

*Az alábbi nyílt levelet lapunk munkatársa, dr. Mailáth István intézi a szlovák emigráció egyik vezető személyiségéhez, a politikus-történész dr. Jozef Kirschbaumhoz, válaszul a Szlovák Világkongresszus lapjában megjelent cikkére, amelyben ő a magyar emigráció „szlovákellenes” magatartását bírálja, s a szlovákiai magyar kisebbség helyzetét különösen bírálóan minősíti.*

*Dr. Mailáth István maga is felvidéki származású, s mint a problémákör híváló ismerője, gyakran közöl lapunkban értekes írásokat a magyar-szlovák viszonyról kapcsolatos kérdésekről.*

## OPEN LETTER

Dear Dr. Jozef Kirschbaum:

With close interest I have read in the 56th issue of the official Bulletin of the Svetový Kongres Slovákov your article in which you address the "anti-Slovak propaganda of the Hungarians in exile," and describe your view of the conditions of the Hungarians in present-day Slovakia. The fact that you have not signed your article in your official capacity as the President of the SKS suggests to me that you have published it as a personal view. Please consider my response to your article as a personal view as well.

You state that your incentive for writing the article is recent attacks by the Hungarian press in exile against the Slovaks abroad and at home. But it is a misunderstanding to regard our writings as attacks against the Slovaks. If we were inspired by aggressive intentions, we could have resorted to publishing from the wealth of documents and articles dating back to the time of the independent Slovakia, which would have been greatly embarrassing to many leading Slovak personalities in the exile. However, we reject the use of such means as being against the spirit of fair play; we have never resorted to it in the past, even under pressure. Neither shall we deal with the Magyar-Slovak relations in a hostile frame of mind in the future either. We realize that it is a dangerous weapon which can backfire. Nevertheless, we want to follow the principle that guided the great statesman, Ferenc Deák: "The truth must be said and lies must be rejected."

I wish to state emphatically: we have made no attacks against the Slovaks; we are only defending our just cause. We are defending our vital interests against the unparalleled genocidal attempts against the existence of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. We are also defending ourselves against Slovak publications at home and abroad which distort and falsify the historical past. By disseminating incorrect data they only generate and foster a hostile attitude toward us. We are trying, in an objective and restrained manner, to counterbalance the propaganda which misinforms the Slovaks in exile and at home.

We have had no arguments about the writings of Prof. Milan S. Đurica, or František Vuk who are sincerely searching for the truth. They write with the sense of responsibility that characterizes a true historian. If they have to say something unfavorable about the Hungarians, and support it with facts and documents, we do not consider it an attack against us but a substantiated view deserving our attention.

You assert that the glowing picture you present in your article about the "privileged" status of the Hungarians in Slovakia is based on reliable information coming straight from Slovakia and also confirmed by Hungarians living in Slovakia. Allow me to express my grave doubts about their objectivity; my doubts are based on evident discrepancies.

You cite the census of Nov. 1, 1980, which recorded 597,000 Hungarians in Slovakia. Later however, you assert that the CSEMADOK, the cultural organ of the Hungarians, has 500 local branches which number all together 700,000 members. How do you reconcile this contradictory data? Only two answers are thinkable: either over 103,000 Slovaks joined the Hungarian cultural organization — which you also probably consider very

unlikely; or there actually are in Slovakia many more Hungarians than officially recorded — which appears to us very likely. It is very likely that the CSEMADOK does not include all the Hungarians living in Slovakia. Consequently, there must be many thousands more Hungarians in Slovakia than those registered with the CSEMADOK.

As far as the "independence" of the CSEMADOK, until the middle of the seventies it was truly allowed to be a representative organ of the Hungarian minority. Around 1975, however, it became "sterilized" by a government decree which emptied it of its original rôle by subordinating it to the nationality department of the Ministry of Education. Consequently, the CSEMADOK became a cultural organ of the government. Restricted to the area of folk arts, it lost its power to develop independent cultural policy, or to act as a defender of minority rights and interests. The Hungarians in Slovakia presently lack any representative organ comparable to the Democratic Association of the Slovaks in Hungary.

We have to correct — with no hostile feeling — your statement that the street signs in the towns with large Hungarian population are bi-lingual. Last October I visited five towns with overwhelmingly Hungarian population, and I could not find a single bi-lingual street sign. Hungarian names for towns and villages simply do not exist. The ancient Hungarian names of villages, which had never had any Slovak population in the past, have been replaced with newly invented Slovak names, evidently a first step toward abolishing their historical Hungarian character. Since the Slovaks frequently resort to comparisons between the minority conditions in Hungary and Slovakia, it is proper to refer here to the fact that in Hungary all the villages which have mixed population the signs are bi-lingual. In the Hungarian towns of Slovakia, even the very few streets named after Hungarian writers, like Ulica Jókaiho, or Ulica Madách, are only in Slovak. This undeniable fact alone makes the reliability of your information highly doubtful.

