

## Autumn 1918–Spring 1919: Six Months of Postwar Material and Political Uncertainty in Slovakia

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A few weeks after the Czechoslovak State has been proclaimed in Prague (October 28, 1918), Slovak territory is still a battleground for political and military control. Mid-January, the Czechoslovak forces are about to control the demarcation line under the command of Italian officers. But still, at that time, political and material problems surrounding the real control of the territory are hardly overlapped (and won't be for almost a semester). This paper intends to observe and analyze this short period of time (February–June 1919) when the material and psychological consequences of World War I cumulate with a weak legitimacy of the (Czecho)Slovak authorities, multiple material obstacles and the lack of experience of the so-called government in Bratislava. Those uncertainties are cruelly reminded in the personal–official and unofficial correspondence–of the main Slovak protagonists who describe a situation far from being controlled as the propaganda puts it. The paper is based on archives of Slovak National Archive, and namely the general Minister plenipotentiary fond, and some personal archives of the main political actors of that period in Slovakia (mostly Vavro Šrobár, Ivan Markovič, Pavel Blaho, Fedor Houdek, Anton Štefánek). We shall also use some elements of the Regional Military Command (ZVV) Košice available at the National Military Archiv, and notably the regional reports.

Keywords: Czechoslovakia, Slovakia, Upper Hungary, aftermath of World War I, Czechoslovak provisional government in Slovakia

Months after the proclamation of the Czechoslovak State in Prague on October 28, 1918, the Slovak territory<sup>1</sup> remained the theater of a battle for military and political control. Throughout this period, the priority for Czechoslovakia and the Slovak political and intellectual elites which supported the newly proclaimed state was solidly to anchor this territory to the new state, despite limited support and fragile political conditions.<sup>2</sup> First, the Czechoslovak claim to certain territories,

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1 For the purposes of this article, I use the term “Slovakia” instead of “Upper Hungary,” as the first expression is the only one used in the correspondence on which I have focused. The term refers to a territory which was not defined precisely, but which encompassed the land north of the demarcation line and/or the territory claimed by the Czechoslovak state at the Paris Peace Conference.

2 For a recent synthesis on this period, see Hronský, “Vznik Česko-Slovenska,” 112–33; idem, *The Struggle for Slovakia*; Krajčovičová, “Začleňovanie Slovenska do Československej republiky.” With different perspectives, see also Nurmi, *Slovakia: A Playground for Nationalism and National Identity*.

particularly those furthest east, was contestable and indeed contested. Second, the forces available in Slovakia to run the administration and take over from the Hungarian authorities were too few. Third, relations between Czechoslovak civilian authorities and the Italian military mission responsible for occupation of the territory were fraught with mutual mistrust. Last, like in most other regions of the former Habsburg Empire, the population faced worsened living conditions of all sorts, and this made the political situation fluid and unstable.

These difficulties and the uncertainties they created within the Czechoslovak apparatus in Slovakia are clear in the private and official correspondence of the main Slovak leaders of the time, who were responsible for administering the region from November 1918. In this article, we will primarily observe the correspondence between the Plenipotentiary, his “government,” and the prefects he appointed. This correspondence will shed light on a few themes that structured the activity and influenced the hopes and fears of these authorities in the first six months after the war. This correspondence shows the consequences of the Great War for the territory, as well as the material and political obstacles to the assertion of Czechoslovak authority. After a general overview of the context of the efforts to take over the civilian institutions in Slovakia in autumn 1918, I consider the main difficulties encountered up until April of the following year, when Czechoslovak authority was endangered during the first weeks of the conflict with the Hungarian Republic of Councils.

### *The Immediate Problem of Taking Control of Slovakia*

In the early days of November, the new government under Mihály Károlyi in Budapest did not specifically address the issue of the Kingdom’s northern counties, where the Hungarian authorities only partially disappeared. The administrative apparatus was usable neither by Budapest, which had other urgent issues to address, nor by the Slovak National Council (SNR) in Turčiansky Svätý Martin (Turócszentmárton), which had been formed on October 30 and which struggled with its inexperience and lack of authority and political sway.<sup>3</sup>

From the very first days of November, serious problems arose concerning public order, and in many places, they broke down into armed conflicts and

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3 An abundant literature is available. See Hronský, *Slovensko na rázcestí*; Krajčovičová, “Slovenská národná rada roku 1918”; Hronský, “Vznik a krátka činnosť druhej Slovenskej národnej rady”; Mlynárik, “Slovenská národná rada.”

looting.<sup>4</sup> Often, the various local councils cooperated with the local authorities in an attempt to maintain order and ensure that supplies reached local people, who were often disoriented.<sup>5</sup> In the northeastern regions, Hungarian National Councils or Hungarian National Guards were assembled at the behest of the Budapest government. This happened most widely in the eastern part of the territory, but these bodies were also formed in some of the most densely Slovak-inhabited counties (like Orava [Árva], Turiec [Turóc], Liptov [Liptó], and even Turčiansky Svätý Martin, where a Hungarian National Guard was created on November 4, which contributed to maintaining political confusion through declarations in favor of autonomy). In response, National Councils and National Guards supported by the Slovak National Party (SNS) were formed in several towns.<sup>6</sup> In some places, these Councils managed to take control of the municipal administration, but disorder remained considerable and difficult to control.<sup>7</sup>

On November 4, the National Committee (*Národný výbor*) in Prague named a provisional government in Slovakia (*Československá dočasná vláda na Slovensku*). Led by Vavro Šrobár, it was composed of three of the most reliable (and available) pro-Czechoslovak politicians: Ivan Dérer, Pavol Blaho, and Anton Štefánek.<sup>8</sup> Its task was to take control of the territory with the help of a few hundred soldiers. This provisional government (known as the “Skalica government,” after the city where it had its first seat) managed to take control of the southwestern tip of

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4 Medvecký, *Slovenský prevrat*, 3–186. The term *Prevrat*, used in this paper without translation, refers both to October 28, 1918 and to the revolutionary process that followed. *Revolution* and *takeover* are possible translations, but insufficiently encompass the specific use of *Prevrat* in Slovak. In Trnava, see Blaho, *Rozpomienky na prevratové dni po západného Slovenska*, SNA, Bratislava, of. Šrobár, box 23, inv. č. 1007. In T. S. Martin, see *Vyzva SNR*, November 4, 1918, LA SNK, 94 R 14. See also recent studies devoted to this question, and mainly Beneš, “‘Zelené kádry’ jako radikální alternative,” and Szabó, “‘Rabovačky’ v závere prvej svetovej vojny.”

5 For an illustration at Tisovec, see LA SNK, 80 H 3, Samuel Daxner: List Jánovi Ormisovi (v forme denníka životopis), 31.

