their growing national consciousness led to their seeking closer contacts with progressive nationalist groups and individuals among the Slovak intelligentsia, very few of who had joined the social democratic movement. The developing political relationship between working-class and middle-class Slovaks was not without problems, but nonetheless became a factor of increasing significance preparing the ground for closer collaboration in the future national revolution. The growing importance of Slovak social democracy was observed with interest by nationally conscious Slovaks in Pressburg. Already at the Slovak mass meeting in August 1905, the social democrats, representatives of other Slovak political groups, and members of the Pressburg Slovak

¹⁹² For Paul Wittich see *Slovenský biografický slovník*, vol. 6, p. 377; SNA, SD, File 206: interview with Wittich, December 1951, January 1952; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 100; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, pp. 69, 80.

¹⁹³ Lehocký, 'Boj bratislavského robotníctva', pp. 259-64; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, p. 27. For more details see chapter four.

intelligentsia had met together to demand universal suffrage and national equality. These democratic demands, but also demands for social reforms in the countryside and elsewhere, had the potential of uniting Slovak social democrats and other Slovak politicians in the longer term. In the towns and villages of western Slovakia, the territory north of Pressburg that was largely inhabited by Slovaks, the Slovak national movement was relatively strong. In 1906 the region even succeeded in electing four Slovak politicians – all of them representatives of the Slovak People's Party (SPP), who seem to have received some support from the Slovak social democrats – to the Hungarian parliament. Slovaks also participated, as far as possible, in the elections for the county assemblies and municipal councils, where a small number of elected Slovaks defended the social and cultural interests of the Slovak population. In Pressburg county, which included a number of small towns where Slovaks made up the majority of the population, there were regional networks of the old Protestant Slovak National Party (SNP) and, especially, of the more recently established Catholic SPP. The SPP and its popular local leader Ferdinand Juriga were increasingly a force to reckon with in the region, and on cultural and ideological issues an opponent of the Slovak social democrats. The meetings of these political groups in Pressburg county were not only attended by Slovaks from the local country towns but also by Slovaks, including Catholic Slovak workers, from Pressburg, who helped to keep the issue of universal suffrage and other democratic demands on the political agenda. In Pressburg itself, the social democrats were the strongest political force among the different Slovak political groups, but here there was less space for Slovak electoral participation than in the country because of the small size and marginal position of the enfranchised Slovak lower middle class. Besides the rather conservative SNP and the more populist but 'clerical' SPP, there were progressive groups of young Slovak middle-class intellectuals. The most radical of them was known as the 'Hlasists', named after the original group around the journal *Hlas* (The Voice) published from 1898 to 1904. Their ideas on crucial national, social, and political issues were relatively close to those of the social democrats.¹⁹⁴

Perhaps the most important society of nationally conscious Slovaks in early twentieth-century Pressburg, was the *Slovenský vzdelávací spolok* (Slovak Educational Society), which organised cultural and educational meetings mainly attended by Slovak students and intellectuals, but occasionally also by Slovak workers. Between 1903-14 the *Slovenský spolok*, as it was usually called, was several times dissolved and again reestablished, which illustrated the uncertain political environment in which the Pressburg Slovaks had to live. Of some importance was also the Catholic societies established by Slovak priests, including a Pressburg Catholic workers' club. After 1910 the Slovak press became increasingly vocal, especially when the office of the influential Catholic newspaper linked to the SPP, *Slovenské ľudové noviny*, was moved to Pressburg, which caused the Hungarian authorities to express the fear that 'the most intense form of Slovak propaganda' was now penetrating the city. But the members of Pressburg societies like the *Slovenský spolok* lived in constant fear of police persecution and, therefore, preferred to meet in the relative safety of private homes belonging to Slovak patriotic families, where they could freely discuss cultural and political issues affecting the Slovak people. Some of these meetings were also attended by Slovak social democrats, which further encouraged a degree of mutual understanding between middle-class and working-class Slovaks in Pressburg. Apart from discussing political questions, a common activity was the organisation of cultural events like

¹⁹⁴ For Slovak political parties before 1918, see *Politické strany na Slovensku 1860-1989*, ed. Ľubomír Lipták, Bratislava, 1992, pp. 35-101; Ľubomír Lipták, 'Úvod: Politické strany a ich miesto v slovenských dejinách', in *ibid.*, pp. 9-31; Ľubomír Lipták, *Slovensko v 20. storočí*, 2nd edn, Bratislava 2000, chap. 1; *Na začiatku storočia 1901-1914 [Slovensko v 20. storočí. I]*, ed. Dušan Kováč, Bratislava, 2004, chaps. 4-6 *passim*; František Bokes, *Dejiny Slovákov a Slovenska od najstarších čias až po prítomnosť*, Bratislava 1946, pp. 304-5, 309-12, 323-8; Michal Potemra, 'Uhorské volebné právo a voľby na Slovensku v rokoch 1901-1914', *Historický časopis* 23, no. 2, 1975, p. 235.

concerts, theatre performances, and lectures. In this regard there was also some cooperation between the Slovak social democratic educational society *Napred* and the predominantly bourgeois-intellectual *Slovenský spolok*. Concerts of Slovak and Czech worker choirs (which were very popular) in the *Arbeiterheim* were sometimes attended by middle-class Slovaks as well. After the First World War one of these non-socialist visitors recalled how on occasions like this they ‘could hear how many conscious Slovaks there were in Bratislava’. Indeed, the repertoire of Slovak worker choirs was not exclusively socialist and ‘internationalist’ but also included traditional Slovak songs, which in Dualist Hungary tended to be regarded as an expression of national consciousness. However, between *Napred* and the *Slovenský spolok* there was also a degree of tension, which may have been caused by the social and ideological gap between the two groups, or by an element of competition. During the years 1911-4 it sometimes happened that one society accused the other of showing insufficient interest in its activities. In 1911 some Slovak social democrats had become members of the *Slovenský spolok*, but the society accused them of ignoring its lectures. The social democrats in turn complained that the performances of the Slovak worker theatre group were scarcely attended by members of the *Slovenský spolok*, and that one of them, the Slovak sociologist Anton Štefánek, had ignored an invitation by *Napred* to give a lecture. Thus, we are reminded that cooperation between the Slovak social democrats – who seem to have had a strong desire to be taken seriously by Slovak intellectuals – and the Slovak middle-class and national intelligentsia was by no means unproblematic, and that social and political tension between the two groups was a significant aspect of their relationship. Nevertheless, there was admiration among the Slovak social democrats for those students and intellectuals who had the courage to confront the Hungarian authorities on national issues, or who were persecuted for their conviction. The Magyar attitude to the Slovaks was brought home to them time and again, underscoring the need for Slovak national solidarity. When Slovak students, who had learned to act with the utmost circumspection, tried to found a library for the Slovak youth of Pressburg, this was enough reason for the Magyar press to denounce them as ‘fanatics of the pan-Slav idea’, ‘miserable devils pursuing treacherous and nation-destroying principles’, and the like.¹⁹⁵ In October 1910 a ‘meeting of the expelled’ was held in Pressburg, i.e., of former Slovak students who had been ousted from various Hungarian schools. Out of fifty-eight people attending the meeting, thirty-one had been expelled from schools in Pressburg. The total number of Slovak students who had been expelled during the previous decades was estimated to be at least 122. The prominence of Pressburg as a centre of student organisation and political repression was an indication of its relative importance in the Slovak national movement. Although Pressburg was not regarded as the political centre of this movement, the Slovak social democrats and a hard core of Slovak students and intellectuals ensured that the city played its part in it.¹⁹⁶

The outbreak of the First World War brought a new wave of repressive measures against nationally conscious Slovaks and others who were mistrusted by the Hungarian authorities. Before Dualist Hungary finally disintegrated, Magyar chauvinism went through another protracted upsurge dominating the entire wartime period 1914-18. In Pressburg Slovaks only dared to speak their mother tongue in public markets and in peripheral urban areas like Theresienstadt and Blumental, which had a strongly mixed and partly Slovak population; in shops and offices in the city centre they usually did not dare to do so. At secondary schools in Pressburg non-Magyars were intimidated, and several Slovak students were imprisoned. In May 1918 Magyar students at the Lutheran Theological Academy went so far as to demand that the

¹⁹⁵ Quoted in Lehotská, ‘Slovenské národné hnutie’, p. 277.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 274-7; Glettler, ‘The Slovaks’, pp. 311, 313, 317-8; Mannová, ‘Ethnic Identity’, p. 10; Čulen, *Slovenské študentské tragédie*, vol. 1, p. 15. Čulen’s book, an important study of the persecution of Slovak students, pays particular attention to the events in Pressburg.

speaking of German or Slovak in the school should be forbidden. It is, perhaps, difficult to think of a more graphic illustration of the extreme nationalism that had come to prevail during the war. Only when Slovak students presented a memorandum to the academy board signed by seventeen theologians, arguing that it was an affront to declare speaking one's mother tongue a crime, the academy's professors condemned the excessive 'patriotism' of the Magyar students.¹⁹⁷ Like elsewhere in Central Europe, the beginning of the war in 1914 had triggered mass enthusiasm, which only gradually began to give way to bitterness as a result of the growing misery. During the first years of the war, both Slovak politicians and Pressburg social democrats of all ethnic groups called for restraint and a policy of political passivity, or even proclaimed their loyalty to Austria-Hungary. In October 1914 *Robotnícke noviny* argued that the class struggle must be suspended for the time being, because the working class had a 'natural interest' in the victory of the state in which she lived.¹⁹⁸ The loyalty of the Magyar and German social democrats went further than that and was expressed in terms of support for what was seen as the historic political aims of the German and Hungarian nations, notably the struggle against Czarism. However, after the end of the Czarist regime in 1917 this attitude began to change, and Pressburg's May Day celebration of that year became a manifestation for peace and universal suffrage. The summer of 1917 saw a series of strikes, even of agricultural labourers, in the Pressburg region, but it was only in 1918 that everything began to move. In January 1918 Hungary experienced a general strike, followed by another one in June; Pressburg's working class participated in it on a large scale and demonstrated against 'starvation' and war. In March the city celebrated the seventieth anniversary of the revolution of 1848, an occasion used by the labour movement and radical middle-class groups to express their desire for democratic change. On 22 April the Pressburg social democratic movement organised another mass demonstration for universal suffrage, accompanied by strike action. May Day 1918 saw several meetings of Pressburg workers who demanded an end to the war and social and political reforms. On 5 June 1918 a revolt broke out in a military barracks in Pressburg when a group of soldiers began to protest against the brutal regime and bad food and refused to leave for the front. The military unit they belonged to consisted for sixty-five percent of Slovaks. Two Slovak soldiers were convicted for 'rebellion' and executed by other Slovaks from the same unit who were forced to do so on pain of being shot themselves. On 18 June Ferdinand Juriga, one of the three Slovaks in the Hungarian parliament, dared to make some political demands including a just nationality law and a Slovak chair at Pressburg University. A Magyar deputy threatened to slap him in the face and Prime Minister Tisza called for the most severe punishment of such demands. On 14 August Vavro Šrobár, another important Slovak national leader and a pro-Czechoslovak 'Hlasist', was imprisoned for his activities and his contacts with Czech political figures, something that the Hungarian government was particularly afraid of. During the autumn months the Pressburg authorities tried to prevent that returning soldiers travelling through the city on their way home (especially Slovaks) would come into contact with local citizens. In October, while in some of the strategic Pressburg factories a military regime prevailed, martial law was proclaimed in the city. It was clear that the fear of revolution was in the air, but no one knew exactly what to expect.¹⁹⁹

By September 1918 the Slovak social democrats had joined the other Slovak political groups in preparing the formation of a Slovak National Council; they were fully accepted as an equal political partner. Meanwhile, the leadership of the HSDP began to advocate the need to preserve the territorial integrity of Hungary, which meant that its support for national self-determination was conditional. A clash between the Slovak and Magyar social democrats had

¹⁹⁷ Lehotská, 'Slovenské národné hnutie', p. 278; Jozef Hanák, *Obsadenie Bratislavy 1918-1920. Kronika pamätných dní*, Bratislava 2004, pp. 20, 22.

¹⁹⁸ See further chapter four.

¹⁹⁹ Lehotský, 'Prvá svetová vojna', pp. 323-7; Hanák, *Obsadenie Bratislavy*, pp. 18-32.

become inevitable, with the Germans taking an intermediate position by expressing support for national autonomy within the framework of Hungary. In Pressburg, where the Germans predominated in the labour movement, the social democrats – perhaps with the exception of some of the Slovaks – were unprepared to face the difficult challenges of national-political change and revolution. The more extreme Hungarian patriotism, or even Magyar nationalism, of many social democrats in Budapest, Košice, and other cities in Hungary did not meet with the same kind of response in Pressburg. The Magyars were only a minority of the city's working class, while the German workers were generally loyal to Hungary but not without criticism or qualification. In this uncertain situation it was possible for the Slovak social democrats, supported by their Czech comrades, to temporarily move to the foreground and proclaim the principle of Czechoslovak self-determination, which met with enthusiasm on the part of many Pressburg Slovaks. While the Slovak social democrats refused to sign the HSDP Manifesto of 8 October 1918, which proposed national-minority rights within an undivided Hungary, they supported the 'Martin Declaration' of 30 October, which called for unconditional Slovak self-determination and the establishment of a Czechoslovak state. The Slovak social democrats also actively participated in the formation of the 'Slovak National Council for Pressburg and Surroundings'. This Pressburg national council, which was formed on 27 October 1918, was actually the first local Slovak national council in Upper Hungary/Slovakia, being established even before the Martin Declaration and before the appeal of the central Slovak National Council in Martin to form local Slovak national councils all over Slovakia. It was typical of the special position of Pressburg in the process of national revolution in Slovakia that there were no less than four social democrats on the Pressburg Slovak National Council, viz., Emanuel Lehocký, Ján Pocisk, Ignác Kellner, and Michal Korman.²⁰⁰ At the same time, the slow response of the Pressburg German and Magyar social democrats to the revolutionary events in Hungary and Slovakia was all too evident. Only at the beginning of November did they begin to participate – along with other German and Magyar citizens – in the revolutionary Hungarian and ethnic-German national council movements. These developments will be further discussed in chapter five.

By September-October 1918, then, the process of national fragmentation in Pressburg became an irreversible trend, even though the local labour movement tried to rescue its tradition of interethnic class solidarity. The events of 1918 were destined to have a decisive influence on the history of the city and its working-class movement. Despite the multiethnic tradition of Pressburg's social democratic movement, there had always been tensions between the different national groups. Not only the Slovaks but also the German social democrats came into conflict with the policy of Magyarisation. It is argued in this study that the Germans provided a certain social, political, and cultural space for the Slovak organised workers in Pressburg. But this does not mean that the German social democrats, for all their positive 'internationalist' tendencies, really understood the difficult situation or the national feelings of the Slovaks. Although the relations between German and Slovak social democrats seem to have been relatively good, there was also a degree of social distance between them. If the German social democrats in Pressburg were opposed to certain aspects of the Magyarisation policy, they were likely also to oppose Slovak or Czechoslovak nationalism, or indeed a new national-political regime dominated by the Czechs and Slovaks. For the German social democrats, despite their 'Hungarian patriotism', it was natural to seek support among the Austrian social democrats in Vienna (as it was for the Slovaks to seek the support of the Vienna Czechs and Slovaks). It was also natural for them to believe that the Central European (perhaps even the international) working-class movement should be led by people who understood the importance of German culture and the German language in promoting progress, political intelligence, and civilisation. It was precisely this kind of belief that led to conflicts between the Czech and German social democrats in Austria and

²⁰⁰ Lehocký, 'Prvá svetová vojna', pp. 323-7; Portisch, *Geschichte*, pp. 528, 530.

binational Bohemia. In Hungary, where the Germans were in a minority position, they could resist the process of Magyarisation only to a limited extent, while some of them actually supported the idea of Magyarisation of the multinational state and working class on Marxist grounds, arguing that it created a larger and more homogeneous – and therefore stronger and more advanced – national unit. For the great majority of Slovak social democrats, however, it was a completely different matter. Although the Slovaks had their renegades too, it would seem that in the ranks of the social democratic movement their number was small and that the nationally conscious position of the Slovak social democratic leadership reflected the predominant attitude of the organised Slovak workers. This attitude was strengthened by conflicts over national oppression and by the Magyar indifference to the Slovak language and the Slovak social democratic press. An analysis of the conflicts between the HSDP leadership and the Slovak social democrats is highly instructive. It helps us to develop a concrete understanding of the meaning of national conflict and the role of national languages in the multiethnic working-class movement. It may also explain why, when the moment of national revolution had come, the Slovaks decided to break with the all-Hungarian party and to unite with the Czechs. We will now turn to a detailed examination of the national question in the Hungarian social democratic movement, focusing on the Slovaks. At the same time, the Habsburg Monarchy as a whole will be taken as a broad context for the analysis.

Social democracy and the national question

It is impossible to grasp the consequences of the ‘national question’ for the social democratic movement in the Dual Monarchy without understanding its meaning for the multinational state as a whole. The national question in the Habsburg Empire was, if not entirely unique, at least more crucial than in the rest of Europe because of its implications for the continued existence of the state itself. Because the process of economic, cultural, and political modernisation did not lead to a greater cohesion of the state and a strengthening of common loyalties, but to a centrifugal process of national emancipation, nation-building, and conflicts between different ethnonational groups. It is true that around 1900 almost no European State was a ‘pure’ national state in the sense of being ethnically homogeneous, but the multinational empires of Central and Eastern Europe were of a different category. Like the Habsburg Empire, the Russian Empire was truly multinational, but more than two-thirds of its population was composed of the relatively akin Great Russians, Belorussians, and Ukrainians, its diversity therefore less complicated; moreover, little or no political freedom was allowed to national protest movements. The Ottoman Empire, although heavily affected by nationalism as well, could hardly be considered part of the political, social, and cultural world of Europe and was difficult to compare with it in terms of modern endeavours to address the problems of multinational coexistence. Thus, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was a singular phenomenon in Europe, and indeed – unlike the other two multinational empires – very much part of Europe. It could be seen as a unique ‘multinational laboratory’ that tried to come to terms with the force of modern ethnic nationalism but in the end was overwhelmed by it. In the Habsburg Empire there was not only marginalisation and oppression of the non-dominant nationalities, but also attempts to find solutions for the different ethnolinguistic and national-political problems, although this applied more to the Austrian than the Hungarian part of the state.

No national group in the Dual Monarchy in 1910 enjoyed a numerical majority in either half of the multinational state, neither the more than nine million Austro-Germans that constituted some thirty-five percent of the population of the Austrian half of the Empire (‘Cisleithania’), nor the Magyars in Historical Hungary including Croatia (‘Transleithania’).²⁰¹ Nevertheless, the ethnic Germans in Cisleithania (which also included Bohemia and Moravia with its Czech majority, Galicia with its largely Polish and Ukrainian/Ruthenian population, Slovenia, and Dalmatia) were considered in almost every respect the dominant national group in their part of the empire – both by themselves (even if they felt increasingly threatened by the other groups) and by an important national group like the Czechs, with some six million the second largest nationality in Cisleithania. The hegemony of the Magyars over the Slovaks and the other minority nationalities (including two million ethnic Germans) in Hungary has been described in the preceding chapters. The political, economic, and cultural dominance of the Austro-Germans in Cisleithania – apart from their global hegemony in the empire as a whole, including Hungary – was a painful reality especially for the ambitious and highly developed Czechs, although the specific form of this dominance was less brutal, more subtle, than the Magyar regime in Hungary. However, neither in Hungary, nor in Cisleithania the position of the dominant nation remained unchallenged. The Habsburg Monarchy gradually became Europe’s – and indeed the international labour movement’s – ‘multinational danger zone’, the place where ethnic nationalism and national conflict were bound to cause serious upheaval.

There were some important differences between the Austrian and the Hungarian part of

²⁰¹ For population figures see, e.g., Robert A. Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire 1526-1918*, Berkeley 1974, appendix 1, pp. 603-8.

the Dual Monarchy, both in terms of political conditions, national aspirations, and patterns of interethnic relations. Although the ethnic Germans were the dominant element in Austria, they generally did not have the aspiration to create a German national state in Cisleithania by means of systematic assimilation of the other national groups, unlike the Magyars many of whom seemed to support the idea of creating a unitary Magyar national state within the borders of Historical Hungary. The dominant feature of German nationalism in Austria was the desire for inclusion in the German Empire, the old idea of a Greater Germany, which meant the break-up of the multinational Habsburg Monarchy. The aim of Germanising the non-Germans was largely restricted to areas where Germans were already a majority of the population, such as Vienna or the predominantly German areas of Bohemia. The pan-German ideal had its origins in the revolution of 1848 and the German national liberalism of the nineteenth century. This Greater German tradition, rooted in the earlier democratic nationalism, continued to be important in Austria after the foundation of the ‘small’ German Empire of Bismarck in 1870-1 and became increasingly linked to the political Right. But although the ideal of the Greater German national state was especially espoused by anti-socialist German-nationalist groups, it also remained part of the ideological heritage and political thinking of Austrian social democracy, which like the liberal and nationalist political streams had its roots in the democratic nationalism of 1848. Indeed, after the collapse of the multinational state in October-November 1918, the Austrian social democrats ‘rediscovered’ this old tradition – which in fact had always been part of their historical, cultural, and political outlook – and called for *Anschluss* of German Austria to Germany. The historical legacy of the democratic (but also ethnocentric) nationalism of 1848 was a fundamental element in the political thinking of both the Austro-German and the Magyar social democrats. The latter traditionally participated in the annual celebration on 15 March of the Hungarian Revolution led by Kossuth, and tended to maintain links with the political successors to Kossuthism such as the Hungarian ‘48ers and Independence Party’. Unlike the Slovaks and the Czechs, to most of whom the name of Kossuth was anathema because of his refusal in 1848 to accept Slovak and other non-Magyar national demands,²⁰² the Austrian social democrats identified with the anti-Habsburg revolutionaries of 1848 as well. In addition, some of them would occasionally express their belief in the superiority of the German language and German culture as instruments of progress and working class uplift. They found it difficult to come to terms with the national aspirations of the Czechs and the other non-German groups in the all-Austrian Social Democratic Party. However, the political and administrative structure of Austria itself, with its relative autonomy of the different provinces and Crown Lands and its central government and dynasty in Vienna who often tried to mediate between the quarrelling national groups, was quite different from the increasing bureaucratic centralism, official nationalism, and oppressive policies of Hungary. As a result of this and other factors, the Austrian social democrats were better prepared – despite their ethnonational prejudices – than their Hungarian (Magyar) counterparts to tolerate a form of national federalism both within the labour movement and the state.

The leaders of the all-Austrian party, sometimes described as the ‘Little International’, were keen to pose as a vanguard of socialist internationalism as long as they could ensure factual German domination of the Cisleithanian labour movement through German language supremacy and administrative centralisation (especially in the trade unions) from Vienna. They would on occasion accuse the Czech social democrats, who considered themselves part of the movement for Czech national emancipation, of representing a narrow, ‘petty-bourgeois’ type of nationalism

²⁰² The Slovak historian Peter Macho has argued that ‘reconciliation’ between Slovaks and Magyars has always been hampered by ‘mutually exclusive symbols’, of which the figure of Kossuth is perhaps the most significant example. See Peter Macho ‘Štefánik a Kossuth ako symboly slovenského a maďarského nacionalizmu (Nacionálny mýtus versus integrácia a dezintegrácia v stredoeurópskom priestore)’, in *Stredoeurópske národy na krížovatkách novodobých dejín 1848-1918*, eds Peter Švorc and Ľubica Harbuľová, Prešov, 1999, pp. 152-60.

that contrasted with the ‘internationalism’ of the Austro-German comrades and the Austrian party leadership. ‘Internationalism’, it seemed, was especially part of the rhetoric of those who belonged to the ethnically dominant group in the working-class movement and who, for political or economic reasons, felt threatened by tendencies of national separatism. The German-dominated labour movement in Austria, partly rooted in the German national liberalism of 1848, was a movement where the notion of ‘historical nations’ (such as the Germans and Magyars with their state-political and ‘official’ cultural traditions) and ‘non-historical nations’ (e.g., the Slavs, with the exception of the Poles and the Russians) was widespread. Friedrich Engels, patriarch of the social democratic movement in the early 1890s, even had – as Isaiah Berlin phrased it – “an incurable aversion to everything east of the Elbe”, in particular to the Russians and the Slavs, while Karl Marx had been ‘something of a pan-German’. Engels believed that the nationalism of the Czechs and the other Western Slavs ‘was an artificially preserved, unreal phenomenon, which could not long resist the advance of the superior German culture’. As late as the early twentieth century many German social democratic leaders found it difficult to hide their feelings of cultural superiority towards their eastern neighbours.²⁰³ This attitude was partly based on the Marxist evolutionist doctrine that economic development was only possible in large national units, that small nations were ‘obsolete survivals impeding social and economic progress’, that historical evolution caused ‘the smaller to be merged in the greater’, and that, therefore, ‘all progressive parties should actively encourage’ this amalgamation; but there was also an element of German cultural and national chauvinism in all of this.²⁰⁴ Shortly before his death in 1895, Engels was approached by the Austrian social democratic leader Victor Adler to give his advice on the problem of the growing political separatism of the Czechs and the Poles in the Austrian party. The dying Engels was not able to answer Adler’s request but may have been surprised by the vitality of Czech nationalism and Czech social democratic autonomism, phenomena that hardly fitted into his historical and political concepts. In 1911, when Czech-German antagonism in Austria had reached unprecedented heights as a result of the demand for Czech-language schools in Vienna and the problem of Czech social democratic trade union separatism, Adler complained to another German, the social democratic leader August Bebel, that the Czech comrades were ‘totally blinded’ by their ‘nationalist instincts’, against which all class instincts were receding. But Adler himself was a typical exponent of German ethnocentrism in the Austrian labour movement. In 1887 he wrote that, ‘for Austria, German is the language of social democracy’, and that the German workers had the right to ‘defend’ themselves against the national claims of the Czechs. This attitude remained characteristic of Adler and other Austro-German labour leaders, although there were others – especially Otto Bauer, perhaps also Karl Kautsky – who had a more sophisticated position.²⁰⁵ By 1910 all-Austrian social democratic ‘internationalism’, coupled as it was with tendencies of German chauvinism and assimilationism, had found its counterweight in Czech social democratic autonomism with the Czechs embarking on their next stage of nation building. What Austrian social democracy had developed in terms of a programme ‘to solve the national question’ had proved too vague and theoretical, and at the same time too clearly

²⁰³ Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, 2nd edn, Oxford 1978, pp. 126, 148, 201; Albert S. Lindemann, *A History of European Socialism*, New Haven 1983, p. 174. For Engels’s German chauvinism and attitude to the Czechs see further Zdeněk Šolle, ‘Die Sozialdemokratie in der Habsburger Monarchie und die tschechische Frage’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 6-7, 1966-7, pp. 337-8, 343-4, 351-4; Helmut Konrad, ‘Österreichische Arbeiterbewegung und nationale Frage im 19. Jahrhundert’, in *Sozialdemokratie und Habsburgerstaat*, ed. Wolfgang Maderthaner, Vienna, 1988, pp. 120-1, who writes that Engels left his low opinion of the Czechs uncorrected.

²⁰⁴ Berlin, *Karl Marx*, pp. 127, 148.

²⁰⁵ Victor Adler to Friedrich Engels, 13 July 1895, in *Friedrich Engels, Dokumente seines Lebens 1820-1895*, ed. Manfred Kliem, Leipzig, 1977, p. 596; Victor Adler to August Bebel, quoted in Brigitte Hamann, *Hitlers Wien. Lehrjahre eines Diktators*, Munich 1996, pp. 455-6; for Adler’s statement in 1887, see Šolle, ‘Sozialdemokratie’, p. 336; Konrad, ‘Österreichische Arbeiterbewegung’, p. 126.

motivated by expediency, to keep the 'Little International' together.

Although the political outlook of the Austrian Germans was more flexible than that of the Magyars, they shared a belief in the political and cultural superiority and the assimilatory potential of their 'historical' nations, including the labour movement. Usually this kind of belief was not openly expressed by Austrian or Hungarian social democrats, although there were exceptions. That it was widely shared by social democratic leaders can often be inferred from their actions – e.g., their indifference to the aspirations of the other nations – rather than their statements. The latter usually referred to their 'internationalism', that is, what was understood by this from the standpoint of the ethnically dominant, who always wanted 'unity' on their own terms. The major difference between the political realities confronting the Austro-German and the Magyar social democrats, respectively, was that the Magyars had to deal with the aspirations of weak nationalities like the Slovaks, while the Austrians had to face – in addition to the weaker Poles, Slovenes, and others – the demands of the self-conscious and well-organised Czechs, by far the strongest organised labour element in Austria after the Germans.²⁰⁶ The Czechs also played an important part in the rise of the Slovak social democratic movement in Hungary. Indeed, the development of the labour movement in Austria was an important backdrop to developments in Hungary, and it was not only the Austro-Germans but also the Czechs, through their support for the Slovaks, who became a factor linking up the movements in both parts of the empire. The central question addressed in this chapter is how the national problem in Hungary, whose dynamics was different in some crucial ways from the national problem in Austria, helped to shape the evolution of the Hungarian working-class movement, in particular of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (HSDP) established in 1890. There is perhaps no better way to examine this issue than by looking at the position and the role of the Slovaks. Although the HSDP spoke out against national oppression and in favour of national equality, proclaiming itself an 'internationalist' party, the question is what these declarations meant in practice, what were the party's real policies, and how they were perceived by the Slovak and other non-Magyar social democrats. It will be shown that the HSDP was unwilling to address the concrete issues associated with the problem of national oppression in Hungary. In this regard it was less serious and creative than the Austrian party; unlike the latter, moreover, it refused to reorganise itself along national-federalist lines. The party was better at making politically correct statements than developing concrete policies like giving adequate support to non-Magyar political and educational activities or to the non-Magyar labour press.²⁰⁷ It never squarely opposed the policy of Magyarisation, but instead gave the impression of quietly supporting it. In Budapest and other major cities the party tended to neglect the organisation of the non-Magyar workers, and after 1900 it increasingly left the propaganda work among them to the special Minority Committees, whose competencies it tried to circumscribe as narrowly as possible, however. These developments were especially important for the Slovak working-class movement, to a somewhat lesser extent for the Romanians and the Serbs, whose level of proletarianisation and urbanisation was lower than that of the Slovaks.²⁰⁸ The ethnic Germans, who were strongly represented

²⁰⁶ By 1910-11, the different trade unions affiliated to the Austrian social democratic trade union federation based at Vienna comprised a total membership of more than 400,000 – largely Germans but also smaller groups of Poles, Slovenes, and others, including a minority of 'centralist' Czech trade unionists who disagreed with the policy of Czech trade union separatism. The autonomous Czech trade union movement represented almost 75,000 workers, but the total number of Czech organised workers may have been close to 100,000. See, e.g., Fritz Klenner, *Die österreichischen Gewerkschaften. Eine Monographie*, Vienna 1974, pp. 51-2.

²⁰⁷ The HSDP's rhetoric has misled some historians to believe that the party was 'progressive' on the issue of equal rights for Hungary's different ethnic groups. See, e.g., Zdenek Suda, *Zealots and Rebels. A History of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia*, Stanford 1980, p. 4.

²⁰⁸ According to one historian, in 1910 the proportion of Slovaks living from wages was 42.8 percent, while among the Romanians it was 33.7 percent, among the Serbs 24.5 percent, and among the Magyars 51.1 percent. See Vilmos Sándor, 'Charakter závislosti Uhorska v období dualizmu', *Historický časopis* 7, no. 3, 1959, p. 442.

among the artisans and skilled workers, were always a special case and from the beginning played an important part in the Hungarian labour movement. In the early twentieth century they too began to pay more attention to ethnic identity issues and the defence of cultural and language positions.

Of major importance in shaping the political outlook and strategy of the HSDP was the belief that the party should work for the 'bourgeois-democratic' transformation of Hungarian society, for the liquidation of feudal and semi-feudal structures. In this context the struggle for universal suffrage was seen as pivotal, both as a political aim and a means of mass mobilisation. It was believed to entail the necessity of cooperation with other Hungarian democratic forces, in particular the nationalist ('Kossuthist') Independence Party. The achievement of universal suffrage and democracy, or even of socialism itself, was seen as the necessary precondition for resolving the national question, which was just one argument among many for not concretely addressing it, legitimising the party's passivity on the issue. The fact that the non-Magyar social democrats had different ideas and repeatedly demanded practical action on various aspects of the national issue, to begin with within the party itself, created serious problems for the multinational labour movement and interethnic cooperation. The indifferent and ignorant attitude of the party leadership to the needs of the non-Magyar workers was partly the result of its own prejudices, including that of the superior political and cultural level of the Magyars compared with the other national groups of Hungary. It was also a product of the party's 'democratic strategy' and of the Marxist-evolutionary concept that large territorial, economic, and national units were a *conditio sine qua non* for economic and social development. Some Hungarian party leaders could not conceal their belief that assimilation and Magyarisation were 'progressive' tendencies promoting the homogeneity of the working class and strengthening the 'cultural level' of the labour movement. Indeed, the social democratic movement, especially in Budapest, was itself a 'school of Magyarisation', which was sometimes openly admitted by party leaders. All this confirmed the conviction of the Slovaks that they would have to act independently of the HSDP if they wanted to defend their national culture and their own press organs and social democratic organisations. It is not surprising that the HSDP, marked as it was by national insensitivity, a good deal of political blindness, and mechanistic reasoning, was unprepared for the revolution of 1918 and unwilling to support the demands of the non-Magys for national independence.

The Austrian Social Democratic Party, formed in 1888-9, was more sensitive to the national problem and national-minority aspirations than the Hungarian party. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, the pattern of interethnic relations in Austria was different from that in Hungary since Austro-German labour leaders had been confronted with the claims and national consciousness of Czech organised workers as early as the late 1860s.²⁰⁹ Given the strongly developed self-consciousness and organisation of the Czechs there was no possibility for the German social democrats, either in Bohemia, Vienna, or elsewhere, to ignore them. The tendency of the Czech socialists to combine class politics with the politics of national emancipation was expressed time and again. 'We declare that our Czech nationality is, and always will be, holy and inviolable', wrote the first Czech socialist newspaper *Dělnické listy* (Workers' Paper) in January 1873, referring to a declaration of principles and demands of Czech social democrats in Prague.²¹⁰ The sentiment underlying statements like this was a reality that would never change.

²⁰⁹ Hans Mommsen, *Die Sozialdemokratie und die Nationalitätenfrage im habsburgischen Vielvölkerstaat. I. Das Ringen um die supranationale Integration der zisleithanischen Arbeiterbewegung (1867-1907)*, Vienna 1963. A second volume was never published, but see Helmut Konrad, *Nationalismus und Internationalismus. Die österreichische Arbeiterbewegung vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, Vienna 1976; Raimund Löw, *Der Zerfall der 'Kleinen Internationale'. Nationalitätenkonflikte in der Arbeiterbewegung des alten Österreich (1889-1914)*, Vienna 1984; Šolle, 'Sozialdemokratie'.

²¹⁰ Quoted in Václav Peša, 'Die Entwicklung der Sozialdemokratischen Partei in Österreich in den Jahren 1868-1874', *Historica* 22, Prague, 1983, document 22, p. 66.

Secondly, after 1867 the Austrian governments, in contrast to the Hungarians, were increasingly inclined to make concessions to the national demands of the Czechs, Poles, and others. Since the Habsburg Court and the Austrian government had no nationalist aspirations, but were prepared to make concessions to the non-German nationalities in order to keep the peace – thereby incurring the anger of German nationalists –, there was no official Austrian policy discouraging the social democrats to make their own national concessions. Thirdly, the Austrian Social Democratic Party was blessed with a number of first-rate intellectual figures, some of who set out to address the whole complexity of the national question in the Habsburg Monarchy. The most important of them were Otto Bauer and Karl Renner. The Hungarian party did not possess thinkers of this calibre and was almost exclusively led by self-taught men who had risen from the ranks of the artisan and skilled worker strata and who, unfortunately, did not develop a broad perspective on the national problem.²¹¹ For all these reasons, both objective political and subjective intellectual ones, the Austrian party was able – but also forced by circumstances – to develop political and organisational reform concepts trying to neutralise the danger of national antagonism that was disrupting the social democratic movement. The Hungarian party leadership, on the other hand, did not seem to have the will and ability to follow the Austrian policy of party federalism and of advocating a scheme of federalisation of the state based on cultural autonomy for the different nationalities. Although it has been argued (and probably rightly so) that the Austrian social democratic national reform programme principally had the propagandistic and psychological function of calming down the situation in the party, the HSDP took it seriously enough to refuse to support the ideas of Austrian party leaders like Renner and Bauer, the men who were largely responsible for developing the programme. As in the Austrian case, the Hungarian attitude may have stemmed from both objective conditions – in particular the weakness of the non-Magyar nationalities and the single-minded Magyar policy of creating a greater national state, which also influenced the Hungarian labour movement – and subjective factors like the intellectual weakness of the HSDP leadership. The latter factor also had something to do with the gentry background and snobbish behaviour of many Hungarian intellectuals, few of whom were interested to join the ‘plebeian’ social democratic party. In addition, there may have been fear in Hungarian party circles that support for national-federalist schemes might provoke stronger government repression. The result was that there were great shortcomings in the political imagination of the HSDP leadership, who tended to identify with Magyar national-political traditions rather than with national reform schemes.

Ever since the 1860s and 1870s German labour leaders in Austria had been forced to acknowledge the demand of the Czechs to be treated on a basis of equality in the working-class movement, and to be allowed to form their own organisations that should decide for themselves whether or not to link up with the Germans. Patterns of labour organisation, Czech-German relations, and the significance of national ‘separatism’ – a term mostly used by the Germans when referring to Czech autonomism – varied from region to region, being different in northern Bohemia, Prague, Vienna, or Moravia. The crux of the matter was that the all-Austrian labour movement had to recognise in one way or another the right, or even the inevitability, of the Czechs to decide their own fate as fellow-social democrats and organised workers. In 1878 an autonomous ‘Czechoslav Social Democratic Workers’ Party’ was founded, which in 1888-9 became part of the new all-Austrian Social Democratic Party but in 1893 reaffirmed its autonomous position. In 1897 the all-Austrian party adopted new organisational by-laws that recognised the national principle as the basis for what now became a national-federalist party

²¹¹ Tibor Erényi, ‘The Activities of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary during the First Decade of the Century’, in *Studies on the History of the Hungarian Working-Class Movement (1867-1966)*, ed. Henrik Vass, Budapest, 1975, p. 58; Gy. Borsányi, ‘The Labour Movement and the Jewish Question in Hungary (1880-1944)’, *Études historiques hongroises* 1985, pp. 88-90.

organisation. The same year, after the Czech demand also to introduce a national division of the all-Austrian Trade Union Secretariat had been rejected, an autonomous Czech Trade Union Secretariat was formed. However, until 1910 the majority of Czech trade unionists continued to be affiliated to interethnic trade union organisations and to be ‘controlled’ by the all-Austrian Trade Union Secretariat in Vienna. The precise status of the Czech labour movement as a constituent but simultaneously autonomous part of the Austrian working-class movement was never clearly defined and, therefore, always a subject of debate and controversy. When in the 1890s the Austrian social democratic movement came into its own, experiencing substantial growth both in its membership and political influence, the Czech party organisation proved it was equal to the German in facing the challenges and tasks of the moment.²¹² It also became increasingly clear that the national question was not becoming less important, as many German social democrats had hoped, but on the contrary was moving to the forefront of political life, especially after the violent nationalist confrontations of 1897. In that year promises were made by the Austrian government that the Czech language would be put on an equal footing with German in Bohemia and Moravia, triggering vehement German protests that poisoned the atmosphere between the two national groups also outside these classical ‘Czech Lands’. In fact, the use of the term ‘Czechoslav’ by the Czech party was meant to express it was not exclusively interested in restoring the political autonomy and ‘historical rights’ of Bohemia and Moravia (the old Kingdom of Bohemia). The party had a broader ethnic – in part ‘personalistic’ and non-territorial – approach to the interests of the Czech nation and the Czech working class. The struggle for language rights and other ethnocultural objectives (for instance in Vienna) was crucial for the party, which only gradually moved towards the position of supporting the demand for a territorially defined self-governing Czech or Czechoslovak state.²¹³ Indeed, this political goal was complicated by the fact that by the first decade of the twentieth century some 250,000 Czechs (and several ten thousand Slovaks) were living in the greater Vienna metropolis, a considerable proportion of whom resisted assimilation and tended to remain Czech-speakers. It was argued by people like the Czech social democratic leader Bohumír Šmeral that working-class Czechs in cities like Vienna would be ‘lost’ if the Czech national movement ignored them and only made demands regarding the status of Bohemia and Moravia. Thousands of Czechs had migrated even to Hungarian cities like Budapest and Pressburg, where there was a shortage of skilled labour during the first phase of industrial expansion in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Thus, the national outlook of the Czech party transcended the narrow Bohemian perspective and aimed to embrace all Czechs in the Habsburg Monarchy. The term ‘Czechoslav’ expressed this broader ethnic perspective and also potentially included the Slovaks, who according to some Czechs and Slovaks, including social democrats like Šmeral, were historically and culturally part of the Czech nation; to ignore them would be against the national interest as well.²¹⁴ The broader

²¹² See Mommsen, *Sozialdemokratie*, chaps I.3, II.2-5, for a detailed account of some of these developments; also František Soukup, *Revoluce práce. Dějinný vývoj socialismu a Československé sociálně demokratické strany dělnické*, 2 vols, Prague 1938, vol. 1, pp. 429-623. For other important details see Ludwig Brügel, *Geschichte der österreichischen Sozialdemokratie*, 5 vols, Vienna 1922-5, esp. vol. 5, p. 80; Miroslav Bouček and Miloslav Klimeš, ‘Der Kampf für die Einheit der Arbeiterbewegung in der Tschechoslowakei’, *Historica* 19, Prague, 1980, p. 31; Wolfgang Maderthaner, ‘Die Entwicklung der Organisationsstruktur der deutschen Sozialdemokratie in Österreich 1889 bis 1913’, in *Sozialdemokratie und Habsburgerstaat*, ed. W. Maderthaner, pp. 42-4; Marlis Sewering-Wollanek, ‘Die deutschböhmisches Sozialdemokratie in den Jahren 1889 bis 1914’, in *ibid.*, pp. 184-8; Konrad, ‘Österreichische Arbeiterbewegung’, pp. 126-7.

²¹³ Jiří Kořalka in collaboration with Berthold Unfried, ‘The Czech Workers’ Movement in the Hapsburg Empire’, in *The Formation of Labour Movements, 1870-1914: An International Perspective*, 2 vols, eds Marcel van der Linden and Jürgen Rojahn, Leiden, 1990, vol. 1, p. 337; Mommsen, *Sozialdemokratie*, p. 91; Šolle, ‘Sozialdemokratie’, p. 331.

²¹⁴ Michael John and Albert Lichtblau, ‘Česká Víden: Von der tschechischen Grosstadt zum tschechischen Dorf’, *Archiv: Jahrbuch des Vereins für Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 3, 1987, pp. 34-40; Karl Brousek,

ethnonational and ‘personalistic’ approach of the Czech party also meant that many Czech social democrats, despite their differences with the Austro-Germans, tended to support the ideas of Renner and Bauer, who after the all-Austrian Brünn Party Congress of 1899 began to advocate a programme of political and cultural reform of the multinational state that was essentially aimed at its preservation through democratisation, decentralisation, and national federalisation. This programme included not only the old demands of universal suffrage and democratic self-government, but a constitutional policy of multinational federalism based on cultural autonomy for the different national groups.

By the late 1890s Austrian social democrats like Karl Renner – but also Karl Kautsky in Germany – had come to the conclusion that the multinational state should be preserved as a framework promoting interethnic coexistence and economic development and as an arena for the transnational class struggle. In order to fulfil the function of interethnic *Ausgleich*, the state should be reorganised on a democratic and federalist basis ensuring the equality of all nationalities. Thus, the Brünn Party Congress of 1899 adopted a resolution calling for a democratic federal state of equal nations based on the principle of cultural autonomy. This aim was to be achieved by a combination of democratisation of the empire as a whole and a system of cultural self-government in the different ethnolinguistic districts and regions, which should be delimited as much as possible along national lines. Renner – but less so Bauer and others – also advocated the non-territorial principle of ‘personal autonomy’ in national-cultural affairs, i.e., the idea that every citizen could belong to a legally recognised national community regardless of his place of origin or residence, somewhat similar to membership of religious communities. He hoped that in this way the problem of national minorities and territorial conflicts could be avoided. But many other social democrats considered the personal autonomy or ‘personalistic’ idea utopian and among the Czechs and others support for it gradually declined, although the territorial and ‘personalistic’ variants of the national autonomy concept continued to exist side by side.²¹⁵ While these ideas of leading Austrian social democrats represented great political progress in comparison with the old attitude of ignoring the challenges of the national question by loudly declaring international solidarity, they failed to pacify the situation. As Oszkár Jászi has

Wien und seine Tschechen, Vienna 1980; Jean-Paul Bled, *Wien. Residenz-Metropole-Hauptstadt*, Vienna 1998, esp. p. 158; Monika Glettler, *Die Wiener Tschechen um 1900. Strukturanalyse einer nationalen Minderheit in der Grossstadt*, Munich 1972, pp. 377-415 for the Czech social democrats in Vienna; Jan Galandauer, ‘Šmerals Auffassung der Nationalitätenfrage und des Verhältnisses der tschechischen Nation zu Österreich-Ungarn am Vorabend des Ersten imperialistischen Weltkrieges’, *Historica* 23, Prague, 1983, esp. p. 67. According to Boris Zala, the ‘Czechoslav idea’, i.e., the concept that the Czechs, Moravians, Austrian/Czech Silesians, and Slovaks were members of the same ‘branch of the Czech Slavs’, went back deep into the nineteenth century. See Boris Zala, ‘Ku zmyslu sociálnej demokracie v slovenských dejinách’, in *Kapitoly z dejín sociálnej demokracie na Slovensku*, eds Stanislav Sikora et al., Bratislava, 1996, p. 352. Another example of how the ‘Czechoslav’ idea came to include the Slovaks too, was *Československá jednota*, an organisation of Czech and Slovak students and intellectuals based at Prague that during the early years of the twentieth century supported the national activities of the Slovaks and promoted practical Czech-Slovak mutuality. See Nadežda Jurčišinová, ‘Pomoc Československej jednoty pri výchove slovenského remeselníckeho dorastu’, *Česko-slovenská historická ročenka* 2002, pp. 277-93. In the English summary to this article ‘Československá’ (Czechoslav) is translated as ‘Czechoslovak’, which illustrates the ease with which a Czechocentric political concept could incorporate the Slovaks.

²¹⁵ Jacques Hannak, *Karl Renner und seine Zeit. Versuch einer Biographie*, Vienna 1965, pp. 88-92; Robert A. Kann, *Das Nationalitätenproblem der Habsburgermonarchie*, 2 vols, Graz 1964, vol. 2, pp. 160-82; Francè Klopcic, ‘Austromarxismus und Nationale Frage bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg’, *Austriaca* 15, 1982, pp. 81-90; Oscar Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, Chicago 1929, p. 180. Jászi writes: ‘Not a single class of the former Austria realized so clearly the fateful [nationality] problem of the monarchy as the Austrian Social Democracy’ (p. 177). On the other hand it has been argued that the Brünn Programme of 1899 had a propagandistic and psychological function – it was primarily meant to calm the interethnic situation – rather than a practical political one; see, e.g., Mommsen, *Sozialdemokratie*, chap. III.4; Šolle, ‘Sozialdemokratie’, p. 369.

pointed out, after 1900 nationalism was passing beyond the stage of merely demanding language rights or cultural autonomy and entering the phase of institutional separatism and demanding political-administrative autonomy (followed after 1914 by the demand of state independence).²¹⁶ The concept of cultural or personal autonomy, and the tendency to narrow nationalism down merely to ethnolinguistic affairs, became increasingly problematic as cultural demands radicalised and national-political antagonisms increased. Thus, it was not easy to address an issue like the demand of the Vienna Czechs to have their own Czech-language schools, something that was vehemently opposed by the local Germans including the German social democrats. Neither was it easy to resolve a problem like the growing insistence of the Czech social democrats in Bohemia, Moravia, and even in Vienna to have their own trade unions. According to Jászi, by stressing the need for preserving the multinational state the programme of 1899 implicitly confirmed the broad German hegemony in Austria-Hungary, also vis-à-vis the Magyars, who would lose their privileged position in a federalised Hungary dissolved in the greater Monarchy.²¹⁷ As for the small ‘non-historical’ nations, as long as the Czechs, the Slovaks, and others were satisfied with a theoretical form of cultural autonomy, they tended to support the Austrian social democrats’ federalist schemes; but when they became more ambitious, they abandoned it. This became clear, first of all, with regard to the labour movement itself. After the first Austrian general election on the basis of universal manhood suffrage in 1907 the all-Austrian party rapidly disintegrated, to begin with its parliamentary caucus of 50 Germans, 24 Czechs, and 13 others. By 1910 the struggle between Czechs and Germans over the issue of trade union organisation (centralism versus autonomism) all but put an end to the last vestiges of interethnic unity and led to complete separation on both the trade union and party levels. After the majority of Czech social democrats had broken away from the all-Austrian labour movement, the last pre-war Austrian general election of 1911 resulted in a great victory for the Czech ‘separatist’ party among Czech working-class voters, although men like Šmeral continued to defend affiliation to the Austrian party and the idea of a federal multinational state. The conflict between the Czech ‘separatists’ and the German (and a small minority of Czech) ‘centralists’ led to such terrible mutual denunciations and even violent confrontations, that the ‘Little International’ ended its life even before the multinational state itself. Whatever the deeper causes of the process of national fragmentation of the all-Austrian labour movement, there can be little doubt that the Austro-German social democrats – despite their German chauvinism and assimilatory ideals – were taking the national question more seriously than many other ethnically dominant social democrats in Europe, in particular the Hungarians.²¹⁸ Even if a major reason for this was the force of circumstances, especially the political, cultural, and economic reality of unrelenting Czech pressure, it nonetheless distinguished them favourably from the Magyar HSDP leadership, as a more detailed analysis of the Hungarian situation will show.

²¹⁶ Jászi, *Dissolution*, p. 180.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 180-1. That the ‘Austromarxist’ programme of cultural autonomy would eliminate the worst national oppression while leaving crucial imperial power positions in German hands, is also observed by other authors. See, e.g., Roman Rosdolsky, ‘Friedrich Engels und das Problem der “geschichtslosen” Völker (Die Nationalitätenfrage in der Revolution 1848-49 im Lichte der Neuen Rheinischen Zeitung)’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 4, 1964, pp. 247-8; Sewering-Wollanek, ‘Die deutschböhmisches Sozialdemokratie’, p. 186.

²¹⁸ Siegfried Matl, ‘Austria’, in *Formation of Labour Movements*, eds M. van der Linden and J. Rojahn, pp. 306-19; Brügel, *Geschichte*, vol. 5, pp. 77-101, 105-8; Julius Deutsch, *Geschichte der österreichischen Gewerkschaftsbewegung*, 2 vols, Vienna 1929-32, vol. 1, pp. 413-27; Fritz Klenner, *Die österreichischen Gewerkschaften. Vergangenheit und Gegenwartsprobleme*, 2 vols, Vienna 1951-3, vol. 1, pp. 318-28, 339; Mommsen, *Sozialdemokratie*, chaps II- IV; Löw, *Der Zerfall der ‘Kleinen Internationale’*, pp. 67-165; Maderthaner, ‘Organisationsstruktur’, p. 50; Sewering-Wollanek, ‘Die deutschböhmisches Sozialdemokratie’, p. 188; Jászi, *Dissolution*, p. 184; Bouček and Klimeš, ‘Der Kampf’, p. 31; Hamann, *Hitlers Wien*, pp. 458-9; Galandauer, ‘Šmerals Auffassung’, passim; Jan Galandauer, *Bohumír Šmeral*, Prague 1986, pp. 30-9; Šolle, ‘Sozialdemokratie’, pp. 374-6; Soukup, *Revoluce práce*, pp. 763-71.

But before we set out to examine in detail the development of social democracy in Hungary, something more needs to be said about the ideas of Otto Bauer, this towering figure among the Austrian social democrats. Bauer was probably the most original and courageous thinker on the national question in the ranks of the social democratic leadership and the intelligentsia in the Habsburg Monarchy, if not in Europe. His book 'The National Question and Social Democracy' (1907) became famous, as became some of his later writings and statements on the subject. One of the most interesting aspects of Bauer's thought on the national question was his insistence that there was such a thing as 'national character', perhaps surprising for a Marxist intellectual, but Bauer, for all his Marxism, was by no means a mediocre or superficial Marxist ideologist. According to Otto Bauer, the socialist movement had inherited the 'naive cosmopolitanism' of the Enlightenment, the idea that nations may be different as far as their language but not as far as their basic character is concerned, as he put it. The truth was however – and here Bauer addressed the ethnic Germans – that 'all of us are under the influence of national ideology, of national romanticism, and only few of us can utter the word "German" without producing a peculiar sentimental tone'. He stressed that 'the national community is one of the most complicated social phenomena, a complex of the most diverse social symptoms'.²¹⁹ Bauer rejected the view that the idea of the nation was merely a 'bourgeois prejudice', and described the factual diversity of 'national character' in Europe and its historical and socio-economic roots. He showed how with the growth of capitalist society, the modern working-class movement, and eventually socialism, the diversity of national character must become ever more marked, because the working class was gaining an ever greater participation in national life, until in socialist society it would become a full member of the national cultural community. The process of social and political change generated a democratisation, an extension of the national community, leading to a greater differentiation of the different nationalities in terms of their cultural characteristics, their national character. Thus, the nation gradually became a truly culturally-united 'community of character', and socialism would make the nation 'autonomous' in that its fate now became the product of its 'conscious will' instead of blind economic forces, resulting in an even starker differentiation of national identity. This tendency was prepared by the development of capitalism, which promoted the integration of the nation by incorporating the masses under conditions of modern production. In the case of the so-called 'non-historical nations', this modernisation logically produced their national 'awakening', the first stage in the rise of their national cultural communities. On the basis of Bauer's analysis it is not difficult to understand that the process of cultural extension must have been something of great significance for the rising working classes of the small Slav nations. Indeed, the working-class movement itself, especially among these small nations, was a powerful factor extending the national cultural community as a result of its political and organisational efforts, i.e., its using the vehicle of the national language in its agitation, educational activities, etc. As Bauer phrased it, in each country socialist ideology was 'married' to specific cultural traditions and in this way became nationally differentiated itself: 'the specific spiritual character of the nation helps to shape the socialism of each nation'. As Bauer explained, the two 'historical nations' in the Dual Monarchy (the Germans and the Magyars) had to understand that the demands for equality of the Slav nations dominated by them were irresistible and could only be satisfied by reform of the constitutional basis of the state. But typically – and prophetically – he also warned the Czechs and the other Slavs not to pursue a policy that would link their cause to multinational Austria's collapse in a world war, stressing that 'every sensible person must strive to find a form of coexistence of the

²¹⁹ Otto Bauer, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie*, Wien 1907, preface, v. Besides Bauer, there were a handful of other socialist thinkers – e.g., Mikhail Bakunin, George Orwell, and some Irish socialists – who dared to point out the significance of the nation and 'national character', thereby distinguishing themselves from the bulk of Marxists and socialists. But it is doubtful that any of them had the analytical power of Bauer.

nations in the existing state-political framework'. He also warned the working class not to pin its hopes on the empire's downfall, for it needed a national policy that helped to create favourable conditions for the transnational class struggle, and this was more likely to exist in a reformed multinational state than in a host of separate nation-states. However, by 1910 Bauer became increasingly pessimistic about the future of the multinational state, believing that an imperialist war might be inevitable and that it would end with the revolution of the Slav nations. Moreover, Bauer himself was susceptible to German national emotions and to the tendency of perceiving the Slav nations as a danger to the position of the Germans. He also underestimated, for all his understanding of the power of nationalism, the real meaning and impact of working-class nationalism among the Czechs and the other non-dominant nations and resented the Czechs' social democratic 'separatism'.²²⁰ Nevertheless, during the last phase of the First World War he became the first Austrian social democratic leader arguing that the national revolution was inevitable. This also led him, with regard to the position of the Austro-Germans, to return to the older concept of Greater German unity as the alternative for multinational Austria.

Bauer's approach to the phenomenon of the nation is important for historians who try to understand its social dynamics and its attraction for the organised workers of the Austro-Hungarian minority nationalities, as well as for the dominant Magyars and Germans. It also provides a broader background to his observation that, the higher the skills and the 'cultural level' of 'proletarian immigrants of the industrial-capitalist type', such as the Czechs in Vienna (or the Slovaks in Budapest), the lower their propensity to assimilate to their new ethnic environment. It was these relatively skilled and educated workers who formed the backbone of the labour movement, also among the small nationalities.²²¹ Nowhere, perhaps, was the powerful force of nationalism, both in its positive and destructive consequences and both among the dominant and the subordinate nations, more evident than in multinational Hungary. Many of the Magyars themselves, despite their being the ruling nation in 'Historical Hungary', felt they were only 'half-independent' and still living under the hegemony of the Austro-Germans. On the other hand, the non-Magyar nations keenly felt they were oppressed by the Magyars, which encouraged them to seek the help of Austrian political figures or, as in the case of the Slovaks, of a 'brother' nation like the Czechs. The multinational Hungarian labour movement was part of this intricate political and psychological complex, and Magyar labour leaders had to define their position vis-à-vis the Austrians, on the one hand, and the political claims of the non-Magyar nationalities on the other. From the inception of the Hungarian working-class movement in the late 1860s, some of its leaders had opposed the building of joint organisations with the Austrians. The desire to have a separate Hungarian labour movement was linked to the tradition of Hungarian patriotism, the new post-Compromise state-political reality, and the tendency of Magyar labour leaders to seek links with 'progressive' figures of the opposition Independence Party, which regarded itself as the successor to the Kossuthist national-liberal and anti-Habsburg movement of 1848-9. The Independence Party was supported by a radical section of the gentry, bourgeois democrats, petty-bourgeois strata including some peasants and artisans, and nationalist elements among the working class. Magyar labour leaders tended to argue that cooperation with

²²⁰ See the interesting analysis by Julius Braunthal, 'Otto Bauer's Lebensbild', in *Otto Bauer. Eine Auswahl aus seinem Lebenswerk*, ed. Julius Braunthal, Vienna, 1961, pp. 16-9, 22-3; relevant selections from Otto Bauer, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie*, 2nd edn, Vienna 1924, in *Otto Bauer*, ed. J. Braunthal, esp. pp. 154, 161. See in Bauer's work, e.g., chap. I.1 on 'national character', I.11 on 'national consciousness and national feeling', III.17 on 'the awakening of the non-historical nations'. See for some brief but interesting observations on the limitations of Bauer's thought and his understanding of the national problem Raimund Löw, 'Der Zerfall der "Kleinen Internationale"', in *Arbeiterbewegung in Österreich und Ungarn bis 1914*, ed. Wolfgang Maderthaler, Wien, 1986, p. 161; Šolle, 'Sozialdemokratie', p. 373; Konrad, 'Österreichische Arbeiterbewegung', pp. 129-30.

²²¹ Otto Bauer, 'Die Bedingungen der nationalen Assimilation', *Der Kampf* 5, no. 6, March 1912, p. 256.

the Independence Party would help to extend the influence of the socialist working-class movement to other social groups, but it would seem that nationalist sentiment, rooted in Magyar patriotic and national-democratic traditions, played a role as well. These sentiments and traditions were deeply mistrusted by the non-Magyar nationalities, including the non-Magyar socialists, although there were occasional moments that non-Magyar politicians felt attracted by the democratic promises of the Independence Party or other Magyar opposition groups.

A sense of affinity with the Independence Party became a notable feature of Magyar socialism, which helped to sustain Magyar national feeling in the Hungarian labour movement during the entire period 1867-1918. In the 1870s the 'Non-Voters' Party' (NVP), led by the well-known Hungarian socialist Leo Frankel, was seeking the support of democratically minded Independence Party figures for the struggle for universal suffrage and democratic freedoms. In 1877-8, joint mass meetings were held by the NVP and the left wing of the Independence Party during a campaign for democratic reforms. This cooperation with radical Magyar nationalists was accompanied by the publication of articles in the socialist press – perhaps in an attempt to increase its influence with the Independence Party – that gave expression to certain ethnocentric prejudices. Around this time the NVP leadership also refused to criticise Magyar nationalist attitudes (which could be positively interpreted as articulating a democratic anti-Austrian position), or to take a critical stance on Hungarian national-minority policies. Ethnocentrism was a matter of the Magyar rank-and-file as well. Thus, a local worker society in Budapest aroused nationalist feelings among Magyar workers against German workers, many of who played a prominent part in the early Hungarian labour movement. When in 1880 the Hungarian General Workers' Party (GWP) was established in an attempt to unify the country's quarrelling labour and socialist groups, these tendencies continued. At its founding congress some delegates wanted to call the new party 'Hungarian [Magyar] Workers' Party', arguing that they were Magyars and Magyar workers, but others, including the Pressburg delegate Karl Hanzlíček, insisted on adding the word 'general' in order to avoid explicit national distinctions. The party was tolerated by the Hungarian authorities as long as it refrained from openly propagating socialism and only functioned as a loose platform, which facilitated government control and occasional clamping down on individual party leaders. Under the difficult conditions of semi-legality and state-sponsored chauvinism, some party leaders argued they should make more 'concessions' to the prevailing political climate by using the right Magyar patriotic language. This would make it easier for the party to function as a labour movement, but it is doubtful that this argument was merely 'tactical' and not based on nationalist motives as well. In November 1882 the GWP's newspaper *Népszava* attacked those non-Magyars who wanted to use their mother tongue at worker meetings in Budapest; this was considered inappropriate in a country where Magyar was the official public language. During the 1880s part of the Magyar labour press, in typical chauvinist fashion and similar to the attitude of some Austro-Germans, frequently portrayed the Magyar nation as more civilised and advanced than the non-Magyar nationalities. Some leading Magyar socialists openly defended the unitary Hungarian state and condemned the national movements of the non-Magyars, using phrases from the official Hungarian propaganda arsenal like 'pan-Slavs' when referring to Slav political figures and their aspirations. At a meeting of the GWP leadership in 1884, Zsigmond Csillag defended the 'tactical' principle that the party 'must not come into open... conflict with certain concepts... that tyrannically dominate public opinion in Hungary. Every socialist in Hungary, even if holding entirely different views, must behave as a "good Hungarian, in body and soul"'. According to Csillag, this meant that the Hungarian socialists had to support in the nationalist spirit of the Independence Party the 'Hungarian state idea', i.e., the concept of the unitary Magyar national state and Magyar supremacy. In addition to the argument of preventing government repression, it was also claimed again that this position would increase socialist influence among the progressive bourgeois opposition and among those

Magyar workers who were influenced by nationalism.²²² Whatever the merits of the tactical argument, there can be little doubt that nationalist sentiments existed among not a few Magyar labour leaders, especially in Budapest. An article published in the trade union journal 'The Carpenter' in June 1889, probably written by the Magyar socialist Viktor Külföldi, argued: 'It is not our intention to be on a collision course with the Hungarian concept of the state and it is not the purpose of our paper to create difficulties for the Hungarian government when it is engaged in the great task of regenerating our nation; not only our sense of justice and patriotism prevents us from so doing but our determination as well, which is to cooperate with all that is at our disposal in creating a Hungary where all the peoples are independent, free and happy.' Another example of Magyar 'labour nationalism' was the newspaper 'Let there be light', published by a trade union of printing workers. Indeed, in Upper Hungary/Slovakia the Magyar typographers became notorious for their support for the Magyarisation policy.²²³ It must remain a mystery how men like Külföldi could bring their 'sense of justice' in harmony with support for Hungarian nationalist policies, or how these policies could be reconciled with the 'freedom' and 'independence' of the different 'peoples' that Külföldi was talking about.

After the formation of the Austrian Social Democratic Party in 1888-9 and of the HSDP in 1890, there followed a decade when the 'internationalism' of the Hungarian party was stressed more emphatically than had been the case before. This was the result of the intervention of the Second International and the Austrian social democrats in Hungarian socialist affairs, and of the adoption of a Marxist programme at the HSDP's founding congress in December 1890. Friedrich Engels himself sent an optimistic letter to the congress, claiming that Hungary, 'a multinational country', now had a working-class party that was itself 'truly international' as well, comprising workers of five different nationalities (Magyars, Germans, Slovaks, Romanians, and Serbs). The HSDP's Declaration of Principles adopted in 1890 proclaimed the party an 'international party' that did not recognise 'privilege of nation, birth or property...' Fear of the potentially negative consequences of universal suffrage for the ethnic stability of multinational Hungary (which apparently existed among part of the delegates) was allayed by a delegate of the Shoemakers' Union, who assured the congress that universal suffrage would 'not destroy Hungary'. A congress resolution stressed that the Hungarian proletariat was made up of many nationalities and that the party, 'because of the multi-national structure of Hungary... deems it necessary that socialist leaflets be circulated in the languages of these nationalities so that social democratic principles may reach them more easily'.²²⁴ This was an important suggestion, but no further analysis was made of the national question in Hungary, although the rhetoric of the party in the

²²² Edit S. Vincze, 'The Struggle for the First Independent Proletarian Party. The First Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary (1868-1890)', in *Studies on the History of the Hungarian Working-Class Movement (1867-1966)*, ed. Henrik Vass, Budapest, 1975, pp. 24-7, 30-6, 53; Pavel Hapák, 'Zu den Anfängen der Arbeiterbewegung in der Slowakei (die Jahre 1848-1890)', *Historica* 14, Prague, 1967, p. 116; Pavel Hapák, 'Robotnícke hnutie v rokoch 1867-1890', in *Dejiny Slovenska II. Od roku 1848 do roku 1900*, eds Eudovít Holotík and Július Mésároš, Bratislava, 1968, pp. 460-71; Vladimír Lehotský, 'Počiatky robotníckeho socialistického hnutia a boj o politické osamostatnenie robotníctva v Bratislave (1867-1900)' (Ph.D. diss., Komenský University, Bratislava, 1969), pp. 132-3, n.138. The chauvinism of some of the Magyar labour leaders is described by Slovak historians like Hapák and Lehotský in a starker way than by Hungarian historians like Vincze. But the Hungarians are critical in their own, perhaps somewhat more detached way, and they provide important data on the subject. However, Hungarian authors like Erényi, Vincze, etc. do not use the term 'Magyar' in addition to 'Hungarian' – which could have been done in the English translation of their work – to help the reader distinguish between ethnic and supra-ethnic aspects of the actions of the Hungarian labour movement. This is presumably because this distinction is not made in the Magyar language itself.

²²³ Quotation of Külföldi in Tibor Erényi, 'The Origins of the Hungarian Trade-Union Movement', in *Studies on the History of the Hungarian Trade-Union Movement*, eds E. Kabos and A. Zsilák, Budapest, 1977, pp. 38-9; see also Hapák, 'Robotnícke hnutie v rokoch 1867-1890', p. 461.

²²⁴ Vincze, 'Struggle', pp. 41-9; see also Miloš Gosiorovský, *Dejiny slovenského robotníckeho hnutia (1848-1918)*, Bratislava 1958, pp. 295-7.

1890s, especially when it began to attract growing numbers of non-Magyar in addition to Magyar workers, became more internationalist than before. In July 1895 *Népszava*, the party's principal Magyar-language newspaper, even declared: 'The social democrats, not only in words but in deeds, proclaim their support for the full autonomy of every nation, nationality and race according to language or other characteristics.'²²⁵ However, this rhetoric was not followed by practical political steps such as a policy of active support for the non-Magyar socialist press. The 'politically correct' rhetoric was perhaps mainly motivated by fear that the non-Magyar workers might otherwise come under the influence of their 'own' bourgeois-nationalist movements, which like the labour movement became stronger during the 1890s. Despite the declared aim of developing an independent working-class politics, the moderate wing of the HSDP wanted to continue the policy of seeking cooperation with progressive elements of the Independence Party. Those in the party who opposed this strategy considered the Independence Party a dangerous competitor precisely because it had influence among part of the Magyar working class due to its nationalist and anti-Austrian slogans – similar to the influence of non-Magyar nationalist parties among some of the non-Magyar workers. The Marxist reaction of the HSDP to the Independence Party's attractive ideology of national unity against Austria was to stress the primacy of class politics and to de-emphasise the importance of nationality. In order to create a strong class-based party, the HSDP – more so than its predecessor the GWP – criticised the official Hungarian chauvinist policies and protested against the oppression of the national minorities. At the same time, in order to prevent political unity between non-Magyar workers and nationalist politicians, it also attacked the 'bourgeois nationalism' of the non-Magyars, while it rhetorically recognised their right to autonomy. While the party made declamatory concessions with regard to the national question – which it never seriously analysed and whose 'solution' it postponed into the future –, with the apparent aim of taking the wind out of the sails of national-minority politicians and disaffected non-Magyar labour leaders, such concessions were not made with regard to the equally important agrarian question. The HSDP's founding congress of 1890, where this question was briefly discussed for the first time, decided that the aim of the party's agrarian policy was the public ownership of land, not its redistribution. Party policy was shaped by the perspective of proletarianisation, organisation of rural workers, and future socialisation, not by the idea of an alliance with the numerous but deeply mistrusted small and marginal peasantry. The 'bourgeois' demand of dividing up the great estates, which was supported by many rural workers as well, was obviously seen as less relevant for the party from a tactical point of view than the cultural demands of the national minority population, growing numbers of whom were joining the urban working class.²²⁶ Even if national minority demands could be denounced as 'bourgeois' as well, they were demands that were supported by sections of the urban working class and, therefore, important enough to be noted by the party. But political rhetoric was not the same thing as practical party policy.

Indeed, it soon became clear that the HSDP's theoretical recognition of the rights of the national minorities was, far more evidently than in the case of the Austrian party, a matter of pacifying rhetoric and internal propaganda rather than political substance. The party was unable to break out of the constraints of its predominantly Magyar environment, which was marked by ethnocentrism and chauvinism. One way of showing this is to examine the social position of the Slovak working class in Budapest. In the course of the nineteenth century large numbers of Slovaks had been moving from the impoverished areas of Upper Hungary to the country's capital, which unlike many other parts of Hungary experienced considerable economic expansion. Budapest became the 'largest Slovak city' because of the large number of Slovaks –

²²⁵ Quoted in Vincze, 'Struggle', p. 53.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 53; Erényi, 'Activities', pp. 64-7, for the HSDP's inability to produce a serious agrarian programme and its consistent disregard for the demands of the peasantry also during the following decades.

more than in any other city in the Dual Monarchy – working and living there, even though it was not part of the principal ethnic Slovak region further north. Slovak seasonal labourers as well as permanent in-migrants became a prominent feature of the Budapest scene, the Slovak population being the third largest ethnic group in the city (after the Magyars and the Germans). Of particular importance were the Slovak building workers, ‘the people who built Budapest’, as many Slovaks and others used to say. In 1888 a Budapest newspaper estimated that two-thirds of the local Slovaks belonged to this occupational group. At the Annual Congress of the HSDP in 1897, a Slovak delegate put the total number of Slovak workers in Budapest at over forty thousand, many of them masons and bricklayers, both seasonal labourers and others. The same year the Slovak social democratic newspaper *Nová doba* (The New Era) estimated their number at sixty thousand, while the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior even spoke of eighty thousand. Besides building workers there were Slovak tailors, cobblers, day labourers, domestic servants, etc. It was well-known that the inhabitants of Budapest tended to ignore or ridicule them, which may have been due to their raw peasant image, their Slav language, other real or ascribed ethnic characteristics, and of course Magyar prejudice. In March 1891 the HSDP’s central organ *Népszava* published an article on the miserable conditions of the Slovaks in the city. It described how they were doing the worst jobs for the longest hours and the lowest pay: ‘They are satisfied with next to nothing, they never complain about maltreatment, one can call them names and hit them. After all they are “Slovaks”’.²²⁷ Slovak workers in Budapest were not only exploited as workers, but felt the weight of the national oppression of the Slovak people as expressed in the context of their social and economic position. At the many building sites of expanding Budapest the Magyar expression ‘Tót nem ember’ (the Slovak is not a human being) was used with impunity, as was the joke that ‘it was only a Slovak who fell from the scaffold’. All of this was revealing of the status and the treatment meted out to Slovak workers.²²⁸ There is evidence that the Slovaks, Romanians, and Serbs in Budapest and other places in Hungary were exploited and intimidated more than Magyar workers. The Hungarian government itself openly discriminated in favour of Magyar workers and paid bonuses to those Magyars, for example railway workers, who were willing to move to Slovakia to help further the policy of Magyarisation; only loyal Magyars or ‘Magyarones’ (non-Magyar renegades) could get certain jobs in state industries. It happened frequently that Slovak workers were expelled from their jobs even for showing the slightest expression of sympathy for the Slovak national movement. This demonstrated how, like other Slovaks, the Slovak working class was subjected to national oppression in addition to exploitation and social marginalisation.²²⁹ It was not easy for the social democratic movement to deal with these social realities and ethnic antagonisms.

From the late 1860s, Slovaks in Budapest participated in the unfolding working-class movement alongside Magyars, Germans, Czechs, and others. Among the Slovak working class in Budapest and elsewhere, there was also a lively interest in Slovak cultural life and Slovak national aspirations. This was shown, especially among the more skilled and educated artisans and trade apprentices, by interest in Slovak literature and other cultural activities, and by

²²⁷ Quoted in Monika Glettler, ‘The Slovaks in Budapest and Bratislava, 1850-1914’, in *Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe, 1850-1940. Vol. 8: Ethnic Identity in Urban Europe*, ed. Max Engman, Aldershot, 1992, p. 317.

²²⁸ Quotation in Hapák, ‘Zu den Anfängen’, p. 102. See Miroslav A. Huska, *Liptovskí murári*, Liptovský Mikuláš 1968, pp. 66-97 for the Slovak masons and bricklayers in Budapest during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See for the position and social structure of the Slovak population in Budapest also Vladislav Zapletal, *Počátky slovenského sociálně demokratického dělnického hnutí v Budapešti 1893-1900*, Prague 1969, pp. 3-4.

²²⁹ Hapák, ‘Zu den Anfängen’, pp. 91-107; Hapák, ‘Robotnícke hnutie v rokoch 1867-1890’, pp. 444-78 passim; Pavel Hapák, ‘Robotnícke hnutie na konci storočia’, in *Dejiny Slovenska II. Od roku 1848 do roku 1900*, eds L. Holotik and J. Mésároš, pp. 523-48 passim; Pavel Hapák, ‘Postavenie robotníctva’, in *ibid.*, pp. 420-43; Glettler, ‘The Slovaks’, pp. 302-3, 317.

participation of Slovak workers (for instance building workers in Budapest) in the organisation of financial support for Slovak schools and the cultural institute *Matica slovenská*. That a number of Slovak workers in Budapest played a part in the early labour movement is shown by the fact that the first socialist worker organisation in Budapest, the General Workers' Society established in 1868, had its official name and declaration of principles printed in three languages (Magyar, German, and Slovak); one of its founders, János Hrabje, was probably of Slovak origin. But at least as significant was the establishment in Budapest in 1870 of the 'Czechoslav Workers' Society', not long after also known as the 'Czechoslovak Workers' Society'. This ethnic association, which existed for two decades, started as a mutual aid society of Czech and Slovak workers, but also had the function of a social and educational club where they could speak their own languages. Thus practically from the outset of labour organisation in Budapest and Hungary, there were both interethnic and 'ethnic-separatist' forces at work in the social world of the multinational working class. Although a considerable proportion of Slovaks in Budapest tended to assimilate to Magyardom, and although many of them joined interethnic (but Magyar-dominated) worker organisations like the trade unions, there was also a degree of 'cultural stability' reinforcing the tendency to form ethnically specific worker societies. These could be exclusively Slovak or organisations of Slovaks, Czechs, and other Slavs, because a considerable number of Czechs and Poles (at least several thousand) were employed in Budapest as well. Indeed, it has been estimated that around 1875 almost a quarter of Budapest's craft and industrial workers were non-Hungarians, mainly Austro-Germans, Czechs, and Germans from the German Empire. In Hungary as a whole, fifty-five percent of industrial workers were non-Magyars, including Hungarian Germans, Slovaks, and foreigners. One-third of Hungary's industrial production and industrial working class were concentrated in the Budapest area, a proportion that only slightly decreased during the following decades, when other centres, including Pressburg, acquired some importance as well. According to Hungarian statistics, the Magyar proportion of the industrial working class increased from forty-five percent in the 1870s to two-thirds in 1910, but this was lower than the Magyar proportion of the overall urban population (seventy-five percent), showing that the non-Magyar industrial working class remained disproportionately large. Although the Hungarian government discouraged the formation of non-Magyar worker societies and preferred the Slovaks and other ethnic groups to join Hungarian labour organisations, which it believed it could more effectively control, the phenomenon of ethnic particularism was difficult to eradicate even in Magyar-dominated Budapest. This was the result, partly of natural language barriers and limits to Magyar assimilatory power, partly of the prevailing national sentiment among people who wanted to keep their own language and cultural identity and who in some cases became increasingly nationalistic. For Slovak labour leaders in Budapest, however, bi- or trilingualism was an imperative, because they had to know Magyar, used their own mother tongue, and perhaps had some knowledge of German, the Central European socialist *lingua franca*. There is evidence that they addressed worker crowds both in Slovak and Magyar.²³⁰ Slovak social democratic leaders had to avoid provoking the suspicion of

²³⁰ Hapák, 'Zu den Anfängen', pp. 100, 107; Pavel Hapák, 'Zájem slovenského robotníctva o národný život v druhej polovici 19. storočia', in *Slováci a ich národný vývin*, ed. Július Mésároš, Bratislava, 1966, pp. 229-45; Pavel Hapák, 'Vzťahy medzi slovenskými a českými robotníkmi v Budapešti v druhej polovici 19. storočia', in *O vzájomných vzťahoch Čechov a Slovákov*, ed. Ludovít Holotík, Bratislava, 1956, p. 231; Ruprecht Steinacker, 'Zur Rolle der Deutschen in den Anfängen der ungarländischen Arbeiterbewegung', *Südostdeutsches Archiv* 17-18, 1974-5, p. 134; Glettler, 'The Slovaks', pp. 315, 317; Erényi, 'Origins', pp. 21, 28; Erényi, 'Activities', p. 56. According to Hapák ('Vzťahy medzi slovenskými a českými robotníkmi') the Czechoslovak Workers' Society in Budapest was originally Czech and called 'Czechoslav Workers' Society'; it is likely that the term 'Czechoslav' was gradually replaced with 'Czechoslovak' as those involved in it became accustomed to the phenomenon of Czech-Slovak worker association. This would mean that the society was one of the first examples – perhaps the very first – of working class 'Czechoslovakism' in Austria-Hungary.

the Hungarian authorities, which were always on their guard against 'pan-Slav' troublemakers. But at the same time they had to extend their influence among the many Slovaks in Budapest who only had a limited understanding of Magyar, apart from their belief that Slovak should be a language of agitation of the labour movement as a matter of principle. It was a language that was indispensable for mobilising Slovaks, Czechs, and other Slav workers and for making them feel that their languages were respected by the movement. Most important of all, the use of the Slovak, Serb, and Romanian languages by the Hungarian labour movement was not only a question of the spoken word, of their use at public meetings, but even more crucially of the written word, of the social democratic press.

It was precisely this question of the use of the Slovak language as a tool of the social democratic press and propaganda that became a major source of tension in the HSDP. The question is of fundamental importance, because it shows that the 'national question' was not an abstract ideological or political issue, or a product of irrational sentiment and ethnic hatred, but a concrete, practical problem of labour organisation and propaganda activity, even if it is true that national sentiments played their part in the background. It was this concrete issue of the use and status of different languages in the agitation and propaganda of the Hungarian working-class movement that was to decide whether an interethnic labour movement, or an 'international' social democratic politics, would be possible at all. It is true that the Hungarian authorities, both for political and practical reasons, tried to discourage the growth of the non-Magyar press and the public use of non-Magyar languages. Thus, when in 1894 a social democratic mass meeting in Budapest in support of the demand for universal suffrage was addressed by a Slovak speaker in addition to a Magyar and a German one, his speech was interrupted by police officers who said he must stop speaking because they could not understand him. Because it was the task of the police to observe and supervise social democratic meetings, and because it was not easy always to prevent or prohibit the public use of non-Magyar languages, the Budapest police began to send observers to worker meetings who understood Slovak, evidence that the Slovak labour element had become increasingly important. Since it was impossible to ban the Slovak language from the streets of multiethnic Budapest, it was not possible either to completely ban non-Magyar newspapers, several of which were published in the Hungarian capital. However, the government frequently took action against the non-Magyar press and non-Magyar organisations if it felt that they became too politically audacious, in particular Slav worker associations and their 'pan-Slav' propaganda activities. In 1894 it dissolved a recently established Czech workers' society, which also included Slovaks, shortly thereafter the Slovak workers' society *Jednota* (Unity), which had been joined by many Czechs as well. In 1897 Slovak, Czech, and Polish socialists in Budapest founded the Slav workers' association *Pokrok* (Progress), but again the government intervened and disbanded it. In 1899, after the disappearance of the first Slovak social democratic newspaper in Budapest *Nová doba*, Slovak social democrats founded the 'General Slovak Workers' Educational Society' in a desperate attempt to regain some space for Slovak autonomous activity, but also against this initiative the authorities decided to act.²³¹ Despite all these repressive measures, there were no reasonable political arguments for the HSDP leadership not to support the publication of non-Magyar social democratic newspapers as part of the general propaganda

²³¹ Hapák, 'Robotnícke hnutie na konci storočia', p. 535; Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, pp. 90-1, 116; Július Mésároš, 'Uhorský režim a Slováci po vyrovnaní', in *Slovensko. 1. Dejiny*, ed. Ján Tibenský, Bratislava, 1978, p. 589; also Zapletal, *Počátky slovenského sociálne demokratického dělnického hnutí*, pp. 24-7 for cooperation of Czech, Slovak, and Polish workers in Budapest. In 1897 there existed a 'Czechoslav Section of the Workers' Educational Society' in Budapest, but it is not clear for how long it could continue; see SNA, SD, File 340. From the same source it appears that until after 1900 there continued to exist in Budapest some Slovak building workers' societies, probably with a social rather than a trade union character. This may be explained by the constant presence of large numbers of (both seasonal and permanent) Slovak building workers in the city, who always built a specific ethnic milieu within the local working class.

activity of the ‘international’ party.

The party’s founding congress in 1890 had called for the distribution of socialist propaganda material also in the non-Magyar languages. In the spring of 1891, a Slovak brochure was distributed in Budapest entitled ‘Proclamation to the working class of Hungary’ announcing the impending May Day celebration, but nothing happened in terms of promoting a permanent Slovak newspaper. Significantly, the brochure – which was probably written by Slovak socialists rather than by the HSDP leadership – called on all Slovak workers who understood Czech to read Czech socialist newspapers, which frequently reached Budapest from Prague, Vienna, and other cities in Cisleithania. Shortly before May Day 1895, a similar ‘Appeal to the Slovak working people’ was distributed in Budapest. The brochure also referred to the difficult social position of the peasants and to the national oppression of the Slovak people; one of its authors, Ján Polóni, a leading Slovak social democrat, was sentenced to three months imprisonment for political ‘incitement’.²³² At meetings of Slovak workers in Budapest the question of Slovak-language propaganda and the need for a Slovak social democratic newspaper became an important point of discussion. In their difficult situation, one of dual (class and national) oppression and limited political experience, the Slovak social democrats tended to rely on the support of the relatively small number of Budapest Czechs, people who often had gone through the school of the more experienced Czech labour movement in Austria. The reality and significance of this support strengthened the conviction of Slovak social democrats that the Czechs and Slovaks were ‘brother nations’, who had to act in close cooperation in the class and national struggles. An influential Czech social democrat in Budapest in the 1890s was the coppersmith František Tupý, who interestingly enough carried on correspondence with one of the leading Slovak progressive middle-class intellectuals in central Slovakia, Fedor Houdek. Houdek was a prominent member of the group of young Slovak nationalists around the journal *Hlas* (The Voice), the so-called ‘Hlasists’, who were protagonists of Czech-Slovak unity and a socially progressive Slovak nationalism.²³³ Along with men like Vavro Šrobár and Milan Hodža, Houdek was one of the few contemporary Slovak ‘bourgeois intellectuals’ who showed an active interest in the Slovak working-class movement. At the end of May 1897, Houdek was informed by Tupý that Czech help for the Budapest Slovaks had been crucial when, only a few weeks ago, they had started a Slovak social democratic newspaper to help build the Slovak working-class movement. It was an excellent example of the ‘Czech-Slovak mutuality’ that the Hlasists (who were about to launch their own newspaper) were propagating themselves, and an illustration of the practical and political importance of the Czechoslovak national idea. After the Slovak social democratic paper had been started in May 1897, Tupý impressed upon Houdek that their initiative – their working-class opposition to social and national oppression and their launching the Slovak language into the Budapest public domain, something he argued more timid and conservative Slovaks did not

²³² Miloš Gosiorovský, *Príspevok k dejinám slovenského robotníckeho hnutia*, Bratislava 1951, p. 17; Pavel Hapák, ‘Slovenské robotnícke hnutie v Budapešti v deväťdesiatych rokoch XIX. stor.’, *Historický časopis* 3, no. 1, 1955, p. 60; Hapák, ‘Robotnícke hnutie na konci storočia’, pp. 532-4; Mésároš, ‘Uhorský režim’, p. 589. During the years 1895-8 several other leaflets and appeals like this were distributed in Budapest. Some of them called for special Slovak worker meetings to be held, or referred, in addition to specific worker grievances, to the social and cultural grievances of the Slovak people as a whole, to the fact that they had ‘no rights’ and ‘no schools’. See SNA, SD, File 340.

²³³ For the Hlasists see, e.g., František Bokes, *Dejiny Slovákov a Slovenska od najstarších čias až po prítomnosť*, Bratislava 1946, pp. 300-2; Jozef Butvin, ‘Diferenciácia slovenskej buržoáznej politiky’, in *Dejiny Slovenska IV (od konca 19. stor. do roku 1918)*, ed. Pavel Hapák, Bratislava, 1986, pp. 199-205; Milan Podrimavský, ‘Križa liberálneho režimu 1901-1904’, in *Na začiatku storočia 1901-1914 [Slovensko v 20. storočí. I]*, ed. Dušan Kováč, Bratislava, 2004, pp. 133-4; Owen V. Johnson, ‘Newspapers and Nation-Building: The Slovak Press in Pre-1918 Slovakia’, in *Bildungsgeschichte, Bevölkerungsgeschichte, Gesellschaftsgeschichte in den böhmischen Ländern und in Europa. Festschrift für Jan Havránek zum 60. Geburtstag*, eds Hans Lemberg et al., Vienna, 1988, pp. 169-71.

dare to do – was clear proof of their being ‘good patriots’ in their own socialist way. According to Tupý, indeed, they were ‘a hundred times’ better patriots than most of the anti-socialist Slovak politicians. The latter’s allegations that the Slovak social democrats were unpatriotic or ‘un-national’ (*beznárodní*) he strongly rejected by explaining that, although their socialist ideals were international, their concrete actions were in the interest of the nation and, therefore, by no means unpatriotic.²³⁴ Thus, three crucial features of the Slovak labour movement were becoming apparent already at this early stage: the important role of Czech support and Czecho-Slovak cooperation; the urge to stress that the Slovak social democrats were – like the Czech social democrats – both socialists and fighters for national emancipation; and the tendency – similar to the Magyar social democrats – to forge political links with progressive elements amongst their ‘own’ non-working-class nationalist movement.

At the HSDP Annual Congresses of 1895 and 1896 Slovak delegates demanded that the party pay more serious attention to the publication of Slovak-language socialist literature and a Slovak newspaper; this demand was accepted by a majority of delegates, but afterwards not acted upon.²³⁵ Making promises and giving token support by means of congress resolutions, but then failing to take practical steps, became a familiar pattern that was repeated many times the following years. In 1895 it was agreed that the HSDP’s central organ *Népszava* would publish a weekly Slovak supplement of two pages, but this promise was not carried out. When the Party Congress of 1896 again failed to bring practical results, the Slovak and Czech social democrats in Budapest decided to act independently of the party leadership. They formed a special committee led by Tupý to start a Slovak-language newspaper that was to be called *Nová doba* (The New Era), ‘organ of the Slovak working class’. The first issue of this monthly paper appeared on 1 May 1897, and two weeks later a second (but short-lived) monthly called *Zora* (The Morning Star) was started as well. The publication of two monthly papers instead of one bimonthly was decided, because it was much cheaper; a large amount of money had to be paid as security when starting a weekly or bimonthly newspaper in Hungary. Almost everything depended on money, and the truth was that the Slovak and Czech communities in Budapest were so poor that the second monthly *Zora* had to be closed down after two issues, with only *Nová doba* continuing for a longer period of time.²³⁶ The enthusiasm with which *Nová doba* was received by Slovaks in Budapest and elsewhere was shown by the many letters of working-class readers, proof of the great need for a Slovak-language social democratic newspaper. It was significant that the paper also published articles written by leading Hlasists, and that it presented national-cultural demands like that for Slovak-language schools in Hungary. It was no less significant that at May Day parades in Budapest in 1897 Slovak, Czech, and Polish workers carried flags and banners both in their national colours and in red. It was an illustration of the ease with which workers belonging to the subordinate nationalities would combine loyalty to their national cause with the idea of socialism. The boost given to the Slovak labour movement by *Nová doba* could be seen in the

²³⁴ SNA, SD, File 340: František Tupý, Budapest, to Fedor Houdek, Ružomberok, 28 May 1897. The correspondence between the social democrats and Houdek continued for many years. On 5 May 1905, for example, Emanuel Lehocký wrote to Houdek from Pressburg that, given their ‘political affinity’, they should cooperate in the field of Slovak education; he also informed Houdek about the Slovak social democrats’ attempts to achieve a more autonomous position within the HSDP. Men like Houdek were interested in the social democrats’ ideas and publications; in February 1909, Edmund Borek wrote to Houdek that he would send him twenty copies of a new social democratic brochure. See SNA, SD, File 340. See also Gosiorovský, *Príspevok*, pp. 18, 20, 25; Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, pp. 89-94, 304-7. See for Tupý *Slovenský biografický slovník*, 6 vols, Martin, 1986-94, vol. 6, pp. 137-8.

²³⁵ Hapák, ‘Robotnícke hnutie na konci storočia’, pp. 537-8.

²³⁶ *Literatúra a revolúcia. Robotníctvo a kultúra 1897-1923*, ed. Štefan Drug, Bratislava, 1981, p. 449; Gosiorovský, *Príspevok*, p. 18; Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, pp. 92-7; Hapák, ‘Slovenské robotnícke hnutie v Budapešti’, pp. 62-6; Zapletal, *Počátky slovenského sociálne demokratického dělnického hnutí*, pp. 33-45; Fraňo Ruttikay, *Robotnícka žurnalistika v sociálnom a národnom hnutí Slovákov (1897-1918)*, Martin 1980, pp. 29-57.

fact that at the HSDP Congress in June 1897 an unprecedented number of ten Slovak delegates were present, and that for the first (and the last) time one of them, *Nová doba*'s editor Gustáv Švéni, was elected to the party's Executive Committee. When in 1898 the Hungarian government began to expel social democrats from Budapest who were citizens of Austria, including Czechs like Tupý, *Nová doba*'s editorial staff was seriously weakened. The increased repression and financial problems meant that the paper would have to close down soon; its last issue appeared in July 1899. In this last issue the Slovak social democrat Štefan Martinček wrote: 'No one cares about us, not even the leadership of the party.'²³⁷ It was a painful grievance, which may have encouraged the Slovak social democrats to learn how to stand on their own feet, however. Although the Czechs played an important role in the early Slovak working-class movement, the number of experienced Slovak labour leaders was slowly but surely growing as well, both in Budapest, Pressburg, Vienna, and the smaller provincial cities of Slovakia. After 1900 the centre of the Slovak social democratic movement shifted from Budapest to Pressburg, with nearby Vienna emerging as another city where the Czechs and Slovaks were developing practical working-class cooperation and Czecho-Slovak solidarity. Both in Budapest, Vienna, and Pressburg the Czechs and Slovaks were important minority groups, and in all three cities their social democratic organisations were pursuing a dual policy of national and working-class struggle. In the long run Budapest proved to be a place where the pressure of assimilation, government repression, and the dominance of the Magyar HSDP leadership were all factors that unfavourably affected the aspirations of non-Magyar social democrats. But of course Budapest, with its large Slovak working class, remained an important city for the Slovak labour movement. Especially during the crucial years 1904-6, the Slovak social democratic leadership in Pressburg kept in close touch with Slovak labour leaders in the Hungarian capital, especially with Matej Šuňavec, an important organiser among the numerous Slovak building workers.²³⁸ In Vienna the situation was somewhat different because of the strength of the Czech social democrat movement and the greater political tolerance of the Austrian authorities. The Slovaks in Vienna were represented in the Czech Social Democratic Party, but also had their own political life. Thus, in November 1908 a special conference was held of 'Hungarian Slovaks living in Lower Austria', organised by the social democratic 'agitation committee' of Slovaks in Vienna.²³⁹ Supported by the Vienna Czechs and Slovaks it was Pressburg, however, with its large and stable Slovak working class, which was destined to become the centre where the Slovak social democratic movement could establish a permanent political base for its increasingly 'separatist' activities.

At the HSDP Annual Congresses of 1901 and 1902 Slovak delegates appealed to the party leadership again to help establish a Slovak press organ, which was all the more urgent after the demise of *Nová doba*. Because they met with little understanding on the part of the Magyar social democrats, who seemed unable to grasp the ramifications of the national problem in Hungarian society, the advocates of an autonomous Slovak social democratic organisation on the Czech model became increasingly influential. At the HSDP Congress in 1902 the Slovak delegate Štefan Martinček, echoing his statement of 1899 quoted above, accused the party leadership that it was not really interested in the non-Magyar workers. He said that 'the Slovak workers know very well... that as long as the non-Magyar workers are not organised, there can be no victory for

²³⁷ Gosiorovský, *Príspevok*, pp. 19, 22; Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, pp. 98, 115 for the quotation of Martinček; Hapák, 'Robotnícke hnutie na konci storočia', pp. 537-40, 548; Hapák, 'Slovenské robotnícke hnutie v Budapešti', p. 65; Zapletal, *Počátky slovenského sociálne demokratického dělnického hnutí*, pp. 46-9; Mésároš, 'Uhorský režim', pp. 589-90; Fraňo Ruttkay, 'Noviny a časopisy (do roku 1918)', in *Slovensko. 4. Kultúra - 2. časť*, ed. Karol Rosenbaum, Bratislava, 1980, p. 578.

²³⁸ SNA, SD, File 340. See for Matej Šuňavec *Slovenský biografický slovník*, vol. 5, p. 546.

²³⁹ SNA, SD, File 340.

social democracy in Hungary'.²⁴⁰ His demand that (as in 1897) at least one Slovak should be elected to the party's Executive Committee was not accepted, another indication that the HSDP leadership did not have the intention to take adequate action to address Slovak grievances. In 1903, the HSDP Annual Congress adopted a new Party Programme speaking among other things of 'equality of the nations', but a fresh attempt by the Budapest Slovaks to start a Slovak newspaper failed because of insufficient support by the party. Only the Hungarian Building Workers' Union, which had to accommodate large numbers of Slovaks in the building industry and its own Slovak Budapest membership, thought it wise to support the publication of a Slovak-language newspaper. Thus on 1 September 1903 the first Slovak trade union paper, *Staviteľský robotník* (The Building Worker), was started, but this modest and rather irregular publication could not answer the need for a proper social democratic press organ.²⁴¹ The combination of the growing influence of the Czech social democrats and growing Slovak frustration about the HSDP had a radicalising effect especially in Pressburg, where Czech newspapers were read and control by the Budapest party leadership was weaker. The autonomist example of the Czechs strengthened the resolve of the Slovaks to step up the pressure on the Hungarian party and to demand support for a Slovak newspaper as well as a degree of Slovak political autonomy within the party. Perhaps it was hoped that the threat of 'Czech-style' separatism would induce the HSDP to make concessions. It was significant that at the crucial Eleventh HSDP Congress in April 1904 it was not a Slovak from Budapest but Emanuel Lehocký, the most prominent Slovak social democratic leader in Pressburg, who led the Slovak delegates in demanding once again that the party should act in the matter of supporting a Slovak press organ. The congress accepted the older proposal to publish a weekly Slovak supplement to *Népszava*, but as usual no concrete action followed. However, the congress also agreed to support the establishment of an 'Executive Committee for the Organisation of Slovak Workers', which already had been formed by Slovak delegates during the congress and which was to be responsible for Slovak-language propaganda and the publication of a Slovak newspaper. It would seem that the HSDP leadership – which to the chagrin of the Slovaks argued that it did not have the financial means to fully support non-Magyar press organs – consciously lay the responsibility and a major part of the financial burden for publishing a Slovak newspaper in the hands of the Slovak Committee (also, of course, the responsibility for a possible failure of this project). This 'autonomist concession' was not without political risks, but the party tried to keep political and organisational control by restricting the committee's competencies and financial means. The Slovak Committee, however, was politically and financially supported by the Czech party organisations in Vienna, even though their financial resources were limited as well.²⁴² Thus, on 1 October 1904, a new Slovak social democratic monthly, *Slovenské robotnícke noviny* (Slovak Worker News), the first permanent newspaper in the history of the Slovak labour movement, was launched. This happened not with the help of the

²⁴⁰ Quoted in Július Mésároš, 'Na prahu nového storočia', in *Slovensko. I. Dejiny*, ed. J. Tibenský, p. 601; Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, p. 136. Viliam Hotár's claim that at the HSDP Congress in 1901 Paul Wittich, German delegate of the Pressburg party organisation, did not support the proposal to help publish a Slovak newspaper (see also chap. 3, note 58) does not prove that Wittich rejected Slovak aspirations *per se*; as Hotár writes himself, after 1905 Wittich cooperated with the Slovak social democratic leader and editor of *Slovenské robotnícke noviny* Emanuel Lehocký. See Viliam S. Hotár, name index (almost a brief biographical dictionary) in *Kapitoly*, eds S. Sikora et al., p. 486. Wittich himself claimed in 1951-2 that he had 'always cooperated with Lehocký' since the moment he met him in 1901. See the interview with Paul Wittich, December 1951, January 1952: SNA, SD, File 206.

²⁴¹ Mésároš, 'Na prahu', p. 601; Gosiorovský, *Príspevok*, p. 28; Erényi, 'Activities', pp. 60-1 for sections from the HSDP Party Programme of 1903; Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, pp. 298-303 for the complete programme; Ruttkay, *Robotnícka žurnalistika*, pp. 66-72 for *Staviteľský robotník*.

²⁴² Mésároš, 'Na prahu', p. 601; Gosiorovský, *Príspevok*, pp. 27-9; Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, pp. 136-40; Pavel Hapák, 'Robotnícke hnutie na začiatku 20. storočia', in *Dejiny Slovenska IV (od konca 19. stor. do roku 1918)*, ed. P. Hapák, pp. 237-40.

HSDP, but with that of the Czechs. In September 1906 a second monthly, *Napred* (Forward), was started, but it was only in May 1909, again thanks to Czech support, that the Slovaks could begin publishing a weekly (*Robotnícke noviny*). The first issue of *Slovenské robotnícke noviny* had some harsh things to say about the HSDP: ‘The party leadership does not do anything in the matter of a Slovak newspaper. The sooner the workers of the different nationalities in Hungary were Magyarised, the more pleased it would be. Only we, Slovak social democrats, do not agree with this private national policy of our Magyar comrades. And therefore nothing remains but to stand on our own feet.’²⁴³ The Slovak social democrats, indeed, believed that the HSDP leadership had a ‘private’ (i.e., a hidden and unofficial) policy of encouraging the assimilation of the non-Magyar working class or at least speculated that this assimilation would take its ‘natural’ course as time progressed. Therefore, the party refused to support a policy bolstering the status of other languages than Magyar. It was this Slovak belief, or impression – and, of course, the causes triggering it –, that in the final analysis lay at the heart of the problem of national antagonism in the Hungarian social democratic movement – an antagonism that was especially inflamed by the controversy over press and language policy. The fact that the new Slovak newspaper was an independent Slovak initiative rather than one initiated or actively supported by the HSDP meant that it was likely to become a platform for a highly critical and increasingly autonomous Slovak social democratic organisation.

National antagonism was on the rise despite the fact that the HSDP had adopted a new Party Programme in 1903 that condemned national oppression and discrimination, and that the party had decided to ‘officially’ tolerate a degree of autonomous non-Magyar political activity. This more pragmatic attitude was brought about – as in the case of the Austrian party – by the force of circumstances rather than by conviction. However, the HSDP never followed the example of Austrian federalist policy and continued to adhere to the concept of the unitary party, even if it increasingly became an illusion as ethnic tensions intensified. Although the party adopted a programme demanding the ‘equality of all nations’ in Hungary, this was hardly an improvement compared with the old programme of 1890, and the right to ‘national self-determination’ (i.e., autonomy) that the Second International had proclaimed at its London Congress in 1896 was not even mentioned. The party regarded the national question as a purely linguistic and cultural problem that it hoped could be resolved by the introduction of universal suffrage and full democracy, and by the implementation of the Hungarian Nationalities’ Law of 1868. The Hungarians were even less inclined than the Austrians to make a serious analysis of the national problem, and of the historical, political, and social mechanisms of national inequality and national oppression. Like the Austrian party the HSDP was in favour of keeping the Dual Monarchy as a large economic unit and arena of the class struggle; for the same reason the party defended the model of multinational working-class organisations. But at the same time the party was influenced by Magyar nationalism and, unlike the Austrians, did not conceive of the multinational state as an opportunity to experiment with federalist reforms. The party rejected the national-federalist organisation model introduced by the Austrian party in 1897, partly because of the different, unitary structure of the Hungarian State, partly because of the relative weakness of the Hungarian working-class movement, especially among the national minorities. However, this attitude was also rooted in the Magyar leadership’s unwillingness to federalise the party, or indeed the country, in any case. Arguably, the organisational structure of the labour movement, especially of the trade unions, precluded its federal reorganisation according to nationality, a

²⁴³ *Slovenské robotnícke noviny*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1 October 1904, also quoted in *Literatúra a revolúcia*, ed. Št. Drug, p. 42. By 1907 *Slovenské robotnícke noviny* and *Napred* had together a circulation of more than eight thousand copies, making the Slovak social democratic press the third largest in the field of the Slovak political press. See Ľubomír Lipták, *Slovensko v 20. storočí*, 2nd edn, Bratislava 1998, pp. 35, 39. See also Ruttkay, *Robotnícka žurnalistika*, p.94ff., 137ff.

situation that did not essentially change when the Party Congresses of 1903-5 modified the party's by-laws to accommodate the new Nationality Committees. The committees were only meant to be non-Magyar 'agitation committees', mainly concerned with making propaganda among those non-Magyar workers who were less easily brought within the orbit of the mainstream labour organisations and the Magyar-language press. Their status was seen as similar to that of the regional party groups, such as the West Hungarian party organisation. The Party Congress of 1904 passed another ambivalent resolution on the national question. It referred to the national oppression of the non-Magyar workers but at the same time downplayed its significance, stressing that their oppression as workers was of greater importance than their oppression as non-Magyars, and that they were essentially in the same position as the Magyar workers.²⁴⁴ The fact that the competencies of the Nationality Committees of the Slovaks, Germans, Serbs, and Romanians were not clearly defined was one reason among many for the deterioration of the relationship between the Slovak Committee in Pressburg and the party leadership in Budapest. The Slovaks now had their own 'Executive Committee' that was responsible for Slovak-language agitation, propaganda, and organisational efforts, but the powers suggested by the term 'executive' hardly existed in reality and the committee lacked the political and financial means to function effectively. Therefore, the Slovak social democrats' dissatisfaction did not go away, and in 1905, the year of unprecedented Slovak activity and self-confidence, they decided, despite their financial and organisational weakness, to attempt a leap forward.

In January 1905 *Slovenské robotnícke noviny* wrote that the HSDP 'must be fundamentally reorganised, because the party's meetings do not suit us Slovaks at all'. This was a reference to the fact that at most party meetings only Magyar or German was spoken, and that little interest was shown in the specific problems of the Slovak workers. In April 1905 the paper spoke of the 'failure' of the Nationality Committees, which it attributed to the party's 'neglect' of the non-Magyar workers and their 'biased chauvinistic treatment by the Magyar comrades' and the party leadership.²⁴⁵ At the HSDP Annual Congress in 1905 the party's Executive Committee was criticised once again for its lack of interest in and support for the organisation of the non-Magyar working class. Several delegates, including some Magyars, argued that greater autonomy for the non-Magyars was the only way to improve the situation. The Nationality Committees were too weak to function effectively without active party support, but at the same time they were not independent enough to pursue their own, possibly more effective policies. The complaints about insufficient HSDP support, on the one hand, and about the Slovak Committee's lack of autonomy on the other, were only seemingly in conflict. A choice had to be made between two options. Either the party give serious support to the Slovak (and the other non-Magyar) social democrats and keep them under its wings, or it should allow them a substantial degree of independence, including the right to collect membership fees of Slovak trade union and party members to make this autonomy feasible. Without active support or a proper financial basis, Slovak autonomism would remain relatively impotent and the Slovak movement would get stuck in a grey zone somewhere between the two options. That this – and the gradual assimilation of the Slovaks – was precisely what the HSDP leadership was aiming at must have been about the worst fear of the Slovaks. The party did not want the Slovaks to leave (to avoid undercutting in the labour market), but at the same time, so the Slovaks complained, it did not want to support them and recognise their special needs as non-Magyar-speakers in the different labour organisations. The reason why even some Magyars wanted greater autonomy for the Nationality

²⁴⁴ F. Mucsi, 'Die Kämpfe für die organisatorische Reform der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Ungarns, 1900-1918', *Études historiques hongroises* 1975, 2 vols, vol. 2, pp. 124-6.

