



European
University
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DEPARTMENT
OF HISTORY
AND
CIVILIZATION

Protests and Parades:

National day commemorations in Hungary and
Czechoslovakia, 1918-1989

Andrea Talabér

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization
of the European University Institute

Florence, 03 June 2016

European University Institute
Department of History and Civilization

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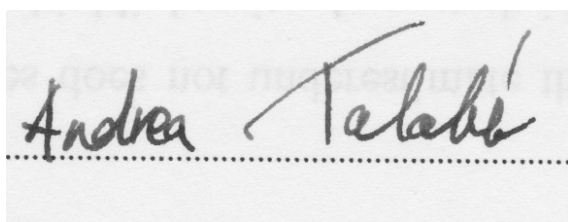
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Abstract

This thesis examines national days in Hungary and Czechoslovakia from their establishment as independent nation-states in 1918 to the collapse of Communism in 1989. The focus is on the capital cities of Budapest and Prague, as the locations of the official commemorations.

In these eighty years both countries underwent major political, social and cultural changes that were reflected in national day commemorations. In the interwar period these countries were free to establish their own commemorative calendars and construct their own national historical narratives. Whilst in Hungary this was a rather straightforward process, in Czechoslovakia establishing the calendar was fought along a number of different battle lines.

During the Second World War Czechoslovakia was occupied by Nazi Germany and dismantled with Slovakia becoming a Nazi ‘puppet state’, whilst Hungary became Hitler’s satellite. National day calendars, rather than simply being completely cancelled, continued in some form from the previous period, as this allowed the Nazis to maintain a semblance of normality.

The most significant overhaul of the national day calendar came with the Communist take-overs. The Communist parties imposed a new socialist culture that included a new set of Soviet-themed national days. However, they could not completely break away from the national days of the independent interwar states. Eventually, especially from the late 1960s, the Communists in both countries found that it was expedient to restore some of the interwar national days, some of which still continue today, thus questioning how radical a break 1989 was.

Studying national days over the *longue durée* enables historians to uncover how the dynamics of political power operated in Central and Eastern Europe over the 20th century. This thesis concludes that national days are an example of both the invention of tradition as well as the resilience of tradition, demonstrating how political regimes are always bound by the broader cultural context.

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Acknowledgement

Completing this thesis would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of many people. My supervisor Professor Pavel Kolář not only provided me with his tremendous support, insights and guidance, but he also willingly read countless drafts of this thesis. My second reader, Professor Lucy Riall, offered a perceptive eye, encouragement and enthusiasm.

Special thanks are due to my two external examiners, Professor Peter Haslinger and Professor Nancy M. Wingfield for their thorough reading of this thesis, their encouraging and insightful comments and for pointing me towards possible future directions for this research.

During the research for this PhD I benefited from two extended stays in Prague and Budapest. These were made possible by an Erasmus scholarship to Charles University in Prague and the Doctoral Support Programme of the Central European University in Budapest. I would like to thank Dr Michal Pullmann at Charles University and Professor László Kontler at the CEU for their hospitality. More pertinently, this research would not have been possible without a studentship awarded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills of the United Kingdom, for which I am especially grateful.

Amassing all the sources and materials would not have been possible without the help of the archivists and librarians of the National Archives of the Czech Republic, the Budapest City Archives, the Hungarian National Archives, the National Library of the Czech Republic, the Slovak National Library and the National Széchenyi Library. I would particularly like to thank Dr Miroslav Michela for sharing some of his sources from the State Archives of Nitra with me, for his insights into national days and above all for his friendship.

Warm thanks go to all my friends and colleagues at the EUI for scholarly discussion, for the two-hour long lunch breaks and for the afternoon teas and coffees. Many thanks go to Vedran Duančić for reading and commenting on parts of this thesis.

On a personal level, I would like to thank my parents for their love, support and encouragement. Their assistance in driving my belongings between Sopron, Florence, Prague and Budapest

several times over the past few years was invaluable. Thanks also to my grandmother who, whenever I was explaining to her just what I was doing at EUI, would always respond by asking me what I had for lunch, thus reminding me of the more important things in life. Lilla Farkas offered a much needed respite during the writing up of this thesis by taking me on weekend trips from Florence.

Last, but not least, thank you to Despina Christodoulou for keeping me company in London, Florence, Budapest, Prague and Athens, for making me cups of tea on demand, even though they often ended up cold and undrunk, and for supporting me through the writing of this thesis.

Introduction

1898 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Franz Joseph's reign on the Austrian throne, and to celebrate the occasion an elaborate Jubilee was organised in the Austrian side of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The Hungarians, the Austrians' partner in the Dual Monarchy, declined to participate in the Jubilee celebrations, because, so they claimed, with the Compromise of 1867 Franz Joseph had been crowned King of Hungary, and hence, it was not Franz Joseph's fiftieth jubilee as their monarch. The Hungarians formally expressed their congratulations to the Emperor, but no actual celebrations took place on Hungarian territory.¹

By the time of Franz Joseph's sixtieth jubilee celebrations ten years later, in 1908, relations between the Czechs and Germans of Bohemia had deteriorated drastically, a product of emerging rival national identities. The Czechs boycotted the procession in honour of the emperor, which was intended to demonstrate the unity of the monarchy by including representatives of all its peoples, because of a dispute with German nationalists over participation of the Czech National Theatre in the jubilee festivals in Vienna.² The Hungarians again did not turn up, on the basis that Franz Joseph's sixtieth jubilee would not be until 1927 as he had only been their king since 1867.

Franz Joseph almost lived long enough to celebrate his seventieth year on the throne, dying just two years before. In any case, the year 1918 was to witness the final dissolution of the empire with the end of the First World War, and the creation of the independent successor states of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The different reactions to the anniversary of Franz Joseph's reign in the Kingdom of Hungary and the Bohemian lands encapsulate their different statuses within the Habsburg Monarchy. The 1867 Compromise meant that the Kingdom of Hungary enjoyed relative independence within the Dual Monarchy, with its own parliament and control over its domestic affairs.³ The Bohemian Lands were yet another part of the

¹ James Shedel, 'Emperor, Church and People: Religion and Dynastic Loyalty during the Golden Jubilee of Franz Joseph' in *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 76, No. 1. pp. 71-92, p. 71, n. 1. For a study of Habsburg imperial celebrations see: Daniel Unowsky, *The Pomp and Politics of Patriotism: Imperial Celebrations in Habsburg Austria, 1848-1916*, West Lafayette IN: Purdue University Press, 2005.

² Nancy M. Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2007, pp. 114-115. [hereafter: Wingfield, *Flag Wars*]

³ For a study on the administrative units of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and on the policies of the Austrian state vis-à-vis nationalism see: Peter Haslinger, 'How to Run a Multilingual Society: Statehood, Administration

Cisleithania, where the Czechs were battling it out with other ethnic and linguistic groups (specifically German-speakers), over the ‘nationalisation’ of public space, particularly in provincial municipalities.⁴ In contrast, to Prague and other parts of the Bohemian Lands in Hungary ‘urban minorities’, especially Germans and Jews ‘were ready to assimilate into the Hungarian majority’.⁵

The Compromise made it possible not only for the Hungarians to boycott Franz Joseph’s jubilee celebrations, but also, for example, to stage their own millennium anniversary in the capital of Budapest in 1896, marking the apparent thousand years since the arrival of the Magyars in the Carpathian Basin.⁶ Moreover, Hungary’s position in the Dual Monarchy also enabled the Hungarians to commemorate their own national days, i.e. other than religious holidays and holidays that referenced the Emperor. These were St Stephen’s Day on 20 August, the day commemorating the founder of the Hungarian state and from 1898 11 April, the anniversary of the signing of the April laws by Ferdinand V that codified some of the demands of the 1848 revolutionaries into law.⁷

In the Bohemian Lands, on the other hand, only religious and imperial holidays were permitted, and the ‘repressive policy of the Austrian state [...] forbade all organized forms of social activity and persecuted any expression of political ideas.’⁸ The expression of national feeling through national days was therefore prohibited. Yet, there was still a burgeoning Czech identity

and Regional Dynamics in Austria-Hungary, 1867-1914’ in Joost Augusteyn and Eric Storm (eds) *Region and State in Nineteenth Century Europe: Nation-building, Regional Identities and Separatism*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 111-128. Concerning Hungary’s position within the Monarchy after 1867 see: pp. 112-115. [hereafter Haslinger, ‘How to Run a Multilingual Society’]

⁴ I use the term Bohemian Lands when discussing the pre-1918 period or pre-1945 developments in the Czech part of Czechoslovakia. After 1945 I use the term Czech Lands. See also: Wingfield, *Flag Wars*, p. xvii. For ethnic conflicts also see for example: Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A local history of Bohemian politics, 1848-1948*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002; Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the language frontiers of Imperial Austria*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2006; Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914*, West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006 or Jan Křen, *Die Konfliktgemeinschaft: Tschechen und Deutsche, 1780-1918*, Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1996.

⁵ Haslinger, ‘How to Run a Multilingual Society’, p. 114.

⁶ See: Ilona Sármany-Parsons, ‘Ungarns Millenniumsjahr 1896’ in Brix, Emil and Stekl Hannes (eds) *Der Kampf um das Gedächtnis: Öffentliche Gedenktage in Mitteleuropa*, Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Verlag, pp. 273-291.

⁷ For 20 August see: Árpád von Klimó, ‘A nemzet Szent Jobbja: A nemzeti-vallási kultuszok funkciójáról’ [The Holy Right of the nation: On the functions of national-religious cults] in *Replika*, Vol. 37, 1999, pp. 45-56, p. 49. and for the anniversary of 1848-49 see: György Gyarmati, *Március hatalma, a hatalom márciusa: Fejezetek Március 15. ünnepelésének történetéből* [The power of March, the march of the power: Chapters from the commemoration of 15 March], Budapest: Paginarium, 1998, p. 19.

⁸ Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 61,

throughout the 19th century, cultivated by individuals such as the historian František Palacký and later Tomáš G. Masaryk, through whom a historical narrative that honoured Bohemian historical figures, chief amongst them Jan Hus, the 15th-century Czech priest and religious reformer, was developed.⁹

By 1918, the Habsburg empire had collapsed and the independent states of Hungary and Czechoslovakia had emerged from its rubble, alongside Austria, Yugoslavia, Poland and Romania. As part of their nation-building processes, both new countries sought to create national day calendars. For the Hungarians, thanks to their already-developed commemorative calendar, this was a relatively straight-forward process. The new element, however, was the loss of two-thirds of Hungarian territory as a result of the Treaty of Trianon of 1920, the peace treaty between Hungary and the Allies. This grievance was aggressively incorporated into the post-1918 national rhetoric and fed into the discourse of the national days. Even so, the loss of these territories made Hungary a mostly ethnically homogenous country. Czechoslovakia's difficulties, on the other hand, stemmed from the fact that it was riven with ethnic and religious cleavages between Catholic and Protestant, Czech and Slovak, Slav and German, which were strongly manifested in the debates over the composition of the national day calendar.

In this thesis I investigate the national days of Hungary and Czechoslovakia – from independence in 1918 to the end of Communism – through a commemorative approach that takes this differentiation between Hungary and the Bohemian Lands in the late Habsburg Empire as its starting point. The two countries, Habsburg successor states with entangled histories, have followed almost parallel paths in the 20th and 21st centuries, yet there are distinct differences in the ways they commemorate: in Hungary, national day commemorations are almost universally acknowledged and widely celebrated, whereas in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic the creation of national day calendars was a long, drawn-out and divisive process, which produced national days that were not often loved and today little commemorated. Their differing statuses in the late Habsburg Empire, whereby the Hungarians

⁹ See for example the 1903 Jan Hus celebrations which purpose was to lay the foundations for a Jan Hus memorial: Cynthia Paces, 'Rotating spheres: Gendered commemorative practice at the 1903 Jan Hus memorial festival in Prague' in *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2000, pp. 523-539. The second half of the 19th century saw the rise of 'national' commemorations throughout Central and Eastern Europe. For Poland see for example: Patrice M. Dabrowski, *Commemorations and the Shaping of Modern Poland*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004. Especially pp. 18-21 where Dabrowski outlines the start of what she refers to as '[t]he age of Polish commemorations' in the second half of the 19th century.

had their own national days for their own heroes and events as well as their own kingdom, while the Bohemian Lands had neither, may account for this to a degree.

Alongside this comparative aspect, what is also fascinating are the continuously changing political and social systems in both countries throughout the period covered. Over the course of the 20th century both Hungary and Czechoslovakia were part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, they then experienced independence after 1918, came under the influence of or were occupied by Nazi Germany after 1938, following which both countries came under the control of the Soviet Union.¹⁰ Each of these new governments/regimes wished to establish its own national day calendar, a potent tool of political legitimisation and control, to commemorate historic figures and events. Moreover, in most cases, each of these new political systems claimed to be the opposite of its predecessor. I am thus interested in the way national days, and their building blocks narratives and symbols, were adopted, adapted and utilised by the different political systems from 1918 to the end of communism in 1989. A running theme of the thesis, then, is how each new regime treats the national day commemorations of its predecessor: even those regimes that claimed to represent a revolution and attempted to introduce a whole new national day calendar still felt the need to keep a hold of elements from the political system they had supposedly overturned.

Narratives

One of the conceptual tools used in this thesis is that of the *narrative*. In very simple terms, I use narrative to mean the ‘story’ of the nation (or a historic episode or significant figure), particularly its historical past from the (mythical) foundations until today. More specifically, this ‘story’ is the one that the nation creates for itself. The (historical or national) narrative does not necessarily reflect historical truth but is related to national identity and how the nation-state perceives its past, which is a reflection of its current identity. Counter and dissenting narratives are also present, some of which I will explore, however the main focus is on the official narratives that are constructed by the official governments and regimes.

National days and official commemorations are especially salient ways of transmitting and reproducing ideas of the historical narrative as they focus on what are considered the most

¹⁰ Since then, both countries abandoned Communism at around the same time, and joined NATO and the European Union together.

important events or individuals in the nation's history. They also supposedly bring together the whole nation/state collectively and officially. One of the characteristics of the national narrative is that it is not strictly defined and it is not necessarily a written narrative (although 'core' versions of it are reproduced in school text books, official publications, etc.), and therefore different versions can exist. Despite this flexibility, national days purport to represent the actual historical truth and an official, state-sanctioned national (historical) narrative.¹¹

Narratives are composed of a series of events that become connected through the telling of the 'story'. By definition, a story has to have a beginning, a middle and an end (or the culmination of the preceding eras), which in the case of the national narratives of Hungary, the Bohemian/Czech lands and Slovakia are basically arranged around mythical origins and freedom, followed by suppression by outside forces and, eventually, reclamation of freedom. These narratives (and especially historical narratives) aim 'to involve the listeners in the narrated events, to let them take part emotionally in the drama.'¹² Moreover, in the case of national days the narrator of the 'story' is usually the ruling elite, particularly in authoritarian states.

Another salient aspect of narratives is that they are flexible, and they can be told and retold: as long as the general overall 'meta-narrative' is maintained, the details can alternate, the sequence of events be rearranged, the perspective from which they are being narrated change. A narrative is also embedded within a broader network of episodes, events, perspectives, voices. More pertinently, given that a narrative is comprised of a beginning, middle and end, as well as various episodes, then the story that is told through a national day can extend to the present day: its beginning may be the historical event or figure commemorated in the national day, but the end of the story may be the present-day nation.

¹¹ See for example: Krijn Thijs, 'The Metaphor of the Master: "Narrative Hierarchy" in National Historical Cultures in Europe' in Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (eds) *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, Writing the Nation Series, 2008, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 60-74. Especially pp. 69-73. Yael Zerubavel discusses the relationship between what she describes as the commemorative narrative and the historical narrative. The commemorative narrative is 'a story about a particular past'. Zerubavel identifies the process of narrativisation as the defining feature of both commemorative and historical narratives, which arrange a series of facts (real or fictional) into a narrative form. See: Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 6.

¹² Jürgen Straub, 'Telling Stories, Making History: Toward a Narrative Psychology of the Historical Construction of Meaning' in Straub (ed) *Narration, Identity and Historical Consciousness*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005, pp. 44-98, p. 57.

Symbols

One of the vehicles – apart from the choreography, speeches or media coverage – through which national days can transmit these narratives is symbols. As anthropologist Jan Kubik has argued in relation to Communism in Poland, new political elites have three choices in what to do with symbols such as national days: they can impose ‘a totally new culture and the socialization of the populace to accept it’; they may embark on ‘partially remodeling the existing culture’; or, as a third possibility they could accept ‘or appearing to accept [...] the existing (political) culture of the country.’¹³ Although Kubik is discussing the possibilities that were open to the Communist parties throughout Eastern Europe following the end of the Second World War, these three options are applicable to almost any form of regime change.

Throughout the 20th century, despite the frequent social and political transformations in Eastern Europe, and more specifically in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, national days and the narratives and symbols that are associated with these days proved to be enduring, multivocal symbols of the state. Kubik notes that those Communist regimes that attempted to introduce a completely new political culture – and he cites the example of Communist Czechoslovakia – were bound to fail. Instead, it seems that most new regimes tend to choose Kubik’s second option, choosing to remodel already existing cultural practices and symbols (such as national days) rather than completely wiping them out or adopting them wholeheartedly. As will be made apparent in this thesis, the more resilient symbols were also those that were ‘multivocal’, symbols which can be interpreted differently by different groups, be attributed different meanings. One such symbol was that of St Stephen, the founder of the Hungarian state, who could be embraced by both liberals and nationalists, each group interpreting him in their own vision, to the extent that even the Communists, who had attempted to erase him from the commemorative calendar, had to consider restoring him. Symbols that had very specific meanings, such as Jan Hus in Czechoslovakia, could be divisive, whereas a weak symbol, such as that of St Wenceslas, which had a weak content and told a vague story, tended to be unable to unite.

¹³ Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power: The rise of Solidarity and the fall of state socialism in Poland*, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, p. 3.

Capitals

Although the contexts for this thesis are Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the main focus will be on commemorations in the capital cities of Budapest and Prague. This was partly to keep the thesis within manageable limits, but also because its primary approach is to analyse the creation and utilisation of national days by the political elites. In this sense, I am interested in the official state versions of national days – especially since it is the state that defines, organises, controls and performs national days and they are, effectively, reflections of the state, of how the state perceives itself.¹⁴ As such, national day commemorations almost invariably, unless there are special historic or symbolic reasons, take place in capital cities. Capital cities are where the organs of the state are to be found, and where the political elites are most often based or meet. They are often also where the events or figures being commemorated may have taken place or been active, or where special monuments to them have been built, which themselves have over time acquired a particular resonance. The physical space of the city is thus itself part of the performance of the national day.¹⁵

As historian Andreas Daum writes in a study of Berlin and Washington as capital cities: ‘[c]apitals are expected to perform specific functions for their nation-states. [...] a capital mediates between its urban space, the surrounding society, and the nation no less than between the nation-state and the international world.’¹⁶ Daum identifies four different functions that capital cities perform: political, economic, social and cultural functions.¹⁷ For my purposes, the cultural function is the most important, as it is through this that the capital enacts its ‘*representative and symbolic functions*’. These include the presence of the parliament, the seat of power, architecture and national memorials and its ‘*performative functions*’, which – although Daum does not include it amongst these events *per se* – the staging of national day

¹⁴ See for example: Hobsbawm, Eric ‘Introduction: Invention of Traditions’ in Hobsbawm, E. and Ranger T. (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 1-14. [hereafter: Hobsbawm ‘Introduction: Invention of Traditions’] and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London and New York: Verso, 2003. [hereafter: Anderson, *Imagined Communities*]

¹⁵ I do not mean to claim that only capital cities are useful in the study of national day commemorations. Other regions, such as borderlands can also offer a unique insight, for example through the contestation of public space by different ethnic or linguistic groups.

¹⁶ Andreas Daum, ‘Capitals in Modern History: Inventing Urban Spaces for the Nation’ in Daum, Andreas W. and Christof Mauch *Berlin-Washington 1800-2000: Capital Cities, Cultural Representation, and National Identities*, Cambridge and Washington DC: Cambridge University Press and German Historical Institute, 2005. pp. 3-28. p. 3.

¹⁷ Ibid. pp. 13-19.

commemorations.¹⁸ The ‘performative function’ gives the capital ‘the ability to stage events and put the political mission of a state and the idea of national identity on display’ and enables the capital to ‘mediate between the nation-state’s past, present, and envisaged future.’¹⁹ National days can thus be seen not simply as commemorations but also as displays, mediating messages about the state and projecting its self-image to the country’s population and internationally.

National days – definitions

National day commemorations often commemorate events in the distant past, while they themselves are annually repeated events that follow a certain ritual choreography, the meanings and explanations of which also lie in the past. A commemorative or even festival atmosphere surrounds them, and they are often holidays from work, separated from the normal organisation of time and daily life. This therefore gives the illusion that they are timeless and unchanging, and adds to their ‘sacredness’; in reality, however, they are most often relatively recent inventions, and in many cases have undergone significant changes over their lifespans.

Yet, they may often have been invented by a new regime, or be already-existing commemorations that a new regime has appropriated and adapted in some way. It is always important for new regimes and governments to establish their own narratives, signs and symbols. As Lynn Hunt argues in relation to the French revolution, ‘[t]here is no government without rituals and without symbols, however, demystified or unmagical government may seem.’²⁰ Moreover, as she continues: ‘[g]overning cannot take place without stories, signs, and symbols that convey and reaffirm the legitimacy of governing in thousands of unspoken ways.’ Any regime or government that wants to overthrow a previous one must also defeat it on the symbolic level and also legitimate itself symbolically. Hunt believes that the challengers ‘must go about inventing political symbols that will express accurately the ideals and principles of the new order.’²¹

Hunt was discussing the Republic established after the French Revolution which, as Mona Ozouf has analysed, formulated not only a whole new set of festivals – such as the *Fête de la*

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 16. and p. 18.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 18.

²⁰ Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1984, p. 54. [hereafter Hunt *Politics, Culture, and Class*]

²¹ Ibid. p. 54.

Fédération, which the first great revolutionary festival to celebrate the establishment of the constitutional monarchy – but also new ways of measuring time with the adoption of the French Revolutionary calendar.²² Moreover, these French Republic festivals were the first models of secular national days. Yet, as discussed above, symbols and national days are often multivocal and hence can be inherited or adapted by different regimes to transmit their messages, or make them more palatable, or at the least to gain the approval of the populace.

National days serve as ‘key markers in national biography’²³ and are ‘invested with extraordinary significance and assigned a qualitatively distinct place in our conception of the past.’²⁴ My interest is not in all ‘significant days’ or all holidays or red letter days but primarily the state holidays which, by virtue of being literally days off work, school and ‘normal life’ in order to commemorate certain aspects of the state, are made ‘different’ and somehow separate.²⁵ Therefore, in this thesis I do not study religious holidays – such as Easter or Christmas – or international holidays – such as New Year’s Day – unless they happen to coincide with national days, such as some saints’ days or 1 May, the feast of work.²⁶ Moreover, I also restrict my study to days that were officially included in the national day calendar through the passing of legislation.

Here a note is necessary on the terminology of national days in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In this thesis I refer to these events in English as national days, primarily to avoid confusion and so as to use one expression throughout the thesis.²⁷ Even so, in both Hungary and Czechoslovakia national days are referred to in a number of different ways, often reflecting a certain hierarchy within the commemorations. In Hungary public holidays – that is days off work – were grouped into two categories: the state holiday (*állami ünnep*), which is the most

²² Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988. [hereafter: Ozouf, *Festivals*]

²³ David McCrone and Gayle McPherson, ‘Marking Time: The Significance of National Days’ in McCrone and McPherson (eds) *National Days: Constructing and Mobilising National Identity*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 212-221. p. 213.

²⁴ Barry Schwartz, ‘The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory’, *Social Forces*, Vol. 61, No. 2, 1982, pp. 374-402, p. 377.

²⁵ See also: Carola Lentz, ‘Celebrating independence jubilees and the millennium: national days in Africa’ in *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2013, pp. 208-216. See especially pp. 208-210.

²⁶ The same guidelines are also used by: Karen Gammelgaard, and Ljiljana Šarić ‘Discursive construction of national holidays in West and South Slavic countries after the fall of communism: Introductory thoughts’ in Šarić, Ljiljana, Karen Gammelgaard and Kjetil Rå Hauge *Transforming National Holidays: Identity discourse in the West and South Slavic countries, 1985-2010*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012, pp. 5-31, p. 6. [hereafter: Gammelgaard *et al.*, ‘Discursive construction of national holidays’]

²⁷ The term ‘national holiday’ would be misleading in this thesis as these commemorative days were not always holidays or days off work.

important national day and national days (*nemzeti ünnep*).²⁸ These categories were used from the interwar period to today.

In Czechoslovakia, the calendar throughout the period 1918 to 1993 was more complex. During the interwar period – apart from religious holidays – public holidays were divided into two categories: state holiday (*státní svátek*) and memorial days (*památné dny*). These were all days off work. With the Communist usurpation of power from 1948 the national day calendar of Czechoslovakia was transformed, and the types of national days were also changed. Three categories of highly hierarchical types of national days were introduced. The most important national day was categorised as a state holiday (*státní svátek*), followed by public holidays (*dny pracovního klidu*). These were all days off work. Another two categories included significant (*významné dny*) and memorable days (*památné dny*). These were not days off work, and were of a lesser status.²⁹ After the fall of Communism a new national day law was passed and the categories of national days were revised again. The most important national days remained in the state holiday category. A new category was introduced under the banner of other holidays (*ostatní svátky*). The categories of significant and memorable days were also kept.

The changing nature of the terms used to categorise national day commemorations reflects the unstable nature of these commemorative events as symbols of the nation. American political scientist Michael E. Geisler argues that national day commemorations ‘are relatively weak and extremely unstable signifiers of national identity’, especially when we compare them to ‘other national symbols’, such as national anthems or flags.³⁰ Even so, I believe that their instability is precisely why these events are of such interest to study over the *longue durée*. Their weakness and instability makes them malleable and changeable, and they can thus be used by different regimes or groups to mean different things. The dramatic social, political and regime changes in Hungary and Czechoslovakia during the 20th century also affected what was commemorated.³¹

²⁸ Although during the discussion of the new national day calendar in 1991, members of the new, democratic Hungarian parliament stressed that the status state holiday is simply a protocol status and not a hierarchical one. See for example: ‘Speech by Tamás Isépy [Christian Democratic People’s Party], Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, Hungarian Parliament, 5 March 1991 at <http://www.parlament.hu/naplo34/084/0840005.html>’ [last accessed: 20 December 2015]

²⁹ I will discuss this further in Chapter Four.

³⁰ Michael E., Geisler, ‘The Calendar Conundrum: National Days as Unstable Signifiers’, in McCrone, David and Gayle McPherson (eds) *National Days*, pp. 10-25. p. 14. [hereafter: Geisler, ‘The Calendar Conundrum’]

³¹ See also: Gammelgaard *et al.*, ‘Discursive construction of national holidays’, p. 10.

The function of national days

Despite their instability as signifiers, national day commemorations are an important device in the construction and reproduction of national narratives as they can mobilise the whole nation or ‘mnemonic community’ to remember a historical event, a shared image of the past.³² The emphasis, as Paul Connerton in his book *How Societies Remember* suggests must be on the word ‘shared’.³³ Participants must have a basic knowledge regarding what is commemorated, they must have access to the ‘background story’. This can be achieved in a number of ways (education, socialisation etc.), but one of the most important aspects in this regard is that these commemorative events are repetitive. These commemorative events happen (usually) annually and on the same day. This repetitive nature ‘automatically implies continuity with the past’³⁴ or, more precisely, these events, as Eric Hobsbawm writes, ‘normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past’.³⁵ In this sense, national days are a perfect example of Hobsbawm’s concept of ‘invented traditions’.

Another interesting aspect of the types of events that are selected as national day commemorations is time. At any one of the periods (and even in the periods preceding 1918) under scrutiny here the spread of events that is commemorated reveals that they can be divided into two separate groups: events that occurred in the distant past (for example the foundation of the Hungarian state by St Stephen or St Wenceslas in the Bohemian lands) and ones that occurred in more recent times (for example the 1848-49 uprising against the Habsburgs in Hungary or the foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918). Eviatar Zerubavel, the sociologist of time, analysed the commemorative calendar of 191 countries and concluded that ‘different qualities’ are attached to the concept of time in all these countries, which he labels as ‘marked’ or ‘extraordinary’ time, and ‘unmarked’ or ‘mere ordinary’ time.³⁶ While ‘unmarked’ or ‘uneventful’ periods ‘of history are essentially relegated to social oblivion’³⁷ – despite covering the vast majority of historical time – it is the “eventful”, ‘historically “significant”’ or ‘sacred periods’ that society collectively remembers and commemorates’. Moreover, it is ‘ritual

³² Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 4. [hereafter Zerubavel *Time Maps*]

³³ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989, p. 3.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 45.

³⁵ Hobsbawm ‘Introduction: Invention of Traditions’, p. 1.

³⁶ Zerubavel *Time Maps*, p. 26.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 45.

commemoration [that] helps mnemonic communities explicitly articulate what they consider historically eventful'.³⁸

This insight into time, memory and community underlines the important role of national day rituals not simply in constructing and articulating history, memory and identity but in creating a sense of 'community' or collective identity amongst the nation. Moreover, through national days, this 'national' or, to borrow Benedict Anderson's phrase, 'imagined community' is experienced as a continuation of the national community of the past: time is flattened and modern Hungarians or Czechs are made members of the same community as medieval Hungarians or Czechs.³⁹

The selection of periods that are considered to be eventful or uneventful in a nation's history is particularly salient. In his study of the commemorative calendars of 191 countries Zerubavel found that the periods that 'mnemonic communities come to regard as their history [are] *unevenly distributed chronologically*'.⁴⁰ In other words, the historical periods are not tidily arranged or divided equally in a nation's commemorative calendar. If we look at the distribution of the dates that are commemorated what is striking is the long stretches of time when seemingly nothing happened, i.e. nothing is commemorated.

National days by their very existence turn the citizens of a country into a collective whole and a community for the purposes of national commemoration, regardless of the extent to which each individual participates in these rituals. They mobilise the concept of a collective community in a very real way: almost everyone within the country on the occasion of a national day shares in the fact that this day is different from regular days, regardless of their own personal level of involvement (whether they are great enthusiasts who line the streets to watch the parade or someone who avoids the commemoration events but is still affected as their workplace is closed and they cannot go to the shops). In his comparison of national days with other types of national symbol such as flags, Michael Geisler makes the point that: 'By sheer virtue of the 24-hour caesura in our daily routines, national days cannot be entirely "overlooked". [...] One may choose not to observe or celebrate a national day, but it is pretty

³⁸ Ibid. p. 29.

³⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

⁴⁰ Zerubavel *Time Maps*, p. 29.

hard to miss'.⁴¹ Regular time is stopped, seemingly placing us in a special 'historical' time that links directly to the idealised past.

Even so, for national days to be successful a number of factors need to be present. Sociologist Gabriella Elgenius suggests in her study of national day commemorations in Denmark, Sweden and Norway that '[d]ifferences in the popularity of national days [in these three countries] suggests that historical prerequisites and national day design are crucial in the making of successful ceremonies.'⁴² Whilst in Norway Constitution Day is widely celebrated, in neighbouring Sweden and Denmark the equivalent national days 'have not appealed to the imagination of the citizens'. A similar pattern has also been observed by historian Vera Simon between another set of very similar neighbours, France and Germany. Whilst Bastille Day 'is generally accepted to be the archetype of national celebration and is often cited as a role-model for other national celebrations', in Germany Reunification Day is a rather sombre affair.⁴³ Similarly, in both of these cases the countries with the successful national day celebrations see these events as uniting and as commemorating a historic watershed, while in those countries where the national days are less successful, although they are officially considered to be important, they are also wrapped up in historical dilemmas. This reflects my observations on Hungary and Czechoslovakia both historically, in the 20th century, and today. Whilst in Hungary national days have proved to be popular days of celebration (and at times anti-government protest) in Czechoslovakia these days were more sombre (and at times divisive), with an emphasis on political speeches rather than festivities.

The innovative aspect of this present study, however, is that it takes both a comparative approach and a long-term one. Moreover, it aims to examine the national day calendars as complete units, rather than isolated commemorations, thus examining the selection of commemorated days as part of a broader process and in relation to each other. As described above, the histories of these two countries are closely linked and entangled, not simply because they were part of the Habsburg/Austro-Hungarian Empire, but because their histories have overlapped greatly even after 1918. The circumstances were at times different, but a common historical timeline can be drawn up for both countries: post-Habsburg, interwar independence;

⁴¹ Geisler, 'The Calendar Conundrum' p. 11.

⁴² Gabriella Elgenius, 'The politics of recognition: symbols, nation building and rival nationalisms' in *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2011, pp. 396-418, p. 412.

⁴³ Vera C. Simon, 'Nations on screen: Live broadcasting of Bastille Day and Reunification Day' in *European Review of History/ Revue européenne d'histoire*, Vol. 15, No. 6, pp. 615-628, p. 616.

association (forced or otherwise) with Nazi Germany during the period of the Second World War; Communist dictatorships between 1948 and 1989, followed by a post-Communist democratic era.

A particular dynamic of this thesis, then, is the dramatic changes that Central Europe generally and Hungary and Czechoslovakia went through during the 20th century. This was a period that was punctuated by dramatic social, cultural and political changes, alternating from authoritarianism to democracy and back to authoritarianism again. My interest here is in how the historical narratives present in national day calendars were adapted for use by one political system to another. How did the democrats of interwar Czechoslovakia and the communists of post-war Czechoslovakia treat Jan Hus? How did the authoritarian regime of interwar Hungary and the communist regime of post-war Hungary respond to the messages of 15 March?

This thesis concludes that the history of national day commemorations is not only a ‘ruptured’ history, but one that is also characterised by surprising continuities. As many studies have shown, at times of dramatic social and political change, the new governing regimes usually introduce a new set of symbolic markers, such as a new group of national day commemorations.⁴⁴ Despite this trend, in both Hungary and Czechoslovakia there were specific national day commemorations that occurred in each of these very different historical periods, even if their content was dramatically rewritten. I thus seek to explain and understand the ways in which national days were reworked, adopted and adapted, contested, rejected and reclaimed.

Aside from the similarities there are, of course, also important differences between the two case studies. As a result of Hungary’s privileged position in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Hungarian politicians and nationalists were able to officially commemorate national days prior to 1918. This was not the case for the Bohemian Lands under the Empire. This could explain to some extent why in Hungary the main question after 1918 was not what should be commemorated, but how and by whom. In contrast, in Czechoslovakia the question was who or what, and why certain events needed to be commemorated. These differences did not only run along ethnic lines – between Czechs and Slovaks – but also along religious lines, between

⁴⁴ A classic study on this is Ozouf, *Festivals*.

Catholics and Protestants.⁴⁵ These questions were not only asked during the interwar period, but also during the Second World War and in the post-1989 period. During the Communist period many of the ‘previously existing’ national day commemorations were still commemorated in some form, although as I will discuss in Chapters Four and Five, their meanings were developed along the lines of Communist ideology. The comparative perspective will enable me to approach these continuities and discontinuities in a more nuanced way.

Moreover, the comparative approach will also enable me to avoid the pitfalls of exploring these national day commemorations only through the prism of national history (specifically, that of my own country, Hungary) and to locate the developments in both these countries within a broader Central European perspective. The thesis thus focuses on Hungary and the Bohemian/Czech Lands of Czechoslovakia. There will be diversions to Slovakia when pertinent, in particular in Chapters One, Two and Three. Slovakia contained (and still does) a large Hungarian minority, while friction between Czechs and Slovaks impeded the smooth adoption of a national day calendar for Czechoslovakia.

Sources

I use a wide variety of primary material, ranging from archival, parliamentary and (local) government sources as well as contemporary publications (such as history books) and newspapers. The primary source material was largely gathered from the National Archive of the Czech Republic, the Hungarian National Archives, the Budapest City Archives as well as from the Nitra State Archives in Slovakia.⁴⁶ The contemporary printed material – such as books, pamphlets etc. – were mainly consulted in the National Library of the Czech Republic, the Slovak National Library and in the National Széchényi Library in Hungary. The sources are in four different languages: Czech, German, Hungarian and Slovak.

The wide range of sources was necessary to be able to study national day commemorations over the long timeframe. Between 1918 and 1989 Hungary and Czechoslovakia experienced at least three different political realities and the type of sources used for each period are reflective of the different political regimes. In the interwar period, parliamentary sources for both countries – especially for Czechoslovakia, where the national day law debate highlighted the

⁴⁵ Ethnic differences also manifested themselves amongst the Czechs and the Germans of Czechoslovakia. See for example: Wingfield, *Flag Wars*, pp. 172-174 on German attitudes towards the commemoration of 28 October.

⁴⁶ I would like to thank Dr Miroslav Michela, who shared his Nitra State Archive Sources with me.

cleavages between the different groups –, proved to be valuable. Parliamentary sources, however became less pertinent for the periods of totalitarian regimes, although in the case of Czechoslovakia the national day law announcement – rather than a debate – during the Communist period offered a great contrast with the interwar period. I also relied on legislation as signposts for major changes within the national day calendar and the parliamentary sources further helped me to interpret these developments.

Local government sources, especially in the interwar period and during the Second World War such as the minutes of the Municipal Council of Budapest proved to be a fruitful source of information on national day commemorations. In Czechoslovakia for the period of the War the Office of the Reichsprotektor of Bohemia and Moravia was also especially rich in sources.

In the Communist era, by the nature of the political system, official Party sources were particularly useful. In Hungary, I especially relied on sources from the Agitation and Propaganda Department, which acted as the main organiser of national days. In Czechoslovakia the most useful sources regarding national day commemorations were found in the archives of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the Central Committee of the National Front.

Throughout the thesis I also used newspaper articles, as reports in the newspapers on the celebrations enabled me to see what actually happened on the official national day commemorations. Where possible I attempted to use a wide range of newspapers to be able to see the commentary by different party and social factions. Even so, at times of totalitarian regimes, this was not possible and thus I relied on the official Party newspapers in the Communist era. Of course, these were heavily censored and reports tended to repeat the same platitudes every year, but they reprinted the official programme and also the speeches by leading Party comrades.

Contemporary publications – especially history books and special anniversary publications – also proved invaluable. These – usually – official publications provided an extended version of the official narrative on these commemorative days and the figures that were being commemorated. For example, once the Communist takeover in Hungary was complete the figure of St Stephen, the mythical founder of the Hungarian state was cancelled from the 20 August national day. The day was also renamed Constitution Day from St Stephen Day.

However, as the first king of Hungary he was still included in the official history textbooks and thus the Communist interpretation of Stephen could be extracted from these publications.

Using mainly official sources also has its disadvantages. These sources were especially useful for my main aim which was to study national day commemorations over a long timeframe to explore how the different regimes over time utilised commemorative days. In each period I tried to cover the main threads/ events of opposition to the official national days mainly through police sources – such as in the case of Hungarian minorities in Slovakia and their attitudes towards Czechoslovak and Hungarian national days, or the protests by Czechs in Prague during the Protectorate – or through the secondary literature. The disadvantage of this approach was that I was only able to cover the main protests, and not the output and views of the protesters themselves. Even so, within the scope of this thesis it would not have been possible to gather bottom-up sources.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured chronologically and is divided into three sequential parts: the interwar period, Second World War and Communism. The first part of the thesis, the interwar period, is divided into two thematic chapters. Chapter One asks why the commemoration of medieval saints and martyrs became key dates in the national day calendars following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. These medieval figures were considered not only to prove the historical longevity of the nation, but also to legitimise the new nation-states that were being born after 1918. Even so, in Hungary following the Treaty of Trianon and the loss of two-thirds of the country's territory, St Stephen's Day – the medieval founder of the mythical Hungarian state – was celebrated as evidence that the Treaty was an injustice. In Czechoslovakia, the choice of which medieval hero(es) should be commemorated, who should be commemorated in which territory, and even whether these figures should be commemorated at all was the main contention. Many in the governing elite of the Hrad (Castle), amongst them President Tomáš G. Masaryk, wished to commemorate Jan Hus, who symbolised an anti-Catholic and anti-Habsburg tradition. This was opposed, naturally, by Czech and German Catholics and Slovaks, who looked to medial figures such as St Wenceslas, Jan Nepomucký, or even Ss Cyril and Methodius, as alternatives or counter-balances.

In Chapter Two, I discuss those national days that commemorated more recent historic events. For Hungary, this was the 1848-49 revolution, commemorated on 15 March. The day did not

become an official national day until 1927, by which time it was appropriated by the social democrats. Even after it became an official national day, the Horthy regime remained rather ambiguous towards the day, feeling its revolutionary and democratic dimensions were a threat. In Czechoslovakia, the days were 28 October, the anniversary of the foundation of the state in 1918 and 2 July, commemorating the Battle of Zborov of 1917, the first victory of the Czechoslovak legionnaires over the armies of Austro-Hungary. 28 October came to be challenged by the Slovaks, in a kind of counter-attack to Czech proposals to commemorate Jan Hus. Chapter Two also deals with how the Hungarian minorities celebrated 15 March in Slovakia and what their attitudes were towards 28 October.

Chapter Three asks how national days could be commemorated during the Second World War, under Nazi occupation and oversight. Hungary became Nazi Germany's 'reluctant' satellite state, in the hopes that the territories 'lost' as a result of the Treaty of Trianon would be reversed. Ironically, the most coveted territories of the *Felvidék* and Transylvania now belonged to Slovakia and Romania respectively, both allies of Nazi Germany. Slovakia had by now become an 'independent' puppet state, whilst the Czechs were living under the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. In the Protectorate Nazi officials attempted to continue with the commemorations of St Wenceslas as they believed that he represented good historical relations between Germans and Czechs, and the contemporary Czechs would thus be easier to 'Germanise'. Instead, the saint's day and other national days became an opportunity for symbolic protest by Czech people and the resistance. The Slovak leaders, on the other hand, were able to establish or consolidate national days that they perceived to be central to Slovak national identity.

The Communist period is the subject of Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Four seeks to understand how, in the period up until 1956, the Communist parties in both Hungary and Czechoslovakia attempted to create new socialist societies that still utilised historical narratives. These narratives derived from some of the previously established national day commemorations, especially those that could be connected to the rhetoric of revolutionary traditions. In Hungary this day was the anniversary of 1848-49 on 15 March, whilst in Czechoslovakia Jan Hus Day was chosen. Even so, once the Communists had completely monopolised power in 1948, these nationally-oriented days were demoted in the hierarchy of national days and those with a Soviet-theme, such as Liberation Day and 1 May, were installed in their place.

Chapter Five explores the fate of national day commemorations from 1956 to 1989. In Hungary following the 1956 revolution and the de-Stalinisation efforts national day commemorations also underwent certain modifications. The previously not commemorated Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 was given its own national day. In the mid-1960s the anniversaries of the 1848-49 revolution, the Hungarian Soviet Republic and Liberation Day became known as the Revolutionary Youth Days, their aim supposedly being educate the youth. The biggest transformation was that of 20 August, which from 1949 no longer commemorated St Stephen and the foundation of the Hungarian state, but the 1949 Stalinist Constitution. Even so, from the mid-1960s Stephen was restored to the narrative, this time as King Stephen. By the 1980s the official commemorations of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party were being challenged by the emerging opposition groups, especially on the anniversary of 1848-49.

In Czechoslovakia the changes were subtler. De-Stalinisation did not happen until the early 1960s, and national day commemorations more or less continued on in the same vein till then. Attempts were made in 1968 to reform the system during the Prague Spring, as 1 May that year will show. Whilst some changes were introduced to national day commemorations, significant developments – on a par with those in Hungary – did not happen until the 1980s. This reflects the more rigid nature of the Czechoslovak communist regime, in contrast with the more liberal communism of Hungary.

After 1989, as is discussed in the Conclusion, things had almost come full circle. With the end of communism, countries of the former Eastern bloc shed their Soviet days and looked back to those of the interwar period. Both Hungary and Czechoslovakia today commemorate more-or-less the same national days as when they first became independent states in 1918. Even so, this 'restoration' was not even: while Hungary slipped naturally back into its commemorations of St Stephen and 15 March, the Czech Republic commemorates the foundation of a state that no longer exists (Czechoslovakia).

Chapter One

Stephen, Wenceslas, Hus: Medieval figures in the building of the modern nation-state

In his survey of national days in 191 countries, the sociologist of time Eviatar Zerubavel observed that ‘around the entire world, only nine countries actually commemorate on their national holidays historical events that occurred between 680 and 1492’.¹ Eight of these countries are in Europe (India being the ninth), including Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Furthermore, this period neatly covers what is conventionally called the medieval period or the Middle Ages. This underlines the importance of medieval history to national historical narratives in Europe, and particularly in the countries that are the subject of this thesis.² More pertinently, the subjects commemorated in Hungary, and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic and Slovakia are not events but historical figures, who play an important role in the historical and commemorative narratives of both Hungary and the Bohemian lands. Figures such as St Stephen, the king and founder of Hungary, St Wenceslas, the Duke of Bohemia, and the Czech religious reformer Jan Hus are used in the national historical narratives to signify the deep historical roots of the new nation-state, to cement its position in Europe (both after 1918 and 1989) and to represent its political values. This was especially important in the period after 1918, when these new European states were created. The peace negotiations following the Great War and the final breakdown of the Habsburg Empire required Hungarians and Czechoslovaks literally to compete – and with each other – using historical justifications for the existence and boundaries of their new states.

Stephen, Wenceslas and Hus had been present in the collective memory of their respective nations since at least the 19th century, but it was only after 1918 – especially in the case of Czechoslovakia – that they could be officially commemorated as an embodiment of the state. Yet, throughout the 20th century, this central position has often been challenged and

¹ Eviatar Zerubavel, ‘Calendars and History: A Comparative Study of Social Organization of National Memory’ in Olick, Jeffrey K. (ed), *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts and Transformations in National Retrospection*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003, pp. 315-337, p. 330.

² See for example the ‘Introduction’ by Clare A. Simmons in *Medievalism and the Quest for the Real Middle Ages*, by Clare A. Simmons (ed.), London: Frank Cass, 2001, pp. 1-28. On East-Central Europe, see the chapters in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and disjunctures in the 19th and 20th centuries, Volume I*, Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (eds), Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2004.

undermined and their commemorations sometimes completely removed from the calendar, invariably in a reflection of the political context and the regime of the time. In this chapter I investigate how these three medieval figures came to be commemorated in the period after independence in 1918 until the outbreak of the Second World War. I am interested in why these new nation-states looked back to medieval figures to symbolise, legitimise or represent them and in how complex the process of establishing commemorative calendars was: was this a straightforward process or was it a convoluted and disputed one, and if so where did the fault lines lie? These commemorative calendars were not comprised solely of days dedicated to medieval figures, however, and modern ‘civic’ or military events were also commemorated, as will be discussed in Chapter Two.

In Hungary, the medieval figure selected for primary commemoration was St Stephen (*Szent István király*), the king and founder of the Hungarian state, who reigned from c. 997–1038. St Stephen is the predominant figure in the national and cultural identity of Hungary: not only is his national day a major event, but other political symbols associated with him, such as his crown and mummified right hand, are ever prevalent in Hungarian social and political life, while references to St Stephen are legion in Hungarian political rhetoric.³ The most prominent national day in the Hungarian calendar since independence was, and still is, 20 August, the anniversary of when he was canonised and made a saint in 1083, although the event actually celebrated is the foundation of the state in AD 1000.⁴ In Czechoslovakia another medieval ruler was commemorated, St Wenceslas, the 10th-century Duke of Bohemia from 921–929. He was assassinated on 28 September 929, it is believed by his pagan brother Boleslav, and in the interwar period this date was commemorated as St Wenceslas Day. The Czechs also commemorated Jan Hus Day on 6 July, the late 14th-/early 15th-century religious reformer and martyr who was burned at the stake on 6 July 1415.

These three medieval figures had been important in the creation of national identity and a national historical narrative from the 19th century and even earlier. Their usefulness was magnified in the interwar period as, in the eyes of the political actors, they helped to legitimate and consolidate Hungary and Czechoslovakia on the post-1918 political map of Europe,

³ See, for example: Árpád von Klimó, ‘A nemzet Szent Jobbja: A nemzeti-vallási kultuszok funkcióiról’ [The Holy Right of the nation: On the functions of national-religious cults] in *Replika*, Vol. 37, 1999, pp. 45–56. [hereafter Klimó ‘A nemzet Szent Jobbja’].

⁴ See: Robert Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest*, DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005, p. 110. [hereafter: Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest*]

showing that they had existences as state formations before being incorporated into the Habsburg Empire. The perceived roles of Stephen and Wenceslas as founders of the 'original' medieval states of Hungary and Bohemia gave them added symbolic weight for the creation of the modern states. The function of Jan Hus is more complicated, as his commemoration strained cleavages within Czechoslovakian society rather than created unity. Yet, he was promoted by many within the Bohemian lands, in particular the political elite and Protestants, as a symbol of democracy and progress. He may not have underlined historical and territorial unity, as Stephen and Wenceslas did, but he represented a democratic and anti-German/-Austrian identity among the Czechs, which had added value in this period.

More generally, however, the medieval past was becoming a period of fascination in 19th and early-20th century Europe. Medieval figures were being 'rediscovered' in the 19th century when the Romantics and scholars sought continuity with the past in order to promote the territorial claims of one particular ethnic group over another.⁵ In this period the attention of scholars and historians also turned to the construction of group identities and the construction of a shared past.⁶ However, to achieve these goals it was no longer viable to symbolise the nation with 'the old mould of heroes', i.e. kings and military leaders, but the new symbolic discourse asked for 'genuine great men, who rose to prominence, not because of their privileged background, but due to their contribution to the destiny of the nation'.⁷ In many cases this led to the re-evaluation of heretics and religious reformers in the nation's historical canon, as was the case with Jan Hus in the Bohemian lands.⁸

⁵ Monika Baár, 'Heretics into National Heroes: Jules Michelet's Joan of Arc and František Palacký's John Hus' in Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 128-148. p. 136 [hereafter Baár, 'Joan of Arc and Hus'], and Miroslav Hroch, 'National Romanticism' in Balázs Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček (eds) *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945) Texts and Commentaries Volume II: National Romanticism – The Formation of National Movements*, pp. 4-18. p. 6. [hereafter Hroch, 'National Romanticism']

⁶ Hroch, 'National Romanticism' p. 6.

⁷ Baár, 'Joan of Arc and Hus' p. 18. See also Paul Stephenson's study, *The Legend of Basil the Bulgar-slayer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, for the use of this Byzantine emperor in early-20th-century Greece.

⁸ See for example: Baár, 'Joan of Arc and Hus' on how Joan of Arc and Jan Hus were transformed into 'acceptable' national symbols by two 19th-century historians, Jules Michelet and František Palacký respectively. For an example of how Joan of Arc became an all-encompassing national symbol, used by both the left and the right see: James F. McMillan, 'Reclaiming a martyr: French Catholics and the Cult of Joan of Arc, 1890-1920' in Diana P. Wood, (ed) *Martyrs and Martyrologies: Papers Read at the 1992 Summer Meeting (Glasgow) and the 1993 Winter Meeting (London) of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 359-370.

Even so kings were not fully out of favour with 19th-century national thinkers, especially since they helped to promote the apparent historical longevity of the nation and the importance of territory. One of the most efficient ways to prove historical longevity and territorial belonging was the utilisation of the mythical founders of the state in the national discourse. These foundational figures serve two, very much interlinked purposes. They legitimise the present-day existence of the nation, even if the nation was under foreign rule for a period, and they also legitimise the territorial space that these nations claim as their own. This point is especially salient in both the countries under scrutiny, as territorial disputes are present in both cases. In fact, the historical territories of both the Bohemian lands and Hungary can be referred to in terms of St Wenceslas and St Stephen as ‘the Crown Lands of St Wenceslas’ or the ‘Crown Lands of Bohemia’ and the ‘Crown Lands of St Stephen’.⁹

In this chapter, therefore, in order to examine how these cults came to represent their respective nations after 1918, I also aim to understand the significant developments in the preceding 19th century and earlier. All three of these cults went through a great transformation (St Stephen and St Wenceslas) or were placed at the forefront of the national narrative (Jan Hus) during the ‘national revivals’. These transformations very much impacted on how these previously primarily religious cults and, by now, national days, were utilised in the post-1918 period. These cults also played a crucial role within the symbolic landscape of Budapest and Prague, through the erection of statues as well as the physical act of their commemoration, and this 19th- and 20th-century urban transformation will also be touched upon.

St Stephen

The cult of St Stephen can be traced to the 11th century, almost immediately after his death in 1038. Even so, it was not until the end of the 18th and through the 19th century that the cult started to shift from a religious, Church commemoration to a national, secularised one (alongside the parallel religious commemoration).¹⁰ His cult was promoted by the Habsburgs as a way of strengthening the loyalty of the Hungarian nobility to the Habsburg rulers. The Habsburg emperor (or empress, in the case of Maria Theresa) was also the king of Hungary (even in the case of Maria Theresa) – just as they were also the king of Bohemia – and were

⁹ The Hungarian phrase was coined by Ferenc Deák in 1861. Ferenc Deák, ‘Zágrábmegye körlevele és az egyesülés’ [Circular of Zagreb county and the unification] in *Pesti Napló*, 24 March 1861, pp. 1-3, p. 3. [hereafter: Deák, ‘Zágrábmegye körlevele’] For the Czech phrase I have not been able to find an origin, and it is also less used.

¹⁰ Klimó, ‘A nemzet Szent Jobbjá’ pp. 46-47.

crowned as such with the crown of St Stephen. Maria Theresa founded the Order of St Stephen in 1764, and returned the Holy Right to Buda from Croatia in 1771. More significantly, she ordered that the Holy Right be carried around Buda on Stephen's feast day, thus establishing the traditional ritual of the procession and a day of commemoration for him. A mass was also held, followed by feasting and games for the people.¹¹

In 1819 the rules for the event were laid down by Archduke Joseph, Palatine of Hungary. Representatives of the Hungarian nobility were called to attend the procession, which served to further integrate the noble elite into politics.¹² It was with Palatine Joseph's support that St Stephen's Day became 'one of the most impressive religious holidays in Hungary, yearly celebrated with devotion and solemnity.'¹³ The procession, however did not only aim at integrating the Hungarian noble elite, but it also showed the 'corporate order' during the procession upon which the authority of the ruling house rested: 'The alliance of throne, town and altar was spatially illustrated in the procession's route from the royal palace to Buda parish church and in the close proximity of the archbishop and the archduke in the procession.'¹⁴

Until the 1848 uprising St Stephen's Day and the Holy Right procession were very much a religious, Church affair.¹⁵ Hungarian nationalists started to be critical of the day in the early 1840s, arguing that it was not a national day with all the religious and German elements that were associated with it.¹⁶ They were, however supportive of commemorating St Stephen. The issue of language was also tied up with the broader political controversies of the time, especially with the nationalist movement's calls for the use of the Hungarian language in the Church. With the 1848-49 revolution, however, St Stephen's Day became more nationalised and politicised.

The growing importance of the procession for Hungarian national identity and as a means to establishing a Hungarian political culture and symbolic system was further illustrated during the 1848-49 uprising when key figures of the revolution – István Széchenyi, Lajos Kossuth and

¹¹ Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest*, p. 110.

¹² Klimó, 'A nemzet Szent Jobbja' p. 49.

¹³ Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest*, p. 110.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 111.

¹⁵ Gábor Gyáni, 'Kommemoratív Emlékezet és Történelmi Igazolás' [Commemorative Memory and Historical Justification] in Vespéry, László (ed) *Szent István és az államalapítás*, Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2002, pp. 569-581. p. 570. [hereafter, Gyáni 'Kommemoratív Emlékezet és Történelmi Igazolás']

¹⁶ Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest*, p. 112.

Bertalan Szemere – all attended the procession.¹⁷ Thus, the achievements of the 1848-49 uprising were not only political and social but, as Gábor Gyáni highlights, they also marked the starting point of the process of making 20 August and St Stephen's Day into a national event.¹⁸ Even so, the results were not immediate. The 1867 Compromise which established the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary did not result in major changes to the content of the 20 August holiday, which was by then becoming increasingly popular also outside of Pest-Buda, as the two cities that later unified as Budapest were then jointly known.¹⁹ It was not until 1895 that St Stephen's Day became a fully nationalised commemorative event. By this time the number of participants reached into the many thousands, and from this year on state buildings displayed the national flag,²⁰ although in legislative terms it was only in 1920 that St Stephen's Day officially became a national day.²¹

In addition to the Holy Right, another important symbol of the nation is connected to St Stephen, namely the Holy Crown, today housed in the Hungarian Parliament. According to the popular legend, the Crown was given to Stephen by Pope Sylvester II. Art historians in the 19th and 20th centuries began to question this myth, however, and it is now widely acknowledged that Stephen never actually wore this crown.²² Even so, as Hungarian historian Tibor Glant observes 'the myth stuck': the Crown is still very much connected to St Stephen and the doctrine of the Holy Crown is 'an integral part of Hungarian constitutional tradition.'²³ The Crown also came to symbolise the territorial integrity of the nation from 1790, when the Hungarian diet 'claimed to legislate for the other Lands (*regna*) under the Hungarian crown.'²⁴ Before 1790 this legislative power only extended over Hungary proper. The conflation of the symbol of the crown with the territory of Hungary and its political exploitation became apparent after the 1830s when 'the liberal nationalists called for all the Lands of the Hungarian crown to be reunited in a single governmental system' as part of the efforts to establish an

¹⁷ Klimó, 'A nemzet Szent Jobbja' p. 49.

¹⁸ Gyáni 'Kommemoratív Emlékezet és Történelmi Igazolás' pp. 570-571.

¹⁹ Klimó, 'A nemzet Szent Jobbja' p. 50.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Gyáni, 'Kommemoratív Emlékezet és Történelmi Igazolás' p. 571.

²² Péter László, 'The Holy Crown of Hungary, Visible and Invisible' in *SEER*, Vol. 81, No. 3, 2003, pp. 421-510, pp. 424-425. [Hereafter: László, 'The Holy Crown of Hungary']

²³ Tibor Glant, 'American-Hungarian Relations and the Return of the Holy Crown' in Hupchick, Dennis P. and R. William Weisberger (eds), *Hungary's Historical Legacies: Studies in Honor of Steven Béla Várdy*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, pp. 168-186, esp. p. 168.

²⁴ László, 'The Holy Crown of Hungary' pp. 421-510, esp. p. 458. The crown lands included the Kingdom of Hungary (including the Principality of Transylvania and the former Voivodeship of Serbia and Banat of Temeschwar), the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia and the City of Fiume with territory.

independent Hungarian state.²⁵ This underscores the links between Stephen and the Crown, and the concept of the Crown as symbolising constitutional rule over what are considered the historical Hungarian lands. In this sense, Stephen/the Crown were presented as historical ‘evidence’ and a justification for Hungarian constitutional autonomy over the ‘lands under the Hungarian crown’ before independence in 1918. After 1918 and the Treaty of Trianon they were used to promote the ‘rightness’ of Hungarian claims to these crown lands.

The significance of the crown, as a national symbol and a religious relic, was confirmed in the 1848 April laws,²⁶ which promised greater Hungarian autonomy and were passed in response to the March uprising, which ‘ordained the creation of “the complete *álladalmi* [state] unity of the territory under the Hungarian Holy Crown”’.²⁷ These laws established a Magyar state that was to have its own Diet or parliament and control its own budget, military and foreign policy. It was to be united with the Austrian Empire only in the figure of the king-emperor. Although Emperor Ferdinand I of Austria (in Hungary and Bohemia known as Ferdinand V) ratified these laws on 11 April 1848, the Austrians no longer recognised them after the eventual defeat of the Hungarian revolution in 1849. Nonetheless the April Laws will play a significant role in the commemoration of the 1848-49 revolution at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁸

Despite the failed uprising, efforts for autonomy continued until the Compromise of 1867. A few years before, in 1861, a new phrase had been coined by Ferenc Deák, the Hungarian statesman and Minister of Justice in the Batthyány government (the first autonomous government after the April laws) and one of the key architects of the Compromise. In an article discussing the constitutional standing of the Croatian Lands of the Crown of Zvonimir in the newspaper *Pesti Napló*, on 24 March 1861 Deák referred not to the ‘Lands of the Holy Crown’, but to the ‘Lands of the Crown of St Stephen’.²⁹ Deák’s phrase came to be used widely,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ 11 April commemorated the signing of the so-called April (or March) Laws (*Áprilisi törvények*) in 1848 by Ferdinand V. The law was passed by the Hungarian Diet that at the time had its seat in *Pozsony* (today Bratislava, in Slovakia). The Laws were more or less based on the Twelve Point manifesto that was circulated in Pest-Buda on 15 March 1848 when the revolution erupted. They granted Hungarian control over the National Guard, national budget and foreign policy and also removed serfdom. After the crushing of the Hungarian revolution the Laws were largely void, but Hungary did gain autonomy within the Habsburg Empire after the 1867 Compromise (*Ausgleich/Kiegyezés*). György Gyarmati, *Március Hatalma a Hatalom Márciusa: Fejezetek Március 15. Ünneplésének Történetéből* [The Power of March, the March of the Powers: Chapters from the commemoration of 15 March] Budapest: Paginarum, 1998, p. 31. [hereafter: Gyarmati, *Március Hatalma*]

²⁷ László, ‘The Holy Crown of Hungary’ p. 459.

²⁸ Gyarmati, *Március Hatalma*, pp. 10-11.

²⁹ Deák, ‘Zágrábmegye körlevele’

although in legal enactments the phrase ‘Lands of the Hungarian Crown’ remained in use until the end of Austro-Hungary.³⁰ Deák perhaps chose to talk more specifically of the lands of the Crown of St Stephen as the Croatian lands were coming to be described as the lands of the Crown of Zvonimir, the 11th-century Croatian king. This would make the Hungarian crown lands less of an abstract concept and attach to them the glory of a medieval king and saint. This was particularly important as this term could make Hungarian claims stand out amongst all the other claims for greater autonomy being put forward by the peoples under Austrian imperial rule.

The importance of Deák’s phrase will be seen especially during the interwar and the post-1989 periods, when irredentists are still today employing it to highlight the ‘injustice’ of the Treaty of Trianon and their desire to reclaim the ‘lost’ territories. The legacy of Trianon was to haunt all efforts at conceiving and representing the nation after 1920, and the sense of grievance and national feeling it engendered was to be a driver in the creation of a national day calendar throughout the interwar period, even until today (during the Communist period, this sense of grievance was suppressed). Unlike, as we shall see, in the case of Czechoslovakia, where the ethnically and religiously and hence symbolically divided nation created problems in constructing a national day calendar, Hungary was a relatively ethnically and culturally homogenous country, meaning that its choices for who or what was to be commemorated were relatively obvious. Although, the question of how and by whom – which political entities – these events should be commemorated arose repeatedly. The irony is, however, that it was the Treaty of Trianon that made Hungary so homogenous – without the loss of its former territories, Hungary would have had large communities of Slovaks, Romanians, Serbs and Croats within its borders, who may have been less willing to commemorate St Stephen or 15 March.