According to your information the use of Hungarian language is common in the offices in places with sizeable Hungarian population. I have no accurate information in this regard. Even granting this, certainly it is not strong evidence in itself for a liberal policy toward the Hungarian minority, especially in a territory which had been forcibly detached from thousand year old national community. The use of nationality language is the minimal due to minorities in every civilized country.

You refer in your article to the representation of the Hungarians in the regional administration and in the national parliament. You must know as well as we do that these representatives are not elected officers but are appointed by the ruling party. As such, they are simply tools of the government. Even if they were the people's appointees, in the moment they dare to criticize the anti-Hungarian actions of their government, they receive the same treatment as Dr. Miklós Duray, whose recent persecution and trial scandalized the free world.

"Denationalization, no matter by what means, is not only a cultural crime but a crime against humanity." (Imrich Kruzliak, Horizon, 7.8.'82)

Now a few reactions to your data by which you suggest that the educational conditions of the Hungarians are more than satisfactory. They may perhaps accurately reflect the situation around 1970. However, the issue of Új Szó (published under the government control in Pozsony-Bratislava), which carried the official statistics of 80/81 school year, shows an alarmingly deteriorated picture.

At the Hungarian Teachers' College the number of the admitted students decreased from 118 in 1964 to 18 in 1979. The number of the Hungarian secondary schools and technical institutes has been constantly reduced and replaced by parallel classes in Slovak schools. Along with them the quota of Hungarian educators and certified instructors is also continually diminishing. Does it not indicate the gradual repression of Hungarian cultural life?

The same issue of Új Szó gives further statistical data of this ongoing genocidal process. In the early seventies the number of children in Hungarian kindergartens numbered approximately

22,000. After many of these kindergartens had been suppressed, the above number diminished over the short period of one decade to 15,690 children. This means that over 28% of the Hungarian children of pre-school age have to be placed by their parents in Slovak kindergartens. Out of 5,156 Hungarian high school students, 936 (18.1%) attend Slovak secondary schools. We heard complaints from many Hungarian parents that in several Hungarian villages the kindergartens were closed for a variety of reasons. Soon after a Slovak kindergarten was opened and the Hungarian parents, both of them working, had no other choice but to apply for admission at the Slovak kindergarten. Even there, their children were accepted only after the parents signed a commitment to enroll them later in Slovak elementary schools.

By your information the number of Hungarians definitely has grown over the last decade. During the same time the number of institutions, which are to preserve and cultivate the Hungarian language, has significantly decreased, and a large percentage of Hungarian students have to pursue their education in Slovak schools. What is this if not a planned attempt against the cultural survival of the Hungarian minority?

We realize that the Slovaks in exile are in no position to change the trend of the official policy in Slovakia which is unmistakably geared to gradual elimination of the Hungarian minority. We do not blame the Slovaks in exile for what is happening back at home. But we can not help but feel deep concern when Slovak publications abroad not only fail to treat the Hungarian problem objectively, but even defend and encourage the anti-Hungarian policy of the Slovak government. The SKS gave definite evidence of this by publishing an open letter addressed to the President and to the Ministers of the Czechoslovak Government. Your article, too, impresses us more as an apology for the official Slovak policy than as a sincere effort to see the Hungarian situation objectively. Your statement that "the real situation is such that the Slovaks under this regime suffer much more than the Hungarians...who in certain periods enjoyed a privileged position" sounds so unrealistic that it gives your whole article the tone of cheap propaganda. Who would believe that Slovak national interests are disadvantaged today in Slovakia? The present regime in every possible way supports aggressive Slovak nationalism, which threatens the survival of the Hungarian minority. You must close your eyes not to see the real trend! Your prejudiced attitude toward the conditions of the Hungarian minority is revealed by the casual attitude with which you cover the extermination drive of the post-war (non-Communist) Slovak government. You state: "...it is true the Hungarian minority immediately after the war lived through critical times." Such casual comment apparently minimizes the most brutal genocidal actions of the Kosický Program which certainly was conceived by the Beneš clique but was executed with the active cooperation or silent assistance of the Slovaks. Moreover, you make an utterly illogical claim when you state that the Slovak Catholics — the majority of the nation — suffered the same as the Hungarians did, as if the Hungarian Catholics had not suffered the same religious oppression in addition to the anti-Hungarian actions. You go even farther when you state that the sufferings of the Slovaks were many times greater than those of the Hungarians because the regime actually liquidated Dr. Tiso and his government while it was only planning to liquidate the Hungarian minority but did not carry it to the end. Not to mention that the same regime liquidated, even more cruelly and less justifiably, Dr. János Esterházy and all the political and cultural leaders of the Hungarian minority. But to put the fate of a small political group — upon which the survival of the Slovak nation certainly did not depend — on the same level with a large minority population which the regime condemned to extinction, even if it was unable to carry out the plan fully, this is evidently an irrational emotional statement not worthy of a historian of your reputation.