6 Hronský, *Slovensko na rázcestí*, 99–100. See also SNA, Personal collection (of.). Dula, box 9, IVb/3, inv. č. 234/9. For a complete list of the members of the National Councils by county (drawn up between December 6 and 12, 1918), see LA SNK, 94 S 19, *Zoznam členov SNR*.

7 Hronský, *Slovensko na rázcestí*, Príloha VIII; Medvecký, *Slovenský prevrat*, 3–186. For Turiec, see LA SNK, sign. 166 D 1, Ivan Thurzo, *Z práce a z obeti za národ (Rozpomienky)* [Work and sacrifice for the nation, Memories], 510–11.

8 Janšák, *Vstup Slovákov medzi slobodné národy*, 71–77. Vavro Šrobár (1867–1951) was one of the first activists of the Czecho-Slovak mutuality in the 1890s. Dérer, Blaho and Štefánek belonged to the most active groups favoring Czecho-Slovak mutuality in the 1900s. More details in Boisserie, “Family networks and the ‘generational key’,” 114–27.

Slovakia, between the Moravian border and the area north of Bratislava (Pozsony).<sup>9</sup> A few towns were occupied, but resources were known to be insufficient to consider continuing as far as Bratislava.<sup>10</sup> The Czechoslovak troops did succeed, however, in following the river Váh (Vág) upstream and occupying part of it before reaching T. S. Martin. But the situation of the Czechoslovak civilian authorities in Slovakia soon became delicate. The situation varied among regions, but the weakness of the available forces was felt everywhere, raising immediate difficulties for the “liberators.”<sup>11</sup> There were many pockets of resistance that were not limited to transport nodes like the Vrútky (Ruttka) railway hub, where the workers came essentially from the Hungarian Plain and which was beyond Czechoslovak control.<sup>12</sup> Initially, the position of the provisional government was fragile, but it was nonetheless more favorable than that of the Slovak National Council. The situation of the Skalica government grew increasingly complicated following the Belgrade armistice, which left the Hungarian Government free to govern the whole territory of the Kingdom, including regions which had been claimed by Czechoslovakia. The Skalica government did work, however, to keep or retake control, eventually reaching parts of the Moravian border. These operations left only a narrow, fragmented strip of land along the Moravian border under Czechoslovak control. Most situation reports sent to Šrobár at the time underlined the instability of the situation and detailed the provisional solutions aimed at ensuring the safety of the population.<sup>13</sup>

In Prague, the Revolutionary National Assembly met beginning on November 14. Two days later, Club of Slovak Deputies which had been formed within

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9 For clarity's sake, we have chosen to use the name “Bratislava” here, which would officially be bestowed on the city a few weeks later. In the Slovak documents of the time, there was no single standard: the names Prešpurk or, more often, Prešporok were used most often, but Břetislava and Bratislava were also employed. About the naming of the city, see Bugge, “The Making of a Slovak City.” See also Bartlová. “Transformácia administratívy v Bratislave.” Some important aspects of the evolution of the city may also be read in van Duin, *Central European Crossroads*.

10 Hronský, “Vznik a krátka činnosť druhej Slovenskej národnej rady,” 123 *passim*.

11 In Trnava (Nagyszombat), see Frndák, *Spomienky na vojnu a prevrat*, 55. See also SNA, BA, collection Československá dočasná vláda na Slovensku, 6–14.11.1918 [Čs. doč. vláda], sign. C, inv. č. 7. For Skalica (Szokolca), see Janšák, *Vstup Slovákov medzi slobodné národy*.

12 Šegřová, “Revolučná verejnosť v roku 1918.”

13 See short situation reports (November 14–22) for the cities of Zvolen [Zólyom], Banská Bystrica [Besztercebánya], Slovenská Lupča [Zólyomlípce], Pod Brezová [Zólyombrézó], T. S. Martin, Vrútky, Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš [Liptószentmiklós], Žilina, [Zsolna], Čadca [Csáca], Trenčín [Trencsén], in SNA, BA, of. Šrobár, box 8, inv. č. 582, November 1918, Zprávy zo Slovenska. Hospodárske a politické [Reports from Slovakia. Economic and political situation].

it proclaimed the transfer of the competences of the SNR to the provisional assembly and the Czechoslovak government.<sup>14</sup> The SNR was marginalized by the second half of November.<sup>15</sup>

The situation in Slovakia raised further difficulties for the Czechoslovak authorities, which were also facing challenges in the Czech Lands. The question of the authority of civilian bodies was acute, and several obstacles complicated the issue of control of the demarcation line.

In early December, a bill was prepared on exceptional provisional measures in Slovakia.<sup>16</sup>

Slovakia (MPS). He arrived in Žilina (Zsolna) five days later, and he convened his government the next day.<sup>17</sup> While his presence in Žilina was a step forward from a Czechoslovak perspective, this government had no legitimacy in the eyes of the locals. There is no clearer demonstration of the difficulties facing the Czechoslovak provisional authorities than the tale of the night-time arrival of one of its key figures, Štefan Janšák, who was in charge of public works. His account is far from glorious: “[The government] set to work in its new seat inconspicuously. At the station, it was met by a single man. Dr. Brežný was afraid that the people of Žilina would protest against our arrival, so he led us towards the center through the side streets. In our worn coats, with battered, old-fashioned suitcases, we looked like traveling salesmen [...]. The hotels were in such a state [...] that we did not venture into them. Dr. Brežný spread us among various local families.”<sup>18</sup>

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14 Šrobár, *Osvobodené Slovensko*, 254. See also the most comprehensive study: Lipscher, “Klub slovenských poslancov.”

15 LA SNK, Martin, Sign. 94 S 8, List výkonného výboru SNR... [Letter from the SNR Executive Committee...]. On concerns in Prague and tensions between Prague and Martin, see also Mlynárik, “Slovenská národná rada,” 516–18.

16 Zákon 64/1918 o mimoriadných prechodných ustanoveniach na Slovensku, zo dňa 10. prosince 1918. SNA, BA, f. Československá dočasná vláda na Slovensku, 6–14.11.1918, k. 1, sign. B2, inv. č. 4. The act provided for the appointment of a Minister Plenipotentiary for the Administration of Slovakia and 14 government *referenti* for Slovakia. They had exclusive powers for the Slovak territory under the authority of the counterparts in Prague.

17 SNA, BA, f. Čs. doč. vláda, box 1, sign. B2, inv. č. 4, Správa z nasadnutia min. komisie (MPS) z 13.12.1918.

18 Janšák, *Vstup Slovákov medzi slobodné národy*, 99. See also I. Thurzo, LA SNK, sign. 166 D 1, Z práce a z obeti za národ (Rozpomienky), 582–84. For another type of report, see Šrobár, *Osvobodené Slovensko*, 371–72.

