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Nationality movements under the spell of the Wilsonian ideas in the focus of Romanian efforts to gain territory

Abstract

At the beginning of the 20th c. of the inhabitants of the south-eastern region of present-day Hungary two-thirds claimed to be Hungarians, one-fifth Slovaks, the rest Germans, Romanians and Serbians. The Romanian empire occupied the area in April 1919 and organized a movement, especially among the Slovak inhabitants, to urge for the annexation of the region to Romania, in order to support Romania's aspirations for more territories before the Paris peace conference.

The mentality, political and cultural aspirations of the Slovaks living in the area between the Rivers Körös and Maros covering about 8000 square kilometre were mainly influenced by the fact that they were embedded – together with German, Romanian and Serbian groups – among the majority Hungarian nationals. In 1910 the Slovakian population was 23% in Co. Békés, 12% in Co. Csanád, in the two largest counties of the region, while Hungarians represented 73% and 75% respectively.¹ The island-like settlement of the Slovaks and other minorities is even more conspicuous if the data are analysed district by district considering the whole area of the counties Békés and Csanád and the district of Co. of Arad too, that were part of the Romanian territorial claims and also involved in the borders defined by the Trianon treaty.

¹ The 1910 census of the countries of the Hungarian Crown. Part I. Budapest, 1912. Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények. Új sorozat. Vol. 42.

Table 1.
Distribution of the population according to districts in 1910²

District	Total population	Hungarian	%	Slovak	%	Cyerman	%	Romanian	%	Serbian	%
<i>County Békés</i>											
Szarvas	46 255	26 171	56,6	19 899	43,0	78	0,2	39	0,1	3	–
Gyoma	25 213	24 382	96,8	200	0,8	601	2,4	9	–	4	–
Szeghalom	36 004	35 805	99,5	93	0,3	58	0,1	42	0,1	2	–
Békés	45 810	36 640	80,0	5 842	10,8	3 222	7,0	87	0,2	6	–
Békéscsaba	47 930	17 305	36,1	29 936	62,5	287	0,6	313	0,7	42	0,1
Orosháza	59 351	48 443	81,6	10 537	17,8	136	0,2	128	0,2	12	–
Gyula	14 790	10 707	72,4	950	6,4	85	0,8	2 967	20,1	–	–
<i>County Csanád</i>											
Battonya	33 750	26 433	78,3	724	2,2	337	1,0	3 168	9,4	3 011	8,9
Központ	23 786	16 167	68,0	5 077	21,3	111	0,5	1 733	7,3	623	2,6
Mezőkovácsház	26 853	23 289	86,7	3 210	12,0	151	0,6	158	0,6	21	–
Nagylak	25 941	8 515	32,4	7 970	30,7	206	0,8	8 837	34,1	269	1,0
<i>County Arad</i>											
Elek	34 209	9 405	27,4	2 885	8,4	9 945	29,1	11 826	34,6	4	–
Total	419 892	283 262	67,5	87 323	20,8	15 217	3,6	29 307	7,0	3997	1,0

From the above table it becomes evident that with the exception of three districts (Békéscsaba, Elek and Nagylak) the Hungarian inhabitants represented absolute majority and it was only in the Békéscsaba district that the exact number of Slovaks exceeded that of the Hungarians.

It is known that when the area was re-settled after regaining the country from the Turks in the 18th c. The newly founded villages had a more or less homogeneous population, people belonging to the same nationality were settled there. Slovak population was considerable first of all in Szarvas, to a less extent in Békéscsaba and Tótkomlós; there were Romanians in Kétegyháza, Germans in Elek, etc. It also occurred that two or three nationalities settled down at one place: in Mezőberény Hungarians, Slovaks and Germans, In Gyula Hungar-

² Ibid. 'other' nationalities registered by the census (in majority gipsies)– have not been included into the tables as their proportion was below 1%.

ians, Romanians and Germans, In Battonya Hungarians, Romanians and Serbs. Regarding the whole area, the majority of the settlers were Hungarians. Part of them were resettler having had fled from the Turks from this area. They occupied Füzesgyarmat, Vésztő, Sarkad, Doboz, Szeghalom, Köröstarcsa, Körösladány, Békésszentandrás and Békés. Hungarians from Transdanubia settled down at Gyoma, Endrőd, Orosháza and other villages. The ethnic pattern was further added to when the town getting overpopulated, sent out settlers Slovaks too, who founded new villages, e.g. poor tobacco cultivating communities e.g. Pitvaros, Ambrózfalva, Mezőkovácsháza and others, or the more prosperous families bought divisions of the crown property that grew into quickly developing settlements, e.g. Medgyesháza.³

It is evident that there was communication between the settlements of different ethnic communities from the start on. After the emancipation of serfs, since the middle of the 109th c., the earlier closed peasant communities gradually loosened and simultaneously the earlier closed ethnic communities too. Market areas had developed, the inhabitants began to migrate, moved into towns and mingled with one another. That meant reciprocal cultural and economical influence. It meant slow assimilation for the minority ethnics since they could only participate in the social development if they accepted the majority language as *lingua franca*. Bilingualism spread that besides the inner need was assisted by the efforts to make Hungarian the language of the administration, the official policy of education and also through the development within the Lutheran church that was the major support of the identity for a great part of the Slovak minority.⁴

³ Borovszky Samu: Csanád vármegye története 1715-ig. Bp. 1896 [the history of Co. Csanád till 1715]; Karácsonyi János: Békésvármegye története. Gyula, 1896 [History of Co. Békés]; Maday Pál: Békés megye városainak és községeinek története. Békéscsaba, 1960 [istory of the towns and townships of Co. Békés]; Oltvai Ferenc: A Csanád vármegyei telepes községek társadalma és igazgatása a XIX. század első felében. Szeged, 1978 [The society and administration of the settlements of Co. Csanád in the first half of the 19th c.]; Further there are local histories and ethnic monographs recently published by the above mentioned localities.

⁴ Evangélikus Országos Levéltár [National Lutheran Archives = NLA] Békés Megyei Levéltára [Co. Békés Archives] bundles 63. and 74. Gyivicsány, Anna: Fejlődésváltozatok amagyarországi szlovákok hagyományos kultúrájában. A magyarországi

The assimilation of Slovak inhabitants in the settlements though went in different ways and at different speed, however, was unstoppable as shown by *Table 2.* below.

