INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CRR - (1)

WHO LOST SLOVAKIA?

by Chandler Rosenberger

Slovakia is so small that, if the question of "who lost" it ever arose, you might expect people to pat their pockets and look under the couch cushions. But the recent triumph of national socialism here, the impending break with the Czech Lands and the coming Communist coup will send shock waves, not tremors, through the so-called "Visegrad Troika" of Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary. It's therefore worth taking a look at who broke up Czechoslovakia and where an independent Slovak state is heading.

MEČIAR'S SUCCESS, THE FEDERALISTS' DISTRESS

"With Mečiar to the Balkans!" was the sarcastic chant of federalists who heckled at last summer's mass meetings of the "Movement for a Sovereign Slovakia." Vladimir Mečiar was Slovakia's second post-Communist prime minister. Appointed to the post by a coalition of VPN, (or Public Against Violence) and the KDH, (Christian Democratic Movement), Mečiar moved quickly to pull many of the Czechoslovak Federation's powers down to the Slovak government. Privatization, originally to be managed at the federal level, became a complicated web of federal, Czech and Slovak ministries of Trade, Economy, Industry and others. Slovakia created its own Ministry of International Relations. The federation's 1968 constitution, with the veto it gave to each "nation," had worked under the heavy hand of the Communist Party; the shifting alliances among splintering post-Communist parties rendered it unmanagable.

Fed up with Mečiar's intransigence in Prague and frightened by his overtures to the "old structures" at home and abroad, the coalition that raised him high swiftly cut him down. In April 1991, VPN and KDH deputies in the Slovak parliament dismissed him and his closest allies. Both parties, however, were mortally wounded in the coup. Seventeen VPN deputies in parliament left, taking with them other leaders of the revolution, such as the charismatic actor Milan Kňažko. Under Mečiar's leadership, they established the "Movement for a Democratic Slovakia" (HZDS).

CHANDLER ROSENBERGER is an ICWA fellow writing about the new nations of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, especially Slovakia and the Czech Lands.

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

VPN also lost the post of Prime Minister, which they gave to KDH chief Jan Čarnogurský in exchange for his support. Although the KDH did not break-up immediately, Čarnogurský had to give top jobs to leaders of a nationalist wing that gradually undermined him.

Who is the once and present Premier? When Mečiar was recruited by the Communist secret police in the 1970's, agents noted that he was a "right-wing opportunist." And, indeed, Mečiar's post-revolutionary rhetoric was, and remains in part, in favor of economic reform. But, as the Hungarian economist Janos Kovacs recently said, "give me the most radical Anglo-American libertarian, put him in power of a post-Communist society and within months you'll be looking at an out-and-out interventionist." The problem, Kovacs explained, is that politicians quickly become seduced by "regulated deregulation" and "planned steps to the market."

Now mix this brew of a "strong state for liberalism" with the Slovak federalism of Mečiar's '68 generation. As Václáv Havel points out in Summer Meditations, the Czech and Slovak leaders of the Prague Spring quarrelled over whether to reform only Communist Party or also to fight for the federalizing of what was then a unitary state based in Prague. Mečiar, just back from two years of study in Moscow, was then Chairman of the Socialist Youth Movement of Slovakia and an active campaigner for federalism. To a Slovak of Mečiar's generation, more "representation" in Prague means one thing -- greater access to the state money for government programs in Slovakia. If the end of socialism means less state money, they will seek greater powers to guide the market toward helping the country's ailing eastern half.

In this sense, the Slovaks of Mečiar's '68 generation of reforming Communists achieved more than their Czech counterparts; they at least got their federation, albeit a totalitarian one. Mečiar himself fell victim to the 1970s "normalization" that swept clean the country's politics, universities, schools and newspapers. Like Havel, he was forced to work as a manual laborer.

Unlike Havel, his tenure at the wheelbarrow was very brief. In the early 1970's, the Communist Party rehabilitated Mečiar and sent him to the Commenius University faculty of law. There studied under Marian Čič, Slovakia's first post-Communist Prime Minister, and met the lawyers who

would form his future government, such as Katarina Tothová, now Slovak Minister of Justice and Jan Cuper, now a federal vice-premier. There also, some say, he forged the alliances and the legal skills necessary to use the state to his ends. There is no hard evidence that Mečiar worked for the secret police, only that he was a "candidate for collaboration." Files in Trenčin that might have contained his reports were destroyed in 1990 while Mečiar was Minister of the Interior. But his experience as a company lawyer for a glass factory in Trenčin certainly taught him the ropes of a strongly interventionist state.