In his memoirs, Ivan Thurzo, then Secretary of the Slovak National Council, mentions another difficulty faced by the Skalica government. Šrobár “knew nothing of what had happened in Slovakia in the last few days,” and, in particular, he knew nothing of the passage of the Mackensen army through Žilina, which had had an effect on the population far greater than the effect a few dozen Czechoslovak soldiers could have had.<sup>19</sup> Šrobár also faced a variety of challenges: making the civilian administration work, organizing supplies, and controlling the postal service, communications, and railways.<sup>20</sup> The doubt as to the solidity of Czechoslovak positions was also an obstacle for the members of his government.<sup>21</sup> In a report to Šrobár on the military situation after a tour by train, Fedor Houdek, *referent* in charge of National Defense, painted a picture of the uncertainty of the time:

in Sučany and Turany [Nagyturány in Hungarian; situated a few kilometers east of T. S. Martin], we did not find any Czechoslovak army members. That was suspicious. The railway administration was occupied by old officials. Either they knew nothing or they did not want to tell us anything, so we learned very little from them. In Turany, the station manager is from Lisková, and he says Šrobár knows him.<sup>22</sup> He was not very well disposed to us, but you could read the fear in his eyes. Disoriented in the political situation, perhaps he feared the return of the Hungarians, and being too attentive to us could have damaged his position. I asked him if I could use the station telephone, and I contacted Lubochná [Fenyőháza] and then Ružomberok [Rozsahegy]. In both places, they were unable to tell me if there were Czechoslovak army elements ahead of us, and I could obtain no information from them on the possible presence of the Hungarian army.<sup>23</sup>

At the end of October, the decision was made provisionally to retain all legislation from the Dualist period. Minister Plenipotentiary Šrobár therefore had to reorganize the whole administration on that basis. The implementation of policies in the different sectors was carried out by government delegates

19 LA SNK, 166 D 1, I. Thurzo, *Z práce a z obeti za národ* (Rozpomienky), 582–84.

20 In his first telegram after arriving in Žilina, Šrobár reported the departure of 70 locomotives and almost all the carriages from the town before his arrival. SNA, BA, f. Čs. doč. vláda, box 1, sign. B2, inv. č. 4, *Minister Šrobár na Slovensku...*, S.d. 1918.

21 SNA, BA, f. Čs. doč. vláda, box 1, sign. B2, inv. č. 4, *Zpráva zo zasadnutia min. komisie v Žiline*, 13.12.1918.

22 Vavro Šrobár was born in the village of Lisková (Liszkofálu), in Liptov (Liptó) County.

23 Šrobár, *Osvobodené Slovensko*, 411–12.

chosen carefully by Šrobár from among men who were both experienced and reliable. The various lists available in the Šrobár papers indicate that, while appointments were not yet decided with certainty, he could rely on a group of some 20 close collaborators with long reputations in the Slovak patriotic milieu. Apart from them, the pool was limited, most notably for the administration.<sup>24</sup> In addition to the emergencies that Šrobár's "government" had to handle itself, an essential task was delegated to the prefects (*župani*) appointed in the different counties. Upon their appointment, they were to reorganize local and municipal administrations and ensure the Czechoslovak State's control over the territory. A shortlist of potential prefects had been drawn up before Šrobár's arrival in Slovakia,<sup>25</sup> but one of the difficulties was balancing the importance of presence in Prague and in the Slovak territory.<sup>26</sup>

In the days and weeks that followed, political uncertainty would be an obstacle to strengthening the pool of personnel on which the Šrobár government could. Several men reputed to be reliable cautiously declined the offer when contacted.<sup>27</sup> Šrobár's initial list had its limits. In his memoirs, Janšák sets out the problem in wider terms and highlights that the difficulties continued in early 1919. "Šrobár did his statistics before he even received answers from the people he had considered making the officers of this army of officials. When he informed them in writing that they were to take office, he encountered many refusals and much prevarication. Political insecurity in late 1918 and early 1919 and the risks attached to serving the new state were such that members of the older generations, especially fathers whose livelihood was assured (even if modest), preferred to wait and see which side fortune would ultimately favor."<sup>28</sup> Only in the early days of February were all the prefects definitively appointed.<sup>29</sup> But

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24 SNA, BA, of. Šrobár, box 10, inv. č. 611, Zoznam kandidátov. On prior links between the men of the Šrobár government, see Boisserie, "Family networks and the 'generational key'." For recent global studies on Šrobár's period and the prefects, see Krajčovičová. "Vavro Šrobár," and Šuchová, "Šrobárovi muži: vymenovanie prvých československých županov."

25 SNA, BA, of. Šrobár, box 9, inv. č. 607, Slovenskí župani – Návrh z 8.12.1918; SNA, BA, of. Šrobár, box 10, inv. č. 611, Menoslov slovenských katolíckych a evanjelických advokátov a juristov. See also LA SNK, Martin, C 903, Koncept návrhov na županov na Slovensku, 8 December 1918.

26 SNA, BA, of. Šrobár, box 9, inv. č. 607, "Slovenskí župani – Návrh z 8.12.1918."

27 For the example of Samuel Daxner (eventually appointed župan of Gemer-Malohont on 29 December 1918), see LA SNK, 80 H 12, Župa Gemer-Malohontská v dobe štátneho prevratu. See also Medvecký, *Slovenský prevrat*, 326.

28 Janšák, *Vstup Slovákov medzi slobodné národy*, 160.

29 See the comprehensive study of Xenia Šuchová, "Šrobárovi muži: Vymenovanie prvých slovenských županov." See also some aspects of this question in Krajčovičová, "Vavro Šrobár."

some of them, like Otokar Jamnický in Komárno (Komárom), were only able to take office a few weeks later.<sup>30</sup> It was sometimes impossible for them to exercise genuine authority. In Hont County, for example, the prefect's position remained very unstable until April, when the appointment of Milutin Sahulčík enabled the establishment of a fledgling Czechoslovak authority.<sup>31</sup> In his activity report published at the end of the year, the prefect of Hont recalled that “because of the complete lack of Slovak officials in the county seat, the prefect [author's note: then Lehotský] could not carry out his functions, and old Hungarian officials continued to govern.” Only in late April could his successor establish his authority in some districts of the county.<sup>32</sup>

If the Žilina government faced these kinds of difficulties in the first half of December, this was also because the diplomatic and military situation remained disordered and uncertain. On December 9, the Czechoslovak Supreme Military Command in Prague published the “directive for the occupation of Slovakia,” which was to be carried out by the Czechoslovak army in Italy. Units of volunteers were tasked with securing the major transit routes and borders with Poland and occupying the interior of the territory. The last stage of this first phase of the occupation of Slovakia met with mixed results. The reports sent to Šrobár during the second half of December indicated multiple material difficulties, including food and/or coal shortages in several towns and regions, and the impossibility of installing a nascent administrative apparatus in certain towns. On January 7, 1919, Matej Metod Bella, who had been in charge of supplies for a few weeks, reported that “although we have appointed prefects, the administrations are not working.”<sup>33</sup>

However, after two months of great difficulties, some form of Czechoslovak civilian and military authority had been established over the territory. But when the peace conference opened in Paris, difficulties remained considerable—

30 Jamnický, “Z veľkých udalostí historickej doby prevratu,” 119.

31 Šťavnica – Hontianská župa – návrh na vymenovanie Sahulčíka za župana. SNA, BA, fond MPS, box 255.