Table 2. The proportion of the Slovak inhabitants in localities in 1852/1854 and 1910⁵

Settlement	Proportion of the Slovak population in 1852/1854 %	Number of inhabitants	Hungarian %		Slovak %	
			In 1910			
Szarvas	91,1	25 879	9 533	36,8	16 262	62,8
Békéscsaba	89,8	42 599	13 271	31,1	28 682	67,3
Tótkomlós	97,0	10 502	1 146	10,9	9 307	88,6
Nagybánhegyes	61,4	5 204	2 467	47,4	2 691	51,7
Medgyesegyháza	– ⁶	3 628	1 431	39,4	2 048	57,4
Ambrózfalva	94,3	1 042	45	4,3	991	95,1
Csanádalberti	95,9	1 370	60	4,4	1 303	95,1
Pitvaros	97,1	2 936	170	5,8	2 746	93,5
Nagylak	52,1	14 043	1 439	10,2	7 651	54,5

At the beginning of the 19th c. the centres of Slovak linguistic renewal and national awakening in the capital and the Upland expressed interest in the Slovak population of the Great Plain (and

szlovákok népi kultúrájának atlasza. Békéscsaba 1996 pp.7-74 [variations in the development of the traditional Slovak culture in Hungary. The cultural atlas of the Slovaks in Hungary]. Etnokulturális változások Tótkomlóson. Tótkomlós néprajza. Tótkomlós – Gyula, 1996. pp.379-395. [Ethno-cultural changes at Tótkomlós] A szlovák kultúra intézményei [Békéscsabán]. Etnokulturális változások. A művelődés évszázadai Békéscsabán. Szerk. Käfer István–Köteles Lajos. Békéscsaba, 1998. 195–219.[The institutions of Slovak culture. Centuries of culture at Békéscsaba]; Dedinszky Gyula: A szlovák betű útja Békéscsabán. Békéscsaba, 1987.[the way of Slovak literacy]; Virág László: A közoktatás évszázadai. A művelődés évszázadai Békéscsabán. Békéscsaba, 1998. 290–346 [centuries of education at Békéscsaba]; Tótkomlós története. Szerk. Szincsek György. Tótkomlós, 1996 [History of Tótkomlós].

⁵ Source: Szabó Ferenc: Békés és Csanád megyék nemzetiségi statisztikája a XIX. század közepén. Békési Élet, 1980. 3. sz. 283–294. [the ethnic statistics of the Counties Békés and Csanád at the middle of the 19th c.], and A Magyar Szent Korona Országainak 1910. évi népszámlálása... 1910 Census. – The Table does not show other ethnic groups except Hungarians and Slovaks.

⁶ In the 1850s Medgyesegyháza was not yet an independent township.

Banat), partially because the peasants there were supposed to be well to do and willing to offer efficient financial help. It turned out soon that no such assistance will be offered causing severe criticism against the larger settlements (e.g. Békéscsaba and Szarvas).⁷ The disappointment felt toward this region has not abated in the attitude of the Slovaks organizing and then achieving their nationhood.

The settlements that developed into market towns (Békéscsaba, Szarvas, Mezőberény) had developed gradually a stratum of bureaucrats and intelligentsia of double identity without denying their Slovak origins. Thus the inhabitants could communicate with the local representatives of administration in their mother tongue and did not consider the local authorities alien. At the same time the prominent intellectuals, teachers, ministers, historians (Lajos Haan, Mihály Zsilinszky, Károly Sztraka, Pál, Gajdács later Lajos Zsigmond Szeberényi) living in the region at the middle of the 19th c. and who have highly been estimated both by the Hungarian and Slovak cultural history, together with their communities got into the crossfire of both national movements. They could not disregard that they had lived in Hungarian milieu but also tried to protect the Slovak traditions too. That was expressed by their works, published both in Hungarian and in Slovak. They were aware of the fact that the Slovaks in the Great Plain developed different ways of life, different mentality than those in the Upland. As Lajos Haan put it: 'In character they represent a middle between the Hungarians and the Upland Slovaks.'⁸

Considering the following decades, the events of the turn of the 19th – 20th cc., there are two more aspects to be mentioned. One is that in the spiritual centres of the Slovaks of Co. Békés at Békéscsaba and Szarvas, due to the bourgeois development and urbanization several Jewish families settled down. Though their number was proportionately not significant they were more active than average in organizing and financing societies, cultural institutions. Their presence introduced the liberal ideas alleviating the national approach. By their activities, e.g. publishing Hungarian language newspapers, books, supporting theatre-companies they strengthened the development of Magyarization. The Socialist ideas and political organiza-

⁷ Gyivicsán Anna: *Op.Cit.* pp. 196–197.

⁸ *Op.Cit.* p.208

tions appearing on the scene at the turn of the 19th – 20th cc worked in the same direction and put the social-economic conflict of interest into the focus of public discourse and in the belief that these would automatically solve the minority conflicts too.

The name of András L. Áchim should be mentioned. In his first speech in the parliament on the 11th of May 1905 he dissociated himself from upland politicians fighting for the Slovak national aspirations was not kowtowing in front of the Hungarian majority or self-serving exhibitionism but the sincere expression of the Slovak feeling of the Great Plain saying that it was a fact that not all the citizens of Hungary were of Hungarian nationality, there were several nationalities speaking several languages, serving Hungary with blood and money. He declared, had he been living in France, he would have been a French patriot, in the land of the Jews a Jewish one; since he was living in Hungary he wanted to be among the first patriots of Hungary.⁹ It is noteworthy that the rural representatives of Slovak descent of the agrarian – Socialist movement had published their complaints, reports, opinions both in Hungarian and Slovak newspapers.¹⁰ That approach characterized Áchim's political appearance too, depending on the occasion and his audience he delivered his speech either in Hungarian or in Slovak. It also happened that at the same occasion he delivered a part of his speech in Hungarian and the other part in Slovak.¹¹ Both the various agrarian Socialist movements and Áchim's Peasants' Party took the preservation of the linguistic-cultural identity for granted, but never transformed it into a policy of venting minority grievances. More importantly the message of the Agrarian Socialist movement and Áchim's peasant movement was that their interests should be asserted through the local self-governments, the

⁹ Az 1905–1910. évi országgyűlés képviselőházának naplója. I. Budapest, 1905. 259–260. [the Diary of the House of Commons of the 1905-1910 parliament.]; Fancsovits, György: Áchim L. András beszédei az országgyűlésben. Békéscsaba, 1986. p.5. [The speeches of A.L.Á.].

¹⁰ Siraczky, Jan: A tótkomlói szlovákok 1918 előtti nemzetiségi, kulturális és társadalmi mozgalmainak történetéhez. Békési Élet, 1982. 1. sz. pp. 28–38 [The history of national, cultural and social movements of the Slovaks of Tótkomlós before 1918]; Gombos János: Agrármozgalom Tótkomlóson. Áchim L. András az idő mérlegén. Szerk. Hrivnák Mihály és Molnár M. Eszter. Bp., 2003. pp.75–79. [Agrarian movement at Tótkomlós].

¹¹ Gombos Op.Cit.

positions obtained in township, and eventually in the county administration and through an active participation in the local life.