Ss Wenceslas and Nepomucký

In Bohemia, the equivalent phrase ‘lands of the Crown of St Wenceslas’ was not used, and the most common national territorial reference was simply the phrase ‘Bohemian lands’. Even though there was literally a crown of St Wenceslas and the St Wenceslas cult has the oldest, continuous tradition in the Bohemian lands, his figure did not have the same resonance for the Bohemian ‘national revival’ as St Stephen’s did for the Hungarians. St Wenceslas could not play the wholly unifying role that St Stephen did in Hungary, given his position as a Catholic

³⁰ László, ‘The Holy Crown’, pp. 459-460.

saint when most of the Czech nationalists of the 19th century and early 20th century were proponents of the radical church reformer Jan Hus. Moreover, the historian of the Czech national revival František Palacký considered Wenceslas as having compromised with the Germans, which made him a problematic figure when attempting to construct a historical narrative based on overthrowing the Habsburgs or, later, fighting the Nazis.³¹

Wenceslas, the Duke of Bohemia, was martyred when he was murdered by his pagan brother Boleslav on 28 September c. 929. His relics, according to medieval chronicles, were transferred to the church of St Vitus in Prague from Stará Boleslav three years after his death on 4 March.³² In the eleventh century, the cult of St Wenceslas was mainly a 'regular liturgical celebration', twice a year, on 28 September and on 4 March, with the former date also serving as a post-harvest celebration.³³ In the Middle Ages Wenceslas also became the patron saint of the Czech lands and he was also portrayed as 'the eternal ruler of the heavens'; before battles soldiers would sing the St Wenceslas Chorale and would march into battle under Wenceslas' banner.³⁴

St Wenceslas remained popular throughout the 17th and 18th centuries amongst Catholics, although the most popular Catholic saint in the Bohemian lands in this general period was Jan Nepomucký (1340s-1393). This 14th-century Bohemian martyr's cult was rigorously promoted in the Bohemian lands by the Habsburgs as part of their re-Catholicisation campaign after the Battle of White Mountain. From the town of Pomuk in southwest Bohemia, Nepomucký was a priest and religious advisor to the German king of Bohemia Wenceslas IV, who eventually had him killed for unclear reasons. The manner of his killing – being thrown into the River Vltava – had a strong Prague resonance, and his statue is today one of the most distinctive on the Charles Bridge. Efforts were made from the late 17th century to promulgate Nepomucký's cult and for him to be canonised by the Habsburgs, the Catholic Church in Prague and Bohemia, and elite German-speaking families in Prague.³⁵ His grave was opened in 1719, when his tongue was found fully preserved, apparently symbolising God's protection

³¹ Robert Pynsent, *Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 1994, p. 198. [hereafter: Pynsent, *Questions of Identity*]

³² Lisa Wolverton, *Hastening Toward Prague: Power and Society in the Medieval Czech Lands*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, p. 157.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Jiří Rak, *Bývali Čechové ...: české historické mýty a stereotypy* [The Czechs of Yesteryear: Czech historical myths and stereotypes], Jinočany: H&H, 1994, p. 37. [hereafter Rak, *Bývali Čechové*]

³⁵ Howard Louthan, *Converting Bohemia: Force and Persuasion in the Catholic Reformation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 280-300. [hereafter: Louthan, *Converting Bohemia*]

of the Czech language for some Bohemian nationalists in the 18th century.³⁶ His canonisation followed in 1729.

Habsburg support for Nepomucký's cult and canonisation led Czech nationalists in the 19th and 20th centuries to claim, as Howard Louthan describes it, that 'Nepomuk was a Habsburg invention foisted on the nation to suppress allegiance to the kingdom's true saint, Jan Hus'. Indeed, the image of a swan (Nepomucký) defeating a goose (Hus) was part of the iconography of Nepomucký's beatification in 1721. Nepomucký's supporters portrayed him also during his canonisation as a 'counter-Hus' symbol, who came to correct the Protestant errors.³⁷ Towards the second half of the 19th century, Czech nationalists were getting their own back, describing Jan Nepomucký's cult as the 'Jesuit darkness', and it became the antithesis of the cult of Jan Hus in the new historical narrative that was being constructed.³⁸

There are parallels here with Hungary: in the 18th century, the Habsburgs promoted St Stephen's cult – as they did Nepomucký's in Bohemia – in order to inculcate loyalty to the empire. By the later 19th and early 20th centuries, with the 'national revivals' and independence, Nepomucký's cult was under siege from the Czechs while Stephen had become the pre-eminent national symbol of Hungary. The reasons are obvious: Nepomucký was effectively plucked from thin air in the 18th century, while Stephen's cult was much older and related to a much earlier independent Hungarian state. Nepomucký had a dynamic rival in Jan Hus, and both came to symbolise opposing camps in the politics of early Czechoslovakia. While Nepomucký could have been promoted as a 'national' figure who had stood up to the German king of Bohemia, this narrative was too convoluted. Most importantly, Stephen was a coherent and historic political symbol for an independent Hungary.

A similar role could have been played by Wenceslas in Czechoslovakia, but he too did not resonate symbolically in the same way. In the 19th century his cult, along with other saintly cults, was re-examined and many of his associated ceremonial elements were also revived: for example, in 1836 Ferdinand V of Hungary and Bohemia (Ferdinand I of Austria) was still crowned king of Bohemia by the Knights of the Order of St Wenceslas. Nonetheless, the

³⁶ Pynsent, *Questions of Identity*, p. 204. Pynsent points out that, thanks to a 'scientific investigation' in 1973, we now know that the tongue is 'actually a clump of brain tissue.' (p. 204.)

³⁷ Louthan, *Converting Bohemia*, p. 293.

³⁸ Vít Vlnas, *Jan Nepomucký, česká legenda*, Prague: Mladá fronta, 1993, p. 235. [hereafter: Vlnas, *Jan Nepomucký*]

Wenceslas cult, along with Nepomucký's cult gradually came into conflict with the legend of Jan Hus, which was promoted in particular by the historian František Palacký and, towards the end of the 19th century, also by Tomáš G. Masaryk, president of the First Czechoslovak Republic.³⁹ The new Czechoslovak state's ideology clearly distanced itself from the Nepomucký cult by 'interpret[ing] the creation of the independent state as the victorious consummation of the Czech Reformation.'⁴⁰ Nepomucký statues all over Czechoslovakia were toppled, on 3 November 1918 a group of nationalists attempted to topple the saint's statue on Charles Bridge into the Vltava – re-enacting the way Nepomucký was killed – but they were unsuccessful.⁴¹

Despite challenges to Wenceslas' role as a cult figure in the 19th century, he was still making his mark on the urban landscape as part of the growing 'national revival'. On what is today known as Wenceslas Square in Prague, there had been a fountain with the equestrian statue of St Wenceslas by the sculptor Jan Jiří Bendl from 1678 to 1879. Until 1848 this square was called Horse Market (*Koňský trh*), but was renamed after the Bohemian patron saint in 1848.⁴² In the second half of the nineteenth century Prague underwent a rapid urban transformation: for example, the construction of the Vinohrady district that closed off the top of Wenceslas Square.⁴³ It was also decided that a building that would house the National Museum needed to be constructed at the top of Wenceslas Square, and plans were made to erect a new Wenceslas statue in front of the new Museum.⁴⁴ A public competition for the statue was announced in 1894, the winner being Josef Václav Myslbek, whose St Wenceslas statue surrounded by four Czech saints was unveiled in 1912.⁴⁵

As was the case all over Europe at the time, historical state rights in Bohemia became a pressing issue in the second half of the nineteenth century. After 1860, with 'the revival of constitutional political life in the empire', the Bohemian nobility supported either the centralist (supporting

³⁹ Rak, *Bývali Čechové*, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁰ Vlnas, *Jan Nepomucký*, p. 244.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Zdeněk Hojda and Jiří Pokorný, *Pomníky a zapomínky* [Monuments and Forgetting], Prague: Paseka, 1996, pp. 105-106.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 106.

⁴⁴ Construction lasted from 1885 to 1891.

⁴⁵ For a detailed discussion see: Kateřina Kuthanová, 'Sochařský duel o realizaci pomníků mezi Josefem Václavem Myslbekem a Bohuslavem Schnirchem' [Sculptural duel for building the monument between Josef Václav Myslbek and Bohuslav Schnirch] in *Metamorfózy politiky: Pražské pomníky 19. století*, Prague: Archiv hlavního města Prahy, 2013, pp. 58-75. See especially pp. 66-73.

Viennese centralism) or federalist (supporting Bohemian independence) factions.⁴⁶ The latter group argued for Bohemian independence within a federalised Empire based on the historic right to territory, under the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Rights, they argued, that went unrecognised since the defeat at the Battle of White Mountain in 1620. Whilst in Hungary the rhetoric used was very much connected to the Holy Crown and St Stephen (especially after Ferenc Deák coined the phrase ‘Lands of the Holy Crown of St Stephen’), in the Czech lands the most common reference is ‘Lands of the Bohemian Crown’ (*země Koruny české*), or simply Bohemian Lands. The term ‘Lands of the Crown of St Wenceslas’ (*země Koruny svatováclavské*) does exist, but hardly appears in either the primary or secondary literature. This further underlines the decline in the significance of St Wenceslas by the 19th century.

Therefore, although Wenceslas was a respected historical figure who symbolically represented the Czech nation and its historical territorial and state rights (or claims), he was also among some groups a controversial figure that was too close to the old Habsburg/Catholic order and not able to represent the political goals of independence. Moreover, the values symbolised by Wenceslas conflicted with those symbolised by Jan Hus, who was rapidly becoming the icon of Czech independence ideals, especially in relation to the rhetoric of democracy and progress that those advocating for an independent Czechoslovakia espoused. Hence, when it came to formulating a national day calendar for Czechoslovakia after 1918, although 28 September was established as St Wenceslas Day, there was little enthusiasm for it.

Jan Hus

The figure whose stock was rising in the symbolic landscape of the Bohemian lands in the 19th century was indeed Jan Hus, the 15th-century religious reformist martyr. Jan Hus was the perfect figurehead for 19th century Bohemian nationalists to represent the modern nation; Hus had supported the use of the Czech vernacular, breaking with the German domination within the Church, and criticised the hierarchy within the Church, especially the role of the Pope. He could thus be seen as a powerful symbol against the Catholicism that was enforced by the Austrian imperial ruling elite.

⁴⁶ Eagle Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists: The transformation of the Bohemian aristocracy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 23. [hereafter: Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists*] For a wide-ranging discussion on the various debates on the national territorial discourse from 1880 to 1914 also see: Peter Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium in tschechischen politischen Diskurs 1880-1938*, München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2010. Especially Chapter 2, Section II ‘Territorium als nationalpolitische diskursive Ressource: die Diskussion um das böhmische Staatsrecht 1880-1914’ pp. 67-90.

Hus' cult started in the 15th century, was sustained throughout the 16th, but it barely survived the Counter-Reformation to become 'an underground cult', until the 'national awakening' of the nineteenth century, when Hus was projected as a central figure of Czech historical identity.⁴⁷ The Hus legend of the 19th century was influenced especially by the work of the Protestant Czech historian František Palacký, one of the most dominant figures of the Czech national revival. In his most famous work, *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a v Moravě* (The history of the Czech nation in Bohemia and Moravia) Palacký writes that:

Observing the chief differences in Czech history, without difficulty we can note at first glance three ages – namely, the *early*, *middle*, and *modern*. The middle age is marked by the religious skirmishes that entered Czech public life with the start of Hussitism in 1403 and ended with the expulsion of all Utraquists from the country in 1627. In that age our nation reached the zenith of its historical importance.⁴⁸

Palacký thus places Hussitism and Jan Hus himself into the golden age of Czech history, specifically the middle or medieval age. Palacký's role in the creation of a national narrative cannot be overemphasised, as Patrick Cabanel comments: 'Palacký fully belonged to the category of historian-founders of a nation: it is the narrative that they provide of a nation that largely contributes to its (re-)creation after a long period of slumber'.⁴⁹ Therefore, Palacký not only effectively defined Jan Hus as the golden age of Czech history but, more importantly, for the 19th-century awakeners, he gave them an example that they could and must look to. It is important to underline that not only did Protestantism present an opportunity to the Czechs to further differentiate themselves from the Catholic Habsburg Monarchy, but the idea of Hus as a protestor, as someone who fought against the oppressive established order enabled Czech liberal nationalists to present themselves as fighting for democracy. Palacký's stance also greatly influenced Tomáš Masaryk, the leading figure in the creation of Czechoslovakia, who was raised Catholic but converted to Protestantism in his youth. Masaryk, a professor of philosophy who had also served as a representative of the Bohemian lands in the Austrian parliament, was a fervent supporter of the Hus cult, and in 1896 published a book entitled *Jan*

⁴⁷ Robert, *Questions of Identity*, p. 201.

⁴⁸ František Palacký, 'History of the Czech nation in Bohemia and Moravia' (trans. Derek Paton) in Balázs Trencsényi, and Michal Kopeček (eds), *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945): Texts and Commentaries, Volume II, National Romanticism, The Formation of National Movements*, Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2007, pp. 51-56, p. 56.

⁴⁹ Patrick Cabanel, 'Protestantism in the Czech historical narrative and Czech nationalism of the nineteenth century' in *National Identities*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2009, pp. 31-43. p. 34.

Hus: Naše obrození a naše reformace (*Jan Hus: Our revival and our reformation*), in which he wrote: 'Our revival is an attempt to continue the work of Hus, we see from the effort of our major revivalists: Dobrovský, Kollár, Šafařík, Palacký, Havlíček, Aug. Smetana, they continue on the path that has been embarked on by Hus.'⁵⁰ Hus was thus seen, amongst Czech liberal nationalists who dominated the rhetoric of Czech national identity, as the founding father of Czech national ideology to whom the 19th-century national revival owed its existence.

Masaryk had been the leading activist and theoretician for an independent Czechoslovakia, campaigning for its establishment before 1918. The role Hus and his cult played in the thinking of Hus and other Czech leaders is thus crucial. Masaryk, even before 1918, would again and again return to the figure of Jan Hus, most importantly in 1915, when the politician was the most emblematic figure of the Czechs' 'struggle abroad' for independence. He then called for 'an international meeting of European Protestants, Czech émigrés, and his own political supporters in the Hall of the Reformation in Geneva, Switzerland.'⁵¹ The meeting took place on 6 July, the 500-year anniversary of Jan Hus' burning at the stake as a heretic. A lecture was given on the historical importance of Hus by the French historian of the Bohemian lands and Slovakia, Ernest Denis, also a Protestant, after which Masaryk declared that: 'Every Czech must decide to be for reformation or against reformation, for the Czech model or for the Austrian model, an organ of European Counter-Reformation and reaction.'⁵² Masaryk understood that the outbreak of the First World War meant that the map of Europe would soon be redrawn and he took the opportunity to call for the division of Austria and the creation of an independent Czecho-Slovak state, siding with the Allies against the Central Powers. The Austrian press saw Masaryk's manifesto as a declaration of war on Austria by the Czechs.⁵³

The figure of Jan Hus was built into the founding philosophy of the Czechoslovak state and the preparations for it, and the intensification of his cult also made its mark on the urban landscape of Prague. The Jan Hus monument on Old Town Square, erected in 1915, was to become not only a site of commemorations, but also of symbolic contestation. Its planning and

⁵⁰ T. G. Masaryk, *Jan Hus: Naše obrození a naše reformace* [Jan Hus: Our revival and our reformation], Prague: Bursík a Kohout, 1925, p. 8 (first published in 1896).

⁵¹ Cynthia Paces, *Prague Panoramas: National memory and sacred space in the twentieth century*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009, p. 83. [hereafter: Paces, *Prague Panoramas*]

⁵² Masaryk quoted in Ibid. p. 84.

⁵³ Ibid. p. 84.

construction took over two decades. Whilst Czech nationalists were enthusiastic about a new monument that would commemorate Hus, Czech Catholics were less enthralled by the idea. By April 1890, The Club for the Building of the Jan Hus Memorial in Prague had collected 50,000 crowns, not only from town councils, but also by corporations and individuals. Choosing the site for the memorial was, however, a contentious issue but, after much lobbying from the Club and also by the radical, nationalist newspaper *Národní listy*, Old Town Square was chosen.

This seems to have been a deliberate gesture, a provocation to the Marian Column that also stood in the square, and all that it was believed to symbolise. The Marian Column was an overtly Catholic symbol erected after the victory of the Habsburgs over the Protestant Swedes in 1648 during the Thirty Years War. For Czech nationalists, it was therefore a symbol of the hated Habsburg rule, and was associated with Habsburg victory over the Bohemian estates at the Battle of White Mountain in November 1620, in the early part in the Thirty Years War. This defeat was believed to have ushered in a period of ‘darkness’.⁵⁴ Catholics, on the other hand, organised a number of protests against the Hus memorial, arguing that they did not want a heretic near the column in honour of the Virgin Mary.⁵⁵

The statue – portraying not just Jan Hus but figures of exiled Hussite and Protestant warriors and a young mother, representing national rebirth - was eventually unveiled in 1915 on the 500th anniversary of Hus’ martyrdom. The construction of the Hus statue marked a deliberate symbolic clash over control of public space in the heart of Prague – a forewarning of the social divisions that would again erupt during the disagreements over the creation of a national day calendar for Czechoslovakia after 1918. As it happened, the Marian column and the Jan Hus memorial only shared Old Town Square for three years, as the Marian column was torn down on 3 November 1918, just after an independent Czechoslovakia had been declared, by a mob returning from a commemoration of the Battle of White Mountain.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Marek Nekula, ‘The Divided City: Prague’s Public Space and Franz Kafka’s Readings of Prague’ in Marek Nekula, Ingrid Fleischmann and Albrecht Greule (eds) *Franz Kafka im sprachnationalen Kontext seiner Zeit: Sprache und nationale Identität in öffentlichen Institutionen der böhmischen Länder*, Weimar, Köln: Böhlau, 2007, pp. 85-106, p. 105.

⁵⁵ Paces, *Prague Panoramas*, pp. 25-26.

⁵⁶ Cynthia Paces and Nancy M. Wingfield ‘The Sacred and the Profane: Religion and Nationalism in the Bohemian Lands, 1880-1920’ in Judson, Pieter M. and Marsha L. Rozenblit *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006, pp. 107-125.

Commemorative choices for an independent state

It can therefore be seen that choosing who and what should be commemorated in the national day calendars after 1918 was a generally straightforward process in Hungary, although less so in Czechoslovakia. In Hungary the symbols of the state had been more or less established (and officially commemorated annually) and largely uncontested since the 19th century and the national historical narrative was an uncomplicated one. In Czechoslovakia the situation was more complex. Even though many of the traditions were present in the period prior to 1918, the Czechs were not always permitted to openly commemorate their heroes and important events as these may not have been officially sanctioned under Austrian rule (the Hungarians were more free to do so under the rules of the Dual Monarchy as discussed in the Introduction). Moreover, the Czechs also had to face open conflicts with the ethnic (and also religious) minorities living in the territory and, more pertinently, they also needed to accommodate the Slovaks. In Hungary, by contrast, the Treaty of Trianon resulted in the loss of areas in which minorities resided. The resulting population was much more homogenous and there was thus less of a 'minority issue', and this is reflected in the simple and uncomplicated national day law debate in parliament. Whereas in Hungary separate laws establishing individual national days were passed without much controversy, in Czechoslovakia, which will be discussed first, there was one single national day law that took a number of years to draw up and get through parliament.

Czechoslovakia: Between Jan Hus, Jan Nepomucký and St Wenceslas

The pioneers of Bohemian/Czechoslovak independence from Austria-Hungary – Tomáš G. Masaryk, Edvard Beneš and Milan Rastislav Štefánik – encouraged the Slovaks to unite with them as this would strengthen calls for the creation of an independent state and the arguments being made at the Paris Peace Conference following the Great War.⁵⁷ Czechoslovakian independence was, however, to be based on contradictory myths, in order to be able to incorporate the Slovaks, as well as the Germans in the border regions, and also the Catholic/Protestant division amongst Czechs themselves. Czech politicians and thinkers overwhelmingly dominated the drive for the creation of an independent Czechoslovakia, and this is reflected in their adherence to the motifs of the Czech national movement, based upon the historical narrative developed by František Palacký, which foregrounded the 15th-century

⁵⁷ Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers: Six months that changed the world*, London: John Murray, 2002, pp. 243-244.

Hussite movement and its founder, the religious reformer Jan Hus. In this trenchantly anti-German and anti-Catholic schema, Hus was seen as a proto-democrat who campaigned against corruption in the Catholic Church, which was in collusion with the autocratic Austrian-German Habsburgs.

Hus was thus presented as the founder of the supposed Czech democratic tradition that was being promoted by Masaryk and Beneš in their drive to create an independent Czechoslovakia, in particular at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, designed to establish the post-war order. Their aim was to present a new Czechoslovakia as a democratic, industrial, egalitarian state and a promoter of European values. This was, perhaps, partly in contrast to the more aristocratic/monarchist, conservative Hungary that had fought with Austria and the losing powers in the war. The Czechoslovak and Hungarian governments were both competing for control over the territory of Upper Hungary, which had a large Hungarian population and which Hungary was eventually to lose with the Treaty of Trianon.

Alongside this, however, the Czechs also sought to proudly claim a medieval state as the precedent for the modern one they were arguing for, just as the Hungarians and also the Poles were able to. And it is partly in the role of representative of this medieval state that Wenceslas of Bohemia was given a national day in Czechoslovakia.

The need to create a unified identity and loyalty from a diverse population whose various constituent groups were often in conflict with each other made establishing a national day calendar for Czechoslovakia a tricky matter. The fault lines ran between Czechs and Slovaks, Czechs and Germans (in Bohemia), Slovaks and Hungarians (in Slovakia), and even – pertinently – between Catholics and Protestants. As a result, the battle over national symbols was extensive and can be seen in disputes over names of streets and squares, statues and, of course, commemorations.⁵⁸ President Masaryk himself stated that, ‘We have more important business than statues,’⁵⁹ mainly in response to Czech communities in mixed towns tearing down statues of the Habsburg emperor Joseph II.⁶⁰ There were numerous other incidents where

⁵⁸ This process had been underway particularly in regions with German and Czech populations. See, for example, Nancy M. Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech*, Cambridge Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2007, pp. 17-47 [hereafter: Wingfield, *Flag Wars*] and King, Jeremy, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: a local history of Bohemian politics, 1848-1948*, Princeton, N.J. and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Wingfield, *Flag Wars*, p. 164.

⁶⁰ See: Wingfield *Flag Wars*, pp. 17-47 and 156-166.

Czechs tore down statues that they perceived to be connected to the Germans, most famously the Marian column on Old Town Square. This tension over political symbols formed the background to the debates on the national day law in parliament from 1918 until the first half of the 1920s.

The new Czechoslovak government did decide on some national days in 1919: for example 28 October, the day when the new Czechoslovak state was established in 1918, and 1 May, given the strong presence of workers' parties.⁶¹ Moreover, not surprisingly, 11 April, commemorating Hungary's 1848 Constitution, which had been commemorated throughout the Habsburg Empire under the Dual Monarchy (Austria-Hungary), was dropped as a national day in Czechoslovakia.⁶² Even so, there were complaints from the various ethnic and religious groups who did not feel included in this national day calendar. The Habsburg festival calendar had been heavy on Catholic religious holidays, and the government sought to reduce their number. There was also an economic motivation to have fewer holidays.⁶³ But, the government found it difficult to select just which religious holidays to remove, given the diverse traditions throughout the country. This meant that the huge push for a Jan Hus Day on 6 July – from liberal nationalists, guilds, voluntary associations, local governments – was in vain as there was little space left within the calendar for yet another holiday.⁶⁴ The process for the establishment of new national days was thus long and convoluted, and it was not until 1925 that a complete national day law was passed.⁶⁵

The seven-year gap between the establishment of the First Republic and the passing of a comprehensive national day law did not mean that only 28 October was commemorated in this period. Indeed, as František Veselý, a senator for the Czechoslovak Socialist Party, stated during the Senate debate on the law, some 'holidays were considered to be memorable days by the people, but they were not universally recognised.'⁶⁶ This suggests that, until an official

⁶¹ Paces, *Prague Panoramas*, p. 116.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 117-118.

⁶⁵ '65. Zákon ze dne 3. dubna 1925 o svátcích a památných dnech republiky Československé' [Law No. 65 of 3 April 1925 on the holidays and memorable days of Czechoslovakia] in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*, V Praze: Státní tiskárna 1925, pp. 433-434. [hereafter: '65. Zákon ze dne 3. dubna 1925 o svátcích a památných dnech']

⁶⁶ 3 April 1925. 'Zprávu ústavně-právního výboru o usnesení poslanecké sněmovny (tisk 2113) k vládnímu návrhu zákona o nedělích, svátcích a památných dnech republiky Československé. Tisk 2126.' [Report of the Constitutional-Legal Committee of the Chamber of Deputies' resolution on the government bill regarding Sundays, holidays and memorable days of the Czechoslovak Republic] 3 April 1925, Session 260 at <http://www.senat.cz/zajimavosti/tisky/1vo/stena/260schuz/S260002.htm> [accessed 2 February 2012] [hereafter Session 260].

national day calendar was devised, various groups took the issue into their own hands, creating 'bottom-up' commemorations, mainly focused on St Wenceslas and Jan Hus.

In response to the frustration resulting from this indecision over declaring Jan Hus Day as a national holiday, various (Czech) liberal nationalist organisations (many of which were closely linked to the state) organised their own commemorative events. These groups included Sokol, women's clubs, Freethought (*Volná myšlenka*), different workers' organisations and similar associations. In other words, this was an initiative of civil society, rather than an action of the political elites. For example, for the 1919 Hus commemorations homeowners in Vinohrady, then a Prague suburb, were asked 'to decorate [their] houses with banners on the eve of the 6th July celebrations.'⁶⁷ On 6 July 1919 the Sokol athletics movement organised sporting contests and street celebrations in Vyšehrad and the working-class strongholds of Žižkov and Smíchov.⁶⁸ Lectures on Jan Hus were given at Charles University.⁶⁹

Attempts were also made to link the legacy of Hus with the legacy of the Battle of White Mountain. In Charles University's Great Hall the Hus commemoration was tied together with the commemoration of Jan Jesenský, the rector of the University, who had been executed in 1621 on Old Town Square along with 26 other nobleman as retaliation for the Protestant uprising.⁷⁰ The central commemoration took place at the Jan Hus monument in Old Town Square, with Czechoslovak Army garrisons present among the nationalist organisations. The monument was covered in flowers, in a strictly orderly fashion: 'When donating and laying flowers people are reminded to heed the instructions of the gardener who is responsible for the ornamentation.'⁷¹ Hus was presented as 'the first aware apostle of Czech democracy', who taught that the Czechs 'must stand inalienably for a pattern of moral and civic virtues.'⁷² Less than a year after rioting protestors had demolished the Marian Column, seen as a Catholic/Habsburg symbol,⁷³ the public space of the Old Town Square was again being used to underline the eventual victory of the Czech/Protestant over the Habsburg/Catholic – a struggle that, so the imagery implied, had been waged for several centuries.

⁶⁷ 'Husovy Oslavy' [Hus celebrations] in *Národní politika* 1 July 1919, p. 3.

⁶⁸ See for example the Jan Hus commemoration in 1919: 'Husovy oslav' in *Národní politika*, 2 July 1919, p. 3.

⁶⁹ 'Husovy Oslavy' in *Národní politika*, 1 July 1919, p. 3. Similar articles appeared in subsequent years.

⁷⁰ 'Husovy Oslavy' in *Národní politika*, 2 July 1919, p. 3.

⁷¹ 'Husovy Oslavy' in *Národní politika*, 3 July 1919, p. 4.

⁷² Hus (6. července 1415 - 6. července 1919.) [Hus (6 July 1415 – 6 July 1919)] in *Národní politika*, 6 July 1919, pp. 1-2, p.1.

⁷³ Zdeněk Hojda and Jiří Pokorný, *Pomníky a Zapomínky* [Monuments and Forgetting], Litomyšl: Paseka, 1996, p. 30.

The other historical symbol of Bohemia, St Wenceslas, was also remembered on 28 September, the anniversary of his assassination by his pagan brother Boleslav in 929. The newspaper *Národní politika*, which in 1919 had covered the civil society commemorations of Jan Hus on 6 July, also published opinion pieces on Wenceslas and described the events held by non-state actors in honour of the saint on 28 September of the same year.⁷⁴ Wenceslas was typified in the paper as a figure who ‘encouraged the Czech people in their hopes, soldiers in bravery, Czech political struggle in persistence and confidence’ and who was ‘the symbol for Czechs, of their faith in the future’.⁷⁵ There was also a report on a large public commemoration for Wenceslas organised by the Catholic Church, which attracted around 60,000 participants.⁷⁶

Miracles – although not something that would necessarily impress non-Catholics – were also attributed to Wenceslas in terms of saving the Czech nation in times of need, for example during the Battle of Kressenbrunn in 1260, when Ottokar II Přemysl defeated King Béla IV of Hungary, or in helping the Czechs during the First World War by sending the Czech Legions against the Austro-Hungarians ‘at the worst moment’, thus winning the independence of the Bohemian Lands.⁷⁷ In other words, Wenceslas was remembered because he was an ‘important’ historical figure who could be used as ‘evidence’ for a coherent Czech state over the centuries, apparently providing sustenance to the Czechs in times of need.

While 28 October may – at first – have been an easy national day to establish, as it presented the future vision of the new state, commemorating the past of the lands that encompassed Czechoslovakia proved to be a much stickier affair. A draft bill was put together by the *Pětka*,⁷⁸ the Group of Five coalition party leaders who, as Peter Bugge notes, ‘decided what issues to put on the political agenda [...] as well as what to do with them.’⁷⁹ Nonetheless, early drafts of the law – which would have abolished all religious holidays except Christmas – were eventually worked into a compromise bill that contained three civic holidays (28 October, 1 May, 6 July), two semi-religious holidays commemorating significant historical figures (Cyril

⁷⁴ See for examples in: Jiří V. Stoklas, ‘Český národní kult svěťce Václava’ [The Czech National Cult of St Wenceslas] in *Národní politika* on 28 September 1919, pp. 1-2. or ‘Husovy Oslavy’ in *Národní politika*, 1 July 1919, p. 3. Similar articles were also present in the subsequent years.

⁷⁵ Stoklas, *Český národní kult svěťce Václava*, p. 1.

⁷⁶ ‘Veliký den katolické Prahy’ [Great day for the Catholics of Prague] in *Čech* on 29 September 1919, p. 1.

⁷⁷ Stoklas, *Český národní kult svěťce Václava*, p. 1.

⁷⁸ Paces, *Prague Panoramas*, p. 119.

⁷⁹ Peter Bugge, ‘Czech Democracy 1918-1938 – Paragon or Parody?’ in *Bohemia* Vol. 47, No. 1. 2006, pp. 3-28, p. 14. The Pětka, or Group of Five, consisted of the leading politicians from the five major parties: the Agrarians, National Democrats, Czechoslovak People’s Party, Social Democrats and National Socialists. The process of the decision-making was extremely secretive and members of the group did not even take notes.

and Methodius on 5 July, St Wenceslas on 28 September), and a number of Catholic religious feasts bequeathed from the Habsburg era, including Corpus Christi, Ascension day, All Saints Day and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary.⁸⁰

The debate on the law in the National Assembly, held in late March and early April 1925, was often ferocious, reflecting the deep splits in Czechoslovak society between Protestant and Catholic, which were further magnified in the cleavage between Protestant Czech liberal nationalists and conservative Catholic Slovaks. Although the parliamentary debates had little effect on the national day law – this mainly being down to the decisions of the *Pětka* – they are nevertheless of great interest as the National Assembly provided a forum in which the opposing views could confront each other. The main point of contention was the establishment of an official day in commemoration of Jan Hus, where the fractures of Czechoslovak society erupted.

Even the parties that belonged to the *Pětka* did not always agree on who or what should be commemorated, with the divisions running along ethnic, religious and localist lines. The Hungarian paper *Prágai Magyar Hírlap* [Prague Daily Newspaper] reported on 14 March 1925 that whilst it seemed that the coalition parties had reached an agreement in regards to the national day law, in the morning the Czechoslovak People's Party, led by Jan Šrámek announced that they could not stand behind a law that was not acceptable for the Catholics.⁸¹ The paper also informed its readers that the *Pětka* was not trying to convince some of the opposition and minority parties to vote for the draft, and this would however be difficult to achieve, since the German and Hungarian people's parties were exercising passive resistance. *Prágai Magyar Hírlap*, however, offered its advice to the coalition parties by suggesting that instead of trying to pass this large draft bill, they should only choose one or two days as state holidays and leave it up to the different churches and associations to make their own holidays.

Unsurprisingly, the suggestion of the *Prágai Magyar Hírlap* fell on deaf ears. The debate in the Chamber of Deputies on 21 March 1925 opened with the general remarks of Josef Černý, a backbench member of the Agrarian Party. His contribution is of particular interest as he also

⁸⁰ Paces, *Prague Panoramas*, p. 119.

⁸¹ 'A cseh néppárt nem szavazza meg az ünnepekről szóló javaslatot' [The Czech People's Party will not vote for the proposal on the celebrations] in *Prágai Magyar Hírlap*, 14 March 1925, p. 3.

happened to be the son-in-law of the prime minister, Antonín Švehla.⁸² Černý can therefore be understood as having been selected to promote the *Pětka* position that had been decided upon behind closed doors, which aimed at compromise and at satisfying everyone by including everything. Černý proposed a national day calendar that included (in addition to 28 October as Foundation of State Day) Cyril and Methodius, St Wenceslas and Jan Hus who, he argued, were all important for the Czechoslovak nation and should thus be commemorated.⁸³ He gave a brief justification of the inclusion of Cyril and Methodius, the 9th-century Byzantine Greek missionaries, on a historical basis, as they had ‘established the Slavic letters’.

In contrast, both St Wenceslas and Jan Hus received lengthy treatments from Černý. St Wenceslas had been seen by ‘the Czech nation for nearly a millennium’ as ‘its national patron, whose name is the healing symbol of Czechoslovak independence [...] and whose cult became so widespread in the Bohemian Lands that his day was not regarded purely as a religious holiday, but mainly as a national one.’ This is an important distinction as it ‘de-Catholicised’ Wenceslas in order to make him acceptable to the strong liberal nationalist tendency that favoured the Protestant Hussite tradition. Even so, reverence for St Wenceslas, Černý continued, is also evident in the St Wenceslas Chorale ‘that had been sung at all the famous and unfortunate times of our nation.’ Furthermore, since the 13th century the Bohemian army had advanced under the saint’s banner. To offer a more contemporary example of Wenceslas’ significance and stature, Černý points to the first gold coin that was minted in the new Republic, the Czechoslovak ducat, which bore the image of the saint.

Černý attempted to weave a coherent historical narrative that harmoniously contained both St Wenceslas and Jan Hus. This narrative still prioritised Hus as symbolising the values and identity of the Czechoslovak nation, whilst Wenceslas was characterised as the patron saint and general symbol of the new Republic, whose usefulness lay in the fact that he gave historical weight to this new and relatively fragile state. Černý proclaimed Hus ‘the greatest son and greatest Czech, whose name is linked to [...] the most celebrated part of our national history.’ Hus was ‘the first awakener’, an ‘advocate of [the nation’s] right and freedom, a fearless fighter

⁸² Daniel Miller, *Forging Political Compromise: Antonín Švehla and the Czechoslovak Republican Party, 1918-1933*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999, p. 164.

⁸³ ‘Zpráva výboru ústavně-právního k vládnímu návrhu (5061) zákona o nedělích, svátcích a památných dnech republiky Československé (tisk 5119).’ [Report of the Constitutional Law Committee on government proposal 5061 regarding Sundays, holidays and memorable days of the Czechoslovak Republic] 21 March 1925, Session 336 at <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/stenprot/336schuz/s336001.htm> [accessed 13 December 2013]. [hereafter: Session 336]

for the moral and spiritual liberation of mankind.’ Černý argues that ‘[t]herein lies the huge importance of Hus, not only for the Czechoslovak nation, but for the entire cultural world.’ In this sense, he is attempting to place Czechoslovakia in the western European democratic tradition by arguing that Hus was an important contributor to it and the Czechoslovaks are not simply followers but also leaders in this respect.

Underlining this western European orientation, Černý notes that commemorating Hus is nothing new as it had been done since the 15th century, but the defeat of the Bohemian nobles at White Mountain in 1620 by the Habsburgs had put a stop to this practice. The foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic, however, had restored normality and ‘most of the nation worships Hus’ monument *de facto*’, while the proposed law is only a legal formality in making 6 July a national day of commemoration.⁸⁴ Commemoration of Hus on this day had indeed been a ‘grassroots’ event with widespread support, but Černý still had to qualify the level of this support – most of the nation, not all the nation – indicating that Hus, while the most important figure of national identity for many, was divisive for others.

Yet, after Černý’s cheerful and hopeful introduction, the rest of the debate on the law in the National Assembly was often vitriolic. The main point of controversy was indeed the establishment of an official national day for Jan Hus. The Slovaks in particular protested that he was of little relevance to them, and this galvanised them into questioning even the necessity of 28 October as a state holiday that they too should be obliged to commemorate, as shall be seen in the following chapter. The prioritisation of a Bohemian protestant reformer even pushed Catholic Slovaks into questioning whether Czechoslovakia belonged to them in the same way as it belonged to the Czechs. This produced different interpretations of the foundation of Czechoslovakia, with the Slovaks arguing that they would prefer to commemorate 30 October, when they signed the Martin Declaration and officially joined Czechoslovakia, as their Foundation of State Day.

In contrast, during the national day debate the name of St Wenceslas appears mainly in terms of re-enforcing the Catholic tradition of the Bohemian lands and Slovakia, but no group seems to be against commemorating 28 September. Wenceslas thus appears to have been successfully incorporated as a figure that could theoretically belong to all Czechs and his status as a Catholic

⁸⁴ Ibid.

saint could be seen as incidental by non-Catholics. The arguments focused, rather, on Hus and proposals to commemorate Jan Nepomucký as a counter to Hus, while there was also a question as to whether Cyril and Methodius were relevant enough nationally to merit a national day of their own.

The Slovak People's Party, in particular, led the campaign against Hus. Andrej Hlinka, the party's leader and a Catholic priest, said he would agree to commemorating Hus, if the inscription on his statue in Old Town Square were actually adhered to, but after listening to the debate so far he had come to the realisation that the inscription meant nothing.⁸⁵ Hlinka described how he walked past the Hus statue every day, and he quoted its inscription as: 'Pravdu milujte a pravdy každému přejte.' [Love the truth and wish the truth for everyone] – a slight mistake as the inscription actually reads: 'Milujte se, pravdy každému přejte.' [Love one another, wish the truth for everyone.] Hlinka's other argument against 6 July was that the majority of the Slovaks were Catholics, thus for them Hus had no special significance. Indeed, Hlinka accused the governing elite of trying to 'trample over everything' by enforcing the commemoration of Hus over that of Catholic saints, eliding the religious splits also into a split along national and local lines. Furthermore, he observed during his stays in Prague that what he calls the 'national cult' was focused on Catholic saints, as the city centre is dotted with their statues: St Wenceslas, Adalbert of Prague or Jan Nepomucký. So why commemorate Hus and 'trample' on all this?

Hlinka's speech is interesting for a further reason, in that it exemplified the nexus that connected historical figures, the urban landscape of statues and physical symbols, religious/national identity, political/state symbols, and historical narratives with national day commemorations. By pointing to the statues of Catholic saints on Charles Bridge, he was saying that they were every bit as real and present – and for Czechs as well as Slovaks such as himself – for the identity of Czechoslovakia as Jan Hus, whose statue is in Old Town Square.

Moreover, the Slovak press, especially *Slovák*, the official newspaper of Hlinka's right-wing, conservative nationalist Slovak People's Party, keenly followed and echoed the debates in the National Assembly. Hlinka's lengthy speech in the Chamber of Deputies was reproduced in

⁸⁵ Session 336 at <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/stenprot/336schuz/s336004.htm>. [accessed 13 December 2013].

full in *Slovák*,⁸⁶ underlining how much the debate resonated among the various communities of Czechoslovakia and how it was seen as an opportunity to get their own ‘side’ across. There were numerous articles protesting against the commemoration of Jan Hus in Slovakia, while others pushed for the commemoration of 30 October, instead of 28 October, as a more apt Foundation of State Day for the Slovaks.⁸⁷ *Slovák* even described the inclusion of Jan Hus in the commemorative calendar as ‘an insult’ to Slovak Catholics and accused the Czech political elite of ‘violent uses of state power against bishops and priests’.⁸⁸

Jozef Tiso, Catholic priest and member of the Slovak People’s Party who was later to become the leader of the Slovak Republic between 1939-1945, in particular promoted this theme of the commemoration of Hus as an attack on Slovak (Catholic identity). Tiso belied any concept of Czechoslovak unity. As his biographer James Ward writes, ‘Since he had always constructed Slovak identity around Catholicism, it is not surprising that he rejected a Czechoslovak identity that celebrated the progressive Masaryk, the anticlerical Sokol, and the heretic Hus.’⁸⁹ Tiso presented the creation of a Jan Hus Day for the whole of Czechoslovakia as an attempt to turn the Slovaks into Czechs and turn them away from Catholicism, thunderously proclaiming that, if the Slovaks were going to be forced to commemorate Hus then they should, like the Czechs, do so with fires, where they would burn everything connected to Hus: ‘And at each of these celebrations, let the Slovak nation swear... “We will never be Czechs, and we will never give up the Catholic Church!”’⁹⁰

Many of his Slovak People’s Party colleagues refused even to consider commemorating Hus. Senator Jozef Barinka, for example, argued that the holiday of ‘Master Jan Hus has deeply offended 30% of the Catholic citizens of Slovakia. Why the insult?’⁹¹ Barinka negatively contrasted Hus with Nepomucký, adamantly stating that ‘for the Slovaks’ Jan Hus ‘is not a historical figure, Jan Nepomucký is.’ Since Hus’ reformation was unsuccessful in Slovakia, the majority of the Slovaks did not even know who he was. Barinka almost threatened the

⁸⁶ See: ‘Hlinkova obrana kresťanského Slovenska’ [Hlinka defends Christian Slovakia]. In *Slovák*, 24 March 1925, pp. 1-2. and ‘Nechceme ani 28 október ani Husa’ [We do not want 28 October or Hus] in *Slovák*, 25 March 1925, pp. 1-3.

⁸⁷ ‘Otázka sviatkov’ [The question of holidays] in *Slovák*, 18 March 1925, p. 3.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ James Mace Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013, p. 85. [hereafter: Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator*]

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 92.

⁹¹ Session 260 at <http://www.senat.cz/zajimavosti/tisky/1vo/stena/260schuz/S260002.htm> [accessed 2 February 2012]

Czech senators with his thunderous proclamation that '[t]he Slovaks will never remember Hus' and the 'wounded Catholics will not harbour love and trust for the Czech nation, but it will lead to hatred towards the Czechs, which neither I nor my colleagues want.'

Jan Herben, a Czech senator from the right-wing National Democratic Party, felt provoked by Barinka's comparison between Hus and Nepomucký: 'I think that in the interest of keeping the dignity of the Senate such comparison should be left unanswered. [...] Jan Hus and Jan Nepomucký cannot be compared.'⁹² If, as Barinka claimed, Hus was unknown in the Slovakian part of the Republic while Nepomucký was held in high status then, Herben quipped, 'this is a disaster for Slovakia.' Herben proceeded to educate his Slovak colleagues and elaborated on the historic significance of Hus, again emphasising that Hus is not only important for the Czechoslovak nation, but he also possesses worldwide significance. In contrast, '[t]he importance of Jan Nepomucký is only local, and unfortunately only relates to world history insofar as historians dealt with the process of him being declared a saint. [...] It is therefore desirable that Slovakia endeavoured to make the respect for Jan Nepomucký disappear and replace it with respect for Jan Hus.' As Herben concluded: 'It shall benefit Slovakia.'

For Czech liberal nationalists, Nepomucký was as big a red rag as Hus was for the Slovaks and Czech Catholics. Františka Zemínová, a Czech National Social Party deputy, argued that whilst Hus represented 'the highest glory' in the national history, Nepomucký represented just the opposite: 'the most terrible suffering' of the nation under the Habsburgs, and that these '[t]wo symbols illuminate the [...] millennial struggle of the Slavs with Rome.'⁹³ Zemínová claimed that Nepomucký was only made a saint for political reasons, whereas Hus, on the other hand, was the first to proclaim the nation's freedom, and it is through his example that '[t]he Czech nation, free and victorious, proved that it has the right to exist' - deliberately disregarding the fact that while Hus may be the founder of the Czech nation's freedom, he was not seen in that way in the whole of Czechoslovakia. Moreover, she continued, 6 July fits neatly into the already existing national day calendar: by commemorating 6 July, '28 October and 1 May [are also] newly illuminated and edified'. Zemínová's argument is virulently anti-Catholic, and pan-Slavist: the Slavs had been in a millennial struggle (again linking back to the medieval period) against the Vatican in Rome. Hus fought against Rome's supremacy over

⁹² Session 260 at <http://www.senat.cz/zajimavosti/tisky/1vo/stena/260schuz/S260003.htm>. Herben has long been opposed to the commemoration of Nepomucký. See: Vlnas, *Jan Nepomucký*, p. 71.

⁹³ Session 336 at <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/stenprot/336schuz/s336002.htm>

the Czechs, whereas Nepomucký represented Rome. For Czech liberal nationalists, only Hus tells the story of the Czechoslovak state as they saw it. If for Slovaks and Czech Catholics, Hus was an ‘insult’ then the debate over the creation of a national day calendar for Czechoslovakia suggests that the new state was a deeply riven one with no unified historical narrative possible.

Czech Catholics, on the other hand, were concerned about the way in which the commemoration of Hus had been selected, as they perceived that the advocates of a Hus national day were using this opportunity to attack Catholics and their revered figure of Jan Nepomucký. Even so, they were at pains to stress that – unlike the Slovaks – they were not opposed to Hus per se. Václav Myslivec, member of the Catholic Czechoslovak People’s Party, argued that they were not ‘hurt’ by the introduction of a Hus national day, since they agreed with about 90% of Hus’ teachings (and even František Palacký believed that the remaining 10% was undesirable).⁹⁴ What they were hurt by was the fact that choosing Hus as a national day also entailed fighting the Catholics, in this case especially against Jan Nepomucký.

Other members of the Slovak People’s Party used the opportunity of the debate to fulminate against perceived slights against Catholics. Senator Ján Kovalik, for example, even complained about the fact that only the dates were cited in the draft law, not the actual personage or event they commemorate:

These Slavic heroes [...] for one thousand years have been called St Wenceslas and St Cyril and Methodius. [...] This name belongs to them, they are historical names [...] And the bill does not name ‘Saint’ Cyril, does not name ‘Saint’ Wenceslas, but says 5 July and 28 September. It seems to me that you do not want to name these Slav heroes with their proper names, instead you give them only numbers as for convicts in jail!⁹⁵

The Catholic Slovak opponents of the national day law thus used the ploy of Slavism to paint the law as unpatriotic and attack Czech nationalists. Indeed, the law, Kovalik continued, was ‘anti-Christian’, and would ‘destroy [and] annihilate Slavic culture, Christian culture, upon which the whole world’s culture is founded.’ Of interest, however, is his appeal to the concept of ‘Slavic heroes’ of a thousand years ago: Cyril and Methodius (for the Slovaks) and Wenceslas (mainly for the Czechs) could function to construct a national history and national

⁹⁴ Session 336 at <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/stenprot/336schuz/s336005.htm>

⁹⁵ Session 260 at <http://www.senat.cz/zajimavosti/tisky/1vo/stena/260schuz/S260001.htm>

day calendar for a united Czechoslovakia as they were all Slavic and Christian. Neither Hus nor Nepomucký needed to be elevated to this extent by the state while this narrative still discreetly observed the separate identities of the Slovaks and Czechs. It is as though Kovalík is saying that those in Prague who devised this law did not have respect for such a potential common narrative, as they wanted to impose their own anti-Catholic Czech agenda.

Another interesting contribution to the national day law debate came from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ). Edmund Burian, one of the founding members of the KSČ and representative of the Czechoslovak Communists during the Third Congress of the Communist International in Moscow in 1921, put forward an amendment to the national day law on 21 March 1925.⁹⁶ Burian proposed nine national days: the Day of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin Day, Karl Marx Day, the Day of the Paris Commune, 1 May, Jan Hus Day, a harvest festival on the last Sunday of August, a day commemorating the 14 October general strike of 1918 and day of the Russian revolution of the Proletariat. Needless to say, the amendment was not accepted. As we shall see in Chapter Four, this is a very different set of days than what the Communists will implement after 1948. Most of the days, unsurprisingly were Internationalist in nature, but it is revealing to note that the Communists were already treating Jan Hus as a proto-Communist figure – the only ‘national’ figure or event they proposed aside from 14 October – along the lines of Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Marx or Lenin.

Despite Catholic opposition to Hus, the new national day law was eventually passed on 3 April 1925 with Jan Hus Day firmly embedded in it. Saints Cyril and Methodius Day, commemorating the 9th-century Christian missionaries to the Slavs, conveniently on 5 July, the day before Jan Hus Day, was included as an appeasement to the Slovaks and other Catholics. The law stipulated the following, rather numerous, religious feasts as public holidays, giving no explanation for what they were (other than for moveable feasts): ‘1 January, 6 January, Ascension Day, Corpus Christi, 29 June, 15 August, 1 November, 8 December and 25 December.’ As regards ‘memorable days’ (*památné dny* i.e. national days), the law again gave the dates with no explanation: ‘The memorable days of the Czechoslovak

⁹⁶ For Burian’s involvement during the Third Congress see: John Riddell (ed.) *To the Masses: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 1921*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015, p. 96. For the amendment proposed by Burian for the national day law see: ‘Zpráva výboru ústavně-právního k vládnímu návrhu (5061) zákona o nedělích, svátcích a památných dnech republiky Československé (tisk 5119).’ [Report of the Constitutional Law Committee on government proposal 5061 regarding Sundays, holidays and memorable days of the Czechoslovak Republic] 21 March 1925, Session 336 at <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/stenprot/336schuz/s336008.htm> [last accessed 14 January 2016]

Republic are: 5 July, 28 September, 6 July, 1 May and 28 October is a state holiday under the Act of 14 October 1919, No. 555.⁹⁷ It appears that even when the national day law had been passed, the discomfort with the contradictions that it contained made it difficult even to describe the events and individuals being commemorated.

Two new holidays with religious as opposed to strictly civic connotations, were introduced, which could perhaps be perceived as a small concession to the Catholics and the Slovaks. These were the Day of St Cyril and Methodius and St Wenceslas Day — even though a similar argument was made against this day as against a Nepomucký Day, namely that so far it ‘had only a small feast day in Moravia.’⁹⁸ Thus, while (some of) the Czech legislators appeared to try to find a middle ground, and include commemorations that would be satisfactory to both the Czechs and the Slovaks, the legislation that was passed presented an almost exclusively ‘Czech’ national narrative.

The 1925 Jan Hus commemoration

On 6 July 1915, the 500th anniversary of Hus’s death, Masaryk in Geneva had called for the establishment of a Czech-Slovak state. In Prague on the same day, the Jan Hus monument was unveiled on Old Town Square. By the time of the 510th anniversary of Hus’ death in 1925, an independent Czechoslovakia was a reality and Jan Hus Day had – albeit controversially – just been made an official national day. It is no surprise then that the Hus commemoration of 1925 was celebrated in a major, state-sponsored commemoration. Even so, the differences that were apparent between the different political parties, also translated to society as a whole. Many elements of society did not support this holiday and even though there were many festive programmes with which the organisers tried to appeal to a broader public, those who were not already on the side of Czech nationalism, for example, the Slovaks and Czech Catholics, or ethnic minorities such as Germans and Hungarians, still resented the holiday.⁹⁹ The Jan Hus commemoration also caused conflicts with the Vatican as Hus was seen as an anti-Catholic symbol.

⁹⁷ ‘65. Zákon ze dne 3. dubna 1925 o svátcích a památných dnech’

⁹⁸ See Wilhelm Niessner’s remark during the Senate debate: Session 260 at <http://www.senat.cz/zajimavosti/tisky/1vo/stena/260schuz/S260001.htm>

⁹⁹ Cynthia Paces, ‘Religious Heroes for a Secular State: Commemorating Jan Hus and Saint Wenceslas in 1920s Czechoslovakia’ in Bucur, Maria and Nancy M. Wingfield, *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*, West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2001, pp. 209-235. p. 211. [hereafter: Paces, ‘Religious Heroes’]

The first Jan Hus Day commemoration started off rather quietly on 5 July 1925, a day before the actual commemorative day, with the laying of flowers at the Jan Hus memorial monument on Old Town Square in Prague, followed by a march by school children to the monument. This was followed by a private ceremony in the Old Town Hall, attended by Josef Rotnágľ, deputy mayor of Prague, members of the city council and the representatives of a number of academic institutions. During this meeting the ‘unofficial theme’ of the 1925 commemorations was further explicated by Jaroslav Prokeš, historian of Prague, who argued that the philosophy of the 15th-century Hussites and the political direction of Czechoslovakia are inextricably linked. On 5 July the ‘message’ being put across was less about Hus himself and more about ‘the struggles of the Czech and Slovak people during the First World War’.¹⁰⁰ Rotnágľ gave a speech in which he alluded to the Austrian’s ‘mild injunction’ at the inauguration of the monument in 1915, which meant that Czechs were not able to celebrate its unveiling. Even so, the newly-unveiled statue had been covered in flowers in tribute of Hus. Historian of Prague Cynthia Paces, commenting on Rotnágľ’s speech, writes that ‘this display of quiet courage, according to the mayor, had set the Czech and Slovak people on the path toward full national independence.’¹⁰¹ In other words, Rotnágľ is attempting to embed the idea that Hus was the symbol of the struggle for independence for Czechs and Slovaks and the 500th anniversary of his burning, while still under Austro-Hungarian rule, had provided the opportunity for resistance and contestation.

The commemorative event on 6 July itself was very brief, lasting only half an hour, and was attended by the leading politicians of the state, including President Masaryk, Prime Minister Antonín Švehla and several ministers,¹⁰² all celebrating Hus as a national hero. There were, however, voices within Czechoslovakia, such as the Catholic Populist Party, which opposed Masaryk’s attendance, believing that the figurehead of the state should not make Hus the symbol of the state in this way.¹⁰³ The papal nuncio, Monsignor Marmaggi, was also outraged at the presence of Masaryk and government leaders at the Hus commemoration, and left Prague in protest. Relations between the Czechoslovak government and the Vatican did not fully recover until 1928, thus further straining efforts within Czechoslovakia to alleviate the tensions

¹⁰⁰ Paces, *Prague Panoramas*, p. 122.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p. 123.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Martin Kitchen, *Europe Between the Wars*, New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 207.

between Protestant and Catholic. Generally speaking, however, the commemoration passed without major protest and the police only had to address a number of minor incidents. This may be because the policy of balancing Jan Hus Day with Cyril and Methodius Day the previous day so as to dissipate any Catholic/Slovak anti-Hus feeling was successful. The Ľudáks, for example, were busy organising Cyril and Methodius Day throughout Slovakia. Tiso, who was leading the Cyril and Methodius Day rally in Bánovce, used this as the opportunity for his anti-Hus tirade, rather than Jan Hus Day itself.¹⁰⁴

The Wenceslas Millennium

The dichotomy that characterised much of official Czechoslovakian state identity in the interwar period can also be seen in the fact that, apart from the Jan Hus commemorations of 1925, the other commemorative highlight of the First Republic — when it came to medieval saints — was the celebration of a Catholic saint with the 1929 St Wenceslas millennium, commemorating the thousand-year anniversary of the saint's murder. The commemorations of these two Czech historical heroes reflected the rituals and aesthetics of their respective religious dogmas: whilst 'the 1925 state ceremony for Hus was brief and simple, the Saint Wenceslas festivities featured a week of painstakingly staged parades, speeches by state leaders, military displays, and museum exhibitions'.¹⁰⁵

The rift with the Vatican had been settled by 1928, but after the 1925 elections the pro-Catholic Czechoslovak People's Party had become the third-strongest party in parliament, further prompting Masaryk's circle to acknowledge the importance of the sizable Catholic electorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Moreover, the Slovaks had also grown increasingly embittered 'with the Czech-dominated national discourse'.¹⁰⁶ Paces suggests that the Wenceslas millennium commemorations were held mainly as a pragmatic decision, 'to extend an olive branch to Czechoslovak Catholics' and to 'avoid further domestic and international rifts over religion, and to atone for the anger engendered by the 1925 Jan Hus festival.' Wenceslas was the 'obvious choice' for this attempt, as, aside from being the 'Czechoslovak patron saint and martyr', it just so happened that his millennium anniversary was conveniently in 1929.

¹⁰⁴ Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator*, p. 92.

¹⁰⁵ Paces, 'Religious Heroes', p. 221.

¹⁰⁶ Paces, *Prague Panoramas*, p. 131.

Furthermore, Wenceslas ‘had a history that did not conflict with the memory of Jan Hus’ and he lacked the Habsburg and Jesuit baggage of saints such as Jan Nepomucký.¹⁰⁷

Whilst Paces is right to highlight the religious significance, she overlooks other aspects that made the Wenceslas commemoration valuable. These are: the opportunity this event presented to further incorporate Slovakia into Czechoslovakia (Paces mentions this, but does not elaborate) and the fact that the Wenceslas tradition was not ‘invented’ for the 1929 millennium, but even in much earlier periods it represented the foundation and the consolidation of the Bohemian state in the 10th century. Although in the 19th century Wenceslas’ cult was in decline he still represented a cohesive figure for both Czechs and Slovaks. Alternative Catholic ‘heroes’ such as Jan Nepomucký were unacceptable to Czech liberals. In any case, the religious connotations of Wenceslas were downplayed during the commemorative week. What was important was that he could be connected to a 9th-/10th-century Bohemian state.

Preparations for the week-long Wenceslas millennial festivities (22-28 September) started well before the actual commemoration that took place on 28 September 1929. Lectures were delivered in regional towns, which focused on ‘the national and religious importance of St Wenceslas’.¹⁰⁸ In addition to the lecture series, a documentary film was commissioned by the National Committee for the Celebration of the Saint Wenceslas Millennium (*Objednávku Národního výboru pro oslavu svatováclavského milénia*), premiering on 28 November 1928. The documentary was entitled *Svatováclavské památky* (St Wenceslas Relics).¹⁰⁹ The film was ‘1500m long’, which translates to roughly sixty minutes.¹¹⁰ The documentary itself shows various places associated with the St Wenceslas tradition, including footage of the pilgrimage to Stará Boleslav where he was killed, ‘the ecclesiastical celebration held on September 28, 1928 at the St Wenceslas grave at Prague Castle’, the St Wenceslas art collection of Bishop Antonín Podlaha and the completion of St Vitus cathedral amongst other sites.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 132.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Petr Placák, *Svatováclavské Milénium: Češi, Němci a Slováci v roce 1929* [St Wenceslas Millennium: Czechs, Germans and Slovaks in the year 1929], Prague: Babylon, 2002, p. 20. [hereafter: Placák, *Svatováclavské Milénium*]

¹⁰⁹ Viktor Velek, *Saint Wenceslas: The First Czechoslovak Historical Epic Film*, Prague: The Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2010, p. 17. [hereafter: Velek, *Saint Wenceslas*]

¹¹⁰ Placák, *Svatováclavské Milénium*, p. 20. and Velek, *Saint Wenceslas*, p. 17.

¹¹¹ Velek, *Saint Wenceslas*, p. 17.

A number of other projects and events preceded the millennium commemorations, such as building works (mainly churches, it seems), whilst *Orel*, the Catholic gymnastics organisation, organised an athletics competition. A number of specifically Catholic religious events were also planned, such as the 14th International Congress of Catholic Esperantists (10-16 August) and the Eucharistic celebration in Stará Boleslav (15-16 September). However, these religious events were not officially endorsed by the state.¹¹² This further highlights that whilst for the state Wenceslas might not have been as important – in terms of symbolism – as Hus was, he was still important for a significant group of the Czechoslovakian population, the Catholics.

Masaryk believed that the cult and commemoration of St Wenceslas contained a number of important factors for national identity and the legitimisation of the state, although he was keen to downplay the religious symbolism. In an interview with the magazine *Život* (Life) when asked about the importance he attached to the upcoming millennial commemorations, Masaryk sidestepped the religious aspects, and answered the question ‘from the point of view of the state.’¹¹³ He characterised Wenceslas as ‘likeable’, but even during this interview Masaryk attempted to almost link the cult of Jan Hus and Wenceslas, stating about Wenceslas that:

He promoted Christianity and the Church, and in his times the work was commendable, cultural and progressive. [...] The history of Christianity in our country teaches us that religious organisations and Christianity were not much developed in the early 10th century. More precisely speaking, I see no unsurpassable contradiction between the idea of St. Wenceslas and the Reformation. It is well known that Hus and the Hussites themselves honoured St Wenceslas.¹¹⁴

This constant parallelisation between Hus and Wenceslas and Masaryk’s ‘veneration of martyrs’ and his stress of Czech suffering, also termed the ‘Czech martyr complex’, is accounted for by Robert B. Pynsent as displaying the influence of Ernest Denis, the Protestant French historian of Bohemia. For Masaryk, Pynsent argues, ‘this martyr cult exists on the fact that the most glorious period of Czech history had begun and ended with martyrdom, that of Saint Wenceslas and of Jan Hus.’¹¹⁵ In this interview, Masaryk also talked about plans to commemorate Wenceslas that would have been organised by the government with a clear

¹¹² Placák, *Svatováclavské Milenium*, pp. 23-24.

¹¹³ T. G. Masaryk, *Cesta Demokracie IV: Projevy, články, rozhovory, 1929-1937* [Path of Democracy IV: Speeches, articles and interviews], Prague: Ústav T. G. Masaryka, 1997, pp. 39-42, p. 41. [hereafter Masaryk *Cesta IV*]

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Pynsent, *Questions of Identity* pp. 190-191.

‘political character’.¹¹⁶ These plans, however, did not come to fruition as Prime Minister Antonín Švehla fell seriously ill. The millennium commemorations that took place were described by Masaryk as having been carried out by the church and being religious, but as head of state he still sought to underline that he wished ‘that the fact that already in the late 9th and at the beginning of the 10th centuries we had an organised and a fairly orderly state would be known, at home and abroad.’ Thus, in Masaryk’s argument the religious aspects were downplayed, and the sole historical achievement of St Wenceslas seemed to be that during his era there already existed an ‘orderly state’. Moreover, as Cynthia Paces points out, Wenceslas’ truce with the German tribes was not even mentioned. If more had been made of Wenceslas’ relations with the Germans, this may have made the Germans in Czechoslovakia feel more included in the festivities and given them a sense of unity with the Czechoslovak state, although it would also have been against the governing elites’ anti-Habsburg sentiments. Once all these aspects of Wenceslas were ignored or downplayed, ‘all that was left in 1929 was an empty symbol’.¹¹⁷

Perhaps as a result of this lack of ‘message’ during the festivities, the Wenceslas commemorations did not draw the same passion or anger as the Hus commemorations had. Another conspicuous aspect of the Wenceslas commemoration was the absence of President Masaryk and other prominent state leaders from the main event, the official re-opening of St Vitus Cathedral in Prague Castle, perhaps because this event had overtly religious, specifically Catholic, aspects.¹¹⁸ Masaryk’s absence angered the Czech and Slovak Catholics. Thus, although the Wenceslas commemoration was intended to repair relations between the governing elite and the Catholics, these disgruntled groups ‘would continue to complain that the state promoted an exclusive national ideology’.¹¹⁹

The millennium commemoration was also accompanied by a large number of publications detailing the life and relevance of St Wenceslas. The format of these publications was rather similar: they begin with the early legends of Wenceslas, then discuss his importance through the different periods, subsequently detailing his importance for the First Republic (i.e. the new Czechoslovak state). Many of these volumes were written by eminent historians of the time,

¹¹⁶ Masaryk *Cesta IV*, p. 41.

¹¹⁷ Paces ‘Religious Heroes’ p. 223.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p. 227.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. p. 230.

such as František Michálek Bartoš, a historian of the Hussite era, and Josef Pekař, professor of history at Charles University.¹²⁰ It is not surprising that both Bartoš and Pekař were invited to produce these books on Wenceslas, as they represented Catholic positions. They were also two of the greatest opponents of Hussitism, in particular the idea of Hus and Protestantism as the defining core of Czech national identity. Pekař was a critic of Palacký's and Masaryk's historical theories on Czech national history and Jan Hus, believing that Czechs should be more open to Catholic, noble and even German and other European influences in the development of Czech history.¹²¹

The Wenceslas celebrations also gave the Slovaks an opportunity to participate and be included: Ján Pöstényi, a Catholic historian who focused on the history of the church in Trnava in western Slovakia, contributed to this publishing output with *Slováci a svätý Václav* (The Slovaks and St Wenceslas).¹²² His book follows the familiar pattern, but there is special effort to connect the Slovaks and Slovak history not only to the St Wenceslas tradition, but through this also to Czech history, to underline the common roots of the two parts of Czechoslovakia. The first five chapters of the book deal with the history of the Slovaks (and through them the Czechs as well) from before the arrival of the Slovaks to the times of St Wenceslas. Chapter Seven discusses the death of Wenceslas and the last chapter introduces the reader to the legends connected to the saint.