²⁴⁵ Quoted *ibid.*, p. 127. See also Erényi, 'Activities', p. 74, who writes that the work of the Nationality Committees 'was impeded by the narrow-mindedness of the party leadership', which did not take the national-minority workers 'seriously enough'. Mucsi and Erényi, Hungarian historians, are remarkably frank about the problem of Magyar chauvinism in the labour movement.

Committees was that it seemed the only way to make the organisation of the non-Magyar workers more effective, and thus to improve the protection of wage levels. If little could be expected from the central party organisation, the only way out was to grant more powers and competencies to the non-Magyar committees. However, a proposal to this effect was not accepted by a majority of delegates at the Annual Congress in 1905, and was also rejected by the party's Executive Committee.

In response to this, the Slovak Committee decided to call a special congress of Slovak social democrats. This congress, held in Pressburg in June 1905, was attended by forty-four delegates from a dozen localities, who represented twenty-four branches of various trade unions and 'free organisations', mainly in western Slovakia. It was also attended by three representatives of the Czech Social Democratic Party and a representative of the HSDP. On the initiative of the Czechs it was decided to establish an autonomous Slovak Social Democratic Party on the Czech model. After the congress *Slovenské robotnícke noviny* wrote that an independent Slovak party was the first step towards a federal reorganisation of the HSDP on the Austrian model. It also noted that *Népszava* had not reported on the Slovak Congress at all, and that the Budapest party leadership had first shown disinterest, then active opposition to the Slovak step, although it decided to send an observer. The HSDP now started negotiations with the Pressburg Slovak leaders who dominated the new organisation, but without result. The Slovaks made an attempt to collect the party and trade union fees of the Slovak social democratic membership, which would have to be withdrawn from the central financial procedures controlled by the HSDP and the Hungarian trade unions. This attempt failed because of the Slovaks' political and organisational weakness, and because the HSDP succeeded in making the free organisations in the different trade unions prevent the building of separate national sections and keep control of the collection of membership fees. The free organisations, illegal but conditionally tolerated unofficial party branches that were functioning as a substitute for a normal party membership structure (which was officially forbidden), had a strategic position in linking the party and the trade unions. They took charge of those trade union activities, such as strike action or political propaganda, that the unions were forbidden to carry out themselves; at the same time, they represented a Social Democratic Party structure at grass-roots level responsible for collecting party membership fees and keeping the unions in line with party policy. There was thus a close overlapping of the trade union and political movements, with both hinging on the free organisations but with the unions acting as the legal face of the movement and physically dominating HSDP congresses. Indeed, a majority of trade unionists – though not all of them – were also members of the party, which therefore existed *de facto* as a mass organisation, even if officially it did not have a mass political membership; moreover, the collection of trade union and party fees were closely linked. This peculiar Hungarian situation meant that it was very difficult for political 'separatists' like the Slovak social democrats to get hold of their 'own' trade union members and their 'own' trade union and party fees. The unions remained unified multiethnic organisations – in contrast to Austria, they did not split along national lines before 1918 – loyal to the HSDP, many of whose leaders were trade union functionaries themselves.²⁴⁶ Because the Slovaks failed to get hold of trade union revenue and the Czechs were unable to fill the gap, there was no financial basis for an independent Slovak working-class organisation, and in March 1906 the Second Slovak Social Democratic Congress decided to re-affiliate with the HSDP. The Slovak party organisation was downgraded to its old status of Nationality Committee, which was to look after the special linguistic, cultural, and propaganda needs of the Slovak workers and which was now called the 'Slovak Executive Committee of the HSDP'. However, it continued to be a relatively autonomous organisation – even if its competencies remained ill-defined – that was able to

²⁴⁶ The concrete conditions and interethnic relations within the individual trade unions are a research topic that needs to be examined more thoroughly.

publish its own critical newspaper, conduct its own propaganda and organisational activities among Slovak workers, and hold its own congresses. At HSDP congresses it was represented as a separate organisation, which to some extent made up for the fact that Slovak trade unionists were seldom delegated to these national congresses. Thus, to a limited extent the Hungarian labour movement developed its own brand of national pluralism – less complete than in Austria, but similarly marked by controversies over how to deal with the national question.²⁴⁷

At the HSDP Annual Congress in June 1906 the status of the Nationality Committees was confirmed. They were to be in charge of party agitation in their own languages, but it was stressed that non-Magyar workers should be organised in the existing multiethnic organisations, especially the trade unions. Separate ethnic organisations should be formed only in those cases where no political or trade union branches had thus far existed. The financial needs of the committees, the importance of which cannot be overestimated, were to be covered partly by the HSDP, partly by special contributions of the organised national minority workers themselves. Since these ambiguous arrangements went as far as the party leadership was willing to go, the non-Magyar social democrats may have felt that they had no other option but to accept them, especially in view of their own financial and political weakness. Probably the greatest concession they had won from the party was the factual recognition that they were in control of their own newspapers, a crucial factor that enhanced the trend of national fragmentation. Nevertheless, the attempts to federalise the Hungarian party and to achieve a greater measure of fairness and national equality in internal party life continued. Interestingly, at the First Congress of the German Nationality Committee in 1907, a proposal was submitted to divide the HSDP into a Magyar, a German, and a Slovak party; it was a symptom of the growing cultural-autonomist tendencies that also existed among the German social democrats. At the Third Slovak Social Democratic Congress in March 1908 a federal reorganisation of the party was proposed as well, even though according to an internal report the Slovak Committee represented only 6,346 party members. The latter were dispersed over a large number of trade union branches in thirty-five localities and local Slovak political committees in six cities. Delegates to the congress argued that their weakness was not just their own fault, but also the result of the presence of ‘chauvinists’ in the HSDP leadership. Nevertheless, at the HSDP Congress in 1908 the competencies of the Nationality Committees were slightly enlarged. In ‘mixed-language areas’, some party and trade union organisations were now allowed to create separate language groups within the same organisation; membership fees of national minority workers could be written in the membership books in their own language (typically a detail of considerable significance in the context of

²⁴⁷ Gosiorovský, *Príspevok*, pp. 32-7; Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, pp. 165-77, and 308-21 for the resolutions passed by the five Slovak social democratic conferences held between 1905 and 1914; Pavel Hapák, ‘Vzostup robotníckeho hnutia pod vplyvom prvej ruskej revolúcie’, in *Dejiny Slovenska IV (od konca 19. stor. do roku 1918)*, ed. P. Hapák, pp. 248-60; Mésároš, ‘Na prahu’, p. 620, who writes that the Slovak move was an ‘act of protest’ rather than an ‘attempt at national separatism’ as the HSDP leadership saw it; Marián Hronský, ‘Robotnícke hnutie na Slovensku do roku 1918’, in *Kapitoly*, eds S. Sikora et al., pp. 34-5; Mucsi, ‘Die Kämpfe’, p. 128. See for the question of the ‘free organisations’ and the, perhaps, unique structure of the Hungarian social democratic movement (also briefly discussed in chap. 2) Ernő Kabos, ‘The Links between the Social Democratic Party of Hungary and the Trade Unions from 1890 to 1914’, in *Studies on the History of the Hungarian Trade-Union Movement*, eds E. Kabos and A. Zsilák, pp. 47-9, 52-60; Erényi, ‘Activities’, pp. 70-1; Keith Hitchins, ‘Hungary’, in *Formation of Labour Movements*, eds M. van der Linden and J. Rojahn, pp. 358-61. Hitchins writes (p. 365) that the Slovaks had their own trade unions, but this is not really true, because most Slovak trade unionists were members of the all-Hungarian organisations, even when they participated in autonomous Slovak political activities at the same time. As for the number of trade unionists in Hungary: in 1908, a high point, the Hungarian Trade Union Council claimed it represented 140,000 workers. The HSDP may have had some 100,000 members (largely trade unionists also paying party fees), but reliable figures are difficult to get given the semi-legal nature of party membership. After 1908 membership figures temporarily declined – cf. ‘Chronology’, in *Studies...*, eds E. Kabos and A. Zsilák, pp. 296-7; Erényi, ‘Activities’, pp. 57, 72; Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, pp. 153, 184, 206-7, 244, for various figures.

Central Europe's ethnolinguistic struggles); half of the minority workers' fees could be automatically set apart for the work of the Nationality Committees; and delegates of the committees could attend meetings of the HSDP Executive Committee, where they had the 'right of advice' on nationality issues. However, the degree of autonomy of national minority workers in the trade unions remained limited, and the important free organisations remained undivided and outside the scope of the Nationality Committees. Therefore, these concessions did not end the criticism of the Slovak and other Nationality Committees, whose organisational competencies and political leverage continued to be restricted by the existing power structure benefiting the Magyar majority. Moreover, the political and administrative language in the multiethnic party and trade union branches remained – apart from a city like Pressburg – almost exclusively Magyar, and only trade unionists who knew the Magyar language were delegated to trade union and party congresses.²⁴⁸

After 1908 the HSDP was not prepared to make further concessions, which strengthened the arguments of those who wanted to ignore its meetings altogether and focus exclusively on the Slovak organisation itself. This resurgent separatism reached a high point during the years 1909-10. In September 1909 the Slovak Committee, expressing its frustration about the manifold problems in the Hungarian labour movement, proposed to establish a separate Slovak trade union organisation uniting all Slovak organised workers in the different industries and localities of Hungary. The organisation should be an autonomous section of the Hungarian Trade Union Council, which would have to form a special Slovak secretariat overseeing the organisation of Slovak workers. No doubt the Czech policy of complete trade union separatism, which was carried into effect during the years 1909-11, was an inspiring example here, but there could be no question of the Slovaks doing the same thing as the much stronger Czechs. The Slovak social democratic newspaper *Robotnícke noviny*, the weekly successor to *Slovenské robotnícke noviny*, openly supported the Czechs in their conflict with the Austrian party and the Second International itself (whose Copenhagen Congress of 1910 condemned the Czechs' trade union 'separatism' and supported the old model of interethnic trade unionism). In September 1910 a heated debate erupted between *Robotnícke noviny* and the HSDP's central organ *Népszava*. On 13 October 1910 *Robotnícke noviny* wrote that under the existing conditions the problems of the Nationality Committees were 'insoluble', which sounded like a threat to follow the Czech example of trade union and political separatism. The Slovaks now made a number of further demands. These included the establishment of Slovak sections in the Hungarian trade unions; a policy of providing them with Slovak or Czech social democratic literature; adequate Slovak representation on the trade union councils, sick funds, and other institutions; obligatory knowledge of the Slovak language on the part of trade union officials dealing with Slovak workers; and publication of trade union journals also in the Slovak language. In 1911, after protracted negotiations, the HSDP Executive Committee and the Hungarian Trade Union Council promised to give more financial assistance to help strengthen Slovak trade unionism, to support the renewed publication of Slovak trade union journals (notably those of the building and leather workers), and to encourage Slovak trade unionists to take subscriptions to *Robotnícke noviny*.²⁴⁹ However, the result was hardly spectacular in terms of strengthening the Slovak labour movement or improving relations between the Slovak and Magyar social democrats. Suspicion of Czech-induced separatism prevailed on the Magyar side, suspicion of HSDP indifference to the needs of Slovak workers on the other side.

²⁴⁸ See the previous note.

²⁴⁹ Mucsi, 'Die Kämpfe', pp. 129-32; Gosiorovský, *Príspevok*, pp. 47-8, 55; Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, pp. 187-99; Mésároš, 'Na prahu', p. 647; Hronský, 'Robotnícke hnutie', pp. 37-8; Pavel Hapák, 'Zápas robotníckej triedy za politické práva (1908-1914)', in *Dejiny Slovenska IV (od konca 19. stor. do roku 1918)*, ed. P. Hapák, pp. 314-23.

After 1910 the deepening antagonism between the HSDP leadership and non-Magyar labour leaders was also promoted by broader political developments, in particular the resurfacing tendency of the Hungarian social democrats to seek a political alliance with the democratic wing of the Independence Party, led by the parliamentary opposition leader Gyula Justh. This traditional Hungarian socialist strategy had already been revived shortly after 1900, but during the period of hostility between the ‘Coalition Parties’ and the HSDP (1905-10) it was suspended. Now the aim was a broad parliamentary and extra-parliamentary alliance for franchise reform and universal suffrage. But because Justh’s party contained a strong Magyar nationalist element, which induced the HSDP to tactically tone down its ‘internationalism’ and to ignore the political demands of the national minorities, it badly affected relations with the non-Magyar social democrats. The latter were encouraged to seek a further rapprochement with their ‘own’ democratic nationalists, and the Slovak social democrats entered the road that would eventually cause their leader Emanuel Lehocký to participate in the formation of a Slovak National Council in May 1914. This did not mean they refrained from criticising nationalist politicians, especially if the latter were believed to betray democratic goals and principles. On the contrary, during a special conference of the Slovak social democrats in April 1910 Milan Hodža and other Slovak members of the Hungarian parliament were severely attacked for allegedly neglecting the fight for universal suffrage, and even relations with the more radical Hlasists were not always easy. At least as important as an ally for the Slovak social democrats were, of course, the Czech social democrats. Political and financial support for the Slovak labour press by the Czechs in Vienna, later also from Prague, gradually increased, and the Slovaks openly expressed their sympathy for their Czech comrades, to the chagrin of the HSDP leadership. *Robotnícke noviny*, since May 1909 a weekly paper thanks to Czech help in raising the substantial amount of money required as security, wrote in October 1910 that no such support or understanding could ever be expected from the Magyar social democrats. In April 1911 the paper suggested that no Slovak membership fees should be sent any longer to the HSDP in Budapest, because for the Magyars the Slovaks were ‘nothing’ and, as far as the Magyars were concerned, they should not even be allowed to speak their own language at worker meetings. These were harsh words. On 2 March 1911 *Robotnícke noviny* wrote: ‘The Slovaks and the Czechs are one people.’ This did not augur well for the HSDP as an ‘international’ party, or for ‘Historical Hungary’, and was revealing evidence of the Slovak social democrats’ growing Czechoslovak orientation.²⁵⁰

Another factor working to the advantage of Slovak autonomism was the situation in Pressburg and the position of the regional German-dominated West Hungarian party organisation. The Pressburg party tolerated and occasionally supported the efforts of the Slovaks to publish their own pamphlets, newspapers, etc., organise Slovak cultural and educational activities, and conduct their own agitation and organisational work. The significance of this becomes more apparent when comparing Pressburg conditions with the situation in the regional Upper Hungarian party organisation based at the city of Košice (Kassa, Kaschau), where there was no similar understanding for the specific needs of Slovak workers and Magyar dominance was as blatant as in Budapest.²⁵¹ In Pressburg, after 1900 the political centre of the Slovak labour movement, it was possible for the Slovak social democrats to be quite frank about their political perspective of combining the working-class struggle for socialism with the struggle for Slovak national freedom and equality. To their social democratic comrades of other national groups they explained why they identified with the Slovak cause. In debates with Slovak nationalists they explained – as Tupý was already doing in 1897 – that although they were part of an international movement, Slovak social democracy was not ‘un-national’ or anti-national. In February 1907 an

²⁵⁰ Erényi, ‘Activities’, pp. 77-80; Mucsi, ‘Die Kämpfe’, p. 133; Gosiorovský, *Prispevok*, pp. 52-6; Glettler, ‘The Slovaks’, pp. 311-2, 317-9.

²⁵¹ Mésároš, ‘Na prahu’, pp. 619-21.

article in *Slovenské robotnícke noviny* argued that although the social democrats had to organise on an international basis against international capital, they could not close their eyes to the reality that the nation could only develop its political and cultural potential (which was also in the interest of the working class) if it preserved its ‘individuality’. The anonymous author – probably the Czech socialist Edmund Borek, who acted behind the scenes as adviser to the editors of *Slovenské robotnícke noviny* – evidently wanted to distinguish between the emancipatory patriotism of the subordinate nations and the national chauvinism of the dominant nations in the Dual Monarchy. He distanced himself from the ‘chauvinism’ of the Magyar and Austro-German social democrats, claiming that the latter ‘regard themselves as the only competent leaders of social democracy in Austria and are calling every movement for equality of the other Austrian nations... a split and an expression of separatist desires’.²⁵² The Magyar social democrats were making the same kind of claim about the Slovaks.

Thus, while the Slovak social democrats had to defend themselves against anti-socialist Slovak nationalists on the one side, they had to explain their position to the ‘Magyar comrades’ on the other side. In September 1910 *Robotnícke noviny* published a noteworthy article, ironically entitled ‘Slovak separatism’, dealing with the concrete linguistic, cultural, and sociopolitical problems dominating the everyday lives of Slovak workers in Hungary. ‘The Magyar comrades should have acknowledged that the Slovak working-class movement has greater needs than the Magyar movement’, the article observed. ‘The Magyar worker went to a school that may be poor, but where at least he learned something, because he was instructed in his mother tongue; he can go to industrial and technical schools where he learns something in a comprehensible language, he has scientific socialist literature, socialist brochures, a socialist daily newspaper... he has the possibility to educate himself through the theatre and to participate in other cultural achievements. In the organisations lectures, educational courses are arranged for him where he is raised in a socialist spirit.’ The difference with the situation of the Slovak worker was great: ‘But the Slovak worker? He goes to a school where he is instructed in a language he does not understand, and as a result he is mentally blunted. In his youth he learns very little of the Magyar language, and not much more during the rest of his life. He has no technical or other schools where he could further educate himself in a comprehensible language; he cannot go to a Magyar school, because most of the lectures he would not understand.’ Even worse was the fact that the Hungarian labour movement itself was not much better. ‘He [the Slovak worker] does not have socialist literature, newspapers, brochures, and must be content with *Robotnícke noviny*, which is the only means to teach him about socialism. He does not hear Slovak lectures, no educational courses are organised for him... He cannot educate himself through the theatre, for Slovak theatre production is poor.’ As a consequence, the Slovak social democrats had to make on their own a contribution to Slovak cultural efforts: ‘From this every sensible person can see how big are the challenges for Slovak social democracy, whose task is to liberate the Slovak working people from the chains of economic slavery, political lawlessness, and cultural backwardness.’²⁵³ The almost hopeless social and cultural position of the Slovak working class, which was far more difficult than that of the Magyar workers, was seen as a product of the policy of Magyarisation and national oppression, but also of the disinterest and neglect on the part of the HSDP. Interestingly, the effects of the Magyarisation of primary education on the non-Magyars was also described in 1908 by the Hungarian party leader Zsigmond Kunfi, perhaps the only prominent Magyar social democrat who was able and willing to critically evaluate Hungarian cultural policies. In a publication entitled ‘The Crimes of our Popular Education’ Kunfi (a former teacher) showed that

²⁵² *Slovenské robotnícke noviny*, 1 February 1907. The explicit reference to the Austrian situation suggests that it was a Czech, probably Borek, who wrote this article. See for the important figure of Edmund Borek, Ruttkay, *Robotnícka žurnalistika*, pp. 176-87; *Slovenský biografický slovník*, vol. 1, pp. 292-3.

²⁵³ *Robotnícke noviny (RN)*, 22 September 1910.

the time spent by non-Magyar children on learning the Magyar language without acquiring a proper knowledge of it 'impeded the relative efficiency of the other branches of instruction'. In other words, it tended to offset the useful effects their education otherwise might have had. Oszkár Jászi, in a Magyar work entitled 'The Evolution of the Nation States', published in 1912, similarly argued that the forcible Magyarisation policy in Hungarian schools was one of the chief causes of 'the pitiful cultural backwardness' of the non-Magyar peoples.²⁵⁴ Arguably, the Hungarian social democratic movement could have done more to help improve the cultural and educational level of the organised non-Magyar workers, but it seems that, outside the Pressburg region and a few other areas, not much was done in this field. Vis-à-vis the Magyar dominance in the labour movement, the Slovak social democrats were not defending an abstract national ideology but the concrete national rights and cultural needs of the Slovak working class. To the extent that the HSDP leadership insufficiently appreciated Slovak cultural efforts and concerns, it was regarded as an obstacle to the national progress of the Slovaks. The idea that the Magyar party leadership was actually co-responsible for the attempted assimilation of the Slovaks to Magyardom and saw the labour movement as a means of helping to bring this about, was never far from the minds of Slovak or Czech social democrats.

An example of this was provided by HSDP leader Manó Buchinger, the official representative of the HSDP Executive Committee at the last pre-war Slovak Social Democratic Congress in April 1914. A major issue discussed at this congress in Pressburg was the national question, and Emanuel Lehocký, the chairman of the Slovak Committee, gave a long speech on it. Lehocký argued that the equality of the nations of Hungary could not be achieved by a policy of collaboration with official Hungarian politicians or Austrian public figures like Archduke Franz Ferdinand, as a Slovak politician like Milan Hodža seemed to believe. It could only be achieved by relying on 'their own national strength', by 'a tough and purposeful national struggle leading... via democracy to national equality and autonomy'.²⁵⁵ Lehocký supported a policy of national-federalist reorganisation of the HSDP and of the Dual Monarchy and was influenced by the ideas of Bauer and Renner, although it is not clear how well he was acquainted with the details of their analyses and propositions. But more importantly, the congress also discussed the attitude of the HSDP to the Magyarisation policy and its consequences for the Slovak working class, and on this sensitive issue Buchinger defended the party and its central organ *Népszava* against Slovak criticism. According to a report in *Robotnícke noviny* of 16 April 1914, Buchinger said: 'If *Népszava* observes that the trade union organisations assimilate more people than all the Magyarisation Societies together, it is its duty to say this and it should be reproached if it did not do so, for the Magyar comrades in the trade unions are leading indifferent workers to the community of Magyar culture.'²⁵⁶ Thus Buchinger did not only defend the freedom of *Népszava* to write about the Magyarisation process that was going on in the trade unions, but actually defended this process. Indeed, he equated the workers' uplift with their assimilation and described the process of Magyarisation as the only alternative to a condition of 'indifference' and disorganisation. At the same time, he denied that the Slovak workers were losing their national feelings in the process but typically also stressed that the HSDP 'did not regard it as its task' to solve the national question in Hungary. The possibility of uplifting Slovak workers by means of Slovak-language political and educational work was apparently not regarded by Buchinger (himself a Magyarised German) or other HSDP leaders as a serious alternative. Perhaps it was not realistic from their Budapest perspective since in the Hungarian capital in 1914 the Slovaks were only a small proportion of the settled working class and the number of Slovak seasonal labourers relatively large. However, in those urban and industrial centres where the Slovaks were

²⁵⁴ Jászi, *Dissolution*, p. 330, also for the quotation of Kunfi.

²⁵⁵ Quoted in Gosiorovský, *Príspevok*, p. 62.

²⁵⁶ Quoted in Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, p. 222.

a substantial section of the permanent working-class population (such as Pressburg), their Magyarisation was by no means a foregone conclusion and made even more unlikely by the growing national consciousness of Slovak organised workers. On the eve of the First World War, the trend of national disintegration of Hungary's multiethnic labour movement was reinforced by growing political aspirations like cultural and administrative autonomy. At the Slovak Social Democratic Congress in April 1914, indeed, a series of demands on the national question were explicitly formulated, most notably the right to use the Slovak language in public life and local administration in Slovak areas.²⁵⁷ In May 1914 Lehocký was invited to participate in a meeting of Slovak political leaders to prepare the formation of a Slovak National Council (SNC), a multiparty political organ that was to fight for political reforms and Slovak national rights. At the insistence of the Hlasists, the most progressive group among the non-socialist factions of the Slovak national movement, the Slovak social democrats accepted the offer to take a seat on the SNC. It meant that they were accepted as a serious political factor and as an integral part of the Slovak national movement. The outbreak of the war delayed the activation of the SNC, but four years later it was established again.

Two days after the Austrian declaration of war against Serbia on 28 July 1914, *Robotnícke noviny* commented on the new situation that the Slovak people and the Slovak working class 'would have to see it through'. Before 28 July the paper had warned against war hysteria and even tried to explain the assassination of Franz Ferdinand as the outcome of the long-standing subjugation of the Slav nations, but now it did not dare to protest against the war. However, it refrained from enthusiastically supporting Austria-Hungary the way the HSDP did, which was carried away by Magyar popular chauvinism and, like the Austrian party, was openly defending the war as a crusade against reactionary Russia and Serbia.²⁵⁸ Nevertheless, during the first months of total war *Robotnícke noviny* began to identify more closely with the fate of the Habsburg Empire, arguing on at least one occasion that in a war like this the proletariat had an interest in the victory of its own country. On 22 October 1914 it wrote: 'It must naturally be an interest also of the working class that the state in which she lives, which gives her the possibility to develop and to be useful, should win.'²⁵⁹ A combination of intimidation by the authorities and a degree of loyalty to the empire caused that even the Czechs, to the surprise of both the friends and enemies of the empire, scarcely expressed pro-Slav or pro-Serb sentiments during the first phase of the war.²⁶⁰ The reticence of the Slovak social democratic press was also caused by the fact that many were called up for the army, including Edmund Borek, the Czech adviser to

²⁵⁷ Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, pp. 219-25; Hapák, 'Zápas robotníckej triedy', pp. 330-3; Mésároš, 'Na prahu', p. 650; Hronský, 'Robotnícke hnutie', p. 40; Anna Magdolenová, 'Emanuel Lehocký – zakladateľ slovenskej sociálnodemokratickej strany Uhorska', in *Kapitoly*, eds S. Sikora et al., p. 76. See also Miroslav Pekník, 'Cesty čechoslovakizmu pred prvou svetovou vojnou', in *Pohlady na slovenskú politiku*, ed. Miroslav Pekník, Bratislava, 2000, p. 529, who writes that after 1911 the intensive Slovak-Czech cooperation 'temporarily stagnated', referring to František Kolář, 'Postoj československé sociální demokracie ke slovenskému dělnickému hnutí před první světovou válkou', *Sborník historický* 35, 1988, pp. 142-3. But the latter only says that after 1911 there was a slightly less intensive Czecho-Slovak social democratic collaboration because both groups were absorbed by their own problems; their special relationship however continued.

²⁵⁸ Gosiorovský, *Príspevok*, pp. 65-6; Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, pp. 229-31; Pavel Hapák, 'Vznik vojny a jej dôsledky pre politický a hospodársky život', in *Dejiny Slovenska IV (od konca 19. stor. do roku 1918)*, ed. P. Hapák, pp. 404-5; Hronský, 'Robotnícke hnutie', p. 41; Zoltán Halász, *Kurze Geschichte Ungarns*, Budapest 1974, p. 201; Erényi, 'Activities', p. 84; T. Erényi, 'Die Frage der Revolution und der Reform in der Arbeiterbewegung Österreich-Ungarns um die Jahrhundertwende', *Études historiques hongroises* 1975, vol. 2, pp. 57-9.

²⁵⁹ Gosiorovský, *Príspevok*, pp. 71-2; Ján Michalec, 'V prvej svetovej vojne', in *Slovensko. 1. Dejiny*, ed. J. Tibenský, p. 656; Ruttikay, 'Noviny a časopisy', p. 582.

²⁶⁰ David Pazdera, 'The Mobilisation of 1914 as the First Step on the Road to the Creation of the Soldier of the Great War', *History and Warfare. The Journal of the Historical Institute of the Army of the Czech Republic*, Special Issue 2002, p. 75.

Robotnícke noviny behind official editor Lehocký. But there remained a difference between the reaction to the war of many Austro-German and Magyar social democrats, and the reaction of the Slovaks, Czechs, and other Slavs. The latter, no doubt imbued with a sense of Slav brotherhood, did not indulge anti-Russian and anti-Serb declarations the way the Germans and the Magyars did. The Austro-German and Magyar social democrats, much in accordance with the old attitude of Marx and Engels, regarded Czarist Russia as the head of the international counter-revolution. When Russian armies entered Austro-Hungarian territory, even Otto Bauer saw in this ‘a mortal danger to the struggle of the European working class’ and stressed the right, even the duty of national defence.²⁶¹ Only by 1917 the political climate began to change among most sections of the social democratic movement, and by the end of that year *Robotnícke noviny* began to write about the right to national self-determination and the national demands of the Slovaks. The Austrian social democratic newspaper *Arbeiter-Zeitung* began to distance itself from the military and political interests of the empire, calling for peace and moderating its tendency to glorify the ‘supra-national state’. Otto Bauer, returned from Russian captivity, even began to criticise this idea of the supra-national empire, which had been propagated by the Austrian Social Democratic Party to legitimise its support for the war effort. He began to argue that the liberation struggle of the Slav nations had entered a new stage because the aim of full independence had replaced the older perspective of cultural autonomy. Bauer saw his task as mentally preparing the Austrian party for the national revolution of the Slav nations and the end of the Habsburg Monarchy. In April 1918 an article expounding his new national programme was published in the Austrian social democratic theoretical journal *Der Kampf*. ‘Social democracy must recognise the right to self-determination of the nations’, he wrote, including the right to state independence of the Czechs, the Poles, the South Slavs, and others. At the same time he called on the Slav social democrats ‘to fight any attempt of their national bourgeoisie to enslave other nations in the name of freedom for their own nation’. The forcible incorporation of the Germans of Bohemia and Moravia into a Czecho-Slovak state he clearly saw as an example of this. Initially, the majority of Austrian social democrats regarded Bauer’s views as belonging to the realm of fantasy. When looking back in 1920 he wrote that ‘in 1918 the Austro-German workers still saw the liberation struggle of the Slav nations as pure “nationalism”, if not high-treason’.²⁶² Karl Renner and other Austrian party leaders at first opposed Bauer’s views, but by October 1918 many had come to accept them. On 3 October 1918 the Austrian Social Democratic Party issued a declaration recognising the right to self-determination of ‘all nations’. On 17 October Otto Bauer wrote in the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* that ever since the Brünn Congress of 1899 the Austrian social democrats had fought for the reconstitution of Austria, for a ‘federal state of free nations’; now they were ‘overtaken by history’.²⁶³

In contrast to the Austrians, the HSDP had developed no concrete ideas on what to do in the event of a collapse of the Habsburg Empire, which might also mean the disintegration of Historical Hungary. The Hungarian party had no men of the calibre of Otto Bauer – not even Zsigmond Kunfi could be regarded as such – who could warn it for what might lay ahead and impress the need upon it to prepare for the national revolution of the non-Magyar nations. Indeed, not only did the Hungarian party refuse to accept Bauer’s new national programme recognising the right of the Slav nations to unconditional self-determination, but it had not even accepted the older programme of national-cultural autonomy and federalist reform of the empire. The idea of reorganising the party on national-federalist lines like in Austria was always opposed by the HSDP leadership, who argued that it would lead to disintegration and ‘separatism’, to a number of ineffective, only loosely connected ethnic parties. It was claimed it did not suit Hungarian

²⁶¹ Braunthal, ‘Otto Bauer’s Lebensbild’, pp. 23-4; Erényi, ‘Activities’, p. 86.

²⁶² Braunthal, ‘Otto Bauer’s Lebensbild’, pp. 27-30.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-1, also p. 284.

conditions and in addition would be viewed as an action against the integrity of the state, provoking repressive government measures. Although at the Twentieth HSDP Congress in 1913 Kunfi had spoken of the ‘double yoke’ of social and national oppression keeping down the non-Magyar workers, and had urged the Executive Committee to issue a proclamation on the need for national equality and local self-government, the political integrity of Historical Hungary was not a matter for discussion, and as usual the party had dissociated itself from the federalist idea and Otto Bauer’s perspective of full national-cultural autonomy.²⁶⁴ The slogan of transforming the Habsburg Monarchy into a democratic ‘federation of free peoples’ was sometimes raised by the Hungarian social democrats as well, but mainly for rhetorical reasons. It did not mean that Hungary should be fundamentally reorganised but that the ‘great economic unit’ of the multinational state as a whole should be held together. The HSDP accused the non-Magyar national movements of wanting to break up this multinational state, but shortly before the war the party itself became more critical to it. However, the party was unable to understand, or unwilling to recognise, the political significance and democratic character of the non-Magyar national movements.²⁶⁵ As late as October 1918 it was almost exclusively interested in the freedom and independence of Hungary and the Magyars vis-à-vis Austria and the Habsburgs. Like the Slovaks and others the HSDP actively opposed the war since 1917, but its Magyar national perspective did not change in the process. Therefore, although the strikes and agitation against the war were supported by all Hungarian workers, they were also accompanied by national-separatist tendencies and growing alienation between the Magyar and non-Magyar elements of the Hungarian labour movement.

In June 1917 the HSDP sent a delegation of six men to the international socialist peace conference in Stockholm; it only included Magyars. *Robotnícke noviny* commented a few months later that the Hungarian party leaders did ‘not want the world to know about us’, and spoke of an ‘inquisition’ against the Slovaks. In Stockholm the HSDP delegation asked support for the preservation of Austria-Hungary after the war, rejecting complete self-determination or state independence for the different nations. The Czech delegation, on the other hand, declared it wanted a ‘Danubian federation’ of equal and sovereign nation-states to take the place of the old Habsburg Empire. One of these nation-states should be a ‘Czech independent state’ that also included the Slovak ethnic territory in Hungary. Indeed, the Czech social democrats – who clearly had abandoned the idea of a more limited cultural autonomy, though not the notion of a loose confederation in Central Europe – demanded the ‘political unification of all members of the Czech nation living on a compact territory, that is the Slovaks too’.²⁶⁶ It was the first occasion on which the different social democratic parties collided on the international level over the question of the post-war order in Central Europe. Shortly after the Stockholm Conference the HSDP leadership became aware that a more subtle tactics was needed if Historical Hungary was to be saved. Emanuel Lehocký was offered membership in the Hungarian party delegation to the next international socialist peace conference, which was expected to be held in the near future (but never took place). However, a condition for his inclusion was that in his capacity of Slovak representative he should defend the territorial and political integrity of Hungary. After consultation with the Czech social democrats, the Slovaks decided to decline participation in the

²⁶⁴ As Erényi shows, the HSDP followed the Austrian party in demanding ‘democratisation’, but not in its perspective of national federalisation; see Erényi, ‘Die Frage’, p. 49.

²⁶⁵ Erényi, ‘Activities’, pp. 67-8, 73-4, 85-6.

²⁶⁶ František Soukup, *28. říjen 1918*, 2 vols, Prague 1928, vol. 1, p. 539; Jan Galandauer, *Vznik Československé republiky 1918. Programy, projekty, perspektivy*, Prague 1988, p. 291. The declaration of the delegation of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party presented to the Stockholm Conference on 27 June 1917 was signed by the three Czech party leaders Habrman, Němec, and Šmeral; see Galandauer (*Vznik...*), pp. 289-93. In 1918 the idea of a ‘Danubian federation’, or a federalised multinational state, disappeared from the programme of the Czech and Slovak social democrats, but it was kept alive by people like Jászi.

Hungarian delegation. *Robotnícke noviny* of 4 October 1917 argued: ‘The Magyar social democrats have always talked big about internationalism and democracy, but with their actions they have trampled on the most elementary principles of democracy.’ The Slovaks were ‘not prepared to tolerate domination’ by the Magyars any longer; the ‘Magyar comrades’ could not represent them on the international level.²⁶⁷ On 15 October 1917 the Slovak (but Czech-born) social democrat Václav Chlumecký observed in *Robotnícke noviny* that ‘the Magyar comrades... are and remain stubborn chauvinists’. On 29 November he wrote that the Slovak social democrats had to pursue their own policy, which was to be based on their own national needs. On 20 December 1917 *Robotnícke noviny* even warned the party leadership in Budapest that it ‘should get rid of the habit of calling everyone a pan-Slav who strives for justice’; the Slovaks in the labour movement were social democrats as much as the Magyars, and had ‘a duty to their nation too’. The paper also made the concrete demand that Slovak should be an administrative language in the trade unions in Slovakia.²⁶⁸ Thus from the second half of 1917 the process of national fragmentation in the HSDP seemed to be entering its final stage. The Slovak historian Marián Hronský has argued that even ordinary Slovak party members were under the impression that the HSDP was ‘degrading’ the socialist idea to ‘Magyarism’, that the party’s socialism was a mix of pseudo-internationalism and Magyar chauvinism. Its ‘internationalism’ meant in practice that the non-Magyars had to forget their nationality; it had the function of neutralising their national consciousness.²⁶⁹

The Slovak social democrats were paying more and more attention to the struggle for national freedom. The objectives of democracy and self-determination, though always in combination with social justice, moved irresistibly to the fore. Already in November 1917 *Robotnícke noviny* demanded the right to national self-determination, referring to the historic moments of 1848, 1861 (when the Slovaks presented a memorandum to the Hungarian diet), and subsequent occasions when the Slovaks had demanded autonomy in their own ethnic region of northern Hungary. ‘Let us learn for God’s sake something from historical development and the all-European events! Democratic equality, social justice, and the right to “self-determination” will be our slogan.’²⁷⁰ One of the most outspoken men was Chlumecký, who argued that the Magyars believed that only Magyar culture could raise the Slovak workers and that over the course of time ‘Magyar democracy’ would extinguish Slovak national feeling. According to Chlumecký the only Magyars with different ideas were Lajos Mocsáry and Oszkár Jászi; all the others, including the democrats and the socialists, supported the idea of Magyarism. ‘We Slovak social democrats have warned our Magyar comrades a hundred, a thousand times, that against their fanatical chauvinism we will fight even more fanatical than all the other [Slovak] national parties.’ He claimed that a ‘new era’ was beginning in which the Slovak social democrats could only cooperate with the Magyars if they accepted the new principle of equality and autonomy.²⁷¹ The Slovaks continued to press for a ‘total reorganisation’ of the HSDP. This should bring greater Slovak representation at party congresses and party organs, a higher status of the Slovak language, more competencies for the Slovak Committee, and greater Slovak influence on how Slovak party and trade union fees were used.²⁷² But because the Hungarian party did not show

²⁶⁷ Quoted in Hronský, ‘Robotnícke hnutie’, pp. 45-6.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-8; *Sociálne a národné hnutie na Slovensku od Októbrovej revolúcie do vzniku československého štátu (Dokumenty)*, ed. Ľudovít Holotík, Bratislava, 1979, document 9, pp. 53-6, document 14, pp. 65-7; Ruttkay, *Robotnícka žurnalistika*, p. 507.

²⁶⁹ Hronský, ‘Robotnícke hnutie’, pp. 46-7; Marián Hronský, *Slovensko pri zrode Československa*, Bratislava 1987, pp. 141-4.

²⁷⁰ *RN*, 22 November 1917.

²⁷¹ *RN*, 10 January 1918. See for Chlumecký, Ján Pleva, *Václav Chlumecký*, Martin 1958; *Slovenský biografický slovník*, vol. 2, pp. 462-3.

²⁷² *RN*, 21 February 1918.

much willingness to mend its ways, and the Czechoslovak movement was gradually getting stronger, the cooperation with radical Slovak nationalists increased. Articles appeared in the Slovak social democratic press written by men like Vavro Šrobár, who was fully aware of the increased importance of the social democrats as a factor in the Slovak national movement. Highly significant in this regard were the events of May Day 1918, when in the Slovak town of Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš, a centre of the Slovak national movement, Šrobár was the principal speaker at a meeting organised by the local social democrats and attended by some two thousand people. A resolution passed at this meeting demanded among other things the right to self-determination of 'the Hungarian branch of the Czechoslovak nation'.²⁷³ The Mikuláš meeting caused anxiety amongst the Hungarian authorities. The Hungarian Prime Minister, Wekerle, wrote to the Minister of the Interior that a Czech newspaper in Brünn (Brno) had reported that those present at the meeting were singing a 'Czechoslovak hymn'. Moreover, the resolution adopted at the meeting spoke of 'support for building Czechoslovak unity' and Šrobár had been speaking about the war aims of 'their enemies', thus indirectly propagating the Czechoslovak state idea. In a word, the meeting was a 'political demonstration' for Czechoslovak unification. The Hungarians regarded this idea as extremely dangerous and the prime minister urged the Minister of the Interior to suppress it immediately, although he did not believe that the Slovak people had been won for the Czechoslovak movement yet.²⁷⁴ But neither Hungarian action against the influence of the Czechs, nor repressive measures against Slovak nationalists like Šrobár, could halt the trend of developments and growing self-confidence of the Slovaks.

In the view of the Slovak social democrats, the Slovak national movement was a 'natural', defensive, democratic movement representing a particular stage in the social and political evolution of the nation to which their working-class constituency belonged. The national revolution could only improve the position of the Slovak working class, and Slovak defensive nationalism was seen as something fundamentally different from the nationalism of the ruling nations. An article in *Robotnícke noviny*, entitled 'The worker and nationality', explained that 'nationalism is not everywhere the same thing... one type pursues the subjugation of nations with another language, the assimilation of its neighbours, another type only defends the bare life of the nation as a natural thing. It is one thing to say that the German or Magyar language is necessary for a particular [other] race, quite another thing that I want no one to forbid me to speak the language in which I was raised in my home'. Defensive democratic nationalism could be and should be part of the Slovak social democratic programme. As *Robotnícke noviny* explained: 'Nationalism as a given feeling or desire to defend the cultural rights of a nation is actually a minimum social programme as long as there are political parties of one nation demanding the oppression of another nation... On the territory inhabited by the Slovaks two forms of nationalism meet: one is supported by the whole apparatus of the state and is trying to silence other languages, the other defends itself against oppression. The Slovak proletariat can take only one side.' The implementation of the Slovak national programme would promote the struggle for socialism, because it would mean 'the spread of education, which is a better foundation for the class programme'. A new, post-war Socialist International could only be established on the new political foundation of national equality and acceptance of the 'minimum national demands' of small nations like the Slovaks. The working class of these small nations would 'serve as an

²⁷³ Gosiorovský, *Príspevok*, pp. 75-84; Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, pp. 266-70, 327-8; Hapák, 'Vznik vojny', pp. 406-9; Pavel Hapák, 'Narastanie revolučnej situácie po Októbrovej revolúcii', in *Dejiny Slovenska IV (od konca 19. stor. do roku 1918)*, ed. P. Hapák, pp. 434-44; Pavel Hapák, 'Vzostup revolučnej nálady v lete 1918 a v predvečer rozpadu Uhorska', in *ibid.*, pp. 469-73; Pavel Hapák, 'Robotnicke hnutie a otázka rozpadu Uhorska', in *ibid.*, pp. 475-81; *Sociálne a národné hnutie*, ed. E. Holotík, document 66, pp. 129-30, documents 97-8, pp. 170-4; see for some of these events also chapter two.

²⁷⁴ *Sociálne a národné hnutie*, ed. E. Holotík, document 147, pp. 272-4.

example' in the new International.²⁷⁵ However, if this perspective of *Robotnícke noviny* was to become reality, and international social democracy was to be united again on a new political basis, the old pseudo-internationalism of parties like the HSDP would first have to disappear in a painful process of multinational disintegration. The HSDP's desperate attempts to get the support of non-Magyar social democrats for a policy of preserving Historical Hungary were doomed to failure. The Party Manifesto of 8 October 1918 called for a 'new Hungary' within its old borders, and demanded peace, universal suffrage, and complete Hungarian independence from Austria. The new Hungary would be built on the basis of national equality and would end the national oppression of the non-Magyars, so the manifesto promised. It also mentioned the right to self-determination of the non-Magyar nations, but in the sense of language rights and cultural autonomy within the framework of Hungary, thus reducing it to the old Austrian concept of 1899, which apparently was now adopted at last. The Magyar social democrats, like the other Magyar political parties, were always at least one step behind the actual developments – the non-Magyar social democrats were already speaking of the unconditional right to self-determination including the right of secession from Hungary. The HSDP Manifesto claimed that a new Hungary built on the 'free association of free nations' would be more in the interest of these nations than a break-up of the old Hungarian State, but it was already too late for such wishful thinking. Although the manifesto was published in *Robotnícke noviny*, the Slovak social democrats – officially still a section of the HSDP – refused to support it. They believed that only the Slovak National Council, the representative of 'all Slovak political parties and social classes', could make decisions about the future of the Slovak nation, and they advocated close Czecho-Slovak cooperation, which might lead soon to the proclamation of a Czechoslovak state. Therefore, they also refused to attend the Extraordinary HSDP Congress in Budapest on 13 October 1918, where even an 'unofficial' Slovak delegate from Košice declared that the split between Slovaks and Magyars was unavoidable. The fact that Emanuel Lehocký refused to sign the HSDP Manifesto on behalf of the Slovak Committee as the party leadership had asked him to do, meant that the Slovaks openly rejected the policy of preserving Historical Hungary. Making a public declaration to that effect in Budapest might have exposed him to accusations of high treason; this was another reason why he or other 'official' Slovak representatives did not attend the HSDP Congress.²⁷⁶

By the end of October 1918 the process of disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy and Historical Hungary had become irreversible. *Robotnícke noviny* wrote that the 'German-Magyar chauvinists' were nervous because their position was collapsing and the liberation of the 'non-Magyar and non-German nations' imminent. The 'politics of Magyarisation' experienced its last moments and in 'the future Slovakia' there would be 'no lords to order us around in a strange language'.²⁷⁷ In Pressburg the Slovak social democrats joined bourgeois and Catholic politicians in establishing a local Slovak National Council, the first of its kind in Slovakia. Meanwhile, the German social democrats had to define their attitude to the unfolding Czechoslovak Revolution, the emerging German national movement in Hungary, and the Budapest-centred Hungarian Revolution itself. The chapters that follow will make a detailed analysis of these revolutionary events, focusing on the local level of trinational Pressburg. It is not possible to fully appreciate these events without understanding the trends and patterns of the half-century preceding it. During the era of Dualism the Magyars were the politically and culturally dominant nation in greater Hungary, Pressburg, and the Hungarian social democratic movement. The Germans were the socially and economically dominant group in the city of Pressburg, and the major element in the local social democratic movement. The Slovaks were a subordinate nationality in the northwestern part of multinational Hungary and an important group within the Pressburg working

²⁷⁵ RN, 29 August 1918.

²⁷⁶ RN, 10 October 1918, 17 October 1918; Hapák, 'Robotnícke hnutie a otázka rozpadu Uhorska', pp. 476-8.

²⁷⁷ RN, 24 October 1918.

class. This old Hungary now came to an end, but its death was slow and painful. It is not surprising that a national revolution that threatened to reverse the traditional positions of the different ethnic groups should also have enormous consequences for the working-class movement.

Part II: events, 1918-1919

Revolution and reorientation: October-December 1918

In the course of October 1918 it became increasingly clear that the Habsburg Empire and multinational Hungary had entered a crisis of historic proportions. The non-German and non-Magyar nations were breaking away from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as did the Magyars themselves in an attempt to renew the Hungarian state as a democratic entity independent of Austria – but one that should maintain its territorial integrity and close links with the non-Magyar minorities. However, the latter – the Slovaks, Ruthenians, Romanians, Serbs, Croats, and ethnic Germans of ‘Historical Hungary’ – were determined not to accept the continuation of the old ethnic power structure. On 30 October 1918 the Slovaks issued their Declaration of the Slovak Nation (‘Martin Declaration’), informing the world and the Hungarian government about their intention to form an independent state together with the Czechs. In fact, this happened before they heard the news of the proclamation of the Czechoslovak Republic in Prague on 28 October, thus making it an independent act of expressing the Slovak political will. Meanwhile, the ethnic Germans were organising a national movement of their own, which demanded cultural autonomy for the German population of Hungary.²⁷⁸ The sudden emergence of this movement in 1918 showed that below the surface disaffection among the Germans must have been slumbering for years, and that both nationalism and socialism – the latter being particularly strong among the Germans in a city like Pressburg – had been strengthened enormously during the First World War. It was remarkable how keen the Hungarian Germans were to appropriate the slogan of self-determination for their own ends, in imitation of the other nationalities, even though most of them also continued to stress their loyalty to Hungary. By October 1918 the more than two million Germans were the only non-Magyar nationality in Hungary who seemed to be content with a status of cultural autonomy instead of complete independence. On the one hand, this could be seen as the result of their dispersed pattern of settlement, marked by different concentrations of German-speakers in various parts of western, northern, southern, and southeastern Hungary. On the other hand, it also had something to do with their special status – if more in a psychological and cultural than a political and institutional sense – as a national group that was traditionally more respected by the Magyars than the other non-Magyar nationalities. However, the Germans too had been long-standing victims of national marginalisation, Magyar resentment, and unrelenting Magyarisation pressure.

The German national movement for cultural autonomy, which included the German social democrats as well, tended to be loyal to the new Hungarian government led by Mihály Károlyi. The Károlyi government represented a mix of democratic revolution, social reform promises, and

²⁷⁸ See for the Martin Declaration František Bokes, *Dejiny Slovákov a Slovenska od najstarších čias až po prítomnosť*, Bratislava 1946, pp. 361-7; Ivan Thurzo, *O Martinskej deklarácii*, Martin 1968, esp. pp. 11-46; *Sociálne a národné hnutie na Slovensku od Októbrovej revolúcie do vzniku československého štátu (Dokumenty)*, ed. Ľudovít Holotík, Bratislava, 1979, documents 228-39, pp. 396-414; Viliam Plevza, *Rok osemdesiaty*, Bratislava 1988, esp. pp. 72-7. See for the German national movement in Hungary Ludmilla Schlereth, *Die politische Entwicklung des Ungarländischen Deutschtums während der Revolution 1918/19*, Munich 1939, esp. chaps. 1-5; Gertrud Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen Pressburgs. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Umbruchperiode 1918/20*, Munich 1942, esp. pp. 57-148; Egbert K. Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei in den Jahren 1918-1929. Ein Beitrag zur Nationalitätenproblematik*, Munich 1971, pp. 33-9; Rudolf Melzer, *Erlebte Geschichte. Vom Umsturz 1918 zum Umbruch 1938/39. Eine Rückschau auf ein Menschenalter Karpatendeutschum*, Vienna 1989, pp. 12-4; Paul Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert der Karpatendeutschen in der Slowakei*, Stuttgart 1992, pp. 32-5; Gerald Schlag, *‘Aus Trümmern geboren...’: Burgenland 1918-1921*, Eisenstadt 2001. See for a longer-term perspective on the complex phenomenon of German national consciousness in Hungary since the nineteenth century *Land an der Donau [Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas 6]*, ed. Günter Schödl, Berlin, 1995, pp. 349-632.

the hope of saving Hungarian territorial integrity by making long overdue concessions to the national minorities. The German national movement was particularly important in four counties of western Hungary, where the city of Pressburg was one of its strongholds; it demanded an autonomous status for the German parts of this region as a compact territory. The German social democrats were a leading factor in the broad democratic movement – both all-Hungarian and ethnic-German – for political, social, and national reform in Hungary, and opposed the incorporation of the city and county of Pressburg into the new Czechoslovak state. In Pressburg they cooperated with democratic forces among the German and Magyar middle classes, to a decreasing extent with the national-revolutionary Slovak social democrats. Because the latter supported the consolidation and expansion of the Czechoslovak state in northwestern Hungary, interethnic social democratic cooperation became increasingly difficult after October 1918. Until December 1918, the German social democrats tended to support the movement of resistance in Pressburg against the annexation of the city by the Czechoslovak Republic. However, there was increasing confusion about the question of whether or not this annexation was inevitable. During the period from October to December 1918, as this question was intensely discussed, there gradually emerged a new tendency among the Pressburg social democrats to look at it in a more pragmatic, less uncompromisingly Hungarian-patriotic way. The arguments used in this debate revolved around issues of civic pride and national identity, and around notions like ‘freedom’, ‘justice’, and of course ‘self-determination’, the key slogan of the post-war era.

This chapter will look at the reactions of the citizens of Pressburg to the new situation and the atmosphere of political uncertainty, to the challenges following the collapse of the old order in Central Europe, and to the prospect of their incorporation into the Czechoslovak Republic. In this connection we are especially concerned with the German and Magyar social democrats, who after the end of the war were working together in increasingly isolated Pressburg in what became known as the ‘German-Magyar Social Democratic Party’. More generally, we will look at the ‘old’ population of trinational Pressburg as a whole, in particular the Germans, who increasingly tended to go their own way. The expression ‘German-Magyar [*Deutsch-Ungarisch*] Social Democratic Party’ referred to two ethnic groups working together. This indicated not only that there was a form of unity between them but, given that both groups were specifically mentioned, that there was a process going on of growing ethnonational differentiation. The rich German-language press of Pressburg provides a wealth of information on the activities and the changing social, political, and ethnic attitudes of the city’s German and Magyar population, and on the shifting perspectives on the future of the city expressed in a situation of growing confusion and uncertainty. We are not as well informed about the activities of the Pressburg Slovaks during this period, although some crucial pieces of information are available. The Wilsonian slogan of ‘national self-determination’ was raised by all the political and ethnic groups in Pressburg in order to legitimise their claims for a share in political power and for national autonomy.²⁷⁹ To the great majority of politically conscious Slovaks ‘self-determination’ meant joining the Czechoslovak Republic, even though disagreement about the precise terms on which this should happen soon led to tensions within the Slovak and Czechoslovak camp itself. To the German and Magyar citizens of Pressburg ‘self-determination’ similarly meant the right to decide their own fate, in particular the opportunity to express themselves on the question of whether or not they should be incorporated into the new state. Indeed, their demand for a plebiscite was a way of trying to prevent this from happening, and the fact that this demand was rejected by the

²⁷⁹ The precise meaning of ‘national self-determination’ was unclear and controversial, and even Wilson himself did not seem to know. The American Secretary of State Robert Lansing noted on 20 December 1918 in his diary: ‘When the President talks of “self-determination”, what unit has he in mind? Does he mean a race, a territorial area or a community?’ The result was that everyone used their own definition to further specific interests. See D. Perman, *The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State. Diplomatic History of the Boundaries of Czechoslovakia, 1914-1920*, Leiden 1962, p. 139.

Czechoslovak leaders confirmed the Magyar and German suspicion that the right to self-determination was only meant for the Czechs and Slovaks. The resistance to annexation by the Czechoslovak Republic was partly based on traditional loyalty to Hungary; the fact that in November 1918 Hungary became a democratic republic made the Hungarian connection even more worth defending in the eyes of many Pressburgers. Partly, their resistance was also based on a tradition of local pride and urban patriotism, and it is interesting that an attempt was made in November 1918 to attain an autonomous international status for the city in between Hungary, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. But in the course of December a growing part of the population of Pressburg began to accept the inevitability of the city's incorporation by Czechoslovakia. The German social democrats – if only after many weeks of hesitation – belonged to the more pragmatic political element in this respect, and at the end of December 1918 they actively opposed the political and military extremists who wanted to fight for Hungary until the end. This created a degree of goodwill towards them on the part of the new Czechoslovak authorities, which took control of the city during the first days of January 1919. The long interval between the end of the war and the final occupation of the city by Czechoslovak troops enables us to have a close look at the political and national attitudes of the Pressburg population in a situation of revolutionary upheaval. During these two months the Slovaks receded into the background, although in the end they and the Czechs were the victors of the revolution – actually a military occupation – in Pressburg. Until the moment of this final victory in January the Slovaks were, perhaps more than ever, a politically marginal group in the city. It happened several times that their leaders were assaulted or intimidated by excited pro-Hungarian crowds, armed National Guards, or indisciplined soldiers. On the other hand, there were also occasional contacts between Slovak, German, and Magyar political leaders who understood the need for maintaining a degree of interethnic communication and order in a city whose future was so uncertain.

The atmosphere of mutual national-political hostility had been brewing for months already, and especially the Czechs were seen as dangerous troublemakers in Pressburg. Since the summer of 1918 the Pressburg newspapers were bringing an increasing amount of bad news, including cases of 'Slav soldiers' deserting from the Austro-Hungarian army and 'Czech agitators' inciting the Slovaks in Upper Hungary. On 28 July 1918, after four years of war, the *Pressburger Zeitung* reported about 'treason' at the Italian front, with numbers of Czech soldiers running away to the enemy; the 'guilt' of these 'miserable creatures' was said to be 'indelible'. Yet the victory of the Central Powers was believed to be 'certain', because 'divine justice' was on their side. However, on 18 August the paper reported that 'the Czecho-Slovak nation' had been recognised by Britain as an allied state, which meant that Britain supported 'the whole programme of partitioning Austria'. The Czech leader Edvard Beneš had reportedly declared that from now on Austria could no longer treat the Czechs as 'rebels'. Indeed, there were also rebels at the home front. On 25 August it was reported that a 'female pan-Slav agitator from Prague' had been expelled from Hungary. The woman was said to work for a prohibited Czech newspaper and to have tried to influence Slovaks in the area of Liptovský Mikuláš in central Slovakia, where she 'conducted agitation for a Czecho-Slovak state' and for 'Slav unity'. The authorities and the Hungarian press urged that politically active Czechs should no longer be admitted into Hungary. In Italy, meanwhile, the 'Czechoslovak Legion' created from deserters and prisoners of war were getting more impertinent every day. On 30 August the *Pressburger Zeitung* reported that officers of the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy had described Vienna as a 'future suburb of Prague'; this showed the 'chauvinist madness' of these deserters, who now 'carried on the propaganda of terror as Czecho-Slovak legionaries'. The paper also claimed that the legionaries were threatening to kill all Czechs who remained loyal to Austria. On 5 September there was more bad news from the Hungarian point of view; it was reported that the American government had recognised 'the Czecho-Slovaks' as a 'belligerent power' as well. All these developments unmistakably showed that the Czechs and Slovaks had become a serious

threat to Austria-Hungary and that it was necessary to take more restrictive and defensive measures. On 12 September the *Pressburger Zeitung* reported that the Slovak Museum Society and the Society of Slovak Women, both located in the town of Martin, had been informed by the government that their annual meetings were forbidden ‘because they were planned as political demonstrations instead of serious, scientific meetings’.²⁸⁰ But the image of the Slovaks was not entirely negative, for they were seen by many Pressburgers as loyal and obedient people who were merely incited by the Czechs. On 16 October a meeting of the Pressburg Chamber of Trade and Commerce expressed the conviction that they could fully trust their ‘Slovak-speaking fellow citizens’, who had been ‘loyal to the Hungarian State for a thousand years’ and who did not want anything to do with the ‘agitation of the Czechs’.²⁸¹

By the beginning of October the Pressburg newspapers were becoming more nervous about the ‘Czech ambitions’ with regard to the city, as the first rumours about a Czechoslovak claim to Pressburg began to circulate in Hungary and Central Europe. The Czech and Slovak political leaders in exile – Edvard Beneš, T.G. Masaryk, M.R. Štefánik – were keen to turn Pressburg into a Czechoslovak city for strategic and economic but also for historical and nationalistic reasons. Because the Czechoslovak annexation of the city would undoubtedly be against the will of the majority of its inhabitants, it was obvious that the latter’s ‘right to self-determination’ could not be taken into consideration. But this was not immediately apparent to all German and Magyar Pressburgers, some of whom believed, at least for some time, that they could claim the same right as the Czechoslovak ally of the Entente Powers. The change in the status of Pressburg – ‘Pozsony’ in the official Magyar – would eventually prove a classical zero sum game: the ‘national freedom’ and ‘self-determination’ of one national group excluded that of other national groups. Dramatically phrased one could say that the non-Slovak Pressburgers, who were among the losers of the war and the trend of twentieth-century history, were to be sacrificed on the altar of Czechoslovak freedom and independence. Of course, this was immediately obvious to some of the more perceptive and sceptical people in Pressburg itself, and from the beginning there were voices dismissing any illusions about the ultimate fate of the city. Nevertheless, the first reactions in Pressburg to the ‘Czech demands’ – the Slovaks were seen as tools of the Czech political will rather than as autonomous actors, sometimes even as victims of the Czechs like the other citizens of Pressburg – were indignation and refusal to give in. At the beginning of October the *Pressburger Zeitung* wrote: ‘In their delusion the Czechs are taking the partition of Hungary already for granted, and are demanding... the establishment of a Czech university in Pozsony.’ The claims to Pressburg and surroundings by some Austro-Germans were rejected as well.²⁸² Although a major part of ‘German West Hungary’ was eventually incorporated into Austria as the new province of ‘Burgenland’ in 1921-2, Hungarian patriotism predominated as yet among the Germans of Pressburg, Ödenburg, and the wider region. The Pressburgers also may have considered it shameful to be kicked around by other powers, which offended their urban pride. Their old Hungarian loyalty appeared from statements made in the Pressburg town council, where on 7 October protests were made against the Czech and Austro-German claims to Hungarian territory. County Sheriff Gy. Szmrecsányi sharply condemned the ‘Czech aspirations’, stressing that ‘every Hungarian will be ready to defend the integrity of the Hungarian fatherland’.²⁸³ However, the following week it was admitted by the *Westungarischer Grenzboten* that ‘the Central Powers have lost the world war’; it was a ‘terrible awareness that is shocking millions of hearts today’. The Central Powers had ‘justice and morality’ on their side,

²⁸⁰ *Pressburger Zeitung (PZ)*, morning paper, 28 July 1918; *PZ*, morning paper, 18 August 1918; *PZ*, morning paper, 25 August 1918; *PZ*, evening paper, 30 August 1918; *PZ*, evening paper, 5 September 1918; *PZ*, morning paper, 12 September 1918;

²⁸¹ *Westungarischer Grenzboten (WG)*, 17 October 1918.

²⁸² *PZ*, evening paper, 9 October 1918.

²⁸³ *WG*, 8 October 1918.

while their enemies represented ‘meanness and egotism’, but it had been ‘a struggle of only 120 million against eight hundred million people’ that could not be won.²⁸⁴ In Pressburg the democratic opposition parties now became more vocal. On 14 October the social democrats organised a peace demonstration and a mass meeting that adopted a resolution demanding a democratic government, Hungarian independence, radical social reforms, the right to self-determination of the nations, and a ‘fully representative’ Hungarian delegation to the coming peace conference. The resolution appealed to ‘all non-Magyar nations living in Hungary’ and all truly democratic parties ‘to participate in the struggle’ for Hungarian democracy. Now that they had lost the war, they should not ‘lose the peace’ too; their final struggle for democracy ‘must prevent that Hungary comes out of the war dismembered’.²⁸⁵ The Radical Party of Oszkár Jászi seemed to be optimistic about the possibility of keeping the non-Magyar nations in Hungary as well. Its Party Congress of 14 October 1918 expressed the belief that ‘the integrity of Hungary is not in contradiction to the justified claims of the nationalities, neither to the aspirations of the new states that are in the process of formation’. The party wanted ‘equality of the nationalities’ and ‘cultural and municipal autonomy for all peoples of Hungary’; apparently it could hardly conceive of the possibility that the Slovaks and others simply wanted to break away from Hungary completely.²⁸⁶ Unfortunately for Jászi, the ‘aspirations of the new states’ proved in fact to be in contradiction to the integrity of Hungary.

However painfully, a greater sense of realism was gradually emerging in Pressburg. At the end of October the *Westungarischer Grenzboten* noted that after the speeches in the Hungarian parliament of the Slovak deputy Juriga and the Romanian Vajda, who ‘presented their declarations of independence’, it should be admitted that ‘the situation was quite hopeless’. Perhaps it might still be possible ‘to separate the Slovaks from the Czechs by giving them a great measure of autonomy, but this possibility is rejected by the Czechs, who more than ever demand Czecho-Slovak unity’. It was also reported that American Slovaks had ‘decided’ to make Pressburg the future capital of liberated Slovakia and to rename the city ‘Wilsonstadt’. With a mixture of bitterness and irony the paper commented that ‘if the American Slovaks want this, you [Pressburg] will not contradict them’; apparently the paper had no high expectations of the Pressburgers’ will to resist. It was reported that the Hungarian opposition leader and future Prime Minister Mihály Károlyi had met with the Czech leader Karel Kramář, declaring that Hungary was prepared to hand over four counties to the future Czechoslovakia.²⁸⁷ At the end of October an interesting letter was published in the *Pressburger Zeitung* written by one Stefan von Fodor, a local writer and electrical engineer. The letter revealed some of the frustration and confusion that had come to prevail in Pressburg in the course of October, and was remarkable for its peculiar combination of bitterness, cynicism, and realistic assessment of the general political situation in Central Europe. ‘There can be no doubt any longer that the Czechoslovak state will occupy a prominent place in the future structure of Europe. The Czechs have undeniably acquired merit with the Entente, and therefore all their demands will be accepted.’ The author ridiculed all those who believed in the possibility of a plebiscite to decide the fate of Pressburg and Slovakia. ‘They imagine that at the end of the day Wilson will organise some kind of plebiscite in which the Hungarian Slovaks will have the freedom to opt for Hungary. As far as the Entente is concerned, there will be no plebiscites anymore’. According to Fodor, the right to self-determination of the nations was ‘nothing but an empty phrase, which is used by the Entente against its enemies while it has no validity for the Entente itself’. It was observed that the Czechoslovak claim to Pressburg

²⁸⁴ *WG*, 13 October 1918.

²⁸⁵ *WG*, 15 October 1918; *Nyugatmagyarországi Híradó*, 15 October 1918, in Slovak translation in *Sociálne a národné hnutie*, ed. L. Holotík, document 215, pp. 356-8.

²⁸⁶ *WG*, 16 October 1918.

²⁸⁷ *WG*, 24 October 1918.

was based not only on its allegedly being an ancient Slavic settlement, but on pragmatic arguments that the city was crucial to the economic life of Czechoslovakia. Fodor claimed that all the Pressburgers wanted was peace, and therefore ‘they simply let themselves be led to the shambles’; they had not only lost the war on the battlefield, but also the war ‘at the home front’. However, a just peace had now become impossible: ‘What can we expect from it if they want to make beggars of us, if they want to take away from us the last remnants of our self-respect and to compel us to negotiate with a strange people about the fate of our native soil.’²⁸⁸ This ‘strange people’, of course, were the Czechs, not the Slovaks, and it was still believed by many in Pressburg that the Slovaks would prefer to remain part of Hungary if given the chance to express their will in a plebiscite. This wrong assessment of the Slovaks’ national feelings was typical of the ignorance of many Germans and Magyars and would be reiterated time and again during the last months of 1918 and even thereafter. Thus the mood in Pressburg at the end of October 1918 was a strange mixture of despair, defiance, and some vague hope. However, the end of old Hungary and the coming to power of the Károlyi government on 31 October had the potential to strengthen the Pressburg citizens’ resolve to resist.

The day before the victory of the Hungarian democratic revolution in Budapest on 31 October 1918 the chief editor of the *Pressburger Zeitung*, Alois H. Pichler, presented his readers with an assessment of the German ethnopolitical situation and the perils threatening Pressburg. ‘We German Hungarians of Pressburg’, he wrote, ‘are clearly threatened by a two-fold danger. The first is to lose the beloved fatherland, to be wrested from our old-established Hungarian nation, either to descend to the status of a border town of industrialised Austria, or indeed to be handed over to the no less industrialised Czech State in order to suffer exploitation and complete de-Germanisation [*Entdeutschung*]. The second danger threatening us, but also the local Magyars in their own fatherland, is complete Slavicisation by Slovak fellow citizens who are armed with their own rights to self-determination.’ The Germans were threatened with the loss of both their fatherland and their ethnic identity, and the answer should be to defend both. ‘We will belong and want to continue to belong to Hungary: now and forever! But in the future we do not want to lose anything of our own identity, our own nationality [*Volkstum*] anymore; we demand the strengthening and cultivation of our ethnic [*völkisch*] customs, of our German language and native tongue!’²⁸⁹ This remarkable declaration of ethnic self-consciousness demonstrated that the ideology of national self-determination and defensive national struggle had reached the Pressburg Germans in full strength. The Germans wanted to remain loyal to Hungary, but on condition that from now on their identity should be respected in what was to be a truly democratic state; this demand was made even before the final victory of the Budapest revolution. Furthermore, although the Slovaks were not considered as politically dangerous as the Czechs, they were nonetheless seen as a potential threat if the Czechoslovak state took possession of Pressburg and accorded them a privileged position alongside the Czechs. This could be the beginning of a new type of assimilation policy. However, the Germans were now embarking on a struggle for national rights, be it vis-à-vis the Czechoslovak state or the Hungarians. The *Pressburger Zeitung* called upon the Germans to unite in a ‘cultural society’ and make their voice heard. ‘Under the pressure of the present world-historical events, the German Hungarians are now achieving national unity as well... The German Hungarians of Pressburg will and may not fail to present themselves too.’ They were discovering all the arguments of the national struggle. ‘We are the oldest inhabitants of the country and were always peaceful representatives of civilisation [*Kulturträger*], but unfortunately we were never alive to the need to preserve our national

²⁸⁸ *PZ*, morning paper, 26 October 1918. A similar article by Fodor was published in *Nyugatmagyarországi Híradó*, 27 October 1918; see Maroš Hertel, ‘Situácia v Bratislave koncom roka 1918 na stránkach denníka Nyugatmagyarországi Híradó’, *Historické štúdie* 43, 2004, p. 184.

²⁸⁹ *PZ*, morning paper, 30 October 1918.

position. Proof of this is offered by the complete de-Germanisation of many of our settlements. This de-Germanisation happened almost without interruption, to the benefit of the much younger Slav settlements, as can be proven by documents, and now the waves of Slav population are rising to a flood under the influence of world-historical events!²⁹⁰ Thus the struggle for German ethnic survival was primarily seen as a defensive struggle against the advance of the Slovak majority in northwestern Hungary; the evil consequences of the Magyarisation policy were already seen as a thing of the past. The image of the Slav demographic flood threatening the German population of Central Europe was nothing new and was also expressed by some one like Otto Bauer.²⁹¹

During the period of national revolution the German feeling of being threatened by the Slovaks was even stronger in a region like the Zips (Spiš) in eastern Slovakia, traditionally an area with a large German population – the so-called ‘Zips Saxons’ – that was surrounded by predominantly Slovak territory. While the German newspapers in Pressburg could be said to be relatively moderate in their descriptions of the Slav danger (notwithstanding Pichler’s statement quoted above), a Zips German newspaper like the *Karpathen-Post* was more blatantly chauvinistic, sometimes in an almost racist way. At the end of October the paper asserted that ‘in the whole of the Zips there is not a single educated man who would regard himself as belonging to the Slovak nation!’ One week later it wrote: ‘If the flourishing German culture of the Zips would be unconditionally handed over to the uncivilised Slav masses, how could this be reconciled with the Wilsonian civilisational ideals? It is impossible for these Slovak masses to be considered an equal factor to the historical civilisational claims of the Zips Saxons.’²⁹² This kind of language clearly illustrated the sense of cultural superiority that many of the Germans in Slovakia were imbued with vis-à-vis the Slovak majority in the country. They do not seem to have felt the same degree of civilisational superiority vis-à-vis the Magyars, which may have been one of the reasons why many Germans preferred to remain part of Hungary instead of becoming part of the Czechoslovak state. While the Czechs were portrayed as a kind of evil genius manipulating the historical fate of the Germans of Upper Hungary in the corridors of Entente power, the Slovaks were seen as a rather primitive peasant people who could not be allowed to lord it over the civilised Germans. However, during the period October-December 1918 the theme of Slovak primitivism was not as prominently present in the German newspapers of Pressburg as it was in the German press of the Zips. It was mainly the politically dangerous, far more experienced and influential Czechs who were feared and criticised, as well as the injustice of the fact that the German population was not allowed to exert the same right to self-determination.

The victory of the democratic revolution in Budapest was received with great enthusiasm in Pressburg. On 31 October a mass meeting was held in the city attended by six thousand people, among whom the social democrats and their organisations were reported to be the most numerous element. It was attended by almost all classes of the German and Magyar population of Pressburg, including local officials, the middle classes and free professions, university students, army officers, etc.; the Slovaks however seem to have been conspicuous by their absence. The meeting was organised by the German and Magyar social democrats and ‘bourgeois’ political

²⁹⁰ *PZ*, morning paper, 31 October 1918. It is not surprising that the process of national-political change in Central Europe was accompanied by all kinds of questionable historical claims.

²⁹¹ Raimund Löw, ‘Der Zerfall der “Kleinen Internationale”’, in *Arbeiterbewegung in Österreich und Ungarn bis 1914*, ed. Wolfgang Maderthaler, Wien, 1986, p. 161; Otto Bauer, *Deutschtum und Sozialdemokratie*, Wien 1907.

²⁹² *Karpathen-Post*, 24 October 1918, 31 October 1918. See for the negative attitude of the Zips Germans to the foundation of the Czechoslovak state Milan Olejník, ‘Postoj spišských Nemcov k rozpadu Rakúsko-Uhorska a vzniku ČSR’, in *Stredoeurópske národy na križovatkách novodobých dejín 1848-1918*, eds Peter Švorc and Ľubica Harbuľová, Prešov 1999, pp. 309-15.

groups, and although the social democrats were the most important political force in the city, ‘they voluntarily left the leadership of the meeting to the patriotic bourgeoisie.’²⁹³ This pattern of behaviour was characteristic of the Pressburg social democrats during much of the era of national revolution, and they pursued the same strategy with regard to the multi-party German national movement. The meeting fully supported the revolutionary Hungarian National Council (HNC) and the programme of the new Károlyi government and demanded an immediate peace, an independent Hungary, democratic institutions, and maintenance of Hungary’s territorial integrity. The almost official character of the meeting was shown by the presence of people like the Pressburg mayor Theodor Kumlik, the popular former mayor Theodor Brolly (who was appointed chairman), Pressburg County’s Deputy Sheriff and Government Commissioner Zoltán Jankó (the more conservative County Sheriff Szmrecsányi was about to step down), and the city’s police chief Kálmán Peterdy. There were at least eight speakers, both ‘official’ and unofficial ones, which demonstrated the beginning of a new democratic era. Brolly spoke as a ‘Hungarian patriot’ and stressed the threat from outside rather than the theme of democratic revolution. He said: ‘They want to separate us from our mother, the Hungarian fatherland, and we have come here to protest against it.’ Paul Wittich, the most prominent leader among the Pressburg social democrats after the departure of Heinrich Kalmár to Budapest, gave his own version of patriotism coloured by the idea of the ‘stage of democratic revolution’. Wittich exclaimed: ‘Hungaria, this is how I like you, united in one political camp and aware what infinite misery the aristocracy and cliques have brought on this country. The working class joins the National Council with enthusiasm. She sees the fall of feudal Hungary, the rise of a new Hungary... Long live the new, the other Hungary, long live the people’s republic!’ At this early hour the German and Magyar social democrats were full of positive expectations about ‘the new Hungary’ and keen to play their part in the unfolding democratic revolution. The meeting decided to establish a local national council, officially called the ‘Pozsony Executive Committee of the Hungarian National Council’ (briefly, the ‘Pressburg National Committee’ or ‘Pressburg National Council’), to support the efforts of the HNC in Budapest. The council had twenty-five members, at least six of whom were German and Magyar social democrats. It was a bad omen that immediately after the meeting a series of violent incidents occurred in various parts of the city. Crowds of returned soldiers, excited women, and violent youngsters moved through the city plundering shops, restaurants, hotels, and military warehouses. They also stormed several military prisons, freeing the inmates, most of who were ordinary criminals, and wreaking havoc everywhere.²⁹⁴ Not the least unpleasant aspect of these events was the outbreak of anti-Jewish riots, with young people shouting ‘down with the Jews!’, ‘death to the Jews!’, and attacking Jewish property. That same night a Jewish security guard was formed from Jewish soldiers in the city, apparently some 130 men. The looting and burning of Jewish property continued for several days, the regular police and security guards having great difficulty to stop it. In the Jewish quarter in Theresienstadt, between the old city and Pressburg castle, all windows, doors, and shop windows were kept shut and the Jewish guard patrolled the streets as effectively as they could.²⁹⁵ Some returning Slovak soldiers passing through Pressburg on their way home joined the looting as well. Their Slovak songs impressed local Slovak patriots, but their presence may have contributed to the rising social and national tension in the city.

On 3 November the Pressburg National Committee decided to establish a National Guard composed of civilian volunteers to help maintain public order in the city and its immediate

²⁹³ *WG*, 1 November 1918.

²⁹⁴ *WG*, 1 November 1918, 3 November 1918.

²⁹⁵ Jozef Hanák, *Obsadenie Bratislavy 1918-1920. Kronika pamätných dní*, Bratislava 2004, pp. 35-6; Pieter van Duin, ‘November’s Brutal Bonfire: Anarchy and Anti-Semitism in the Slovak Revolution of 1918’, Paper presented to the Slovak-Hungarian Historical Conference, Péter Pázmány Catholic University, Pilisecaba (Hungary), June 2001, p. 7.

hinterland; its members had to swear loyalty to the Hungarian National Council. The same day Deputy Sheriff Zoltán Jankó took over the office of county sheriff of Pressburg from Gy. Szmrecsányi, who was too much associated with the old regime. Jankó, a relatively progressive figure who was also acceptable for the social democrats, proved a realistic and useful man for Pressburg who also tried to maintain close relations with the new government in Budapest. Another organisation emerging in Pressburg during the first week of November was the German-Magyar *Arbeiterrat* (Workers' Council); it was established by the social democrats and led by their leader Paul Wittich. The *Arbeiterrat* also formed a workers' guard (*Arbeitergarde*), which helped to keep order in and around Pressburg's factories and, if necessary, in the wider public domain. The Pressburg *Arbeiterrat* was an example of the workers' council movement that was springing up all over the former Austria-Hungary at the end of the war, perhaps most notably in Vienna and Budapest. Like the post-war Social Democratic Party itself, it was mainly representative of the German and Magyar working class, but not of the Slovak workers, who increasingly went their own way and kept in the political background for the time being. The *Arbeiterrat* functioned as a platform giving expression to a wide range of grievances and demands of the organised working class in the social, economic, and political fields. In addition to the Pressburg National Council and the German-Magyar *Arbeiterrat*, there also emerged a Pressburg movement connected with the broad-based German national movement in Hungary. Initially the German movement was split between a moderate Catholic and a more radical autonomist wing. By the middle of November the bourgeois-radical autonomist element established a new 'German National Council of Pressburg' (*Deutsche Volksrat für Pressburg*), which was joined by the German social democrats in December. All of Pressburg's new political institutions and multiparty organisations were increasingly influenced by the radical political parties, notably the social democrats, the German Radical Democratic Party, and the pro-Károlyi Hungarian Independence Party. Thus the first president of the Pressburg National Council was the widely respected Marczell Jankovich, a lawyer, writer, member of the Independence Party, and chairman of the local Hungarian Cultural Society.²⁹⁶ But more important than men in official positions such as Jankovich or than the Magyar-dominated Independence Party were the German-dominated social democrats and the German Radical Democrats, two Pressburg political movements who developed an ambivalent mutual relationship. The German Radical Democratic Party was originally linked to the Radical Party of Oszkár Jászi but increasingly focused on the German autonomist programme. Its support for the project of German autonomy in West Hungary helped to increase its influence in Pressburg; among its leading figures were Hugo Dewald, Alois Zalkai, and Max Fejér. However, it was especially the social democratic leader Paul Wittich, a member of the Pressburg town council since 1914, who became an important figure on the Pressburg political scene. At the beginning of November he had the honour to visit the Hungarian National Council in Budapest as the official representative of the city of Pressburg and the Pressburg National Committee. After his return he appealed as a veritable political leader to the members of the Pressburg town council 'to fully contribute to the consolidation of the newly created political basis' in Hungary, because only in this way could Hungary become 'free

²⁹⁶ *WG*, 3 November 1918, 5 November 1918; *PZ*, morning paper, 5 November 1918, 9 November 1918; *Republik*, 17 December 1918; Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, p. 66; Emil Portisch, *Geschichte der Stadt Pressburg-Bratislava*, 2 vols, Bratislava 1933, vol. 2, pp. 536-7; Dušan Provazník, 'V prvom desaťročí v ČSR', in *Dejiny Bratislavy*, eds Darina Lehotská and Ján Pleva, Bratislava, 1966, pp. 328-9; Dušan Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave 1918-1929*, Bratislava 1969, pp. 72-4; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, p. 82; Peter Zelenák, 'Maďarská sociálna demokracia na Slovensku', in *Kapitoly z dejín sociálnej demokracie na Slovensku*, eds Stanislav Sikora et al., Bratislava, 1996, p. 158; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 35; Marián Hronský, *The Struggle for Slovakia and the Treaty of Trianon 1918-1920*, Bratislava 2001, p. 68.

and happy'.²⁹⁷ During the following two months Wittich – who seemed to like his new role as a respected political leader – and the German social democrats did their best to play their part in the process of democratic revolution. It partly consisted in effacing themselves within a broad-based Hungarian (and ethnic-German) democratic unity, partly in presenting concrete social and economic working-class demands. However, there were too many political and ethnic cleavages preventing the Hungarian Revolution from becoming a success in Pressburg.

The 'Slovak National Council for Pressburg and Surroundings' similarly united social democrats and middle-class and Catholic political groups. Initially, cautious as it felt it had to be in the for Slovaks rather unfriendly atmosphere of revolutionary Pressburg, the council only advocated Slovak national rights within the framework of Hungary. But during the second week of November, as Czechoslovak troops were approaching the city, it began to support more openly the aim of Czechoslovak statehood. It was difficult for the two national councils in Pressburg – the Pressburg National Committee and the Slovak National Council – to find common ground as long as the uncertainty about the future of the city and the risk of military confrontations between Hungary and Czechoslovakia continued. Indeed, some members of the Slovak National Council – among others the social democratic leader Emanuel Lehocký, who was known as a supporter of the Czechoslovak state and who had published the Martin Declaration in *Robotnícke noviny* – fled to the nearby Austrian town of Hainburg when their homes were attacked by pro-Hungarian crowds and armed men. On the other hand during the days of growing unrest in early November some members of the Slovak National Council, until then an almost illegal body, were invited by County Sheriff Jankó to help maintain public order in the Slovak areas just outside the city, where numbers of Slovaks were on the rampage. This cooperation appeared to work for a short period of time, but the issue of maintaining contacts with Slovak political leaders was controversial among part of the Magyar and German population (though not among the more autonomist-minded Germans). By the middle of November, the Slovak National Council practically ceased to function because of the hostile attitude of many Pressburg citizens towards Czechoslovak political aspirations. Many of its members then moved to Prague, Vienna, or the headquarters of Vavro Šrobár's provisional Slovak government in western Slovakia, but others stayed in Pressburg and tried to make the best of an almost impossible situation. It would seem that the relations between Slovak and German social democrats deteriorated as well. The German social democratic leaders in Pressburg supported the national programme of the Károlyi government, i.e., the policy of granting cultural autonomy to the non-Magyar nationalities within a territorially intact Hungary. The Germans were the only nationality in Hungary who seemed to accept this (a perspective rather than a reality), although the actual implementation of German autonomy in a region like West Hungary proved to be a problematic affair. Especially during the first weeks of November there was little sympathy among the Germans for the Slovak aspiration to become part of an independent Czechoslovak state. However, there is no evidence that the German or even the Magyar social democrats were in the forefront of anti-Slovak agitation in Pressburg, although their attitude to the Czechs was a somewhat different matter.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ *WG*, 5 November 1918.

²⁹⁸ Provazník, 'V prvom desaťročí', pp. 329-30; Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 75-6; Anna Magdolenová, 'Emanuel Lehocký – zakladateľ slovenskej sociálnodemokratickej strany Uhorska', in *Kapitoly*, eds S. Sikora et al., p. 78; Zelenák, 'Maďarská sociálna demokracia', p. 158; Št. Krčméry, 'Slovenská rozpomienka na Bratislavu', in *Slovenský prevrat*, ed. Karol A. Medvecký, 4 vols, Trnava, 1931, vol. 4, pp. 71-2; Marián Hronský, 'Obsadenie Bratislavy čs. vojskom na rozhraní rokov 1918-1919 a postoje mestského obyvateľstva', in *Armáda, mesto, spoločnosť od 15. storočia do roku 1918*, eds Vojtech Dangl and J. János Varga, Bratislava, 2002, pp. 309-10. See for the Károlyi government's attitude to Slovakia and its proposals regarding Slovak autonomy in Hungary Milan Krajčovič, 'Károlyiho vláda v Maďarsku a jej vzťah k Slovensku', in *Slovensko a Maďarsko v rokoch 1918-1920*, ed. Ladislav Deák, Martin, 1995, pp. 32-45; Natália Krajčovičová, 'Konceptia autonómie Slovenska v maďarskej politike v rokoch 1918-1920', in *ibid.*, pp. 46-55.

By 8 November Czechoslovak (mainly Czech) troops had nearly reached Pressburg, and rumours went round that the city could be occupied at any moment. However, in order to prevent what promised to become a bloody battle, a new demarcation line was agreed upon that kept the Czechoslovak military units outside the city. By the middle of November they even had to withdraw as the Hungarians started a counter-offensive that succeeded in reconquering most of Slovakia, at least for the time being. On 9 November the Pressburg National Council decided to send a delegation – consisting of the social democrats Paul Wittich and August Masár and the Radical Democrat Max Fejér – to the Czechoslovak envoy in Vienna, Vlastimil Tusar (a prominent Czech social democrat), to discuss the position and future of Pressburg. Tusar told the delegation that the Czechoslovak Republic needed Pressburg on economic and strategic grounds. He explained that the Entente and the Czechoslovak government had decided already some time ago that the city should become part of Czechoslovakia. Therefore, it was not even necessary to immediately occupy it, an act that would be carried out in any case and that could be postponed for some time. The Pressburg delegation requested Tusar to inform the Prague government that the population of the city unanimously wished to remain part of Hungary; he promised to do this even though it would be useless. The *Pressburger Zeitung*, ignoring the economic and strategic arguments, put the position as follows: ‘The population of the city cannot understand at all what the reasons could be that the Czechs should want to occupy the city of Pozsony, which does not belong to their sphere of interest. After all, only a small proportion of the population is Slav, and therefore an occupation of the city of Pozsony by the Czechs contradicts the principles of Wilson.’ The paper again expressed the hope that the will of Pressburg and the principles of Wilson would be respected, and that the city would not be occupied by ‘the Czechs’.²⁹⁹ It is difficult to tell how far the *Pressburger Zeitung* really believed in the Wilsonian principles of the Entente, that is, in its willingness to impartially and fairly apply them, or whether the paper merely used the Wilsonian rhetoric and the political morality of self-determination to defend the position of Pressburg. It would seem, however, that there was a good deal of sincere belief in the ‘Wilsonian principles’ among the Pressburg citizens, as is shown by the German press reports and subsequent events. For the Pressburgers this belief – and a fair decision by the coming peace conference – increasingly became their last hope, especially when not long after the Hungarian government proved unable to protect the city or even to ensure public order. When the Pressburg National Council sent a delegation to Budapest to appeal to Károlyi not to accept an occupation of Pressburg by the Czechs, the only thing the Hungarians could do was to send more troops. But these reinforcements (many of them notoriously aggressive former sailors) were extremely indisciplined and maltreated the population of Pressburg and vicinity; they threatened to kill the political leaders of the Slovaks and incited, intimidated, and robbed other inhabitants of the city. At the beginning of December they were withdrawn at the request of the Pressburgers themselves. Meanwhile, the Hungarian government instructed the postal and other government employees of Pressburg to stay at their posts in the event of a Czechoslovak occupation, not to resist, and even to swear loyalty to the Czechoslovak government if this was demanded of them.³⁰⁰ These instructions were somewhat surprising when seen in the light of later events, and could be interpreted in different ways. They may have looked like an act showing a sense of responsibility, or an indication that the Hungarian government was about to give up as far as its control of Pressburg was concerned. It has also been suggested that it was a strategy to keep Hungarians in key positions after a Czechoslovak occupation, from where they could supply the Hungarian government with useful information.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ *PZ*, morning paper, 10 November 1918 for quotation; *PZ*, morning paper, 12 November 1918; Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, p. 67; Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 537.

³⁰⁰ Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, pp. 537-8; Hanák, *Obsadenie Bratislavy*, pp. 52, 55.

³⁰¹ Cf. Hanák, *Obsadenie Bratislavy*, p. 66.

During the second week of November a group of prominent citizens associated with the Pressburg National Council, including the German Radical Democrat Max Fejér, launched a plan to turn Pressburg into an independent internationalised city. One motive behind the plan was the misbehaviour of Hungarian military units, another the growing belief in some German circles that Pressburg could not be kept for Hungary. Pressburg should become a 'free city' called 'Wilsonstadt' or 'Wilsonov'. This name – not the idea of a free city – had been proposed by American Slovaks in October and was now adopted by some of the Pressburgers themselves in a bid to defend the city against annexation. But because there was no international support for the plan and the enthusiasm in the city itself soon died down as well, not much was heard of it anymore by the end of November. There were also Pressburg Germans who began to consider joining Austria as the most desirable option for the city, but they remained a small minority as well.³⁰² Yet from the middle of November a growing differentiation of opinion became apparent with regard to the future of the city and possible incorporation into the Czechoslovak state. Among the most determined opponents of accepting annexation were the professors and students of Pressburg's Elisabeth University, a bulwark of Hungarian patriotism and Magyarism. On 13 November it was reported that the professors, on the initiative of university rector Edmund Polner, had sent a telegram to the Hungarian Minister of Education and the president of the Hungarian National Council in which they strongly protested against the 'Czech intention' to occupy Pressburg. It was demanded that the Hungarian government try to prevent it with all possible means. A declaration issued by the university claimed that breaking up Hungary was a 'crime against nature and common sense', and that 'the nations of territorially united and multilingual Hungary have lived for centuries happily together!' In order to explain the exceptional poverty of the national minorities (in particular the Slovaks) it was argued that 'the lower cultural level of the non-Magyar nationalities is merely the result of the fact that these tribes... emerged only during the last century from their condition of pastoralists and lumbermen.' Moreover, the Slovaks were said to be the descendants of immigrants from the twelfth century, one of the mystifications spread by Magyar nationalists.³⁰³ Meanwhile the Czech social democrats, who were seen as a major culprit inciting the Slovaks, were accused by a Pressburg Magyar newspaper of identifying with Czech 'imperialist aims' and 'betraying' the principles of international social democracy.³⁰⁴ As against this, an organisation like the German Radical Democratic Party, but also some of the German social democrats, began to look at the situation in a more balanced and pragmatic way, both for political and economic reasons. It was reported that Tusar had told the Pressburg delegation to Vienna that the Prague government anticipated that in a few decades the Pressburg population would increase to several hundred thousand. The city would become predominantly Slovak, but this great developmental and economic perspective and Tusar's insistence that Czechoslovakia needed Pressburg as a port on the Danube seems to have impressed the members of the delegation. Apparently the Czechoslovak envoy had also given assurances that the city's non-Slav nationalities would be granted a substantial degree of cultural autonomy. On 14 November Max Fejér, a member of the delegation, gave a speech at a meeting of the German Radical Democratic Party about their interview with Tusar that sounded remarkably conciliatory and realistic. He said that the Pressburg citizens must reckon with the possibility that the city would soon become part of the Czechoslovak state, but that there were great opportunities for its future development in terms of trade and economic expansion.

³⁰² *WG*, 13 November 1918; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 39; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, p. 35; Hronský, 'Obsadenie Bratislavy', pp. 310, 312; Hanák, *Obsadenie Bratislavy*, pp. 54, 58, 60; Eubomír Lipták, *Changes of Changes. Society and Politics in Slovakia in the 20th Century*, Bratislava 2002, p. 95.

³⁰³ *PZ*, morning paper, 13 November 1918; Hanák, *Obsadenie Bratislavy*, p. 60; Hronský, 'Obsadenie Bratislavy', p. 311.

³⁰⁴ Zelenák, 'Maďarská sociálna demokracia', p. 159, quoting *Nyugatmagyarországi Híradó*, 17 November 1918.

According to the *Pressburger Zeitung* he also said, ‘for minorities – and the Magyars and Germans in Pozsony will soon belong to them – a certain autonomy is anticipated.’ Fejér claimed somewhat naively that the negotiations with the Slovak National Council in Martin and the Czechoslovak government in Prague ‘warrant the greatest hope that an occupation of the city by Czech troops can be avoided.’ Apparently he visualised a quiet transfer of Pressburg to Czechoslovakia.³⁰⁵ It was one of the first indications that the German Radical Democrats were becoming more ‘Czech-friendly’.

However, towards the end of November fear and disillusion were still the predominant sentiments among the bulk of Pressburg citizens, whose protest movement against a Czechoslovak occupation reached a climax on 23 November 1918. On this day a huge mass meeting was held in the city centre to protest against any forcible separation of Pressburg from Hungary and against all Czechoslovak and Austrian endeavours in this direction. The local press reported that ‘all strata of the Pressburg population’ had come together again to attend the meeting, which was held under the auspices of the Pressburg National Council. Pressburg’s mayor Theodor Kumlik said that the Hungarian People’s Republic – as Hungary was officially known since 16 November 1918 – was strangled by Czechoslovakia on one side and Austria on the other; both tried to tear Pressburg loose from ‘the Hungarian fatherland’. He appealed to all economic interest groups, the organised labour movement, the political parties, secular and religious institutions, schools, etc., ‘to protest unanimously, relying on the right to self-determination that Wilson too wants to carry into effect, against the severing of the city of Pozsony from the body of the Hungarian People’s Republic, and against annexation by whatever other state’. Kumlik’s statements were received ‘with enthusiasm’, and a resolution to this effect was signed by the various organisations and institutions representing German and Magyar civic society in Pressburg. Jankovich, the president of the Pressburg National Council, gave a remarkable speech in which he tried to define the tolerant character of Pressburg and the ways in which it differed from the excited nationalist mentality in Bohemia. He described their situation as one of ‘to be or not to be’, i.e., as a question of whether or not they could keep their traditional liberal character. ‘Among us in Pressburg there never emerged anything like racial hatred, not even against the Turks’, he said. But in Bohemia it was different: ‘The Czechs are from the volcanic soil of Bohemia, and those in northwestern Hungary who displayed the national characteristic of racial antipathy were almost exclusively descendants of Bohemian exiles.’ This claim, another Hungarian mystification, throws an interesting light on how Czech and Slovak nationalists were seen by some, perhaps many, in Pressburg. Because Protestants had dominated Slovak nationalism during the nineteenth century, and because some of them were descendants of Bohemian religious exiles who had fled to Hungary from the Austrian Catholic repression in the seventeenth century, it was possible, with a stretch of the imagination, to represent Slovak nationalism as exclusively the product of Czech influences, of the ‘fanatic’ Czech nationalist mentality. That this was an ignorant and demagogic interpretation of the origins of Slovak nationalism is a question that must be left aside at this place, but its existence is revealing. After Jankovich had spoken, a declaration was read by Alois Zalkai, who represented both the German *Volksrat* and the German Radical Democratic Party. ‘Neither the Czechs, nor the Slovaks, have the right to claim this city. Pressburg has always belonged to Hungary and was founded and developed by German Hungarians’, he declared.³⁰⁶ Interestingly, not long after this meeting on

³⁰⁵ *WG*, 13 November 1918; *PZ*, evening paper, 15 November 1918.

³⁰⁶ *PZ*, evening paper, 23 November 1918; *PZ*, morning paper, 24 November 1918 for quotations; *Pressburger Tagblatt*, 26 November 1918, 28 November 1918. The Austrian claim to Pressburg was contained in an official declaration issued on 22 November. See *Aussenpolitische Dokumente der Republik Österreich 1918-1938 (ADÖ). 1. Selbstbestimmung der Republik: 21. Oktober 1918 bis 14. März 1919*, eds Klaus Koch, Walter Rauscher, and Arnold Suppan, Vienna, 1993, pp. 33-4, 172. See also Ladislav Hubenák, *Vznik a založení KSC na západnom Slovensku*, Bratislava 1969, p. 41, according to whom ‘part of the Germans of Pressburg – also the

23 November Zalkai emerged as one of the more ‘Czechophile’ political figures in Pressburg. German national consciousness and Hungarian patriotism could go – but did not have to go – hand in hand. It is true that many Germans mistrusted the Slovaks, not to mention the Czechs, as a historically marginal or almost alien element in Pressburg, as people who should refrain from making political claims. If some Germans, especially the social democrats, had been willing in the past to support some of the Slovaks’ emancipatory activities, now the feeling seemed to be that as allies or tools of the Czechs they were a threat to the freedom and the status of the non-Slav citizens of Pressburg. However, this national chauvinism was increasingly counter-balanced by political pragmatism. Indeed, there were indications that both the Radical Democrats and the German social democrats began to take more distance from the pro-Hungarian orientation of the Pressburg National Council.

Zalkai – in spite of his insistence that the Slovaks had no right to claim Pressburg – also reminded the meeting of 23 November that the German *Volksrat* had recently held a mass meeting of its own, where the Slovak political leader Ferdinand Juriga had put in an appearance as well. Juriga had declared that he welcomed the movement of the Hungarian Germans. He encouraged them to unite as a nationality and said that the Slovaks ‘could learn a lot’ from the Germans of West Hungary. Juriga admitted that the Slovaks were culturally backward, but said it was the old Hungarian governments that were to blame for this. It would seem that Juriga’s friendly attitude to the German national movement foreshadowed the Czechoslovak policy to seek the Slovak Germans’ support against the Magyars by granting them cultural autonomy. From Zalkai’s statements it further appears that Juriga’s presence at the German meeting had led to disagreements between those who refused to have anything to do with the Slovaks and more moderate and pragmatic Pressburgers, probably ethnic Germans who considered it wiser to keep normal contacts with Slovak political leaders. Zalkai and his party belonged to the second group. In his speech on 23 November Zalkai argued that it would be unacceptable to expel men like Juriga from their meetings. ‘Do some chauvinistic characters want the Germans and Slovaks to attack each other? This favour will not be done to them. The German Hungarians want to live in peace with all nationalities and also welcome the Slovaks as brothers.’ He stressed that the Germans demanded the right to self-determination for themselves, in Hungary or otherwise. ‘The present government promised the right to self-determination to the Romanians, the Slovaks, the Serbs, the Ruthenians, so how could the same legal rights be denied to the German Hungarians, who are on a much higher level of development?’ Zalkai explained what was their vision for the future. ‘We do not want to belong to the Czechs, nor to the German Austrians. Instead of Latin or Greek, we should learn at the Gymnasiums the languages of the nationalities living alongside us. Moreover, it was totally wrong to establish Magyar primary schools in ethnic-German communities... it is to be hoped that the People’s Republic does not mean a new blazon for an old system, but really is a new system with the old Hungarian blazon. The true Magyars are not at all chauvinists, but men of freedom.’³⁰⁷ The German Radical Democratic leader was thus remarkably frank about his party’s refusal to join the camp of Magyar chauvinism and about their willingness to have normal relations with the Slovaks. He clearly expressed their desire for cultural autonomy and their rejection of the old Magyarisation policies. When the Czechoslovak authorities began to lure the Pressburg Germans with promises of cultural autonomy and a respectable status for the German language, the German Radical Democrats were the first to

social democrats – demanded that the city join Austria’; however, he gives no evidence for this. Despite the links between the Pressburg and Vienna social democrats, the former do not seem to have advocated joining Austria before August-September 1919, when the idea was briefly flirted with (see chapter 9).

³⁰⁷ *PZ*, morning paper, 24 November 1918. According to the Radical Democratic newspaper *Republik* of 5 January 1919, Ferdinand Juriga had also been present at the ‘founding meeting’ of the German Radical Democratic Party (probably at the end of October or the beginning of November), where he ‘proclaimed the brotherhood of all nationalities of Pressburg’.

respond to this, earlier than the German social democrats or anyone else. Also in accordance with the increasingly independent attitude of the Pressburg Germans was a statement by a German member of the Pressburg town council, Franz Pohl. Shortly after the mass meeting of 23 November, he said during a session of the town council that they should remember ‘that under the former oligarchic-chauvinistic regime any allegiance to their German mother tongue was regarded as high treason’. At the same meeting Hugo Dewald, another leader of the German Radical Democrats on his way to becoming a pragmatist, proposed to incorporate some largely German-speaking villages on the city’s periphery into the Pressburg municipality. This would help reduce the Slovak element in the greater Pressburg area and strengthen the argument for self-determination of the Germans. Of course, it would also enlarge the German population vis-à-vis the Magyars, but this he did not say. Both the Magyars and the Slovaks could be seen as rivals as the Germans set out to define their national aspirations – which might have to be realised in the Czechoslovak state.³⁰⁸

On 6 December 1918 it was reported in the Pressburg newspapers that the Entente would no longer tolerate the presence of the Hungarian army in ‘Slovakia’. The ethnic-Slovak areas of Upper Hungary, possibly even a larger territory, were to be occupied by Czechoslovak troops; but there continued to be uncertainty about the question of whether Pressburg would shortly be occupied as well, or only at some later stage. The regional Hungarian military headquarters in Pressburg was removed to the Hungarian city of Győr, although a smaller number of troops under a local commander stayed behind, which did not enhance military discipline. According to one press report, the terms of the armistice concluded by Hungary with the Entente at the beginning of November laid down that Pressburg belonged to those strategic locations that were to be occupied by Entente troops even before the peace treaty. In fact these troops, Frenchmen, were expected to arrive in the city within a few days. At the same time mention was made of an open letter of Prime Minister Károlyi to the chairman of the Pressburg branch of the Independence Party reassuring him that ‘the Hungarian government has never given up Pozsony and will never give up Pozsony’, and that the arrival of French troops would not change this. On 12 December the French military unit of about 250 men arrived in Pressburg from Budapest. But they were only a kind of vanguard preparing for the occupation of the city by Czechoslovak troops at a later stage and do not seem to have had much influence on further political or military developments. More important was the announcement in the local press that on 10 December 1918 a law had been adopted by the Revolutionary Czechoslovak National Assembly in Prague providing for the first phase of Czechoslovak administration in Slovakia. Vavro Šrobár, one of the most important Slovak fiercely pro-Czech political figures, had been appointed ‘Minister Plenipotentiary for the Administration of Slovakia’. His provisional ‘Slovak Government’, which included the Slovak social democratic leader Emanuel Lehocký as ‘commissioner for social care’, took up residence in the northwestern Slovak city of Žilina. From here the ethnic-Slovak territory was gradually brought under control by Czechoslovak troops as the Hungarian army and the last Magyar officials withdrew from the former ‘Upper Hungary’. However, it was only on 21 December that the Entente, urged on by the Prague government, issued a formal diplomatic note delimiting the final demarcation line that was practically identical with the later Slovak-Hungarian border. The fact that it definitively assigned Pressburg to the Czechoslovak side was a shock for many Pressburgers, especially for those who tried to keep hope alive that they would be given the chance to decide their own fate. The Hungarian government had no choice but to accept it, although the actual occupation of the city occurred only ten days later. Furthermore, on 10 December another important political appointment was made by the Prague government, which gradually took control of Slovak affairs and largely ignored the rather impotent Slovak National Council in Martin. The Protestant pastor Samuel Zoch, a well-known Slovak patriot, was

³⁰⁸ *PZ*, morning paper, 26 November 1918.

appointed Czechoslovak Government Commissioner and County Sheriff (*župan*) of Pressburg, in which capacity he was to be the highest Czechoslovak official having to deal with the situation in the city during the first weeks after the occupation. As long as Šrobár remained in Žilina (until 4 February 1919), Zoch would be the man who had to bring the local political situation under control. Zoch immediately informed his counterpart, Hungarian County Sheriff Zoltán Jankó, about his appointment, and about the Czechoslovak intention to occupy Pressburg shortly after Christmas (later the occupation was postponed until New Year). However, some of the Hungarian military units that had stayed behind in the city and Magyar Bolshevist elements (a new political phenomenon) made it clear they rejected the policy of peacefully handing over the city to Czechoslovakia, declaring they would fight 'till the last drop of blood'. Zoch, who was awaiting further instructions in the nearby town of Pezinok, which already had been occupied by Czechoslovak troops, responded by saying that all resistance was useless. Similarly, the German *Volksrat* declared already on 9 December that armed resistance would only lead to unnecessary bloodshed and protested against any military defence measures.³⁰⁹ But although things were moving irresistibly towards a Czechoslovak take-over and only a small minority wanted to resist, many people in Pressburg continued to believe that the political fate of the city could eventually be decided by themselves, or at least by the international peace conference.