A different road was chosen by the society of Tótkomlós in the south western corner of Co. Békés and the small villages of Co. Csanád shown in *Table 2*. Their mentality was considerably different from the one explained above. At the beginning of the 20th c. these settlements had still preserved their closed peasant communities and their Slovak identity. In 1910 only 4-10% of the inhabitants claimed to be Hungarians, and according to the census data more than half of them did not speak Hungarian. Nevertheless such notaries were usually appointed who did not know the Slovak Language that became the source of conflicts for long decades.¹²

It was the inhabitants who created the institutions of self-education, preservation of traditions, however modest they were, which also were the basis of the awareness of ethnic identity. In 1903 the Folkbank was founded in Nagylak, the largest Slovak bank on the Great Plain.¹³ Between 1902 and 1910 the inhabitants of Tótkomlós, Nagylak and Pitvaros organized societies that served special nationality aspirations besides social and cultural aims. These townships had Slovak language theatre groups too.

Before WW1 the situation was especially explosive at Tótkomlós. The readers' complained in various papers about the lack of specialists to educate them in their mother tongue, because the Lutheran teachers did not care about it. In 1904 there was a well committed applicant, Lajos Hrdlicska, for the post of the Lutheran minister but was turned down because the higher ecclesiastical authorities found his patriotism insufficient. But the members of the Agrarian Society (farmers, small landowners and some members of the intelligentsia) hurt in their Slovak identity, after carrying out wide propaganda activities among the Slovaks of the region, managed to have Hrdlicska's appointment consented.¹⁴ Similar conflict broke out because of

¹² 1868. Article XLIV. Rules about the language use of the nationalities and the required duties of the administration §§14, 20. 21. ruling that the nationalities had the right to decide what should be the language of :matriculation and education, township meetings, and the administrative persons must use the language of the township.

¹³ Pechány Adolf: A tótokról. Bp. 1913. 167–174. [On the Slovaks].

¹⁴ Gombos Op.Cit.

the appointment of judges. In January 1908 Mihály Lehoczky, a self-respecting Slovak farmer, member of Achim's movement, was elected judge, in spite of the objections of the district and county authorities.¹⁵

Without reciting more examples it can be stated that the small closed rural societies were influenced by the changes occurring in their wider environment, by the connection to the Hungarian population of the neighbouring settlements and frequently suffered from the undiplomatic behaviour of administrative authorities that disregarded the law regulating language use and that became the source of real and imagined grievances and that led to further conflicts.

Following the collapse after WW1 the government of the bourgeois democratic revolution promised to insure the general human rights, improve the social services, the realization of the agrarian reform, the more equitable distribution of working time and wages and tried to redress the grievances of the multiethnic country's non-Hungarian inhabitants. The Károlyi-government entering office on the 31st of October 1918 promised important measures in the field of administration, education and language use. It planned to establish counties and districts for the ethnic nationalities to enable the Slovaks, Romanians, Germans and other minorities living in the area to create self-governments of county rank for their own administration and education. Considering the present topic besides the X. 1918. and VI. 1919 laws especially important is Law XXX. 1919 too 'On the self-government of Slovenska Krajina'. It is well known that the latter became irrelevant already at its creation as the Upland had already come under the rule of Czechoslovakia and the law did not mention the Slovaks of the Great Plain. It was suitable, however, to embolden the leaders of some minority communities and also to give arguments to the local authorities in support of their rigid policy.

The events of 1918–1919 support the above discussed difference between the mentality of the Slovaks living in the southern and northern area of the southern region east of the River Tisza.

¹⁵ Lapusnyi András: Lehoczky Mihály életútja. Áchim L. András az idő mérlegén. Szerk. Hrivnák Mihály és Molnár M. Eszter. Bp., 2003. pp. 80–81. [The life of Mihály Lehoczky. Á.L.A. examined].

In the strained situation the Slovak inhabitants of the market towns in the centre and northern part of Co. Békés, who were already connected to the processes of integration generated by the general economic and bourgeois developments – as was the case among the Hungarian population too – were especially interested in the following questions: they demanded the extension of political rights general suffrage included, measures against the acute social problems and the realization of the land reform.¹⁶ The inhabitants of Békéscsaba, Mezőberény and Szarvas, though preserving its cultural and linguistic identity showed little interest in the realization of national aspirations at political level. According to researches these settlements did not raise national political or cultural claims either at that period or later after the Communist takeover.¹⁷ The Law 206 631/1918. VKM issued in November 1918 did not cause any response either that permitted the teaching of the nationality languages schools, stopped the compulsory lessons of Hungarian in the first and second forms and ordered the teaching of the minority languages as subjects. In the above-mentioned settlements there was no change in the proportion of the subjects taught in Hungarian and Slovak during the time of the two revolutions. Concerning the teaching of the mother tongue in secondary schools, there were optional language courses at the secondary schools with only 2-4% of the pupils participating. In February 1919 these students too quitted.¹⁸

¹⁶ Hajdu Tibor: *Az 1918-as polgári demokratikus forradalom*. Bp. 1968. 119 [The 1918 bourgeois democratic revolution]; Fancsovits György: *A polgári demokratikus forradalom sajátosságai Békés megyében*. A Tanácsköztársaság Békés megyében 1919. Békéscsaba, 1969. pp. 98–100 [The characteristics of the bourgeois democratic revolution in Co. Békés]. The national council of Co. Békés – together with the representatives of minority settlements – accepted a radical land policy on the 15th of November 1918.

¹⁷ *A Tanácsköztársaság Békés megyében 1919*. Szerk. Szabó Ferenc. Békéscsaba, 1969 [The Hungarian Soviet Republic in Co. Békés]; Nádor Jenő: *Szarvas története*. Szarvas, 1922 [The history of Szarvas]; Dedinszky Gyula: *Békéscsaba nyelvi és vallási képének alakulása*. Békéscsaba, 1987. stb [The linguistic and religious development of Békéscsaba].

¹⁸ Tilkovszky Lóránt: *A szlovákok történetéhez Magyarországon 1919–1945*. Bp. 1989. 41–42. [Hungaro-Bohemioslovaka, 3.] [The History of Slovaks in Hungary 1919– 949].

At Tótkomlós and other smaller settlements in Co. Csanád the situation was different. Besides social demands and the land reform nationality sentiments came also to the surface.¹⁹

Lajos Hrdlicska, the Lutheran minister who had been and active participant in the Slovak movements of Tótkomlós for 15 years wrote in his memoirs that the war had represented the turning point in the widening of their aspirations. They were in constant contact with the Slovak and Czech politicians of the Upland and Prague respectively who introduced them to the activities of the Czech and Slovak emigration, to the aspirations towards an independent Czechoslovakia. During WW1 it became apparent for the Slovaks of the Great Plain that besides the demand of cultural rights political rights too should be included.²⁰ They shared their information and aspirations with the similarly thinking Slovak leaders of the settlements in Co. Csanád and were in contact with the Slovaks of Nagylak too.