32 Zpráva župana o politickej a administratívnej situácii župy Hontianskej koncom roku 1919. SNA, BA, fond MPS, box 5, Sign. Prez. II/2, inv. č. 328. For similar problems in Gemer-Malohont County, where the whole of the county's central administration refused to swear allegiance. See SNA, BA, fond MPS, box 255. Tisovce župan. Vymenovanie župana a úradníku, Tisovec, letter of the Prefect to Vavro Šrobár, 12 April 1919, and one month later, the report of the newly appointed Prefect, Ján Jesenský, to the *referent* for internal affairs: “ay župa – zpráva o poměroch“, 24 May 1919. SNA, BA, fond MPS, box 255. For a wider overview on this question, see mainly Šuchová, “Šrobárovi muži.”

33 Šrobár, *Osvobodené Slovensko*, 427.

and they would increase throughout the spring, as the Slovak authorities faced resistances and insufficiencies that they were unable to overcome in such a short space of time.

Some resulted directly from the weakness of the authority exercised, while others, which were occasional but not unimportant, affected the eastern regions close to the demarcation line or were linked to disruption in certain sectors such as transport and supplies.<sup>34</sup> The overall difficulties were a hindrance to exercising genuine civilian authority beyond Bratislava and western Slovakia, as well as to coordinating this civilian authority with the military authority handled by the Italian military mission since the December 1918 agreement.<sup>35</sup>

### *Italian-Slovak Tensions and Their Impact in Slovakia*

During the construction phase of the Czechoslovak military apparatus, Czechoslovakia's own forces were insufficient, and it had to rely on its allies for support. The main Slovak leaders in Slovakia were acutely aware of these needs. Initially, Italy expressed the most willingness to serve this function. In November, Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš had negotiated an agreement in principle for the Czechoslovak troops of France and Italy to be transferred to Czechoslovakia.<sup>36</sup> It soon became clear that the French were reluctant, while the Italians were more inclined to go ahead with the transfer swiftly.<sup>37</sup> The agreement reached in mid-December was quickly implemented. There were now Czechoslovak units (around 7,000 men) in Slovakia under the command of Colonel František Schöbl. Over the course of the month, these men took back the main cities claimed by the Czechoslovak state. But their behavior was criticized in all quarters, including by the Czechoslovak Defense Minister himself, Václav Klobáček, and by the Italian commanders who reported back to Luigi Piccione, Supreme commander of the Czechoslovak army in Slovakia.<sup>38</sup> However, the Czechoslovak army deployed gradually along the demarcation line, and reinforcements came regularly.

But in the first weeks of 1919, tensions emerged between Rome and Prague, and relations between the Italian military authorities and the Šrobár government

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34 See Krajčovičová, "Dva t'áživé problémy Úradu ministra." See also Samuel Zoch's warning regarding the supply of coal in his report on the supply situation in Bratislava and the whole county (Modra, 7 January 1919), in *Od Uhorského kráľovstva*, 153–54 (doc. 61), 160 (doc. 65), and 222 (doc. 101).

35 *Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky*.

36 Beneš, *Světová válka a naše revoluce*, 506–8 (doc. 204).

37 Klípa, "Italská vojenská mise," 30–32.

38 *Ibid.*, 42–43.

broke down rapidly. This had an impact on the situation in Slovakia. Ivan Markovič, Secretary of the Foreign Ministry specifically in charge of political and legal affairs reporting to Šrobár, underlined this in a report to Beneš sent in the first days of February:

In Slovakia, the attitude of the Italian officers is making waves. [...] I do not want to go into detail, because I would only be telling you what I have heard, without evidence, and you would not be able to conclude anything much from it. In short, the Italians are acting as if they had not recognized our sovereignty, particularly in the Magyarized towns. In particular, they are saying that it is not yet certain that these towns (Prešporok, Lučenec, Komárno, Nitra) will be ours. That comes across in the administration (in Nitra, the Italian colonel has not allowed us to raise our flags on the county administration building so as not to upset the Hungarian population).<sup>39</sup>

These conflicts heightened following the government's move from Žilina to Bratislava in early February, and serious incidents occurred in the following days, including during the great demonstration of February 12, killing eight and injuring around 20.<sup>40</sup> The Italians were now said to be favorable to the Hungarians. Their behavior was the subject of numerous complaints to the Czechoslovak authorities,<sup>41</sup> and some of the most criticized officers were replaced. This tension between Italy and Czechoslovakia remained a point of constant tension until the departure of the Italian military mission at the end of May. It came on top of the shortage of available human resources, insufficiently compensated for by the contribution of Czech volunteers, which was organized spontaneously and informally in November 1918 before being made systematic.<sup>42</sup>

This policy of sending Czechs had its limits: the pool of personnel was small, and the chaotic conditions in Slovakia did not help. In several regions, reports

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39 Letter from Markovič to Beneš, Prague, [before 10] February 1919. SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 8. See Boisserie, "Situácia," 276–77.

40 Šrobár, *Oslobodené Slovensko*, 29–31. For the measures taken by Defence Minister Klofáč, see Opis č. 3641, 4 February 1919, Vojenský historický ústav, Bratislava. VHU, collection Zemské Vojenské Veliteľstvo (ZVV) Košice, Presidium 1919, box 2, prez. č. 267/1919.

41 See for example SNA, BA, of. Milan Rastislav Štefánik, box 39, inv. č. 1235 in the case of Lučenec (Losonc) or, more generally in the recriminations and with a detailed description of several series of incidents, same collection, inv. č. 1249.