The view of the majority of Pressburg Germans that armed resistance to the approaching Czechoslovak troops was useless and self-destructive was an important step in their political evolution. The protests of the German *Volksrat* against the intention of those political and military groups who wanted to defend the city gained more weight when the social democrats began to play a more active role in it. On 15 December the German *Volksrat* of Pressburg was broadened and reorganised and the influence of the left strengthened. Around this time the Pressburg *Volksrat* was maintaining close contacts with the German *Volksrat* of West Hungary, a broad-based regional organisation coordinating the efforts of the ethnic Germans to attain autonomy on a territorial basis in western Hungary, a project in which the Pressburgers were interested as well. The initiative for the reconstitution of the Pressburg *Volksrat* itself came from the social democratic *Arbeiterrat*, which called for a public meeting on 15 December to strengthen the political basis of the German movement for 'national equality, German cultural autonomy, and democracy'. The leading political forces in the reconstituted *Volksrat* were the Radical Democrats and the social democrats, but other German political parties, notably the Christian Socials, decided to join up as well. Around the middle of December some Pressburg Germans were still entertaining illusions about the possibility of remaining part of Hungary and participating in the project to establish German national autonomy in the Hungarian western counties. This project was a more attractive option for them than incorporation into the Czechoslovak Republic, and it was probably seen as the last chance to forestall the coming of 'the Czechs'. At the Pressburg meeting of 15 December indeed a resolution was passed supporting the affiliation of the Pressburg *Volksrat* to the broader German movement and

³⁰⁹ *PZ*, morning paper, 6 December 1918, 10 December 1918, 13 December 1918, 22 December 1918; *Republik*, 11 December 1918, 14 December 1918; Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 538; Magdolenová, 'Emanuel Lehocký', p. 78; Hronský, 'Obsadenie Bratislavy', pp. 315-7; Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, pp. 90-1, 130; Victor S. Mamatey, 'The Establishment of the Republic', in *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*, eds Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža, Princeton, 1973, pp. 30-3; Perman, *Shaping*, p. 94, who stresses that the 'Entente note' of 21 December 1918 was in fact a unilateral French note. See for the establishment of the 'Ministry Plenipotentiary', which made Šrobár virtual 'dictator of Slovakia', Ferdinand Peroutka, *Budování státu*, 2nd edn, 4 vols, Prague, 1991 (1st edn 1933-6), vol. 1, pp. 256-62; see also Katarína Zavacká, 'K tradícii nariadení právomoci na Slovensku', *Česko-slovenská historická ročenka*, 2002, pp. 197-212; Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, pp. 561-2, who stresses that the law on the provisional administration of Slovakia of 10 December 1918 stipulated that the Hungarian officials and government employees could stay at their posts if they were competent and swore allegiance to the Czechoslovak Republic. See for Samuel Zoch Natália Krajčovičová, 'Samuel Zoch', in *Muži deklarácie*, ed. Dušan Kováč, Bratislava, 2000, pp. 182-98.

demanding that the Hungarian government accord ‘German West Hungary’ (now a standard expression) full autonomy as a unified territory. The Pressburgers supported the creation of a German National Assembly for West Hungary to discuss and introduce a system of self-government and obviously wanted to participate in it. But when on 22 December the autonomy of German West Hungary, possibly including Pressburg, was proclaimed in Ödenburg (Sopron), this seems to have caused some confusion in Pressburg. Apparently the Pressburg *Volksrat* had not been properly informed about this step before it was taken, even though the German Radical Democratic leader Alois Zalkai had played an active part in preparing the ‘Ödenburg Proclamation’. Pressburg had clearly become increasingly isolated from the rest of West Hungary, and the Entente note of 21 December effectively precluded its participation in the German autonomy plans. Moreover, not much substantial resulted from them as yet, apart from declarations, negotiations with the Hungarian government, and making further plans; three years later, after many vicissitudes and finally a plebiscite, a major part of ‘German West Hungary’ was incorporated into Austria as the Burgenland province. What is important about this episode however is that the interest of the Pressburg Germans to participate in the German West Hungary project showed their growing national consciousness and their desire for cultural autonomy. The Pressburg Germans had reached a state of mind where the defence of Pressburg as a Hungarian city had become less important than the achievement of a form of German ethnocultural autonomy. If this could not be realised in Hungary, perhaps it could in the framework of the Czechoslovak Republic. This meant that the political and psychological gap between the Germans and Magyars of Pressburg became wider, the former refusing to risk their lives for Hungary. The German *Volksrat* of Pressburg became for a short period of time a successful German national platform. The election as chairman of Carl Angermayer, the owner of the *Pressburger Zeitung*, on 19 December was meant to underscore the all-German, inclusive character of the *Volksrat*. Its newly elected *Präsidium* had six members – the three Radical Democrats Zalkai (who was also editor of the newspaper *Republik*), Dewald, and Ludwig Fink, Paul Wittich as the representative of the *Arbeiterrat*, the Christian Social leader Count Ferdinand Billot, and Angermayer. The seemingly weak representation of the social democrats – which was strengthened later, however – reflected their policy of encouraging the ‘bourgeois’ political parties to play an active role in the democratic revolution (although on other occasions they insisted on the working-class movement being represented ‘on a par with the bourgeoisie’). On 30 December, two days before the Czechoslovak occupation of Pressburg, the *Volksrat* held another meeting where Angermayer described its objectives as follows. ‘Our wishes are the result of our German feelings’, he said, ‘our wish is that our German mother tongue shall attain its old importance again... in school, church, before the authorities, before courts of justice.’ Their aim was ‘to unite all German Pressburgers in the camp of the German *Volksrat* of Pressburg, so that we will attain the power and prestige... that we deserve’.³¹⁰ By this time it must have become quite clear to the Pressburg Germans that, if anything was to be achieved in this direction, it would have to happen within the framework of the Czechoslovak Republic.

The German mass meeting of 15 December, called in connection with the reconstitution of the Pressburg *Volksrat*, was an especially remarkable event. A closer look at it may provide us with a deeper insight into the growth of the new German national consciousness among the Pressburgers and the Hungarian Germans generally, including the social democrats. Paul Wittich

³¹⁰ *Republik*, 15 December 1918, 17 December 1918 (for details on the meeting of 15 December), 21 December 1918, 25 December 1918; *PZ*, evening paper, 15 December 1918; *PZ*, morning paper, 16 December 1918 (for the meeting of 15 December), 20 December 1918, 31 December 1918 (for Angermayer and the meeting of 30 December); Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, p. 82; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, pp. 34, 36; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, p. 35; Danuša Serafinová, *Pressburger Zeitung - Nutz und Lust*, Bratislava 1999, p. 121 for data on Angermayer. See for the rise of the German autonomy movement in West Hungary Schlag, ‘*Aus Trümmern geboren...*’, esp. p.121ff for the German *Volksrat* of West Hungary.

spoke of ‘the day of the rebirth of Pressburg’ on which the German population, ‘after decades of oppression’, could at last ‘meet together as equal citizens’. One of the most important speakers at the meeting was Pressburg’s old social democratic leader Heinrich Kalmár, who had come from Budapest to his home town as an official representative of the Central Commission of Hungarian Germans. Kalmár noted that some leaders of the German national movement in Hungary had acquired among their opponents the reputation of ‘pan-Germans’; he commented that it was better to be a pan-German than a ‘pan-Magyar’ or a ‘German who discovered his German identity only yesterday’. Kalmár said it was a normal thing if one loved one’s own people first, and it was no wrong ‘if one had a somewhat *völkisch* orientation’. The Hungarian Germans had long been oppressed politically, socially, and nationally; there had been no universal suffrage because the Hungarians were afraid of the other nationalities. The children of the German workers had been educated in a ‘strange language’ and did not learn to read or write proper German. The political and parliamentary representatives of the old regime were ‘political criminals’; they showed a liberal face to the outside world but were tyrants in their own country. According to Kalmár, ‘the operetta freedom of the Magyars was known all over the world’. He wondered how they could speak of the territorial integrity of Hungary all the time ‘when it did not exist anymore’. He said they – apparently he meant the Hungarian politicians of the moment – wanted to continue a damnable system ‘under the cloak of integrity’, but what Hungary really needed was a multinational federation. Kalmár made the notable statement that ‘the social question in Hungary could not be solved as long as the national question had not been settled’. The ‘politically educated working class’ would play a leading role also in the national field and would become the ‘*Sturmtruppe* of the Germans in Hungary’. But he added that while they were stressing their German national identity (*Deutschtum*), they should not lapse into chauvinism; what they demanded for themselves must also be granted to the other nationalities. Another speaker at the meeting, the Radical Democrat Alois Zalkai, pointed out that the Germans were the only ones who still supported the Hungarians, since all the other nationalities had turned their back on them; therefore, the Hungarian government should accept all their demands for cultural autonomy. Kalmár, who briefly spoke for a second time, said he was ‘astonished’ that the Hungarian school ordinance on German-language education had not been adopted yet, and that it was still happening that German speakers at public meetings were not allowed to speak.³¹¹ From these statements made on 15 December it may be concluded that the Germans had not only abandoned their timidity in confronting the Hungarian authorities and the Hungarian political scene, but that they were increasingly impatient and discontented with the pace of national-political reform. Nationally conscious German social democrats like Kalmár had reached the stage where they declared the resolving of the national question to be a priority over all other social and political issues in Hungary. But the rise of an unprecedentedly militant German national consciousness did not automatically mean that the Hungarian or the Pressburg Germans also had the political leverage to enforce their demands. Neither was it certain that the militant attitude of a minority was sufficiently backed up by the enthusiasm of the mass of ethnic Germans, a condition for strengthening and unifying the multi-party German national movement.

The Pressburg Germans realised that much depended on their ability to take the political initiative and to maintain a degree of ethnic unity. This was probably also one of the reasons why the German social democrats accepted for the moment a minority position in the German *Volksrat* vis-à-vis the Radical Democrats and other ‘bourgeois’ parties, although they were the strongest social and political movement in the city. They saw the *Volksrat* as a means to mobilise larger numbers of people in order to fight for the democratic and national-cultural rights of the broader German population. This unity was highly necessary, for as was frequently noted by German journalists and political leaders, a principal enemy of the Germans was their own apathy

³¹¹ *Republik*, 17 December 1918.

and indifference. ‘Apathy’ may have been an exaggeration, but it is true that the Germans were faced with completely new social and political challenges and that many of them were slow to meet them. This was caused by what has been described as the traditionally ‘opportunistic’ mentality of many Pressburg Germans, in effect their Janus-faced survival strategy. Further by the multilingual and multinational character of the city, which to some extent discouraged extreme ethnic nationalism, especially during the first weeks of enthusiasm for the Hungarian democratic revolution. It was also caused by the Germans’ experience of the oppressive Magyarisation policies, which had prepared them badly for the new situation, and by their consequent inexperience in defending their ethnic interests. Finally, it was encouraged by the fact that a leading movement like social democracy, despite its occasional defending of German ethnocultural positions in the past, had always stressed class interests over ethnic interests. Various Pressburg newspapers, which were in the process of making the change to defending specific German interests themselves, were keenly aware of this. The *Westungarischer Grenzboten* noted in connection with the reconstitution of the German *Volksrat* that ‘the greatest enemy of *Deutschtum* is neither the already tamed Magyars, nor the presently untamed Slavs’. Indeed the greatest damage to the ‘forty thousand German-speaking inhabitants of Pressburg’ was caused by their own ‘indolence’, which still dominated ‘the greater part of them’ today. They had so much been intimidated by decades of ‘chauvinist rule’, that they had even tolerated ‘without resistance’ that their German schools, German theatre, and German administrative language were taken away from them. That was bad enough, but what they needed now was ‘a strongly organised *Deutschtum* in the midst of the Slav flood’.³¹² The struggle for German national interests had at first been focused on finding solutions in the new democratic Hungary. In this context the idea arose of implementing the ‘Swiss model’ of small-scale national federalism, of decentralisation or ‘cantonisation’, in an effort to achieve real self-determination and national equality. According to the *Pressburger Zeitung*, Hungary should become a ‘Switzerland of the East’, a slogan that was also raised by Oszkár Jászi, and later by Edvard Beneš to prove the good intentions of the Czechoslovak Republic.³¹³ But this neo-Hungarian option became ever more unrealistic as the likelihood of Pressburg’s annexation by Czechoslovakia increased, and also because it proved very difficult to carry out a serious reform programme in Hungary itself. Indeed, even a pro-Hungarian newspaper like the *Karpathen-Post* suggested during the second week of December that ‘we may have to join the Germans of Bohemia’.³¹⁴ Like other German political groups, the German social democrats and their newspaper *Westungarische Volksstimme* initially supported the programme of national rights for all Hungarian nationalities and national autonomy for German West Hungary. Their old leader Heinrich Kalmár, who had moved in 1914 to Budapest, even became secretary of the ‘Central Commission of Hungarian Germans’ and played a leading part in the effort to implement the German West Hungarian project. After the Czechoslovak occupation of Pressburg, the German social democrats continued to support the programme of national-cultural autonomy, but now as a strategy to ensure minority rights in the new state.³¹⁵ A new German newspaper in Pressburg was the *Radical Democratic Republik*, which started publication on 1 December 1918. Like other German newspapers it tried to balance German nationalism and Hungarian patriotism, demanding complete cultural autonomy, including German schools and an official status for the German administrative language, for the Germans of West Hungary within the historical Hungarian borders. At first the paper hoped that Pressburg could be part of this project, but in the course of December some of its leaders, especially Zalkai

³¹² *WG*, 17 December 1918.

³¹³ *PZ*, morning paper, 20 November 1918.

³¹⁴ *Karpathen-Post*, 12 December 1918.

³¹⁵ Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, p. 130; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 99; Ruprecht Steinacker, ‘Roland Steinacker und die Gründung des Burgenlandes’, *Südostdeutsches Archiv* 14, 1971, pp. 173-87.

and Dewald, began to develop a working relationship with Czechoslovak representatives like Milan Hodža, Zoch, and Šrobár. *Republik* even expressed its confidence in the democratic credentials of the Czechoslovak State and its leaders. This Radical Democratic tendency increased towards the end of December and even more after the Czechoslovak occupation of Pressburg in January 1919. It soon caused growing alienation between the allegedly ‘Czechophile’ Radical Democrats and the more proudly independent German social democrats.³¹⁶

On 22 December, almost simultaneous with the announcement of the Entente note on the demarcation line between Hungary and Czechoslovakia assigning Pressburg to the Czechoslovak side, Alois Pichler, editor of the *Pressburger Zeitung*, published an open letter addressed to the Pressburg population. Apparently the letter was meant to psychologically prepare the Pressburgers for the imminent change of national regime. Pichler impressed upon his readers and the citizens of Pressburg that if it came to a Czechoslovak occupation of the city following an Entente decision to that effect, armed resistance would be useless. He argued that Hungary was not in a position to act, either politically or militarily, ‘and therefore our imperative duty is: protection of our closer fatherland, our home town and citizenry. Pragmatic considerations compel us to accept the inevitable. Cold reasoning, not being more Roman than the Pope, not feeling more capable of governing than the government itself. A warm feeling for our poor heavily afflicted home town and citizenry!’³¹⁷ This emotional statement can be seen as a historic retreat by a major section of Pressburg citizens from the position of being Hungarians first, Pressburg Germans second, to the position of proclaiming themselves Pressburg citizens and ethnic Germans first. Urban patriotism, the immediate interests of the city, now proved to be the hard core of the Pressburgers’ identity, especially in the case of the ethnic Germans. Their status and interests as Pressburg citizens was something the German-speaking Pressburgers were unlikely to abandon, unlike their status as Hungarians and the traditional imperatives of Hungarian patriotism. The next step could be to pragmatically accept annexation by Czechoslovakia, especially if guarantees were given that the Germans’ cultural and ethnic identity would be tolerated and protected. Pichler disclosed in his open letter that the German *Volksrat* of Pressburg had sent a message to the Hungarian government that it had decided on 19 December that a military defence of Pressburg, as some elements in the city continued to advocate, was a threat to the population. The *Volksrat* assumed that the political status of Pressburg would be finally decided at the international peace conference ‘in accordance with the right to self-determination’ and asked the Hungarian government to help protect the people from the risks of a senseless military action. According to Pichler, this was ‘truly the wish of our citizens’. He went so far as to quote Friedrich Schiller, who had written in 1801, after the French conquest of parts of Germany (the Holy Roman Empire): ‘Even if the Empire perished, its dignity would remain unchallenged. She is a moral entity, she is rooted in civilisation and character, and these are independent of her political fate.’ Pichler stressed that ‘our town community will remain under every *Imperium* for all of our citizens the closer, beloved fatherland [*Heimat*]!’³¹⁸ The stressing of their local cultural and ethnic identity was for the Germans of Pressburg a way to legitimise their refusal to make useless military efforts for the

³¹⁶ Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, pp. 91-2; Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, pp. 132-4. During the first weeks of its existence *Republik* called itself ‘German daily of the Radical Democratic Party of West Hungary’ and ‘official organ of the German *Volksrat* of West Hungary’.

³¹⁷ *PZ*, morning paper, 22 December 1918.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*; see also *Republik*, 20-22 December 1918. According to a report in the *Republik* of 21 December 1918, Wittich was initially against the proposition that under no circumstances resistance must be put up to the Czechoslovak army and that they must accept that only the Entente could decide their fate; perhaps he considered this wording too defeatist. But the declaration of the German *Volksrat* of 19 December was signed by all members of its *Präsidium*, including Wittich.

sake of Hungary, and an expression of their pragmatic way of looking to the future of the city. They found some strength, honour, and conviction in pointing to the cultural and civilisational rather than the political meaning of being German. This tendency also existed in social democratic circles, which in addition could fall back on socialist notions of internationalism and proletarian solidarity. For a German social democratic leader like Heinrich Kalmár, the fate of their German nation was in the present situation more important than either the preservation of the Hungarian State or even the defence of working-class interests. The political dynamics of post-war Central Europe had turned Marxism upside down, causing a major shift in the thinking and political priorities of both the German, the Magyar, and the Slovak social democrats.

While the Slovaks and the Germans were in the process of transforming their national position, the Magyars felt deeply threatened, and some of them were determined to defend Hungary's interests in Pressburg. On 23 December it was confirmed that the 'Hungarian Soldiers' Council of Pozsony', which included both officers and common soldiers, wanted to defend the city 'till the last drop of blood'. This was bizarre given that at the same time provisional arrangements for the formalities of occupation were discussed between County Sheriff Jankó and his intended successor Czechoslovak County Sheriff Zoch. Jankó told Zoch that the Pressburgers were 'far from enthusiastic' about the prospect of occupation and that 'strong resistance' would be put up if irregular armed elements instead of regular army troops would try to enter the city; only the latter would be admitted without resistance. Zoch assured him that the occupation would be carried out by highly disciplined troops only, units recruited from the Czechoslovak Legions that had been fighting on the western and Italian fronts. He also informed Jankó that it had just been decided that the occupation would not take place before New Year. Moreover, he told the Hungarian County Sheriff that the administration of the city would be allowed to continue in the Magyar and German languages; but in the administration of Pressburg County the Slovak language would be introduced (how far it would be possible to distinguish between these two administrative levels remained to be seen). Afterwards Jankó told the *Pressburger Zeitung* that he had the impression that the personality of Samuel Zoch was a 'reassuring guarantee' that the citizens of Pressburg would not suffer any injustice.³¹⁹ The reactions in Budapest were different. When on 24 December the head of the Entente military mission in Hungary, the French colonel Vyx, officially informed Károlyi about the Entente decision on the new demarcation line, which was to be regarded as the *de facto* frontier between Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the Hungarian Prime Minister protested that 'purely Magyar cities like Pozsony and others had to be given up'.³²⁰ It was undoubtedly very painful for the Hungarian government and indeed for the Magyar nation that large portions of the former Historical Hungary, even if they were by no means 'purely Magyar', had to be handed over to the pro-Entente successor states. The Károlyi government simply could do nothing about it, and there is little evidence that militant groups like the 'Hungarian Soldiers' Council' in Pressburg were instructed from Budapest. The situation seemed all the more hopeless for the Hungarians now that the Czechoslovak Republic was looking for allies among the German population. At the end of December the Slovak Milan Hodža, envoy of the Czechoslovak Republic in Budapest, wrote to Samuel Zoch that people like the Radical Democrat Alois Zalkai – in other words, Pressburg Germans who were developing a pragmatic perspective on the Czechoslovak take-over of the city – could be seen as 'positive elements' from the Czechoslovak point of view and should be involved in the new Pressburg administration.³²¹ That the social democrats were potentially such

³¹⁹ *PZ*, evening paper, 23 December 1918; see also *Republik*, 24 December 1918; Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 538. The *Republik* of 28 December 1918 reported that the 'defence force' of Pressburg claimed that 'the Pressburg population' demanded a plebiscite and protested against 'Czech Imperialism'.

³²⁰ *Pressburger Tagblatt*, 25 December 1918.

³²¹ Letter of Milan Hodža to Samuel Zoch, 30 December 1918, in *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska. Pripojenie Bratislavy k Československej Republike roku 1918-1919. Dokumenty*, eds Vladimír Horváth, Elemír

an element as well was shown, perhaps, by a meeting of the *Arbeiterrat* on 27 December. The meeting expressed what looked like a mixture of anti-Czechoslovak protest and political realism. It was argued that, because ‘more than eighty-five percent’ of the Pressburg population were Magyar- and German-speakers, the Entente order to hand over the city to Czechoslovakia ‘violated Wilson’s right of self-determination’ and supported the ‘illegal annexation policy’ of the Czechoslovak state. The Pressburg population would ‘not renounce its right’ to decide the fate of its own city. The *Arbeiterrat* demanded a plebiscite, supervised by a mixed Magyar-German-Slovak commission, on the status of Pressburg and on the question of what language should be the city’s language of administration. The occupation should not take place prior to the holding of this plebiscite. It was also demanded that officials like Pressburg’s Government Commissioner, mayor, and police chief should be elected by the population, and that cultural institutions like the university, schools, and the theatre should be reorganised ‘in accordance with the result of the plebiscite’, so that ‘all nationalities would be satisfied with regard to their cultural claims’. What was visualised was apparently a policy that was democratic both in a civic-political and an ethnocultural sense, with all the important national languages being recognised in Pressburg’s cultural and political institutions. Furthermore, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly should be granted ‘to all national groups’, and social support of the disabled, the unemployed, and the sick (measures introduced by the Hungarian government) should be retained. If the Czechoslovak state fulfilled these demands, ‘the organised working class would strongly support the occupation forces in keeping order’, otherwise she would ‘refuse all responsibility and fight for her rights with all means at her disposal’. Thus, although the *Arbeiterrat* opposed the occupation in principle, it also indicated that it might be prepared to cooperate with the new regime if certain conditions were met. But some of these conditions, especially a plebiscite, were hardly realistic – apart from the fact that the occupation was likely to happen before the Czechoslovak government could even meet them. Moreover, whether or not the social democrats would assist in keeping order in Pressburg also depended on pre-occupation developments in the increasingly unruly city. Nevertheless, on 28 December the Pressburg National Council – whose influence had been gradually declining – decided to support the demands of the *Arbeiterrat* as a basis for further talks with Czechoslovak representatives.³²²

A factor that was – however unpleasant – to the advantage of both the German pragmatists in Pressburg and the Czechoslovak Republic was the outbreak of disorder, plundering, and almost complete anarchy during the last week of December 1918, which speeded up negotiations about the surrender and occupation of the city. On Christmas Eve there were violent incidents and shooting-affrays involving intoxicated individuals of various descriptions,

Rákoš, and Jozef Watzka, Bratislava, 1977, p. 156. According to Milan Krajčovič, Hodža ‘cooperated’ in Budapest with west Hungarian German leaders like Zalkai and Géza Zsombor; see Milan Krajčovič, ‘Die Slowakei und die Entstehung des Burgenlandes’, in *Burgenland 1921. Anfänge, Übergänge, Aufbau*, ed. Rudolf Kropf, Eisenstadt, 1996, p. 81. From an interview with Alois Zalkai’s son Ľudovít Zalkai in December 1951 it appears that Alois Zalkai visited Hodža in Budapest in December 1918, and that, perhaps as a result of this visit, he came to regard the Czechoslovak annexation of Pressburg as inevitable. It also appears that Alois Zalkai had contacts with a French legionary of Czech or Slovak origin (František Novák) and other French military officers who came to Pressburg with the French military mission in December 1918. See SNA, SD, File 203.

³²² *Republik*, 29 December 1918; see also Zelenák, ‘Maďarská sociálna demokracia’, pp. 161, 186 n.40. That the *Arbeiterrat*, despite its rather ambitious demands, tended to make a realistic assessment of the situation is shown, for example, by its attempts to change the mind of the militant Hungarian Soldiers’ Council. A meeting of the Soldiers’ Council on 30 December was attended by three social democratic leaders (Wittich, Franz Fehér, and Elsa Grailich), who appealed to the soldiers to support the policy of the *Arbeiterrat*, i.e., ‘to protest against an occupation but not to call for a military defence’. See *Republik*, 31 December 1918. Even more interesting is the fact that Wittich visited Prague at the end of December to ‘negotiate’ about the imminent Czechoslovak occupation. At a meeting of the German *Volksrat* of Pressburg on 31 December (by which time Wittich had become *Volkskommissär*), he confirmed that the occupation would probably take place on the first days of January and said it was ‘unavoidable, because an Entente decision’. See *Republik*, 1 January 1919.

soldiers, police, criminals, and others. The remaining Hungarian military units in Pressburg, especially the Hungarian Soldiers' Council and its 'Soldiers' Guard', were reinforced by and transformed into the so-called 'Red Guard'. The Soldiers' Guard denied that they were plunderers ('as many in Pressburg seem to think') or extremists and claimed they simply wanted to protect the population; they wore 'red cockades' just to be 'recognisable' (but also of course to display their political belief). The radicalised 'Red Guard' arising from this milieu was an increasingly audacious armed formation of Magyar militants that seems to have included both soldiers and others, and that represented a political-ideological mix of Bolshevism and Magyar nationalism. They were determined not to surrender the city to 'the Czechs', the 'Czech Imperialists', the 'Czech bourgeoisie', etc.³²³ By the end of December they encountered active opposition from the social democratic (and German-dominated) *Arbeiterrat*, which mobilised its own armed formation, the *Arbeitergarde*, against them after the police had proved incapable of suppressing their violent actions. During the last days of December a veritable power struggle erupted between the predominantly Magyar Red Guard and the predominantly German *Arbeitergarde*, a struggle that had both political-strategic, ideological, and ethnopolitical connotations. This episode in the history of Pressburg has been subject to ideological mystifications on the part of communist-era historians, while other historians of the period have paid insufficient attention to it. The fact that the Red Guard were seen by later communists as 'Bolshevist revolutionaries' – even though they were plunderers and Magyar nationalists as much as radical socialists – has led to a grotesque emphasis on the 'class character' of their actions and the strong 'class consciousness' of the Magyar workers who allegedly supported them. It is bizarre to read how pre-1989 Slovak historians have negatively described the role of the 'reformist' and 'right-wing' German social democratic leaders, who rejected the 'revolutionary' aims and violence of their opponents and insisted on a peaceful transfer of power to the Czechoslovak army. And how they have positively described the role of Magyar radicals who actually tried to prevent this transfer of power, but who are idealised by historians who would otherwise tend to identify with Czechoslovakia. There are few episodes in modern Central European history where the 'national' and 'social' questions seem so bizarrely in contradiction to one another, and this picture was compounded by the communist interpretation of post-First World War developments. The best known of these episodes is the Hungarian Soviet Republic led by Béla Kun (March-August 1919), which after an invasion of eastern Slovakia in June 1919 established a short-lived satellite Slovak Soviet Republic that similarly has been glorified by Slovak communist historians. A less known and much briefer episode is the one we are concerned with here, the power struggle in Pressburg during the last days of December 1918. This was essentially a struggle between German – but also moderate Magyar – social democrats and Magyar 'national Bolsheviks' over the question of public order and political strategy in a situation of national, not social revolution.

In 1977 a Slovak historian, Miroslav Kropilák, described this struggle as one between the 'right-wing' Pressburg social democratic leadership and the 'most class-conscious', mainly Magyar section of the proletariat, not mentioning at all the Red Guard's Hungarian nationalist orientation.³²⁴ Part of the social basis of the Red Guard may indeed have been – in addition to

³²³ *Republik*, 28 December 1918 for incidents and disorder on Christmas Eve; *Republik*, 29 December 1918 for the Soldiers' Guard; *Republik*, 31 December 1918 for plundering mobs; *Republik*, 1 January 1919 for the apparent failure of the police (and of the non-social democratic Civil Guard) to stop the disorder and plundering at the end of December.

³²⁴ Miroslav Kropilák, 'Začlenenie Bratislavy do Československa po prvej svetovej vojne', in *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska*, eds V. Horváth, E. Rákoš, and J. Watzka, p. 22. See also Provazník, 'V prvom desaťročí', pp. 333-4, where the bizarre claim is made that 'it was characteristic of the German social democrats, not of the Magyar proletariat, that they wanted Bratislava to remain with Hungary', because 'they supported the German and Magyar bourgeoisie, who were afraid of Czech industrial competition'; also Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v*

radicalised soldiers – a section of the unskilled strata of the Magyar working class, indisciplined social groups that were susceptible to social and national demagoguery. The skilled strata that traditionally formed the basis of the more responsible and ‘respectable’ social democratic movement, especially among the German working class, could clearly not be won for revolutionary or violent pro-Hungarian actions. The events in Pressburg – and similar confrontations between social democrats and communists in Budapest – were a kind of rehearsal for the seizure of power by Magyar ‘national Bolshevism’, resulting in the regime of Béla Kun that was born from a mixture of national frustration and social discontent. Where national defeat was experienced as an intense humiliation, political radicalism could take over as a last ditch of defence. This happened in post-war Germany, Austria, and especially in Hungary, where the inability of the Károlyi government to resist the various Entente demands finally led to the Bolshevik take-over at the end of March 1919. It was as though the Magyar masses and their political leaders sought a way out of national demoralisation by plunging into social and political radicalism and a new policy of national revenge. In this way despair could perhaps be transformed into moral regeneration. The old political groups, even the old-style social democrats, were seen as incapable of saving Hungary; they had to be ousted and replaced with Bolshevism. A national-Bolshevik regime might offer a perspective to restore the position and self-respect of the Hungarian nation and at the same time bring social justice. Thus Hungarian Bolshevism could be seen as an expression of the state of the Magyar collective psyche during the period of national revolution and Hungarian defeat.³²⁵ The German population of Pressburg, however, had developed a somewhat different psychological condition during the critical days of December 1918. The Germans began to evolve their own strategy of political and ethnic survival – pragmatic acceptance of the unavoidable annexation of Pressburg by the Czechoslovak state, and demanding a form of autonomy within the new state-political framework. An important phase in this process was the events at the end of December and the confrontation between the social democrats and the Red Guard.

As the situation in Pressburg deteriorated from day to day and the arrival of Czechoslovak troops seemed only a matter of time, fear and anxiety among part of the citizens increased. Some of those belonging to the Magyar gentry and the Hungarian administration began to evacuate economic and bureaucratic assets and to leave the city with their families, as did a number of merchants and entrepreneurs, ‘especially Jews’, according to one historian.³²⁶ County Sheriff Zoltán Jankó proclaimed martial law, restricting the hours that people were allowed to leave their homes and prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages. However, the different security forces in

Bratislava, p.79ff. Zelenák (‘Maďarská sociálna demokracia’, p. 162) notes that ‘the political objectives and motives that led to the formation of the Red Guard are not entirely clear’; such post-communist historiographical considerations may be an incentive to further research.

³²⁵ See Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars*, Seattle 1974, p. 145 for a modern historian who explicitly uses the term ‘national bolshevik’ when describing the Hungarian events. Cf. F.L. Carsten, *Revolution in Central Europe 1918-1919*, Berkeley 1972; *Slovensko a Maďarsko v rokoch 1918-1920*, ed. Ladislav Deák, Martin, 1995; Oscar Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Hungary*, 2nd edn, New York 1969, esp. chap. 5 on the ‘mass psychology of the Bolshevik movement’, an interesting analysis by a key observer of the events in Budapest. Also of great interest is the analysis by the Hungarian social democrat Zsigmond Kunfi, one of the first commentators using the expression ‘national Bolshevism’. Kunfi fled to Vienna in 1919, and in 1925-6 gave a series of lectures about the ‘development of state and society in the post-war era’. Kunfi described how in Hungary the ‘setback’ of the lost war and its political consequences ‘assumed the form of national Bolshevism’; the same thing happened in Germany, where the Spartacists did not want to accept the ‘imposed peace’ and wanted ‘to continue the war with the help of revolutions’, which led to a ‘split in the German working class’. Kunfi stressed that ‘one should not underestimate the influence of national considerations on the working class’. See *VGA, P*, Box 157, File 1181: ‘Kunfi-Vorträge’, pp. 138-9. Another Hungarian social democratic leader and participant in the events of 1918-19, Wilhelm (Vilmos) Böhm, used the term ‘national Bolshevism’ too; see Wilhelm Böhm, *Im Kreuzfeuer zweier Revolutionen*, Munich 1924, p.295ff.

³²⁶ Hanák, *Obsadenie Bratislavy*, pp. 70, 78.

Pressburg, including the police, the National Guard (which did not seem to be a great success anyway), and the remnants of the Hungarian army, were not properly functioning anymore, or even unwilling to help maintain order. In this situation of increasing anarchy, lawlessness, and threatening power vacuum, which was aggravated by the aggressive behaviour of the Red Guard and indisciplined Hungarian soldiers especially during the last days of December, the desperate local authorities, including vice-mayor Richard Kánya and part of the Pressburg police administration, asked Paul Wittich, leader of the *Arbeiterrat*, to take over responsibility for keeping order in the city for as long as necessary, in any case until the arrival of Czechoslovak troops. It seems that not everyone agreed with this, for example Mayor Theodor Kumlik and police chief Kálmán Peterdy, both of whom withdrew to the background. Kánya then took charge of public administration, with Wittich becoming responsible for everything to do with public order and provisioning the city. On 30 December Wittich assumed the title of *Volkskommissär* and began to take his own security measures, which were supported by the German *Volksrat* and the *Arbeiterrat*.³²⁷ In order to successfully carry out the task of maintaining order in the disintegrating city, the social democratic *Arbeitergarde* was enlarged, armed, and instructed to act against all plunderers and violent elements, in particular the Magyar revolutionary groups whose actions might cause the loss of social and political control by the more moderate element of the population. By 30 December, indeed, the situation had deteriorated to such an extent, with plunderers being active all over the city and Magyar radicals planning a revolutionary coup, that the *Arbeitergarde* decided to act on a massive scale and to mobilise several hundred men, all ‘reliable organised workers’, as the German social democratic newspaper *Westungarische Volksstimme* put it. Some days later the paper wrote: ‘When a storm of unimaginable proportions and horror threatened to engulf the city, the *Arbeiterrat* decided to assume authority, entrusted comrade Wittich with its execution, and organised an *Arbeitergarde* to maintain public order and disarm those elements who were endangering public security... The *Arbeitergarde* consisted exclusively of organised workers and soon brought the situation under control – the looting stopped.’³²⁸ It was stressed by the social democrats that the only objective of the *Arbeiterrat* and the *Arbeitergarde* was to restore order, by no means to seize power on a permanent basis as was subsequently claimed by some of their political opponents, notably the Christian Socials. Indeed, on 4 January 1919 Wittich resigned his mandate as *Volkskommissär* at a session of the Pressburg town council, after the responsibility for maintaining law and order had been handed over to the Czechoslovak military authorities. Shortly after the occupation the commander of the Czechoslovak forces, the Italian colonel Riccardo Barreca, suggested that for the time being the *Arbeitergarde* should continue to assist the police and the Czechoslovak army in keeping order. But the *Arbeitergarde* was voluntarily disbanded by the social democratic leadership, which apparently preferred to keep an independent position vis-à-vis the new regime.³²⁹

The social democrats took great pains to dispel rumours that they had anything to do with the looting in the city themselves, or with the ‘revolutionary’ actions of the would-be Bolsheviks. Not only the Christian Socials, the social democrats’ political and ideological archenemy, but also Pressburg’s police chief Peterdy – who must have felt humiliated by the manner in which he was ousted from his post and by his inability to achieve what the *Arbeitergarde* seemed able to achieve – claimed at the beginning of January that the social democrats had stage-managed the large-scale plundering themselves in order to justify their seizing power. These allegations were

³²⁷ *Republik*, 1 January 1919: ‘Appeal of the Pressburg *Arbeiterrat* to the workers and soldiers’, 30 December 1918, calling on them to support its efforts to maintain order. The same issue of *Republik* also had a report on how Wittich took over the offices of Peterdy and Kumlik. See further Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, pp. 538, 543; Provazník, *Robotnícké hnutí v Bratislave*, p. 79; Kropilák, ‘Začlenenie Bratislavy’, p. 22; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 36; Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 43.

³²⁸ *Westungarische Volksstimme (WV)*, 4 January 1919.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

not appreciated by the new Pressburg authorities and the Czechoslovak military command, and as a result Peterdy was definitively dismissed from his post. This demonstrated that during the first phase of the Czechoslovak regime the German social democrats were regarded as a stabilising and reliable political factor in Pressburg. To underscore their democratic orientation and the claim that they had saved the city from anarchy and unspeakable misery, the social democrats made a great effort to distance themselves from the Bolshevik revolutionaries and to explain their actions to (and thereby consolidate their position among) the wider population. The *Westungarische Volksstimme* wrote: ‘Since a few weeks there has been talk of a so-called Red Guard. There are people who, either because of ignorance or bad intent, try to associate the Social Democratic Party with this horde dressed in uniform whose deeds must undoubtedly be marked as crimes.’ It was explained that the social democrats had nothing in common with the Red Guard or with ‘those who call themselves “Communist Party” or “Revolutionary Committee”’. When the leadership of the Social Democratic Party ‘recognised the dangerous activities of these people, who were partly being irresponsible, partly driven by evil motives, it took immediate steps to ensure order’ by organising ‘an irreproachable guard of organised workers’ to protect the city from plunderers. What ‘the working class’ had accomplished in this regard, especially during the early hours of New Year’s Day, ‘will remain an ever lasting moment of honour’. The social democrats, in other words, were portrayed – and perhaps rightly so – as the saviours of Pressburg and the guardians of order, decency, common sense, courage, and civilisation. They were the people who were always described – and always described themselves – as ‘the organised workers’: solid, responsible men, an asset to the civilised community, the opposite of the rabble who supported irresponsible ‘revolutionary’ actions. ‘These workers have been on service without interruption for thirty-six to forty-eight hours, putting their lives at risk, without eating or resting’, the German social democratic newspaper wrote. Besides protection against plunderers, ‘it was the aim of the workers to disarm those dangerous elements who under the name of “Red Guard” were playing havoc in the city; this happened in innumerable cases’. Therefore to equate the social democrats with the Red Guard was ‘an evil denunciation of the organised workers’.³³⁰ According to an anonymous letter written to the *Westungarische Volksstimme*, there were also men from Vienna among the Red Guard, possibly Bolsheviks, but perhaps plunderers who only pretended they had political motives. The writer claimed that as late as 3 January there were still people being killed or wounded by gunfire associated with the Red Guard.³³¹

The repeated claims in the Christian Social press that the social democrats were involved in plundering and revolutionary incitement themselves were obviously seen as a threat to the status and reputation of Wittich and his men as saviours of the city. It also potentially undermined the political credit they had achieved with the population and the Czechoslovak authorities. Therefore the social democratic press continued to stress how ‘the organised working class saved the city from disaster by quick, strong and diplomatic action’, and that considerable ‘courage was shown in neutralising the Red Guard’. This action was taken by people who did not defend their wealth or capital, but simply their moral conviction and civic values. ‘The working class has nothing to protect, nothing to defend, hence nothing to lose, and yet our comrades stepped courageously and boldly forward when it was necessary to protect the city in its greatest need against another, much more terrible threat’ than anything seen before.³³² The *Westungarische Volksstimme* gave interesting details of the struggle between the *Arbeitergarde* and the Red Guard during the last days of December. More than three hundred men were mobilised and armed by the *Arbeitergarde* to protect the major warehouses around the city; they ‘acted purely out of conviction’. During the early hours of New Year’s Day another wave of looting erupted,

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Letter from ‘Pressburger’, in *ibid.*

³³² *WV*, 9 January 1919.

but ‘was immediately suppressed’; ‘the different elements of the “Red Guard” were disarmed’ and foodstuffs stolen from the warehouses ‘were brought to safety’. Some of these foodstuffs were temporarily stored in the *Arbeiterheim*, the headquarters of the Pressburg social democratic movement. This may have been one of the reasons for the allegations of the Christian Socials and others, but of course the explanation of the social democrats was different. ‘How critical the situation was, can only be judged by those who were involved in it during this night. The “Revolutionary Committee” and part of the “Red Guard” wanted to seize the foodstuffs that had been brought to safety in the *Arbeiterheim*...’ The social democrats claimed that they knew about the revolutionary plans of the Hungarian radicals. ‘The great danger that was threatening us is only known by those who found out about the Revolutionary Committee, which already began to act according to plan. The occupation of banks, etc., was only a question of hours.’ In addition to the use of force, ‘diplomatic methods’ (such as tactically engaging in endless debates with leaders of the Red Guard) were used to stop them from carrying out their revolutionary plans. In several cases where direct confrontations occurred, this exposed leading social democrats to mortal danger. ‘Comrade Wittich was openly told that if he did not act in his capacity of *Volkskommissär* as the Revolutionary Committee instructed him, he would get a bullet into his head.’ Another social democratic leader was threatened in the *Arbeiterheim* with a bayonet. The ‘Revolutionary Committee’ had a leaflet printed calling on the workers and soldiers to take to the street. ‘If it had been distributed it would have caused great misery’, the *Westungarische Volksstimme* commented in a statement betraying a sound mistrust of the mob and fear of the ease with which it could be manipulated by revolutionary demagogues. The social democrats managed to seize these leaflets and destroyed them, putting an end to the political activities of the Red Guard and other Magyar radicals. They complained that ‘for this voluntary work to the benefit of the city there is not a word of recognition in the bourgeois press’. Instead, there were ‘lies’ about the role of the social democratic movement.³³³ After the defeat of the Red Guard and the Magyar Bolsheviks, most of them fled from Pressburg to seek refuge in the predominantly Magyar-speaking area to the east of the city and south of the river Danube.³³⁴

The German-dominated social democratic movement thus played a crucial political role during the period of national revolution and transition between the end of the war and the occupation of Pressburg at the beginning of January 1919. This was especially evident during the critical last days of December 1918, when a power struggle erupted between Magyar Bolsheviks and democratic socialists. The German social democrats, but also those Magyar social democrats that were part of the leadership and hard core of the Pressburg labour movement, actively defended the pragmatic policy of orderly transition to the new state-political regime. The Germans were in effect preparing for a strategy of seeking support from the Czechoslovak state to protect the ethnocultural position of the German population of Pressburg. The German social democrats were keen to be seen as defenders of the democratic order and opponents of revolutionary adventurism. This could only strengthen their position vis-à-vis the new Czechoslovak rulers, as well as their prestige among the German, Slovak, and even part of the Magyar population, most of whom had no interest in revolutionary upheaval. All the while the Slovak social democrats had remained on the sidelines of political action and the Pressburg political scene; given the weak and defensive position of the Slovaks in the city they could hardly influence developments during November and December. At the end of October *Robotnícke*

³³³ Ibid. According to Kropilák (‘Začlenenie Bratislavy’, p. 22), the Red Guard did not attempt to carry out violent actions. But Provazník (‘V prvom desaťročí’, p. 334) admits they did, and the reports in the *Westungarische Volksstimme* and other newspapers clearly show this was the case. According to a Czech military report, ‘a revolution of the Red Guard’ had broken out in Pressburg. See Hronský, ‘Obsadenie Bratislavy’, p. 320, and p. 325 for evidence of resistance by some of the Red Guards to Czechoslovak troops as late as 1-2 January 1919.

³³⁴ Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, p. 80.

noviny had optimistically written, ‘Slovakia is today a factor in international politics, lifting herself out of the narrow Hungarian framework’. Radical change was in the air, but the establishment of the Czechoslovak regime in Slovakia, and the political organisation of the Slovaks themselves, were difficult tasks. Indeed, *Robotnícke noviny* was uncertain about the immediate future, even about the stamina of the Slovaks in the long term. It was ‘not sure if the Slovaks will withstand the promises of the Magyar lords that the situation will be corrected’, if they could ‘endure for at least fifty years’, just relying on their own strength.³³⁵ What the future had in store for the Slovak social democrats, in particular in Pressburg, was as yet unclear as well. Their breakaway from the Hungarian Social Democratic Party happened only gradually, and they always felt they needed strong Czech support. At the historic meeting of the Slovak National Council on 30 October 1918, where the Martin Declaration was adopted demanding Slovak self-determination within the framework of a Czechoslovak state, the Slovak social democratic leader Emanuel Lehocký said ‘they did not trust their Magyar comrades’. At a SNC meeting the following day he took the side of those who stressed the need for close Czecho-Slovak unity. However, it was only at the beginning of December that the last organisational links with the HSDP were finally severed.³³⁶ There were several reasons for this delay. Many social democratic organisations, especially the trade unions, had a multiethnic membership; there were also numbers of Slovak social democrats working in predominantly Magyar cities like Budapest or Košice. Obviously the process of organisational separation was not a smooth and easy one, and may not even have been carried out completely. Since the middle of 1918 there had been discussions between the Slovak and Czech social democrats about a future amalgamation, but it entailed a good deal of preparatory work. Nevertheless the Slovak social democrats were gradually moving towards the moment of unification with the Czechs. At social democratic meetings across Slovakia resolutions were passed – even though several parts of the country had not been brought under Czechoslovak military control yet – anticipating the consolidation of the new state, and of its democratic and social character. On 15 December, for example, a social democratic mass meeting in the Slovak town of Liptovský Mikuláš adopted a resolution declaring that ‘the Slovak proletariat... demands that our Czechoslovak State will be based on social democratic foundations’.³³⁷

On 25 December 1918 the Slovak social democrats held their first post-war congress, which was also their last one as an autonomous Slovak organisation. It was significant that this time the congress was not held in Pressburg, but in Liptovský Mikuláš, a town with an overwhelmingly Slovak population. The congress claimed it represented almost 13,750 organised workers; the total number of Slovak trade unionists and Social Democratic Party members, however, may have been some fifteen thousand, only a fraction of whom were from the Pressburg region.³³⁸ A resolution adopted by the congress declared: ‘We adhere unwaveringly to

³³⁵ *Robotnícke noviny* (RN), 24 October 1918.

³³⁶ *Sociálne a národné hnutie*, ed. E. Holotík, documents 238-9, pp. 410-4; Marián Hronský, ‘Robotnícke hnutie na Slovensku do roku 1918’, in *Kapitoly*, eds S. Sikora et al., p. 66; Xénia Šuchová, ‘Sociálna demokracia na Slovensku v prvých rokoch Česko-Slovenska’, in *ibid.*, p. 112.

³³⁷ Miloš Gosiorovský, *Príspevok k dejinám slovenského robotníckeho hnutia*, Bratislava 1951, p. 87.

³³⁸ Gosiorovský, *Príspevok*, p. 90; Šuchová, ‘Sociálna demokracia’, pp. 112-3; Ladislav Ruman, ‘Členstvo, organizačná výstavba a programové ciele socialnej demokracie v medzivojnovom období (so zreteľom na podmienky Slovenska)’, in *Kapitoly*, eds S. Sikora et al., p. 192; Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 53; *Dejiny Slovenska. V. (1918-1945)*, Bratislava, 1985, p. 40. Ruman, Hubenák, *Dejiny Slovenska. V* (where no individual authors are mentioned), and Hautová (see below) all give the official figures of 13,736 Slovak social democratic trade unionists and 12,203 party members. Not all trade unionists were party members and *vice versa*, although there was a considerable overlapping; a total number of fifteen thousand organised Slovak social democrats (trade unionists plus non-trade unionist party members) may be a fair estimate. Indeed, there were also Slovak social democrats in east Slovakia who were members of the Upper Hungarian Social Democratic Party organisation

the Martin Declaration of 30 October 1918, which was unanimously adopted by the representatives of all strata of the Slovak nation. As loyal sons of the Slovak nation and at the same time convinced social democrats, we join and welcome the foundation of the democratic Czechoslovak Republic led by the worthy president Masaryk.’ The resolution also spoke of their enemies: ‘We vow we are prepared to defend our new, arduously conquered freedom with all our strength against all enemies and false friends, who are not at all interested in the Slovak people but are raising bombastic slogans offering our people – who up till now were kept down with the help of these slogans – autonomy and self-government...’ Thus the Slovak social democrats were entering the Czechoslovak State with great enthusiasm and high expectations. Those who were described as ‘false friends’ were undoubtedly the Hungarian social democrats and the leaders of the Károlyi government, who kept promising the Slovaks autonomy within a ‘new Hungary’. These promises and ‘slogans’ were not taken seriously by the Slovak social democrats and were seen as a means to prevent the Slovak people from attaining their real freedom and independence. In the eyes of the Slovaks the ‘slogan’ of internationalism moreover had been misused by the HSDP in the past to keep them from expressing their justified national demands. However, the Slovak social democrats continued to regard themselves as socialist internationalists as well, despite all the conflicts and disappointments they had experienced and that were still being inflamed at that moment. The congress declared: ‘On the ruins of the old monarchy we, together with the Czech comrades, shake hands with the comrades of the other Slav nations. And we want to establish relations with the workers of all other nations of the world as soon as possible, and the foundation of a new, healthy, just International securing a lasting peace for the nations of the world!’ The congress called for social reform policies, but also for a multiparty coalition to govern the Czechoslovak State during its phase of infancy and consolidation; a few days later the Czechoslovak social democratic unification congress did the same thing. The Czech social democrats were a major party in the first Czechoslovak coalition government in Prague; the Slovak social democrats were part of the provisional Slovak administration led by Vavro Šrobár. On 25 December Emanuel Lehocký commented as follows on the decision to dissolve the Slovak social democratic movement in a unified Czechoslovak party: ‘The Slovak socialists have full confidence in Czechoslovak democracy... we are convinced that our Czech comrades will not disappoint us.’ Therefore he advocated the unification of the Slovaks with – in effect their absorption by – the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers’ Party. This unification was implemented at the Czech party’s Twelfth Congress on 27-30 December 1918, which was attended by twenty-five Slovak delegates.³³⁹

The Czechoslovak/Czechoslovak Party Congress was a remarkable demonstration of Czechoslovak unity and of the Czechoslovak orientation of the Slovak social democrats, who did not seem to mind that the unified party was styled ‘Czechoslovak’ rather than ‘Czecho-Slovak’. There is some evidence however that during the following years the tendency to conceive of the Czechoslovak idea not just in terms of a common state, but in terms of a common ‘Czechoslovak nation’ (inevitably dominated by the Czechs), began to cause dissatisfaction among some of the Slovak social democrats, especially among the older generation, including Lehocký. Of course, ‘Czechoslovakism’ had a strong foundation in the Slovak social democratic movement, with its long tradition of Slovak-Czech mutuality and cooperation. But from 1919 the Slovak section of the new Czechoslovak party was gradually taken over by a new generation and a new type of

based at Košice, which remained part of the HSDP until 1919. See *Dokumenty k dejinám KSČ na Slovensku (1917-1928)*, ed. Júlia Hautová, Bratislava, 1981, document 4, pp. 27-8.

³³⁹ RN, 8 January 1919, quoted in *Dokumenty*, ed. J. Hautová, pp. 27-8; Ján Pocisk, ‘Z dejín sociálnej demokracie na Slovensku’, in František Soukup, *Revoluce práce. Dějinný vývoj socialismu a Československé sociálně demokratické strany dělnické*, 2 vols, Prague 1938, vol. 2, p. 1145; Šuchová, ‘Sociálna demokracia’, p. 113; Gosiorovský, *Príspevok*, p. 90; Magdolenová, ‘Emanuel Lehocký’, p. 79; Ruman, ‘Členstvo’, p. 193; Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 53; *Dejiny Slovenska. V.*, pp. 40-1.

Slovak professional politician closely associated with the Prague centre. This reinforced the impression that the Slovak organisation was simply absorbed by the Czechs and the old Czechoslovak party. Slovak discontent with Czechoslovak centralism – symbolically expressed in the disappearance of the hyphen in the name of the state, the nation, and most institutions and organisations – also emerged to some extent in the notoriously pro-Czechoslovak social democratic movement. But this was not yet apparent at the Prague unification congress of 27-30 December 1918, where a resolution was adopted declaring: ‘Here stands the unified Czechoslovak nation... With the new name we seal not only the unity of the republic and the nation, but also the unity of social democracy within the Czechoslovak nation.’ A start was made with the construction of Czechoslovak trade union unity by officially amalgamating the different trade union organisations from Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia. Lehotský said that the Slovak social democrats wanted ‘an undivided Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party’ as well as unity of the trade union and cooperative movements. The strongly nationalistic and ‘Czechoslovakist’ atmosphere at the unification congress also found expression in attacks on the ‘Austrianism’ of old Czech social democratic leaders like Bohumír Šmeral. The latter had been for many years one of the principal advocates of the federalist idea in the Czech party, arguing that a democratic multinational state was the best solution for the national problems of Central Europe.³⁴⁰ The nationalist tendencies in the new Czechoslovak party made it difficult for the Slovak social democrats in Pressburg – or for the Czech social democrats in ethnically mixed areas in Bohemia and Moravia – to find common ground with the German social democratic movement, which now represented a minority nationality in the Czechoslovak Republic.

If Šmeral had to suffer the criticism of those of his party comrades who wanted to celebrate their triumphant nationalism and to denounce everything that smacked of things ‘Habsburg’ or ‘Austrian’, the Austro-German social democrats, once the leading element of the working-class movement in the Dual Monarchy, had to do a good deal of rethinking too. As early as 1911 Otto Bauer had written, ‘when the chaos of the East begins to move, when the nations of Eastern Europe start their struggle for the reconstitution of their national life, when for Europe there begins again a period of wars, revolutions, state-political reconstruction’, then the question of German unification would be taken up again as well.³⁴¹ Although Bauer had been a protagonist of the idea of transforming the Habsburg Monarchy into a democratic federation of equal nations, he was less emotionally attached to the Austrian supra-national state than his fellow party leader Karl Renner. He was more inclined to return to that other national-political tradition in the Central European labour movement – the idea of greater German unity associated with the revolution of 1848, which had always survived in the Austro-German social democratic movement. As Bauer declared after the collapse of the multinational state, the Austro-Germans

³⁴⁰ Magdolenová, ‘Emanuel Lehotský’, pp. 79-80, 82 n.20; Peter Greguš, ‘Teoretické východiská sociálnodemokratickej politiky’, in *Kapitoly*, eds S. Sikora et al., pp. 20, 22 n.7; Šuchová, ‘Sociálna demokracia’, p. 113; Ruman, ‘Členstvo’, pp. 192-3; Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 55; *Dejiny Slovenska. V.*, p. 41. Magdolenová argues that ‘Czecho-Slovak social democratic unity did not develop on a natural basis’, but on the basis of an artificial Czechoslovakism and centralism. This is true in so far as there was a certain difference between the ‘old’ Czecho-Slovak mutualism and solidarity of the Lehotský generation, and the ‘new’ ethno-ideological and bureaucratic Czechoslovakism of the younger Slovak social democratic generation represented by men like Ivan Dérer and Ivan Markovič. But it should not be forgotten that men like Lehotský were themselves heralds of the idea and practice of close Czecho-Slovak cooperation and unity. They ‘naturally’ prepared the ground for the next step of complete unification and advocated this unification themselves, though perhaps without realising what its consequences could be. In a movement like social democracy, given its specific nature and history and the difficult pre-1918 conditions in Slovakia, the step of complete Czechoslovak amalgamation was unlikely not to be made, even if it is true that the notion of a unitary ‘Czechoslovak nation’ was a political fiction.

³⁴¹ Quoted in Julius Braunthal, ‘Otto Bauer’s Lebensbild’, in *Otto Bauer. Eine Auswahl aus seinem Lebenswerk*, ed. J. Braunthal, Vienna, 1961, p. 33.

did not want to lead the life of citizens of a small nation, ‘a life in which nothing big can grow, least of all the biggest thing we know – socialism’. Therefore, it was his aim ‘to become part of Germany, so that we too can lead the great life of a great people’.³⁴² These statements were revealing indeed. They disclosed some of the deeper motives that lay hidden inside the German labour movement in Austria. They showed again how a sense of German cultural superiority could go hand in hand with the Marxist notion that great national units were a necessary condition for socialism and ‘progress’. They also underscored the aversion of prominent political figures in Vienna to what was seen as provincialism and petty nationalism, the nationalism of small nations like the Czechs and Slovaks. Karl Renner, who continued to believe in the future of the multinational empire much longer than Bauer, had a similar and even deeper aversion to small-nation particularism. If Bauer was more pragmatic and realistic in assessing the trend of developments during the revolutionary year 1918, Renner tended to believe that nationalism and the national state were reactionary in comparison with the Austrian multinational state. In the new edition of his book ‘State and Nation’ published in 1918, he warned against the ‘jungle morality’ of the different nationalisms. He wrote: ‘Nationalist ideology replaces the idea of the rule of law with a kind of predator philosophy.’ The ultimate consequence of this ethnocentric mentality, which he claimed was accompanied by endless national struggles, might be that all nations would finally become ‘the prey of the people who already today are the most numerous, and soon will also have the most bayonets – the Chinese’.³⁴³ By evoking racial nightmares like this, Renner tried to delegitimize the political claims of Central European small-state nationalism, to represent ethnic nationalism as a form of barbarism and primitivism, as a movement leading to the destruction of European civilisation.

However, the break-up of the Habsburg Monarchy into mutually antagonistic national – or quasi-national – states could not be halted, and the Austrian social democrats, led by their major ideologist Otto Bauer, had no choice but to acknowledge this. On 15 October 1918 the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* wrote that there could be no doubt that ‘the dissolution of the State of mixed nationality into separate and independent nations is in progress; if not yet in law and in fact, it already has occurred in the minds of men... The nations exist, have long ago constituted themselves, their will to be free and independent is unshakeable...’³⁴⁴ On 1 November 1918 the Party Congress of the Austro-German social democrats showed that it perfectly understood the trend of events. ‘The German Social Democratic Workers’ Party’, the congress declared, defining itself in ethnic terms as well, ‘unconditionally recognises the unlimited right to self-determination of the other nations and demands the same right also for the German people.’³⁴⁵ On 12 November Otto Bauer became foreign secretary of the ‘Republic of German Austria’; Renner had become chancellor. During the previous months Bauer had shown the wisdom not to oppose the struggle for liberation of the Slav nations and to recognise their right to state independence. For this he won their respect, but now he was also the first to insist that the Austro-Germans had the right to join Germany (*Anschluss*). This he considered the final fulfilment of the national programme of 1848, of the struggle for the unity and freedom of the German nation.³⁴⁶ In 1918-19 the demand for unification with Germany was probably supported by a majority of Austrian Germans; but its implementation was prevented by the Entente, which feared an even stronger Germany. In the eyes of the Austrians and the other Germans of the former empire, the right to self-determination also meant that the Germans of Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia should have the right to decide their own fate just like the other nations, for instance through a plebiscite. However, there could

³⁴² Ibid., p. 34.

³⁴³ Quoted in Jacques Hannak, *Karl Renner und seine Zeit. Versuch einer Biographie*, Vienna 1965, pp. 93-4.

³⁴⁴ Quoted in Lewis Namier, ‘The Downfall of the Habsburg Monarchy’, in Lewis Namier, *Vanished Supremacies. Essays on European History 1812-1918*, Harmondsworth 1958, p. 181.

³⁴⁵ Quoted in Hannak, *Karl Renner*, pp. 343-4.

³⁴⁶ Braunal, ‘Otto Bauer’s Lebensbild’, p. 32.

be no question of this under the political circumstances prevailing in post-war Central Europe. This consequence of the revolution in the interethnic power structure, which downgraded the position of the Germans and the Magyars, caused great bitterness with Otto Bauer and the Austrian social democrats, as well as with the Hungarian social democrats.

Thus, the powerlessness of the Pressburg Germans was shared by all other ethnic Germans who were handed over to the Czechoslovak Republic, in a broader sense even by the citizens of the Republic of Austria. Neither the Hungarian government of Mihály Károlyi, nor the social democratic-dominated government of Austria, were in a position to do anything substantial for the German or Magyar minorities incorporated by the other successor states. The claim made by the Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs Edvard Beneš in December 1918 that Otto Bauer and the Austrian government were conducting a dangerous policy of 'promoting extremist movements' and sending weapons to armed national-minority gangs in the Czechoslovak Republic, gave an exaggerated picture of what the Austrians, or for that matter the Hungarians, could do in this respect.³⁴⁷ The German and Magyar minorities themselves were even more powerless, and notwithstanding their protests against incorporation into the Czechoslovak Republic, simply had to wait and see what their fate would be. The only exception were the Germans of western Hungary, who were given the opportunity by means of a plebiscite to join Austria three years later. This possibility did not exist for the German population of Pressburg, which the Czechoslovak leadership insisted, should become part of the Czechoslovak state. After the end of the war, the Pressburgers had almost two months to reach the point where they had to accept the inevitable fact that their future would be in Czechoslovakia. Many of the Pressburg Germans eventually proved pragmatic enough to come to terms with this reality, but it would seem that some of the Magyars were never reconciled to their separation from Hungary. Among the Germans the moderate social democrats were the strongest political force, a factor that together with the pragmatic attitude of the German Radical Democrats helped to ensure a peaceful transition to Czechoslovak rule. Perhaps the social democrats' ideological tendency to regard the official state politics of the day as less important than long-term sociopolitical trends made it easier for them to view the national revolution in pragmatic rather than exclusively ethnic or nationalistic terms. This does not mean that the national question was unimportant for them; on the contrary, the events of the period between October and December 1918 had awakened a stronger consciousness of the significance of ethnocultural identity. But the German social democrats began to believe that it might be possible to defend, perhaps even to strengthen, their position as a national minority within the framework of the Czechoslovak state. Moreover, some Czechoslovak and Entente leaders, especially Tomáš G. Masaryk and the American president Woodrow Wilson, were respected and even admired by them. German social democratic leaders knew what the old Magyar regime had meant for the Germans of Hungary; they also knew about the difficulties frustrating the endeavour to create German autonomy in the 'new Hungary'. There was no reason not to believe that it might be possible to gain certain concessions in the field of German national-cultural rights from the Czechoslovak authorities. Samuel Zoch, the newly appointed Czechoslovak County Sheriff of Pressburg, had already indicated that the new regime wanted to respect the linguistic and cultural rights of the German population. Indeed, it even might be possible to achieve a better position for the Germans than they had ever enjoyed in Hungary, even in the new democratic Hungary. In this regard the situation of the Germans in

³⁴⁷ Letter of E. Beneš, minister of foreign affairs of the Czechoslovak Republic, to S. Pichon, minister of foreign affairs of France, 20 December 1918, in *Československo na pařížské mírové konferenci 1918-1920. I (listopad 1918 - červen 1919) [Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky]*, eds Jindřich Dejmek and František Kolář, Prague, 2001, document 48, pp. 119-21. Beneš urged France and the Entente to delimit a clear demarcation line indicating the territories to be governed by the Czechoslovak Republic. The following day, 21 December 1918, the Entente note was issued defining the demarcation line that also covered the Slovak-Hungarian frontier and assigned Pressburg to the Czechoslovak side.

Slovakia was different from that of the Germans in Bohemia and Moravia, who had belonged to the ruling nationality in old Austria. The German social democrats in Pressburg tried to develop a working relationship with the Czechoslovak regime without assuming a servile or uncritical attitude. Their struggle against the Magyar Red Guard had proved that they intended to act like a responsible and democratic political force. They felt that they deserved to be rewarded with a measure of goodwill, perhaps political concessions, on the part of the Czechoslovak administration. During the critical month of January 1919 it seemed at first as though these expectations were fulfilled. The real disappointment came later, towards the end of the month. We will now look at how things developed after Pressburg was occupied by Czechoslovak troops on the first days of January 1919.

From Hungary to Czechoslovakia: January 1919

By the second half of December 1918 the predominantly German parts of Bohemia and Moravia – those areas whose German population became known as the ‘Sudeten Germans’ – had all been occupied by Czech military forces, and a beginning had been made with instituting the new Czechoslovak administration.³⁴⁸ The occupation of Slovakia proved a more formidable task because of the serious Hungarian military resistance encountered by Czechoslovak troops between the middle of November and the beginning of December. Nevertheless, by the end of December most of Slovakia proper, i.e., the predominantly ethnic-Slovak region of the former Upper Hungary, had been occupied by the Czechoslovak army. All that remained to be done in terms of military action was taking over the city of Pressburg, the ethnic-Magyar areas to the east of the city and north of the Danube that were to become part of the Czechoslovak Republic as well, and parts of eastern Slovakia, where the Hungarian influence had always been stronger than in central or western Slovakia. This final military campaign took place during the first weeks of January 1919, with the occupation of Pressburg happening on the first two days of January.³⁴⁹ However, even more important than the purely military aspect was the political fact that the – no doubt partly forcible – consolidation of the Czechoslovak State meant a radical shift in the interethnic power structure. It is no exaggeration to say that this national revolution was a shock for the Germans and the Magyars. In Bohemia and Moravia almost 3.5 million Germans had to come to terms with the fact that, from now on, they would have the status of a national minority living under the hegemony of the Czech – ‘Czechoslovak’ according to the official state doctrine – state-building nation. The initial resistance to this national revolution was strong. From the beginning of November 1918 mass meetings were organised, often led by the German social democrats, demanding the right to self-determination for the Bohemian and Moravian Germans. The most prominent leader of this protest movement was Josef Seliger, not only the leader of the German social democrats but for some time the popular leader of German Bohemia as a whole, the man who was able to inspire the German masses to politically resist. The social democrats played a leading part in establishing autonomous provincial governments among the Germans of Bohemia and Moravia; when this policy had to be ended after the Czech occupation of the German areas, they began to demand national autonomy for the Germans within Czechoslovakia.³⁵⁰ The events of November and early December 1918 have been described by a

³⁴⁸ Victor S. Mamatey, ‘The Establishment of the Republic’, in *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*, eds Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža, Princeton, 1973, pp. 27-30.

³⁴⁹ For military and diplomatic developments in Slovakia between November 1918 and January 1919, see Marián Hronský, *The Struggle for Slovakia and the Treaty of Trianon 1918-1920*, Bratislava 2001, pp. 131-52; Marián Hronský, ‘Obsadenie Bratislavy čs. vojskom na rozhraní rokov 1918-1919 a postoje mestského obyvateľstva’, in *Armáda, mesto, spoločnosť od 15. storočia do roku 1918*, eds Vojtech Dangl and J. János Varga, Bratislava, 2002, pp. 313-28; D. Perman, *The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State. Diplomatic History of the Boundaries of Czechoslovakia, 1914-1920*, Leiden 1962, pp. 78-9, 91-5, 185-6; Mamatey, ‘The Establishment of the Republic’, pp. 30-3.

³⁵⁰ Johann Wolfgang Brügel, *Tschechen und Deutsche 1918-1938*, Munich 1967, pp. 47-60; Klaus Zessner, *Josef Seliger und die nationale Frage in Böhmen. Eine Untersuchung über die nationale Politik der deutschböhmisches Sozialdemokratie 1899-1920*, Stuttgart 1976, pp. 116-43; Norbert Linz, ‘Die Binnenstruktur der deutschen Parteien im ersten Jahrzehnt der ČSR’, in *Die demokratisch-parlamentarische Struktur der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik*, ed. Karl Bosl, Munich, 1975, p. 205; Martin K. Bachstein, ‘Die Sozialdemokratie in den böhmischen Ländern bis zum Jahre 1938’, in *Die Erste Tschechoslowakische Republik als multinationaler Parteienstaat*, ed. Karl Bosl, Munich, 1979, p. 97.

Czech historian as a 'German revolution'.³⁵¹ Not only the local Germans themselves, but also the Austrian government and the Austrian social democratic leadership protested in vain against the new *fait accompli* resulting from the construction of the post-war political order and from the new interethnic power constellation in Central Europe.

Until September 1919, when the Peace Treaty of St. Germain was concluded between the Entente and Austria, some Germans and Magyars in Czechoslovakia continued to entertain the illusion, despite the hard facts on the ground, that their fate could be reversed by a favourable decision of the peace conference, notably the holding of a plebiscite. Statements by Czechoslovak and Entente representatives that the new state-political and territorial reality that had come into existence by January 1919 had to be seen as irreversible, were not believed by part of the German and Magyar population. Among the more resentful were the Magyars of southern Slovakia, including Pressburg, some of whom were never reconciled to the new status quo and easily influenced by Hungarian irredentist propaganda. But also the Germans of Bohemia and Moravia, and even many Germans in Slovakia, never became loyal citizens of the Czechoslovak Republic, despite the fact that they came to enjoy extensive minority rights in what remained for twenty years a democratic state. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the historically determined sense of cultural superiority of many Germans and Magyars vis-à-vis the Czechs, the Slovaks, and other Slavs was a major cause of this. This does not mean that the Czechoslovak government, or the Czechoslovak authorities on the local level, did not make mistakes in dealing with the new, sometimes intransigent national minorities. On the contrary, many such mistakes were made, especially during the months of establishing the new state in both Slovakia and the 'Historical Lands', as Bohemia and Moravia were called by the Czechs in a reference to the historical Bohemian Kingdom. The creation of the perhaps 'artificial' Czechoslovak Republic, which was mainly the outcome of the political will and the effective diplomatic manoeuvring of a small number of Czech political leaders, was accompanied by the propagation of certain historical and national-political myths. One of them was the claim that there existed a 'Czechoslovak' nation, a political subject whose will it was to form a unitary Czechoslovak state. The pragmatic background to this claim was that it was the only way to create a majority state-building nation, since even the more than 6.5 million Czechs, the largest national group in Czechoslovakia, did not constitute a majority of the state's total population of almost 13.5 million. The Czechs and the two million Slovaks together, however, made up almost two-thirds of Czechoslovakia's total population. But even so, the fact that at least one third of the Republic's population belonged to 'national minorities' was highly significant and fraught with political risks.

One of the arguments used by the ethnic Germans and the Austrian government to resist the Germans' incorporation into the new state, and to demand their inclusion in Austria or a greater Germany, was that the resentment caused by their subjection to Czech rule was bound to intensify national hatred and fuel German irredentism, which was a threat to the peace in Europe. Between November 1918 and the signing of the Peace Treaty of St. Germain in September 1919, the Austrian and Bohemian-German social democrats repeatedly warned of the dangerous consequences of forcing the Germans to become part of the Czechoslovak Republic. In a long letter written on 9 January 1919, Otto Bauer, now Austrian foreign minister, tried to impress this point on the French socialist leader Jean Longuet and to get his support for the Austrians' and Bohemian Germans' wish to be united with Germany. 'If... the peace conference will grant the German territory of Bohemia to the Czechoslovak state, so that 3.5 million Germans will be subjected to Czech foreign rule, the terrible national hatred between Germans and Czechs will continue, the German Irredenta inside the Czechoslovak Republic will be a permanent threat to peace, the reconstitution of the international solidarity between German and Czech workers will

³⁵¹ Zdeněk Kárník, *České země v éře První republiky (1918-1938). I. Vznik, budování a zlatá léta republiky (1918-1929)*, Prague 2000, pp. 37-44.

be impossible, and the development of socialism will be terribly complicated by national conflicts.’ According to Bauer, the prevention of this nightmare scenario was not only in the interest of keeping the peace between Germans and Czechs – who had to be separated by including them in different national states – but in the interest of the cause of socialism and the international working-class movement. Bauer explained to Longuet that it had been a long-standing ‘tradition’ of Austro-German social democracy to believe that, in the event of the collapse of multinational Austria, ‘we must fall back on the programme of the national defence of all Germans in a German Republic, which German social democracy has always advocated since the days of Marx and Engels’. The idea of a ‘Danubian Federation’ promoted by some political figures in Western and Central Europe he dismissed as a project only serving the aims of ‘French Imperialism’ (at the same time the Czechs tended to view it as serving the revival of Austro-Hungarian Imperialism). The only perspective for the Germans of the former Habsburg Monarchy was *Anschluss* to the new republican and democratic Germany, and ‘the more Germany is developing in the direction of socialism, the more passionately the Austro-German proletariat is speaking out for *Anschluss*’. Bauer asked Longuet to use his influence in Paris to find support for the idea of organising a plebiscite in the German areas of Bohemia and Moravia; this would give the Germans the opportunity to decide whether or not they should belong to the Czechoslovak State. He also asked his support for a plebiscite in Austria itself to decide the question of unification with Germany.³⁵² Bauer’s letter shows what the political atmosphere in Central Europe was like at the beginning of January 1919, and what the Austro-German and other German social democrats had in mind in terms of a solution for the difficult national problem of the German population, including the German working-class movement. In German social democratic circles across Central Europe the idea of greater German unity was well and alive. This was an important factor underlying the refusal of the powerful social democratic movement in German Bohemia and Moravia to accept the new political constellation following the establishment of Czech domination in the region. For the Germans of Pressburg, who were not directly involved in these Austrian and Bohemian-German endeavours, the situation seemed even more difficult, because they were a relatively small and vulnerable population group. As we have seen, the Pressburg Germans, in particular the Radical Democrats and the social democrats, gradually developed a more pragmatic attitude to the prospect of incorporation into Czechoslovakia. However, this did not mean that they withdrew into an attitude of meek political passivity after the occupation of the city.

³⁵² Stephan Verosta, ‘Bemerkungen zum Brief Otto Bauers an Jean Longuet vom 9. Januar 1919’, in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Festschrift für Karl R. Stadler zum 60. Geburtstag*, eds Gerhard Botz, Hans Hautmann, and Helmut Konrad, Vienna, 1974, pp. 101-2. Similar claims regarding the threat of intensified national hatred and irredentism following a Czechoslovak incorporation of German Bohemia were made in a memorandum prepared under Bauer’s direction shortly before Christmas 1918; in Bauer’s speech on 4 December 1918 quoted in chapter one; and in other Austrian and Bohemian-German letters and memoranda drawn up before May 1919. See Arnold Suppan, ‘Zur österreichischen Aussenpolitik 1918/19’, in *Aussenpolitische Dokumente der Republik Österreich 1918-1938 (ADÖ). 1. Selbstbestimmung der Republik: 21. Oktober 1918 bis 14. März 1919*, eds Klaus Koch, Walter Rauscher, and Arnold Suppan, Vienna, 1993, pp. 38-41; Perman, *Shaping*, pp. 77-8, 199-200. Leaders of the Bohemian Germans sent a memorandum to President Wilson protesting against the ‘imperialistic encroachments of the Czech state’ as early as the third week of November 1918. They asked the president to prevent the use of force against them, demanded the right to self-determination, and declared they considered themselves part of ‘the free German Republic’. See Perman, *Shaping*, p. 77, and p. 91 for subsequent appeals. The Hungarians did the same thing. On 19 November 1918 Károlyi sent a note to President Wilson asking his support for ‘the young Hungarian democracy’, which was ‘menaced by armed troops’ of its neighbours. He made several unsuccessful attempts to meet and negotiate directly with the Americans and other Entente representatives, thus bypassing Czechoslovakia and the other successor states. See Perman, *Shaping*, p. 80. It is clear, therefore, that when in February 1919 the Pressburg social democratic leaders made a similar attempt to enter into direct negotiations with the Entente, they were following a familiar pattern; these events will be discussed in chapter 7.

This chapter attempts to analyse the beginnings of the new political dynamics in Pressburg following the take-over of the city by Czechoslovak (mainly Czech, and Italian-led) military forces. The Pressburgers experienced how their old city was simply transferred from one state to another, from Hungary to Czechoslovakia. In the political developments of the first weeks under the new regime the German social democrats, who had been in virtual control of the city during the interval between Hungarian and Czechoslovak rule, continued to play an important role. They wanted to continue the strategy of peaceful transition and adjustment to the political transformation, while at the same time defending what they saw as the basic interests of the organised working class and the broader Pressburg population. The German social democrats did not hesitate to criticise what they believed were policy mistakes of the Czechoslovak administration with regard to the social, cultural, and political problems of the working class. Initially the new rulers seem to have been pleased with the attitude of the Pressburg social democratic movement. Because they made promises to protect the position of the German language and the jobs of German and Magyar workers employed by the railways and other government and municipal services, the social democrats had positive feelings as well. It seemed as though a relationship of mutual trust could be built by the Czechoslovak administration in Pressburg, headed by the conciliatory Samuel Zoch, and the German-Magyar social democratic leadership. But when the ‘Minister Plenipotentiary for the Administration of Slovakia’, Vavro Šrobár, and some of his commissioners began to intervene in the affairs of Pressburg and to prescribe what policies must be pursued in the occupied city, tension between the Czechoslovak authorities and part of the Pressburg population began to rise. The latter felt that some of the promises originally made by Zoch were not kept. Moreover, in the course of January a number of restrictive measures were taken that helped to spoil the atmosphere between the two sides. Thus the initial hope and cautious optimism began to turn into antagonism and hostility. The German social democrats felt they were forced to take a far more critical and oppositional stance if they were to keep their self-respect and their influence among the Pressburg population. They began to evolve a moral-political rhetoric of maintaining one’s honour, pride, and independence vis-à-vis the Czechoslovak regime. The fact that some of the other German political groups did not seem to care about this to the same extent, and allegedly were acting opportunistically in their dealings with the new rulers, was a reason for the social democrats heavily to attack them.

On the eve of the occupation of Pressburg, during the last days of December 1918, some sporadic fighting occurred between Czechoslovak troops and various Hungarian armed elements, including the Red Guard, who refused to accept the decision not to put up resistance to the approaching Czechoslovak army. Such resistance as there was, was easily overcome by the well-trained Czechoslovak forces, most of who were Czech legionaries from Italy under Italian commanders. The Italian commanding general Luigi Piccione and Czechoslovak County Sheriff Samuel Zoch were waiting in the nearby town of Pezinok for the moment when they could enter Pressburg. On 1 January 1919 Pressburg’s railway station just outside the city centre was occupied, and during the night and the following day the occupation of the city was completed without serious resistance being met. Apparently, only a small group of ‘agitators’ tried to rouse the population to resist; four of them were shot dead (in some newspaper reports they were described as plunderers however). The *Pressburger Zeitung* reported that on 31 December ‘the Czechs’ had appeared in the immediate surroundings of the city and that hundreds of their troops had overrun Hungarian military positions. Interestingly, the paper also brought the news that an Italian aeroplane had dropped German and Slovak leaflets reassuring the Jewish population of Pressburg that the occupation should not be seen as a threat to them; the Czechoslovak troops came to liberate the ‘nationalities’ from the ‘Magyar yoke’. Reportedly the leaflets had been sent by ‘Jewish organisations in Prague’.³⁵³ The social democratic *Arbeitergarde* had successfully

³⁵³ *Pressburger Zeitung (PZ)*, evening paper, 2 January 1919.

maintained law and order during the previous days and until New Year was firmly in control of the city. According to the *Pressburger Zeitung*, ‘everything was quiet in the city’ early on New Year’s Day, the *Arbeitergarde* ensuring public security. The paper wrote: ‘The shootings that were a common feature since Christmas Eve, day and night, have ended at last. A single-mindedly led security guard makes its presence felt.’³⁵⁴ These were complimentary comments on the role of the German social democrats, but other, more negative comments were soon to follow too. In the afternoon of 1 January a Pressburg delegation including *Volkskommissär* Paul Wittich met with a delegation of Entente military officers led by the Italian colonel Riccardo Barreca, who had been appointed military commander of Pressburg and who was destined to play a prominent part in the subsequent events. During negotiations between the two sides in the Pressburg railway station, the Pressburgers made a formal protest against the occupation, saying they had no choice but to accept the inevitable after they had decided not to put up resistance to regular troops. Wittich asked Barreca to protect their civil liberties, the right of association and assembly, and freedom of the press. Barreca promised he would do so and said he had come also to protect the city’s ‘minorities’; all Magyar and German inscriptions, notice boards, and the like would be allowed to stay. He said that the administration of the city would be left unchanged and the safety of the officials of all nationalities guaranteed; he asked the Pressburg delegation to urge the local officials and police officers to remain at their posts. Reportedly he also said he simply had to keep order in Pressburg until the city’s fate was decided by the peace conference, a statement that must have sounded far from disagreeable to Pressburg ears. It was agreed that, for the time being, public order would be maintained by Czechoslovak troops, the police, and the *Arbeitergarde* together. All stockpiles of foodstuffs were to be guarded to prevent a repetition of the looting that had been going on during the last week of December. Thus began the activity of the Italian colonel Barreca, a major actor in occupied Pressburg who, it soon appeared, was not always inclined to act in accordance with the policies of the Czechoslovak administration. From the start his attitude towards the ‘old’ population of the city seems to have been one of goodwill, but his position as local military commander held him back from directly interfering with the decisions of the Czechoslovak civil authorities, at least until February. Barreca’s superior general Piccione, who did not take up residence in Pressburg but in nearby Moravia, issued a proclamation informing the ‘population of Slovakia’ that the Entente-commanded army had arrived as ‘a friend of the entire population, without any distinction’. He appealed to all individuals and groups in the city to hand in their weapons and not to oppose the occupation army or any of its directives.³⁵⁵ But it was especially the assurances given by Barreca that made a positive impression on the population, although it must have been understood by Pressburg’s political leaders that Barreca was not more than a military officer, not a political or administrative official.

On 2 January, after the Czechoslovak occupation of Pressburg had been completed, a proclamation printed in German and Magyar and signed by acting mayor Kánya and *Volkskommissär* Wittich was distributed across the city. It explained to the Pressburg population under what circumstances the occupation had taken place, and argued that normal life was affected only to a limited degree. It stressed that the ‘responsible human factors’ representing the city had protested against the occupation, and had ‘only accepted the unavoidable in the hope that the democracy of the world will on the occasion of the peace conference make a judgment on the fate of our home town that will satisfy the concerned minds of this historical city’. Pressburg’s

³⁵⁴ *PZ*, morning paper, 1 January 1919.

³⁵⁵ *PZ*, morning paper, 1 January 1919, 2 January 1919; *PZ*, evening paper, 3 January 1919, 4 January 1919; *Republik*, 3 January 1919, 4 January 1919; *Westungarische Volksstimme (WV)*, 4 January 1919. The *Republik* of 4 January 1919 also reported that sixty-five inexperienced ‘youthful hotheads’ were killed when (against the official advice) they tried to resist the advancing Czechoslovak army just outside Pressburg.

citizens were urged to keep calm and were informed that the commanding officer of the occupation troops, colonel Barreca, had given the assurance that if the population did not disturb the peace, ‘the existing freedoms, civic customs, freedom of conscience, and the national life of the individual citizens would be respected and protected’. Barreca had assured them that the occupation troops consisted of well-disciplined men, of whom the Pressburgers had nothing to fear. ‘Attend to your work and remain calm’, the leaflet concluded.³⁵⁶ Barreca’s assurances, and the proclamation by Kánya and Wittich, probably had a positive effect on the attitude of the majority of Pressburgers. It may have been interpreted by them as a first sign that their city’s incorporation into the Czechoslovak Republic did not necessarily mean the loss of their freedom, identity, or way of life. Moreover, the *Arbeitergarde* and the Pressburg police were still functioning alongside the Czechoslovak army to keep order. It would seem that the *Arbeiterrat* decided to disband its armed guard on the evening of 2 January at the earliest; the official ending of Wittich’s mandate as *Volkskommissär* happened on Saturday 4 January at a session of the Pressburg town council. The role of the *Arbeitergarde* somehow provided political ammunition to the enemies of the social democrats, particularly the leaders of the Pressburg Christian Social Party and certain police officers. In order to neutralise this, and to keep their distance from the Czechoslovak regime, the social democrats must have deemed it wise to end the active role of the *Arbeitergarde*. Some Pressburg newspapers reported between 3 and 9 January that Wittich had tried to establish a socialist ‘dictatorship’, from which the city had been liberated by the Czechoslovak army.³⁵⁷ This claim was largely anti-social democratic propaganda, probably also an attempt to prevent that the social democrats would gain too much influence with the new regime. However, there may have been a factual foundation in it in so far as Wittich and his men – perhaps backed up by their allies in the town administration, including acting mayor Kánya – would have hesitated to disband the *Arbeitergarde*, which really controlled the city for some time and was regarded by the Christian Socials and others as a political threat. Although the *Arbeitergarde* was eventually disbanded after less than a week of concerted action, the social democrats preferring to keep their distance from the new regime, the allegations about its role made it clear that the different German and Magyar political groups were preparing their moves. There was going to be no political unity among the Germans of post-occupation Pressburg.

Thus, on 3 January Ferdinand Billot, chairman of the Pressburg Christian Social Party, published a declaration in the local pro-Christian Social newspaper positively evaluating the situation in Pressburg after the Czechoslovak occupation and heavily attacking the social democrats. ‘The occupation has also brought a certain sense of... relief from anxious uncertainty. The tragedy has ended; from now on we are looking to the future... The anarchistic security conditions of the recent period, especially of the last few days, have disappeared; everyone is calmed down and concentrating again on their work and profession after the occupation troops, in association with our police, established unprecedented order within a few hours and made all party guards superfluous.’ Billot was one of the most contented men in town, especially because the Czechoslovak troops seemed a guarantee against any social democratic endeavour to consolidate the power of the *Arbeiterrat* and its armed guard. The declaration continued: ‘The failed attempt to establish a dictatorship of the social democratic minority will soon be a thing of the past, and we are assured that the new rulers will entrust the direction of all public affairs to men who have the confidence of all classes of the population, as has happened already with regard to the post of county sheriff.’ The Christian Socials were looking with a surprising degree

³⁵⁶ Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska. Pripojenie Bratislavy k Československej Republike roku 1918-1919. Dokumenty, eds Vladimír Horváth, Elemír Rákoš, and Jozef Watzka, Bratislava, 1977, document 49, pp. 160-1.

³⁵⁷ *Pressburger Tagblatt*, 3 January 1919, 9 January 1919; *Westungarischer Grenzboten*, 5 January 1919; Egbert K. Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei in den Jahren 1918-1929. Ein Beitrag zur Nationalitätenproblematik*, Munich 1971, pp. 40, 92.

of confidence and optimism on the new political order. ‘The state to which we belong at the present time stands on healthy democratic foundations... The spirit of discipline and order instead of pursuing revolutionary Utopias, of compromise between different interests instead of class struggle and all kinds of intolerance, is considered the foundation of every state... the Christian Social Party will be called upon to participate in a decisive way in the construction and consolidation of the new state.’³⁵⁸ Billot’s declaration was remarkable for several reasons. It openly expressed the Christian Socials’ willingness not only to recognise but to actively support the new state, even though only a few days ago they still had been among the staunchest defenders of the ‘Hungarian ruling class’, as the social democratic newspaper *Westungarische Volksstimme* bitterly commented. People who changed so quickly from being Hungarian to being Czechoslovak patriots could not be an asset for the new state, but only a reason for shame, ‘for their patriotism is a commodity that is sold to the one who pays the highest price’.³⁵⁹ The same thing could be said about the German Radical Democrats and their newspaper *Republik*, who similarly changed their position after the occupation of Pressburg, although in their case a ‘Czech-friendly’ attitude had already been in the making for some time. The *Republik* fiercely attacked the ‘terrorism’ of the Magyar Red Guard, from which it suggested the city had been liberated by the Czechs (not the local social democrats), who were portrayed as the democratic leaders of the new Central Europe. The paper even claimed that since the time of the medieval Bohemian Kingdom ‘true German democracy was always united with Czech democracy’, and wrote that the ‘Germans and Czechs want to stand together again as brothers’. But while the Radical Democrats offered their support to Zoch and the new regime, they also demanded protection for the German language and German culture.³⁶⁰

The claim by the Christian Socials and (less explicitly) the Radical Democrats that the social democrats had tried to institute a kind of dictatorship was an allegation without foundation. It would have been impossible anyway because of the impending Czechoslovak occupation. During the days of growing anarchy and threatening political vacuum preceding the occupation, Wittich’s party had acted in agreement with (part of) the Pressburg local authorities, notably acting mayor Richard Kánya, who as yet temporarily took over from mayor Theodor Kumlik. In fact, it was the German social democrats that neutralised the danger of chaos and revolutionary upheaval. It would seem, therefore, that the claims of the Christian Social Party and others were mainly an attempt – apparently from a defensive position – to denounce and illegitimate the German social democrats in front of both the Pressburg population and the new regime, with the aim of preventing them from becoming too powerful or too influential with County Sheriff Zoch and the Czechoslovak administration. But the social democrats soon proved considerably less opportunistic in their dealings with the new authorities than the Christian Socials or the Radical Democrats. Perhaps the German social democrats enjoyed a greater respect and therefore had a greater leverage with Czechoslovak officials like Zoch than other Pressburg political parties, but they used this influence to press their own demands rather than to accept whatever political crumbs were offered to them. Indeed, in an interview with Paul Wittich more than three decades

³⁵⁸ *Pressburger Tagblatt*, 3 January 1919. The *Pressburger Tagblatt* had been for years the voice of the German Christian Social Party in the Pressburg region.

³⁵⁹ *WV*, 4 January 1919. On 15 January the *Westungarische Volksstimme* carried an article on a Christian Social delegation, led by the ‘clerical count’ Billot, which had visited County Sheriff Zoch some days before ‘begging for influence and support’. The *PZ*, morning paper, of 12 January had an article on this as well. It reported that the delegation complained about the ‘social democratic terror’ against non-socialist workers, ‘against which the former regime did not act’. Apparently the Christian Socials hoped that the new regime would help to reduce the power of the social democrats also in the workplace and the social sphere.

³⁶⁰ *Republik*, 5 January 1919, 8 January 1919; *PZ*, morning paper, 15 January 1919; Gertrud Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen Pressburgs. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Umbruchsperiode 1918/20*, Munich 1942, pp. 134-6.

later, the former German social democratic leader claimed that Minister Plenipotentiary Šrobár had ‘tried to win’ him for a local ‘coalition government’, but he had rejected it and ‘demanded a liberal policy’ from the Czechoslovak administration.³⁶¹ The weeks that followed were to show that the German social democrats were able and willing to respond to the new situation in a pragmatic, but also in an independent and ‘honourable’ way. They kept a critical distance to the new regime, where others allegedly resorted to almost uncritical support and questionable manoeuvring to gain influence.

On 4 January the *Westungarische Volksstimme* informed the citizens of Pressburg that Wittich had resigned from his position as *Volkskommisär* before the Pressburg town council. The *Arbeitergarde*, whose weapons were to be handed over to the police like all other weapons in the city, was dissolved on the instruction of the *Arbeiterrat*. The *Arbeiterrat* itself continued to function as a social democratic-dominated sociopolitical platform and an organ of working-class power.³⁶² Among the positive expectations of the social democrats and others was the expectation that Pressburg’s local officials and government employees would remain in office also after Samuel Zoch had officially taken over as County Sheriff of Pressburg. This political act would make him, at least for the time being, the most powerful Czechoslovak official in the city. Zoch’s official inauguration on 6 January as ‘Sheriff of the County and City of Pressburg and Government Commissioner’ was preceded by a German-language proclamation, dated 4 January 1919 and signed by Zoch himself, addressed to the general population of Pressburg, but in particular to the Germans. In this interesting document Zoch tried to explain the Czechoslovak perspective on the new situation in the multinational city, and the intended direction of his policies in the near future. The proclamation contained certain promises that were obviously meant to calm the minds especially of the German population. There were similarities to the earlier statements made by colonel Barecca, although it is not clear if there had been any political or propagandistic coordination between Pressburg’s military commander and its highest political-administrative official. Zoch declared that he was ‘not surprised’ if the German-speaking inhabitants of Pressburg viewed the Czechoslovak take-over of the city ‘with scepticism’. For, ‘although in general economic life the German-speaking citizens of Pressburg were dependent on the Slovak inhabitants of its immediate surroundings, there was no spiritual link between the two peoples. They failed to appreciate the Czechoslovak people, which led to mutual alienation’. This was a mild way of referring to the feelings of superiority of the Pressburg Germans vis-à-vis the Slavs. ‘There is fear among the German-speaking population’, Zoch continued, ‘that we, who were subdued for so long, will oppress others now that we have come to power. However, there is no foundation for such fear whatsoever.’ Zoch went on to quote the famous Slovak nineteenth-century poet Ján Kollár, a man of humanistic views and an admirer of German culture, who once said that ‘only those deserve their freedom, who also value the freedom of others’. Zoch assured the Pressburg population that the Czechoslovak government was determined to respect and even to promote the development of ‘all rights, languages, cultures of all non-Slovak fellow citizens living within our state borders’. He laid particular stress on the rights of Pressburg’s German-speakers and reminded them that they, too, had been victims of the Magyarisation policy in the recent past. This was now going to change. ‘We will ensure the language rights of the German population, and those who were oppressed so much that they could not even defend the German theatre, home of the arts, will certainly convince themselves that if in the future this city belongs

³⁶¹ SNA, SD, File 206: interview with Paul Wittich, December 1951, January 1952. See also Peter Zelenák, ‘Maďarská sociálna demokracia na Slovensku’, in *Kapitoly z dejín sociálnej demokracie na Slovensku*, eds Stanislav Sikora et al., Bratislava, 1996, p. 187 n.43.

³⁶² The *Westungarische Volksstimme* of 4 January 1919 indeed only speaks of the dissolution of the *Arbeitergarde*, by no means of the *Arbeiterrat*, which was responsible for both establishing and disbanding the *Arbeitergarde*. At critical moments in 1919-20 the *Arbeiterrat* always re-emerged as a key organ defending working-class and social democratic interests.

to the Czechoslovak State, it will only bring advantages.’ Therefore he ‘asked’ the people of Pressburg to accept the ‘irreversible fact’ that the city belonged to the Czechoslovak Republic. He asserted that the city had a great economic future, that it would flourish to a degree that would ‘exceed the most audacious dreams’, because as a Czechoslovak city it would be more important than it had been in the Habsburg Monarchy. ‘The linking up of Pressburg with the nations of Western Europe will then be a fact, and the former suburb of Vienna will be a flourishing cultural and economic centre.’ He said that Pressburg would be proud to be the capital of the territory again whose centre it had been during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (when as a result of the Turkish conquest of most of Hungary Pressburg became the centre of what remained of Habsburg Hungary, a territory almost coinciding with modern Slovakia). Thus Zoch appealed to the well-known pride and local patriotism of the Pressburgers, who could look forward to a great future. He then drew attention to the Czechoslovak law of 10 December 1918 that provided for the incorporation and administrative reorganisation of Slovakia. In accordance with this law Zoch announced the dissolution of the Hungarian county assembly and the old Pressburg town council; he said he would soon institute new representative bodies to replace them. He confirmed that the administrative language in Slovakia as a whole would be Slovak, but where there were ‘major concentrations’ of speakers of other languages such as in Pressburg, the use of other administrative languages would be allowed as well; he would soon issue a decree on this matter. Zoch considered it necessary also to give a warning. He said he would punish ‘with the greatest severity’ any incitement against the Czechoslovak State, the Czechoslovak army, or the new state language. He trusted that the German population would fulfil its ‘patriotic duties’, and that all would become ‘loyal and devoted industrious citizens’ of the new state. Samuel Zoch, a Protestant pastor, concluded by saying: ‘I hope I will convince my fellow citizens, without the use of coercive measures and on the basis of the purest charity, that our state will motherly treat and protect them all.’³⁶³ The proclamation was a moral, political, and propagandistic document all in one. It typically wielded both the carrot and the stick. One feels that Zoch considered the task awaiting him a heavy and complex one, that perhaps he was not entirely sure how to go about it. Indeed, he left his post prematurely in August 1919 after having accumulated a good deal of political frustration. His experiences in trying to sort out the affairs of Pressburg on behalf of the Czechoslovak government undoubtedly played a part in this.

As yet the first steps of the new administration were welcomed by different sections of the Pressburg population. The *Pressburger Zeitung* even spoke of the city’s liberation from ‘the chains of centralist Budapest’.³⁶⁴ The official taking over of the administration of Pressburg County from Hungarian Sheriff Zoltán Jankó by Samuel Zoch occurred on 6 January. As Pressburg’s representatives had done before Barreca on 1 January, Jankó made a formal protest against the Czechoslovak annexation, but otherwise there seemed to be a relatively relaxed atmosphere, some of Zoch’s more serious statements notwithstanding. Also present was a former sheriff of Pressburg County, the notorious Count Josef Zichy, who was highly respected by some but seen as a symbol of the old reactionary and chauvinist Hungary by others. Zichy, according to the *Pressburger Zeitung* ‘an outstanding politician, well versed in *realpolitisch* experience’, presented a ‘solemn declaration of loyalty’ to the new state, which the paper said would ‘undoubtedly convince the last sceptics’ to accept the political transformation.³⁶⁵ The *Westungarische Volksstimme* was less enthusiastic about the presence of Zichy, who was described as an ‘opportunistic dishonourable aristocrat’ – much in contrast to Jankó, whom the

³⁶³ Bratislava, *hlavné mesto Slovenska*, eds V. Horváth et al., document 55, pp. 167-8; see also *WV*, 9 January 1919. See for the law of 10 December 1918 Emil Portisch, *Geschichte der Stadt Pressburg-Bratislava*, 2 vols, Bratislava 1933, vol. 2, pp. 561-2.

³⁶⁴ *PZ*, morning paper, 5 January 1919.

³⁶⁵ *PZ*, morning paper, 7 January 1919.

social democrats regarded as a democrat and an honourable man.³⁶⁶ It is likely indeed that the conservative aristocrat Zichy – who had displayed his Magyar chauvinism to the Slovaks of Pressburg County in the 1890s – was invited to the official ceremony in an attempt to silence Magyar opposition. With the same end in mind Zoch used his inauguration to give an interview to one of the editors of the *Pressburger Zeitung*. He stressed once again that the incorporation of Pressburg into the Czechoslovak Republic had to be regarded as a definitive and irreversible fact. It was obviously deemed important by the Czechoslovak government to eliminate any illusions about another change in the status of the city, which it rightly feared still existed among part of the population. Zoch repeated he could understand ‘the unhappiness of the Hungarian public’ about the state-political transformation, and he requested the editors of the *Pressburger Zeitung* – seen as the most influential newspaper in the city – to assist him in making the transition ‘as little painful as possible’. He asked the paper to use its influence among the Pressburg public in a constructive way, ‘so that we are not forced to take measures that I wish to avoid in the interest of peaceful coexistence’. Interestingly, he said he had actually been instructed by the Czechoslovak army command to take hostages from Pressburg to enforce compliance and public order in the city. But because he knew the ‘sedateness and thoughtfulness’ of the Pressburgers, he had advised his superiors not to resort to this drastic measure. ‘I hope that the conduct of the population will not force me to change my mind. But of course I have to declare that in the event of the public refusing to obey the new order... we would be forced to take energetic measures after all.’³⁶⁷ It is remarkable how Zoch was balancing his purported confidence in the prudence of the Pressburg population with scarcely concealed threats to act against any form of defiance or resistance. He was obviously uncertain about what to expect from the Pressburgers in the short run. But he was prepared to give them the benefit of the doubt, or so he suggested, unlike the Czechoslovak army command (and probably some of the political leaders in Prague and in Šrobár’s headquarters in Žilina) who thought it better to be sure than sorry. It would seem that Zoch was basically improvising as he tried to come to terms with the unpredictable Pressburg situation; he probably knew he was soon going to have to take some unpopular measures, so that it was crucial to ensure peace and stability in the city first. Indeed, some of the first unpopular measures being taken around this time were the prohibition of inter-city telephone communication for private persons; the ending of all ordinary traffic over the Danube bridge connecting Pressburg with the southern, Hungarian bank of the river; and the removal of all signs and symbols of the Hungarian State and the old Habsburg army. Thus on 6 January a protocol was signed by Zoch, Jankó, and some lawyers and other Pressburg officials regarding the terms of the Czechoslovak civil and political take-over of Pressburg. Jankó had to hand over all official documents and to promise that from now on ‘he would reside in Pressburg in the capacity of a private person only’ and not engage in any public activity. If he did not observe these conditions, Zoch would have to take ‘the most severe measures’ against him. Jankó signed the protocol under due protest, declaring he had no choice but to submit to the coercion used against him.³⁶⁸ One gets the impression that, although the atmosphere at the ceremony was seemingly good, it was somehow more than just a formality. As if below the surface uncertainties and anxieties were existing not immediately apparent when only superficially looking at the ease with which the formal transition to Czechoslovak rule took place. A man like Jankó, unlike some of the others, did not belong to the class of turncoats. This may have made him look like a potential danger to the undoubtedly suspicious Czechoslovak authorities, which insisted he must refrain from

³⁶⁶ *WV*, 9 January 1919.

³⁶⁷ *PZ*, morning paper, 7 January 1919. On the question of taking hostages there had been earlier reports in Pressburg newspapers. On 28 December 1918 the *Republik* reported that the Czechoslovak military command had informed the Pressburg authorities that hostages would be taken from among the ‘notables’ of the city.

³⁶⁸ *PZ*, evening paper, 7 January 1919; *Republik*, 8 January 1919; Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 540.

political activities. It also made him a man who, like Kánya, was respected by the social democrats, who were keen to show they did not belong to the class of unprincipled opportunists either.

After a good week of experience with the Czechoslovak occupation, the *Westungarische Volksstimme* published a critical comment on the reactions of the Pressburg population, in particular of the different political groups, to the national revolution in their city. 'Long live the loyalty to one's principles!', the article was headed that wanted to investigate the problem of 'character' in the context of the Pressburgers' 'adjustment' to the new regime. It gave the impression of being an exercise in the rhetoric of political moralism by the German social democrats, who felt that they (and a small number of other Pressburgers) stood out as morally superior for independently acting political subjects in the unprecedented situation that had befallen the city. It was observed that the population of Pressburg adapted to the new regime 'very quickly', perhaps more quickly than was reasonable to expect. This reminds us of how the character of the 'typical Pressburger' was sometimes depicted as pliable and pragmatic; if pragmatic meant 'prudent' or 'liberal' it could be seen as a positive quality, but if it meant 'opportunistic' it was a different matter. The German social democrats had shown a good deal of pragmatism themselves when faced with the inevitability of the Czechoslovak occupation. But they believed that political prudence was not the same thing as unprincipled, 'characterless' opportunism. The *Westungarische Volksstimme* admitted that the Pressburg population, including the social democrats, had no other choice but to accept the new political situation as a *fait accompli*, and to await further developments. At the same time, however, the social democrats continued to protest against 'raw wielding of power' and to support the principle of the right to self-determination, the details and final implementation of which could only be decided by the peace conference. In the present situation, difficult though it was, there was 'a great difference' between a sensible acceptance of the inevitable and the 'undignified chumming up' with the new rulers practised by 'various elements' in Pressburg. The social democrats stressed that they had always fought against the old Hungarian governments that represented 'class rule' and 'oppression of the majority of the population'. Then the Hungarian Revolution of October 1918 had brought a government to power that could be regarded as the expression of the will of the people, and the social democrats had whole-heartedly supported it. The social democrats had clear political principles and political aims and did not have a history of 'shameless opportunism' like others. The aristocratic opportunism of men like Zichy, for example, or the opportunism of a party like the Christian Socials, was said to damage the 'honour of Pressburg' in Central Europe and beyond.³⁶⁹ Another question was how to judge the character of the new Czechoslovak rulers in Pressburg, the most important of whom was Samuel Zoch. At this stage Zoch was seen in a positive light by the German social democratic press. He was described as a man with 'democratic feelings', who had 'fought like ourselves against the class rule of old Hungary'. It was hoped that in his capacity of Czechoslovak Government Commissioner and County Sheriff 'he would remain a democrat'.³⁷⁰

On 8 January a 'working-class delegation' representing the German and Magyar social democratic movement went to see Zoch to present a 'list of demands'. The delegation consisted of thirty members of various trade unions and other social democratic organisations and was led by Paul Wittich, clearly the undisputed leader of the movement. Wittich submitted a number of issues that he argued were of crucial importance for the working class of Pressburg, both political and socio-economic ones. This meeting with Zoch can be seen as the first stage in the complex development of relations between the Pressburg social democrats and the Czechoslovak authorities, a process that finally led to the crisis of February 1919. Wittich said he was happy to

³⁶⁹ *WV*, 9 January 1919.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

learn that Milan Hodža, the Czechoslovak envoy in Budapest, had declared that the Czechoslovak government interpreted the concept of national self-determination to mean that ‘no people can be ruled by a government it does not trust’. In accordance with this definition, the social democratic movement demanded adequate representation in the Czechoslovak government and in the local Pressburg administration. On the new town council that was to be appointed shortly, ‘the working class’ demanded ‘parity’ (half of all seats), a rather ambitious and perhaps premature demand. The social democratic movement may have considered itself entitled to this because of its crucial role during the transition to Czechoslovak rule; obviously it wanted some leverage vis-à-vis the new regime. But the demand of parity was also an expression of the socialist belief that during the democratic revolution the ‘working class’ and the ‘bourgeoisie’ should be equally represented in important political institutions (though for tactical reasons not necessarily so in temporary multiparty platforms). Furthermore, Wittich demanded that given the rising level of unemployment new public works be started; that unemployment benefits be maintained at their present (Hungarian) level; that more working-class houses be built; that civic rights like the freedom of association and assembly and freedom of the press be respected; and that the Pressburg government employees and officials keep their jobs. Zoch, who seems to have attached great importance to developing a working relationship with the German and Magyar social democrats, replied that in the past he had always had many links with the social democrats, and that he had been involved himself in the organisation of agricultural workers in Hungary. As far as the new political situation was concerned, he explained that the present government in Slovakia was a ‘national Slovak’ one, but after the ‘stabilisation’ of political conditions and the institution of democracy and universal suffrage ‘social democracy will be part of the government’. He also said municipal autonomy would be restored in approximately six months, when local elections were to take place. On the interim town council of Pressburg, which would have forty members, he would appoint ‘ten representatives of the working class’; this was clearly a rejection of the demand for ‘parity’. But he stressed that he wanted to fight unemployment and to start public works, and that the payment of unemployment benefits would continue; he would also try to fulfil the working-class demand of introducing elected industrial arbitration courts. As for the Hungarian government employees, an issue that soon became very tricky, the delegation was assured that they would be allowed to stay; if this policy changed, it would only be for ‘military reasons’ (war with Hungary). The social democrats seem to have been relieved. ‘They may rest assured’, the *Westungarische Volksstimme* commented, that ‘in a few days Zoch will prove that their interests are being protected’.³⁷¹ The paper now also published the Czechoslovak ‘law on transitional arrangements in Slovakia’ of 10 December 1918. It stipulated among other things that all government officials, employees, etc., would ‘stay in office for the time being, if they swear an oath of allegiance to the Czechoslovak Republic and if the Government Plenipotentiary considers them fit for the job’.³⁷² This shows how difficult it is to apportion blame or responsibility for the crisis that followed. It cannot be denied that the retention of the government employees from the Hungarian era was conditional on their swearing allegiance to Czechoslovakia and an assessment of their qualifications. On the other hand, the stipulation that it was up to the ‘Government Plenipotentiary’ to judge their fitness for the job left plenty of room for political arbitrariness. The man who had become ‘Minister Plenipotentiary for the Administration of Slovakia’ was Vavro Šrobár, and it was Šrobár, Zoch’s political superior, who would inevitably play a decisive role in the effort ‘to make Pressburg safe for Czechoslovakia’.