The news of the events coming from Budapest caused disturbances on the 1st and 2nd of November 1918. The shops of Jewish merchants were broken into and the notary and administrators who did not speak the Slovak language were chased away. The meeting scheduled for the 2nd of November re-elected Mihály Lehoczky the popular Slovak farmer as judge, and the new organization of authority the National Council with Lajos Hrdlicska as its president; some its members were not ready to give their oath in Hungarian saying that they Slovaks and not Hungarians.²¹

¹⁹ The centre of the nationality movement was Nagylak (that was annexed to Romania in 1920). The Slovaks of Nagylak would have liked to join Yugoslavia, however the Romanian influence became stronger and from January 1919 the organization of the Romanian inhabitants of the place and the armed Romanian guard defined the developments. OL K40 830/1918. sz.; Cf. the contemporary periodicals of the region: Csanádvármegye Hivatalos Lapja 1919. június 26. és július 3.; Makói Független Újság 1918. december 2. és december 24.; Arad és Vidéke 1918. december 20.; Délmagyarország 1919. február 23.; Népköztársaság 1919. február 22. és február 25.; Makói Független Újság 1919. február 25.

²⁰ Prof. L. J. Hrdlička: Spoved e učtovanie exulanta. Bratislava, 1945. Idézi: Koppány János: A tótkomlósi evangélikus gyülekezet és az 1918–1919-es forradalmi időszak. 6. (Kézirat, Békéscsabai Munkácsy Mihály Múzeum adattára.) [The Lutheran congregation of Tótkomlós and the 1918-1919 revolution].

²¹ HL HM PDF II. Szegedi Katonai Kerület Parancsnoksága No. 47-10-398. [The Szeged Military HQ Archives].

In Csanádalberty and Pitvaros the anarchic developments of the first November days were to replace the notary who did not know the Slovak language and the demand was consistently held even after the uproar abated. However, the authorities of the Co. Csanád sabotaged the appointment of administrators with knowledge of Slovak. They could not prevent the meetings and minutes being kept in Slovak, it was also possible to regulate School teaching in Slovak that was kept till the Romanian army marched in April 1919. Afterwards the Hungarian teaching language was re-introduced causing the schools to shut in some townships for several months.²²

Besides the requirement of the use of the mother tongue there were peculiar political demand too, especially at Pitvaros probably instigated by the Slovak agents coming from Nagylak and the southern region and the propaganda material distributed by them could be the basis of the creation of the Slovak Democratic Party on the 7th of November, with Pál Veszelszki retired Lutheran teacher as chairman. The party held daily meetings where the common understanding developed that the only way of the Slovak success was by independence from Hungary. On the 27th of November the party – analysing the Wilsonian idea of self-determination in their own way – declared their wish to annex Pitvaros to Slovakia.²³ At the beginning of January the national council was re-organized, all the Hungarian members left out; and ruled that the minutes be kept only in Slovak and it will be the language of administration and education too. On the 7th of January – probably after realizing that joining up with Slovakia was unfeasible – there was the resolution made to *annex Pitvaros to Yugoslavia* as was also the wish of Nagylak and Újvidék (Novi Sad). The copy of the minutes were taken to Pécs to the Yugoslav authorities staying there, however, eleven days later the delegation came back with the reply that *Yugoslavia did not want Pitvaros*.²⁴

The attempts of Pitvaros, a community of 3000 inhabitants who were mainly day workers without their own land, where there were

²² Report of the Co. Csanád-Arad-Torontál administrative committee of the year 1927. Makó, 1928. pp. 171–174.; Csanádvármegye Hivatalos Lapja, 1919. június 26. és július 3.; A Csongrád megyei munkásmozgalom 1917–1919. augusztus 1. Ed. Gaál Endre. Szeged, 1969. 162–165.[Workers' movement in Co. Csanád 1917-1919].

²³ Op.Cit. p.173.

²⁴ Ibid.

no local intelligentsia or urbanized elements, tottering between the slogans of the international power politics and its real political possibilities might be regarded as a curiosity of the time if there had not been there the comparison with Nagylak described above and the case of Tótkomlós to be analysed below. In spite of the similarities may be the real question could have been why did not Pitvaros take similar steps and join the other two townships.

Tótkomlós with its more differentiated society of 10 500 inhabitants had more possibilities to adequately respond to the challenges of the time. However, the extremist ideas got into the foreground instead of choosing more realistic solutions was the result of the attitude of the district and county authorities that kept declining even the rightful demands of the language use, and also there were the ill-proportioned aspirations of some local politicians.

From the beginning of January life in *Rolniczky Spolok*, the agrarian society, was revitalized. Most of the members were well-to-do landed peasants but it was visited by workers and artisans too. Lajos Hrdlicska Lutheran minister, Márton Matejdesz and Mihály Franciszti Lutheran teachers were the leaders. The members got their political information through the peasant movement led by András L. Áchim and Vilmos Mezőfi and construed their demands accordingly. The sign for that lay in the fact that they got into contact with the most promising of the re-organized Hungarian political organization, the Smallholders' Party led by István Nagyatádi Szabó. At the beginning of 1919 local organizations of the party were in preparation.²⁵ At the same time *the traditions* set by Áchim were abandoned for some reason because instead of getting hold of self-determination at the local forums *foreign powers* were approached for the improvement of their situation.

The other pole of the political life of the township was the local organization of the Social Democratic Party. That collected the masses of diggers, some blue-collar workers and certain circles of artisans and small-holders. The party organization, led by the diggers Mihály Pips and András Hirka, considered the representation of the poorest layers of the population, the solving of social problems and the land

²⁵ EOL Békési Evangélikus Egyházmegye Levéltára, 171. csomó; Koppány, János idézett kézirat pp.4–5. [Archive of the Lutheran diocese Békés. MS cit.]

reform to be their most important task. The group did not deal with nationality problems even opposed some of the extreme demands, though the leaders and the majority of the members were Slovaks.²⁶

Besides these two organizations there was the group collected around Pál Gajdács director-minister, teachers, artisans, peasants without forming any organization. The members of the group were active in the public life of the township. Since Gajdács was always in favour of assimilation and of smooth coopearion with Hungarians, he wanted to lessen the nationalist aspirations with the help of his group.²⁷