What is noteworthy in this volume, however, is the attempt made to connect the history of the Slovaks with that of the Czechs. Chapter Four is entitled 'Velký Štát Slovákov a Čechov' (The Great State of the Czechs and Slovaks), and refers to the 9th-century Great Moravian Empire (in Czech: *Velkomoravská říše* and in Slovak: *Veľká Morava* or *Veľkomoravská ríša*). Pöstényi credits Svätopluk I, '[t]he most famous Slovak ruler' with fully establishing the territory of the Empire and thus, establishing the first common state of the Czechs and Slovaks.¹²³ But he also credits the Czech Bořivoj I, Duke of Bohemia, who preceded Svätopluk (although only for a

¹²⁰ See for example: Josef Pekař, *Svatý Václav* [St Wenceslas], Prague: Historický klub, 1929; Bartoš, F. M. *Kníže Václav svatý: a dějinách a v legendě* [St Prince Wenceslas: history and legend], Prague: Čin, 1929; *Svatováclavský sborník akordu 929-1929* [The St Wenceslas anthology 929-1929], Prague: Ladislav Kuncíř, 1929; Karel Stloukal, *Svatý Václav: A svatováclavská idea v našich dějinách* [St Wenceslas: The ideal of St Wenceslas in our history], Prague: Politický klub československé národní demokracie, 1929

¹²¹ Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists*, pp. 136-138. and Karel Brušák, 'The Meaning of Czech History: Pekař vs Masaryk' in Péter László and Robert Pynsent (eds) *Intellectuals and the Future in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1890-1914*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988, pp. 92-106.

¹²² Ján Pöstényi, *Slováci a svätý Václav* [The Slovaks and St Wenceslas], Trnava: Spolok sv. Vojtecha, 1929.

¹²³ Ibid. p. 25.

short period until Bořivoj I's eldest son Spytihněv I reached maturity).¹²⁴ Bořivoj I was also married to Ludmila, grandmother of Wenceslas. In this way Pöstényi makes Wenceslas highly relevant for the Slovaks, by putting him in direct descent from a Slovak ruler, Svätopluk I.¹²⁵ Moreover, he presents a unified territory that belonged to both Slovaks and Czechs, who were genealogically related, and which Slovaks had an equal role in fighting for and establishing.

The most comprehensive publication from the Czech side, however, did not appear until 1934, when the first volume of the *Svatováclavský sborník* (St Wenceslas proceedings) was published, with the subtitle *Vydáný na památku 1000. výročí smrti knížete Václava svatého* (Issued to commemorate the thousandth anniversary of the death of St Wenceslas).¹²⁶ The first volume ran to 1115 pages and includes chapters by renowned Czech(oslovak) historians, such as the aforementioned Pekař and Bartoš, but also by the recently deceased Catholic Bishop of Prague Antonín Podlaha. This volume explores the legends of St Wenceslas, but also includes articles about the remains of St Wenceslas, his grave, the origins of Czech coins and St Vitus cathedral, which stands on the site where an early Romanesque rotunda, founded by St Wenceslas, was built in 925. Pekař's chapter entitled 'Svatý Václav' gives a historical background to St Wenceslas, but interestingly it does not mention Great Moravia – a concept favoured by the Slovaks – although it does discuss Bořivoj I and his heir Spytihněv I.¹²⁷ Svätopluk I is only mentioned in passing.¹²⁸ Therefore, unlike the attempt by the Slovak historian Pöstényi to link Czech and Slovak history, the Czech Catholic contributors to this volume had an opportunity to create a history around Wenceslas which integrated the Slovaks, but they ignored this and focused on presenting a mainly Czech Wenceslas.

The millennium commemorations were also intended to be celebrated with the silent epic film entitled *Svatý Václav* (St Wenceslas), starring Zdeněk Štěpánek as Wenceslas and directed by Jan Kolár. But the search for funding and other production complications meant that the film instead premiered on 3 April 1930, by which time interest had waned. Its makers were the Millenium-Film society, set up specially to produce the film for the Wenceslas millennium.

¹²⁴ Ibid. pp. 25-26.

¹²⁵ Svätopluk, since the 18th-19th centuries is often referred to as a 'Slovak king' in Slovak literature. Július Bartl, *Slovak History: Chronology and Lexicon*, Mundelein, Ill.: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2002, p. 88.

¹²⁶ *Svatováclavský sborník: na památku 1000. výročí smrti knížete Václava svatého* [The St Wenceslas collection: for the 1000th anniversary of the death of Prince Saint Wenceslas], Prague: Tiskem státní tiskárny v Praze, 1929

¹²⁷ Josef Pekař, 'Svatý Václav' [St Wenceslas] in *Svatováclavský sborník: na památku 1000. výročí smrti knížete Václava svatého*, Prague: Tiskem státní tiskárny v Praze, 1929, pp. 9-101. p. 11-22.

¹²⁸ Ibid. p. 19. and p. 71.

The founder was P. Method Klement, a Benedictine monk, who wanted to make the film so that the millennium celebrations could ‘reconcile the nation, divided between atheists, republicans, and supporters of the Jan Hus tradition on the one hand, and the supporters of the clerical state on the other.’¹²⁹ Millenium-Film was able to secure some state funding and loans but also found itself criticized by some of the press, which believed it to be too close to the Catholic Church. On the other hand, it did receive support in parliament to make the film from the (Catholic) Czechoslovak People’s Party. The film’s producers openly spoke of their intention to return Wenceslas to the Czech nation, arguing that he represented its thousand-year statehood, which did not begin just in 1918.¹³⁰

In its search for money, Millenium-Film applied for funding to the Jubilee Fund, set up to finance different social and cultural initiatives promoting the tenth anniversary of the foundation of Republic.¹³¹ According to a letter dated November 1928, production had by now already been underway for two years. The filmmakers were keen to pre-empt any criticisms about the film’s objectivity and partiality, stating that the ‘original screenplay was critiqued by historians, artists and film experts’. Moreover, the film was ‘a very serious enterprise, free of all political tendencies, that will only benefit the Republic in terms of cultural consolidation domestically and in propaganda beyond the borders.’ The film’s budget became out of control, however, and the makers attempted to attract funding from abroad, although this never materialised.¹³²

In the end the film turned out to be the most expensive film made in Europe at the time and the last silent movie made in Czechoslovakia.¹³³ The filmmakers put the cost at the astronomical sum of 3.5 million Kč including the musical soundtrack.¹³⁴ The plot of the film is very much based on what the audience of interwar Czechoslovakia would have known about

¹²⁹ Velek, *Saint Wenceslas*, p. 18.

¹³⁰ Ibid. pp. 19-20.

¹³¹ National Archives of the Czech Republic [hereafter NACR], *Jubilejní fond*, Box 7, Svatováclavský historický film - subvence, 22 November 1928 [hereafter *Jubilejní fond*]

¹³² *Jubilejní fond*, Box 7, Film sv. Václav. Subvence u jubilej. fondu čs. 5 January 1929 and Film Sv. Václav informace o poslední stadiu věci, 21 May 1929

¹³³ See the introduction of the documentary *Svatý Václav – světec, kníže, legenda* [St Wenceslas – saint, prince, legend], 2010, dir. Martin Suchánek.

¹³⁴ *Jubilejní fond*, Box 7, Film Sv. Václav informace o poslední stadiu věci [St Wenceslas film, information of the current state of affairs], 21 May 1929. Viktor Velek notes that the average productions costs for a silent film in Czechoslovakia was 200,000 Kč while a sound film cost around 800,000 Kč. See Velek, *Saint Wenceslas*, p. 35. The film eventually cost over 4.2 million Kč to produce. See also: http://www.rozhlas.cz/socr_eng/news/_zprava/saint-wenceslas-evening-at-the-rudolfinum--787142.

Wenceslas, and which was also reflected in the publications about Wenceslas for the Millennium celebrations. It tells the life of St Wenceslas, how he was drawn to Christianity, mainly through his grandmother Ludmila who raised him in this spirit. After Wenceslas' father dies his mother, Drahomíra and his grandmother Ludmila fight for the throne. This power struggle ends when the pagan Boleslav invites his brother Wenceslas to the consecration of a chapel, although this is only a ruse to draw him near. In the film Wenceslas is killed by Boleslav's men in front of the chapel.¹³⁵

The film's official premiere came on 3 April 1930, six months after the official millennium commemorations were over. The premiere was held in the Alfa cinema with government and political figures, the archbishop of Prague, artists and generals in attendance. The soundtrack was performed by a large orchestra conducted Jan Elšnic, conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra.¹³⁶ Yet, despite the glitzy promotion, the film was a flop. There was little media coverage, even less critical interest and the general public did not respond enthusiastically.¹³⁷

In the end, the film *St Wenceslas*, perhaps similarly to its namesake main character, did not become the overarching success its makers predicted it to be. There are some obvious reasons for this: the timing of the premiere came too late, and also the film itself might have seemed dated for the audiences who were more interested in the new 'talkies' and not in a silent movie. But, the film's problems also lay in its content and the way it was made. As the Czech musicologist Viktor Velek points out, the film suffered due to its fragmented aims. Firstly, it attempted to do something almost impossible: to satisfy both Czech liberals and Catholics. The figure of Wenceslas was also expected to be all things to all men.¹³⁸ An academic committee oversaw the writing of the screenplay, presumably to make sure it was 'objective', but this only had the effect of making it dull and too academic.¹³⁹ The film also presented the scenes in which peace was made between the Czech and German armies and between Wenceslas and the German Emperor in a positive way, an unpopular view at the time. As Velek underlines, '[i]t

¹³⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the plot also see: Velek, *Saint Wenceslas*, pp. 15-16.

¹³⁶ Ibid. p. 66.

¹³⁷ See for example: *Národní politika*, 3 April 1930, p. 3; *Národní listy*, 3 April 1930, p. 3, 'Co nového ve filmu' [What is new in film] in *Národní politika*, 4 April 1930, p. 6; and 'Slavnostní předvádění filmu "Sv. Václav"' [Festive performance of the film *St Wenceslas*], in *Národní listy*, 4 April 1930, p. 6.

¹³⁸ Velek, *Saint Wenceslas*, p. 11.

¹³⁹ Ibid. p. 26 and p. 74.

was impossible to combine the theme of Czech-German relations with the primarily anti-German atmosphere of the First Republic in a satisfying way.¹⁴⁰

The Germans in Czechoslovakia reacted positively to the St Wenceslas commemorations – for precisely the same reasons that the commemorations were less popular among Czech nationalists. Petr Placák has investigated the press coverage of the various communities to the millennium celebrations. He found that the newspapers of the German minority in the Bohemian lands (who were mainly Catholic) responded positively to the St Wenceslas commemorations: the *Deutsche Press*, the daily newspaper of the German Christian Democratic Party, even criticised one of its senators for the one-sidedness of the organisation of the commemoration, as everything had been organised by the Czech side.¹⁴¹ The paper also highlighted that this commemorative occasion presented an opportunity for the German Catholics to work together with the Czech Catholics.¹⁴² Other German-language newspapers kept a certain distance from the commemorations, such as the *Deutsche Landpost*, the official party organ of the conservative *Německý svaz zemědělců* [*Bund der Landwirte* or Farmers' League],¹⁴³ but only the *Deutsche Böhmerwald Zeitung* ignored the commemorations completely.¹⁴⁴ The Wenceslas commemorations could, therefore, have acted as a way of bringing the Germans in and giving them a stake in the Czechoslovak state, but the general anti-German atmosphere did not allow this. Emphasising Wenceslas' efforts at peace with the Germans would also not have been acceptable for the Czech nationalists.

The St Wenceslas commemorations also came in for criticism from the Communist Party and its daily *Rudé právo*. On 26 September, an article generously peppered with the word 'fascist' declared that the St Wenceslas feast brought together 'the bourgeoisie with the clerical reaction and supports social-fascism as a manifestation for clericalism, fascism and in preparing for war.'¹⁴⁵ According to the paper, the workers of Prague II and VII had called the people to demonstrate against this 'clerical-fascist reaction at a public meeting of the people'. The article below the announcement, entitled 'St Wenceslas tribute — clerical reaction, fascism and militarism', also called the workers to demonstrate on the feast day: 'The main programme of

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 100.

¹⁴¹ Placák, *Svatováclavské Milenium*, p. 113.

¹⁴² Ibid. p. 115.

¹⁴³ Ibid. p. 112.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 119.

¹⁴⁵ 'Svatováclavské oslavy' [St Wenceslas celebration] in *Rudé právo*, 26 September 1929, p. 2.

the St Wenceslas feast should be on Friday 27 September at six o'clock in the evening a tribute to the nation at the statue of St Wenceslas.¹⁴⁶ The purpose of this tribute, according to the Communists, was for the workers to 'worship their exploiters, it is a tribute to clerical reaction, fascism and militarism'. Naturally, it was to be attended by 'all of the official representatives of the Czechoslovak bourgeoisie. To counteract this '[t]he class conscious proletariat of Greater Prague cannot remain silent!' The *Rudé právo* headline of 28 September itself declared that all should be: 'Against dictatorial fascism and social fascism'.¹⁴⁷ Most of this article was, however redacted by the censors, in an unwitting confirmation of just how much the 'proletariat' was oppressed by the 'bourgeoisie'. At the bottom of the front page the article still read: 'Workers! Demonstrate against the clerical-fascistic St Wenceslas parade!'

The Slovak press was more positive about the Wenceslas millennial commemorations, seeing them as an opportunity to strengthen the Catholic element of Czechoslovakia and create a distance from the former Hungarian rule in Slovakia. Czech politicians also saw an opportunity in the St Wenceslas commemoration to 'bring Catholic Slovakia into "Czechoslovakia"'.¹⁴⁸ *Slovák*, the newspaper of the Slovak People's Party whose deputies had argued vociferously against Jan Hus Day, published the programme of the commemorative week in mid-September for the hundreds of pilgrims from Slovakia that the newspaper foresaw would attend the celebration in Prague.¹⁴⁹ *Slovák* wrote that 1929 is a 'year of great significance [*veľavýznamný rok*] in the history of Czech Catholicism and for the whole of Czechoslovakia'.¹⁵⁰ All the Slovak papers examined by Placák were in favour of the Wenceslas commemoration, portraying the event as a 'connecting bond for the future', and the sign of the end of 'foreign traditions', i.e. Hungarian traditions in Slovakia.¹⁵¹

Nonetheless, in Slovakia there was a further complication, namely the Hungarian minorities in certain areas, especially in the southern regions of Slovakia. These Hungarian populations were less supportive of the Wenceslas tradition. In the town of Nitra in western Slovakia, for example, the Hungarian city officials and Catholic clergy did not take part in the official

¹⁴⁶ 'Svátováclavský hold — klerikální reakci, fašismu a militarismu' [St Wenceslas tribute — clerical reaction, fascism and militarism] in *Rudé právo*, 26 September 1929, p. 2.

¹⁴⁷ 'Proti diktatuře fašismu a sociálfašismu —' [Against the dictatorship of fascism and social fascism] in *Rudé právo*, 28 September 1929, p. 1. Social fascism at this time meant social democracy for the Communists.

¹⁴⁸ Placák, *Svátováclavské Milenium*, p. 136.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 163.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 138.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p.144. The narrative was rather similar in all the other papers as well. See pp. 138-144.

commemorations, which mainly involved school children and youth singing on the main town square.¹⁵² This outraged the journalist of *Národná stráž*, who protested that during the St Stephen Day commemorations – in honour of the Hungarian national saint and state founder – the Hungarian officials ‘decorate the town knee-deep in the Hungarian tricolour’.¹⁵³ National day commemorations in these smaller towns, with mixed communities, acted as flashpoints of conflict, during which the ethnic divisions and competition over public space came into the open. Unsurprisingly, the Hungarian community of Nitra – which had only been detached from Hungary nine years previously – still preferred to commemorate Hungarian official national days and not those of Czechoslovakia.

Horthy’s Hungary

In Hungary itself, the decisions about what should be a national day were more settled than in Czechoslovakia with both days selected having a precedent, in some form, in the 19th and 20th centuries. During the interwar period there were two official national days: 15 March, commemorating the start of the 1848-49 revolution against the Habsburgs (previously commemorated on 11 April, the day the April Laws were signed in 1848); and 20 August, commemorating the foundation of the Hungarian state in the year 1000 and its founder St Stephen. St Stephen was a far less controversial figure in Hungary than the medieval saints and martyrs were in Czechoslovakia, and any disputes were not over the actual figure of Stephen himself, but rather on his figure was used by the governing elite of Admiral Miklós Horthy. During the interwar period the main theme that runs through 20 August is closely interconnected with the loss of two-thirds of Hungary’s pre-First World War territories as a result of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920.

In the first two years of Hungary’s existence as an independent state the country was a politically unstable place, experiencing two revolutions and a counter-revolution. In October of 1918, opposition leader Count Mihály Károlyi initiated the ‘Aster revolution’, which led to the formation of the Hungarian Democratic Republic with himself as prime minister. King Charles IV stood down from the Hungarian throne on 12 November 1918.¹⁵⁴ The biggest threat

¹⁵² Placák, *Svatováclavské Milenium*, p. 165.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ King Charles IV (IV. Károly) of Hungary or King Charles I (Karl I.) of Austria was the last monarch and ruler of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, from November 1916 until November 1918. As Karel I., he was also the last King of Bohemia.

to this Republic were the Communists led by Béla Kun, who soon became the ‘new heroes’ of ‘the disaffected masses’.¹⁵⁵

In the meantime, the borders of the Austro-Hungarian successor states had still not been established. Hungary was in a weak position, having been on the losing side of the war. On 20 March 1919 Károlyi received the so-called Vix memorandum from the French Lieutenant Colonel Fernand Vix, which allowed the Romanian army to advance into Hungary.¹⁵⁶ This caused further political instability in Hungary as well as national outrage. The Social Democrats, the largest party in Parliament, took this opportunity to assume sole responsibility of the government and, thus, on 21 March 1919 the Hungarian Soviet Republic, also known as the Republic of Councils (*Tanácsköztársaság*), was formed with Béla Kun at its helm. The Entente did not acknowledge the legitimacy of the Republic. It lasted for 133 days, during which time the Communists organised a splendid 1 May Labour Day holiday, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Yet, Kun also gave in to international pressure over the peace treaties that were being developed at the Paris Conference and withdrew Hungarian troops from Slovakia. However, with military conflicts with most of Hungary’s neighbours and waning support domestically, the days of the Hungarian Soviet Republic were numbered. On 1 August the Romanian Army launched a new offensive against Hungary and occupied Budapest on 6 August 1919.¹⁵⁷ This provided the opportunity for the head of the National Army, Miklós Horthy, to assume power, and on 1 March 1920 the Kingdom of Hungary was re-established. Since the Entente Powers would not agree to the return of Charles IV, Horthy was installed as head of state and Regent.¹⁵⁸

Elections were held on 25-26 January 1920 and the first task of the winning coalition of the Smallholders and the Christian National Unity Party was to decide what form the new state should have. Monarchy was the preferred option, as this form most suited claims to ‘the historical continuity of the new regime and the legality of Hungary’s claim to the land of the Holy Crown of St Stephen’.¹⁵⁹ There were attempts to establish Charles IV as King of Hungary,

¹⁵⁵ László Kontler, *A History of Hungary: Millennium in Central Europe*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 332. [hereafter: Kontler, *A History of Hungary*]

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. pp. 333-334.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. pp. 338-339.

¹⁵⁸ Péter Apor, *Fabricating Authenticity in Soviet Hungary. The Afterlife of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in the Age of State Socialism*, London: Anthem Press, 2014, pp. 4-5. [hereafter: Apor, *Fabricating Authenticity*]

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 341.

but threats from neighbouring states and the victorious allied powers as well as and the lack of support from Horthy prevented this from happening. Horthy was elected regent with sweeping presidential powers, and was able to appoint and dismiss Prime Ministers without having to consult much with Parliament itself. Count Albert Apponyi, who was greatly trusted amongst the political elite, was sent to Paris to negotiate the peace treaty. This indicates another marked difference between Hungary and Czechoslovakia in the interwar period: whilst, Czechoslovakia presented itself as a modern democratic state, Hungary at this time was a 'kingdom without a king', governed by the conservative regent Admiral Miklós Horthy, who ruled from March 1920 to October 1944. In consequence, 'an antiliberal, antidemocratic, anti-Semitic, revisionist, nationalist, conservative culture dominated Hungarian politics throughout the entire interwar period.' The chaos of the Hungarian Soviet Republic allowed this regime to present itself as 'defending society from the alleged menace of Bolshevik revolution.'¹⁶⁰

The Treaty of Trianon, signed on 4 June 1920, meant that Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory with the principal beneficiaries being Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. This development was to dominate debates and configurations of national identity for the rest of the interwar period, and would again become a hotly debated topic after the fall of the Communist regime after 1989. During the Communist period, however, the imposed 'friendliness' between the Eastern Bloc states meant that such discussions had to be suppressed to maintain cordial relations with Czechoslovakia and Romania.

Stephen and Hungary

Hungarian historian László Kontler makes the astute observation that whilst today (and in the interwar period) 20 August is commemorated as the foundation of the state in the year 1000, this is historically 'imprecise' since 'states' did not gain the meaning that is implied until the early modern period.¹⁶¹ Moreover, whilst the great importance of the mythical foundation of the state is obvious, this kind of event, or myth, is not unique to the Hungarians, and there are thus other explanations for the 'unparalleled status of [20 August] in Hungarian collective memory and public remembrance'. Kontler sees the reasons for the position of 20 August in the Hungarian historical narrative in the maintenance of statehood and the capacity of the state

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. pp. 6-7.

¹⁶¹ László Kontler, 'Foundation Myths and the Reflection of History in Modern Hungary' in Godfrey, Sima and Frank Unger (eds) *The Shifting Foundations of Modern Nation-States*, Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2004., pp. 131-148, p. 142.

to survive, the ‘creation of sovereignty’ and ‘the *maintenance of old tradition*’.¹⁶² It is during the 19th and 20th centuries, and especially the interwar period, when these aspects come to the fore, with the ‘national revival’ and eventual creation of the nation-state.

During the interwar period, most Hungarians living outside of the capital of Budapest still worked in farming, and for them the main days of commemoration/celebration were the 1 May festivities, carnivals and, most importantly, the harvest celebration during the fair on St Stephen’s Day on the 20 August.¹⁶³ The Day of St Stephen on 20 August has a long tradition of being commemorated in some form, but it was not until the interwar years, specifically in 1920, that St Stephen’s Day became a secular national day.¹⁶⁴ The Hungarian historian Gábor Gyáni remarks that the shift to a more secular and politicised commemoration is not surprising, as ‘the Horthy regime emphatically articulated its own political ideology through the language of historical mythology’.¹⁶⁵

Added to this, and strengthening the new secular, more political overtones of the day, was the element of territorial revisionism, as a direct result of the Treaty of Trianon. Reversing the Treaty was high on Horthy’s agenda and came to permeate the 20 August commemorations during this period. 20 August, the foundation of the state, St Stephen, the crown, the parade with the Holy Right, and what is often referred to as the ideology/ideal of St Stephen (*Szent Istváni eszme*) were the perfect vehicle to transmit the messages of the Horthy regime about Trianon and Turánism (a movement popular at the time that emphasised the eastern/Asian origins of the Hungarian people).¹⁶⁶ Yet, from early on, the Hungarians also saw other potentials in the St Stephen’s Day commemorations, not simply ‘national’ issues, but intertwined issues, such as economic and tourism opportunities.

¹⁶² Ibid. pp. 143-144.

¹⁶³ In Czechoslovakia in the early interwar period ‘nearly half the population belonged to the lower middle class, to the white-collar worker strata and intellectuals.’ One-third of Czechoslovakia’s population were employed in the industries, one-quarter to one-third of the population belonged to the peasantry, with the majority belonging to the lower middle class. In Hungary, in contrast, the urban population reached only about 38% of the overall population, with a clear peasant majority. See: Ivan T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe Before World War II*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998, p. 294.

¹⁶⁴ Gábor Gyáni, ‘Kommemoratív Emlékezet és Történelmi Igazolás’ [Commemorative Memory and Historical Justification] in Veszpémy, László (ed) *Szent István és az államalapítás*, Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2002, pp. 569-581. p. 571.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ The Holy Right (*Szent Jobb*) refers to the (allegedly) mummified right hand of St Stephen.

Budapest has promoted itself as a popular tourist destination with an elaborate marketing strategy from around 1885.¹⁶⁷ During the late 19th and early 20th centuries the main attractions that were strategically advertised to foreign tourists were ‘fairs and other transnational spectacles’ under the branding of Budapest as the ‘Paris of the East’, lending the city a cosmopolitan air.¹⁶⁸ After the dissolution of the Monarchy and the consolidation of the nationalist-conservative Horthy regime, the branding of the city also shifted to more nationalist-conservative and inward-looking discourse, rejecting the previous cosmopolitan image. Instead the focus was on ‘Hungary’s natural features’ under the new branding: ‘Queen of the Danube’.¹⁶⁹ The active promotion of Budapest fell under the Budapest Tourism Office, set up in 1916, although with the rising popularity of tourism in the 1930s a number of other agencies were also set up, such as the National Tourism Office, the Federation of Hungarian Tourism Agencies or the Baross Federation.¹⁷⁰

The active promotion of St Stephen’s Day as a tourism attraction started in 1926 when ‘Queen of the Danube’ brochures published by the Tourism Office ‘in French, English, German, Italian, Spanish, and Esperanto (and which were sent in several million copies abroad) presented St. Stephen’s week as the high point of the touristic season in Hungary.’¹⁷¹ The promotion of St Stephen’s Day as an international tourist destination attempted to show off the pageantry of the day, and, of course, it was also hoped that this would be a lucrative business for the country.

It was hoped that foreign tourism would also attract the attention of foreigners to Hungary’s fate after the Treaty of Trianon. In *A Szent István napi ünnep története* [The history of the St Stephen Day celebrations] published in 1928, the foreword quotes the proposal of Archduke Joseph Francis of Austria – who in 1919-1920 had been the potential next king of Hungary – that was published in *Az Ujság* [The Newspaper] suggesting that the commemorations and celebrations on 20 August could make Budapest a major tourist attraction.¹⁷² Gábor Gyula, the book’s author, observed that the mayor of Budapest, Ferenc Ripka, also seemed to have read

¹⁶⁷ Alexander Vari, ‘From “Paris of the East” to “Queen of the Danube”: International Models in the Promotion of Budapest Tourism, 1885-1940’ in Zuelow, Eric G. E. (ed.) *Touring Beyond the Nation: A Transnational Approach to European Tourism History*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011, pp. 103-125, p. 104. [hereafter: Vari, ‘From “Paris of the East” to “Queen of the Danube”’]

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. pp. 104-105.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 113. For the rejection of cosmopolitanism see: pp. 111-112.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 111.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. pp. 113-114.

¹⁷² Gyula Gábor, *A Szent István napi ünnep története* [The history of the St Stephen Day celebrations] Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1928

the Archduke's words, as Ripka had started to encourage the transformation of the holiday to attract greater international attention. Gábor supported these new developments, arguing that in times like these, 'in our hearts we need to keep alive and care for the unbreakable hope and faith in the resurrection of Greater Hungary'. The logic behind Gábor's argument appears to be that St Stephen's Day, as an entertaining and interesting event for tourists and people outside of Hungary, could raise the country's profile and its 'cultural heritage', thus strengthening Hungarian claims for the restoration of the lost territories. He asks: 'What would be more suitable than the Crown of St Stephen, the holy symbol of former Greater Hungary?'¹⁷³ The foreword concludes: 'Let every 20 August from now on be a year by year renewed, always living demonstration against Trianon, so long until St Stephen's Crown shines upon us again whole, in its old light.'¹⁷⁴

On 15 August 1925 *Az Ujság*, a great advocate of supporting tourism during the 20 August commemorations, published an interview with Ottó Marencsik, one of the leading figures of the Hotel Industry Board. Marencsik argued that '[i]t is well known that in the summer months many American and English tourists come to our continent, who all try to see what deserves attention. So if in connection with St Stephen's Day we organised celebrations, spectacular processions, artistic performances and concerts, and folk games [*népies játékok*], we would definitely be able to attract the overseas visitors to the continent.'¹⁷⁵ The introduction of these 'folk games' also welcomed by extreme nationalist elements within Hungary as well, who perceived Budapest as not being a *Magyar* enough city.¹⁷⁶ Whilst their plans of setting up small, peasant villages all over the capital never materialised, the Budapest city authorities and the regime did implement the promotion of peasant themes in its propaganda.¹⁷⁷

Unlike in the Czechoslovakian case, both St Stephen's Day and the more 'political' anniversary of 15 March were easy commemorations to settle on as national days for the Hungarians. Yet, as we will see in the following chapter, while the content and rituals of the St Stephen's Day commemorations were uncontroversial, those of 15 March were the subject of some

¹⁷³ Ibid. p. 8.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 9.

¹⁷⁵ 'Páratlan érdeklődés mutatkozik Szent István napja iránt' [There is an unmatched interest towards St Stephen's Day] in *Az Ujság*, 15 August 1925, p. 3.

¹⁷⁶ For plans of the extreme nationalists to set up small villages within the capital city to showcase the 'Magyar Soul' including peasant houses, libraries, pubs and different arts and crafts workshops. See: Vari, 'From "Paris of the East" to "Queen of the Danube"', p. 116.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. pp. 116-117.

nervousness. Even so, and perhaps precisely because of the general unanimity that St Stephen represented certain Hungarian political ideals and values, the figure of Stephen was often mobilised in an expression of dissent, in order to argue that the political and clerical elite itself was undermining these values. For example, *Népszava*, the Social Democrat paper, attacked the government for not adhering to the ideals of St Stephen. In its coverage of the 1926 commemorations, *Népszava* published an article by an ‘active Catholic priest’, who ‘wants progress in a way that largely fits our [the paper’s] perception, in opposition to’ those Christians ‘who referring to “traditions” want the medieval period back’.¹⁷⁸ The anonymous priest argues that although the regime continuously refers to the figure of St Stephen, they act completely against his ideals.

The core of the article’s argument is that whilst Stephen realised that the Hungarians needed to turn towards the West to be able to survive (by adopting Christianity and establishing relations with the medieval European powers), the current generation of the 1920s, who often think that they are more Turanian [*turánibb*] than the ancient pagan Hungarians, reject Western influences such as the rule of law that Stephen fought so hard to protect. This illustrates the way in which Stephen was a universally accepted but multivocal symbol, which was used by opposing groups with conflicting positions (from nationalists to social progressives) to argue that the other side was not truly ‘Hungarian’ as they diverged from Stephen’s message.

In 1927 the Catholic Church also caught up with the rhetoric of Budapest not being, in this case, a Catholic enough city. Supported by the Ministry of the Interior, the Hungarian Actio Catholica (AC) was established in 1927.¹⁷⁹ One of the AC’s main tasks was the strengthening of the Church in everyday life, a task that the leaders of the organisation believed was best achieved by organising ‘single major events’ supported by ‘modern propaganda techniques’ that would allow for ‘the triumphant staging of ideas’ and help with ‘the re-Christianisation of the urban population’.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, as Árpád von Klimó suggests, the establishment of AC also enabled the Catholic Church to reclaim some control over the 20 August, as the Church

¹⁷⁸ ‘Szent István és a művelt Nyugat: Szent István-napi gondolatok’ [St Stephen and the cultivated West: Thoughts on St Stephen’s Day] in *Népszava*, 20 August 1926, pp. 1-2. p. 1.

¹⁷⁹ Árpád von Klimó, *Nation, Konfession, Geschichte. Zur nationalen Geschichtskultur Ungarns im europäischen Kontext* (1860-1948). Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003, p. 259. [hereafter: Klimó, *Nation, Konfession, Geschichte*]

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 260.

was concerned with the ‘increasing degeneration of the St Stephen celebrations into a tourist and political spectacle’ in the early 1930s.¹⁸¹

The first occasion where AC was able to showcase its ideas for Budapest came during the 1930-31 St Emeric-year celebrations, commemorating the 900th anniversary of the death of Stephen’s son, Emeric.¹⁸² The celebration of Emeric fitted not only with the aims of the Catholic Church, but also with the aims of the regime, with its focus on youth integration.¹⁸³ In the end, the St Emeric commemorations were not a great success and, apart from these special commemorations, were never celebrated again nationwide.¹⁸⁴ The celebrations did serve, however as a ‘dress rehearsal’ for the 1938 34th Eucharistic Congress that was to be held in Budapest alongside the 900th anniversary commemorations of St Stephen’s death.

During the 1920s and the early 1930s the figure of St Stephen served two main purposes: to emphasise the unfairness and unlawfulness of the Treaty of Trianon, since those ‘lost territories’ were historically part of the Crown Lands of St Stephen, while his day was employed for the promotion of Budapest as a tourism destination. Tourism not only provided business for the capital, but it also served to illustrate the nationalist narrative that was on display during 20 August.

In Hungary, as opposed to Czechoslovakia where the commemoration of medieval figures divided society along religious and ethnic lines, St Stephen appealed to everyone from the left to the right and from religious to non-religious alike. The main draw of St Stephen lay in the message of the unity of the nation, including the ‘lost territories’. Whilst the figure of Stephen was not divisive, how certain groups used his image was often debated. The Social Democrats did not agree with the regime’s conservative-nationalist image of Stephen and instead highlighted Stephen’s European credentials. The Church, supportive of the overall message of the regime, also tried to take matters into its own hands with the establishment of the umbrella organisation Actio Catholica, attempting to restore the religious significance of 20 August.

Stephen in Slovakia

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Emeric died during a hunting accident in 1031.

¹⁸³ Klimó, *Nation, Konfession, Geschichte*, p. 260.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 263.

The Treaty of Trianon had created a Hungarian minority in southern Slovakia, and one of the thorniest issues of the interwar period for relations between local Slovaks and Hungarians was the contest over the 'symbolic ownership' of public space.¹⁸⁵ National day commemorations came to the forefront for both the local Hungarian population of Slovakia, who still wanted to commemorate Hungarian national symbols, amongst them the founder of the Hungarian state, St Stephen. In Hungary, St Stephen became a symbol of Greater Hungary and the justification of irredentist rhetoric. Not all of the Hungarian population of Slovakia, however, agreed with this interpretation of Stephen. Some Hungarian activists in Slovakia accused the motherland of misinterpreting 'the real meaning of St Stephen's message'.¹⁸⁶ For these Hungarian minority activists, the tradition of St Stephen 'represented an idea of tolerance among nations', what the newspaper *Kassai Napló* summarised as: "A home should be a home to all its sons."¹⁸⁷ Yet, despite the efforts of some members of the local Hungarian population, St Stephen was indeed still seen by many local Hungarians as a symbol of Greater Hungary, and the irredentist discourse was thus easily reproduced in southern Slovakia too.¹⁸⁸

Slovak Church and state authorities were also aware of the importance of St Stephen and the nationalist connotations attached to his image for the Hungarian population. In 1919 a Circular of the Apostolic Administration of Trnava clarified that 20 August was a working day in Slovakia and forbade any commemorative sermons or masses. Instead of 20 August, the Church argued that the feast day of St Stephen should be commemorated on 2 September, in accordance with the calendar of the Catholic Church.¹⁸⁹ Despite these constrictions, the Hungarian population still commemorated Stephen, mostly by abstention from work and by wearing black on the day.

A further ban on 20 August was implemented in 1931, which evolved into a general ban on commemorating St Stephen in any form on this day. The 'patronal churches' in Slovakia

¹⁸⁵ Miroslav Michela, 'Collective Memory and Political Change – The Hungarians and the Slovaks in the Former Half of the 20th Century' in *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, No. 3-4, 2006, pp. 15-26, p. 19. [hereafter: Michela, 'Collective Memory and Political Change']

¹⁸⁶ *Kassai Napló*, 20 August 1920, p. 1, quoted in Miroslav Michela, "'A Home should be a Home to All its Sons': Cultural Representations of the Saint Stephen in Slovakia during the Interwar Period' in Adam Hudek (ed.) *Overcoming the Old Borders. Beyond the Paradigm of Slovak National History*, Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV v Prodanu, 2013, pp. 97-110, p. 102. [hereafter: Michela, 'Cultural Representations of the Saint Stephen in Slovakia']

¹⁸⁷ Michela, 'Cultural Representations of the Saint Stephen in Slovakia', p. 102.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 103.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. pp. 105-106.

‘declar[ed] that Slovakia had already become a part of [a] new state and therefore there was no reason to celebrate a feast which the Catholic Church [already] celebrates on 2nd September’.¹⁹⁰ Although the general ban on commemorating 20 August did indeed oblige many Hungarians to stop publicly commemorating Stephen, this did not mean that his cult and day of commemoration died out in Slovakia. As Slovak historian Miroslav Michela observes, by the 1930s many Hungarians had stopped attending the 20 August commemorations and provocations against the state authorities also gradually declined, as Hungarians wanted to avoid accusations of irredentism and the subsequent discrimination against them. This did not, however, mean that Hungarians completely abandoned the commemoration of Stephen, and commemorations still took place in the private sphere.¹⁹¹

The International Eucharistic Congress of 1938 and the 900th anniversary of St Stephen’s Death

The main event of the interwar period in relation to the 20 August commemorations came in 1938. First, the 34th Eucharistic Congress took place in Budapest between 25 and 29 May 1938, soon followed by the official St Stephen Commemorative Year celebrations, on the occasion of the 900th anniversary of Stephen’s death. The 1938 Eucharistic Congress had many highlights, including the largest Holy Right procession thus far. *Népszava*, the Social Democrat paper, again reminded its readers at the beginning of the Jubilee Year festivities that if Stephen had not turned towards the West in AD 1000, the Hungarians would not have survived, concluding that ‘the Hungarians want to live *with Europe and not against Europe*’.¹⁹² This was, obviously, a comment against Hungary’s growing alliance with Nazi Germany, a turning away from the West that the Social Democrats did not see as fitting with the political ideals of St Stephen. The paper also stressed that the Hungarians need to remain independent if they want to survive in the Carpathian Basin, implying that an alliance with Nazi Germany represented ‘violence’ and ‘the barbarian spirit’.¹⁹³

Preparation for both of these events started well in advance, including a number of changes to the symbolic and urban landscape of the capital. It was considered important for the members of the Assembly to show Budapest to the foreign visitors in its best possible light. In the years

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 107.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² ‘1038-1938’ in *Népszava* 31 May 1938, p. 1.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

preceding, there had been a lack of financing for new roads or even for the repair of old ones. This needed to be remedied in advance for both the Congress and the Jubilee year so that the capital could cope with the influx of foreign visitors and visitors from other parts of the country. Moreover, to make the capital look more pleasing the Assembly also ordered ‘more gardening work’.¹⁹⁴

The International Eucharistic Congress made the St Stephen commemorations an international event attracting thousands of visitors to the capital. The Eucharist delegation arrived in Hungary on 23 May 1938. The Congress opened on 25 May on Heroes’ Square, which was the locus of the Congress. The main attraction of the Congress was however, the Eucharistic ship procession on the Danube that took place on 26 May during which the papal legate gave his blessings.¹⁹⁵ On 29 May the Congress ended and the St Stephen Commemorative Year began.

In preparation for the commemoration of the 900th anniversary of Stephen’s death in 1936, the National Committee for the St Stephen Commemorative Year (*Szent István Emlékév Országos Bizottsága*) was established to oversee all the preparations for the jubilee celebrations.¹⁹⁶ Amongst the first plans that were proposed was the renaming of District V in Budapest from *Lipótváros* (Leopoldstadt, so named in 1790 after Leopold II) to *Szent István város* (St Stephen town).¹⁹⁷ In a meeting of the General Assembly on 2 June 1937 this proposal was discussed and the motion was forwarded to the Minister of the Interior.¹⁹⁸ The Assembly justified the renaming by arguing that:

The General Assembly of the Municipality of the Capital would like to bear witness to the fact that, on the one hand, the public of the capital strictly adheres to those historical and constitutional directives that our first holy king laid down for the nation, on the other that the declared St Stephen Jubilee year, and the occasion of the XXXIV International Eucharistic Congress, that in 1938 was summoned to Budapest, [the public of the capital] wants to show in front of the whole world its veneration and gratefulness towards Saint King Stephen, who established the independent Hungarian national state with cross and sword.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ *Budapest 1937. Közgyűlések*, 1937, No. 405. p. 358.

¹⁹⁵ Moravek, Endre (ed.) *A Szent István Emlékév* [St Stephen Commemorative Year], Budapest: A Szent István Emlékév Országos Bizottsága, 1940, pp. 185-186. [hereafter: Moravek, *Emlékév*]

¹⁹⁶ Budapest Főváros Levéltára [hereafter BFL], IV. 1402. b 1274/1937 pp. 1-4, p. 3. Letter from Prime Minister Kálmán Darányi to Jenő Karafiáth. Dated: 20 October 1937.

¹⁹⁷ Today District V is called *Lipótváros* again, as it also was in the Communist era. The name must have been restored at the beginning of the Communist period in 1948.

¹⁹⁸ *Budapest 1937. Közgyűlések* No. 241. p. 148.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

In 1938 the renaming of the District was also praised by the mayor of Budapest Károly Szendy, who in a letter to the Lord Mayor, Jenő Karafiáth highlighted why District V was the best choice, since this part of the city is ‘one of the most beautiful’, and this is where many of the symbols of the nation connected to St Stephen could also be found, such as the St Stephen Basilica, the Parliament [*Országház*], the courts and Freedom Square [*Szabadság tér*]:

where four memorials of Trianon are arranged at the four points of the compass that propagate the ungratefulness that was shown to the lands of the holy crown of by those European nations that can thanks their survival for St Stephen’s Hungary, which for centuries shed its blood to protect western civilisation and Christianity.²⁰⁰

The theme for the jubilee was thus to be Stephen as the embodiment of the Hungarian state, historically and territorially. In this sense, the Hungarian state exceeded the present borders and encompassed the areas detached by the treaty of Trianon. The interesting element in the above passage is the notion of St Stephen’s Hungary as having for centuries protected western Christianity from invasions from the East – most notably against the Turks –, only to have been betrayed by these nations. Here we see the development of Hungary’s argument in aligning itself with the fascist powers of Europe, which would lead to it soon siding with Germany in the Second World War, against the western European powers that were deemed responsible for Trianon, in the hope that Germany would be able to restore the ‘lost’ territories, including parts of Slovakia. While in 1938 Hungary was using St Stephen as the symbol of a historically whole Hungary, the beginning of the break-up of Czechoslovakia was underway, with Sudeten German demands for greater autonomy being used as a pretext for the Munich Agreement in September.

The Jubilee commemoration began on 30 May 1938, the day after the Eucharistic Congress finished, with the Holy Right procession. For this occasion, it did not take place in Buda Castle, but started in front of Parliament and the ‘crowds many kilometres long’ followed the relic to Heroes’ Square.²⁰¹ The move from Buda Castle to more open-planned Pest allowed for an even bigger spectacle with larger crowds. As part of the commemorative year the Holy Right was also taken on a tour of the country on a ‘Golden Train’ [*Aranyvonat*], again offering the opportunity for presenting a unified symbolic map of the country through the route followed

²⁰⁰ BFL IV. 1402. b 286/1938 pp. 1-33. p. 15. Letter to Jenő Karafiáth from Károly Szendy. Subject: The commemorative assembly on the occasion of the 900th anniversary of St Stephen’s death. Dated: 2 May 1938.

²⁰¹ Moravek, *Emlékév*, p. 191. For the full description of the opening ceremony see pp. 187-191.

by the train. Altogether there were seven stages of the journey, taking it on a tour of Hungary's most important towns.²⁰²



Figure 1: The start of the St Stephen commemorative year in front of Parliament, 30 May 1938. Source: Fortepan/ Szinnay Gábor

The main events of the St Stephen Commemorative Year centred around Budapest, although it was decided that in May that on 21 August the House of Representatives and the Upper House of Parliament would hold a joint commemorative session in Székesfehérvár, where ‘St Stephen held royal juridical days, out of which grew the parliamentary tradition of the Árpád era’.²⁰³ This commemorative session in Székesfehérvár – a town around 65 km southeast of Budapest, historically the seat of the Hungarian kings and burial place of many of them, including Stephen – took place on 18 August and the only item to be discussed was a proposed bill regarding the immortalisation of the memory of St Stephen. The bill was, of course, passed and it proclaimed that: ‘The parliament, in testimony of the eternal gratitude and profound reverence of the Hungarian nation enacts into law the glorious memory of King St Stephen.’ The law then specified that the commemorations were to take place on 20 August every year,²⁰⁴ although

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ ‘Augusztus 21-én a képviselőház és a felsőház Székesfehérvárott ünnepi ülést tart’ [On 21 August the House of Representatives and the Upper House will hold a commemorative session in Székesfehérvár] in *Népszava*, 12 May 1938, p. 8.

²⁰⁴ Béla Imrédy, ‘Indoklás a “Szent István király dicső emlékének megörökítéséről” szóló törvényjavaslatához (1938)’ [Justification for the “Immortalisation of the memory of King Saint Stephen” bill] in Veszpémy, László

this had already been established in 1920, and St Stephen's Day was already considered to be the most important national day in Hungary.²⁰⁵ In the justification of the law, Prime Minister Béla Imrédy argued that:

With this commemoration the nation does not only immortalise the memory of the first Hungarian king, but at the same time expresses that in the future [the nation] will wish to uphold the Hungarian state, build its institutions further and carry out its own historical mission in the spirit of the creations of King Saint Stephen.²⁰⁶

Miklós Horthy also delivered a speech in Székesfehérvár, where he again emphasised the unfairness of the Treaty of Trianon by stressing that 'our predecessors fought to protect Christianity and thousands upon thousands of Hungarian valiants [*vitézek*] shed their blood in heroic battles whilst other countries could peacefully develop under our sacrificial protection.' Horthy then asked what the Hungarian nation received in turn to which he answers: 'Instead of gratitude and thanks we got Trianon!'²⁰⁷

During the 1938 commemorations in Budapest all symbolic objects connected to St Stephen were on show. The Holy Crown, usually not accessible to the public, was on display in Buda Castle, for the first time since 1916 when Charles IV had been crowned.²⁰⁸ It was originally intended that Crown would be on display for only two days, 16-17 August, but because the public 'visited the Marble Room of Buda Castle [*királyi palota*] in such great numbers' Horthy ordered the extension of the display for an extra day (on 19 August, as on the 18th a joint session of the two houses was held in Székesfehérvár and so the display was closed).²⁰⁹

On 20 August the largest Holy Right procession thus far started at 8.15 in the morning with a short religious ceremony, followed by the start of the actual procession at 8.30.²¹⁰ As always in this period, on 20 August 1938 the Holy Right procession's starting point was the St Sigismund Chapel in the Castle District of Buda.²¹¹ Interestingly, for St Stephen's Day the original route

(ed) *Szent István és az államalapítás*, Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2002, pp. 539-541. p. 539. [hereafter Imrédy 'Indoklás'] (The speech was originally delivered in 1938.)

²⁰⁵ Klimó 'A nemzet Szent Jobbja', p. 50.

²⁰⁶ Imrédy 'Indoklás' p. 540.

²⁰⁷ 'Horthy Miklós kormányzó Szent István-napi beszéde' [Admiral Miklós Horthy's St Stephen Day speech] in Veszpémy, László (ed) *Szent István és az államalapítás*, Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2002, pp. 541-542.

²⁰⁸ Moravék *Emlékév*, pp. 102-103.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 102.

²¹⁰ BFL IV. 1402. b 693/1938 pp. 1-6. p. 1. Letter from Prime Minister Béla Imrédy to Mayor Jenő Karafiáth.

²¹¹ Moravék *Emlékév*, p. 174.

was kept, although during the Eucharistic Congress the procession had been transferred to Pest to accommodate more people. The Holy Right was removed from the chapel, where it had been kept since 1900, and the procession from Buda Castle started off towards Tárnok Street, ending at Matthias Church in the Castle District. The streets were lined with people, while others attempted to catch a glimpse from the surrounding areas.



Figure 2: Holy Right procession in Buda Castle on 20 August 1938. Source: Fortepan/ Fortepan

It was not only Hungarians and the Hungarian ruling elite that took part in the commemorations. Importantly for the Hungarian government and also for Hungarian foreign policy, delegates from Germany and Italy took their seats during the procession on a tribune set up opposite Matthias Church.²¹² Presumably to coincide with the visit of the German and Italian dignitaries to the Holy Right procession, *Népszava* in an article on its front page again reiterated its opposition against the regime's alliance with the Nazi Germans.²¹³ The Social

²¹² BFL IV. 1402. b 702/1938 pp. 1-12. p. 10. Programme of the St Stephen Day celebrations for the German and Italian delegations.

²¹³ 'István király országa' [The country of St Stephen] in *Népszava*, 20 August 1938, p. 1.

Democrat paper pointed out that Stephen had had three roads to choose from: to follow that of the Pope and be independent, that of Byzantium, and that of the German emperor. Stephen chose independence, as he realised that this was the only way for the Hungarians to survive. Now, *Népszava* argued ‘we need the Hungarians to find their way back to the basic aims of the politics of St Stephen.’ For them, this was obviously a western orientation and independence, not a German alliance.

The 20 August commemoration not only showed Hungary’s alliance with Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, but it also revealed that Hungary still very much hankered towards the Habsburg past. This stands in contrast with the Czechoslovak example, where a clear distancing from the Habsburg past is evident in the whole of the national day calendar. In the Holy Right procession Archdukes Joseph and Albrecht, both members of the House of Habsburg and both great supporters of the revision of the Treaty of Trianon, accompanied Admiral Miklós Horthy, riding a white horse.²¹⁴

1938 was also important for the Hungarian minority in southern Slovakia. Although the commemoration of St Stephen had been publicly banned in Czechoslovakia since 1931, 20 August 1938 was an exemption and the anniversary of the death of St Stephen was openly commemorated. The Hungarian minority in Slovakia was closely policed by the Slovak authorities during this time; in Komárom county (in Slovak *Komárno*, the town had been split into half by the Treaty of Trianon) the local police were instructed by the county officials to check the hems of women’s skirts at a village fire brigade celebration for secret Hungarian tricolour hemlines.²¹⁵ In the town of Dunaszerdahely (in Slovak *Dunajská Streda*) a mass was attended by over 300 people, including those who came from neighbouring villages. Whilst 20 August was also officially a working day in Slovakia in many southern Slovakian towns and villages people took the day off work.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Moravek *Emlékév*, p. 176. Archduke Joseph was regent of Hungary after the fall of the Republic of Councils in 1919. He was not acceptable to the Allies, however and was forced to resign. He was a member of the Upper House, comprised of nobility and established in 1927.

²¹⁵ Attila Simon, *Egy rövid esztendő krónikája: A szlovákiai magyarok 1938-ban* [The chronicle of a short year: The Slovak Hungarians in 1938], Somorja: Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2010, p. 161.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

The collapse of the Habsburg empire in 1918 produced, among its successor states, an independent Hungary and the new state of Czechoslovakia. Both countries constructed state structures and implemented state practices, such as national days, through which they presented their ‘founding myths’ as new, 20th-century, post-Habsburg states. Shared features, as expressed in their national day calendars, include a focus on a supposed embryonic predecessor early medieval state, which preceded the Habsburgs by several centuries (Stephen, Wenceslas, even Cyril and Methodius to a degree, as founders of a ‘Slavic space’). This was accompanied by a ‘struggle’ against the Habsburgs/Germans, which was only fulfilled with the foundation of the modern state (15 March, Battle of Zborov, discussed in the following chapter), and a day commemorating the foundation of the state, whether the medieval or the modern one (28 October, 20 August).

What differed were the accompanying ‘founding stories’ of the two new states. Czechoslovakia, despite its deep divisions, attempted to present itself as a western-oriented, progressive, modern and democratic state. Although Hungary had sought independence for decades, its eventual achievement was truncated by the Treaty of Trianon, resulting in a grievance that continues today. Along with the crushing of the Republic of Councils, this led to a conservative, nationalist and authoritarian government for most of the interwar period.

As a result of Trianon, however, Hungary was ethnically homogenous, unlike Czechoslovakia. It also had a much stronger national historical tradition, which could be traced back for decades and even centuries, and could easily be slotted into a national day calendar. Czechoslovakia was riven with splits and cleavages and its historical identity was very recent and weak. Although a ‘victim’ of the collapse of Austria-Hungary, the union of Czechs and Slovaks was more a result of expediency than of historical ties or a common ethnicity. Moreover, the Czech ‘national revival’ was based on a Protestant identity centred on the figure of Jan Hus. For the Catholic Slovaks (and the Czech Catholics), efforts to create a national day for Jan Hus were seen as an attack, exacerbating their feelings of not being treated equally within the Czechoslovak state. Unlike Hungary, where St Stephen could comfortably mean different things to different people, the Czechs and Slovaks were unable to create multivocal national symbols that could unite all by allowing different groups to provide their own interpretations of these symbols. St Wenceslas was the closest to such a multivocal symbol, but he was not potent enough a figure in a landscape filled with divisive symbols. As will be seen in the

following chapter in the discussion of 28 October, this antagonism over the Czechoslovak national day calendar and the deeper divisions it signified, were even to cast doubt on the part of the Slovaks over the very manner in which Czechoslovakia itself was founded.

Chapter Two

Political commemorations: the 1848 revolution in Hungary, the foundation of Czechoslovakia and the Battle of Zborov

During the interwar period, the commemorative calendars of both Czechoslovakia and Hungary consisted not only of medieval saints and martyrs – figures, who evidenced the long historical traditions of these nations – but also days that commemorated more recent historical events. This chapter explores national days that commemorated days connected with political/military events/achievements of the recent past. In Czechoslovakia these two days were 2 July, commemorating the Battle of Zborov in 1917, with the victory of the Czechoslovak Legionnaires over the Habsburg Army, and 28 October, celebrating the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918. In Hungary there was one commemorated political event, the start of the 1848-49 revolution on 15 March 1848 against the Habsburg Monarchy. These military/political achievements were intended to demonstrate that these nations not only had a long historical past – as the commemorations of the medieval figures showed – but also that they already pre-existed as political/pre-state entities and were ready to form a nation-state and be recognised as such by other countries.

In Hungary, the 1848-49 revolution ended in defeat, with serious consequences: the execution of the 13 Hungarian rebel generals in the town of Arad and the so-called Bach era from 1851 to 1859, during which the Austrians attempted to completely centralise the Monarchy. Despite the defeat, 15 March and the 1848-49 revolution became of central importance in the Hungarian national narrative, highlighting the apparent fighting spirit of the Hungarian nation against foreign occupiers and in times of adversity.

Yet, it is precisely because these commemorations of a military/political nature were for events that were recent and highly politicised that the authorities were so concerned about them. The commemorative day of the 1848-49 revolution came to occupy an ambiguous position under the Horthy regime; it did not become an official national day until 1927, by which time a number of opposition groups, especially the Social Democrats had claimed the day as their own. In Czechoslovakia the main point of contention over 28 October became the exclusion of the state's minorities, even the Slovaks, from the commemorative displays and narratives.

As described in the previous chapter, the new state of Czechoslovakia was proclaimed on 28 October 1918, almost two weeks before the war ended, although in Hungary the political situation was initially unstable. On 16 November 1918 the Hungarian People's Republic was proclaimed, although it only lasted until 21 March 1919, when the Hungarian Soviet Republic was established by Béla Kun. Even though the Hungarian Soviet Republic was short-lived, its members understood the importance of establishing commemorative days to entrench their power and spread their message. Conveniently, they were in power on 1 May, International Workers Day. On the previous day, the front page of the official gazette of the Hungarian Soviet Republic declared that 1 May 'the memorial day of the unity of the world's revolutionary workers' was to be a day off work.¹

1 May 1919 was lavishly commemorated, in particular with interventions into the urban space using 'cosmopolitan' motifs more as opposed to national symbols. The statues of national heroes were covered up and models of the globe placed over them, symbolising the internationalist ideology of the Soviet Union, as it was at this time. Arthur Koestler, the Hungarian-born British journalist in his memoir *Arrow in the Blue*, gave a vivid description of the streets of Budapest on 1 May 1919:

That May Day celebration of 1919 was the apotheosis of the short-lived Hungarian Commune. The whole town seemed to have been turned upside down. The public squares of Budapest suffer from an abundance of oversized statues of worthies in bronze, charging the enemy on prancing horses, or orating with one arm upraised, a scroll under the other. On May Day all these statues were concealed by spherical wood frames covered with red cloth on which were painted the continents and seas of the world. These gigantic globes – some over fifty feet high because the bronze hero inside was sitting on a particularly tall horse – had a curiously fascinating effect. They looked like balloons anchored to the public squares, ready to lift the whole town into the air; they were symbols of the new cosmopolitan spirit, and of the determination of the new regime "to lift the globe from its axis."²

Arts and aesthetics were of central importance to the leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, who saw art as a means to radically change the ideological thought processes of the population.³

¹ *Tanácsköztársaság* [Republic of Councils], Vol. 32, 1 May 1919, p. 1. The decision was dated 30 April 1919.

² Arthur Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue: The First Volume of an Autobiography: 1905-31*, London: Hutchinson of London, 1969, pp. 83-84.

³ Emese Révész, 'A múltat végképp eltörölni – Helyett, legalább gyorsan lefedni: A Tanácsköztársaság május elsejei ünnepségének dekorációi' [To utterly abolish the past – instead at least quickly covering it up: The decorations of the 1 May celebration of the Hungarian Soviet Republic] at http://artmagazin.hu/artmagazin_hirek/a_multat_vegkepp_eltorolni.html?pageid=86 [last accessed: 2 February 2016]

Rather tellingly, the propaganda posters that decorated the streets – not only during the 1 May celebrations – were under the responsibility of the propaganda department. Streets were not only decorated with different propaganda posters, but the Communists also draped statues and monuments in red material.⁴ Thus, instead of removing elements in the city-scape that they wanted to be forgotten, they symbolically occupied these spaces by hiding them under the drapery of Communism and Internationalism.

Yet, 1 May's splendid and city-transforming celebration of internationalism was not to be repeated. The Kun regime fell and Admiral Miklós Horthy took power. Subsequently, 1 May commemorations, along with the Communist party, were banned. The Hungarian national narrative turned from internationalism towards itself, specifically towards the injustice of the Treaty of Trianon of 1920.



Figure 3: Ferenciek tere [Square of the Franciscans] in Budapest on 1 May 1919, decorated on both sides with globes. Source: Fortepan/ Schoch Frigyes.

⁴ Ibid.

15 March – Hungary

On 15 March 1848, in the midst of the revolutionary fervour that had gripped much of Europe, a group of young Hungarian intellectuals, writers and students gathered at the Café Pilvax in Budapest and agreed on a set of demands known as the ‘Twelve Points’. These included union with Transylvania, abolition of censorship, an independent national guard and an annual national assembly in Pest-Buda. The group then marched to various points around the city, most notably the National Museum, where the poet Sándor Petőfi recited his poem, the ‘National Song’, and the Twelve Points, to enthusiastic crowds.

The Hungarian revolution thus started out poetically and without bloodshed, but by the first anniversary of 15 March in 1849 Hungary, and much of Central Europe, was a war zone. The Hungarians finally surrendered on 13 August 1849 at Világos. The repercussions were severe: on 6 October 1849 thirteen Hungarian generals were hanged in Arad, and the moderate Prime Minister Lajos Batthyány was executed in Pest. The anniversary of 15 March 1848 was already being commemorated underground the following year but it was not until 1860 that such commemorations could be conducted in the open, albeit still unofficially. Following the Habsburg defeat in Italy in 1859-1860, university students called for the overturning of the ban and for 15 March to be publicly commemorated. As Alice Freifeld observes, ‘Students thereby staked their claim as bearers of the 15 March tradition.’⁵ In the later 19th century, 15 March commemorations, given their anti-establishment message, were often flashpoints for political dissent, but the anniversary was not completely adopted by the political elites.

Even after 1860 the ‘public hailing’ of Lajos Kossuth, the Regent President of the Kingdom of Hungary during the time of the revolution, and his Italian co-revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi, was penalised.⁶ The first open and official commemoration of 1848-49 came in 1898, when Law No. V was passed, which sanctioned the commemoration of the revolution for the

⁵ Alice Freifeld, ‘The Cult of March 15: Sustaining the Hungarian Myth of Revolution, 1849-1999’ in Bucur, Maria and Nancy M. Wingfield, (eds) *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*, Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, pp. 255-285, esp. p. 261. and Peter Bihari, ‘The Hungarian Revolution of 1848 and its consequences’ in Stradling R. (ed) *Crossroads of European histories: Multiple outlooks on five key moments in the history of Europe* Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2006, pp. 47-58. p. 49.

⁶ György Gyarmati, *Március hatalma, a hatalom márciusa: Fejezetek március 15. ünneplésének történetéből* [The power of March, the march of the power: Chapters from the commemoration of 15 March], Budapest: Paginarum, 1998, p. 25. [hereafter: Gyarmati, *Március hatalma*]

approaching fiftieth anniversary. But, what was commemorated was not 15 March, the date favoured by most Hungarians, amongst them Ferenc Kossuth, son of Lajos Kossuth, who put the bill forward. The implications of this particular date were too controversial. Instead, the Hungarian Parliament selected 11 April, the date in 1848 when Emperor Ferdinand I (King Ferdinand V in Hungary and Bohemia) approved the April laws, a move that was also more palatable for Vienna.⁷

With national independence after 1918, however the unpopular compromise date of 11 April no longer needed to be commemorated and the possibility of having 15 March as the official commemorative day arose.⁸ The Horthy regime was at first cautious about adopting 15 March as its own, presumably because of its revolutionary and liberal connotations, and also because it was associated with other groups as well, such as the social democrats, who saw themselves and the working class as '[t]he only one real guardian of the [18]48 revolution.'⁹ The Horthy regime, sidestepping symbols that had previously been connected to the commemorations, such as the poet of the revolution Sándor Petőfi, shifted the focus to the Surrender of Világos in 1849, which ended the revolution, and Arad, scene of the execution of the Arad Martyrs. Thus the Horthy regime still felt there was value in identifying with the memory of 1848 and the revolution, and connected Arad with Trianon so as to reconfigure the narrative of 15 March to fit with their irredentist ambitions. Petőfi was still a hugely potent symbol for Hungarians, however, and, although he did not represent the regime's conservative politics he still had a nationalist value and hence it was essential that they attempted to make Petőfi their own, in particular through commemorative events.

One such occasion was the centenary of the poet's birth. The Petőfi centenary commemorations took place over the period of a year, from 31 July 1922 to 31 July 1923, with the main event being held on 1 January, the poet's birthday.¹⁰ In Parliament a debate was also held to establish a National Pantheon (first suggested by István Széchenyi in the late 1830s), where a bust of Petőfi could be displayed along with those of other important figures from the nation's history.

⁷ Ibid. p. 31.

⁸ Although officially 11 April was only scrapped with the passing of an official law regarding the commemoration of 15 March in 1927.

⁹ 'Március bilincsben' [March in handcuffs] in *Népszava*, 14 March 1926, p. 2.

¹⁰ Árpád von Klimó, *Nation, Konfession, Geschichte: Zur nationalen Geschichtskultur Ungarns im europäischen Kontext (1860-1948)*, München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2003, p. 292. [hereafter: Klimó, *Nation, Konfession, Geschichte*]

This, however, was vetoed by Kunó Klebelsberg, Minister of Religion and Education, on the basis that this was not financially possible under the current circumstances.¹¹

It was not until the run-up to the 80th anniversary of the revolution in 1928, when special events were planned, that the Horthy regime tried to fully claim the day by making it an official national day commemoration. All parliamentary parties agreed upon the importance of enacting the memory of 15 March into law. This did not mean, however, that there was no opposition to the Horthy regime's claim to the memory of the revolution. The opposition parties, and especially the Social Democrats, who from the beginning of the 1920s claimed to be the true heirs of the revolution, criticised the government on a number of issues.