³⁷¹ Ibid.; *PZ*, evening paper, 9 January 1919. See also Ladislav Hubenák, *Vznik a založenie KSC na západnom Slovensku*, Bratislava 1969, p. 46; Dušan Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave 1918-1929*, Bratislava 1969, pp. 84-5. *Robotnícke noviny* of 14 January 1919 commented optimistically that the German and Magyar social democrats had apparently lost their ‘fear’ of the Czechoslovak State, which they hoped would be, if not a socialist state, then at least a ‘democratic people’s state’.

³⁷² *WV*, 9 January 1919.

From his headquarters in Žilina, Šrobár began to exert growing influence on the Pressburg situation; this reached a climax when he moved from Žilina to Pressburg on 4 February 1919. The improvising and conciliatory County Sheriff Samuel Zoch had to increasingly coordinate his actions with those of Šrobár's commissioners as some of the latter began to shape more distinct and less conciliatory government policies in the future capital of Slovakia. Thus, while the country was being cleared of the last Hungarian military and bureaucratic elements, the incipient Czechoslovak administration in Pressburg tried to come to grips with the difficult problems and the different social and political groups in Slovakia's largest city.³⁷³

One of the first steps causing antagonism between the authorities and part of the Pressburg population was the Czechoslovak 'nationalisation' of the city's Hungarian university, the Elisabeth University, on 7 January. The university senate strongly protested and declared that this action of the Czechoslovak State was a violation of international law. However, the university was told it could continue its normal activities until the end of the academic year. This included Magyar-language lectures, the study of Hungarian law, and enrolment of students from nearby Hungary. But at the same time the staff and students had to promise not to engage in any activities against the Czechoslovak Republic. The university senate then decided to continue its normal functions 'until a final settlement is reached in accordance with international law'.³⁷⁴ It was the ambition of Czech and Slovak politicians to establish a national university in what was to become the capital of Slovakia. The Elisabeth University was known to harbour strong Hungarian patriotic sentiments, and therefore was deeply mistrusted by the Czechs and Slovaks. At the other end of the Pressburg political spectrum there were those local Germans who were moving into a more pro-Czechoslovak or even 'Czechophile' position, a phenomenon already briefly mentioned before. While the political views of the Pressburg Christian Socials were likely to be at odds with those of the often anti-clerical Czechs, the views of the German Radical Democrats were more in line with them. The Radical Democrats were a loosely organised political group with a liberal character, and it was perhaps not surprising that they discovered similarities with the political orientation of a dominant section of the Czech political establishment. Their allegedly 'opportunistic' tendencies, which stemmed in part from their lacking deep political roots comparable with those of the social democrats, increased after the occupation of Pressburg and the arrival of large numbers of Czechs who gradually established themselves as a dominant political and administrative element in the city. Also important in this connection was the German *Volksrat* of Pressburg, in which the Radical Democrats and the social democrats played a leading part. At a meeting on 7 January the *Präsidium* of the *Volksrat* was reconstituted; it now included, besides three Radical Democrats (Dewald, Frühwirth, and Brodbeck), two social democrats (Wittich and Elsa Grailich) and the Christian Social leader

³⁷³ For correspondence between Zoch and Šrobár during this period, see *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska*, eds V. Horváth et al., documents 59, 61-3, pp. 174-8; more in particular *Roky prvých bojov. Dokumenty z robotníckeho hnutia Západoslovenského kraja 1918-1921*, ed. Ladislav Hubenák, Bratislava, 1961, document 26, p. 55: letter of Zoch to Šrobár of 10 January 1919 on the question of unemployment benefit. This letter shows that Zoch deemed it wise to act immediately and had ordered payment of eighty thousand crowns unemployment benefit to the large number of unemployed in Pressburg, 'because otherwise it might not be possible to avoid unrest'. See also Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 21, 45. Apparently this money was taken from the local tax office, and on 16 and 31 January Zoch arranged for two more payments to the unemployed through the Pressburg Trade Union Council, viz., sixty thousand and ninety thousand crowns, respectively. According to a Slovak historian, this level of financial support for the unemployed was ended after the arrival of the Šrobár Ministry in Pressburg at the beginning of February, which was one cause of the growing unrest. See Ján Mlynárik, 'Hnutie nezamestnaných na Slovensku v rokoch 1919-1929', *Historický časopis* 11, no. 2, 1963, pp. 197-8.

³⁷⁴ See *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska*, eds V. Horváth et al., pp. 180-92, 195-7 for documents on the Czechoslovak take-over of the university; also Provozník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 82-3; *WV*, 11 January 1919.

Billot, with Angermayer remaining chairman. The Pressburg newspapers reported that Zoch had promised Angermayer that the rights of the Pressburg Germans would be guaranteed 'in every respect'. This was to apply in particular to German schools, recognition of the German language at public offices and courts of justice, and tolerance of German signs and inscriptions in the public domain. There was an optimistic atmosphere at the *Volksrat* meeting. But Wittich warned them to make sure that they did not get 'only empty promises', and that the Germans of Pressburg get representation in local administration to ensure that their demands were really carried out. Grailich stressed – as other Germans had done before her – that their bad national-cultural position was their own fault, because in old Hungary 'they renounced their rights voluntarily and let themselves be terrorised'; this 'indifferent' and 'unworthy' attitude should be replaced by 'healthy activity' directed by a proper action plan. It would seem that the German *Volksrat* continued to function until the second quarter of 1919, when according to the opponents of the Radical Democrats it disintegrated as a result of the 'Czechophile' attitude of leading German Radical Democratic political figures. The German social democrats and others were repelled by this 'opportunism', 'characterlessness', and 'chumming up'. Growing party-political antagonisms and differentiation excluded in any case the possibility of maintaining a common German political platform. The *Volksrat* was never officially dissolved, but the defence of German cultural rights and the promotion of German national consciousness were carried on by other political and cultural organisations and by the German press.³⁷⁵ The German social democrats continued to support these efforts too.

On 11 January Zoch released a proclamation that may be regarded as a political turning point, because it started a gradual deterioration of interethnic relations in recently occupied Pressburg. The proclamation contained information on several important aspects of the political and administrative reorganisation of Pressburg and the rest of Slovakia. First of all, Zoch reminded the general population that Šrobár had been appointed 'Minister Plenipotentiary for Slovakia' and that he was assisted in executing his tasks by a number of commissioners based at Šrobár's provisional headquarters in Žilina. One may wonder why Zoch made this well-known point; the Czechoslovak government had appointed Šrobár already a month ago. It is possible that the significance or even the very existence of Šrobár's 'Slovak government' had been lost on the population of Pressburg, who so far had only had to deal with Zoch and Barreca. It is also possible that Zoch wanted to stress that the unpopular measures that were to follow had been decided by the Slovak government administration as a whole, not just by him personally. Indeed it would seem that Zoch had received new instructions to put in place a stricter regime in Pressburg in preparation of the planned removal of the Šrobár apparatus to the city. Some of the measures that were now announced were far more restrictive and sounded a different tone from what had been said by Zoch before. The 11 January proclamation informed the Pressburg population that for a certain, unspecified period of time the importation of Hungarian newspapers from Budapest was prohibited; the reason given for this was that they were publishing false reports about the actions and behaviour of the Czechoslovak army. While it is quite possible that Hungarian newspapers were giving false or incomplete information about some of the actions of Czechoslovak troops who were consolidating their positions in Slovakia, the rather exaggerated response of the Czechoslovak authorities gives the impression that they were in a remarkable

³⁷⁵ See the *PZ*, morning paper, 8 January 1919, and *Republik*, 8 January 1919 for the meeting of the German Radical Democrats on 6 January, where (again) the Slovak political leader Ferdinand Juriga was present as well and even gave a speech in Pressburg's three languages that was 'received with acclaim'. See the *PZ*, evening paper, 8 January 1919, and *Republik*, 9 January 1919 for the meeting of the German *Volksrat*. See further Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 543; Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, pp. 83-4; Paul Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert der Karpatendeutschen in der Slowakei*, Stuttgart 1992, p. 82; Rudolf Melzer, *Erlebte Geschichte. Vom Umsturz 1918 zum Umbruch 1938/39. Eine Rückschau auf ein Menschenalter Karpatendeutschtum*, Vienna 1989, p. 14.

state of uncertainty. Another security measure was that all mail destined for countries outside Czechoslovakia or ‘other Entente countries’, as well as telegrams and telephone conversations, was subject to censorship. It was clear that the propaganda war between Hungary and Czechoslovakia had entered a new phase, which increased feelings of insecurity on all sides. The Pressburg citizens were also informed that the old government employees in the city would remain at their posts for the time being, but ‘new regulations’ on this issue were to follow soon. Even more important, and indicative of a change in the political climate, was the information in Zoch’s proclamation relating to the new policy of Šrobár’s Commissioner for Transport and Communication, Kornel Stodola. In connection with the Czechoslovak take-over of the Hungarian railway system in Slovakia, Stodola earlier had promised all railway workers (through printed information in three languages) ‘the broadest democratic treatment, indulgence, and patience’ as far as the protection of their jobs was concerned. At the same time, he demanded their ‘unconditional obedience’. But now, in a further specification of Stodola’s railway policy as contained in the proclamation, Magyar and German railway workers were given to understand: ‘Only those can remain in the service who can speak Slovak... Those who do not know the Slovak language will... be sent on leave to learn it.’ Furthermore, Stodola informed all railway servants: ‘Even the slightest agitation, opposition, or distribution of pamphlets will be punished severely... those involved will be immediately arrested and tried by court-martial. All those who obstruct the orderly functioning of the railway service by *Amerikanisierung* [slowing down, wildcat strikes], or even sabotage, must reckon with an equally severe procedure.’ Although there may have been a risk that the former Hungarian railway workers would refuse to cooperate with the new regime in Slovakia, there was as yet little evidence of it outside the war zone further to the east, and perhaps these severe warnings and measures were provoking mischief instead of preventing it. Another point mentioned in Zoch’s proclamation was that he had appointed a new police chief for Pressburg, Richard Brunner, a former Czechoslovak army captain. The officials, detectives, and other high-ranking employees of the police service were reported to have expressed their willingness to stay in their jobs. They had already sworn allegiance to the Czechoslovak State in the presence of Brunner, vowing that they would not undertake anything that was against the interests of the state and that they would not engage in politics. The lower ranks of the police service would swear an oath the following day.³⁷⁶ Perhaps it was hoped that the example of the police would induce other government employees to follow suit and swear an oath of allegiance as well; but this proved more problematic than may have been expected. It was also reported by the *Pressburger Zeitung* that the Czechoslovak authorities had repeatedly tried to persuade Theodor Kumlik, Pressburg’s former mayor, to resume his office, which was still administered by acting mayor Richard Kánya. It was claimed that the citizens of Pressburg had the same wish as the government and that the continuity of the town administration would suffer if Kumlik continued to decline this request. For some reason the Czechoslovak rulers seem to have had confidence in Kumlik, perhaps because he had enjoyed a great prestige in the city and was believed to have the ability to help defuse potential political trouble. Negotiations on the composition of the new town council, meanwhile, which would be appointed by Zoch to replace its dissolved Hungarian predecessor, had been started as well. The administrative autonomy of Pressburg had been suspended for the time being. ‘As soon as the autonomy of the municipality is re-established, the appointed town council will be replaced by a town council elected on the

³⁷⁶ *PZ*, morning paper, 11 January 1919; *WV*, 11 January 1919; Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 542. The Czechoslovak administrative measures were backed up by international steps; on 18 January the Entente notified the Hungarian government again that it regarded Slovakia as part of the Czechoslovak Republic, another attempt to persuade the Hungarians to stop having any further irredentist illusions. See for Kornel Stodola (‘a visionary and a man of action’) *Do pamäti národa. Osobnosti slovenských dejín prvej polovice 20. Storočia*, eds Slavomír Michálek and Natália Krajčovičová, Bratislava, 2003, p. 540.

basis of universal suffrage', the *Pressburger Zeitung* reported.³⁷⁷

The same day, 11 January, an important meeting was held to discuss Pressburg's social and economic problems and the possible ways and means to revitalise production and economic life. The initiative for this consultation of the city's employers and organised workers was taken by Zoch, who may have felt that – to counterbalance the somewhat intimidating proclamation discussed above – something constructive needed to be done to prove the Czechoslovak administration's positive intentions. Zoch, who could not attend the meeting himself, was represented by his deputy Ján Galla; the meeting was chaired by Kánya. There were representatives of big industry, the craft production sector (*Gewerbe*), trade and commerce, and the organised working class, which was represented by various social democratic and trade union leaders. An important question discussed was whether or not the Czechoslovak authorities should change the social and economic policies of the Hungarian government, which had taken many measures to protect the workers against unemployment and other social ills. The Pressburg social democrats were afraid that the new rulers were less socially progressive than the increasingly leftist Károlyi government. Representatives of big industry, who had their own interests, wanted to know if the Czechoslovak government intended to continue the policy of the Hungarian government guaranteeing that eighty percent of the wages paid to certain classes of industrial workers were subsidised by the state, a policy aimed at reducing unemployment. Wittich insisted that the new government should continue this policy, but Galla avoided taking a clear position on the matter and said he did not know yet what the government's policy would be. The social democratic trade union leader Rudolf Chovan claimed that the employers did not observe the wage agreements concluded prior to the Czechoslovak occupation; the Czechoslovak government should oblige them to do so. Another labour leader, Franz Fehér, brought up the difficult situation of the workers employed by the railways, the postal service, and other government services. The Károlyi government had passed a law protecting their jobs, but the Czechoslovak government did not recognise it and seemed to have its own plans. Fehér said that the government employees felt seriously threatened – Stodola's measures had clearly begun to cause anxiety – and that the government should uphold the Hungarian laws. Several other social democratic labour leaders submitted wage demands on behalf of different groups of workers and employees in Pressburg, including the bakery workers, waiters, and others. Another social democratic demand was that the Pressburg army barracks, property of the municipality, should be converted into small apartments for working-class families; this would help reduce unemployment and alleviate the shortage of houses for the workers. A spectacular feature of the meeting was the conduct of a representative of the small masters in the craft production sector, one Mr. Pridal. He used the opportunity to denounce the Hungarian government, big industry, as well as the organised workers, using a great many swear words. Perhaps his attitude was characteristic of a certain type of representative of the world of small producers, who continued to be important in Central Europe and in a city like Pressburg. Big industry was seen as a threat to the independent craftsmen and small tradesmen, while the Hungarian government was probably regarded as another, pro-socialist threat. Pridal was also one of those who were seen as guilty of 'chumming up' with the new regime; he was fiercely attacked by Wittich and the social democrats. Wittich described Pridal's denunciation of the Hungarian government as 'mean' and as 'political characterlessness'; the working class and 'other citizens' refused to have anything to do with it. Wittich said the Károlyi government had always had the best of intentions, and the 'dishonourable chumming up' of Pridal with the Czechoslovak government would certainly be rejected also by the latter. 'I know that the great statesmen of the *Czech Reich* are sincere political characters who will reject such people with contempt, because the characterless, denunciators, and flatterers are a danger for every government and every country.' According to a report in the

³⁷⁷ *PZ*, morning paper, 11 January 1919.

Westungarische Volksstimme, Wittich's statement was followed by applause of those present at the meeting. But the undeterred Pridal went on to say that the workers were 'lazy', which provoked a 'storm of indignation' and almost led to Pridal being physically attacked. It was obvious once again that there could be no question of a united front of the different Pressburg interests vis-à-vis the Czechoslovak authorities. Both politically and economically they were too much divided, which could only be to the advantage of the new rulers. Another problem was that the trade unionists in a sector like building, an industry that traditionally contained a large number of small masters, had to maintain close relations with the latter in order to protect wage levels. If a man like Pridal was appointed by the small masters as their representative and as the defender of their interests, there were likely to be political in addition to economic tensions between masters and men. According to a report in the *Westungarische Volksstimme*, this is precisely what happened at a meeting of workers and employers in the building trades around this time, a great deal of acrimony being exchanged instead of practical discussions. However, with the bigger employers or the Czechoslovak government the interests of the organised workers were not safe either. It is true that at the meeting on 11 January Zoch's deputy Galla promised to give consideration to the wishes of the different economic interests in Pressburg.³⁷⁸ But the truth was that during the following weeks not much was done to fulfil the demands of the social democratic workers.

The process of national-political (and in part also social) transformation in Pressburg was entering a critical phase. The statements of Zoch and Stodola demonstrated that both the carrot and the stick were wielded in their approach of the Pressburg problem, with the incipient Czechoslovak administration making vague economic, social, and political promises while simultaneously looking for ways to establish control. There was a degree of apprehension about the attitude of the former Hungarian railway workers and other sections of Pressburg's non-Slovak working class. Czechoslovak officials had to keep a subtle balance between imposing political-administrative control measures and keeping a degree of goodwill among different groups of the German and Magyar population. Not the least important of these were the social democrats with their considerable influence among the workers and employees of the city. A moment of exceptional political and psychological importance would be the official relocation of Šrobár's Slovak government apparatus from Žilina to Pressburg, which was planned for 4 February. To make preparations for a 'dignified reception' of Šrobár, Zoch organised on 16 January – also the day when Pressburg was proclaimed capital of Slovakia and the seat of the Slovak government administration – a special meeting to which representatives of the most important Pressburg civic institutions, associations, and political parties were invited. According to the *Pressburger Zeitung*, the following representatives of the Pressburg citizenry and Pressburg's 'corporate bodies' attended the meeting. They were: acting mayor Richard Kánya; the vice-sheriff of Pressburg County Samu Vermes; representatives of the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religious communities; representatives of organisations like the Pressburg civic association, the town councillors' club, and the German *Volksrat*; Hugo Dewald of the German Radical Democratic Party; Paul Wittich on behalf of the social democrats; and Alois Pichler for

³⁷⁸ *WV*, 15 January 1919. The profile and background of several of the individuals mentioned in the social democratic press is often vague, but some biographical information on German and Magyar labour leaders can be found in Miloš Gosiorovský, *Dejiny slovenského robotníckeho hnutia (1848-1918)*, Bratislava 1958, pp. 352-70; *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska*, eds V. Horváth et al., pp. 357-76; *Kapitoly*, eds S. Sikora et al., pp. 427-88. The name indexes in these works are relatively elaborate, sometimes almost like brief biographical dictionaries. See also *Slovenský biografický slovník*, 6 vols, Martin, 1986-94. The comparison made by the social democrats between the progressive social policies of the Károlyi government (clearly an important reason why it was supported by them) and those of the Czechoslovak government has been noted by some Slovak historians. See Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, pp. 157-8; Hubená, *Vznik*, p. 21, who also shows that Zoch tried to convince Šrobár that unemployment benefits should continue to be paid at the Hungarian level (see note 26).

the *Pressburger Zeitung*. Zoch was accompanied by Pressburg's military commander Barreca, Ferdinand Juriga (now a member of the Czechoslovak National Assembly in Prague), and a number of other persons. Zoch presented a programme of various functions and festivities to be held on the occasion of the reception of Šrobár on 4 February; he was to form an organising committee together with Kánya and Vermes. The Czechoslovak government would be asked to declare 4 February 1919 a holiday in Slovakia, which would encourage the population to participate in the events, so it was undoubtedly hoped.³⁷⁹ However, there was already one institution in Pressburg ready to spoil the anticipated Czechoslovak party. The Elisabeth University, which had been invited to send a representative to the preparatory meeting too, boycotted it. On 21 January the rector of the university, Edmund Polner, sent a letter (in French) to Zoch informing him that the university senate had unanimously decided not to attend the festivities and the official reception of the Šrobár government on 4 February. The letter spoke of the 'mutilation of Hungary' and of the 'moral impossibility' for Hungarian patriots to participate in a celebration like this.³⁸⁰ Although the university had been officially taken over by the Czechoslovak state, it had kept its autonomy for the time being and remained a hotbed of Hungarian patriotism and anti-Czechoslovak sentiments despite its promise not to engage in political activities. It is interesting that it was only one week later that Zoch responded to this first act of open defiance of the Czechoslovak regime; his reaction was to close down the university. He must have hesitated to take this draconian measure and did not seek a confrontation. But he – as well as Šrobár and other policy makers – probably speculated that it would be more dangerous to tolerate this kind of opposition than to clamp down on it. The question was also how the university's stance would be responded to by other institutions and political groups in Pressburg; some might be tempted to follow its example. The university's attitude was a public affront and a political challenge, and Zoch must have felt that the fragile prestige of the Czechoslovak State could not be allowed to be undermined by what he regarded as a provocation. But Zoch's response was delayed and only announced to the Pressburg public after a few more pieces of Czechoslovak propaganda had been dished up.

On 19 January Alois Pichler, the editor of the *Pressburger Zeitung*, published an article on the Paris Peace Conference, which had been opened the previous day, and on the likely prospects and implications for Pressburg. The article was a remarkable example of 'constructive' and 'conciliatory' reflecting on the new state-political and interethnic reality. Indeed it was a piece of suggestive writing that came very close to the Czechoslovak perspective on Pressburg's historical and political position. By writing this article Pichler did Zoch a favour, objectively speaking, but there is no evidence that it was the result of his deliberately doing so or the outcome of an agreement between the two men. One must assume that it was primarily a spontaneous attempt by Pichler to boost the morale of the Pressburg population and to encourage it to view the situation in an optimistic light. In a sense it was also an exercise in historical revisionism from the German perspective. 'Against fate even the Gods fight in vain', Pichler wrote. The Pressburgers understood that the old times would never come back. But – as had been argued also by Tusar,

³⁷⁹ *PZ*, morning paper, 16 January 1919; Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 541. It should be noted that Šrobár's 'Slovak government' (actually the Ministry Plenipotentiary) was not a government in the proper sense of the term, but a provisional and improvised apparatus responsible for laying the foundations of the Czechoslovak administration in Slovakia. As the Czechoslovak State was consolidated, it gradually lost most of its autonomous decision-making power (the power to govern Slovakia by decree), and its different sections led by Slovak commissioners became more and more executive organs of the Prague central ministries. See, e.g., Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, pp. 90-6. See also the interesting introduction to the inventory of the archival collection SNA, MP. With regard to the crucial and incredibly complicated year 1919, it is not always clear who was actually in charge of particular administrative initiatives and political actions: Šrobár, one of his commissioners, certain local officials, or government ministers in Prague. There is consensus among Slovak and other historians that much more research is needed on these questions.

³⁸⁰ *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska*, eds V. Horváth et al., document 94, p. 217.

Zoch, and some German Radical Democrats – Pressburg was destined to play an important role in the future, both economically and otherwise. The Germans should first learn to appreciate the importance of the Slovak people. ‘Up till now Slovakia was not to us what it should have been, either with regard to mutual ethnic relations or to trade: ... an organic hinterland. Regrettably... during the course of the nineteenth century it almost became a strange land. We had Slovaks living alongside us as honourable, hard-working fellow citizens and inhabitants, but what was lacking was regard for Slovakia, so richly blessed by nature, and for the solid Slovak nation as a valuable connection.’ The Hungarian policies of the past had hurt the city of Pressburg as well as the Slovaks, and had driven them apart. ‘This regrettable situation was... caused only by the exaggerated spiritual and economic centralisation policy favouring Budapest. What was left for the city of Pressburg, for Slovakia, was not much more than alms. That a world war was necessary to change this situation, which was not at all benefiting us, is only the responsibility of the system described above... Pressburg and Slovakia were not taken into account... The German townsmen and the Slovak people carried equally little weight.’ Pichler saw fit to describe the Slovaks and the Pressburg Germans as sharing the same status of victim of the policies of the old Hungarian State, since both groups had always been neglected by the rulers in Budapest. Although this was not entirely untrue in itself, it was a rhetorical exaggeration of what the two groups had had in common in the past or might have in common in the present and the future. Pichler’s argument of common interests and affinities between the Germans and Slovaks may have been received with sympathy by some people in Pressburg, but it involved a good deal of wishful thinking. His article was ‘realistic’ in that it acknowledged the new power structure in Pressburg and Slovakia, in that it understood that Pressburg was now part of Slovakia; it was less realistic in its claim of an identity of German-Slovak ethnic interests. Pichler and others were right to believe that the Germans of Pressburg could have a future in Czechoslovakia, but this future was not necessarily as smooth and bright as he made it seem. He wrote somewhat pathetically that Pressburg and Slovakia, ‘these two organisms that belong together, are achieving the greatest victory among all the states of Europe... The citizens of Pressburg, together with the national elements of Slovakia, are standing... on the threshold of a great cultural and economic future!’ Pichler concluded, ‘our new order is not emerging accompanied by internal shocks, but is emerging by... natural building’.³⁸¹ The question was how many Pressburgers could agree with this optimism.

What Pichler, a prominent German-speaking Pressburger, stated in exaggerated terms, in a language specifically directed at the collectivity of rather uncertain Pressburg Germans, a representative of the Czechoslovak Republic was likely to formulate in more straightforward political though equally conciliatory terms. On 22 January Milan Hodža, Czechoslovakia’s envoy in Budapest, visited Pressburg and gave an interview to the city’s newspapers. Hodža declared to the assembled journalists that Slovakia, including Pressburg, was now a part of the sovereign Czechoslovak Republic. He stressed that although only the Peace Conference could legally settle the final frontier between Czechoslovakia and Hungary, it would undoubtedly be the same as the present demarcation line or even be marginally redrawn to the advantage of Czechoslovakia. Indeed at Pressburg the frontier with Hungary would not be the river Danube but a boundary further south, because the southern bank of the river opposite the old city would most probably be given to Czechoslovakia for security reasons. Hodža praised ‘the correct attitude of the well-behaved Pressburg citizenry’ and used the opportunity to make three points that were obviously regarded as crucial by the Czechoslovak government in the propaganda war with Hungary. He said, firstly, that the Pressburg Germans were regarded by Czechoslovakia as civilised and respectable people; secondly, that the Hungarian state had also been oppressive and bad for the Germans; thirdly, that the Czechoslovak Republic would bring true democracy to Pressburg and

³⁸¹ *PZ*, morning paper, 19 January 1919.

its German population. Hodža stressed that the Czechoslovak government was ‘not surprised’ about the ‘correct behaviour’ of the Pressburg Germans. ‘We never expected anything different from the Pressburgers, for we know very well that the original population [*Stammbevölkerung*] of Pressburg is eminently suited to serve as a reliable basis for an orderly democratic state.’ Now better times were coming for Pressburg. ‘The damage done to the intelligent hard-working and creative citizenry of Pressburg by the old Magyar pseudo-liberalism can only be repaired by a democracy that unites all classes of the population of the state in harmony, regardless of their national origin and national customs, which is the only way to ensure respect for work and the political freedom of mankind. I am deeply convinced that Pressburg did not yet exist, but will exist only now.’ These were statements by a man who had himself great political ambitions; there was perhaps no other political figure among the Slovaks as talented as Milan Hodža.³⁸² There may have been an element of sincerity in his positive evaluation of the character and the qualities of the Pressburg Germans. It would seem that the ‘civilised’ German population was seen by the Czechoslovak government as a useful element in the project of modernising Slovakia and turning that relatively backward land into a functional part of the Czechoslovak State. But Hodža’s assertions were also part of the Czechoslovak propaganda campaign aimed at neutralising the enemies of the new state and winning over at least some ‘non-Czechoslovak’ population groups. As far as Slovakia was concerned, Czechoslovak leaders were right to believe that they had a better chance to achieve this with the local Germans than with the Magyars. However, at this early stage they did not seem to know how to effectively influence a crucial political element like the German social democrats, whose support for the project of building a successful democratic Czechoslovak Republic might be indispensable. Even the concept of ‘Czechoslovak’ itself was as yet problematical. It could refer either to a particular ethnonational group, or to the state and its citizenry as a whole; indeed the term caused confusion with the Pressburg social democrats and others. When the government announced that all adult men of ‘Czechoslovak nationality’ would be mobilised for military reserve units, the *Westungarische Volksstimme* reacted by declaring that it did not understand the meaning of ‘Czechoslovak’. The paper made inquiries about the official announcement with a military officer in Pressburg, who explained that the term ‘Czechoslovak nationality’ excluded all whose mother tongue was German or Magyar.³⁸³ This ethnic (and ethnocratic) distinction was not likely to enhance the enthusiasm for the new state among the Pressburg social democrats.

The perspective of the German social democrats on the complex political situation in Pressburg and Czechoslovakia was partly, perhaps primarily, shaped by their socialist ideology, which professed a basic indifference to state-political and ethnonational developments. Theoretically this made it easier for them to accept the new state, the more so because this state asserted that it would be a democratic and a social state. The *Westungarische Volksstimme* argued that the Pressburg social democrats were interested to help consolidate ‘the republic’, i.e., the democratic republic in a general sense. They had supported the Hungarian democratic republic; they could also support the Czechoslovak Republic. The paper described the process of building the republic as a ‘revolution’. At issue was not only political transformation, strengthening the democratic character of the republic, but also social change, the construction of the republic’s social dimension, which would be a stepping stone on the road to socialism. The ideology of

³⁸² *PZ*, morning paper, 22 January 1919; *Volksstimme*, 25 January 1919. The latter commented that Hodža praised the Pressburgers so much, ‘that it almost has a sour aftertaste’. It sarcastically described the journalists of the other newspapers that were present at the press conference as behaving ‘in the well-known pompous manner’, which was caused by ‘their loyalty to the new regime’. Indeed there were unfortunately ‘plenty of people’ who would be ‘proud of this’ (this attitude of self-important loyalty). See for Hodža Vladimír Zuberec, ‘Milan Hodža’, in *Muži deklarácie*, ed. Dušan Kováč, Bratislava, 2000, pp. 160-81; *Milan Hodža. Štátnik a politik*, ed. Miroslav Pekník, Bratislava, 2002.

³⁸³ *WV*, 15 January 1919.

Central European social democracy was a classical case of ‘social-evolutionary’ thinking. It was an ideology, a socialist world-view (*sozialistische Weltanschauung*), arguing that socialism could be achieved in a peaceful evolutionary way, that the democratic republic could be gradually extended to become a socialist society. Now that the Czechoslovak State had been established in their territory, the Pressburg social democrats argued that what mattered most was extending the ‘principles of democratic socialism’. In concrete terms this meant, for example, making preparations for the first Czechoslovak general election, which was originally planned for the middle or the second half of 1919 (it was eventually held only in April 1920). But also in other respects the tasks that the socialist working-class movement was faced with were complex and more formidable than ever before.³⁸⁴ One problem arising in the course of 1919 was the conflict between moderate social democrats and revolutionary socialists, with the latter about to turn into ‘Bolshevists’ and Russian-style communists. The *Westungarische Volksstimme* aptly described this conflict as one between those who ‘stand on the foundation of evolutionary theory, of the gradual transformation of the present social order into a socialist one’, and those ‘for whom all this goes far too slow’ and who wanted ‘to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat’ right now. It described the latter as ‘desperate people who want to break their chains by force’. A lecture on ‘socialism and communism’ given at a meeting of trade unionists on 16 January tried to explain the difference as well. The speaker, August Masár, a leading Pressburg social democrat, argued that the goal of socialists and communists was the same, but ‘we want to accomplish our demands on the basis of legality, while the communists are of the opinion that we have to accomplish everything now, if necessary by the use of force’. Bolshevism was described by the *Westungarische Volksstimme* as ‘a sign of the sickness of society’, caused by capitalist imperialism and war; it was ‘the idea of the violent liberation of mankind’. ‘Bolshevism is a historical error committed by those who believe that they can act prematurely. It is emotional socialism [*Gefühlssozialismus*] rather than scientific socialism, which is able to analyse with mathematical precision the phenomena of societal life on the basis of Marxist theories’, asserted the paper on 30 January 1919.³⁸⁵

Although the moderate wing of the labour movement continued to dominate in Pressburg throughout 1919, there emerged a radical pro-Bolshevist wing as well. This had consequences also for the way in which the character of the Czechoslovak Republic was evaluated in certain newspaper articles in the socialist press. Whereas moderate social democrats like Wittich, Masár, and others were prepared to view the Czechoslovak State as a democratic republic in the process of formation, Magyar and German radicals – like the Red Guard in December 1918 – tended to denounce the state as the expression of ‘Czech imperialism’. This made it more difficult to achieve solidarity between German-Magyar and ‘Czechoslovak’ worker organisations in multinational Pressburg. During the second half of January low-profile discussions were held in Pressburg with a view to establishing closer contacts, perhaps serious cooperation, between the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party and Czechoslovak trade union organisations, on the one hand, and the German-Magyar social democratic movement on the other. There was even talk of the final aim being a unified social democratic party. These discussions were not successful, and at a regional conference of the Czechoslovak party organisations of Pressburg and Nitra counties

³⁸⁴ Ibid. An article on the general election in Britain in the same issue complained that the British Labour Party lacked a *sozialistische Weltanschauung*.

³⁸⁵ *WV*, 18 January 1919; *Volksstimme*, 30 January 1919 (as from 22 January 1919 the *Westungarische Volksstimme* had to change its name to *Volksstimme*). For other examples of lectures and discussions on the issue of socialism vs. communism, which were organised by both the trade unions and the Social Democratic Party, see *Volksstimme*, 25 and 30 January 1919. In the course of January the Slovak social democrats similarly distanced themselves from the idea and strategy of Bolshevism; see, e.g., Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 57. See for August Masár (Maszár) the *Karpatendeutsches Biographisches Lexikon*, eds P. Rainer Rudolf and Eduard Ulreich, Stuttgart, 1988, p. 212; *Slovenský biografický slovník*, vol. 4, p. 102.

held in Pressburg on 26 January, the atmosphere was nationalistic and the question of interethnic cooperation was not concretely discussed. Nevertheless a resolution was adopted supporting the political principle of ‘unification of all socialist parties’, presumably at some point in the future. The political-administrative and socio-economic measures taken by the Czechoslovak authorities, which were increasingly seen by the German and Magyar social democrats as a policy of confrontation, were by and large supported by the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party in Pressburg. This had made serious cooperation between the different labour movements impossible by the end of January. The February events that were to follow made it even more unlikely that social democratic unity could ever be achieved.³⁸⁶ At the same time, on the level of the workplace and in other day-to-day situations multiethnic worker interaction and coexistence continued to be a normal phenomenon (which does not mean that this interaction always had a friendly character). The German social democratic press published occasional reports on Slovak worker meetings and activities in Pressburg, which shows that the broader labour view remained a normal phenomenon as well. Especially in the world of trade unionism interethnic cooperation must have been an everyday reality, even though the formation of separate Czechoslovak trade unions enhanced national antagonism and may have negatively affected interethnic relations also in the workplace. When at the beginning of January a new trade union of chemical workers was established at a meeting in Pressburg, one of the speakers reportedly addressed the workers in Slovak as well, probably an attempt to enrol them in the interethnic (but predominantly German and Magyar) trade union. It was not always possible to create or carry on trade unions that included all national groups, because Slovak workers were increasingly likely to join the new ‘Czechoslovak’ instead of the old German-Magyar-dominated organisations.³⁸⁷ Collaboration and ethnic separatism thus existed side by side. While on the political level relations between the Czechoslovak and German-Magyar working-class movements were highly problematic, on the level of the workplace and even trade unionism a degree of interethnic solidarity continued to exist – if to a lesser extent than before the war. There was little evidence of overt ethnic chauvinism on the part of the German or Magyar social democrats in everyday life in Pressburg, although there were occasional examples of derogatory comments on the Czechs and Slovaks where political issues were concerned. This does not mean that German and Magyar feelings of ethnic superiority did not exist, or that the attitude of some social democratic leaders to the Czechoslovak State was not emphatically negative. But such feelings and attitudes were also encouraged by unpopular measures of the Czechoslovak administration itself, by political steps that were seen as threatening the interests of the Pressburg working class.

It is true that some German social democrats in Pressburg did not perceive Czechoslovakia as a potential democratic republic but an aggressively expansionist and imperialist state. Originally this was the view particularly of the more radical elements, but gradually, as frustrations about the Czechoslovak administration increased, some moderate social democratic leaders became more severe in their comments as well. An anonymous article in the *Westungarische Volksstimme* described the Czechoslovak State as ‘a construction of the imperialist counter-revolution’. It claimed that the Czechoslovak social democrats ‘meekly let

³⁸⁶ Zelenák, ‘Maďarská sociálna demokracia’, p. 163; Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 54-5; Provazník, *Robotnicke hnutie v Bratislave*, p. 83; *Dejiny Slovenska. V. (1918-1945)*, Bratislava 1985, p. 41; Ladislav Ruman, ‘Členstvo, organizačná výstavba a programové ciele sociálnej demokracie v medzivojnovom období (so zreteľom na podmienky Slovenska)’, in *Kapitoly*, eds S. Sikora et al., p. 193. According to a document quoted by Ruman, the regional conference of the Czechoslovak party in Pressburg represented 3,714 ‘political members’ in the ‘Prešporok’ – indeed not yet ‘Bratislava!’ – and Nitra counties of southwest Slovakia. *Robotnicke noviny* of 26 January 1919 reiterated in connection with the conference that the Slovak social democrats had ‘nothing in common with the Bolsheviks’ and were ‘in favour of democracy’.

³⁸⁷ *WV*, 4 January 1919, 18 January 1919. The history of trade unionism in Pressburg is another topic on which much more research needs to be done.

themselves be used to back up the policy of imperialist annexation of the Czech bourgeoisie', that they accepted 'the role of the Czech State as an ally of Entente Imperialism and aid of the counter-revolution'. Czech social democracy was said to have always been part of the 'partly insincere-servile, partly nationalist-conspiratorial politics of the Czech bourgeois parties'. This remarkable assertion revealed how easily anti-Czech stereotypes could go hand in hand with 'internationalist' ideology in the rhetoric and world-view of some German and Magyar socialists. The author of this article also claimed that within the Czech working class and the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party the 'opposition' against official Czechoslovak policies was growing. Another article in the same issue of the *Westungarische Volksstimme* noted that 'the Czech rulers' supported the right to self-determination of Ireland, but not of the non-Czechs in their own state. It became increasingly clear that the 'Czech republic' was not the 'republic of the Czech workers and peasants', but of the Czech capitalists and large landowners.³⁸⁸ This easy conflation of national and social antagonism was characteristic of the rhetoric of certain German and Magyar socialists – theirs was a struggle against the Czech bourgeoisie, not the Czech workers. Also typical was the suggestion that the Czechoslovak Republic was exclusively a Czech affair, with the Slovaks – who were sometimes portrayed as victims of the Czechs just like the Germans and Magyars – being hardly mentioned at all. Apparently it was hoped that denouncing the Czechoslovak State as a project of the 'imperialist bourgeoisie' could help detach the Czech and Slovak working-class movement from the state's broad sociopolitical support base. Towards the end of January the 'anti-imperialist' rhetoric increased and occasionally moved to the front page of the Pressburg social democratic press. The *Volksstimme* claimed that 'democracy' and 'national liberation', slogans of the Entente during the war, after the armistice only served as arguments to humiliate those who had lost the war. Entente policy and behaviour were described as 'anti-democratic' and 'imperialist-militarist', and were compared with the policies of the former 'Prussian army command'. The victory of the Entente did not mean the democratisation of Europe, but at best the replacement of 'feudal Junker imperialism' with 'bourgeois imperialism'. The construction of democracy in Czechoslovakia was said to be fraught with uncertainties and lagging behind Germany, Austria, and Hungary.³⁸⁹ Furthermore, the proceedings at the Paris Peace Conference and the demands of 'certain Entente states' – meant were undoubtedly France and Czechoslovakia – were not conducive to achieving international peace. 'The nations of Central Europe' – the Germans and the Magyars –, which had been 'seriously harmed by their former rulers' as a result of the war, now were blamed and punished for the crimes for which 'only the old regimes' had been responsible. After they had liberated themselves in 'intense struggles' from these reactionary regimes, must they also 'be forced to defend their newly obtained freedom against new threats?' The *Volksstimme* claimed that President Wilson, the man who was almost always seen in a positive light also by the German social democrats, was pressurised by some of his allies, 'one of whom has an unlimited lust for power', to dilute the aim of national self-determination. What would be left under these circumstances of Wilson's 'Fourteen Points', which the social democrats of Central Europe 'had accepted unconditionally?' Only one thing was certain: 'It will not be a tender peace.'³⁹⁰ This was a realistic assessment of the situation, but it is hard to tell how representative of 'mainstream social democratic opinion' – if such a thing existed at all – this view was; indeed there also continued to exist more optimistic expectations with regard to Entente policy. But scepticism about the aims of the Czechoslovak Republic and its Entente allies (especially France and Prime Minister Clemenceau) was part of the political reality, and difficult to bring into harmony with the pragmatic policies hitherto pursued by the German social democrats.

³⁸⁸ *WV*, 18 January 1919.

³⁸⁹ *Volksstimme*, 22 January 1919.

³⁹⁰ *Volksstimme*, 25 January 1919.

The views of the German and Magyar social democrats on international developments were linked to the local political situation in Pressburg, in particular the growing number of Czechoslovak restrictive measures. One of them was that on 22 January 1919 the *Westungarische Volksstimme* had to be renamed *Volksstimme*. The Czechoslovak authorities decreed that the word ‘West Hungarian’ be removed apparently because it contradicted the new status quo and might undermine the Pressburgers’ willingness to accept it. The measure, which affected three newspapers in Pressburg, was regarded as undemocratic and repressive. The *Volksstimme* commented that it was painful they were forced to change the ‘characteristic’, ‘historical’ name of their newspaper. It also fiercely attacked the Radical Democratic organ *Republik*, which had publicly disagreed with the social democrats’ objection to the Czechoslovak decree and which it said had ‘no roots, no quality, no spiritual property’.³⁹¹ Another sensitive issue was the more serious censorship. Although some – not all – newspapers from Hungary and Austria had been readmitted to Pressburg after a period of temporary prohibition, inter-city telephone conversations in Slovakia were still subject to censorship. Even more important for the Pressburg social democrats was the closing down of the university, to be discussed below. There were also a growing number of grievances in the social and economic field. Although on 13 January the Czechoslovak government had passed a law on the eight-hour working day, it had not yet taken effect in Slovakia. Food prices were rising continually, with wages lagging behind. Perhaps worst of all was the problem of rising unemployment. The *Volksstimme* reported that, although the existing ordinance on this question (an old Hungarian one) prohibited the dismissal of workers without prior notice, the number of unemployed was growing every day. Unemployment benefits were still being paid, but their level was too low and had not yet been clearly fixed by the new government, causing a general feeling of uncertainty. Furthermore, many male citizens of Pressburg, especially of course those who had returned from the war, were disabled or partly disabled, and therefore had to be taken care of. There could be no doubt that ‘social disaffection was increasing’, the *Volksstimme* observed.³⁹²

Thus the social and political atmosphere in Pressburg was deteriorating and trust in the Czechoslovak administration quite rapidly declining. Zoch’s initiative at the end of January to establish a new framework for settling labour disputes, something in the nature of a permanent arbitration board, was possibly a way to improve the atmosphere, but it would seem it came too late. After discussions with employers and employees it was decided by Zoch and the other two parties to form a ‘commission of twelve’ (consisting of six employers’ and six employees’ representatives) to address social conflicts and industrial disputes in Pressburg. On 26 January a meeting of the unemployed was held in the *Arbeiterheim*, to which Zoch was invited as well. An article in the *Volksstimme* describing the proceedings not only discussed the problem of unemployment itself but also the broader political context. It began by observing that the working-class movement had fought for many years against ‘the rule of the Hungarian Junkers’. The Hungarian Revolution led by Károlyi had put an end to this anti-democratic regime, and a government came to power that pursued an ‘exemplary social policy’. But the working class of Pressburg could not enjoy its benefits for long, because the city was annexed by ‘an alien power’, and now the workers ‘had to begin the struggle anew’. This statement confirmed that the social democrats had little confidence in the social policies of the Czechoslovak government. The major grievance discussed at the meeting itself was the level of unemployment benefit. Whereas the Hungarian government had guaranteed an amount of fifteen, ten, or eight crowns a day, depending on the family circumstances of the unemployed worker, the Czechoslovak government had laid down an overall maximum of 8 crowns. This was based on conditions in Prague, where prices were not as high as in Pressburg. Moreover, Samuel Mayer, the editor of the *Volksstimme*,

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² *Volksstimme*, 22 January 1919.

demanded work instead of unemployment benefit. He reminded the meeting that in December 1918 working-class representatives had asked Pressburg's mayor Theodor Kumlik to start new public works in order to reduce unemployment, but this plan had never been carried out (social policy in Hungary was apparently not as 'exemplary' as suggested). The implication of Mayer's statement may have been that the Czechoslovak government could prove its willingness to do something for the working class if it acted where the former Pressburg authorities had failed to act. Another social democratic leader, Franz (Ferenc) Fehér, gave a speech in Magyar, of which no details were reported in the *Volksstimme*. Interestingly, when it was Zoch's turn to speak, he began by translating Mayer's German speech and Fehér's Magyar speech into Slovak ('the Slav language', as the *Volksstimme* described it). Obviously there were Slovak workers at the meeting as well, and Zoch made a point by stressing that their presence and their language should be taken into consideration. He then commented in Magyar on the different grievances and demands of the workers, which suggests there were many Magyars among the unemployed in Pressburg; apparently he wanted to gain their confidence in this way. Like the Slovaks, the Magyars were more strongly represented among the vulnerable unskilled strata than among the skilled workers, who were predominantly German and as relatively well-organised trade unionists often had their own social security arrangements. Zoch may have been afraid of the potentially explosive discontent of unemployed Magyar workers, which might assume nationalist in addition to social forms. Indeed he assured 'the working class of Pressburg' of the goodwill and support of the Czechoslovak government, but asked them for a 'bit of patience' as the government was preparing plans to address the different social and economic problems in the city. He said he regarded it as his 'first duty' to improve the supply of food and coal; this would also help reduce prices and unemployment. He agreed that the social conditions and levels of unemployment benefit in Prague could not serve as a guiding principle for social policy in Pressburg, where prices were much higher. Zoch was frequently interrupted by the workers and the unemployed, but according to the *Volksstimme*, 'the iron discipline of the organised working class' ensured that the meeting proceeded in a 'dignified' manner.³⁹³ Tension was building up in the city however, although at this point a political crisis might yet have been avoided. But what aggravated the situation more than everything else, and eventually proved most crucial, was the indignation following the closing down of the university.

We have seen that on 21 January the rector of the Elisabeth University informed Zoch that the university senate had decided not to participate in the official reception of Šrobár's Slovak government on 4 February. Zoch's response, which followed a week later, was to close down the university and to place the university staff under police supervision. This unpleasant escalation did not only affect the university itself, but deeply influenced the attitude and position of the German-Magyar social democratic movement as well. The comment of the *Volksstimme* on Zoch's drastic step was severe and sarcastic. 'This measure is an unheard-of violation of the law, because coercion to participate in a festivity like this cannot exist in a legal sense. It offers us truly agreeable prospects with regard to the promised liberties in the Czecho-Slovak State!' It was announced that an extraordinary meeting of the Pressburg social democratic leadership would be held to define their position on the matter.³⁹⁴ There can be no doubt that the closing down of the university by the highest Czechoslovak official in Pressburg made a deep impression on the social democrats and others, and that it was a crucial factor triggering the escalation that eventually led to the tragedy of 12 February 1919. Zoch and the Czechoslovak authorities must have felt threatened by the attitude of the university and been afraid that other institutions or political groups in the city would follow its example of open defiance. In an attempt to forestall this, they decided to set an example and to clamp down on the university's rector, senate, and

³⁹³ *Volksstimme*, 30 January 1919.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

teachers and professors. But tragically, it was precisely this decision that led to a further escalation and to countermoves by the German and Magyar social democrats, who felt they should make a stand to defend their political ‘principles’ and the civic and political liberties of the Pressburg citizenry. They must have felt that if they did not protest against Zoch’s action and assumed the same passive attitude as some of the other political groups – who for this reason were harshly criticised by them –, they would lose their self-respect and their reputation as an independent, democratic, and serious political movement. They also may have been afraid that Zoch’s measure was an indication of the growing political coercion that was likely to follow. On 29 January Zoch issued the official decree closing down the university and imposing the other restrictive measures connected with it. The day before he had sent a letter to the university senate informing her about this decision, which meant that from now on all lectures were forbidden. The university staff were to stay in Pressburg as ‘private persons’, were placed under police supervision, and would be punished ‘most severely’ if they did not comply.³⁹⁵

In the early morning of 30 January Zoch gave a press conference for the Pressburg newspapers. He informed them about a wide range of subjects and about the latest measures taken by the Czechoslovak administration. With regard to the closing down of the university he reminded them that earlier that month the government had allowed the university to continue as a Hungarian educational institution until the end of the academic year. A condition had been that the leaders of the university should draw the attention of the students to the need ‘to behave impeccably’ towards the Czechoslovak State and to avoid any kind of provocation. In a claim that reminded of his statement earlier that month that he had opposed the policy of taking hostages in Pressburg, he told the assembled journalists that it had been difficult for him all along to defend a conciliatory policy towards the (notoriously pro-Hungarian) university. This was difficult, ‘because everywhere, also on our side, there are men who prefer to use force and who wanted to proceed in this way also with regard to the university’. In other words, Zoch had initially opposed repressive measures and had defended the policy of keeping the Hungarian Elisabeth University open for the rest of the academic year. But now he had been proved wrong and had to conclude: ‘Precisely for this reason I have to say that, since assuming my office, nothing has hurt me so much as the attitude of the university senate.’ He explained that following the decision of the university senate to boycott the festivities of 4 February, ‘he was obliged vis-à-vis the government’ to take the measure of closing down the university, ‘because if even the leaders of the university act in this way, imagine what attitude the university youth might have taken’. He confirmed that the rector and the university deans had been placed under police supervision and were not allowed to leave the city.³⁹⁶ From Zoch’s elaborate explanation it can be gathered that the university was considered a tricky and potentially dangerous institution, which is hardly surprising given the traditionally important role of the universities and university students in the different political and nationalist movements in Central Europe. It would seem that the decision of closing down the university was taken by Zoch himself, and that he was not simply instructed to do so by either a government minister in Prague or Šrobár in Žilina. On the other hand, the fact that his decision was made only after one week suggests that he wanted to consult Šrobár and the government first. Indeed there were those who had always wanted to pursue a hard line towards Magyar nationalists, and now Zoch concluded that he was ‘obliged’ to the government to act the way he finally did. Failing to do so might have exposed him to criticism by Šrobár or others, or might have provoked even more severe measures by other Czechoslovak officials.

In addition to the university question, Zoch informed the Pressburg press on 30 January

³⁹⁵ See *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska*, eds V. Horváth et al., pp. 218, 229-30, 281-2 for documents on the closing down of the university; see also *PZ*, morning paper, 29 January 1919.

³⁹⁶ *PZ*, morning paper, 30 January 1919.

about several other important matters as well. The previous day he had at last appointed an interim town council to take the place of the old Hungarian council, as had been planned already several weeks before. He said he had taken care to consider the claims of all the political parties and local organisations that had presented themselves to him. The provisional town council was to have fifty members (earlier he had spoken of forty). This included Wittich and a number of other social democrats, some Radical Democrats and Christian Socials, the owner and the editor of the *Pressburger Zeitung*, and various other prominent and representative Pressburgers. The opening session of the town council was to take place on 1 February. Its first task would be the appointment of ‘committees of experts’ for the different fields of municipal policy; in the course of the following week it would begin addressing the issues on Pressburg’s local agenda. In a few days Zoch would also appoint a representative council for Pressburg County. He further told the assembled journalists that the highly appreciated former mayor of Pressburg, Theodor Kumlik, was not willing to resume his office. The reason given by Kumlik was his bad health condition and the illness of his wife, but the real reason may have been political. With regard to the general question of the occupation of administrative posts in Pressburg, Zoch explained – more frankly, it seems, than before – that in terms of the Czechoslovak law on the administrative reorganisation of Slovakia of 10 December 1918 no one could claim his present position as a permanent right. The Czechoslovak government had the right to appoint whomever it wanted, but this did not mean that it did not want to keep the old officials. On the contrary, he himself had defended the point of view that, as far as Pressburg was concerned, ‘not a single official’ should be ousted from his position. As on previous occasions, Zoch presented himself as the great conciliator, and not without justification. He was keen to coopt some of the former Hungarian local officials who had left their posts. Apparently he had even offered a prominent administrative post to the popular former county sheriff Zoltán Jankó, despite the fact that the latter had had to promise on 6 January that ‘he would reside in Pressburg in the capacity of a private person only’. Jankó refused the offer, another indication that the Pressburgers’ willingness to cooperate with the Czechoslovak authorities was declining. The impending removal of Šrobár to Pressburg and the closing down of the university were undoubtedly factors in this. The editor of the *Pressburger Zeitung*, Alois Pichler, asked Zoch on 30 January if he had any understanding for the fact that old Hungarian officials felt they were ‘in a very difficult position’ if they were forced to demonstrate their loyalty to the Czechoslovak Republic. The official reception of the Šrobár government planned for 4 February was a key example of this. The question concerned all former Hungarian officials, government employees, and prominent local institutions, but more in particular the staff of the university who had already been punished. Zoch explained his position on this painful question as follows: ‘We demand of no one that they change their disposition overnight... if the [university] officials had stayed away from the reception of the government without saying a word, we might not have given any comment, perhaps it would not even have been noticed. But the official rejection was insulting to me, and a great error on the part of the university.’ Zoch suggested that the Czechoslovak administration might have tolerated more passive or subdued forms of protest, but the demonstrative manner of protest of the university ‘he did not deserve’. He denied he wanted to oppress anyone. He had allowed an institution like the Pressburg Magyar theatre to continue its activities and had even visited it, because he was ‘no enemy of the Magyar theatre’. He had also given permission for ‘four Budapest newspapers’ to be imported again.³⁹⁷ Zoch tried to be the conciliator, but the difficult circumstances of Pressburg and the unpredictability of different political actors made it all but impossible.

Zoch’s personal tolerance, including his concession in the matter of foreign newspapers and his appreciation of Magyar culture, could not alleviate the resentment caused by the closing down of the university. Not all the political groups in Pressburg regarded this issue as crucial and

³⁹⁷ Ibid.; Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 544.

bearing upon matters of principle. There were those who understood the 'hurt feelings' of County Sheriff and Government Commissioner Samuel Zoch. There were also those who, even if they disagreed with Zoch's action, would not let the issue take precedence over their fear to confront the new rulers, or indeed over their own ambitions, their desire to 'chum up' with the Czechoslovak regime, as the social democrats used to put it. It was especially the Pressburg social democrats who felt that a critical limit had been overstepped, and that the university should be supported by the protest of other sections of the local community. For the German and Magyar social democrats the university issue, and the (lack of) response to it by different groups of Pressburg citizens, became the principal yardstick for assessing the moral and political soundness of the different political and social elements of the community. The issue also became instrumental in developing the social democrats' rhetoric of political morality. At the same time, the question was linked to other, more practical issues, such as the protection of jobs, unemployment benefit, and wage levels. Nevertheless it was the controversy over the closing down of the university that sparked off the great confrontation of February 1919.

Hope and hatred: February 1919

By the end of January, beginning of February 1919, the initial atmosphere of hope that the transition to another national-political regime in Pressburg could occur without dramatic political conflicts had disappeared, and had turned into hatred and antagonism. The growing tension between the Czechoslovak authorities and a major part of the Pressburg population reached a climax during the first half of February. The official festivities on the occasion of the transfer of the 'Slovak government' from Žilina to Pressburg on 4 February were seen by the Czechs and Slovaks as a historic event, but were boycotted by the German and Magyar social democrats and the bulk of the city's 'non-Czechoslovak' population. Instead, a general strike broke out that led to the arrest of social democratic leaders, who were suspected of wanting to sabotage the Czechoslovak Republic and to undermine the position of the Pressburg authorities. The question of whether the strike was inspired by political motives of this nature is one of the great controversies surrounding it. There were certainly political issues involved in addition to social and economic grievances, even if this was at some points denied by the strike leadership. On the other hand, the allegations of the Czechoslovak authorities that the strikers were tools of Hungarian 'irredentism' must be seen as a political simplification resulting from panic and from a lack of understanding of the Pressburg situation. Indeed these claims had the strange appearance of a mixture of paranoia and propaganda. The chain of events that was set in motion by the strike finally resulted in the shootings and bloodshed of 12 February 1919, Pressburg's 'bloody Wednesday', as this tragic day in the history of the city may well be called. Moreover, the refusal of the Slovak social democrats to join the strike of the German and Magyar workers, and their support for the Czechoslovak government during the entire Pressburg crisis, became another landmark in the mutual alienation between the different national groups making up the local working-class movement.

Those Pressburgers who could not accept their new status, or indeed the restrictive political and administrative measures taken by the Czechoslovak authorities, found some last hope in the theoretical possibility that the Paris Peace Conference might ultimately change the status of the city or decide that a plebiscite be held. Most of the reports reaching the city from Paris did not help to underpin this hoping against hope, however. Nevertheless some political groups, including the German and Magyar social democrats, appear to have believed that it was still worth trying to persuade the Entente to intervene in the affairs of Pressburg, bypassing the resented Czechoslovak administration. During the second week of February, when it had become clear that strike action alone would not bring an acceptable result, an endeavour was made in this direction by the social democratic leadership. As these desperate political efforts were made, the German and Magyar population of the city began to develop feelings of hatred towards the Czechoslovak regime. It would be wrong to claim that the Czechoslovak administration in Pressburg was tyrannical or intensely repressive. But the many instances of petty harassment (as it was experienced by the Germans and the Magyars) and the symbolic institution of the new pattern of national domination (perhaps an inevitable feature of every national revolution) created, in combination with social policies antagonising the working-class movement, a climate in which dialogue and negotiations became all but impossible. Measures like the obligation for bookshops to ensure that a certain proportion of the books displayed in their shop-windows were in the Czech or Slovak language, or the prohibition of Hungarian and Austrian newspapers, did little to inspire confidence in the new regime among the Pressburg population. The same held true for the introduction of the Czech and Slovak languages in public administration at the expense of Magyar and German, the constant shortages of coal and foodstuffs during the winter months, and

indeed the closing down of the openly defiant university. The latter step was experienced by many as a particularly repugnant measure exposing the true nature of the new regime, and the German social democrats responded by declaring that an important matter of principle was involved – the ‘freedom of conscience’ – and that they would take up the challenge and resist. By this time the political atmosphere in Central Europe as a whole had become intensely nationalistic, not least among the victorious Czechs. On 1 February 1919 the American diplomat H. Gibson, who was travelling through the region, reported to the American Foreign Secretary Robert Lansing: ‘Of all the people whom we saw in the course of our journey, the Czechs seemed to have the most ability and common sense, the best organization, and the best leaders. They seem, however, to have been seized lately with a strong attack of imperialism, and a desire to dominate central Europe. This was evident in frank conversations with President Masaryk, the Prime Minister, Dr. Kramarcz [*sic*], and many others.’³⁹⁸ As far as the situation in Pressburg was concerned, it would be wrong to believe that one side was simply provoking the other or exclusively responsible for the escalation of the situation. An example of this kind of thinking was the claim that the German and Magyar social democrats, the major opposition force in Pressburg, were deliberately trying to destabilise the Czechoslovak State in collaboration with the Hungarian government and Magyar nationalists. This was asserted by Czechoslovak officials at the time, and is sometimes repeated in the Slovak and Czech historiography even today. The truth would rather seem to be that the strikes and bloodshed of February 1919 were caused by a combination of factors leading to a breakdown of confidence between the parties. The Czechoslovak authorities cannot be exempted from part of the responsibility for what happened, including political mistakes that contributed to a serious deterioration of the situation and to one of the greatest tragedies in the history of the city. At the same time, it would be naive to ignore that irresponsible Magyar nationalist elements (even if they were only spontaneously acting students) were intermingling with the organised strikers and protesters in Pressburg, some of who may have had contacts with Bolsheviks or nationalists in Hungary. But this does not mean that the German-Magyar labour movement as a whole was actively working together with, or even directed by, Hungarian political or military circles. What is important above all is to try and reconstruct as precisely as possible the factual course of events and the motives, decisions, and emotions of the moment. Only thereafter it may be possible to draw certain conclusions about the role played by the different actors in the drama.

On 31 January 1919 both the German-Magyar Social Democratic Party leadership and the *Arbeiterrat* of Pressburg passed resolutions on the university question with far-reaching consequences. The Social Democratic Party declared that it regarded the closing down of the university and the police measures against ‘the professors’, which were taken only because they did not want to participate in the festive reception of the Šrobár government on 4 February, as ‘a serious violation of the freedom of conscience’. The government measures were also said to deprive the university students of the possibility to continue their studies. ‘The Social Democratic Party assures the professors of the complete solidarity of the working class of Pressburg’, the resolution continued, ‘and it will try to find ways and means to have this serious violation of the law redressed as soon as possible’. The *Volksstimme* of 2 February explained that this party resolution had been adopted in spite of the fact that ‘the social democratic working class’ had good reasons to be greatly dissatisfied with the ‘attitude of the university professors’ in the past. Indeed many of them had supported the agitation of the Christian Socials and ‘clericalism’ (the

³⁹⁸ Quoted in Erwin Viehhaus, *Die Minderheitenfrage und die Entstehung der Minderheitenschutzverträge auf der Pariser Friedenskonferenz 1919. Eine Studie zur Geschichte des Nationalitätenproblems im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Würzburg 1960, pp. 4-5. See for the Czechoslovak restrictive measures and the resulting resentment among the Pressburg population, e.g., Egbert K. Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei in den Jahren 1918-1929. Ein Beitrag zur Nationalitätenproblematik*, Munich 1971, pp. 41-2.

university had a Catholic profile) against their ideological enemies. The professors should have helped to raise the ‘spiritual, intellectual, and cultural level’ of the city, but by their intolerance and confessional incitement they had instead exacerbated the antagonisms splitting the population of Pressburg into different *Lager* (confessional and ideological ‘camps’). Nevertheless, the *Volksstimme* continued, in the present situation the university must be defended against government repression, especially because the Christian Socials and the bourgeois liberals (the Radical Democrats) kept ‘silent’ about the issue, their newspapers only giving ‘long reports on the imminent reception of the Czechoslovak government’. The university had been an exponent of the ‘clerical belief’ that all authority comes from God; now it was itself a victim of the political opportunism bred by this attitude, with its political allies not daring to protest against the government. The endeavours of the social democrats ‘to teach the bourgeoisie strength of character’ were obstructed by the very circles that the university professors identified with. And now it was only the social democrats ‘who could understand the bitterness of the university’ and who wanted to do something about it. The *Volksstimme* announced that the social democrats would first try to go ‘the official road’ of peacefully approaching the authorities; perhaps this would lead to a satisfactory result, because the authorities might understand that their drastic step of closing down the university ‘had been taken too hastily’. However, if this brought no result, ‘the working class will have to look for other ways and means to attain justice’. The Pressburg *Arbeiterrat* decided to support the party leadership and to present a petition to County Sheriff Zoch demanding the immediate revocation of the ‘police measures against the professors’ and the reopening of the university.³⁹⁹ Thus the German-dominated social democratic movement decided to intervene in the university controversy on declared grounds of principle, and to link its fate to that of those who had been most directly affected by what was seen as a policy of increasing repression and violation of the law. The statement that the authorities might understand that their action had been taken ‘too hastily’ and might be persuaded to change course, suggests that as late as the weekend of 1-2 February social democratic leaders still believed they might achieve something through peaceful pressure. In other words, they were not simply using the university issue to spark off a political escalation. However, by the afternoon of Sunday 2 February they must have come to the conclusion that the Pressburg authorities led by Zoch were not prepared to reconsider the measures against the university, and that the option of looking for ‘other ways and means to attain justice’ must be translated into action. This should include a boycott of the reception and celebrations on 4 February, and even strike action. There is no reason to believe that the German social democrats were not sincere when they claimed that their resistance was a question of defending the ‘freedom of conscience’. This notion had figured in their political rhetoric before. It was part of their effort to present themselves as a political movement of independent and principled men who would not descend to the level of fear and opportunism they associated with political parties like the Radical Democrats and the Christian Socials. But as the conflict was reaching its climax, the university issue was increasingly linked also to other grievances, both local and international ones.

The *Volksstimme* reported that the composition of Zoch’s interim town council had caused ‘great disappointment’. Persons who were ‘completely unknown’ in Pressburg had been appointed as well, ‘only because they are Slovaks’; these individuals had been living in the city ‘hardly a few weeks’. As a result others had been ‘arbitrarily’ deleted from the original list of candidates, causing ‘great bitterness especially among the working class’. Indeed, ‘old comrades’

³⁹⁹ *Volksstimme*, 2 February 1919. The Radical Democratic organ *Republik* did not consider it necessary for the Germans to protest against the closing down of what was after all a Hungarian (Magyar) university, but it also declared it wanted a German professorial chair after the university’s reopening. See Gertrud Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen Pressburgs. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Umbruchsperiode 1918/20*, Munich 1942, p. 136.

were affected ‘who had worked for twenty years or more’ in the social democratic movement. Some of the ‘newcomers’ were obviously Slovak social democrats, for the *Volksstimme* declared: ‘Everyone is welcome who subscribes to the social democratic programme, but we demand in the first place recognition of our list.’⁴⁰⁰ The list of fifty town councillors published in the *Pressburger Zeitung* shows that at least four Slovak – or ‘Czechoslovak’ – social democrats had been included, of whom three (Emanuel Lehocký, Ján Pocisk, and the Czech-born Ferdinand Benda) had lived in Pressburg for many years.⁴⁰¹ Therefore the complaint of the German social democrats about ‘unknown Slovaks’ did not seem to be entirely justified as far as these Slovak social democrats are concerned. On the other hand, the relatively small number of German and Magyar social democrats appointed to the town council (half a dozen out of fifty) was arguably too low given the political importance and influence of their movement in Pressburg. This influence was clearly shown in the first Czechoslovak general election in April 1920, when they proved the largest political party in the city. On 31 January 1919 the *Arbeiterrat* passed a resolution protesting against the composition of the town council too. It rejected the inclusion of persons ‘who are not Pressburgers’ and claimed that Zoch ‘did not keep his promise to grant parity to the working class’, i.e., half of all seats. But this complaint did not seem justified either, for when the social democrats sent a delegation to Zoch on 8 January to discuss their demands, he did not promise to accept the demand of ‘parity’. Instead he said he would appoint at least ‘ten workers’ to the town council, which is exactly what happened because there seems to have been a total number of ten social democrats – German, Magyar, and Czechoslovak social democrats combined – on the list. Nevertheless the German and Magyar social democrats, quite apart from their somewhat xenophobic tendency, were right to argue they were not properly represented, although the demand to have half of all councillors was bordering on the preposterous. The *Arbeiterrat* decided to send a delegation to the opening session of the town council on 1 February to protest against the council’s composition. It was also announced that ‘perhaps other steps’ would be taken as well, and the fact that the delegation’s protest was not accepted by Zoch was an additional factor helping to radicalise the atmosphere in Pressburg. Social democratic leaders like Wittich and Chovan declared at this first town council meeting that if the government did not change its repressive methods and restrictive policies, the social democrats would ‘go into opposition’.⁴⁰² The council elected acting mayor Kánya mayor of Pressburg, which was appreciated by the social democrats, but they complained that the municipal committees were ‘arbitrarily constituted’ by Zoch just like the council itself. According to the *Volksstimme*, this demonstrated what ‘democracy’ meant under the new regime: a system in which ‘the population has no voice’.⁴⁰³ These strongly worded grievances no doubt contributed to the decision to boycott the Šrobár reception on 4 February and indeed to engage in strike action.

On Sunday 2 February the atmosphere in Pressburg had become fairly excited. The *Volksstimme* edition of that day addressed not only the local but also the international political situation, parading slogans like ‘Long live Wilson! Down with the dictated peace [*Gewaltfrieden*]!’ and ‘Long live the self-determination of the nations! Down with imperialism!’ The German social democrats tried to link the political crisis in Pressburg to the international situation and to put pressure on the government in Prague. The *Volksstimme* published an ‘open letter’ from the Pressburg Social Democratic Party to the Czechoslovak President Tomáš G. Masaryk, which discussed the closing down of the university and the other restrictive measures

⁴⁰⁰ *Volksstimme*, 2 February 1919.

⁴⁰¹ *Pressburger Zeitung (PZ)*, morning paper, 30 January 1919. Cf. Emil Portisch, *Geschichte der Stadt Pressburg-Bratislava*, 2 vols, Bratislava 1933, vol. 2, p. 544; the name index in *Kapitoly z dejín sociálnej demokracie na Slovensku*, eds Stanislav Sikora et al., Bratislava, 1996. See for Benda also *Slovenský biografický slovník*, 6 vols, Martin, 1986-94, vol. 1, p. 206.

⁴⁰² *PZ*, morning paper, 2 February 1919.

⁴⁰³ *Volksstimme*, 2 February 1919, 6 February 1919; *Westungarische Volksstimme*, 9 January 1919.

taken by the Pressburg authorities within a broader political context. It declared that the social democrats believed that Masaryk would agree that the action against the university was unjust and a violation of the freedom of speech and freedom of conscience, things for which Masaryk himself 'had fought all his life'. The letter reminded Masaryk that Zoch had instructed all 'corporate bodies' in Pressburg to participate in the reception of the Šrobár government. 'Faced with the choice, either to submit and deny its true conviction or to follow its conscience, the university senate had chosen the latter' and refused to attend the reception. 'By manly sticking to its conviction, it has as a representative of civilisation merely fulfilled its task of giving an example of respectable strength of character.' But the response of the Czechoslovak government representative in Pressburg was to close down the university and to place its professors under police supervision. This 'act of violence' caused 'the greatest bitterness among broad strata of the population, because it gave the impression that the government wanted to build its power on the mentality of renegades and servile obsequiousness, on infringement of the law and coercive measures'. The letter asserted that 'the first act' of the Czechoslovak troops after their arrival in Pressburg had been to prohibit foreign newspapers, a coercive measure aiming at the 'spiritual isolation' of the city from the outside world. Because newspapers from Vienna and Budapest were publishing reports that 'the gentlemen of the new regime' did not like, they made it impossible to get hold of them for several weeks. Only after repeated protests from the Pressburg population were the import and sale of some of these newspapers permitted again. However, the social democratic *Arbeiter-Zeitung* from Vienna was not among them and continued to be excluded from Pressburg, even though it had never participated in the 'campaign of denouncing Masaryk' conducted by other newspapers. On the contrary, after the war the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* published a series of articles written by Masaryk himself, from which 'the working class in Pressburg learned about the greatness of Masaryk'. The open letter to the Czechoslovak president concluded with a question: did Masaryk actually know about the actions of the Czechoslovak government representative (Zoch) in Pressburg?⁴⁰⁴ The letter can be seen as another indication that the Pressburg social democrats were trying at the last moment to avoid a fatal escalation of the situation in the city. It could also be argued that it was to serve as a legitimisation of the general strike that was already being planned. The violation of the freedom of conscience in the university question, and of the freedom of speech and information by Czechoslovak censorship policy and the exclusion of foreign newspapers, was presented by the German social democrats as proof of the nature of the regime in Pressburg (not in Prague). Opposition to this regime was legitimate on democratic grounds. The recent, only partial rescission of the prohibition of Hungarian and Austrian newspapers was characterised as 'arbitrary', 'incomprehensible', 'unacceptable'; all newspapers should be admitted without exception. As against the unacceptable policies of the Czechoslovak administration in Pressburg, as well as the unacceptable Czechoslovak demands at the Paris Peace Conference, Wilson and Masaryk were invoked as statesmen from whom a measure of justice could be expected. The *Volksstimme* reported that Wilson had delivered a speech in Paris stressing that 'no nation has the right to rule over another nation'. The Pressburg social democrats also showed that they were by no means uncritical about the Hungarian government. The *Volksstimme* reported that the 'German Governing Council' trying to implement German autonomy in Hungary complained that several of its wishes were not fulfilled by the Hungarian government. One of its demands was that the unreliable Hungarian census figures from 1910 should be rectified in order to acquire an accurate demographic basis for the establishment of German autonomous institutions.⁴⁰⁵

The German-Magyar social democratic movement thus went through a process of radicalisation caused by increasing political frustration. After having displayed a good deal of

⁴⁰⁴ *Volksstimme*, 2 February 1919.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

patience, pragmatism, and willingness to give the Czechoslovak authorities the benefit of the doubt at least to some extent, its stamina was dissipating. By Sunday 2 February, when meetings were held by various Pressburg working-class organisations, the general mood had become grim and defiant. There was wide support for the decision of the social democratic leadership to come to the support of the Elisabeth University and to follow its example not to participate in the festivities on 4 February. Throughout the day, demonstrations and other actions took place across the city to protest against the measures of the Czechoslovak authorities and to express the rejection by the wider population of the 4 February celebrations, because it was felt there was nothing to celebrate. All of this seems to have occurred in an atmosphere of spontaneous defiance, not as a result of carefully planned action. In a message to Colonel Riccardo Barreca on 2 February, Zoch informed the Italian military commander that several ‘impertinent demonstrations’ had been held, and that decorations placed across the city in connection with the arrival of Šrobár had been pulled down. Because he had received information that more demonstrations were being prepared, he asked Barreca – who as the highest military officer in Pressburg was officially responsible for keeping order – to proclaim martial law and to prohibit all political meetings.⁴⁰⁶ Barreca, even if he was far from enthusiastic about taking such measures, probably believed he had no other option but to accede to Zoch’s request given the importance of avoiding unrest on 4 February. This cleared the way for the arrest by the Pressburg police of Paul Wittich and other individuals the following days, although Barreca himself was not responsible for this and was not even informed about it. It seems that Barreca was critical about the removal of the Šrobár government to Pressburg and that he was increasingly mistrusted and ignored by the city’s political and police authorities. The proclamation of martial law was not immediately effective, however, for on Monday morning, 3 February, several trade union organisations were getting ready to start a general strike that afternoon; three days later the *Volksstimme* described the beginning of the strike as a ‘spontaneous’ action. Whether spontaneous or organisational factors were responsible for starting the strike must remain a moot question. The relative importance of economic and political grievances is a difficult question as well. It would seem that the strike was not only directed against Zoch’s university measures and other allegedly coercive and ‘anti-worker’ policies, but against the whole political show surrounding the Šrobár reception. The escalation of anti-Czechoslovak grievances led to the decision to boycott the 4 February festivities. When the strike started at 1 p.m. that Monday, and was supported by growing numbers of organised workers and employees in the city, Pressburg’s police chief Richard Brunner unsuccessfully appealed to the workers to return to work.⁴⁰⁷ The attempts by Zoch and Brunner to suppress the activities of the working-class movement made them highly unpopular. Barreca on the other hand was increasingly seen as a tool, or even a victim, of the other two men, and as a potential ally of the strikers.

Before we look in greater detail at the Pressburg strike movement, it should be noted that unlike the social democrats most other German and Magyar organisations that had been invited to the reception on 4 February decided to send representatives. In most cases this happened without much enthusiasm, in stark contrast to the Czechs and Slovaks large numbers of who, often dressed in national costume, were brought to Pressburg from the immediate and more distant hinterland to strengthen the loyal element in the otherwise rather hostile city. But by this time the German and Magyar social democrats were evidently pursuing a different strategy vis-à-vis the Czechoslovak authorities than most of the other (‘bourgeois’) civic and political organisations in

⁴⁰⁶ Župan (sheriff) Samuel Zoch to colonel Riccardo Barreca, 2 February 1919, in *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska. Pripojenie Bratislavy k Československej Republike roku 1918-1919. Dokumenty*, eds Vladimír Horváth, Elemír Rákoš, and Jozef Watzka, Bratislava, 1977, p. 247.

⁴⁰⁷ Brunner ordered posters to be billed across the city making this appeal; see *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska*, eds V. Horváth et al., document 116, p. 249.

Pressburg, which did not support the decision to boycott the Šrobár reception. It would seem that the majority of the broader Pressburg population tended to follow the example of the social democrats rather than that of the other political groups, steering clear of any involvement in the festivities and ‘ostentatiously acting indifferently’. Many citizens participated in the strike movement (also non-socialists), and when the *Arbeiterrat* drafted a memorandum listing their grievances against the Czechoslovak regime it found wide support among the population. It is questionable, therefore, if the organisations present at the Šrobár reception were at all representative of the feelings of the Pressburgers. Of course they were more or less forced to participate, the examples of the university and the Social Democrat Party, many of whose leaders were arrested on 3 and 4 February, showing what might happen if they openly expressed their opposition. On the other hand, some representatives of German and Magyar organisations used the reception to express their true feelings and demands, though largely in diplomatic terms. It was obvious however that the organised section of the Pressburg citizenry was divided over the question of what strategy to follow towards the new rulers. The Šrobár reception and festivities of 4 February was the moment when this became painfully clear. The ‘diplomatic’ posture of those who were present starkly contrasted with the ‘principled’ position of the social democrats. This difference in attitude did not remain without political consequences. The presence at the reception of Radical Democratic figures and representatives of the German *Volksrat* of Pressburg caused the social democrats to accuse the Radical Democrats of ‘political prostitution’, and to announce the end of their participation in the *Volksrat*.⁴⁰⁸

A report in the *Pressburger Zeitung* informs us in detail about the statements made by some of the representatives of German and Magyar organisations at the reception on 4 February; it also confirms that not a single German or Magyar social democrat was present. The report briefly recapitulated the major events in Pressburg since the Czechoslovak occupation. It was recalled that the city was handed over to Czechoslovak rule by the Hungarian county sheriff and the Pressburg mayor ‘under dutiful protest’, and that the Hungarian government had instructed all administrative officials to stay at their posts, even if they had to swear allegiance to the new regime. Military resistance was considered useless (although politically speaking the Hungarians never accepted the loss of Pressburg). According to the *Pressburger Zeitung*, ‘neither the former Hungarian, nor the present Slovak government had ever any reason for dissatisfaction with the local citizens’. The latter on their part acknowledged the ‘conciliatory attitude’ of military commander Barreca and Government Commissioner Zoch, as well as the effective way in which they restored order and saved the city from anarchy. As a consequence the Czechoslovak government was faced with a local population that, ‘despite its patriotic feelings’, appreciated some of the government’s accomplishments. The paper reiterated the popular Pressburg belief in the liberal character of the city and its population: ‘The local citizens never knew... hatred and antagonism either with respect to class, confession, or language.’ This claim contradicted the assertions made in the *Volksstimme* (quoted above) about the division of the Pressburg population into antagonistic *Lager* and about the intolerant behaviour even of an educated group like Pressburg’s university professors. The rather mystifying language of the *Pressburger Zeitung* was also silent about the Magyarisation policy, which until recently had made the city’s Slovak- and German-speakers suffer in various fields of social, cultural, and political life, ranging from theatre policy to sick fund administration to political persecution. If the ‘thesis of liberal Pressburg’ was meant to refer to the general attitude of the local Germans, there was perhaps some truth in it (apart from their anti-Semitism). Indeed it could be argued that ideological and nationalist

⁴⁰⁸ *Volksstimme*, 6 February 1919, 9 February 1919. According to the contemporary Czech historian Peroutka, the opposition against the Šrobár government was organised by ‘the Magyar Social Democratic Party’, a typical example of overlooking the important Pressburg German element; see Ferdinand Peroutka, *Budování státu*, 2nd edn, 4 vols, Prague 1991 (1st edn 1933-6), vol. 1, p. 433.

intolerance was a relatively recent phenomenon, and that aside from the problematical issue of the Jews and anti-Jewish attitudes, ethnic relations had a different, more tolerant character until the late nineteenth century. The *Pressburger Zeitung* was frank about the likely ethnopolitical and demographic consequences of the national revolution in Pressburg. ‘The Slovak nation will develop especially strongly’, it predicted.⁴⁰⁹

The Šrobár reception was attended by a large number of Czechoslovak officials and politicians, including Šrobár’s commissioners, some government ministers from Prague, and Slovak members of the Revolutionary National Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic. Among the government ministers and officials were three prominent Czech social democrats: Minister of Justice František Soukup, Minister of Education Gustav Habrman, and the Czechoslovak envoy to Vienna and future prime minister Vlastimil Tusar. An even more remarkable feature was the presence of between 2,000 and 2,500 members – many of them armed – of the Czech nationalist gymnastic society *Sokol* (Falcon). They had been brought to Pressburg from Prague, Brno, and other Czech cities not only to attend the celebrations, but also to assist the military and police in keeping order. Apparently this happened at the request of Zoch, who – like the Prague government itself, which also sent additional military units – had apprehensions about the security situation in Pressburg. At the reception several hundred *Sokols* dressed in Czech national costume were singing Czech and Slovak national songs, which must have strongly enhanced the atmosphere of national sentiment and national revolution, as well as the impression that it was particularly the Czechs who were celebrating a historic victory. Nevertheless, those representatives of German and Magyar organisations who were given the opportunity to speak did so in their mother tongue. This was not so much an expression of their aversion to the new regime, but simply of their inability to speak Czech or Slovak, underscoring the social distance between the different national groups and the lower status of the Slavs before 1918. A high-ranking representative of the Pressburg Roman Catholic Church and a representative of the Liberal Jewish community spoke in Magyar; a pastor of the Lutheran Church and a rabbi representing the Orthodox Jewish community spoke in German. This properly reflected the sociocultural reality of Pressburg, where the majority of Protestants and Orthodox Jews were German-speakers, while among leading Catholics and liberal Jews – many of whom were originally German-speakers as well – there had been a stronger tendency to identify with Magyarised Hungary. Dr E. Lichtner, speaking on behalf of the Liberal Jewish community of Pressburg, declared: ‘Today, as the country to which we are bound by ties a thousand years’ old and by the duty of our deepest gratitude is suffering agonising pain from countless wounds, you cannot expect words from us shouting with joy.’⁴¹⁰ This statement can be seen as typical of the way in which liberal Hungarian Jews, who had greatly benefited from Hungary’s policy of welcoming all groups and individuals who embraced assimilation, experienced their loyalty to Hungary. The Magyarisation of Hungarian Jews was less than a century old, but had bred a degree of identification with ‘thousand-year-old Hungary’ that was difficult to match. The pro-Hungarian attitude of many Jews had brought about a strong antagonism between the oppressed non-Magyar nations and the liberal Jews of Hungary, the consequences of which constituted one of the great ethnopolitical tragedies of East Central Europe. This made it all the more remarkable that Lichtner openly expressed his Hungarian patriotic feelings at the reception of the Slovak

⁴⁰⁹ *PZ*, morning paper, 6 February 1919.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*; also Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, pp. 541-2. See for the festivities and the role of the *Sokols* also Dušan Provazník, ‘V prvom desaťročí v ČSR’, in *Dejiny Bratislavy*, eds Darina Lehotská and Ján Pleva, Bratislava, 1966, p. 335; Dušan Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave 1918-1929*, Bratislava 1969, p. 86; Ladislav Hubenák, *Vznik a založenie KSČ na západnom Slovensku*, Bratislava 1969, p. 46; Marián Hronský, *The Struggle for Slovakia and the Treaty of Trianon 1918-1920*, Bratislava 2001, p. 159.

government of Vavro Šrobár, a man who was not exactly known for his pro-Jewish feelings.⁴¹¹

Another guest at the Šrobár reception was Pressburg's mayor Richard Kánya, who spoke in Magyar as well; his speech was translated into German for the benefit of Czech government representatives, who unlike many Slovaks did not understand Magyar. In contrast to the proud Hungarian patriot Lichtner, but similar to the author of the report in the *Pressburger Zeitung* quoted above, Kánya did not mention the Pressburgers' suffering as old Hungarian citizens, but stressed their local patriotism and liberal character. He said that the Pressburgers had a 'fanatical love' of their hometown, and 'certain conservative traits' as far as their wish to keep their 'old rights' was concerned. 'A principal characteristic of the Pressburg citizens is their liberalism! During a thousand years Christians and Jews, Magyars, Germans and Slovaks were living and working in the greatest harmony inside the walls of this city. An indication that the religions and nationalities never developed conflicts here and always had respect and love for each other.' This idealisation was probably not primarily motivated by the desire to present a glorious historical picture of liberal and tolerant Pressburg, but by the more practical need to urge the Czechoslovak rulers to treat Pressburg's non-Slovak population in accordance with liberal principles. This was the only way for the German and Magyar Pressburgers to defend their language and ethnic identity. As Kánya phrased it, they hoped that they would 'not be hindered in exercising their traditional rights and customs'. At least as interesting is what the representatives of the German *Volksrat* of Pressburg had to say, who appeared at the reception with a sizeable delegation of ten men, including several from two local German national councils in German villages just outside Pressburg. Although the social democrats were known to play a prominent part in the *Volksrat* movement, the delegation did not include any of them. Carl Angermayer, the chairman of the Pressburg *Volksrat* and owner of the *Pressburger Zeitung*, gave a speech explaining their objectives and the importance of preserving the German language. He said that the German *Volksrat* of Pressburg, which represented 'the unification of the German-speaking citizens and workers in this city', had only one aim: 'The maintenance and strengthening of the original German-speaking population' in the spiritual and cultural field in order to support the city. He believed that the mother tongue and the 'special character' of the German Pressburgers was protected by 'the commands of intelligence, the overbearing necessity of world communication, and particularly by the exchange of all civilisation through living international languages'. In other words, the German language should be seen as indispensable because of its role as an instrument of the human intellect, international communication, and world civilisation. This provided a certain 'natural' protection of their language to German-speakers, including those in Pressburg. However, this claim had a rhetorical and political function as well, because it was understood to be necessary to stress the practical use of the German language also for the new state. 'For every state the German-speaking population represents a secure foundation, laid by its rich past... Therefore, also [Czechoslovakia]... should be interested in keeping this foundation for the construction of the new state and allow the free development of the Germans, German culture, and the German language.' Angermayer argued that for this reason the new state should know their wishes, without whose fulfilment 'the undisturbed continuation of their work' was unthinkable. Their principal demands were the following. 'We want autonomy for our German town institutions; that our German mother tongue is protected in primary and secondary schools and by means of university chairs; that communication with the authorities and courts of justice, offices of transport and state administration can be conducted in the German language.' The

⁴¹¹ For Šrobár's – largely politically motivated – anti-Jewish attitude, see Aharon Moshe Rabinowicz, 'The Jewish Minority', in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia. Historical Studies and Surveys*, 3 vols, Philadelphia, 1968-84, vol. 1, appendix D, pp. 223-7; Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the world wars*, Bloomington 1987, pp. 150-1; Pieter van Duin, 'November's Brutal Bonfire: Anarchy and Anti-Semitism in the Slovak Revolution of 1918', paper presented to the Slovak-Hungarian Historical Conference, Péter Pázmány Catholic University, Piliscsaba (Hungary), June 2001, esp. for the sociohistorical and revolutionary context.

cultural and liberal qualities of the Pressburg Germans were said to entitle them to this. ‘These wishes... are only based on the rights won by us in the course of centuries by work, diligence, honour, and capability... Just as our German-speaking population has never sown the seed of discord with its fellow inhabitants of a different mother tongue, so we believe that our own mother tongue, our special character, deserves full recognition and legal protection.’ Angermayer ended his speech by quoting a well-known statement of President Wilson, the man who was seen or presented by almost all parties as the supreme arbiter of justice and protector of liberal principles, and who had declared in 1917: ‘America enters the war for the sake of establishing a true basis for peace’.⁴¹² By 1919 Wilson was neither able nor willing to intervene in the affairs of a Central European city like Pressburg. But as the Czechoslovak State was consolidated in the course of 1919-20, the Germans of Slovakia, who were regarded by the government as a useful factor to help modernise this relatively backward region, were granted extensive minority rights. The Czechoslovak government hoped that in this way their loyalty could be won and the danger of long-term German-Magyar irredentist collaboration neutralised.

While the social democrats were steering clear of the Šrobár reception, the German Radical Democrats sent their representatives. It had become obvious soon after the occupation of Pressburg that the Radical Democrats were the most pro-Czechoslovak element among the different German and Magyar political groups in the city. A man like the Radical Democratic leader Alois Zalkai, editor of the *Republik*, was even reported to hail Šrobár.⁴¹³ As usual this triggered contempt and sarcasm on the part of the German social democrats, who regarded Zalkai and his party as the foremost example of ‘characterless chumming up’ with the new rulers, an attitude they despised so much. On 4 February Zalkai gave a speech as the official representative of the German Radical Democrats, but the *Pressburger Zeitung* did not mention any details of it, possibly because it was considered too painful and too much at variance with the more nationally assertive viewpoint of the German *Volksrat*. After the German and Magyar guests had completed their speeches, Šrobár replied in general terms and in three languages, first giving a speech in Slovak, then one in German, afterwards one in Magyar, and concluding again in Slovak. There were slight differences between the three speeches depending on what he considered the specific positions of the three national groups in Pressburg. At the same time he suggested that the different languages could coexist side by side, perhaps even on a basis of equality. In stark contradiction to this, almost giving the impression of promoting ethnic segregation instead of interethnic coexistence, was the fact that the Czechoslovak authorities had organised three separate ‘mass meetings’. Different meetings for Slovaks, Germans, and Magyars were arranged to give the different nationalities of Pressburg the opportunity to participate in the festivities in their own way; the German and Magyar meetings were far from successful.⁴¹⁴ On the evening of 4 February military bands were marching through the streets of the city, accompanied by enthusiastic *Sokols* and other people. The *Pressburger Zeitung* reported that a performance in the Pressburg Theatre was attended by many ladies and gentlemen in Czech or Slovak national costume; ‘this gave the theatre a special, unusual character’.⁴¹⁵ Indeed it was very Central

⁴¹² *PZ*, morning paper, 6 February 1919. See also Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, pp. 83-4.

⁴¹³ The *Republik* of 4 February 1919 wrote, ‘the liberated peoples of the former Upper Hungary hail Šrobár and the Slovak government’. This language led to internal struggles in the German Radical Democratic Party. When other party members protested against the exaggerated pro-Czechoslovak attitude of Alois Zalkai and Hugo Dewald, the two men resigned from their party posts on 7 February. See Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 92; Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, pp. 136-7; Paul Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert der Karpatendeutschen in der Slowakei*, Stuttgart 1992, p. 82.

⁴¹⁴ Portisch (*Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 542) writes: ‘The Pressburg population did not participate – the rumour was spread that the occupation was only temporary.’

⁴¹⁵ *PZ*, morning paper, 6 February 1919.

European that the national revolution was also celebrated and symbolically displayed in what was undoubtedly the centre of cultural life in Pressburg. That the Pressburg Theatre should be occupied by people in Czech and Slovak costume may have been for many a 'native' Pressburger the epitome of the unusual, the ultimate proof that strange things were happening in their city. But perhaps even stranger than this was the fact that, while all these 'festivities' were going on, Pressburg was actually in the grip of a general strike.

In the afternoon of Monday, 3 February, a general strike began that came to embrace a major proportion of the working and general population of Pressburg. This first strike lasted three and a half days, until 7 February; it was followed by a second strike starting on 11 February. The strike movement in Pressburg partly coincided with strikes of railway workers and other government employees (most of whom were Magyars) in other parts of Slovakia, which were meant likewise to express the strikers' political and economic grievances against the Czechoslovak government. The *Volksstimme* of 6 February explained that the strike in Pressburg was consciously started one day before the arrival and reception of Šrobár in order to avoid the impression that the workers supported the government, which had declared 4 February an official holiday. The reasons for the strike were extensively explained as well. They did not only include the well-known list of economic and political grievances, including the closing down of the university, but also the resented celebration on 4 February itself. It was argued that since the beginning of the Czechoslovak occupation of Pressburg restrictions of the rights of its citizens – rights which had been 'granted by the Hungarian government' – had become daily practice, and that the population was 'fed with promises that were not kept'. It was admitted that a problem like the insufficient provision of foodstuffs to the city was difficult to resolve under the existing circumstances, 'but it is, to put it mildly, an unparalleled lack of taste to organise festivities at a time of general distress and unemployment'. These festivities had to be paid for by the municipality, and even if the Czechoslovak government would eventually refund the expenses, 'there are a hundred other things that are more important'. The 'bitterness of the working class' had 'increased from day to day' by this and other grievances. These included the reduction of unemployment benefit; the reduction of the wages and the dismissal of government employees; the non-introduction of the eight-hour working day in Slovakia; the violation of the freedom of conscience by closing down the university; and the 'Jesuitical evasion of promises about the representation of the working class' on the town council. All this – a mixture of socio-economic and political grievances – had 'induced the working class to inform the new government on the occasion of its arrival in Pressburg, that she has no trust in it given her experiences so far'. The Šrobár reception and festivities would therefore be boycotted. It would seem that this decision was taken by the *Arbeiterrat*, which acted as the central body representing the strikers and controlling the strike leadership during the following days. The strike decision must have been communicated to the Pressburg authorities on 3 February at the latest, the day the strike began. As we have seen, the *Volksstimme* claimed that the strike started 'spontaneously'; it gradually came to embrace growing numbers and different classes of workers and employees, including the printers, railway workers, tramway men, postal and telegraph employees, and various groups of factory and municipal workers. It is likely that a combination of organisation and spontaneous action made the strike successful. Armed policemen and soldiers tried to coerce certain classes of employees to continue working, especially the tramway workers, hotel employees, and waiters, people who were indispensable for receiving and looking after the many Czech and Slovak guests invited to the festivities. The Hotel Employees' and Waiters' Union was ordered to dissolve, and its leaders arrested. One of them, the Magyar social democrat Rudolf Chovan, had already been arrested one week before because he had visited Budapest, and because Pressburg employers had accused him of being a 'Bolshevist agent'. The police had searched his home, but no evidence was found confirming the charge that he was a Hungarian or Bolshevist 'agent'. Posters were billed by the authorities across the city calling on the workers to do their 'duty' and threatening

them with military courts and ‘militarisation’ of Pressburg, but according to the *Volksstimme*, ‘it did not impress them very much’. It would seem that a considerable proportion of the waiters and other ‘strategic’ workers managed to join the strike and stayed away from their duties, which caused serious logistical problems for the government and its guests. Probably on account of this, and in an attempt to avoid losing control and political prestige, the Pressburg authorities decided to try and behead the strike movement by detaining its principal leaders, above all the most important leader of the social democratic movement, Paul Wittich. He was arrested on the evening of 3 February, which was followed the next morning by the arrest of seven other German and Magyar social democratic leaders as well as the rector of the university and the editor of the *Hiradó*, the most important local Magyar newspaper.⁴¹⁶ The *Volksstimme* claimed that the arrests did not break the strength of the organised workers, but of course it created an emergency situation for the labour movement.

The arrests on 3 and 4 February led the *Arbeiterrat* to call a meeting on 4 February to discuss the situation. The fact that all of this occurred while the official festivities were going on, dramatically demonstrated the political, social, and national divisions afflicting Pressburg. The *Arbeiterrat* discussed both the arrests and the broader question of the grievances of the strikers. The result of the meeting was a list of eight (clusters of) demands, viz., (1) the release of all detainees; (2) right to self-determination, freedom of conscience, reopening of the university; (3) freedom of association and assembly, reconstitution of the dissolved Hotel Employees’ and Waiters’ Union; (4) introduction of the eight-hour working day; (5) collective agreements of employers and employees to be backed up by industrial legislation, creation of jobs; (6) increase of unemployment benefit to fifteen crowns for men, ten crowns for women; (7) dismissed government employees to be taken back; (8) reduction of the wages of government employees to be revoked and their wages to be kept on the level fixed by the Hungarian government. While political demands figured prominently on this list, it is clear that social and economic demands were at least as important. The right to self-determination and freedom of conscience were broad political principles. Of more immediate strategic importance for the labour movement was the freedom of association and assembly, which had been attacked by the declaration of martial law, the arrest of labour leaders, and the dissolution of at least one trade union. The *Arbeiterrat* appointed a committee of five whose first task it was to start negotiations about the release of the detainees.⁴¹⁷ This led to the first phase in the long process of negotiations between the German-Magyar social democratic movement and the Czechoslovak authorities. It was also the first time that a systematic list of demands was drawn up defining the objectives of the strikers.

On Wednesday morning, 5 February, the committee of five went to see Pressburg’s mayor, Richard Kánya, who had nothing to do with the arrests. Together with Kánya they then went to Pressburg’s military commander Barreca, who was apparently seen as ultimately responsible or being in a position to intervene. The ‘representatives of the organised working class of Pressburg’ presented Barreca with a ‘memorandum’ containing three ‘requests’ and two promises. He was asked to release all detainees, to ensure full political rights, and to promise that no punitive measures would be taken on account of the ‘political strike’; it was promised that if these requests were met, work would be resumed and public order maintained. It seems that at this point the list of eight demands was not mentioned; it was probably hoped that it could be presented after the release of the detainees. The use of the term ‘political strike’ shows that it was admitted that political motives and objectives were part of the strike movement from the

⁴¹⁶ *Volksstimme*, 6 February 1919. As far as the allegations against Rudolf Chovan are concerned, it is interesting that a few weeks later the Hotel Employees’ and Waiters’ Union, of which Chovan was the secretary, sent a letter to the *Pressburger Zeitung* categorically rejecting the constant suggestions that he was ‘involved in Bolshevik agitation’. See *Pressburger Zeitung*, morning paper, 4 March 1919.

⁴¹⁷ *Volksstimme*, 6 February 1919. See also *Robotnícke noviny (RN)*, 8 February 1919; Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 545, according to whom the printing worker Karl Philipp Kowarik was the leader of the committee of five.

beginning. However, after the detention of their most important leaders, clearly an effective measure, the strikers must have felt that they were acting from a defensive position, and that they were not powerful enough to make key political demands. What was ‘political’ about the strike at this point was mainly the defensive demand of respecting political and organisational freedoms and protection against repression and victimisation. The question was whether the struggle could be conducted in conditions of democracy and legality, or not at all. It was hoped, or believed, that Barreca was in a position to participate in negotiations on political issues, but it soon became clear that Zoch and Šrobár were determined to deny him such powers. Indeed, Barreca told the *Arbeiterrat* committee that the arrests had been made without his knowledge. It had been a decision of Zoch and police chief Brunner, and he had not even been consulted and was informed only afterwards. Nevertheless Barreca ‘promised’ that the detainees would be released that afternoon; apparently he still believed he had enough influence to achieve this. The *Arbeiterrat* committee must have believed this too, for it prepared a meeting in the *Arbeiterheim* to welcome the social democratic leaders upon their release. But instead of the labour leaders an armed patrol arrived at the *Arbeiterheim* demanding that all go home; it was decided to comply in order to prevent incidents. It was learned that Brunner had refused to accept Barreca’s order to release the detainees, but he could probably not have done this without the knowledge or instructions of Zoch, his administrative superior. This incident was the beginning of a conflict between Zoch and Barreca over their respective competencies in the field of maintaining public order, a conflict that had soon political consequences as well. The (perceived) role of Brunner and Zoch during the strike was deeply resented by the social democrats, but Barreca was increasingly seen in a very different light. Barreca himself must have felt insulted by the actions of Zoch and Brunner. He asked Pressburg’s mayor Kánya, who tried to act as an intermediary, to tell the *Arbeiterrat* committee that he deeply regretted he had been unable to keep his promise to release their leaders. When he was told that evening about the military patrol breaking into the *Arbeiterheim*, he declared again that he knew nothing about it. He said his task was ‘to keep order and protect justice’, and he promised to fulfil the wish of the workers that the Czechoslovak military guards be withdrawn from the factories, which was seen as provocative. However, this promise he could not keep either. That same evening, against a background of administrative confusion and continued merry-making among Czechoslovak functionaries, the executive committee of the *Arbeiterrat* decided to carry out a spectacular action. ‘Despite many difficulties’, they managed to get access to Šrobár and František Soukup in one of the government buildings and to persuade them to order the release of the detainees. They promised that the released leaders would go to their private homes and not appear at a public mass meeting, but later that night they attended a committee meeting of the *Arbeiterrat*. The release of the social democratic leaders was described by the *Volksstimme* as a ‘victory of the organised working class’ and a ‘triumph of solidarity’. The government, which was said to believe it could intimidate them and ‘copy the system of Tisza and Bánffy’ (repressive former Hungarian prime ministers), had to acknowledge that ‘it must reckon with the power of the organised working class’.⁴¹⁸ The impact of the general strike, which continued on 5 and 6 February, is difficult to assess, but the social democrats tended to exaggerate it. It is clear however that the situation led to confusion among the different political,

⁴¹⁸ *Volksstimme*, 6 February 1919, 9 February 1919. The *Volksstimme* of 9 February commented on the conflict between Barreca and Zoch-Brunner that Barreca as the representative of the Entente and military commander of Pressburg was exclusively responsible for keeping order. Therefore only Barreca should be in control of the military units and no one else had the right to use them without his knowledge. The social democrats had ‘so far no reason to have any doubt about Barreca’s word of honour’, but the role played by Brunner and Zoch was ‘unclear’. They ‘did not respect the competency’ of their ‘superior’ Barreca, who ‘with his tactful and correct behaviour has always taken notice of the difficult situation of the Pressburg population’, unlike the other two men. The social democrats probably hoped that they could gain advantage from the power struggle between the military and civil authorities in the city and get Barreca on their side.

administrative, and military authorities in Pressburg, with Barreca, Brunner, and Šrobár all doing different things. Šrobár, now the highest Czechoslovak government representative in Pressburg, must have deemed it wise to make a tactical concession to the social democrats in order to avoid a further escalation. It is also possible that the presence of the Czechoslovak social democratic leader and Minister of Justice Soukup played a part in the decision to release the Pressburg labour leaders as well. But it did not mean that the strike movement now could easily win other, more substantive concessions too, as subsequent developments were to show. It was agreed by Šrobár and the *Arbeiterrat* committee however that negotiations would be started about the other issues mentioned in the committee's memorandum and list of grievances.