The bone of contention was the teaching language at school at Tótkomlós too. Probably it was at the agrarian society where the petition was composed signed by Mátyás Sebo and further forty-seven inhabitants of the township requesting the teaching language to be uniformly in the Slovak language. The petition was discussed first by the Lutheran school committee then by the presbytery. The latter could not decide because there were some seconding the petition and some opposing. Therefore on the suggestion of the director minister Gajdács turned to higher ecclesiastical authorities with the result that the question was removed from the agenda and the practice remained as before. Religious education was in Slovak at every school; the general subjects were taught in Hungarian by the teachers belonging to the colleagues of Gajdács, while the followers of Hrdlicska taught every subject in Slovak.²⁸

The debate about the teaching language and the language use in the administration was a logical outcome of the suppressed emotions. Parallel to it – with enthusiasm about the newly created Czechoslovakia and the quick and unbelievably complete realization of the Slovak national aspirations – Tótkomlós, too, especially the members of the agrarian society came up with unrealistic ideas similar to those at Nagylak and Pitvaros. In addition, the Slovak national committee created in Újvidék sent agents to urge the Slovaks of the Counties Békés and Csanád to express their wish to be annexed to Yugoslavia. Though the local national committee led by Lajos Hrdlicska had not

²⁶ Prof. L. J. Hrdlička: I. m. – Cited: Koppány, János MS cit. p. 6.

²⁷ EOL Békési Evangélikus Egyházmegye Levéltára Bundle 171.

²⁸ BML Békés vármegye Közigazgatási Bizottságának iratai, No. 144/1920. [Archive of the Administrative Committee of Co. Békés] also Koppány, János MS cit. pp. 5–6.

yet made such a proclamation but the matter was under discussion which state would be preferable that would be ready to fulfil the aspirations of the Slovaks of the region. The borough council sent a telegram to the Ministry of home affairs about the activity of 'Southern Slavic' agents that was forwarded to the detachment of police of the Ministry of Defence. The squad sent to Tótkomlós on the 16th of December 1918 stopped the unrealistic plans for a while.²⁹ Within the committee the pro-Hungarian tendencies strengthened with the result that Hrdlicska as chairman was replaced by Gábor Povázsai, who belonged to the group of Pál Gajdács.³⁰

Lajos Hrdlicska started another campaign. Shortly before Christmas he went to Budapest and looked up Milán Hodzsa, the first ambassador of Czechoslovakia in Budapest. There is no information about their discussion but it seems certain that he explained the events of the previous two months, and also tried to find out where the new borders between Hungary and Yugoslavia as well as Romania would be; and also how the great powers planned to realize the self-determination of the small groups of minorities and what was the stand point of the Czechoslovakian politicians. Milán Hodzsa gave a certificate to Hrdlicska to use on his journey to Újvidék. After discussions with the Slovak leaders there he returned to Tótkomlós where he started animated campaign in favour of secession from Hungary.³¹

There was another meeting on the 31st of December with the participation of the representative of *Slovenski Rada*³² of Nagylak, Dr. János Laurovics formerly lawyer at Tótkomlós. Hrdlicska presented a draft resolution to join the Slovak National Committee of Újvidék together with the Slovaks of Nagylak and request the annexation of the Slovak townships to Yugoslavia. The committee commissioned Mihály Franciszti teacher and András Benyó farmer to present the accepted resolution at Újvidék and to take up official contact with the leaders there as the representatives of the township. Tradition has it

²⁹ HL HM PDF 7. (Karhatalmi) osztály 10-318. és 10-477.

³⁰ EOL Békési Evangélikus Egyházmegye Levéltára, Bundle 171.; Koppány János MS cit.

³¹ HL HM PDF Szegedi Katonai Kerület Parancsnoksága, 10-398. [Military district HQ Szeged].

³² At Nagylak there was already a separate Slovak and Romanian national committee at the time.

that the deputation started out but was held up at Szeged because the authorities there did not allow them to cross the demarcation line.³³

It is noteworthy that during a later disciplinary investigation of the employees of the Lutheran Church some witnesses declared that the committee had no resolution in the matter, the decision was left to the general assembly of 9th January 1919, which declared fidelity to Hungary by a majority decision. The minutes were supposed to prove it, but the authenticity of the paper kept in the Archives of Co. Békés is highly arguable.³⁴

The fiasco of the Újvidék deputation might have shown how unviable the plan to join Yugoslavia really was. The gaining ground of the local Social Democratic Party was also of importance since they constantly stressed the economic demands and the participation in the local authority as the primary interest of the Slovaks of the neighbourhood from the beginning. In January 1919 they severely criticized the leaders of the agrarian society for their extremist demands. According to Lajos Hrdlicska's memories the debates almost ended in fisticuffs and he saw it necessary to explain that he did not necessarily regard the secession from Hungary as the only solution of the success of the Slovaks.³⁵ In fact, the two camps approached one another in January – February of 1919. As a consequence Lajos Hrdlicska was reelected president of the national committee that from then on called itself *narodna rada*, the language of the meetings and also that of the minutes was Slovak,³⁶ as had already been laid out in the law. Slowly it was worked out how could further rights be ensured for the Slovaks of the neighbourhood, greater possibilities for their success and wider representation of interest. At the same time the agrarian society too accepted the major social and social political demands of the Social Democrats. As the result of the cooperation the inhabitants of the township accepted a memorandum at the 13th March 1919 meeting signed by 500 inhabitants and the next day a twelve-person

³³ EOL Békési Evangélikus Egyházmegye Levéltára, Bundle 171.; HL HM PDF Szegedi Katonai Kerület Parancsnoksága, 10-398.; BML Békés vármegye Közigazgatási Bizottságának iratai, No. 144/1920.

³⁴ EOL Békési Evangélikus Egyházmegye Levéltára, Bundle 171.; BML Békés vármegye Közigazgatási Bizottságának iratai, No. 144/1920.

³⁵ Prof. L. J. Hrdlicška: op.cit. – Koppány, János MS cit. p. 6.

³⁶ EOL Békési Evangélikus Egyházmegye Levéltára, Bundle 171.;

strong delegation brought it to Budapest to present it to the government. The delegation was led by Lajos Hrdlicska. The list of names is not known but it can be taken for granted that both groups were represented in it. The representatives of Tótkomlós were received by the National Propaganda Committee (NPC) on the 14th of March and the next day by the President of the Republic, Mihály Károlyi too.³⁷

In the memorandum The inhabitants of Tótkomlós assured the Hungarian revolutionary government of their fidelity then presented their requests. First of all that Tótkomlós should be annexed to Co. Csanád (from Co. Békés) and made into a district centre with the neighbouring Slovak settlements belonging under its authority: Ambrózfalva, Pitvaros, Csanádalberti, Nagybánhegyes, Nagylak and also Nagymajlát, though inhabitants of the latter were Hungarians. In exchange they offered to open an agricultural school with Slovak teaching language financed by the state. Another the demand was the building of a narrow-gauge railway between the district centre, the townships in question and the county town of Co. Csanád as well as the building of roads between Tótkomlós and the above mentioned townships and villages in aid of to help Tótkomlós act out its expected role.