We would be sincerely interested to hear your view on how you visualize a common front against the common enemy — as you urge it — while such an attitude prevails among the Slovaks at home and abroad as well. We sincerely desire to reach mutual understanding and effective cooperation. But it is hard for us to overcome the fear that while one arm of yours opens for friendly embrace the other hides a dagger against our very existence.

The Slovak publicists pay close attention to the Slovak minority groups scattered in Hungary, Moravia and Bohemia. This certainly is their right and duty. When we make some corrective comments to such publications — e.g. to the highly exaggerated number of Slovaks in Hungary — we do it with no hostile intention but only to pressure the Slovak writers to respect the facts and the truth. Spreading historical theories and other information which lack objectivity generates only conflict and adverse feelings. We acknowledge the national duty of the Slovaks to show care and interest in the plight of their minority groups. We also expect the Slovaks to respect our efforts to support our fellow Hungarians in their struggle for survival, which we do in painstakingly objective and restrained manners.

You expressed adverse criticism on the English edition of Dr. Kálmán Janics's book. Since I could not avail myself of it, I cannot deal with your criticism of its merits. However, I am familiar with the Hungarian edition which is replete with appalling documents on the genocidal attacks against the Hungarian minority. You call the English edition a political mistake comparable, on the part of the Slovaks, to the publishing again Scotus Viator's: *Radical Problems of Hungary*. Personally, I would welcome the realization of this idea, in spite of the fact that the book is antiquated since it deals with an anachronistic problem long buried by the ruins of two World Wars. I would encourage the Hungarian organizations to buy up all the copies and distribute them along with Dr. Janics's book. Both together would make very enlightening reading for many misinformed readers who thus would have a chance to make an authentic comparison between the oppression of the Slovaks in the Hungarian Kingdom and the fate of the Hungarians under Czecho-Slovak rule. Such comparison would clearly show which side committed greater crimes against basic human rights.

You refer, with a disparaging side remark, to the article from György Györffy (published in this paper on Sept. 5, 1982) calling its view on the past of the Slovaks not worthy of attention. Against him you cite the authority of two hardly known Slovak historians from the beginning of 18th century who supposedly proved, with scientific authority, the descent of the Slovaks from the Great Moravian Empire. It is not uncommon for historians to disagree when interpreting historical periods for which they can rely on very limited sources. I am not familiar with the work of the Jesuit historian Samuel Timon, nor with the writings of J.B. Magin, a one time parish priest of Dubnica. But it is evident that since their time many previously unknown documents have been discovered, additionally recent archeological findings like those of Dr. Gyula László, have shed entirely new light on the distant past of Central Europe. It is unprofessional to dismiss as "not serious" the view of an acknowledged historian who is correcting the historical picture

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which the respectable parish priest of Dubnica drew up of the origin of the Slovaks more than two hundred years ago. On the basis of the scanty documents, it may have appeared to him as true history. Yet views of historians must be critically examined and corrected if they are in disagreement with the reliable documents; it is not professional to dismiss them with a mere expression of displeasure. We would welcome a documented refutation of Dr. Győrffy's view; in critical times national legends do not pass for history, and historical views cannot be imposed in dictatorial fashion.

. . .

At the general meeting of the SKS in June, 1981, the President of the organization made the following statement: "The Hungarians avoid being drawn into controversy with the Slovaks on historical questions. Yet we shall pressure them into debate with us."

Well, Dr. Kirschbaum, we yielded to this pressure and since that time we have dealt with some controversial issues with regard to the Magyar-Slovak relations. You, however, to our regret, seem to take a stand against such discussion. We regret that you consider our writings as attacks against the Slovaks, though we have been particularly careful to continue the dialogue in a detached, objective manner. We never aim at generating hostility and hatred; on the contrary, our writings are inspired by a desire to dispel mistrust and prejudices among us. We are not entertaining, though, the idea of a kind of political agreement as it would be beyond our authority. Yet an acceptable *modus vivendi* could be worked out between the representatives of the two nations destined by history to live as neighbors, side by side. The first step is to dispel the atmosphere of mistrust and diffuse all artificially fueled antagonism. The leaders in exile can make a valuable contribution to this process; they can draw inspiration from the conditions of some multi-cultural democratic countries where they established their new homes and where they can acquire a broader perspective on the co-existence of nationalities which is often disturbed in mono-cultural states.

In this awareness we continue seeking and strengthening our common interests, thus rebuilding the historical bridge over the gulf that was brought about between our nations by two World Wars. The failure or success of this endeavor will not depend on us.