It was Mečiar's command of Communist law, his desire to "regulate de-regulation" and his past as an advocate for Slovak federalism that made him such a potent force in forging a winning coalition. His party gathered 38 percent of the Slovak vote in 1992, making it by far the largest party in the Slovak parliament.

But in the zero-sum game of parliamentary politics, one man's success is another man's failure. In the Czech Lands, Vacláv Klaus triumphed over the "old structures" such as those Mečiar aligned himself with. Admittedly, he didn't have to cope with the resentment the Slovak nationalists whipped up. But, nonetheless, Mečiar never faced any serious opposition from the VPN or the KDH, both of which quarrelled among themselves rather than build power bases. Please bear with me for trying to unravel the complicated weave of Slovak politics; it's necessary to examine the threads of the coalition that frayed.

VPN led the 1989 revolution in Slovakia. It named itself "Public Against Violence" as a symbol of its opposition to the brutal methods the Communists used to break-up a 1988 public meeting of the underground church, the first anti-Communist rally in Czechoslovakia. But by the time VPN started to talk about what it was for rather than what it was against, it had splintered into seven different political parties.

First Čarnogurský left. As the moving spirit of the underground church, he was the only VPN member with an established anti-Communist power base. Even during the revolution he used to "commute" from the VPN co-ordination center in a grand Austro-Hungarian palace to a street corner, his other "office." The KDH fought the 1990 elections and earned 13 percent of the vote. In 1992, they managed just 8 percent.

Next came Mečiar, who formed the HZDS in May 1991. In response to his departure, VPN's "economic elite" came into ascendency within the movement. Jozef Kucerak, a disciple of Milton Friedman and a close friend of Vacláv Klaus, became head of the party. His strong support of radical economic reform quickly alienated the late Alexander Dubček. Dubček, however, could not join HZDS; he feared that Mečiar would endanger his beloved federation. He instead left to form the Slovak Social Democrats, who won four percent of the Slovak vote in 1992.

Finally, Čarnogurský fell victim to the nationalist wing of his own party. In February 1992, Jan Klepac, then a member of the presidium of the Slovak parliament, cast the decisive vote against a constitutional agreement with the Czechs. An infuriated Čarnogurský took to Slovak television to condemn the schismatics for having "deepened the ongoing crisis in our republic." They retaliated by forming the "Slovak Christian Democratic Movement" (or SKDH) from ministers committed to a Keynsian revival of the economy (to be paid for by Prague.) They won three percent of the 1992 vote.

But what happened to the rump of VPN, the famous dissidents and close associates of Vacláv Havel? What happened to the party that controlled virtually the entire government and held top posts in Prague? Sadly, it was itself divided within. Sadder still, the split and infighting was exacerbated by the political style of Havel and his followers.

Renamed the Občianská Democratiská Uniá (ODU), the "Civic Democratic Union" split roughly into a pro-Havel faction of "dissident politics" and one committed to closer ties with the Czech politician Vacláv Klaus and "practical politics." While Havel sought to preserve the power of a unified group of dissidents, Klaus, himself never a dissident, was trying to expand the movement and turn it into a political party.

Klaus and Havel settled their differences more or less. Klaus took control of the revolutionary movement, Civic Forum, and turned it into a political party, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS.) Havel hung onto the Castle and his group of advisors drawn from the dissident movement. But in Slovakia, the two factions simply lined up within their rival Czech allies and fought for control of VPN.

The pro-Havel faction opposed all attempts to turn the "movement" into a "party." For two years they dominated the executive committee of VPN and even attempted once to re-write its constitution to reserve unelected seats for themselves on it. They depended on their positions in "the Castle" for their power among Slovak elites.

This was no way to learn what ordinary people in Slovakia were thinking. It's not clear that anyone in the Castle cared. Milan Kňažko, now of HZDS, was briefly a presidential advisor, but left, complaining that he was the only Slovak and was allocated a brief for "Slovakia." Later Slovak advisors were given briefs for "human rights," the implication being that one never knows what those other Slovaks will get up to.