Another important demand expressed in the memorandum was the quick and radical land reform. According to the memorandum there were 1800 persons with land claim in the area. The expropriation and distribution of the neighbouring large estates (Hász, Wenkheim, Montágh, Spilkovszky, the city of Makó and the stud farm of Metőhegyes) was suggested, and finally – in order to lessen the social tension – the building of 100 so-called workers' houses at the cost of the state.³⁸

The meeting with the chairman of NPC was rather strained as the governmental officer reprimanded Hrdlicska for his propaganda in favour of joining Yugoslavia, his negotiations in this respect and

³⁷ Prof. L. J. Hrdlička: op.cit. – Koppány, János MS cit. p.7. The National Propaganda Committee functioned for the Minister President's Office its task was to propagate the adherence to Hungary among the nationalities – after the closing of the Ministry of Nationality of Oszkár Jászi.

³⁸ Prof. L. J. Hrdlička: op.cit. – Koppány, János MS cit. pp. 8-10; and EOL Békési Evangélikus Egyházmegye Levéltára, Budle 171. The document itself could not be found either in the National Archive or in the Archives of Co. Békés.

demanded a declaration to be published in the central Budapest papers that Tótkomlós declares its wish to remain part of Hungary but Hrdlicska was not ready to comply.³⁹ The next day the meeting with President of the Republic was in friendlier atmosphere, Mihály Károlyi listened carefully to the proposition and promised to do as much as possible.⁴⁰

In order to prepare the elevation of Tótkomlós to district centre the national council created yet another committee with the task to propagate the idea in the townships concerned in Co. Csanád and to urge them to cooperate in its realization.⁴¹ The committee, however, was not able to do anything because of the political changes occurring from the 21st of March that prevented the government too from fulfilling its promise.

The description of the events cannot be concluded without mentioning the attitude of district and county authorities and the rejection of the majority of the inhabitants. The opinion was that there never was minority oppression in Hungary and the nationality movements were the result of irresponsible agitators.⁴² The question was especially severely discussed during the 13th January 1919 meeting of the municipality of Co. Csanád, where the members denounced the 'Eastern Switzerland' concept of Mihály Károlyi and Oszkár Jászi. The committee passed a resolution that the government should defend the integrity of the country.⁴³ Of course the use of the Slovak language in education and certain fields of social life could not have been prohibited as it was assured by the law but wherever it was possible it was obstructed. The most serious shortcoming of the authorities of Co. Csanád was their lack of knowledge of the Slovak language and the insistence of the employment of notaries without the knowledge of the language and with anti-nationality feelings. Under such circumstances the organization of a Slovak majority

³⁹ EOL Békési Evangélikus Egyházmegye Levéltára, Budle 171.

⁴⁰ Ibid.; ans Prof. L. J. Hrdlička: op.cit. – Koppány, János MS cit. p.10.

⁴¹ BML Békés vármegye Közigazgatási Bizottságának iratai, No. 144/1920.

⁴² CSML Csanád vármegye alispánjának iratai 7910/1919 [archive of the Subprefect of Co. Csanád]; Csanádvármegye Hivatalos Lapja, 1919. július 3. [The official publication of Co. Csanád].

⁴³ A Csongrád megyei munkásmozgalom 1917–1919. pp. 207–208. [Iorkers' movement in Co. Csanád].

district with Tótkomlós as its centre would not have been possible had the government had longer remained in power.

In the southern Trans-Tisza region the Soviet Republic existed only a couple of weeks. The takeover happened as elsewhere: answering a telegram sent from Budapest the workers' council elected the directorate that took over power after the 22nd of March. The system of councils created a peculiar situation. The Communist-Socialist leaders believed that the nationalist aspirations would be automatically fulfilled as part of the international battle for the proletarian revolution. According to the sources the Slovak language use was not restricted. The orators and audience used both the Hungarian and the Slovak language in their speeches in the settlements with Slovak inhabitants during the meetings and discussions, the local directorates published and distributed the text of regulations and important propaganda materials in Slovak too.⁴⁴

The special nationality aspects were gradually shoved into the background. The major reason might have been due to the antidemocratic way of the takeover and practising power. Those groups grabbed the power that earlier had not cared too much for the nationality interests; thus those intellectuals, farmers, artisans and merchants were left out of the direction who had been the important representatives of the nationality aspirations. At Tótkomlós the differences grew so severe that Hrdlicska and some of his followers were threatened with hanging, and Mihály Franciszti who was not eager to cooperate with the directorate with deportation.⁴⁵ The 7th of April 1919 elections too, threw light on the difference between the declared high principle, i.e. 'every worker has the right to participate in the dealing with common matters' and the political practice. At Békéscsaba the government's delegate annulled the results of the election saying that there were too many 'bourgeois elements' among them, though the candidates were nominated by the unions. Thus in the second round of the elec-

⁴⁴ Békésmegyei Népszava, 1919. április 1. [daily paper]; BFL Budapesti Büntetőtörvényszék. Büntetőperes iratok. (Korábbi jelzete: PI Arch. 653. fond 3/U. 1920-19.) [Criminal Court of Budapest, Archive of criminal proceedings].

⁴⁵ EOL Békési Evangélikus Egyházmegye Levéltára, Bundle 171.

tions the intellectuals preparing the system of the local administration were left out.⁴⁶ Similarly peculiar interpretation characterized the elections at Tótkomlós too. The list of names of the nominees and the votes were crossed out with added remarks as ‘not a true proletarian’, ‘exploiter’, ‘unreliable’, etc. probably made by the members of the directorate thus the members of the local council were not the ones who got the most votes but those who were deemed good proletarians by the leaders of the directorate.⁴⁷ The intellectuals, farmers and artisans who represented the nationality ideas were deprived of the possibility of political activity and participation in the leadership.

The Romanian army crossed the demarcation line on the 16th of April 1919 and started the offensive to occupy the Trans-Tisza region that was completed by the end of April.

It is known that the entente powers agreed in the 16th August 1916 Bucharest agreement with Romania that if Romania joins the war against the Central Powers the Romanian Kingdom would receive Transylvania and a part of the Trans-Tisza region.⁴⁸ Based on this promise the Romanian peace delegation handed in a memorandum to the peace conference on the territorial demands of its country in which – following the above agreement – wanted to delineate the future western borders of Romania: the valley of the River Tisza 4 km from the point it is joined by the River Szamos, following in South-South West to a point 6km east of Debrecen, than again to the River Körös, 3km to a confluence point of the White Körös and the Swift Körös then north of Szeged, and west of Orosháza and Békéssámsón in the hight of Algyó to the River Tisza.⁴⁹ The Romanian (and Yugo-

⁴⁶ Fancsovits György: A magyar októberi forradalom és a Tanácsköztársaság Békés megyében. Tanulmányok Békéscsaba történetéből. Szerk. Kristó Gyula – Székely Lajos. Békéscsaba, 1970. 272 [The Hungarian October revolution and Soviet Republic in Co. Békés].; G. Vass István: Egy kortörténeti mű 1920-ból. Levéltári Szemle, 1989. No.1. [A documentary from 1920].