42 For December 1918, see SNA, BA, of. Pavol Blaho, box 40, inv. č. 1509. The pay problem of Czech officials in Slovakia was addressed from March 1919. See SNA, BA, fond MPS, box 255, 156/1919 prez. Adm, Opatření politického úřednictva, 22 March 1919.

from the prefects highlighted fragile political and social conditions.<sup>43</sup> Other factors were not conducive to increasing the number of volunteers, including the prevailing financial conditions, as pay was markedly lower than in the Czech Lands,<sup>44</sup> and professional questions, as some professions were better suited than others to being exercised in communities in which there were Hungarian majorities and which were reputedly hostile.<sup>45</sup> Other difficulties were merely material and linked to the difficulty of billeting the men. These factors together explain the particular profile of most Czech volunteers in Slovakia: relatively qualified men who were young and unmarried, and who often mentioned pre-war Slovakophilia and/or had personal ties or friendships with Slovaks close to the new regime.<sup>46</sup> Despite this contribution, staff shortages still affected all areas of the administration in early April, including the judicial apparatus, where the situation was soon considered acute.<sup>47</sup> Even as late as April, Juraj Slávik in Prague noted that only three courts were totally controlled by the Czechoslovak authorities, in Banská Bystrica (Besztercebánya), Ružomberok, and Levoča (Lőcse), while others, such as in Nitra (Nyitra), had had to be closed.<sup>48</sup> Šrobár made a wider, sharper report to Piccione on April 10, after having received authorization to occupy the territories north of the demarcation line: “I reminded him of the difficulties we would face *if we were to* occupy the country: supplies, the shortage of specialists and reliable people, administration, justice, railways, and the postal service. We have no teachers (...) and not even enough soldiers to hold a long border.”<sup>49</sup> In addition to these administrative problems, there were also more political difficulties that the Czechoslovak administration in Slovakia

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43 See SNA, BA, of. Šrobár, box 10, inv. č. 619 for the reports from February 1919 in Novohrad County and Igor Hrušovský's report for the Žilina region.

44 For a global overview on the question, see Krajčovičová, “Českí zamestnanci v štátnych službách na Slovensku.”

45 Markovič to Beneš, Prague, 15 April 1919. SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 10.

46 These were the primary characteristics of those who directly approached the Czechoslovak authorities in Slovakia. SNA, BA, of. Blaho, box 40, inv. č. 1509. The first Czech officials sent to Slovakia had an atypical profile compared to the dozens of volunteers who approached Pavol Blaho. A detailed list of 64 of them sent to Slovakia in December 1918 highlights that they are relatively experienced men: 40 were over 40, and 15 were over 50. Moreover, 53 were married and 38 had children. SNA, BA, fond MPS, box 255, Status zem. kanc. úřed. české národnosti.

47 Markovič to Beneš, Prague, February 23, 1919. SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 10.

48 Porada županů a poslanců ve dnech 11–13/4/19. Odbor soudnictví. Referent Dr. Dérer. SNA, BA, fond MPS, box 255. See also Markovič's report to Beneš, Prague, 15 April 1919. SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 20.

49 Šrobár, *Oslobodené Slovensko*, 114. (Underlined by Šrobár.)

struggled to resolve. Some of these difficulties were provoked by the attitude of the Slovak authorities themselves, particularly in early 1919.

### *The Government's Move to Bratislava and Internal Political Difficulties*

From the *Prevrät* onwards, the city of Bratislava experienced a distinctive evolution as regards the territory potentially attached to Czechoslovakia. This attachment had initially been very strongly opposed among the German and Hungarian elites, before a form of accord was reached with the former. In the last days of 1918, the situation might appear to have calmed, but from the beginning of January and until the government's arrival in Bratislava, the situation worsened in the city, particularly because of the decisions made by the Slovak government as it prepared its arrival. These measures contradicted the promises that had been made in the autumn, which had helped defuse the acute political opposition of the first weeks following the *Prevrät*. A few decisions made in late December had already appeared counterproductive. Railway employees who did not speak Slovak had been dismissed, as had those who had refused to swear allegiance to the government.<sup>50</sup> In the days that followed, social allowances for the unemployed were reduced. Some workers were no longer paid, supplies became more difficult to assure, and the administration seemed to struggle to find a solution to material problems. The major difficulty faced by the Slovak authorities throughout the first half of the year remained supplies. The creation in January 1919 of a Supplies Department for Slovakia (*Zásobovací ústav pro Slovensko*) was supposed to help coordinate all activities. But it did not resolve the management and control difficulties that were creating tensions and serious concerns.<sup>51</sup> Food stores in particular were looted, without the law enforcement forces (which were both insufficient in numbers and unreliable) putting an end to it. Moreover, disagreements between the Czechoslovak civilian administration and the Italian military authorities were now an open secret. In mid-January, the Slovak authorities still seemed optimistic about the situation in the city, but the situation went downhill fast.<sup>52</sup> In the end, when Šrobár arrived in the city, there

50 Šrobár, *Osvobodené Slovensko*, 439. See recently: Luther, *Bratislava česko-slovenská*, 44–56.

51 Report of the Conference of Prefects and Deputies, 9–10 March 1919 in Šrobár, *Osvobodené*, 144–45.

52 For a rather optimistic analysis of the situation, see Report of the Prefect Samuel Zoch to Šrobár, January 17, 1919, in *Od Uhorského kráľovstva*, (doc. 83), 87. On the worsening of the situation and the interruption of several economic sectors because of a continuing shortage of coal, see Úradne osvedčenie župan Zoch, 2 February 1919, *ibid.* (doc. 104), 228.

was an atmosphere of open hostility. The crowd that greeted him was essentially made up of Slovaks from the surrounding area who had been brought in for the occasion. The inhabitants of Bratislava ostensibly did not take part in these festivities. Šrobár had to contend with an insufficient, unreliable administration and a shortage of housing for the new arrivals, as well as scarce coal for the economic apparatus because of the priority accorded to transport, and the need to disarm the railway workers and some postal service personnel. The strikes in February demonstrated the importance of taking control of several administrations, including the railways.<sup>53</sup> In the following weeks and months, more than 450 administrative staff and 2,500 railway workers were sent from the Czech Lands to replace employees who had refused to pledge allegiance to the new state and had been dismissed.

The new government also made repeated errors of judgment. Poor decisions included the closure of the city's university after the refusal of the professors to take part in the festivities for the government's arrival in the city.<sup>54</sup> These tensions came on top of recurrent problems in relations with the civilian population in other regions. In early February, several reports from prefects noted a very unstable and dangerous situation for the Slovak authorities in regions close to the demarcation line.<sup>55</sup> The normal functioning of the administration was endangered and the weakness of the Czechoslovak military presence had led to fatal incidents in a few towns.<sup>56</sup> Two weeks later, Markovič summarized the government's difficulties to Beneš, noting the persistent challenges faced by the civilian administration: "In Slovakia, the situation is more difficult than it was. The Hungarians continued committing provocative acts, especially among officials, and this has led to a general strike. It has above all affected the railways and the postal service, where the largest number of Hungarians and Magyarons work. Luckily, it did not break out everywhere at once, which has allowed us to

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53 Van Duin, "Vavro Šrobár, bratislavský štrajk."