Rather than reach out through a political party, Havel and his advisors complained about Slovakia from above. In Summer Meditations, Havel wrote that "some Slovaks" were "stirring up falsehoods" about his approach to Slovakia. Indeed they were, in rabidly anti-Havel newspapers like Koridor. But is complaining about it in a book the best way to combat it? The dissidents tried briefly to run a daily newspaper, "Verejnost," but its editors published self-congratulatory articles about the movement rather than address Slovaks' concerns. After a year of selling less than 10,000 copies a week, it collapsed. Havel's advisors then starting applying for grants to write "analyses" of the Slovak press. All the while they had Havel's ear and the prestige of their Castle jobs.

Thanks to their neglect of practical politics, Havel and his advisors had no understanding of Slovak grievances. The Slovaks to this day do not want independence, for all of Havel's musings on self-determination and a metaphysical "home." Slovaks voted for a man who claimed to be defending their economic interests, not a separatist.

I once ran into a former leader of ODU, also a Havel advisor, at a banquet for a new Slovak academic foundation. I had come from a mining town, he from Prague. I told him that ordinary workers were calling for his party to protect them from being fired for their political beliefs. Sipping his white wine, he explained to me patiently that leaving ordinary ODU members without help would better teach them to stand on their own. Could ordinary Slovaks ever take such people seriously?

Such dissidents lost power at the movement's grass roots, however, when Kučerak became leader in May 1991. Like Klaus, he had been an economist but never a dissident. Like Klaus, he aspired to strengthen the voice of the movement's regional centers by building on an emerging entreprenurial class. In the interest of the reader, I here announce my bias. I worked for Kučerak and believe his approach was more democratic than that of "dissident politics." Let me cite Havel in my defense. In "On the Theme of an Opposition," printed in 1968, Havel wrote that "political programs are not born at writers' desks" and that "you can't invent a strategy without an army." Then, Havel recognized that only political parties can filter the complaints and concerns of ordinary citizens into a political program that represents their interests and win their votes.

When Kučerak took over, VPN stood at 2.7 percent in opinion polls. When he resigned in October 1991, ODU, as it was by then known, had between 8 and 10 percent support and was rising. But Kučerak was frustrated at every turn by his executive committee, at that time still dominated by Havel's advisors. They did not, for instance, share his taste for the stuff of democracy -- public meetings. Once, when Mečiar organized a rally for "sovereignty," Kučerak turned around three days later and brought 30,000 people out in favor of the common state. For his trouble, he was attacked that evening by the executive council, who thought such a move was too risky.

Most importantly, Kučerak's overtures to Klaus were regularly sabatoged by the executive council. Hoping to save the federation, Klaus, leading what was already the most popular political party in the Czech Lands, was seeking a coalition partner in Slovakia. Klaus was regularly held at arm's length by the ODU executive council until, exasperated, he decided to set up ODS offices in Slovakia.

Tragically, it was too late. Neither ODU nor ODS had taken the time before the elections to set up strong regional offices. The VPN that had won 29 percent of the 1990 vote was reduced to scraping 3.4 percent in 1992. ODS earned the same. Neither passed the 5 percent threshold to get into parliament (although they would now be represented there had they formed a coalition.) Taken together, the parties of the old VPN, excluding the HZDS and including two minorities' parties I have not discussed, would

have amounted to 26 percent, a decent representation. Divided, VPN and KDH, the defenders of the common state and economic and political reform, were wiped out.

THE END OF THE FEDERATION

The elections left the fate of the federation in the hands of Klaus and Mečiar. In the first 24 hours, Havel's aides tried briefly to organize an "anti-Mečiar" federal coalition, but the scheme showed more naïveté than talent. Klaus, on the other hand, met Mečiar immediately. Almost as immediately, he announced that the federation was "in danger."

It soon became clear that he breaking point was not, as expected, the status of the currency. Some of Mečiar's allies were demanding more of a say in monetary policy in hopes of inflating the Czechoslovak crown to stimulate consumption within the country. But Mečiar had quickly set aside the discussion. It's also clear now that Klaus was not (and is not) willing to risk an economic collapse in Slovakia merely to ensure the purity of Czech reform; too much business is done between the republics for the Czech Lands simply to cut and run. The two sides have since agreed to a customs union and a common currency between the republics.