The bill to introduce 15 March into the national day calendar was announced by Prime Minister István Bethlen on 18 October 1927 in the House of Representatives, amidst '[e]nthusiastic cheering and clapping from the right and the left and the [political] centre.'¹² Despite the universal enthusiasm shown after Bethlen's announcement, the debate quickly turned to a discussion about freedom of the press and civil liberties, both issues that were at the core of the ideals of the 1848 revolution. The Social Democrats, whilst welcoming the initiative to pass a law commemorating the revolution, argued that before the passing of the law the government should have made sure that the freedom of the press was intact.¹³ The president of the parliamentary faction of the Social Democrats, István Farkas, questioned how the draft law could claim the triumph of the ideals of 1848 when 'from the great ideals of 15 March there is nothing [left or achieved]'.¹⁴ By using 15 March to protest the erosion of the freedom of the press and civil liberties, the Social Democrats were demonstrating the commemoration's potential to be a threat to authority.

Other concerns were also raised by the regime's rushed attempt to establish 15 March as a national day. Károly Rassay, president of the short-lived (1926 to 1928) Independent National Democratic Party [*Független Nemzeti Demokrata Párt*], agreed that the passing of 15 March

¹¹ Ibid. p. 293.

¹² 'Az országgyűlés képviselőházának 78. ülése, 1927 október hó 18-án, kedden, Puky Endre elnöklete alatt' [The 78th session of the House of Representatives on 18 October 1927, Tuesday, under the presidium of Endre Puky], *Országgyűlés Képviselőházának Naplója. Hatodik kötet*. Budapest: Athenaeum 1927, pp. 97-110, p. 99.

¹³ Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁴ 'Az országgyűlés képviselőházának 79. ülése, 1927 október hó 25-én, kedden, Puky Endre és Huszár Károly elnöklete alatt' [The 79th session of the House of Representatives on 25 October 1927, Tuesday, under the presidium of Endre Puky and Károly Huszár] in *Országgyűlés Képviselőházának Naplója. Hatodik kötet*. Budapest: Athenaeum, 1927, pp. 111-142, p. 133.

as a national day ‘should have been the duty of the Hungarian legislature a long time ago’, he was alarmed that this sudden flurry to pass the law was simply happening to avoid enacting a law in the memory of Lajos Kossuth.¹⁵

Rassay’s fears were not entirely without foundation. At the same time as the law regarding 15 March was being debated in parliament, preparations were underway for the unveiling of the statue of Lajos Kossuth in the square in front of the parliament building. Funds for the creation of this statue had been collected since 1895, the year after Kossuth’s death, and it had been approved by parliament in 1902, but a series of disagreements (as well as the war) meant that work on the statue only started in 1925.¹⁶ The official unveiling was to take place at the end of October. Despite this impending event, in the official wording of the 15 March commemorative law, Kossuth was not mentioned at all. Yet, suddenly, after Rassay’s complaints, at the beginning of the next session of the House of Representatives, Prime Minister István Bethlen put forward a draft Memorial Act [*Emléktörvény*] to commemorate the achievements of Kossuth.¹⁷ In the reasoning for the Memorial Act, Bethlen stated that it was being introduced to the House of Representatives on the occasion of the unveiling of the statue. The Memorial Act was eventually passed together with the 15 March law.¹⁸

This episode encapsulates the regime’s concern over the political use of and loyalty towards radical political symbols, such as Petőfi and Kossuth. As national heroes they could not successfully be ignored, in particular during events such as anniversaries and statue unveilings. Yet, the liberal and revolutionary messages of these symbols meant that the regime could not allow other political forces to claim ownership of them, and was particularly sensitive when it

¹⁵ ‘Az országgyűlés képviselőházának 78. ülése, 1927 október hó 18-án, kedden, Puky Endre elnöklete alatt’ [The 78th session of the House of Representatives on 18 October 1927, Tuesday, under the presidium of Endre Puky], *Országgyűlés Képviselőházának Naplója. Hatodik kötet*, Budapest: Athenaeum 1927, pp. 97-110, p. 108.

¹⁶ József Ádámfi, *A világ Kossuth-szobrai* [Kossuth statues of the world], Budapest: Népművelési Propaganda Iroda, 1980, pp. 22-30. The statue itself was also criticised at the meeting of the city council, where the mayor of Budapest had to protect the statue from the critics. The main criticism against the statue was that ‘it did not represent a Kossuth that trusted the future of the nation, but shows us a dispirited, broken, an almost contrite Kossuth.’ Ibid. pp. 29-30.

¹⁷ ‘Az országgyűlés képviselőházának 79. ülése, 1927 október hó 25-én, kedden, Puky Endre és Huszár Károly elnöklete alatt’ [The 79th session of the House of Representatives on 25 October 1927, Tuesday, under the presidium of Endre Puky and Károly Huszár] in *Országgyűlés Képviselőházának Naplója. Hatodik kötet*, Budapest: Athenaeum 1927, pp. 111-142, p. 112.

¹⁸ Gyarmati, *Március hatalma*, p. 54. The Memorial Act stated that Parliament wished to ‘show its long due gratitude’ towards Kossuth, whom it described as an ‘apostle of unbreakable faith of constitutional liberty, equality before law and Hungarian justice’. ‘1927. évi XXXII. törvény Kossuth Lajos örök érdemeinek és emlékének törvénybeiktatásáról’ [Law No. XXXII. of 1927 regarding the enactment into law of the merits and eternal memory of Lajos Kossuth] at http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=92700032.TV [accessed 15 June 2015]

appeared that this was happening. Hence, their rushed effort to honour Petőfi and Kossuth in ways they could control.

During the final reading of the law in the Upper House of Parliament, the deputy Elemér Simontsits succinctly summarised the Horthy regime's position on why a commemorative day for the memory of the 1848-49 revolution was 'necessary and needed'.¹⁹ According to Simontsits 'the importance of the moral conditions' were highlighted in 'the fight for the survival of the nation' after Trianon, and the right moral attitude of the population was more important than any financial aid in the effort to overthrow the Treaty. Thus, in this new interpretation, 15 March joined 20 August, foundation of state day, in the irredentist rhetoric of the Horthy regime. Whilst St Stephen and his commemorative day served to historically justify Hungary's claims to the 'lost territories', 15 March was meant to give hope to the population; the Hungarian nation had faced adversity before and managed to overcome it. Sentiments that were also very much reflected in the wording of the law:

The Hungarian nation in its adversity, amid its severe trials commemorated fifteenth of March 1848 with grateful reverence. In their burning patriotism it was on this day that the glorious sons of the nation professed their faith to the lofty ideals of constitutional liberty and equal rights, which pervaded the whole nation with their holy enthusiasm and pointed the thousand-year-old homeland to the path of progress in the spirit of the new times.²⁰

This law was passed: 'So that the nation can draw faith, power and hope from the glorious traditions of this day for the supervision of a better future.' It was soon accompanied by other new uses of national symbols, as part of the commemorations for the eightieth anniversary of 15 March. In 1928 Kunó Klebelsberg, Minister of Culture, issued a directive according to which the national flag was to be displayed in schools during the 15 March commemorations, as the flag symbolised the power and unity of the nation and was also a symbol of the state's dignity.²¹

¹⁹ Az országgyűlés felsőházának 19. ülése, 1927. évi november hó 25-én, pénteken, Bárány Wlassics Gyula és Beöthy László elnöklete alatt [The 19th session of the Upper House of Parliament on 25 November 1927, Friday, under the presidium of Baron Gyula Wlassics and László Beöthy] in *Az országgyűlés felsőházának naplója, II. kötet*, Budapest: Athenaeum 1928, pp. 3-24, p. 6.

²⁰ 1927. évi XXXI. törvénycikk március tizenötödikének nemzeti ünnepé nyilvánításáról [Law no. XXXI of 1927 regarding the proclamation of fifteenth of March as a national holiday] at <http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3¶m=7715> [accessed 01 June 2015]

²¹ Gyarmati, *Március hatalma*, p. 58.

The first official commemorations were overshadowed by a number of other, current events and daily politics such as Pál Teleki's speech in the Upper House of Parliament regarding the *numerus clausus* (which aimed to limit the number of Jewish students enrolled at the universities), the serialised memoirs of Countess Larisch (Empress Elisabeth's onetime lady-in-waiting), and Kunó Klebelsberg's promises of a new National Theatre building.²² Of course, Trianon also made an appearance in the commemorative narrative. The British newspaper owner, Lord Rothermere, a strong supporter of the Hungarians in their irredentist tendencies and himself a campaigner for revision of the Treaty of Trianon, sent encouraging words that were read out during the commemorations.²³ He wrote that even though 'these are hard times for Hungary', the Hungarians have never been broken through their thousand-year-old history and 'they will not lose hope as the result of the country's mutilation that was committed ten years ago.' He rather optimistically added that '[i]n the last years great progress have been achieved to right the injustice that happened in Trianon.'²⁴

Whilst most newspapers showed a general lack of enthusiasm for 15 March in 1928, the Social Democrats, who claimed to be the true heirs of the revolution, commemorated the day by lamenting its new status. The front page of *Népszava* ironically stated: '[i]t is now written in the law and is now, so to say, compulsory to commemorate [15 March]. The *counterrevolution* made the day of the *revolution* into a lawfully celebrated day.'²⁵ Indeed, this 'tamed March' did not correspond with many of the demands set out in 1848, such as the freedom of the press or civil rights, on which the Social Democrats called out the government during the debate in the House of Representatives. This was clever politics for the Horthy regime: by turning 15 March into an official holiday, it also made it more difficult for the Social Democrats to gather on the day and hold their own commemorations at the sites where the official commemorations were being held.

²² Ibid. p. 57.

²³ Lord Rothermere published an article in the British daily newspaper the *Daily Mail* – owned by him – entitled *Hungary's Place in the Sun – Safety for Central Europe*. Rothermere argued that some territories along the borders with Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia, where the population was mainly Hungarian should be returned to Hungary. Moreover, he suggested that in the disputed areas a plebiscite should be held. See: Miklós Zeidler, *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary 1920-1945*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, pp. 103-104. See also: pp. 103-116.

²⁴ Quoted in Hungarian in Gyarmati, *Március hatalma*, p. 58.

²⁵ 'Az amnesztiált Március' [The amnestied March] in *Népszava*, 15 March 1928, p. 1.

The Horthy regime also went a step further. They not only tried to prevent the opposition from appropriating the symbolic spaces connected to the revolution, but they also banned their events. On the front page of *Népszava*, the Social Democrat newspaper, on 17 March 1928 the headline announced that, ‘The celebratory procession was banned, but the working people of Budapest and its environs will still meet at the Petőfi statue!’ Noting that the police had banned the celebrations, the article ended with a call: ‘!!Everyone must agitate for the success of the people’s assembly!!’²⁶ On page 3, the paper argued that their meeting was not a ‘demonstration’, but a ‘celebratory procession’ and quoted from the police justification of the ban which stated that ‘it is evident that the planned procession was intended to be party political’, i.e. the permission for the procession was submitted by the Social Democrat Party, therefore it must have a political purpose.²⁷ The Horthy regime was keen on controlling the message of the day by banning any kind of counter-commemoration that might counteract the official narrative.

This practice of banning the demonstrations/processions of the Social Democrats continued throughout the interwar period. As a result, *Népszava* wondered in 1938: ‘why is it damaging to public order and peace, if the working masses of Budapest *remember* that glorious day when the Hungarian people tore off the chains of foreign servitude? Every nation aspires to familiarise its history’s heroic chapters with the widest strata of its people.’²⁸

A main characteristic of the 15 March commemorations in the 1930s was that the ‘historical names became victims of amnesia’ in the narrative of the Horthy regime.²⁹ In other words, the actual historical figures associated with the events of 15 March 1848 were erased from the picture. Whilst the names of Kossuth (despite the passing of the Memorial Act) and Petőfi were absent, Trianon was clearly visible. Klebelsberg, writing in *Az Újság* in 1931, claimed that although the ideals of 1848 had been fulfilled, the Hungarians still could not celebrate the day completely, not until territorial integrity was achieved again.³⁰ The official commemorations during the first half of the 1930s very much mirrored the fate of the first official commemoration with their general lack of enthusiasm. However, from the second half of the

²⁶ ‘Az ünnepi felvonulást betiltották, de Petőfi szobra előtt mégis találkozik Budapest és környéke dolgozó népe!’ [The celebratory procession has been banned, but the working people of Budapest and its environs will still meet in front of Petőfi’s statue] in *Népszava*, 17 march 1928, p. 1.

²⁷ ‘Betiltották!’ [They banned it!] in *Népszava*, 17 March 1928, p. 3.

²⁸ ‘Betiltották’ in *Népszava*, 13 March 1938, p. 11.

²⁹ Gyarmati, *Március hatalma*, p. 62.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

1930s, with Hitler's rise to power in Germany, Hungarian politicians started to weigh up the possibility of being politically close to Germany and supporting its revisionist plans, in the hope that Hungary would also receive some of its 'lost territories' back.³¹

In the 1930s, and especially towards the end of the decade, the regime had to deal with opposition groups on the left who utilised the meaning of 15 March 1848 in their campaigns against the government. In the middle of the decade, Hungarian Communists abroad (in Hungary the party was illegal) started a propaganda campaign against the Horthy regime, initially mainly through articles published by József Révai, who lived in exile in Vienna and Moscow, on 1848 and plans for a new national revolution.³² This propaganda drive from the Communists, pushed by Moscow, inspired the establishment of the so-called March Front (*Márciusi Front*) in Budapest on 15 March 1937. The March Front consisted of left-leaning writers and intellectuals who met in the Central coffeehouse in Budapest.³³ They issued a declaration of 'Twelve Points', deliberately echoing the original Twelve Points of Petőfi, thus presenting themselves as the true heirs of the 1848 revolutionaries. The Twelve Points of the March Front 'were a mixture of democratic and social demands, but also included the revision of Trianon.'³⁴ The new demands now included freedom of the press, democratic transformation and a Danube-valley confederation (the original Twelve Points included union with Transylvania).³⁵ Such democratically-oriented demands were seen as a threat by the Horthy regime, which – as it had with the gatherings of the Social Democrats – banned the March Front's meetings and publications and sued its writers.³⁶ As a result, a year after the establishment of the March Front, the organisation was in disarray.

The Anschluss of 1938, three days before 15 March, overshadowed the national day commemorations in Hungary and with that the hopes of the Hungarian governing elite that Trianon could be reversed.³⁷ The Horthy regime's aim to incorporate 15 March into the nationalist-religious narrative of the interwar period largely failed for a number of reasons. Firstly, given the revolutionary, anti-authoritarian meaning of 15 March, the actual events that

³¹ Ibid. p. 65-66.

³² Klimó, *Nation, Konfession, Geschichte*, p. 311. For more on Révai see Chapter Four.

³³ Almost all of the members of the Front were to be members of the National Peasant Party [*Nemzeti Parasztpárt*] that was established in 1939. See: Gyarmati, *Március hatalma*, p. 72.

³⁴ Klimó, *Nation, Konfession, Geschichte*, p. 312.

³⁵ Gyarmati, *Március hatalma*, pp. 71-72.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 74.

³⁷ Ibid. pp. 74-75.

took place on that day in 1848 could not easily be appropriated by the Horthy regime, and it preferred to expand the day's meaning to include ideas such as the Surrender of Világos and the Arad Martyrs. But, since the commemoration of 15 March, with the Twelve Points and Petőfi, already had a huge popular support and a commemorative tradition of 70 years, the Horthy regime was obliged by this 'bottom-up' drive to mark 15 March in some way. One further reason for eventually making 15 March an official national day, particularly in light of the forthcoming 80th anniversary, is that this took away from the Social Democrats the ability to use the day for their own purposes.

The Horthy regime's initial ambiguity towards 15 March in the first half of the 1920s thus acted as an impediment to the full incorporation of the day into an official commemorative narrative. The revolutionary tradition was therefore utilised by the Social Democratic party (and later, in the 1930s, by the Communists), who claimed to be the heirs of 1848. This association took on ever greater significance as the regime grew more authoritarian, and skirted with fascism. Thus, by leaving its official appropriation of 15 March so late, the Horthy regime faced a counter-narrative that was already firmly established by 1927, when the commemoration was eventually made an official national day. The revolutionary narrative of 15 March – unlike St Stephen's Day – better suited the parties on the left of the political spectrum, and proved to be a difficult fit with Horthy's Catholic-nationalist rhetoric.

15 March in Slovakia

Whilst 20 August, the anniversary of the foundation of the state and its founder St Stephen, in Hungary was already established as a day of commemoration even before the First World War, 15 March, as discussed above, only became a day of commemoration after 1918 and was not an official national day until 1927. Despite its unofficial status as a national day 15 March was still commemorated in Hungary and, significantly, by Hungarian communities in Slovakia, in regions that had until recently been part of Hungary. The Czechoslovak authorities, fearing the separatist tendencies, banned the anniversary of the 1848-49 revolution alongside the anniversary of the foundation of the Hungarian state on 20 August.³⁸

³⁸ Attila Simon, 'Maďarská komunita, štátna moc a 15. marec v období prvej Československej republiky' [The Hungarian community, state power and 15 March during the First Czechoslovak Republic] in Macho, Peter, (ed.) *Revolúcia 1848/49 a historická pamäť*, Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2012, pp. 95-107, pp. 96-97.

Since 15 March had not officially been established as a national day prior to 1918, as historian Attila Simon observes, it lacked a comprehensive tradition in southern Slovakia.³⁹ Moreover the ban on commemorating Hungarian national days meant that ‘the Hungarian minority was completely deprived legally of the possibility of using their national symbols, and thus of the legitimate celebration of their national days.’⁴⁰ Despite the lack of tradition, the Hungarians in southern Slovakia came up with alternative ways of commemorating the revolution. These alternative commemorations included private clubs and also religious services.⁴¹ The open commemoration of 15 March was also banned in churches, although Hungarian churchgoers would sing the national anthem as a sign of respect towards the day during the first half of the 1920s. As with the commemoration of St Stephen, however, towards the end of the 1920s and during the 1930s these commemorative acts became increasingly sporadic.⁴²

Czechoslovakia - 28 October

The evening edition of *Národní listy* on 28 October 1918, a Monday, announced laconically that ‘The National Committee is taking over the administration of the Czechoslovak state’. A smaller article on the front page clarified that the nation had been liberated.⁴³ The next day other newspapers also reported on the creation of the new state.⁴⁴ Not much was written about the actual day at the time, aside from this newspaper coverage, a point underlined by Antonín Klimek through a series of quotations from a number of writers, students and other people about the weather on the day.⁴⁵ Some described the day as being a ‘grim, foggy Monday’, ‘cloudy’, a ‘cold day [...], Charles square [was enveloped] in a quiet autumn mist, the smell of wet leaves’. Others, however, remembered the day as ‘beautiful, sunny’. The Institute of Meteorology reported that the weather showed ‘marked improvement’ from Sunday to

³⁹ Ibid. p. 96.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 97.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 102.

⁴² Simon demonstrates this with an example from 1929. The Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior received information that the 15 March commemoration in Budapest would take place on an especially grand scale, which in turn would also affect the Hungarian inhabitants of southern Slovakia. Whilst the Czechoslovak authorities were ready to tackle a possible demonstration, nothing out of the ordinary happened on the day. Ibid. p. 103.

⁴³ ‘Národní výbor přejímá správu československého státu’ [The National Committee assumes the administration of Czechoslovakia] in *Národní listy*, 28 October 1918, p.1. and ‘Osvobozený národ’ [The liberated nation] in *Národní listy*, 28 October 1918, p.1.

⁴⁴ See for example: Praha pozdravuje neodvislý československý stát! [Prague greets the independent Czechoslovak state!] in *Národní politika*, 29 October 1918, p.1. or ‘Die Errichtung des tschechoslowakischen Staates’ [The creation of the Czechoslovak state] in *Prager Tagblatt*, 29 October 1918, p.1.

⁴⁵ Antonín Klimek, *Říjen 1918: Vznik Československa* [October 1918: The formation of Czechoslovakia], Prague: Paseka, 1998, pp. 181-182. [hereafter: Klimek, *Říjen 1918: Vznik Československa*]

Monday. On Sunday there were snow flurries and light rain, but by 'Monday morning the clouds thinned and for a moment the sky was visible.' Temperatures were around four degrees.

On 18 October 1918 Tomáš G. Masaryk, Edvard Beneš and Milan Rastislav Štefánik had issued the Washington Declaration of Independence, which outlined the fundamentals of a democratic Czechoslovak Republic. The Declaration 'claim[ed] the right of Bohemia to be reunited with her Slovak brethren of Slovakia, once part of our national State, later torn from our national body'.⁴⁶ Ten days later, on 28 October the press in Prague published the note of the Foreign Minister of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Gyula Andrássy the Younger, on the conditions of Austria's signing of the peace agreement. This was misinterpreted by many as surrender – the newspaper *Národní politika* had posters with the word *Příměří* [Surrender] printed – and people started gathering on the streets of Prague, celebrating Austria's capitulation.⁴⁷ Representatives of the National Committee in Prague – Alois Rašín, Antonín Švehla, Jiří Stříbrný, František Soukup and Slovak Vavro Šrobár –, the 'men of October 28', proclaimed independent Czechoslovakia by 'creating the first law, through which the "Czechoslovak state came to life"'.⁴⁸ Although Šrobár only arrived around ten o'clock in the morning and he was not a member of the National Committee, 'he was enthusiastically adopted: We finally have a Slovak!' by the four Czechs.⁴⁹

The Slovaks in the Slovak part of the new Czechoslovakia, however, were unaware that the country's independence had been proclaimed in Prague on 28 October.⁵⁰ They still did not know about it when, two days after the Prague proclamation, on 30 October representatives of the Slovak political parties formed the Slovak National Committee and issued the Declaration of the Slovak Nation. Known also as the Martin Declaration as it was signed in Turčiansky Svätý Martin, it declared Slovakia's independence from the Kingdom of Hungary and the wish of the Slovak people to join in a common state with the Czechs. In this sense, the proclamation of an independent Czechoslovakia in Prague on 28 October 1918 had no Slovak participation,

⁴⁶ 'Declaration of Independence of the Czechoslovak Nation', 18 October 1918 at <https://archive.org/details/declarationofind00cze> [last accessed 12 February 2016]

⁴⁷ Klimek, *Říjen 1918: Vznik Československa*, p. 186.

⁴⁸ Tomáš Burda, 'Czechoslovakia ninety years ago' in *Klaudyán: Internet Journal of Historical Geography and Environmental History*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2008, pp. 67-72, p. 69.

⁴⁹ Klimek, *Říjen 1918: Vznik Československa*, p. 215.

⁵⁰ Jan Rychlík, 'Czech-Slovak relations in Czechoslovakia, 1918-1939' in Mark Cornwall and R. J. W. Evans (eds) *Czechoslovakia in a Nationalist and Fascist Europe, 1918-1948*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 13-26, p. 13.

aside from the chance appearance of Šrobár. Three members of the ‘men of October 28’ – Švehla, Rašín and Stříbrný – were to be members of the so-called *Pětka*, or the committee of five, which was established in 1920 and effectively ran the country. Given that there were other days that could have been selected as foundation of state day, which would have been more inclusive of the Slovaks, such as 18 October, the day the Washington Declaration of Independence was issued, it is possible that the men of the *Pětka* and proclaimers of Czechoslovak independence on 28 October deliberately selected this date in order to promote their own glory. Selecting 28 October also underlines the Prague focus and Czecho-centrism of the new state and its governing elite. Hence, although 28 October as the anniversary of the foundation of the Czechoslovak state came to be the most important national day celebration during the First Republic, it too was plagued by many of the issues discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the national days of St Wenceslas and Jan Hus, given the inability to fully integrate non-Czechs. The Czech leadership had failed to create a truly inclusive image of the national body with 28 October.

On 14 October 1919, just in time for the first anniversary of the establishment of the independent Republic, the first Czechoslovak national day law was passed making 28 October into a state holiday, as Foundation of State Day.⁵¹ The passing of the law in the Chamber of Deputies — the lower house of the National Assembly — did not elicit a heated debate. The draft bill was presented to the Chamber by František Weyr, a distinguished law professor and leading member of the Czech State-Rights Democrats [*Česká státoprávní demokracie*], who was one of the authors of the Czechoslovak Constitution.⁵² Weyr stressed the double importance of the legislation, which ensured that ‘the most significant day of our Republic, 28 October, is declared a state holiday [*státní svátek*].’ Weyr argued that the passing of the law was also significant from a legislative standpoint, as it would set a precedent for further legislation on national day commemorations – although, as seen in the previous chapter, it would take some years for the full Czechoslovak national day law to be passed. Foundation of State Day, Weyr underlined, was to be the first holiday in the Bohemian Lands that officially commemorated a day with state/national significance. Weyr compared the Bohemian situation

⁵¹ For the law see: ‘Čís. 555. Zákon ze dne 14. října 1919, jímž se prohlašuje 28. říjen jen za svátek státní’ [Law No. 555 of 14 October 1919, declaring 28 October a state holiday] in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*, Prague: Státní tiskárna, 1919, p. 781.

⁵² ‘Zpráva výboru ústavního jednak výboru právního o vládní osnově zákona (tisk č. 1589), jímž se prohlašuje 28. říjen za svátek státní (tisk č. 1678)’ [The report of the constitutional and secondly of the legal committees on the outline of act (no. 1589) that declares 28 October as a state holiday] 14 October 1919, Session 83 at <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1918ns/ps/stenprot/083schuz/s083002.htm> [accessed 3 March 2014]

with that of Hungary: during Habsburg rule, the law only recognised religious holidays – unlike in Hungary, where holidays with a national character were recognised.⁵³

This point was important for Weyr, who stressed the need for the separation of Church and state, and thus the separation of religious and national holidays. Moreover, given that each religious and national day was also a non-working day, Weyr underlined the importance of a balanced national day calendar for economic reasons. As new holidays were introduced, some of the old ones (i.e. the religious holidays) would need to be ‘trimmed’. For this reason, Weyr urged the Assembly to put forward a bill on the new and revised law on Church and state/national holidays.

28 October as De-Austrianisation

Of course the debate on the meaning of 28 October was not limited to the Chamber of Deputies and commemoration of this day also had multiple narrative layers. 28 October was presented as a revolution at home (personified by the people and also by the Legionnaires) and abroad (the foreign action led by Masaryk, Beneš and Štefánik).⁵⁴ President Masaryk himself on the first anniversary proclaimed that ‘[o]ur revolution had a special character. Behind it lay a thoughtful and diligent propaganda and diplomacy. [...] At home our parties worked without bloodshed’ despite the brutality of Habsburg Austria.⁵⁵ Even though Masaryk places the Czechs morally above the Austrians – they ‘worked without bloodshed’, as opposed to the Habsburgs – he still underlines the importance of the recovery of the nation from the Austrian demoralisation during the war. To ensure this ‘moral recovery’ the Czech(oslovaks) can call upon the help of ‘thousands and thousands of associations [...], different organisations’ such as Sokol and even the parliament and the press.

The aftermath of every successful revolution brings about the ousting of the old regime and its symbols and narratives, as new ones displace them. Czechoslovakia was no exception to this,

⁵³ Weyr is referring to St Stephen’s Day, commemorating the founder of the Hungarian state in the year 1000. Also, 11 April, the day the April laws were signed.

⁵⁴ See also: Natali Stegmann, *Kriegsdeutungen, Staatsgründungen, Sozialpolitik: Der Helden- und Opferdiskurs in der Tschechoslowakei 1918-1948*, München: R. Oldenbourg, 2010, p. 45. [hereafter: Stegmann, *Kriegsdeutungen*]

⁵⁵ ‘Předseda NS. Č. Tomášek uvádí za nadšených ovací do dvorany presidenta republiky dra T. G. Masaryka’ [The chairman of the National Assembly Č. Tomášek presents T.G. Masaryk with an enthusiastic ovation in the hall], 28 October 1919, Session 85 at <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1918ns/ps/stenprot/085schuz/s085001.htm> [accessed 10 May 2014]

and here the establishment of the state was presented as a separation from Austria-Hungary. The accompanying narrative also contrasted foreign/absolutist rule with the democratic nature of the new state, thus legitimising Czechoslovak statehood within the European and international context.⁵⁶ As President Masaryk wrote on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Republic:

[...] it is ten years since the conclusion of a struggle that lasted not for four years, but for centuries: a struggle against foreign rule, misrule and servitude; a struggle which was part of the universal striving for a better, freer and more democratic world order. We cannot fail today to remember all those who before us awakened the nation and during the period of Austro-Hungarian oppression were our models in the process of de-Austrianisation.⁵⁷

‘De-Austrianisation’ was not only the driving force of the narrative of 28 October, but also made its impact on the urban space (more famously the toppling of the Marian Column)⁵⁸ and on the symbolic level. The new state did not only require a state holiday where the new narratives could be displayed, but new regalia and urban markers were also needed for this ‘display’ of the new state. The law on a new Czechoslovak flag was passed on 30 March 1920. It foresaw that the ‘[s]tate (national) flag consists of a red lower field and a white upper field, between which a blue wedge is inserted from the pole towards the centre of the flag.’⁵⁹ The law also made provisions for the new crest of the state and for the President’s banner. The colours of the flag — red, white and blue, the Pan-Slavic colours — were already displayed on Wenceslas Square in 1918 during the initial celebrations of independence.⁶⁰

Crowds of protestors were the first to start marking out Czech, as opposed to Habsburg Imperial urban space by attacking symbols connected to the Habsburg Monarchy. These symbols included German-language inscriptions such as storefronts and street names.⁶¹ Soon however it was not only the public that perceived these German-language signs as ‘foreign’ to the new

⁵⁶ Stegmann, *Kriegsdeutungen* p. 49.

⁵⁷ ‘President Masaryk’s Message to Czechoslovakia on its Tenth Anniversary’ in *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 7, 1928/1929, pp. 374-389. p. 374.

⁵⁸ See for example: Zdeněk Hojda and Jiří Pokorný, *Pomníky a zapomínky* [Monuments and Forgetting], Prague and Litomyšl: Paseka, 1996, pp. 28-32. and Cynthia Paces, ‘The Fall and Rise of Prague’s Marian Column’ in Walkowitz, Daniel J. and Lisa Maya Knauer (eds) *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004, pp. 47-64.

⁵⁹ Čis. 252. Zákon ze dne 30. března 1920, kterým se vydávají ustanovení o státní vlajce, státních znacích a státní pečeti’ [Law No. 252 of 30 March 1920, regarding the provisions for a state flag, state signs and for the state seal] in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*, Prague: Státní tiskárna, 1920, pp. 539-540, p. 539.

⁶⁰ Nancy M. Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech*, Cambridge Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 135. [hereafter: Wingfield, *Flag Wars*]

⁶¹ Ibid.

state, but also the government. Law No. 266 was passed on 14 April 1920, regulating the names of ‘cities, towns, villages and streets’ as well as signs and even the numbering of houses.⁶² The law required that all place/street names be displayed in Czech or Slovak, with the Ministry of the Interior overseeing the changes.



Figure 4: 28 October (no year) celebration on Wenceslas square from the interwar period. Source: NACR, Národní rada česká, Box 70.

⁶² ‘Čís. 266. Zákon ze dne 14. dubna 1920, o názvech měst, obcí, osad a ulic, jakož i označování obcí místními tabulkami a číslování domů’ [Law No. 266 of 14 April 1920 regarding the names of towns, villages, hamlets and streets as well as local signs and house numbers] in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*, Prague: Státní tiskárna, 1920, pp. 595-596., p. 595.

This tension came to a head in the anti-German, anti-Semitic riots of November 1920. The violence started at the end of October when in the borderlands Czech nationalist elements destroyed Austrian monuments. In retaliation, German nationalists attacked Czech schools in the town of Cheb (Eger).⁶³ The unrest reached Prague on 16 November when members of the North Bohemian National Alliance (*Národní jednota severočeská*) organised a demonstration to Wenceslas Square, which was attended by 1500 people, amongst them many Legionnaires. The unrest lasted for several days during which a number of buildings and institutions – including the German theatre, the Jewish Town Hall and the synagogue, various associations and the offices of Jewish and German newspapers – were plundered and damaged.⁶⁴ In the Czechoslovak national(ist) narrative Germans and Jews did not fit in according the nationalist factions of the population, a rhetoric that was also clearly visible in the narrative of the 28 October (and also the Battle of Zborov) commemorations.

Revisiting 28 October in the 1925 national day law

Although in 1919, František Weyr had urged that a comprehensive national day law quickly be passed, the complications of identifying which religious holidays to abolish and which state days to introduce meant that it was not until 1925 that a new national day calendar was agreed, as discussed in the previous chapter. Although in 1919, the legislation to make 28 October, along with 1 May, a national day was easily passed, by 1925 the arguments over what were to be Czechoslovakia's national days had become so acrimonious that even the relatively innocuous and widely accepted 28 October was being put into doubt by some.

During the national day law debate on 21 March 1925, Josef Černý – prime minister's Antonín Švehla's son-in-law – reminded the Chamber that 28 October had already been passed as a state holiday, to remind the people that 28 October 1918 ended the centuries-long 'oppression of the nation by foreign powers and foreign enemy dynasties'.⁶⁵ It was on 28 October that the Czechs — although, as we will see the Slovaks, were not in complete agreement — 'finally

⁶³ Ines Koeltzsch, *Geteilte Kulturen: Eine Geschichte der tschechisch-jüdisch-deutschen Beziehungen in Prag (1918-1938)*, Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2012, pp. 164-165.

⁶⁴ Ibid. pp. 165-166. Prague was again the scene of anti-German demonstrations in September 1930 when Czech nationalists staged a four-day demonstration against German-language films. See: Nancy M. Wingfield, 'When film Became National: "Talkies" and the Anti-German Demonstrations of 1930 in Prague' in *Austrian History Yearbook*, Vol. XXIX, No. 1, pp. 113-138.

⁶⁵ 'Zpráva výboru ústavně-právního k vládnímu návrhu (5061) zákona o nedělích, svátcích a památných dnech republiky Československé (tisk 5119)' [Report of the Constitutional Law Committee on government proposal 5061 regarding Sundays, holidays and memorable days of the Czechoslovak Republic] 21 March 1925, Session 336 at <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/stenprot/336schuz/s336001.htm> [accessed 13 December 2013]

overthrew the bonds of slavery and national subjugation and proclaimed before the world the liberty of the nation.' Černý continued: '28 October is the recognition of Czechoslovak independence [...] it forever incorporated two levels of national unity, the Czech and Slovak.' His speech aimed to highlight the broader rhetoric of 28 October, which emphasised the importance of the new relationship between the Czechs and the Slovaks. Černý here was attempting to weave a unifying narrative around 28 October, to incorporate the Slovaks into its achievements, claiming that they were achieved by Czechs and Slovaks together. Even so, many Slovaks still felt that they were not included in Czechoslovakia on an equal footing with the Czechs, and were to question the priority given to 28 October.

Perhaps concerned, therefore, that not all the communities of Czechoslovakia felt that 28 October represented them, the government attempted to bolster this official day in the 1925 law, although it was nominally about the other national days. The draft (and eventually the final law) included §3, with its 'special statutory provisions', which Černý claimed were vital to ensure that 'the importance of this great feast is not disturbed'. These 'special statutory provisions' included equating the day of 28 October with the characteristics of a Sunday, i.e. a complete non-working day, when shops and offices had to be closed. For those who did not follow these rules the fine was either 10,000 Kč or up to one month in prison. This, Černý stressed, would further underline 'the great national importance that 28 October will have for the Czechoslovak people.'

It might be asked just how reflective of the identity of the people 28 October was if they had to be threatened with a month in prison so as not to violate the rules of its commemoration. Although this paragraph was obviously aimed mainly at the non-national minorities of Czechoslovakia, such as the Hungarians, it also demonstrates the great concern of the Prague-based political elite to make 28 October into the most important holiday of the nation that would unite – albeit through slight coercion – the Czechs and the Slovaks in the new nation. Yet, despite the Czech aim to present 28 October through a unifying rhetoric, almost all the minorities within the new state, including the Slovaks, used the 1925 national day law to challenge 28 October, even though it was not the central subject of the new law.

During the debate in the National Assembly, two members of the German Social Democratic Workers' Party – Franz Palme in the Chamber of Deputies and German senator Wilhelm Niessner in the Senate – attacked the contentious §3 of the draft bill, although claimed that they

did not have anything against 28 October *per se*. Palme even admitted that for him '[t]his form of government is certainly much more sympathetic than the old monarchy', whilst Niessner emphasised that he is not a monarchist, but for the republic.⁶⁶ Even so both Palme and Niessner expressed their disapproval of §3, Palme pointing out that if the bill was passed as it stood §3 would lead to the 'continual bullying' of people in areas that are less invested in commemorating 28 October, such as areas with a high German population. Palme argued that the fines 'are too high' and accused the government of wanting 'to fill up the empty treasury this way.' Senator Niessner echoed Palme's sentiments and underscored that he wanted 28 October 'to be celebrated freely by the population, guided by love and trust [...] and not under police surveillance.'

The Slovaks, on the other hand, had an issue with when, how and what exactly was commemorated. Whilst independent Czechoslovakia was proclaimed on 28 October, the Slovaks officially only joined the Republic two days later on 30 October, when a committee of the Slovak National Party met in Martin [*Turčiansky Svätý Martin*] in northern Slovakia to accept the declaration of the Slovaks for a union with the Czechs. During the gathering, the Slovak National Council was founded and the Declaration of the Slovak Nation was accepted. The first point of the Declaration affirmed that 'the Slovak nation, linguistically, culturally and historically, is part of one Czecho-Slovak nation.'⁶⁷ Thus it is not surprising that the Slovaks were not satisfied with commemorating the foundation of Czechoslovakia on 28 October. Andrej Hlinka, leader of the Slovak People's Party [*Slovánska ľudová strana* soon to be renamed after him as *Hlinková slovánska ľudová strana*] used florid imagery – again with a reminiscence about the weather – to argue that for the Slovaks 30 October, not 28 October, is significant: 'today I remember that chilly autumn day [...] we went [...] to Martin to say: yes! [...] Now 30 October is omitted from the law.'⁶⁸ Hlinka's speech clearly goes far beyond discontent over national days and he is firing a shot in the arguments over the political balance between Czechs and Slovaks in the country and the level of autonomy Slovakia was to enjoy. The omission of 30 October 'is treading on Slovak affairs'; nonetheless, in Slovakia they will make such decisions themselves and 'we will celebrate 30 October.'

⁶⁶ Session 336 at <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/stenprot/336schuz/s336005.htm> [accessed 13 December 2013], For the debate in the Senate see: Session 260 at <http://www.senat.cz/zajimavosti/tisky/1vo/stena/260schuz/S260001.htm> [accessed 2 February 2012]

⁶⁷ Quoted in Július Bartl, *Slovak History: Chronology and Lexicon*, Mundelein, Ill.: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2002, p. 219.

⁶⁸ For the Chamber of Deputies debate see: Session 336 at <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/stenprot/336schuz/s336004.htm> [accessed 13 December 2013]

While much of Czech political discourse posited the foundation of Czechoslovakia on 28 October as marking the Czech people's liberation from the Germanic, Catholic 'yoke' of the Habsburgs, for Slovak nationalists, it was the 'release from under the Hungarian regime' on 30 October 1918 that was the true 'memorable day'.⁶⁹ In his contribution to the debate, the Slovak People's Party deputy Ján Kovalík conjured up the image of the Slovak masses demanding the commemoration of 30 October. In dramatic, almost threatening, language, he reminded the Czechs that the Slovaks also formed a body politic that had its demands. As Kovalík explained, when he and his colleagues from the Slovak People's Party travelled around towns and villages of Slovakia, 'we hear [...], we see and feel the Slovak soul, we hear its request and everywhere in Slovakia [people] say: We want 30 October.' In fact, Kovalík claimed that 30 October was the real foundation date of Czechoslovakia, as it 'documents that the Slovak nation testified that it wants to join the Czech nation, they want to form a common republic.' In other words, the Slovaks are a separate nation from the Czechs, who by choice formed a common and equal republic with them. As such, the underlying threat may be, the Slovaks may also have the choice to leave the common republic if it does not offer them the desired level of political autonomy.

The Slovak nationalist press, especially *Slovák*, the official newspaper of the Slovak People's Party, echoed the debates on its pages. They protested against the commemoration of 28 October (and also against the commemoration of Jan Hus) and pushed for the commemoration of 30 October.⁷⁰ *Slovák* also reprinted Hlinka's speeches in the Chamber of Deputies under the titles: 'Hlinka defends Christian Slovakia' and 'We do not want 28 October or Hus'.⁷¹ This rhetoric is in sharp contrast with that of the second largest party in Slovakia, the Agrarian Party, and its newspaper *Slovenská politika*, which was mainly occupied with the Church reform, not with the debate surrounding 28 October.⁷² For the Agrarians the symbolic politics of national identity were lower on the agenda than how the holidays and the Church reform would affect people working on the fields and in the factories.

⁶⁹ Session 260 at <http://www.senat.cz/zajimavosti/tisky/1vo/stena/260schuz/S2600002.htm> [accessed 2 February 2012]

⁷⁰ 'Otázka sviatkov' [The question of holidays] in *Slovák*, 18 March 1925, p. 3.

⁷¹ 'Hlinkova kresťanského Slovenska' [Hlinka defends Christian Slovakia] in *Slovák*, 24 March 1925, pp. 1-2. and 'Nechceme ani 28 október ani Husa' [We do not want 28 October or Hus] in *Slovák*, 25 March 1925, pp. 1-3.

⁷² 'Po sviatkoch' [After the holidays] in *Slovenská politika*, 16 April 1925, p. 1.

Despite the efforts of the Slovak nationalist deputies and senators, 30 October was never seriously considered by the Czech lawmakers. §3 establishing penalties for not appropriately observing 28 October in fact found further support amongst the Czech senators. In the words of Juraj Babka of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party [*Československá sociálně demokratická strana dělnická*], 'I personally like the third paragraph of this act', it 'provides for severe penalties for those wicked who would not celebrate this day with dignity.'⁷³ The comprehensive national day law was passed with §3 intact.⁷⁴

Commemorating 28 October

The actual commemorations of 28 October blended the military and civilian aspects of the day. According to Dagmar Hájková and Nancy M. Wingfield, the 'basic outlines' of the celebrations were largely the same throughout the 'predominantly Czech areas.'⁷⁵ The celebrations 'recalled the deeds of the brave Czech and Slovak politicians at home and abroad who worked to create the democratic Czechoslovak nation-state from the Bohemian Lands, Slovakia, and Ruthenia.'⁷⁶ The other group that featured heavily during the commemorations were the Legionnaires. The participation and heavy presence of the Legionnaires raises the question of what happened — at least in terms of their remembrance — to the soldiers who fought for the Imperial Army. German historian Natali Stegmann writes that those who fought on the side of the Imperial Army, as Czechs and Slovaks were at the time obliged to do, were effectively seen as having risked the foundation of the Republic. Despite this, these soldiers still wanted to participate in the 28 October commemorations, as for them the day 'expressed that they shared in the national liberation, and it also symbolised the "human liberation" from suffering and hardship.'⁷⁷ Whilst the memory of the fallen soldiers was celebrated as sacrificial and heroic, 'the visibility of the physical infirmity and the social misery of war invalids during the official celebrations was undesirable.'⁷⁸ The inclusiveness of the commemorative day – both 2 July and 28 October – when it came to the war dead can also be seen in the layout of Prague

⁷³ Session 260 at <http://www.senat.cz/zajimavosti/tisky/1vo/stena/260schuz/S260003.htm> [accessed 2 February 2012]

⁷⁴ '65. Zákon ze dne 3. dubna 1925 o svátcích a památných dnech republiky Československé' [Law No. 65 of 3 April 1925 on the holidays and memorable days of Czechoslovakia] in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*, Prague: Státní tiskárna, 1925, pp. 433-434, p. 434.

⁷⁵ Dagmar Hájková and Nancy M. Wingfield 'Czech(-oslovak) national commemorations during the Interwar period: Tomáš G. Masaryk and the Battle of White Mountain Avenged' in *Acta Histriare*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 425-452, p. 428. [hereafter: Hájková and Wingfield, 'National Commemorations']

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 428-429.

⁷⁷ Stegmann *Kriegsdeutungen*, p. 52.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 52-53.

Olšanské cemetery, where the tombs of the Legionnaires and those who fought for the Imperial Army lie next to each other.⁷⁹

28 October commemorations were always lavish, but the tenth anniversary was one of the largest commemorations during the First Republic. In Prague, in sunny weather, the streets were lined with the representatives of different clubs and schools, whose places had been marked in chalk by the organisers.⁸⁰ Wenceslas Square, where the military procession started was the busiest, filled with audiences, and with uniformed members of the Legionnaires associations, and the Sokol and Orel sports clubs also present. The military parade through the streets of Prague ended at the White Mountain – at the scene of the battle that ended constitutional rule in Bohemia in 1620, ending the parade here symbolised the resurrection of the nation. The ensuing rituals performed on the grounds were almost identical to what took place the previous year during the tenth-anniversary commemoration of the Battle of Zborov, which will be discussed below, thus further entwining the victory at Zborov with the independence of Czechoslovakia. The main tribune was again occupied by the diplomatic corps, high-ranking politicians and military personnel.⁸¹ President Masaryk arrived at 11.30 am along with generals from the military to the fanfare of Smetana's opera 'Libuše'. The symbolism of the day – including the Sokol, the visit to the site of the Battle of White Mountain and Libuše – lent the day a very Czech flavour, not at all inclusive of the Slovaks.

Národní politika did, however, make an effort in an article to remember the Slovaks, presenting the improvements the Slovak people had experienced in the ten years since they had been part of independent Czechoslovakia. The article claimed that in the Hungarian press it was being reported that 'the Slovaks had been satisfied under the former' Hungarian regime. *Národní politika* refuted these assertions and turned to statistics to support its point.⁸² The forced Magyarisation of the Slovaks between 1914 and 1918 could be demonstrated through the decline of Slovak-language schools: 'In 1914-15 there were 343 schools, 1915-16 310, 1916-17 304, 1917-18 there were only 276 schools.' Furthermore, these were Church schools, not

⁷⁹ Nancy M. Wingfield, 'National Sacrifice and regeneration: Commemorations of the Battle of Zborov in Multinational Czechoslovakia' in Cornwall, Mark (ed.) *Sacrifice and Rebirth: The Legacy of the Habsburg Empire's Great War*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016, pp. 129-150, p. 142.

⁸⁰ 'Praha ve znamení armády: vojenský průvod ulicemi' [The army in Prague: military parade through the streets] in *Národní politika*, 29 October 1928, p.2.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² 'Na Slovensku před deseti roky dnes' [The Slovaks ten years ago today] in *Národní politika*, 28 October 1928, p.2.

state schools, which had been ‘built exclusively to service Magyarisation.’ For the past ten years, however, since the Slovaks had been part of Czechoslovakia they are independent, and do not have to fear Magyarisation tendencies.

In the Slovak nationalist press, three years after the passing of the national day law, and ten years after independent Czechoslovakia was proclaimed on 28 October, the Slovak People’s Party was still pushing for 30 October to become the official state day.⁸³ In the build-up to the tenth anniversary commemorations a number of articles appeared in *Slovák* criticising the Czech nation for, amongst other issues, not complying with the Pittsburgh Agreement.⁸⁴ Whilst *Národní politika* pointed out the improvements to conditions in Slovakia, Andrej Hlinka accepted that some improvements had been made but also urged the Slovaks to take stock of the last ten years.⁸⁵ The main points that Hlinka raised against the Czechs were along the lines of the issues that had been raised during the 1925 debate on the national day law: religious disagreements and the status of the Slovaks within Czechoslovakia.

In sharp contrast with the People’s Party the second largest party of Slovakia, the Agrarian Party, treated both days in a factual manner in their newspaper. *Slovenská politika* referred to the state day as the day of ‘the foundation of our republic’.⁸⁶ The newspaper praised the achievements of the new state and argued that ‘from the very beginning’ the Republic aimed to achieve ‘great social goals, economic advancement and emancipation for both agricultural and factory workers.’ Of course, *Slovenská politika* also commemorated the signing of the Martin Declaration on 30 October. The signing of the Declaration was a sign that ‘expressed to the world that we, the Slovaks and the Czechs [want to] live together fraternally in the common Czechoslovak state.’⁸⁷

The Czech elite’s aim of turning 28 October into a state day that would be an all-encompassing celebration of the new Czechoslovak state did not succeed. Whilst in the Czech part of the Republic the day was usually lavishly commemorated, in Slovakia the day – its content, the day itself and its message – was contested by Slovak nationalists. There are a number of reasons

⁸³ See for example: ‘Otázka 30. oktobra’ [The question of 30 October] in *Slovák*, 20 October 1928, p. 1.

⁸⁴ The Pittsburgh Agreement was signed on 31 May 1918 between the Czech and Slovak expatriate communities in the United States of America, agreeing to the creation of the Czechoslovak state. President Masaryk was amongst the signatories. In the agreement the Slovaks were treated as equal members of the Czechoslovak state.

⁸⁵ Andrej Hlinka, ‘Odkaz národu českému’ [The question of the Czech nation] in *Slovák*, 28 October 1928, p. 1.

⁸⁶ ‘Československé jubileum’ [Czechoslovak jubilee] in *Slovenská politika*, 26 October 1928, p. 1.

⁸⁷ ‘30 október’ in *Slovenská politika*, 30 October 1928, p. 1.

why 28 October could not become a successful state day; despite the inclusive rhetoric of the Czech political elites the day was not formulated in an inclusive manner, with the symbolism very much reflecting a Czech 19th-century ideal. Moreover, the main complaint of the Slovak nationalists, commemorating 30 October instead of 28 October was never seriously discussed, but was dismissed without consideration, further angering the Slovak nationalists. The Foundation of State Day on 28 October, which they were legally obliged to celebrate, provided them with an opening to present their claims for greater Slovak autonomy.

Hungarians and 28 October

28 October was not only challenged by the Slovaks and the Germans in Czechoslovakia, but also by the Hungarian minorities in southern Slovakia. The Hungarian population mainly showed its disregard for the celebration of the foundation of the Czechoslovak state by their absence from the official events and by disregarding the day's status as a holiday from work by keeping their shops open, for example, thus violating §3 of the 1925 law.⁸⁸ Even so, the situational reports from the southern Slovakian town of Komárno (in Hungarian *Komárom*, the city was split into two as a result of the Treaty of Trianon, with one side lying in Hungary and the other in Czechoslovakia) show that, after the initial boycott of the state day, parts of the local Hungarian population started to become more receptive to the new Czechoslovak practices. The 1927 report of the Komárno police commissioner stated that the local population was aware of the importance of the 28 October celebrations, and that even the Hungarian population was becoming used to it and treating it with respect.⁸⁹

To enable the adequate and dignified celebration of 28 October, the Slovak authorities posted different posters and fliers in both Slovak and Hungarian. These reminded the citizens of the importance of the day and the necessity of its dignified celebration by decorating public buildings with the Czechoslovak flag. Moreover, it was 'forbidden' to display the state flag 'in an inappropriate or insulting manner'.⁹⁰ The Police Commissioner of Komárno made it clear

⁸⁸ Miroslav Michela, 'Collective Memory and Political Change – The Hungarians and the Slovaks in the Former Half of the 20th Century' in *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, No. 3-4, 2006, pp. 15-26, p. 22. [hereafter: Michela, 'Collective Memory and Political Change']

⁸⁹ Štátny archív v Nitre, Ivanka pri Nitre, f. Policajný komisariát v Komárne, k. 18 [hereafter SANR, PkK, k 18.] Report dated 29 October 1926

⁹⁰ SANR, PkK, k 18. Poster issued by the Police Commissioner of Komárno, 19 October 1929. A 1926 flyer issued by the Police Commissioner not only threatened those who did not comply with the regulations of the state holiday with a fine or a prison sentence, but also with police proceedings for minor offences. The flyer also expressed the Commissioner's hope 'that the inhabitants of the city of Komárno [...] will use the occasion to

that non-compliance would result in either a 10,000 Kč fine or one month in prison (as stated in §3 of the 1925 national day law). The Police Commissioner, however also added that he:

believe[d] that all the interested institutions and their leaders, guided by the importance of 28 October and by the spirit of the achievements of this historic day, will not give reason for these punitive measures, but, on the contrary, they will do their utmost on this occasion, similarly to previous years, to raise the dignity [...] of the celebration.⁹¹

He also hoped that not only the institutions but also the general public would commemorate the day by displaying Czechoslovak flags on their houses.

Despite the threats of fines and imprisonment members of the Hungarian minority often did not comply at the beginning. Non-compliance took the form of disregarding the public holiday from work and keeping Hungarian shops open or by the absence of the Hungarian population from the official commemorative events.⁹² Reports by the Police Commissioners of each county were required from 1925, and they shed interesting light on the political and cultural activities of the different political parties and minorities in Slovakia. The reports also describe the behaviour of the Hungarian minority population towards the 28 October commemorations and towards the new Czechoslovak state in general. Although many of the reports pointed out that large parts of the Hungarian minority acted ‘aloof’ or ‘behaved passively and did not participate’, they also show a gradual acceptance of the celebration of the new Czechoslovak state.⁹³ Reports, especially in the late 1920s and early 1930s also noted that ‘the Hungarian ultra-chauvinists have fallen silent’ and there is ‘already a noticeable participation of Hungarians in the state celebrations.’⁹⁴

solemnly show their affection for the Republic and will contribute to the dignified celebrations in many ways.’ SANR, PkK, k 18. Flyer issued by the Police Commissioner of Komárno, 20 October 1926.

⁹¹ SANR, PkK, k 18. Poster issued by the Police Commissioner of Komárno, 19 October 1929.

⁹² See, for example, reports from the Police Commissioner in Komárno: SANR, PkK, k 18. Report on the celebration of the state holiday on 28. X. 1926 in Komárno, 29 October 1926 or SANR, PkK, k 18. Report on the celebration of the state holiday in Komárno on the day 28 October 1927, 4 November 1927. See also: Michela Miroslav, “‘A Home should be a Home to All its Sons’: Cultural Representations of the Saint Stephen in Slovakia during the Interwar Period” in Hudek, Adam (ed.) *Overcoming the Old Borders. Beyond the Paradigm of Slovak National History*, Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV v Prodama, 2013, pp. 97-110, p. 104.

⁹³ SANR, PkK, k 18. Police Commissioner in Komárno – situational report for the first half of 1930, 30 June 1930 and SANR, PkK, k 18. Report on the celebration of the state holiday in Komárno on the day 28 October 1927, 4 November 1927.

⁹⁴ SANR, PkK, k 18. Police Commissioner in Komárno – situational report for the second half of 1929, 27 December 1929. Situational reports pointed towards growing Hungarian participation in the celebrations of 28 October as early as 1926: ‘the Hungarian side appears to have a growing tendency to participate’ in Czechoslovak commemorations. ‘The proof for this was the celebration of the state day on 28 October 1926.’ SANR, PkK, k 18. Police Commissioner in Komárno – situational report for the last quarter of 1926.

This increasing trend for Hungarian participation in the celebrations for the foundation of the new Czechoslovak state also coincides with the waning of the open confrontation against the state on, for example, 20 August commemorations. The (seeming) acceptance of the new order by some members of the Hungarian population could be explained by a number of different factors: fear of the repercussions if caught not commemorating the Czechoslovak state day or simply accepting the new situation.⁹⁵ Towards the end of the 1930s nationalist feelings began to be outwardly expressed through the wearing of national dresses, cockades and other Hungarian symbols.⁹⁶ This was prevalent mainly in larger towns such as Kassa/Košice, Nyitra/Nitra or in Pozsony/Bratislava, but apart from some smaller incidents, this did not lead to larger conflicts amongst the different ethnic populations.⁹⁷

28 October in 1938

During the 1930s the narrative of the 28 October commemorations kept to the same script with the focus on freedom (from the Austro-Hungarian yoke), democracy and the achievements of the Czechoslovak state.⁹⁸ The 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1938, however, was commemorated in very different circumstances from the previous years. Not even a month before 28 October and as a result of the Munich Agreement Nazi Germany, annexed the Sudetenland and the Second Czecho-Slovak Republic was declared.

The 28 October 1938 was commemorated in a much more solemn way than in previous years. The government decided that 28 October should be commemorated as a ‘symbol of work’ stressing that the nation could only rely on itself now.⁹⁹ Similar sentiments were also expressed

⁹⁵ The 1929 report of the Police Commissioner of Komárno noted that whilst events in Budapest did influence the mood in southern Slovakia, the Hungarian minorities were becoming less and less receptive: ‘the constant efforts of the Hungarians not to comply with the peace treaties [...] are echoing less and less’ in the area. Even so, the same report also mentioned a demonstration in Komárno against the Treaty of Trianon on 9 June, although it does note that this was a peaceful protest. SANR, PkK, k 18. Police Commissioner in Komárno – situational report for the first half of 1929, 1 July 1929.

⁹⁶ Attila Simon, *Egy rövid esztendő krónikája: A szlovákiai magyarok 1938-ban* [The chronicle of a short year: The Slovak Hungarians in 1938], Somorja: Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2010, p. 162.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 163.

⁹⁸ See for example: ‘S důvěrou k další práci’ [With trust towards further work] in *Národní politika*, 28 October 1932, p.1.; ‘Po sedmnácti letech se slavně uznal podíl českého lidu na vítězství národní revoluce a dobytí svobody’ in *Národní politika*, 29 October 1935, p. 1.; Medek, Rudolf, ‘Den osvobození a sjednocení’ [Liberation Day and unification] in *Národní listy*, 28 October 1937, p. 1.

⁹⁹ ‘28. říjen – národní symbol práce’ [28 October – national symbol of work] in *Národní listy*, 28 October 1938, p. 1.

in *Národní politika*, in which the paper drew its readers' attention to the changing spirit of 28 October, and asked: 'Who would have thought a year ago that for the twentieth anniversary of our independence, we would be without a solid border?'¹⁰⁰ in reference to the uncertainties the Munich Agreement caused.

Whilst the Czech papers were lamenting the end of the Czechoslovakia that had been established in 1918, the Slovak People's Party's demands for Slovak autonomy intensified. On 7 October *Slovák* published the Party's 'Manifesto of the Slovak nation', in which the Slovak nationalists argued that with the 'Munich Agreement the four powers significantly changed the public and political situation in Central Europe.'¹⁰¹ In these new circumstances, the nationalist Slovaks now demanded their national self-determination. 28 October was not commemorated in Slovakia in 1938; instead, as *Slovák* proclaimed, for the first time 30 October would be commemorated freely with celebrations planned all over Slovakia.¹⁰²

With the Munich Agreement and the disintegration of Czechoslovakia, 28 October became a day of resistance for the Czechs (especially during the Second World War), while the Slovaks dropped 28 October from their commemorative calendar and replaced it with 30 October. The post-Munich situation further underlines the failure of 28 October as a state day for a common Czechoslovakia.

Zborov - Czechoslovakia

Although the date of 2 July, the anniversary of the 1917 Battle of Zborov, was not included in the 1925 Czechoslovak national day law, it is still considered the second most important national commemorative day of the interwar Czechoslovak Republic after 28 October. It was made a national day commemoration — under the name Czechoslovak Army Day, presumably to make it more inclusive — as part of the tenth anniversary commemorations of the foundation of the state.¹⁰³ Czechoslovak Army day, as Dagmar Hájková and Nancy M. Wingfield argue, 'came to include a military cult of male heroism and sacrifice that was connected to important figures from the past who had themselves been reinterpreted to fit the needs of the young state,

¹⁰⁰ 'Duch 28. října' [Spirit of 28 October] in *Národní politika*, 28 October 1938, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ 'Manifest slovenského národa' [Manifesto of the Slovak nation] in *Slovák*, 7 October 1938, p. 1.

¹⁰² 'Prvý slobodný 30. október' [First free 30 October] in *Slovák*, 27 October 1938, p. 1.

¹⁰³ Galandauer, Jan *2.7.1917 Bitva u Zborova: Česká Legenda* [Battle of Zborov: Czech legend], Prague: Havran, 2002, p. 55. [Hereafter: Galandauer, *Bitva u Zborova*] See also: Hájková and Wingfield, 'National Commemorations' p. 434.

especially Hus and Žižka.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, Czechoslovak Army Day also ‘offered members of the Czechoslovak military with the opportunity to demonstrate their prowess in the name of the “tradition of Zborov” and the Legionnaires the opportunity to reassert the importance of their role in the creation of the state.’ Despite the narrative of Czechoslovak unity, one of the weaknesses of the commemorative day was again – as with 28 October – the failure to integrate the minority population of the new state, including the Slovaks.

The Battle of Zborov – then located in Poland, today in the Ukraine – was a victory in the First World War against the Austro-Hungarian army by the Czech Legions, formed by Czech deserters of the Austrian Army. The victory was thus seen as a victory of the Czech people against the Austro-Hungarian imperial rulers, at a time when the Bohemian lands were still part of Austria-Hungary. The tradition of Zborov started almost immediately after the battle was fought. Wartime censorship meant that the deeds of the Legionnaires were only known once the Russian General Staff’s report was published. Although this news was at first received by the Czechs with scepticism, when it was confirmed as true, the battle quickly took on the dimensions of a legend and those who fought in it became the ‘first citizens of the Czechoslovak Republic’.¹⁰⁵ There were articles about the battle in the press and poems were published, perhaps most notably *Lví srdce* [Lionheart] by Rudolf Medek, a general of the Czechoslovak Legions.¹⁰⁶ The general narrative of the newspaper articles and many of the poems being that after 300 years — since the Battle of White Mountain — a Czech army was born again.¹⁰⁷

The success of the Battle of Zborov, however, was not only the birth of the new Czech(oslovak) army, but was also seen as a prerequisite for the new, independent state, which had both proved its military capabilities and sided with the democratic victors of the war. Because of these symbolic characteristics Zborov also became a key event for the Czechoslovak foreign action that was led by the soon-to-be president of the soon-to-be established First Czechoslovak Republic. Tomáš G. Masaryk realised that positive public opinion abroad was crucial to the

¹⁰⁴ Hájková and Wingfield, ‘National Commemorations’ p. 435.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 436.

¹⁰⁶ For Medek and Zborov see: Katya Kocourek, *Čechoslovákista Rudolf Medek. Politický životopis* [Czechoslovakist Rudolf Medek. A political biography], Prague: Mladá fronta, 2011, pp. 83-88.

¹⁰⁷ Jan Galandauer, ‘Zborovská bitva v České historické paměti’ [The Battle of Zborov in Czechoslovak historical memoirs] in Galandauer, Jan, Petr Hofman and Ivan Šedivý (eds) *Zborov 1917-1997*, Prague: Ministerstvo obrany České republiky, 1997, pp. 48-65. pp. 50-51.

establishment of an independent Czechoslovakia. In his conversations with the writer Karel Čapek, Masaryk often emphasised this:

There was no getting around it, though; we had to do something about public opinion, the general public knowing little about us and all but nothing about the Slovaks. The war with the Germans had been popular in America, but the tangled national problems of Central Europe were quiet alien to people. Fortunately, the Czechs in America had been carrying on an anti-Austrian propaganda campaign since the war began, and when the Czech Legions in Siberia captured the attention of the whole world we were ready to take advantage of it. The main thing was to waste no time because the war was drawing to a close.¹⁰⁸

Masaryk also observed that ‘our greatest support came from public opinion, when our men fought so well at Zborov.’¹⁰⁹ Thus, for Masaryk and others the existence of an independent Czech legion — fighting against the Germans and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy — was a crucial prerequisite for showing that the Czechs were serious about their independence and would even fight for it on the battlefield. This narrative continued once the war was over, and independent Czechoslovakia was proclaimed. In 1919 Masaryk, now as President of the First Czechoslovak Republic, wrote in the newspaper *Československý legionář* about the political significance of Zborov, whilst on the fifth anniversary of the battle in 1922, he again emphasised that 2 July 1917 was the birth of the — now referred to as — Czechoslovak Army, ‘which was the prerequisite for the success of fighting for an independent state.’¹¹⁰

The exact number of the Legionnaires is not known, although it was estimated to be around 100,000 soldiers.¹¹¹ The number of Slovaks amongst the ranks of the Legionnaires was rather low.¹¹² With the creation of the Czechoslovak Army the Legionnaires became the embodiment of not only the ideal citizen as pioneers and champions of Masaryk’s democratic ideals, but they also became the ideal for a new and democratic soldier.¹¹³

The new Czechoslovak Army was created by unifying the soldiers who fought in the Habsburg Army and the Legionnaires, who had *de facto* fought against them. After the unification of the

¹⁰⁸ Karel Čapek and Heim, Michael Henry (ed.) *Talks with T.G. Masaryk*, North Haven, CT: Catbird Press, 1995, p. 177.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 169.