⁴⁷ OL Belügyminisztérium. (Korábbi jelzete: PI Arch. 603. fond, 6/9 ö. e. [National Archive Ministry of interior].

⁴⁸ Cf. *Trianon* Ed. Seidler, Miklós. Budapest 2003. pp.17-18.

⁴⁹ The full text of the memorandum is published in.: Francia diplomáciai iratok a Kárpát-medence történetéről 1918–1919. Összeállította és szerkesztette Ádám

slavian) claims handed in by their governments i.e. about the future borders between Hungary and Romania and Hungary and Yugoslavia were first discussed by the committee for Romanian and Yugoslavian matters. On the 6th of April the committee finalised its report and the draft about the future borders to be handed in to the supreme council of the allies. The finalised proposal had been accepted with small changes and they are the same as present borders of Hungary prescribed in the Trianon treaty, as the higher forums of the peace conference had not carried out any changes.⁵⁰

As is known Hungary was not represented at this stage of the preparations at the peace conference in Paris. The diplomats of Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were there and followed the proceedings with minute interest and the participants of the conference continuously discussed with them the matters, in order to justify their claims with new arguments.⁵¹ The Romanian delegation and the government had to face the decision of the committee that they wanted to draw the border 30-50 km to the east compared to the Romanian claims. They more or less came to terms with the 'loss' of the area north of the Rivers Körös, as it was a great gain for them to obtain the region around Nagykároly, Szatmárnémeti and Szilágyság, with mostly Hungarian population. But they were not ready to denounce the area south of the Rivers Körös and especially of Békéscsaba as an important junction. Therefore on the 11th of June 1919 before the discussion of the proposal by the Regional Committee and later the supreme council of the peace conference and later after the occupation of Budapest in August the territorial claim for part of south Trans-Tisza was repeatedly submitted.⁵² In support of the claims so-called 'joining movements' were organized among the inhabitants of southern Trans-Tisza, especially among the Slovaks living there.⁵³

Magda és Ormos Mária. Bp. 1999. pp. 97–104 [French diplomatic papers on the history of the Carpathian Basin 1918-1919].

⁵⁰ Ibid. V.-VII. Also Ormos, Mária: Padovától Trianonig 1918–1920. Bp. 1983. pp. 202–205 [From Padova to Trianon].

⁵¹ Francia diplomáciai iratok VI.

⁵² Ormos, Mária Op.Cit. pp. 303 and 355.

⁵³ The facts and most important momentums are described in local documentations: Orosháza története. Szerk. Nagy Gyula. Orosháza, 1965. p. 608 [The history of

The Romanian military occupation of the area had two way aspects from the start.

In order to abolish of the Council system and the prevention of possible resistance strict terror – measures were introduced. Several thousand young men were interned. In some townships the directorate members and disobedient civilians were publicly flogged. That was the fate of Mihály Pipis, chairman of the Tótkomlós directorate and the other members too. At Gyula there were four left wing leaders, at Békés eleven farms were executed. At Apátfalva where the inhabitants resisted requisition the military replied with a veritable blood bath: there were 35 casualties and more than 100 persons, among them the notary, the minister and several teachers were arrested. The population was severely hit by the ever stricter requisitions or as is described in the history books, the economic plundering of the region. Not only foodstuff, grain for bread and fodder, animals were taken away but the farm appliances, factory equipments and even household items and luxury items (piano, typewriter, sewing machine) too.⁵⁴

The Romanian authorities tried to make the population to declare their wish to join to Romania by propaganda, by threats and by the promise of lightening the requisitions. The canvassing was not only directed to the nationality population but to the more well to do layers irrespective of nationality, who had most to fear from the requisitioning. According to some contemporary reports some members of the Hungarian landed farmers had also been won over.⁵⁵

The reason Romania could rely on the support of the nationality population of the area, was not only because of the general feelings caused by the earlier thwarting of their aspirations but also on the ambitions of the nationality leaders coming to the field after the situation that developed after WW1, and who acted in the belief that time had come to have their demands presented to whoever owns the region.

The burden of the Romanian occupation fell with equal weight and strictness to everybody. After a couple of months the situation

Orosháza]. Tótkomlós története Szerk. Szincsek György. Tótkomlós, 1996. pp.191–195 [The history of Tótkomlós].

⁵⁴ OL TAGYOB II/18.; Békésmegye, 1919. június 8.; Csanádvármegye Hivatalos Lapja, 1920. március 27.; Orosháza története és néprajza. Szerk. Nagy Gyula. Orosháza, 1965. I. köt. 607–608 [The history and folklore of Orosháza].

⁵⁵ HL HM 1920. Elnöki C. osztály, Bundle 770. No. 62 661.

changed, probably in connection to the newer territorial demands presented to the peace conference. The Szarvas, Orosháza and Gyoma districts of Co. Békés came under military administration under the command of Major Elek Babescu. The rest of the county remained under the commandership of Mihály Márkus lawyer of Gyula and there the requisition was lessened; similar was the case in the Nagylak, Battonya and Mezőkovácsháza districts of Co. Csanád. These were areas the west of the border line suggested by the committee of the peace conference and that the Romanians wanted to keep for themselves. The propaganda always stressed that the area would remain part of Great Romania. The Romanian authorities took so much for granted that following the electoral law issued by the Romanian king there were members of the parliament and senators elected in the occupied Hungarian region too. Lajos Hrdlicska became a nominee at Nagylak but it was Aurél Petrovics a local lawyer who got elected. The senator of Tótkomlós became Pál Veszelszki teacher at Pitvaros. According to the later report of the subprefect of Co. Békés, of the 8000 inhabitants only 150-160 persons had voted; at Békéscsaba nobody participated in the elections.⁵⁶

The Romanian authorities wanted to achieve the support of the local population as the proof to their territorial claims. They concentrated their propaganda at Békéscsaba as the strategically most important city. György Hrabovszky and János Zsilinszky farmers and Mihály Szák bank accountant were won over to organize the project. At the end of June and beginning of July Hrabovszky and his companions called on Szarvas. Tótkomlós and other smaller townships in Co. Csanád contacted the leaders of the local agrarian societies and other organization and members of the intelligentsia. They tried to convince the people that the inhabitants of the Counties Békés and Csanád would be better off if they would join Transylvania and together they would belong to Romania; that such a decision would result in the abating of the requisitioning, and later the restoration