Nor could the break have come over Klaus' "coupon privatization" scheme. Although HZDS was and is hostile to the program, that would be no reason for pushing for the country's division, since the collapse of the federation would do the scheme more harm even that HZDS could.

Rather, the break came over the question of the "sovereignty" of Slovakia and its international recognition within the federation, both key HZDS demands. One might well ask what "sovereignty" without independence is. Indeed, many did, when its proponent was Čarnogurský, not Mečiar. But the two politicians had different ideas about sovereignty and its importance. To Čarnogurský, the new state consitution had to satisfy traditional Slovak grudges against the Czechs. They stem from the Pittsburgh agreement of 1918, in which the Czechs promised autonomy for Slovaks that was never given. Čarnogurský was satisfied with the February 1991 constitutional agreement, the Milový agreement, that said the two peoples, the Czechs and the Slovaks, acknowledged each other's sovereignty but were simultaneously giving it up to a federal government that would itself be the only subject of international law.

What Mečiar demanded was much more extreme. Both Slovakia and the Czech Lands would be subjects of international law and able to sign their own treaties. Each would have a functioning foreign office; the federal or confederal foreign ministry would merely co-ordinate agreements. Each would have sovereignty in legal matters, i.e. federal laws would be subservient to republic laws. The justification, HZDS claimed, is that Slovakia had been poorly represented in Prague. The Slovak government needed more of its own powers, including the power to sign separate treaties, in order to encourage Western investment and re-build its economy.

Had such a loose state ever prospered? Ladislav Hohoš, Mečiar's political philosopher, cites Belgium, where both the Flemish and French-speaking parts have foreign ministers. But Pavol Bratinka, now Deputy Czech Foreign Minister, asks in turn if Belgium is really a model of stability to which to aspire. Moreover, whatever compromise the Belgians might have come to within their borders, there are not separate seats for Flemish and French-speaking citizens at the United Nations.

"I wonder why we are forced to explain this issue," Bratinka recently said to me. The Slovaks could not expect more representation in the federal government than they already have, he said. Although the Czechs outnumber the Slovaks by two to one, the complicated 1968 constitution resembles the American compromise of a House and Senate in that the upper house, the House of Nations, is composed of 75 Czech and 75 Slovak representatives, giving the Slovak republic an equal say in the state's affairs. But the Slovaks have a further power of veto no American state enjoys; the two halves of the House of Nations vote separately and every bill requires the approval of each house. If a Slovak faction in the House of Nations mustered a majority there, they could block legislation with a mandate to represent 51 percent of one third, or just over 1/6 of the country's population.

Bratinka's frustration comes from the world's, especially the U.S.'s, decision to the break-up as a squabble in which both sides are at fault. As a result, the Czechs, like the Slovaks, will have to re-negotiate 2,600 international agreements. Bratinka estimates the work will take his ministry four years. He asks who more at fault in a divorce; the party that sets unreasonable

conditions for union or the party that refuses to abide by unreasonable conditions?

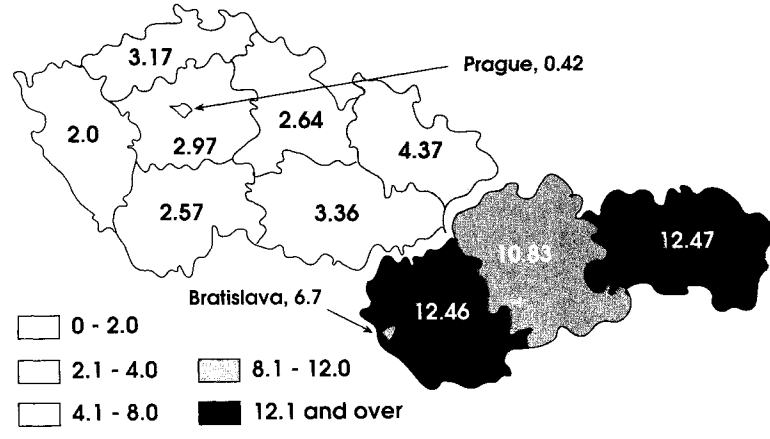
The HZDS argument against such political calculations is that real business is done outside of parliament. They've got a case. The Federal Foreign Ministry under Jiři Dienstbier was notoriously "Pragocentric." His proposal that Czechoslovakia should stop producing arms for the world market devastated Slovak towns such as Martin, dependent on its T-72 tank factory. A federal assault on this industry, however pernicious the arms might have been, was an attack on Slovak livelihoods.