Meanwhile the festivities of 4 February were described in bitter terms in the German social democratic press, which used the opportunity to produce another piece of political moralism. Critical or even devastating comment was possible because at this stage Czechoslovak censorship of the Pressburg newspapers (unlike censorship of foreign newspapers) was limited; this only changed after March 1919.⁴¹⁹ The 'festive mood' and the security measures on the day of Šrobár's arrival in Pressburg were described in detail in the *Volksstimme*, which reported that the 'police and military, armed with bayonet and machine-gun', were dominating the streets of the city. It was forbidden for the inhabitants of Pressburg to receive strangers if their homes were located along the route of the official parade bringing Šrobár from the railway station to the city centre. It was even decreed that no one were allowed to be at the ground floor of these houses, apparently because of fear of attacks or other hostile incidents. According to the *Volksstimme*, the whole thing was like a theatre performance. 'The authorities understood perfectly well that they could not expect any participation from the Pressburg population; therefore not only the major actors but also the supernumeraries and the public were brought from far away.' It was strange that the Czechoslovak government, 'who are clever men', were organising such a 'show of deception'. The paper wondered: 'Whom did they want to deceive? The Slovak population? She does not deserve such a deceit. On her own native soil her feelings would have been expressed far more authentically; in Pressburg she only served to fill in the picture.' It is true that large numbers of Slovaks from other parts of the country had been brought to the city for the festivities. But here the *Volksstimme* suggested that all Slovaks were outsiders in Pressburg, a claim we also encountered in connection with the contested composition of the interim town council. Another possibility, according to the paper, was that the 'show' had been organised to deceive and impress the non-Slovak Pressburgers. 'But generally they consider themselves victims of an act of violence, which is not even denied by leading Czech politicians. They cannot be denied the right to expect a final solution from a decision of the Peace Conference; until that moment they would accept the existing situation as long as no infringements of the law are committed. More cannot be demanded of us, because demanding characterlessness contradicts the foundations of a democratic republic.' The German social democrats regarded the festivities as 'a great tactical mistake'. It would have been much wiser if the government 'had arrived quietly', and had begun

⁴¹⁹ Nevertheless the *Volksstimme* of 9 February reported that on 3 February a letter had been sent to all Pressburg newspapers by the office of County Sheriff Zoch warning them that if they published 'false' or 'inciting' reports they would be shut down. Newspaper editors had to send three copies of each issue to the 'Ministry for Slovakia' and one to the office of the county sheriff immediately after publication. However, censorship was as yet primarily aimed at foreign newspapers, especially Magyar- and German-language newspapers from Hungary and newspapers from Austria, Germany, and even the Czech Lands, the importation of which was prohibited again (after a short period of censorship relaxation) during the first week of February. The *Volksstimme* spoke of a 'spiritual starvation policy' isolating the Pressburg population from the outside world and leaving them exposed to rumours only, which 'could not have a calming effect'. Both Šrobár and the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior in Prague played an active role with regard to censorship policy in Slovakia. On 6 February, for example, a letter was sent by the Prague Ministry to Šrobár's Commissioner of Internal Affairs, Milan Ivanka, in Bratislava informing him that only three Bohemian-German newspapers could be admitted to Slovakia, the rest being banned. See SNA, MP, Box 255.

to address the many serious problems in Pressburg and to fulfil the promises made by Zoch. This would have shown its 'democratic character' and its understanding for the feelings of the population. But instead of coal or cheaper foodstuffs, the government had brought 'strangers... thousands of hungry people who, given the amount of food provided for the occasion, must have believed that the Pressburgers live in luxury; they ate well and in addition took home with them what they could. They did not realise, for instance, that the milk for their white cake was taken from poor hungry children.' The festivities were 'a provocation not only of the Pressburgers, but also of the Slovak peasant population, who similarly suffer from the insufficient provision of foodstuffs; the government tried to buy them off with games instead of bread. But the Slovak peasants are not so stupid anymore and look right through this game.'⁴²⁰ Thus the Slovaks, even if they were portrayed as peasants and outsiders in Pressburg, were also represented as people from whom a degree of criticism and opposition to the Czechoslovak government could be expected. It was true that discontent among part of the Slovak population in some parts of the country was growing. Their grievances against the Czech-dominated government, and especially against the Czechoslovak army, were partly economic, partly religious, and partly ethnolnational, but this did not mean that they demanded reunification with Hungary.⁴²¹

The *Volksstimme* asserted that the Czechoslovak celebration was based on 'untruth', itself the result of the government's 'uncertainty', of which the use of force, beginning with the closing down of the university, was another significant expression. 'A bonfire with machine-guns, bayonets, etc., has a strange taste', the paper wrote. The triumphal arch that had been built in one of Pressburg's main roads was described as 'an empty whitewashed botch'. But the most important point was the following: 'When the people are hungry and children are cold, it is not a moment for celebration. Only despotism builds on coercion and lies.' Therefore, to express its feelings of distaste and repugnance, 'the organised working class spontaneously stopped working' on Monday afternoon, 3 February. She wanted to demonstrate to the Šrobár government that she did not agree with its policies, that 'she had expected something different and better from the government of a democratic republic'. Thus, critical though they were, the German social democrats continued to suggest – perhaps sincerely, perhaps tactically – that they saw the Czechoslovak Republic in principle as a democratic state, despite all their rhetoric about 'despotism' and the like. Their ambiguity in defining the character of the Czechoslovak State, especially in the Pressburg context, may also have been influenced by the conflict between Zoch and Barreca, which the social democrats were quick to note. This conflict may have strengthened their belief that it might be possible directly to address the Entente, and that the position of the Czechoslovak government could be weakened if it was represented as less than democratic, as not living up even to its own promises. As yet the mood seemed optimistic. The *Volksstimme* wrote: 'Šrobár will have little to be happy about. He must look for some kind of accommodation of the Pressburgers.' The position of the strikers was strengthened by their ability to keep discipline and to avoid incidents or provocations; this ability was lost only on 12 February. Their protest against the government and its ill-considered festivities – which were held in a hostile city beset by social and economic problems – was expressed by simply ignoring them, by silent resistance instead of noisy demonstrations. This was encouraged by the strike leadership, who understood that it was the most effective way to get the detainees released and, perhaps, some of their other demands accepted as well. The strikers avoided the use of violence, counter-violence, or intimidation, at least in public, not necessarily in the workplace, as later accusations by the Slovak social democrats were to show. During the first Pressburg strike of 3-6 February – which was followed by a second strike on 11-12 February – Czech workers and military personnel took

⁴²⁰ *Volksstimme*, 6 February 1919.

⁴²¹ See Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 47; Ismo Nurmi, *Slovakia - a Playground for Nationalism and National Identity. Manifestations of the National Identity of the Slovaks 1918-1920*, Helsinki 1999, p.95ff.

the place of the striking railwaymen; postal and telegraph employees were forced to work under military supervision and the threat of imprisonment. In this way the government could maintain a minimum degree of normality, although the strike movement embraced the bulk of Pressburg workers (22,000 according to the social democrats) and was causing serious problems for the Pressburg authorities. But as the conflict continued, so did the process of radicalisation both in terms of goals and methods. The list of grievances drawn up by the *Arbeiterrat* on 4 February was a stepping stone to further but unsuccessful negotiations with the government, the calling of a second strike, and the shootings of 12 February. The background to these developments was a combination of the international political situation and the specific problems in Pressburg.⁴²²

The first strike was 'suspended' (not definitively ended) following a decision made at two simultaneous mass meetings on Thursday morning, 6 February – one in the great hall and one in the garden of the Pressburg *Arbeiterheim*. Spirits were high, and the strikers were even described by the *Volksstimme* as 'fighters for the rights and the genuine liberation and fraternisation of the nations'. Paul Wittich declared at one of the meetings that the social democratic leaders had been arrested because 'the workers are people with character who did not want to bow before those in power'. He claimed that according to police chief Brunner the refusal of the social democrats to participate in the Šrobár reception was a 'sufficient reason' to detain them. This showed the 'peculiar' understanding the Czechoslovak government had of democracy. The government said it had come 'to liberate the oppressed people', but the reality was that those who were 'liberated' actually opposed their 'liberators'. According to Wittich there were many among them who initially believed that the Czechoslovak government represented humanitarian ideals, but its deeds of the past few weeks had opened their eyes. 'We social democrats are fighting against the policies of the Czecho-Slovak government because she is not a democratic but an imperialist government, because she stands in opposition to the principles that President Wilson has formulated and on the basis of which we have ended the war.' Democracy demanded the abolition of militarism; the victory of the democratic revolution had toppled Prussian militarism, but now they were supposed to accept 'Czech militarism'. After this denunciation of Czech 'imperialism' and 'militarism' it was somewhat surprising that Wittich went on to say that their strike had 'a purely economic character'. But in the complicated Pressburg situation the distinction between 'economic' and 'political' grievances had become difficult to make, because behind socio-economic issues there was always the broader national-political picture. Wittich reminded his audience that many railway and postal workers had been dismissed from their jobs for a period of one year to learn the Slovak language and had been replaced by Czechs, and that Magyar government employees were 'forbidden to use their mother tongue'.⁴²³ Was it under

⁴²² *Volksstimme*, 6 February 1919; Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, p. 68; Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 47-8; Provazník, 'V prvom desaťročí', pp. 335-6; Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 85-7; Peter Zelenák, 'Maďarská sociálna demokracia na Slovensku', in *Kapitoly*, eds S. Sikora et al., p. 164; Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, p. 159. Zelenák and Hronský point to the international political context, including the international socialist conference in Bern that began on 2 February and where the delegation of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party protested against the Czechoslovak occupation of Slovakia before the Paris Peace Conference had made a final decision. Further the anticipated speech to the Peace Conference by the Czechoslovak foreign minister Edvard Beneš (on 5 February); and the attempt by the Hungarian government to create the impression, in particular vis-à-vis the Peace Conference, that only under Hungarian rule order and stability could be ensured in Slovakia. Provazník stresses that the arrival of the Šrobár government in Pressburg was in a similar propagandistic way meant to demonstrate the unity of the 'Czechoslovak nation' and the viability of the Czechoslovak State to the international public and the Peace Conference.

⁴²³ Other government employees had been discharged because of their refusal to swear allegiance to the Czechoslovak Republic and it is possible that the 'one-year leave' enforced on others was in fact regarded as permanent dismissal as well. Indeed it was difficult to imagine that the Czech newcomers to Pressburg would leave their posts after this one-year period, or that all Magyar and German employees would be willing to learn the Slovak language.

these circumstances surprising, he asked, ‘that the social democratic working class as a loyal defender of justice and humanity loses patience?’ Wittich then summed up the list of demands they were to submit to the government, which had been extended by the inclusion of a new political (ninth) demand. Briefly formulated, they were: (1) recognition of the principle of self-determination of the nations and of the freedom of conscience; (2) reopening of the university; (3) freedom of association and assembly; (4) introduction of the eight-hour working day; (5) legally recognised collective agreements, and creation of jobs; (6) higher unemployment benefits; (7) dismissed government employees to be taken back; (8) reduction of the latter’s wages to be revoked; (9) discharge of county sheriff Zoch and police chief Brunner. Apparently Zoch and Brunner had so much become the object of social democratic resentment and mistrust that their removal was seen as a major political issue. Wittich appealed to the population of Pressburg ‘to stand united to successfully fight the decisive battle against the wave of imperialism that is threatening our future’.⁴²⁴ It was not entirely clear how this dramatic rhetoric could be translated into practical political action. The options were tough negotiations, renewed strike action, or perhaps some other form of political pressure, possibly with the help of Barreca.

The other meeting on 6 February was addressed by Samuel Mayer, the editor of the *Volksstimme*. He said that after decades of struggle the proletariat of Hungary had at last managed ‘to end class rule’, but now they were threatened by another form of class rule that was ‘more ruthless in its methods’. The Károlyi government had introduced laws ensuring political freedom and protecting the economic position of all those who were victims of the war. ‘If the Czecho-Slovak government wants to win favour with the working class, it has to offer at least as much in terms of political freedom and social support as the working class enjoyed since 31 October 1918’, Mayer aptly argued. The Pressburg strikers declared their solidarity with the striking railway and postal workers across Slovakia, who demanded that the government take back those who had been dismissed ‘on the most trivial grounds’, pay them the same wages as the Hungarian government had done, and ‘respect the use of their Magyar mother tongue’. It would seem that groups of government employees were dismissed on various grounds; the situation was complicated and is in some respects difficult to reconstruct. Some were dismissed because of their refusal to swear allegiance to the Czechoslovak Republic, others because they could not speak the Slovak language, because they protested against wage reductions, because they had gone on strike, or simply because they were not trusted by the government. Their grievances had become part of the platform of the Pressburg strike movement. Wittich, clearly the undisputed leader of the German-Magyar labour movement in Pressburg, briefly addressed the other meeting as well, reiterating some of his political sentiments and principles. He said that after the arrest of the social democratic leaders, ‘the government knows for whom the heart of Pressburg beats’. They were on strike against the Czechoslovak government, ‘because we social democrats stand on the platform of the right to self-determination of the nations, but the government on that of imperialism’. Interestingly, Wittich called on ‘the Slovak-speaking comrades’ to base their judgement of the government’s policies ‘not on nationalist views, but exclusively on the viewpoint of international social democracy’. This was a rather naive statement, especially after his denunciation of Czechoslovak policies as ‘imperialist’, ‘militarist’, etc., qualifications that few Slovak workers were likely to agree with. There were other disagreements as well. When a vote was taken on the proposal of the strike leadership to suspend the strike and resume work on 7 February, a majority at both meetings voted against and proved in favour of an indefinite continuation of the strike. The strikers were in a militant mood and saw no reason to accept the arguments of the strike leadership – whose rhetoric was radical, but whose tactics was moderate – that promises had been made to Barreca to restrain themselves and that it was wiser at this stage to enter into negotiations and to suspend the strike for the time being. Only when a second vote

⁴²⁴ *Volksstimme*, 9 February 1919; see also Provaznik, *Robotnícké hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 86-7.

was taken, and (as the *Volksstimme* put it) ‘only after a tactful intervention’ of one of the chairmen of the meetings, a majority proved willing to support the proposal to suspend the strike. But this only happened on the condition that, if the government did not accept their demands before 6 p.m. on Saturday, 8 February, the strike would be resumed on Monday morning, 10 February. It was stressed that the general support among the population for the ‘legitimate’ strike had been so wide that ‘even the bourgeoisie had sympathy for it’. It was also noted that ‘despite many provocations’ the strike had run its course without incidents, ‘thanks to the iron discipline of a socialist-organised army’.⁴²⁵

But of course not all ‘bourgeois’ political groups could be regarded as allies of the strikers, nor indeed the important Slovak social democrats. In an open letter to ‘comrade Lehoczky [*sic*]’ (the Slovak social democratic leader Emanuel Lehocký) published in the *Volksstimme* of 9 February, the latter was reminded of the times when he had been ‘fighting together with us [the German and Magyar social democrats] for the rights of the Pressburg working class’. When some ten years ago Lehocký had been sentenced to three months’ imprisonment, he was morally supported by the German social democrats, and after his release he was welcomed at a mass meeting in the *Arbeiterheim*. But today, the *Volksstimme* noted they did not stand together but opposed each other, and this ‘is not our fault’. Lehocký and the Slovak social democratic newspaper *Robotnícke noviny* indeed were among those who accused the Pressburg strikers of being supported, financially and otherwise, by ‘Budapest’. The *Volksstimme* commented on this that Lehocký had worked long enough with the German and Magyar social democrats to know that, even during the days of old Hungary, they never got any material support from Budapest (from the Hungarian Social Democratic Party headquarters), and that ‘the Pressburg working class always had to rely on its own strength’. Now Lehocký dared to make ‘the defamatory claim that one of our comrades... has collected money in Budapest to support the strike movement’. Lehocký was advised not to tell lies and to critically evaluate himself first. ‘But that you have worked for years with Czech money – about that you wisely keep silent. And although both Hungarian and Czech social democracy defend the viewpoint of the right to self-determination of the nations, you have put yourself at the service of a government that does not recognise this right... and that uses the same methods you were once a victim of yourself.’ Lehocký – now ‘a big gentleman’ – had become ‘Commissioner for Social Care’ in Šrobár’s Slovak administration, and in this capacity he had allegedly refused to play a constructive role during the early phase of the strike. According to the *Volksstimme*, when a ‘colleague minister’ of Lehocký urged him to go to the *Arbeiterheim* to calm the German and Magyar workers after the detention of their leaders, he rejected this with indignation, saying: ‘Ale prosím, ja neidem!’ (‘But please, I won’t go!’). For the German social democrats the question was how Lehocký could reconcile his ‘present behaviour’ with ‘the principles’ he once had fought for.⁴²⁶ In subsequent negotiations between the strikers and the authorities, Lehocký acted as one of the government’s representatives.

The other adversaries of the Pressburg strikers were perceived to be those ‘bourgeois’ political elements among the German and Magyar population – the Christian Socials, the Radical Democrats, and even the German *Volksrat* – who had sent representatives to the reception on 4 February, or were even defending government policy. Those who ‘shamelessly throw themselves into the arms of the rulers of the moment, who are even proud of it’, were said to ‘tarnish the name German’ with their characterlessness and ‘political prostitution’. In the eyes of the German social democrats the word ‘German’ evidently referred to people with ‘character’, pride, and principles. Political principles, independence of mind, and articulation of non-opportunistic national character were matters the social democrats defended with passion, and which they

⁴²⁵ *Volksstimme*, 9 February 1919.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

claimed they were the true representatives of. For them there was no contradiction between ‘internationalism’ (as they understood it) and their refusal to be national opportunists, because both were based on important political principles and an independent attitude. The *Volksstimme* sarcastically ‘congratulated the new regime with its success’ in attracting opportunist elements. Probably the worst of these in the view of the social democrats were the German Radical Democrats and their newspaper *Republik*, whose ‘abuse of the name republic’ was said to cause ‘a feeling of sickness’. The paper was accused of shamelessly having taken the side of the Czechoslovak government and was seen as representative of the worst type of political turncoat in Pressburg. ‘In the name of the republican idea and the German-speaking organised working class of Pressburg we protest against this newspaper prostituting the idea of the republic and of *Deutschtum*.’⁴²⁷ But also the delegates sent to the Šrobár reception by the German *Volksrat* of Pressburg, Angermayer and others, were heavily criticised. The *Volksstimme* published a social democratic declaration asserting that these people did not have the right to speak on behalf of the German *Volksrat*, because ‘half of it consists of representatives of the working class’ (a political principle rather than a reality), and because its members and supporters were not even invited to give their opinion on the question of sending a delegation. Therefore those who went to the Šrobár reception acted without democratic authorisation; indeed it was not clear ‘who sent them’. The social democrats were so angry about the whole affair that they announced that ‘under such circumstances the working class forgoes further cooperation’ with the German *Volksrat*.⁴²⁸ This was an important political step, which deepened the gap between the social democrats and the other German political parties and which precipitated the end of the *Volksrat*, because without the social democrats, with their massive support among the German working class of Pressburg, the organisation became rather insignificant. The *Volksstimme* used the opportunity to claim that it was the social democrats, not the bourgeois Radical Democrats, who had been the true initiators and principal supporters of the German national movement in Pressburg following the democratic revolution of October 1918. In contrast to what the *Republik* was claiming, the Radical Democrats had ‘initially hesitated’ to support the *Volksrat* movement. When they finally did in December 1918, the social democrats, ‘in the interest of the cause’ (i.e., of a broader German unity), granted them a stronger position in the leadership of the *Volksrat* than they were actually entitled to.⁴²⁹ But after the occupation of Pressburg the Radical Democrats began to excuse and even defend Czechoslovak government policies. The *Republik* argued for example that Czechoslovak policy with regard to the university was quite understandable, and that they had no desire to play the ‘role of martyrs’ by opposing it. According to the *Volksstimme* ‘one of the Radical Democratic leaders’ – meant was probably Alois Zalkai – had already contacts with Czechoslovak representatives (this was true) and ‘agitated against Hungary’ (this was an exaggeration) before the occupation of Pressburg. After the occupation this chumming up with the new regime was also practised by even more ‘reactionary elements’, ‘exponents of the old chauvinism’, who were welcomed by the regime because it feared they otherwise might ‘go over to the *Lager* of the Bolshevists’.⁴³⁰ All this may sound bizarre, but in post-war Hungary, with its

⁴²⁷ *Volksstimme*, 6 February 1919. On 9 February the *Volksstimme* reported that some members of the German Radical Democratic Party (a ‘group of dissidents’) had visited its office declaring they could no longer identify with the attitude of the *Republik* and their party leadership.

⁴²⁸ *Volksstimme*, 9 February 1919.

⁴²⁹ In the light of other evidence on the evolution of the German *Volksrat* of Pressburg during November and December 1918 (see chapter 5), it is questionable if this social democratic short story is entirely in accordance with the facts. It is true however that the social democrats were the most important political factor behind the *Volksrat* movement once they had begun to actively support it in December (perhaps earlier). More research is needed on the *Volksrat* movement and on other ethnic and political organisations in Pressburg during the period of national and democratic revolution.

⁴³⁰ *Volksstimme*, 14 February 1919.

peculiar 'national Bolshevik' tendencies that could be embraced even by old chauvinist politicians, almost everything was possible, and the Czechoslovak regime was prepared to take equally bizarre counter-measures. In this highly uncertain and unpredictable situation the German social democrats were keen to pose as a leading example of consistency, political morality, and rationality – even if they too could not avoid occasional fits of hatred, demagoguery, and political mystification.

Rationality was certainly required in the negotiations with the local Czechoslovak authorities, which started on 7 February, the day the Pressburg strikers resumed work. To the list of nine demands, two additional demands were added: prohibition of the export of foodstuffs from Pressburg and, most significantly, the demand that military commander Barreca should be involved in the negotiations as well. Two days later, after the original deadline of the evening of 8 February had expired (it had apparently been postponed), Minister Plenipotentiary Šrobár personally received the workers' delegation to discuss their demands. There followed two rounds of negotiations on 9 and 10 February, in which the Slovak government was represented by Milan Ivanka (Commissioner for Internal Affairs), Kornel Stodola (Commissioner for Transport and Communication), and Emanuel Lehocký (Commissioner for Social Care). The organised workers of Pressburg were represented by a committee of nine men, including Paul Wittich, their main negotiator. The negotiations on Sunday 9 February did not produce an agreement, and when that evening the workers' negotiating committee appeared before a meeting of the *Arbeiterrat* to submit their report, the latter declared the attitude of the government to be unacceptable. Only after long discussions could a decision to resume the strike on Monday morning – a possibility that had been reckoned with since 6 February – be averted. 'Because of the increasingly tense situation among all groups of the population', the *Arbeiterrat* was to meet again early on Monday morning. The negotiations of the previous day were again evaluated, and this time it was decided that if the government did not make meaningful concessions that same day, the general strike would be resumed on Tuesday morning, 11 February. When a last round of negotiations did not produce a satisfactory result, the strike was indeed resumed on 11 February, massively supported by Pressburg's 'workers and employees, as well as the entire citizenry'. In even more dramatic terms than before, the *Volksstimme* declared that given the unity of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie this 'gigantic struggle' had a 'historical importance' not only in the history of the city, but 'in the spiritual and civilisational life of mankind as a whole' (*im Geistes- und Kulturleben der Menschheit überhaupt*).⁴³¹ Some of the workers' demands had been accepted by the government, at least theoretically, but other demands had been completely or partially rejected. For this reason, and because an atmosphere of disillusion and general excitement had come to prevail (partly caused by rumours about new repressive and military actions) in which the Czechoslovak government was seen as an unwilling negotiating partner, the strikers must have felt it was impossible to reach an agreement.⁴³² A detailed analysis of the strikers' demands and the government's response could further clarify this. The grievances and demands of the Pressburg strikers, led by the *Arbeiterrat* and the German-Magyar Social Democratic Party, were listed in a memorandum presented to the government during the last round of negotiations on 10 February (a final version was written later that day).

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² See the *PZ*, evening paper, 10 February 1919 for rumours about new government repression. Although the strike leaders felt they could not reach an agreement with the government, it soon seemed to them they could not continue the strike either, as will be shown below. Some strike leaders must have feared the possible consequences of further strike action in terms of violent or unpredictable political confrontations; this is also suggested by the various attempts to postpone renewed strike action between 6 and 10 February. Below the surface of grandiloquent rhetoric there must have been a good deal of anxiety. The option of seeking direct contact with the Entente through Barreca was arguably the only way out and can be seen as a desperate defensive step as much as an attempted 'leap forward'.

The memorandum, written under the auspices of the *Arbeiterrat*, had an introductory section describing the feelings of ‘the population of Pressburg’ about the conditions in their city. It provides insight into the motives and emotions behind the strike, and the relative importance of the national aspect, especially in the case of the old government employees, who had moved increasingly into the limelight. The population of Pressburg was said to believe that only the Peace Conference and the right to national self-determination ‘constituting its foundation’ could decide her status vis-à-vis the Czechoslovak Republic; she had merely ‘retreated before the force used against her’. Although ‘deeply grieved’, the population of Pressburg had followed ‘with self-conscious honour’ the advice of the Hungarian government – not to be confused with Hungarian military units in Pressburg – not to resist the Czechoslovak army, meanwhile having ‘full confidence’ in the Peace Conference. However, the policies and decrees of the Czechoslovak regime ‘were making the position of the population intolerable’. The first grievance mentioned in this connection was the fact that the Czechoslovak government had forbidden the officials and employees of Pressburg to use any other languages in government offices but Slovak, ‘even among themselves’; this had happened although the government employees ‘do, of course, not know the Slovak language’. A second grievance was that the government, ‘without any reason’, had discharged, or sent on leave, a large number of government employees, in particular railway and postal workers. It should be noted again that, at least in some cases, there had been a ‘good’ reason for this, for as the memorandum admitted itself, they would ‘only be taken back’ if they swore an oath of allegiance to the Czechoslovak government. Obviously, a number of employees had refused to do this, and to that extent they were responsible for their own plight. A third grievance relating to the government employees was that the government did not pay them the same wages as the Hungarian government had done. It also forbade them to procure the ‘missing percentage’ of their wages from Budapest – which the Hungarian government was apparently willing to pay, in the eyes of the Czechoslovak government an intolerable interference with its internal affairs. Another question of major importance to the Pressburg labour movement was censorship. The memorandum pointed out how on 8 January the Czechoslovak authorities had banned all newspapers from Hungary, followed by the banning of Austrian newspapers on 15 January. Although at the end of January, ‘on the insistence of the public’, the ban was alleviated and a number of foreign publications were readmitted, on 6 February almost all foreign newspapers in the German and Magyar languages were banned again. The Czechoslovak government was apparently afraid that its political opponents in Pressburg could be influenced by propaganda from Budapest or Vienna. However, there is little evidence that external influence rather than domestic grievances was responsible for the strike and protest movement among the Pressburg population, even though the Czechoslovak authorities were keen to ‘prove’ this. Another grievance was that some Pressburg newspapers, including the *Westungarische Volksstimme*, had been forced by the government to remove the words ‘West Hungarian’ from their name, so that ‘nothing would refer to the existence of West Hungary’.⁴³³

At this point the memorandum set out to discuss the grievance that all the local institutions, civic associations, and political parties in Pressburg had been forced to participate in the reception of the Šrobár government on 4 February. Those who declined to be present, notably the rector of the university and the leaders of the labour movement, were detained, but the strike had demonstrated that repression could not eliminate the unrest but ‘only strengthened the opposition’ to the government. Other grievances were that the unemployment benefits introduced by the Hungarian government were either not paid by the Czechoslovak government at all, or at only ‘one-third’ of their original level; that the government allowed the export of large quantities of foodstuffs from Slovakia to Bohemia, although there were great shortages in Pressburg; and

⁴³³ *PZ*, morning paper, 14 February 1919.

that the rights and freedoms that the population enjoyed in Károlyi's Hungary had been abolished. The freedom of the press had been restricted by decrees enabling the government to temporarily close down newspapers that published 'opinions it did not like' (perhaps this claim was exaggerated given the considerable freedom to criticise exercised by a newspaper like the *Volksstimme*). Particularly important from a political point of view was the wish of the 'German-Magyar-Slovak population' – indeed the Slovaks were explicitly mentioned as well – to exercise the right to self-determination by means of a plebiscite; this was said to be 'resisted by the Czechoslovak government more and more violently'. Thus the demand for a plebiscite in Pressburg was openly put on the agenda, revealing a political radicalisation that was the result of both hope (at Entente intervention) and hatred (caused by disbelief that the Czechoslovak government was willing to make meaningful concessions). Now that the social democratic movement had begun to pursue a more confrontational strategy – egged on, it would seem, by the mass of strikers rather than the political leadership –, it no longer hesitated to demand what it considered the ultimate democratic solution for the national question in Pressburg: a plebiscite expressing the will of the population regarding the international status of the city. The fact that the Slovaks were explicitly mentioned in this connection as well was either because their number was considered too insignificant to decisively influence the result of a plebiscite, or because it was sincerely believed that they too were unhappy with the policies of the Czech-dominated regime. A third possibility was that it was simply considered unwise not to mention them in this context; of course, it could also have been a combination of different motives. The memorandum concluded by explaining that her experiences with the new regime had 'embittered the population of the occupied territories so much' that she decided to go on strike again in order to show her feelings. This statement suggests that the final version of the memorandum was written on 10 February immediately after the failure of the last negotiations. It was claimed that the strike embraced the entire population of Pressburg, including the organised working class, the commercial, government, and bank employees, the transport, postal, and telegraph workers, the lawyers and officials of the courts of justice, teachers, medical doctors, in a word 'the entire population without exception'.⁴³⁴

In the last round of negotiations with government representatives the workers' committee presented a list of eleven demands, the background and most of the substance of which has been analysed above. They were described by the *Pressburger Zeitung* as 'the demands of the leadership of the political general strike in Pressburg'. The fact that Milan Ivanka, Šrobár's Commissioner for Internal Affairs, had become the principal negotiator for the government during the last phase of the negotiations suggests that the crisis in Pressburg was now regarded by the authorities as a question of public order and national security, not merely as a labour conflict. On 11 February, when the strike had already been resumed, Ivanka had a document published entitled 'the result of the negotiations'. It presented the government's reply to the eleven demands of the strikers and suggested that most of the demands had been accepted. Ivanka's presentation of the situation was as follows; it is useful to list the demands and replies systematically because it helps us understand why the strikers felt the government's attitude remained unsatisfactory. To the first demand, viz., that the Czechoslovak Republic should recognise the right to self-determination and the freedom of conscience, the government replied that it accepted these rights 'as a matter of course'. Second, in reply to the demand that the government revoke the closing down of the university, it promised to allow the university to resume its activities 'soon'.⁴³⁵ Third, to the demand that the government unconditionally guarantee freedom of association and

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ The university was reopened on 18 February, on which occasion its rector Edmund Polner claimed that 'the university had had no contacts with emissaries or agitators' from Hungary and had not engaged in subversive political activities. See *PZ*, morning paper, 19 February 1919.

assembly and freedom of the press, it replied that it unconditionally allowed meetings of the trade unions and freedom of the press; other (political) mass meetings had to be reported to the authorities twenty-four hours in advance. Fourth, to the demand that the eight-hour working day be immediately introduced, the government replied that the parliament of the Czechoslovak Republic 'had already passed a law on the eight-hour working day'. Fifth, to the demand for collective wage agreements and more employment opportunities, the government replied it would support 'all reasonable proposals' regarding these matters. Sixth, to the demand for higher unemployment benefits, the government replied that it would 'supplement' these benefits by 'opening soup kitchens'. Seventh, in reply to the demand that the government take back the dismissed government employees, it promised to re-employ those who would swear allegiance to the state. Eighth, in reply to the demand that the government revoke the reduction of the wages of government employees or allow payment of the difference by Hungary, the government stressed that these wages could be fixed and paid by the Czechoslovak state only. The ninth demand of the strike leadership was the dismissal of County Sheriff Samuel Zoch and police chief Richard Brunner, the men who had ordered the detention of social democratic leaders and who had refused on 5 February to accept Barreca's decision to release them. The government replied it was willing to 'objectively examine any concrete accusations' against the two men. To the strikers however these 'accusations' and the guilt of both men was crystal-clear. They had abused and exceeded their power by carrying out detentions in a matter – the refusal to attend the 4 February reception – where the 'freedom of conscience' should prevail; and they had suppressed the freedom of assembly, association, and strike action after suspending the normal rule of law. To them the government's attitude appeared evasive, and the same applied to several other issues the government commented on. To demand number ten, viz., that the export of foodstuffs from Slovakia to Bohemia should be stopped, the government replied that it allowed the export of 'superfluous food' only. Last but not least (demand number eleven), the strike committee declared after the failure of the negotiations with the government that from now on it only wanted to conduct further negotiations with the Italian military commander of Pressburg, colonel Riccardo Barreca. Thus the earlier demand that Barreca be involved alongside the government was turned into the assertion that Barreca (i.e., the Entente) was the only alternative in terms of a negotiating partner for the Pressburgers. This demand (or unilateral declaration) was spectacular indeed, even if it was no more than a leap in the dark and an expression of political despair. It meant not only that Zoch and Brunner but also Šrobár, Ivanka, or any other Czechoslovak officials in Pressburg were no longer accepted as negotiating partners. In other words, the strike leadership now only wanted to deal with non-Czechoslovak Entente representatives and all but rejected the authority of the government. As in the case of other issues, the government responded evasively and cryptically. It did not squarely confront the issue by saying that this highly political demand was simply unacceptable, which suggests it only wanted to gain time. It said it wanted 'to protect the interests of the working class in so far as it does not prejudice the interests of the state'; to that extent 'it was prepared to accept the services of anyone who wanted to act as a spokesman for the workers'.⁴³⁶ But of course the demand – including the appointment of Barreca as the main negotiator on the Entente side – was completely unacceptable for the government, which now had to face a dangerous political crisis on top of a general strike. It is also obvious that several of the other demands of the strikers were not accepted either, and that they were replied to in a general, vague, evasive manner. The *Volksstimme* concluded that the government 'did not want to fulfil the most essential demands' of the workers. This meant the

⁴³⁶ *PZ*, morning paper, 14 February 1919; *Volksstimme*, 14 February 1919; see for the last round of negotiations also *PZ*, morning paper, 11 February 1919.

continuation of what it called an ‘unbearable situation’.⁴³⁷

The official answer to the demands of the labour movement announced by Milan Ivanka was not acceptable to the strike leadership. On 10 February it had become clear that the negotiations failed to produce any result. The second general strike, which began on 11 February, coincided with the publication of Ivanka’s official reply, and the strike leadership explained that the attitude of (and the interpretation of the situation by) the Czechoslovak government did not satisfy them in the least. Firstly, the government’s answer as contained in the Ivanka document only ‘partly’ addressed and fulfilled their demands; secondly, it ‘incompletely’ presented the real facts of the situation; thirdly, the strikers could ‘only recognise a sovereignty that is founded on a plebiscite’ (an ambitious political claim). Therefore it was considered useless to continue the negotiations with the government. The strike leadership declared that, ‘because under the prevailing circumstances the working class can naturally have no confidence in the Czechoslovak government, a petition has been sent to the Allied States of the Entente requesting them to delegate an impartial commission to Pressburg with which the negotiations should be continued’.⁴³⁸ However, this did not mean that the *Arbeiterrat* or the social democratic leadership wanted to push the matter to extremes; in fact, it would seem they were rather uncertain about the whole situation. Indeed, later that day, 11 February, the *Arbeiterrat* decided to call a mass meeting for the following day, Wednesday 12 February, to present the strike memorandum (and the reasons for the dead-lock in the negotiations) to the Pressburg population and to military commander Barreca. Interestingly enough, the aim of the meeting was also to propose to end the strike. A leaflet distributed on 13 February explained to the population – which could not be properly informed on 12 February itself because of the violence – that the *Arbeiterrat* had decided on 11 February, ‘to end the general strike and to continue the struggle for implementation of our demands with other means’. It was this decision or proposal that was to be presented to the mass meeting on 12 February, a meeting that according to the *Volksstimme* was ‘reported to the authorities in advance, in accordance with the regulations’. The political purpose of the meeting was for the ‘suffering’ Pressburg population ‘to appeal to the sense of justice of the Entente, urgently asking it to send a neutral commission to end the unbearable conditions prevailing in the occupied territories and to restore the previously existing peaceful societal life’.⁴³⁹ It was probably felt that Entente intervention was more likely to happen if the strikers showed willingness to restrain themselves and to suspend or end the strike. It is also likely that the *Arbeiterrat* was aware of the risks involved in a further continuation of what now really had

⁴³⁷ *Volksstimme*, 14 February 1919. There is a lot of confusion in the literature about the details of the situation, and the research on it has always been unsatisfactory. According to Provasník, Hubenák, and Zelenák, the government was prepared to accept all demands except two. According to the first two authors – as well as *Dejiny Slovenska. V. (1918-1945)*, Bratislava, 1985, p. 42 –, these two were the wage demand for government employees and the demand for higher unemployment benefit; according to Zelenák, the wage demand and the question of self-determination for Pressburg. Indeed the three authors suggest that even the demand to discharge Zoch and Brunner was accepted, but no evidence is given for this or for the other claims. Cf. Provasník, ‘V prvom desaťročí’, p. 336; Provasník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, p. 87; Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 48-9; Zelenák, ‘Maďarská sociálna demokracia’, pp. 164, 187 n.50. Zelenák refers to Vavro Šrobár, ‘Oslobodené Slovensko. Pamäti z rokov 1918-1920. II’, the (until recently unpublished) second part of Šrobár’s memoirs that was only published in 2004; but Zelenák’s claim is not supported by this evidence. See Vavro Šrobár, *Oslobodené Slovensko. Pamäti z rokov 1918-1920. Druhý zväzok*, Bratislava 2004, pp. 27-8. It would seem that as a historical source Šrobár’s memoirs are not always critically evaluated by Slovak historians, perhaps because he is seen by many as a national hero. Šrobár’s role in the Pressburg events is further analysed below. See for Šrobár’s Commissioner of Internal Affairs, Milan Ivanka, *Do pamäti národa. Osobnosti slovenských dejín prvej polovice 20. storočia*, eds Slavomír Michálek and Natália Krajčovičová, Bratislava, 2003, p. 244.

⁴³⁸ *PZ*, morning paper, 14 February 1919.

⁴³⁹ *Volksstimme*, 14 February 1919. The leaflet distributed on 13 February proclaimed *inter alia*: ‘We call on all party comrades to resume work on Thursday 13 February completely, quietly, and orderly. Comrades! Our just cause will achieve victory! Keep calm!’

become a political strike. These risks included abuse of the strike by extreme nationalist elements on both sides, and loss of control over the actions of large masses of people.

Thus on Wednesday 12 February the memorandum containing the grievances and demands of the working-class movement was to be publicly presented to colonel Barreca, the man who was seen as the legitimate representative of the Entente in Pressburg and as the only individual with whom the strike leadership could deal at this stage. With the general strike in full progress, large numbers of people began to concentrate in the city centre, where at 3 p.m., on the square in front of the town market, the public meeting was to take place. The strike leaders were there, as was Barreca, who had evidently been persuaded to cooperate. The mass meeting was to adopt what was called ‘the memorandum and demands of the population of the city of Pressburg’, which were to be presented to ‘the Pressburg command of the occupation forces of the Allied armies’ in the person of Barreca. The latter was apparently supposed to pass them on to his military and Entente superiors. Although the meeting ended in chaos and bloodshed, the strike leaders managed to hand over the memorandum to Barreca just before hell broke loose. However, the meeting as a whole could not be carried on as planned. This was prevented by ‘bloody events that never happened in the history of our city before’, as the *Pressburger Zeitung* described it.⁴⁴⁰ These events were the result of the rising tension and a series of incidents and provocations on both sides of the national-political divide. On the one side nervous and rather unprofessionally acting Czech legionaries were unable to deal with the extraordinary situation; some of them were actually off duty, but had come to the meeting armed with knives and bayonets and reportedly displayed an aggressive attitude, trying to disrupt the meeting. On the other side some of the strikers and other Pressburg inhabitants, who may have felt provoked by the presence of Czech soldiers armed with guns and bayonets, began to act in a provocative way themselves, for example by displaying Hungarian national symbols. It is possible that some Magyar demonstrators were deliberately provoking incidents with the military, but this could hardly justify the reaction that followed. At one point, after a boy had tried to attach a Hungarian flag to a lamppost and then was shot at, chaos erupted and soldiers who obviously lost self-control began to shoot at the people. Six people were killed immediately and some two dozen or more were wounded, at least two of whom died of their injuries afterwards. Barreca was assaulted as well and knocked down with a gun, according to the social democratic press and the Italian general Luigi Piccione by a Czech soldier, according to the Czechoslovak authorities by one of the demonstrators.⁴⁴¹ In what follows some crucial additional details will be presented, as well as a survey of different interpretations.

The *Volksstimme* spoke of ‘a day of horror’. In addition to the reports in the *Pressburger Zeitung*, the social democratic newspaper’s accounts of the events are among the most detailed at our disposal. Some of the details it reported are also mentioned in other sources and by Slovak historians, whose evaluation of the events will be analysed below. The *Volksstimme* wrote that ‘a peaceful crowd’ had begun to assemble at the market-square when suddenly a Czech soldier, ‘who was not even on active duty’, tried to pull off a red, white, and green ribbon (the Hungarian national colours) from a young man’s coat. A fight ensued, the soldier drew a knife and stabbed the man in his neck, thereby seriously wounding him. The incident caused ‘a terrible panic’, which was increased by the sound of gunshots. The sudden arrival of Barreca ‘ended the brutal action of the military’, which led to a ‘spontaneous ovation by the people’, but shortly afterwards

⁴⁴⁰ *PZ*, morning paper, 14 February 1919.

⁴⁴¹ *PZ*, evening paper, 13 February 1919; *Volksstimme*, 14 February 1919; messages of general Piccione to Prague, 13 and 20 February 1919, in *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska*, eds V. Horváth et al., pp. 276, 294; Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 546; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, pp. 41-2; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, pp. 36-7; Provazník, ‘V prvom desaťročí’, pp. 336-8; Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, p. 88; Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 50; Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, p. 160; Pieter van Duin, ‘Die Deutschen Bratislavas und ihre Einverleibung der ČSR, 1918-1919’, *Historické štúdie* 43, 2004, pp. 167-81.

he too ‘was caught in the chaos, and a Czech soldier hit him in the eye with a rifle-butt’. The question of who assaulted Barreca became – against the background of the increasingly antagonistic relationship between Barreca and the Czechoslovak administration – one of the many controversies surrounding the events of ‘bloody Wednesday’. Barreca tried to calm the crowd and declared that the meeting, which he said had been announced in accordance with the regulations, could be proceeded with, which caused ‘great satisfaction’. But ‘hardly had calm partially returned’ when another incident occurred, ‘which had clearly been provoked by the action of the soldier’. A few ‘irresponsible young people’ had got hold of a Hungarian flag, and ‘when one of them tried to attach it to a lamppost another shot was fired, this time causing a tumult that soon embraced the whole city’. People were running in all directions, ‘being shot at by furious soldiers [*rasende Soldateska*]’. The crowd was dispersed with ‘bayonets and rifle-butts’ and soon the market-square was deserted, with soldiers taking up positions everywhere and moving through the streets chasing people. Thus although the *Volksstimme* admitted that some ‘irresponsible young people’ were co-responsible for the escalation, the major portion of the blame was laid on the Czech military units. It was even suggested that the shootings had been planned by elements in the Czechoslovak army or the Pressburg administration. This was a variant of conspiracy mania that was the reverse of the Czechoslovak claim that a campaign of sabotage organised by pro-Hungarian elements had been the cause of both the strike movement and the violence and provocations on 12 February. The *Volksstimme* wrote that the ‘initiator’ of the bloodbath was not yet known, but ‘we have indications that it was well-prepared’. It was also claimed that many soldiers were under the influence of alcohol and, as a result, ‘were shooting indiscriminately at the crowd without reason; they really got excited and were reminded of the recent war’. Those who were ‘responsible’ were said to be ‘hiding’. The paper wished to know who actually controlled the military – obviously not Barreca – and how the government could explain the events. Although it was not explicitly suggested that the Czechoslovak authorities in Pressburg were directly responsible, it was believed they were in a position to identify the culprits. The social democrats said they hoped that ‘the government will give an explanation and punish those who are responsible’; the population was ‘impatiently waiting for an explanation’. Because the bloodbath was ‘an unprecedented crime’, it would ‘cause indignation far beyond the borders of the country’.⁴⁴² But apart from criticism by Italian military officers and declarations of solidarity with the Pressburg strikers by labour organisations in Hungary, Austria, and Czechoslovakia, the events had no remarkable political repercussions. Of course it was different in Pressburg itself.

The account of the events by Emil Portisch, a local Bratislava historian, written fourteen years later, is in many ways similar to the reports in the *Volksstimme* and other local newspapers. However, it lays greater stress on the part played by nationalist Magyar students and adds some important details on the government claim of a conspiracy. It speaks of a group of young people – obviously students – among the crowd on the market-square who were wearing ribbons in the Hungarian national colours and of soldiers demanding they take them off. When the youngsters refused to do so, there ensued a fight in which one of them was stabbed and seriously wounded. This was followed by more excitement when ‘a student’ dropped a small Hungarian flag from the window of a nearby house and when another young man, ‘a high-school student’, grabbed it and climbed a lamppost to attach it there. An army officer shot at him without hitting him, but now

⁴⁴² *Volksstimme*, 14 February 1919. See also the *PZ*, evening paper, 13 and 14 February 1919, where various details are described in a similar way but some other details are given that are missing in the *Volksstimme*, for example that several soldiers were attacked and disarmed by the crowd. Both the *Volksstimme* and the *Pressburger Zeitung* published lists of the names and occupations of those who were killed or wounded, which shows the usual Pressburg mix of German, Magyar, and Slav names and a preponderance of working-class people (see also the *Volksstimme*, 16 February 1919). A list of the deceased dated 15 February and containing seven names with their family circumstances and other personal data can be found in SNA, MP, Box 270.

the crowd began to threaten the soldiers, who took a machine-gun and started firing. The crowd fled in all directions, leaving dead and wounded behind, and soldiers continued to fire shots across the city. But more important is the following. According to Portisch, the military authorities had been 'instructed' – by whom he does not say, but he may have meant Šrobár, one of his commissioners, or police intelligence – to take drastic action if necessary. This was because 'a report' had been received that at the other side of the Danube 'Hungarian red troops' were 'waiting for a sign' to march into the city and that the mass meeting on 12 February was to be the start of an 'uprising'. He concludes his account by saying, 'this report turned out to be incorrect'.⁴⁴³ The claim of a planned Hungarian invasion and its coordination with the strikers' mass meeting was later repeated by Šrobár in his memoirs, and may have had a political function (Šrobár never admitted that this claim was incorrect). Indeed it may well be that the Minister Plenipotentiary was co-responsible for the escalation of the situation himself, although it is also possible that the source of the 'incorrect report' was some one other than Šrobár. The claim of a planned invasion and uprising was widely believed (and fostered) on the Czechoslovak side. This appears, for example, from the investigation into the events of 12 February carried out – under pressure of the Pressburg town council and, possibly, French and Italian military officers – by the Czechoslovak authorities during the second half of 1919. One of the people interviewed during this investigation was Major Rudolf Fabian, the commander of the 33rd regiment of the Czechoslovak army whose men were responsible for the bloodbath. In October 1919 Fabian declared that on 12 February there had been 'reports' about an 'organised armed uprising' of the Pressburg population, an imminent assault on the Czechoslovak military garrison, and an 'attack by the Hungarian army from the other side of the Danube'. He also pointed to the extremely tense situation in the city, with Czech soldiers being constantly provoked by the 'population of Magyar nationality', especially Magyar students. He claimed that shots were fired at the soldiers 'from a window or from the crowd', and that given all these threats the soldiers had actually responded in a 'remarkably restrained' way. His conclusion that the soldiers could not be blamed for the casualties among the civilian population, because they had to defend themselves against violent attacks by others, was supported in February 1920 by Václav Vohlídal, a high Czech official at Šrobár's ministry in Bratislava.⁴⁴⁴

It is clear that nationalist Magyar students played a part in the escalation of the situation on 12 February. But the contention that the disturbances were exclusively provoked by Magyar nationalists, or that the whole strike and protest movement had been organised or decisively influenced by certain individuals and political groups in Hungary, is highly questionable. It would seem that these 'conspiratorial' interpretations do not touch the heart of the matter. Even if there were contacts between some individuals (radical socialists or nationalists) in Hungary and Pressburg, it would have been impossible for them to organise or manipulate a strike movement like this; indeed there is no evidence for this at all. There were, of course, Magyar nationalists in Pressburg, and some of them may have been involved in 'anti-Czechoslovak activities', but they were not influential enough to direct the actions of the labour movement. The German social democrats, the most important political group in the city, pursued relatively pragmatic policies after 1918. Their apparent radicalisation, their decision to embark on strike action, and their attempt to start direct negotiations with Entente representatives were the result of growing

⁴⁴³ Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 546.

⁴⁴⁴ SNA, MP, Box 256, File 1136. Vohlídal did not mention the reports about a planned Hungarian attack but only reports speaking of the preparation of 'street disturbances'. He argued that only firm action by the army could prevent 'even greater disturbances' and 'more serious consequences', and strongly stressed that the Czechoslovak soldiers were not only 'provoked' and 'insulted' but attacked and fired at on several occasions. The fact that the soldiers simply had to 'defend their lives' led him to the conclusion that they were not guilty of any crimes. He therefore rejected the demand – made by the Bratislava town council and others – that financial compensation should be given to the relatives of the victims.

political alienation in the Pressburg context itself, not of outside interference. It does not seem plausible either that the events of bloody Wednesday more in particular were provoked by outside agents or well-organised Magyar nationalist groups (or indeed by consciously acting Czechoslovak political or military circles). They would rather seem to have been the result of a spontaneous and tragic process of escalation that was spinning out of control. Even the ‘reports’ about an imminent Hungarian invasion may have been the product of fear and anxiety rather than of deliberate disinformation, manipulation, or panic mongering. However, the problem was that in Central Europe at the time people on all sides, and on both sides of the national-political divide in a city like Pressburg, tended to explain events like this in terms of conspiracy, external intervention, manipulation and orchestration by the enemy. This was not just a consequence of ‘political paranoia’, although paranoia certainly played a part in it. Conspiratorial explanations also made things easier to understand if and when one’s own expectations did not materialise, when set-backs and unforeseen developments had to be accounted for. Indeed high-ranking diplomats and politicians were as much involved in spreading conspiracy theories as the man in the street. It is sometimes difficult to judge if the proclaiming of this or that conspiracy theory was a matter of genuine belief, an attempt to clear oneself of any blame for serious political mistakes, or a way of explaining away one’s inability to control the situation. Thus on 15 February 1919 Ivan Krno, Milan Hodža’s successor as Czechoslovak envoy to Budapest, wrote to his superiors in Prague that ‘many agitators from Hungary’ had gone to Slovakia to stir up trouble and discontent with the Czechoslovak regime. He claimed, ‘it is certain that the unrest in Pressburg and the whole strike in Slovakia were arranged here in Budapest. The Magyar socialist Pavel Denes openly declared at a meeting of the “Upper Hungarian League” on 8 February that he had just returned from Pressburg, where he participated in a meeting that made preparations for the strike.’⁴⁴⁵ The fact that one man from Budapest attended a meeting in Pressburg could be construed as proof that the strike in Pressburg was ‘arranged in Budapest’.

In the early morning of 14 February, some thirty-six hours after the events of bloody Wednesday, an even more remarkable claim was made by Vavro Šrobár, now the strong man in Pressburg. The Slovak Press Agency published an official report signed by Šrobár, presenting the government’s interpretation of the drama. The report spoke of six fatal casualties – ‘all of them workers, including one woman’ – and twenty-two wounded and said that one soldier was seriously injured as well, several others lightly. It was admitted that the real number of wounded civilians was probably higher than twenty-two, because some people had gone into hiding and only later went to see a doctor. Šrobár expressed his ‘sincere regret about the innocent casualties in the riots caused by provocation’. According to the Czechoslovak authorities, these ‘riots’ had been organised by Hungarian agents together with local social democratic leaders; the latter, moreover, were said to have been cooperating with Bolsheviks. ‘The government has evidence that the Budapest government has sent agents to Slovakia with the aim of organising the Bolshevik movement. Their confidential agents were the leaders of the Pressburg Magyar workers Paul Wittich and Rudolf Chovan.’ But there was more. ‘In the *Arbeiterheim* the police... has found two machine-guns with ammunition... The investigation proves that the intended putsch, which was immediately suppressed, was prepared by emissaries sent from Hungary... This is also confirmed by the fact that... the railway and postal employees refused to obey the Czechoslovak government, referring to instructions from the Hungarian government, and began to strike in support of the strike of the workers [in Pressburg]. During the riots twelve persons were arrested, against whom criminal proceedings were started. Wittich and his aid Chovan, who

⁴⁴⁵ Letter of Ivan Krno, 15 February 1919, in *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska*, eds V. Horváth et al., p. 283. For other, similar reports by Krno in February and March 1919, see *Československo na pařížské mírové konferenci 1918-1920. I (listopad 1918 - červen 1919) [Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky]*, eds Jindřich Dejmek and František Kolář, Prague, 2001, document 124, pp. 228-9, and document 139, p. 243.

have become blind tools of Magyar propaganda, will also have to bear the responsibility for the loss of life.’⁴⁴⁶ Several details in this story are quite bizarre. To begin with, at this stage the Hungarian government was by no means controlled by Bolshevists yet; only at the end of March they succeeded in seizing power. Therefore it was not convincing to claim that the Hungarian government itself had been sending Bolshevik agents to Pressburg. At least as strange was the assertion that the social democratic leader Paul Wittich – a leader of the German rather than the ‘Magyar’ workers – was a ‘confidential agent’ of Bolshevik emissaries. There can be no doubt that Wittich was an opponent of Bolshevism as well as extreme nationalism and promoted moderate policies with regard to the national problem. Rudolf Chovan was a Magyar social democratic leader who had the same political outlook as Wittich and who does not seem to have supported ‘national-Bolshevist’ endeavours. On 1 February 1919 Chovan had declared at the opening session of the Pressburg town council: ‘We workers are totally indifferent to the question in what state we live, for we are internationalists. What is important is what system, what policies the Czecho-Slovak government will pursue.’⁴⁴⁷ He may have played down his emotional attachment to Hungary, the extent to which he had Hungarian patriotic and, perhaps, anti-Czechoslovak feelings in addition to ‘internationalist’ ones. Nevertheless, like Wittich he seems to have been a ‘solid’ social democrat all along, not a revolutionary agitator or pro-Hungarian conspirator. Although Chovan had visited Budapest at the end of January, it is difficult to believe he intended to serve the aims of Bolshevik or Hungarian ‘agents’.⁴⁴⁸ As for the weapons found in the Pressburg *Arbeiterheim*, probably property of the old *Arbeitergarde*, this did not prove they were meant for a ‘putsch’. It sounds unbelievable that social democratic leaders would have attempted a ‘putsch’ with only two machine-guns against the well-armed Czechoslovak army. Furthermore, the fact that in other parts of Slovakia strikes of railway and other government employees had broken out did not prove that the strike in Pressburg had external causes. There is little evidence that the Hungarian government had changed its earlier position (when it advised the Pressburgers not to resist the Czechoslovak military occupation), and had now ‘instructed’ the workers in Pressburg and the rest of Slovakia to disobey the Czechoslovak government and to destabilise the Czechoslovak State by means of strikes and armed rebellion. The ‘criminal proceedings’ against those individuals accused of having engaged in subversive activity did not produce anything substantial. The claim that Wittich and Chovan were ‘blind tools of Magyar propaganda’ was absurd, as was the suggestion that they were responsible for the bloodshed on 12 February.

The Slovak Press Agency also reported that on 13 February Pressburg was ‘quiet’ again; the strikers had gone back to work and shops were open. ‘Serious warnings by the police’ and the threat that an extended period of martial law (reintroduced on 12 February) might be proclaimed if people did not resume their normal lives ‘did not fail to produce effect’, it was noted. It was also suggested that the whole problem had been caused by the fact that the Hungarian

⁴⁴⁶ Published in the *PZ*, morning paper, 15 February 1919. In his memoirs written more than ten years later, Šrobár spoke again of an attempted ‘putsch’; see Vavro Šrobár, *Oslobodené Slovensko. Pamäti z rokov 1918-1920. Druhý zväzok*, p. 29.

⁴⁴⁷ Zelenák, ‘Maďarská sociálna demokracia’, p. 187 n.42 for quotation of Chovan in Slovak translation; for the original Magyar statement at the town council meeting of 1 February 1919, see *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska*, eds V. Horváth et al., p. 244. It should be remembered that during the critical last days of December 1918 Magyar social democrats like Chovan and Fehér had been on Wittich’s side and opposed the Magyar Red Guard; see *Westungarische Volksstimme*, 9 January 1919.

⁴⁴⁸ *Volksstimme*, 6 February 1919. Visits like this were nonetheless immediately interpreted by the Czechoslovak authorities as proof of conspiratorial behaviour, as were visits to Pressburg by people from Budapest. In an interview with Paul Wittich in December 1951 and January 1952, he said that during the strike various kinds of people had come from Budapest to Pressburg, ‘mostly irresponsible people, students, etc.’, also irredentists and communists. He also said he ‘was against the strike’, which raises doubt on the reliability of Wittich’s statements. See SNA, SD, File 206.

government had kept silent about the Entente note of 18 January 1919. This had informed the Hungarians again that the Entente Powers recognised the ‘absolute right of sovereignty’ of the Czechoslovak Republic in the former Upper Hungarian territories occupied by the Czechoslovak army, including Pressburg. Šrobár gave instructions to bill posters across the city containing the message of the Entente note, so that the Pressburg citizens ‘could orient themselves’. It was claimed by the government that this ‘caused a considerable stir’, because the great majority of the population knew nothing about it. The Czechoslovak government was ‘convinced that the recent events will open the eyes of that part of the working class that up till now has been deluded and misled’. In the future the Pressburg workers ‘would not let themselves be misused for the dishonest purposes of Magyar gentry politics, which would plunge them as well as the whole of Hungary into the abyss of Bolshevism’.⁴⁴⁹ The Hungarian government’s allegedly effective manipulation of the Pressburg working class was thus related to its keeping secret one particular diplomatic demarche – as if the Pressburg population would make its attitude exclusively dependent on this, or did not have the opportunity to learn about it from other sources. The point was rather that the population, or at least a considerable part of it, was still hoping that the Paris Peace Conference would make a final decision that might help to change the status of the city, in particular the organisation of a plebiscite. Many Pressburgers as yet refused to regard the Entente note of 18 January, or any other diplomatic note, as the last word on the whole position the way the Czechoslovak government liked to see it. The official Czechoslovak press report of 14 February was therefore unable to convince the population that it should give up all hope for an alternative solution. It was even more unconvincing because it represented the Hungarian government in a simplistic way as the expression of ‘Magyar gentry politics’ and, at the same time, of ‘Bolshevism’. It deliberately ignored the broad-based and democratic character of the Hungarian government, which was supported by liberals, social democrats, communists, and others. The press report was right however to point to the potential danger of Bolshevism and general political chaos overwhelming Hungary, even if the Czechoslovak government itself was not very helpful in preventing this. Post-war Hungary was a country whose national trauma steadily increased as a result of demoralising Entente notes, the amputation of large sections of its historical territory, and growing political radicalisation. It was increasingly likely that the Károlyi government that had replaced the old gentry regime (after 18 January the Berinkey cabinet, Károlyi having become president) would in turn be replaced by a more radical regime, one that combined irredentist with revolutionary aims in a ‘national-Bolshevist’ perspective. But although the Czechoslovak Republic soon proved a more stable democratic state than either revolutionary or counter-revolutionary Hungary, its use of the propaganda weapon was often as blatant as that of its enemy. Šrobár’s unconvincing propaganda stunt with regard to the Pressburg events must be regarded as one of the least elevating episodes in his political career.⁴⁵⁰ Indeed it is difficult to believe that he himself believed the claims made in the Czechoslovak press report of 14 February.

⁴⁴⁹ *PZ*, morning paper, 15 February 1919. See for the renewed proclamation of martial law on 12 February Bratislava, *hlavné mesto Slovenska*, eds V. Horváth et al., document 134, pp. 274-5. For Šrobár’s information campaign regarding the Entente note of 18 January 1919, see *ibid.*, document 135, pp. 275-6; see also the *Volksstimme*, 16 February 1919. Elsewhere an Entente note of 10 January is referred to; see, e.g., the *PZ*, morning paper, 22 January 1919 and 18 February 1919; Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, p. 163.

⁴⁵⁰ For brief biographical sketches and articles on Šrobár see Václav L. Beneš, ‘Czechoslovak Democracy and Its Problems, 1918-1920’, in *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*, eds Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža, Princeton, 1973, pp. 56-8, 76-81; Josef Korběl, *Twentieth-century Czechoslovakia: The Meanings of Its History*, New York 1977, pp. 96-7; Miroslav Kropilák, ‘Vavro Šrobár’, in *Muži deklarácie*, ed. Dušan Kováč, Bratislava, 2000, pp. 76-101; Nataša Krajčovičová, ‘Vavro Šrobár – prvý slovenský minister’, in *Prinos osobností Liptova pre históriu a súčasnosť*, eds Karol Dzuriak and Jozef Žatkuliak, Liptovský Mikuláš, 2000, pp. 46-55; *Do pamäti národa*, eds S. Michálek and N. Krajčovičová, pp. 575-8. As is the case with several other important Slovak political figures from this period, a comprehensive and critical biography of Vavro Šrobár has not yet been written.

It would seem that Šrobár was a novice to the art of effective propaganda making, although a touch of political paranoia (and therefore sincere belief in his own claims) may have played a role as well.⁴⁵¹ In his memoirs written more than ten years later (probably in 1931) he claimed: ‘It appeared that the workers had an agreement with the Hungarian army on the southern bank of the Danube, which was to attack the city. Shortly after the shootings, a Magyar messenger appeared at the bridge with the message that, if by 5 p.m. there was no calm in the city, the Hungarians would occupy it’.⁴⁵² This was one version of the official Czechoslovak claim that the Hungarians and ‘the workers’ were collaborating to undermine or even topple the Czechoslovak administration in Pressburg.

Later Slovak historians have echoed some of the claims made by Šrobár and other Czechoslovak leaders. In contrast to communist historiographic comments on the activities of the Red Guard in December 1918 – and on the Béla Kun regime in 1919, which was idealised as well –, there is a degree of anti-Magyar historiographic consensus in claiming external causes for the Pressburg events of February 1919. This can be explained by the fact that on this occasion it was crucial to defend the legitimacy of the Czechoslovak State and its possession of Pressburg; but some Slovak communist historians have also defended the German and Magyar working-class movement and have criticised the policies of the ‘bourgeois republic’. Post-1989 Slovak historiography is not much different from its pre-1989 predecessor as far as the evaluation of the Pressburg events is concerned, although there are new nationalist tendencies. According to a post-communist publication of the older historian Marián Hronský, the Magyar and German social democrats, although they declared they would accept any future decision of the Peace Conference on the status of Pressburg, ‘counted in reality on the city not being included in Czecho-Slovakia, and they planned to assist this outcome with their resistance’. Hronský writes that in the tense situation prevailing in the city reports began to circulate that it would be attacked by Hungarian troops from the other side of the Danube; the source of these ‘reports’ or rumours he does not analyse. At the mass meeting of 12 February, ‘Hungarian nationalist groups organized a provocation and attacked... Barreca’; this claim about who attacked Barreca is questionable, to say the least.⁴⁵³ Hronský (in 2001) thus roughly follows the old Šrobár and Czechoslovak story and hardly differentiates between the aims of the Pressburg labour movement and those of the Magyar nationalists. Peter Zelenák, also writing in post-communist Slovakia, is more circumspect. He describes the strike that began on 3 February as a conscious attempt to resist the consolidation of the Czechoslovak State in strategically important Pressburg. But he also asserts that the generally ‘realistic’ leaders of the German-Magyar social democratic movement understood that ‘the road of total confrontation with the new state power was not in the interest of the party and the working-class movement’. According to Zelenák, the eleven demands of the Pressburg strike leadership were more moderate than one might have expected. Indeed on 11 February it was proposed by the *Arbeiterrat* to end the strike and to submit this

⁴⁵¹ In his memoirs Šrobár describes how after the attempted ‘putsch’ of 12 February he began to organise a more systematic ‘anti-Magyar [anti-Hungarian] counter-propaganda’ campaign; see Šrobár, *Oslobodené Slovensko. Pamäti z rokov 1918-1920. Druhý zväzok*, p.32ff. See also SNA, MP, Box 270: copy of telegram of Milan Ivanka to all Slovak county sheriffs, 20 February 1919, instructing them to start anti-Hungarian counter-propaganda in the local press and in other ways. In April 1919 a ‘publicity agency’ was created to make pro-Czechoslovak propaganda among the Slovak population, which was believed to be influenced by the Hungarian propaganda. According to this organisation there were in December 1919 ‘some six thousand Hungarian agents’ in Slovakia. See Michal Lukeš, ‘K úloze Propagační kanceláře slovenského území 1919-1921’, in *Stredoeurópske národy na križovatkách novodobých dejín 1848-1918*, eds Peter Švorc and Ľubica Harbuľová, Prešov, 1999, esp. p. 354.

⁴⁵² Šrobár, *Oslobodené Slovensko. Pamäti z rokov 1918-1920. Druhý zväzok*, p. 37. See for some useful observations on the origin of Šrobár’s memoirs, their influence, and the possible reasons why the second part was not published earlier the introduction to part two of Šrobár’s memoirs by Jan Rychlík, esp. p. 9.

⁴⁵³ Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, p. 160.

proposal to a mass meeting the following day. The same point is also made by Dušan Provazník, whose views will be discussed below, and is confirmed by reports in the *Volksstimme*, which so far have been insufficiently studied by historians. Zelenák further writes, ‘Magyar nationalist provocations caused chaos at the mass meeting’, which culminated in the shootings; he seems to hold these nationalists responsible for the violence rather than the Czechoslovak military. After the strike had ended, the social democratic leadership distanced itself from all nationalist and irredentist actions.⁴⁵⁴ Zelenák thus distinguishes between the aims of the labour movement and those of the Magyar nationalists. This is done even more emphatically by Xénia Šuchová, who writes that disillusion with the new regime (even among Slovaks), the result of the bad social and economic situation, was exploited by Hungary, with the population being ‘unceasingly exposed’ to both communist and irredentist propaganda from Budapest. The working class of Pressburg ‘wanted freedom, but did not entirely clarify her principal demands’. Šuchová does not specify why she thinks this was the case, but she probably means that ‘the working class’ was exposed to different political influences and that her leaders were indecisive or confused. The intervention of the Czechoslovak military on 12 February she describes as ‘inadequate’, even if it was a ‘defensive action’ against attempts to destabilise the Czechoslovak Republic, attempts that ‘took advantage of the discontent among the working class’.⁴⁵⁵ Thus the picture emerges of a Pressburg labour movement that was certainly not in the same camp as Magyar nationalists but which to some extent let itself be used by them.

This is also the picture presented by Dušan Provazník and Ladislav Hubenák, two older historians from the communist era that may be regarded as experts on the history of the labour movement in Pressburg/Bratislava. To their accounts of the Pressburg events written in the 1960s later authors have added remarkably little, neither in factual nor in analytical terms. According to Provazník, the *Arbeiterrat* in Pressburg distanced itself from nationalist groups, ‘but it did not prove that it prevented Magyar nationalists from using the strike for their own ends’. It is not entirely clear if in the view of the author this was primarily the result of political impotence, or also of unwillingness. In the nervous atmosphere in Pressburg, ‘Magyar nationalists spread the rumour that the Hungarian army... was getting ready to occupy the city, distributed nationalist badges they were wearing ostentatiously, and provoked with their behaviour the Czechoslovak army and the authorities’. In addition, ‘some shots were fired’ from the Hungarian southern bank of the Danube. Here the interesting claim is made that the source of the ‘rumours’ or ‘reports’ about a planned Hungarian invasion were actually the ‘Magyar nationalists’, not individuals in the Czechoslovak army or administration; the issue is likely to remain a moot point. As a result of all the excitement the belief ‘that the strike was linked to attempts to detach Pressburg from Czechoslovakia’ came to dominate the minds of the Slovaks, the Czechs, the legionaries, and the *Sokols*. Indeed, the government wanted to liquidate the strike as quickly as possible because it regarded it as a political action. In the atmosphere of ‘outpouring of nationalism on both sides’, the strike leadership ‘made the mistake’ to call the mass meeting on 12 February, thereby giving Magyar nationalists the opportunity ‘to act in public’ and the Czechoslovak authorities the opportunity ‘to confront both the strikers and the nationalists’. According to Provazník the purpose of the meeting was not properly explained to the population, his suggestion being that this provided political space to the nationalists. After the shooting at the boy with the Hungarian

⁴⁵⁴ Zelenák, ‘Maďarská sociálna demokracia’, p. 164.

⁴⁵⁵ Xénia Šuchová, ‘Sociálna demokracia na Slovensku v prvých rokoch Česko-Slovenska’, in *Kapitoly*, eds S. Sikora et al., pp. 116-7. It should be noted that neither Šuchová, nor Zelenák, nor any of the other authors discussed here are clear about ‘the goals’ of ‘the Magyar nationalists’ beyond suggesting that they tried to create chaos or, perhaps, tried to help the Hungarian army occupy Pressburg. Neither is it clear who these ‘Magyar nationalist groups’ actually were; the impression one gets from newspaper sources is that they were simply individual Pressburgers or small groups of young people who were acting spontaneously rather than being directed by outside instructions.

flag – which was ‘thrown from the window of a house’ by ‘Magyar nationalists’ – and the knocking down of Barreca, who had rushed to the place where the boy had fallen down, trying to calm the people, chaos could no longer be avoided and ‘from nearby windows nationalists fired shots several times’. After soldiers had unsuccessfully urged the crowd to disperse, and as a result of the ‘provocative behaviour of some individuals’, soldiers began to shoot with machine-guns, which was ‘directed at the Magyar nationalists rather than at the strikers’. Provazník concludes his account by saying that the tragedy was the result of a confrontation between ‘Magyar bourgeois nationalism’ and ‘Czech and Slovak bourgeois nationalism’.⁴⁵⁶ He tries to distinguish between the aims of the German and Magyar labour movement and the ‘provocations’ of Magyar nationalists, but also puts some of the blame on the former because of its failure to act effectively against the latter, which caused serious problems for the labour movement itself. He also says – and here he makes an important point – that during the last phase of the strike, which after the failure of the negotiations was increasingly seen as a political crisis, the workers’ demands had become irrelevant to the government. The strike leadership was becoming aware of this and therefore wanted to end the strike (its ‘Entente strategy’ can thus be seen as a desperate last political move). However, the increasingly political character of the strike movement did not mean that the Czechoslovak Social Democrats were right when they accused the *Arbeiterrat* of trying to destroy the Czechoslovak Republic and to detach Slovakia from the state, of receiving money from Budapest, etc. According to Provazník, there is no evidence confirming this, which means that he interprets the crisis as essentially a local conflict.⁴⁵⁷ The analysis of Hubenák, who mentions some of the details reported in the *Volksstimme*, is similar. He writes that among the crowd on 12 February there was also ‘a section of the Magyar nationalist petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia’, who used the opportunity to further their own ends and ‘caused disturbances and provocations’. This included displaying Hungarian national symbols and shouting at Czechoslovak soldiers, who at one point ‘answered by firing at the demonstrators’. But although ‘nationalist elements joined the strike and tried to take advantage of the working-class struggle for just demands’, it was a class conflict, not a national conflict.⁴⁵⁸ It may be concluded that both before and after 1989 some of the more perceptive Slovak historians moved beyond what may be called the ‘Šrobár interpretation of bloody Wednesday’. This interpretation claimed that the February crisis was mainly the result of Hungarian and Magyar-nationalist machinations. On the other hand echoes of it are still present today, if perhaps especially among nationalist and popularising historians.⁴⁵⁹ Moreover, very little new research has been done since the 1960s.

The Slovak social democrats had opposed the strike of the German and Magyar workers from the beginning. Interestingly enough, Slovak historians have paid little attention to this particular aspect. After the first strike of 3-6 February, the Slovak social democrats commented that it had a purely political character, only using social and economic demands as a pretext to act against the Czechoslovak State.⁴⁶⁰ After the end of the second strike, it was repeated that it was a

⁴⁵⁶ Provazník, ‘V prvom desaťročí’, pp. 335-6. Elsewhere Provazník writes that the ‘unsuitably chosen beginning of the strike’ on 3 February gave Magyar nationalists ‘a very good opportunity’ to take advantage of it. The German-Magyar social democratic leadership ‘was unable to assess the complicated situation, to distance itself from the general atmosphere of nationalism more effectively’, making tactical mistakes that made it difficult to avoid a nationalist confrontation. See Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 86, 89.

⁴⁵⁷ Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, p. 89. Provazník’s suggestion that it was Magyar nationalists who spread the rumour of the Hungarian army wanting to occupy Pressburg is a different interpretation from what other writers have suggested, viz., that there were ‘reliable’ reports – apparently from people on the Czechoslovak side – indicating this. The truth may have been that there was a ‘game’ going on of provocative rumour mongering on both sides, but there may be also even darker explanations (lies, persecution mania, etc.).

⁴⁵⁸ Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 50; see also *Dejiny Slovenska. V. (1918-1945)*, p. 42.

⁴⁵⁹ See, e.g., Jozef Hanák, *Obsadenie Bratislavy 1918-1920. Kronika pamätných dní*, Bratislava 2004, pp. 128-46, esp. p. 136.

⁴⁶⁰ *RN*, 8 February 1919.

political not an economic affair. It was also stressed that the *Arbeiterrat* did not represent the Slovak workers of Pressburg.⁴⁶¹ There is some evidence, however, that some Slovak workers joined the strike. It was widely felt that the Czechoslovak government paid insufficient attention to the difficult social and economic situation of the working class, including the Slovak workers, despite repeated warnings by some of the Slovak social democrats themselves. The latter complained about the intolerable conditions many had to live in and pointed to the potential for social unrest this produced.⁴⁶² Furthermore some of the Czech newspapers were critical about the way in which the government was handling the crisis in Pressburg. The leading Czech social democratic newspaper *Právo lidu* described the action of the military against the Pressburg demonstrators on 12 February as ‘execution’.⁴⁶³ Nevertheless there can be little doubt that the dramatic events of bloody Wednesday, the emotions generated by it, and the increasingly political character of the Pressburg strike and protest movement greatly exacerbated the antagonism between the Czechoslovak and German-Magyar social democrat movements. Although at a later stage pragmatic cooperation proved possible in special situations like the general election of April 1920, it was difficult to imagine that the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party and the German-dominated Pressburg social democratic movement could ever be brought together in a unified organisation. Indeed this never happened during the existence of the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-38). The great confrontation of February 1919 demonstrated that the Czechoslovak State, which had an ‘ethnocratic’ as well as a democratic character, was destined to be master of the city and that the German and Magyar population could do little to change their position as ‘national minorities’. It also became clear that the Entente was not going to intervene in Slovakia over the issue of its being an integral part of the new state (or indeed over the grievances of the national minorities against the Czechoslovak government), although the illusions about this continued for several months and therefore remained an important political factor. Pressburg was of strategic and economic importance for Czechoslovakia, and both the Czech political leadership in Prague and local Slovak leaders like Šrobár were determined to consolidate their hold on the city. One prominent political personality commenting on the position of Pressburg was the president of the Czechoslovak Republic, T. G. Masaryk himself. When a journalist in Prague confronted Masaryk with the indisputable fact that Pressburg was not an ethnic-Slovak city, he replied that this was true, but that it was ‘not a Magyar city either, but a German city’. But ‘the entire hinterland is Slovak’, he added, ‘and our economic needs compel us to incorporate Pressburg’.⁴⁶⁴ The German population of Pressburg, since times immemorial the dominant element in the city, was not powerful enough to prevent the Czechoslovak national revolution from running its course. Although the Germans were granted a substantial degree of cultural and institutional autonomy, the revolution meant that the ethnic character of the city could be gradually transformed through demographic engineering. In February 1919 the German social democrats ‘made their point’, demanding respect for the social, political, and national-cultural freedoms they wished to preserve and develop, including the ‘freedom of conscience’. They even tried to go further than that and exerted pressure to get a plebiscite and Entente intervention in Pressburg. But as happened in the case of Otto Bauer and the Austrian social democrats, and in that of the German social democrats in Bohemia and Moravia, it was brought home to them that they would have to submit to the political will and the broad ethnopolitical dominance of the Czechoslovak leadership.

After the end of the strike and the drama of bloody Wednesday, the leadership of the German-Magyar social democratic movement made an effort to distance itself from all nationalist

⁴⁶¹ *RN*, 19 February 1919.

⁴⁶² Suchová, ‘Sociálna demokracia’, p. 116.

⁴⁶³ Quoted in Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, p. 37; see also the *Volksstimme*, 20 February 1919.

⁴⁶⁴ *Pressburger Presse*, 10 February 1919.

endeavours, countering allegations that it had ended up on the side of Magyar irredentism. Now the social and economic character of its grievances was underscored again, and it was denied that the strike had been aimed at the Czechoslovak State as such. The attempt to outmanoeuvre the Czechoslovak government and to enter into direct contact with the Entente through colonel Barreca had failed completely. Pressburg's Italian military commander had been seriously injured on 12 February and, after heavy Czechoslovak pressure on his superior general Piccione, was removed from his post. At the end of the day, the Pressburg social democratic leadership proved realistic enough to understand that it could only deal with the Czechoslovak government. It was also understood that the German-Magyar labour movement could not afford to permanently alienate the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party and the Slovak working class, which represented a quarter or more of the total working class of Pressburg. Shortly after the end of the strike the Pressburg *Arbeiterrat*, which claimed to speak on behalf of 22,000 organised workers, adopted a resolution explaining their position to the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party. It was stressed that the aims of the organised workers represented by the *Arbeiterrat* had a democratic and social, not a national character. It was admitted that public order had to be maintained and denied that the Pressburg strike had had anything to do with 'sabotage', which they condemned, claiming that the actions of sabotage that undeniably had happened could only have been the work of 'unorganised' and 'undisciplined' elements. They did not fight against the Czechoslovak Republic and 'had nothing in common with separatist or irredentist tendencies'; the strike in Pressburg was not a struggle against the state but a protest against the 'illegal' suppression of civic rights and democratic freedoms. It was claimed in good socialist fashion that for the *Arbeiterrat* it was 'a secondary question' to which state Pressburg should belong; this was a matter for the Peace Conference to decide.⁴⁶⁵ Thus the national-political aspect of the strike, including the attempt to start direct negotiations with the Entente, was played down, although the Peace Conference was mentioned again as the final and legitimate arbiter. The response of the Slovak social democrats and their newspaper *Robotnícke noviny* was scornful. The claim that the strike had been primarily economically motivated was sneered at ('only a fool would believe that'), as was the suggestion that the *Arbeiterrat* could also speak on behalf of the organised Slovak workers of Pressburg. Indeed, according to *Robotnícke noviny* the latter constituted 'more than a quarter' of the 22,000 organised workers in the city and they had their own ideas about the political situation. The paper did not believe that the strikers had opposed the 'policy of sabotage'. On the contrary, it accused them of having joined the 'political strike' of the Magyar railway workers who had allegedly demolished railway equipment in the Pressburg railway station, and even of having cooperated with the Hungarians at the other side of the Danube. Interestingly, the paper also claimed that in some Pressburg factories 'Czechoslovak workers' had been expelled from their jobs by shop stewards of the German- and Magyar-dominated labour organisations, and that some of them had to defend themselves 'with revolvers'. If the workers of Pressburg wanted to achieve closer unity in the future, 'they could remain conscious Slovaks, Germans, or Magyars, but not fanaticised masses'. According to *Robotnícke noviny*, the German workers' pro-Hungarian allies in the strike movement had proved 'unreliable elements', and now they had to pay the price for it, as well as for their 'dreams' of being 'lords' in the country.⁴⁶⁶ Although the Slovak social democrats were extremely critical and even sarcastic about Pressburg's German-led labour movement, they left the door open to future cooperation. But among many Slovaks hatred against Hungary, and against those Magyars and Germans in Slovakia who were seen as playing the role of a fifth column, was intense. It was important for the German social democrats to clearly distance themselves from all pro-Hungarian irredentist

⁴⁶⁵ Quoted in *RN*, 19 February 1919. See also Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 50. Interestingly, this *Arbeiterrat* resolution was not published in the *Volksstimme*, perhaps because it was felt to be humiliating and not entirely sincere.

⁴⁶⁶ *RN*, 19 February 1919.

tendencies. At the same time, however, the German labour movement developed a strong resentment against those who were 'responsible' for the events of bloody Wednesday, as we shall see in the next chapter. As far as the German social democrats were concerned, not Magyar nationalists were primarily responsible for the bloodbath, but unspecified 'elements' in the Czechoslovak political and military administration.

Another victim of the events of 12 February, both physically and politically, was the unfortunate military commander of Pressburg, Colonel Riccardo Barreca. His role in the events is of more than marginal importance, if perhaps somewhat bizarre. The fact that Barreca had been willing to appear at the mass meeting on 12 February to receive the memorandum of the Pressburg strikers had caused bad feelings with Zoch, Šrobár, and the other Czechoslovak authorities and may explain why he was assaulted by a Czech soldier. In fact, these bad feelings had already been in the making for some time, mainly because of Barreca's understanding attitude to the grievances of the German and Magyar population. It also seems that Barreca was against the transfer of the Slovak government to Pressburg in early February, warning that the largely non-Slovak city was unfriendly disposed to it and that unrest and violence might break out in reaction. Apparently his superior, the Italian general Luigi Piccione, was not very enthusiastic about the move either. The Czechoslovak legionaries in Pressburg seem to have developed a growing resentment to their Italian commanders, regarding many of them as 'Magyarophiles'. Barreca complained to Šrobár about the 'rigid' attitude of Czechoslovak officials to certain Pressburg citizens (probably prominent Magyars), but his complaint did not meet with sympathy. Šrobár told him that as a military officer he was in a subordinate position vis-à-vis the civilian Slovak administration and that he should not interfere in political and administrative affairs. Šrobár also warned him that if the relations between him, Barreca, and the Czechoslovak military units did not improve, he had to ask for his departure from Pressburg. On 11 February, a critical day, Šrobár sent an official complaint to President Masaryk that the army and the Slovak population accused the Italian officers of 'favouring the Magyars'. By this time it had become evident that Barreca was pursuing his own policy in matters of crucial political importance in Pressburg. Later Šrobár even claimed that Barreca and other Italian officers had been responsible to a large extent for the bloody events on 12 February, because Barreca should have helped to prohibit all mass meetings in order to prevent violent incidents.⁴⁶⁷ The Czechoslovak authorities, who increasingly regarded Barreca as 'anti-Czechoslovak', wanted to get rid of him, and the fact that he had been injured during the stampede on 12 February provided an opportunity to achieve this. In fact, already on 11 February general Piccione had signed a document handing over the military command of Pressburg to another Italian officer, Giuseppe Caio; it would seem that political pressure was brought to bear on the Italians to oust the 'pro-Hungarian' Barreca from his post.⁴⁶⁸ On 13 February a meeting was held between Šrobár and Piccione with a view to improving the relations between the Italians and the Czechoslovak administration in Pressburg. Šrobár demanded that the Italian officers should 'not favour the Magyar population', not interfere with administrative and judicial organs, seek closer contacts with Czechoslovak military officers, and that Barreca should leave the city. Piccione, who must have become nervous about the bloodshed in Pressburg and about the deterioration of Italian-

⁴⁶⁷ Bohumila Ferenčuhová, 'Talianska a francúzska vojenská misia na Slovensku a československo-maďarský konflikt v rokoch 1918-1919', in *Slovensko a Maďarsko v rokoch 1918-1920*, ed. Ladislav Deák, Martin, 1995, pp. 136-7. See also Šrobár, *Oslobodené Slovensko. Pamäti z rokov 1918-1920. Druhý zväzok*, pp. 25-7, 38. Šrobár even claimed that in the company of his Magyar friends Barreca called the Czechs and Slovaks 'barbaric nations'; see *ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴⁶⁸ See for the appointment of lieutenant-colonel Caio as the new military commander of Pressburg *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska*, eds V. Horváth et al., document 133, p. 274. From the elaborate name index in *ibid.*, p. 357, it appears that because of his injury Barreca remained in a Pressburg hospital until the beginning of March, when he left the city.

Czechoslovak relations, met all of Šrobár's demands and Caio became the new official commander of the Entente occupation forces.⁴⁶⁹

The result of these developments was that the German and Magyar social democrats could not reasonably hope any longer to find political allies among Entente personalities in Pressburg. Their references to the right to self-determination that was to be guaranteed by a decision of the Peace Conference became largely rhetorical, as became many of their other political statements. The German-led social democratic movement in Pressburg could only resort to a newspaper campaign of moral and political criticism, a campaign of rhetorical rather than practical political language. The Pressburg social democrats continued to protest against the policies of the Czechoslovak authorities, but were unable to do much about it. Yet they also had to find ways to forge a kind of minimal working relationship with the Czechoslovak rulers. The social democrats, after all, were pragmatists as much as men of principles, and in addition the difficult circumstances forced them to be so.

⁴⁶⁹ Ferenčuhová, 'Talianska a francúzska vojenská misia', p. 137. See for the political background to the Italian-Magyar affinity in Pressburg and Slovakia (which in addition may have had a social and cultural background) Perman, who shows that the Italian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference was more friendly disposed towards Hungary than the other Entente delegations, which also influenced the issue of the Slovak-Hungarian frontier. In February 1919 there were rumours about secret negotiations between Italy and Hungary to counterbalance the French-Yugoslav alliance. See D. Perman, *The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State. Diplomatic History of the Boundaries of Czechoslovakia, 1914-1920*, Leiden 1962, p. 186. The *PZ*, evening paper, 28 February 1919 wrote that the Italians had 'sympathy for Hungary' but were 'too weak to decisively influence the Peace Conference'.

Protest and pragmatism after the February crisis

The February strikes ended in a defeat of the German and Magyar social democratic movement and the striking workers of Pressburg and other parts of Slovakia. In southwest Slovakia groups of railway workers and other government and municipal employees, predominantly Magyars, continued to strike for another week. But by 20 February the Czechoslovak government seemed to have the situation more or less under control, that is, until the moment when another wave of unrest among government employees erupted in March. On 18 February Vavro Šrobár, 'Minister Plenipotentiary for the Administration of Slovakia', issued an ultimatum ordering the last strikers to resume work within twenty-four hours. Those who failed to do so would be dismissed from government service and the 'foreign nationals' (i.e., Magyars) among them would be expelled from Slovakia.⁴⁷⁰ It has been argued that especially these later post-February 12 strike actions assumed a political 'anti-Czecho-Slovak character', with the Czechoslovak army having to intervene to ensure the functioning of government services.⁴⁷¹ In addition to Czechoslovak soldiers, Czech railway workers played an important part in helping to break the February and March strikes, thus speeding up the process of replacement of Magyar and German labour by Czechs and Slovaks in the public sector. As we have seen, this development started already in January 1919 with the first dismissals of 'non-Czechoslovak' government employees for political and linguistic reasons; these measures against former Hungarian employees constituted one of the major grievances leading to the strikes in early February. As a result of the February strikes additional numbers of predominantly Magyar railway and postal workers were discharged, and in March, as the political situation in neighbouring Hungary became more threatening and unpredictable, even more of them were dismissed and replaced with Czechs and Slovaks. Some of the dismissed officials and employees went to Hungary, but others stayed in Slovakia, where some of them may have been tempted to join radical movements of the left (pro-Hungarian communism) and the right (irredentist nationalism). Again, other former Hungarian government employees acted more pragmatically and tried to be reinstated in their former jobs with the help of the German-Magyar labour movement and other Pressburg organisations.⁴⁷²

In 1924 Ivan Dérer, one of the new leaders of Slovak social democracy, wrote: 'In this political strike arranged from Budapest the only answer could be expulsion from service of all those who participated in it.' However, he also admitted that 'from this phase of the Slovak revolution [the February strikes] arose a difficult problem of national life'.⁴⁷³ This problem concerned not in the last place the deepening of mutual national suspicion in the ranks of the

⁴⁷⁰ Ladislav Hubenák, *Vznik a založenie KSČ na západnom Slovensku*, Bratislava 1969, pp. 50-1, 194. On 24 February Samuel Zoch, sheriff of Pressburg County, repeated the ultimatum (which suggests that the unrest could not be completely suppressed) and instructed all mayors and administrative offices in the region accordingly. See *Roky prvých bojov. Dokumenty z robotníckeho hnutia Západoslovenského kraja 1918-1921*, ed. Ladislav Hubenák, Bratislava, 1961, document 27, p. 55.

⁴⁷¹ Marián Hronský, *The Struggle for Slovakia and the Treaty of Trianon 1918-1920*, Bratislava 2001, p. 160.

⁴⁷² On 21 March a Pressburg delegation, which included social democratic leaders and representatives of different groups of former government employees, visited Prague where they talked with Czechoslovak government ministers and even with President Masaryk. The delegation expressed the former employees' wish to return to their jobs and asked for Prague to intervene with Šrobár. An article in the *Volksstimme* of 1 June 1919 reported on the frustrating negotiations with the Bratislava authorities to have numbers of railway and postal employees reinstated and spoke of the 'bad will' of the Šrobár government.

⁴⁷³ Quoted in Xénia Šuchová, 'Sociálna demokracia na Slovensku v prvých rokoch Česko-Slovenska', in *Kapitoly z dejín sociálnej demokracie na Slovensku*, eds Stanislav Sikora et al., Bratislava, 1996, p. 117. See also Xénia Šuchová, 'Československá sociálnodemokratická strana na Slovensku a Slovenská republika rád', in *Slovensko a Maďarsko v rokoch 1918-1920*, ed. Ladislav Deák, Martin, 1995, p. 102.

working class and among the general population of Slovakia. As a Slovak historian noted, ‘in the consciousness of the Slovak public’ (of all nationalities) the events of 12 February 1919 ‘got the reputation, particularly in the opposition press, of being one of the first examples of Czech legionaries acting against the working class of Slovakia’. The situation was compounded by the fact that the massive arrival of Czech government officials, railway workers, and other Czech newcomers was also increasingly resented by ethnic Slovaks, some of who felt bypassed in terms of allocation of new jobs and political posts. But as yet more important was the fact that the Slovak (or Czechoslovak) social democrats’ support for the government during the February crisis was seen by the German and Magyar social democrats as betrayal of working-class interests. Especially the emerging pro-Bolshevist wing interpreted it as betrayal of ‘the proletariat’ and collaboration with the ‘Czech bourgeoisie’; indeed at this stage the majority of procommunists in Slovakia were ethnic Magyars.⁴⁷⁴ This overlapping of national identity and ideological orientation was reinforced by Béla Kun’s proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic on 23 March 1919. In Slovakia this dramatic development led to further dismissals of disloyal or ‘suspect’ employees (in particular of those who had gone on strike again), renewed tensions in the multiethnic working-class movement, and a new wave of detentions of Pressburg social democratic leaders (although especially the Germans were by no means uncritical towards the Béla Kun regime).

After the end of the Pressburg strike, the German and Magyar social democratic leadership was faced with a difficult dilemma. They did not want to abandon their political ‘principles’, their ‘oppositional’ and ‘independent’ stance, but at the same time they could not afford to cut off all relations with the government. It was impossible to ignore the fact that the city was firmly controlled by the Czechoslovak Republic and that there was no short-term or even long-term prospect of Entente intervention to change this. All that remained was the vague hope that the Paris Peace Conference would make a final decision on the status of Pressburg that would protect the position, or at least guarantee the minority rights, of the ‘non-Czechoslovak’ population. This hope was eventually fulfilled in so far as the Peace Conference insisted on Czechoslovakia – like other successor states – signing a ‘minorities’ treaty’ with the Entente Powers ensuring the rights of her national minorities.⁴⁷⁵ In the meantime the German-Magyar social democratic movement had to try to resume ‘normal’ relations with the Czechoslovak authorities, and of course with the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party; she would have to show her realistic, sober-minded face. This was a difficult challenge because the resentment against the Czechoslovak State, especially against those who were ‘responsible’ for the bloodbath of 12 February, was intense, and the social democrats’ pride and sense of moral superiority had been strengthened by the events. The *Volksstimme*, principal organ of Pressburg’s social democratic movement, embarked on a campaign of moral rhetoric, public indignation, and attacks on the Czechoslovak Republic and ‘opportunist’ elements in their own ethnic (especially the German) community. Arguably this had an important psychological function. It had to help prevent demoralisation, feelings of having been reduced to political insignificance. This chapter looks at a broad spectrum of national-political and sociopsychological developments following the tragedy of ‘bloody Wednesday’. It roughly covers the period from the middle of February to the beginning of April 1919. The rise of the Hungarian Soviet Republic at the end of March created a new political dynamics both internationally and in Slovakia that led among other things to more severe restrictions of the political freedom of Pressburg’s social democratic movement. This also meant a considerable intensification of censorship; in comparison the level of censorship during the period we are concerned with here was mild, and the social democratic

⁴⁷⁴ Šuchová, ‘Sociálna demokracia’, p. 117.

⁴⁷⁵ Victor S. Mamatey, ‘The Establishment of the Republic’, in *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*, eds Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža, Princeton, 1973, p. 37.

press therefore remains an important source. We will look at the two elements of ‘protest’ and ‘pragmatism’, both of which were characteristic of the attitude and the policies of social democracy. On the one hand the German social democratic press was severe in its condemnation of the Czechoslovak authorities, attacking along strongly moralising – but sometimes also ambivalent – political lines ‘Czech imperialism’ and everything associated with it. These denunciations were underpinned by a last remnant of hope and belief that the Czechoslovak annexation of Pressburg was not completely irreversible yet. But on the other hand the social democrats were pragmatic enough to acknowledge the political reality as it was and to seek a mode of communication, even reconciliation, with government representatives in Pressburg, in particular with the much-maligned County Sheriff Samuel Zoch. In order to survive as a relevant and influential political force, it was necessary to make the best of a difficult situation. The situation was made even more unpleasant for the Germans and Magyars by a fresh round of political and administrative measures, including the decree changing the name of the city to ‘Bratislava’. The relationship between the German and Magyar social democrats and the Czechoslovak social democrats remained difficult as well. However, the will to seek a degree of practical working-class unity and, on the part of the Germans and the Magyars, to acknowledge that the Czechoslovak State was not just ‘imperialist’ but also an exponent of the democratic revolution in Central Europe, made it possible to overcome at least some of the worst feelings of mutual hostility.

The immediate response of the German social democratic press to the bloody events of 12 February was to dramatise their political significance. The Czechoslovak State was criticised as imperialist, as lacking a genuine democratic ethos, especially with regard to international and interethnic relations. It was claimed that the Czechoslovak Republic (CSR) had committed ‘fratricide’, that she had ‘defiled her Imperium with the mark of Cain’. The use of biblical language by supposedly non- or even anti-religious socialists is an interesting phenomenon in itself; it clearly helped to provide an effective moral language in an age when even atheists were acquainted with biblical expressions. Perhaps by using the phrase ‘fratricide’ it was admitted that the Czechoslovak Republic, in spite of everything that had happened, was a democratically and humanistically inspired state. The fact that it had killed its ‘brothers’, working-class people and fellow citizens of the republic, was making its deeds all the more tragic. But the CSR continued to be portrayed as an imperialist state that was occupying and annexing territories whose inhabitants did not want to be incorporated. As against this the German social democrats presented themselves as internationalists and democrats who wished to respect the right to self-determination of all; they therefore had the right to criticise the misdeeds of the CSR. The *Volksstimme* wrote: ‘We social democrats do not carry on a nationalist struggle. We would conduct our struggle in the same way against Italians or Frenchmen as against Germans or Hungarians... And we fight above all against imperialism, the most bitter opponent of democracy... The Czecho-Slovak government however pursues an explicitly imperialist policy, despite the democratic slogans she is uttering, and when she refers to the support she gets from the Entente, we cannot believe that the latter wants to replace Prussian Imperialism with Czech Imperialism.’ It is possible that leading German social democrats in Pressburg still believed that the Entente Powers, not just the popular American President Wilson, were pursuing political principles rather than power politics. It is also possible that the notion of the ‘good intentions’ of the Entente was used as a rhetorical device, a stick to beat the CSR. In either case it could be argued, ‘it is this naked imperialism, the struggle for political and economic dominance at the expense of other peoples and nations that we fight against with all our strength’. Theoretically there could be no confusion about the principles on the basis of which a solution for the intricate problems of Central Europe could and should be found. ‘The government claims that as an ally of the Entente she supports the principles of the Entente “as a matter of course”. The Entente claims she supports Wilson’s Fourteen Points. Social democracy has unconditionally adopted these

Points from the very beginning.’⁴⁷⁶ The conclusion was that if there could and should be agreement on the basic principles of democracy and self-determination, while in reality there was no political agreement at all, the reason for this could only be the behaviour of the Czechoslovak government and military.

According to the German social democrats of Pressburg, this behaviour had been demonstrated in a most gruesome way on 12 February 1919, even if it was still unclear who was politically ‘responsible’ for what the Czech legionaries – these ‘heroes making victims’ – had done. Against those who had taken possession of the city and were violently defending their ‘illegally acquired property’ the social democrats ‘did not demand revenge’; what they wanted from them was ‘atonement’ (*Sühne*). The *Volksstimme* wrote in lofty, almost biblical terms: ‘And there is only one atonement: that you leave this unfortunate city with your entire army as quickly as possible... And there cannot and will not be peace in this city as long as you stay inside its walls.’ If the political reality did not permit the departure of the Czechoslovak army from Pressburg, social democratic rhetoric could demand it all the same. Indeed it was argued that if the occupants remained in Pressburg, this ‘soon would mean the decline of an old and flourishing *Kultur*’, also economically. This claim actually went beyond the moral dimension and reasserted the Germans’ belief in their cultural superiority, which was always accompanied by anxiety that their *Kultur* (civilisation) was threatened by Slav intruders. Every now and again this old and deep-seated belief resurfaced, especially at moments of political and psychological crisis. The Pressburgers’ status of victims continued to be stressed as well. In rather macabre terms the Czechoslovak authorities were assured that ‘the martyrdom of your system’s victims, whom we accompany to their graves, will deeply entrench itself in the souls of the entire population of this city; the ghost of its memory will stick like a curse on your heels’. The *Volksstimme* reported that ‘almost all injuries’ of those who were shot had been sustained in the back. This was said to prove that not the public but the military had behaved in an aggressive manner. The paper dished up many horrific details and stressed that several victims had been pursued and shot in remote streets, not on the market square where the meeting took place and where some of the soldiers may have been forced to defend themselves. The fact that the shooting had been going on throughout the city was presented as evidence that ‘there was a carefully thought-out plan to create chaos in the city’. Thus the Czechoslovak army was blamed directly, although the ‘real’ culprits – presumably political figures – and their intentions were said to remain hidden. The attempt to conceal the aggressive intentions of the military was ‘proved’ by the denial of the authorities that colonel Barreca had been attacked by a Czech soldier, by their attempt to blame a civilian, ‘although there were numerous eye-witnesses’ of what had really happened. The *Volksstimme* announced it was looking for additional eyewitnesses to collect evidence on the various incidents, including the attack on Barreca. The social democrats were obviously interested in an evaluation of the events of 12 February, also for propagandistic reasons. There was a tendency, always difficult to suppress, for them to come up with conspiracy theories, just as their adversary Šrobár was doing. There was also a strong desire to represent the strike movement as a heroic and important episode in the history of the city, perhaps in an attempt to play down its failure. Although the strike had been defeated, it was claimed again that the ‘unanimity’ prevailing on 11 and 12 February was ‘unique’ in the history of Pressburg. The general population, including the Pressburg ‘bourgeoisie’, had been ‘welded together in a powerful bloc, a mighty declaration of protest against the violation of the... law and democracy’.⁴⁷⁷ In fact, the strike had hardly been more than just that: a short-lived movement of mass protest against the

⁴⁷⁶ *Volksstimme*, 16 February 1919. In this issue sections were reproduced from the recently published book *Die Reden Woodrow Wilsons*, Bern 1919. The popularity of the American president in social democratic circles was a remarkable phenomenon given the fact that he was a ‘bourgeois’ political figure.

⁴⁷⁷ *Volksstimme*, 16 February 1919.

new rulers of the city. It had become painfully clear what were the limits of the power of German and Magyar social democracy in the new political situation.

Nevertheless some positive developments could be reported. In Austria the social democrats had won an impressive election victory, becoming the strongest party in the country in the general election of February 1919. Although the result fell short of an absolute majority, which was achieved only in Vienna and a few other social democratic strongholds, the Pressburg *Volksstimme* ecstatically proclaimed: 'Victory is with us!' Another ray of hope was that on 16 February a regional conference of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party in Bohemia adopted a resolution protesting against 'the spilling of workers' blood' in Slovakia and the equally restive region of Teschen (Těšín), a disputed border area between Czechoslovakia and Poland. The Bohemian party organisation also protested against the restriction of civic rights, freedom of the press, and the freedom of assembly and association in Czechoslovakia generally. The resolution declared that the Czechoslovak party would defend the CSR 'against all enemies from outside, but also against all internal enemies who are removing by their actions her democratic and liberal character and are trying to reduce her to a mere executive organ of their capitalist interests and endeavours.' The aims of the party were deeply democratic. 'We want our Republic to be built in such a way that we can defend her in front of the socialist public. We will mobilise all our strength in order that our Republic shall become a protective shield for all her inhabitants with regard to all their political, national, social, and cultural needs.' These were encouraging statements for the German and other non-Czechoslovak social democrats. But according to the *Volksstimme* the Slovak social democrats in Pressburg did not act in accordance with these principles, but continued to put themselves 'at the service of the most gruesome imperialism'. If on the one hand the Slovaks could be generally represented as real or potential critics of the Czech-dominated government in Prague and Pressburg, on the other hand the Slovak social democrats were seen as more loyal and obedient than their Czech comrades. This Slovak social democratic attitude was difficult to accept, because the Czechoslovak regime in Pressburg was denounced as repressive notwithstanding the considerable freedom of the press that the critical reporting in the *Volksstimme* was proof of (the worst censorship would be imposed only several weeks later). As yet, the paper could disclose details of 'a new act of murder'. It reported that a boy of thirteen or fourteen years old had been shot by a Czech soldier because he was speaking Magyar and did not understand him when the soldier addressed him in Czech. 'This is what the security of life in the CSR is like, this is how the protection of the population by the sober-minded and disciplined army of the CSR is provided.' According to the *Volksstimme*, the population of Pressburg lived in a 'constant state of horror' following the events of 12 February. This had been made 'even worse' by the official Czechoslovak press report of 14 February (analysed in chapter 7). Indeed from this 'ignominious fabric of lies and slander, for whose production one needed two full days', the population gathered in dismay that she had fallen into the hands of tyrants 'who were lacking even the most elementary sense of political decency, law, and justice'. They were people that were producing 'violence, desperate lies, and public slander', culminating in the charges made against the social democratic leaders Paul Wittich and Rudolf Chovan. The suspicion was warranted that in Pressburg a group of 'highly educated denounciators' was thriving whose 'ruthless wheeling and dealings' constituted the sole support of the Czechoslovak government in the city. The absurdity of the accusations levelled against Wittich and Chovan was shown by the fact that they were described in one breath as 'emissaries of Magyar gentry politics' and 'agents of the Bolsheviks'. Those who were making such claims had very little political understanding and 'simply make themselves ridiculous'. The two leaders had always shown 'the greatest concern' for keeping order in the city and enjoyed the confidence of the general population; the government's allegation that they conducted 'Magyar propaganda' was completely untrue. The *Volksstimme* stressed that 'the bulk of Pressburg's working class' was German, only a small proportion being Magyar; the implication was that the

working-class leaders could not simply be Hungarian propagandists. It was also noted that public use of the Magyar language had thus far ‘not been forbidden’ in Pressburg; in other words, there was no reason to consider its use in public a political crime.⁴⁷⁸

Despite its attack on the pro-government Slovak social democrats, the *Volksstimme* asserted that ‘the Slovaks’ no longer believed the Czech claim that they had come to liberate ‘their poor Slovak brothers’ from the Magyar yoke. Moreover, the Slovaks ‘were about to receive autonomy’ from the ‘democratic Hungarian Republic’ by the time the Czechs arrived. These assertions were highly questionable and indicative of a lack of understanding of the Slovaks’ national-political sentiments and indeed of the policies of the Hungarian government. Even if it was true that many Slovaks were becoming more critical of certain Czech-directed policies in the economic, political, and cultural field, there was hardly any desire among them to break with the Czechs and become part of Hungary again. Nevertheless, according to the *Volksstimme* the Slovaks were now convinced that they were ‘nothing but a tool of the insatiable Czech Imperialism’; Slovaks in administrative positions were ‘just figure-heads’. Although some of these claims were not entirely beside the point, they were primarily an expression of the political wishful thinking of the German and Magyar social democrats. Perhaps even more important for those Germans and Magyars who were clinging to the hope that a permanent Czech supremacy could be averted was the press report that a commission of the Peace Conference was studying the possibility of an internationalisation of the river Danube. This was seen as proof by the *Volksstimme* ‘that it had not been decided yet whether the Czechs would keep Pressburg’. Therefore, ‘we are right when we contend that the last word has not yet been spoken, that the whole affair is simply an act of violence by Czecho-Slovak Imperialism, which stands in stark contrast to the principles of democracy and Wilson’. Hope about the future of Pressburg could thus be kept alive by practically everything; the political and psychological basis for this was the ‘thesis’ of the contradiction between Entente principles and Czechoslovak practices. A contradiction was even perceived between the acts and the political claims of the Czechoslovak government itself: ‘Therefore we fight against this government, which contradicts itself and its own declared programme.’⁴⁷⁹ If the Czechoslovak government acted against its own democratic principles – apparently it was not denied by Pressburg’s German social democrats that the CSR wanted to be a democratic state –, there could be no doubt that social democratic criticism was justified. Of course it also meant that the CSR could not be rejected on grounds of political principle, that it was admitted it had a democratic potential.