54 On February 9, Markovič, Secretary of the Foreign Ministry of the Czechoslovak government, who had recently been given responsibility for liaison with Šrobár, sent the latter a message from President Masaryk: "The University of Prešporok should not have been closed. That is an attack against a cultural institution. Particularly sensitive. It was a tactical error to ask the professors to welcome the government when it was predictable that they would refuse." Message from Masaryk to Šrobár, February 9, 1919, SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 7. See also Samuel Zoch's decision, in *Od Uhorského kráľovstva*, (doc. 93), 211. And his explanation to Šrobár (14 February), *Bratislava hlavné mesto Slovenska*, 281–82.

55 See in particular, for Novohrad County: Eudovít Bazovský's reports to Šrobár of February 3 and 5, 1919, SNA, BA, of. Šrobár, box 10, inv. č. 619.

56 Letter from Markovič to Beneš, Prague, [before 10] February 1919. SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 8.

gradually and fairly swiftly paralyze it by bringing in Czech personnel. Today, the trains are running more or less as regularly—or rather, irregularly—as before.”<sup>57</sup>

### *Uncertainty on Borders and the Issue of the Circulation of Information*

The other immediate difficulty was the lack of information available to Šrobár.<sup>58</sup> And when information did circulate, it was not precise enough for measures to be taken in Slovakia. In his report dated March 11, Fedor Houdek, who was close to the men of the government in Slovakia and a member of the Czechoslovak delegation to the peace conference and who had been in touch with Šrobár for a few days, reported with a touch of disappointment and anger that he could “still not give any positive information on the final settlement of the borders.”<sup>59</sup> This problem of information circulation would persist. It was an increasing source of concern as the situation worsened in Slovakia, and the contradictory information available in Prague soon gave Markovič a sentiment of discomfort, which he expressed to Beneš in early April.<sup>60</sup> At that time, the little information Šrobár had received from Houdek dated back to early April and was not very encouraging: there was nothing on borders, there was an atmosphere of secrecy in Paris, and the Wilsonian position “of optimistic humanism... does more harm than good.” His general assessment of the overall situation was pessimistic: “For us, the danger has never been greater than it is now, and it will be greater still in the near future.”<sup>61</sup>

In the meantime, in February and March, Markovič visited Bratislava, where he would spend several days before heading to Budapest. While he participated in several conferences aimed at asserting Czechoslovak authority,<sup>62</sup> he sent

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57 Letter from Markovič to Beneš, 23 February 1919, SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1 inv. č. 10. In Slovak, see Boisserie, “Situácia,” 279. In several regions, prefects’ reports highlighted the fragility of social and political conditions. SNA, BA, of. Šrobár, box 10, inv. č. 619, for the February 1919 reports.

58 Šrobár, *Oslobodené Slovensko*, 146. This acute problem was also reported by Markovič to Beneš between February and May: letters from Markovič to Beneš, Prague, February 23, 1919, SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 10; March 13, 1919, SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 14; April 7, 1919, SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 18.

59 Zpráva 7 Fedora Houdka Vavrovi Šrobárovi, Paris, March 11, 1919, SNA, BA, of. Šrobár, box 10, inv. č. 623.

60 Boisserie, “Situácia,” 280.

61 Zpráva 11 Fedora Houdka Vavrovi Šrobárovi, Paris, April 1, 1919, SNA, BA, of. Šrobár, box 10, inv. č. 623.

62 *Slovenský denník*, February 25, 1919, p. 3, March 4, 1919, p. 2, March 6, 1919, p. 3, and March 8, 1919, pp. 2–3.

reports to Beneš that were frankly optimistic as to the situation in the country. He had only just arrived when he sent a report on February 23, in which he offered the following conclusion: “I would not like my report to give you the impression that the conditions here are untenable. They are not. The people are generally showing calm and maturity, but the situation is worsening [...], the administration is working very poorly because there are not enough officials. In brief, the situation in Slovakia is not yet critical, but it is difficult, and it could become critical if the current uncertainty were to last even longer.”<sup>63</sup> One month later, the effects of long-term uncertainty on the borders seemed to worsen due to effective Hungarian propaganda: “The Hungarians are still acting as if there were no doubt as to the territorial integrity of the Kingdom being upheld. That can be seen in several of their decisions and in the insinuations made by their press and agitators. And the masses are totally intoxicated by this hashish.”<sup>64</sup>

The uncertainty faced at the time by the Šrobár government and its administration was combined with political difficulties on various levels. These were linked in particular to the religious issue and the attitude of the politically organized Slovak Catholic faction. This fraction had organized in November 1918 around a priest from Ružomberok who was a figurehead of the Catholic faction of the national movement before the war: Andrej Hlinka.<sup>65</sup> This Catholic faction, gathered within a Slovak People’s Party (SES), soon opposed Šrobár’s authority.<sup>66</sup> The religious conflict which had marked the last years before the war was revived and amplified by the measures taken by the Interior Ministry in January 1919 to restrict freedom of assembly.<sup>67</sup> These measures attracted much public criticism throughout February and March.<sup>68</sup> In the context of the time, this agitation, described as “anti-Czech” by the authorities in Prague, was a constant source of concern. However, it was considered potentially less dangerous than

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63 Letter from Markovič to Beneš, Bratislava, February 23, 1919. SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 10.

64 Letter from Markovič to Beneš, March 13, 1919. SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 14.

65 Výzva A. Hlinku na založenie..., 10. november 1918 [Appeal of Andrej Hlinka for the creation of..., November 10, 1918]. SNA, BA, of. Hlinka, box 21, inv. č. 976. On Catholic agitation and the attitude of Hlinka, see Kramer, *Slovenské autonomistické hnutie*. See also Rychlík, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století*, 75–79. More recently, Holec, *Hlinka: Otec národa*, 138–56.