¹¹⁰ Galandauer, *Bitva u Zborova*, p. 89.

¹¹¹ Martin Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und Staatlicher Realität: Die tschechoslowakische Armee und ihre Nationalitätenpolitik, 1918-1938*, Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2006, p. 84. [hereafter: Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und Staatlicher Realität*]

¹¹² Ibid. p. 93.

¹¹³ Stegmann, *Kriegsdeutungen*, pp. 73-75.

two groups, soldiers from the Habsburg Army were in the majority with the Legionnaires comprising 29% of the Army. This was well below the 50% that was envisaged during the 1920 unification process. The amalgamation of these two groups also created conflicts within the Army with, for example, members of the two groups often not greeting each other and the Legionnaires often referring to the ex-Habsburg Army soldiers as ‘Rakušáci’ (Austrians).¹¹⁴

Despite the Legionnaires being in the minority within the general staff of the Army – they only reached 50% in 1927 – the new Czechoslovak Army tradition was still built around the Legionnaires and their achievements. The Legionnaires also pushed for nationalist policies: on 22 September 1919, for example, the more conservative-nationalist elements called for the ‘unlimited dictatorship of Masaryk’ and for the dismissal of German and Jewish members of the Army.¹¹⁵ All these elements were tied up in the new Czechoslovak military tradition that was constructed around the Legionnaires, independence and the Hussite tradition – of which the Legionnaires were said to be the heirs since they had fought for Czechoslovak independence. This new tradition also served to distance the new Army from the Austro-Hungarian military traditions, which were now characterised as being ‘foreign or hostile’ to the Czechoslovaks.¹¹⁶

On the fifth anniversary of the battle in 1922, Zborov and the Legionnaires became the focal point for another symbolic marker: the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, further strengthening the symbolic connection between independence and the sacrifices of the Legionnaires on the front as turning Zborov into a national symbol. The first burials of Unknown Soldiers occurred on Armistice Day, 11 November, 1920 in London and Paris, followed by similar ceremonies in 1921 in the United States, Italy, Belgium and Portugal.¹¹⁷ Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia followed in 1922. Czechoslovak eagerness to adopt this new commemorative practice may also have intended to underline their democratic and Western credentials, placing them into the same line of traditions as Britain and France, who had fought against Austria-Hungary. Tellingly, Austria and Hungary did not follow suit until 1930.¹¹⁸ The Czech historian Jan Galandauer writes that whilst in most countries, such as the United Kingdom, France or Italy,

¹¹⁴ Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und Staatlicher Realität*, p. 88.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. pp. 104-105.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p. 214.

¹¹⁷ Ken S. Inglis, ‘Entombing Unknown Soldiers: From London and Paris to Baghdad’ in *History and Memory*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1993, pp. 7-31, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. See also: Wingfield, *Flag Wars*, pp. 189-190.

the Unknown Soldier was chosen from the regular army of these countries, this was not the case in Czechoslovakia, where Czech soldiers had been integrated into the Habsburg army, the very entity from which the Czech(oslovaks) wanted to gain their independence.¹¹⁹ The ritual of a symbolic Tomb of the Unknown soldier was very new and had been initiated by Britain and France in 1920, soon followed by other countries such as the United States and Belgium. In these cases, the symbol of the Unknown soldier was explicitly linked to the Armistice and commemorated on 11 November. In Czechoslovakia, by contrast, the Tomb was linked to the Battle of Zborov, further underlining the importance of the Battle to the Czechoslovak nation.

Approaching the fifth anniversary of the Battle of Zborov, a delegation from the Ministry of Defence was dispatched to Poland, where Zborov was now located to arrange a pilgrimage and also to erect a monument for the fallen legionnaires.¹²⁰ Once the delegation arrived in Zborov, they had also been entrusted with choosing the remains of one of the fallen Legionnaires and transferring them to Prague, where they were to be placed in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The body of the chosen legionnaire was then transferred on a special train to Prague, stopping on the way in a number of towns.¹²¹ Once in Prague, 'the coffin with the remains of the Unknown Soldier and three legionnaires from Italy lay in the Pantheon' at the top of Wenceslas Square, guarded by soldiers and members of the Sokol sports clubs who were watching over the coffins 'as still as statues'.¹²² On 2 July, at one o'clock the coffins, 'veiled in the national flag were placed on four carriages of the First Artillery Regiment and with an Honour Guard' made its way to Old Town Square, where they were awaited by soldiers, members of Sokol and delegates from all over the nation. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was placed inside the Old Town Hall, along with 'soil from battlefields from all over the world'.¹²³

The article covering the commemorations in the evening edition of *Národní listy* on 3 July repeated many of the key elements of the national historical narrative around Zborov: through the Battle of Zborov the Czechoslovaks had gained their rights for independence, and the victory in the eastern front balanced out the memory of the defeat at White Mountain in 1620. The article concludes by relating that all the larger towns and cities in Bohemia, Moravia and

¹¹⁹ Galandauer, *Bitva u Zborova*, pp. 89-90.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p. 90.

¹²¹ Hájková and Wingfield, 'National Commemorations' p. 441.

¹²² 'Pocta zborovských hrdinů v Praze' [Tribute to the heroes of Zborov in Prague] in *Národní listy*, 2 July 1922, p. 1.

¹²³ 'Zborov' in *Národní listy*, *Večerní vydání*, 3 July 1922, p. 1.

Slovakia had held some sort of celebratory event to commemorate Zborov. The ceremony surrounding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was a good indicator of how the Czechs envisioned the symbolic landscape relating to the Battle of Zborov. The ceremony was a largely Czech affair, even though it was meant to commemorate all of the Czechoslovak war dead, the main focus being on the achievements of the Legionnaires.

1927: the tenth anniversary commemoration of Zborov

Following the burial of the Unknown Soldier in 1922, Zborov stopped being front-page news until the tenth anniversary commemoration of the Battle in 1927.¹²⁴ The preparations for the anniversary were initiated in February 1927, when the Memorial of the Resistance (*Památník odboje*) – whose director at the time was Rudolf Medek, Legionnaire veteran of the Battle of Zborov – informed the National Council of Czechoslovakia (*Národní rady československé*) by letter that it had been authorised by the Ministry of National Defence ‘to organise this year’s nationwide pilgrimage to Zborov.’¹²⁵ Medek wrote: ‘The Memorial of the Resistance has been commissioned to call on ministries, authorities, schools etc. to send their representatives to the meetings’. A number of different organisations were also listed in the letter and these were to be asked to send representatives. Most of these organisations were connected to the Legionnaires or played an integral part in the formation of the Czechoslovak state. The organisations listed included: the Czechoslovak Legionnaires Association, the Circle of French Legionnaires, the Association of the Volunteers of the Serbian Army, the gymnastics organisation Sokol and its Catholic counterpart Orel, the scouts, the Association of Czechs and Slovaks of Russia, the Association of American Slovaks, and of course, the press.

The pilgrimage took place from 1 to 3 July, with trains departing from Prague and Košice, the former carrying 1,028 people, the latter a further 525 people.¹²⁶ The train left Prague at five o’clock in the morning on the first day of July, ‘to express their gratitude and remember the triumphant 2 July’ where the battle took place.¹²⁷ There the delegates were to ‘lay down the

¹²⁴ Between 1922 and 1927 the anniversary of Zborov was largely hidden amongst the other news in the Czech papers, if it appeared at all. See for example: ‘Denní zprávy’ [Daily news] in *Národní listy večerní vydání*, 2 July 1923, p. 2. The news regarding the commemoration was the fifth item in the list. The short paragraph informed the readers of the paper that the sixth anniversary commemorations of Zborov would take place in the chapel of the Old Town Hall. The participants of the commemoration included veterans of the Battle of Zborov. See also: Olga Fastová, ‘Legionáři’ in *Národní politika*, 2 July 1924, p. 1.

¹²⁵ NACR, *Národní rada česká*, Box 198. Box includes a number of official correspondence.

¹²⁶ ‘Pout’ ke Zborovu’ [Pilgrimage to Zborov] in *Národní politika*, 3 July 1927, p. 2.

¹²⁷ ‘Národní pout’ ke Zborovu’ [National pilgrimage to Zborov] *Národní politika*, 1 July 1927, p. 1.

golden wreath from the President of the Czechoslovak Republic T. G. Masaryk'. *Národní politika* then added that '[t]oday's journey is [...] a manifestation of our profound gratitude and love to all who risked their lives against superior enemy forces.'

The commemorative events of the tenth anniversary centred, naturally, on the army, but it was also important for the organisers that the celebrations had a nationwide character.¹²⁸ The Ministry of National Defence issued guidelines to the military headquarters on 10 May on how to commemorate the tenth anniversary. The instructions stressed that Zborov's 'historical significance lies in the fact that for the first time a large unit of the Czechoslovak army conducted a military campaign independently. The Battle of Zborov ended in victory for the Czechoslovak soldiers over the more numerous enemy troops and this has become the beginning of its history.'¹²⁹ The instructions continued: 'The whole nation will be celebrating the tenth anniversary of the battle. Troops will partake in the celebrations of the national festivities, taking into account the local circumstances of the different garrisons and military units and the civic celebrations. [...]' The instructions further stated that '[c]elebrating the army will take place on 1 and 2 July [...]. On these days, i.e. from twelve o'clock on 1 July until eight o'clock on 3 July all military buildings will display state bunting.'

¹²⁸ Galandauer, *Bitva u Zborova*, p. 105.

¹²⁹ Quoted in Galandauer, *Bitva u Zborova*, p. 105.



Figure 5: Commemorations in Zborov, in Poland. Source: NACR, Národní rada česká, Box 777.

Although there was a concern that the celebrations be perceived as nationwide, the focal point naturally remained Prague. Despite the stated aim of national inclusiveness, they were also held in what was a very Czech historical tradition and very much connected to the Legionnaires. The commemorations in Prague started on 1 July with a festive gathering of ministers, generals and military attaches in Old Town Hall.¹³⁰ Later that day wreaths were laid on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and a lantern procession took place in the evening. Edvard Beneš, Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia, and František Udržal, Minister of Defence observed the celebrations, together with generals and members of the diplomatic corps.

The main event was on 2 July, when President Masaryk, along with nearly all the top politicians and military personnel of the Czechoslovak Republic, went to White Mountain to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Zborov. The celebrations started at nine o'clock in the morning and included a military parade of the complete Prague garrison, and thirty-five planes of the 1st Aviation Regiment also flew overhead.¹³¹ Thus, during the first decennial celebrations

¹³⁰ Ibid. p. 107.

¹³¹ 'Zborovské oslavy v Praze' [Zborov celebrations in Prague] in *Národní politika*, 3 July 1927, pp. 1-2.

the narrative of the victory at the Battle of Zborov - an atonement for the defeat at White Mountain – was further linked in the physical space and national ideology with the military parade that took place on White Mountain. It is also interesting to note the names of some of the regiments that took part in the parade: 5th Infantry Regiment T. G. Masaryk, 1st Artillery Regiment Jan Žižka of Trocnov or the 1st Cavalry Regiment Jan Jiskra z Brandýsa (named after the 15th-century mercenary soldier).

Despite the apparent nationwide nature of the commemorations, the Slovaks were visibly less enthusiastic about Zborov than the Czechs. Whilst commentators in the Slovak nationalist press agreed that all layers of Slovak society should respect the Czechoslovak Army, they also complained about the programme of the commemoration, especially regarding the heavy presence of Sokol, which was very much seen in the nationalist Slovak press as a Czech ‘institution’, not related to the Slovaks.¹³² The coverage of the commemoration was also not as wide-ranging as in the Czech press, with articles simply reporting on the activities of the commemoration.¹³³ The commemorations in Bratislava included a march of the garrisons through the centre of Bratislava, a torch-lit procession in the evening and – ‘without which no great feasts are held’ as *Slovák* put it ironically – the Hussite choral.¹³⁴

Opposition to Zborov

Whilst the Slovaks in theory supported the day, or at least they were not hostile against it in principle, commemoration of Zborov was openly opposed by other groups, most notably by the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the German minorities. The Czechoslovak Communist Party — which was founded in 1921 in Czechoslovakia, and was legal, unlike in most of the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Hungary — was perhaps most visibly against the official commemoration of Zborov, and boycotted the celebrations.¹³⁵ However, this did not mean that they did not attempt to appropriate the narrative to suit their own political message. The manner in which the Communists approached the narrative of 2 July is very similar to how they were to attempt to discredit 28 October, the foundation of Czechoslovakia,

¹³² ‘Koniec zborovských osláv v Bratislave’ [The end of Zborov celebrations in Bratislava] in *Slovák*, 5 July 1927, p. 3. To coincide with the commemoration of Zborov and Jan Hus Day (on 6 July) Sokol organised its own celebrations in Bratislava. See: ‘Sokolsé slávnosti v Bratislave’ [Sokol celebrations in Bratislava] in *Slovenská politika*, 3 July 1927, p. 1. *Slovenská politika* however was not critical of the Sokol celebrations.

¹³³ See for example: ‘Zborovské oslavy v Bratislave’ [Zborov celebrations in Bratislava] in *Slovenská politika*, 3 July 1927, p. 1.; ‘Zborov v slávnostnom rúchu’ [Zborov in festive attire] in *Slovenská politika*, 5 July 1927, p. 1.

¹³⁴ ‘Oslavy Zborov’ [Zborov celebrations] in *Slovák*, 3 July 1927, p. 5.

¹³⁵ Hájková and Wingfield, ‘National Commemorations’ 437-438.

after the Second World War. In other words, they did not condemn the day or its meaning, but the way in which the supposed bourgeois republic commemorated it. The Czechoslovak Communist Party did also use the atonement narrative, but they argued that most of the Legionnaires who fought in Zborov were workers, who fought for a state with social equality, but the bourgeois elite of the Republic failed to deliver on this promise.¹³⁶ Hence, they were not opposed to commemoration of Zborov, but to its official commemoration and appropriation by the state – or simply saw it as a way to criticise the establishment.

Czechoslovakia's German minority was positively hostile to Zborov. Even though 2 July was not yet officially referred to as Czechoslovak Army Day – this was only legislated in 1928 – the rhetoric of the commemoration was not limited to Zborov, but also highlighted the creation of the Czechoslovak Army. Within the Czechoslovak Army the second largest group consisted of the German minority – in 1923 10% of the officers were German – thus a truly inclusive commemorative narrative would have had to be inclusive of the German minorities in some way.¹³⁷ This would not be easy to achieve, however, even if the Czechs had desired it, considering that the Czechoslovak Legionnaires had fought against the Germans and Austrians.

German attitudes in Czechoslovakia were summed up by Franz Matzner, parliamentary deputy of the German National Party. Matzner accused the Czechs of having, with 'sophisticated ingenuity', invented 'all these laws' with complete 'disregard to the Germans'. He also took the opportunity to push for autonomy: 'Every law that has been voted on includes severe damage to the Germans, especially to their right to autonomy, which the Germans had since time immemorial'.¹³⁸ Now, to add insult to injury, the Germans also had to endure the interruption of the legislative process so that members of the Chamber of Deputies could take part in the celebratory procession of the Battle of Zborov, to 'satisfy their patriotic feelings'. For the Germans, however this display of Czech patriotism was 'deeply offensive' as, for them, the Battle of Zborov was not a victory. Instead, as a result of the desertion of the Austro-Hungarian army by Czech soldiers, a seven-kilometre gap opened up on the front, which enabled the Russians to penetrate the German lines. As a result, 'thousands and thousands of

¹³⁶ Ibid. p. 438.

¹³⁷ Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und Staatlicher Realität*, p. 107.

¹³⁸ Poslanecká sněmovna [Chamber of Deputies] Session 150, 28 June 1928 at <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1925ns/ps/stenprot/150schuz/s150001.htm> [last accessed 2 May 2014]

German soldiers, sons and fathers of our nation silted up this gap with their bodies and bled to death on the battlefield.’

Zborov as an official national day and the 20th anniversary commemorations

1928 not only marked the tenth anniversary of the establishment of Czechoslovakia, but it was also the year when 2 July officially became a national day commemoration under the name Czechoslovak Army Day, as announced by Minister of National Defence František Udržal. Udržal claimed that by commemorating Zborov officially every year, it is possible to ‘enshrine in the mind of the next generation the glorious tradition of the nation’s battle at Zborov’.¹³⁹ Even though the day was not named after Zborov, but after the new Czechoslovak Army – which in theory could have been a more inclusive name – the nature of the rhetoric and the commemorations carried on in very much the same way.

In 1927 construction of the National Liberation Memorial began. The site was again chosen in a way that linked the present to the glorious past, in this case Jan Žižka’s victory during the Hussite wars over Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund on 14 July 1420. The battle took place on Vítkov hill and is also immortalised in Alfons Mucha’s *Slavic epic* [*Slovanská epopej*] — his cycle of twenty large canvas paintings depicting the history of the Czechs and other Slavs — under the title *After the Battle of Vítkov hill*. Shortly after the battle, Sigismund abandoned Bohemia. The complex on Vítkov hill was not simply a monument, but there were further plans for a pantheon and a mausoleum as well, where the Legionnaires could be buried.¹⁴⁰ An equestrian statue of Jan Žižka was also commissioned, but it was not unveiled until 14 July 1950. The complex opened on the fifteenth anniversary of Zborov, in 1932, with the museum and the archives, housing documents from the Legionnaires. In the 1930s the museum also housed an exhibition about the freedom fight of the legionnaires during the First World War, where the link between the Hussites and the soldiers was made even more explicit.¹⁴¹ This further underlined the claims of historical continuity between the Hussites and Czech nationalism, which, however, excluded the non-Czech elements in Czechoslovakia.

¹³⁹ quoted in Galandauer, *Bitva u Zborova*, p. 110.

¹⁴⁰ Nancy M. Wingfield, ‘The Battle of Zborov and the Politics of Commemoration in Czechoslovakia’ in *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 2003, pp. 654-681, p. 666. [hereafter: Wingfield ‘The Battle of Zborov’]

¹⁴¹ Richard Lein, *Pflichtfüllung oder Hochverrat?: Die tschechischen Soldaten Österreich-Ungarns im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Wien: LIT Verlag, 2011, p. 7. [hereafter Lein *Pflichtfüllung oder Hochverrat?*]

1937, the twentieth anniversary of Zborov was also commemorated with great pomp, although with the changing international context the emphasis was more on showcasing Czechoslovak military might. Zborov was still the focus of the commemoration as *Národní listy* reported, ‘the whole of the Czechoslovak Republic is remembering the heroic struggle of the Czechs and Slovaks at Zborov.’¹⁴² On the eve of 2 July wreaths were laid in Old Town Square, with a number of military regiments, and other organisations such as Sokol and Orel present. The celebrations on the day included a review of the Prague garrison in Strahov stadium, with President Beneš present on the main tribune along with generals, members of the cabinet and so on. All the military attaches were present at Strahov stadium in addition to the German, Hungarian and Austrian attaches.¹⁴³ After the review 72 planes, in groups of four flew over the stadium.¹⁴⁴ A specially-written play was also performed, *Obranu státu (Zborov)* (In Defence of the State [Zborov]), centred on the Legionnaires’ battles with Austro-Hungarian troops. It ‘also incorporated the patriotic trinity of Czechoslovakia: Masaryk, Beneš and Štefánek’ and its musical accompaniment included ‘the Hussite battle hymn, “Kdož jste Boží bojovníci” [“You Who Are God’s Warriors”] to connect Zborov to Czech national-military traditions.’¹⁴⁵

Zborov, however was not only commemorated on special anniversaries: the Legionnaires themselves and their victory on 2 July also became part of the symbolic landscape of Prague. Apart from the monument on Vítkov hill, streets were also named after the event and its protagonists, and a number of works of arts were also inspired by Zborov. Streets that were given Zborov-associated names included: Zborovská in Malá strana and Smíchov (which kept its name to today) and Dvacátého Osmého pluku [28th Regiment].¹⁴⁶ One of the bridges over the river Vltava traversing Prague is named after the legionnaires: Most Legií [Legion Bridge] (although it was renamed 1 máje [1 May] between 1960-1989).¹⁴⁷ A bank was even established by the Legionnaires, the *Banka československých legií* or *Legiobanka*, the Bank of the

¹⁴² ‘Armáda naší záštitou’ [The army is our shield] in *Národní listy*, 2 July 1937, p. 1.

¹⁴³ ‘Hold Neznámému vojínů’ [Tribute to the Unknown Soldier] in *Národní listy* [Evening edition], 1 July 1937, p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Slavná zborovská přehlídka na Masarykově stadionu v Praze’ [Great Zborov parade in Masaryk stadium in Prague] in *Národní politika*, 3 July 1937, pp. 1-2, p.2.

¹⁴⁵ Wingfield, ‘The Battle of Zborov’ p. 674.

¹⁴⁶ Lein, *Pflichtfüllung oder Hochverrat?* p. 410.

¹⁴⁷ Marka Last'ovky, *Pražský uličník: Encyklopedie Názvů Pražský Veřejných Prostanství, I. Díl (A-N)* [The streets of Prague: Encyclopedia of the names of Prague’s public spaces], Prague: Nakladatelství Libri, 1997, pp. 468-469.

Czechoslovak Legions, which was housed on Na Poříčí Street.¹⁴⁸ The building is (still) adorned by Jan Štursa's statue and fresco of Legionaries, entitled *Zborov*.

The Battle of Zborov became, especially after 1928, the second most important national day commemoration in the Czechoslovak Republic. Whilst newspaper articles gave the impression of nation- or state-wide celebrations, in reality it was mainly the Czechs and only to a lesser extent the Slovaks who were addressed during these commemorations. The other national minorities of the Republic, such as the Germans and the Hungarians, were completely absent from the official Zborov narrative. Since they were the 'enemy' against whom the Legionnaires fought at Zborov, it would be difficult to find a way to integrate them into its commemorations. The Battle of Zborov was placed into a longer historic tradition of Czech military achievements by being linked up with the Hussite past. Moreover, to showcase its significance to the current political situation the Legionnaires and their victory were presented as a prerequisite for the establishment of the independent Czechoslovak state in 1918.

Conclusion

National days that commemorated more recent events in the nation's history were themselves in many cases newly invented traditions. Foundation of State Day on 28 October and Czechoslovak Army Day were completely new creations. Although 15 March in Hungary had a tradition of commemoration, the Horthy regime first attempted to create a new narrative for 15 March by associating it with the Arad Martyrs and not Sándor Petőfi. More often than not, these days also failed as attempts to express a unified narrative of the new state. In Hungary the Horthy regime did not make the anniversary of 1848-49, commemorated on 15 March, into an official national day commemoration until 1927, by which time the day had been claimed by the Social Democrats, who used it to criticise the regime. The Horthy regime remained ambivalent towards the commemorations of the day even after it had made it into an official national day; the day did not fit in easily with its nationalist-Catholic rhetoric.

¹⁴⁸ For the history of the bank see: http://www.cnb.cz/cs/o_cnb/archiv_cnb/fondy/banka_cs_leg.html [accessed 15 May 2014]

28 October in Czechoslovakia was also a point of discomfort between the Czechs and the Slovaks, the main point of friction being the date. Czechoslovakia was proclaimed on 28 October 1918, but the Slovaks did not sign the Martin Declaration until 30 October. The more nationalist Slovaks argued that for them 28 October did not represent the birth of the state, while for the Hungarian and German minorities in Czechoslovakia, 28 October represented the foundation of a state that most of them did not support. The Czech-dominated government could easily have made some efforts to be more accommodating with the foundation of state commemorations, not insisting on such a tight focus on 28 October and attempting to shape a more inclusive commemoration.

The anniversary of the Battle of Zborov became after 28 October the largest national day commemoration, especially after 1928, when it was made into an official national day under the name Czechoslovak Army Day. The anniversary of Zborov provided another opportunity to create an inclusive national event, and on some level there was an attempt at this, but, in reality, it mainly commemorated Czech achievements. Moreover, the day was connected to a Hussite past that further alienated many of the Slovaks and ethnic minorities, such as the Germans or the Hungarians.

In Hungary the choice of 15 March as a modern political event to be commemorated as a national day was almost necessitated by the fact that this day had been a significant anniversary in the past, its democratic and anti-authoritarian messages were a problem for Horthy, who preferred to focus on other events of the 1848 uprising. Yet, the popular potency of 15 March meant that it was a day that no Hungarian regime could afford to ignore. In contrast, in Czechoslovakia the political elite went to great pains to promote the political commemoration of Foundation of State Day on 28 October, which proved to be of little potency for the population as a whole (and downright opposed by some communities). In addition, an elaborate ritual was devised in order to create an Unknown Soldier monument to accompany the Battle of Zborov commemorations. This indicates the difficulty in finding overarching stories that could unite the country – while in Hungary the opposite situation was the problem for the government. Here, the authoritarian regime's difficulty was that there was a strong and popular commemorative tradition of 15 March, with significant grassroots support, which they saw as something they had to try to control.

Chapter Three

National days under Nazi eyes

The period between 1938 and 1945 – from the Munich Agreement to the end of the Second World War - saw an almost complete reversal of fortunes in the histories of Czechoslovakia and Hungary. After 1918, following the First World War, whereas Czechoslovakia gained territory and became an independent nation-state, Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory as a result of the Treaty of Trianon of 1920. Yet, only twenty years later, in 1938, the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia began while, between 1938 and 1941 Hungary, thanks to its initial alliance with Nazi Germany in the war, regained some of the territory it had lost to Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania. This again brought Czechoslovakia, or more precisely independent Slovakia, into conflict with Hungary over the regions. Hungarian control over the re-annexed region of the *Felvidék*, a term which during the interwar and Second World War period referred to the whole of Slovakia, was seen as a great triumph and was promoted and represented through educational, linguistic and cultural policies, in which the mandatory celebration of Hungarian national days and use of Hungarian national symbols played a major role.

Even so, despite these developments, the period of the Second World War was not only one of ruptures and new beginnings as regards the official historical narratives or the rhetoric of national day commemorations, but also one of continuities in both the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and Hungary. In the Protectorate, St Wenceslas commemorations, according to the official guidelines issued by Protectorate officials, followed the same programme – at least in the first year of the occupation – as they had done during the First Republic. In Hungary, the rhetoric of the St Stephen commemoration was still largely preoccupied with the Treaty of Trianon, but was now also supplemented by a ‘return narrative’ as a result of the re-annexation of territories with the First and Second Vienna Awards.

In this chapter I examine how something as ‘patriotic’ as national days were possible under Nazi occupation/control. Did the Nazis see national days as a threat, as an expression of national independence, or as a tool through which they could assert their hegemony and

emphasise historical connections with Germans? How were the narratives and content of national days adapted to fit the new reality, wherein a unified Czechoslovakia no longer existed but had been divided into two states, whilst Hungary, in contrast, had expanded and managed to reverse some of the Treaty of Trianon?

As is notoriously known, the signing of the Munich Agreement by Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Italy on 30 September 1938 permitted Nazi Germany to ‘legally’ annex portions of Czechoslovakia, the so-called Sudetenland, an area mainly inhabited by a German population. President Beneš resigned on 5 October when Marshal Goering told the Czechoslovak Minister in Berlin that unless Beneš resigned ‘Germany would treat Czechoslovakia with absolute ruthlessness in the application of the Munich Agreement.’¹ He was succeeded by Emil Hácha.² Czechoslovakia began to unravel. The following day Slovakia, and then two days later, on 8 October, Ruthenia were granted extensive autonomy (although Ruthenia did not enjoy its extensive autonomy for long as it was soon annexed by Hungary). The name of the state was changed to Czecho-Slovakia, and this new regime was known as the Second Republic.

Under the presidency of Emil Hácha and the premiership of Rudolf Beran, the leader of the Agrarian Party, the Second Czechoslovak Republic abandoned the democratic and egalitarian principles of the First Republic (even if these were not always adhered to), and pursued highly nationalist and fascist-leaning policies. The leaders of the Czecho-Slovak Republic believed that the Munich Agreement, ‘a national catastrophe’, was a result of the failure of the liberal democracy embodied by Masaryk.³ Parallels were also drawn between the situation of Czech society before the Battle of White Mountain and the situation before the Munich Agreement: both of these tragic events, it was suggested, were antedated by a period where the social and intellectual traditions of the Czech people were supplanted by the imitation of foreign intellectual and social traditions.⁴

¹ Edvard Beneš, *Fall and Rise of a Nation. Czechoslovakia 1938-1941*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 26.

² Joseph Rothschild and Nancy M. Wingfield, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II*, Third Edition, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. p. 32. [hereafter, Rothschild and Wingfield, *Return to Diversity*].

³ Jan Rataj, *O autoritativní národní stát: Ideologické proměny české politiky v Druhé Republice, 1938-1939*, [The Authoritarian National State: The ideological transformation of Czech politics during the Second Republic] Prague: Karolinum, 1997, p. 93. [hereafter: Rataj, *O autoritativní národní stát*]

⁴ Ibid.

Rather ironically then, this new Czech nationalism heavily relied upon good relations with Germany. The leaders of the Second Republic believed that their founding doctrine of protecting the nation could only be achieved with the help of Nazi Germany.⁵ The Czech conservative leadership also found itself in a close ideological connection with the Reich: both regimes supported a strong state and conservative family values, with men at work and women at home; both were against socialism and were virulently anti-Semitic.⁶

Hácha and Beran not only broke with the democratic traditions of the First Republic, but also with its symbolic ideals, namely the Hussite past, and preferred St Wenceslas, whose figure was better suited to represent their conservative-nationalistic ideals.⁷ This shift produced a narrative of St Wenceslas that connected the Czechs and Czecho-Slovakia to the Germans, which was to reach its full articulation in the years of the Protectorate.⁸ During the Protectorate, St Wenceslas was adopted by the Nazi officials to reinforce the idea of a 1000-year old connection between the Bohemian Lands and Germany. In the Second Republic this new veneration of St Wenceslas was shown when President Hácha ‘kissed the bones of St. Wenceslas and behaved himself as a highly pious Catholic (with one eye cocked at the devout and troublesome Slovaks)’.⁹ St Wenceslas did not only serve the leaders of the Second Republic as a figure that could distance them from the First Republic, but also as a figure that could win the support of the Czech and Slovak Catholics for the Second Republic. Although the Slovaks were soon to be removed from the picture and St Wenceslas’ religious significance was again blotted out, the central role of St Wenceslas as national saint and connector of Czechs and Germans continued throughout the war.

The Second Republic did not enjoy a long life, and Hitler utilised the internal crisis in Prague to encourage the Slovaks to declare their independence. The Slovaks duly obliged and proclaimed their independence on 14 March. President Hácha acquiesced to the occupation of

⁵ Ibid. p. 159.

⁶ Melissa Feinberg, ‘Dumplings and Domesticity: Women, Collaboration, and Resistance in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia’ in Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur (eds) *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006, pp. 95-110. p. 98. [hereafter: Feinberg, ‘Dumplings and Domesticity’]

⁷ As I discussed in Chapter One, the figure of St Wenceslas was difficult to incorporate into the historical narrative of the First Republic. Wenceslas was a Catholic saint, thus did not fit into the anti-Catholic/Austrian narrative of the leaders of the First Republic. Jan Hus was much easier to incorporate into the nationalist narrative of the First Republic.

⁸ Rataj, *O autoritativní národní stát*, p. 167.

⁹ George F. Kennan, *From Prague after Munich: Diplomatic Papers 1938-1940*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 8. [hereafter: Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*]

the rump state by Nazi German troops in March 1939,¹⁰ which brought about the end of the apparently independent Czecho-Slovakia and the establishment of two new separate states: the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, under German occupation, and the ostensibly independent Slovak Republic. The Sudetenland was directly absorbed into Germany.

Hungary, on the other hand, became 'Hitler's reluctant satellite' during the Second World War.¹¹ Admiral Miklós Horthy, regent of Hungary, and his government soon realised that the only way they could fulfil their irredentist dreams was to remain German-friendly. The first opportunity to prove this came with the Munich Agreement. Although the Agreement itself did not deal with the question of Hungarian minorities in Slovakia, the Annex attached to the Agreement did.¹² The Annex stated that the Hungarians and the Czecho-Slovaks should come to an agreement over which territories the latter would grant to Hungary, and only if this was not feasible would the signatories to the Agreement intervene. On some points, the two governments did come to an agreement (for example the river island of Csallóköz/Žitný ostrov, today in south-western Slovakia), but, most crucially, they were unable to agree on the status of the cities of Pozsony/Bratislava, Nyitra/Nitra, Kassa/Košice and Ungvár/Uzhorod (in today's Ukraine). This led to the First Vienna Award, on 2 November 1938, in which Hungary regained the latter two cities, but not the historically important Bratislava and Nitra.¹³

As a result of Hungary's German-friendly attitude there were three further occasions when Hungary regained some of its pre-Trianon territories: the rest of Ruthenia after the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and the independent Slovak state, followed by northern and eastern Transylvania (as a result of the Second Vienna Award) and, lastly, the Bácska/Bačka region from Yugoslavia in April 1941.¹⁴ These territorial gains were to strongly affect both the historical and the national day narratives in Hungary in the years of the war.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 33.

¹¹ László Kontler, *Millennium in Central Europe: A History of Hungary*, Budapest: Atlantis Publishing House, 1999, p. 364.

¹² Ignác Romsics, *Magyarország Története a XX. században* [The history of Hungary in the 20th century], Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1999, p. 243. [hereafter Romsics, *Magyarország Története a XX. században*]

¹³ Ibid. pp. 243-244.

¹⁴ Rothschild and Wingfield, *Return to Diversity*, p. 38. and Romsics, *Magyarország Története a XX. században*, pp. 244-249

Although Hungary clearly pursued a German-friendly policy, the country's Prime Minister, Pál Teleki, at the outbreak of the war stressed that the country wanted to stay clear of the conflicts among the Great Powers and wished to remain neutral, although at the same time continuing on with its revisionist politics.¹⁵ However, by owing so many favours to Nazi Germany as a result of the land redistribution, staying neutral during the war was impossible. Hungary thus abandoned its neutrality on 20 November 1940 and entered the war on the side of the Axis powers. Hungary's reluctance could mainly be explained by the country's relationship with Romania. Both countries were Hitler's allies, but Hungary wanted to re-annex Transylvania. Relations between the two countries were thus tense, and the Hungarian leadership was afraid of a replay of 1919 when Romanian troops pushed back the weakened Hungarian army into Budapest.¹⁶ To avoid a similar situation the Hungarians kept 'troops and supplies in reserve for an eventual fight with Romania.'¹⁷ However, Hitler made it clear to the Hungarians that if they did not contribute enough troops and supplies to the German offensive against the Soviet Union in the summer of 1942, the territorial question would be decided in favour of Romania.¹⁸

An exploration of German policies through the prism of national days in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and Hungary can offer much insight into Nazi strategies for maintaining their control of the different states that Germany occupied or were its 'puppet' states. National days could be both a risk and a useful tool for the Germans. While commemorations of national independence and historical fights for freedom would provide the opportunity for anti-occupation and resistance protests, at the same time, a successful reshaping of the symbolism and messages of the national days and their accompanying historical narratives, as was particularly attempted in the Bohemian lands, could be used in an attempt to solidify Nazi rule. The Nazi approach to national days can also help identify how the Nazi strategy of control evolved in response to reactions among the occupied populations.

¹⁵ Romsics, *Magyarország Története a XX. században*, p. 245.

¹⁶ Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 78. [hereafter: Case, *Between States*]

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 79. For a more detailed discussion on the relationship between Nazi Germany, Hungary and Romania see Ibid. pp. 67-90.

The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

With the end of the Second Republic, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was established; in theory, this was an autonomous administrative unit within the Reich (the Sudetenland was directly integrated into the Third Reich). The Czecho-Slovak parliament was dissolved on 21 March 1939 and Hácha remained president under the newly formed Czech National Alliance. The new Czech government, however, was weak, and was easily subordinated to the newly established German administrative system in the country.

The head of the German authorities was the Reichsprotektor, appointed directly by Hitler himself, who, in the words of the designer of the system State Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior Wilhelm Stuckart 'is ... the viceroy in the Protectorate. [...] He alone embodies the Reich in all areas of state governmental life in the Protectorate.'¹⁹ The Reichsprotektor was assisted by the Reichsprotektor's office, while at the bottom of the German administrative pyramid in the Protectorate were the Oberlandräte, responsible for areas such as the police, ethnic relations on a local level and for the official correspondence between local and Prague officials.²⁰

The first Reichsprotektor was Konstantin von Neurath, a career diplomat, who although had a strong sense of duty, offered a much less radical tone than his main rival within the German administrative system within Prague, Karl Hermann Frank, who was the senior SS official in the Protectorate. Frank was from the Sudetenland and was a Pan-Germanist and, perhaps as a result, was far more ideological and hard-line in his approach.²¹ It is important to note here, though that the Sudeten German position was not universal. Some Sudeten Germans did not want to cooperate with Nazi Germany, whilst others – Frank for example – thought that the Czechs deserved a much harsher treatment than what the Nazi Germans employed.²²

'Germanising' the history of Bohemia and Moravia

George F. Kennan, Secretary of the US Legation in Prague, in his report on 29 March 1939 remarked that the complete occupation of the rump state was the 'first time that the National

¹⁹ Quoted in Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 31. [hereafter: Bryant *Prague in Black*]

²⁰ Ibid. 31.

²¹ Ibid. pp. 31-34.

²² For the Sudeten Germans within the Reich and their positions see for example: Ralf Gebel, *"Heim ins Reich!" Konrad Henlein und der Reichsgau Sudetenland (1938-1945)*, Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999. [hereafter: Gebel, *"Heim ins Reich!"*]

Socialist regime has absorbed an important and purely non-Germanic political unit'. This made him ponder that 'the type of regime set up here may well give an indication of the form of domination which — if German hopes are successful — may later be applied to other parts of the continent.'²³ Kennan, in this regard, was however mistaken, as the Nazi policies in the Protectorate were very different from those in Poland, which was invaded by Germany on 1 September 1939. As early as 1938 internal documents stressed a historical connection between the German Reich and the Bohemian Lands, a connection that was also emphasised on a racial level.²⁴ Both Reichsprotektor von Neurath and K. H. Frank submitted proposals to suggest that a large portion of the Czech population could be Germanised. Neurath, for example, noted that 'one is surprised at the great number of fair-haired people with intelligent faces and well-shaped bodies, people who would not compare unfavourably even in the Central German and South German area, not to speak of the area east of the Elbe river.'²⁵ Two years later, in 1942, Reinhard Heydrich, who took over the Reichsprotektor's office from Neurath, still claimed that forty to sixty per cent of the Czechs could be Germanised.²⁶ Frank and Neurath's claims were investigated in 1940 and further supported by Dr Walter König-Beyer of the Race and Settlement Head Office in Berlin, who found that the Czechs were 'predominantly [45%] nordic, dinaric or western people'.²⁷

Why was the percentage of Germanisable Czechs deemed so high compared to other countries and their populations? Despite the apparent distinctions between Czechs and Germans that supposedly necessitated the German annexation of the Sudetenland, the German approach to the integration of the Protectorate was a racially-based one, which not only saw Czechs as being of a Germanic stock but also sought to construct a historical narrative of a 1000-year relationship between the Germans and Czechs. The aim of this historical narrative was to justify and legitimise their rule over the Czech lands and to inculcate a sense of loyalty or at least adherence among the Czechs for the German war effort. In most of these internal reports, the 1000-year historical connection between the German peoples and the Bohemians and Moravians was underlined and used as a justification for the establishment of the Protectorate. German-language books on the history of Bohemia and Moravia at this time highlighted the

²³ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, p. 94.

²⁴ Václav Král, *Lesson from History: Documents concerning the Nazi policies for Germanisation and extermination in Czechoslovakia*, Second edition, Prague: Orbis, 1962. p. 24. [hereafter: Král, *Lesson from History*]

²⁵ Ibid. p. 56.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 135.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 69.

connection between the Holy Roman Empire –referred to in the books as the German Empire, claiming it to be an antecedent of the Reich – and the Bohemian Lands. Nonetheless, K. H. Frank, the head of the SS in the Protectorate, admitted in his 1943 book *Böhmen und Mähren im Reich* that there were difficulties with the ‘objective historical representation’ of the history of these lands, as ‘Bohemian historical writing is largely influenced by the work of Czech historian Franz Palacky [František Palacký]’, who, ‘was in fact [...] a politician and his historical works are strongly influenced by his political interests and Czech wishful thinking.’²⁸

Frank and other writers therefore needed to undermine the historical narrative established by Palacký, which was oriented towards an independent Czech nation. He therefore had to establish a historical narrative that supposedly predated that of Palacký and would be based on more ‘authoritative’ historical evidence that attempted to weaken the Slavic element. Another contribution in this direction was the book by Erich Gierach and Karl C. von Lösch entitled *Böhmen und Mähren im Deutschen Reich*, published in 1939.²⁹ Gierach was a scholar and pioneer of the Sudeten German movement and one of the key contributors to the *Ostforschung*, whilst Lösch was an ethnologist and taught at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Berlin (now the Humboldt-Universität).

New historical research, according to Gierach and Lösch’s book, claimed that even before Roman times there had been German or Germanic tribes in the area of Bohemia and Moravia, ‘long before the Slavs migrated here.’³⁰ These were the Boii, who also gave the area its name of Bohemia, although, as Frank cautions, it is only from the early Iron Age that we can be certain of who lived in the area.³¹ After the Boii departed the Germanic Marcomanni tribe arrived, and they remained in the area of today’s Bohemia for almost half a century. During this same period, Moravia and Slovakia were inhabited by the Quadi, another Germanic tribe.³² The Marcomanni left the area in around the sixth century AD and the Slavs arrived later, in the seventh century. Frank argues that Germanic historical continuity is clearly indicated in the German words and place names that the Slavs kept.³³

²⁸ Hermann Karl Frank, *Böhmen und Mähren im Reich*, Schriftenreihe Böhmen und Mähren Band 2, Prag: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1943, pp. 6-7. [hereafter: Frank *Böhmen und Mähren im Reich*]

²⁹ Erich Gierach and Karl C. von Lösch, *Böhmen und Mähren im Deutschen Reich*, München: Verlag F. Bruckmann, 1939 [hereafter: Gierach und Lösch *Böhmen und Mähren im Deutschen Reich*]

³⁰ Ibid. p. 6.

³¹ Frank *Böhmen und Mähren im Reich*, p. 7. and Gierach und Lösch *Böhmen und Mähren im Deutschen Reich*, p. 7.

³² Frank *Böhmen und Mähren im Reich*, p. 7. Gierach und Lösch *Böhmen und Mähren im Deutschen Reich*, p. 11.

³³ Frank, *Böhmen und Mähren im Reich*, p. 8.

Thus, the first connection between the German/Germanic and Slav peoples could be established. The affiliation of Bohemia with the Franks – even though they were also a Germanic tribe – and Great Moravia are dismissed as small diversions, and the focus shifts to the constant political and constitutional connection of the Holy Roman Empire and Bohemia from Charlemagne until 1866, when Austria seceded from the German Confederation.³⁴ In the books by both Frank and Gierach and Lösch, fairly detailed run-downs are given of how the connection between the two lands (the German and Bohemia) changed over time. Intriguingly, Frank does not mention St Wenceslas, who was most appropriated by the Nazi Germans when they were communicating with a Czech audience, whilst Gierach and Lösch only mention him in passing, in terms of how his death seemingly shook German hegemony in the area and as the first martyr and saint of the Bohemian Lands.³⁵ Frank as well as Gierach and Lösch are more interested in other important historical periods and figures, such as: Charles IV, who established the first German language university within the Holy Roman Empire in Prague (Charles University); Hus and the Hussite Wars, and their anti-German sentiments; the Battle of White Mountain and the 19th-century national revival.³⁶ One possible reason for absence of St Wenceslas was that these books – written in German – were directed more at the Sudeten Germans and less at Czechs, therefore, the emphasis needed to be on deeper historical connections with Germany, rather than on the patron saint of the Bohemian Lands.

Also pertinent were Nazi German views of the Czechoslovak First Republic. A proposal of the Sudeten German Party – the Nazi-influenced party that after the 1935 elections in Czechoslovakia received the single largest vote –³⁷ characterised the First Republic as an anti-German state, which partly failed because of the Czechs’ ‘lack of ability [...] in the development of an orderly state.’³⁸ But since the Bohemian Lands are strategically an important part of the Reich: ‘Bohemia and Moravia cannot exist without the *Reich*, and a strong Reich must have Bohemia and Moravia’ as the area is of key importance ‘[f]or the protection of the Germanic-German Lebensraum’ and it is now necessary to restore the old regime (presumably

³⁴ Frank, *Böhmen und Mähren im Reich*, p. 6. and p. 17.

³⁵ Gierach and Lösch, *Böhmen und Mähren im Deutschen Reich*, p. 12. and p. 13.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 22 and p. 25; Frank *Böhmen und Mähren im Reich*, p. 12-13. and p. 17.

³⁷ The Sudeten German Party was established by Konrad Henlein, a Sudeten German politician in 1933 under the name *Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront* [Sudeten German Home Front] soon after the banning of the German National Socialist Workers’ Party. In 1935 it was renamed *Sudetendeutsche Partei* [Sudeten German Party] and campaigned for Sudeten solidarity with a *völkisch*, right-wing rhetoric and by the second half of the 1930s became a major pro-Nazi party. For more on the history of the Party see: Gebel, “*Heim ins Reich!*”, pp. 25-42.

³⁸ Král, *Lesson from History*, p. 35.

the Germanic regime before the Habsburgs left the German Confederation in 1866).³⁹ After the taking of the Bohemian Lands, on 16 March 1939, Hitler, as Karl Hermann Frank put it, could look out of the window of Prague Castle, in a city ‘whose inhabitants are now mainly Czech, but whose stones, towers and monuments [...] speak German.’⁴⁰

Attempts were also made to strengthen the relationship of the Germans to the city of Prague itself. Deputy mayor and former university professor of medieval and East European history at the German University of Prague, Josef Pfitzner, in his book *Das Tausendjährige Prag*, attempted to establish a deep historical connection between the German people and Prague.⁴¹ Pfitzner emphasised from the beginning of the book that ‘the thousand-year old Prague [...] is a major part of Central European-German history, and therefore the current and future configuration [Gestaltung] of the faith of Prague remains a primary concern for the German people and for the Greater German Reich.’⁴² The German presence is highlighted throughout the book from the German merchants of the 10th century (who, ‘[a]s luck would have it for the Czechs and the city of Prague’ moved into the city to counter the Jewish presence), to Charles IV and to the Habsburgs.⁴³ Trouble for the Germans started with the Czech national revival in the 19th century with the Pan-Slavic ideals of the Czech nationalists.⁴⁴ Of course, for Pfitzner the greatest break came with the establishment of the First Republic in 1918. Prague became ‘the capital of a so-called “sovereign”, “independent” state’ and thus lost its historical significance in the Central European space it had occupied since its foundation.⁴⁵ Presumably as a result of the loss of German influence. The Sudetenland became the victim of the anti-German policies of Masaryk and Beneš and thus the period of the First Republic was ‘one of the gloomiest episodes in the history of the Germans in Prague’.⁴⁶ The situation was only remedied in September 1938 with ‘the homecoming of the Sudeten Germans back to the Reich’ and with the establishment of the Protectorate on 15 March 1939.⁴⁷

³⁹ Frank, *Böhmen und Mähren im Reich*, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 27.

⁴¹ Josef Pfitzner, *Das Tausendjährige Prag*, Bayreuth: Gauverlag, 1940.

⁴² Ibid. p. 5.

⁴³ For the German merchant presence see: Ibid. p. 7. For Charles IV see p. 12. and for the beginning of the Habsburg influence see: p. 25.

⁴⁴ Pfitzner mentioned the Prague Slavic Congress. See Ibid. p. 35. Furthermore, he also lamented the fact that there were no German city representatives in Prague from 1887. See: p. 37.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 41.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 46.

Whilst these ‘historical’ books were written in German, thus presumably for a German audience whether in Germany or the Protectorate, they provide important clues to the Nazi policies within the Protectorate and also to the symbolic policies of the new regime. The Czechs and the city of Prague were presented in these volumes as historically linked to the German sphere of influence. In this way, the Nazi regime and the Protectorate officials could explain their more moderate treatment of the Czech people (compared to the Poles, for example) to their home audience, especially to those Sudeten Germans who favoured a harsher approach. With the establishment of a new historical narrative, in which Bohemian history was completely subordinated to the German narrative of a 1000-years of cooperation, how did practices that represented a Czech national conception of the historical narrative, such as national days, fare? As I will argue below, the Nazi authorities were initially content to allow national days to continue in a similar style to the interwar period, albeit with a greater emphasis on St Wenceslas and the exclusion of 28 October. They believed that this would assist in the Germanisation process and allow the Czech people to feel they had a semblance of autonomy, although in practice these days were used as opportunities for anti-Nazi protest.

National days and symbolic resistance

Nazi German officials, amongst them Frank himself, stressed that it would be difficult to completely eliminate the Czech nation, who were needed in particular to keep industrial production going, and this would not benefit the Reich.⁴⁸ Moreover, the Germans also needed the Czechs to co-operate with them to some degree. Thus, Czech customs that were deemed not to be anti-German were allowed to continue, with some modifications, whilst connecting the history of the Holy Roman Empire to the history of the Bohemian Lands was an important part of how national days were to be commemorated. Somewhat surprisingly, apart from Hitler’s birthday, Protectorate officials did not establish other annual commemorations from the beginning of the occupation, although there were one-off occasions that were celebrated with great pageantry, such as the arrival of Reichsprotektor von Neurath on 5 April 1939. Even so, the reception of Neurath neatly reflects Czech attitudes towards the Germans, which were not as welcoming as the Nazis had hoped. As the American diplomat George Keenan, who we can be confident gave an accurate account, wrote on the arrival of the Reichsprotektor in Prague, the Germans planned an elaborate welcome festivity:

⁴⁸ Král, *Lesson from History*, p. 56.

a ceremonious greeting with a guard of honor at the station, a motorcar procession through the main streets, a formal welcome at the Palace [...], an exchange of visits between the Reichprotektor and President Hacha (in which the latter paid the first call), a military parade on the Square of St. Wenceslas, a formal dinner, and a torchlight tattoo before the Palace in the evening.⁴⁹

Moreover, the day was declared a public holiday, shops were closed, and home-owners were ordered to display their flags on their houses: the swastika for Germans living in Prague, and for Czechs their national colours. Great care was taken that the Reichsprotektor's journey from the train station to the Palace was appropriately festive: Prague Germans were required to be present and Kennan also believed that people were ferried in from the Sudeten area to celebrate Neurath's arrival. The German authorities also tried to rally the Czechs: Czech schoolchildren were required to attend events at their schools, from which they were marched to locations along the route of the procession, whilst the Sokol, the fire department and other uniformed organisations were also in attendance, alongside the Committee of the National Community (as the Czech government was referred to at this time).⁵⁰ As Kennan observed, most events passed satisfactorily, but the Czechs' participation in the festivities was far from enthusiastic. Many households opted to pay a six-hundred-crown fine rather than display flags, the uniformed organisations hardly sent any people to attend, and even those who were present seemed like 'they were being marched to their own slaughter', whilst many Czech school children were simply kept at home.⁵¹

This kind of silent symbolic resistance became the staple of Czech resistance towards the German occupiers. Protectorate and German officials, as we will see, focused on St Wenceslas, in whose image they saw an opportunity to create what the Kuratorium for Youth Education in Bohemia and Moravia [*Kuratorium pro výchovu mládeže v Čechách a na Moravě*] termed Reich-loyal Czech nationalism: 'The idea that one could be both a Czech nationalist and a loyal Reich subject'.⁵² Tara Zahra has demonstrated the policy of Reich-loyal Czech nationalism through schools and educational policies, especially through the Nazi Kuratorium for Youth Education, and Heydrich's Summer Relaxation Camps for Czech Children and the Week of Czech Youths. Pertinently, as Zahra points out, after Heydrich took over from Neurath in 1941

⁴⁹ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich* p. 111.

⁵⁰ Ibid. pp. 111-112

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 112.

⁵² Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008. p. 239. [hereafter: Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*]

as Reichsprotektor efforts at Germanisation were intensified and '[i]t became more and more common for Czech boys and girls to parade the outward signs of Czech ethnicity, singing nationalist songs, speaking Czech and wearing costumes, all under the Nazi banner.'⁵³ Although at first there was little enthusiasm for these educational organisations, towards the final years of the war this changed and they became rather popular.⁵⁴ The concept of Reich-loyal Czech nationalism is especially useful when we explore Protectorate policies towards Czech national day commemorations. Although St Wenceslas and his national day on 28 September were the prime vehicles in the eyes of the Protectorate officials for this task, other Czech national days were not banned — apart from 28 October, the day of the anniversary of the foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 — but were permitted to continue with close monitoring.

With most national days still not banned – at least until 1942 – the Czechs used the opportunity they provided for non-violent or symbolic resistance to show their opposition to the Nazi occupation. As I discuss in greater detail below, the underground resistance urged Czechs to wear their Sunday best and the Czech tricolour on various anniversaries connected to either national days or to figures of Czech history (including the president of the First Republic T. G. Masaryk), and to boycott public transport and even the official newspapers. Maciej J. Bartkowski in his introduction to a volume on non-violent resistance argues that as a form of non-violent or symbolic resistance locals can 'borrow from existing symbols, rituals, and customs to devise even more effective strategies and tactics against an oppressor, particularly a foreign one.'⁵⁵ National day commemorations offer a pertinent space within which this kind of resistance can take place. Moreover, as Bartkowski points out, civil disobedience also helps to develop a sense of patriotism amongst its participants.⁵⁶ He describes this indirect method of resistance 'as antlike, stubborn endurance to ensure collective survival in the midst of severe oppression, within a limited public space for independence.'⁵⁷ This is borne out in the Protectorate, where there was a limited possibility for armed resistance. A former national day such as 28 October, which before the occupation had been regarded by much of the population

⁵³ Ibid. p. 239.

⁵⁴ The Kuratorium was established after Heydrich's assassination in 1942. The main aim was 'to secure the loyalty of Czech children to the Third Reich through physical and ideological education.' By the summer of 1943 almost a million (944, 770) Czech Youth were registered. Ibid. p. 233.

⁵⁵ Maciej J. Bartkowski, 'Recovering Nonviolent History' in Bartkowski, Maciej J. (ed.) *Recovering Nonviolent History: Civil Resistance in Liberation Struggles*, Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013, pp. 1-30, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 5.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 15.

with a degree of indifference, became a central point of resistance activity, with the widespread mobilisation of national and historical symbols.

In the Protectorate and for the Czechs, however, there was an added complexity as, at least in 1939 and in the first years of the war, national day commemorations were not only allowed – apart from the anniversary of the foundation of the First Czechoslovak Republic on 28 October, which was banned – but St Wenceslas Day was directly used by the Protectorate officials to show the link between the two nations and to legitimise their occupation and rule. Moreover, some of those people who silently protested at these commemorative events/anniversaries against the occupation, likely also worked in a role – be it in factories or other industries – that benefited the German war effort.⁵⁸

The first national days to arise in the calendar after the establishment of the Protectorate came in July 1939, with Zborov Day on 2 July and Jan Hus Day on 6 July. There were a number of anti-Nazi demonstrations on both days, with around 30,000 to 40,000 people gathering on Old Town Square on 6 July.⁵⁹ The Germans also organised a Jan Hus commemoration, although not everyone within their ranks was enthusiastic about commemorating or letting the Czechs officially commemorate this day, presumably because of the anti-German sentiment that could be attached to Hus. The Deputy Mayor of Prague, Josef Pfitzner, voiced his disapproval to K.H. Frank in a letter dated 7 July 1939.⁶⁰ Pfitzner urged that the Town Hall should be left out of the programme for the Jan Hus commemoration, as it was not an appropriate venue to commemorate what Hus stood for. He was particularly sensitive to the implications of the day, proclaiming that he had in ‘all definitiveness explained that Hus, as long as I sit in the Town Hall will not be celebrated by us, but it would also be a lie if someone wanted to claim that we banned the Hus celebrations or that we only approved of it under pressure from the English or French press.’

This demonstrates the sensitivity with which the Nazi authorities viewed Czech commemorations at a time (July 1939) when the Second World War had not yet commenced

⁵⁸ This again matches with Zahra’s concept of Reich-loyal Czech nationalism. See: Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, p. 239. For the dichotomy between resistance and collaboration see for example: Feinberg, ‘Dumplings and Domesticity’, pp. 95-110.

⁵⁹ Detlef Brandes, *Die Tschechen unter Deutschem Protektorat, Teil I. Besatzungspolitik, Kollaboration und Widerstand im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren bis Hezdrichs Tod (1939-1942)*, Munich and Vienna: R. Oldenbourg, 1969, p. 82. [hereafter: Brandes, *Die Tschechen unter Deutschem Protektorat, Teil I*]

⁶⁰ NACR, Státní tajemník u říšského protektora, Box 28.

in Europe: on the one hand, they did not want to be seen as being so heavy-handed as to ban such events, yet on the other they did not want to be perceived as bowing to pressure from the British or the French. In Pfitzner's case, as a Sudeten German, he had a particular disdain for Hus and recalled the destruction of statues after Czechoslovak independence was proclaimed: 'Had we behaved like the Czechs did in 1918 [...] today the Hus monument would absolutely be no more.' Pfitzner also recalled that during a local council meeting — where the issue of Hus arose — a certain Kremlička also remarked that there was a possibility that 28 October, the anniversary of the foundation of Czechoslovakia, may be commemorated officially in some form. Pfitzner ended this section of his letter by urging Frank to thoroughly revise the national day law 'so we are spared any unpleasant incidents in the future.'

The first real test of Nazi German symbolic policies came on St Wenceslas Day on 28 September 1939, less than a month after outbreak of the war, thus making this day the first commemoration that happened in wartime. For the Germans, Wenceslas provided the opportunity to cement their narrative of a historical German-Czech cooperation and St Wenceslas Day was an ideal vehicle through which to promote this. As the Secretary of State, Karl Hermann Frank, wrote in a letter to the prime minister of the Protectorate, Alois Eliáš, dated 12 September 1939: 'The position of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in relation to the German Reich requires, that on this day celebrations take place in such a manner that the relationship of the Protectorate to the German Reich is justified.'⁶¹ Frank requested Eliáš to ensure that the content of the commemorations did not cause any grievances for either the Czechs or the Germans, as happened with the Jan Hus commemorations on 6 July.

'History ascribes two great statesmanlike acts to St Wenceslas' announced *Národní listy* on its front page on 28 September 1940.⁶² These two acts were discussed in all the Czech-language newspapers, where St Wenceslas was presented as a connection between the Germans and Czechs: he had brought the Bohemian Lands into the western cultural sphere – by adopting Christianity – and made peace with the powerful German neighbours. This latter point was especially pertinent since through the peace treaty between the Czechs and the Germans, Wenceslas 'provided himself and his successors with the successful internal construction of

⁶¹ NACR, Předsednictvo ministerské rady, Box 501, Letter from K.H. Frank to the Prime Minister, Prague, 12 September 1939

⁶² 'Sv. Václav, patron české země' [St Wenceslas, the patron of the Czech Lands] in *Národní listy*, 28 September 1940, p. 1.

the Bohemian Lands.’ Two years later, during his St Wenceslas Day radio message entitled ‘Loyalty to St Wenceslas, is Loyalty to the Reich’, the Minister of National Enlightenment Emanuel Moravec informed his Czech listeners that in the past two decades – i.e. the First Republic of independent Czechoslovakia – the country was ‘crippled, unfit and vegetating’.⁶³ Moravec blamed this state of affairs on the anti-German policies of the Republic, and he warned that even after the Munich Agreement some Czechs were secretly collaborating with the English and the Jews against the Great German Empire. Moravec attempted to present the creation of the Protectorate as almost a favour to the Czechs: the President of the Second Republic Emil Hácha, before his departure to Berlin – on Hitler’s invitation – ‘visited the grave of St Wenceslas and kissed the saint’s skull. Adolf Hitler pleaded [for Hácha to join Czechoslovakia to the Third Reich], our President obliged. The abandoned Bohemian Lands joined the Third Reich, which gave it extensive self-government and cultural autonomy.’⁶⁴

In other words, the creation of the Protectorate and the relationship with Germany were a fulfilment of the Czechs’ historical destiny, as epitomised by St Wenceslas. Moravec was thus doubly concerned that 19th-century Czech liberal nationalist interpretations of history had made Wenceslas appear anti-German. For example, in the previous century the St Wenceslas Chorale ‘was understood to imply that Prince Wenceslas was our guard against the Reich.’ But this, according to Moravec, is a misunderstanding, since Wenceslas helped the Czechs to make peace with the Germans and incorporated the Bohemian Lands into the Empire, ‘which gave them protection and uplifted them so they could flourish’. Therefore, Moravec concludes ‘Loyalty to St Wenceslas means loyalty to the Reich. The politics of St Wenceslas are the politics of Hácha.’⁶⁵

To complement this narrative of St Wenceslas, the Protectorate officials also staged St Wenceslas commemorations, although, somewhat contradictorily, these continued to be based on the commemorations of the First Republic. The programme of the St Wenceslas commemorations in 1939, for example, included official events in the Hrad, including a pontifical mass on the day at St Vitus Cathedral.⁶⁶ The Protectorate government was in

⁶³ ‘Věrnost sv. Václavu je věrností Říši.’ [Loyalty to St Wenceslas is loyalty to the Reich] in *Národní politika*, 30 September 1942, pp.1-2, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Ibid. In reality there was not much ‘pleading’ from Hitler. Once Hácha arrived at Berlin, Hitler informed him that the German army was about to invade Czechoslovakia.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ NACR, Předsednictvo ministerské rady, Box 501, Bureau of the Ministerial Council, 26 September 1939, St Wenceslas celebrations.

attendance, including the Protectorate President Emil Hácha. The traditional St Wenceslas procession also took place with the relics of the saint, such as the skull.⁶⁷ The procession consisted of about six to seven hundred participants, while ten to twelve thousand people lined the route. The St Wenceslas Day commemoration was also accompanied by an elaborate arts and media programme. For example, an exhibition was organised in the Municipal House in Prague and there were medium wave radio programmes on the saint from 23 to 30 September 1939.⁶⁸ The programmes were quite diverse in nature and included concerts (e.g. Dvořák's *Hussite Overtures*, Josek Suk's *Meditation on the St Wenceslas Chorale* and Smetana's *Má vlast*, all Czech national composers), public talks (e.g. on the visual representation of St Wenceslas, on the oldest Slavic legend on St Wenceslas) and live radio broadcasts, especially on 28 September when the pontifical mass was broadcast from St Vitus Cathedral as was the tribute to St Wenceslas from Stará Boleslav.

Thus, the 1939 St Wenceslas commemorations, in essence, did not differ significantly from what the Czech population was used to during the time of the First Republic, thanks to meticulous planning on the part of the Nazi Germans who made a particular effort to replicate the pre-1939 experience. Guidelines on what the local authorities needed to follow were circulated by the Bureau of the Ministry of the Interior in both German and Czech, '[t]o all board members of the precincts and state police authorities and their branches' on 20 September.⁶⁹ Whilst St Wenceslas commemorations were allowed, the Ministry set out clear instructions for the programme of the commemorations: 'Only those St Wenceslas celebrations may be allowed that are considered to be established, and that do not differ from the celebrations of this kind which were organised in the previous years.' The guidelines noted that '[a]ny transgressions from the designated framework are to be prevented.' The guidelines ordered that the commemoration must be the same as in previous years not only in 'their content and character' but 'especially in their duration, magnitude and [...] meaning'. Furthermore, the programme of the commemorations 'must under no circumstances contain something that in any way could interfere with the current political [...] conditions and that could interfere with the mutual relations and calm cohabitation of the population of both nationalities.'