The funeral of the victims of bloody Wednesday was another occasion for bitter words. The funeral ceremonies – a small one at a Protestant cemetery, a bigger one at a Catholic cemetery – took place on Sunday 16 February. The Pressburg social democratic movement was strongly represented, and some six hundred men from various social democratic organisations were appointed to keep order. It must have been an impressive event and was certainly described as such in the Pressburg newspapers. The *Volksstimme* wrote: ‘The crowd was immense. Old Pressburgers concurred in saying that in the history of the city of Pressburg there had never been a funeral that was attended by such a massive number of people and that made such a deep and lasting impression on the population.’ The funeral procession started at the *Arbeiterheim*. In addition to the different social democratic organisations, there were delegations from the Christian Social Party – which reportedly offered its services as a ‘supra-national mediator’ between the government and its opponents –, Pressburg’s university, the medical profession, organisations of disabled war veterans, and so on. There were also representatives of the Entente military (an Italian officer), the Czechoslovak government (K. A. Medvecký, one of Šrobár’s commissioners), and the Pressburg municipality, including mayor Richard Kánya. After the

⁴⁷⁸ *Volksstimme*, 20 February 1919.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

burial of the 12 February victims on the Catholic cemetery, there were speeches by Paul Wittich (in German) and Franz Fehér (in Magyar) on behalf of the *Arbeiterrat*. Wittich said they would continue to believe that the death of the workers must be ‘atoned for’. Perhaps he hoped that the tragedy would make it possible to attain certain political concessions benefiting the Pressburgers. Fehér’s speech was even more emotional and included comparisons with the cruel death of the famous leader of the early sixteenth-century Hungarian peasant revolt, György Dózsa. He declared among other things: ‘You [the victims] will be the eternal heralds of the sins of the culprits who are grinning and hiding behind the mask of liberation.’ But their socialist cause would triumph and they were not seeking revenge; against their enemies they would use ‘the weapon of reason’. As they had defeated the ‘Caesars’ (the Central and Eastern European Emperors), so they would defeat ‘them’, i.e., those responsible for what happened on 12 February 1919 (perhaps he even meant the Czechoslovak regime itself). The ceremony was concluded by songs of the workers’ choir *Liedesfreiheit*, which also sang the Marseillaise, whose German version was still important in the musical repertoire of Central European socialism.⁴⁸⁰ It was politically significant that during the funeral a Hungarian aeroplane dropped a number of wreaths with ribbons in the Hungarian national colours.⁴⁸¹ This did not prove that the Hungarians had been directly involved in the Pressburg strike movement. But it is true that in inter-war Hungary the commemoration of the ‘Pressburg martyrs’ of 12 February 1919 became part of nationalist and Hungarian irredentist ritual.⁴⁸²

Around the time the funeral was prepared, the issue of renaming Pressburg came up for discussion as well. The government wanted to speed up the process of consolidating its hold on the city and announced it would issue a decree changing its official name to ‘Bratislava’. The measure was to take effect only on 14 March, but soon began to draw the attention of the Pressburg town council. By mid-February Alois Pichler, the editor of the *Pressburger Zeitung* and a member of the town council, submitted an interpellation to a council session caricaturing what he called the ‘Czech historical approach’ that argued that the name ‘Bratislava’ was the only ‘historically valid’ one. If this was true, Pichler mocked, the entire period between 892 (when a Slav duke named Bratislav allegedly founded the settlement) and 1919 ‘was only a 1027-year German intermezzo’. He described this way of looking at the history of the city as ‘mystification’. Of course this was true, but it should not be forgotten that the Germans and the Magyars had produced their own historical myths as well. Pichler was clever enough also to use the opportunity to condemn the old ‘Magyar policy of denationalisation’; apparently he wanted to stress that he did not defend Hungarian interests but only the historical rights of the German population.⁴⁸³ People like Pichler understood that it was in the interest of the Pressburg Germans to show they did not blindly follow Hungarian propaganda. The same point was made, though from a different angle, by Ivan Markovič in a speech delivered at Pressburg on 17 February.

⁴⁸⁰ The *Volksstimme* of 23 March 1919 quoted the German words of the ‘international and revolutionary melody’ Marseillaise; the song was apparently not identified with the recent enemy France. But among Czechoslovak soldiers, with whom the melody was popular as well, it was associated with their ally France, to the chagrin of the German social democrats.

⁴⁸¹ *Volksstimme*, 20 February 1919; *Pressburger Zeitung (PZ)*, morning paper, 19 February 1919. According to the *PZ* seven wreaths were dropped, one for each victim, including one that contained a message from the wife of the Hungarian president Károlyi. The seven people who had died before 16 February were all buried in a common grave at the *Blumental* Catholic cemetery, including the one Protestant victim. See SNA, MP, Box 270: official announcement of the funeral procedure by police chief Brunner. The boy shot by a Czech soldier on 16 February (fatal victim number eight) was buried on 20 February in the common grave as well; see *PZ*, morning paper, 21 February 1919.

⁴⁸² See, e.g., Dušan Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave 1918-1929*, Bratislava 1969, pp. 89-90.

⁴⁸³ Gertrud Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen Pressburgs. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Umbruchperiode 1918/20*, Munich 1942, p. 84. The issue of renaming Pressburg was extensively discussed again at the town council meeting on 17 March; see *PZ*, morning paper, 18 March 1919.

Markovič, like Šrobár a prominent member of the group of Slovak progressive nationalists known before the war as the 'Hlasists', was destined to become one of the new leaders of Slovak social democracy. In August 1919 he joined the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party together with Šrobár's Commissioner for Justice Ivan Dérer, of whom mention has already been made, and the two men became models of the new type of 'Czechoslovakist' Slovak social democratic leader. During the first half of 1919 Markovič was a member of the Czechoslovak delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, and in this capacity he gave a lecture on the position and future of Pressburg in February 1919. He pointed out that it should be clear to all inhabitants of Pressburg that the city was irreversibly part of the CSR. He said it was important that this was repeated once again, because 'especially in Pressburg rumours are spread by the enemy about the status of the city that may cause very tragic events, like on last Wednesday'. The population of Pressburg should know the 'factual conditions', 'devote themselves quietly and orderly to their productive work', and 'not let themselves be deceived by rumours spread by Hungarian political emissaries'.⁴⁸⁴ It is difficult to say how much the German and Magyar population could be influenced by statements like this – statements that contained a strong echo of the 'Šrobár interpretation of bloody Wednesday' and therefore also reinforced the existing scepticism. Some Pressburgers continued to argue that the Czechoslovak occupation of the city was only provisional, that only the final judgement of the Peace Conference could make it definitive. But moderate people like Pichler, the leaders of the Christian Social Party, and even leading social democrats were increasingly disposed to accept the new political reality, understanding that it was useless to entertain illusions about a non-Czechoslovak future for the city. Such opposition as there was – and the criticism and opposition of the social democrats was bitter – was mainly rhetorical, and aimed at preserving a sense of self-respect. What was important in this connection as well was that the Czechoslovak authorities should make a symbolic gesture to show that they accepted at least part of the blame and responsibility for what had happened on 12 February.

On Friday 21 February a dramatic 'extraordinary general meeting' of the Pressburg town council was held. The meeting had been called by social democratic and other town council members to make a formal protest against the action of the Czechoslovak military on 12 February, to demand an investigation, if possible a punitive procedure, against the culprits, and to demand guarantees from the government for the security of the population. A prominent Catholic priest, abbot-canon Árpád Kazacsay, submitted a resolution on behalf of a Magyar-German majority of the town council declaring that the council 'deeply regretted' the bloody events of 12 February and that there could be 'no excuse' for the way in which the military had acted. The resolution observed that civilians had been shot even in remote streets, and there was 'strong evidence' that it was a Czechoslovak soldier who had severely wounded Barreca, the military commander 'who had shown a human face to the people'. There was a 'disturbing feeling' in the city that part of the Czechoslovak troops had a 'hostile spirit' towards the population; indeed there was a risk that violent incidents could happen again. It was demanded that the government withdraw the military units from Pressburg that included the soldiers who had been shooting at the people; that it start an 'objective and conscientious' investigation into the events 'in collaboration with the town council'; and that the culprits be punished. Kazacsay maintained – a theoretical and rhetorical rather than a realistic argument – that the sovereignty exercised by the Czechoslovak government in Pressburg was 'provisional', the final decision yet having to be made by the Peace Conference. The present 'interregnum' had created a complicated situation and demanded 'political wisdom' from the 'occupying power'. The latter had to show 'consideration' for the population, which had suffered severely from the war and from the 'dualism of the political situation'. Various measures taken by the government showed that this had not been the case, including the closing down of the 'Hungarian university' (reopened just a

⁴⁸⁴ *PZ*, evening paper, 18 February 1919.

few days ago), the detention of citizens, the restriction of the freedom of the press, the ‘incomprehensible suppression of the [Hungarian] national colours during the interregnum’, the restriction of the freedom of movement by a system of passes, and the exportation of large quantities of foodstuffs to Bohemia. All these measures were both unjust and ‘politically inexpedient’, causing additional problems instead of preventing them and disturbing the ‘peaceful sentiment’ of the population. Kazacsay, obviously a convinced Hungarian patriot, said they expected the government to withdraw its special decrees because the Pressburg population had been ‘law-abiding for centuries’. He asked County Sheriff Zoch to communicate their resolution to the Minister for Slovakia, Šrobár.⁴⁸⁵ Despite their scepticism towards the legality of the Czechoslovak actions, the Pressburgers’ struggle against government policy was now conducted through the official institutions, the only political arena left to them. The fact that a man like Kazacsay had been chosen to present the resolution suggested that Hungarian patriots understood this political reality as well.

Zoch (who had not been dismissed, as the strikers had demanded) replied in an impressive way in each of the city’s three languages. At this crucial moment in the history of Pressburg, he proved his ability to calm the situation and to help bring about a feeling of reconciliation between the different national groups. Zoch said he considered this moment, ‘as they were thinking of the nine victims in their graves, a very serious one’. (The death of an eighth person wounded on 12 February and the killing of the boy in a separate incident had raised the number of fatal victims to nine). How ‘humiliating’ it was for mankind, he said, that she could not free herself from ‘the wild passions imposed by war’. Indeed who had caused ‘that our soldiers, admired for their discipline, let themselves be carried away to commit this act... and that the mental balance of the sensible citizenry of Pressburg was destroyed?’ Here Zoch admitted that the military had made a serious mistake, but he also suggested that the Pressburg population was co-responsible as well because of its provocation of the soldiers. He thus depicted the events as a tragedy caused by loss of control on both sides, refusing to apportion blame to one side only. His attitude was clearly different from that of Šrobár. Zoch, a Lutheran pastor, tried to lay a basis for reconciliation by creating an atmosphere of confession and self-criticism. ‘We can accuse each other’, he said, ‘but no, today we should not stand opposite but alongside each other and repeat the words of the prophet Nathan: “Have mercy on me, sinner!”’ Zoch – who tried to transcend the level of politics – declared he had not come to Pressburg (to become county sheriff) ‘as a politician, but as a human being’; his words were not those of ‘a politician who was only proclaiming his own truth’. All of them were shocked that people had died and ‘all of them were guilty’. ‘Confessing our mistakes and guilt, we do not wish to serve our party interests, our selfish aims, but the public.’ The principal question was not what was the cause of the events but how a repetition could be prevented. They had to keep the peace regardless of whether the present political status of Pressburg was final or provisional. He asked the town councillors to accept his words – the words of ‘a member of bitterly afflicted mankind who is carrying a heavy cross’. Zoch also asked them not to disturb ‘this difficult moment’ with speeches and debate, which met with sympathy and understanding but not complete consent. He promised to pass on the resolution presented by Kazacsay and supported by an overwhelming majority of the town council⁴⁸⁶ to the government, and ‘to do everything he can’ to ensure that its ‘substance’ would be carried into effect and a repetition of the events avoided.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁵ *Volksstimme*, 23 February 1919; see also *PZ*, evening paper, 21 February 1919, and *PZ*, morning paper, 22 February 1919.

⁴⁸⁶ Apparently, many Slovak town council members also supported the final decision that the resolution be adopted without further debate.

⁴⁸⁷ *Volksstimme*, 23 February 1919. From a French-language summary of the town council meeting written by mayor Richard Kánya (probably for the French and Italian military officers in Slovakia and other Entente representatives), it appears that, in addition to the demand that the government investigate who were responsible

After County Sheriff Zoch, Paul Wittich spoke. He said Zoch's speech had made a deep impression on him, but he still believed there should be a debate on the events of 12 February. It was necessary to establish who were responsible and what was the cause of the bloodbath, because only in this way measures could be taken to prevent another disaster. He maintained that the security of the population had not improved since 12 February and Zoch had not sufficiently reassured them on this point. Wittich could not continue his speech because he was interrupted and the meeting turned into a pandemonium by Hugo Dewald, one of those who represented the most pro-government section of what was left of the German Radical Democratic Party. Dewald declared he agreed with the government that the mass meeting of 12 February had been part of an attempted 'Bolshevist putsch'; therefore the action of the military was 'understandable'. After the occupation of Pressburg Dewald had increasingly come to be seen as a 'traitor' by a large part of the population, especially by the social democrats. Now, in response to his latest provocative statement, other town councillors began to shout at him, calling him a 'beast', a 'murderer', etc., and some demanded he should leave the meeting. But Dewald refused to support the resolution, claiming to speak 'on behalf of the citizenry', which was vehemently denied by other council members. Not shrinking back from a political confrontation, Dewald said he supported Wittich's proposal to have a debate on the 12 February events, but in response Wittich declared that if Dewald supported his proposal he would withdraw it. This was apparently meant to express the disgust that Dewald – according to the *Volksstimme* a 'political charlatan' – aroused among the social democrats, who wanted nothing to do with 'opportunists' of his 'immoral' kind. Thus the town council session ended in turmoil and confusion, but Zoch did not exploit the situation and confirmed that the resolution had been adopted.⁴⁸⁸ Zoch's conduct on this occasion was one of the most important actions in his political career. He gave expression to a sense of guilt on the part of the Czechoslovak authorities, although it was not clear if his personal attitude was supported by them and although he was not able to guarantee that the Pressburgers' demands (for an objective investigation, etc.) would be respected. Although a great majority of the town council supported the resolution, including the appeal to the government to make an investigation, there was no political unity even among the German and Magyar population and a lack of concerted action to enforce this demand. When the government made an investigation at the end of 1919, it did not produce the result that the Pressburgers had hoped for. Therefore, no more than a partial and – thanks to Samuel Zoch – symbolic reconciliation was achieved, but this was important enough in itself. Of course the action of Dewald was extremely painful for the Pressburgers, especially vis-à-vis County Sheriff Zoch and the Czechoslovak administration. The 'Radical Democrat' Hugo Dewald, who could successfully undermine the solidarity of the Pressburgers, became more than ever the symbol incarnate of the 'traitor' of Pressburg, the desecrator of its civic pride.

At least as painful was the lack of unity of the broader social democratic movement, which continued to be significant after the February strike. The negative attitude to the strike of the Slovak social democrats caused the *Volksstimme* to denounce their paper *Robotnícke noviny* as 'an organ of the Czechoslovak government'. The Slovaks' contention that the strike of Pressburg's German and Magyar workers aimed to strengthen the political enemies of the state and government and to help prepare a 'putsch' was rejected with indignation. The *Volksstimme* noted that according to the Slovak social democrats Hungarian flags were distributed at the meeting on 12 February and groups of demonstrators attacked Czechoslovak soldiers, which made military action necessary. Barreca was portrayed by the Slovaks as a 'friend of the

for the shootings and that the culprits be punished, the town council also demanded that the relatives of the victims be financially compensated. See SNA, MP, Box 256, File 1136. As already mentioned in chapter 7, it does not seem that these demands were fulfilled by the Czechoslovak government.

⁴⁸⁸ *Volksstimme*, 23 February 1919.

Magyars' and a man who refused to protect Slovak workers who wanted to continue working during the strike. These claims were interpreted by the German social democrats as proof that their Slovak counterparts 'had thrown themselves completely into the arms of the government'. Their 'rejoicing about the killing of innocent workers and their lamentation about the lack of protection for strike breakers is sufficient proof how deep these people have fallen morally... To us this constitutes valuable evidence to have them thrown out from the International as quickly as possible'. These were harsh statements indeed, and at the Bern conference of the Socialist International in February 1919 the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party was criticised because of its strong support for the Czechoslovak government. According to the *Volksstimme*, this meant that 'the Czech and Slovak comrades' had to take a fundamental decision regarding their political orientation: 'Either they return to social democracy or they completely join the anti-democratic and imperialist government policy.' The paper said it did not know what 'the Czech comrades' were going to decide; perhaps they were given the benefit of the doubt for the time being. The Slovak social democrats, however, were all but written off as far as their attitude to a 'correct internationalist position' (from the German point of view, of course) was concerned.⁴⁸⁹ The German concept of 'internationalism' had been evolved during the long period of German and Magyar domination in Central Europe and the Central European labour movement. It was very difficult for the Germans and Magyars to come to terms with the fact that this period had come to an end, that it was now the Slovak and Czech social democrats who were part of the dominant ('nation-building') political subject. This Czechoslovak political subject had seized power in Slovakia (the former 'Upper Hungary') and the Czech Lands and the Czechoslovak social democrats supported this national revolution. Indeed even for the reconstituted Socialist International it was difficult to get accustomed to the new political reality in Central Europe following the war and the national revolution.

However, the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party was more than just a nationalist organisation, and with regard to the political attitude of the Czechs (not the Slovaks) the German social democrats noted some progress. At the end of February, the *Volksstimme* reported that 'the Czech social democrats' were 'awakening' and that 'the comrades in Prague' were apparently beginning to understand that 'Czecho-Slovak government policy was anything but socialist'. This also seemed to be true in the case of Czechoslovakia's social democratic Minister of Justice František Soukup, who at first 'seemed to have completely submitted to the capitalist-imperialist policies of his colleagues'. Soukup, the Czech social democratic leader who probably played a part in persuading Šrobár to release the Pressburg detainees on 5 February, caused a stir by criticising some of the government's restrictive measures and by advocating more socialist-oriented policies. In a speech to a meeting of mine workers in the Bohemian town of Kladno, Soukup declared he would not tolerate any further restrictions of the freedom of assembly or the freedom of the press. He said he had instructed district commissioners in northern Bohemia to end all repressive measures, including detentions, against German workers who were speaking out in favour of self-determination for the Germans; 'in a democratic republic no one's freedom should be restricted'. Even more remarkable was Soukup's statement that certain things had happened in northern Bohemia, Teschen (Těšín), and Slovakia that 'one cannot agree with', things that 'damage us abroad'. But Soukup also reiterated the well-known claim that in Slovakia a large-scale 'Magyar anti-Czech agitation' was going on, and that the Italian military commanders in the region were sympathising with the Magyars.⁴⁹⁰ It could be argued that this pro-Hungarian agitation was encouraged by tactless and repressive actions of the Czechs, but on the other hand these actions could be seen as an answer to the 'Magyar' agitation. In any case, from the German social democratic point of view there seemed to be reason for hope that at least

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ *Volksstimme*, 27 February 1919, referring to the Bohemian newspapers *Prager Tagblatt* and *Svoboda*.

part of the Czechoslovak social democratic leadership was becoming more critical towards government policies. This may have revived their belief in the democratic potential of the Czechoslovak Republic, but also the illusion that the political status of Pressburg might be altered.

With regard to the ‘opportunists’ in their own ethnic ranks however, i.e., political group like the German Radical Democrats or the Christian Socials, there could be no reason for illusions. In this respect small social details could be more telling than big political stories. The *Volksstimme* informed the Pressburg population that, during the preparations for the arrival of the Šrobár government in early February, the hated Hugo Dewald had actually been appointed inspector of the Pressburg *Redoute* (ballroom-house), where he was entrusted with the organisation of the various festivities. He had received a large quantity of coal – like flour and other essentials of life a scarce commodity during these days – for the purpose of heating several rooms in the *Redoute* to hold dancing parties and the like; meanwhile ‘it was cold in the Lutheran orphanage and hospital’. Thus ‘while the population was suffering, the Czecho-Slovak gentlemen had plenty to eat’, assisted by ‘Dewald the dancing master’. These details were of more than marginal significance, because in this way Dewald could be represented as the ultimate example – indeed the incarnation – of the opportunist traitor and anti-social bourgeois scoundrel. He fulfilled an important function as scapegoat for the frustrated Pressburgers and was an ideal object of hatred for the social democratic moral-political campaign. In the same context of moral protest the social democrats collected money for the families of the victims of bloody Wednesday; some ten days after the events of 12 February it was reported that more than 31,000 crowns had been collected. Social democratic political morality had thus a positive social side as well as a negative side of relentlessly denouncing their moral, social, cultural, and political ‘enemies’. Beside the person of Dewald, the Radical Democratic newspaper *Republik* continued to be an object of social democratic resentment as well. An article in the *Republik* describing ‘the Czechoslovaks’ as the ‘shelter and protection of the Germans’ was defined as ‘mindless’ in a letter to the *Volksstimme*, a mild expression compared with others. Another letter attacked the *Republik*’s claim that the ‘Magyar oligarchy’, not the Czechoslovak government, was responsible for the shortage of flour in Pressburg, and even more the paper’s refusal to condemn the government because of the events of 12 February (‘truly Jesuitical’, ‘spitting the citizens in their face’). The ‘hypocritical Jesuits’ – always a popular notion among the social democrats – and Catholics themselves were denounced in a *Volksstimme* article aimed at the Christian Socials and their newspaper *Pressburger Tagblatt*. ‘The popish religion [*Pfaffenglaube*] is... the root of all evil and it would be worth the effort to liberate mankind... from it’; many variations on this theme can be found in the social democratic press. But for the moment the more immediate evil in Pressburg was the political depravation of the *Republik* and its constituency. On 21 February the Pressburg *Arbeiterrat* decided to start a boycott of this despised paper; newspaper stands were urged not to sell it anymore. It was also decided to call a meeting of the unemployed for Sunday 23 February to protest against the reduction of unemployment benefit, a key issue for the Pressburg labour movement. The government was invited to send a representative.⁴⁹¹

Like the Pressburgers’ political grievances, the economic and social grievances of the Pressburg working class were channelled back into the arena of negotiations and peaceful protest after the February crisis, but this hardly toned down their criticism. The *Volksstimme* observed that two months after the Czechoslovak occupation of Pressburg no steps had been taken to alleviate the plight of the unemployed, many of whom were ‘hungry’. There were more unemployed workers in the city than ever before, and unemployment benefits had been reduced to about half of what they were under the Hungarian government. It was ‘lamentable’ that this

⁴⁹¹ *Volksstimme*, 23 February 1919; *Republik*, 15 February 1919; Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, p. 137.

situation had been brought about with the assistance of a man ‘who owed his rise to his present position to the working-class organisation of the city’. This man was the Slovak social democrat Emanuel Lehocký, now Šrobár’s Commissioner for Social Care. ‘Men who deny their nationality for reasons of personal advantage are usually called renegades. For men who disown the class from which they spring and become blind tools of a policy of exploitation there is no parliamentary expression. But the feelings with which the masses of the unemployed are filled will sooner or later make it clear to this man that he has betrayed his former class.’ It would seem that the government did not send a representative – neither Lehocký nor anyone else – to the meeting of the unemployed on 23 February, which was held in the *Arbeiterheim* and attended by several thousand people.⁴⁹² The meeting was addressed by Paul Wittich and three other German and Magyar social democratic leaders, all of whom delivered a ‘devastating criticism’, as the *Volksstimme* phrased it, of the government’s policy of reducing unemployment benefit. The atmosphere at the meeting was ‘tumultuous’ and a resolution was passed demanding a substantial increase in unemployment benefit for both men (single and married) and women. It was observed that for several weeks the working class of Pressburg had been ‘demanding its rights’ in a ‘peaceful way’, and now the government should immediately start public works to provide ‘bread and work’.⁴⁹³ Another economic grievance of the Pressburg social democrats was the manner in which the new Czechoslovak currency was introduced. It was claimed that the exchange rate of the old Hungarian currency to the Czechoslovak crown was fifty percent too low. This meant that ‘the Czech capitalists’ were significantly improving the value of their currency and capital ‘at the expense of the population of West and Upper Hungary’; it was a ‘confiscation’ of a part of their savings. The *Volksstimme* argued that also in this matter the Czechoslovak government should have waited for a decision of the Peace Conference, but the worst aspect of this policy was that it imposed (in proportional terms) ‘an equal burden on the rich and the poor’. The modest savings of the poor were most severely affected (in terms of existential security); therefore Czechoslovak financial policy was ‘anti-democratic’ and another illustration of the true character of the new regime.⁴⁹⁴

Pressburg’s mayor Richard Kánya, meanwhile, threatened to resign, almost causing another political crisis in the city. It is interesting that the reason for this was the activities of the despised Hugo Dewald, which shows again that they were of more than marginal importance in the eyes of the Pressburgers. Kánya tried to intervene in Dewald’s unpopular affairs but felt that the Czechoslovak authorities, including County Sheriff Zoch, obstructed him. He then declared it was ‘incompatible with the responsibility of his office to have only duties and no rights’ and announced his resignation, but Zoch asked him to stay and to help ‘resolve the differences’ that had arisen. The problem was that Kánya had protested against the fact that the Czechoslovak authorities allowed Dewald to be entrusted with the organisation of additional rather exclusive social functions in the *Redoute*, which required large quantities of coal to heat the building. Similar to the social democrats, he argued that if the city’s streets were not lighted and its schools and hospitals could not function normally because of the shortage of coal, it was improper for the authorities to favour such special interests at the expense of the public interest. Therefore, in his capacity of mayor he had decided to close the *Redoute* and to remove the electrical lights in the

⁴⁹² The Czechoslovak Press Agency issued a report on 22 February claiming that the government regarded unemployment as one of the most urgent problems in the city. It also asserted that the unemployment benefits were not much lower than the old Hungarian ones, especially for families with several children. See *PZ*, morning paper, 23 February 1919.

⁴⁹³ *Volksstimme*, 27 February 1919. See also *PZ*, evening paper, 24 February 1919.

⁴⁹⁴ *Volksstimme*, 27 February 1919. The *PZ*, morning paper, 26 February 1919 reported that the other fifty percent of the people’s savings would be returned to them in the form of receipts with which taxes and the like could be paid. See also Emil Portisch, *Geschichte der Stadt Pressburg-Bratislava*, 2 vols, Bratislava 1933, vol. 2, p. 547. The question of currency substitution was closely pursued in subsequent issues of the *Volksstimme*.

ballroom. However, Dewald – presumably through his contacts with individuals in the Czechoslovak administration – then mobilised a group of ten soldiers and managed to reopen the building. Although it was not clear exactly who assisted ‘this fool whom all decent people despise’, the *Volksstimme* wished to know how he could get ‘the favour of the pastor-sheriff who always praises his own morality’. Was it compatible with Zoch’s ‘priestly dignity’ to entertain the friendship of a man of whom it was known he had established a tavern frequented by men of ‘a dubious moral reputation?’ A government that had to seek the friendship of men like this must be in a ‘sad’ condition.⁴⁹⁵ Thus another dimension was added to the social democrats’ moralistic press campaign – opposition to socially ‘immoral’ or Bohemian-like characters. Dewald, who evidently made a business out of various social activities around the city, was also associated with repugnant social types. A few days later it became clear that Dewald had managed to get the assistance of the soldiers without the knowledge of the authorities. This saved Zoch from further (unwarranted) attacks by the social democrats, who had even begun to question the moral level of the county sheriff. The German-Magyar Social Democratic Party leadership and the *Arbeiterrat* – in the parlance of the *Volksstimme*, ‘the depositories of the popular will’ – passed a resolution deploring Kánya’s intention to step down and assuring him of their full confidence and support if he remained in office. It was demanded that the government ‘rehabilitate’ the mayor and should respect the rights of the city ‘as an autonomous corporation’.⁴⁹⁶ At the end of the day Kánya decided to stay on as mayor of Pressburg, although the power of his office remained limited vis-à-vis the county sheriff and Šrobár’s administration even in local affairs.

In other parts of Czechoslovakia the achievement of political stability was as yet difficult as well. On 4 March 1919, fifty-four people were killed by Czech soldiers and police during demonstrations in various cities in Bohemia and Moravia with a large German population. The local Germans, led by the social democrats, protested against their incorporation into the CSR and the fact that they had not been allowed to participate in the recent Austrian general election. The German social democrats organised a general strike and large protest demonstrations on 4 March because on this day the newly elected Austrian parliament would meet in Vienna. The demonstrators demanded self-determination and *Anschluss* to Austria and shouted anti-Czechoslovak slogans; in several cities confrontations ensued with the military and the police, who reacted with force. The large number of people killed led to sharp protests by the Austrian government, which again demanded a plebiscite to give the German population the opportunity to express their will. The Austrian president Karl Seitz spoke of ‘Czech Imperialism’, ‘murder’, etc., as did other commentators and the Austrian and Bohemian-German social democrats.⁴⁹⁷ A Czech

⁴⁹⁵ *Volksstimme*, 27 February 1919.

⁴⁹⁶ *Volksstimme*, 2 March 1919. The *Volksstimme* of 6 March 1919 reported that Dewald had been expelled from what was now known as the ‘German Democratic Citizens’ Association’ as a result of his unacceptable behaviour. Already in February he and Alois Zalkai had resigned from their leading posts in the Radical Democratic Party.

⁴⁹⁷ German social democratic and other German newspapers in Bohemia and Moravia spoke of ‘Czech terror’, ‘Czech blood-rule’, etc.: see the newspaper clippings in VGA, P, Box 225. See also Kurt Glaser, *Czecho-Slovakia: A Critical History*, Caldwell, Idaho, 1961, pp. 23-4, quoting a report from the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*; Johann Wolfgang Brügel, *Tschechen und Deutsche 1918-1938*, Munich 1967, pp. 75-7; Arnold Suppan, ‘Zur österreichischen Aussenpolitik 1918/19’, in *Aussenpolitische Dokumente der Republik Österreich 1918-1938 (ADÖ). I. Selbstbestimmung der Republik: 21. Oktober 1918 bis 14. März 1919*, eds Klaus Koch, Walter Rauscher, and Arnold Suppan, Vienna, 1993, pp. 46-7; Richard G. Plaschka and Arnold Suppan, ‘Historische Perspektiven zur Vertreibung der Deutschen aus der Tschechoslowakei’, in *Nationale Frage und Vertreibung der Deutschen in der Tschechoslowakei*, ed. Oberösterreichisches Landesarchiv, Linz, 2000, p. 18; Nancy M. Wingfield, ‘Working-Class Politics in the Bohemian Lands 1918-1921: National Identity, Class Consciousness, and the Social Democratic Parties’, *Bohemia* 34, no. 1, 1993, p. 94; Zdeněk Kárník, *České země v éře První republiky (1918-1938). I. Vznik, budování a zlatá léta republiky (1918-1929)*, Prague 2000, pp. 43-4. The *PZ*, evening paper, of 5 and 6 March 1919 contains Czechoslovak press reports giving the official version of what happened in certain towns in Bohemia and Moravia.

historian has called the bloodbath of 4 March 1919 the ‘greatest tragedy in the history of the First Republic’, one that badly affected Czech-German ethnic relations.⁴⁹⁸ More than twenty years later Wenzel Jaksch, a Bohemian-German social democratic leader and anti-fascist who had fled to London, wrote that the shootings of 4 March 1919 were the ‘starting-point’ of the Munich Agreement of September 1938, because ‘those who gain territories by force must reckon with the possibility that they will be taken back by force’.⁴⁹⁹ The judgement of a leading historian of the Bohemian Germans, J.W. Brügel, who describes the events as the tragic outcome of a series of uncontrolled actions on both sides (not unlike the interpretation of Pressburg’s ‘bloody Wednesday’ in the present study), is somewhat milder. However, he stresses that the official Czech claims that the events were the result of a ‘well-prepared German revolt’ – which reminds us of similar claims after the Pressburg events – were ‘totally unjustified’. He also writes that the political consequences of the tragedy were limited and that there followed no radicalisation on the German side.⁵⁰⁰ The Pressburg *Arbeiterrat* expressed its solidarity with their suffering ‘comrades in fate’ in Bohemia and Moravia, who were said to be fighting for the right to self-determination like themselves.⁵⁰¹ In Slovakia the events of 12 February were similarly remembered as proof of the violent way in which Czechoslovak rule was imposed on the unwilling German and Magyar population; but as in the Czech Lands, the immediate political consequences were limited. Moreover, the political evolution of Hungary in the 1920s ensured that, unlike Austria and Germany, Hungary was no longer seen by national-minority social democrats as an alternative to the CSR. Communist rule after March 1919, but especially the White Terror after August 1919 made Hungary less attractive for Slovakia’s Magyars and Germans than the democratic Czechoslovak Republic. However until April or even later, Hungary continued to be seen and represented as the more attractive option.

At the beginning of March, indeed, the *Volksstimme* carried an article arguing that ‘democratically, in part also culturally, the new Hungary’ was on a ‘much higher level’ than the successor states that had absorbed the non-Magyar nations previously living in Hungary. It was claimed that these nations – the Slovaks, the Romanians, etc. – were slowly becoming aware of this themselves. They had won the freedom to use their own language, but politically they were dominated by new ‘imperialist’ states whose role of ‘liberator’ had merely led to disappointment. According to the *Volksstimme*, the Hungarian Social Democratic Party was in favour of equality and self-determination of the nations (if this was true, it had come too late), but ‘this principle was most seriously violated by the Czech invasion of Pressburg’. The proletariat of Pressburg was fully conscious of its ‘historical mission’ to be the ‘protector of the accomplishments’ of the Hungarian democratic revolution, including the equality of the nations of Hungary; Czech domination however meant economic, cultural, political, and national ‘oppression’. Apart from the naive idealisation of the aims and accomplishments of the Hungarian Revolution, the attitude of the Slovaks to the Czechoslovak regime was again incorrectly appraised by the German social democrats. Most Slovaks preferred Czechoslovakia to Hungary, even if it is true that their attitude was not always consistent and that some Slovaks were highly critical of certain government policies. Ironically, reference was also made again to Lehocký and the Slovak social democrats, who were said to be ‘cowardly hiding behind the government’ out of fear of the German and Magyar workers who deeply resented their refusal to criticise government policy. Perhaps the German and Magyar social democrats were simply unable to see the contradictions in their own assertions, perhaps it was the same old wishful thinking. This wishful thinking was also responsible for their claim that ‘national emotions’ could only be ‘temporary phenomena’, only

⁴⁹⁸ Kárník, *České země*, p. 43.

⁴⁹⁹ Quoted in Plaschka and Suppan, ‘Historische Perspektiven’, p. 18.

⁵⁰⁰ Brügel, *Tschechen und Deutsche*, pp. 77-8.

⁵⁰¹ *Volksstimme*, 9 March 1919.

expressions of ‘temporary confusion’. In classical fashion it was argued that at the end of the day these national emotions could not halt the triumph of international socialism and class solidarity.⁵⁰² Perhaps the German mass meeting in the west Hungarian city of Ödenburg (Sopron) on 6 March was seen as an example of the validity of their belief in international solidarity, even though it expressed a sense of ethnic rather than interethnic solidarity. The meeting strongly protested against the incorporation of Pressburg into the ‘Czech Imperium’ and against the ‘massacre’ in Bohemia and Moravia.⁵⁰³

The fact that the Czechoslovak government conducted its own propaganda campaign and continued to express its own variant of wishful thinking made it easier for the German social democrats to believe in their interpretation of what was happening. The Czechoslovak Press Agency constantly reported on ‘espionage affairs’ and on the Hungarian ‘agitation’ and ‘propaganda’ in Slovakia. This partly may have had the function of explaining away the existing opposition to unpopular Czechoslovak policies, for example among Slovaks who objected to economic measures like the confiscation of foodstuffs. The German social democrats maintained that the Czechoslovak press reports on Hungarian espionage and propaganda were a conscious act of deception, an attempt to conceal the fact that government policy itself was the actual cause of the general discontent and that in Slovakia there was a growing and spontaneous ‘movement for self-determination’. The *Volksstimme* dismissed the claims of foreign (Hungarian) intervention and agitation: ‘As if in the prevailing circumstances an outside factor was needed to promote dissatisfaction among the population. Someone has to be the scapegoat, but not of course the Czechoslovak government.’⁵⁰⁴ On 9 March, after the declaration of a state of emergency, the paper informed its readers that from now on public meetings had to be reported to (and permitted by) the authorities one week in advance; the political atmosphere in Slovakia was rapidly deteriorating again. The Šrobár government explained this measure by referring to the ‘intense agitation against the Czechs’, which it admitted was also influencing part of the Slovak population.⁵⁰⁵ The *Volksstimme* commented sarcastically that the government should not think that the Slovaks ‘were so stupid’ to be incited by ‘a Magyar agitation against their benefactors’, the Czechs who arrived as ‘liberators of the Slovaks’. The paper repeated that the cause of the discontent was the government, the Czechoslovak government being ‘the best agitator against itself’. New political restrictions and repressive measures only served to prove that dissatisfaction with the government was ‘fully justified’. Charges by the Czechoslovak government that the Hungarian Social Democratic Party – which it saw as co-responsible for the agitation against the CSR – was a ‘Magyar chauvinist’ organisation were dismissed by Pressburg’s German social democratic press. The *Volksstimme* claimed that the HSDP had ‘always’ opposed the oppression of the non-Magyar nations in pre-1918 Hungary, and that neither the HSDP nor the Austrian Social Democratic Party ‘had ever approved of the suppression of the rights of the Czechs by the Austrian government’. Arguably, this picture of the attitude of the Hungarian and Austrian social democratic parties was not completely in accordance with the somewhat more complicated

⁵⁰² *Volksstimme*, 6 March 1919.

⁵⁰³ Paul Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert der Karpatendeutschen in der Slowakei*, Stuttgart 1992, p. 37.

⁵⁰⁴ *Volksstimme*, 6 March 1919. See for Czechoslovak claims about espionage, propaganda, and military activities against the CSR organised by Germany, Austria, and Hungary (and ‘assisted’ by the Germans in Slovakia) also the *PZ*, morning paper, 2 March 1919.

⁵⁰⁵ *Volksstimme*, 9 March 1919. The *PZ*, evening paper, 6 March 1919 reported that according to the Šrobár government ‘anti-Czechoslovak elements’, ‘Hungarian agents’, and ‘paid agitators’ were inciting government employees to strike against the government and were promoting hatred of the Czechs among the Slovak population. The government reminded the population that not long ago these agitators ‘propagated the general strike among the workers and influenced them in a way that led to bloody events’; under the circumstances the government was ‘forced to restrict the freedom of assembly’. The *PZ*, morning paper, 7 March 1919 brought another official announcement, viz., that the government thought it necessary to disband ‘provocative’ crowds of young people who assembled at the side of the Danube singing, yelling, and waving Hungarian flags.

historical truth. The *Volksstimme* was probably closer to the truth when it wrote about itself: ‘We have remained the same. The oppressed and the oppressing nations have just changed roles.’⁵⁰⁶ Because the German social democrats – with their special understanding of ‘internationalism’ – had remained the same, they found it difficult to accept their new position of belonging to a national minority that was dominated by ‘the Czechs’. What had remained the same as well, was their inability to fully grasp the nature of Slovak nationalism and their more recent tendency to exaggerate the extent to which the Slovaks ‘opposed’ the Czechoslovak government. It is true however that the government made it sometimes easy for them to come to the wrong conclusion. The Czechoslovak delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, for example, rejected the suggestion to hold a plebiscite in Slovakia, arguing among other things that as a result of their long oppression by the Hungarians the Slovaks were politically too immature to make a well-considered decision. Not surprisingly, this argument was seen by the German and Magyar social democrats as a perfidious excuse for the Czech invasion and Czech rule in Slovakia: ‘Something must be very rotten in the State of Denmark’, they commented.⁵⁰⁷

Perhaps the best illustration of the Czech policy of domination and ‘usurpation’ – as the German and Magyar social democrats described it – was the Czech ‘demographic invasion’ of Pressburg and Slovakia. This consisted in the arrival of growing numbers of Czechs who took the jobs of Magyar and German former government employees on the railways, the postal service, etc.; for their benefit large numbers of houses were bought or even confiscated. Although the local authorities had established a housing commission that also included representatives of the labour movement, the social democrats complained that nothing was done to alleviate the shortage of houses for the Pressburg working class. Meanwhile ‘a constant immigration of foreign elements’ was taking place, and the growing numbers of Czech military personnel, officials, and employees were paying for their houses only a fraction of what ‘the Pressburg taxpayers’ had to pay. The Pressburg labour movement protested against this ‘anti-social’ policy. At the same time it was suggested that the most important reason for ‘the import of Czech human material’ was that it could be used to ‘prove’ that Pressburg was ‘an ancient Slav city’. While the children of Pressburg were living in misery (because of unemployment and other problems), the new rulers, who had their own priorities, were looking for ‘a solution of the population problem’ by gradually reducing the proportion of Germans and Magyars. The Czechoslovak government, in other words, was carrying out a policy of ethnodemographic engineering. In this connection an important organisation like the Pressburg Printing Workers’ Union had its grievances too, which were part of the overall picture of labour competition and ethnic rivalry. The union protested against mass unemployment and the restrictions of freedom of the press. At a trade union conference on 2 March it also insisted that, as long as the Paris Peace Conference had not made a final decision on the status of Pressburg, the printers and other local unions could not be forced to join the Czechoslovak trade union organisations based at Prague. However, the question of leaving the Hungarian Printing Workers’ Union and joining the all-Czechoslovak union was discussed in a pragmatic way, and not long after a joint meeting of Slovak, German, and Magyar printing workers decided to link up with the Czechoslovak trade union. The Pressburg union complained that the printing works of the Ministry for Slovakia was employing workers from Bohemia and Moravia instead of workers from Pressburg provided by the union. It argued this policy undercut existing wage levels in Pressburg, but no doubt direct job competition was considered a crucial problem as well. It is likely that integration into the all-Czechoslovak trade unions was seen as a way to solve such problems.⁵⁰⁸ This integration was also promoted by new Czechoslovak labour legislation, which was gradually put in place in the course of 1919. On 15

⁵⁰⁶ *Volksstimme*, 9 March 1919.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁸ *Volksstimme*, 6 March 1919; Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 56.

March 1919, for example, Milan Ivanka, Šrobár's Commissioner of Internal Affairs, informed the Pressburg Metal Workers' Union (a predominantly German-Magyar trade union that officially was still affiliated to the Hungarian Metal Workers' Federation) that it did not have the right to establish new trade union branches in Slovakia. This could only be done by the Czechoslovak Metal Workers' Federation based at Prague, which already had a secretariat in Slovakia responsible for some nine thousand trade union members.⁵⁰⁹ Steps like this – as well as the arrival in Slovakia of large numbers of Czech trade unionists – enhanced the probability that trade union integration on Czechoslovak terms could be gradually implemented. But interethnic trade union unification never became a complete success.

An article in the *Volksstimme* headed 'the usurpation continues' described the ongoing substitution of Czechs for former Hungarian government employees. It argued that the government, instead of keeping its original promises to leave the old employees in their posts, 'was forcibly taking possession of one public institution after the other'. The reduction of their wages and in particular the demand that they swear allegiance to the CSR was still resisted by part of the railway workers, postal workers, teachers, and other government employees; it even led to renewed strike action. Those who refused to swear an oath of allegiance, often using the argument that it was incompatible with the 'freedom of conscience', were discharged and replaced with Czechs and Slovaks, but it would seem that others were dismissed for less clear-cut reasons. One of the latest examples of this increasingly harsh but consistent government policy was the financial administration of Pressburg, where employees who had worked at the office for twenty-five to thirty years were forced to leave 'with tears in their eyes'. The *Volksstimme* spoke again of 'Jesuitical tactics' by 'a government that calls itself democratic and is led by a Prof. Masaryk' but whose promises 'are worth nothing'. Furthermore, several school buildings and houses belonging to their teaching staff were allegedly confiscated and given to Czech officials, which led the social democratic newspaper to conclude that the government was prepared to go to the length of 'reducing the cultural level of the city and breeding illiterate persons'. The high and rising level of unemployment in Pressburg – there were more than three thousand unemployed on the registers of the Pressburg Trade Union Council, in addition to unknown numbers of unemployed railway workers, postal workers, and others – created a terrible situation. This was aggravated by the 'forcible' reduction of unemployment benefit. The 'harshly low level of Czechoslovak social care for the native working class', both for skilled and unskilled workers, starkly contrasted with the 'industrious importation of unemployed persons from Bohemia' and even of 'strike-breakers'.⁵¹⁰ To compensate for the reduction of unemployment benefit, the government had started a soup kitchen for those who were worst affected. This initiative also created a number of jobs, but it appeared that only people who could speak Czech or Slovak were taken on, another example of sheltered employment for the benefit of the government's own ethnic group. Another grievance of the social democrats was that Pressburg's war widows and orphans had not received financial support from the Czechoslovak government for several weeks; apparently the government regarded those in need of help as 'fools', or perhaps it was simply 'incompetent'. Equally sad was the plight of Pressburg's elderly citizens, who were said to be hungry 'while other people are enriching themselves'.⁵¹¹

During the first week of March a number of railway workers were arrested by the Pressburg police. The railway and postal workers of Slovakia had decided to take action again in

⁵⁰⁹ SNA, MP, Box 270, File 1178: letter of Ivanka to Antal Svarka, chairman of the Bratislava Metal Workers' Union, 15 March 1919; and letter of the office of the Commissioner for Social Care to Ivanka, 13 March 1919, explaining its perspective on the trade union issue.

⁵¹⁰ *Volksstimme*, 9 March 1919. See for the situation at the Pressburg financial administration, whose officials and employees apparently refused to swear the oath of allegiance to the CSR, also *PZ*, morning paper, 5 March 1919. See for the confiscation of school-buildings also *PZ*, morning paper, 6 March 1919.

⁵¹¹ *Volksstimme*, 13 March 1919.

protest at the reduction of their wages and the obligation to swear an oath of allegiance to the CSR, which they said their ‘conscience’ forbade them to do. Strikes broke out in several places and on 5 March Šrobár declared a state of emergency.⁵¹² According to the *Volksstimme*, the railway workers found support even among ‘their Czech colleagues’; if this was true, it was presumably for their economic demands rather than their refusal to swear the oath of allegiance. However, the Slovak social democratic newspaper *Robotnicke noviny* offered to mobilise two hundred men to help run the postal service after postal employees had gone on strike. As could be expected, the German social democrats described this action as ‘attacking the strikers in the back’ and ‘boundless characterlessness’. In stark contrast to this they praised the Italian colonel Barreca, who was reported to leave Pressburg for good after he had left the hospital where he had been treated for his injuries sustained on 12 February. Barreca was said to have won the sympathy of the ‘entire population’ but to have aroused the ‘greatest aversion in Czecho-Slovak circles’, which resulted in his transfer and his departure from the city. Indeed Barreca sent an amount of one thousand crowns to Mayor Richard Kánya to help support ‘the poor orphans’ of Pressburg.⁵¹³ Thus, in the extraordinary conditions of national revolution in Central Europe, it could happen that one group of social democrats denounced another group of social democrats as traitors while praising a military officer for his ‘humaneness’.

After the detention of the railway workers the Pressburg *Arbeiterrat* sent a delegation to Milan Ivanka, who was in charge of security measures, to inquire about their condition. Ivanka said that no specific charges against the detainees had been made thus far and assured the delegation they would be treated as ‘political prisoners’, not as criminals. The *Arbeiterrat* decided that the only thing it could do was to await further developments.⁵¹⁴ The period of organising large-scale strikes and protest movements against the Czechoslovak government was apparently at an end. Only the group of predominantly Magyar government employees, whose very existence was threatened by government policy and whose Hungarian loyalties were more pronounced than those of other workers, were willing to engage in strike action once again. The government decided to cut off communication with the outside world in order to deal with this last effort to contest Czechoslovak rule in Slovakia. According to the *Volksstimme*, coercion by the government to swear allegiance was unacceptable in terms of international law; the striking employees were said to have the right to protest against the violation of the freedom of conscience and the reduction of their wages. These claims were rather naive, another instance of wishful thinking and seeking the moral high ground in a situation where a national revolution was going on. But the paper was probably right to argue that the Czechoslovak government was ‘not interested in an agreement’ and was only using the situation to speed up the process of replacing strikers with Czech workers. This proved again ‘how harmful is the national division of the proletariat’, it complained. The only ray of hope for the Pressburg social democrats was the report that newspapers in Prague, and even the Prague government, were critical about some of the measures taken by Šrobár’s Slovak government. The latter’s ‘new but unusual power’ seemed to have caused a fit of ‘megalomania’ among Slovak leaders. The *Volksstimme* – which never could decide who was most to blame: the Šrobár government, the Slovak social democrats, or the newly arrived Czechs – also reported that in Slovakia the courts of justice were taken over by judges from Bohemia and Moravia, additional proof of the ‘boundless expansion of Czech rule’.

⁵¹² Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, p. 160. Already at the end of February mention was made of a ‘militarisation’ of the Slovak railway system and the need to send railway military police from the Czech Lands to Slovakia: SNA, MP, Box 270 (correspondence of 27 February 1919). During February and March there was a great deal of correspondence between the Šrobár administration in Bratislava and local administrative offices across Slovakia about the need for a systematic policy of discharging, expelling from Slovakia, or detaining disloyal former Hungarian officials and government employees (see especially SNA, MP, Box 270).

⁵¹³ *Volksstimme*, 6 March 1919.

⁵¹⁴ *Volksstimme*, 9 March 1919.

That the Slovaks were assisting this process, the paper explained by the tendency of people everywhere to think that ‘God is with the strong’, and by the Slovaks’ desire to advance beyond the historical stage of ‘national martyrdom’ and to ‘enjoy its fruits’ at last.⁵¹⁵ Of the paper’s many statements during the months of national revolution, this observation was certainly not the most superficial one. Perhaps the German social democrats were beginning to understand that the Slovaks were really on the side of the Czechs, despite occasional friction and the fact that some of them were more enthusiastic than others.

Meanwhile the anniversary of the Hungarian revolution of 15 March 1848 was approaching, an event also traditionally celebrated by the Pressburgers and the social democratic movement. The government must have feared another wave of unrest, for on 3 March the Slovak government (followed a few days later by the local Pressburg authorities) explicitly prohibited the public celebration of the 15 March anniversary.⁵¹⁶ Perhaps the anxiety of the government was increased by the fact that on the day before the anniversary, on 14 March 1919, Pressburg was to be officially renamed ‘Bratislava’. This created another alienating factor, another psychological problem for the city’s majority population. The establishment of the new state frontier and of new psychological boundaries between Czechoslovakia and Hungary was symbolised by the closing of the Pressburg bridge linking the Hungarian southern bank of the Danube with the Czechoslovak northern side on which the old city was located. The bridge was blocked halfway with barbed wire and became for many a depressing example and a prominent symbol of the separation of people who had been united before. This, at least, is how an article in the *Volksstimme* represented the new situation. It spoke of ‘pain and anger’ in the hearts of the Pressburgers, especially those who were immediately affected, and claimed it was the ‘lust for power and property’ that was responsible for the new hostility and hatred between people who were at bottom ‘peaceful and conciliatory’. Today a ‘poisonous quarrel’ between different nations was going on and the question was when the Pressburg bridge could become again a link between people instead of a frontier and a ‘symbol of peace and harmony’.⁵¹⁷ Under the circumstances the German social democrats could pose as advocates of international brotherhood, which sharply differentiated them from the new rulers in Pressburg, who were busy dividing people from one another. The introduction on 14 March of the city’s new official name ‘Bratislava’ was seen as another divisive instead of unifying step and was received with great scepticism in the German press. The new name ‘Bratislava’ was declared ‘untranslatable’ by the government, which meant that in principle the old names ‘Pressburg’ and ‘Pozsony’ were no longer tolerated as equivalents in the public domain. However, after heavy protests newspapers whose name included the word ‘Pressburg’ (such as the *Pressburger Zeitung* or the *Pressburger Presse*) were allowed to keep their old name.⁵¹⁸ Moreover, the name ‘Pressburg’ and even ‘Pozsony’ was not consistently suppressed in practice and continued to be used alongside the new name ‘Bratislava’ on the unofficial level, as can be gathered from the pages of the *Volksstimme* and other local newspapers. In accordance with the official change of name, however, it seems appropriate to speak from now on of Bratislava as well as Pressburg; whether the one or the other

⁵¹⁵ *Volksstimme*, 13 March 1919.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*; *PZ*, morning paper, 8 and 11 March 1919; Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, p. 161; SNA, MP, Box 270 for various documents on the banning of the 15 March celebration.

⁵¹⁷ *Volksstimme*, 9 March 1919.

⁵¹⁸ Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, pp. 547, 552; Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, p. 68; Egbert K. Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei in den Jahren 1918-1929. Ein Beitrag zur Nationalitätenproblematik*, Munich 1971, p. 41; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, p. 37. The *PZ*, morning paper, 22 March 1919 confirmed that the Slovak ‘Ministerial Council’ in Bratislava had issued a ministerial decree that Pressburg was renamed ‘Bratislava’ as of 14 March 1919; it would seem therefore that the initiative came from Šrobár. The *Volksstimme* of 20 March 1919 noted that the other new name sometimes suggested, ‘Wilsongorod’, had apparently been dropped.

name is used will depend on the context of the argument. The fact that Bratislava had become the capital of the new Slovakia – alternative propositions to choose a capital city with a more distinct ethnic-Slovak profile were rejected – was not regarded by the Germans and Magyars as a reason for joy or pride. A German newspaper wrote: ‘The Pressburg Magyars and Germans would happily do without the honour of Pressburg as capital city, because then they will not be so much exposed to Slavicisation.’⁵¹⁹ This was a revealing statement. In addition to a measure like the prohibition of the 15 March celebration, it showed that political life and interethnic relations in the new Bratislava were as yet far from ‘normal’.

Already before 15 March the sporting of cockades, ribbons, and other symbols in the Hungarian colours red, white, and green had been forbidden. In response to this some people began to wear white-spotted red toadstools with green leaves, which were forbidden as well, however. Nevertheless on 15 March some 35,000 of these toadstools seem to have been deposited in front of the memorial of the Hungarian national poet Sándor Petőfi, a symbol of the Hungarian revolutionary struggle of 1848.⁵²⁰ The anniversary of 15 March was seen as an occasion for expressing Hungarian patriotism, and therefore (from the Czechoslovak point of view quite understandably) it was suppressed by the Šrobár regime. From the phrasing of the 3 March decree, it appears that Šrobár’s decision to prohibit the anniversary celebrations was – again – motivated by ‘reports’ that ‘agitators’ were sent from Hungary to Slovakia. This time their aim was ‘to urge the Magyar population to demonstrate against the CSR’ on 15 March, so that there was a serious risk of disturbances. It reminds us of similar stories surrounding the events of 12 February, and it is possible that in addition to real apprehension there was an element of Czechoslovak ‘counter-propaganda’ involved to justify the restrictive measures. The authorities impressed upon all school teachers and church ministers in Slovakia (having in mind especially the Magyars) that all attempts to organise festivities in schools and churches in connection with the 15 March anniversary would be severely punished.⁵²¹ The national-democratic dimension of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 was traditionally honoured by the Magyar and German social democrats too. On 9 March Antal Svarka, in his capacity of secretary of the Pressburg Social Democratic Party, asked permission for a workers’ demonstration to be held on Sunday 16 March, the day after the official anniversary; his request was rejected.⁵²² The *Volksstimme* published an article about the special character of the revolution of 1848 in Hungary and about the role that different social classes had played in it. It was admitted that the revolution had a national-democratic rather than a purely ‘bourgeois democratic’ character; only in 1918 a real democratic – and partly a social – revolution was carried through by an alliance of the democratic bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Indeed it was argued that Hungary was at present right in the middle of a proletarian revolution, the result of which ‘was yet unknown’. Despite its limitations, the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 was regarded as a ‘glorious’ event by the Magyar and German – much less by the Slovak – social democrats, as a struggle for freedom against the old order and the Habsburg regime. In the early morning of 15 March the Bratislava *Arbeiterrat* passed a resolution declaring that the prohibition of the celebration of the 1848 anniversary was an ‘insult’ of the population and a violation of the rights that the revolutionaries of 1848 had been fighting for. To protest against the ‘anti-popular’ (*volksfeindlich*) and repressive Czechoslovak government, the *Arbeiterrat* decided to call a one-hour strike (from 9 to 10 a.m.) that day. The

⁵¹⁹ *Pressburger Presse*, 17 March 1919.

⁵²⁰ C.A. Macartney, *Hungary and Her Successors*, New York 1937, p. 104.

⁵²¹ SNA, MP, Box 270: copies of telegrams showing that Šrobár instructed all county sheriffs in Slovakia to enforce the banning of the celebrations. See also the *PZ*, morning paper, 8 March 1919, which reported that Zoch issued ‘strong warnings’ to the Pressburg population. Interestingly enough, on 7 March the ‘name day’ of President Masaryk (Thomas) was celebrated in a Pressburg government building; one national-political symbolism was replacing (and suppressing) the other. See *ibid*.

⁵²² SNA, MP, Box 270.

following day it was reported that the strike had been peaceful and successful; all shops were closed and Bratislava's public transport system stopped.⁵²³ It is clear that the prohibition of the 15 March celebration was experienced as an intolerable repressive act by the social democratic movement and the Pressburg citizenry. The meaning of the anniversary as a feature of the city's 'Hungarian' political culture should not be underestimated. But it is also clear that, unlike certain groups of government employees, a strike of only an hour was all the Bratislava social democratic movement dared to initiate under post-12 February conditions. The movement was not willing to stake everything on defending the Hungarian connection or Hungarian political traditions.

More than ever before, the principal weapon of the German social democrats was their press organ. The *Volksstimme* was keen to analyse an issue like 'the future of the peoples of the Czecho-Slovak State almost three months after the occupation of Upper Hungary'. An article on this subject acknowledged that a crucial political actor in the new situation was the strong Czech social democratic movement. The paper noted that although there were indications that the Czech social democrats were 'sobering down' from their 'nationalist frenzy', a major part of the Czech working class remained highly susceptible to 'chauvinist dogmas'. It was argued that the explanation for this phenomenon could be found in the past, when the Czech 'separatist faction' had been 'poisoning' the masses with chauvinism, destroying the unity of the Austrian social democratic organisations, and collaborating with the Czech bourgeois parties. The actions of the Czech separatists were said to be 'without parallel in the International, for they are the only ones who incited the proletariat with nationalism'. This superficial historical analysis revealed once more how little understanding the German and Magyar social democrats tended to have for the aspirations of the Slav nations and their Slav fellow-social democrats. The *Volksstimme* expected that it would take a long time to overcome the nationalist 'delusion' prevailing among the Czech working class. Therefore German and Magyar social democracy was not in a position to put up effective resistance to the 'absolutist' and 'militarist' Czechoslovak regime. This meant that 'the peoples of German Bohemia and Upper Hungary' would continue to suffer from a state of emergency that was a 'unique' form of political oppression, forcing 'hundreds of people' – meant were presumably former government employees – to leave their homeland every day. All this was happening while in Germany, Austria, and Hungary 'the class-conscious proletariat was ruling'. It was pointed out that there had been no elections in the CSR yet, but not that the same held true for Hungary. The *Volksstimme* reiterated that 'a real peace should also bring a plebiscite in German Bohemia and Upper Hungary'. In 'Upper Hungary' – the paper was slow to introduce the new geopolitical term 'Slovakia' – 'at least ninety percent might vote against the Czechs', because the Slovaks were 'dissatisfied with Czech rule' as well. But if the Peace Conference made a decision to the advantage of the Czechs, which would be supported 'by only a few others', would 'the intelligent Germans and Magyars accept being dominated by these few renegades, morally deeply fallen people?' Could one imagine a situation 'whereby in the middle of free Europe a little Asia would exist?' This would be 'worse' than the situation in the former Monarchy. And similar to Otto Bauer and other ethnic-German social democrats, the *Volksstimme* explained what would become the greatest problem for the Czechoslovak rulers: they would suffer from 'permanent fear of seventy million Germans and twelve million Magyars'. It was 'impossible to understand' why the Czech social democrats were supporting a policy that was bringing this about, it was argued.⁵²⁴ Confusion about the character of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party – a 'chauvinist' organisation on the one hand, a socialist

⁵²³ *Volksstimme*, 16 March 1919.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.* The *Volksstimme* of 23 March had a 'travel story' about some people travelling through Slovakia and constantly observing that the Slovaks had different views on all sorts of matters from the Czechs; perhaps the story was authentic, perhaps it was made up.

party that might mend its ways, on the other – continued to play an important role in the German social democrats' attempts to define their position. The Czechoslovak party itself was subject to a good deal of confusion as well, which was partly caused by the national question.

One week after the publication of this rather biased article, the *Volksstimme* dished up another article analysing the latest developments in the different 'Czech' political parties, in particular in the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party (CSSDP). It was claimed that the CSSDP was experiencing an 'intense crisis', as its left wing became increasingly critical of the government. The 'Czech workers' – as usual the Slovaks were hardly mentioned – were 'looking enviously at Germany and Austria', where democratically elected parliaments were creating the foundations of a 'new social order'. Like the Germans, the Czech social democrats disagreed with measures like the obligation to report mass meetings well in advance, and because of their frequent ignoring this decree some of their leaders had been arrested, newspapers confiscated, etc. According to the *Volksstimme*, the government's repressive policy against other national groups was rejected by (part of) the Czech organised workers as well. Already on 16 February a conference of the Bohemian CSSDP had protested against the shooting of workers in Slovakia and Teschen and against restrictions of the freedom of association and assembly and freedom of the press. It seemed that especially the Czech left wing was critical of government policies towards the Germans and other national minorities, but as we have noted above a mainstream social democrat like Minister of Justice Soukup had a critical attitude too. The new Czech left-wing social democratic newspaper *Sociální demokrat* wrote that 'they were happy' about the foundation of the CSR, but their goal was 'a socialist not a bourgeois republic'. The paper was popular among a group like the radical Czech mine workers in the Bohemian town of Kladno, where on 8 March 1919 thirty thousand workers demonstrated against the 'suppression' of the freedom of association and assembly and 'the shooting of workers in German Bohemia' four days earlier. They even demanded that the social democrats leave the Czechoslovak multiparty coalition government. The *Volksstimme* responded enthusiastically that the Czech working class was about to 'blow up' the government coalition, to establish a new social order, and to create a normal relationship with the other nations in the state.⁵²⁵ But remarkably enough another article in the same issue of the *Volksstimme* described 'the Czechs' as a people who had 'learned' from the old Habsburg rulers how to carry out political repression; their national liberation had only led to a policy of 'revenge'. The decree prohibiting the 15 March celebration, the threats to detain prominent Pressburg personalities if the population did not obey, and the way in which the military and police were patrolling the streets of the city for several days were abundant proof of the 'intimidation' that was going on. 'The people did not let themselves be provoked' and on 15 and 16 March the city remained calm, but all of this 'had left deep traces' on their feelings. The contrast with the situation in Hungary was great because at the other side of the Danube people were singing political songs on 15 March that could be heard in the city. The well-known social democratic leader and native of Bratislava Heinrich Kalmár had come over from Budapest to give a speech near the Hungarian riverbank. In the city itself not everyone remained silent. At a worker meeting at Bratislava's Siemens factory on 11 March critical statements were made similar to what the *Volksstimme* was writing. A speaker argued that the workers could not understand why the government of a 'democratic republic' was using 'Habsburg' methods against them; it looked like the actions of a 'Czarist' regime. According to the *Volksstimme* the population of the city was now divided in two groups: those who had lived there for years, including the Germans, the Magyars, and the Slovaks, and those who had 'invaded' Pressburg 'to establish a new city called "Bratislava"'. The first group was living in 'miserable' conditions, the

⁵²⁵ *Volksstimme*, 23 March 1919, also quoting *Sociální demokrat*. See for the Czech left wing in the CSSDP at this stage also Zdenek L. Suda, *Zealots and Rebels. A History of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia*, Stanford 1980, p. 23.

second in 'affluence'.⁵²⁶ Of course, by the second group was meant the Czechs, who were taking over much of the bureaucracy, the postal service, the railways, etc.*

Meanwhile the rather hopeless strike actions of groups of government employees that had begun during the first week of March continued for another two weeks or so. An article in the *Volksstimme* written by a spokesman of the former Hungarian officials and employees – apparently not a social democratic or trade union functionary – explained that the conflicts between the Czechoslovak government and the 'public employees of the Hungarian State' were mounting from day to day. While numbers of postal and railway employees were striking (and then dismissed by the government), others who expressed their solidarity or refused to swear an oath of allegiance to the CSR were dismissed as well. This included the judges of the court of justice in the city of Nitra, the employees of the local financial administration in Bratislava, and schoolteachers in predominantly Magyar southern Slovakia. It was claimed that the teachers of a Magyar secondary school near the Hungarian border who refused to swear allegiance to the CSR were forced to leave Slovakia. When they were followed by the majority of their students, who decided to attend school in Hungary, the government declared that the school would be continued as a 'Czechoslovak' school. It is quite obvious that the background to this last wave of strikes and protests was largely political and much more than just a social or economic affair. There may have been good reasons for the Bratislava social democratic movement to refrain from throwing its weight behind the Magyar strikers, even if it subscribed to many of their views. The spokesman of the striking employees argued in the *Volksstimme* that the 'core of the conflict' was the question of the *provisorium*, i.e., the strikers' claim that Czechoslovak power in the Hungarian occupied territories was not definitive as the government maintained, but merely provisional. The final state frontier could only be decided by the Peace Conference and such a decision had thus far not been made in an internationally accepted formal way. The government employees would only recognise the new *definitivum* if the Hungarian government informed them about an international legal decision that Slovakia was no longer part of Hungary. Until that moment their relations with the Czechoslovak government were 'those of employees of an occupied territory' with 'an occupying military power'. They were 'still hoping for a favourable outcome' and the Czechoslovak government 'could not deprive them of their hope'.⁵²⁷ The last bit of hope that annexation by the CSR could be averted was thus expressed through a desperate protest movement of former Hungarian government employees who were in fact sacrificing their jobs. It is remarkable that a succession of Entente notes, Czechoslovak government proclamations, and newspaper reports all of which declared that Slovakia must be regarded as part of the CSR were not accepted as final proof that this was indeed the case. It is unlikely that this stubbornness was simply the result of agitation by Hungarian agents. No doubt there continued to be a strong element of spontaneous resistance on the part of people who had always been loyal to the Hungarian State. Moreover, there was a lot of confusion about developments at the Peace Conference and there continued to be different views on the future position of Bratislava, both among the German social democrats and other political groups. Reports received at the end of March that the definitive frontiers of the CSR had been settled were followed by other reports that President Wilson had threatened to withdraw from the Peace Conference if the other Entente Powers did not accept his Fourteen Points as the basis for a final peace settlement. Indeed there were even fresh rumours that Bratislava would be internationalised.⁵²⁸ Some of

⁵²⁶ *Volksstimme*, 23 March 1919.

⁵²⁷ *Volksstimme*, 20 March 1919. Although this article was written by some one who was apparently not a member of the German-Magyar Social Democratic Party, its publication in the *Volksstimme* suggests the party supported his views. However, it was not prepared to follow the government employees in their strike actions.

⁵²⁸ The confusion increased during April; see the *Volksstimme* of 6 April, 17 April, and 27 April 1919. The paper noted that because they were 'completely isolated' from the outside world, they did not know what 'rumours' and reports were true. Hardening Czechoslovak censorship after March 1919 made it more difficult for the

these reports may have given a new lease of life to the hope that a plebiscite might be held in Slovakia and that annexation by the CSR could still be avoided. However, Magyar and German recalcitrance may also have been caused by unwillingness to accept the national revolution anyhow, not just by a sincere belief that the last diplomatic word had not yet been said; the same held true for the increasingly unpredictable and unstable Hungarian government. But even if the Pressburg social democrats supported the legal argument of the *provisorium* too, they were no longer prepared to take unnecessary political risks by openly confronting the new rulers. The labour movement did not go further than making general political or ‘moral’ statements and raising its voice against certain concrete government policies; it now acted cautiously and pragmatically. The *Arbeiterrat* protested against the fact that striking postal workers in Bratislava had been told by the government that, as ‘foreigners’ (Magyar employees who refused to swear allegiance to the CSR), they had to leave Czechoslovak territory and that those who refused to leave would be forcibly expelled across the border by the police. According to the Bratislava *Arbeiterrat* this was a ‘violation of international law’, but no further action followed.⁵²⁹ Although the organisation was keen to denounce ‘opportunists’, she was at the same time sensible enough not to identify with openly pro-Hungarian elements.

Perhaps the most effective institutional forum for voicing protests against government policies was the Bratislava town council. At its meeting on 17 March the council was informed by one of its social democratic members that another person, one Josef Skoda, had died of his wounds sustained on 12 February, raising the total number of dead caused by the events on that day to nine.⁵³⁰ A few days later, the social democrats announced a plan to erect a monument for the victims of 12 February.⁵³¹ Another sensitive issue laid before the town council was the government’s plan to hold a census of the population of occupied Slovakia. One council member insisted that the ‘three thousand’ Czech officials and military personnel should not be included in the list of the general Bratislava population, because this would produce a ‘distorted’ picture. Wittich wished to know if it was true that an Entente commission had visited the city to examine its ethnic character. County Sheriff Zoch replied that the Entente commission had only visited Bratislava’s surroundings to ascertain if it was indeed predominantly Slovak (as the Czechoslovak government had argued); the ethnic character of the wider area, not just ‘the largely German character’ of the city was ‘decisive’. Zoch also explained that the census in Slovakia was meant to collect fresh evidence in order to ‘correct’ the unreliable Hungarian census figures. It seems that not the least important objective of the census was to establish the real number of Slovak (and other non-Magyar) inhabitants of Bratislava; a government decree

population of Slovakia to establish the truth about what was happening on the international level. In fact, the situation was as follows. In March 1919 the Czechoslovak Commission of the Peace Conference finally delimited the Slovak-Hungarian frontier (largely as Czechoslovak foreign minister Edvard Beneš had proposed) and in early April the Peace Conference approved the Commission’s recommendations. But the signing of peace treaties with Austria and Hungary was delayed by the rise of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, which threatened to throw the whole situation into disarray. See Mamatey, ‘Establishment of the Republic’, p. 36; D. Perman, *The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State. Diplomatic History of the Boundaries of Czechoslovakia, 1914-1920*, Leiden 1962, pp. 136-8, 144-52.

⁵²⁹ *Volksstimme*, 23 March 1919. At the same time, Hungary was expelling Slovaks without Hungarian citizenship, for example a group of 250 Slovak workers at the beginning of March. See *PZ*, evening paper, 11 March 1919: report on the meeting of Slovak MP’s and county sheriffs in Bratislava, 9 March 1919 (statement by Dr. Okanik).

⁵³⁰ *Volksstimme*, 20 March 1919; see also *PZ*, evening paper, 17 March 1919, which reported that Josef Skoda, a shopkeeper at the market square, had died that day. At the town council meeting of 21 February, Zoch had already spoken of nine dead persons; this included the boy who was shot by a Czech soldier on 16 February and another (eighth) person who died of his wounds sustained on 12 February. It would seem therefore that Skoda was fatal victim number ten (and number nine of those killed as a result of the 12 February shootings).

⁵³¹ *Volksstimme*, 23 March 1919.

announcing the census called upon all Slovaks in the city ‘to openly report their nationality’.⁵³² However, Zoch promised the town council to ask the government to insert a separate class of recently arrived officials and employees from Bohemia and Moravia. The *Volksstimme* observed that it was true that the Hungarian census was unreliable, but they hoped that ‘the Czechs will not do the same thing’. The census, which originally had been planned for the period between 24 March and 3 April, was postponed because of the political and military crisis following the establishment of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. At least as controversial in the town council as the census and as much considered indicative of failing Czechoslovak policies and Czechoslovak intentions was the persistent problem of mass unemployment. The municipal commission responsible for addressing the problem and for supporting the unemployed, known by its post-war name of ‘Demobilisation Commission’, proposed to start new public works to help reduce the level of unemployment among both skilled and unskilled workers. On 14 March Zoch announced that from now on workers could only be discharged after permission had been received from the Demobilisation Commission. But it was questionable if this measure was really effective. At the town council meeting of 17 March Rudolf Chovan said that so many ‘foreign’ workers came to Bratislava that local workers could not find jobs.⁵³³ During the following weeks there were repeated complaints that concrete action to fight unemployment, in particular by promoting building activity, was lagging behind all the beautiful plans and intentions proclaimed at the various conferences dealing with the problem.⁵³⁴ The lack of progress in fighting unemployment led the *Volksstimme* to declare at the beginning of April that if the government wanted ‘to chase away the ghost of Bolshevism’, she must create real employment opportunities.⁵³⁵ By this time the Bolsheviks had seized power in Hungary. This created a new political situation internationally, but also domestically in Bratislava and in the rest of Slovakia.

A few days after the official proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic on 23 March 1919, the *Volksstimme* brought the news that the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ had been established in Hungary.⁵³⁶ Béla Kun, ‘people’s commissar for foreign affairs’ and the strong man of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, was quoted as saying that the Hungarian revolution had been forced into action by two political factors. The first was the desire to end the yoke of capitalism; the second was resistance to ‘Entente Imperialism’, which wanted ‘to destroy Hungary’. Perhaps even more revealing was Kun’s statement that ‘the Czech, Slovak, and Romanian bourgeois conquerors want to suppress the Hungarian working-class revolution with armed force’. Initially, developments in Hungary were received with a degree of goodwill by the German social democratic press in Bratislava, but gradually this gave way to growing scepticism. In part this

⁵³² Ibid.; *PZ*, morning paper, 18 March 1919. See for the organisational preparations for the census also *PZ*, evening paper, 11 March 1919, which reported that Czech teachers from Bohemia and Moravia might be asked to help. Further *PZ*, morning paper, 15 March 1919, which reported that the Bratislava mayor called for local volunteers; *PZ*, morning paper, 29 March 1919, for the government decree of 20 February on holding a census in Slovakia. The latter laid down, among other things, ‘it is necessary that every member of the Slovak nation pays attention to his national honour and openly reports his nationality’; fear to do so (as in the Hungarian period) was unnecessary and even ‘reprehensible’ (*strafwürdig*).

⁵³³ *Volksstimme*, 20 March 1919; *PZ*, morning paper, 18 March 1919.

⁵³⁴ See the *Volksstimme* of 6 April 1919 for reports on two conferences (on 21 and 25 March) dealing with the problem of unemployment and bringing together representatives of the government, employers, and the labour movement. See also the *PZ*, morning paper, of 23, 27, 28 and 29 March 1919. These reports show that the coming of large numbers of ‘foreign’ (i.e., Czech) workers to Bratislava had become a hot issue. Other controversial issues were the granting of Slovak government contracts to Czech instead of local firms and the alleged transportation of raw materials (tobacco, wool) from Slovakia to Bohemia, which benefited Czech industry but reduced employment opportunities in Bratislava.

⁵³⁵ *Volksstimme*, 6 April 1919.

⁵³⁶ On 21 March 1919 the Budapest Workers’ Council proclaimed a ‘Soviet government’ and on 23 March Béla Kun proclaimed the Hungarian Soviet Republic in a declaration that was also meant for the outside world. See Oscar Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Hungary*, 2nd edn, New York 1969 (1st edn 1924), pp. 96-8.

was caused by social democratic doubts about the methods of revolutionary Bolshevism, in part by the fact that the German-Magyar labour movement was deeply mistrusted by the Czechoslovak government, which decided to detain several of its most important leaders. The formation of the new Hungarian regime was accompanied by the proclamation of martial law in Hungary, and on 25 March Vavro Šrobár declared martial law in Slovakia too ‘in connection with the events in Budapest’. As we have seen, this had been preceded already three weeks before by the declaration of a state of emergency following renewed protest and strike actions by disloyal government employees. The declaration of martial law meant, *inter alia*, that public meetings without police permission were forbidden, that a curfew was imposed, and that censorship was intensified. Moreover, eighteen prominent political personalities in Bratislava were arrested and detained. This happened ‘without cause or reason, only on grounds of suspicion [of supporting the Hungarian Bolsheviks]’, as the *Volksstimme* wrote on 27 March. All except two were leaders of the German and Magyar social democratic movement, including Paul Wittich, Samuel Mayer, Rudolf Chovan, and Elsa Grailich.⁵³⁷ Few of them, if any, were sympathisers with the Bolshevik movement, and it would seem that the Czechoslovak authorities – notably Šrobár, his Commissioner for Internal Affairs Milan Ivanka, and Bratislava’s police chief Brunner – were as before unwilling or unable to distinguish between moderate social democrats and revolutionary pro-Hungarian communists.⁵³⁸ On 26 March a ‘deputation of prominent citizens’ led by Bratislava’s vice-mayor visited Zoch to ask for the release of the

⁵³⁷ SNA, MP, Box 255: list of detained Bratislava civilians, 27 March 1919, with a political profile, drawn up by a Bratislava police officer, co-signed by Richard Brunner, chief of police, and approved by the Commissioner for Administrative (Internal) Affairs Milan Ivanka. See further *PZ*, evening paper, 26 March 1919; *Volksstimme*, 27 March 1919; Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 63, 78; Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, p. 69; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 42; Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, p. 90; Šuchová, ‘Sociálna demokracia’, p. 119. The *PZ*, morning paper, 25 March 1919 reported that the legal basis for the declaration of martial law and the emergency measures was, *inter alia*, a Hungarian law from 1912. The death penalty could be given for high treason, incitement, etc.; all public meetings and demonstrations were prohibited; curfews could be imposed; every disturbance of the peace would be suppressed by force. See the *PZ*, morning paper, 28 March 1919 and the *Volksstimme* of 30 March 1919 for the imposition of a curfew in Bratislava on 28 March. People were forbidden to leave their homes after 10 p.m. on pain of three months’ imprisonment and a fee of five thousand crowns; all meetings of associations, churches, etc., had to be asked permission for with the police, who could send an officer to supervise the meeting. See for the details and the exact wording of the declaration of martial law *Dokumenty k dejinám KSC na Slovensku (1917-1928)*, ed. Júlia Hautová, Bratislava, 1981, document 6, pp. 29-30.

⁵³⁸ In this respect nothing seemed to have changed since early February. Of the sixteen detained social democrats, Chovan, Mayer, Wittich, Judovics, Németh, Kiss, and Grailich were described as ‘communists’ in the police report that served as the ground for interning them; Chovan, Wittich, and some of the others were also characterised as ‘violent’, ‘working by means of terror’, ‘fanatic’, etc. The whole group of detainees was depicted as dangerous pro-Hungarian communists who were a ‘threat to the security of the CSR’. The report was clearly not a serious assessment of the political orientation of the Bratislava social democratic leadership. See SNA, MP, Box 255: list of detained Bratislava civilians, 27 March 1919. There may have been pro-Bolshevik elements in the Bratislava labour movement, especially among the Magyars, but the authorities hardly made an effort to differentiate between them and the moderate leaders. Perhaps they were only superficially informed about the movement, perhaps their fear and mistrust was too great to bother about such differences. A systematic effort was made to clamp down on all suspected ‘Bolsheviks’. Šrobár instructed the county sheriffs to detain ‘all leaders of the communist movement’, but also the editors of ‘disobedient’ newspapers, and to search the detainees’ homes; instructions by the Ministry of the Interior in Prague spoke of taking steps against ‘communist elements in the Social Democratic Party’. See Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 63, 77-8. The fact that people like Wittich were arrested because they were seen as pro-communist does not suggest that the authorities in Slovakia had a clear understanding of who these ‘communist elements’ were. Nevertheless, at a meeting in Bratislava on 11 April of the Slovak county sheriffs and Slovak MP’s Šrobár made the claim they had ‘confiscated all kinds of documents proving that the persons concerned [the detainees] were preparing in our territory a Bolshevik dictatorship of the proletariat’. He also said that since the detention of these persons there was ‘relative calm among the working class’. See *PZ*, morning paper, 12 April 1919.

detainees ('who did not engage in any agitation') or at least their internment in Bratislava instead of the notorious Ilava prison. Zoch said he would try to intervene with the government, but the internment was 'a military measure' (over which he had no jurisdiction). Four days later a delegation that also included representatives of the working-class movement visited Ivanka, who said he could not carry out the request to release the detainees. He claimed that the latter were 'the exponents of the local political movement that in Hungary has degenerated into Bolshevism'. According to the *Pressburger Zeitung*, 'the deputation left in a dejected mood'.⁵³⁹

The government took unprecedented security measures to avert the new danger coming from Hungary and to liquidate the last hotbeds of domestic Magyar political and labour resistance. Šrobár issued a special decree on 'security, peace, and public order'. Those who were, or who were suspected to be, a security risk could be immediately expelled from Slovakia, detained, or placed under police supervision. The phrase that Šrobár was 'dictator of Slovakia' now seemed to have become reality. After the proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the majority of the old employees who were still in Czechoslovak government service were dismissed, including 439 postal and telegraph workers in Bratislava. A total of 1,118 railway workers were discharged and replaced with Czechs and Slovaks. Some individual Magyars and groups of former government employees were simply expelled to Hungary; this happened for example in May 1919 with forty-two working-class families from Bratislava. By April the number of persons detained for political reasons in Ilava prison was already 143, many of them from Bratislava. The number increased during the following months and at one point detainees from Slovakia had to be brought to prisons in Bohemia and Moravia for lack of space. In Bratislava strong military units were on the alert to defend the city against a possible attack from revolutionary Hungary. The consequence of all these security measures was that normal political activity by German and Magyar social democratic organisations became all but impossible. This situation continued throughout the period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, that is, until the beginning of August 1919.⁵⁴⁰ The only thing a Pressburg political movement like the German social democrats could do was carrying on a cautious form of agitation and political criticism by means of their press organ, with Czechoslovak censorship being markedly intensified in the course of April.⁵⁴¹ The efforts to have the social democratic and other detainees released from prison were continued, while in various newspaper articles the international background to the rise of Hungarian Bolshevism (seen as a product of unreasonable Entente demands) was explained. According to the *Volksstimme*, the detention of political leaders had caused 'great bitterness' among the Bratislava population. 'The bit of trust that the government had gained by making tactful steps has been lost again, right at the moment when it was most necessary.' It was argued that the detention of the 'social democratic party leadership' and other political figures would be harmful to keeping the peace in the city.⁵⁴² But this argument hardly proved true, for there was no way for the German and Magyar social democratic movement to seriously influence the course of events after March 1919.

According to the *Volksstimme*, it was the Entente policy of 'humiliating' defeated nations

⁵³⁹ *PZ*, evening paper, 26 March 1919; *PZ*, morning paper, 30 March 1919.

⁵⁴⁰ Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 63; Provazník, *Robotnicke hnutie v Bratislave*, p. 90. See also Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, p. 161, according to whom the Czechs who replaced the Hungarian government employees in Slovakia 'were better paid than Slovaks' in similar positions.

⁵⁴¹ Large sections, sometimes entire columns or pages, were left blank in the issues of the *Volksstimme* of 6 April, 13 April, and 20 April 1919 in particular. Another newspaper heavily censored was the *Pressburger Presse*, a weekly known for its satirical and critical style. On 29 March this paper was closed down on the instruction of Šrobár, because an article in its last issue allegedly threatened 'the interests of the army and the Czechoslovak Republic'; a week later it was announced that on 7 April the *Pressburger Presse* would appear again. See *PZ*, morning paper, 30 March and 5 April 1919.

⁵⁴² *Volksstimme*, 30 March 1919.

like Hungary that drove the latter into the arms of Bolshevism. The struggle against communism could only be successful, so the paper argued, if all nations were granted self-determination in accordance with Wilson's programme, instead of one nation oppressing the other. It was claimed that the Entente wanted to dominate 'the Central European nations' that had liberated themselves from the old regime and that the Peace Conference did not keep its promises. 'Is it surprising, then, that all elements of a nation unite in one camp, protesting loudly and opposing with all their strength the new oppression?', the *Volksstimme* asked. Making a somewhat awkward comparison, the paper argued that as the Peace of Brest-Litovsk (a 'mistake' of the Central Powers with 'great consequences') had 'awakened the seed of Bolshevism' in Russia, so the Paris Peace Conference, if it pursued the same goal of imposing an unjust peace on Hungary, would do something that was 'even worse than a mistake': it 'would commit a crime it could never justify'. It was also claimed however that since the rise to power of Hungarian Bolshevism the Entente Powers were becoming aware of the mistakes they had made with regard to Hungary and now they wanted to speed up the process of concluding a peace treaty with it.⁵⁴³ Despite its analytical shortcomings, the *Volksstimme* was right to stress that Hungary felt deeply humiliated and that the demoralisation of the Hungarian nation, in combination with the impotence of the Károlyi government and its successors on the international stage, had led to a kind of escapist political radicalism. That this radicalism could even result in attempts to reconquer some of the lost territories in Slovakia and elsewhere under the banner of the socialist revolution, subsequent events were to show. The observations of the Austrian social democratic *Arbeiter-Zeitung* were even more to the point. It wrote: 'To Hungary the social revolution seems the only way out of the national catastrophe.' The dictatorship of the proletariat was 'a dictatorship born from despair', a 'declaration of war against the Entente and its Czechoslovak, Romanian, and Yugoslav vassals', a 'means that could only be used by the most extreme despair'.⁵⁴⁴ While Hungarian Bolshevism seems to have frightened Bratislava's German and Magyar middle classes, its impact on the local working-class movement may have been more complicated, especially during the first weeks of the Bolshevik revolution. The *Volksstimme* noted that 'the good citizens' of Bratislava now felt they had to choose between 'the Czechs' and 'being ruled by the Bolsheviks'. Like the 'bourgeois press', the Czechs were depicting the Hungarian Bolshevik regime 'in the darkest colours', spreading 'terrifying rumours' about its excesses while presenting themselves as the 'guardians of peace and order' in Central Europe. But the working class was 'not impressed' by this and, unlike the middle classes, would have 'no reason to hesitate' if it had to choose between the Czechs and the Bolsheviks.⁵⁴⁵ This did not mean that the *Volksstimme* or the majority of mainstream German social democrats was pro-Bolshevik. It was stressed that social democracy agreed with the 'principles' (the political goal of socialism) but not with 'the tactics and the pace' of Bolshevism (its revolutionary and violent methods). It was 'in this sense' that the detained social democratic leaders opposed Bolshevism, the *Volksstimme* explained. It was a 'tragic irony' that precisely those who had always represented 'a more or less moderate tendency' and who supported the 'evolutionary theory' had been interned 'as Bolshevik hostages'. If the Czechs and the Entente refused 'to give democracy a chance', they 'forced' the social democrats 'to choose between imperialism and communism'. This argument was not entirely illogical from the perspective of German-Magyar social democracy. But the reality was that the Bratislava social democrats had to confine themselves to making modest demands like the release of the political detainees. At a meeting of the Bratislava town council on 7 April, where several social democratic councillors were absent because they were held in Ilava prison, the new vice-sheriff Viktor Dušek admitted that the detainees had not committed any unlawful acts. He said their

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 22 March 1919.

⁵⁴⁵ *Volksstimme*, 30 March 1919.

detention was a 'purely preventive military measure' on which the local civilian administration had no influence. But he promised the town council that county sheriff Zoch and himself would ask the Slovak government to release the detainees as soon as 'the situation permitted'.⁵⁴⁶

Meanwhile the question of defending the status of the German language and German ethnic identity in what had now become Bratislava was kept on the agenda too. The *Pressburger Zeitung*, not usually known for its audacious attitude, invited the Bratislava Germans to step forward and present their opinion on the future of the German community in the paper. One of the first contributions was written by G. Dörnhöfer, who called upon the Bratislava Germans to consciously stand by their language, culture, and nationality and to make themselves independent of the old Magyar influence. A unification of all Germans, irrespective of party-political orientation, was 'urgently necessary' in order to raise their political weight in the city and to develop their culture and identity. Indeed, language was not enough, because 'most Pressburgers' did not realise that speaking German was not the same thing as 'being German'. 'But we want to be Germans!', the author exclaimed. 'Today it may not be called betrayal of the fatherland [as in old Hungary] anymore if one does not only speak German but also thinks like a German, if one feels love, esteem for one's national origin [*Vaterstamm*] and openly expresses it'. But the battle for a stronger German nationality would be difficult. 'How sad and embarrassing it is for us Germans when many of our brothers deny their mother tongue out of shame or expedience... He who does not honour his nationality changes his nationality in accordance with considerations of expedience: today he is a Magyar, thereafter perhaps a Czech!' They had to rebuild what the old 'Budapest politics' had destroyed and had to act independently of the Magyars.⁵⁴⁷ This enthusiastic embracing of German identity and rejection of national opportunism was – despite all criticism of government policies – linked to a growing awareness that in the long run Czechoslovak rule might bring certain advantages and new opportunities for the Germans of Bratislava and Slovakia. Under the old Hungarian regime the pressure of Magyarisation had been heavy indeed. During the two months that the Károlyi government had ruled Pressburg this pressure had abated. And now the promises of the Czechoslovak authorities that the Germans could keep their language, culture, and nationality seemed in the process of being fulfilled if the latest official and unofficial statements were to be believed. At the Bratislava town council meeting of 17 March, for example, County Sheriff Zoch declared again that in Bratislava 'all three languages would be recognised' as administrative languages.⁵⁴⁸ Although Slovak replaced Magyar in the county and national administration, Magyar and German were to keep their status on the local political-administrative level where large national minorities existed, for example in the Bratislava town council and in the city's municipal documents. As yet this did not end the many grievances about the declining status of Magyar, especially, and there were other complaints about the linguistic practices of the Bratislava administration as well. German and Magyar citizens and associations would receive official documents in the Czech or Slovak language they did not understand. As a result the offices of social democratic organisations and the *Volksstimme* were constantly visited by people who were looking for help to figure out what

⁵⁴⁶ *Volksstimme*, 13 April 1919; *PZ*, morning paper, 8 April 1919. Dušek, a former 'public notary', took up his post as 'Vice-Sheriff and Deputy Government Commissioner of Bratislava County' on 17 March; he thus became the principal political-administrative official assisting County Sheriff Zoch. See *PZ*, morning paper, 18 March 1919; Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 547.

⁵⁴⁷ *PZ*, morning paper, 21 March 1919. Another indication that the *Pressburger Zeitung* was getting more critical, independent, and even audacious was the publication of an article by its chief editor Alois Pichler claiming that 'our population' felt 'disappointed, sobered down, deeply anxious', because the winners of the war were making decisions 'about' them 'without' them. 'The Czechoslovak government promised justice, and she should avoid everything that looks like injustice'. See *PZ*, morning paper, 25 March 1919.

⁵⁴⁸ *PZ*, morning paper, 18 March 1919.

was demanded of them, which caused considerable irritation.⁵⁴⁹ Nevertheless a process was underway whereby – at least in municipalities with a large German or Magyar population – the minorities’ mother tongue was accorded administrative equality and public status alongside Czech and Slovak. But political pressure by the German and Magyar population was often necessary to ensure implementation of the government’s promises. During the first week of April a group of prominent Bratislava citizens submitted a request to Zoch for inscriptions and notice boards in the three local languages to be placed at the railway station, the post office, and all other public offices in the city. Apparently many of the old Hungarian notice boards had been removed. Zoch told them that their request would be accepted and that three-language notice boards were already being made.⁵⁵⁰

Although Czech and Slovak became the official languages of the CSR, German and other minority languages were eventually given a kind of quasi-official status as well, at least on the local level in a selected number of districts and municipalities.⁵⁵¹ Especially for the German population of Slovakia, who unlike the Germans of Bohemia and Moravia had not enjoyed a status of ethnic and language supremacy during the era of Dualism, a new epoch seemed to begin that allowed for a more free development of their cultural identity and ethnic institutions. The Pressburg newspapers reported that the Czechoslovak National Assembly in Prague was discussing a ‘Bill on the Establishment of National Schools’. It stipulated that in all municipalities where during the last three years there had been at least forty children of school-going age, state primary schools could be established providing education in the children’s mother tongue. Where there were at least four hundred children of school-going age, a national-minority secondary school could be established.⁵⁵² Some German newspapers continued to express their fear that the greatest danger to a German national revival was apathy among the Germans themselves. Another article in the *Pressburger Zeitung* on the future of the German community pointed out that only the democratic revolution of 31 October 1918 and Wilson’s slogan of national self-determination had made the Germans aware that they had ‘sinned’ against their own nationality [*Volksstamm*]. They had sinned against their ‘glorious’ German identity ‘by completely assimilating to Magyarism’. Their awakening from this ‘dream’ – apparently their real assimilation to Magyarism had remained incomplete – had put them to work at last to make up for what had been neglected for decades. The greatest obstacle to overcome in this process was ‘the enormous indifference of the Pressburg citizens’ who did not want to be bothered or ‘to be woken up from their indolence by engaging in political or social activities’. Therefore the problem of national-political apathy among the Bratislava Germans could only be solved by a ‘small but determined group of men’, enthusiasts for the cause of *Deutschtum* who would be able to protect the Germans against ‘any danger’.⁵⁵³ This is indeed what happened during the following years, also thanks to the relatively liberal Czechoslovak minority policy that did not

⁵⁴⁹ *Volksstimme*, 27 March 1919; the paper commented ‘they were not a translation office’, and people with language problems were re-directed to the authorities who were responsible for the problem. On 4 April it was reported that a ‘translation office’ would be established at the Bratislava municipal administration employing six people. Thus far only one person had been responsible for this work, which was rapidly accumulating given the growing number of government decrees in the Slovak language. See *PZ*, morning paper, 4 April 1919.

⁵⁵⁰ *PZ*, morning paper, 9 April 1919.

⁵⁵¹ This happened after the adoption by the Czechoslovak parliament of a Language Law in February 1920. See Jaroslav Kučera, *Minderheit im Nationalstaat. Die Sprachenfrage in den tschechisch-deutschen Beziehungen 1918-1938*, Munich 1999, pp. 36-61.

⁵⁵² *PZ*, evening paper, 4 April 1919.

⁵⁵³ *PZ*, morning paper, 11 April 1919; this article was written by an anonymous Bratislava German. Another contribution to the debate about the future of the Germans by one Adolf Heim argued – as others had done before him – that they needed a ‘united German party’ (obviously the *Volksrat* did not function anymore); see *PZ*, morning paper, 12 April. But this was a naive suggestion, because the fragmentation of the German political spectrum was an established fact as among the other nationalities.

obstruct German ethnocultural initiatives. The Czechoslovak authorities were actually happy with this development and did everything they could to help widen the gap between the Germans and Magyars in Slovakia by encouraging German national endeavours. At the beginning of June 1919 a Czechoslovak report on the political situation in Bratislava noted optimistically that the Germans had ‘completely broken’ with the idea of loyalty to the Hungarian nation and were absorbed in many different German cultural activities. This included the German theatre, German summer schools, and the opening of a new German cultural centre (*Deutsches Heim*), among others.⁵⁵⁴ This did not mean that all Germans in Bratislava were happy with the situation or trusted by the government. The social democrats, especially, continued to be observed by the authorities with a good deal of mistrust, but not primarily because they defended national-minority rights but because they were suspected of having links with revolutionary Hungary. The editors of the *Pressburger Zeitung* meanwhile increasingly presented themselves as champions of the cause of German national revival, although it was doubtful if their attitude of the past few months – not to speak of the past few years – could entitle them to this.⁵⁵⁵ After the broad-based German *Volksrat* of Pressburg had disappeared from the scene other groups and institutions and most of the German press continued the struggle for German national-cultural rights in the city. The German social democrats supported these efforts as well because they were forced by the pluralistic multiethnic structure of the CSR and by their new position as a national minority to deal with ethnopolitical as well as class-based issues. When the *Deutsches Heim* was opened on 11 May, the *Volksstimme* paid full attention to it. It reported that ‘all German societies of Pressburg’ participated in the event. ‘Speeches were the way they were’, i.e., cautious and subdued, but this ‘could not be different given the present conditions’.⁵⁵⁶

The fragmented national structure of Bratislava made it difficult for the different social democratic groups to bring about working-class unity, even on the level of trade unionism. On 21 March 1919 a joint meeting was held of the German-Magyar Trade Union Council (*Gewerkschaftskartell*) and the Bratislava section of the Czechoslovak Trade Union Federation (OSČ). The major issue discussed was how to come to grips with the city’s complex organisational conditions marked by national divisions, different trade unions operating in the same industries, and ineffective trade union centralisation. It was decided to organise as soon as possible a broader conference in Bratislava of the OSČ and the Hungarian Trade Union Council, with which many Bratislava trade unions still maintained organisational links. Its aim should be to resolve the different problems of mutual relations and trade union cooperation on the basis of the new state-political reality. It almost seemed as if a new spirit of political realism and working class cooperation could emerge. However, the rise of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the resulting political tensions and new hostilities in Central Europe prevented these plans from being carried out. It was only in September 1919 that another broad-based trade union conference could be held.⁵⁵⁷ Meanwhile the arrival of substantial numbers of Czech workers and Czech trade union officials made the structure of the working-class movement in Bratislava even more complex, with at least four national groups having their specific political and economic positions. According to a Slovak labour historian the Bratislava Czechs, who soon dominated not only the local government administration but also many of the Czechoslovak trade union branches,

⁵⁵⁴ SNA, MP, Box 273: colonel Hanf of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Defence to the Ministry of the Interior in Prague, 7 June 1919, quoting a report of the Czechoslovak military high command in Slovakia. The Czechoslovak army in Slovakia evidently played a political in addition to a purely military role.

⁵⁵⁵ See Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, pp. 79-103, where it is shown among other things that only a year ago the *PZ* had still been trumpeting Hungarian patriotism and ‘neglecting German interests’. My own research corroborates this assessment; see in particular chapter five.

⁵⁵⁶ *Volksstimme*, 15 May 1919.

⁵⁵⁷ Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 56.

‘helped to keep the working class divided along national lines’.⁵⁵⁸ However, Czech labour leaders also wanted to unify the working-class movement on their own terms, the crucial question being the changes in the interethnic power structure that benefited the Czechs and Slovaks and those who identified with the Czechoslovak State. For the most important organised labour element in the city, the German social democratic movement, the problem was how to strike a balance between independence and cooperation, between criticism and a degree of opposition on the one hand and pragmatic acceptance of the new political reality on the other.

In the next chapter we will examine how the positions of the German-Magyar and the Slovak/Czechoslovak social democratic movements evolved during the following two to three years. The months following March 1919, and especially the years after August 1919, was the period when the Czechoslovak State was consolidated and when the last illusions about a plebiscite or a direct form of ‘self-determination’ for the Germans and Magyars had to be abandoned. It was also the period when the relations between the different national elements of the working-class movement in Bratislava and the CSR gradually assumed a more stable though ambiguous form. Social democracy triumphed in the general election of April 1920 but never became a unified movement; it was destined to be split along national as well as ideological lines. The communist wing seemed more successful in uniting the different national groups than the moderate social democratic wing, but only in an ideological and superficial way. The communist movement largely ignored the concrete problems of multiethnic coexistence, renounced the culture of rational and democratic debate, and became a demagogic movement with a messianic rhetoric and psychology. Because communism, with its peculiar political mentality, tended to ignore or play down the reality of national antagonism in the multiethnic working class of Czechoslovakia, it could pose as an alternative movement that had actually overcome the problem. At the same time moderate social democracy, which had opted for the pluralist democratic state, had to acknowledge the reality of different national interests and different ethnic cultures. The Czechoslovak Republic was both a democratic and an ‘ethnocratic’ state.⁵⁵⁹ This created political space for democratic criticism (also with regard to the state’s ethnic problems), but also for all sorts of political demagoguery (nationalist, communist, etc.). The CSR was a multiethnic state and one national group, the Czechs (officially the ‘Czechoslovaks’), clearly dominated it; but their ethnocratic rule was combined with democratic practices and a democratic political culture. In this context an extremely diverse political pluralism could flourish. This pluralism, this ethnic segmentation and political fragmentation, had cultural, national-political, and ideological dimensions that could interact in bizarre ways.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

⁵⁵⁹ The notion of ‘ethnocratic’ will be elaborated in chapter nine.

Part III: results, 1919-1921

Social democracy triumphant and fragmented

Part I of this study presented a historical context to the 1918-19 national revolution spanning the half century 1867-1918; part II analysed in detail the six months of revolutionary and immediate post-revolutionary events between October 1918 and March 1919. Part III now will look at the two to three years, during which the new political constellation resulting from the national revolution in Bratislava was finally consolidated. This process of consolidation already began after the unsuccessful February strikes, but was intensified after the proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic at the end of March 1919, which caused the Czechoslovak government to act more resolutely and indeed more repressively. The process more or less ended after the general election in April 1920, which proved a success for Czechoslovak democracy and which was followed by the dramatic social democratic-communist split in the working-class movement, and finally after the controversial Czechoslovak population census of February 1921. The short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic that existed between March and August 1919 led to a more repressive government and military regime in Slovakia. The former Upper Hungary had been occupied by Czechoslovak troops only recently and an atmosphere of political uncertainty continued to prevail especially in terms of the attitude of the Magyar and German population to the new state. Even if a major part of the German-Magyar social democratic leadership in Bratislava was sceptical about Bolshevism, it was not clear how much sympathy for the Béla Kun regime there was among broader strata of the working class in Slovakia, especially among the Magyars. The Czechoslovak authorities in Bratislava led by Minister for Slovakia Vavro Šrobár decided to take no chances and detained the most prominent leaders of the German and Magyar social democratic movement in Bratislava and elsewhere in Slovakia. At the same time a policy of censorship and other restrictive measures had to ensure that the government would be able to keep the overall political situation in Slovakia under control. Until August 1919 the German and Magyar social democrats could do not much more than voicing cautious criticism in their closely watched press and propaganda organs and holding rather subdued party meetings. This changed after the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic at the beginning of August, which opened the way for greater freedom of expression and a more assertive pattern of political activity by the social democratic movements of all national groups in Slovakia. However, some political restrictions, partly motivated by Czechoslovak fear of Hungarian irredentism, continued to exist and could be used by the government to suppress unwanted developments or communist actions. The more open situation after August 1919 also led to renewed attempts to overcome the divide between the German-Magyar and Czechoslovak working-class movements. There was a degree of interethnic rapprochement in trade union circles and in the emerging pro-communist wing. But within the mainstream political leadership of the different social democratic movements these attempts remained largely unsuccessful, so that national separatism continued to dominate the picture. Various factors were responsible for this, including mutual national suspicion and the controversial Czechoslovak census of February 1921 that purported to show important shifts in the ethnic population structure of the Czechoslovak Republic (CSR) to the disadvantage of the Germans and Magyars. In Bratislava, whose ethnic structure the government was keen to transform, the census triggered vehement disputes about the official results and about the methods by which they had been obtained. In this controversy, and in the debates about national-minority policy, the Bratislava social democrats played a prominent role.

This chapter, then, attempts an analysis of the development of the multinational social democratic movement in Bratislava from the second quarter of 1919 through 1921. The first Czechoslovak general election in April 1920 clearly showed that the social democrats were the

strongest political force among all national groups in Slovakia. The Constitution of the CSR adopted in February 1920 and the Republic's democratic institutions and relatively liberal national-minority policies allowed the German and Magyar social democrats to freely participate in political life. It also allowed them to seek cooperation with other, like-minded social and political movements or, alternatively, to pursue a policy of ethnopolitical separatism. Indeed even after the communist-social democratic split in the second half of 1920 the German social democrats in Slovakia refused to join the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party (CSSDP). Instead they joined up with the German Social Democratic Party of Bohemia and Moravia based at the Bohemian city of Liberec (Reichenberg). Slovakia's Magyar social democrats, only a small group after the majority had joined the communist movement, remained independent until 1926; in that year the tiny party decided to affiliate with the CSSDP in a desperate bid to politically survive. Thus by the end of 1920 even the organisational unity of Bratislava's German and Magyar social democrats was dissolved, although a degree of collaboration was maintained. The multinational and 'ethnocratic' character of the CSR found expression in the ethnic fragmentation of its party-political scene including social democracy. It was also expressed in the fact that German and Magyar social democratic members of the Czechoslovak parliament from Bratislava consistently adopted a critical stance towards the state and aspects of its minority policy. Meanwhile the Slovak social democrats, who had been absorbed by the centralist CSSDP, were similarly marginalised after massive communist defections in 1920, which demonstrated the superficial character of their election victory in April that year. Like the German and Magyar social democrats, if for somewhat different reasons, they were relegated to the margins of political power in Slovakia. They were reduced to relative insignificance by the dominant Czechs but also by their own 'Czechoslovakist' and centralist orientation and by the volatile political behaviour of many Slovak workers and Slovak voters. In the end it is possible to conclude that the history of social democracy in Slovakia and the CSR was shaped by the specific conditions of a multinational state that was both liberal-democratic and ethnocratic. The state allowed free political activity and mass mobilisation but was also marked by national hierarchies and differences in ethnic power and status.

We have seen in chapter eight that the German and Magyar social democrats in Bratislava had a rather ambivalent attitude to the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Bolshevism, especially its methods and ideology of immediate social revolution, was mistrusted by many older social democratic leaders who believed in the potential of democracy and new legislation to gradually achieve socialist goals. But many German and Magyar social democrats also believed that Entente (including Czechoslovak and Romanian) policy towards Hungary was to blame for the political radicalisation in that country. According to the *Volksstimme*, 'the men of the Peace Conference lost the confidence of the international working class' when they abandoned what they initially described as 'the only true' principles for a lasting peace: self-determination and democracy.⁵⁶⁰ The territorial demands of 'the Czechs', perhaps even more those of the Romanians, could only provoke 'the most desperate resistance of the Hungarian proletariat, which was left to itself to be destroyed'. 'Where is Wilson?', the *Volksstimme* wished to know.⁵⁶¹ The Slovak social democratic newspaper *Robotnicke noviny*, not burdened by such considerations in favour of the Hungarians, was far more outspoken in its criticism of Hungarian Bolshevism. It openly attacked the political regime of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, rejecting the 'dictatorship of a minority' and defending the 'road of democracy and parliamentarianism'.⁵⁶² It argued that

⁵⁶⁰ *Volksstimme*, 27 April 1919.

⁵⁶¹ *Volksstimme*, 11 May 1919. According to Jászi, the nationally humiliated people of Hungary had already 'turned away from the Wilsonian hypocrisies with disgust and hatred'; see Oscar Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Hungary*, 2nd edn, New York 1969 (1st edn 1924), p. 87.