66 Zápísnica z porady výkonného výboru, 28. novembra 1918. SNA, BA, of. Hlinka, box 21, inv. č. 977.

67 Memorandum, January 21, 1919. SNA, BA, of. Šrobár, box 10, inv. č. 613.

68 The sessions of the Club of Slovak Deputies echoed those tensions in February. See mainly “Zápísnica schôdzky Klubu slovenských poslancov, dňa 27. Februára 1919,” in *Zápisnice Klubu slovenských poslancov*, 148–51. See also Pavol Blaho’s request to Šrobár (March 26, 1919) for the creation of a Catholic periodical that would enhance Czechoslovak sentiment and serve the new State. SNA, BA, of. Šrobár, box 10, inv. č. 613.

the supply problems, which had become acute.<sup>69</sup> In the first weeks of spring, the accumulation of material difficulties, political agitation involving the main leaders of the different Slovak factions, and the imperfect implantation of an embryonic administration supported by Czechs came to a head.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to this tense intra-Slovak context, the attitude of the Hungarian population also raised difficulties.<sup>71</sup> Writing from Bratislava, Ivan Markovič underlined the most important aspects in a letter to Beneš in the first half of March.<sup>72</sup> He reported the fear of incidents during the commemoration of the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence on March 15 and the rumored armed uprisings, notably in Bratislava and Košice (Kassa), where exceptional security measures were taken.<sup>73</sup> In Košice, the command of the 6th Infantry Division asked General Schöbl to ensure that all contact between officers and the civilian population was avoided in the days following the banned festivities.<sup>74</sup> In Prague meanwhile, Prime Minister Karel Kramář was worried about the authorities' ability to control the situation.<sup>75</sup>

### *Persistent Weaknesses and the "Kun Effect"*

The impacts of the material difficulties and strategic situation of Slovakia both before and after Béla Kun came to power in Hungary were a source of concern. In early March, Markovič informed Beneš of the recurrent agitation provoked by the scarcity of food and other essentials and the lack of work. "This shortage is definitely a good means of agitating against the Czechs and the army, which is 'starving' Slovakia," he wrote. No doubt used to modest goals,

69 Letter dated March 13, 1919. SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 14. On this meeting, see also *Slovenský Denník*, March 5, 1919, "Bratislavské porady," and *Slovenský Denník*, March 6, 1919, "Politická situácia na Slovensku."

70 Boisserie, "Situácia," 281–82. See also the report of Milan Ivanka, referent for internal affairs during the Council of April 11–13, 1919. SNA, BA, fond MPS, box 255, and an illustration in the Nitra County: letter from Igor Hrušovský to Vavro Šrobár, March 26, 1919, SNA, BA, of. Šrobár, box 10, inv. č. 619.

71 Among recent studies on the subject, see Nurmi, *A Playground*; Michela, *Pod beslom integrity*.

72 See for example letters of March 6 and 13, 1919. SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 12 and 14. On this subject, see also the resolution adopted by the members of the Club of Slovak Deputies on February 27 1919, *Slovenský Denník*, March 5, 1919, "Za očistu nášho politického života."

73 Letter from Markovič to Beneš, March 6, 1919, SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 12. For the measures adopted by Šrobár, see Výnos MPS, 1131/1919 adm., March 6, 1919. VHÚ, BA, ZVV Košice, Presidium 1919, box 3, inv. č. 613.

74 VHÚ, BA, ZVV Košice, Presidium 1919, box 3, inv. č. 7854.

75 Letter from Kramář to Masaryk, Paris, February 28, 1919, in *Korespondence T. G. Masaryk – Karel Kramář*, 330.

he did consider, however, that “the machinery is just about functioning”<sup>76</sup> and that, while the stability of the Czechoslovak authorities remained fragile, the reliability of certain bodies that had long been questionable (for instance the police) was gradually improving, and anti-Czech agitation persisted in a less radical form. But less than two weeks later, while reporting a calm situation, he did note that, in some places, this calm could transform into a rebellion were the Czechoslovak authorities to show an insufficiently firm hand.<sup>77</sup> The situation in Eastern Slovakia and Ruthenia particularly captured the attention of the Slovak authorities, which were informed of the multiple difficulties encountered. The material situation there was constantly described as even more unfavorable than in other regions. In March, acute supply difficulties became a problem again. During the Conference of Prefects and Deputies meeting of mid-April in Bratislava, the *referent* for supplies, Matej Bella, reported that the situation had at that stage “reached a point where there were fears of collapse.” The situation was still seen as critical by some, meaning only “the most basic needs” could be fulfilled.<sup>78</sup> This situation raised fears of the population turning to Bolshevism in a region suffering endemic poverty and where the Czechoslovak ability to run a civilian administration encountered the most recurrent problems. Judging from the report by prefect Ladislav A. Moyš on the situation in Užhorod County in early May, this problem persisted throughout the period: “So far, we have been forced to run the administration, the justice system, etc. with officials from the old regime insofar as it is better to have poor staff than no staff at all.”<sup>79</sup>

Evidence indicates that the change in regime in Hungary and the Kun offensive had a positive impact on the authority of the Czechoslovak state. The fears inspired by the Kun regime in certain categories of the population, which had hitherto been either silently or overtly hostile to the Czechoslovak State, helped limit the destabilization of the Czechoslovak authorities, particularly

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76 Letter from Markovič to Beneš, March 6, 1919, SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 12.

77 Letter from Markovič to Beneš, March 26, 1919, SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 15. On the same topic, see the report on Šrobár's foreword in Porada županů, April 11–13, 1919, SNA, BA, fond MPS, box 255.

78 Porada županů a poslanců ne dnech 11–13/4/19. Odbor zásobování. Referent Dr. Bella. SNA, BA, fond MPS, box 255.

79 VHÚ, BA, ZVV Košice, Presidium 1919, box 4, inv. č. 1496. For the memories of prefect Moyš, see Ladislav A. Moyš: Jeho účinkovanie počas vojny, počas prevratu a po prevrate, SNA, BA, of. Šrobár, box 26, inv. č. 1096. At that time, Užhorod County included part of the eastern part of the Slovak territory, as it was eventually delimited in the following years.

in Bratislava,<sup>80</sup> and criticism of the authorities became less audible. Reports converged in this vein to the extent that President Masaryk wrote in a rather satisfied tone to Beneš: “Hungarian bolshevism has helped us a lot in Slovakia: many Hungarians and Magyarons now see us as their salvation.”<sup>81</sup> Markovič, meanwhile, mentioned certain segments of the population to which he referred as the *majetnejšie neslovenské triedy* (non-Slovak property-owning classes), for whom personal security and wealth were more important than the integrity of the Kingdom of Hungary and whose relations with the Czechoslovak authorities were now “generally better.”<sup>82</sup> But the eastern sector remained an exception. Hungarian propaganda allegedly was exerting a growing influence over the population, who lived in a state of great deprivation, regardless of creed or nationality.<sup>83</sup>

Setting aside the special case of the eastern regions, which were fragile in the long term, early April saw the beginning of a general improvement in supplies and a gradual strengthening of the administration.<sup>84</sup> In certain sectors important to the new regime, such as schools, the population was not spontaneously welcoming with the new arrivals, even in regions with Slavic majorities. This school issue was, along with that of the judicial institutions, one of the difficult points to address across the territory.<sup>85</sup> In his report to the Conference in mid-April, the *referent* for school affairs, Anton Štefánek, reported that the opposition of Hungarian teachers to the new regime had grown in the first weeks of spring, and he announced the decision to close all schools that did not have a Czechoslovak teaching “corps” (*Sbor československý*) early, underlining the importance of triggering a “great cleansing of schools from the national point of view.”<sup>86</sup>

80 Letter from Markovič to Beneš, April 7, 1919, SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 18.

81 Šolle, *Masaryk a Beneš ve svých dopisech*, 204.