⁵⁶ Békésmegye, 15th May, 18th May, 8th June 1919. Békés vármegye alispánjának jelentése a Törvényhatósági Bizottság részére a forradalom, a proletárdiktatúra és a román megszállás alatt előfordult eseményekről. Békésvármegye Hivatalos Lapja, 1920. április 20.; Csanádvármegye Hivatalos Lapja, 1920. március 27. [the report of the subprefect of Co. Békés on the events during the revolution, proletarian dictatorship and Romanian occupation].

of the commerce between Transylvania would ensure the population enough fuel, consumer goods and the industry raw material. They also believed that the political situation of the Slovaks, the assurance of their nationality rights had better chances in the Romanian state.⁵⁷

At Tótkomlós the public opinion was greatly divided whether to join the proposition. Lajos Hrdlicska, Márton Matejesz and Mihály Antal, a well to do farmer the then chairman of the Farmers's Society, the shoemaker János Lászik, the small holder Benyó András and some others too, were ready to accept the argument presented by Hrabovszky and company. They circulated a list to be signed that they claimed was to accompany a petition about abating the requisition. It was, however, suspected that it was meant to serve the resolution about joining Romania. On the 12th of July there was a meeting of the Farmers' Society where Hrdlicska outlined the aims of the Slovak assembly to be held at Békéscsaba the next day and suggested to send a delegation to represent the people of Tótkomlós. First the petition about the abating of the requisition was mentioned but then also about joining Romania. Hrdlicska stressed that everybody should follow their own conscience and act on their own risk. Next day a fifty strong delegation went to Békéscsaba where they called on the Romanian prefect first to hand in the petition about the abating of requisition than participated in the assembly in front of the townhall.⁵⁸

There were delegations coming from Pitvaros and Ambrózfalva, but the inhabitants of Csanádalberti and Nagybánhegyes had not responded to the propaganda. Similarly unsuccessful was the agitation at Szarvas too. Pál Borgulya, the chairman of the local Smallholders' Circle announced the content of the circular on the day of the assembly but those present received it with aversion. There was just a telegram sent in greeting to Békéscsaba.

At Békéscsaba György Hrabovszky, among others, made a speech from the balcony of the town-hall demanding the town and the neighbouring townships and villages to be annexed to Romania. The assembly made a unanimous decision in this respect and decided to send it together with the signed lists by a three strong delegation to

⁵⁷ EOL Békési Evangélikus Egyházmegye Levéltára, Bundle 171.

⁵⁸ Ibid.; and also BML Békés vármegyei Közigazgatási Bizottságának iratai No. 144/1920 [Archive of the administrative committee of Co. Békés].

the Council of Five in Paris. The assembly was held in a most agitated atmosphere. Some sources had it that it was only the presence of the Romanian army to prevent the physical conflict between the of pro- and anti-annexation groups.⁵⁹

In spite of these facts the delegation consisting of György Hrabovszky, Mihály Szák and Sámuel Sirka, Lutheran minister of Apatelek, first left for Bucharest then to Paris to act as the representatives of all the Slovaks of the Counties Békés and Csanád. The gist of their memorandum was that the future Hungarian – Romanian border should run above Gyula along the Rivers White and Double Körös to the north-west, following the River Körös to the bend it makes south-west of Szarvas. The border than should run west from Szarvas, Csanádalberti, Pitvaros and Magyarcsanád reaching the River Maros. The townships mentioned and all the settlements east to them should belong to Romania.⁶⁰ In the area encircled by the present border and the one suggested above there were 42 townships with about 300 000 inhabitants. According to the 1910 census the nationality distribution of the area was 63,5% Hungarian, 25,5% Slovak, 5.1% Romanian, 4,6% German and 1,2% Serbian.

The data speak for themselves.

In retrospect to the Romanian occupation that lasted almost a year it can be stated that the movement was mainly organized and directed by the Romanian authorities and the most active, mostly newly appearing, Slovak leaders joined in the hope of material advantages and later offices. It is indicated by the fact that Békéscsaba became the centre of the movement, although earlier there was very little interest shown about the Slovak nationality movement there. It is also instructive, however, that such old leaders also joined the movement who already had wider political experience. They, however, were caught in the web of illusions and could not offer any such solution to their community that would have meant real possibilities of success. These Slovak leaders – while stressing the right for their

⁵⁹ BML Békés vármegye főispánjának iratai. Kigyűjtött munkásmozgalmi iratok 1920-907.; Békésmegye, 1920. március 31. [The papers of the Lord Lieutenant of Co. Békés. Collected papers of the workers' movement].

⁶⁰ EOL Békési Evangélikus Egyházmegye Levéltára, 171. csomó.; Békésmegye, 1920. szeptember 14.

own self-determination had not taken any account for the national self-determination and interests of the Hungarian majority.⁶¹

Considering the events of 1918 – 1919 the period was troublesome teaching severe lessons to the nationalities (especially for the Slovaks) of the Counties Békés and Csanád. It became, however, evident that the demand for nationality language use, for the assurance of their rights – especially in the closed communities of small villages of Co.Csanád and Tótkomlós – was not merely the result of the propaganda of some agitators but the natural claim of the majority of the minority population. It became also evident that the leaders of the movement overstepped the usual educational aims and represented such demands that concerned the language of official communication, certain contents of administration and political representation of interest. They were wrong when disregarded the interests and possible attitude of the majority Hungarian inhabitants and in their own way they, too, were extreme nationalists. The events were traumatic experiences for both nations that had their influence over the history of the region between the two world wars and after the second world war too.

Abbreviations

BFL	Budapest Főváros Levéltára: Budapest Metropolitan Archives
BML	Békés Megyei Levéltár: Archives of County Békés
CSML	Csongrád Megyei Levéltár: Archives of County Csongrád
EOL	Evangélikus Országos Levéltár: National Lutheran Archives
HL	Hadtörténeti Levéltár: Military Historical Archives
HM	Honvédelmi Minisztérium: Ministry of Defence
OL	Országos Levéltár: National Archives
PDF	polgári demokratikus forradalom: Bourgeois Democratic Revolution
PI Arch.	Párttörténeti Intézet Archivuma: Archives of the Institute of Party History
TAGYOB	Tanácsköztársaság Adatait Gyűjtő Országos Bizottság: National Committe for the collection of the data referring to the Soviet Republic of Hungary

⁶¹ It has to mentioned the attitude was induced by the spirit of the time and was characteristic not only of the Slovak nationality leaders of the southern Trans-Tisza region. It is known that the whole process of the peace talks was based on the principle that the right for self-determination is due to the winners and to the nations joining them, but not to the defeated people. Cf.: Ormos, Mária pp.139-140.