⁵⁶² *Robotnicke noviny (RN)*, 29 March 1919.

the struggle for socialism was ‘long and difficult’ and that ‘the needs of the Slovak people are not only social but also national, for they need time to overcome their long national oppression and to develop their nation’. According to the paper, communism, a stage in social evolution, could only be achieved if the basic conditions for it were fulfilled.⁵⁶³ The Slovak social democrats stressed that they completely rejected the ‘methods’ of the Hungarian Bolshevik regime and that they were fighting for ‘the evolutionary development of socialisation’. At the same time they did not forget to point out that creating jobs for the mass of unemployed workers would make them ‘less interested in Bolshevism’.⁵⁶⁴ But the *Volksstimme* was critical about Bolshevism as well. It described in graphic terms how during a communist demonstration in Vienna in April 1919 violent attacks were made on the Austrian parliament building. It is difficult to believe that such reports did not encourage scepticism about the communists among responsible and democratically minded German social democrats.⁵⁶⁵ On the other hand, there is little evidence that the Slovak social democrats were inclined to criticise the detention of German and Magyar social democratic leaders by the Czechoslovak government, especially during the first weeks of the Béla Kun regime. Neither did they seem to distinguish between moderate German or Magyar social democrats and revolutionary Bolsheviks; for national reasons all Magyar and German political leaders were mistrusted, as had also been the case in February. This caused bad blood with the German and Magyar social democrats, who in turn were encouraged to regard their Czechoslovak counterparts as political enemies.⁵⁶⁶ At the end of April, a meeting of the CSSDP leadership in Prague declared that the party would give maximum support to ‘everything that can contribute to the security of our state’.⁵⁶⁷ The perceived threat from the Hungarian Soviet Republic was undoubtedly a major reason for this attitude. It would seem that only at the end of May, at a conference of the CSSDP organisation of Bratislava County, some party members began to criticise ‘the abuse of martial law to persecute the organised workers’.⁵⁶⁸ In April Magyar social democratic organisations in various towns in southwest Slovakia had been dissolved by the authorities because they were accused of having links with Hungarian Bolsheviks.⁵⁶⁹ A Slovak historian has noted that the effects of martial law and various repressive measures against the Magyar and German working-class movement in Slovakia during the period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic were substantial. Moreover, this policy was accompanied by ‘a wave of nationalism among part of the Slovak working class’.⁵⁷⁰ In connection with the impending May Day celebrations, *Robotnícke noviny* warned that they should occur without any kind of ‘hostile actions’ against the Czechoslovak government. The celebrations should be ‘socialist and dignified’. It was pointed out that the social democrats were working for ‘a new and democratic social order’, socialisation by ‘lawful means’, and ‘evolutionary development’; they could not condone ‘any kind of dictatorship’.⁵⁷¹ Unlike the actions of the Hungarian communist regime, the repressive security measures of the Šrobár government were not regarded as a form of dictatorship by the Slovak social democrats.

The *Volksstimme* used the occasion of May Day to make some observations on the question of revolutionary and evolutionary socialism, too. These observations confirmed the

⁵⁶³ *RN*, 1 April 1919.

⁵⁶⁴ *RN*, 12 June 1919, 20 May 1919.

⁵⁶⁵ *Volksstimme*, 20 April 1919.

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. Dušan Provazník, ‘V prvom desaťročí v ČSR’, in *Dejiny Bratislavy*, eds Darina Lehotská and Ján Pleva, Bratislava, 1966, p. 340.

⁵⁶⁷ Quoted in Ladislav Ruman, ‘Členstvo, organizačná výstavba a programové ciele sociálnej demokracie v medzivojnovom období (so zreteľom na podmienky Slovenska)’, in *Kapitoly z dejín sociálnej demokracie na Slovensku*, eds Stanislav Sikora et al., Bratislava, 1996, p. 194.

⁵⁶⁸ Ladislav Hubenák, *Vznik a založenie KSC na západnom Slovensku*, Bratislava 1969, p. 78.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁵⁷¹ *RN*, 26 April 1919.

moderate orientation of the German social democratic leadership. The paper wrote that ‘some’ believed that the social revolution could happen just as quickly as the political (democratic) revolution, but was this true? ‘The building of a socialist society cannot happen violently, in a destructive way, but only by planning and organised work, step by step, gradually and deliberately moving forward’. The social revolution was ‘a question of many years’, moving through the successive stages of building democracy, the ‘conquest of political power’ in this democracy, and finally ‘the building of socialism, which is a creative legal and administrative work’. Another article in the same *Volksstimme* issue noted that after the international solidarity of the working class had been broken in 1914 by ‘a storm of hurrah-patriotism’, the democratic revolution of 1918 had made thrones and states disappear ‘as if they had never existed’. This had created new hope for peace and justice but was followed by more suffering and by splits in the labour movement. Formerly oppressed nations ‘now act like oppressors’, while ‘those who liberated themselves’ (such as the Germans and Magyars of Slovakia) were being oppressed. In Hungary the old order was destroyed without the revolutionaries ‘substituting another’; apparently the German social democrats saw Bolshevism as a failure. But they insisted that the international proletariat would eventually find ‘the right way’ of moving forward despite all the ‘mistakes’ that had been made.⁵⁷² These statements were obviously not typical of Bolshevik ideology at all. However, the Šrobár administration prohibited all meetings and demonstrations on May Day. A meeting had been planned in the Bratislava *Arbeiterheim* with German, Magyar, and even Slovak speakers, but it had to be cancelled. The German social democratic press claimed that some spontaneous May Day celebrations took place in Bratislava nonetheless, which were ‘very impressive’.⁵⁷³ During May 1919 and the following months the *Volksstimme* continued to report in a critical way about developments in Bratislava and Slovakia, and there were frequent cases of censorship reflected in blank columns or entire blank pages.⁵⁷⁴ Bratislava citizens demonstrating their loyalty to the CSR were sharply reproved, for example when at the end of April a Bratislava delegation including the editor of the *Pressburger Zeitung* Alois Pichler and other Germans visited Prague and President Masaryk. Pichler declared ‘on behalf of the Bratislava population’ that he wished to communicate their desire for ‘compromise’ and ‘agreement’, but the *Volksstimme* and the *Pressburger Presse* rejected this. Although the Bratislava Germans presented demands relating to German-language schools, the *Volksstimme* argued that these visits (there were several during this period) were propagandistically exploited by the Czech pro-government press, which was always happy to write about German and Magyar delegations coming to Prague ‘to pay tribute to Masaryk’. The *Volksstimme* also stressed that a man like Pichler did not represent the working class of Bratislava.⁵⁷⁵ Another crucial issue that the paper continued to report about was mass unemployment, which it argued was made even worse by the immigration of Czechs to Bratislava. The German and Magyar social democrats complained that local workers were often ignored when new jobs were created in the field of government employment. At the end of March a government official had promised to investigate this grievance, but fresh cases of Czechs replacing local workers were reported, even in the

⁵⁷² *Volksstimme*, 1 May 1919.

⁵⁷³ *Volksstimme*, 27 April 1919, 1 May 1919, 4 May 1919.

⁵⁷⁴ In the *Volksstimme* of 15 May 1919, two-thirds of the front page was left blank below the heading ‘Criminal imperialist megalomania’; this nicely shows where the paper exceeded the limit of what was considered tolerable by the censors and the Bratislava authorities. Other examples were the issue of 1 June 1919, on whose front page one and a quarter column was left blank, and that of 8 June 1919, where part of a column had been deleted in an article expressing disappointment about the Paris Peace Conference (‘their last hope [for a just peace], but they waited in vain’) and about President Wilson’s failure to become the ‘apostle of peace’ and the ‘redeemer of yearning humanity’.

⁵⁷⁵ *Volksstimme*, 1 May 1919. See also Emil Portisch, *Geschichte der Stadt Pressburg-Bratislava*, 2 vols, Bratislava 1933, vol. 2, p. 549.

kitchen of a Bratislava government department.⁵⁷⁶ There were also cases of cheap workers being imported from the Slovak countryside to replace local Bratislava workers. The labour movement and meetings of the unemployed strongly protested against what they saw as the failure of the government and of the Bratislava town council to take effective action against the rising unemployment.⁵⁷⁷ The problem was also worsened by breaches of the law on the eight-hour working day, which arguably reduced the demand for labour. According to the *Volksstimme*, there were ‘complaints everyday’ that in some workshops certain groups of workers, especially women workers (e.g., women tailors), were working 9-9½ hours a day.⁵⁷⁸

The national revolution in Bratislava found expression in a sometimes gradual, sometimes rapid change in power structure in various fields of local society. It was also expressed in a series of decrees on the renaming of local institutions and in other measures of symbolic or national-cultural significance. The German social democratic press expressed its fear that the Czechoslovak government wanted to close down cultural and educational institutions benefiting the German and Magyar working class, or that it wanted to make such institutions ‘serve political ends’. Therefore it was demanded that the local university become a ‘people’s university’ that should be accessible to all with a minimum educational level, and that it should be ‘trilingual’. The former Hungarian Elisabeth University had been reopened during the second half of February, and a few months later it became the Czechoslovak ‘Komenský University’. Promises that its teachers’ and professors’ corps would be representative of the three language groups of Bratislava were not fulfilled, and the position of German- and Magyar-language university education was never more than marginal. The early ending in May of Bratislava’s school year, which affected all primary and secondary schools in the city, was criticised as a very bad idea by the social democrats. They also criticised the apparent intention of the authorities – who were said to make ‘the same mistake’ as the former Hungarian regime – to force the local children quickly to learn Slovak instead of Magyar.⁵⁷⁹ Furthermore, the new rulers (and sometimes even individual Czechs and Slovaks) were busy changing the names of streets, buildings, and even tourist sights. The *Volksstimme* reported that on hiking trails and tourist sights around Bratislava Magyar and German signs, and objects with Magyar or German inscriptions, were pulled down by unknown ‘vandals’. It described the perpetrators as ‘animal-like fanatics’ who had ‘a lower cultural level than primitive people in the African jungle’.⁵⁸⁰ Perhaps more civilised, but serving the same somewhat petty end, was Zoch’s decree that at least one-third of the books displayed in shop-windows of Bratislava’s bookshops had to be in the Czech or Slovak language. Booksellers not complying with this obligation could lose their licence, which in that case would be given to Czechs or Slovaks. The *Volksstimme* commented that what seemed to matter most to the

⁵⁷⁶ *Volksstimme*, 4 May 1919.

⁵⁷⁷ *Volksstimme*, 8 May 1919.

⁵⁷⁸ *Volksstimme*, 22 May 1919.

⁵⁷⁹ *Volksstimme*, 8 May 1919, 27 April 1919; Gertrud Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen Pressburgs. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Umbruchsperiode 1918/20*, Munich 1942, p. 89; Branislav Varsik et al., *50 Jahre Komenský-Universität in Bratislava 1919-1969*, Bratislava 1969, pp. 27-8. The early ending of the school year in Slovakia was no doubt partly motivated by fear (both in Prague and in Bratislava) of the ‘anti-Czechoslovak agitation’ that was apparently carried on by some Magyar teachers. See SNA, MP, Box 274: letter of the Czechoslovak Minister of Education Habrman, Prague, to Šrobár, Bratislava, 15 June 1919. On 1 July Šrobár’s Commissioner for Education (Anton Štefánek) proposed to the Commissioner for Administrative (Internal) Affairs to discharge all ‘hostile’ teachers in state schools in Slovakia; see correspondence in *ibid.*

⁵⁸⁰ *Volksstimme*, 8 May 1919. In July the first official decisions on the renaming of streets, etc., were taken by the town council, but obviously some ‘unofficial’ activity along these lines was going on as well. See also Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 551.

government was ‘what the city looks like’, i.e., its national appearance not its cultural level.⁵⁸¹ Reports that the government was pondering the ‘Swiss model’ of a federal state – there was talk of a ‘Switzerland of the East’ again following statements to that effect by Czechoslovakia’s foreign minister Edvard Beneš – to achieve reconciliation between the different national groups in the CSR led the paper to wonder if it could be true after all that the government had learned from ‘the fate of the Monarchy’. If the government did not follow the road of federalism, but instead ‘tried to Slavicise the Czechoslovak Republic against the will of three million Germans and to oust all German officials and to eliminate all other languages from the schools’, she would probably discover this was impossible. According to the *Volksstimme*, history ‘teaches us that nations keep their language and identity even under the most adverse conditions’, of which the Slovaks in Hungary were said to be a good example. Indeed, ‘action produces reaction’ and oppression only strengthened national consciousness. The paper speculated that growing awareness of this might have influenced the Czechoslovak government; if it pursued the federalist model of national equality this would certainly help to consolidate the CSR. The German social democrats thus were living between hope and fear. They claimed that ‘the working class’ – which they represented as an organic whole, unless they meant the German working class – ‘never knew chauvinism, never agitated against people with another language as long as its own national identity was not suppressed’. If in the future ‘old prejudices were really removed and the nations of the Czechoslovak Republic received full equality, the working class would see this as proof of a conciliatory spirit’. In the next century mankind, both the winners and the losers of the war, would have no time for ‘empty national slogans’, but had to rebuild ‘what was destroyed in the most terrible war’ that had ever been.⁵⁸² The release of the German and Magyar social democratic detainees arrested at the end of March could be a first step to build confidence and reconciliation. During the second week of May one of them, Elsa Grailich, a leading figure in Bratislava’s social democratic women’s movement, was released because of illness. Some days later a delegation of the German and Magyar social democratic movement was told by Šrobár that the majority of the prisoners would be sent home within a few days. On 15 May all social democratic detainees from Bratislava except two (Chovan and Judovics) returned home from Ilava prison. But not long after, as the Hungarian military threat increased, new arrests were made among former government employees and others, and it was only in July that the last political detainees were released.⁵⁸³ At a meeting of the Bratislava town council on 2 June 1919 Wittich declared that the policy of detention was both unacceptable and ineffective. The government and the town administration had ‘the duty to regain [the citizens’] confidence in the law and in their authority by taking practical steps’. The government’s bad social policies were ‘more dangerous than Bolshevism’, because they took away the population’s ‘confidence in social justice’ and in ‘state authority’. These policies included the non-payment of pensions to those who were not recognised as citizens of the CSR and the government’s failure to act against mass unemployment and the rising prices of foodstuffs. Another example was the government’s

⁵⁸¹ *Volksstimme*, 1 May 1919. Apparently before 1918 the City Library of Pressburg did not have a single Slovak or Czech book in its collection, a noteworthy piece of evidence of the cultural neglect of the Slovak population during this era. See Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 586.

⁵⁸² *Volksstimme*, 11 May 1919. As we have seen, the idea of a ‘Switzerland of the East’ or a ‘Danubian Federation’ was put forward by Hungarian democratic politicians who sought to preserve the integrity of Historical Hungary in a more acceptable way; see, e.g., Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, p. 91. On 20 November 1918 the *Pressburger Zeitung*, morning paper, had also written that Hungary should become a Switzerland of the East. Interestingly, the Czech social democratic leader Antonín Němec similarly declared in Paris at the end of May (perhaps not only for propaganda reasons) that the Czechoslovak social democrats wanted a ‘Federation of Central European nations to prevent the isolation of the different national states’; see *Volksstimme*, 25 May 1919. However, other Czech politicians rejected this.

⁵⁸³ *Volksstimme*, 11 May 1919, 15 May 1919, 18 May 1919, 5 June 1919. See also Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 551.

refusal to release the last two social democratic detainees from Bratislava. Deputy sheriff Viktor Dušek said he supported the request to release Chovan and Judovics, but he repeated that the detention was a 'military security measure on which the political authorities had no influence'. The government's anxiety actually increased in June as a result of new military and political developments. This was underscored by another announcement of police chief Brunner that 'those who spread rumours about military confrontations, atrocities, resistance to the Czechoslovak authorities', etc., or were 'inciting the population and threatening law and order', would be punished in accordance with martial law regulations.⁵⁸⁴

The first military confrontations between Hungarian Bolshevik units and Czechoslovak troops had occurred already at the end of April, and on 30 May the Hungarian Red Army started a large offensive against the CSR, occupying parts of eastern and southern Slovakia. Although a small number of Czech and Slovak communists were attached to the Hungarian Red Army as well, even left-wing Czechoslovak social democrats criticised the Hungarian Bolshevik invasion of Slovakia. As a Slovak historian put it, the Béla Kun regime 'wanted to renew the old frontiers with bayonets under the slogans of the Communist Internationale'.⁵⁸⁵ Oszkár Jászi has argued that one reason why the Hungarian Soviet Republic was accepted by a considerable part of the Hungarian population was 'the demagogic way it played upon popular chauvinism'. The initial successes of the Red Army could be attributed 'at least as much to nationalist as to Socialist feeling among the soldiery'.⁵⁸⁶ Apparently some soldiers of the Hungarian Red Army had inscribed on small metal shields attached to their caps, the words 'Resubjugation of Upper Hungary'. On 3 June 1919 the sheriff of the southern Slovak county of Novohrad wrote in a telegram to the National Assembly in Prague: 'The Hungarians are inflamed with the legendary Hungarian chauvinist fever, united in legendary harmony with Bolshevism, and their common slogan is preservation of the integrity of the old Hungarian state'.⁵⁸⁷ On 5 June a 'military dictatorship' was proclaimed in Slovakia by the Šrobár government to enable the Czechoslovak army and the local authorities to defend the country more effectively against the Hungarians and to take all necessary measures to neutralise the 'enemies' of the CSR. It meant that the military command was now the highest authority in Slovakia but it also increased the powers of Šrobár, which had already been considerable since the declaration of martial law in March. In Bratislava a curfew after 9 p.m. was proclaimed, and everywhere additional numbers of people were detained who were suspected of having contacts with the Hungarians, being involved in Bolshevik activities, or simply being a potential danger to the CSR. This happened even in Bratislava and western Slovakia, a region that the Hungarian Red Army never managed to reach.⁵⁸⁸ On 16 June a nominally independent 'Slovak Soviet Republic' was proclaimed in east Slovakia, but ethnic Slovaks were only a tiny minority in its leading organs and when the Hungarians withdrew from Slovakia at the beginning of July this political entity immediately collapsed.⁵⁸⁹ At the beginning of August the Hungarian Soviet Republic itself collapsed as well;

⁵⁸⁴ *Volksstimme*, 5 June 1919.

⁵⁸⁵ Marián Hronský, *The Struggle for Slovakia and the Treaty of Trianon 1918-1920*, Bratislava 2001, p. 168.

⁵⁸⁶ Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, p. 117.

⁵⁸⁷ Quoted in Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, p. 182.

⁵⁸⁸ See for the proclamation of 'military dictatorship' *Dokumenty slovenskej národnej identity a štátnosti*, 2 vols, gen. ed. Miroslav Pekník, Bratislava, 1998, vol. 2, document 187, pp. 91-2; *Volksstimme*, 8 June 1919. Among the new detainees were postal employees, railway workers, etc., as well as former military officers and reserve-officers of the old Austro-Hungarian army, some of whom were sent to prisons in Bohemia and Moravia. See SNA, MP, Boxes 273-274 for various documents and correspondence on this question, including requests to release detainees on economic or political grounds. It seems that many of the arrested former government employees had been involved in the February and March strikes, but some against their will, at least according to their wives or other relations. Although they had lost their jobs, they were still seen as politically dangerous.

⁵⁸⁹ Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, pp. 176-98; Xénia Šuchová, 'Sociálna demokracia na Slovensku v prvých rokoch Česko-Slovenska', in *Kapitoly*, eds S. Sikora et al., pp. 120-3; Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 65, 76-7; Portisch,

apparently this made a ‘deep impression’ in Bratislava.⁵⁹⁰ The paradoxical result – especially from the Magyar point of view – was that while in Hungary the ‘White Terror’ began, in Slovakia a relative normalisation of political life became possible that also benefited the Magyars and the Germans. This happened even though Šrobár’s ‘military dictatorship’ remained in place for many months. On 11 August a meeting of the Bratislava CSSDP critically addressed the bad economic, social, and political situation in Slovakia. It demanded the end of martial law and of the military dictatorship, full freedom of the press and freedom of assembly, the suppression of ‘usury’ (i.e., profiteering from high prices for scarce commodities), and the calling of general elections as soon as possible.⁵⁹¹ On 22 August a mass meeting organised by the Bratislava German and Magyar social democrats – the first one since several months – spoke out in favour of the CSR as the only possible state-political framework for their ongoing ‘struggle for freedom’. The meeting also demanded nationalisation of the great landed estates (this was apparently preferred to the option of land redistribution), condemned the White Terror in Hungary, and declared its support for the suffering Hungarian working class ‘as proletarian internationalism demands’.⁵⁹² Especially the statement regarding the acceptance of the CSR was of great importance. It showed that, as Hungary was in the grip of bloody counter-revolutionary violence – a level of violence in comparison with which Czechoslovak ‘repression’ was insignificant –, the Magyar and German social democrats understood that the CSR was their only option.

Nevertheless, their attitude remained ambivalent and suspicious. This was apparent, for example, from a leading article in the *Volksstimme* discussing the attitude of President Masaryk to the Czechoslovak Germans. It was noted that Masaryk had become popular because he advocated that the Germans should become ‘normal citizens’ of the CSR with equal rights. But from an interview with Masaryk by the Prague correspondent of the German newspaper *Die Zeit*, which was extensively quoted in the *Volksstimme*, a less clear-cut picture was said to emerge. The German journalist asked Masaryk if it was true that the Constitution of the CSR would be adopted without the participation of the ethnic Germans. The president replied that the provisional National Assembly of the CSR was a ‘revolutionary organ’ and that the Bohemian Germans were against the revolution, which was underscored by their refusal to play a constructive role in the building of the state. Although these facts were true, the Bohemian Germans’ attitude may have confirmed the suspicions against the CSR of the German social democrats in Bratislava. Masaryk was also asked about the delineation of electoral districts in connection with the impending general election, particularly in regions with a large German population. The Bohemian Germans wanted small ethnically pure districts that would ensure a maximum German representation in the National Assembly, while the Czechs preferred larger ethnically mixed districts that would reduce the weight of the German vote. Masaryk said the government was still considering the question. But he stressed – perhaps to suppress federalist illusions about a ‘Switzerland of the East’ encouraged by other Czech political figures – that the canton-system of Switzerland, a country ‘with a population of only three million’, could ‘hardly be taken as an example’ for the CSR. About the question of language policy in the schools

Geschichte, vol. 2, pp. 550-1; Jozef Klimko, *Slovenská republika rád*, Bratislava 1979, pp. 81-113; Éva S. Balogh, ‘Nationality Problems of the Hungarian Soviet Republic’, in *Hungary in Revolution, 1918-19*, ed. Iván Völgyes, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1971, pp. 112-20.

⁵⁹⁰ Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 552.

⁵⁹¹ Local branches of the CSSDP in Slovakia complained that their meetings were often prohibited by the military authorities and had to be reported in advance; they demanded an end to the military dictatorship. See SNA, MP, Box 274: letter by the secretary of the CSSDP branch in Vrútky (central Slovakia) to the Executive Committee of the CSSDP in Bratislava, 3 September 1919.

⁵⁹² Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 79, 85; *Volksstimme*, 23 August 1919; Ferenc Boros, ‘K vzťahom maďarskej komunistickej emigrácie a československej marxistickej ľavice’, *Historický časopis* 7, no. 4, 1959, p. 524.

Masaryk said that the relative size of national minorities in individual districts – eventually fixed at twenty percent or more – would decide whether or not they could use their native tongue as the language of instruction. He added it was also a problem of financial means. The idea of a ‘Danubian Federation’, which was propagated in certain political circles in Austria and Hungary (but also by some Czechs and Slovaks), was rejected by Masaryk if it was meant to be ‘another Austria’. He said he supported close economic cooperation in Central Europe, but not the idea of a reconstituted Austrian multinational state. According to the *Volksstimme*, the statements of the Czechoslovak president were ‘vague and reserved’ and did not give sufficient insight into his ‘real intentions’. There were ‘no guarantees for goodwill towards the nationally different [andersnationale] population’.⁵⁹³

In Bratislava the issues addressed in the Prague interview were intensively discussed, especially the question of German- and Magyar-language education. German newspapers, including the *Pressburger Zeitung*, were carrying on a campaign for German schools, but as yet not all Bratislava Germans were enthusiastic. Many middle-class bilingual Germans had become accustomed to the traditional Magyar-language education (for example at the Bratislava Lutheran Lyceum), and it was only after 1920 that Magyar was definitively replaced by German in many Bratislava schools. Meanwhile in Slovakia most of the teachers the CSR had inherited from Hungary, most of them Magyars but also some Germans, had been discharged. Those in state schools (a minority) were replaced with Czechs and Slovaks; here the cleansing operation proposed by the Commissioner for Education, Anton Štefánek, on 1 July 1919 could be fully carried out. The majority of teachers at the more numerous church schools were dismissed as well, but only ‘provisionally’; they could apply for reinstatement if they met certain conditions in terms of swearing loyalty to the CSR and acquiring knowledge of the Czech or Slovak language. Many could return thanks to their ability to take charge of Slovak classes in addition to German or Magyar ones, but this was a gradual, incomplete, and often painful process. To calm the Bratislava town council, the Šrobár administration announced that the old Hungarian school laws would remain in place until the election of a new National Assembly the following year. But meanwhile the grievances of non-Czechoslovak teachers led to public protests in August 1919, and as late as October many secondary school students – especially those who refused to learn Slovak – were without school education.⁵⁹⁴ Evidently, the process of national revolution in Bratislava was difficult and complicated, and considerable efforts on the part of the new regime were required to overcome resistance and create a minimum of mutual confidence. This was also shown by press reports that the number of police detectives in the city had increased from eight at the end of 1918 to forty-six less than a year later (this did not include ordinary policemen). It was reported that while the police budget of Prague was only 130,000 crowns, that of Bratislava – factually an occupied city – had risen to three million crowns. The grievances and complaints of the Bratislava population about various political, cultural, and administrative government measures by no means abated, despite the general acceptance that the new state was an inescapable reality. To house the large number of new Czech officials and employees, houses continued to be confiscated or bought by the government and their tenants were sometimes evicted. The *Volksstimme* called these measures ‘unheard of’. The way the disabled war veterans of Bratislava had to ‘beg’ the government for help to improve their desperate living conditions, it described as ‘humiliating’.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹³ *Volksstimme*, 5 August 1919.

⁵⁹⁴ Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, pp. 89-95; Rudolf Melzer, *Erlebte Geschichte. Vom Umsturz 1918 zum Umbruch 1938/39. Eine Rückschau auf ein Menschenalter Karpatendeutschum*, Vienna 1989, pp. 15-6; *Volksstimme*, 5 August 1919.

⁵⁹⁵ *Volksstimme*, 5 August 1919. See also Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, pp. 548-9 for confiscation of houses. According to a document dated 17 June 1919, there were 267 policemen in Bratislava at that moment (it is not

Meanwhile municipal elections had been held in Bohemia and Moravia (15 and 16 June). This demonstrated that the German population was able to democratically participate in the political life of the Czechoslovak State and to secure a fair representation on the town councils. The CSSDP won 32.5% of the Czech vote, i.e., of all the votes given to the Czech parties (because practically all political parties were ‘mono-ethnic’, it was easy to establish how much support each party enjoyed among its own ethnic group). The German social democrats won no less than forty-eight percent of the German vote, an enormous success that was the result to a considerable extent of their leading role in the German protest movement against the forcible incorporation of ‘German Bohemia’ into the CSR. The election results strengthened the position of the social democrats all round and led to the formation of a new provisional Czechoslovak centre-left government led by the Czech social democrat Vlastimil Tusar. Tusar, the former Czechoslovak envoy to Vienna, replaced the CSR’s first far more conservative Prime Minister Karel Kramář. The new Prime Minister vowed he would defend Slovakia against ‘the Magyar and German armies of the Magyar communist dictator Béla Kun’, which at that time had deeply penetrated into Slovakia. But he also said he would create ‘favourable conditions’ for coexistence of the Czechs and Slovaks with the CSR’s national minorities.⁵⁹⁶ The Czech social democratic newspaper *Právo lidu* wrote on 21 June 1919: ‘We must not be content with winning the Germans’ passive loyalty but must establish a cordial relationship with them, so that they will readily and enthusiastically co-operate in the building of our new State which is also to be theirs.’⁵⁹⁷ Even if ‘enthusiastic cooperation’ was too much to ask from the German population and the German social democrats, there were some positive developments. In August 1919 the German social democrats of Bohemia and Moravia severed their organisational links with the Austrian Social Democratic Party and officially established themselves as an independent party called the ‘German Social Democratic Workers’ Party in the CSR’. Their leader Josef Seliger continued to protest against the denial of self-determination to the Germans of Czechoslovakia and the German social democrats consistently supported the demand for national autonomy for the German minority throughout the 1920s and 1930s. But there was little agreement among the Germans themselves on the concrete form that this autonomy should take and in what way it was to be different from the existing minority rights. However the party now declared its readiness to accept the CSR as a reality and as the state-political framework for its activity. Although this was welcomed by the Czech social democrats, they rejected the demand for German autonomy if it meant territorial autonomy. An article in the *Právo lidu* of 2 September 1919 argued this was a demand by people who previously had opposed territorial autonomy for the Czechs in the Habsburg Monarchy.⁵⁹⁸

We have seen that in August the German and Magyar social democrats in Bratislava declared their acceptance of the CSR as well. The collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the ensuing counter-revolutionary terror in Hungary, the successful local elections in Bohemia and Moravia, and the signing of peace treaties with Germany and Austria in June and September

clear if this included the forty-six detectives): SNA, MP, Box 273, proposition on police policy in Bratislava and Košice, 17 June 1919, submitted to the police inspectorate in Prague.

⁵⁹⁶ Zdeněk Kárník, *České země v éře První republiky (1918-1938)*. I. *Vznik, budování a zlatá léta republiky (1918-1929)*, Prague 2000, pp. 71-2; Alexander Brož, *The First Year of the Czecho-Slovak Republic*, London 1920, pp. 31-4; J.W. Bruegel, ‘The Germans in Pre-war Czechoslovakia’, in *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*, eds Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža, Princeton, 1973, p. 170; Norbert Linz, ‘Die Binnenstruktur der deutschen Parteien im ersten Jahrzehnt der ČSR’, in *Die demokratisch-parlamentarische Struktur der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik*, ed. Karl Bosl, Munich, 1975, p. 205; Šuchová, ‘Sociálna demokracia’, p. 123 for quotation of Tusar.

⁵⁹⁷ Quoted in Bruegel, ‘The Germans in Pre-war Czechoslovakia’, p. 170.

⁵⁹⁸ Bruegel, ‘The Germans in Pre-war Czechoslovakia’, pp. 170-1; Linz, ‘Die Binnenstruktur’, p. 206; Nancy M. Wingfield, ‘Working-Class Politics in the Bohemian Lands 1918-1921: National Identity, Class Consciousness, and the Social Democratic Parties’, *Bohemia* 34, no. 1, 1993, pp. 95-6.

1919 induced the German social democrats and their Magyar comrades to acknowledge the CSR.⁵⁹⁹ The last illusions about a possible change in the status of Bratislava had to be put aside when on 24 June Samuel Zoch issued a proclamation informing the population of the city that the Peace Conference had at last made its final and legally binding decision on Czechoslovakia's international frontiers. By this time Austria had had to accept the incorporation of the whole of Bohemia-Moravia into the CSR, which meant that the CSR's frontier with Hungary became definitive as well. Because Bratislava had been assigned to the CSR and no longer had the status of an occupied territory (as many of its inhabitants had been arguing), it had to be seen as an integral part of the Czechoslovak State. Its inhabitants were citizens of the CSR and 'did not face a foreign occupying power anymore'; this power was now 'their own government'.⁶⁰⁰ On 14 August the territory around Bratislava was enlarged by the Czechoslovak occupation of the southern bank of the Danube immediately opposite the city; this was the last important change of the Czechoslovak-Hungarian frontier. It meant the annexation of the predominantly German village of Engerau (Petržalka) and created a strategic buffer-zone protecting Bratislava, pushing the border with Hungary a few kilometres to the south.⁶⁰¹ Remarkably enough, two weeks later Samuel Zoch, the man who had played such a crucial role during the establishment of Czechoslovak rule in Bratislava, resigned from his post as County Sheriff and Government Commissioner. He declared that he did not want to be co-responsible any longer for the 'injustices of the authorities' as a result of which the 'hatred against the Czechs' was increasing every day, especially against 'those who regard Slovakia as a colony'.⁶⁰² Zoch had increasingly come into conflict with some of the more extreme 'Czechoslovakists' and pro-Czech 'progressivists' in the Bratislava administration, especially, it seems, with Šrobár's Commissioner for Education Anton Štefánek, who was working hard to introduce a new system of state-controlled education with strong secular and anti-clerical overtones. This was resented by most Catholics but also by a part of the Protestants (including Zoch) in relatively conservative Slovakia, where the churches had traditionally been in charge of education. But although Zoch's resignation was triggered by confessional grievances about the direction of Czechoslovak school policy,⁶⁰³ another reason for Zoch's step was the government's frontal attack on the old Hungarian teachers, whose massive dismissal and protests have already been mentioned above. When Zoch came to their defence and openly opposed some of Štefánek's measures, he was accused by some Czechoslovak political leaders of being a 'Magyarone', i.e., a pro-Hungarian and therefore politically unreliable person. In the ensuing conflict with Štefánek and others Zoch decided to step down, in which decision he was followed by Commissioner for Internal Affairs Milan Ivanka. Zoch was succeeded as County Sheriff by Method Bella, previously

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. Peter Zelenák, 'Maďarská sociálna demokracia na Slovensku', in *Kapitoly*, eds S. Sikora et al., p. 167, who only mentions the factor of the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic.

⁶⁰⁰ *Pressburger Zeitung (PZ)*, evening paper, 24 June 1919; Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, pp. 542, 551. Four days later the Peace Treaty of Versailles was concluded between the Entente and Germany (ending the *Anschluss* aspirations of the Austrians and the Czechoslovak Germans and confirming the international frontiers of the CSR), followed in September by the Peace Treaty of St Germain with Austria. The negotiations between the Entente and Hungary were resumed after the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in August 1919 and continued until the final conclusion of the Treaty of Trianon in June 1920; they produced only some marginal changes of the Slovak-Hungarian frontier. See Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, chapter 6.

⁶⁰¹ Paul Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert der Karpatendeutschen in der Slowakei*, Stuttgart 1992, p. 37; Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, p. 200; *Bratislava, hlavné mesto Slovenska. Pripojenie Bratislavy k Československej Republike roku 1918-1919. Dokumenty*, eds Vladimír Horváth, Elemír Rákoš, and Jozef Watzka, Bratislava, 1977, pp. 352-4 for documents on the annexation of Engerau/Petržalka.

⁶⁰² *PZ*, evening paper, 28 August 1919.

⁶⁰³ Personal communication by Natália Krajčovičová. See for Anton Štefánek *Do pamäti národa. Osobnosti slovenských dejín prvej polovice 20. storočia*, eds Slavomír Michálek and Natália Krajčovičová, Bratislava, 2003, p. 580.

‘Commissioner for Supply’.⁶⁰⁴ The resignation of the conciliator Samuel Zoch was a loss for Bratislava, perhaps also from a social and economic point of view. In June Zoch had helped to achieve a collective agreement between the organised agricultural labourers and the landowners of Bratislava County. In July he ordered an investigation into the problem of poverty in the city and the need to distribute clothes and footwear among the poor; it was estimated that about four thousand people in Bratislava were living in a state of poverty.⁶⁰⁵ Zoch’s resignation showed that tensions between the different Slovak (and Czechoslovak) political groups were rising, which further complicated the Bratislava political scene.

When in August 1919 a ‘new start’ was made by the German and Magyar social democrats in Slovakia, this created new opportunities for social democracy as a whole, but it also enhanced the process of ideological differentiation. The Magyar social democrats in Bratislava at last started a weekly newspaper of their own, independent from Hungary; like the old Budapest paper and the German *Volksstimme* it was called *Népszava* (The People’s Voice). Its first issue of 24 August 1919 critically analysed the record of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the lessons the working-class movement should learn from it. The paper began to discuss the issue of cooperation and a possible future unification with the CSSDP. Of course this problem was linked to the broader problem of national-minority policy in the CSR generally. Must they strive for an early merger of the different working-class parties or first address the special problems of the national minorities? Also related to this was the demand for Slovak autonomy within the CSR, an objective loudly proclaimed by the increasingly influential Slovak People’s Party (SPP), a nationalist and Catholic political movement led by the popular Slovak priest Andrej Hlinka. In contrast to both the Slovak and the German social democrats, *Népszava* seemed willing to support the idea of Slovak autonomy if it was based on ‘full democracy’, the crucial precondition to equal rights and autonomy for all nationalities in Slovakia. This meant, perhaps surprisingly, that the Magyar social democrats were prepared to support to some extent the autonomist programme of the SPP. They tended to regard it as a chance for the Magyars too, although they rejected the SPP’s nationalist and Catholic-conservative understanding of it.⁶⁰⁶ The German social democrats were far less enthusiastic about the idea of Slovak autonomy; they feared it would mainly benefit the ‘clericalist’ and ‘reactionary’ SPP.⁶⁰⁷ Like the Magyars, the Germans demanded national rights, cultural autonomy, and self-government for the minorities. But they preferred to implement this on the basis of small ethnically delimited districts in the framework of the state as a whole, not in the framework of an autonomous Slovakia. This had more or less been their concept since October 1918, when they supported the programme of national autonomy for

⁶⁰⁴ Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, pp. 92, 127; Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 552. The controversial issues of ‘progressive’ secular education and large-scale replacement of the Hungarian teachers were interrelated. Šrobár and Štefánek were not only interested in the question of language (as were more conservative and religious Slovaks, some of whom wanted to keep the Magyar teachers on condition they learned Slovak) but wanted to oust the Magyars and ‘Magyarones’ because they regarded them as ‘reactionary’, ‘unreliable’, etc., and because they wanted to foster a progressive ‘Czechoslovak’ consciousness. The result was that a large number of Czech teachers had to be imported; there was a shortage of Slovak teachers and the Czechs had to staff many of the new Slovak secondary schools in the required ‘Czechoslovak spirit’. See Pavol Matula, ‘Českí stredoškolskí profesori na Slovensku v rokoch 1918/1919’, in *Stredoeurópske národy na križovatkách novodobých dejín 1848-1918*, eds Peter Švorc and Ľubica Harbuľová, Prešov, 1999, pp. 346-7.

⁶⁰⁵ *Sociálne zápasy bratislavského robotníctva 1918-1938 (Dokumenty)*, eds Darina Lehotská and Vladimír Lehotský, Bratislava, 1979, documents 1-2, pp. 45-7.

⁶⁰⁶ Zelenák, ‘Maďarská sociálna demokracia’, pp. 168, 188 n.63. Dušan Kováč however stresses that the Magyar and German proposals to create small autonomous administrative districts – ‘the Swiss model of cantons’ – were unacceptable to the SPP, which wanted autonomy for Slovakia as one political-administrative unit. See Dušan Kováč, ‘Slovenskí Nemci, česko-slovenské vzťahy a česko-slovenský štát’, *Česko-slovenská historická ročenka*, 2002, p. 132.

⁶⁰⁷ See, e.g., Egbert K. Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei in den Jahren 1918-1929. Ein Beitrag zur Nationalitätenproblematik*, Munich 1971, p. 117.

all nations in Hungary, including the Germans of West Hungary. The idea of national autonomy continued to be their perspective after the Czechoslovak occupation of Bratislava and southwest Slovakia. Although during the short period August-September 1919 (after the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and before the signing of the peace treaty with Austria) the *Volksstimme* flirted with the idea of *Anschluss* of Bratislava to Austria, it soon realised this was an illusion.⁶⁰⁸ Although the German social democrats never united with the CSSDP, they developed a perspective that was oriented towards the Czechoslovak State. This was different from the traditional Hungarian – or regional Upper Hungarian/Slovak – perspective of the Magyars. Although, paradoxically, after their electoral defeat in 1925 the Magyar social democrats decided to affiliate with the CSSDP, this step was made in order to survive, not to express a newly discovered solidarity. The Germans' linking up with the Bohemian-German Social Democratic Party in 1920 was a confirmation of the trend of all-German separatism and meant the end of German-Magyar unity in Slovakia. As for the Slovak social democrats, their pro-centralist 'Czechoslovakist' orientation was strengthened by the arrival of numbers of Czech social democrats who moved to Slovakia to occupy all sorts of professional positions as well as leading posts in Slovak party and trade union organisations. People like Ivan Dérer and Ivan Markovič, Slovak middle-class radicals with a strongly 'Czechoslovakist' background, joined the CSSDP as well and set their stamp on its moderate and anticommunist wing. Some Slovak historians have suggested that Dérer and Markovič were urged by Šrobár and Masaryk to join the Slovak party in order to strengthen its pro-Prague element and to counter the influence of the left wing.⁶⁰⁹ On 9 October 1919 Dérer published a rather specious and escapist article in *Robotnícke noviny* arguing that the concept of 'so-called Slovak autonomy' was meaningless because the CSR was a democratic and 'autonomous' political entity itself. The CSR was the expression of 'the common autonomy of the Czechs and Slovaks, where only the Czechoslovak people is ruling'.⁶¹⁰ It was clear that monolithic Czechoslovakists like Dérer had no time for discussing questions of Slovak political and administrative autonomy. These questions became nonetheless increasingly important for many Slovaks who felt they were subjected to a new type of dominance, even if it was far more benign in its intentions than the old Hungarian regime.

On 28-30 September 1919 a congress of German and Magyar trade unions from different parts of Slovakia was held in Bratislava. It was the first major German-Magyar social democratic labour conference in Slovakia since the fall of the Bolshevik regime in Hungary. Many more meetings and conferences would follow during the months leading up to the elections of April 1920, all of them attempts to define social democratic political and trade union policy including the question of interethnic relations. The congress at the end of September was a belated

⁶⁰⁸ Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, p. 130; *Volksstimme*, 20 August 1919. During the period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic the relationship between the Hungarians and the Germans of West Hungary notably deteriorated and some German leaders fled to Austria or even Bratislava. This may have helped to reduce the enthusiasm for the Hungarian connection (and may have promoted the idea of closer links with Austria) also in Bratislava. See Balogh, 'Nationality Problems of the Hungarian Soviet Republic', pp. 107-9.

⁶⁰⁹ Cf. Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 56; Anna Magdolenová, 'Emanuel Lehocký – zakladateľ slovenskej sociálnodemokratickej strany Uhorska', in *Kapitoly*, eds S. Sikora et al., pp. 79-80, 82 n.20; Xénia Šuchová, 'Ivan Dérer, sociálna demokracia na Slovensku a slovenská otázka', in *ibid.*, p. 234; Ruman, 'Členstvo', p. 194.

⁶¹⁰ Quoted in Šuchová, 'Ivan Dérer', pp. 234-5. Dérer never changed his mind and always remained one of the staunchest 'Czechoslovakists' among Slovak politicians. In 1927 he argued in a social democratic brochure that if the SPP ever got the chance to implement their project of Slovak autonomy, it would not be a 'Slovak people's autonomy' but an 'old Austrian' bureaucratic police state. It was as if Dérer returned the charge made against the Czechoslovak bureaucracy and its centralist-Czechoslovakist defenders. See Ivan Dérer, *Miesto ľudovej autonómie byrokratický centralizmus*, Bratislava 1927: SNA, SD, File 242. In May 1934 Dérer gave a revealing lecture entitled 'Why are we against autonomy?' in which he referred to the 'Hungarianist [*Hungaristické*] elements in the Slovak mentality', i.e., the Slovaks' lack of political maturity and progressive thinking that in his view necessitated strong Czechoslovak administrative cohesion. See Ivan Dérer, *Československá otázka*, Prague 1935, pp. 68-95.

realisation of the broad-based trade union meeting that had been planned already six months ago (for 21 March) but could not be held at the time. The idea was to create more favourable conditions for closer unity between the Czechoslovak social democratic trade union federation, the OSČ, and the Magyar-German (the former Hungarian) trade union movement in Slovakia. Representatives of trade unions affiliated to the OSČ were invited to the congress as well, and on the agenda was not only the question of trade union unification but joint political action in the forthcoming general election. Initially, the Slovak Executive Committee of the OSČ had called on its members not to send delegates to the congress, and the Slovak authorities did not want to allow it because the Magyar and German trade unions had not yet been registered under the new Czechoslovak labour legislation. (Only on 25 October 1919 the new German-Magyar trade union council known as the *Union* applied for registration.) However, Czechoslovak social democratic leaders understood the political and electoral importance of the Magyar-German labour movement in Slovakia pursuing a legal and Czechoslovak-oriented course; they successfully intervened with the authorities in Bratislava, persuading them to give permission for the congress. As a result the Slovak Committee of the OSČ changed its position as well and both the CSSDP and the OSČ sent representatives to the congress. The congress supported the principle of seeking unity with the OSČ and spoke out in favour of a united trade union movement in Slovakia and in the CSR; given the factual overlapping of the political and trade union movements this would also mean closer political unity. However, in the short term the German-Magyar trade union leadership wanted to keep a substantial degree of autonomy for their organisations. Therefore a special commission of representatives of both sides was appointed to consider the conditions for German-Magyar affiliation to the OSČ and to discuss the various problems involved in a reorganisation of the whole trade union movement in Slovakia. The commission met the following month in Prague and recommended that concrete steps be taken to bring about unity of the different trade union movements. However, in the course of November and December it became clear that both sides, especially the Germans and Magyars, needed more time for preparing the unification of the trade union and political movements. On 7 December a meeting was held in Bratislava of Magyar and German social democratic organisations from five Slovak cities; it supported the idea of closer unity and joining up with the CSSDP. But there was a difference between proclaiming this idea and actually carrying it into effect, a difference that was to haunt the multinational labour movement in Slovakia and the CSR for a long time to come. What is more, differences arose between the Magyar social democrats in the eastern Slovak city of Košice, who as a consequence of their radical 'internationalism' advocated rapid unification with the Czechoslovak labour movement, and the German and Magyar social democrats in Bratislava. The latter insisted that, first certain concrete conditions should be met by the CSSDP, the substance of which became clear in January 1920. On 12 December the special trade union commission declared in Prague that 'the Magyar and German comrades' accepted the need for unification, but it would probably be accomplished only in the spring of next year. Although Magyar and German labour organisations reiterated on various occasions that they wanted to unite with the OSČ and the CSSDP, at another German-Magyar social democratic congress in Bratislava on 25-27 December it became clear that there continued to be a strong tendency for them to maintain their own organisations. Indeed, at this congress concrete steps were made to reorganise the German-Magyar Social Democratic Party in Bratislava with a view to making it politically more effective and organisationally less fragmented. The congress also proceeded to formulate a new political and election programme for what was obviously meant to remain an independent party. There were different views on what should be their relationship to the CSSDP.⁶¹¹

⁶¹¹ Zelenák, 'Maďarská sociálna demokracia', pp. 168-9; Dušan Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave 1918-1929*, Bratislava 1969, pp. 91-3; Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 88.

The journal of the youth organisation of the CSSDP wrote on 15 December 1919 that ‘some secretaries’ of ‘Magyar’ social democratic organisations in Bratislava were ‘only concerned with their own interests’ and wanted to keep separate organisations ‘on a chauvinist basis’. It was admitted however that other functionaries were willing to take a broader view.⁶¹² It may indeed have been a combination of national particularism and fear of losing their jobs that caused part of the Magyar and German labour leadership to slow down the process of unification. Especially in Bratislava, where they were the dominant organised labour element, German and Magyar social democratic leaders seemed to prefer keeping their own organisations. Losing their leading position by merging into a broader multiethnic working-class movement that inevitably would be dominated by the Czechoslovak majority, was difficult to swallow. But there were also other factors impeding labour unification. The local leadership of the CSSDP, which had on various occasions openly cooperated with the Bratislava authorities, was mistrusted by almost all German and Magyar social democrats, both by the moderate wing and by the emerging revolutionary wing. Neither did the broader German and Magyar working-class movement unconditionally support the policy of organisational unification, not just for political or nationalist reasons but also because of the problem of interethnic job competition and discrimination of non-Czechoslovak workers in the field of government employment. In this respect the situation in Bratislava, with its relatively large administrative and public sector, was more complex than elsewhere in Slovakia. But ethnonational antagonism and fear of being marginalised and reduced to political impotence in an all-Czechoslovak labour movement were real political factors shaping the behaviour of German and Magyar labour leaders. Their attitude was influenced by more than just fear of losing their jobs as labour functionaries in the existing German and Magyar organisations. By the end of October, in connection with the compulsory registration of all voluntary associations in the CSR, German and Magyar trade unionists in the Bratislava region had been successfully reorganised in the trade union council *Union*. This reinforced the tendency to maintain trade union separatism. Both the *Union* and Magyar trade union organisations in other parts of Slovakia agreed on the need to continue taking into account what was called the ‘special conditions’ of Slovakia. This meant above all preserving the autonomous trade union structures that had come into being as a result of ‘special’ historical and ethnonational conditions.⁶¹³

At the Slovak OSČ Congress held in the town of Piešťany on 6-8 January 1920, representatives of the *Union*, which claimed a membership of approximately forty thousand trade unionists in southwest Slovakia, explained their opposition to immediate trade union unification. Their viewpoint that for the time being they had to maintain their own organisation for practical reasons and their criticism of ‘Czech nationalism’ met with a negative response of the Slovak social democrats, whose newspaper *Robotnícke noviny* spoke on 15 January 1920 of ‘Magyar separatism’. But the *Union* delegates also said they strove for affiliation to the OSČ in the longer term, and they supported a congress resolution calling for a unified working-class movement in the CSR.⁶¹⁴ According to the Slovak historian Peter Zelenák, ‘both conceptual and personal motives’ were responsible for the fact that the debate about working-class unity did not seem to lead anywhere, not even by January 1920. Some of the relevant factors already have been mentioned above, but there was more. German and Magyar labour leaders like Paul Wittich, Samuel Mayer, Gyula Nagy, Antal Svraka, and others were aware of the national-political risks of joining up with the CSSDP. Apart from a potential loss of ethnic identity and political power, it might lead to a weakening of the popularity of the social democratic movement among the

⁶¹² Quoted in Zelenák, ‘Maďarská sociálna demokracia’, pp. 188-9 n.70.

⁶¹³ Ibid., p. 170; Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 96-7.

⁶¹⁴ Zelenák, ‘Maďarská sociálna demokracia’, p. 170; Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 88-9; Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, p. 96.

Magyars and Germans, who made up the majority of the population of Bratislava and about twenty percent and five percent, respectively, of the total population of Slovakia. Because of the approaching general election other Magyar and German political parties were consolidating themselves as well, and all had a programme of defending national-minority rights in the CSR. Since the trauma of the disintegration of Historical Hungary was an important aspect of Magyar political consciousness, this programme had a great appeal also for the Magyar working class. Another problem was the rise of the social democratic procommunist wing – also in the Czechoslovak party, where it was known as the ‘Marxist Left’ –, which tended to believe that it could neutralise national differences by loudly proclaiming the international revolutionary struggle for socialism. In 1920 the procommunist wing became more important in the social democratic movements of all national groups, in Bratislava particularly among the Magyars and Germans. It attracted many social democrats of the younger generation, but among the older more experienced generation many were sceptical about it, although there were some important exceptions. It has been argued that many older social democrats were aware of the risks of stressing an abstract revolutionary working-class unity over practical labour organisation among their own (social and ethnic) group; they feared it might weaken the labour movement both among their own nationality and the other nationalities.⁶¹⁵ Most of the leading German and Magyar social democrats tended to stick to the pattern of nationally separate organisation to avoid losing support to the nationalist right. At the same time, they kept their distance from Bolshevik radicalism by stressing practical labour politics and the legitimacy of demanding national-minority rights. A way of avoiding conflicts between the moderate and procommunist wings was also to stress the classical programme and goal of socialism.

It was not only the Magyar and German but also the Czechoslovak social democrats that were hesitant to engage in a more than pragmatic type of cooperation. This became evident when the discussions about closer political unity in the general election proved unsuccessful. While the Germans and Magyars wished to keep especially their own trade union organisations, the CSSDP was keen to maintain its national identity (although the Magyars had national motives as well). A local meeting of Bratislava’s German-Magyar Social Democratic Party on 11 January did not concretely discuss the question of ‘working-class unity’ (apart from the usual socialist rhetoric), but only ‘cooperation’ between the different social democratic parties in the election campaign. At a more broad-based congress of German and Magyar social democratic organisations from across Slovakia held in Bratislava on 18 January, it was disclosed what were the actual reasons for the failure to achieve social democratic unity even in the upcoming election. Paul Wittich admitted they had ‘greater trust in the Czech comrades’ than had been the case before, because the Czechs had ‘moved from the labyrinth of chauvinism to the road of international class struggle’. They were discussing joint action with both the CSSDP and the Bohemian-German Social Democratic Party, but Wittich stressed that their short-term goal could not be complete party unity but only cooperation in the election campaign. Samuel Mayer then explained to the congress why even the discussions with the CSSDP about joint action in the election had failed thus far. The CSSDP supported the principle of joint action, but the details of its propositions were highly problematical and had led to serious differences. Apart from problems regarding a common programme and a joint political leadership, their differences mainly related to the crucial issue of joint lists of candidates. The German and Magyar social democrats wanted unified lists in all seven (relatively large) electoral divisions of Slovakia. But the CSSDP only wanted joint lists in the electoral divisions of Nové Zámky, which included Bratislava and other areas with a large

⁶¹⁵ See Zelenák, ‘Maďarská sociálna demokracia’, pp. 170-1 for some of these observations. See for arguments on the generational and other social (skill, level of unemployment) differences between social democrats and communists in Central Europe Richard Vinen, *A History in Fragments: Europe in the Twentieth Century*, London 2002, pp. 99, 157.

Magyar and German population, and Košice, which contained a large Magyar population. The reason why the CSSDP refused to have joint lists with the Germans and Magyars in the other five districts, which had an overwhelmingly Slovak population, was fear that it would provoke nationalist attacks by other Czechoslovak parties and would deter Slovak voters. The party also demanded that in the Nové Zámky and Košice divisions Slovak social democrats should lead the joint lists, and it offered only four National Assembly mandates to the Germans and Magyars. The CSSDP press played down the significance of a possible electoral cooperation with the Magyar and German social democrats in Slovakia in response to attacks in other Czech and Slovak newspapers. This strengthened the belief of the Germans and Magyars that the party was only interested in votes, not in social democratic unity. On the other hand, some German and Magyar social democrats made unrealistic proposals that only made a bridging of the gap more difficult. An example of this was the demand that a united working-class party should have the nationally neutral name of 'Social Democratic Party of the CSR' or 'International Socialist Party of Czechoslovakia'; this was unacceptable for the many leading and ordinary CSSDP members with strong national feelings. According to the Slovak historian Dušan Provazník, this demand was made under pressure of the 'separatist' Bohemian-German Social Democratic Party, which was gaining more influence among the Germans in Bratislava. Mayer said on 18 January that 'real unity' required 'direct reciprocity' and that the German and Magyar social democrats saw themselves as equal political partners to their Czechoslovak counterparts. But the problem was – and this 'internationalists' like Mayer preferred not to say – that there had been a revolution in power structure. There were now new 'majorities' and 'minorities' in a new 'nation-state', and the social democrats were affected by it as well. More realistic was the demand of the Magyar social democratic leader Antal Svraka, who said that the Slovak social democrats should include in their programme a solution for the minority question that recognised the cultural demands of the national minorities. He added that if they did not do this, the idea of cooperation was useless and the German-Magyar party must participate in the election independently. Although some left-wing delegates demanded greater efforts to build a unified working-class party and criticised the tendency to make the question dependent on electoral considerations, the congress of 18 January decided that the German-Magyar Social Democratic Party would participate in the general election as an independent political force. Interestingly, this decision was welcomed by *Robotnícke noviny*, which wrote on 22 January 1920 that it showed that the German and Magyar social democrats had accepted the CSR and its political system. Apparently their participation in the election as such was seen as more important than social democratic unity. A police report similarly commented in a positive vein that it meant the defeat of those pro-Hungarian and radical-leftist elements in the Magyar and German labour movement that had refused to recognise the CSR or to participate in Czechoslovak political life. The congress of 18 January left the door open to electoral cooperation with the CSSDP, but on condition that the party accept joint lists of candidates in all electoral districts and a common political programme. The CSSDP did not accept these conditions, because it did not consider them to be in its own interest. The party had to compete in the election with parties like the Czech National Socialists (not a fascist but a left-wing nationalist party with considerable support among sections of the Czech working class) and had to avoid alienating nationalist sections of its own constituency. The CSSDP was not willing to engage in serious political cooperation with the German and Magyar social democrats if it meant that its national profile would be diluted, or that its position in the Czechoslovak Republic might be weakened. In Slovakia, specifically, the party may also have feared the influence of the relatively strong Magyar and German organised labour element in a united social democratic party.⁶¹⁶

⁶¹⁶ Zelenák, 'Maďarská sociálna demokracia', pp. 171-3, 189 n.80; Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 93-4; Ruman, 'Členstvo', p. 195; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 99.

Because the CSSDP and the Slovak social democrats did not accept the conditions and principles of cooperation put forward by the German-Magyar party, the German and Magyar social democrats of southwest Slovakia decided at a meeting in Bratislava on 1 February 1920 to confirm the earlier decision to participate in the election independently. This meeting was also attended by the Bohemian-German social democratic leader K. Cermak, who strongly opposed cooperation with the CSSDP. He said the CSSDP's national 'chauvinism' was proved by its refusal to accept the political propositions of the German and Magyar social democrats. However, despite the growing influence of the Bohemian Germans on their Bratislava comrades, the political positions of the two German groups were not completely identical. Pro vazník has rightly argued that the Bratislava social democrats were less openly German-nationalist in their rhetoric and orientation than the Bohemians, and more willing to participate in the political life of the CSR. This was in accordance with their pragmatic attitude all along and an illustration of the fact that, in contrast to the Bohemian Germans, they did not have a long history of conflict with a strong Slav social democratic nationalism. Interestingly, at the end of February Wittich opposed the action of German nationalists from Bohemia who had come to Bratislava to organise a public meeting; the social democrats' opposition caused that the meeting became a fiasco. It is also interesting that the decision to participate in the election as an independent force was not reported very prominently in the local – especially the Magyar – social democratic press. According to Zelenák, one reason for this may have been the influence of the increasingly leftist Magyar social democratic movement in Košice and east Slovakia, which was more in favour of actively striving for unity with the CSSDP than the more autonomist movement in Bratislava. He also claims that the decision on 1 March 1920 of the Košice Trade Union Council to seek affiliation to the OSČ had the effect of widening the gap between the Magyar and German labour movements.⁶¹⁷ In other words, the radical Magyars of eastern Slovakia and the more moderate German-dominated movement in the Bratislava region were also growing apart in terms of their attitude to 'internationalist' unification with the Czechoslovak labour movement. This may seem surprising given the fact that during the years 1918-19 the Magyars had been generally anti-Czech and anti-CSR. But in the 'post-Béla Kun era', with the factor of Hungarian Bolshevism removed, the pro-Bolshevist Magyars in Slovakia proved tactically pragmatic enough – one might also say: politically volatile enough – to redefine the meaning of 'proletarian internationalism'. The Germans on the other hand continued to be focused on their autonomist strategy and were more sceptical about 'Bolshevist enthusiasm' or tactical unification with the CSSDP. Their growing links with the Bohemian-German labour movement demonstrated the broadening of their perspective towards the CSR as a whole. But the Bohemian labour movement was relatively nationalistic and may have strengthened the Bratislava social democrats' belief in German cultural superiority as much as their belief in 'evolutionary' methods. Nevertheless by the middle of 1920 the communist element began to gain the upper hand also in the German-dominated labour movement in Bratislava. Already during the first months of 1920 some groups of radical trade unionists in southwest Slovakia, perhaps Germans as well as Magyars, decided to affiliate with the OSČ, another illustration of the link between political radicalism and trade union strategy. In February a section of Bratislava's woodworkers and in March all organised woodworkers in the predominantly Magyar city of Nové Zámky affiliated with the OSČ, thus strengthening the radical element in the CSR's principal trade union federation.⁶¹⁸ The Magyar left wing combined ideological radicalism with tactical and strategic pragmatism; post-Béla Kun communism also tended to play down the national question. The German moderate wing combined political reformism with organisational and ethnic particularism; it could not be

⁶¹⁷ Zelenák, 'Maďarská sociálna demokracia', pp. 173-4; Pro vazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, p. 95.

⁶¹⁸ Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 90. The historiography of individual trade unions in Slovakia – and trade unionism generally – is an underdeveloped field of research.

defined as 'nationalist' but perhaps increasingly became so after 1920. Despite all the contradictions involved, both tendencies could be seen as 'logical' options produced by different combinations of ideological, strategic, and ethnic motives influencing different groups of socialist and organised workers.

On New Year's Day 1920 the German social democratic newspaper *Volksstimme* made some interesting observations on the tragedies of the historic year 1919 and its expectations for the new year, which would undoubtedly bring more political uncertainty but also new opportunities including democratic elections. An article entitled 'retrospect and prospect' evaluated the 'terrible struggles' of the social democrats against their enemies and the 'sad' phenomenon of internal conflicts in the labour movement. In optimistic socialist fashion however it was claimed that all of this was proof of the 'birth of a new age', even if its character and meaning was 'not immediately clear'. Since the war had ended and the old political order in Central Europe had given way to democracy, the social democrats, who were everywhere the strongest party 'but not the majority', were faced with the dilemma of whether they should leave post-war reconstruction to the bourgeois parties or take co-responsibility for it instead of merely voicing criticism as they had done before. Everywhere in Central Europe the social democrats had decided to follow the latter course, it was observed, but now a large proportion of their supporters were discontented and demanded the immediate establishment of a socialist state by means of 'workers' councils'. While this great controversy had led almost everywhere to a split in the social democratic ranks, it seemed at first as if the Bolshevik regime in Hungary had created a new unity of the 'left' and the 'right'. But this unity proved superficial, 'not based on solid foundations', and when the Bolshevik regime collapsed it disappeared with it. If there had been 'real unity', so the *Volksstimme* argued, the united Hungarian working-class leadership would not have lost the initiative and would have been able to maintain the dictatorship of the proletariat. As for the situation in the CSR, the Czechoslovak social democratic 'right wing' had become a government party too, but it was incapable of opposing the 'nationalist-imperialist' government policy and even dragged along with it. In Czechoslovakia, one of the 'winners' of the war, 'imperialism' was so strong that for the time being it was 'able to suppress the left wing' in the CSSDP. But the struggle between socialism and capitalism continued, as did the struggle between the moderate and revolutionary wings of the labour movement. According to the *Volksstimme*, the struggle to achieve their socialist objective would be 'slow and difficult', and 'full of obstacles'.⁶¹⁹ This was not the language of revolutionary Bolshevism, even though the article was strongly critical of the CSSDP's 'imperialist right wing'. The article tried to be impartial vis-à-vis the internal socialist controversy, not to denounce or defend either the pro- or the anticommunist wing, although it suggested that progress towards socialism could only be gradual. This reflected the fact that the ideological differentiation process had not been completed yet, and that the German-Magyar social democratic leadership was hoping it could prevent a final split. Criticism of the CSR and the CSSDP could be a way of helping to avoid this. Not long after, however, as the struggle between the two wings intensified in the Bratislava labour movement, the tone of the *Volksstimme* began to change and became more explicitly anticommunist. At the end of January the paper criticised the communists' stereotypical revolutionary concepts: 'The Russian Bolsheviks... want to impose their tactics on Western conditions that are fundamentally different from Russian conditions.'⁶²⁰ It was impossible to foresee that by September that year the *Volksstimme* itself would be taken over by the procommunist wing. This could only happen as a result of the accelerated process of ideological differentiation and organisational disintegration following the social democratic election victory in April 1920.

⁶¹⁹ *Volksstimme*, 1 January 1920.

⁶²⁰ *Volksstimme*, 24 January 1920. See also Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 101.

Despite all the uncertainty and confusion inside and outside their movement, the German social democrats had some reason for optimism. It was reported, for example, that in January 1920 some secondary schools had been started in Bratislava with German as the language of instruction and teachers with a 'perfect command' of that language; at these schools Slovak was an obligatory subject as well. Of major importance in this respect was the city's old and famous Lutheran Lyceum, where German was at last beginning to replace Magyar, regaining its original position and historical status. In questions like school policy the German social democrats cooperated with German national-cultural organisations in Bratislava and Slovakia.⁶²¹ The German-Magyar Social Democratic Party was also busy re-organising itself, which was undoubtedly one reason for its reticence to embrace unification with the CSSDP. While thus far the social democratic movement had largely been built on the trade unions, a traditional model inherited from the semi-legal conditions of old Hungary, now urban district committees were established in Bratislava of the political party only. This was the expression of a new separation of the social democratic political and trade union wings, although their close interaction and considerable overlapping continued to be significant. The urban district committees were to play an important role in the election campaign, in which effective political communication with the Bratislava electorate and the party's rank and file was crucial. Indeed political meetings were organised of German- or Magyar-speakers only, although mixed meetings continued to be held as well. Especially at working-class grass-roots level, the 'typical' Bratislava phenomenon of multilingualism may actually have been far more circumscribed than is sometimes assumed. It is unlikely, for example, that the majority of the Magyar working class had a perfect knowledge of the German language and *vice versa*. In February 1919 the editor of the *Pressburger Zeitung* Alois Pichler had claimed that almost eighty percent of the Bratislava population had a working knowledge of the German language.⁶²² German was no doubt the principal language of communication in the Bratislava labour movement and in many other social contexts. But it remains a moot point how much knowledge of the German language the Magyar and Slovak workers in the city actually had (or indeed how much knowledge of Magyar the German and Slovak workers had). In any case it must have been necessary to hold party meetings for different language groups, especially in those cases where a proper understanding of political or organisational issues was essential.⁶²³

Although the German social democrats were keen to keep their own organisations vis-à-vis the CSSDP, and although there is evidence that the gap between Germans and Magyars was growing as well, internationalist rhetoric remained strong, as was the tendency to reduce working-class nationalism to ruling class manipulation. The *Volksstimme* admitted that many workers were influenced by 'the beast of nationalism' but claimed that internationalism was 'not yet dead'.⁶²⁴ Although social democratic orthodoxy prescribed that the victory of socialism would automatically end all forms of national oppression and national conflict, it was also asserted that the labour movement had to fight for 'national peace' here and now in order that the class struggle could be carried on more effectively.⁶²⁵ At the same time it was argued that in the context of 'real internationalism' there was room for a 'non-oppressive, noble, civilising [*kulturfördernd*] nationalism', which was fundamentally different from 'chauvinism'.⁶²⁶ The

⁶²¹ *Volksstimme*, 1 January 1920; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 98. From 1920 the number of German schools in Slovakia increased continuously; see Eduard Winter, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei und in Karpathorussland*, Münster 1926, pp. 25-8, 45.

⁶²² *PZ*, morning paper, 16 February 1919.

⁶²³ *Volksstimme*, 1 January 1920; on page 9 a 'meeting for Magyar-speaking comrades' is announced. See also Provazník, *Robotnicke hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 105-6.

⁶²⁴ *Volksstimme*, 9 January 1920.

⁶²⁵ *Volksstimme*, 11 January 1920.

⁶²⁶ *Volksstimme*, 27 January 1920.

Volksstimme typically claimed that the capitalists needed the ‘chauvinist emotions of the masses’ and promoted ‘nationalist incitement’ among them; an example was the effort of the Czech capitalists ‘to distract the attention of the Czech people from the social question’.⁶²⁷ After its successful national revolution the ‘Czech bourgeoisie’ claimed the status of *Herrenvolk* (ruling nation). By defining their new position like this, some Czech politicians, especially those of the right, demonstrated they were even worse than the rulers of old Austria, and ‘almost worse than old Hungary’.⁶²⁸ Old Hungary indeed had been ‘the land of the oppression of the nationalities’ and had paid the price for it; if the CSR committed the same mistake, her fate had ‘already been decided’.⁶²⁹ In October 1919 the *Volksstimme* had warned: ‘Only by granting equal rights to all nationalities it will be possible to maintain the Republic.’⁶³⁰ During the following months the paper repeatedly noted that there were indications that the CSR, in contrast to pre-1918 Hungary, was willing to grant national-cultural rights to its minorities, of which the government’s school policy with regard to the Germans in Slovakia seemed a promising example. Thus, although there was scepticism about the Czechoslovak State as far as the future status of the Germans and Magyars was concerned, there was always a certain discrepancy between anti-government rhetoric and willingness to acknowledge that democratic national-minority structures were put in place. There was also a discrepancy between social democratic rhetoric about internationalism – and the claim that working-class nationalism was the product of the ideological dominance of the bourgeoisie – and the undeniable reality of mutual suspicion between the different national groups making up the working class and the labour movement. Of course there had always existed a tension between socialist rhetoric and social democratic practices and for the social democrats it was only natural to persist in this tendency, especially with regard to the complex and unmanageable issue of national antagonism and interethnic relations. An additional complication was the claim of the emerging communist movement that, in contrast to the old-style social democrats, it was able to bridge the gap between theory and practice in the field of interethnic relations thanks to its ‘revolutionary internationalist’ politics.

On 14 March 1920 an extraordinary Magyar-German trade union congress was held in the Slovak city of Žilina where representatives of the OSČ, the CSSDP, and the Bohemian-German labour movement were present as well. The principal aim of the congress was to discuss the relationship between the Magyar and German trade union organisations in Slovakia and the OSČ. The congress – at which the left wing was strongly represented – had been organised to keep the debate about closer working-class unity going, to avoid a deepening of the mutual alienation between the Czechoslovak and German-Magyar labour movements, and indeed to prevent an early crisis in the relationship between the moderate and procommunist wings of the Magyar and German working-class movement. Since there was a considerable overlapping of the trade union and political wings of the social democratic movement, the different viewpoints expressed by different groups and individuals at the congress had also political implications. A representative of the CSSDP headquarters in Prague, Klein, stressed that on both the party-political and the trade union level unification of the different labour movements in the CSR was necessary and inevitable. As against this, the Bohemian-German representative Tauber argued – as other Bohemian Germans had done before him – that unification was not yet possible because the OSČ and the CSSDP were still dominated by ‘national chauvinism’. He said he was not against cooperation, but under the circumstances it could only happen on the basis of keeping separate movements. The debates at the congress took place around these two polarised views, which were brought to Slovakia from Bohemia and Moravia but shared by different groups in

⁶²⁷ *Volksstimme*, 12 March 1920.

⁶²⁸ *Volksstimme*, 5 June 1920, 11 January 1920.

⁶²⁹ *Volksstimme*, 24 February 1920.

⁶³⁰ *Volksstimme*, 28 October 1919.

Slovakia itself. Delegates from eastern and southern Slovakia, many of them Magyar radicals who were influenced by Bolshevik political exiles from Hungary, supported the position – despite the Bohemian-German opposition to it – that Magyar and German affiliation to the OSČ should happen as quickly as possible, using ideological arguments of international proletarian unity. On the other hand delegates from southwest Slovakia influenced by the moderate Bratislava leadership maintained a reserved attitude to affiliation, even though paradoxically their non-communist position was closer to that of the OSČ leadership. This contradictory pattern was typical of the labour movement in Slovakia at this stage. The situation was also influenced by the growing strength of the German-Magyar trade union council *Union*, which by 1920 represented more than forty thousand trade unionists in southwest Slovakia, including a considerable number of agricultural labourers. The leaders of the *Union*, most of them from Bratislava, saw unification of the working-class movement as a gradual process and wanted to move towards closer unity in Slovakia first, only thereafter in the CSR as a whole. Their argument that they had to consider the ‘unique’ Slovak conditions had in part a basis in reality; it did not only result from personal motives or fear of domination by the Prague centre. The secretary of the *Union* (and of the Agricultural Labourers’ Union) Gyula Nagy declared that affiliation to the OSČ was ‘premature’; moreover the Bratislava delegates ‘did not have a mandate’ to vote on it at this congress. Paul Wittich and other Bratislava delegates, who were under heavy pressure from both the radicals and the OSČ and who tried to avoid a deadlock or painful recriminations, assured the congress that they supported the principle of trade union unity and affiliation to the OSČ. Indeed they would actively help to carry it into effect if certain conditions were met. The congress then adopted a resolution declaring that ‘the Magyar and German proletariat’ in Slovakia wanted to affiliate with the OSČ and the CSSDP because the struggle for socialism could only be successful ‘if the international proletariat acted in unison’. However, more important than this solemn declaration were matters of practical detail. The resolution was followed by a list of concrete conditions that had no doubt been insisted on by the more practical-minded and moderate delegates, especially those from Bratislava. The list of conditions demanded that the Magyar and German workers could keep control over their own membership fees; that national-minority workers be represented on the secretariats of the regional trade union councils of the OSČ; that their language rights be guaranteed; that Magyar- and German-language trade union journals be published by the OSČ in addition to Czech and Slovak ones; that special committees dealing with the problems of Magyar and German workers be established; and that there should be a change in the name of the united social democratic trade union federation.⁶³¹ As long as the moderate leaders succeeded in keeping a dominant position in the German-Magyar labour movement in Slovakia, there could be no question of hasty unification with the Czechoslovak movement, despite the increasingly vociferous revolutionary rhetoric of the procommunist wing. It was obvious however that the struggle between the left and right was intensifying in all sections of the labour movement. The antithesis was kept in check until after the general election in April 1920, as was the antagonism between the German-Magyar and Czechoslovak labour movements. To a limited extent the different movements even cooperated in the election campaign.⁶³²

The election campaign in March and April 1920 was the last occasion on which the moderate social democratic and procommunist wings of the German, Magyar, and Czechoslovak

⁶³¹ These conditions are very similar to the demands made by the Slovak social democrats at the time of their national struggles within the Hungarian Social Democratic Party and the Hungarian trade union movement. There was obviously a basic pattern of ethnolinguistic demands and aspirations in Central Europe, which could be defined as the ‘quest for cultural recognition and cultural autonomy’.

⁶³² Zelenák, ‘Maďarská sociálna demokracia’, pp. 174-7, 190 n.96, 190 n.100. Zelenák points out that *Népszava* and the *Volksstimme* paid little attention to the Žilina congress, which reflected their ‘autonomist’ position. See also Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 95; Provozník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 98-9; *Dokumenty k dejinám KSC na Slovensku (1917-1928)*, ed. Júlia Hautová, Bratislava, 1981, document 12, pp. 43-4.

labour movements managed to put on a semblance of ‘working-class unity’. The campaign was marked by a good deal of socialist rhetoric, which was obviously necessary to keep the radical and moderate wings together and to achieve a maximum result in the elections for the Czechoslovak National Assembly (on 18 April) and the Senate (on 25 April). The election campaign started around the middle of March 1920. On 16 March a brief general strike starting at 3 p.m. was organised in Bratislava to give expression to the desire of the ‘organised working class’ for socialist reforms after the elections. All sections of the Bratislava labour movement and all national groups were involved in it and a radical atmosphere of sorts seems to have prevailed. Banners were carried around the city proclaiming ‘death to the profiteers’ and ‘to the gallows with profiteers’; pieces of rope were attached to lampposts with signs reading in three languages: ‘place for profiteers!’⁶³³ The problem of the rising cost of living, against a background of continuing shortages of the necessities of life, was obviously experienced as a principal issue. At meetings speeches were delivered in three languages and demands were made for the ‘socialisation’ of land and factories. Slogans like ‘long live the dictatorship of the common people’ and ‘long live communism’ suggested that the radical wing played a prominent part in the different activities. Another slogan was ‘down with the government’; it was demanded by demonstrators that the government should concern itself with improving the position of the ‘working people’, not with furthering the interests of capitalists and great estate owners.⁶³⁴ This demand showed that many Bratislava workers and citizens expected something positive from the government, which was led by the Czechoslovak social democrats, and did not blindly follow revolutionary slogans or communist-populist ‘solutions’ for everything. This also appears from other evidence. At a congress in Bratislava of the Agricultural Labourers’ Union of southwest Slovakia on 4 April, its secretary Gyula Nagy mainly addressed the issues of collective wage agreements and land reform, that is, practical matters rather than revolutionary schemes.⁶³⁵ The election campaign itself was a mix of practical demands and radical slogans. A meeting of the Slovak CSSDP had already declared at the beginning of February that the social democratic movement should try to win a ‘parliamentary majority for the proletariat’, so that it could assert its will by means of legislation and a truly representative Czechoslovak government. The party’s Election Manifesto published in March promised a combination of industrial socialisation measures and radical land reform. At least as important was that the national minorities were promised ‘tolerance’ and ‘justice’.⁶³⁶ This and the Germans’ and Magyars’ acceptance of the CSR made it possible for the social democrats of different nationalities to pragmatically cooperate in the election campaign. The election propaganda of the different social democratic parties was very similar as far as socio-economic demands were concerned. It was agreed they would avoid attacking or obstructing one another, or putting up rival candidates in the same district if this was harmful to any one of them. The social democrats’ agitation against the ‘bourgeois parties’ and other political ‘enemies’ was all the more aggressive however. At an election meeting of the CSSDP in Bratislava on 8 April, the threat was evoked of a restoration of the Habsburg dynasty and the ‘Magyar oligarchy’. Ivan Dérer, one of the speakers, also attacked

⁶³³ Hatred of ‘profiteers’ and ‘usurers’ was also fostered, both during and after the First World War, by the Christian Socials and anti-Semites, who equated them with Jews. See, e.g., Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, pp. 118-9; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 105. Indeed the difference between ‘left-wing’ social protest and agitation of another kind was not always clear-cut, and Jahn points out (pp. 105, 107) that anti-Semitism was also strong among the Bratislava working class.

⁶³⁴ *Roky prvých bojov. Dokumenty z robotníckeho hnutia Západoslovenského kraja 1918-1921*, ed. Ladislav Hubenák, Bratislava, 1961, document 34, p. 59: report of the Bratislava chief of police to the Ministry for Slovakia, 17 March 1920. According to this report, some fifteen thousand people participated in the meetings and demonstrations on 16 March. See also Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 94-5; Provozník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, p. 101.

⁶³⁵ Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 93-4.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

the ‘autonomists’ of the Slovak People’s Party and other Slovak ‘reactionaries’.⁶³⁷ A joint election meeting of the Christian Social Party and the Magyar National Party in Bratislava on 11 April was disrupted by radical socialists shouting ‘long live the Third International’.⁶³⁸ Social democratic election propaganda has been described by a Slovak historian as ‘social-populist’ rather than socialist. The agitation of the CSSDP in Slovakia focused on the immediate material demands of the politically ‘uneducated’ Slovak electorate, the overwhelming majority of whom were going to the polls for the first time in their life. There was a notable contrast between the CSSDP as a government party and as a ‘radical electoral agitation force’.⁶³⁹ But there were also differences in approach between the different local and regional social democratic organisations. The Bratislava CSSDP was part of the moderate party wing, while some of the party organisations in central Slovakia were more radical. The same kind of contrast existed between the relatively moderate German-Magyar social democratic leadership in Bratislava and the more procommunist Magyar organisations in Košice and east Slovakia. We are reminded again that Bratislava, with its strong skilled-worker and governmental profile, was in some ways a different type of social environment than many of the smaller provincial towns with their more one-sided industrial base and less differentiated political culture, even if this distinction should not be exaggerated.

The German-Magyar Social Democratic Party in Slovakia entered the election as an independent political force, as did the German Social Democratic Party in Bohemia and Moravia. But within each national segment political differences between different local and regional organisations could be significant, for example between the Magyar-German labour movements in southwestern and eastern Slovakia, which to some extent had a different ethnopolitical and sociocultural basis. The election campaign made some of these differences visible, also with regard to the national question. In contrast to the revolutionary propaganda tendencies in the eastern Košice region, the social democrats in the southwestern electoral division of Nové Zámky (which included Bratislava) laid greater stress on the evolutionary concept of gradually moving towards socialism. They saw this political learning process and the workers’ active participation in it as part of the process of working-class emancipation and of the overall democratic, social, and cultural progress of society. While for the communists concrete demands and democratic procedures were subordinate to the goal of establishing the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, for moderate social democrats they were part of the meaning and the gradual realisation of socialism itself. Similar differences in approach existed with regard to the national and national-minority issues. For the communists the ‘solution’ of the national question was a project of the future that could only be accomplished on the basis of the proletarian revolution and socialism; they typically referred to the ‘experience’ of Soviet Russia as the great example in this respect as well. As against this, part of the old Bratislava social democratic leadership was more inclined to argue that without a solution for the national-minority question – or at least a partial ‘solution’ comprising concrete administrative reforms – it was not possible to achieve socialism because national tensions would continue to divide the working class. Indeed since they had come to understand that they were now representatives of non-Czechoslovak working-class minorities, their sensitivity to the ‘national question’ had markedly increased. A Magyar social democratic newspaper in the southern city of Komárno argued in March 1920 that national-minority rights and cultural autonomy had to be ensured by the principle of democratic self-government on the local level. Changes were proposed in the territorial-administrative structure of the CSR by creating single-language districts, something that the Bohemian Germans were advocating too.

⁶³⁷ SNA, PR, Box 231: report on election meeting of 8 April 1920.

⁶³⁸ *Pressburger Presse*, 12 April 1920, quoted in Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 95. See also Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, p. 130.

⁶³⁹ Šuchová, ‘Sociálna demokracia’, p. 129.

Zelenák has argued that national-political demands like this, in addition to social and economic demands expressing the classical programme of the socialist movement, played a part in the election victory of the German-Magyar Social Democratic Party, which was the greatest in Bratislava and the Nové Zámky division.⁶⁴⁰

In the Nové Zámky electoral division as a whole, the party won 35.7 percent of the vote in the election for the National Assembly, followed by the Magyar-German Christian Social Party with 24.5 percent. Its 110,282 votes were the single largest number won by any social democratic party in any of the seven Slovak electoral divisions. The CSSDP won 15.3 percent, which meant that the two social democratic parties together had an absolute majority of fifty-one percent of the vote in the Nové Zámky division. Beside Bratislava and other towns in the district, a substantial proportion of these votes were delivered by the large population of agricultural labourers in this important agrarian region. The fact that all Slovak and Czechoslovak parties together got only 27.3 percent of the vote in the Nové Zámky division reflected the minority position of the ruling 'Czechoslovak nation' in this predominantly Magyar region of Slovakia. In the city of Bratislava, the two social democratic parties won together 23,814 votes, or 48.7 percent of the total; the German-Magyar party got 15,243 votes (31.2 percent), the CSSDP 8,571 votes (17.5 percent). The important Magyar-German Christian Social Party won 12,904 votes (26.4 percent). The Czechoslovak and Slovak parties got together 16,373 votes (33.5 percent), which can be regarded as a reliable indication of the national structure of Bratislava by the first half of 1920. Because all political parties were ethnic (or binational) parties, it may be concluded that the CSSDP won more than half of the Czech and Slovak vote in Bratislava. The German and Magyar social democrats won almost half of the German and Magyar vote both in Bratislava and in the Nové Zámky division. After the elections, the Bratislava town council was reconstituted to make it more properly reflect the relative strength of the different political parties in the city. In contrast to what happened in the election for the National Assembly, the more difficult conditions surrounding the election for the Senate (in which far more votes were needed for one mandate) caused the two social democratic parties to form a joint list for the Nové Zámky division. Apparently cooperation was possible if circumstances really demanded it. The German-Magyar Social Democratic Party in the Nové Zámky division won four seats in the National Assembly; it was to be represented by two Germans (Paul Wittich and Samuel Mayer from Bratislava) and two Magyars (Gyula Nagy from Bratislava and Jozsef Földessy from Komárno). Elsewhere in Slovakia it won another two mandates. It also won two seats in the Senate, to be occupied by the German Matthias Kreppenhofer and the Magyar Antal Svraka, both from Bratislava. These successes meant that the German and Magyar social democrats from Slovakia had the opportunity to express their views in the highest democratic institutions of the CSR. However, it should be noted that the Slovak Germans and Magyars were underrepresented in the Czechoslovak parliament. While in the Prague electoral division 21,986 votes were needed for one mandate in the National Assembly, in the Nové Zámky division 32,714 votes were needed. This was a clear example of reducing the political weight of the national minorities, whose agitation for cultural and national rights was feared by the government as a potentially destabilising factor. The importance of national-minority demands was shown by the electoral success of parties like the Magyar-German Christian Social Party and the Magyar Peasants' Party, both of which strongly defended the Magyar national position in Slovakia. As Zelenák has argued, there can be little doubt that the existence of an independent Magyar-German Social Democratic Party was a strategic condition for maximising the number of Magyar and German votes for social democracy. The same held true for the German social democrats in Bohemia and Moravia, who with forty-three percent of the German vote became by far the largest of the different German parties and the third strongest party in the CSR. National separatism was also

⁶⁴⁰ Zelenák, 'Maďarská sociálna demokracia', pp. 177-8.

crucial for the CSSDP as far as ethnic-Slovak voters were concerned, many of whom seem to have been under the spell of almost millenarian-like expectations of social and national transformation, seen as the inevitable consequence of the anti-Hungarian revolution. The CSSDP won an astounding and unique result in Slovakia: 38.1 percent of the total vote and probably more than half of the ethnic-Slovak vote; this would never be repeated and even surprised the Slovak social democrats themselves. Indeed it was considerably more than the party's result in Czechoslovakia as a whole (25.7 percent). It meant that twenty-one of the CSSDP's seventy-four MP's were from Slovakia, including Ivan Dérer, who was elected in the Nové Zámky division.⁶⁴¹

As a result of the social democratic election victory, Czechoslovak Prime Minister Tusar could form a second centre-left (Social Democratic/National Socialist/Agrarian) coalition government in May 1920 in which the Czechoslovak social democrats were even more strongly represented than before. Dérer replaced Šrobár (a member of the Agrarian Party) as Minister for the Administration of Slovakia.⁶⁴² Another Slovak social democrat, Ivan Markovič, became Minister of Defence. Tusar made an attempt to include the Bohemian-German social democrats and the German Agrarian Party in his cabinet. He did not succeed because the German social democrats continued to demand German territorial autonomy, which the Czechs argued was ruled out by the Constitution. Tusar declared the Czechs could understand that for the Germans and Magyars it was difficult to accept the new situation, but 'the Czech nation built this state at the beginning of the Middle Ages and now it renews it again together with the Slovaks! We regard this as historical justice'. Two days after the conclusion of the peace treaty between the Entente and Hungary on 4 June 1920, Dérer at last abolished martial law in Slovakia, although certain emergency decrees remained in force, notably the power to expel 'undesirable' Hungarian and other 'foreign Bolshevik elements' from Slovak territory. On 24 July martial law in some Slovak-Hungarian border regions was even declared again, and the tension between the CSR and Hungary never ended. According to Dérer, both the Hungarian counter-revolutionary Horthy regime and the communists tried to promote chaos in Slovakia.⁶⁴³ Another problem was that the social democratic election victory speeded up the process of ideological differentiation in the labour movements of all nationalities. The communist element demanded the implementation of radical socialisation measures and the government and moderate social democracy felt the pressure of the impatient section of their constituency. As always, the 'internationalist' rhetoric of the radicals had the potential to confuse the situation. At the end of April, for example, the Magyar social democratic newspaper *Népszava*, which was still controlled by the Bratislava moderates, welcomed the activity of the left wing in the CSSDP, but only in so far as its efforts to overcome national barriers were concerned. By the beginning of May, the German-Magyar social democratic movement in Bratislava began to be seriously affected by the actions of the communists. One reason for this was the growing influence of Hungarian Bolshevik exiles in some of the local labour organisations, certain Bratislava factories, and even among the editors of the *Volksstimme*. On 6 May a meeting of social democratic district committee and factory representatives that was dominated by the radicals declared that the Bratislava working class did not expect its 'political or economic liberation' from bourgeois institutions like the National

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 177-9; Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 69, 100; Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 98-9, 214; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, pp. 69, 80-1; Šuchová, 'Sociálna demokracia', p. 129; Xénia Šuchová, 'Príloha II – Politický systém', in *Slovensko v Československu (1918-1939)*, eds Milan Zemko and Valerián Bystrický, Bratislava, 2004, pp. 553-8; Ruman, 'Členstvo', p. 196; Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 564.

⁶⁴² The *Grenzbote* of 3 June 1920 wrote after Šrobár's leaving his post that he, 'the man who has liquidated Pressburg's autonomy', had been a dangerous 'kind of razor' during his term of office, destroying and 'cutting down' everything around him; see for the issue of Bratislava's autonomy also note 85.

⁶⁴³ Šuchová, 'Sociálna demokracia', pp. 129-30, also for the quotation of Tusar; František Soukup, *Revoluce práce. Dějinný vývoj socialismu a československé sociálně demokratické strany dělnické*, 2 vols, Prague 1938, vol. 2, p. 1434; Bruegel, 'The Germans in Pre-war Czechoslovakia', p. 174.

Assembly or the town council. The meeting decided that a new ‘workers’ council’ should be established, an alternative political organ to defend working-class interests and to fight for a new social order, ‘if necessary with revolutionary means’. This was different from the concept underlying the old *Arbeiterrat*, which had been a kind of auxiliary organ of social democracy and a platform to present working-class grievances to the authorities. Although the communist-style workers’ council does not seem to have come into being in 1920, the idea signalled the beginning of the end of social democratic party unity. The radicals loudly declared that councils of workers, peasants, and soldiers (‘irrespective of nationality’) should be formed to fight for the social revolution as their ‘immediate goal’. When at the end of May a law was adopted making it impossible for unofficial organisations like ‘workers’ councils’ to influence the decisions or the manner of functioning of representative bodies like town councils and local administrative organs, the radicals organised a protest meeting in Bratislava. They claimed the law was ‘anti-democratic’ and reduced the already limited level of local self-government.⁶⁴⁴ It was also demanded that the government guarantee the right of asylum of Hungarian political refugees, another issue through which the radicals hoped to win the sympathy of the local working class. Protests in Bratislava against the ‘White Terror’ in Hungary (but also against Polish and Entente intervention in Soviet Russia) were supported by workers of all nationalities. On 17 August 1920 three separate but simultaneous meetings were held in the city in connection with these issues. One was organised by the CSSDP, another by the German social democrats, and the third by the Magyar social democrats. It was significant that the Magyar meeting adopted the most militantly phrased and revolutionary resolution.⁶⁴⁵ But the German meeting sounded quite militant too. Here Elsa Grailich declared among other things that the Czechoslovak ‘chauvinist’ press was spreading ‘lies’ about a German-Russian alliance in order to incite ‘the national instincts’ of the Czech and Slovak proletariat against Germany and Soviet Russia.⁶⁴⁶

The question of Czechoslovak protection for the large number of Hungarian communist exiles in the CSR became increasingly salient and controversial, especially because many of them were playing a role in the emerging communist movement in Slovakia. Growing concern about this phenomenon led Dérer to issue a decree on 18 July providing for the possibility to refuse asylum status and to expel foreign communists from Slovakia who were involved in ‘fomenting social and political unrest’. By the summer of 1920, the rise of the left in the German-Magyar Social Democratic Party could no longer be halted even in hitherto relatively moderate Bratislava. A coalition of young communists and some older social democrats, impressed by the revolutionary rhetoric of the Third International and driven by disbelief in ‘bourgeois’ parliamentary democracy, began to pull a majority in the Bratislava party to the left. At party meetings on 11 and 18 July a majority of delegates supported the proposal of F. Pfifferling, a radical socialist from Austria, to join the Third International. Paul Wittich, until that moment the most important leader of the Bratislava labour movement, delivered a speech criticising the Hungarian Soviet Republic and stressing the inevitability of an evolutionary road towards socialism. But now, perhaps for the first time in his political career, he did not succeed in getting

⁶⁴⁴ Around this time the loss of Bratislava’s municipal autonomy was also criticised – though from a different perspective – by middle-class citizens and newspapers like the *Pressburger Zeitung*. In 1919 Šrobár issued a decree that the higher officials of the town administration would no longer be elected by the town council but appointed by the County Sheriff/Government Commissioner. In this way Bratislava lost much of its last administrative autonomy; under the Hungarian regime this autonomy had already been considerably reduced (see chapter three). However, it should be noted that the city’s ‘administrative committee’ (*Verwaltungsausschuss*) formed in April 1919 had a degree of co-responsibility for policy making and included representatives of the town council (for example Paul Wittich). See Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 549; Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, pp. 102, 115.

⁶⁴⁵ Zelenák, ‘Maďarská sociálna demokracia’, pp. 179-80; Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 104-7; Provozník, *Robotnicke hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 103-10.

⁶⁴⁶ SNA, PR, Box 231: police report on the meetings of 17 August 1920.

a majority behind him, and the old party leadership led by Wittich was forced to resign. The radicals won a majority in the new provisional party leadership, in which the struggle between the two wings continued until the meeting of a full party congress. The leftists also established control of the party newspapers *Volksstimme* and *Népszava*, which became procommunist organs. At the subsequent Party Congress of 24 September 1920 the radicals won a final victory. Old party leaders like Paul Wittich, Samuel Mayer, and August Masár were expelled from the party because of their refusal to support the Communist International. They now became the leaders of the social democratic minority movement among the Bratislava Germans and Magyars and helped to establish new social democratic parties two months later. In October a new German social democratic newspaper, *Volksrecht*, was started in Bratislava, as well as a new Magyar newspaper. The German-Magyar trade union council *Union* went the same way as the party, but here the issue of ideological orientation was mixed up with efforts to join the Czechoslovak trade union federation OSČ, which was itself affected by the social democratic-communist power struggle too. On 5 September a congress of the *Union* in Bratislava adopted a resolution declaring it wanted to affiliate with the OSČ ‘on the platform of the Third International’. This objective was never achieved because the communists remained a minority movement in the OSČ; a separate communist trade union council came into existence one year later. Wittich and Mayer, but also Gyula Nagy (who later joined the communists), continued to defend the *Union*’s independence, but the political basis for this had weakened. At the end of September negotiations between the *Union* and the OSČ led to a decision on the *Union*’s affiliation, but it was only carried out at the beginning of 1921, after the OSČ had accepted the *Union*’s conditions. This brought more than thirty thousand Magyar and German trade unionists from the Bratislava region into the Slovak organisations of the OSČ, many of who joined the communist trade union movement some months later. By September 1920 the power struggle also began to seriously affect the Slovak social democratic movement, which was influenced by developments among the Magyars and Germans as well as by what happened in the CSSDP. A CSSDP party conference in the county of Nitra was one of several occasions on which the move to the left became apparent; the conference even criticised the ‘nationalist policy’ of the Slovak Executive Committee in Bratislava. It seemed that the CSSDP in Bratislava County was one of the few regional party organisations in Slovakia that remained loyal to the party leadership and to the social democratic-dominated Czechoslovak government. At a conference of the Bratislava party in July, a resolution was passed supporting the Tusar government and the policies of Minister for Slovakia Ivan Dérer. Thus, while in Bratislava’s German and Magyar social democratic movement the left wing gained the upper hand, this did not happen in the Bratislava CSSDP, which remained an example of moderate and ‘governmental’ social democracy. The Slovak social democratic newspaper *Robotnícke noviny* remained an exponent of moderate social democracy as well. From the second half of 1920 it continued to publish articles attacking the Communist International and arguing that the working-class movement should preserve the ‘true foundation’ of social democracy.⁶⁴⁷

By mid-September the internal crisis in the CSSDP resulting from the growing communist agitation had become so bad that the social democratic Prime Minister Tusar, who had lost the support of the radical section of his own party, decided to resign, as did Minister for Slovakia Dérer. An interim ‘government of experts’ opened the attack on communist activity in Slovakia and elsewhere by announcing the expulsion from the CSR of several prominent radical figures who were not Czechoslovak citizens, most of them Magyars, but also some Austrians and others. One of them was the Austrian-born leader of the Bratislava left F. Pfifferling, who had even become editor of the *Volksstimme*. On 3 October he was expelled to Austria, and the next

⁶⁴⁷ Zelenák, ‘Maďarská sociálna demokracia’, pp. 180-2; Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 106-10, 122; Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 110-8; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, p. 80.

day the left-wing leadership of Bratislava's German-Magyar labour movement declared a general strike in an attempt to have this measure withdrawn. Leaders of the Bratislava OSČ and CSSDP refused to support the strike, arguing they had not been consulted by the strike leaders. The authorities mobilised police and army units, prohibited public meetings, and arrested several dozen people, largely Hungarian political exiles. On 8 October *Robotnícke noviny* wrote that the 'political strike' in Bratislava would decide 'whether communism or social democracy will prevail in the CSR'; it denounced its organisers and the Hungarian Bolshevik emigrants. The CSSDP claimed that the strike was an affair of Magyar and German socialists and foreigners only and that the Slovak and Czech workers had nothing to do with it, but there is evidence that initially some Czechs and Slovaks supported the strike as well. The strike leadership accused the CSSDP of trying to isolate the Magyar and German workers from the Czechs and Slovaks and of fostering national differences. On the other hand Ivan Dérer, no longer the highest authority in Slovakia but still a prominent leader of pro-government Slovak social democracy, described the Hungarian Bolshevik exiles, whom he considered the initiators of the strike, as 'subversive elements' and even as 'agents of Horthy'. He said they wanted to split the working-class movement politically and to destroy the CSR. Indeed he hardly considered it necessary to distinguish between Magyar nationalists and communists, both of whom he regarded as anti-CSR irredentists. Dérer called on those Slovak workers who had been forced or persuaded to support the strike to resume work immediately. On 7 October part of the strikers returned to work; two days later only a small group of communists were still on strike.⁶⁴⁸

Between September 1920 and the first quarter of 1921 the process of disintegration of the social democratic movement continued unabated, embracing the Czech and Slovak CSSDP, the German Social Democratic Party in Bohemia and Moravia, and the Magyar and German labour movement in Slovakia. In many regions of Bohemia and Moravia the communists, though strong, remained a minority movement. This can be explained by the strong historical, socio-economic, and cultural roots of social democracy among the German and Czech skilled worker strata, but also by the tendency of the German Social Democratic Party to play a leading role as a national protest movement. The German party's losses to the communists seem to have been smaller than the losses of the other social democratic parties in the CSR.⁶⁴⁹ In Slovakia however the communists managed to conquer a majority position in most regions and most worker organisations and among all nationalities; often it was the social democrats, now a minority, who had to leave the old organisations instead of the communist usurpers. As far as the Slovaks were concerned, this development could be explained by their relatively weak labour traditions and their consequent susceptibility to sudden but volatile expressions of protest and radicalism. As a Slovak historian has described it, in Slovakia communism had a spontaneous, 'elemental' character and included a strong element of 'national' disaffection.⁶⁵⁰ This meant that, like the earlier support for social democracy, Slovak support for communism could suddenly arise but also quickly dissipate again when new opposition movements, for example the nationalist Slovak People's Party, arrived on the scene. The SPP indeed began to build a mass following during the 1920s as Slovak national discontent increased. For the Magyars and the Slovak Germans, communism had even more the dual function of a social and a national protest movement against the new 'Czechoslovak bourgeois' rulers. Unlike the social democratic movement among the more than three million Bohemian and Moravian Germans (a much larger potential constituency than the 600,000 Magyars and 150,000 Germans in Slovakia), the labour movements among the

⁶⁴⁸ Šuchová, 'Sociálna demokracia', p. 113; *Volksrecht*, 20 October 1920; Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, pp. 157-8; Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 117-8; Provazník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 118-24; Provazník, 'V prvom desaťročí', pp. 342-3, and pp. 352-3 for the attempts of the Bratislava authorities in the 1920s to deny Czechoslovak citizenship to Magyar communist labour leaders like Gyula Nagy.

⁶⁴⁹ Wingfield, 'Working-Class Politics', p. 104.

⁶⁵⁰ Šuchová, 'Sociálna demokracia', p. 136.

Slovak Magyars and Germans were too small to fulfil the function of effective protest movements. They were important on the local level, but could not be so on the Czechoslovak level. The communist movement however could perform this function because it was organised on a state level and because it articulated a combination of social and national protest tendencies. An important point about communism in both Hungary and Czechoslovakia is that it included a 'hidden national-protest function', which in the milieu of the working class it could more successfully fulfil than 'bourgeois-nationalist' opposition movements. This was the case from a sociopolitical as well as a psychological point of view.⁶⁵¹ Communist 'messianic' ideology provided a revolutionary 'millenarian' perspective that offered compensation – by their participation in the movement and by achieving the promised goal of 'socialism' – to national minorities for the painful reality of their second-class status in the state. It offered the promise that through 'international' solidarity they could achieve a new society in which their subordinate status, both socially and nationally, would be eliminated. In the specific context of Slovakia, communism could become a major opposition movement among all nationalities by 1920-1, a coalition of disaffected population groups that offered a kind of 'escapist' strategy to break out of their resented subordinate position. Of course communism was not only about resisting new patterns of national domination. After all it was supported by large numbers of Czechs as well, and its social and economic promises were as important as its promise of national equality. What was important was that the communist movement represented a combination of different grievances within one ideological perspective, that it promised many different things at the same time. In practical terms, nevertheless, the communists' 'internationalist' claims did not mean very much, if only because language and national barriers could not be overcome easily. In June 1920, a Magyar-German procommunist labour conference in Košice called for interethnic 'unity', but also for separate national committees within the revolutionary movement 'to extend the socialist culture of each nationality in its own mother tongue'. In January 1921, a historic communist conference in the Slovak village of Ľubochňa decided to create 'national sections' within the communist movement in Slovakia that had to deal with specific national issues and needs.⁶⁵² The national question was to haunt the communist movement as much as other political movements and, apart from the level of rhetoric and propaganda, was never 'solved' by it. The social democratic movement was unable to successfully address the problem as well. Its efforts to develop a national-minority programme were more serious than the politics of the communists, but on the other hand its position was more complicated from the institutional point of view. Even the German-Magyar party in Bratislava split into its component parts, with two new social democratic parties being formed at the end of 1920.

On 20 November 1920 indeed a new German Social Democratic Party was established in Bratislava that became the core of a Slovak regional section of the German Social Democratic Party of Bohemia and Moravia. It meant a strengthening of the national orientation of

⁶⁵¹ Cf. Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, pp. 64-71, 120-1. With regard to the 'mass psychology' of the Bolshevik movement in Hungary in 1918-19, Jászi speaks of 'Messianic fantasies', 'Messianic faith', 'superstitiously nationalist mentality', etc. Although the situation was not exactly the same, this mental disposition also existed among many Magyars and other national groups in the CSR.

⁶⁵² *Dokumenty*, ed. J. Hautová, document 13, pp. 44-5 (see also documents 17-18, pp. 49-52); *Pravda chudoby*, 20 January 1921; Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 108; *Ľubochňa 1921. Spomienky na sjazd marxistickej ľavice*, Lipt. Mikuláš, 1961, p. 15. The reality of parallel ethnic worlds coexisted in a bizarre way with the reality of Communist Party centralism. While lip service was paid to the right of national autonomy and the need to find 'solutions' for the 'national question', the Communist Part of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), which was finally constituted in May 1921, displayed in practice a remarkable degree of 'Czechoslovakism' itself. In day-to-day internal party life bureaucratic centralism from Prague soon came to dominate the party, and already in January 1922 the autonomous Slovak party organisation with its special ethnic arrangements was abolished. See Juraj Kramer and Ján Mlynárik, 'Revolučné hnutie a národnostná otázka na Slovensku v dvadsiatych rokoch', *Historický časopis* 13, no. 3, 1965, pp. 425, 429.

Bratislava's German social democrats, who continued to be led by their old leaders Wittich, Mayer, and Masár in accordance with the national-autonomist programme of the Bohemian Germans. The more overt German orientation of their old party comrades led the small group of Magyar social democrats who had not joined the communist camp to establish a separate Magyar Social Democratic Party on 4 December. This ended the historical organisational link between the German and Magyar social democrats in Slovakia. According to Zelenák, this development was not the result of national antagonism but of 'considerations about the inevitability of reflecting on a national viewpoint in the formation of social democracy'. These considerations could lead to concrete ideas on national-political separatism, but in 1926 the Magyars went the other way and joined the CSSDP. In contrast to the communists, who simply evaded the national problem by pretending it could be transcended through 'international' proletarian solidarity, the social democrats were willing to think about practical solutions for the problem of interethnic coexistence. A new Magyar social democratic programme advocated national autonomy in the field of culture and education and the formation of single-language districts and local Magyar administrative councils; the Czechoslovak National Assembly should only deal with those questions that did not fall under the competence of these local councils. Building on propositions already suggested in 1919 (and on older Austro-Marxist ideas), it was one of the first programmes in the milieu of the Magyar population in Slovakia having the ambition seriously to address national-minority and political-administrative problems. Its perspective was similar to that of the Bohemian Germans, but the Magyar Social Democratic Party was too weak to influence political developments. The majority of the Magyar working class supported either communism or irredentist nationalism; social democracy was tragically marginalised between these two extremes. Although the CSSDP did not support the idea of territorial-administrative autonomy for the national minorities, the small Magyar party affiliated to it in 1926. By that time, after the lost election of 1925, this was apparently seen as the only way for the Magyar social democrats to avoid political extinction.⁶⁵³ Between 1920 and 1925 the Magyar social democrats had escaped this fate by politically cooperating with the German social democratic and other opposition groups, especially in the Czechoslovak parliament where they had representatives until the general election in 1925. During this period there were occasional meetings of the Magyar party in Bratislava to which German social democrats were invited as well and where parliamentary and other issues were discussed in an attempt at joint political efforts.⁶⁵⁴ In contrast to the Magyars, the German social democrats never made the step to affiliate with the CSSDP, but instead they moved ever closer to the Bohemian-German party with its insistence on national and party autonomy. However there were moments of political cooperation in Bratislava even between the German and Czechoslovak social democrats. On 16 December 1920, for example, an anticommunist meeting was held featuring speakers of both parties; a speaker of the CSSDP called Soviet Russia a 'dictatorship over, not of the proletariat'.⁶⁵⁵ The communist movement meanwhile offered its own opposition vision to workers and others who were nationally or socially frustrated, denouncing the 'Czech bourgeoisie' without being nationalist the way some German and Magyar opposition parties were. The communists did not bother about practical details of possible solutions for the national problem, but in the eyes of many Magyar workers the movement may have represented a continuation of the promises of Hungarian 'national Bolshevism'. The post-war atmosphere of social and political radicalism posed a threat to

⁶⁵³ Zelenák, 'Maďarská sociálna demokracia', p. 182; Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 122; Provazník, *Robotnicke hnutie v Bratislave*, pp. 126-7; Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, pp. 85, 115-6; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, p. 81. SNA, PR, Box 231: letter by the secretary of the CSSDP in Bratislava, 9 March 1927, to the Bratislava police informing them about the Magyar Social Democratic Party's decision of 24 October 1926 to dissolve itself and to call on its membership to join the local organisations of the CSSDP.