The Slovaks could also claim that some sort of "Prague filter" existed in a federal government and political culture dominated by the city's dissident community. The Czechoslovak ambassador to the United States, a Dienstbier appointee, publically said the Slovaks were dangerously prone to anti-Semitism; she received no serious rebuke. Western journalists, based either in Prague or further West, routinely treated Slovakia as either not worth the trip or an easy hatchet job (the most glaring example being Henry Kamm's 1991 New York Times formula piece on Slovak anti-Semitism.) But there was no basis for the Mečiar claim that the 1990-2 Slovak representatives of ODU and KDH had betrayed Slovakia in favor of their Prague dissident friends. Pavol Demeš, ODU's Minister of International Relations, ran a professional office in Bratislava that aggressively sought investment for Slovakia.

Mečiar's evidence that the ODU and KDH governments had "betrayed" Slovakia was the different effect of federal economic policy on the two republics. Yes, foreign investment in the Czech Lands was higher. But Western businessmen working in both republics have told me that it was easier to sign a deal in Prague because the Czech Lands didn't suffer from Slovakia's "Mafia-like" connections between bureaucrats, factory managers and Mečiar's shadow government. When Mečiar won the election, a friend at Price-Waterhouse wrote the country off; Mečiar was not the solution; he had been part of the problem.

Yes, unemployment in Slovakia was higher (see chart 1). But Slovak industry suffered more from economic reform because its industry had been built, not seized, by the state. Had Slovak bureacrats and factory managers allowed Western companies to build new factories, rather than stifle such attempts in favour of minority-share investments in their old ones, the unemployment problem would have been temporary not, as it is now, endemic. The Slovak government's recent promise to put more emphasis on buy-outs by the "experienced management" (read "Communist elite") demonstrates whom its representing; the white collars, not the blue collars. It is also worth noting that Slovak unemployment is somewhat artificial. Unlike in the Czech Lands, it is sometimes possible to claim compensation both from the factory firing you and the government. There's much less incentive to look for work.

Unemployment Rate in Czechoslovakia by Region
(May, 1992)