⁶⁷ NACR, Úřad říšského protektora v Čechách a na Moravě, Praha, č. f. 1005, Box 276, I-1a

⁶⁸ NACR, Předsednictvo ministerské rady, Box 501, Programme of the St Wenceslas commemoration from 23-30 September 1939 on the radio (medium wave)

⁶⁹ NARC, Předsednictvo ministerské rady, Box 501, Bureau of the Ministry of the Interior, Prague, 20 September 1939, St Wenceslas Day festivities

It is apparent, therefore, that – initially, at least – the Nazi authorities wished to retain a semblance of continuity with the pre-1939 period, to give the impression, through such pageantry and ritual, that German control was not contradictory to Czech national feeling and that Czech identity could be combined with Reich loyalty. The St Wenceslas Day commemorations were, however, perceived in marked contrast to the more ‘radical’ Zborov and Hus Days: Wenceslas, after all, could be used to promote Czech-German cooperation. Except, St Wenceslas Day soon evolved into an expression of Czech national pride and opposition to Nazi rule.

The 1939 St Wenceslas Day did not lose the power inherent in all national days to provide an opportunity for protest. Despite the thorough preparations and the seemingly unchanging nature of the St Wenceslas Day commemorations, there were still demonstrations and incidents organised mainly by the underground resistance and the Communist Party. The organised resistance in the Protectorate consisted of three major groups that started to become active in the summer of 1939: Nation’s Defence [*Obrana národa*], Political Centre [*Politické ústředí*] and the Committee of the Petition ‘We remain faithful’ [*Petiční výbor ‘Věrní zůstaneme’*].⁷⁰ These three groups were in extensive contact with the émigré group of Beneš, whilst the fourth resistance group, the Communist Party, was taking their orders from Moscow.⁷¹

The focal point of the demonstrations on 28 September 1939 was on Wenceslas Square, in front of the equestrian statue of St Wenceslas. During the day, eight wreaths were placed on the steps of the monument, three of which were without ribbons and were quickly removed by the authorities. The remaining five wreaths were adorned with Czech national colours and were laid down by members of different clubs. The report by the Chief of Police also points out that throughout the day groups of people were loitering ‘in the vicinity of the monument’. This was at first only a small group of forty-six people, whom he described as ‘mainly passers-by or people who got off at the tram stop there’. This group did not cause much trouble but simply ‘stood for a short time in front of the monument in silence, the men mostly bareheaded, and then they moved on.’⁷²

⁷⁰ Vojtech Mastny, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule: The failure of national resistance, 1939-1942*, New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971. pp. 145-146. [hereafter: Mastny, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule*]

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 146. and p. 148.

⁷² NARC, Úřad říšského protektora v Čechách a na Moravě, Praha, č. f. 1005, Box 279, I-1a

By the evening the crowds grew to 150 to 200 people. At 18.15, five women started singing the St Wenceslas Chorale on the steps of the monument. The singing was quickly stopped by police and the women dispersed. Afterwards people in front of the monument started singing the national anthem 'Kde domov můj' and the police stepped in to prevent them yet again. In response to this police action, people in the crowd sang the St Wenceslas Chorale, and the security forces responded by locking down the area around the monument. In the meantime a large crowd of approximately 2000 people had gathered around the pavement, again mainly comprised of passers-by and people who came from the nearby cinema after the screening. Security forces dispersed the crowds and four people were arrested: three people of 'Czech nationality' and another man identified as Jewish, who rather tellingly was held for five days before he was released.⁷³

St Wenceslas Day 1939 provided the opportunity for demonstrations and protests against the Nazi presence outside of Prague as well. Incidents were also reported from, for example, Olomouc and Brno. In Brno, Protectorate authorities took precautions 'in the last week of September on the occasion of St Wenceslas Day and the anniversary of the Munich Agreement'.⁷⁴ In the run up to the saint's day there were passenger boycotts on the trams of Brno, mainly protesting the bilingual German-Czech signs and demonstrators also tore down poster announcements from the Reichsprotektor. In light of these incidents, increased police patrols were implemented, but the report to Frank states that on 28 September nothing unusual happened during the traditional the St Wenceslas procession. The author of the report adds, however, that not all processions and pilgrimages are simply what they seem, namely religious celebrations, 'but [they are] also manifestations of Czechness [*Tschechentums*].'

Thus, although St Wenceslas Day was seen by the Germans as a vehicle for promoting their policy of Czech Reich loyalty and despite the fact that in the interwar period this national day had tended to have an ambiguous position, St Wenceslas Day 1939 still provided an opportunity for protest against the Nazi regime for Czechs by providing them with the cover to express their Czechness. The opportunity for crowds to gather in public spaces also enabled

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ NARC, Úřad říšského protektora v Čechách a na Moravě, Praha, č. f. 1005,, Box 279, I-1a The Reichsprotektor in Bohemia and Moravia, Moravia Group, Brno 5 October 1939 - Situational report for the month of September 1939.

protests. Moreover, the power of the singing of such national songs as part of a non-violent resistance can be seen in the radio message broadcast by the Minister of National Enlightenment Emanuel Moravec on the occasion of St Wenceslas Day a few years later, in 1942, as discussed above. The St Wenceslas Chorale, as used in these protests, symbolised the stance of St Wenceslas, and hence the Czechs, against the historical Reich, tapping into 19th-century nationalist historiography. Hence, why Moravec was at pains to undermine this interpretation of the song, and give it a pro-Reich meaning.

Far more expressive of Czech national identity and independence, and hence more difficult for the Nazis to manage, was the next national day commemoration in the calendar, that of 28 October 1939, commemorating the foundation of Czechoslovakia. This day was also a reminder that, thanks to the policy of the occupying power, the state of Czechoslovakia no longer existed. The new German administration was particularly unenthusiastic about this day, so much so that Frank, in a letter to the prime minister on 12 September, urged Eliáš to appropriately commemorate St Wenceslas on 28 September and to eliminate the 28 October commemoration completely, as ‘since the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia it [28 October] has lost its meaning’.⁷⁵ Thus, in contrast to St Wenceslas Day no official celebrations were planned and any commemorative events were banned. This further enhanced the ‘radical’ nature of 28 October and made it an even more potent symbol of Czech independence and resistance. As a result, the different resistance organisations stepped in to provide their own commemorations, urging the population to mark the anniversary: ‘Never before or after did so many handbills and mimeographed leaflets circulate the Protectorate.’⁷⁶ The only question was about what form this protest should take.⁷⁷ Word about protests to be held on 28 October was spread through leaflets, although the resistance organisations could not agree completely on what to do and the messages contained in these leaflets were somewhat confusing.

The first leaflets calling for protest started to appear between 10 and 15 October, exhorting the population to wear holiday clothes, not to go to the shops and to avoid travelling by tram. A second series of leaflets also went out, but it was unclear who was behind them. By the third

⁷⁵ NARC, Předsednictvo ministerské rady, Box 501, Letter from K.H. Frank to the Prime Minister, Prague, 12 September 1939

⁷⁶ Mastny, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule*, p. 110.

⁷⁷ Brandes, *Die Tschechen unter Deutschem Protektorat Teil I*, p. 84.

wave of leaflets, however, it was apparent that there were two main groups behind the organisation of the protests: the three non-communist resistance groups, which urged people ‘to demonstrate for national unity and called upon people not to take trams, not to buy newspapers, not to drink (because of the war tax that was levied on drinks for the benefit of the *Reich*) and to walk through the city in holiday attire’, while ‘Communist leaflets called for a “general strike”’.⁷⁸ The Communists did not give any specifications on how this should be carried out.⁷⁹ Apart from a sit-in-strike that would have caused some degree of disruption, the other three underground organisations – Nation’s Defence, Political Centre and the Committee of the Petition ‘We remain faithful’ – advocated for non-violent, symbolic resistance on the day.

Both the Czech and German authorities were, of course, aware that the resistance organisations were planning to disrupt order on the anniversary of the foundation of Czechoslovakia. Internal memos warned of ‘a possibility that Czech-chauvinistic elements will use the day to demonstrate or to cause riots of some kind’ and Adolf Hitler’s bodyguard unit, the I./Leibstandarte-SS ‘Adolf Hitler’ was even instructed to ‘be on constant alert’ with ‘[m]otor vehicles fuelled up and ready for departure.’⁸⁰

On the morning of 28 October, a Saturday, people went to work at the usual time although hawkers did good business selling ribbons in the national colours.⁸¹ Around 10-11 o’clock crowds started to gather on Wenceslas Square and the Old Town Square. The unauthorised demonstration was relatively peaceful, until around 13.30 when demonstrators started to clash with police on Wenceslas Square, and protesters started chanting slogans: ‘We want freedom and rights’, ‘Long live Beneš’, ‘Down with Hitler’ and ‘We want Stalin’. The last slogan did not necessarily come from the Communist protestors, but it may also conveyed the sentiments of some Czechs who thought that the Soviet advance would thwart the Germans.⁸² The police dragged some people to the side streets, but they then started singing the Czech national anthem. Later, demonstrators started to demand the re-establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic and began singing the Czech national anthem, ‘Kde domov můj’ and the Pan-Slavic

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 84.

⁷⁹ Mastny, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule*, p. 111.

⁸⁰ NARC, Státní tajemník u říšského protektora, Box 19, Preparatory measures in case of internal disturbances, Prague 26 October 1939 and Czech national day on 28 October 1939, Prague 27 October 1939

⁸¹ Brandes, *Die Tschechen unter Deutschem Protektorat Teil I*, p. 85.

⁸² See also: Mastny, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule*, p. 114. and pp. 166-167.

‘Hej slované’, which was at the time also used by the Slovak Republic as an unofficial anthem.⁸³ Whilst there was a police presence on the square, it was not until around six o’clock that they stopped simply observing, and in a relatively short time had disbanded the demonstrators and cleared the square. The demonstration ended with one person dead, fifteen wounded and 400 people arrested.⁸⁴

Anti-Nazi demonstrations on 28 October 1939 also took place in other large Czech cities. There were demonstrations in Brno, where around 800 people gathered, and in Ostrava in Moravia where a crowd of around 3000 congregated in central squares, although police quickly disbanded them.⁸⁵ Demonstrations in Prague continued on 29 October, although on a reduced scale; tram schedules were altered for the whole of the 29th by the authorities to prevent large crowds from gathering in the city centre. Initially the altered tram schedule was only to be in effect until one o’clock in the afternoon, but the authorities requested an extension.⁸⁶ Thus, despite Frank’s insistence that 28 October needed to be cancelled, since it had lost all its meaning, the resistance organisations and other ordinary Czechs used the day for protest against the occupying powers. For them, 28 October had not lost its meaning; on the contrary, it was imbued with the new meaning of symbolic resistance and Czech identity.

During the 28 October protest, police seriously wounded Jan Opletal, a student at the Medical Faculty of Charles University. Opletal died of his wounds on 11 November. His funeral four days later, on 15 November turned into a protest by university students against the occupiers. K. H. Frank himself became entangled in the protest, when as his car sped through the crowds, the angry protesters overturned it.⁸⁷ In response, the Gestapo rounded up and arrested 1200 students, most of whom were sent off to concentration camps and all Czech universities were also closed down.

Despite the attack on Frank’s car, it was symbolic and non-violent resistance that characterised most Czech responses to the Nazi occupation. This was especially visible during the first couple of years of the Protectorate, after which it waned for a number of reasons, such as harsher punishments and also because by this time the Czech underground resistance groups

⁸³ Brandes, *Die Tschechen unter Deutschem Protektor*, Teil I, p. 86.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 87.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 88.

⁸⁷ Bryant, *Prague in Black*, p. 60.

were now largely non-existent. Following the events of October and November 1939 the Gestapo started to target the resistance organisations.⁸⁸ By April 1940, 1500 people were arrested, with another 1500 to 3000 arrests anticipated by the German State Prosecutor in the foreseeable future.⁸⁹ With their numbers decimated, in the autumn of 1940 the three groups consolidated under the umbrella organisation *Ústřední vedení odboje domácího* (ÚVOD – Central Leadership of the Home Resistance).⁹⁰

Czechs protested in cinemas, during German films, or news items shown before films by whistling and calling out ‘shame’ and ‘go’ when Hitler’s picture was shown on the screen.⁹¹ They also protested during the anniversaries of other important events and on the anniversaries of the birth and death of important Czech nationalist figures, most prominently on the birthday anniversaries of the President of the First Republic, T. G. Masaryk and the 19th-century historian František Palacký.⁹² There was an outpouring of Czech national consciousness on 6 May 1939 during the reburial of Karel Hynek Mácha, the 19th-century Czech romantic poet, whose remains were transferred from Litoměřice to Prague. His coffin lay in state at the National Museum, where 10,000 people paid their respects.⁹³

It was not only the interwar national days that created a space for non-violent resistance during the Occupation, but also other meaningful days in the Czech historical narrative, in particular those relating to the proponents of this narrative. The anniversary of Palacký’s death at the end of May 1939, for example, provided another opportunity for subtle symbolic protest. A number of bookshops were reported to have had window displays that were deemed by the Security Services as being ‘pronouncedly politically tendentious’.⁹⁴ A Czech flag was displayed in the window of the Orbis bookshop in Prague and a banner attached to it with a quotation taken from Palacký that stated: ‘the Czech people until now have always triumphed through their intellectual superiority, and not by physical force.’ The display also included a ‘*Bilderwerk*’ entitled ‘*Figures of Czech history*’, open at a picture of Masaryk and described as the ‘*Book of glory and hope, from Přemysl to Masaryk*’. Another window display at the Melantrich

⁸⁸ Mastny, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule*, p. 147.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 148.

⁹¹ NACR, Úřad říšského protektora v Čechách a na Moravě, Praha, č. f. 1005, Box 276, I-1a. Incidents in cinemas were reported for example from Prague, Náchod, Hradec Králové and Vítkovice (Ostrava).

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Bryant, *Prague in Black* p. 39.

⁹⁴ NARC, Státní tajemník u říšského protektora, Box 127.

publishing house, associated with the left-wing Czech National Social Party, contained a picture of Palacký, the date of his death and a banner with the slogan 'Let us persevere and endure!' printed on it.⁹⁵ Whilst these displays were clearly protesting German occupation, one bookshop, Stýblo, was more straightforward in its stance. Their display included another banner with an alleged Palacký quotation: 'nothing lasts forever, but God', a number of books on and by Masaryk and Emanuel Rádl's *The War between Czechs and Germans*.

The anniversaries of the birth and death of Tomáš Masaryk were also used by Czechs for silent resistance. As discussed above, pictures of Masaryk on various anniversaries were commonplace in window displays. Another way the Czechs found to silently demonstrate against the regime was through wearing holiday clothes and so-called Masaryk-hat, which was later banned by the authorities.⁹⁶ The German authorities sensed that the commemoration of Masaryk was a potential threat and so in 1940 they authorities started to remove statues and plaques that commemorated Masaryk, regardless of 'whether these memorials were erected for the statesman or the scholar Masaryk.'⁹⁷

Less than a month after May 1939, when the window displays had commemorated Palacký, Protectorate officials were reporting about Czech propaganda on the occasion of the anniversary of 21 June 1621, the Battle of White Mountain. In a report to Frank, the security services warned that this anniversary 'in the previous years [...] did not receive much attention', but this year '[a]lmost all of the newspapers published extensive articles (some with full page illustrations)' on the anniversary of White Mountain.⁹⁸ The report quotes extensively from an article in *Národní listy*, written by former deputy mayor of Prague Josef Rotnágl, in which he wrote:

Just a year ago we walked past with obvious indifference. But at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier the Czechs no longer walk past heedlessly. They shower it with flowers and honour the heroes of the war. On the commemorative day of 21.6.39 the Czechs once again show an interest for their "National heroes and Martyrs". They decorate the square where the Czech nobles were executed.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ See for example: NARC, Úřad říšského protektora v Čechách a na Moravě, Praha, č. f. 1005, Box 279, I-1a, Prague, 17 April 1940 and Management report of the Prague *Oberlandrat* for the month of March 1940

⁹⁷ NARC, Úřad říšského protektora v Čechách a na Moravě, Praha, č. f. 1005, Box 279, I-1a, Prague, 17 April 1940.

⁹⁸ NARC, Státní tajemník u říšského protektora, Box 127. Prague, 26 June 1939 Czech propaganda for the commemoration of 21 June 1621.

According to the report, the article was published in the morning edition of the paper, and therefore, it could have been read as an invitation for protest later in the day. Moreover, the report noted, the article is also not free from the usual misrepresentation (from a Nazi German perspective) of Czech history; the twenty-seven noblemen were executed by the Habsburgs and, for the Czechs, the Habsburgs equal *Deutschtum*. Thus, everyone who read that article realised that it opposed the current German administration. The report noted that the motif of the twenty-seven executed noblemen also appeared in the newspaper *Venkov*, which in its article entitled 'A sad date' bewailed that in 1621 no one came to the aid of the Czechs. Whilst the report does not go into detail on this particular point it is likely that the author of the *Venkov* article was referring to the Munich Agreement and the betrayal of Czechoslovakia.⁹⁹

The report paid special attention to the different Czech radio broadcasters. It observed that in previous years they hardly mentioned the commemoration, but this time the anniversary of the Battle of White Mountain received special attention: 'Even the early morning messages from the School Radio dealt, in detail, with the significance of the day, where the historical falsifications were so clear that the German monitoring agency at the Czech Broadcaster was forced to notify the Czech censor on these fakes and urged them to take corrective action'.¹⁰⁰

This anecdote makes clear how the Germans showed a relative tolerance towards Czech activities such as national days, although they understood the inherent danger that they could provide opportunities for protest and dissent and even though some actions were already specifically 'anti-German'. At times the national days were moved by the Nazi officials to the weekends, for example St Wenceslas day in 1940, so as not to take up a workday, but at the same time unintentionally giving further opportunities for protest.¹⁰¹ This relatively 'tolerant' attitude continued until 1942, when on 27 May an attempt was made on Heydrich's life by Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš as part of Operation Anthropoid.¹⁰² Although the assassination was first planned to coincide with the foundation of Czechoslovakia on 28 October (in 1941), because of bad weather conditions and other difficulties Gabčík and Kubiš parachuted into

⁹⁹ NARC, Státní tajemník u říšského protektora, Box 127. Prague, 26 June 1939 Czech propaganda for the commemoration of 21 June 1621.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ '300. Regierungsverordnung vom 19. September 1940 über den 28. September 1940.' in *Sammlung der Gesetze und Verordnungen Jahrgang 1940/ Sbirka zákonů a nařízení Ročník 1940*, Prague: Druckerei des Protektorates Böhmen und Mähren, 1940, p. 697.

¹⁰² Brandes, *Die Tschechen unter Deutschem Protektorat Teil I*, p. 251.

Protectorate territory on 28 December 1941.¹⁰³ Whilst they kept secret regarding their assignment, by May 1942 some members of the underground organisation realised what the pair were planning.¹⁰⁴ Alarmed, they sent a telegram to London on 9 and 12 May asking for the assassination attempt to be cancelled, since, they argued, that assassinating Heydrich 'would be of no use for the Allies, and its consequences for our people would be immeasurable.'¹⁰⁵

Despite the opposition of the local underground organisations, the assassination attempt was carried out. Whilst Heydrich survived the attack, he died of his injuries on 4 June. The repercussions were indeed severe. On 9 June all the male inhabitants of the town of Lidice – which was said to be connected to the assassins, although no proof of this was found – were executed, the women sent to concentration camps, 'Germanisable' children were sent to families in the Reich, whilst '[t]he rest will be supplied with a different education', i.e. sent to concentration camps.¹⁰⁶ The village was burnt to the ground.

The assassins of Heydrich were found to be hiding in the Orthodox Church of St Cyril and Methodius in Prague after Karel Čurda, one of the other parachutists who landed with Gabčík and Kubiš confessed to the Nazi authorities following Heydrich's interim successor, Kurt Daluege's issue of an ordinance promising clemency to people who help the officials.¹⁰⁷ Following the tip off by Čurda, the Nazis managed to locate the pair in their hiding place. Rather than being caught, they committed suicide inside the church on 18 June.¹⁰⁸ Despite the hunt for the assassins being over, and despite Frank's recommendation of a more lenient approach, further retributions followed throughout the month of June. On 24 June the SS raided the village of Ležáky – where some of the parachutists operated a radio – and killed the 24 adult inhabitants of the village.

National days, as possible days of protest and nonviolent resistance, were now looked upon suspiciously by the authorities. After 1942 Nazi officials passed a law that required all national days – namely 5 and 6 July and 28 September – to be commemorated on the following Sundays,

¹⁰³ Mastny, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule*, p. 208.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. pp. 208-209.

¹⁰⁵ quoted in Ibid. p. 209.

¹⁰⁶ Brandes, *Die Tschechen unter Deutschem Protektorat*, Teil I, p. 262. The original German text: 'Der Rest wird einer anderen Erziehung zugeführt.'

¹⁰⁷ Mastny, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule*, pp. 218-219.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 219.

if they fell on a workday.¹⁰⁹ Anyone who violated these orders was either fined 20,000 crowns or was punished with up to two months in prison. This more heavy-handed approach to national days and to protests on such days might offer an explanation why after 1942 resistance against the Protectorate regime dwindled. Situational reports for the second half of 1942 or 1943 hardly mention the previous national days or anniversaries; Masaryk's birthday on 7 March was described as completely calm and uneventful.¹¹⁰ In 1943 it was reported that Hitler's birthday on 20 April was passed in an 'appreciative and celebratory' manner and 'it was very well attended'.¹¹¹ Moreover, on the first anniversary of Heydrich's death 'many cities and towns alongside numerous participants from the German and Czech population named streets and public places after the deceased.'¹¹²

This lack of incidents does not, however, mean that the resistance to the Nazi occupation in the Protectorate stopped completely. The previous umbrella organisation ÚVOD was decimated in 1942, but a new one was created in its stead, Preparatory National Revolutionary Committee (*Přípravný národní revoluční výbor*) and the Communists were also still active.¹¹³ Even so, presumably worried about further repercussions resistance activities declined. In 1943 Beneš remarked after a number of planned sabotage activities were not carried out on 28 October that: 'In the opinion of many Czechs this is not yet the right time.'¹¹⁴

In the occupied Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Nazis aimed to 'Germanise' the Czech population, believing that they could promote historical links between the two peoples. The figure of Wenceslas was considered as a vehicle through which this could be achieved and, hence, the Nazi authorities in Prague, who often included local or Sudeten Germans, viewed his national day and his inclusion in the version of Czech national history they sought to promote positively. In fact, the only national day that the Nazis banned from the beginning was 28 October, Foundation of State Day. Even more potentially controversial days, such as

¹⁰⁹ '336. Regierungsverordnung vom 26. September 1942 über die Handhabung des Feiertagsrechts während des Krieges' *Sammlung der Gesetze und Verordnungen Jahrgang 1942/ Sbírka zákonů a nařízení Ročník 1942*, Prague: Druckerei des Protektorates Böhmen und Mähren, 1942, p. 1685.

¹¹⁰ NARC, Úřad říšského protektora v Čechách a na Moravě, Praha, č. f. 1005, Box 276, I-1a. Situational report for the month of March in 1942.

¹¹¹ Ibid. Situational report from 1 April to 30 June 1943.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Detlef Brandes, *Die Tschechen unter Deutschem Protektorat, Teil II. Besatzungspolitik, Kollaboration und Widerstand im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren von Heydrichs Tod bis zum Prager Aufstand (1942-1945)*, Munich and Vienna: R. Oldenbourg, 1975, p. 61. For the Communists see p. 76.

¹¹⁴ quoted in Ibid. p. 88.

those commemorating Jan Hus and the battle of Zborov, were permitted to continue at the beginning, perhaps as a way of maintaining a sense of normalcy and acceptance of the occupation. The archival sources from the Ministry of the Interior reveal the great concern of the Nazi authorities that the St Wenceslas Day commemorations replicate as closely as possible those of the pre-war period. Nonetheless, while the Protectorate authorities were keen to reinterpret the symbols surrounding Wenceslas, for example the St Wenceslas Chorale, they were still appropriated by the people in their protests against the regime, as the Chorale was.

Although Wenceslas' national day in the interwar period had not really united the population or been universally accepted, they provided the opportunity for protest against the Nazi occupation. Although this protest could be overt, in the form of traditional protest gatherings and banners with slogans, it was also often symbolic, such as books opened at certain pages in shop windows. The Czechs saw national days (including the banned 28 October) not simply as an opportunity to protest, but also to reject Germanisation efforts by re-asserting their Czechness. Of course, not everyone was involved in these symbolic protests, but the sources show that there were enough incidents throughout the Protectorate for these sentiment to be widespread. The situation changed with the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich in 1942, however, and the reprisal destruction of the village of Lidice, with greater crackdowns and more fear.

Slovakia

During the Second World War Slovakia found itself in the paradoxical situation that whilst it became an independent state it also lost the so-called southern Slovakia to the Hungarians, who were for all intents and purposes their allies on the side of Nazi Germany. Whilst Slovakia is often referred to in the literature as a Nazi puppet-state,¹¹⁵ in this section I aim to demonstrate that the leaders of the Slovak Republic were relatively free to pursue their own narratives and commemorations, as well as other aspects of social and cultural life.

The summer before the Munich Agreement, between June and September 1938, the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, now under the leadership of Jozef Tiso, grabbed the opportunity of the brewing international conflict to exert pressure on the Czechs to elevate the status of Slovaks

¹¹⁵ See for example: Elisabeth Bakke, 'Czechoslovakism in Slovak History' in Teich, Mikuláš, Dušan Kováč and Martin D. Brown (eds) *Slovakia in History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 247-268, p. 264.

in Czechoslovakia and Slovakia's role within the state.¹¹⁶ The first comprehensive government-led proposal came on 22 September from President Beneš, the *Settlement of the Relationship Between the Czechs and Slovaks in the Republic*, which offered a compromise to the Slovaks. Even so, this came late and the international situation escalated with the signing of the Munich Agreement in the early hours of 30 September. The Hlinka's Slovak People's Party took advantage of the internal situation that followed the Agreement, ceased all discussion with any of the political parties and 'insisted on the implementation of their own federation project, first announced on 5 June 1938.' Their plans became a reality with the Žilina Agreement on 6 October 1938 that proposed Slovak autonomy.¹¹⁷ The next day Jozef Tiso, leader of the Hlinka's People's Party was appointed head of the autonomous government. After further talks in Prague, the Constitutional Act granting autonomy to Slovakia was passed on 22 November, thus creating a federal state.

Nonetheless, the federal state did not last long. After the Constitutional Act was passed the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party usurped all power in Slovakia: other parties were banned and, to cement their position, the Hlinka Guard, a paramilitary organisation connected to the People's Party, was formed. Having simmered ever since the creation of the First Republic, Slovak narratives of independence were rife, nationalist sentiments were on the rise and political slogans such as 'we will be masters of Slovakia' were openly voiced by the leaders of Slovakia.¹¹⁸ Slovak independence became a reality on 14 March 1939.

This independent Slovakia was of course subject to the needs of Nazi Germany, which perceived the role of independent Slovakia differently from how the Slovaks themselves did. Nazi Germany sent advisors to Slovakia with the task 'to control all operations in Slovakia [...] in the interest of the Reich', which meant advising the Slovak police, Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, agricultural and economic industries or the Slovak National Bank on their policies.¹¹⁹ From the beginning of the existence of the independent Slovak state until the summer of 1940, relations with Berlin seemed good, although the Slovaks were trying to drive across some of

¹¹⁶ Iris Engemann, *Die Slowakisierung Bratislavas. Universität, Theater und Kultusgemeinden 1918-1948*, Wiesbaden: Harassowitz Verlag, 2012, p. 58.

¹¹⁷ Valerián Bystrický, 'Slovakia from the Munich Conference to the declaration of independence' in Teich, Kováč and Brown (eds.) *Slovakia in History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 157-174, p. 160.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p. 162.

¹¹⁹ Tatjana Tönsmeier, *Das Dritte Reich und die Slowakei 1939-1945*, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003, p. 68. For a list of advisors see: pp. 67-68. [hereafter: Tönsmeier, *Das Dritte Reich und die Slowakei*]

their own interests that the Germans did not always agree with.¹²⁰ For example the Slovaks insisted on keeping 150,000 armed soldiers at the border with Hungary – fearing that the Hungarians would cross the border and claim more land – whereas Berlin thought 50,000 was enough. In the end 125,000 men at the border were agreed upon. As I will demonstrate below, Nazi Germany's desire to control the Slovak economy to help the war effort could possibly have led to a more lenient approach when it came to national day commemorations and the historical narrative the Slovaks were constructing.

How did this supposedly independent Slovakia deal with the legacy of the First Republic? National days, such as the anniversary of the proclamation of the First Czechoslovak Republic on 28 October, Jan Hus Day or St Wenceslas Day, were cancelled.¹²¹ From the interwar period only 5 July, the Day of Cyril and Methodius, and 1 May, the feast of work, were maintained. A national day for Cyril and Methodius was an obvious choice, since even during the interwar period this commemoration had been mainly to appease the Slovaks, whilst 1 May promoted the message of the new regime, which was the building of the new Slovakia through work. A new state holiday was introduced: 14 March, the anniversary of the establishment of independent Slovakia.¹²² Other days were also commemorated every year, although these were not officially ordained as national days: 4 May, the anniversary of Milan Rastislav Štefánik's death; and 20 April, Hitler's birthday.

For newly independent states, as discussed in Chapter One, it is not sufficient to build their national identity around their newly found independence or events in the more immediate past, but they also 'need' to show a historical justification for their existence. The cult of the Byzantine apostolic brothers was already officially commemorated in the interwar period in the Slovak half of the Republic, but now the Slovaks were able to build a narrative around the two brothers that monopolised the historical connection of the Slovaks to the 9th-century Great

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 60.

¹²¹ '75. Vládne nariadenie zo dňa 24. apríla 1939, ktorým sa zrušujú ustanovenia o pamätných dňoch pre deň 1. mája 1939.' [Government decree 75. of 24 April 1939, regarding the repelling of the provisions of memorial days on 1 May 1939] in *Slovenský zákonník*, 1939, No. 17, p. 87. This law made Law No. 65 of 1925, which established the national day commemorations of the First Republic, no longer valid in Slovakia. Instead, the new Law No. 154/1939 cancelled 6 July (Jan Hus Day), 28 September (St Wenceslas Day) and 28 October (the anniversary of the foundation of the First Republic). This left 1 May (feast of work) and 5 July (Cyril and Methodius Day) as official national day commemorations of the Slovak Republic. See: '154. Vládne nariadenie zo dňa 4. júla 1939 o zrušení niektorých pamätných dní' [Governmental decree 154 of 4 July 1939 to repeal a number of memorable days] in *Slovenský zákonník*, 1939, No. 34, p. 306.

¹²² '99. Zákon zo dňa 11. mája 1939 o vyhlásení 14. marca za štátny sviatok' [Law No. 99 of 11 May 1939 regarding the declaration of 14 March a state holiday] in *Slovenský zákonník*, 1939, No. 22, p. 135.

Moravian Empire and with king Svatopluk, who was claimed to be the first Slovak king.¹²³ The activities of Cyril and Methodius – bringing Christianity to the people and the creation of the Glagolitic alphabet culture and literature – served as a starting point of national consciousness for the Slovaks. Some commentators went even further, arguing that the legacy of the two saints ‘ensured [the Slovaks’] historical primacy over all surrounding nations.’¹²⁴

The new Slovak historical narrative was cemented by František Hrušovský whose *Slovenské dejiny* [Slovak history] was first published in 1939. *Slovenské dejiny* was the first synthesis of Slovak history since Juraj Papánek’s *Historia gentis Slavae, De regno regibusque Slavorum*, published in 1780.¹²⁵ Hrušovský was director of the history department of the Matica slovenská, a high school teacher and principal but also a member of the Slovak parliament for the Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party between 1938-1945. The volume, published after Slovak independence had been proclaimed, was the official history textbook used in all Slovak schools from 1939 until 1945.¹²⁶ Nonetheless, despite effective Nazi control over Slovakia, the book did not try and weave a pro-German history together, attempting to accentuate supposed good historical relations between Germans and Slovaks. For example, in discussing the work of Cyril and Methodius, Hrušovský argued that the only way for the Slovaks to retain their independence and freedom in the 9th century was to follow an alternative route to Christianity, that sided with neither the Germans nor the Byzantines.¹²⁷

Similarly, when discussing the power struggle between Rastislav, ruler of Moravia and his nephew Svatopluk, Hrušovský acknowledges that Svatopluk defeated Rastislav with the help of the Germans. Yet, since ‘Svatopluk was a powerful ruler’, the Germans began to distrust him and feared that he would pose a danger for them.¹²⁸ In 871 they therefore captured and imprisoned him. When the people of his realm learned of his fate they chose to be led by Slavomir and rebelled against the Germans. Svatopluk offered to lead the German troops

¹²³ See for example: ‘Kráľ Svätopluk - hlásateľ slovenskej moci’ [King Svatopluk - harbinger of Slovak force] in *Gardista*, 17 October 1940, p. 3.

¹²⁴ Andrej Škrábik, ‘Národná svätyňa cyrilo-metodejská’ [National shrine of Cyril and Methodius] in *Slovák*, 5 July 1944, p. 1.

¹²⁵ M. Mark Stolarik, ‘Slovak Historians in Exile in North America, 1945-1992’ in *Human Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1996, pp. 34-44, p. 41. n. 2.

¹²⁶ M. Mark Stolarik, ‘The Painful Birth of Slovak Historiography in the 20th Century’, in *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, Vol. 50, 2001, pp. 161-187, p. 167.

¹²⁷ František Hrušovský, *Slovenské dejiny* [Slovak history], Turčiansky Sv. Martin, Slovakia: Matica Slovenská, 1942 (first published in 1939), p. 42. [hereafter: Hrušovský, *Slovenské dejiny*]

¹²⁸ Ibid. p. 48.

against the rebelling Slovaks. The Germans believed him, and sent troops to Devín Castle with Svatopluk; however, Svatopluk conspired with Slavomir and the German troops were defeated. Following his victory, Svatopluk became the independent king of Moravia. In this telling, Svatopluk cunningly deceives and manipulates the Germans to further the advance of Slovak independence.

In the Protectorate, the newly-constructed narrative around St Wenceslas, stressed the good relations between the Czechs and the Germans for almost a millennium, attempting to give historical justification to the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia. It is therefore noteworthy that in the official, state-backed version of Slovak history, little effort is made to project friendly historical relations between Germans and Slovaks. Especially since Slovak independence was achieved through the policies of Nazi Germany, and the Slovak newspapers were enthusiastic in underlining the assistance of the Third Reich on occasions such as the anniversary of the proclamation of the Slovak Republic on 14 March and on Hitler's birthday.¹²⁹ The reason for this could be that the Nazi Germans were content to allow the Slovaks – whose were no threat to the Reich – to pursue or invent their own cultural traditions, including the establishment of their own national days and national historical narrative. Even the German advisors who were sent to Slovakia were instructed to adhere to local customs such as going 'to Church on Sundays, even if they found it hard.'¹³⁰ By allowing the Slovaks leeway on these cultural and 'patriotic' issues, even if it meant a historically anti-German rhetoric on occasion, they would have been better able to secure their acquiescence on military and economic issues.

The largest celebration of Cyril and Methodius in the Second World War era took place in 1939 at Devín Castle, located about 10 km from Bratislava at the confluence of the Danube and the Morava rivers.¹³¹ However, the area of Devín Castle no longer belonged to Slovakia, as it had been annexed by Nazi Germany in November 1938, and now lay in the territory of

¹²⁹ See for example: 'Adolf Hitler a Slováci' [Adolf Hitler and the Slovaks] in *Slovák*, 20 April 1941, p. 1. or 'Deň slovenskej vdaky' [Day of gratitude in Slovakia] in *Gardista*, 20 April 1944, p. 1.

¹³⁰ Tönsmeier, *Das Dritte Reich und die Slowakei*, p. 65.

¹³¹ Devín Castle has been an important site of memory for not only the Slovaks, but also for the Germans and the Hungarians historically. In Hungarian Devín Castle (*Dévényi vár*) had been referred to as *porta Hungariae* or the Gates of Hungary since the 13th century. In Slovakia, Devín Castle had been connected to Greater Moravia and to the two Byzantine brothers, Cyril and Methodius. In 1863, the 1000-year anniversary of the arrival of Cyril and Methodius was commemorated at the Castle. See: Gabriela Kiliánová, *Identität und Gedächtnis in der Slowakei: Die Burg Devín also Erinnerungsort*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011, pp. 23, 29 and 31.

the Third Reich.¹³² Even so, by mutual agreement the Slovaks were allowed to display their flags and national symbols on the castle ruins.¹³³ Thus, when on 5 July 1939 when the Slovaks arrived to celebrate Cyril and Methodius they needed their passports to cross the border. Moreover, as of 1939, the saints' day was also known as the Day of Slovaks Abroad, presumably referring to many of those Slovaks who lived in the southern Slovakia, now 'abroad' in Hungary.¹³⁴ The new meaning of the commemorations was further accentuated in the newspapers, which reported that the speeches during the event 'will be broadcast on the radio for all Slovaks at home and abroad.'¹³⁵

Cyril and Methodius thus came to be even more symbolic of national territory now that the unity of that territory had been fragmented. This was especially salient as, although Slovakia had gained independence, it had also lost a large part of southern Slovakia to Hungary, and other areas to the Third Reich. In the village of Branč (Nitra county), which at the time, given the Hungarian annexation of southern Slovakia, was close to the Hungarian-Slovak border, Štefan Haššík, county leader decided to erect a statue of the two saints with their faces directed towards Nitra, which, as a result of the First Vienna Award, was in Hungarian territory.¹³⁶ Furthermore, Slovak historians Adam Hudek and Dušan Škvarna point out that according to the old folk tradition Nitra was the centre of the Byzantine tradition in Slovakia.¹³⁷

The 1939 commemoration at Devín Castle was the only mass feast of the two saints to take place during the Second World War. Newspaper coverage of Cyril and Methodius Day (and Slovaks Abroad Day) also petered out, although in 1944 the newspaper *Slovák* dedicated most of its front page to the promotion of the ideals of the Cyril and Methodius tradition and the speech given by bishop Andrej Škrábik in Banská Bystrica. This is the town from where, a few months later, the Slovak National Uprising was to be launched against the regime of the Slovak Republic and Nazi occupation. Škrábik instructed the Slovaks that they 'should repay the men, who led [them] on the path to Christian culture, who gave [them] the basis of [their] literary culture, who gave [them] the beginning of civilisation and ensured [their] historical primacy

¹³² Ibid. p. 75.

¹³³ Ibid. p. 78. The Germans also organised a so-called *Grenzlandtreffen* at the Castle on 27 and 28 May 1939, between members of the Nazi German and Slovak leadership. See p. 81.

¹³⁴ Hrušovský, *Slovenské dejiny*, p. 438.

¹³⁵ 'Program slávnosti na Devíne' [The programme of the celebrations at Devín] in *Slovák*, 5 July 1939, p. 1.

¹³⁶ Dušan Škvarna and Adam Hudek, *Cyril a Metod v historickom vedomí a pamäti 19. a 20. storočia na Slovensku* [Cyril and Methodius in the historical consciousness and memory of Slovakia in the 19th and 20th centuries], Bratislava: Historický ústav Slovenskej akadémie vied vo vydavateľstve Typoset Print, 2013, p. 94.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

over all surrounding nations.’¹³⁸

Apart from the commemoration of Sts Cyril and Methodius the new Slovak state commemorated four more events: the state holiday 14 March (proclamation of Slovak independence in 1939), 20 April (Adolf Hitler’s birthday), 1 May (feast of work) and 4 May (the anniversary of the death of Milan Rastislav Štefánik in 1919). Building upon the rhetoric of the Cyril and Methodius commemorations, these four commemorative events all focused on one central theme, the (eventual) achievement of Slovak independence on 14 March 1939.

In his official history book of the new Slovak state, František Hrušovský wrote of the Žilina Agreement of 6 October 1938, which resulted in an autonomous Slovakia: ‘it did not meet all the conditions that were needed for the viability of a new Slovak state. The Slovak nation longed for such freedom, as it would ensure its unhindered growth [...] in all aspects of its life.’¹³⁹ He also claimed that a fair settlement with the Czechs would have been impossible, since Slovakia had suffered under the rule of Prague. Thus, Hrušovský continued, when the Germans urged the Slovaks to proclaim their independence, the Slovak parliament voted for it: ‘The head of the Propaganda Office, Alexander Mach [previously editor of the nationalist *Slovák* newspaper] announced the historic event over the radio to the whole of the Slovak nation, who greeted the dawn of its new life with an explosion of enthusiasm.’¹⁴⁰ Hrušovský aimed not only to justify Slovakia’s breaking away from the Czechs, but also its alliance with Hitler, at the same time claiming that the proclamation of the Slovak state had been a Slovak achievement.

This great enthusiasm for Slovak independence was also reflected on the front pages of the newspapers in the following days, which proclaimed that the Slovaks now live in ‘the independent Slovak state’ and independence was ‘Hlinka’s dream feat’. Indeed, what happened on 14 March ‘could not have been a surprise’ to anyone.¹⁴¹ 14 March was also soon made into a state holiday.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Andrej Škrábik, ‘Národná svätýňa cyrilo-metodejská’ in *Slovák*, 5 July 1944, p. 1.

¹³⁹ Hrušovský, *Slovenské dejiny*, p. 428.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 432.

¹⁴¹ ‘Slováci! Máme samostatný Slovenský štát! [Slovaks! We are the independent Slovak state!] in *Slovenská politika*, 15 March 1939, p. 1. and ‘Hlinkov sen skutkom: Slovenský štát!’ [Hlinka’s dream feat: Slovak state!] in *Slovák*, 15 March 1939, p. 1.

¹⁴² ‘14 marec bude štátnym sviatkom’ [14 March will be a state holiday] in *Slovenská politika*, 4 May 1939, p. 5.

The rhetoric of the new holiday centred on the rights of the Slovaks to their independent state after 1000 years, which ‘already in itself is the evidence of the ability of the nation to live freely’.¹⁴³ Moreover, *Gardista*, the official newspaper of the Hlinka Guard, underlined that Slovakia deserved its autonomy since Slovaks ‘understand development, we walk with the spirit of the age [...] and again and again we will gain our right to autonomy by work.’¹⁴⁴ On the occasion of the 14 March commemorations in 1940 a number of orders were also issued, so the day could be commemorated ‘in a dignified manner’, the Government Commissioner of the capital city of Bratislava announced that ‘all residents [of the capital] are asked to decorate their houses in the national colours’.¹⁴⁵ This order also applied to shop windows and other window displays.

The themes of ‘good work’ and moral values ran through the commemorative rhetoric, but also the rhetoric of the future of the autonomous Slovak state. This could be seen as a kind of adoption of the Nazi ideology of work. Moral values were seen as especially important for the character building of individuals and through this the building of a new national – i.e. Slovak – identity.¹⁴⁶ As will be discussed below, celebrations for 1 May – the feast of work – were also prominent during the years of the Slovak Republic.

Although the new Slovak historical narrative, as described by František Hrušovský, sought to emphasise the autonomy of Slovakia throughout history, the commemorative rhetoric of 14 March emphasised the help the Slovak Republic received from Nazi Germany and from Hitler himself in achieving its independence. On the occasion of the 14 March state day in 1944 Alexander Mach, Interior Minister and head of the Hlinka Guard, wrote in *Gardista*: ‘Realising that for us these five years have been the biggest development of our capabilities and forces, these most famous of five years would not have been possible without the honesty and reliability of the German nation.’¹⁴⁷ Of course, it would have been impossible for Slovak politicians to have claimed anything different.

¹⁴³ ‘Štátny sviatok v znamení Hlinkovej gardy’ [The state holiday is marked by the Hlinka Guard] in *Gardista*, 16 March 1941, p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Námestie 14. marca v Bratislave [March 14 Square in Bratislava] in *Slovenská politika*, 13 March 1940, p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ Josef Zavorský, ‘Do druhého roku našej samostatni’ [To the second year of our independence] in *Slovenská politika*, 17 March 1940, p. 1.

¹⁴⁷ Alexander Mach, ‘V duchu marcovej revolúcie’ [In the spirit of the March revolution] in *Gardista*, 12 March 1944, p. 1.

Indeed, Hitler himself was celebrated on 20 April, his birthday. For the occasion buildings throughout Slovakia were officially decorated with the national flag ‘and in schools and in the army it will be mentioned that for Germany this is a significant day’¹⁴⁸ – a further reminder of the political links between Nazi Germany and the Slovak Republic. Hitler was variously described in the press as a ‘genius’, and an individual ‘with statesmanlike qualities’ who enabled ‘the flowering of his nation, but also helped us Slovaks when he took our independent state under his protection.’¹⁴⁹

Closely connected to the rhetoric of Slovak independence were two more commemorative days: 1 May (feast of work) and 4 May (the anniversary of the death of Milan Rastislav Štefánik). 1 May celebrations were utilised by the leaders of the new Slovak state to promote their ideas about the state in the new world, which was also just to its workers.¹⁵⁰ Through their work, the people of Slovakia ‘will have the opportunity to prove their devotion to their state and their connection to the new world, which marks the end of slavery and the end of plutocracy.’ In this new world order, the Slovak people were no longer to be under the influence of the ‘old capitalist world’ or the ‘Masonic world domination’ and their ‘manor lords’. 1 May was thus also ‘the manifestation [...] of the rights and freedoms for all Slovaks’, and ‘the feast of free work, work that is exempt from terror and misery.’¹⁵¹

The leaders of the Slovak Republic were also concerned early on in the life of the new Republic that, in addition to 14 March, they would also need a contemporary symbolic figure who could further symbolise the Slovak nation. They found this symbol, somewhat oddly, in the figure of Milan Rastislav Štefánik who, according to Slovak historian Peter Macho, ‘not only had the ability to reach out and mobilise the general population, but he could also serve as a legitimising instrument’ for the new regime.¹⁵² Even so, Štefánik, along with Edvard Beneš and T. G. Masaryk was the founder of the Czech National Council in 1916 (renamed Czechoslovak National Council in 1918) and fought for the creation of a unified Czechoslovak state, as

¹⁴⁸ ‘Slovensko oslávi narodeniny kancenkára Hitlera’ [Slovakia celebrated the birthday of Chancellor Hitler] in *Slovák*, 14 April 1939, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Ako oslávi Bratislava narodeniny A. Hitlera’ [How Bratislava celebrates the birthday of A. Hitler] in *Slovenská politika*, 19 April 1939, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ ‘1 máj – sviatok mimoriadneho významu’ [1 May – a feast of particular importance] in *Gardista*, 20 April 1940, p. 5.

¹⁵¹ Vojtech Tuka, ‘Národnosocialistická práca’ [National Socialist Work] in *Gardista*, 1 May 1941, p. 1.

¹⁵² Peter Macho, *Milan Rastislav Štefánik v hlavách a v srdciach: Fenomén národného hrdinu v historickej pamäti* [Milan Rastislav Štefánik in the hearts and minds: The phenomenon of a national hero in historical memory], Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV v Prodama s.r.o, 2011, p. 146. [hereafter: Macho, Milan Rastislav Štefánik]

opposed to an independent Slovakia. Štefánik was not to play a bigger role in the new Czechoslovakia, as he died on 4 May 1919 when he crashed his plane during landing near Bratislava at Ivanka pri Dunaji. It is perhaps because of his early death that the regime of the Slovak Republic could more easily rewrite the meaning of Štefánik and claim itself as being in continuity from him.

The first opportunity to employ the memory of Štefánik came on the 20th anniversary of his death in 1939, less than two months after the proclamation of independent Slovakia. The new regime claimed to care about the cult of Štefánik, whereas during the First Republic ‘nobody cared’ about the anniversary and ‘[i]n particular the official circles and the press were silent’ about him.¹⁵³ To create connections between the Hlinka Slovak People’s Party and Štefánik, a week-long celebration was organised in memory of the Slovak hero. The main organiser was the Ministry of Defence, with major contributions from the Hlinka Guard, the Hlinka Youth and the *Matice slovenská*.¹⁵⁴ The celebrations lasted from 30 April to 7 May and took place at a number of sites connected to Štefánik: in Ivanka, a small village in western Slovakia where Štefánik’s plane went down, in Bratislava and in Bradlo, where Štefánik is buried.¹⁵⁵

Štefánik was widely described in the press as a hero for the Slovaks and a symbol of nation-building. In his speech during the 1939 commemorations, the historian František Hrušovský stressed that ‘a new state cannot be built without the spirit of Štefánik’ and the ‘Slovak nation must believe that it has the skills and that it can find the means to complete [the building] of the homeland.’¹⁵⁶ The established role of Štefánik during the First Republic was also challenged. In Czechoslovak history and in the discourse of the First Republic, he was presented as one of the three liberators and founding fathers, and a supporter of Czechoslovak unity. The Slovak Republic sought to undermine this narrative and claim that ‘Štefánik set his life’s work for the Slovak nation.’ Therefore, ‘[t]o put him in the same category as Masaryk and Beneš is completely inappropriate. The Czechoslovak liberators’ cabaret in Paris and

¹⁵³ Jan Kubačka, ‘Truc Oslava’ [Defiant celebration] quoted in Macho, *Rastislav Štefánik v hlavách a v srdciach*, p. 146.

¹⁵⁴ Macho, *Milan Rastislav Štefánik*, p. 150.

¹⁵⁵ See for example: ‘V Bratislava bude týždeň Štefánikových osláv s celonárodnou púťou na Bradlo – Sviatok Slovenska [A week-long Štefánik celebration will take place in Bratislava with a national pilgrimage to Bradlo – Slovakia celebrated] in *Slovenská politika*, 29 April 1939, p. 4.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Bratislava vzdala hold Štefánikovi – Slávnosť pred Slovenským národ divadlom’ [Bratislava pays tribute to Štefánik – celebrations in front of the Slovak national theatre] in *Slovenská politika*, 4 May 1939, p. 1.

London' was not what Štefánik wanted and to associate him with them 'would only be dishonouring the glorious memory of a great Slovak.'¹⁵⁷

The aims of the new Slovak historical narrative were twofold. Firstly, it presented a historical past for the new independent Slovak state that was divorced from the historical narrative of the First Czechoslovak Republic, and was instead presented as part of the thousand-year oppression of the Slovak people. The Slovak people were differentiated from the Czechs mainly through the Cyril and Methodius tradition, since the Byzantine missionary brothers never made it to Bohemia. The other important rhetorical element of the new state was presented through the 1 May celebrations that underlined the importance of work in the survival of the nation, with echoes of Nazi ideology.

Unlike in the Protectorate, no major resistance activity took place during the commemorative events in Slovakia, although this did not mean that all Slovaks agreed with the ruling regime. Whilst Tiso's Catholic-nationalist-fascist regime paradoxically appropriated Štefánik to distance the Slovaks from the First Republic (even though he had helped create it), not everyone agreed with the regime's portrayal of this Slovak national hero. Štefánik, like Masaryk was a Protestant, not a Catholic. To voice their disagreement with the regime and its appropriation of Štefánik, the Union of Lutheran Youth organised a commemoration in Bradlo on 20-21 May 1939 to claim Štefánik as their own under the slogan: 'Štefánik our symbol – Bradlo our castle' [Štefánik náš symbol – Bradlo náš hrad].¹⁵⁸ Peter Macho believes that this slogan could be interpreted in two different ways, depending on where the stress is placed in the phrase. On the one hand, it could mean that Štefánik and not Hlinka is the most important national symbol of the Slovak people,¹⁵⁹ thus attacking the stance of the People's Party and the regime. On the other hand, the slogan could also mean that Štefánik is the symbol for the Lutherans, challenging the exploitation of Štefánik's figure by the Catholic-led regime. In the second interpretation, Štefánik is the symbol of Slovakia, as opposed to Catholic Slovakia.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ 'M.R. Štefánik, náš národný bohatier' [M. R. Štefánik, our national hero] in *Gardista*, 27 April 1940, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ Macho, *Milan Rastislav Štefánik*, p. 158.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 161. In this instance the stress would be on 'Štefánik' and on 'Bradlo'. Štefánik was associated with Hlinka in the new historical narrative. See, for example: Alexander Mach, 'Štefánik a Hlinka – jeden duch, náš duch' in *Slovák*, 4 May 1939, p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ Macho, *Milan Rastislav Štefánik*, p. 161. In the second interpretation the stress would be on the word 'náš', meaning ours.

The main Slovak act of resistance, however, was what became known as the Slovak National Uprising in the second half of 1944. The Uprising started on 29 August 1944 by rebel units within the Slovak Army led by Lieutenant-Colonel Ján Golián, chief-of-staff of the army command based in Banská Bystrica, central Slovakia.¹⁶¹ Following the insurgence, for 60 days, Banská Bystrica became the administrative and political centre of ‘free Slovakia.’¹⁶² The Slovak National Council was ‘fully established’ here on 5 September – its existence was announced on 1 September – with 12 ‘commissionerships’ with two commissioners each, in theory, equally representing the civic-democratic and the socialist blocs.¹⁶³ The Communists were quick to seize the opportunity presented to them by the uprising and started to organise; on 2 September they published a declaration announcing that their aim was to defeat Hitler and fascism and their Communist daily, *Pravda* (Truth) began to be published on 9 September.¹⁶⁴ During Communism, especially in the 1950s, the Slovak National Uprising was presented by the ruling Communist Party as a largely Communist-led uprising, which may have failed, but it nonetheless led the way to Victorious February, the 1948 Communist take-over of Czechoslovakia.¹⁶⁵

The uprising, however, was soon defeated, and on 27 October the Nazi German troops retook Banská Bystrica without a fight. Even so, the Red Army was driving Nazi German troops out of Slovakia, and started to liberate towns from December 1944. In March 1945 the regime and German institutions were evacuated to Austrian territory, and by the end of April the Red Army had liberated Slovakia.¹⁶⁶ The Czech Lands and Slovakia were reunited again immediately after the end of the war.

The Slovak National Uprising helped to cover up the memory of willing collaboration during the war and present the Slovaks more heroically, as well as creating a foundation myth for

¹⁶¹ Vilém Prečan, ‘The Slovak National Uprising: the most dramatic moment in the nation’s history’ in Teich, Mikuláš, Dušan Kováč and Martin D. Brown (eds) *Slovakia in History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 206-228, p. 210. [hereafter: Prečan, ‘The Slovak National Uprising’]

¹⁶² Ibid. p. 220.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 221. It was not only the Communist Party that started to organize during the uprising. The Democratic Party – presenting itself as the heir of the ideals of the First Republic – was also active, although at a much slower pace than the Communists; their daily newspaper *Čas* (Time) was published more than a week after *Pravda*, on 17 September.

¹⁶⁵ See for example: Štefan Bašťovanský, ‘Boj za mier a socializmus odkaz Slovenského národného povstania’ [The struggle for peace and socialism and its connection to the Slovak National Uprising] in *Pravda*, 29 August 1951, p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ Prečan, ‘The Slovak National Uprising’, pp. 227-228.

Slovakia's participation in soon-to-be socialist Czechoslovakia. Yet, during the period of the war, under Nazi control, the Slovaks, like the Czechs with St Wenceslas and, as will be shown below, the Hungarians with St Stephen, continued to commemorate their 'medieval founders' of Cyril and Methodius, even maintaining the 'anti-German' content of their national day. The difference with the Protectorate, where Wenceslas was used by the Nazi authorities as a symbol to claim close historical links with Germans, is that Slovaks (their political elite, at least), had become more-or-less a willing satellite state of Germany and Slovakia presented little threat to Nazi hegemony. It could hence be allowed a little leeway, especially since the Nazis had obliged Slovakia to give up territory to Hungary as well as the Third Reich.

The reasons behind the choice to establish a national day in honour of Milan Rastislav Štefánik, the Slovak co-founder of Czechoslovakia alongside Beneš and Masaryk are less clear. Although the Slovak Republic was presented as a break from Czechoslovakia, there is an unavoidable symbolic continuity. This becomes even more convoluted when considering that Štefánik was presented as a Slovak nation-builder. The choice may have been because his figure still resonated with ordinary Slovaks, even if he represented a kind of threat to the Germans in a similar way to Masaryk and Beneš. What tended to be ignored in commemorative events in the wartime Slovak Republic was the loss of territory to the perennial enemy of Hungary, given that the Slovaks were allies of Nazi Germany.

Hungary – Hitler's reluctant satellite

In contrast with dismembered Czechoslovakia, Hungary approached the Second World War as an opportunity to regain the lost lands of the Treaty of Trianon, including parts of Czechoslovakia. Close economic and other relations with Germany (which, since the Anschluss of March 1938, included Hungary's old partner Austria) meant that Hungary felt obligated to ally with the Axis powers, and has thus been described as a 'reluctant' satellite. The Germans had also dangled the prospect of regaining lost territories in front of the Hungarian noses, often putting the Hungarians into direct conflict with other Nazi allies, such as Romania.¹⁶⁷ The Hungarian Regent, Admiral Miklós Horthy, reluctantly maintained this alliance until spring 1944, when it became apparent that the Germans were losing the war and Soviet forces were encroaching upon Hungary. His attempts to come to a secret negotiation

¹⁶⁷ Case, *Between States*, pp. 67-90. Also see the Introduction of this chapter for a further explanation on the conflict between Hungary and Romania over Transylvania.

with the Soviets were uncovered by the Germans, who deposed Horthy and installed the virulently anti-Semitic and fascist Arrow Cross into government in Hungary.

An indication of the affinity that Hungarians, at least the Hungarian government, felt towards Germany and Italy even prior to the outbreak of the war was noted in Chapter One, when delegates from Germany and Italy had prominent positions on the tribune opposite Matthias Church during the Holy Right procession at the St Stephen's Day commemorations in August 1938. As a result of this affinity, Germany did not feel much of a need to control Hungarian cultural and social life and allowed the Hungarians to continue with national day commemorations and other social and cultural practices during the war. In sharp contrast with the case of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Hungarian national day narrative – especially during St Stephen's Day on 20 August – was often triumphant, highlighting the return of (some) of the territories that were 'lost' as a result of the Treaty of Trianon. St Stephen's Day was also employed to justify Hungary's alliance with Nazi Germany, at times even evoking his marriage to Gisela of Bavaria.¹⁶⁸ This is similar to the use of St Wenceslas Day in the Protectorate and the 14 March Independence Day in Slovakia, whereby the role of the historical links with Germany in the achievement of independence (historical or contemporary) were promoted.

The return of the Felvidék

By 15 March 1939 the European situation had changed significantly since the 20 August commemorations of 1938. The Munich Agreement was signed on 30 September 1938, and the ensuing First Vienna Award annexed parts of the *Felvidék* in southern Slovakia and the southern Carpathian Rus, to Hungary and Hungarian troops started to enter the area between 5 and 10 November 1938. The occupation of Czecho-Slovakia was in fact carried out on 15 March 1939. As a result, on this day the front pages of the Hungarian newspapers were not filled with their usual interpretations of 15 March, but instead focused on the events taking place on the northern borders of Hungary, the declaration of Slovak independence and the situation in Ruthenia.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ See for example: 'István király napja' [The day of King Stephen] in *Magyarország*, 19 August 1944, p. 3. and 'István erős hite' [Stephen's strong faith] in *Magyarország*, 20 August 1944, p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ See for example: 'Magyarország 12 órás ultimátumban követli Prágától Ruszinszko katonai kiűrtését' [Hungary is demanding the military evacuation of Ruthenia from Prague in a 12-hour ultimatum] in *Pesti Hírlap*, 15 March 1939, p.1. (They reported about Slovakian independence on p. 3. and about 15 March on p. 6.), 'A szlovák parlament kimondta Szlovákia teljes önállóságát' [The Slovak parliament announced the complete

15 March, in light of these events, was relegated to the inside pages of the newspapers, the narrative with which the day was presented being very much preoccupied with the current fate of Hungary. Readers were asked to contemplate the current relevance of 1848, especially in these '[s]tormy, and difficult times in Central Europe'.¹⁷⁰ It was not until the next day, when speeches and more reactions appeared on the situation in Slovakia and Ruthenia. As *Pesti Hírlap* claimed in its article 'The people of the capital celebrated 15 March with great enthusiasm' – the go-to headline in this period, even when the people of the capital distinctly showed less enthusiasm – and the 15 March commemorations 'received a special significance'¹⁷¹. This 'special significance' also permeated the celebrations in front of Parliament, where Gyula Földessy, a member of Parliament from *Felvidék* reminded the crowds that the Ruthenians 'always stood up for Hungarian matters, and it was the foreigners [Földessy is presumably referring to the Treaty of Trianon] who wanted to break the Ruthenians away from the Hungarians.'

The paper also reported on commemorations of 15 March in Kassa/Košice (in the newly re-acquired territory of southern Slovakia), where 'after the liberation from twenty years of Czech rule, [people] could celebrate the ides of March with the necessary pomp'.¹⁷² But whilst *Pesti Hírlap* and *Magyarország* both celebrated the demise of Czechoslovakia and the possible gains the Hungarians would receive from this, *Magyar Nemzet*, a traditional, nationalist-conservative, but anti-German newspaper, struck a somewhat more cautious tone; while agreeing that the situation could be beneficial to Hungary, it also warned of the possible dangers these foreign policy developments could have on Hungary and the general Central European situation.¹⁷³

As in the interwar period, in the rhetoric against the Treaty of Trianon, St Stephen acted as the symbol of Greater Hungary. On 9 November 1938 Prime Minister Béla Imrédy remarked at the introduction of the bill in parliament that would officially re-annex parts of the *Felvidék*:

independence of Slovakia] and 'Folyik a tűzharc a magyar-ruszin határ több pontján' [Gunfights at several points of the Hungarian-Ruthenian border] in *Magyarország*, 15 March 1939, p.1.

¹⁷⁰ 'Március 15' [March 15] in *Pesti Hírlap*, 15 March 1939, p. 6.

¹⁷¹ 'Nagy lelkesedéssel ünnepelte a főváros közönsége március 15-ét' [The public of Budapest celebrated 15 March with great enthusiasm] in *Pesti Hírlap* 16 March 1939, p. 10.

¹⁷² 'Kassa ünnepe' [The celebration of Kassa] in *Pesti Hírlap*, 16 March 1939, p. 10.

¹⁷³ *Magyar Nemzet*, 15 March 1939, p. 2. Even though *Magyar Nemzet* was a right-wing publication it had anti-Nazi views.

Not even three months have passed since parliament paid homage to the memory of St. Stephen in Székesfehérvár. When we prepared that ceremony, we spent a long time deliberating on how to present an enduring veneration to the memory of St. Stephen [...] that would be worthy of the loftiness of the 900-year jubilee [of his death]. But we felt that the poor means of this bounded country could not do justice to his exalted memory [...]. Alas, in the year of St. Stephen [...] the long-awaited miracle has come to pass: Hungary's territory has peacefully been enlarged.¹⁷⁴

The return of parts of the *Felvidék* to the Crown Lands of St Stephen, unsurprisingly, became the centre point of the Hungarian propaganda machine. The documentary *Észak felé* (Towards the North) provided a filmic depiction of the Hungarian troops entering the annexed territories.¹⁷⁵ The film's opening credits explained that the people of the *Felvidék* are now free after 'twenty years of suffering'. Moreover, the annexation was the result of an 'international agreement', further justifying the Hungarian claims to the territory.¹⁷⁶

St Stephen's Day in 1939 was commemorated in the spirit of celebrating the returning territories (and hoping for the return of more). The official programme declared: 'The proud capital of enlarged Hungary — in the first year of the return — in 1939 celebrates the founder of Hungary, our first holy king, St Stephen's memory with special pomp.'¹⁷⁷ The programme of the actual day, however, remained the same as what people were familiar with from previous years, with a focus on the lost/returned territories. The 'return narrative' and the fact that these returning territories could again openly commemorate 20 August were the main focus of the newspaper coverage. Unprecedented crowds in Budapest were mentioned, and *Pesti Hírlap* recorded that the inhabitants of the returned territories chose this day to visit Budapest.¹⁷⁸ In

¹⁷⁴ 'Imrédy Béla miniszterelnök benyújtja és ismerteti a Felvidék visszacsatolásáról szóló törvényjavaslatot,' [Prime Minister Béla Imrédy submits and presents the bill regarding the re-annexation of Felvidék] Budapesti Hírlap, 9 November 1938, p. 2. quoted in Waters, Leslie Marie *Resurrecting the Nation: Felvidék and the Hungarian Territorial Revisionist Project, 1938-1945*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), 2012, p. 44. [hereafter: Waters, *Resurrecting the Nation*]

¹⁷⁵ *Észak felé: a felvidéki országrészek visszaszerzésének történelmi filmje* [Towards the North: The historical film of the recovery of the area of the Felvidék], Budapest: A Magyar Királyi Honvédelmi Minisztérium és a Magyar Film Iroda, 1939

¹⁷⁶ For the premiere and the reception of the film see: Sándor Márai, *Ajándék a végzettől: A Felvidék és Erdély visszacsatolása* [A Gift from Destiny: the re-attachment of the Felvidék and Transylvania], Budapest: Helikon Kiadó, 2004, pp. 148-150. A number of other publications commemorated the annexation of the *Felvidék*. See for example: *Felvidékünk-Honvédségünk: Trianontól Kassáig* [Our Felvidék-Our Army: From Trianon to Kassa], Budapest: A Vitézi Rend Zrínyi Csoportjának Kiadása, 1939.