82 See for example letters from Markovič to Beneš, April 7, 1919, SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 18) and April 15, 1919, SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 20, and the identical assessment in *Slovenský Denník*: Štefan Janšák, “Verejné práce na Slovensku,” April 8, 1919, and especially “Minister Šrobár precestuje...,” April 11, 1919.

83 See for example the report from the command of the Užhorod (Ungvár) garrison for the week of April 7–13, 1919, VHÚ, BA, ZVV Košice, presidium 1919, box 4, inv. č. 1222.

84 See in particular Vrchní velitelství čs.-slov. vojsk na Slovensku, 361/op, Materiální situace, Kroměříž, March 8, 1919, příloha č. 6, VHÚ, ZVV Bratislava, Presidium 1919, box 3, inv. č. 683.

85 On the difficulties of establishing a Slovak education system, see SNA, BA, of. Anton Štefánek, box 10, inv. č. III/2, Veselé a tragikomické příhody v prvních dnech oslobodeného Slovenska. For the very difficult case of Košice, see VHÚ, ZVV Bratislava, Presidium 1919, box 3, inv. č. 879 and 951.

86 Porada županů a poslanců ne dnech 11–13/4/19, Odbor školství. Referent Dr. Štefánek. SNA, BA, fond MPS, box 255.

Despite persistent military difficulties, most civilian and military reports from this period mention a slight improvement in the situation, for which there were multiple causes. The attitude of the population now seemed more favorable to the Czechoslovak authorities, even if tensions persisted in certain regions, including in the west, such as in Nitra or Štiavnica. The general improvement in the food situation in April and early May helped strengthen the position of the Czechoslovak civilian authorities.<sup>87</sup> Control of the railways and postal service had improved since the strikes had begun to subside in mid-March, but the worry provoked by the serious shortage of personnel to replace the previous administration remained high. It was in this context, which remained unstable, that the Czechoslovak army began a new phase in the conflict with the Hungarian Republic of Councils. Their initial victories gave way to a rout that shed light on the army's endemic fragilities.<sup>88</sup> It lacked means of transport and communication, its supplies were poor, it was ill-equipped, and it was weakened by a discipline more unreliable than ever and overt defiance of the Italian officers. A flurry of reports underlined the role played by the Italian officers in the moral breakdown of the Czechoslovak army.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, during this Hungarian counteroffensive, part of the state apparatus also showed its fragility.<sup>90</sup> Considerable pressure had to be applied to Hungary for the authorities to be able to take back and assert control of the territory from the beginning of July.

### *Conclusion*

The failure of the Czechoslovak authorities to take quick control of the territories in question and the local administrations and the material uncertainties this failure caused undermined the Czechoslovak position.<sup>91</sup> At the beginning of the summer of 1919, Markovič was even more pessimistic than he had been

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87 See the weekly report by the Bratislava command for April 7–13, 1919, VHÚ, BA, ZVV Košice, presidium 1919, box 4, inv. č. 1221; similarly, in Lučenec (Situation report of the garrison command for the third week of April, same collection, inv. č. 1265) and in Banská Bystrica (Situation report dated April 27, same collection, inv. č. 1363). For the case of Nitra, see in particular MNO to ZVV Košice, April 18, 1919, 10743/11, VHÚ, BA, ZVV Košice, Presidium 1919, box 4, inv. č. 1252, and Igor Hrušovský's report, Žilina, March 26, 1919, SNA, BA, of. Šrobár, box 10, inv. č. 619.

88 Hronský, "Priebeh vojenského konfliktu."

89 See in particular Výňatek ze zpravod. hlášení pos. vel. v Košicích ze dne 20.5.1919, VHÚ, BA, ZVV Košice, Presidium 1919, k. 4, prez. 1658.

90 Details in Boisserie, "Markovič zdeluje..."

91 Hronský. "K problémom konsolidácie a bezpečnosti Slovenska."

in the months before. He observed that the conditions were “beyond doubt worse than they were after the *Prevrat* [...]. Not so much because of a lack of will or because of any particular resistance, but because of the demoralization and general apathy of people, worn down by five years of war.”<sup>92</sup> This observation in the summer was confirmed at the end of December 1919 in the Minister Plenipotentiary’s report on the situation in Slovakia, which warned against “the slightest optimism,” which it contended would be “inappropriate and dangerous” given the major difficulties the Czechoslovak authority continued to face, particularly in the four southern and eastern counties (Komárno, Hont, Gemer, and Abaujtorňa).<sup>93</sup> Most of difficulties were familiar from the previous period: the Hungarian threat, the apathy of the Slovak population, the fragility of the administration, and occasional tensions between the army and the civilian population in regions close to the Danube River or the Hungarian border, as well as in eastern regions.

It took several more months to structure the administration, this time employing resources from the Czech Lands and local Slovak elites and/or pre-*Prevrat* civil servants in some regions.<sup>94</sup> But in many districts, particularly in the south and east, control remained incomplete. This administrative and political fragility of the Czechoslovak authority amplified the supply problems driven by the destruction and disorganization of the war against Hungary, which remained considerable.

Moreover, ahead of the legislative elections of spring 1920, Slovak internal political divisions (the early signs of which were observable from November 1918) intensified, as did the power struggles between the SNR and the Club of Slovak Deputies and the tensions between the authority of the Minister Plenipotentiary and political Catholicism. The Czechoslovak government in Slovakia addressed these difficulties through a policy of authoritarian control, taking measures to restrict the freedom of the press and the freedom of movement and using propaganda. Despite a few episodes of social conflict, the new absence of an external threat and the fatigue of the population helped stabilize Czechoslovak authority in the first months of 1920.

92 Letter from Markovič to Beneš, July 29, 1919. SNA, BA, of. Markovič, box 1, inv. č. 63.

93 Situační zpráva ze Slovenska ode dne 8./XII. do dne 21./XII., Bratislava, December 28, 1919. SNA, BA, fond MPS, box 5, Sign. Prez. II 1, inv. č. 328.

94 In the case of Bardejov (Bártfa), for example, see Szeghy-Gayer, “Államfordulat és újrastrukturálódó helyi elit Bártfán.”

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