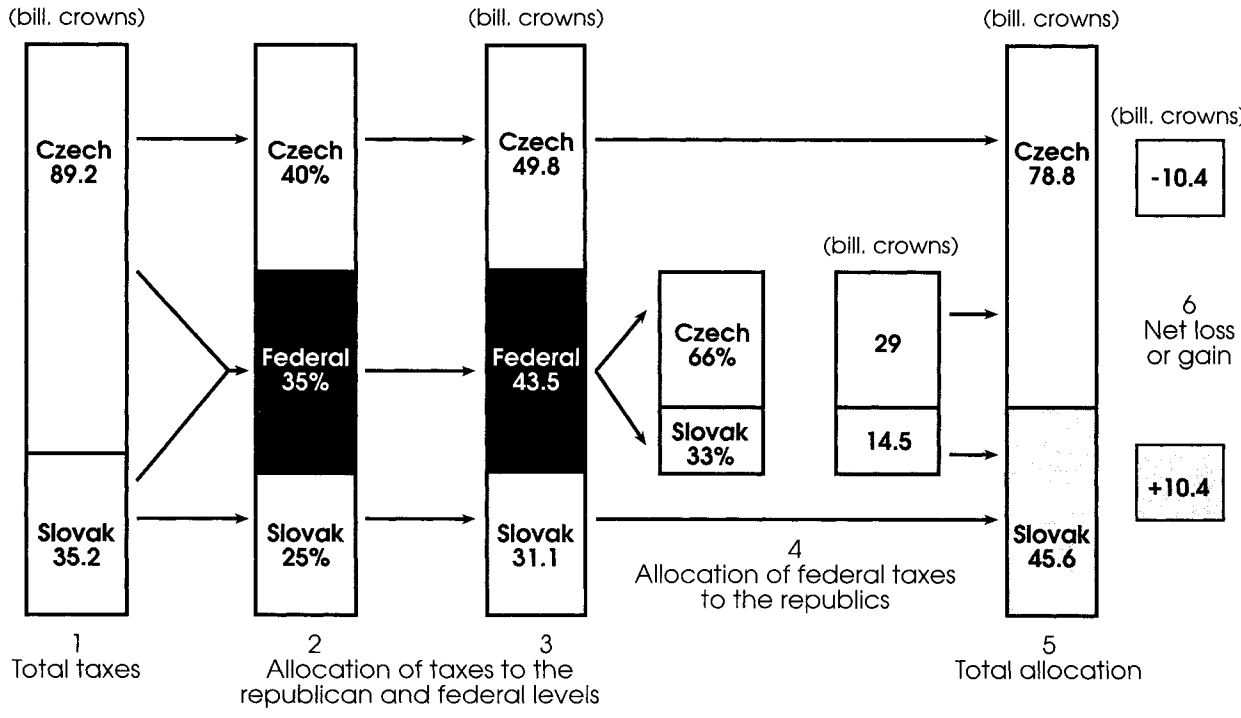


East European Reporter

Nor was there any basis for HZDS's most damning claim -- that Slovakia was being exploited for semi-finished goods that the Czech Lands then completed and sold abroad at a higher profit. Roman Zelenay, previously Mečiar's minister for international relations, advocated breaking the federal tax structure into systems based in the republics; the scheme, he claimed, would bring in more revenues than the current system of transfers. As the chart on the next page shows, nothing could be further from the truth. Slovakia stands to lose 10.4 billion crowns (330 million USD) in subsidies once the federal tax system is abolished. That's a lot of "hidden" value for Slovak goods to make up on their own.

The final blow came when HZDS voted against Havel in the presidential elections. I doubt Havel ever understood Slovakia, but the act was nonetheless provocative. Czech public opinion swung sharply further towards a split.

Redistributing Income: The Czechoslovak Tax Scheme



Payment of federal taxes, totalling 124.4 billion crowns, from the two republics (1) is allocated to the two republics and to the federal level (shown in proportional and absolute terms in 2 and 3). 4 shows the allocation of taxes from the federal level back to each republic in proportion to their populations. 5 shows the total allocation of taxes to each republic, with 6 showing their net loss or gain.

East European Reporter

SLOVAKIA "TO THE BALKANS?"

But is Slovakia now heading towards "the Balkans?" Whether or not Mečiar favors a free market is now almost besides the point. His movement gathered into its fold former secret police agents desperate to block bans on their activities, factory managers used to federal state subsidies, quislings at the top of the Communist trade unions and judges of the old regime unwilling to sentence their friends. It resembles nothing so much as the Civic Union in Russia. If, somehow, an independent Slovakia manages to produce a market economy, it will be run by and for the old elite.

Look, for instance, at Ludovit Černak, Mečiar's new Minister of the Economy. Before the election, Černak was the director of an aluminum factory in Žiar nad Hradom. It made no economic sense to produce aluminum there, but it fulfilled the Communist ambition of industrializing Slovakia's agricultural and conservative society. Last year Žiar nad Hronom absorbed 583 million crowns, or a full half-percent of the Slovak budget.

Worse still, it depends for its coal on a mine in neighboring Nováky rather than more efficient Czech mines. Cost to the state -- another 280 million crowns. Neither business pays much attention to the environment or much money on waste disposal; Nováky pollutes the Nitra river, Žiar the Hron. This is the man the government expects to fulfil its program for a "functioning market economy, with room for social policy and for ecology"?

Or take Lubomír Dolgoš, a former member of the Slovak Anti-Monopoly Office removed for his suspicious ties to the state monopolies. Dolgoš is now Slovak Minister of Privatization. One of his first acts in office was to scrap Colgate-Palmolive's purchase of the Slovak firm Kosmeticka, a deal signed by Čarnogurský's government. He then annulled the privatization of *Danubiaprint*, Slovakia's only large-scale printing press, promising later to sell it to its managers instead.

Dolgoš is the kind of free-marketeer Kovasc describes as the "head of the transformation laboratory." The problem with Čarnogurský's government, he told me, was that it lacked a "conception." Rather than sell quickly and to the highest bidder, as it had done, Dolgoš will divide the Slovak economy into three sections; strategically important firms that cannot compete and require state support; firms that can, in time, compete with Western companies and therefore require some protection; and less important firms that ought to die in the face of Western competition. Slovaks, for instance, cannot make computers; let Slovaks buy IBMs. Slovaks can, however, distribute goods; why should Western trucking firms be allowed to operate here?