⁶⁵⁴ See, e.g., SNA, SD, File 284: report on meeting of the Magyar Social Democratic Party, 3 September 1922.

⁶⁵⁵ SNA, PR, Box 231: police report on social democratic mass meeting of 16 December 1920.

democracy across Central Europe and did not always favour moderate social democracy. In Slovakia social democracy was seriously weakened by the fact that communism was also supported by many ethnic Slovaks, although their number was smaller in proportional terms than the level of support for communism among the Magyars and Germans.

Those Slovaks who remained in the CSSDP were faced with its increasing centralism and ‘Czechoslovakism’. The CSSDP Party Congress held at the end of November 1920 decided a further centralisation of the party, which meant a weakening of the limited autonomy that the regional Slovak Executive Committee had enjoyed since December 1918. The number of Slovaks on the party’s Central Executive Committee in Prague was reduced from three to one. In part this reflected the bad position of Slovak social democracy following the communist take-over of a major part of the organisations in Slovakia. It was also the result of the desire to streamline the structure of the party in accordance with the growing bureaucratic centralisation characterising developments in the CSR as a whole. Although Slovak delegates at the CSSDP Congress reiterated their pro-Czechoslovak stance, they also expressed some criticism by declaring they wanted ‘no importation of incapable old-Austrian bureaucrats [second-rate Czechs]’ to Slovakia.⁶⁵⁶ Two years after the foundation of the CSR there was growing criticism of Czechoslovak centralist methods among various political groups in Slovakia, not only the increasingly clamorous Slovak People’s Party. In 1920 even a man like Milan Hodža, one of the most prominent ‘official’ Slovak political figures and a leading member of the important Agrarian Party, spoke of ‘Austrian methods’ and argued that ‘the core of the Slovak crisis is that the state administration has acted mechanically, not psychologically’. According to Hodža, Prague imposed too much ‘centralism’ and ‘one-sided bureaucratic rationalism’ on the complex and sensitive Slovak situation.⁶⁵⁷ Apart from this insensitive bureaucratic centralism, the massive influx of Czechs into Slovakia had become a major grievance with a growing number of Slovaks also. They felt that Slovakia had become a land of opportunity for those Czechs who could not make it in their own country, which is what the criticism of the Slovak social democrats quoted above referred to as well. Moreover the Czech newcomers, with their ‘rational bureaucratic’ style inherited from old Austria, had a different mentality from the Slovaks, who were used to more relaxed ‘Hungarian-style’ working methods.⁶⁵⁸ Be that as it may, the tendency towards Czech domination in Slovakia, both in terms of job competition and political-administrative ascendancy, caused a degree of discontent even among some Slovak social democrats. It also played into the hands of both the Slovak People’s Party and the communists, both of whom used every opportunity to attack the Czechoslovak political leadership and the CSSDP. By 1921, the only regions where the Slovak social democrats had managed to maintain a strong position vis-à-vis the communists were Bratislava County and some areas in central Slovakia. In April 1921 a conference of the CSSDP of Bratislava County claimed it represented 12,052 political members. This was not bad given the fact that in Slovakia the party had lost more than half of its membership to the communists. However, the CSSDP’s decision in September 1921 to join the new Czechoslovak coalition government led to further membership losses.⁶⁵⁹ A tough campaign of political education and anticommunist agitation would be necessary if the organised workers of the different nationalities were to be convinced that parliamentary democracy and ‘evolutionary socialism’ had something to offer.

⁶⁵⁶ Ruman, ‘Členstvo’, pp. 192, 200-1; Šuchová, ‘Sociálna demokracia’, p. 140.

⁶⁵⁷ Quoted in Ferdinand Peroutka, *Budování státu*, 2nd edn, 4 vols, Prague 1991 (1st edn 1933-6), vol. 3, pp. 1136-7.

⁶⁵⁸ Cf. R.W. Seton-Watson, *The New Slovakia*, Prague 1924, chap. 2; Ladislav Lipscher, ‘Die Personalbesetzung der Verwaltungsbehörden in der Slowakei unmittelbar nach der Gründung der Tschechoslowakei’, in *Die demokratisch-parlamentarische Struktur*, ed. K. Bosl, pp. 155-8; also Ivan Dérer’s comments on the ‘Slovak mentality’ quoted in note 51.

⁶⁵⁹ Ruman, ‘Členstvo’, pp. 201-2.

Attempts to fight back against communist propaganda, which was constantly denouncing the social democrats as ‘traitors’, ‘allies of the bourgeoisie’, etc., were made by the press organs of all social democratic parties in Slovakia. In May 1920 *Robotnícke noviny* published a ‘letter to the Slovak proletariat’ by the Hungarian social democratic leader Zsigmond Kunfi, now living in exile in Vienna, who appealed to them ‘not to follow the path’ of the failed Hungarian Soviet Republic. Kunfi asserted that those who called for a proletarian dictatorship like in Hungary were, ‘consciously or unconsciously’, allies of the Hungarian dictator Horthy and were strengthening the White Terror, weakening the international position of the anti-Horthy states, and ‘prolonging the Golgotha of the Hungarian proletariat’. In July *Robotnícke noviny* warned the Slovak working class for the Hungarian communist exiles in Slovakia who were trying to influence their political debates and who had ‘gone so far that they have become masters in our own home’.⁶⁶⁰ In one of its first issues, *Volksrecht*, the new German social democratic newspaper in Bratislava, argued likewise that ‘with their putschism the communists are playing into the hands of the Horthy regime’ and other reactionary forces. As Kunfi had already tried to explain, the two extremes needed one another to legitimate themselves and in this political game the communists, not the social democrats (as the communists claimed), were the reactionaries’ allies.⁶⁶¹ The irresponsible actions of the communists brought disaster and counter-revolutionary repression: ‘Because the revolutions ordered from Moscow usually end unhappily, today the Moscow International is the champion of reaction’.⁶⁶² When the communists accused the Czechoslovak social democrats of supporting Entente and Czechoslovak ‘imperialism’, the German social democrats tended to agree but were also of the opinion that the communists themselves were playing the game of Russian imperialism. The ‘so-called internationalism’ of the Russian Bolsheviks was said to be ‘similar to that of both the old and the new imperialists’, because it was ‘an internationalism that is subjecting people to a great empire’. The ‘revolutionary’ slogans of the friends of this empire did not have much political relevance as far as the social democrats were concerned. *Volksrecht* denounced the communist ‘hyper-revolutionaries’ who ‘cultivated revolutionary phrases’ but refrained from ‘serious organisational work’.⁶⁶³ Interesting was the paper’s claim that the communists were a mix of young semi-intellectuals and lesser skilled workers, even if the point was exaggerated. It warned: ‘Social democracy will not tolerate the reign of terror of the lumpenproletariat and the communist mercenaries of reaction in the factories.’ It would not accept the ‘dictatorship of inexperienced lads [*grüne Jungen*] and failed students [*verkrachte Studenten*]’, the ‘dictatorship over the proletariat’.⁶⁶⁴ These fears and warnings were not unfounded. On 24 February 1921 a communist mob stormed the office of *Volksrecht* in Bratislava and destroyed the printing works and other objects in the building. The next day the paper could not appear and it had to move to another printer.⁶⁶⁵ The Slovak social democrats were intimidated by the communists as well. In July 1921 *Robotnícke noviny* reported: ‘When our meetings are disturbed, it is almost always by the communists. Last night a meeting was disturbed by communists some of whom were intoxicated. Some were young simple-minded lads led by hard-core communists; there were some bloody

⁶⁶⁰ RN, 18 May 1920, 21 July 1920; Boros, ‘K vzťahom maďarskej komunistickej emigrácie a československej marxistickej ľavice’, p. 536.

⁶⁶¹ *Volksrecht*, 12 October 1920. At the meeting of 16 December 1920 mentioned above a speaker of the Bratislava CSSDP similarly declared that ‘the Czechoslovak proletariat is against a communist putsch’; see Provozník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, p. 129.

⁶⁶² *Volksrecht*, 6 November 1920.

⁶⁶³ *Volksrecht*, 18 November 1920.

⁶⁶⁴ *Volksrecht*, 20 October 1920, 21 January 1921. Oszkár Jászi also referred to the two Bolshevik pillars of the ‘lumpenproletariat’ and ‘young enthusiasts’; see his *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, p. 74.

⁶⁶⁵ Provozník, *Robotnícke hnutie v Bratislave*, p. 132; Hubenák, *Vznik*, p. 160; Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen*, pp. 159-60.

noses and hysterical shouting.⁶⁶⁶ *Volksrecht* stressed it was unacceptable to speak in a frivolous way about revolutionary violence, even if ‘a limited form of revolutionary violence’ might be necessary to break ‘the permanent violence, the rule of the Czech bourgeoisie’. Notwithstanding all their criticism of the communists, the German social democrats were like the communists highly critical of the Czechoslovak State, which remained a serious obstacle to social democratic interethnic unity. According to *Volksrecht*, ‘the Austrian Monarchy perished because of the conflicts between its nationalities, yet the principle of tyranny by a national clique was never so openly expressed... as in the Czechoslovak Republic’.⁶⁶⁷ The communists were saying the same kind of thing, but they accused the social democrats of being nationalists too and claimed that the Socialist International was not more than a loose platform of national parties. The German social democrats replied that ‘an International has value only if she is a unification of strong national movements’. In their view, national parties were as it were the ‘natural units’ of the working-class movement; only on this basis could international or interethnic cooperation have any real meaning.⁶⁶⁸ It has been suggested that this argument also had a sociocultural basis in terms of internal working-class stratification. Egbert Jahn for example has argued that like the petty bourgeoisie, social democratic skilled workers – who were usually more educated than other workers both in terms of school (and socialist) education and the type of work they did – were often existentially dependent on the use of their mother tongue. This was obvious enough in the case of the printing workers and other classical skilled-worker and artisan strata, whose work often required linguistic ability in one way or another. On the other hand many communist workers belonged to the lesser skilled strata, where the use of language in the work situation was less important, and therefore tended to have a ‘pre-nationalist’ outlook.⁶⁶⁹ Suggestive as this argument may be, it has its limitations. Radicalised lesser skilled workers also supported nationalist movements or quasi-nationalist movements of the ‘national-Bolshevist’ type as in Hungary, while communism in Czechoslovakia contained hidden national-protest functions.

Despite agreement about their basic political-ideological orientation and the need to fight the communists, the social democrats in Czechoslovakia remained divided along national lines. This was partly caused by differences in social power resulting from the ethnic hierarchy in the new state. The German social democrats continued to complain that the German population had been incorporated into the CSR against its will and that it was forced to accept the position of a minority with a lower status. Although they did not use the phrase ‘ethnocratic’ (coined by political scientists in the 1920s), they felt that the CSR, for all its democratic pretensions and despite its democratic institutions, was a state with ethnocratic features. It was a state in which the Czechs reigned supreme and which only the Czechs, to a lesser extent the Slovaks, regarded as ‘their own’. At a session of the Czechoslovak National Assembly on 8 June 1920, Paul Wittich protested on behalf of the German-Magyar Social Democrat Party against the ‘violation of the right to self-determination’ of the Germans and Magyars in Slovakia. He said they would continue claiming this right in the future. Nevertheless, the German social democrats in Slovakia seem to have accepted the CSR more easily than their counterparts in Bohemia and Moravia. This was because the Slovak Germans were only a small minority (five percent of the population of Slovakia) in comparison with the Germans in the Czech Lands (one third of the total population). It was also because the German social democrats in Slovakia had no history of conflict with a strong Slav (Czech) nationalism like in Bohemia and because they were deeply impressed by the terror in Horthy’s Hungary, which left them no choice but to accept the CSR as

⁶⁶⁶ *RN*, 26 July 1921. In January 1923 three communists were condemned to several weeks imprisonment for disturbing ‘by violent means’ a meeting of the German Social Democratic Party in Bratislava. See SNA, PR, Box 234: newspaper cutting from *Bratislavské noviny*, 27 January 1923.

⁶⁶⁷ *Volksrecht*, 18 November 1920.

⁶⁶⁸ *Volksrecht*, 23 October 1920.

⁶⁶⁹ Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 144.

the lesser evil.⁶⁷⁰ But while they valued the democratic structure of the CSR, they protested against what they saw as violations of the democratic ethos that the Czechs themselves were always claiming was so dear to them. A significant event in this connection was the first official Czechoslovak census taken on 15 February 1921. At the end of August 1919 a provisional census had already been taken in Slovakia (it was planned for March-April but had to be postponed). This resulted in the following data on the ethnic structure of Bratislava: 30,165 Germans, 24,126 Magyars, 27,481 Slovaks and Czechs (or 'Czechoslovaks'). The substantial rise in the number of Slovaks and Czechs since the last Hungarian census of 1910 was caused in part by the influx of large numbers of Czechs, who were seen as indispensable for consolidating the Czechoslovak hold on the city. It was also caused by a more correct count and recording of the number of Slovaks.⁶⁷¹ The census of February 1921 produced the following data for Bratislava: 25,837 Germans, 20,731 Magyars, 37,038 'Czechoslovaks' (predominantly Slovaks, but also several thousand Czechs). These figures did not look very reassuring, or indeed reliable, as far as the Germans and Magyars were concerned. Within a period of eighteen months the city's total population had risen by fifteen thousand, from 83,200 to 98,189 people. The figure for 1921 included more than five thousand soldiers, substantial numbers of foreigners and political exiles from Hungary, Russia, and other countries, and 3,758 people who had opted for the newly created category of Jewish nationality (thirty-five percent of Bratislava's Jewish population of almost eleven thousand).⁶⁷² The substantial decline in the number of Germans and Magyars between 1919 and 1921 was received with scepticism by these population groups. Apart from the case of Jewish nationality, 'nationality' was defined by the criterion of mother tongue. But especially in Bratislava, where a relatively large number of people were multilingual, there was an element of arbitrariness and subjectivity involved in defining or reporting a person's mother tongue. Nationality was defined as a person's 'adherence' (*Bekennntnis*) to a particular mother tongue, and therefore it was open to manipulation and social pressure. Indeed the Czechoslovak definition of nationality was surprisingly similar to the old Hungarian one, which combined the criterion of mother tongue – by defining it as 'the language one speaks best and prefers to speak' it became a kind of pseudo-mother tongue – with the possibility of administrative manipulation and playing on a person's political loyalty and social (assimilatory) ambitions. The results of the census of 1921 were very important, because they were used for establishing the size of national minorities in the different judicial districts of the CSR. The Czechoslovak Language Law adopted

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 48-9.

⁶⁷¹ Unlike the census of 1921, the Slovak interim census of 1919 did not yet include the category of 'Jewish nationality'. See the data and correspondence on the 1919 census in SNA, MP, Box 274 and 277.

⁶⁷² It has been argued – and this is probably accepted by most historians – that 'the impetus toward the recognition of Jewish nationality' (independent of mother tongue) came from President Masaryk himself. Masaryk established contacts with Jewish leaders during and after the First World War and 'gave support to the Jewish national movement'. The official recognition of Jewish nationality was also welcomed by Czechoslovak leaders because it 'promised to decrease the number of Germans and Magyars'. In other words, it was the result of a combination of pragmatic and political motives and, perhaps, also of the propagandistic consideration that it would make a good impression with the Paris Peace Conference and the League of Nations. See Václav L. Beneš, 'Czechoslovak Democracy and Its Problems, 1918-1920', in *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*, eds Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža, Princeton, 1973, p. 41. Within the heterogeneous Jewish community of Czechoslovakia itself the recognition of Jewish nationality led to conflicts. Orthodox rabbis and others campaigned against it, but in 1921 fifty-four percent of Slovak Jews (almost the same percentage in the CSR as a whole, but less in Bohemia) opted for it, while twenty-three percent opted for the Magyar or German nationality and twenty-two percent for the Czechoslovak nationality. The proportion of Jews opting for Jewish nationality was lower in Bratislava, where many continued to identify with the German or Magyar nationality, although the number opting for Czechoslovak nationality was growing like in Bohemia and Moravia. See Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the world wars*, Bloomington 1987, pp. 146-8; Robert Büchler, 'The Jewish Community in Slovakia before World War II', in *The Tragedy of Slovak Jews*, ed. Dezider Tóth, Banská Bystrica, 1992, pp. 17-8, 23-4.

in February 1920 stipulated that if a district contained a minority group making up at least twenty percent of its total population, this minority – Germans, Magyars, or others – had the right to use its native tongue as the language of communication with the authorities. Provided there were at least forty children of school-going age in the district or municipality concerned, the minority also had the right to use its mother tongue as the language of instruction in the local primary schools. In Slovakia national-cultural issues were even more complicated than in the Czech Lands; the Czechoslovak authorities tended to support the establishment of German schools in order to weaken the traditional Magyar influence. It has even been argued that some Slovaks regarded German cultural institutions also as a means to reduce the Czech influence. Until 1920, the establishment of German-language schools (or German classes in multiethnic schools) led to conflicts among some of the Germans themselves, especially between those who wanted to keep the Magyar language in some secondary schools and those who wanted the German language only. Both German and Magyar thus could acquire a kind of semi-official status on the local level if certain ‘statistical conditions’ were met. Therefore the importance of the population census could not be overestimated, and the German and Magyar social democrats were keenly aware of this.⁶⁷³

Immediately after the publication of the census results a wave of criticism erupted that concerned in particular the figures for the non-Czechoslovak population. In the National Assembly MP’s from Bratislava described the census results in their home city as ‘arbitrary’. It was claimed for example that Germans with Slovak wives or with Slovak names – the latter not being unusual in a city where a history of mixed marriages, cross-cultural influences, and assimilation meant that Magyars could have German names, Germans Slav names, etc. – and children from mixed marriages had been wrongly recorded as ‘Czechoslovaks’. Allegedly, entire rows of houses and blocks of flats with predominantly German or Magyar inhabitants had not been counted at all, figures falsified, and undue pressure applied to make people report a different nationality than their own. It sounded as though a Hungarian census had been taken. On 20 February 1921, *Volksrecht* complained that the census takers were almost exclusively Czechs and Slovaks and that census forms had often not been available in German. It described the census as ‘coercive and partisan’ and ‘completely unreliable’. The debates on the census of 1921 continued for almost two years. On 20 January 1922 Wittich declared in the National Assembly that he was convinced that the number of Germans and Magyars in Bratislava was ‘significantly higher’ than the census suggested. On 16 June 1922 he claimed that shortly before the taking of the census a large number of people were denied Czechoslovak citizenship and expelled from Slovakia. He also said ‘they knew’ that census officials had recorded incorrect data ‘on the instruction of administrative organs’. Apart from possible administrative manipulation, the controversy was also encouraged by the fact that reporting one’s ‘nationality’ (ethnonational identity) was seen by all parties as an important and conscious political act of declaring one’s loyalty to a national

⁶⁷³ Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, pp. 19, 57, 86, 111-2, 135, 155-60; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, pp. 42, 63, 105-9; Provazník, ‘V prvom desaťročí’, pp. 350-1; Hubenák, *Vznik*, pp. 207-9; Jaroslav Kučera, *Minderheit im Nationalstaat. Die Sprachenfrage in den tschechisch-deutschen Beziehungen 1918-1938*, Munich 1999, for a detailed study of the Language Law and Czechoslovak language policies. During the school year 1920-1 there were in Slovakia already 102 primary schools with German as the language of instruction, and six secondary schools where German was either the only or one of two languages of instruction. But while the Slovaks had one primary school per 730 and one secondary school per 15,958 inhabitants, for the Germans these figures were 1,260 and 29,500 respectively. German-language university education did not exist in Slovakia; for this German students had to go to Prague or Brno. See Soňa Gabzdilová, ‘Problémy a východiská vzdelávacieho procesu nemeckej menšiny na Slovensku v období rozpadu Rakúsko-Uhorska a vzniku ČSR’, in *Stredoeurópske národy na križovatkách novodobých dejín*, eds P. Švorc and E. Harbuľová, pp. 326-7. In Bohemia and Moravia the census of 1921 showed a considerable increase of the Czech and a spectacular decline (by almost half a million) of the German population compared with 1910; like in Slovakia this did not remain undisputed. See Kárník, *České země*, p. 88.

group or a national idea. All newspapers in Bratislava, both the Slovak, German, and Magyar ones, engaged in a campaign of calling on their constituencies to help increase the size of their respective national groups. Already at the time of the Slovak interim census in August 1919, the *Pressburger Zeitung* had written that it was the ‘national duty’ of all Germans to correctly report their German nationality. It was said to be necessary, among other things, to reduce the influence of ‘Magyarism’ and to get German schools that would make their ‘national existence’ in the CSR possible.⁶⁷⁴

Some writers who have commented on the historical multiethnic character of Bratislava have stressed that the national identity of many of its inhabitants was traditionally not very distinct. Egbert Jahn observes that the multilingualism of many Pressburgers – and of other inhabitants of Slovakia – and the fact that they often had relatives of different nationalities enabled them to ‘change’ their ethnic or national identity on opportunistic grounds. The *Pressburger Presse* of 1 September 1919, commenting on the interim census that had just been taken, claimed that some of the city’s inhabitants were prepared to change their nationality before the census officials if they considered this to be expedient. The paper, known for its satirical style and approach of local affairs, described how the national-political *Konjunktur* of the moment had once again helped to determine the census result, which reminds us of the Pressburgers’ old reputation of political opportunists. The owner and editor of the *Pressburger Presse*, the notorious Eugen Engyeli, was himself the embodiment of what is described by Jahn and others as the ‘cosmopolitan’ Pressburger and his outlook of ‘conservative internationalism’. Engyeli typically claimed that while the Bohemian Germans were preachers of ‘fanatical hate’, in Bratislava there had always been ‘harmonious cooperation’ between Magyars, Germans, and Slovaks. We have encountered this liberal multicultural self-image before; apparently it was important in the self-understanding of many an ‘old Pressburger’. But apart from the mythical character of this image, the point was that the times were changing, and the Pressburgers were aware of it. According to Jahn, Engyeli sharply and regretfully observed the demise of ‘the old Pressburg local-patriotic citizenry of undefined mixed nationality’. But this old ‘mixed’ identity and harmonious multiethnic coexistence were, at least in part, a myth. Already before the First World War there was unmistakable evidence of rising national consciousness not only among the local Magyars, but also among the Pressburg Slovaks and Germans. It is true however that a new age of national struggles in Central Europe had just begun. Engyeli showed a remarkable intuition when he wrote in April 1920 that ‘a new age of barbarism’ was approaching, an era of relentless ‘racial struggle’.⁶⁷⁵ An important issue in this struggle was the defence of the national-minority languages and cultural institutions of the Germans and Magyars in the CSR. The Germans in Slovakia were a significant case in point. According to the census of 1921, German-speakers constituted at least twenty percent of the population in seven of the seventy-six judicial districts of Slovakia. This affected almost two-thirds of all Slovak Germans (most of whom were concentrated in three regions of Slovakia), so that the great majority of them were in a position to use their language for official administrative and cultural purposes. As has been noted with regard to German-language schools, this promised to bring an improvement of their national position in comparison with the situation in pre-1918 Hungary. In the economic field, on the

⁶⁷⁴ Quoted in Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, pp. 58-9. The considerable extent to which the census of 1921 led – according to the Bratislava authorities themselves – to ‘agitation among citizens’ and ‘pro-Magyar agitation’ in Slovakia, is shown by the large number of documents on this issue in SNA, MP, Boxes 380-385. As is the case with so many other aspects of the history of inter-war Slovakia, this issue needs to be explored far more systematically.

⁶⁷⁵ Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, pp. 53, 62, 95; *Pressburger Presse*, 12 April 1920. See for Engyeli also *Karpatendeutsches Biographisches Lexikon*, eds P. Rainer Rudolf and Eduard Ulreich, Stuttgart, 1988, p. 76, where Engyeli is described as one who ‘bitterly hated’ the Czechoslovak regime, ‘which he sought to hide behind his irony and mockery’.

other hand, the position of many Germans was not so promising and actually deteriorated, which is especially illustrated by trends in the field of government employment. It would seem that the number of German railway employees in Slovakia declined by about twenty percent in the course of the 1920s. Whereas in 1921 almost a third of all economically active Czechs and Slovaks in Bratislava were employed in government services including transportation, only 11.4 percent of the city's Germans were, although the proportion of wage-earners ('degree of proletarianisation') was highest among the German population.⁶⁷⁶ It was clear that the Germans, not to speak of the Magyars, had little to expect from the Czechoslovak State as far as employment opportunities were concerned. Along with the issue of unequal social and political power, this was a crucial factor determining the degree of existential security of the minorities in the CSR, a state that was structured along lines of differential power positions and that could be described as both an 'ethnocracy' and a democracy. While the ethnocratic features of the CSR led to frequent protests, its democratic side was shown by its tolerating these protests to a considerable extent and – after the consolidation of the state in 1919-21 – its avoiding counter-productive repressive responses. The minorities' grievances were manifold. An example of 'ethno-economic' grievances was unfair competition, or simply the absence of any competition, for government contracts. In 1922 Paul Wittich and Samuel Mayer called the attention of the National Assembly to the fact that the Bratislava authorities were granting contracts for major building projects to Czech firms from Bohemia or Moravia, which brought their own workers and reduced the job opportunities of Bratislava building workers. In 1921 the two German social democratic MP's complained about the government practice of giving land in Slovakia to former Czech legionaries; they claimed this increased the level of unemployment among local agricultural labourers. The criticism of the German social democrats also included ethnocultural issues, for example that the government had broken its promise to institute professorial chairs for the German and Magyar languages at Bratislava's Komenský university.⁶⁷⁷

Although the CSR was a democratic state that granted considerable minority rights to the Germans and Magyars after its Constitution and principal Language Law had been adopted in February 1920, it never won their whole-hearted loyalty. Despite the efforts made by the government to support a network of German-language schools in Slovakia, the Slovak Germans were no exception to this.⁶⁷⁸ There were many reasons for this. Unlike the old Hungarian State, which had existed for many centuries, the CSR was a brand-new state construction and especially its 'non-Czechoslovak' citizens needed time to develop an elementary sense of loyalty to it. Despite all the oppressive Magyarisation policies of the period 1867-1918, Hungary had a long tradition of supra-ethnic state patriotism dating back to pre-nationalist times, which also embraced the non-Magyar nations. All of this did not exist in Czech-dominated Czechoslovakia. The Czechs, who had to fight hard for their national emancipation, had an ethnonational consciousness above all, hardly a supra-national sense of state patriotism that potentially could have included other national groups as well (although some Czech politicians were aware of the need to develop such a patriotism). In the CSR the Germans and the Magyars – who had opposed their incorporation into the state – were seen, and were sometimes explicitly defined, as 'national

⁶⁷⁶ Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, pp. 65, 78-9; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, p. 45, according to whom thirty percent of all German railway and postal employees in the CSR were retrenched because of insufficient knowledge of the new state language; Bruegel, 'The Germans in Pre-war Czechoslovakia', pp. 183-4.

⁶⁷⁷ Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 117.

⁶⁷⁸ See, e.g., Kováč, 'Slovenskí Nemci', p. 128, who claims that the Slovak Germans' negative attitude to the CSR lasted throughout the entire period of its existence. See for a survey of national-minority rights in the CSR Emil Sobota, *Das tschechoslovakische Nationalitätenrecht*, German trans. J. Kalfus, Prague 1931, esp. pp. 109-70 on 'the position of minority languages'; 'protection against... consequences of an insufficient knowledge of [the state] language'; 'the elements of national autonomy'; and 'national-minority rights in the field of education and cultural administration'.

minorities'. They experienced this as discriminatory, insulting, and oppressive, and the situation was not improved by the fact that they were mistrusted by many Czechs and Slovaks. The CSR was seen by all national groups as the product of the political will of the 'Czechoslovak nation'; this meant primarily the Czechs, to some extent also the Slovaks. It was 'their state', while the Germans, the Magyars, and others (Ruthenians, Poles, perhaps the Jews) had the sociopsychological position of 'ethnic outsiders' who could not be granted the same right to self-determination in the state. Czechoslovak leaders like the Slovak Milan Hodža tried to reconcile the fact that the CSR was the national state of the Czechs and Slovaks with the claim that it was the state of all its citizens. He said that all of them had the same 'democratic and civic rights', even though 'the non-Czechoslovaks' were 'a minority in terms of legal norms'.⁶⁷⁹ If the notion of 'ethnocracy' is used to describe a key characteristic of the CSR, this is not meant to play down its democratic credentials. The CSR was probably the most stable democratic state (and by the mid-1930s the only democratic state) in inter-war Central Europe. However, it must be understood that at least one-third of its citizens always retained feelings of alienation and antagonism towards it that were the result of a sense of national inequality, of what was seen as a system of ethnic hierarchy. This ethnic hierarchy and national inequality in terms of power and status was undoubtedly a crucial aspect of the political structure and the whole character of the Czechoslovak State.⁶⁸⁰ It would seem to make sense to use the concept of ethnocracy when describing this reality. The term was coined by political analysts in Germany and Central Europe in the 1920s, of whom the German political scientist M.H. Boehm is probably the best known.⁶⁸¹ Jahn has argued that the CSR had institutional 'ethnocratic traits' from the beginning. Indeed the Revolutionary National Assembly, which designed the Czechoslovak Constitution of February 1920 and other key laws including the Language Law, was composed of Czechs and Slovaks only. This was inevitable because the Germans and other minorities refused to participate in the work of building the state, although there were occasional contacts with representatives of the German population during the preparation of the Language Law. Arguably, the ethnocratic element of the Constitution was especially expressed by its preamble. This began with the words *My, národ Československý* ('We, the Czechoslovak nation'). It thus used the term *národ* ('nation' in the ethnic sense) instead of *lid* (Slovak: *ľud*), the more neutral expression for 'the people' in the sense of totality of inhabitants, or instead of *občania* (citizens). On the other hand article one of the Constitution itself declared that 'the people' (*lid*) were the state-building subject. But while the Constitution could be said to be fully democratic, article one of the Language Law, again, defined the 'Czechoslovak language' (i.e., both Czech and Slovak) as the exclusive state language. Several other laws, including the law on the renaming of municipalities, streets, etc., had an unmistakable ethnocratic character as well. Furthermore, the first years of the CSR demonstrated that the administrative practices of many local officials in national-minority areas

⁶⁷⁹ Johann Wolfgang Brügel, *Tschechen und Deutsche 1918-1938*, Munich 1967, p. 138, quoting a statement made by Hodža at a meeting in 1928.

⁶⁸⁰ Cf. Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, pp. 43-7; Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, pp. 32, 40; Brügel, 'The Germans in Pre-war Czechoslovakia', p. 174. Of course it is necessary to look at what the Germans thought and felt about their position themselves; the authors cited here give a fair and objective picture of this.

⁶⁸¹ Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, p. 46; Max Hildebert Boehm, *Das eigenständige Volk. Volkstheoretische Grundlagen der Ethnopolitik und Geisteswissenschaften*, Göttingen 1932; Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat? Deutschland und der Minderheitenschutz. Zur Völkerbundspolitik der Stresemann-Ära*, Marburg 1988, pp. 90-6, 106-13 for background information on Boehm. A British contemporary analyst using the concept of ethnocracy – though in a politically negative rather than a neutral and descriptive way – is the political scientist Roger Griffin. See, e.g., his essay 'Home Truths: The Contemporary Struggle between Democracy and Ethnocracy', in *Racism, Ideology and Political Organisation*, ed. Charles Westin, Stockholm, 1998.

were not always in accordance with Masaryk's liberal intentions.⁶⁸²

It may be concluded that the political context in which the multinational social democratic movement developed after 1919 was highly ambiguous. The Czechoslovak State had a relatively stable democratic system and developed a political culture from which all national groups could benefit. At the same time, the new ethnopolitical power constellation resulting from the national revolution became a source of discontent among the state's national minorities that was hanging like a sword of Damocles over everyone's heads. The German and Magyar social democrats were a major political force articulating this discontent. The combination of democracy and ethnocracy could have unpredictable consequences and made a definition of the political regime or an assessment of its future a difficult matter. In the CSR a political culture of 'pluralism' developed in terms of political-ideological as well as national-political diversity. It was pluralist in the 'positive' democratic sense that it encouraged the development of a vibrant civil society where all political streams and national groups had the opportunity to express themselves and to define their place in the wider democratic spectrum. It was also pluralist in the more 'negative' sense that there evolved a form of 'polarised pluralism' marked by permanent national-political cleavages and antagonisms, which made cooperation between democratic parties representing different national groups almost impossible.⁶⁸³ Although the social democrats of different nationalities made occasional efforts at political cooperation, for example in elections and in the struggle against the communists, the truth is that the major social democratic parties remained separate organisations that did not succeed in surmounting the legacy of national divisions and different attitudes to the state. This can be illustrated by the following significant event. When on 19 September 1921 President Masaryk made his first official visit to Bratislava, where he was to be publicly honoured by the population regardless of nationality and to be welcomed in the three languages of the city, the German and Magyar social democrats refused to be present at the festive meeting to greet him. They declared that 'on grounds of principle the social democratic parties do not participate in such acts of honouring'. They made it sound as though they refused to attend this kind of function under any circumstances, but probably they had a more specific political motive as well, viz., to demonstrate their rejection of the CSR as it was. Masaryk nonetheless made a serious effort to help create an atmosphere of friendship and reconciliation. Indeed, when he was offered a glass of wine, he declared: 'I am a teetotaler, but this time I will drink.' A prominent 'bourgeois' representative of the Bratislava Germans, Samuel Frühwirth, presented the president with a memorandum containing their wishes and demands, and the

⁶⁸² See Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei*, pp. 46-7, with whose analysis I largely agree. Further Bruegel, 'The Germans in Pre-war Czechoslovakia', pp. 174, 176, who argues that although the Constitution did not explicitly proclaim Czechoslovakia a 'national state' or concede special privileges to the Czechs and Slovaks, the CSR failed to remove the 'stigma of political inferiority' from the minority concept. In other words, there was a discrepancy between formal equality and non-discrimination and informal inequality in terms of ethnic power and status. See also Brügel, *Tschechen und Deutsche*, pp. 120-42; Melzer, *Erlebte Geschichte*, p.66ff.; Hronský, *Struggle for Slovakia*, p. 203; Seton-Watson, *The New Slovakia*, chap. 6 for a critical evaluation of the first years of Czechoslovak policy towards the Magyar minority in Slovakia. During the 1920s several Magyar petitions were submitted to the League of Nations complaining, among other things, that local Czechoslovak officials were obstructing use of the Magyar language, especially in districts where Magyars made up less than twenty percent of the population. See Martin Scheuermann, *Minderheitenschutz contra Konfliktverhütung? Die Minderheitenpolitik des Völkerbundes in den zwanziger Jahren*, Marburg 2000, pp. 168-80.

⁶⁸³ Martin Bachstein has referred to the work of the Italian political scientist Sartori and his concept of 'polarised pluralism' to describe the nature of the fragmented multiethnic political spectrum of the CSR. See Martin K. Bachstein, 'Die Sozialdemokratie in den böhmischen Ländern bis zum Jahre 1938', in *Die Erste Tschechoslowakische Republik als multinationaler Parteienstaat*, ed. Karl Bosl, Munich, 1979, p. 89; Giovanni Sartori, 'European Political Parties: The Case of Polarized Pluralism', in *Political Parties and Political Development*, eds Joseph LaPalombara and Myron Wiener, Princeton, 1966, pp. 137-76; see also Giovanni Sartori, 'The Typology of Party Systems – Proposals for Improvement', in *Mass Politics. Studies in Political Sociology*, eds Erik Allardt and Stein Rokkan, New York, 1970, pp. 322-52.

function began to look like that other rather similar episode of 4 February 1919. But Masaryk tried to do it better than Šrobár and said: 'In the democratic republic all citizens must be treated equally. In the future there should be no discontented loyal citizens.' In another speech during his visit to Bratislava he declared that in Central Europe 'pure ethnographic frontiers' were impossible to draw; in other words, every state-political constellation would produce national minorities. He promised to do everything he could to ensure 'humanity and justice' to the national minorities of the Czechoslovak Republic.⁶⁸⁴ But although both Masaryk and the German and Magyar social democrats wanted to avoid unnecessary conflicts, the dynamics of the national-political situation in the CSR made it difficult to bridge the gap between them.

⁶⁸⁴ Portisch, *Geschichte*, vol. 2, pp. 553-6.

Conclusions and perspectives

This study has investigated the development of sociopolitical relations between different ethnonational groups in Bratislava (Pressburg, Pozsony) by focusing on the world of organised workers and the local multiethnic social democratic movement. The central question directing our research was how far different groups of workers were able or willing to cooperate within a joint labour movement. Alternatively, how far ethnic antagonism caused by political tensions and national inequality ultimately shaped the fate and character of Pressburg's – and indeed of Hungary's – social democratic movement. It can be argued that national inequality and assimilatory 'Magyarising' tendencies (also within the Hungarian working-class movement itself) constituted a 'necessary condition' for disintegration by causing growing alienation and organisational separatism between different national groups already before the First World War. The outcome of the Great War then created an additional set of factors that, in combination with the already existing ones, proved a 'sufficient condition' for precipitating the collapse of the multinational Habsburg Empire, the 'Historical' Hungarian State, and the Austrian and Hungarian Social Democratic Parties as multiethnic organisations. The crucial fact about the national revolution of 1918-19 was the sudden radical change in power structure brought about by the defeat of the Central Powers and the subsequent transformation of interethnic relations in many parts of Central Europe. This process also had a great impact on the working-class movement. The events in the multinational city of Pressburg are one of the most interesting examples of the national revolution both within and without the milieu of the social democratic labour movement. The details of national-political transformation in this Central European crossroad should be carefully reconstructed in order to understand the complex meaning and dynamics of this revolution. While before 1918 the Magyars and the Germans, each in their own way, had been dominant in Pressburg's political, social, and economic life as well as in its social democratic movement, in early 1919 the Slovaks and the Czechs established themselves as the new rulers of the city (though not immediately as the leading element in the working-class movement, which continued to be dominated by the Germans and Magyars). Under the new postrevolutionary conditions the major national cleavage in Pressburg's social democracy was confirmed and deepened, with the German and Magyar social democrats playing for some time the role of an opposition movement to the Czechoslovak regime. But at the same time the German-Magyar and Czechoslovak working-class movements were able on occasion to establish pragmatic forms of cooperation so as to avoid the worst political (and electoral) consequences of the prevalent national divide. The dynamics of cooperation versus separatism thus continued after 1918, though in a different form and under completely new circumstances.

Part I of this study (chapters 1-4) focused on the wider historical context of our subject matter: the issues shaping social and political life in pre-1918 Hungary and Pressburg, the evolution of the Hungarian social democratic movement, and the preconditions for national revolution. Chapter two presented a historical survey of social, political, and interethnic conditions in semi-feudal Hungary. It showed that social and national oppression, political disenfranchisement of the great majority of the Hungarian population (which included all national groups), and a kind of 'semi-repressive, semi-tolerant' attitude towards and containment of the labour movement were key features of the country's sociopolitical structure. Chapter three focused on the ethnic, social, and political features of the specific urban milieu of 'trinational' Pressburg. Apart from the Slovaks and the regime of national oppression keeping them in a subordinate position in the city, special attention was paid to Pressburg's economically and socially important ethnic-German population. In various ways the Germans occupied an

intermediary position between the politically dominant Magyars on the one hand – including as far as the social democratic milieu was concerned, the Budapest party leadership – and the harshly marginalised Slovaks on the other hand. The specific ethnosocial position of the Pressburg Germans, historically and economically the dominant group in the city, enabled them to maintain their German cultural identity beneath a veneer of Hungarian loyalism and assimilationist Magyarism. There was a degree of German resistance to certain Magyarisation policies, and the German social democrats, who were an important political force and who gave occasional support to Slovak organisational and cultural efforts, were able to some extent to shield the Slovak social democrats from the effects of national and political oppression. In chapter four the focus was shifted back to the Slovaks in an attempt to establish the main outlines of the political evolution of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (HSDP), in particular the explosive problem of national antagonism within the party. In comparison with the Austrian social democratic movement, where the Czechs were a strongly organised and autonomous group alongside the Germans and where the originally unified trade unions were torn apart by Czech-German antagonism by 1910 already, the situation in the HSDP was both more simple and more complicated. Because of the relative weakness of the non-Magyar social democrats, the HSDP remained a unified organisation until 1918. But at the same time national tensions were at least as manifold, and in fact more subtle (more subdued but intense) in comparison with Austria. The party leadership was forced to tolerate the establishment of at least four ‘Nationality Committees’ catering for the special needs and propaganda activities of the Slovaks, the Germans, the Romanians, and the Serbs. The Slovak Committee was heavily supported by the Czech social democrats in Vienna, an important factor in winning a major part of politically conscious Slovak workers for the idea of Czechoslovak unity and, finally, a common state. The coming of national revolution and imperial disintegration in October-November 1918, which also meant the final collapse of ‘classical’ multinational social democracy, marks the turning point between two historical epochs in Central and Eastern Europe.

Part II of this study (chapters 5-8) looked at the details of the process of national revolution and postrevolutionary transformation in Pressburg, the city that in March 1919 was renamed Bratislava. In its first phase this process was part of the increasingly centrifugal national-democratic revolution in Hungary, after December 1918 of the establishment and consolidation of Czechoslovak rule in Slovakia. In this context it is not only important to establish the historical facts and to interpret them as fairly as possible – however important this may be given the propaganda war carried on by all sides – but also to examine the subjective perceptions of the different parties involved. All parties tended to simplify what were confusing and complex events by fitting them into a preconceived framework of interpretation. In other words, what also mattered was political rhetoric, and the propaganda and rhetoric produced by all sides were important facts and events in themselves, a crucial part of the historical process. Therefore chapters 5-8, especially, are an exercise in analysing political language, rhetoric, and subjective interpretation – the language of political moralism, antagonism, and nationalism – as much as an attempt to reconstruct what actually happened in Pressburg during the period between October 1918 and March 1919. This does not contradict the assertion made in chapter one that what matters above all is the ‘factual’ historical situation, the ‘objective’ context of national conflict and ethno-political claims. It is necessary to address nationalist rhetoric as a phenomenon rooted in historical, cultural, and political realities, notably in the power struggles between different national (including social democratic) elites. But if these antagonisms enter a new phase caused by a sudden revolutionary change in interethnic power structure, there is likely to follow a period of enhanced national-political emotions accompanied by exaggerated rhetoric, extreme statements, and downright propaganda. This is what happened after October 1918, and particularly after January 1919, in Pressburg. It is obvious that the German population and the German social democrats played a crucial part in the unfolding of these events. In chapter five,

which examined the reactions of the Pressburgers to the political developments and uncertainty of the last months of 1918, the focus was shifted back again from the Slovaks to the Germans; but attention is also paid to the city's Magyars and Slovaks and their political leaders. Chapter six looked at the events after the occupation of Pressburg by Czechoslovak troops on 1 January 1919. It tried to show how and why mutual suspicion between a substantial part of the city's population and the new regime increased, leading to the massive unrest and the general strikes of February 1919 analysed in the following chapter. Chapter seven indeed tried to make a detailed analysis of the dramatic events of the first two weeks of February 1919, a historiographic necessity because of their controversial nature and their undeniable historical significance. The following chapter eight tried to show that the German-Magyar social democratic movement, which had become the principal political opposition force in Pressburg, had to find some sort of compromise between protest and pragmatism after the failure of the February strike. The bloodshed of 12 February 1919 is one of the most dramatic events in the history of Pressburg/Bratislava and still able to trigger emotional debates among historians and others. The truth about the events is clouded by national-political bias and by the lasting effects of propaganda. The tragedy played a key role in the long-term alienation and ongoing mutual recriminations of the different national camps making up the local working-class movement; more research on its impact is needed however.⁶⁸⁵ The significance of the rhetoric of political moralism and of the war of propaganda became apparent also in other ways, as is shown in chapter nine. During the years of consolidation of the Czechoslovak Republic (CSR) 1919-21, the cleavage between the Czechoslovak and the German and Magyar social democrats proved to be permanent. But in the context of communist messianic promises of total change, that is, on the level of ideological rhetoric instead of practical politics, it was possible to claim that national antagonism was being overcome. To many Magyars and Germans, to a lesser extent to unprivileged Slovaks, communism provided a way of escaping from the painful reality of new national inequalities and enduring social inequalities; and from the difficult challenge of looking for practical solutions for ethnic problems through patient democratic and legislative work instead of revolutionary phraseology.⁶⁸⁶ The fact that the CSR was an 'ethnocratic' as well as a democratic state generated the necessary amount of national and social discontent to keep both revolutionary-messianic and national-revisionist politics alive (but also the politics of social democratic national particularism). The Czechoslovak State was only a partial success. The historical background to its national-political problems in Bratislava and Slovakia constitutes a major part of this study. The rest of this chapter will try to probe somewhat deeper into this question and to spell out what may be concluded from our investigation and what additional problems need to be addressed.

During the period 1867-1918 the trinational city of Pressburg was characterised by a complicated pattern of ethnic relations in which each of the three major national groups – the Germans, the Magyars, and the Slovaks – occupied a particular economic, social, and political position vis-à-vis the others. After 1918, as large numbers of Czechs arrived and several thousand Jews identified with the newly recognised political and statistical category of Jewish nationality (not to be confused with the Jewish religion), the city's population became even more diverse from the ethnonational point of view. Before the war Pressburg's workers arguably had a lot in common as far as their broadly defined economic interests and class position was concerned. But

⁶⁸⁵ It is likely that some political groups and institutions – ranging from the Czechoslovak authorities to the communists – have tried to mute the memory of 12 February 1919 during the following years. Reasons for this would have been its painfulness, its exploitation by Hungarian propaganda, the dangerous political controversies about its causes, and the extreme way in which it exposed national antagonisms in the working-class movement.

⁶⁸⁶ A recent study confirms the strong support for the Communist Party among the national minorities in Slovakia during the 1920s and 1930s. See Milan Zemko, 'Voličstvo strán národnostných menšín a komunistickej strany na Slovensku v parlamentných voľbách za predmníchovskej republiky', in *Slovensko v Československu (1918-1939)*, eds Milan Zemko and Valerián Bystrický, Bratislava, 2004, pp. 179-98.

there were also important differences between German, Magyar, and Slovak workers in terms of occupational skills, density of trade union organisation, and economic and social status. The shared class position and collective interests of Pressburg workers and the rise of social democracy enabled, especially after 1900, growing numbers of them to organise and to participate on a basis of practical solidarity and apparent social equality in the multiethnic labour movement, especially in the different trade unions. At the same time, however, the historical economic privileges of the old German urban population ensured that German workers remained the dominant element in the skilled trades and in many industrial occupations, as well as in the stronger trade unions of skilled and semiskilled workers. Both the Magyar and the Slovak workers of Pressburg were heavily concentrated in the lesser skilled occupations. However, some of the Magyars, in particular groups of government employees like the railway workers, were in a position to gain advantage from the fact that they belonged to the dominant ethnolinguistic and national group in 'Historical Hungary'. The fact that in the leadership of the Pressburg social democratic movement the Magyars were more strongly represented than the Slovaks alongside the predominant Germans was another illustration that their belonging to the ruling nation – both in Hungary as a whole and in the Hungarian Social Democratic Party – conferred certain advantages to them in terms of social prestige and political power. Particularly the easier access of Magyar workers and Magyar social democrats to the privileged political-administrative language of Hungary meant that they had certain advantages in the field of educational and cultural facilities and in terms of economic and social opportunities.⁶⁸⁷ Therefore it can be argued that the economic privileges of the Germans, including German workers, were balanced by the cultural and social privileges of the Magyars. The social and political position of the Slovaks was quite different, despite their economic position being similar to that of many working class Magyars. Economically, socially, culturally, and politically the Slovaks belonged to the most vulnerable and powerless strata of Pressburg. Their situation was almost that of a socially marginal people, and their few political and intellectual leaders were continually harassed and intimidated by the Hungarian authorities. It would be naive to think that the ethnic hierarchy of Pressburg was not reflected within the milieu of the multinational labour movement. Although the Germans, especially, provided a degree of protection to the Slovak social democrats (and were threatened by the Magyarisation policy themselves), there were limits to what they could or would do in this respect. The German social democrats were themselves imbued with a sense of cultural superiority vis-à-vis the Slavs and the Magyars, while the Magyar social democrats were even less inclined than the Germans to come to the support of the Slovaks. What we see in pre-1918 Pressburg, then, is a pattern of group relations within the local social democratic movement that was marked by features of ethnic hierarchy as well as interethnic class solidarity, a culture of professed labour democracy combined with ethnocentric tendencies. The labour movement had democratic pretensions. It claimed to organise the local working class irrespective of nationality and to reject policies of national oppression. But it also had ethnocentric traits in so far as it could not escape the Hungarian reality of (social and institutional) national inequality and could not avoid reproducing within the social democratic milieu the broad pattern of Magyar political hegemony, German economic privilege, and Slovak marginalisation. This pattern was only eliminated after the national revolution of 1918-19, a political transformation that in many ways was also a social revolution.

It makes sense to use the notions of 'ethnocracy' and 'democracy' as broad categories of

⁶⁸⁷ Cf. Gerald Stourzh, 'Problems of conflict resolution in a multi-ethnic State: lessons from the Austrian historical experience 1848-1918', in *State and Nation in Multi-ethnic Societies. The Break-up of Multinational States*, eds U. Ra'anana, M. Mesner, K. Armes, and K. Martin, Manchester, 1991, p. 71, where it is argued that the lower social classes belonging to dominant ethnic groups – like the Germans in Austria or the Magyars in Hungary – were privileged to some extent, especially because of their easier access to the privileged language.

conceptualisation when trying to interpret the complex and often ambiguous evidence on integrating and differentiating tendencies in the Pressburg social democratic movement. In chapter nine the concept of ethnocracy was used alongside democracy to describe the nature of the political regime of the new Czechoslovak State, but in fact it can be applied to a much wider field of historical-interpretative endeavour. Some brief observations on this are useful at this place. The cultural and political roots of ethnonational differentiation, conflict, and hierarchy that helped to shape working-class movements in Central Europe dated back to the first half of the nineteenth century. It is difficult to understand the development of Central European social democratic movements without understanding the history and significance of nineteenth-century national emancipation movements. After the national emancipation struggles in Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy culminating in the revolutions of 1848-9, the question of ‘national equality’ and national-political rights for the small subordinate ethnic nations came to the fore as a major political issue in Central Europe. Inevitably it also influenced the early social democratic movement. If the Magyar and German social democrats were inspired by the legacy of national-democratic revolutionary heroes like the Hungarian leader Lajos Kossuth, the Czechs and Slovaks remembered their own leaders from the same era, in particular František Palacký (1798-1876) and Ľudovít Štúr (1815-1856). Palacký, a prominent historian and leader of the Czech ‘national awakening’, gave expression to the claims and aspirations of the Czech nation vis-à-vis the Greater German nationalists of 1848. Štúr, codifier of the modern Slovak literary language and the most important Slovak political leader of the nineteenth century, resisted the Hungarian attempts in the 1840s to suppress Slovak national rights and the Slovak national movement. Both men were symbols of the cultural, democratic, and autonomist aspirations of the small Slav nations, early protagonists of the programme of multinational federalisation of the Habsburg Empire, and highly respected in Czech and Slovak social democratic circles. Before 1918 the idea of national-cultural federalism (in broad agreement with Austrian social democratic leaders like Otto Bauer) was upheld by many Czech and Slovak social democrats as the most desirable solution for the political problems of the Empire and its Slav nations.⁶⁸⁸ Antagonistic national traditions and political claims contributed to the rise of a political culture in which the socialist and liberal perspectives on sociopolitical evolution had to accommodate the aspirations of ethnic nations and had to cooperate or compete with national movements. In the increasingly nationalist political culture of Central Europe, ‘ethnos’ and ‘demos’ (or nation and class) were cutting across one another in a way that could only spell trouble for the multiethnic social democratic movement. ‘Nature knows neither ruling nor servile peoples’, Palacký contended in 1848, invoking the always revolutionary natural-rights argument to underpin his claim that all peoples – also ‘natural’ ethnic nations, not just ‘historical’ political nations or individual citizens – were entitled to political status and equal cultural and linguistic rights.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁸ See for the (outside Slovakia little-known) Slovak leader Ľudovít Štúr, Peter Brock, *The Slovak National Awakening: an essay in the intellectual history of east central Europe*, Toronto 1976, chap. 3 (especially for cultural and intellectual aspects); *A Concise History of Slovakia*, ed. Elena Mannová, Bratislava, 2000, chaps V-VI passim (for political and social aspects). After the establishment of the Austrian neo-absolutist regime in 1849-50, Štúr moved into a more Slavophile and Russophile direction, as did Palacký after the for the Czechs deeply disappointing Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. However, the perspective of a national federalisation of the Empire survived and was further developed around 1900 by national-minority politicians, social democratic leaders, and others. The popularity of Štúr and his circle of Slovak nationalists among Slovak social democrats around 1900 is shown by Slovak ‘worker poets’ and proletarian writers who ‘paraphrased’ the earlier national-cultural works of the Štúrists. See Štefan Drug, *Kapitoly k začiatkom socialistickej literatúry na Slovensku*, Bratislava 1961, pp. 24-5.

⁶⁸⁹ Palacký quoted in Gerald Stourzh, ‘Some Reflections on Institutional Conflict Resolution among Ethnic Groups in Historical Perspective’, in *Vienna International Encounter on Some Current Issues Regarding the Situation of National Minorities*, ed. Franz Matscher, Kehl, 1997, p. 18. Stourzh refers to Emerich Francis, *Ethnos und Demos*, Berlin 1965, for an analysis of the juxtaposition of these two different concepts of ‘the

Thus not only the objective reality of ethnic hierarchy and national inequality in pre-1918 Hungary or the Habsburg Empire, but also the subjective reality of increasingly politicised ethnonational consciousness (also among the more educated sections of the lower classes, notably craftsmen and skilled workers) resulting from awareness of historical antagonisms, ongoing national oppression, and cultural tradition made it difficult to create a multiethnic working-class movement focusing exclusively on economic interests, class struggle, and the socialist objective. Moreover, both the objective reality of language barriers – despite such multilingualism as existed especially among the middle classes of cities like Pressburg or Budapest – and subjective attachment to one's own national language and cultural identity created obstacles to a smooth functioning of interethnic cooperation. Naturally, factors like the refusal of the HSDP leadership to give more than marginal support to the Slovak social democratic press did not encourage enthusiastic or effective cooperation either. The three ethnolinguistic groups in the Pressburg social democratic movement had their own cultural and educational circles and activities, which tended to confirm their sense of particularist national belonging. For Slovak workers, whose educational opportunities in their own language were extremely limited in Magyarising Hungary, social democratic cultural activities were of critical importance. The question of how far socialist ideology and joint labour organisation were able to transcend national-cultural separatism and ethnic tensions must remain a moot point given our limited knowledge of many of the ethnosocial details of labour organisation in Pressburg.⁶⁹⁰ This concerns patterns of ethnic relations in the workplace, the structure and composition of different trade unions, programmes of worker education, and so on. It would seem however that the practical experience of Pressburg's workers suggested to them that nation was at least as important as class. Slovak workers largely had to rely on their own efforts and on Czech support, which is demonstrated for example by their constant problems in financing their press organs. Many German and Magyar organised workers found it difficult to abandon the belief that the nations to which they belonged were destined to assimilate the smaller and less developed nations and to create the larger political units through which economic development, cultural progress, and socialism would be realised. Of course, the events of the national revolution of 1918-19 do not suggest that the socialist idea was stronger than the national idea. Arguably, this could not be expected given that Hungary and Pressburg and indeed social democracy itself were deeply influenced by the multiethnic centrifugalism and ethnocentric features characterising the age of nationalism in Central Europe.

Ethnic tensions and national inequality and the growing national consciousness among different ethnic groups contradict the claim that Pressburg was a kind of relaxed and exceedingly tolerant place as far as ethnic relations were concerned. The question of the ethnosociological profile of Pressburg is a complex and ambiguous one. There clearly existed – and still exist today – a great many myths about the city's liberal, tolerant, harmonious multiethnic and multicultural traditions. It would seem that these myths were cultivated especially after the Czechoslovak occupation of the city in 1919, when prominent Pressburg citizens began to stress the city's liberal credentials in order to avert the possible threat of a Czechoslovak denationalisation policy aimed at the predominantly German and Magyar population. It is difficult to deny that, at least to some extent, the social atmosphere of multinational and multilingual Pressburg was more relaxed

people'. It should be noted however that a political leader like Palacký used in his discourse not only ethnic natural-rights arguments but also political-historical arguments (in the Czech case: the continuity of the historical Bohemian Kingdom and its 'state rights').

⁶⁹⁰ It should be pointed out again that, apart from the incomplete social democratic press, there is little primary source material on Pressburg's early labour movement. See also Vladimír Lehotský, 'Počiatky robotníckeho socialistického hnutia a boj o politické osamostatnenie robotníctva v Bratislave (1867-1900)' (Ph.D. diss., Komenský University, Bratislava, 1969), p. 81, where the author explains that as a consequence of the dearth of original sources, one has to rely on contemporary 'bourgeois' newspapers, official documents, and police reports.

than that of Budapest or many other Hungarian cities. This may have had something to do with the proximity of relatively liberal Austria, although in Vienna and other cities in Cisleithania national conflicts were the order of the day as well, especially between Czechs and Germans. The main reason for any comparative liberalism that Pressburg could have boasted was probably the numerical preponderance and the specific intermediary position – in between the dominant Magyars and the subordinate Slovaks – of the German-speaking population. What mattered most was not the presence of the Germans in itself but the fact that their numerical and economic predominance created a relatively balanced interethnic situation in the trinational city. German employers hiring Slovaks could be a kind of buffer protecting them against Magyar cultural demands and in some situations (the workplace, the trade union) German labour leaders could bring about the same effect. The Germans were less harshly clamped down upon than the other non-Magyar nationalities, even though after 1867 they had lost much of their status of a socially dominant group and were frequently attacked by local Magyarisers. The reaction of German Pressburgers to the policy of aggressive Magyarisation was to develop a Janus-faced dual identity whereby the precise relationship between their German and Magyar (or quasi-Magyar) identity was difficult to define. Most of them remained German-speakers, but a growing number, especially among the urban elite and the new administrative middle class, adopted the Magyar language as well and sometimes the Magyar national identity. The Germans learned how to keep up a patriotic Hungarian or ethnic-Magyar appearance in public whenever they were required to do so. Many Germans – but also Slovaks and others – traditionally were Hungarian patriots anyway, that is to say in the old pre-1867 sense. But although only a small number of Germans dared to openly proclaim their German national identity and a growing number officially embraced Magyardom (during the taking of the census, by changing their surname, etc.), there is little evidence that the German language was in the process of disappearing. No doubt it was forced on the defensive and cultural institutions like German schools or Pressburg's originally German City Theatre were attacked by nationalist Magyars and the increasingly Magyarised local administration. But below the veneer of Magyarism the German language and German cultural identity were kept alive, as is shown by the many German newspapers and German voluntary associations in Pressburg, including the various social democratic organisations, many of which were led by Germans. In this context of what may be described as the survival strategy of 'quasi-Magyarism' images could grow of the 'opportunistic' German Pressburger not caring (at least in public) about his German nationality; or of the 'liberal' Pressburger with his attitude of apolitical tolerance of other languages and ethnic identities. In Pressburg the policy of Magyarisation not only led to an increase in the number of 'statistical Magyars' but to a growing number of Magyar-speakers who were actually bilingual Germans and who could be regarded as quasi- or, perhaps, 'semi-Magyars'. There also emerged a class of semi-Magyarised educated middle-class Slovaks, many of who were master of the Magyar, the German, and the Slovak language. These trilingual Slovaks could be regarded as the most 'genuine' multicultural for the most truly polyglot Pressburgers. The resilience of the German language, the old urban lingua franca that was spoken or understood by at least as many Pressburgers as Magyar, acted as a protective shield diluting the effect of Magyarisation; to some extent it also helped to protect the Pressburg Slovaks. It is difficult to tell how far the Pressburg working class, or sections of it like German skilled or Slovak unskilled workers, was subjected to the pressure of Magyarisation. It would seem this was the case, especially in the workplace, only to a limited extent, because many employers and skilled workers were Germans and German remained the principal language of the Pressburg labour movement. German social democratic leaders playing a role in public institutions or in national HSDP meetings and party organs must have felt the pressure to command and speak Magyar. But many ordinary workers, trade unionists, and local party activists probably picked up only a smattering of it, thereby contributing to the formation of a typical Pressburg slang composed of words and expressions from the three local languages. What

is more, the German social democrats in Pressburg were a centre of resistance to certain Magyarisation policies, especially those affecting social insurance institutions and working-class organisations. This is shown by their opposition to the attempted Magyarisation of the Pressburg Workers' Sick Fund, their support for German cultural aspirations in Hungary even before 1914 (which in 1918 developed into a full-fledged German national movement), and the leading role of Pressburg's social democratic leader Heinrich Kalmár in the German autonomist movement.

Idealising claims about the 'nationally mixed', 'multiethnic', or 'multilingual' character of Pressburg, or about the nationally 'indifferent' attitude of its (German) inhabitants, must be considered with caution, even scepticism. These claims hail from various quarters – from Slovak and non-Slovak historians, from contemporary and more recent commentators – and often seem to echo or repeat one another. The German historian Egbert Jahn has pointed to the multilingualism of many early twentieth-century Pressburgers, their not infrequent ethnically mixed marriages, and other factors that are said to have enabled them to pragmatically 'change their nationality' in accordance with the exigencies of the moment. He speaks of an 'old Pressburg citizenry of mixed nationality', characterised by 'opportunism', pragmatic liberalism, and local patriotism. This characterisation, though not entirely incorrect in all respects, must be regarded as an idealisation of multicultural Pressburg and an underestimation of the often inconspicuous determination of many Germans and Slovaks to defend their ethnocultural identity during the period before 1918. The more openly expressed determination of the Germans and Magyars to defend their national identity after 1918 contradicts this idea even more. Other historians, notably Monika Glettler and Elena Mannová, have made comparable but less naively phrased claims. Mannová has pointed to the contextual, situational aspect of ethnic identity, particularly in the case of the Germans and their 'dual' identity, which had a defensive function vis-à-vis the threat of Magyarisation.⁶⁹¹ Understanding this situational quasi-Magyarism (instead of 'situation of mixed nationality') appears to be an important clue indeed to the 'opportunistic' behaviour of many Germans and Slovaks, who tried to protect themselves by acting as good Hungarians in public while keeping to their old ethnic identity in private. Not all historians have shown the same understanding of the subtleties of the Pressburg situation, however. Dušan Provazník for example has described (the majority of) the Pressburg population as a 'diffuse mass' (*dekoncentrovaná masa*), a kind of amorphous multitude 'without national feeling'.⁶⁹² The author does not explain how this situation came into being, but apparently it resulted from an only partly successful Magyarisation policy that produced a diffuse tendency of urban denationalisation. In a similar vein Dušan Kováč describes the population of pre-1918 Pressburg as an 'indistinct' (*nevyhranený*) and 'neutral' group from a national point of view. This likewise seems to miss the point of the Germans' and Slovaks' defensive survival strategy, their

⁶⁹¹ Egbert K. Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei in den Jahren 1918-1929. Ein Beitrag zur Nationalitätenproblematik*, Munich 1971, pp. 62, 95; Monika Glettler, 'The Slovaks in Budapest and Bratislava, 1850-1914', in *Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe, 1850-1940. Vol. VIII: Ethnic Identity in Urban Europe*, ed. Max Engman, Aldershot, 1992, esp. p. 315; Elena Mannová, 'Ethnic Identity and the City (Bratislava in the 19th Century)', unpublished paper, 1995, esp. pp. 3, 7; Elena Mannová, 'Transformácia identity bratislavských Nemcov v 19. storočí', *Historický časopis* 43, no. 3, 1995, p.442ff., 448; Elena Mannová, 'Selbstinszenierung des deutschen Bürgertums in Bratislava im 19. Jahrhundert', in *Stabilität und Wandel in der Grossstadt*, eds Zuzana Beňušková and Peter Salner, Bratislava, 1995, pp. 34-5. See also the older study by Gertrud Reschat, *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen Pressburgs. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Umbruchperiode 1918/20*, Munich 1942, esp. p. 10. See further chapter three of the present study.

⁶⁹² Dušan Provazník, 'V prvom desaťročí v ČSR', in *Dejiny Bratislavy*, eds Darina Lehotská and Ján Pleva, Bratislava, 1966, p. 351; the phrase is repeated in Dušan Provazník, *Robotnicke hnutie v Bratislave 1918-1929*, Bratislava 1969, p. 18. Both Provazník and other historians are very vague about the mechanisms and consequences of 'Magyarisation' and 'denationalisation' and about the question of which social groups were most vulnerable to it. The concrete historical analysis of these problems has hardly begun.

situational self-definition and self-presentation, and their local patriotism that could be given precedence over the expression of a broader national identity, notably Magyar or Hungarian identity.⁶⁹³ Indeed Pressburg patriotism could be seen as a defensive reaction as well, not only to the demands of modern nationalism but also to political crisis situations and national revolutions like in 1918.

Interestingly, it would seem that Provazník's and Kováč's evaluation of Pressburg's ethnosociological profile has been influenced by statements of the first 'Minister Plenipotentiary for the Administration of Slovakia' Vavro Šrobár, whose rather questionable definition of the situation in 1919 is quoted by Kováč without critical comment. In a report to the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior, Šrobár characterised the citizens of Pressburg as follows: 'The Pressburg citizenry is a nationally unconscious, half-Magyar, half-German internationally minded mass without a political creed. With a bit of skilful and tactful policy it could be won over to our Republic, for which County Sheriff Zoch must be given the credit.'⁶⁹⁴ This statement is remarkable for several reasons. Firstly, it appears to consciously play down the critical attitude and national feelings of the Magyar and German citizens of Pressburg, who certainly offered more criticism and opposition to Czechoslovak policies, especially during the first months of 1919, than is acknowledged here. Their demands, opposition, and even open resistance are extensively documented in this study. Secondly, Šrobár's ethnosociological portrayal of Pressburg's urban environment exaggerates the extent to which the partly Magyarised inhabitants of the city had lost their sense of national identity as a result of the Magyarisation policy. This policy had actually been unsuccessful inasmuch as the non-Magyar Pressburgers had not become 'pure' Magyars but indeed at best 'half-Magyars'. However, the existence of a distinct national consciousness among Pressburg's 'pure Magyars' was obvious enough and it is difficult to understand how they could be described as lacking it. But also the Germans' – and even the Slovaks' – sense of national identity is played down, despite the spectacular rise of a German national movement after October 1918; complaints by some of the Pressburg Germans themselves about national apathy as a result of the Magyar influence hardly changed this reality. Thirdly, the representation of the Pressburg population as an amorphous, diffuse, 'international' mass, though not entirely beside the point given the city's multiethnic structure, was clearly a distortion of the more complicated truth. Rather than a sociological it was a political and propagandistic statement that served political and psychological ends. It expressed above all the wishful thinking of the Czechoslovak authorities and Šrobár, who liked to believe that the incorporation and so to speak the 'ethnopolitical digestion' of non-Czechoslovak Pressburg was a relatively easy job given the city's amorphous and cosmopolitan multiethnic structure and their own 'tactful' qualities. The assertion that the Pressburg Germans and Magyars lacked a clear sense of national identity (a 'political creed') had its counterpart in the questionable claim made by some Magyars and Germans about the Slovaks. They described the Slovaks – in stark contrast to the Czechs – as 'passive', 'apathetic', happy to stay in the Hungarian State and as mere tools in the hands of the scheming Czechs.

The questionable claims of Šrobár, the man who played such an important role in revolutionary Bratislava and who was seen by other Slovaks as one of the most dynamic if controversial personalities of their rising nation, had a long-term impact on Slovak images of the national revolution. Indeed they even seem to have had a lasting impact on Slovak historiography. Ironically, his politically motivated assertions were more or less confirmed by those German Pressburgers who immediately after the Czechoslovak occupation were keen to underscore the thesis – which they considered to be in the interest of their struggle for national-

⁶⁹³ Dušan Kováč, *Nemecko a nemecká menšina na Slovensku (1871-1945)*, Bratislava 1991, p. 55.

⁶⁹⁴ Quoted *ibid.* Unfortunately Kováč does not mention the date of Šrobár's report, but its wording suggests that it was written during his term as 'Minister Plenipotentiary', probably in 1919.

minority rights – of traditionally liberal and almost apolitical cosmopolitan Pressburg. By taking a cooperative attitude towards the new rulers (in January 1919, but also thereafter) and stressing their own ‘liberal’ credentials, they hoped that the Czechoslovak authorities could be persuaded to implement liberal policies in the city. In this way, Šrobár’s mythical claims about the Pressburgers’ political malleability could go hand in hand with the myth of ‘tolerant’ and ‘harmonious’ multiethnic Pressburg. The thesis of liberal Pressburg and the struggle for German national rights did not contradict each other, for the latter could be represented (both by the Germans and by the Czechoslovak government) as primarily directed against the old Magyar influence. But at closer inspection the myth of liberal Pressburg contradicted not only the Magyarisation policy, growing nationalism, and indeed the anti-Semitism of the pre-1918 era, but also the rise of new national movements and national states and of a militant national consciousness in post-war Central Europe. The thesis of liberal Pressburg was especially articulated by those who suddenly found themselves in a defensive position, on the losing side of war and revolution. Initially they were tempted to describe their new masters – ‘the fanatically nationalist Czechs’ – as the new oppressors and as the potential destroyers of Pressburg’s tolerant tradition. But if ‘the Czechs’ fulfilled their promise of granting minority rights to the Germans and Magyars, Pressburg’s defenders of ‘liberalism’ – not the social democrats however – were just as willing to portray them as protagonists of democracy. This is how easily images and stereotypes could change in revolutionary Central Europe, as the columns of some of the Pressburg newspapers demonstrate. Indeed to that extent Šrobár’s claims about the Pressburgers’ political adaptability, even if wrongly interpreted, or the German social democrats’ claims about the political ‘characterlessness’ of other German political groups contained an element of truth. Czech politicians and the Czechoslovak government were keen to be seen as liberals as well. They set out to carry into effect a policy of cultural autonomy for the national minorities, especially for the Slovak Germans, from whom they had relatively little to fear and whom they could try to use as a counterweight to the potentially more dangerous Magyar minority. On the basis of more or less the same divide-and-rule motives, the Czechoslovak government introduced the official category of Jewish nationality. The larger the number of Jews who opted for this national-political identity, the smaller the number who would embrace Magyar or German nationality.

Meanwhile the German social democrats and their newspaper *Volksstimme* proclaimed their own version of the thesis of ethnic harmony and cooperation, stressing the primacy of class interests and of their transnational political ideology. Indeed they continued to assert the pre-eminence of interethnic class solidarity even after 1918, although they were part of the broad-based German national movement at the same time and unable in practice to maintain the model of an ethnically unified working-class movement of the pre-war period. Of course, the truth was that the social democrats could not ignore the overwhelming importance of the national question. In fact, already during the era of Dualist Hungary the German social democrats had shown remarkable ethnic resilience and the courage to resist some of the more threatening aspects of the Magyarisation policy. Although the labour movement in pre-1918 Hungary was sometimes described as a ‘school of Magyarisation’ (and perhaps rightly so), there was a degree of immunity to the process of assimilation among the German and Slovak working class of Pressburg. It is obvious that local differences were crucial in this respect, with the somewhat more open and nationally complex Pressburg situation differing from the trend in Budapest, where the trade unionist ‘school of assimilation’ had its major stronghold.⁶⁹⁵ The threat of Magyarisation led to a

⁶⁹⁵ It should be noted that, generally speaking, the Budapest social democratic tendency to see the working-class movement as a ‘school of Magyarisation’ was not necessarily motivated by hostility to the non-Magyar nationalities. It rather resulted from a mechanistic Marxist belief in the need for creating large homogeneous national units to further ‘historical progress towards socialism’. Nevertheless, some Hungarian social democratic

cautiously defensive posture on the part of the German social democrats in Pressburg that also benefited the Slovaks, although the most valuable support for the Slovak social democrats was provided by the Czechs. In the new situation after 1918, the threat to the position of German social democracy was believed to come from the newly dominant Czechs, the local Czechoslovak authorities, and even the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party (CSSDP). The CSR was criticised along two lines by the German and Magyar social democrats. On the one hand, the Czechoslovak ruling class and the state itself – including its social democratic officials and government ministers – were denounced as ‘imperialist’ and ‘chauvinist’ and the authorities in Pressburg accused of suppressing the principles of democracy. On the other hand, the government was accused of pursuing ‘anti-worker policies’, an attempt to portray the actions of the new rulers in terms of class antagonism. The combination of these two lines of criticism enabled the German and Magyar social democrats to launch a general strike in February 1919. It was difficult to maintain that the Pressburg strike had mainly social and economic causes, as was argued especially at moments of weakness or uncertainty among the strikers, in particular after the crisis of 12 February. The strike leadership itself repeatedly used the term ‘political general strike’. The attempt to enter into direct negotiations with Entente representatives and to ignore the Czechoslovak authorities miserably failed, and thereafter the German-Magyar social democratic movement had no choice but to acknowledge the political reality as it was, i.e., the supremacy and sovereignty of the Czechoslovak State in Pressburg. However, even if the roots of the conflict were primarily political, this does not mean that the strike and protest movement was orchestrated by nationalist or socialist elements in Hungary, or by the Hungarian government. The movement was rooted in local grievances and was essentially spontaneous. The claims made by Šrobár, other Czechoslovak representatives, and some Slovak historians that the Pressburg social democratic leaders were tools of the Hungarians or local Magyar nationalists must be rejected. The question was how the German and Magyar social democrats were going to come to terms with the new Czechoslovak regime and its political, social, and national-cultural policies. This was first of all a local problem that concerned the city’s majority population and its different social and political movements. It was a complex issue with psychological, political, economic, social, and cultural aspects.

For all the political arrogance that some Czechoslovak leaders tended to display during the process of national revolution, it is impossible to overlook the fact that many Magyars and Germans were imbued with a strong sense of national and cultural superiority vis-à-vis the Slavs. The German and Magyar social democrats in Pressburg were influenced by it as well. The Greater Hungarian orientation, mixed with occasional tendencies of Magyar chauvinism, of the HSDP leadership was a consistent phenomenon throughout the party’s history. The fact that it was often legitimised by rationalisations of an economistic and Marxist-historicist nature that regarded autonomy for the different nationalities as retrogression and Balkanisation does not change its chauvinistic nature. Similarly, German nationalism and cultural chauvinism were present among some of the leaders of German social democracy both in Hungary, where the Germans were a minority themselves, and in Austria. In Austria the Germans were the leading nationality in the state and in the working class movement, but the strong Czech labour movement forced them to support (unlike the Hungarians) the concept of federalisation. When the Slovaks and Czechs became the ruling nation in Pressburg after 1918, the old tendency of the German social democrats to provide protection to the Pressburg Slovaks was replaced by harsh criticism of Slovak social democratic leaders like Emanuel Lehocký who accepted Czechoslovak government posts. Both in the broader Central European context and on the local level of a city like Pressburg national antagonisms intensified as the ethnic power structure was transformed.

leaders occasionally displayed Magyar nationalist traits and in the background there were notions about the ‘reactionary’ and pro-Russian character of Slav political aspirations.

This is clearly shown by statements of the generally respected Austrian social democratic leaders – from November 1918 leading Austrian statesmen – Otto Bauer and Karl Renner. The two men were shocked by the sudden change of the interethnic power structure of Central Europe; some of their comments have already been quoted (see chapters one, four, and six). When in May 1919 the Austrian delegation to the Peace Conference (which included Bohemian Germans like the social democratic leader Josef Seliger) attended the final stage of the negotiations in St Germain, the Bohemians, supported by Chancellor Karl Renner, submitted a memorandum asking for the German territories in Bohemia and Moravia not to be incorporated into the CSR. A letter by Renner introducing the memorandum declared that the sizeable German minority would never reconcile itself to subordination to ‘a younger and culturally less developed nation’ (the Czechs) and that a ‘second Alsace-Lorraine’ would be created. The memorandum stressed the unwillingness of the Germans to live in the Czechoslovak State and reiterated the demand for a plebiscite.⁶⁹⁶ When on 2 June the Austrian delegation received the peace conditions dictated by the Entente confirming that the historical frontiers of Bohemia and Moravia would be the CSR’s frontier with Austria and Germany, Austria’s Foreign Minister Otto Bauer commented that the 3.5 million Germans of Bohemia and Moravia were ‘openly annexed’. A note of the Austrian delegation to the Entente written in collaboration with the Bohemian Germans stated: ‘The subject nation will never tolerate this domination and the dominant nation will never come to grips with the problem it is faced with; both are condemned to a fatal community of conflict, more fatal than old Austria.’⁶⁹⁷ On 6 September 1919 Chancellor Renner finally accepted all conditions of the peace treaty with Austria, including the incorporation of the whole of Bohemia and Moravia into the CSR. He explained to the Austrian parliament what this ‘annexation’ of the German population by a ‘culturally less developed nation’ meant. ‘The Sudeten Germans, with whom we lived for four centuries in a state community... are torn loose from us and subordinated to an alien state. There is no German who would not experience this solution as undisguised rape, and the pain caused by it will never disappear. The grievances about this injustice will never cease to be heard... treaties, border posts, the actual use of force will separate us, but our hearts will beat in unison, now and forever!’⁶⁹⁸ German nationalism and cultural chauvinism before the First World War had led – in combination with Czech nationalism – to profound alienation between Czechs and Germans and to an early split in the Austrian social democratic movement. But the national revolution of 1918-19 caused a degree of mutual hostility that was even more difficult to overcome. The same held true for the relationship between the Slovak/Czechoslovak and the Magyar and German social democrats in Slovakia. Allegations by the German and Magyar social democrats that their Slovak counterparts were betraying the interests of the

⁶⁹⁶ D. Perman, *The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State. Diplomatic History of the Boundaries of Czechoslovakia, 1914-1920*, Leiden 1962, pp. 199-201. Perman also shows the other side of the story (that of Czech and French arrogance) and his comment that the Austrian delegation failed to adapt its demands to the ‘real political situation’ is simply a factual observation. He quotes the American general Francis J. Kernan, who described in April 1919 how the French – upon whose mind the ‘imperialistic idea’ had ‘seized... like a madness’ – were fostering an ‘imperialistic’ spirit in the CSR, Poland, and Romania, causing fear among the Americans that the new ‘highly nationalistic’ states would become tools of an aggressive French militarism. See *ibid.*, pp. 215-6.

⁶⁹⁷ Richard G. Plaschka and Arnold Suppan, ‘Historische Perspektiven zur Vertreibung der Deutschen aus der Tschechoslowakei’, in *Nationale Frage und Vertreibung der Deutschen in der Tschechoslowakei*, ed. Oberösterreichisches Landesarchiv, Linz, 2000, p. 17; *Aussenpolitische Dokumente der Republik Österreich 1918-1938 (ADÖ). 2. Im Schatten von Saint-Germain: 15. März 1919 bis 10. September 1919*, eds Klaus Koch, Walter Rauscher, and Arnold Suppan, Vienna, 1994, document 260, p. 197, and document 273, pp. 248-9. See for a broad historical perspective on the issue Ferdinand Seibt, *Deutschland und die Tschechen. Geschichte einer Nachbarschaft in der Mitte Europas*, Munich 1993.

⁶⁹⁸ *ADÖ. 2*, document 355, p. 439. It is noteworthy that already at this early stage Renner used the term ‘Sudeten Germans’ when referring to the Germans of Bohemia and Moravia in general; it is often claimed that this term became current only after the 1920s. See, e.g., Johann Wolfgang Brügel, *Tschechen und Deutsche 1918-1938*, Munich 1967, pp. 116-9.

working class by cooperating with the Czechoslovak government had a national-political as much as a class-political meaning. The messianic phenomenon of communist ideology could not change this reality, because it could not change the concrete political, social, and cultural foundations of national antagonism.

Beside the broader ramifications of the Central European national revolution, whose consequences were painful from the German and Magyar point of view, there were the more concrete problems on the local level, which made the revolution even more difficult to accept for those who were its 'victims' and 'losers'. The Czechoslovak occupation of Pressburg and its transformation to Bratislava was accompanied by a series of political-administrative, national-cultural, and socioeconomic measures causing suspicion of the new rulers among the old population of the city. Those who refused to cooperate with the Czechoslovak authorities were targeted by restrictive or openly repressive measures. Perhaps it is remarkable that initially a major segment of Pressburg's traditional political and economic leadership and local press did not offer much resistance at all; perhaps this is not to be wondered at given their will to survive (also politically) and their exhaustion by war and revolution. However there were at least two groups among the Pressburg population that did in fact put up a measure of opposition and resistance. On the one hand there were those nationalist Magyars – both on the political right and the left – who could not bear the idea, let alone the reality, of a change of national regime; on the other hand there were the German and Magyar social democrats with their 'non-opportunistic' attitude. Among the first group were high-school and university students and the staff of the Elisabeth University, the hard core of the Magyar intelligentsia known for its nationalist outlook, but also radicalised Hungarian soldiers, 'Red Guards', and Magyar Bolsheviks. The Magyar soldiers and Red Guards ceased to be a political factor after the departure of the last Hungarian military units and the armed radicals from Pressburg shortly before the arrival of the Czechoslovak army. The rise of post-revolutionary communism in Bratislava after 1919 was part of a later stage of political development and did not seriously threaten the existence of the Czechoslovak State, although it challenged its political regime. Magyar students and intellectuals however, some of whom may have had contacts with disgruntled former Hungarian government employees dismissed by the new regime, continued to oppose the CSR from within. They also played a minor part in the strike and protest movements of February and March 1919 organised by the social democrats and disloyal government employees. The German and Magyar social democrats, the more important but also more pragmatic opposition force openly criticising the new regime, started a political resistance campaign in February 1919 that had in many ways a different character from the nationalist and Bolshevik opposition groups. The concrete aims and motives of the social democratic opposition and indeed the whole outlook of the labour movement were more rational and pragmatic than the attitude of the nationalists and tried to avoid political extremism. Although the German and Magyar social democrats were imbued with a degree of national chauvinism vis-à-vis the Czechs and Slovaks, such sentiments were kept within bounds as far as their political actions were concerned and were usually not allowed to assume aggressive expression. Incidents like the alleged intimidation of Slovak factory workers who refused to support the February strike were, arguably, the result of a 'rational' strike strategy and not unusual under the circumstances. Social democratic moderation on the level of national sentiment enabled the labour movement already in December 1918 to take a pragmatic stance towards the inevitable Czechoslovak occupation of Pressburg and to help restore order in the city by suppressing the activities of Magyar nationalist and Bolshevik elements. After the occupation, during the first days and weeks of January, the German social democrats displayed a degree of goodwill towards the new regime that seemed to be reciprocated by the latter. But towards the end of the month a series of restrictive and highly unpopular political, social, and economic measures began to turn this attitude into resolute opposition. Illusions about the temporary nature of the Czechoslovak occupation, and about the willingness of the Entente to revise the status of

Pressburg or to organise a plebiscite, caused the February strike to overstep the boundary of local grievances, leading to an ill-fated endeavour to ignore the reality of Czechoslovak rule. This strategy failed completely and the German-Magyar social democratic leadership was forced to acknowledge the CSR as the new state-political framework within which it had to operate.

Of great influence on the long-term attitude of the German and Magyar social democrats was also the policy of 'ethnic labour substitution', which was carried out by the new Czechoslovak rulers against the background of a potentially dramatic ethnodemographic transformation of the city. The coming of thousands of Czechs to Bratislava, including government officials, white-collar employees, teachers, technicians, railway and postal workers, building workers, and others, led (in combination with unprecedented political power for the Slovaks) to a large-scale replacement of Magyars and Germans by Czechs and Slovaks in all fields of government and semi-government employment. This policy was motivated by the urge to establish political control – indeed it was speeded up by political strikes –, but also by the desire to show that formerly Hungarian and German Pressburg was really on its way to becoming Czechoslovak Bratislava. The effort by the Czechoslovak government to engineer a transformation of the city's ethnic population structure was of fundamental political importance and found expression, among other things, in the official census results of 1921, which were hotly contested by the German social democrats and other national-minority parties. Demographic engineering as an element of the ongoing process of national revolution was facilitated by the retrenchment of some and the importation of others. The progressive dismissal of numbers of former Hungarian railway and postal workers, municipal employees, and other public servants in Bratislava and southwest Slovakia was a principal grievance of the German-Magyar working-class movement already in January 1919. Paradoxically, the opposition strategy of strike action only served to accelerate it. The arrival of Czech building workers and other 'strangers' employed by Czech entrepreneurs and local government departments similarly constituted a threat to the economic position of Bratislava's 'native' workers, as the social democratic press repeatedly pointed out. It is important to realise that the problem of national antagonism in postrevolutionary Bratislava was not only caused by nationalist sentiment or ethnic prejudice, but also by bread and butter issues and concrete economic interests, especially the allocation of jobs and ethnic distribution of employment opportunities. Nevertheless there was more to all of this than just job opportunities, economic competition, or even demographic engineering. The changing situation in Bratislava was above all the result of revolutionary changes in the structure of ethnic and political power. In the context of the Central European national revolution even processes of social and economic change were shaped by the determinant of political power.

The factor of ethnopolitical power deeply influenced the development of ethnic relations and sociopolitical conditions in the First Czechoslovak Republic of 1918-38. The transformation of the ethnic power structure after the foundation of the CSR – also in the milieu of the multiethnic working-class movement – was alleviated for the revolution's 'historical losers' by the democratic political culture of this rather exceptional Central European state of the inter-war period. The occasional obstruction of national-minority rights and legally prescribed procedures by local administrative organs was, perhaps, one way of ensuring the hegemony of the 'Czechoslovak nation' in minority regions. But the Germans, the Magyars, and other national minorities had ample opportunity to preserve their ethnic identity and to develop their cultural and educational institutions. This resulted in a degree of cultural autonomy under democratic conditions that scarcely existed in other post-war Central and Eastern European multiethnic societies. National-minority rights in combination with a functioning democratic system made Czechoslovakia a comparatively stable – though perhaps 'artificial' – state, but it was also a state and society with 'ethnocratic' traits, which tended to weaken its long-term stability. The story of the further evolution of multinational Czechoslovakia after 1921 is not part of this study, which aimed to explore the origins and development of the national revolution leading to the CSR's

establishment and consolidation in Bratislava and Slovakia. It is clear that the origins of the Slovak Revolution must be analysed in the historical context of pre-1918 Hungary and its semi-feudal social and political conditions, in particular its system of national oppression. The history of Slovakia and Bratislava is as much part of Hungarian history as of ‘Czecho-Slovak’ history (which includes the pre-1918 tradition of Slovak–Czech mutuality). Because of the problematical relationship between ethnonational groups and the state in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Central Europe, it is not always easy to integrate ethnonational history and state-political history. But also when exploring social and labour history, both ‘unofficial’ ethnic and ‘official’ political and institutional aspects must be identified as constituent historical factors. In this way social history may be instrumental in helping to write an integrated history of modern Central Europe. In this context it also becomes apparent that despite the revolutionary events of 1918-19, there was a significant element of historical continuity as far as the issue of ethnic relations – and the ways in which they embraced both coexistence and antagonism – in a city like Bratislava is concerned. The complex interplay of socially integrating and nationally differentiating tendencies characterising the multiethnic microcosm of pre-1918 Pressburg continued after 1918.⁶⁹⁹ When looking at the local level of a single multiethnic city, the subtleties of this ongoing process and the balance of continuity and change can be particularly well observed. The dimension of local historical research demonstrates perhaps more clearly than other approaches the interdependence of social, economic, political, cultural, and psychological factors in the evolution of ethnic group relations. Ethnic relations went through different stages and assumed different forms depending on the structure of political power, demographic and economic change, the strength of national movements, and other factors. The history of working-class movements in Central Europe must always be seen in this broader context. It shows the necessity for social historians to be as ‘multidisciplinary’ as possible, to combine historical detail with broader interpretation, and not to forget that in Central Europe the politics of nationality cannot be left out when probing social and labour history.

This study does not claim that the issue of the interaction of social democracy and national revolution in Pressburg/Bratislava – let alone in the wider region of Central Europe – has been exhausted to the extent that all relevant questions would have been answered or even been addressed. On the contrary, there are many problems that need to be investigated more thoroughly. One of them is our imperfect knowledge of the pre-1918 multiethnic labour movement in Pressburg, and of the complex pattern of relations between the three ethnonational groups both within and without the context of working-class organisation. The history of individual trade unions, educational societies, etc., has yet to be written, and the same holds true for various other aspects of the social history of the working class. Indeed, even the history of Pressburg as a whole has hardly begun to be systematically addressed, especially as far as issues like social and political power and the relations between different urban groups are concerned. Another important question in need of further clarification is the contradictory relationship between denationalisation (assimilation, Magyarisation), whatever this may have meant in the Pressburg context, and the growing nationalism among different

⁶⁹⁹ As far as the role of the ethnic Germans is concerned, this historical process ended with their flight and expulsion from Czechoslovakia after the Second World War, the Slovak aspect of which is little known; the question of the ethnopolitical coexistence of Slovaks and Magyars continues until today. See for the evacuation, flight, mass detention, and ‘transfer’ of the Slovak Germans (including the Bratislava Germans) during the years 1944-6 Kováč, *Nemecko a nemecká menšina na Slovensku*, pp. 198-200; Soňa Gabzdilová, ‘Nemecká menšina na Slovensku koncom druhej svetovej vojny’, *Moderní dejiny* 10, 2002, pp. 111-36; Soňa Gabzdilová and Milan Olejník, ‘Proces internácie nemeckého obyvateľstva na Slovensku v rokoch 1945-1946’, *Historický časopis* 50, no. 3, 2002, pp. 423-38. See for an analysis of the issues surrounding the political status of the Magyar minority in Slovakia today Pieter van Duin and Zuzana Poláčková, ‘Democratic renewal and the Hungarian minority question in Slovakia. From populism to ethnic democracy?’, *European Societies* 2, no. 3, 2000, pp. 335-60.

ethnic groups, including sections of the working class. The concrete mechanisms, limits, and effects of Magyarisation among the working class and the broader population of Pressburg remain somewhat obscure, as are the concrete ways in which nationalism – or national-cultural emancipation efforts – influenced both organised and unorganised workers. A little-known aspect of the meaning of ‘Magyarisation’ in Pressburg is the attitude of the ‘ethnically dominant’ Magyar social democrats to the local implementation of Magyarisation policies and to the other national groups making up the local working class. We also need to know more about the concrete ways in which the German and Slovak social democrats tried to resist specific aspects of the Magyarisation policy in the city. Furthermore, we know far too little about the role of different social and political movements on the local Pressburg scene, including the social democratic movement. The social democrats, but also the Christian Socials and bourgeois radicals, tried to influence local politics even though both the municipal and the parliamentary franchise were extremely narrow, condemning the social democrats and others to a largely extra-parliamentary political existence despite occasional participation in election campaigns.

With regard to the national revolution of 1918-19 and the period of consolidation of the Czechoslovak State immediately thereafter, it is important to gain greater insight into the functioning of local politics and of the Czechoslovak administration in Bratislava. This must include the administration’s political mistakes resulting from false assessments of the situation in the city and from a lack of political-administrative coordination caused by personality differences and by the need to improvise in what was a totally new and unpredictable situation. An interesting point striking the historian of revolutionary Pressburg/Bratislava is, for instance, the contrast between the personalities and attitudes of Bratislava’s Slovak County Sheriff Samuel Zoch and Slovakia’s ‘Minister Plenipotentiary’ Vavro Šrobár. It would seem that this factor was not unimportant in the unfolding of events during the first months of 1919. Of course, this is only one among many questions that need to be addressed in greater detail. Another one is the role of leading personalities on the other side, notably Paul Wittich and other German and Magyar social democratic leaders, but also prominent figures from other political groups and from institutions like the Elisabeth University, including Magyar nationalist students. There can be little doubt that individual personalities played an important role especially during the revolutionary transition period of uncertainty and instability when established patterns of administrative and political communication receded into the background. This absence of political and administrative predictability and rationality is one of the factors that may explain the significance and the bizarre claims of Czechoslovak (and other) propaganda. It may also partly explain the deteriorating relationship between the Czechoslovak and the German-Magyar social democrats in what became an even more complex multiethnic city. Furthermore it is important to know more about the ways in which the Czechoslovak administration – and individual officials within it – tried to win the confidence of at least a part of Bratislava’s ‘non-Czechoslovak’ citizens. No doubt this was crucial at this early stage (1919-21), when the first steps were made to implement a programme of national-cultural minority rights as part of the politics of state consolidation. In Bratislava the German and Magyar ‘minorities’ were actually a majority of the population, and the challenge for the Czechoslovak authorities was to make the city politically function by coopting ‘minority’ politicians and making meaningful concessions to them while remaining in overall control. Apart from the German and Magyar Pressburgers there was also a sizeable Jewish population to take into account, a potential ally of the Czechoslovak government if it was granted political status and minority rights. But of course no ethnic group, not the Jews, the Germans, the Magyars, the Slovaks, or even the Bratislava Czechs, was homogeneous in a political, social, or economic sense. If Bratislava contained at least five major ethnic groups by 1921, when the first Czechoslovak census reported this to be the case (the unitary ‘Czechoslovak nation’ was a political fiction), it contained even more social groups if other criteria of group

membership were taken into account as well. How these different types of social, ethnic, and political group membership interacted, overlapped, and cut across one another, is what this study has tried to explore. But if it can be claimed that the study has broken some new ground, it is also obvious that a lot of work remains to be done to complete the picture.

Glossary

- Ahawat Zion*: Zionist society in Pressburg
Amerikanisierung: slowing down, wildcat strikes
Anschluss: union of Austria and the German parts of Bohemia-Moravia with Germany (political aim in 1918-19)
Arbeitergarde: workers' guard
Arbeiterheim: Workers' Home (labour movement headquarters)
Arbeiterrat: workers' council
Arbeiter-Zeitung: Workers' Paper (Vienna)
Ausgleich: Compromise (1867)
Bekennntnis: confession, adherence
Brünn: Brno
Českoslovanský(-á/-é): Czechoslav (broad ethnic definition of Czech nation)
Československý: Czechoslovak
Czechoslovakism: tendency to regard the Czechs and Slovaks as one nation and to support the policy of centralism
Dělnické listy: Workers' Paper (Czech newspaper)
Deutsche(r) Volksrat für Pressburg: German National Council of Pressburg
Deutsche(s) Heim: German Home (cultural centre in Pressburg)
Deutsche(r) Schulverein: German School Association
Deutschtum: 'Germandom', the ethnic Germans
Dualism: the Austro-Hungarian political-administrative system of the post-*Ausgleich* era (1867-1918)
Előre: Forward (Magyar section of Pressburg workers' educational society)
Ethnocratic: pertaining to political system and political culture of a multinational state in which one ethnonational group is dominant in terms of power and prestige
Ethnocultural: pertaining to cultural identity based on ethnicity, language, nationality
Ethnolinguual: pertaining to language identity linked to ethnic, national consciousness
Ethnonational: pertaining to national identity based on ethnic, cultural, linguistic criteria, which are usually politicised
Gefühlssozialismus: emotional socialism
Gewaltfrieden: imposed, dictated peace
Gewerbe: craft production, handicrafts
Gewerkschaftskartel: trade union council
Grenzbote: The Border Messenger
Heimat: home land, home city
Herrenvolk: ruling nation, master race
Historical Hungary: the pre-1918 multinational Kingdom of Hungary
Hlas: The Voice (Slovak newspaper)
Hlasists: progressive Slovak nationalists around the paper *Hlas*
Honvéd: Hungarian national army
Huszadik Század: The Twentieth Century (Hungarian sociological journal)
Imperium: state, state power, empire
Jednota: Unity (Slovak workers' society in Budapest)
Judea-Holič: Zionist students' association
Karpathen-Post: The Carpathian Mail
Kmeň: tribe, race, family, ethnicity, nation

Konjunktur: political tendency of the moment
Kraxelhuber: opportunistic, provincial Pressburger
Kultur: civilisation, culture
Kulturfördernd: ‘culture-promoting’, civilising
Kulturträger: representatives of civilisation
Lager: ideological, political, confessional ‘camp’, segment
Liedesfreiheit: ‘Singing Freedom’ (Pressburg workers’ choir)
Lingua franca: a language of communication between different national groups
Lud, lid: the people
Ludové noviny, The People’s News (Slovak newspaper)
Maďarský: Magyar, ethnic-Hungarian
Magyar: Magyar, Hungarian
Magyarisch (madjarisch): Magyar, ethnic-Hungarian
Magyarone: pro-Hungarian renegade, Magyarised Slovak
Magyar National Casino: elitist Hungarian social club
Matica slovenská: Slovak cultural institute
Mizrachi: Mizrahi, religious Zionist movement
Napred: Forward (Slovak section of Pressburg workers’ educational society; newspaper)
Národ: nation
Národné noviny: National News (Slovak newspaper)
Népszava: The People’s Voice (Magyar newspaper)
Nőmunkás: The Woman Worker (Magyar newspaper)
Nová doba: The New Era (Slovak newspaper)
Občania: citizens
Obergespan: High Sheriff
Ödenburg: Sopron
Pan-Slav(ist): one who strives for Slav unity or is accused of doing so
Parteistellenarchiv: Party Organs’ Archive (VGA, Vienna)
Pfaffenglaube: the ‘popish’, Catholic religion
Pokrok: Progress (Slav workers’ society in Budapest)
Präsidium: executive committee
Pravda chudoby: The Truth of Poverty (Slovak newspaper)
Právo lidu: The People’s Right (Czech newspaper)
Pressburger Allgemeine Arbeiter-Krankenkassa: Pressburg General Workers’ Sick Fund
Pressburger Jüdische Zeitung: The Pressburg Jewish Newspaper
Pressburger Presse: The Pressburg Press
Pressburger Tagblatt: The Pressburg Daily
Pressburger Zeitung: The Pressburg News
Provisorium: provisional or interim situation
Realpolitisch: politically realistic
Redoute: ballroom-house
Reichsrat: Austrian parliament
Robotnícke noviny: Worker News (Slovak newspaper)
Slovenská ľudová strana: Slovak People’s Party
Slovenská národná strana: Slovak National Party
Slovenské ľudové noviny: Slovak People’s News
Slovenské robotnícke noviny: Slovak Worker News
Slovenský (vzdelávací) spolok: Slovak (Educational) Society
Slovenský týždenník: The Slovak Weekly
Sokol: Falcon, Czech nationalist gymnastic society

Staatsangehörigkeit: citizenship, political nationality
Staatsvolk: state nation, political nation
Stammbevölkerung: original inhabitants, population
Staviteľský robotník: The Building Worker (Slovak newspaper)
Sturmtruppe: storm-troopers
Temeschburg: Timisoara, Temesvár
Teschen: Těšín (Czech-Polish border region)
Uhorský: Hungarian (territorial, political)
Ungarisch: ethnic-Hungarian, Magyar
Ungarländisch: Hungarian (territorial, political)
Ungarländische Jüdische Zeitung: The Hungarian Jewish Newspaper
Vaterstamm: national origin
Völkisch: ethnic, popular
Volkskommissär: people's commissar
Volksrat: people's council, national council
Volksrecht: The People's Right
Volksstamm: nationality, ethnicity
Volksstimme: The People's Voice
Volkstum: nation, nationality
Vorwärts: Forward (Pressburg workers' educational society)
Weltanschauung: worldview
Westungarischer Grenzbote: The West Hungarian Border Messenger
Westungarische Volksstimme: The West Hungarian People's Voice
Zips: Spiš (eastern Slovak region)
Zora: The Morning Star (Slovak students' society; newspaper)
Župan: County Sheriff, High Sheriff

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Nederlandse samenvatting van het proefschrift

De dissertatie van Pieter C. van Duin, “Kruispunt in Midden Europa. Sociaal-democratie en nationale revolutie in Bratislava (Pressburg), 1867-1921”, onderzoekt de ontwikkeling van de sociale, etnische en politieke verhoudingen in de stad Bratislava, tot maart 1919 bekend als Pressburg. In de stad Pressburg woonden drie belangrijke etnische (nationale, taalkundige) groepen: Duitsers, Hongaren en Slowaken. Deze hadden ieder op hun eigen wijze een specifieke sociale positie binnen de gecompliceerde multinationale microkosmos van de stad. De dissertatie concentreert zich vooral op het milieu van de sociaal-democratische arbeidersbeweging, die net als de stad zelf een “trinationaal” karakter had. Centraal staat de vraag hoe de relaties tussen de drie groepen zich binnen de context van de arbeidersbeweging ontwikkelden. Maar deze vraag wordt verbonden met het bredere thema van de ontwikkeling van politiek en samenleving in de stad Pressburg/Bratislava, Hongarije (waartoe de stad tot 1919 behoorde) en de Habsburger-Monarchie als geheel.

De dissertatie combineert een lange-termijnanalyse van de periode 1867-1921 met een korte-termijnanalyse van de jaren 1918-1919. Tijdens de jaren van nationale revolutie 1918-1919 vielen de Habsburger-Monarchie en “Historisch Hongarije” (het oude en veel grotere multinationale Hongarije) uiteen en werden nieuwe “nationale staten” gevormd zoals Tsjechoslowakije en Joegoslavië. Het proces van nationale revolutie had een zeer intensief karakter in Pressburg. Het had tot gevolg dat de etnische Hongaren (“Magyaren”) hun politiek overheersende positie verloren en de etnische Duitsers tot op zekere hoogte hun dominante positie op sociaal-economisch gebied. Deze plotselinge verandering van de etnische en politieke machtsstructuur had tevens belangrijke gevolgen voor de verhoudingen tussen de drie nationale groepen in de plaatselijke arbeidersbeweging. Terwijl voor 1918 de Duitsers en de Hongaren de leiding hadden binnen de multi-etnische arbeidersbeweging van Pressburg, waren het na 1918 de Slowaken (gesteund door de Tsjechen) die meer en meer op de voorgrond traden, daarbij profiterend van hun nieuwe machtspositie en politieke status. Dit leidde tot een splitsing in de arbeidersbeweging tussen enerzijds de sociaal-democratische beweging van de Duitsers en de Hongaren en anderzijds de beweging van de Slowaken, die opgingen in de Tsjechoslowaakse (voorheen Tsjechische) Sociaal Democratische Partij en de nationale Tsjechoslowaakse arbeidersorganisaties. De problematische relatie tussen beide nationale kampen verslechterde nog na het uitbreken van een algemene staking in februari 1919, die was georganiseerd door de Duitse en Hongaarse arbeidersbeweging om te protesteren tegen het nieuwe Tsjechoslowaakse bestuur in Bratislava.

Het onderzoek naar de periode 1867-1918 (het tijdperk van de “Dubbelmonarchie”) en naar de kortere periode 1919-1921 (de jaren van consolidatie van de Tsjechoslowaakse Republiek) vormen de bredere context waarbinnen de eigenlijke revolutie zelf wordt geplaatst. De periode 1867-1918 wordt geanalyseerd door te kijken naar drie historische dimensies: de ontwikkeling van politiek en samenleving in het multinationale Hongarije; de ontwikkeling van de nationale, sociale en politieke verhoudingen in de multi-etnische stad Pressburg; en de ontwikkeling van de multinationale sociaal-democratische beweging in Hongarije en de Habsburger-Monarchie. Op deze manier wordt de lokale geschiedenis van Pressburg/Bratislava verbonden met een breder historisch panorama. Stads geschiedenis wordt geïntegreerd in de regionale geschiedenis van Midden Europa. Deze combinatie van verschillende onderzoeklijnen – in de tijd, in de ruimte en thematisch – is wellicht in staat te verklaren waarom de relaties tussen verschillende etnische groepen in Pressburg en elders in Midden Europa verslechterden aan de vooravond van de Eerste Wereldoorlog en waarom de oorlog zelf uiteindelijk het einde van het multinationale Hongarije en de Habsburger-Monarchie betekende. De Tsjechoslowaakse Republiek als navolgerstaat van Hongarije in de stad Bratislava en in Slowakije kende nationale

minderheidsrechten toe aan de Duitsers en de Hongaren die in de nieuwe staat belandden. Maar de verlaging van de status van beide groepen, de verzwakking van hun politieke, sociale en etnische machtspositie, was niet bevorderlijk voor de kwaliteit van de etnische verhoudingen in Tsjechoslowakije en de stad Bratislava. Dit wordt duidelijk geïllustreerd door de verdere ontwikkeling van de multi-etnische arbeidersbeweging(en) in Bratislava vanaf 1919.

curriculum vitae

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1973-1979 studie geschiedenis aan de Universiteit Leiden; afstudeerrichting sociale en economische geschiedenis.

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Vanaf 1986 onafhankelijk historisch onderzoeker, gespecialiseerd in de sociale geschiedenis van etnische conflicten, nationalisme e.d.; diverse publicaties op het gebied van de geschiedenis van Zuid-Afrika, Midden Europa en actuele politieke thema's.