¹⁷⁷ *Szent István-hét Budapestén 1939. évben* [St Stephen week in Budapest in the year 1939], Budapest: Budapest Székesfőváros Idegenforgalmi Hivatala, 1939 1. o.

¹⁷⁸ 'Húsz év óta először vettek részt az ünnepségen a Felvidék és Kárpátalja lakói' [For the first time in twenty years the population of *Felvidék* and Subcarpathia were able to take part in the festivities] in *Pesti Hírlap*, 22 August 1939, p. 4.

the capital, groups from the returned territories marched in the Holy Right procession along with groups from other regions of Hungary, thus incorporating them in a unified national body:

the szeklers appear, they receive a huge applause, more great applause welcomes the Upper Hungarians, the folks of Subcarpathia, the Slovaks, the sokácok¹⁷⁹ and the Hungarian Germans and the a group from Alsóapsa [today in the Ukraine], who are carrying a flag from the times of Rákóczi, which they managed to hide during the Czech repression.¹⁸⁰

The highlight (apart from the Holy Right procession) came in the evening after the speech of the mayor, Károly Szendy, in the form of the firework display. On the Buda side, ‘the Citadel suddenly became dark and the borders of truncated Hungary [*Csonka Magyarország*] appeared in electric lights. After a couple of minutes the pictured of enlarged Hungary appeared with the re-connected Subcarpathia and *Felvidék*. [...] For the third time everything was enveloped in darkness again and during the Hungarian Credo [*Magyar Hiszekegy*] the outlines of Greater Hungary appeared.¹⁸¹ The enormous light map of St Stephen’s Hungary.’¹⁸²

The ideals of St Stephen

In addition to representing the national body, St Stephen also signified a set of malleable ideals that could be appealed to from all parts of the political sphere to argue for their particular position yet still present it as the authentic patriotic position. In this way, he provided an opportunity for those critical of Hungary’s alliance with Germany and the creeping anti-Semitism to voice their objections in an ‘acceptable’ way.

Despite the euphoria with the return of the ‘lost’ territories, there were still some who could foresee the dangers inherent in Europe, especially with the actual outbreak of war, in particular the threat to Hungary’s Jewish population. These individuals also appealed to the ideals and policies of St Stephen, as a tolerant model to be followed by Hungarians as regards the status of Jews and Hungary’s relationship with Nazi Germany. On 11 March 1939, parliament

¹⁷⁹ In Croatian Šokci. A South Slavic ethnographic group.

¹⁸⁰ ‘Gyönyörű ünnepséggel áldozott tegnap az ország Szent István emlékének’ [The country yesterday paid its respect to the memory of St Stephen with a beautiful ceremony] in *Magyarország*, 22 August 1939, p. 5. [Italics from the article.]

¹⁸¹ The Hungarian Credo [*Magyar Hiszekegy*] was penned in 1920 for a competition that was organised by the Hungarian League to Protect the Intactness of the Territory [*Magyarország Területi Épségének Védelmi Ligája*]. The Hungarian Credo goes as follows: ‘I believe in one God,/ one home, I believe in the eternal justice of God,/ I believe in the resurrection of Hungary! Amen!’

¹⁸² ‘Húsz év óta először vettek részt az ünnepségen a Felvidék és Kárpátalja lakói’ [For the first time in twenty years the population of *Felvidék* and Subcarpathia were able to take part in the festivities] in *Pesti Hírlap*, 22 August 1939, p. 4.

debated the anti-Jewish law, which restricted the professions that Jews could be employed in, in an 8-hour session.¹⁸³ New parliamentarian Aladár Vozáry, from Carpathian Ruthenia, a member of the Felvidék Hungarian Party (*Felvidéki Magyar Párt*) urged caution, arguing that those Jews who had demonstrated their loyalty to Hungary and Hungarianness should be exempted. Indeed, he explained this was the legacy of Stephen: '[...] St Stephen's greatest inheritance to us, [was that Hungary] accepted as its member everyone, regardless of national or ethnic differences.' Therefore, Vozáry argued: 'We propagate towards Transylvania and the Banat: those Hungarian Jews, who before the occupation passed the test of Hungarianness *summa cum laude* and persisted with the Hungarians, those will not be ostracised, we will value them.'¹⁸⁴ Similarly, Antal Balla, a member of the opposition Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers and Civic Party, wrote in 1942 that 'Foreigners could live in peace in the country of St Stephen.'¹⁸⁵ This did not stop the of passing the First Jewish law on 29 May 1938, whilst by the time Balla was writing the Third Jewish Law was passed.

Like Wenceslas, St Stephen could be evoked to underline strong and historical Hungarian ties with Germany. On the occasion of St Stephen's Day on 20 August 1944 *Magyarország* – one of the papers controlled by the Horthy regime – commented that whilst Stephen culturally surrounded himself with Italian and French priests, politically he leant towards the Germans, even marrying Gisela of Bavaria to ensure that the Hungarians gained entry to the Western cultural sphere.¹⁸⁶ Therefore, 'in the fight for existence, Germandom and the Hungarians are bound together by faith.'¹⁸⁷ Or, as László Bárdossy, the Prime Minister put it in 1941: '[...] our geographical, position, economic and cultural relations, [...] the common threats, the commonly fought fights of the past and in general the common twists of our faith denote the place of Hungary next to Germany and Italy'.¹⁸⁸

Even so, not everyone interpreted the official version of Stephen's relationship with the Germans to mean that he had forged a close political relationship with them, but rather the opposite. This view was succinctly expressed in an article in the liberal-conservative *Magyar*

¹⁸³ 'Holnaptól 8 órás ülésen tárgyalja a Ház a Zsidótörvényt' [From tomorrow the House will debate the anti-Jewish law during an 8-hour session.] in *Magyarország*, 10 March 1939, p. 1.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 3.

¹⁸⁵ Antal Balla, 'Szent István királysága' [The kingdom of St Stephen] in *Pesti Hírlap*, 20 August 1942, p. 3.

¹⁸⁶ 'István király napja' [The day of King Stephen] in *Magyarország*, 19 August 1944, p. 3. This article supported Hungary's alliance to Germany, even though by this time Horthy was attempting to break-away from this alliance.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ BFL, IV. 1402 b. 1034/

Nemzet on the occasion of St Stephen's Day in the 1939. According to the writer of the article, it was an obvious choice for Stephen to model the Hungarian state on the Frankish example, but he stopped a step before becoming the 'thane of its large German neighbour'.¹⁸⁹ If he had not stopped, the author of the article argues, 'ten centuries of Hungarian history would not have existed.' Stephen knew that for the survival of the Hungarians he needed to establish Christianity and the structure of a modern state. Whilst 'he copied' the state structure from the Germans, he received his crown from the Pope, thus distancing himself from the Germans, although he was still successful in keeping up good relations with his neighbours. Thus, the article concludes, that 'His Holy Right shows us the way. Woe to us if we do not follow.'¹⁹⁰ Which it seems, according to this paper, was not cooperation with Nazi Germany.

The return of Transylvania

The Second Vienna Award of 30 August 1940 restored Northern Transylvania to Hungary. This bore special significance, as Transylvania is considered to be a core part of the Lands of the Crown of St Stephen, and its loss after the Treaty of Trianon was perhaps the most traumatic.¹⁹¹ Thus, the 'return' of parts of Transylvania garnered great attention with the inevitable evocation of St Stephen. The Budapest City Council held a special meeting to commemorate the return of these territories, during which the mayor, Károly Szendy, waxed lyrical, in an overflowing paean to Transylvania's place in Hungary's history: 'After the return of *Felvidék* and Subcarpathia, most of the East had returned to the thousand-year old homeland. We have reached the border of the ancestral empire of St Stephen on the lines of the Carpathian in Transylvania'.¹⁹² These territories had again become not simply part of Hungary but 'the property of the Holy Crown', and thanked Hitler and Mussolini for enabling the Hungarian resurrection.¹⁹³ He also elaborated upon the significance of Transylvania to the Hungarians:

The returned Transylvania has always been in the thousand-year history of the Hungarians the holy land of our national existence. The glorious memories of the Hungarian past, our holy traditions are linked to those lands, cities and villages, which have now returned with the

¹⁸⁹ 'Hol vagy, István király?' [Where are you, King Stephen?] in *Magyar Nemzet*, 20 August 1939, p. 9.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 10.

¹⁹¹ Even today, there are groupings, even in mainstream politics, who argue for the return of Transylvania from Romania, whereas other parts that were annexed after Trianon receive considerably less attention.

¹⁹² Budapest Székesfőváros Törvényhatósági Bizottsága 1940 szeptember 18-án tartott 10-ik rendkívüli díszközgyűlése, [The 10th commemorative session of the Municipality of Budapest on 18 September 1940] 435-438. szám, 439. pont, p. 438.

¹⁹³ Ibid. pp. 438-439.

Vienna Award. Transylvania played a fate-deciding role during the centuries of Hungary, it was the border bastion [*végvár*] of Hungarian life, where not once could the persecuted and oppressed Hungarian soul find shelter.¹⁹⁴

Moreover, Károly Szendy, the mayor of Budapest emphasised that now with the return of Transylvania and the *szekler* region the spiritual integrity of the Lands of St Stephen had also returned.¹⁹⁵ With such enthusiastic rhetoric it would be difficult to mount an argument against alliance with Nazi Germany, and one can suspect that one function of such praise for the return of these regions is to limit criticism of Germany, which had made their restoration possible.

The Budapest City Council also established a number of scholarships for students from the returned territories so that they could study in Budapest. The Council also took it upon itself to put forward a number of initiatives to ensure the full ‘Hungarisation’ of these regions. The complete list of initiatives had 18 items, including the provision of money to schools for equipment and books with verses by Petőfi, the poet of 1848. It also held summer camp programmes for children from the region, and also invited young adults from the ‘liberated’ territories to get to know Budapest and the opportunity for pupils from Budapest to get to know Transylvania.¹⁹⁶

15 March

The Horthy regime had an ambivalent relationship with 15 March throughout the interwar period, and this continued through during the years of the Second World War.¹⁹⁷ 15 March, according to the official narrative was ‘celebrated with great enthusiasm’ by the masses, with the official narrative focusing on the returning of the territories and, as the war progressed, with the Hungarian war effort.¹⁹⁸ During the interwar period 15 March was regarded mainly as the day of the Social Democrats, and this trend continued into the war years as well, although the Communists were now the main driving force behind the unofficial commemorations of 15 March. In 1942 the National Historical Memory Committee [*Magyar Történelmi Emlékbizottság*] was established, which basically belonged to the outlawed Communists’

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 439.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. pp. 439-440.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 441.

¹⁹⁷ As discussed in Chapter Two, 15 March did not officially become a national day until 1927.

¹⁹⁸ See for example: ‘Kassa ünnepe’ [The celebration of Kassa] in *Pesti Hírlap*, 16 March 1939, p. 10.; ‘Az ifjúság márciusa’ [March of the youth] in *Pesti Hírlap*, 17 March 1943, p. 1.; ‘Nagy lelkesedéssel ünnepelte az ország március 15-ét’ in *Magyarország* [The nation celebrated 15 March with great enthusiasm], 17 March 1942, p. 4. or ‘Nagy lelkesedéssel ünnepelte az ország március 15-ét’ [The nation celebrated 15 March with great enthusiasm], *Magyarország*, 17 March 1944, p. 3.

Hungarian Party.¹⁹⁹ The announcement of the establishment of the Committee was published in the left-wing newspaper *Népszava* [*The Voice of the People*].²⁰⁰

The Committee was established as a civil organisation with the stated purpose of maintaining traditions and awaited people 'who preserve the purity of our historical traditions within themselves, and believe that the nursing of these great traditions and their deepening is an important national task.'²⁰¹ The Committee asked for objects, newspaper articles and other paraphernalia connected to Hungarian history, which they were to protect and display to the general public. Two days later another announcement appeared again in *Népszava*, announcing the creation of the Petőfi badge, in commemoration of the approaching 15 March commemorations. The announcement also elaborated on the current aims of the Committee: 'in the interest of deepening the historical consciousness of the Hungarians, we want to collect the neglected keepsakes. [...] most of these relics are from the time of the 1848 freedom fight.'²⁰² The purpose of the Committee, therefore, was specifically to present a different version of Hungarian history from the 'pro-German' one presented by the Horthy regime, with reference to St Stephen. Instead, it pointed to the revolutionary tradition of Petőfi and 1848, using the opportunity of 15 March.

It was not only keepsakes that the Committee was interested in. As in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, national days with a more political rather than historical edge were used as days of protest against the regime. 15 March with its revolutionary tradition, a phrase that will often be used in the Communist era, provided the perfect space for this. For 15 March 1942 the Committee organised an anti-fascist demonstration to Petőfi Square, despite the police ban. The authorities took steps before 15 March to curtail any kind of protest. The Ministry of the Interior sent out a memo to all *főispáns* (municipal heads) on the issuing of permits for

¹⁹⁹ During the Second World War the Communists' Hungarian Party (*Kommunisták Magyarországi Pártja, KMP*), known as the Peace Party (*Békepárt*) after 1943, played a central role in the fight against fascism. The party followed the line provided by Moscow, that of 'national liberation'. Communist propaganda was transmitted mainly through Inoradio, and later Radio Kossuth. The naming of the radio station after Kossuth signalled that the Communists were fighting against the Nazi Germans and the fascists by following in the footsteps of the heroes of 1848, who sought to liberate the Hungarian nation. In line with this policy, 15 March and the rhetoric attached to the revolution in Hungarian popular opinion were excellent vehicles through which the Communists could express their position. See also: Martin Mevius, *Agents of Moscow: The Hungarian Communist Party and the Origins of Socialist Patriotism 1941-1953*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005, pp. 30-31.

²⁰⁰ Gyarmati quotes *Szabad Szó* for the announcement. See: Gyarmati, *Március hatalma*, p. 80.

²⁰¹ *Dokumentumok a Magyar Forradalmi Munkásmozgalom Történetéből 1935-1945* [Documents from the history of the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers Movement], Budapest Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1964, p. 328. [hereafter: *Dokumentumok*] [The original article was published in *Népszava* on 1 March 1942.]

²⁰² Ibid. p. 330. [Originally published in *Népszava*, 3 March 1942]

group gatherings on 15 March.²⁰³ The memo stipulated that any kind of celebration could only take place indoors, and if the local authorities did not think that this was possible, they had to decline the permit. Only 'traditional' commemorations were permitted to take place in the open air. Moreover, 'statues, heroic monuments etc. that can come into consideration for 15 March can be visited for the laying of wreaths by groups of 10-15 people only.' This sudden caution on the part of the authorities is explained at the end of the memo: 'It is likely that radical parties, on the pretext of celebrating 15 March, will exert activities for agitation'. To prevent this in larger towns and cities the commemorations, the memo instructed, should be done in a way (and by those organisations) that would attract crowds away from 'the parallel celebrations' that are likely to be put on by the radicals.²⁰⁴

Despite the efforts of the authorities the demonstration took place on 15 March. According to the police report on the event, around 300 people gathered at Petőfi Square, where a couple of minutes after three o'clock in the afternoon, led by Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, member of Parliament for the Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers and Civic Party, 5 wreaths were laid at the foot of the Petőfi statue in the name of the Hungarian Historical Memory Committee.²⁰⁵ The report elaborated that all five of the wreaths were adorned with ribbons in the national colour with inscriptions such as: 'The Hungarian Workers', 'Hungarian Intellectuals' or 'The editors of *Szabad Szó* [Free Word]'. The other side of the ribbons simply stated: 'To Petőfi'. After Bajcsy-Zsilinszky and his companions left the square the 300-strong crowd was still present, and unknown elements laid further wreaths, but this time with red ribbons, which were swiftly removed by the authorities. The crowd in the meantime tried to head towards the statue of Lajos Kossuth, but were stopped by the police before they reached their destination.²⁰⁶ Ninety people were detained, eighty-seven of whom were soon released, the other three were arrested. Of these three, two were of Jewish origin while of the ninety people detained thirty-three were members of the Social Democratic Party. The affiliation of the other people detained was not specified.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ BFL, IV. 1402.a. 47/1942. Public regulation order from the Ministry of Interior. Dated: 1 March 1942.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ *Dokumentumok*, p. 334.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 335. There is a footnote to the police report here. The Communists claim that the crowds were 8000-10000 people strong. They base this number on contemporary eye-witness accounts, and newspaper articles. See: p. 335. footnote 1.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 335.

After the events of 15 March 1942, days that held a special significance for the Communists were monitored even more closely by the police. This was the case on 1 May as well. The daily order from the head of the Budapest police read as follows on 30 April 1942: ‘With the aim of protecting public order and public safety, as well as for the protection of works of art, public utilities, furthermore public orchards, parks, trees and forests and so on, from radical elements’ the head of the Budapest police ordered general preparedness, with no days off allowed.²⁰⁸ Indeed, ‘[a]ll kinds of protest, or procession must be stopped at the root’.²⁰⁹ The same was to be applied to all those individuals who tried to distribute illegal pamphlets, people singing ‘the Marseilles or other revolutionary songs’, or who wore red ‘flowers, cockades, ribbons or badges’. The order further commands that the traditional 1 May celebrations of the Social Democrats were to be strictly forbidden.²¹⁰ Also prohibited were trips by larger groups — apart from trips by families — in case they turned into ‘banned forest gatherings’. Despite all these efforts on the part of the officials, the Communists carried on their anti-German and anti-war activities throughout the Second World War.

St Stephen’s Day in 1942 did not ring out with protest, but it turned out to be an extraordinary day. On the morning of 20 August Regent Miklós Horthy’s son, István Horthy, a fighter pilot in the Hungarian air force, died when his plane went down on the Russian front. On the day of the 20th the papers were filled with the official programmes and articles on the meaning of the day, but by the next day the focus had shifted to the tragic demise of the Flight Lieutenant.²¹¹ Efforts were made by the regime to subsume his death into the St Stephens’s Day commemorations, given that his death coincidentally happened on that day. On the one-year anniversary of his day in 1943, black flags were raised early in the morning of 20 August. In the opinion of the *Pesti Hírlap*, the ‘bizarre, ghostly ensemble of the national flag and the black flags since [the death of István Horthy] is the truest symbol of the Hungarian St Stephen’s Day’.²¹² What could it have meant by this, since St Stephen’s Day was traditionally a day of joy and celebration? Perhaps this was a comment on the fate of Hungary during a war in which it was bound to Nazi Germany. In his radio broadcast on 20 August 1943, the prime minister Miklós Kállay attempted to give a new meaning to the day, which surely would not

²⁰⁸ BFL, VI. 2.d, 84/1942, IV.1.-VI. 30. A magyar királyi rendőrség budapesti rendőri őrségének főparancsnoka [The Commander in Chief of the Hungarian Royal Police in Budapest], 120/II. szám, 1942, Napi parancs 1942. évi április hó 30-án, p. 1. The daily orders of the Budapest police. Dated 30 April 1942.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 7.

²¹⁰ Ibid. p. 8.

²¹¹ See for example: *Pesti Hírlap*, 22 August 1942, and *Magyarország*, 22 August 1942.

²¹² ‘Szent István napja’ [The day of St Stephen] in *Pesti Hírlap*, 20 August 1943, p. 3.

have been the case if Hungary had not been at war: 'From now on St Stephen's Day will have two symbols: the king who founded the country, and the hero that protects the country.'²¹³ Yet, as events were to transpire, István Horthy was not remembered again on future St Stephen's Days, as his father was deposed, to be replaced by the fascist Arrow Cross until the end of the war,

The coming of the Arrow Cross

On 15 March 1944 Admiral Miklós Horthy was not in Budapest to observe the annual commemorations, although the day was still apparently 'celebrated [...] with great enthusiasm.'²¹⁴ Instead, he had been invited by Adolf Hitler to Austria, ostensibly to discuss Hungary's war effort but really to keep Horthy out of the way while German forces entered and occupied Hungary. The papers reported that, in the early morning of 15 March, fighter planes had appeared in the southwest of Hungary, although they left Hungarian airspace quickly and no atrocities took place.²¹⁵ To whom exactly these planes belonged is not made clear.

Hitler had discovered that the Hungarian government, in particular under prime minister Miklós Kállay from 1942, had been putting out feelers to the Allies and exploring the possibility of defecting. Horthy was permitted to remain as head of state as long as he appointed a more hard-line government. By October, Horthy had decided that the most sensible path for Hungary now was to ally with Soviet Russia, which he announced in a radio broadcast on 15 October. In a bizarre twist, the Germans, aware of Horthy's plans, arranged to have his other son, also named Miklós, kidnapped on 15 October. The Germans and their faithful allies in Budapest demanded that Horthy step down and be replaced by the leader of the fascist Arrow Cross party, Ferenc Szálasi.²¹⁶ Under the Arrow Cross, Hungary became Hitler's enthusiastic

²¹³ "“Mi a magunk életét akarjuk és fogjuk élni” — hirdette a szentistvánnapi rádiószózatában Kállay Miklós miniszterelnök” [“We want to and will live out own life” – announced Prime Minister Miklós Kállay in his St Stephen Day radio address] in *Pesti Hírlap*, 20 August 1943, p. 1.

²¹⁴ See for example: 'Nagy lelkesedéssel ünnepelte az ország március 15-ét' in *Magyarország*, 17 March 1944, p. 3.

²¹⁵ See for example: 'Hivatalos jelentés a március 15-i zavaró repülésről' [Official report regarding the aviation disturbance on 15 March] in *Magyarország*, 17 March 1944, p. 2.

²¹⁶ The Arrow Cross Party (*Nyilaskeresztes Párt*) was established with this name on 15 March 1939. Its leader Ferenc Szálasi attempted to set up other parties previously, which were banned. He was also imprisoned for disturbing the peace in 1938. See: Zoltán Paksy, 'A nemzetiszocialista mozgalmak megszerveződése, párt- és regionális struktúrája Magyarországon az 1930-as években' in *Múltunk*, No. 3, 2009, pp. 202-237, pp. 225-229.

and willing satellite, and much of Hungary's Jewish population was deported to the death camps or killed.

Arrow Cross rule was brief, lasting only from October 1944 to January 1945, when Soviet troops took Budapest, and so it did not cover either 15 March or 20 August. Nonetheless, we can garner their attitude toward these national days from publications in the party's newspaper, *Magyarság*. The Arrow Cross position towards 15 March is particularly interesting, especially since we have evidence of a kind of debate over the meaning of the day between *Magyarság* and the conservative, anti-fascist newspaper *Magyar Nemzet*. The Arrow Cross appears to have grudgingly accepted that 15 March 1848 was an important national event, but they disagreed with the way it was currently commemorated and also appeared to be at pains to undermine its significance as a symbol against foreign (Germanic) rule. Their problem with the day was in what they called the Communist appropriation of it – on other words, the Social Democrats' claim of 15 March – as its style of commemoration was 'against the nation and it has been lowered to a class celebration that is against the *Zeitgeist*.'²¹⁷ In addition, as authoritarians, they would have found its 'revolutionary' overtones distasteful and a threat.

In this vein, they attempted to present 15 March as a kind of failure, which, since it did not lead to any specific legal or social and economic reforms, 'does not offer a historically tangible event.'²¹⁸ Their main concern appears to have been to disarm the power of 15 March as a symbol of protest against foreign rule, in this case the Nazi Germans. Instead, they claimed that the Twelve Points and the ideals of the 1848 revolutionaries were no longer relevant during the war, since they had been 'purposefully falsified for centuries for political interests and to sustain economic power.'²¹⁹ The causes that 15 March supported – for example, the end of serfdom or independence from an occupying foreign power – were no longer relevant and so neither were the Twelve Points still relevant.²²⁰

In fact, according to the Arrow Cross paper in a pointed article on the day in 1944, 15 March was nothing more than:

²¹⁷ '1944. március 15.' in *Magyarság*, 15 March 1944, p. 5.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ 'Új március felé...' [Towards a new March] in *Magyarság*, 15 March 1940, pp. 1-2.

²²⁰ '1944. március 15.' in *Magyarság*, 15 March 1944, p. 5.

[a] few enthusiastic young men who lured the citizenry of Pest to the streets in wintry March, in the sleet, who were enthusiastic about *something*, that a number of counties already had a couple of years beforehand in so many of the [12] points summarised, and making it a reality depended on the legislature, which met in Pozsony [Bratislava and not in Budapest where the revolution took place]. These [12] points are hardly appreciated by the people of today.²²¹

The symbolic value of 15 March for the people - 'the energy for the fight for existence and enthusiasm' - was only attached to the date at a later stage. Whilst '15 March today belongs to history', it should still be celebrated, but not along the lines of the old ideals, but as a symbol of 'the desire for an eternal nation' - perhaps an echo of the millennial Third Reich.²²²

This article elicited a response from the conservative but anti-fascist newspaper *Magyar Nemzet*, which was not favourable to the alliance with Germany. *Magyar Nemzet* believed that, on the contrary, '15 March 1848 is much more current [...] than ever before.' The paper accepted that revaluating history was a valid exercise, 'if indeed it is supported by a wish for justice and by the clarity of intellect.'²²³ This was not the case right now, as history was instead being interpreted along the lines of 'party passions'. In *Magyar Nemzet*'s view, 15 March was a day of 'the universal celebration of working Hungarians [...] and in its spirit the whole nation is welded together without [taking into account any] differences.'²²⁴

In 1944, 20 August was conspicuous not for protest but for the cancellation of one of the day's most important symbolic events: the Holy Right procession, most likely for security reasons.²²⁵ Two months later, Horthy was deposed and leader of the Arrow Cross, Ferenc Szálasi was installed as prime minister. Although they supported the standard narrative on 20 August, they still attempted to reshape it to fit the precepts of the new Europe that was emerging. In their view, historically the 'empire of St Stephen is an indestructible geopolitical entity' and St Stephen 'the greatest statesmen of Europe in his period'.²²⁶ As such, Hungarians would undoubtedly be a part of the new order, and the ideal of St Stephen would have a 'prestigious

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² '1944. március 15.' in *Magyarság*, 15 March 1944, p. 5.

²²³ 'A "Magyarság" ártértékeli március 15-ét' [The *Magyarság* reassesses 15 March] in *Magyar Nemzet*, 17 March 1944, p. 5

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ 'Elmarad a Szent Jobb Körmenet' [The Holy Right procession is cancelled] in *Magyarország*, 14 August 1944, p. 3.

²²⁶ 'Ezt akarják a nyilasok' [This is what the Arrow Cross wants] in *Magyarság*, 5 April 1939, pp. 3-4. and 'Az új Európa és a szentistváni gondolat' [The new Europe and the ideals of St Stephen] in *Magyarság*, 20 August 1940, p. 1.

place in the new Europe, its role will be for the unification of the small nations in the Carpathian basin under a strong community of states'.²²⁷

The physical symbols associated with St Stephen were also popular with the Arrow Cross. Towards the end of the war the party started seeking direction from the 'fist' of Stephen's Holy Right, upon which 'our eyes fall'.²²⁸ The aggressive metaphor of a fist appealed to them, as did 'the strong and saintly defiance [...] that made the hand into a fist a thousand years ago', a fist that 'remained after the effort of the soul' had been accomplished. The hope was that in the 'fate-changing weeks' of mid to late 1944, 'this fisted Holy Right be [...] a symbol for us'. As is required now, so then the fisted Holy Right indicated the side of the Germans, as Stephen married the Bavarian princess, Gisela, thus establishing 'the thousand-year common fate of the Germans and Hungarians.'

In the interpretation of the Arrow Cross then, St Stephen was no longer simply the symbol of the united Hungarian Crown Lands – which the Arrow Cross now presented as a 'community of states' in the Carpathian basin, rather than the Lands of the Crown of St Stephen – but also the historical example of what is right for the Hungarian nation. This was a similar narrative to that created by Protectorate officials in Bohemia during the War. In the Protectorate, St Wenceslas was presented as the historical link between the Nazi German regime and the Czech Lands in order to justify the occupation. In the case of the Hungarians – at least in the Arrow Cross interpretation – St Stephen's marriage to a Bavarian princess was the starting point of a 1000-year relationship between the two nations.

As premier of Hungary, Ferenc Szálasi took the doctrine of the Holy Crown of St Stephen, according to which sovereignty lay in the crown not the ruler, very seriously, going so far as to smuggle the crown out of Hungary with him as he fled the country in the face of the Soviet

²²⁷ 'Az új Európa és a szentistváni gondolat' [The new Europe and the ideals of St Stephen] in *Magyarság*, 20 August 1940, p. 1. See also: 'Szent István országa az Új Európában' [The country of St Stephen in the New Europe] in *Magyarság*, 20 August 1941, p. 1.

²²⁸ 'István erős hite' [Stephen's strong faith] in *Magyarság*, 20 August 1944, p. 3. A similar argument was also presented in the paper *Magyarország*, which was connected to the Horthy regime, in the same year. The paper argued that whilst culturally Stephen and his successors leaned towards the Italians and the French, politically they followed the Germans. His marriage to Gisela ensured that Hungary not only culturally, but also politically came into the European sphere of influence. With this act he connected 'the faith' of the Hungarians and the Germans. See: 'István király napja' in *Magyarország*, 19 August 1944, p. 3. It seems that both the Horthy regime and the Arrow Cross Party were trying to establish a new narrative towards the end of the war that would historically justify fighting the war on the side of the Germans.

advance. With the crown in his possession, he would still, theoretically, be the country's leader. As Martin Mevius has written, 'Ferenc Szálasi escaped with the Crown from Hungary precisely because he believed in its legitimizing powers.'²²⁹ In October 1944 the Horthy regime, fearing the Arrow Cross, had ordered the Holy Crown to be buried in Buda Castle. After the Arrow Cross coup, they dug the Crown up and Szálasi, as Hungary's new leader, took his oath in the presence of the Crown.²³⁰ The Crown, the Holy Right and the coronation regalia were not to stay in Budapest for long after this, however. With the advancing Red Army Szálasi – who himself, along with his government were retreating towards the west – ordered the Crown, the Right and the regalia to be transported through western Hungary.²³¹ In the American occupation zone in Mattsee, Austria the Crown along with everything else was given to American authorities for safe-keeping by one of the Hungarian Crown Guard, Colonel Ernő Pajtás.²³² The Holy Right was returned to Hungary, aptly, on 20 August 1945, but the Crown – in a period that became known as its 'American adventure' – was not returned until January 1978, until which time it was kept in Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Hungary was free of both German troops and the Arrow Cross by the beginning of April 1945. Along with the rest of Eastern Europe, Hungary came under the Soviet-sphere of influence following its defeat during the War. The First and Second Vienna Awards were declared null and void by the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, the territories that the country had gained with them were thus again lost, and Hungary returned to its 1937 border arrangements with both Czechoslovakia and Romania. With the Communist advancement into power in the years between 1945 and 1948, national day commemorations and life in general in Hungary and the region, were again to be rewritten.

For most of the Second World War, until late 1944, Hungary was a Nazi ally that was not under occupation, and continued to be ruled by the right-wing, authoritarian Horthy regime. National days continued in a similar manner to the interwar period, albeit with a greater emphasis on the lands of St Stephen (i.e. Greater Hungary) and perhaps even a greater distancing from 15 March

²²⁹ Martin Mevius, 'A Crown for Rákosi: The Vogeler Case, the Holy Crown of St Stephen, and the (Inter)national Legitimacy of the Hungarian Communist Regime, 1945–1978' in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 89, No. 1, 2011, pp. 76-107, p. 80.

²³⁰ Péter László, 'The Holy Crown of Hungary, Visible and Invisible' in *SEER*, Vol. 81, No. 3, 2003, pp. 421-510, p. 438.

²³¹ Katalin Kádár Lynn, 'The return of the Crown of St Stephen and its subsequent impact on the Carter administration' in *East European Quarterly*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 2, 2000, pp. 181-215, p. 182.

²³² *Ibid.*

on the part of the authorities. Both occasions provided the opportunity for anti-regime protest. One significant difference, however, was that most of the Treaty of Trianon had been reversed, and the most desired regions of Felvidék and Transylvania had returned to Hungary, and this was quickly incorporated into the rhetoric and content of both St Stephen's Day and 15 March – the Germans had coincidentally occupied Czecho-Slovakia on 15 March in 1939, giving the day a whole new meaning, at least for that year. In general, whilst St Stephen's Day was the most important commemorative event, during the war 15 March was officially respected for its patriotic connotations but still viewed with a little suspicion by the authorities, as it had always been and continued to be, due to its radical and anti-authority overtones. In this respect, 15 March did indeed function during the war as an opportunity for protest against not only the government but its Nazi ally.

Conclusion

The Second World War resulted in a dramatically different situation from the interwar period for Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Czechoslovakia basically no longer existed, while Hungary had grown in size, thanks the alliance with Nazi Germany. The governments in all three states – the Protectorate, Slovakia and Hungary – were beholden to Nazi Germany, which allowed national days to continue in very broad lines as they had been in the interwar period (with the exception of the banning of 28 October in the Protectorate and the abandonment of unified Czechoslovak days in Slovakia). This meant that the German historical connections of Wenceslas and Stephen were accentuated and their national days promoted by the Protectorate authorities and Hungarian government. Paradoxically, in Slovakia, a willing ally of Hitler, the role of Cyril and Methodius, which helped to inculcate a Slav consciousness within a German environment, was highlighted rather than hidden. Similarly, the adoption of a national day for Milan Rastislav Štefánik by the Slovak Republic also served to prove that there had been a pre-1918 Slovak national consciousness and that Slovakia could be an independent state without the Czechs.

This apparent continuity was perhaps deliberately intended, so as to give the impression of 'normalcy', that these states were not under occupation or foreign rule, when in fact they were no longer independent. This can be seen most clearly in the great effort made by the authorities of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia to maintain St Wenceslas Day as it was in the interwar period.

Chapter Four

Communist Commemorations: 1945-1956

Following the end of the Second World War in both Western and Eastern Europe an anti-fascist consensus was established. In both areas, Communist and other left-wing parties came to power; however, the historical debates that attempted to explain fascism and argued for a radical break with the past occurred in rather different circumstances. Whilst in Western Europe these debates took place in the open, in Eastern Europe, which came under the Soviet occupation zone, the Communist parties were quick to curtail free debate. During this time the Communist parties, in what soon came to be known as the Eastern bloc, embarked upon appropriating the historical narratives of the countries in the Soviet-occupied zone, fitting the national narratives into an anti-German, anti-fascist and revolutionary mould. Even so, the process of attempting to establish a Communist national tradition and historical narrative did not start in 1945 and to fully understand the process that happened after the end of the War, but built upon theoretical developments in the interwar period.¹

In this and the following chapter I investigate what happened to the national day calendars of Czechoslovakia and Hungary after the war and the Communist takeovers. How did these socialist societies, which were meant to represent a break with the past and the dawn of a new future, deal with the old historical narratives? How did they use the powerful vehicles of national days to represent and enforce the new ideals? This chapter examines the immediate post-war period and that of Stalinism, up to 1956 and the Hungarian revolution, while Chapter Five covers goulash communism in Hungary and Czechoslovak normalisation, until the end of communism in 1989.

¹ For not taking 8 May 1945 as the *Stunde null* for the start of the Communist take-overs see: Bradley Abrams, 'The Second World War and the East European Revolution' in *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2003, pp. 623-664.

Communist parties in Czechoslovakia and Hungary: the interwar period until the Second World War

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) was formed in 1921 and throughout the interwar period the party competed in both national and municipal elections with relative success.² In 1925 they came second in the parliamentary elections, winning 41 seats, only four seats behind the Smallholders, the winning party.³ The KSČ was also associated with the Moscow-based Comintern, the Communist International. In 1927 Klement Gottwald became the General Secretary of the party and his ascent to the top of the party also signalled the beginning of the Stalinisation process. During the 1930s many ‘old “right-wing” luminaries were acrimoniously expelled and replaced by younger “proletarian” elements, steadfastly loyal to the USSR and its Stalinist bosses.’⁴

Since, unlike in Hungary, the KSČ was legal in the interwar period we can gauge their early opinions regarding national days in the new state. As will become apparent in this chapter, this contrasts in many ways with how they were to treat these commemorative events once they actually came to power following the Second World War. Shifting Communist attitudes to 28 October, the anniversary of the foundation of Czechoslovakia, and 6 July, Jan Hus Day, will be discussed later in this chapter.

One other important interwar national day that was abandoned during the Communist period was Czechoslovak Army Day on 2 July, commemorating the anniversary of the Battle of Zborov. During the interwar period, the Communist party had refused to participate in the official commemorations of the battle.⁵ However, this was not because they did not believe in it but, because, as they claimed, the commemorations represented the bourgeois state. With the radicalisation of the Communist party in Czechoslovakia from the 1930s, they used the occasion to attack the First Republic, arguing that the Legionnaire veterans of Zborov were

² See for example: Kevin McDermott, ‘Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia: origins, processes, responses’ in Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe (eds) *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite purges and mass repression*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010, pp. 98-118, p. 100. [hereafter: McDermott, ‘Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia’]

³ Dieter Nohlen and Philip Stöver (eds) *Elections in Europe: a data handbook*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010, p. 471.

⁴ McDermott, ‘Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia’, p. 101.

⁵ Nancy M. Wingfield, ‘National Sacrifice and Regeneration: Commemorations of the Battle of Zborov in Multinational Czechoslovakia’ in Cornwall, Mark and John Paul Newman (eds) *Sacrifice and Rebirth: The Legacy of the Last Habsburg War*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2016, pp. 129-150, pp. 137. [hereafter: Wingfield ‘National Sacrifice and Regeneration’]

workers who had fought for equality that they had not received during the First Republic.⁶ Even so, the Communist did briefly – between 1945 and 1948 – interpret the Battle of Zborov in the context of the battles fought by the Czechs during the Second World War against Nazi Germany, arguing that Zborov belonged into the larger frame of struggle by the Slavs ‘against the age-old German enemy.’⁷ Victorious February in 1948, however spelt the end of 2 July commemorations in Czechoslovakia. 28 September, St Wenceslas Day was another event that the Communists used during the interwar Republic to voice their disapproval of Masaryk’s ‘bourgeois’ state.⁸

Both these events will, unsurprisingly, be absent from the national day calendar during the Communist era. It would have been impossible to incorporate St Wenceslas Day into an anti-bourgeois, revolutionary rhetoric. There was still a Czechoslovak Army Day, but from 1948 it was now commemorated on 6 October, and the event it memorialised was the Battle of the Dukla Pass in 1944, when the Czechoslovak 1st Army Corps fought together with the Red Army to defeat the Nazi German, Hungarian and Slovak armies.⁹ The Battle of Dukla pass on the Polish-Slovakian border was one of the longest and most bitterly contested battles in the front. The day of the victory over the Nazi German and Hungarian troops was commemorated every year at the beginning of October and became a symbol of peaceful co-operation between Poland, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia.¹⁰

After the war, Czechoslovakia also managed to resolve one of its long-standing ‘problems’, namely the removal of the Germans, and some of the Hungarian, population through the ‘wild expulsions’ immediately after the war and subsequently with the Beneš decrees.

In Hungary the Communist party had a more complicated history. The short-lived Communist Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 was succeeded by the White Terror, unleashed by Admiral

⁶ See for example: ‘Na okraj zborovských oslav’ in *Rudé právo*, 4 July 1937, p. 6. also see: Wingfield, ‘National Sacrifice and Regeneration’

⁷ Nancy M. Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 275. [hereafter: Wingfield, *Flag Wars*] For the brief Communist commemorations of Zborov between 1945 and 1948 see pp. 273-276.

⁸ See for example: “Svatováclavský hold — klerikální reakci, fašismu a militarismu” [St Wenceslas tribute – clerical reaction, fascism and militarism] in *Rudé právo*, 26 September 1929, p. 2.

⁹ NACR, Národní fronta ústřední výbor_č.f. 357_2, Box 10. There are continuities between the Battle of Zborov and that of Dukla Pass. For example, General Ludvík Svoboda, who led the 1st Army Corps, had also fought as a Legionnaire at Zborov (and was later to become president of Czechoslovakia). 6 October is still a commemorative day in Slovakia today.

¹⁰ Wingfield, *Flag Wars*, p. 276.

Miklós Horthy, who proceeded to impose his own right-wing regime. Many members of the now illegal Communists' Hungarian Party (KMP) were executed or exiled, mainly to the Soviet Union. During the 1930s Communist intellectuals, chiefly among them József Révai in exile in the Soviet Union, were already working on incorporating Hungarian revolutionary traditions, specifically the revolution of 1848, into a new, Communist historical narrative.¹¹ Georgi Dimitrov, the Bulgarian communist leader, had instructed the 7th Comintern Congress in 1935 to employ the Popular Front strategy, which meant that Soviet/Communist policy was openly anti-fascist and specifically anti-Nazi.¹² In this sense, it would not permit fascism to lay claim to national traditions and, in the struggle against fascism, Communists would appropriate national symbols.¹³

Indeed, this 'national line', promoted at the urging of Stalin, the former Commissar for Nationalities, became policy for all Communist parties that were members of the Comintern, and continued throughout the war (even though the Comintern itself was disbanded in 1943, precisely so that it would not seem as though the Soviets were guiding the national resistances¹⁴). The Communist parties in different countries were encouraged to develop 'patriotic' historical narratives, where they could search their country's history in order to identify 'radical traditions'. This continued after the war, in the few years before the Communist parties monopolised power, when they employed the strategy of forming or participating in 'national front' governments with other parties. As Martin Mevius writes:

all communist parties in Central and Eastern Europe, without exception, presented themselves as heirs to national traditions and guardians of national interests, the defenders of a 'true patriotism' free of 'chauvinism,' with the Soviet Union as great friend and ally. Communists everywhere claimed national heroes. In Czechoslovakia, Zdeněk Nejedlý presented Jan Hus as a communist predecessor, in Hungary József Révai claimed national poet Sándor Petőfi for the party.¹⁵

Indeed, Nejedlý and Révai were to be the chief ideological thinkers of their respective countries, with responsibility for cultural affairs such as national days, foregrounding the

¹¹ Árpád von Klimó, 'Helden, Völker, Freiheitskämpfe. Zur Ästhetik Stalinistischer Geschichtsschreibung in der Sowjetunion, Der Volksrepublik Ungarn und der DDR' in *Storia della Storiografia*, Vol. 52, 2007, pp. 83-112, p. 96. [hereafter: Klimó 'Helden, Völker, Freiheitskämpfe']

¹² Ibid. p. 94-95.

¹³ Martin Mevius, *Agents of Moscow: The Hungarian Communist Party and the Origins of Socialist Patriotism, 1941-1953*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005, p. 23.

¹⁴ Martin Mevius, 'Reappraising Communism and Nationalism' in *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 2009, 377-400, p. 386.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 388.

‘national heroes’ they had cultivated as part of the overall Soviet-influenced strategy. Conveniently for them, both Hus and Petőfi were already commemorated with national days. The problem, however, for this ‘national line’ is that it could only be followed as far as the Soviet Union under Stalin permitted it. If a traditional national interest went against what the Soviets wanted, then the national position would have to give way.¹⁶

Communist involvement in the resistance during the Second World War in both the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and in Hungary certainly gave the communists an element of credibility and a voice in the immediate post-war period. This was reinforced by the Soviet liberation of these countries and a disappointment with Western European countries, which had let Czechoslovakia down with the Munich Agreement. In Czechoslovakia the communist resistance movement had organised general strikes and was active during the Prague uprising of May 1945. In Hungary the underground communists who had remained in the country after 1919 used the opportunity of the war to reorganise and be active in the resistance. Although not openly calling themselves communists, they still announced themselves as the heirs of the 1848 revolution by setting up the National Historical Memory Committee (*Magyar Történelmi Emlékbizottság*) and organising an anti-fascist demonstration for 15 March 1942, the anniversary of the 1848 revolution. In both countries after the war the Communist parties used their involvement in the resistance movements to display their anti-fascist and anti-German credentials.

Communist take-overs and national days (1945-1948)

With the end of the Second World War the Protectorate and Slovakia were reunited again to form Czechoslovakia in May 1945, once the country had been liberated and the exiled Czechoslovak government had returned.¹⁷ Hungary had already signed the armistice with the Allies on 20 January 1945, and had agreed to withdraw its troops from the territories that it had gained after 1938. It was not until the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 that Hungary officially lost the territories that it had regained between 1938 and 1941.¹⁸ The Peace Treaty also specified that at most 90 days after the signing of the Treaty all Allied troops must have left Hungary’s

¹⁶ For a broader discussion of the Hungarian case in particular, see Mevius, *Agents of Moscow*.

¹⁷ In 1942, Britain and Free France repudiated the Munich Agreement and henceforth regarded the Czechoslovak government-in-exile as the legitimate government of the continuing pre-war Czechoslovak state. Therefore, they did not recognise the division of Czechoslovakia into two independent states.

¹⁸ Ignác Romsics, *Magyarország Története a XX. században* [The history of Hungary in the 20th century], Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1999, p. 300. [hereafter Romsics, *Magyarország Története a XX. században*]

territory, with the telling addition that the Soviet Union was to be able to keep as many troops in Hungary as were required for the transports to Soviet-controlled Austria.¹⁹ Czechoslovakia was also to be part of the Soviet-occupied zone.

Czechoslovakia

In the first post-war elections in Czechoslovakia in 1946, the Communists emerged as the largest party, with 37 per cent of the votes. The popularity of the KSČ in Czechoslovakia immediately after the war can be attributed to a number of factors, including the general post-war atmosphere that tended to favour the left-wing parties. The Czechoslovak Communists were also able to reformulate 'the Czech national self-understanding into a Slavic and socialist mold.'²⁰ This Communist 'revision of national character' enabled the KSČ to present itself as the next logical step for Czechoslovakia. The KSČ was 'reinventing' and 'refashioning' itself 'as a patriotic, at times even nationalist party.'²¹ This was achieved by promoting a 'new Czechoslovak patriotism', which urged the Czechs to learn from 'the lessons of Munich and World War II' and to reinterpret 'the interwar republic while maintaining the stature of [...] Masaryk.'²² This new patriotism, of course, also included opening up towards the east. Even so, it was not only the immediate past that needed to be reconfigured, but also the more distant past. One of the figures of the distant past the Communists were keen to make their own was Jan Hus, who they claimed was the 'first modern *revolutionary*'.²³

The Communist victory at the ballot box can also be attributed to Klement Gottwald's pursuit of the 'Czechoslovak road to socialism', which entailed a supposedly moderate approach – although described by historian Robert K. Evanston as an 'undogmatic, quasidemocratic course'. This approach would not involve agricultural collectivisation, and attempted not to upset the entrepreneurs and lower middle class.²⁴ Gottwald was enthusiastic about this 'national road to socialism' from 1945 to 1947, but was forced by Stalin to abandon it after the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948. It was only with de-Stalinisation from

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Bradley F. Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004, p. 6. [hereafter Abrams, *Struggle*]

²¹ Ibid. p. 94.

²² Ibid. p. 95.

²³ Ibid. p. 100.

²⁴ Robert K. Evanston, 'The Czechoslovak Road to Socialism in 1948,' *East European Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 4, 1985, pp. 469-492, p. 469.

1956 that it became permissible again to talk of ‘national roads to socialism’, which led to a greater ‘nationalisation’ of history.

This brief period between the end of the War and the complete Communist take-overs saw the start of the Communist appropriation of national days. This was the case not only in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, but similar strategies were used in other newly-Communist countries, such as Poland and Bulgaria.²⁵ Despite the KSČ leading the government in Czechoslovakia, the first national day law that was passed in 1946 did not signify a radical break with the past, but instead reflected a continuity with the First Republic. The law, in essence, was the same as that passed in 1925. In addition to the religious holidays, the new law listed the following dates as national days: 7 March, Masaryk’s date of birth; 1 May, Feast of Work; 5 July, commemorating Sts Cyril and Methodius; 6 July, the day of Jan Hus; 28 September as St Wenceslas Day, and 28 October, at this time still commemorating the establishment of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918.²⁶ 2 July, Czechoslovak Army Day, commemorating the 1917 Battle of Zborov, was, however, already missing. For the Slovaks this new law meant that the national days that were established during the independent Slovak Republic were null and void – for example 14 March, the proclamation of independent Slovakia – and their historical narratives would again need to be readjusted.

Although in this period 28 October still commemorated the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, it was also beginning to acquire a number of new meanings: it was on this day in 1945 that the Temporary National Assembly sat for the first time, while on 28 October 1945 President Beneš signed the first nationalisation laws. Thus, by the end of 1946, although the Communists were already part of the government, they were not yet in a position to introduce a full range of Soviet-influenced national days and were still honouring the interwar commemorative days in some way. Despite this, 9 May, Liberation Day (by the Soviets), and the anniversary of the Prague Uprising of 5 May 1945 against the Germans were being commemorated after 1946.²⁷

²⁵ See for example: Izabella Main, ‘Nemzetek Krisztusa: a lengyel nemzeti ünnepek állami és egyházi manipulációja 1944 és 1966 között’ [Christ of Nations: Church and state manipulation of Polish national days between 1944 and 1966] in *Regio*, Vol. 12, 2001, pp. 69-88 and Yannis Sygkelos, ‘The National Discourse of the Bulgarian Communist Party on National Anniversaries and Commemorations (1944-1948)’ in *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 2009, pp. 425-442.

²⁶ ‘248 Zákon ze den 20. prosince 1946 o úpravě svátkového práva’ [Law No. 248 of 20 December 1946 regarding the adjustments to the holiday law] in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení republiky Československé*, Ročník 1946, V Praze: Státní tiskarna, 1947, pp. 1666-1668.

²⁷ Abrams, *Struggle*, p. 140.

It is palpable that in spite of the connections the Communists were attempting to establish between the First and post-war Republics, they still wished to replace 28 October with a day that held more meaning for them. This replacement day was 5 May, the day the people of Prague rose up against the German occupiers in 1945. The day of ‘an anti-German military action intending to secure the physical liberation of the nation’ was transformed ‘into the first act of the “national and democratic revolution”’.²⁸ Furthermore, 5 May was also popular with young Czechs, who viewed the date ‘as “their” holiday’ as opposed to 28 October that belonged to ‘their elders’.²⁹ After 1948, efforts to commemorate 5 May were abandoned, as it was decided that 9 May, when the Red Army entered Prague, should be the special day.

Another interwar national day that was initially popular with the Communists was Jan Hus and the Hussite movement, mainly championed by chief party ideologue Zdeněk Nejedlý. Nejedlý, taking his cue from the Comintern to look for radical traditions in national history, published *Komunisté: Dědici Velikých Tradic Českého Národa*, in which he linked the Hussite movement and the Czechoslovak Communists. Nejedlý argued that during the Middle Ages the nobility were not the bearers of national tradition, as they were all foreigners, or if they had Czech names they Germanised them.³⁰ The Hussite revolution was a revolution of the people and, although it ended in defeat:

Hussitism survived forever in the memory of the nation and also survived in another layer – the farmers and in the cities [...] – amongst the plebeian stratum, that is small artisans, journeymen serving the lower urban classes.³¹

In this interpretation then, the people – and not the ruling classes – were the true heirs of the Hussite movement; the KSČ represents the people, thus the Party is the true heir of the Hussite traditions. In Nejedlý’s mind, Hus would be an active Party supporter: ‘Today Hus would be the head of a political party and his grandstand would not be the pulpit, but Prague’s Lucerna or Wenceslas Square. And very close to his side – we are convinced of this – would be us, the Communists.’³²

²⁸ Ibid. p. 139.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Komunisté: Dědici Velikých Tradic Českého Národa* [*Communists: The Heirs of the Great Traditions of the Czech Nation*], Prague: Vydal Sekretariát ÚV KSČ V Praze, 1946, p. 7. [hereafter: Nejedlý, *Komunisté*]

³¹ Ibid: 8-9.

³² Ibid: 22.

In the Slovak part of the Republic, Cyril and Methodius were also being adapted to a Communist-oriented, anti-German, Pan-Slavic rhetoric. The Communist interpretation of the Cyril and Methodius tradition was cemented during the period between 1945 and 1950, with no significant changes in the rhetoric until 1968. The building blocks of the new interpretation of the tradition included: 'Eastern origins, highlighting the cultural and educational mission, anti-Western (anti-German and anti-Vatican) focus and the [historic] relationship between the Czechs and the Slovaks'.³³ In other words, looking to the Soviets rather than Western Europe, and attacking the role of the Catholic Church – not too difficult a task considering the role Catholic clerics had played in the Nazi-oriented Republic of Slovakia.

Cyril and Methodius commemorations had been held in July 1945 at Devín Castle, which, following its annexation by the Third Reich in 1939, was again back in Czechoslovak territory. During the Second World War, the Slovak regime had also designated 5 July – the day of Cyril and Methodius – the celebration day of Slovaks Abroad. This was abandoned with the end of the war, although the Communists attempted to maintain a similar theme of Pan-Slavic Day (*Všeslovanský deň*) lending the day an international meaning that was favoured by the Communists and, of course, the Soviet Union. The official Cyril and Methodius commemorations of 1945, which were organised 'very rapidly' after the liberation of Slovakia, were still predominantly religious in vein, although the rhetoric and was to shift further to a Pan-Slavic one in the ensuing post-war years as the Communists extended their influence.³⁴

On 1 July 1945, *Pravda*, the Slovak communist paper, published an article inviting all its readers to attend the Pan-Slavic Day at Devín on 5 July, which had been organised by the communist National Front under the umbrella of the Slovak National Council. This was to thank the Red Army for returning Devín, and liberating the Slovak nation and Czechoslovak Republic from Nazi Germany. The Pan-Slavic Committee of Slovakia, which was to be

³³ Dušan Škvarna and Adam Hudek, *Cyril a Metod v historickom vedomí a pamäti 19. a 20. storičia na Slovensku* [Cyril and Methodius in the historical consciousness and memory of Slovakia in the 19th and 20th centuries], Bratislava: Historický ústav Slovenskej akadémie vied vo vydavateľstve Typoset Print, 2013, p. 106. [hereafter Škvarna and Hudek, *Cyril a Metod*]

³⁴ Gabriela Kiliánová, 'Komu patrí Devín? [To whom does Devín belong?]' in Eduard Krekovič, Elena Mannová and Eva Krekovičová (eds) *Mýty naše Slovenské*, Bratislava: Premedia, 2005, pp. 120-133, p. 129. [hereafter: Kiliánová, 'Komu patrí Devín?']

established in Bratislava on 4 July, with the participation of all the Slavic states of Europe, was also to be proclaimed at Devín on the fifth of the month.³⁵

Parallels were also drawn between Cyril and Methodius as defenders of the Slovaks against Germanic tribes and the liberation of the Red Army from Nazi German occupation.³⁶ 1947 saw the first clear signs of the Stalinisation of the events, when a collection of speeches, articles and photographs pertaining to Devín and to the commemoration were published with a cover depicting Stalin 'as the patron of Slavic friendship'.³⁷ Increasingly confident KSČ officials intensified their rhetoric during the commemorations, using the day to undermine their 'ideological enemies' within Slovakia.³⁸

Hungary

In Hungary, although the Communists did not enjoy the same levels of popularity as in Czechoslovakia, they still maintained a constant pressure in the coalition government, thanks to the influence of the Soviet Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, who oversaw the Communist take-over of Hungary. In this way, they managed to force through a number of laws (for example, the nationalisation of industry) and banned a number of civil and religious organisations. They were also busy shaping the new narratives of post-war Hungary. As in Czechoslovakia, the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP) were keen on appropriating previously established commemorative events, reconfiguring them to fit the Communist rhetoric, most importantly the tradition of the 1848 revolution. Additionally, they also attempted to introduce new national days: for example, and in contrast with Czechoslovakia, Liberation Day was included in the first national day law passed once Hungary had been completely liberated from Nazi control in April 1945.

This law was passed on 18 April 1945 by the Provisional National Assembly, headed by interim prime minister Béla Miklós Dálnoki. The provisional interim government largely consisted of the MKP, the Smallholders, Social Democrats and the Peasant Party, with the MKP having the largest share of seats. Moscow's influence loomed large, the Provisional National Assembly itself had even been established at the behest of Stalin. Thus, it is not surprising that the theme

³⁵ Gabriela Kiliánová, *Identität und Gedächtnis in der Slowakei: Der Burg Devín als Erinnerungsort*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011, p. 99.

³⁶ Škvárna and Hudek, *Cyril a Metod*, p. 99.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 100.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 101.

of a clear ‘revolutionary tradition’ is visible in the days that are named in the law: ‘15 March is a national [day], the Sunday following 4 April is the [celebration of our] liberation and 1 May is the celebration of work.’³⁹ It is also no surprise that 20 August, St Stephen’s Day, was not included in the law, even though the anniversary continued to be commemorated at this specific period. Since the Communists were not yet in complete control, and the Catholic Church was still powerful – with over ninety per cent of the population considering themselves religious and almost half attending Church regularly⁴⁰ – the Communists could not just yet cancel the religious celebrations altogether.

This omission was certainly due to the great influence of the MKP on the Provisional Government, and, more pertinently, of Moscow. Again, the view of the local communists was not wholly dismissive towards such traditional ‘bourgeois’ national commemorations with religious overtones. In his memoirs, Mátyás Rákosi, the Stalinist General Secretary of the Communist Party and subsequently premier of the People’s Republic of Hungary from 1945-1956, wrote of the 20 August commemorations of 1945. The Smallholders Party held their Congress in Budapest on 20 August that year, which Rákosi attended. After the conclusion of the Congress the members of the Smallholders Party went to watch the procession of the Holy Right of St Stephen together. Reflecting on the Communist attitude to the day, Rákosi wrote that ‘20 August, Stephen’s Day, until 1919 was purely Catholic, indeed it was not a national day. After 1919, however it was celebrated with greater and greater pomp, partly because the [Holy Right] procession led by the Archbishop of Esztergom [the primate of Hungary] was a kind of demonstration against the Protestant Horthy [...], partly a demonstration for the Empire of St Stephen [...], against Trianon.’⁴¹ Rákosi ignores the fact that before 1919 Hungary was not a coherently independent state and hence was not free to select its own national days, but he does not dismiss it as simply a pompous religious ceremony – indeed, it can be used as a day of protest, against Horthy and against Trianon.⁴²

³⁹ László Szücs (ed.) *Dálnoki Miklós Béla Kormányának (Ideiglenes Nemzeti Kormány) Minisztertanácsi Jegyzőkönyvei 1944. December 23.-1945. November 15. A kötet*, [Minutes of the Ministerial Council of Béla Miklós Dálnoki’s Government (Interim National Government)] Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár, 1997, p. 332.

⁴⁰ Peter Kenez, ‘The Hungarian Communist Party and the Catholic Church, 1945-1948’ in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 75, No. 4, 2003, pp. 864-889, pp. 865-866.

⁴¹ Mátyás Rákosi, *Visszaemlékezések, 1940-1956 I. kötet* [Recollections, Vol. I.] Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 1997, p. 201. [Hereafter: Rákosi, *Visszaemlékezések I.*]

⁴² This is a rather dubious claim, since Horthy actively took part in the Holy Right processions.

The procession that the Smallholders attended in 1945 almost did not happen, as the Holy Right, along with other Church relics and valuables (the Crown, coronation regalia and other insignia) were not in Hungary at the time, having been taken to Austria by the Crown Guard during the last days of Arrow Cross rule, for protection. After the war, US soldiers found the relics in Mattsee, near Salzburg. Árpád von Klimó, writing on the 20 August commemorations between 1945 and 1948, argues that ‘the US troops regarded the Holy Right as a purely religious object, which had been stolen by anti-religious villains.’⁴³ Even so, the Vatican and the Catholic Church in both Austria and in Hungary ‘pushed the Americans to restore the relic to Hungary before St Stephen’s Day’. The Holy Right was returned (but not the Crown, which would only be returned in 1978) just in time for the procession on the night of 19 August 1945. Rákosi claimed that the ‘unexpected’ arrival of ‘these bones, the so-called holy right’, but not the Crown was for one reason: ‘they [the Americans] are sure that in the future the holy crown will be put on the head of a creature who was chosen by America, and all of the Hungarian people will fall on their knees and acknowledge him as their king.’⁴⁴

Rákosi also believed that the return of the Holy Right – ‘with a special courier to Archbishop József Mindszenty to support his authority’ – was part of an American programme of agitation, and to shore up support for Mindszenty, the new Archbishop.⁴⁵ As von Klimó notes, what is interesting is not necessarily whether this was indeed the aim of the US officials, but that Rákosi and the Communists thought so, especially given that almost the whole membership of the Smallholders Party, the most important non-Communist party in Hungary at this time, attended the procession of the Holy Right in 1945.⁴⁶ In contrast, Rákosi succinctly states the communist view of the Holy Right: ‘we did not even think about this procession’.⁴⁷

In the next couple of years, until the complete Communist usurpation of government, the meaning they attributed to St Stephen’s Day was gradually changed. Whilst in 1946 the Communists were still cooperative with local representatives of the coalition parties, they had already started to organise their own separate popular performances and sporting events on this

⁴³ Árpád von Klimó, ‘The King’s Right Hand: A Hungarian National-Religious Holiday and the Conflict Between the Communist Party and the Catholic Church (1945-48)’ in Friedrich, Karin (ed.) *Festive Culture in Germany and Europe from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000, pp. 343-362, p. 345. [Hereafter Klimó, ‘The King’s Right Hand’]

⁴⁴ Rákosi, *Visszaemlékezések I*, p. 452.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 201.

⁴⁶ Klimó, ‘The King’s Right Hand’, p. 348.

⁴⁷ Rákosi, *Visszaemlékezések I*, p. 201.

day, revealing ‘the Communists’ idea of total inclusion of the whole society, especially the young.’⁴⁸ In 1947 the Communists intensified their campaign against the Catholic Church. In reply, the Church dedicated the year’s celebrations to the Virgin Mary, patron saint of Hungary. Because of the Virgin Mary dimension to the celebrations in 1947, ‘Actio Catolica [the organisers of the procession] won an exceptional permit from the Budapest police to hold the procession on Andrásy Boulevard and on Heroes’ Square’.⁴⁹ Árpád von Klimó argues that it was ‘surely the most successful anti-Catholic demonstration since 1945’ and that it may also have contributed to the lacklustre performance of the communists in the elections. The city authorities, under the control of Marshal Voroshilov, attempted to prevent further Catholic public events, perhaps also fearful of their popularity. In 1948, with the Communists now in full control of the government, the Holy Right procession was cancelled and the Communists introduced the day of the New Bread, celebrating the harvest on 20 August.