Dolgoš has proposed tax holidays and other incentives to help Slovakia compete with other East European countries for Western investment. All things being equal, they would appeal. Slovakia has agreed to a customs union with the Czech lands, so firms can gain access to Czechs through Slovakia if they get shut out of Prague. But all things are not equal, especially not Western firms without the kinds of political ties necessary to business with "regulating deregulators." It's also not yet clear how long a "customs union" between the free-market Czech Lands and Dolgoš' Slovakia will survive. If it collapses, Westerners will scale their operations down from ones serving a 15 million market to ones serving Slovakia five million.

The Slovak government, eager to earn a good name with the International Monetary Fund, has written an admirably responsible first draft of a budget. The state deficit of an independent Slovakia will be within the IMF's five percent bounds. But will politicians of Černak and Dolgoš' leanings have the wherewithal to stick to their plans? A wildcat miners' strike in September was instructive. If they were cynical enough, the Slovak government might openly tell potential investors that the government was close enough to the old structures to be able to ensure social stability. But Slovak society has opened up just enough to allow for independent action. When 200 coal miners decided, independent of the trade unions, to stage an underground strike in favor of an 18 percent wage hike, the government quickly gave in. Teachers are turning increasingly to a new independent union to press their claims. They will have more to press for once the government cuts district budgets by 20 percent in order to keep down their deficit.

But countries have survived hard economic times and remained democratic; Germany after the Second World War is a good example. Should the worst come and Slovakia's economy fall apart, will Mečiar's government remain committed to a free society?

The signs so far are not good. The HZDS is full of genuine democrats with chips on their shoulders about the "Pragocentrism" that the 1990-2 federal government did so little to dispel. But Mečiar himself is prone to authoritarianism of the most dangerous kind -- that of totalitarian law. A totalitarian state differs from a merely authoritarian one in that it is based on its own twisted rules, rules that keep apparatchiks from stepping on one another's toes and, in a perverse way, makes them more efficient. Their beneficiaries call these rules "law." Today in Slovakia, the independent newspaper *Smena* is the subject of a criminal investigation prompted by the color (black rather than blue) of its masthead on the day after Mečiar was re-elected. "We have to find out why they attacked me," Mečiar said when announcing the investigation. And this before a crisis.

Worse still, the HZDS may well fall apart. The "Party of the Democratic Left" (SDL) is preparing ministers to take positions in anticipation of HZDS' break-up in early 1993. Whatever Mečiar's faults, these are the very people who first branded him a "right-wing opportunist" -- the former

Communist Party. Černak's Ministry of the Economy has asked Slovakia's 38 regional offices to re-write an 25-year-old scheme for rationing food, this time ensuring that the new private shops have on stock the supplies that the old state shops were supposed to keep in reserve. Whether this is a routine revision or preparation for a hard winter is not yet clear.

But, sadly, the "balkanization" of Slovakia would not be complete without a war. The Czechs and the Slovaks, no matter what the tensions between their governments, will not fight. But, ever since Slovakia forged ahead with a hydroelectric project on the Danube River, the Hungarians downstream in Budapest have been seething. A collapse of the Slovak economy would likely push the HZDS towards more protectionism, a move that would frustrate the plans of Hungarian farmers in Southern Slovakia to do more business with Budapest. How would the Hungarians respond?

The governing Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) has been drifting into right-wing populism in order to bolster its popularity in the countryside. While its Foreign Minister has claimed to represent Hungarians on both side of its post-1918 borders, he has not yet had the nerve to tangle with the Romanians or the Serbs. But Slovakia does not even have its own army yet. Should the MDF need a small war before the 1994 Hungarian elections, this is the one they can win. Sadder still, the Slovak government, despite its terrible reputation abroad, would probably this time be innocent victims.

Slovakia would not being careening towards independence had it not elected Vladimir Mečiar its Prime Minister. But he won because the dissidents, both in Prague and Bratislava, failed. Unfortunately, Mečiar's movement, with its protectionist policies and deservedly bad reputation among Western businessmen, will not fulfil its promises to improve the Slovak economy. But the irony of a nationalist movement is that it relieves the tensions that it itself has raised. However dark the Slovaks' future may be, it is theirs and theirs alone.

Chandler Rosenberger
Bratislava, Slovakia

Received in Hanover 11/16/92