It is clear that the Communists had a particular aversion to St Stephen’s Day, which can be attributed to ideological reasons – St Stephen epitomised the Catholic, monarchist bourgeois tradition that they opposed. As a result, and in order to maintain a national element, they started to appropriate the revolutionary tradition of 15 March as early as 1946. In October a Communist member of the Budapest Council proposed that the 1948-49 commemorations of 15 March 1848 should be appropriately commemorated by naming the special hundred-year anniversary celebrations ‘Freedom-year’. By the next Council meeting, when the motion was accepted, this had been extended to ‘Freedom years’ so as to include 1849 as well.⁵⁰ The plans to commemorate 1848-49 took shape over the next two years, with a budget of two million forint allocated for the events in the 1947-48 budget.⁵¹ For the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the anti-Habsburg revolution a new national day law was passed to bring the 15 March commemorations more into line with the current rhetoric about peace and cooperation with other nations (of course, mostly with the Soviet Union and not the West). The law stated that:

The Parliament of the Hungarian Republic considers itself the heir and realiser of the democratic ideals of the 1848-49 revolution. We solemnly declare loyally to guard the great

⁴⁸ Klimó, ‘The King’s Right Hand’, p. 356.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 358.

⁵⁰ *Budapest Székesfőváros Törvényhatósági Bizottsága, 1946 október 16-iki közgyűlés* [General Meeting of the Municipal Council of Budapest, 16 October 1946], No. 509-517, p. 252 and *Budapest Székesfőváros Törvényhatósági Bizottsága*, No. 553-557, p. 269.

⁵¹ *Budapest Székesfőváros Törvényhatósági Bizottsága, 1947 július 25-iki közgyűlés*, No. 347-353, p. 172.

traditions and the spirit of 1848 and we will further develop it in the spirit of a consistent battle against all kinds of oppression and in a peaceful cooperation between the nations.⁵²

The Communists made a concerted effort to ensure that during the 15 March commemorations their interpretation of history and current events prevailed. The National Historical Memory Committee – active during the war in the resistance – published guidelines on how to appropriately commemorate the centenary. These instructed the Communists to link the present situation with 1848: ‘the commemoration should not simply be a retrospective, but the historical commemoration must be organically linked to the tasks of the nation today [...] [18]48 must be presented as the forerunner of the Hungarian people’s democracy’.⁵³ The guidelines further emphasised the need to highlight the meaning and achievements of 1848, such as the idea that the social empowerment of the working people is linked to national freedom and independence. Moreover, according to the example of 1848, the Hungarian people can only achieve victory if they first eliminate the traitors within their own body, while the great assistance of the Soviet Union must also be emphasised.

On 15 March 1948, the City Council held an assembly to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the events of 1848. Some of the key characteristics of the Communist era national day commemorations were already very much visible in the addresses given, perhaps most conspicuously the mixing of the historical with the current, connecting past historical events with developments in the present. The commemorative assembly was presided over by Árpád Szakasits, soon to be President of Hungary, who in his opening speech claimed that 15 March is perhaps the only historical event in the 1000-year history of Hungary that is so ‘deeply ingrained in the soul of the nation’ and that it had not been co-opted or tarnished in any way.⁵⁴ In his speech Szakasits elaborated on why and what the Hungarian people, and among them the people of Budapest, had fought for in 1848 and what the result of this struggle was for the Hungarians today. A hundred years before, the people of Pest had fought for freedom and implanted the yearning for it in the Hungarian people. It turned out to be the task of ‘our generation’ to fulfil this yearning. The workers of Pest, the Hungarian workers, were worthy

⁵² ‘1948. évi XXIII. törvény az 1848/49. évi forradalom és szabadságharc emlékének megőrkítéséről [Law No. XXIII. of 1948 regarding the memorialisation of the 1848-49 revolution and freedom fight] at <http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3¶m=8305> [accessed 10 April 2014].

⁵³ ‘Irányelvek a centenárius megünneplésére. Kidolgozta a történelmi emlékbizottság’ [Directives to the commemoration of the centenary. Developed by the historical memorial committee.] BFL XVII.1. 261/48 at http://bfl.archivportal.hu/virtkiall_archive/pestbuda184849/iratok/8/48ir8_13.html [accessed 1 April 2014].

⁵⁴ *Budapest Székesfőváros Törvényhatósági Bizottsága 1948 március 15-én tartott rendkívüli díszközgyűlésének jegyzőkönyve*, No. 347-353, 2. o.

of the heroic deeds and self-sacrifice of the March youth, when in the winter of 1945 in snow and freezing conditions, hungry and in rags, instead of wailing, they started to build the city and the nation.’⁵⁵ Further reflecting on the achievements of Hungary and Budapest, Szakasits added that ‘[t]his commemoration would not be complete, if I did not say thank you again on behalf of our city’ to the Soviet army and the ‘first honorary citizen of our city, general Stalin’. He continued: ‘[w]e have him to thank in the very first place for being able to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the Hungarian freedom fight in a free country, in our free capital, in the free possession of our national freedom.’⁵⁶

Other speeches also addressed the debates surrounding the meaning of 15 March and located it in the new rhetoric of revolutionary traditions and with anti-fascist/anti-German elements. József Bognár, the mayor of Budapest – somewhat contradicting Szakasits’ claim that 15 March had not been co-opted and tarnished – in his address asked the question of what 1848-49 actually was: ‘an anti-German independence fight, a bourgeois revolution or an uprising of the nobility?’⁵⁷ He answered his own question, faithful to the interpretations of Hungarian Communist historiography: ‘Today, from the distance and experience of a hundred years, we know that 15 March started off as a pure people’s revolution against the feudal system and against the Austrian ruling dynasty, the then shape of German imperialism.’⁵⁸ But it failed because of ‘the internal accomplices’, members of parliament who wanted peace at all costs and the hostile European environment. However, these lessons had to be learnt, and today the Hungarian people would not make the mistake of the Compromise. Even so, he continued, today, the historical situation is different and the ideals of 1848-49 have become a reality, since now the Hungarian nation is not fighting alone, but together with the liberating Soviet Union.⁵⁹

Szakasits’ and Bognár’s speeches deliberately laid out the new historical narrative for Hungary, to be exemplified through the national day calendar: 20 August and its bourgeois trappings were side-lined; 15 March, a true expression of the uprising Hungarian workers, was now the historical starting point for modern Hungary (although, the nation was still 1000 years old, its origins now somewhat obscured). The culmination of Hungarian history and the Hungarian people’s historical fight for freedom was the post-war arrangements after 1945, which had only

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 3.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 4.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 4.

been made possible through the Soviet Union, in particular through Stalin. Yet, even this historical calendar was to be abandoned by the early 1950s, given that, in practice, 15 March



Figure 6: 15 March commemoration in 1947 on Kossuth square, in front of Parliament. The large portrait in the centre is of Sándor Petőfi. Source: Fortepan/ Berkő Pál

offered too much opportunity for real protest and a more Soviet-oriented national day calendar was to be put in place.

In the brief period immediately after the war and until the complete Communist takeover of the state in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, an attempt was made by the broader political forces in both countries simply to revert back to the earlier, interwar national days. The communists, who were becoming increasingly more assertive, were in many cases satisfied to continue with these interwar commemorations as well as to attempt to rewrite their meaning so as to give it a more Marxist historical interpretation. Yet, once the Communists were fully in power, this seeming continuity with some aspects of the interwar state were abandoned in favour of Soviet-themed commemorations, such as liberation days.

National days from 1948-1956

The Communists started to manoeuvre into complete power in Czechoslovakia and Hungary in 1947 and 1948 respectively. In Czechoslovakia, the Communists were attempting to

monopolise power and rid the government of non-Communist elements. As a result of these Communist machinations, on 20 February 1948 twelve non-Communist ministers handed in their resignations, one short of the number needed to bring down the government. On 25 February, the day that was known during the Communist era as ‘Victorious February’, Prime Minister Klement Gottwald announced that President Beneš had accepted the resignation of the ministers and asked him to form a new government, with a Communist majority. With this the Communist take-over of Czechoslovakia was completed, and the new national historical narrative of Czechoslovakia was fulfilled; the struggle of the Czech and Slovak people was over.

In Hungary, Rákosi’s ‘salami tactics’ – slowly slicing away at the other parties – were in full force in 1947. The elections held that year were manipulated by the Communists in the infamous ‘blue-ballot’ elections and many of the right-wing parties were made illegal through parliamentary decrees declaring them fascist, thus undermining the opposition.⁶⁰ Although these ploys were enough to win the elections, the MKP only received 22 per cent of the vote. After this dismal result, the Communists changed tactics. They eschewed all the democratic facades that the party still put up, and in June 1948 forced the Social Democrats to merge with them, to create a ‘new’ party: the Hungarian Workers’ Party (*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja*, MDP). In the spring of 1949 new elections were held, where the votes could basically only be cast for candidates from the Hungarian Independent People’s Front, led by the Hungarian Workers’ Party. The salami was finally fully sliced.

After the complete take-overs of the Communist parties in both Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the new regimes soon consolidate their power through legislation. A significant role in consolidating and legitimating their position was played by a new historical narrative that could be powerfully and visibly expressed through a national day calendar, much of which was Soviet-inspired. Thus, to fully understand the context of where these processes and new narrative structures originated, we must first understand how the Bolsheviks transformed an Imperial Russian narrative into a Soviet one.

From Imperial to Bolshevik national days

The Bolsheviks were aware — from the very beginning of the October Revolution — of the importance of establishing their own celebratory/commemorative cycle. On 24 January 1918 they replaced the Julian calendar with the Gregorian, thus signalling the first ‘clear break with the past.’⁶¹ This was soon followed by the establishment of the so-called Red Calendar in February 1918, with, as Malte Rolf writes in his study of Soviet mass festivals, the ‘dual aim of ousting the holidays connected with the old regime and social order and of building a new Soviet culture.’⁶² Although, the Red Calendar was not yet completely fixed — for example, Lenin Day was added in 1924 and Victory Day in 1945 — most of the national day commemorations associated with the Soviet Union had been established by this time. The national days followed a hierarchical structure comprised of three levels — similar to the one that was also to be introduced in the countries of the Eastern bloc. National days that belonged to the first tier were officially days off work, and thus were considered the most important commemorative days. Rolf describes how in 1929 three national days were afforded this prestige: 1 May; the anniversary of the October Revolution; and Lenin’s death. The second tier included days that were not holidays, such as: ‘the Anniversary of the Revolution of 1905, the Day of the Constitution, International Women’s Day, Red army Day and the Day of Harvest and Collectives.’ The third tier included days that were more general in their themes, such as Bird Day or Forest Day.⁶³ Even so, some of these commemorative days had already existed before the Revolution, most recognisably May Day, which was the traditional celebration day of the labour movement. Beyond national days, other symbols that were established soon after the October Revolution included the hammer and sickle, the red star, the red flag and the new anthem, the Internationale.⁶⁴

Even though the Red Calendar provided the framework for what was celebrated, the narratives of these events shifted from the internationalism of the 1920s to ‘a patriotic Soviet rhetoric’ in the 1930s.⁶⁵ Karen Petrone notes that this new rhetoric did not simply make the celebrations more Soviet-focused, but it also offered guidelines for the new Soviet citizens in terms of ‘their

⁶¹ Rolf Malte, *Soviet Mass Festivals, 1917-1991*, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, [trans. Cynthia Klohr] 2013, p. 73. [hereafter: Rolf, *Soviet Mass Festivals*]

⁶² Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Rituals in industrial society – the Soviet case*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 154. [hereafter: Lane, *The Rites of Rulers*]

⁶³ Rolf, *Soviet Mass Festivals*, p. 74.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 31.

⁶⁵ Karen Petrone, *Life has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000, p. 4. [hereafter Petrone, *Life has Become More Joyous*]

social locations in the newly forming hierarchies’, enabling them to ‘assert their social status in relation to those around them.’ Moreover, these celebrations also enabled them to compete ‘to gain particular types of social status’. This was especially evident during the main commemorations of 1 May and 7 November (the anniversary of the October Revolution), which served as ‘yearly “report cards” in which production achievements determined the precedence among the marchers.’⁶⁶ Thus, the further a worker was from the beginning of the march, the less they had achieved at work, and the less social status they enjoyed. Furthermore, with the political changes embodied in the First Five Year Plan (1928-1933), these national festivities became the main points of entertainment, albeit sanctioned ones.⁶⁷ This commemorative-style ‘remained the signature image of the Soviet Union and a hallmark of Soviet civic life until 1991.’⁶⁸

The way in which the Bolsheviks tried to achieve their aims also affected the anatomy of the commemorations and the use of urban space. One of the most enduring images of the commemorations is the tanks and other military equipment rolling down large avenues in the Soviet Union and throughout the countries of the Eastern bloc. The military aspect of the commemoration started on May Day 1921, from when ‘detachments of the various divisions of the Armed Forces headed the demonstration, displaying the latest weapons and other equipment.’⁶⁹ Apart from the presence of the armed forces, the commemorations followed the model of mass meetings: ‘On major holidays local mass meetings occurred on the eve of the holiday and were followed on the holiday proper by demonstrations.’ These demonstrations, Petrone observes, were ‘a special kind of mass meeting in which the entire city or town’s enterprises and military garrisons gathered together for a parade.’ These parades were then ‘reviewed [...] by the highest-ranking Party, government, and military officials of the locality, who stood together on an elevated tribune.’⁷⁰ Naturally, the largest parade took place on Red Square in Moscow, in front of the leaders of the Party, government and the military. After appropriating time — with the establishment of the Gregorian calendar and the new festival calendar — the next target was the appropriation of the urban space. The most conspicuous examples of this urban transformation – beyond the ‘choreography’ of the commemorative

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 29.

⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 5-6.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 208.

⁶⁹ Lane, *The Rites of Rulers*, p. 156.

⁷⁰ Petrone, *Life has Become More Joyous*, p. 15.

festivals – were the erection and destruction of statues and monuments, the transformation of Red Square, and the building of the Lenin Mausoleum.⁷¹

These Soviet commemorative events were more than festive occasions, where the new Soviet citizens could have fun, and then go home. They were the vehicles through which the new regime could spread the new political, cultural and social order. Malte Rolf describes these events as ‘a huge artefact’: ‘The Soviet celebration was a synthetic and comprehensive work of art: it consisted of many planning and post-processing activities and subsequent representation in the media’.⁷² The festivities and their messages were disseminated in the media, pictures were published in the newspapers, thus creating publicity and visibility for these events. They were also the vehicles through which the masses were re-educated, socially and culturally controlled, through which the political objectives of the Party were publicised and the regime’s politics were showcased.⁷³ These aspects will also be crucial when we examine the strategies the Communist regimes employed in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, especially after 1948.

The Communist national day calendars of Hungary and Czechoslovakia (and in other countries of the Eastern bloc) followed this model, although applied it with local adaptations. The Feast of Work on 1 May (pre-existing in both countries,⁷⁴ as in pre-Soviet Russia) became the most important national day, along with either the anniversary of the Great October Revolution or Liberation Day. The three-level hierarchical structure to national days was also adopted; in Czechoslovakia, for example, there were national days, significant days, and memorable days. In Hungary, there was a state holiday, national days and non-school days. National day commemorations in the Eastern bloc countries mirrored those that took place in the Soviet Union: they took on the appearance of mass festivals and meetings, with military parades, and a new appropriation of urban space.

⁷¹ See for example: Rolf, *Soviet Mass Festivals*, p. 78.

⁷² Ibid. pp. 64-65.

⁷³ See Lane, *The Rites of Rulers*, p. 25; Petrone, *Life has Become More Joyous*, p. 7; Rolf, *Soviet Mass Festivals*, p. 1 and p. 3.

⁷⁴ Even though 1 May had been banned under Horthy.

Establishing the new commemorative calendars: ruptures and continuities

After the Communists took power in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, they sought not simply to entrench their control but to transform all sectors of economic, social, cultural, public (and often private) life, with the official goal of building socialism. In his study of symbols and regime change in Soviet Russia, Graeme Gill analyses the creation of a 'civilisation' of the Soviet Union under Stalin. This was founded upon 'building the communist future and creating an alternative and superior modernity to that prevailing in the capitalist West'. Such a notion of civilisation operated upon 'three levels: ideology, metanarrative and myth'.⁷⁵ Ideology can be understood as an 'action programme' and 'the basic philosophical foundation for the regime', with its own philosophy of history and the civilisation's place in it. In the Communist bloc, this ideology was Marxism-Leninism.

For this complex ideology to be understood and operate on a day-to-day basis it needs a metanarrative, a 'body of discourse which presents a simplified form of the ideology'. The metanarrative involves 'the symbolic construction of the society and the projection of a conception of society that explains both current reality and future trajectory'. It helps to explain the direction in which society is going and what its goals are, in a way that is more connected to people's lives. Moreover, 'It is the meanings contained in the discourse of the metanarrative that give substance to the regime's rituals.' The metanarrative that we can trace in the cases of Communist Hungary and Czechoslovakia was centuries of oppression by kings/feudalism/the bourgeoisie/foreign powers, failed but commendable indigenous revolutionary struggles, with final liberation thanks to Stalin and/or the Soviet Union, with society now working towards the building of socialism. This one specific metanarrative structured the national day calendars of Hungary and Czechoslovakia during the Communist period. Each national day, regardless of its general content or the particular event commemorated, was now oriented to praising the Soviet Union and eulogising the socialist present and even greater anticipated future. Metanarrative differs the term 'narrative' as used in this thesis, as it is not a simple explanatory story based on the national past that can be subject to continuous revision, but provides an overarching theme and trajectory. In Gill's schema, the metanarrative is sustained by myth, which 'provides a narrative structure and a coherence to the history of the community'.⁷⁶ The

⁷⁵ Graeme Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy in Soviet Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 2. [hereafter: Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy*]

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

events commemorated by national days were such myths in Communist Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

Gill underlines the importance of symbols to ‘the functioning of all three levels of discourse – ideology, metanarrative and myth’. They offer a simplification of complex ideas and help to identify group identity. More specifically, as regards the metanarrative, the ‘backbone of the reconstruction of culture that revolutionary regimes seek to bring about’, there were four major types of symbols that were central to the Soviet case: language, the visual arts, physical environment (including spatial configuration), and ritual.⁷⁷ Gill defines rituals as ‘collective performances’ that ‘follow standardised sequences, and occur at certain places and times that may themselves have symbolic significance’, such as anniversaries. Rituals give individuals a sense of continuity and integration into a social whole and ‘can be a mechanism for the continual affirmation and updating of the myth through the actions of the believers’.⁷⁸ In our case, it is the national day commemorations themselves that are such rituals.

Gill’s analytical frame is appropriate not only to the Soviet Union, but also to those states under its influence. In these cases, however, there was an added complexity: although the ruling elite may have shared the socialist ideology, the metanarratives and myths – and, hence, symbols and rituals – through which they were to articulate and implement the ideology were partially imposed from abroad, from the Soviet Union. The metanarrative in Hungary and Czechoslovakia was not one of indigenous revolution, but a liberation by the Soviets. The trajectory of this metanarrative, and its myths and rituals, was to build socialism with the aid of and modelled on the Soviet Union. As a result, there was always to be an incongruence at best, if not conflict, between a national historical narrative that prioritised the nation and its history and the metanarrative of Soviet overlordship.

National days were one of the most potent rituals through which the metanarrative could be represented. Unsurprisingly then, national day laws were enacted in the first few years of Communist rule, ensuring that the new historical narratives of these nations, which swept away those of the interwar period, reached the widest audience possible. More pertinently, the metanarrative of Soviet liberation and support towards a socialist future was central. The new

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

national day calendars thus prioritised Soviet-inspired commemorations and were embedded in a rhetoric that sacralised Stalin.

In Czechoslovakia the complete overhaul of the national day calendar came in November 1951. This is an interesting date, as it just missed 28 October and the fundamental changes to this day had to wait for the following year to be implemented. November 1951 was also the month when Rudolf Šlanský, who was close to Gottwald and had recently been removed from the position of general secretary of the KSČ, was arrested, to be put on a show trial the next year for Trotskyite, Titoist and Zionist activities and being in the service of the United States of America, along with thirteen others, all of whom were executed. The trial was at the behest of Stalin, who believed that ‘American special services had covertly attempted to arrange the defection of Slansky’.⁷⁹ Gottwald may thus have been concerned to prove his loyalty to Stalin and the Soviet Union, and a new national day law, where the rhetoric was centred even more on the building of socialism and the essentialness of the Soviet Union for the existence of Czechoslovakia.

The new law established 9 May, Liberation Day, as the state holiday [*státní svátek*], whilst 1 May and 28 October — now officially referred to as Nationalisation Day [*Den znárodnění*] — were established as public holidays [*dny pracovního klidu*] along with 1 January, Easter Monday and 25 and 26 December.⁸⁰ Two other categories were also established in this law: significant [*významné dny*] and memorable days [*památné dny*]. Significant days included: 25 February, Victorious February; 29 August, the Slovak National Uprising in 1945; and 7 November, the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. The memorable days included: 5 July, commemorating Cyril and Methodius and 6 July, commemorating Jan Hus. Significant days and memorable days were not public holidays and the distinction between them is vague, although significant days pertain to recent Soviet-related events, while memorable events are more national and historical.

⁷⁹ Igor Lukes, ‘Rudolf Slansky: His Trials and Trial’ in *Cold War International History Project: Working Paper #50*, 7 July 2011, at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/WP50IL.pdf>, p. 2. [last accessed 12 January 2016]

⁸⁰ ‘93. Zákon ze dne 2. listopadu 1951 o státním svátku, o dnech pracovního klidu a o památných a významných dnech’ [Law No. 93 of 2 November 1951 regarding national days, public holidays and memorable and significant days] in *Sbírka zákonů republiky Československé*, V Praze: Státní tiskarna, n. p. 01, 1951, pp. 250-251, p. 250.

The national day law was put forward by a member of the Assembly from Kladno, Zdeněk Vácha.⁸¹ A justification was given for the most important dates in the calendar, couched in the new historical rhetoric. Vácha proclaimed that national day commemorations were ‘always and everywhere the expression and external indicator of the sentiments of the ruling classes of the state and an expression towards the world about the nature of the system.’⁸² This is the case with the Communist national day law as well, which offered a synthesis of national and class-oriented narratives, or, as Vácha put it, the new law is ‘a significant modification, affecting the entirety of our public life, the old traditions of our nation, and the interest of the broad layer of workers.’

The anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution – 7 November – was only a significant day in Czechoslovakia, whereas in Hungary it was a state holiday. Even so, it proved to be – at least for the Communists – the root of all Czechoslovak achievements. The Revolution, Vácha purported, did not only liberate ‘the working class and the broad masses of the workers of Russia’ and it was not only the Soviet Union that benefited from the achievements of 7 November, but also those ‘in other people’s democracies in Europe: Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria’ who had been ‘liberated by the Red Army from the German yoke and Italian fascism.’⁸³

7 November, however, had not only helped to liberate these countries, but in the case of Czechoslovakia it also enabled its existence, since ‘without [the Revolution] at the end of the First World War, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire would not have happened and nor the creation of an independent Czechoslovak state.’ Even so, the independent Czechoslovak state did not fulfil its promise, as, according to Vácha, the bourgeois Czech elite hijacked ‘the day [28 October] for which our people fought, which had promised so much, but eventually throughout the long period between the two world wars gave so little.’ Thus, as a result of the apparent failure on the part of the Czech interwar elite, who could not adequately interpret the importance of 28 October, a new day needed to be found that would deliver on the promises that were not kept after 28 October 1918. This new day became 9 May, Liberation

⁸¹ Vácha was a member of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party, part of the National Front.

⁸² Zpráva výboru ústavně-právního k vládnímu návrhu zákona o státním svátku, o dnech pracovního klidu a o památných a významných dnech (tisk 589) [Report of the Constitutional Law Committee on government proposal regarding national days, public holidays and on memorable and significant days], Session 59, 2 November 1951, at <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1948ns/stenprot/059schuz/s059006.htm> [accessed 5 January 2016]

⁸³ Ibid.

Day, the day ‘with which the Soviet Union returned to our people not only our independence and set us free from fascist oppression, but also enabled us to form a people’s democracy, secured our real government in our territory, removed exploitation, the exploiting class and its helpers and secured the building of socialism.’ Vácha reminded the National Assembly that the Communists had attempted to include 9 May in the 1946 national day law either as a state holiday or a memorable day, but the bourgeois members of the National Front and a letter from President Beneš — who favoured 5 May, the anniversary of the Prague Uprising — torpedoed their initiative.⁸⁴

In Hungary, beyond the 15 March commemorations, the Hungarian Communists, unlike their Czechoslovak counterparts, passed a number of individual decrees to revise the national day calendar. The first law that the Communists passed, in 1948, was regarding 1848-49. The second flurry of changes came in 1950, once the Communists were firmly established in power. 20 August, which had previously commemorated St Stephen and the foundation of the Hungarian state, now became Constitution Day, honouring the new Stalinist Constitution that was passed in 1949. The law stated:

The Constitution expresses and ascertains the result of those fundamental economic and societal changes that have been achieved by our nation since its liberation by the armed forces of the great Soviet Union, and the Constitution also designates the way forward for our future development on our way to socialism.⁸⁵

Thus, all references to St Stephen and the 1000-year old Hungarian state (in contrast with Szakasit’s 1948 speech discussed above) were eliminated from the commemorative narrative. This step is not surprising, and St Wenceslas was also eliminated from the Czechoslovak national day calendar. Especially in the early 1950s, with the radical changes in the nation’s historical narrative and its historiography, accommodating medieval saints into the general revolutionary narrative proved to be challenging, although Cyril and Methodius were granted such status on the basis of their pan-Slavic character. Wenceslas and Stephen had both proven useful in the post-1918 competition to establish nation-states out of the remnants of the Habsburg empire, as they enabled these new states to claim millennium-old antecedents and, hence, solid foundations for support in the present. The new Soviet model, however, required

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ 1950. évi I. számú törvényerejű rendelet augusztus 20. napjának a Népköztársaság ünnepévé nyilvánításáról [Legislative Decree No. 1 of 1950 regarding the establishment of 20 August as a celebration of the People’s Republic] at <http://www.rev.hu/sulinet45/szerviz/dokument/1950.evi7.htm> [accessed 17 March 2014].

that these states look forward to a golden era to come, not a bourgeois-aristocratic golden era of the past.

A more suitable founding myth for the ideology of the socialist countries was Liberation Day, when the new future was made possible on a national level, and the Great October Socialist Revolution, when the path to this new future was first opened. Both days were commemorated as national days in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and the rest of the Eastern bloc. The decree establishing Liberation Day in Hungary stated that:

4 April 1945 is the most decisive turn in the thousand-year, struggle-rich history of the Hungarian people, on which the glorious Soviet army drove out the German fascists and the last of their [Nazi-allied] Hungarian hordes from the territory of our country, liberating [...] our country from the foreign imperialist occupation and oppression, opened the way to the establishment of the true independence of our country, created the possibility for a union of the working class and the working peasantry, for the fight for the people's democracy, the building of socialism.⁸⁶

In the last paragraph, it was stated that 4 April is the greatest national day of the Hungarian nation, and 'an inextricable day of Soviet-Hungarian friendship.'

The commemoration in a Hungarian context of the Great October Socialist Revolution focused on its achievements, although Hungary's existence, unlike that of Czechoslovakia, was not contingent upon the Revolution. The Hungarian decree calls the Revolution 'a world historical turning point', which established the Soviet Union, 'the first nation, which made the equality of nations the basis of its international relationships, honouring national sovereignty, and the protection of peace.'⁸⁷ The Great October Socialist Revolution was a day of celebration for the Hungarian people as, thanks to the Revolution, all kinds of exploitation had ended and the working people liberated. Furthermore, '[t]he day of 7 November is a day of gratitude towards the victorious socialism, the solidarity of the working nations, the liberating Soviet Union and the great Stalin.' Thus, 7 November became the state holiday [*állami ünnep*] of the Hungarian People's Republic. Again, we see that in this new historical and commemorative narrative, fulfilment of liberation and the Hungarians' historical mission could not have been achieved

⁸⁶ 1950. évi 10. számú törvényerejű rendelet április 4-ének Magyarország felszabadulása napjának nemzeti ünnepé nyilvánításáról [Legislative Decree No. 10 of 1950 regarding the establishment of 4 April, the liberation day of Hungary, as a national day] at <http://www.rev.hu/sulinet45/szerviz/dokument/1950.evi6.htm> [accessed 17 March 2014].

⁸⁷ 1950. évi 37. számú törvényerejű rendelet november 7. napjának, a Nagy Októberi Szocialista Forradalom évfordulójának állami ünnepé nyilvánításáról [Legislative Decree No. 37 of 1950 regarding the establishment of 7 November, the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, as a state day] at <http://www.rev.hu/sulinet45/szerviz/dokument/1950.evi3.htm> [accessed 17 March 2014].

without the Soviets. The anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution was not simply a day to be commemorated in Hungary – it was the most important day in the state calendar, displacing 20 August. This was at least in terms of the law passed: as will be shown below, the actual commemoration of the day was a rather muted affair.

Continuities?

Nonetheless, these national day laws and decrees did not replace all the previously existing national day commemorations, and some interwar days were maintained by the Communists: Jan Hus Day (albeit as a memorial day), Cyril and Methodius Day, and 15 March.⁸⁸ Yet, even though the same event or individuals were commemorated, the actual content of these days was radically rewritten. In the historiography, we can observe a relative continuation of the national traditions, although the general narratives in which they were couched have undergone a radical transformation. As Maciej Górny argues in the case of Czechoslovakia, thanks to the chief Party ideologist and president of the newly established Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences Zdeněk Nejedlý, ‘the new Communist interpretation of national culture [...] became much closer to Palacký’s or Masaryk’s ideas than it was before 1929.’⁸⁹

Nonetheless, the narrative changes were far too radical to be able to talk about complete continuities, and to dismiss the significant discontinuities between the present and the past. Górny demonstrates the continuity of traditions through the example of how the Communists adopted Hus and the Hussite movement. For Palacký and for the Communists ‘the Hussite movement is essential as the central, most splendid and important tradition of national history.’⁹⁰ Even so, the narrative surrounding Hus and the Hussites in the interwar period, following Palacký, was about the ‘golden age’, whereas in the Communist historiography Hus had become a fighter against ‘feudal oppression’, the Church and a revolutionary.⁹¹ Indeed, it could be argued that for the Communists, the ‘golden age’ was now, or was currently being ushered in; placing Hus as an antecedent enables the presentation of current developments as the eventual culmination of the Czech people’s national history, and the Communists as the

⁸⁸ The dates of 20 August and 28 October were maintained but their content completely changes, abandoning St Stephen and the foundation of Czechoslovakia all together.

⁸⁹ Maciej Górny, ‘Past in the Future. National Tradition and Czechoslovak Marxist Historiography’ in *European Review of History: Revue européenne d’histoire*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 103-114, pp. 108-109.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 112.

⁹¹ See for example in: *Přehled Československých Dějin, Díl I. Do roku 1848* [Outline of Czechoslovak History, Vol I, Until the year 1848], Prague: Nakladatelství Československé Akademie Věd, 1958, p. 176.

fulfillers of the national struggle. Moreover, to embed the Hussites and Hus even deeper into the revolutionary tradition that underpinned the Communist narrative, the Communists placed the radical Táborite General Jan Žižka in the forefront. Therefore, while there was a continuation of historical traditions, the narrative structure and meanings that accompanied these traditions shifted radically.⁹²

A more radical discontinuity with the previous narratives is visible in the commemoration of 28 October, which in the interwar period represented the establishment of the independent Czechoslovak Republic, but after 1945 — and officially with the 1951 law — represented the nationalisation of industry. The Preface to the third and final volume of *Přehled Československých Dějin, 1918-1945* states that: ‘The Marxist processing of Czechoslovak history in the years 1918-1945 provides solutions to some of the most fundamental questions of our national history.’⁹³

Přehled was intended as a monumental work of prescriptive national history, a collective effort put together by the new Czechoslovak Historical Institute of the Academy of Sciences. *Přehled* eventually consisted of three volumes that appeared between 1958 and 1960, but as a result of the lengthy preparations and the changing political climate of the second half of the 1950s they were already out-dated by the time they appeared.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, these three volumes shaped Marxist historical writing throughout the Communist era in Czechoslovakia and *Přehled* is thus a fruitful resource to gain an understanding of how the Czechoslovak Communists perceived and reinterpreted national history. Similarly to Vácha in his assembly speech during the passing of the national day law, in the *Přehled* the authors argue that 1918 was a missed opportunity as ‘thanks to the immediate response of the revolutionary national liberation movement of the Czech and Slovak people to the victorious Great October Socialist Revolution’ the independent Czechoslovak Republic was founded. Even so, ‘after the defeat of the working class in the post-war years it became a capitalist republic.’ This was only overcome ‘after many years of heroic struggle’ in May 1945 and February 1948 when ‘a new

⁹² For a discussion on continuities and ruptures in Communist historiography, see: Pavel Kolář, ‘Rewriting National History in Post-War Central Europe: Marxist Syntheses of Austrian and Czechoslovak History as New National Master Narratives’ in Berger, Stefan and Chris Lorenz (eds) *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 319-340, especially p. 328. [hereafter: Kolář, ‘Rewriting National History in Post-War Central Europe’]

⁹³ *Přehled Československých Dějin, Díl III. 1918-1945* [Outline of Czechoslovak History, Vol. III, 1918-1945], Prague: Nakladatelství Československé Akademie Věd, 1960, p. 7. [hereafter: *Přehled, Díl III*]

⁹⁴ Kolář, ‘Rewriting National History in Post-War Central Europe’ p. 328. For the history of how the *Přehled Československých Dějin* came about, see pp. 327-328.

era of Czechoslovak history, the era of building a socialist society' started in the country.⁹⁵ Thus, in the official new historical narrative 28 October was replaced by the liberation and Victorious February were new dates of importance along the stages to a socialist future.

A similar historical narrative to that presented in the *Přehled* was developed in Hungary too. Aladár Mód's *400 év küzdelem az önálló Magyarországért* offers the most complete and 'authoritative interpretation of modern Hungarian history from the point of view of the Communist party'.⁹⁶ Mód joined the illegally-operating Communist party in 1932 and was a regular contributor to the left-wing press. He took an active part in the anti-German demonstration of 15 March 1942, after which he had to flee Budapest for a few months.⁹⁷ *400 év* was first published in 1943, after which he was again sought by the authorities: 'On the day after publication because of my part in the independence movement and on charges of disloyalty I was arrested.'⁹⁸ A second extended edition of *400 év* was published in 1945, which, significantly, now included the liberation of Hungary by the Red Army as the end of the struggle for freedom.⁹⁹

The first five editions of Mód's book are structured around the struggle of the Hungarian people against the Habsburgs and their allies, arranging the chapters around the key dates of the struggle, starting in 1514 and the peasant revolts of György Dózsa before the defeat at the Battle of Mohács, which resulted in the partition of Hungary between the Ottoman Empire, the Habsburg Empire and the Principality of Transylvania. As Mód put it in the preface to the second edition: 'The last 400 years of Hungarian history were filled with the fight against German oppression, [against] Austrian colonial dependency.'¹⁰⁰ Thus, as in the Czechoslovak case, Hungarian Communist historical writing both distanced itself from the past – the

⁹⁵ *Přehled, Díl III.* p. 7. and also see p. 9.

⁹⁶ Apor, *Fabricating Authenticity*, p. 29.

⁹⁷ 'Mód Aladár' in *Múlt-kor*, 20 December 2011 at http://mult-kor.hu/20111220_mod_aladar [last accessed 16 September 2015]

⁹⁸ Aladár Mód, *400 év küzdelem az önálló Magyarországért* [400 years of struggle for independent Hungary], Budapest: Szikra Kiadás, 1948, 5th edition, pp. 6-7. [hereafter: Mód, *400 év*]

⁹⁹ Zoltán Oszkár Szóts, 'Mód Aladár és a "400 év küzdelem" mítosza' [Aladár Mód and the myth of the "400 years-struggle"] in *Újkor.hu* at http://ujkor.hu/portre/mod_aladar [last accessed: 16 September 2015] Further editions were also published in 1947 and 1948 with slight changes. The sixth edition of the book came out in 1951. This edition was very much changed from the previous editions, with the focus shifting to Hungarian history after the 1867 Compromise. The post-1945 era was painted as years of success and Mátyás Rákosi was hailed for his achievements. The bibliography was also extended to include key works of Marxism-Leninism.

¹⁰⁰ Mód, *400 év*, p. 6.

Habsburgs, the Nazis, the interwar period – while at the same time also embracing its revolutionary traditions.

Since Mód's book was structured around the struggle for freedom, 15 March and 1848-49 were important elements in it. In Mód's interpretation, during the 1848-49 revolution the key role was played by the poet of the revolution Sándor Petőfi and the peasantry, alongside Lajos Kossuth and Mihály Táncsics, i.e. the more radical faction of the Hungarian revolutionaries.¹⁰¹ *400 év* also concluded that the revolution failed because at the time Hungary lacked 'a wider industrial working class and an urban middle class'.¹⁰² Therefore, whilst 'Petőfi, Táncsics and the March Youths could clearly see what was required for the freedom fight, they could not carry through with their politics, because the united and organised action of the awakened masses was missing from behind them'.¹⁰³ It was not until the interwar period that the industrial workers realised that their livelihood was threatened by the regime's 'foreign-spirited pursuits' and started to organise.¹⁰⁴ After this realisation – according to Mód – they made their goal the establishment of an independent and democratic Hungary, following in the footsteps of 'Petőfi, Táncsics and Kossuth'.¹⁰⁵ However because of the betrayal of the Arrow Cross and because of German imperialist ambitions, the working classes of Hungary could not liberate themselves, but they needed the help of the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁶

After 1948 the metanarratives, in Graham Gill's term, of now firmly Communist Hungary and Czechoslovakia were to be radically rewritten and oriented around a story of salvation by the Soviets and the march towards socialism. Nonetheless, the model of patriotic communism that Communist theoreticians in Hungary and Czechoslovakia applied in the early post-war years enabled them to showcase the 'revolutionary' traditions of their respective nations. This meant that certain interwar commemorations – such as Jan Hus Day or 15 March – could be maintained, albeit in a revised form, lending an element of continuity to the national day calendars and cultural symbolism. This superficial continuity would, however, break down in the later 1950s, as will be seen in the following chapter, and commemorations of the national revolutionary traditions came to be seen, since they provided opportunities for protest, as potential threats to the regime. In the following section, the 'non-revolutionary'

¹⁰¹ Ibid. pp. 100-101, pp. 103-104.

¹⁰² Ibid. p. 109.

¹⁰³ Ibid. pp. 109-110.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 202.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

commemorations of the interwar period and their fates under the new Communist regimes are examined.

Medieval saints and martyrs

The new Communist national day calendars in both Czechoslovakia and in Hungary were oriented around Soviet-themed/inspired commemorations with a nod to national revolutionary traditions, albeit now downgraded to memorable days, rather than full holidays. What, however, had happened to the other interwar commemorations, in honour of medieval saints? Medieval saints' days represented a worldview that was completely the opposite of that of the Communists. It is no surprise, therefore, that in the new national day hierarchy they were largely ignored. As Mátyás Rákosi, said of the St Stephen's day procession, 'we did not even think about this procession'.¹⁰⁷

Yet, although they may not have thought much of the procession, the actual date of 20 August still concerned them. Rather than abolish this commemorative day altogether, they simply erased St Stephen from it and – after the passing of the Stalinist Constitution that came into effect on 20 August 1949 – renamed it Constitution Day. The focus was now on the new Constitution and, at the beginning of the 1950s, on the peasants and workers with mentions of the New Bread. In this sense, maintaining the same date acted as a kind of conquest and abolishment of the previous interwar system, rather than merely an abandonment of it. It could also serve to make it more difficult for there to be any attempts to commemorate St Stephen on 20 August.

During Communism 20 August was no longer known as St Stephen's Day, but first, to bring it closer to the people it was referred to as the Day of the New Bread, then after 1949 it became Constitution Day. Thus, all allusions to St Stephen and the 1000-year old Hungarian state he founded were eliminated from the commemorative narrative. The new Constitution was not only the celebration of the present and the future, but also the past, argued the Communist daily *Szabad Nép* on its front page on the day the Constitution officially took effect.¹⁰⁸ The only allusion to St Stephen or the 1000-year foundation of the Hungarian state was a covert reference that after the 'old taking of the homeland [...] the lords sold the homeland and the country to our enemies of hundreds of years'. Such 'selling out' of the homeland continued through the

¹⁰⁷ Rákosi, *Visszaemlékezések I*, p. 201.

¹⁰⁸ "Az Alkotmány Ünnepe" [The feast of the Constitution] in *Szabad Nép* [The Free People] 20 August 1949: 1

centuries, its climax coming during the Second World War, when ‘even the existence of our nation was in danger’. This trend, however had not ended and the new Constitution is the symbol of a new beginning, a ‘new taking of the homeland’.

Renaming 20 August and replacing St Stephen with the Stalinist Constitution meant that, instead of the medieval founder of the state, the Hungarian nation now looked to the Soviet Union and its liberation of Hungary as the start of a new historical era. This was reinforced by the other legislative decrees and laws that were passed to complete the new, Communist national day calendar. Indeed, throughout the Eastern bloc Liberation Days – when the Red Army liberated these countries – were considered among, if not, the most important national day commemorations. The other commemorative day that could not be missing from the Communist calendar was 7 November, celebrating the Great October Socialist Revolution.

Thus, Stephen was erased from the new commemorative calendar and narrative. Yet, in the three to four years following the war, before they had full governmental control, Communist party cadres still attempted to link themselves to the legacy of St Stephen through a historical narrative, primarily on his national day. On 20 August 1947, the Communist daily *Szabad Nép* published an article by Erik Molnár (Minister of Welfare but soon to be appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs and then ambassador to Moscow) in which he praised Stephen as ‘one of the outstanding vanguards of Hungarian progress’, as the Communists were today.¹⁰⁹ Molnár claimed the Communist party as the ‘truest depository of the Hungarian historical traditions’, and it is apparent that, in this period at least, the Communist party considered Stephen as not simply part of these traditions but he also marked the beginning of a Hungarian historical presence.

These traditions, Molnár stressed, must ‘be rooted in the whole thousand-year past of the Hungarian nation.’ He fixed Stephen into a revolutionary ‘people’s’ tradition, focusing on his achievements in converting the pagan Hungarians to Christianity, and establishing agriculture and the Catholic Church, which at the time was the agent of culture and champion of the poor. Indeed, St Stephen was ‘one of the greatest figures of the Hungarian historic past’. Molnár presents the Communists as part of the legacy of this tradition: they were the ‘party of the

¹⁰⁹ Molnár, Erik, ‘Szent István napjára’ [For St Stephen’s Day] in *Szabad Nép*, 20 August 1947, p. 1.

Hungarian nation' because 'we consider the historical tasks of today and the whole historic past together, because in our own struggles we continue the struggles of the thousand years.'

By the following year, however, the *Szabad Nép* article on St Stephen's Day had become quite critical. Its author, the writer and publicist István Száva, did not overlook Stephen's achievements, but he also claimed that Stephen 'was not a popular ruler' in his day as he led the Hungarians with a 'tight fist.'¹¹⁰ Moreover, Stephen did not achieve everything alone, since accomplishments so great cannot be realised by one man only, but was aided by Slav and Italian priests.

The 1948 commemorations also ushered in a new element to the content of the 20 August national holiday, and the start of the separation of 20 August from St Stephen. No longer known as St Stephen's Day, the Communists renamed it the Day of the New Bread [*új kenyér ünnepe*].¹¹¹ The element of the 'new bread' was not a new concept for those living in the countryside, where it had been part of the St Stephen Day harvest festivities since the late 19th century, when the practice was initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture to halt a harvest strike.¹¹² More recently, the authoritarian ruler of Hungary until 1944, Miklós Horthy, had held a Day of the New Hungarian Bread festivities in Szabadka, when the Bácska region was returned to Hungary in 1941 on 20 August.¹¹³ Although the symbol of the new bread had been used by the right-wing Horthy regime, it was the perfect vehicle for the Communists to showcase themselves as the representatives of the peasantry. It also provided a perfect replacement for the figure of St Stephen while still maintaining a major national day on 20 August.

The Catholic Church, a major proponent of St Stephen and his cult, also attempted to continue some of the traditions following the war that had been firmly established during the interwar period, such as the Holy Right procession in the capital. Since the Castle District in Buda was in ruins, the first two processions after the war took place in and in front of the St Stephen Basilica in Pest. In 1947 the procession followed a new route, starting from the Basilica, along

¹¹⁰ István Száva, 'Az államalapító király' [The state founder king] in *Szabad Nép*, 20 August 1948, p. 3.

¹¹¹ Árpád von Klimó, 'A nemzet Szent Jobbja: A nemzeti-vallási kultuszok funkcióiról' [The Holy Right of the nation: On the functions of national-religious cults] in *Replika*, Vol. 37, 1999, pp. 45-56, p. 52. [hereafter: Klimó, 'A nemzet Szent Jobbja']

¹¹² 'Szent Istvántól az új kenyérig' [From St Stephen to the new bread] at <http://mult-kor.hu/cikk.php?id=6702&pIdx=3>, 2012: 3 [accessed 12 August 2014].

¹¹³ Klimó, 'A nemzet Szent Jobbja', p. 53.

Andrássy Avenue to Heroes Square. The Catholic Church also organised an anti-Communist demonstration for this day, but the Communist party had by now taken power and the Catholic Church lost its societal and political influence.¹¹⁴

A significant effort was made to embed the new meanings of 20 August in the minds of the Hungarian people and to portray it as a popular celebration of the new Communist constitution. Newspaper reports proclaimed it as the ‘Feast of the Constitution’ and that the ‘People of the Country celebrated the Anniversary of Our Constitution Happily and Enthusiastically’.¹¹⁵ The ritual elements also had to be adapted to the new realities of 20 August. Now, instead of a Holy Right procession, the people of Budapest were to be woken early: ‘From seven o’clock in the morning at different parts of the capital eleven bands, thirty cars with loudspeakers and 112 free-standing loudspeakers will wake up the workers with music’. The day’s festivities ended with a fireworks display in the evening, a feature that was carried over from the interwar years.¹¹⁶ 20 August was also made more rural, with a focus on the harvest and threshing, although as the 1950s progressed the new bread was mostly dropped from the programme. Instead, the so-called ‘merry markets’ [*vidám vásárok*] were introduced in 1952.¹¹⁷ These served a double purpose, showcasing the plethora of produce apparently available and also silencing rumours that there was a product shortage.¹¹⁸

The removal of St Stephen from the national day calendar did not, however, mean that he was also removed from the history books. *The History of the Hungarian People: A Short Overview* was published in 1951 and intended for use in secondary schools.¹¹⁹ It covers the history of Hungary from the formation of the Hungarian people in the late 10th century until June 1948, when the Communists gained power (‘Building the country of the people’, as the final section is entitled). St Stephen, now referred to as Stephen I (as a king, not a religious figure, and his

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 51-52.

¹¹⁵ ‘Alkotmányunk Ünnepe’ [The feast of our Constitution] in *Szabad Nép* 20 August 1950, p. 1 and ‘Vidáman és Lelkesen Ünnepelte az Ország Népe Alkotmányunk Évfordulóját’ [The people of the nation celebrated the anniversary of our Constitution cheerfully and enthusiastically] in *Szabad Nép* 22 August 1951, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ ‘Népünnepéellyel ünnepli Budapest dolgozó népe az új kenyeret és az alkotmányt’ [The working people of Budapest celebrated the new bread and the Constitution with mass celebrations] *Szabad Nép*, 20 August 1949, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Magyar Országos Levéltár [hereafter MOL], M-KS 276-61/1952-188. Report on the 20 August celebrations. Dated: 23 August 1952.

¹¹⁸ An Agitation and Propaganda Department report from 1952 conveyed: “There were many things at the markets, and this had a good effect on the peasants because it demonstrated that the rumours that are being spread by our enemies about the produce shortages are false.” See: Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Gusztáv Heckenast, Miklós Incze, Béla Karácsonyi, Lajos Lukács and György Spira, *A magyar nép története. Rövid áttekintés* [The history of the Hungarian people. A short overview], Budapest: Művelt Nép, 1953, p. 5.

saintly status was generally overlooked), was discussed in the contexts of the beginning of the feudal system.¹²⁰ The authors of the *Short Overview* did credit Stephen with a number of achievements: he organised the Hungarian state on the basis of regions/districts, rather than on tribal traditions, which were built on blood relations. Stephen also redistributed the lands of the rebels and himself became ‘the greatest landowner in the country’.¹²¹ This, however, apparently led to a number of problems, about which the schoolbook is critical. The state, in this way, became a state of ‘the economically ruling classes’, the large landowners, leading to the establishment of private property.¹²² Thus, whilst King Stephen was historically relevant enough to appear in a school history book, his achievements did not warrant him a national day. Moreover, since the Stalinist Constitution lay down the basis of a new state, why commemorate the old?

The book also discussed the introduction of Christianity to the Hungarians, representing Christianity as a means to ensure that the workers did not rebel against their exploitation by ‘preaching that the class order and royal power are derived from God.’¹²³ The workers’ ‘humility will be rewarded in the next world, whilst disobedience will be punished on Earth by the ecclesiastical and secular authorities.’ The Church had also needed to be sustained, putting great hardship on the workers. Stephen obliged everyone to pay a tithe to the Church and the pagan population was forcibly baptised. Every tenth village had to build a Church, and land, servants and cattle to be given to the priest. Sunday church attendance was compulsory and ‘those who did not pay attention during the service were punished by being beaten with a twig and shamed by having all their hair cut off.’

By 1951, then, the discourse around Stephen and his achievements had acquired a double-edged meaning. Whilst the Communists acknowledged that his actions were necessary for the survival and progress of the Hungarian people, they censured him for what they claimed was his support of feudalism and the oppressive Catholic Church. As the Communists believed that this new system led to the exploitation of the workers and the beginnings of feudalism, it is no surprise that Stephen was side-lined from the official commemorations. Moreover, the early 1950s when the emphasis was on the revolutionary traditions of the Hungarian people and

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 19.

¹²¹ Ibid. p. 21.

¹²² Ibid. p. 22.

¹²³ Ibid. p. 23.

personality cult, Stephen would have proved a difficult fit. Therefore, by acknowledging Stephen's achievements yet at the same time highlighting the negative effects they had on the workers, the Communists created a new narrative around Stephen whereby he could be omitted from the official 20 August commemorations, since the new Constitution and Comrade Rákosi could step into Stephen's shoes as the 'great leader'.

Medieval saints and martyrs: Czechoslovakia

St Wenceslas in Czechoslovakia fared even worse than St Stephen in Hungary – his day was simply dropped and was not considered important enough even to be replaced with anything. In the interwar period, the Czechoslovak Communists had been hostile towards the St Wenceslas commemorations, thus, not including St Wenceslas in the 1951 national day law was hardly surprising. Yet, Wenceslas was still useful for Communist historiography in that he could 'prove' the longevity of a Czechoslovak state.

In the *Přehled Československých Dějin*, St Wenceslas was further removed from any kind of revolutionary tradition, although he and the other Přemyslid kings were said to be the rulers of a territory that had all the attributes of a state.¹²⁴ Wenceslas' religious activities were, nonetheless, condemned: 'it seems certain that Wenceslas made every effort to support the penetration and anchoring of Christianity in the country and helped to consolidate feudal ideology and religious domination.' The authors acknowledged that Wenceslas had been glorified since the 10th century as 'a kind of national saint — a saint of feudal lords', yet he also united the nation in the 'old times'. He no longer performed this function, however, since in the 19th and 20th centuries the uses of his figure and symbol had become even more reactionary. Thus, the patron saint of the Czech lands no longer fulfilled his role and was effectively replaced on a symbolic level by Jan Hus, who fought against 'feudal oppression'.¹²⁵

Despite the animosity towards the figure of St Wenceslas, in the late 1940s and until around 1950 the Czechoslovak People's Party's daily *Lidová demokracie* would publish articles on the saint on the 28 September anniversary. From 1945-1948, the Czechoslovak People's Party (*Československá strana lidová*, or *ČSL*) continued to present itself as a Czech nationalist and

¹²⁴ *Přehled, Díl III.*, p. 73.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 176.

Catholic party,¹²⁶ but was soon subsumed into the National Front following Victorious February in 1948. Even so, they were allowed to keep their newspaper, *Lidová demokracie*, which aimed to distinguish the different Catholic traditions of the Czechs and the Slovaks, making a link between SS Cyril and Methodius, whose commemoration (mainly in Slovakia), was still permitted and St Wenceslas. The paper attempted to cleanse the St Wenceslas tradition of its Nazi associations, by claiming that St Wenceslas was represented a follower of the religious and political traditions that SS Cyril and Methodius established. Moreover, St Wenceslas did not only follow these traditions, but ‘he also applied them against the Germans, who sought to subdue the Slavs’, according to an article on 18 September 1949.¹²⁷ The connection between SS Cyril and Methodius and St Wenceslas further underlined the unity between the Czech and Slovak parts of the People’s Republic, attempting in this way to legitimise Wenceslas, by associating him with the Czechoslovak unity represented by the permitted Cyril and Methodius. Another article, from 28 September 1949, attempted to distance Wenceslas from the rhetoric of the Protectorate officials by arguing that he did not make a pact with the Germans, but instead applied the traditions inherited from SS Cyril and Methodius to stop a German invasion.¹²⁸

St Wenceslas, the article on 28 September 1949 further argued, was also present throughout Czechoslovak history: in 1918 it was in front of his statue on Prague’s Wenceslas square that independence was declared; in 1945, when the Nazi army capitulated, the tanks of the Red Army liberating Prague filed past the equestrian statue of the saint. Thus, they did not only liberate Prague, but also St Wenceslas.¹²⁹ On 28 September 1950 the paper continued to hope that now peaceful cooperation was possible, St Wenceslas’ legacy would once again be strong.¹³⁰ One gets the sense of the ČSL desperately arguing for the validity of Wenceslas and continuing to honour him on 28 September, as they knew his figure was about to be erased.

¹²⁶ Christiane Brenner, ‘A Missed Opportunity to Oppose State Socialism? The People’s Party in Czechoslovakia’ in Michael Gehler and Wolfram Kaiser (eds) *Christian Democracy in Europe Since 1945*, Vol. 2. London and New York: Routledge, 2004, pp. 173-192, p. 173.

¹²⁷ ‘Ve šlépějích sv. Václava’ [In the footsteps of St Wenceslas] in *Lidová demokracie*, 18 September 1949, pp. 1-2.

¹²⁸ For distancing St Wenceslas from the Protectorate rhetoric see: ‘Katolická akce uctila svatého Václava’ [The Catholic Action honoured St Wenceslas] in *Lidová demokracie*, 28 September 1949, p. 2.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ ‘Svatý Václav – světec a člověk’ [St Wenceslas – saint and man] in *Lidová demokracie*, 28 September 1950, p. 4.

Indeed, by the early 1950s, when the Communist historiography became more definitive, such commemorative articles disappeared.

Whilst St Wenceslas was side-lined, Jan Hus was represented in heroic terms in the first half of the 1950s. Hus is seen as having fought against everything St Wenceslas stood for: feudalism, the kingdom and the Church. Hus and the Hussite movement were not interpreted in the context of religion or the Reformation, but as among the first true revolutionaries. It is not surprising, then, that the Czechoslovak Communists presented themselves – at least in the 1940s and the first half of the 1950s – as the heirs of the Hussite tradition and the only true followers of their legacy.

We might expect, then, that Jan Hus Day – although now only a ‘memorial day’ with the passing of the 1951 national day law – would have been an important marker in the national day calendar and, indeed, at first it was. In the late 1940s until the mid-1950s, the Communist daily *Rudé právo*, now the official state newspaper, published feature articles on Hus around every 6 July, the day of his commemoration. The articles would call ‘all constituents of the National Front, Churches and public corporations to attend the celebrations in large numbers’, report on the commemorative events, emphasise Hus’s importance and praise the Soviet Union for enabling the Czechs to follow their true national traditions.¹³¹ This Soviet aspect was at the core of the speech of Ludvík Svoboda – deputy Prime Minister and army general, veteran of Zborov and Czechoslovak 1st Army Corps – during the commemorative events of 1950. Svoboda claimed that ‘it seems almost obvious that the celebration of Hus became a great national celebration, and that it is the traditional manifestation of our working people.’¹³² He effectively dismissed the celebrations of Hus during the First Republic as fake and untruthful, stating that the ability of the Czechs to commemorate Hus was due to ‘the valour of the Soviet people, whose glorious and victorious army liberated us from German fascism and we owe it to the great teacher of our nation, General Stalin.’¹³³ The message again is that Czech history could only find its true fulfilment through the Soviets and Stalin. Even when a commemorative day honoured a Czech event or figure from several centuries before, the focus was still on the Soviets.

¹³¹ ‘Oslavy svátku M. J. Husi na Staroměstském náměstí’ [Celebration of M. J. Hus on Old Town Square] in *Rudé právo* 1 July 1949, p. 3

¹³² ‘Národní pout’ v Husinci na paměť Mistra Jana Husi’ [National pilgrimage in Husinec for the remembrance of Master Jan Hus] in *Rudé právo*, 5 July 1950, p. 5.

¹³³ Ibid.

It was not just in the print media that the official Hus cult was celebrated during early Communism but also on the big screen, with the Hussite Revolutionary Trilogy of the 1950s. This was a series of three films directed by Otakar Vávra: *Jan Hus* in 1954; *Jan Žižka* in 1955; and *Proti všem* (Against All) in 1957.¹³⁴ Although these films were not directly related to Jan Hus Day there is one interesting aspect to their casts: both Jan Hus and Jan Žižka (in the second and third films) were played by the actor Zdeněk Štěpánek. It was Štěpánek who in 1929 had played the title role in the film *Svatý Václav*, produced for the 1929 St Wenceslas millennium commemorations. This thread running through the films in the form of Štěpánek shows how fragile the narratives and practices introduced by the Communists were and how under the surface there were complex continuities and links with the interwar period. It also reminds us that the state itself, be it the ‘bourgeois’ First Republic or the Communist regime, took a particular interest in promoting the image of its chosen historical heroes. Moreover, it offers a glimpse into how ‘ordinary’ people (if an actor such as Štěpánek could be considered an ordinary person) could, on the surface, easily switch their loyalties to versions of national history if that is what the regime demanded.

Yet, although Hus fitted so perfectly with Communist discourse, – his religious role was mainly ignored, Nejedlý even argued that Hus today would not preach from a pulpit, but he would be the head of a political party –,¹³⁵ by the late-1950s the newspaper reports of his memorial day on 6 July became increasingly sporadic and by the 1960s almost disappeared. This disappearance of media reports must also represent a decline in the significance of his memorial day, even though it still continued to be one until 1975.¹³⁶

Even so, in popular memory both Hus and St Wenceslas retained significance as symbols of the collective body within the public space, as epitomised by their national days, and this created opportunities for rare public protest. This was especially evident during the events of the Prague Spring in 1968. On 21 August, the day the Warsaw Pact countries invaded

¹³⁴ For more on these films see: Petr Čornej, ‘Husitská tematika v českém filmu (1953-1968) v kontextu dobového nazírání na dějiny’ [Hussite themes in Czech films (1853-1968) in the context of contemporary history] in *Illuminace*, 1995, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 13-43.

¹³⁵ Nejedlý, *Komunisté*, p. 22.

¹³⁶ ‘56. zákon ze dne 11. června 1975, kterým se mění zákon č. 93/1956. Sb. o státním svátku, o dnech pracovního klidu a o památných a významných dnech’ [Law 56 of 11 June 1975 amending Law No. 93/1956 regarding national days, public holidays and memorable and significant days] in *Sbírka zákonů Československá socialistická republika*, Prague: Statistické a evidenční vydavatelství tiskopisů, 1975, pp. 195-296.

Czechoslovakia, both the Jan Hus monument on Old Town Square and the St Wenceslas statue on St Wenceslas Square were used as gathering places to protest the invasion.¹³⁷ By the 1970s, the space around the St Wenceslas statue had become such a popular protest site that the Communists erected a metal chain around it, in the shape of linden leaves.¹³⁸ The chain was removed in 2005, but in 2013 Prague City Gallery, that takes care of the monument decided to re-instate the chains since the pedestal of the statue became ‘a place where people lay aside their clothes, use as a snack counter and a place where drug addicts handle their doses.’¹³⁹

The commemoration of Cyril and Methodius mirrors the fate of the Jan Hus commemorations to a great extent. As has already been touched upon, during the immediate post-war years the Communists were attempting to appropriate 5 July to fit, into an internationalist, Pan-Slavic rhetoric, with a focus on Devín Castle, with its Greater Moravia associations. Even so the importance of the yearly pilgrimage to Devín soon faded in significance, especially after 1952.¹⁴⁰ Until that year, commemorations at Devín Castle took place annually, although the emphasis was less on Cyril and Methodius, and more on Pan-Slavism. In 1951, for example, *Pravda*, the official paper of the KSČ in Slovakia, proclaimed on its front pages that the ‘working people of Slovakia’ gathered at Devín Castle on 7 July for peace and friendship under that year’s slogan, which read: ‘With Stalin towards peace and towards the friendship of all nations.’¹⁴¹ Cyril and Methodius were not mentioned in the article, although somehow the events were all about Stalin.

The celebrations at Devín Castle after 1952 became more sporadic, reflecting a similar decline in Jan Hus Day. One reason for this was that Devín is located on the border with Austria, thus in the 1950s (and throughout the Communist era) the area was heavily guarded with barbed wire fences and guard towers.¹⁴² Furthermore, the movement of individuals and even local buses was monitored at all times by boarder guards. In the 1950s, then, the celebrations that took place in Devín were limited to special occasions: in 1959, for example, to celebrate Czech-

¹³⁷ Cynthia Paces, *Prague Panoramas: National memory and sacred space in the twentieth century*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009, p. 213.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ ‘Chain to return to Saint Wenceslas’ in *Praha.eu*, 23 April 2013 at http://www.praha.eu/jnp/en/about_prague/past_and_future/history_of_prague/chain_to_return_to_saint_wenceslas.html [last accessed 6 January 2016]

¹⁴⁰ Kiliánová, ‘Komu patří Devín?’ p. 129.

¹⁴¹ ‘Mohutná mierová manifestácia nášho ľudu pod Devínom’ [Great peaceful manifestation of our people under Devín] in *Pravda*, 10 July 1951, p. 1.

¹⁴² Kiliánová, ‘Komu patří Devín?’ p. 129.

Slovak friendship, or in 1960 for the performance of opera *Svätopluk* by the Slovak composer Eugen Suchoň, based on the 1931 play entitled *King Svätopluk* [*Kráľ Svätopluk*] by Slovak writer and dramatist Ivan Stodola.¹⁴³ The libretto was in fact co-written by Suchoň, Stodola and Jela Krčméry-Vrteľová, and based on historical events with fictional elements.

The opera (and the play) centred on the last years of the reign of King Svätopluk of Greater Moravia in the late 9th century. In his final years, King Svätopluk feels he is dying and wishes to hand over power to his two sons, Mojmir II and Svätopluk the Younger, resulting in their confrontation. In the opera, Suchoň presented the conflict for power between Svätopluk's sons as an allegory of the conflict between the oppressive Western (i.e. Frankish/Prussian) powers who always wanted to subjugate Slavs, with Orthodox Christianity, which protected Slavic identity.¹⁴⁴ This point is particularly pertinent in the post-war period: the Nazis' greatest allies in wartime Slovakia had been fervent Catholics, while it was the Orthodox (even if religion was suppressed in the Soviet Union) Russians who had liberated the Slovaks and the Czechs. In the opera, Svätopluk the Younger sides with the Catholic Prussian clergymen and overlooks all their evils and mistreatment of the poor, as long as they help him get into power. He also allies with the pagans and is friendly with the Hungarians. Mojmir, on the other hand, is a follower of Methodius (who was Orthodox), wants to end slavery and believes in Christian charity towards the poor. It should be noted that, historically, their father, King Svätopluk, had initially promoted the efforts of Methodius to introduce a Slavonic rite in Moravia. After Methodius' death in 885, however, goaded by the German clergy who opposed the use of Slavonic, Svätopluk expelled Methodius' disciples.¹⁴⁵

National days and revolutionary traditions

Medieval saints and martyrs were represented by some of the most important commemorative days in the interwar period, but as the last section has demonstrated, in the early Communist period, especially in the Stalinist period, they became less significant or were abandoned altogether (for some of them only to reappear later, as I will discuss in the next chapter). Thus, the more prominent commemorations throughout the Communist era were the ones that could demonstrate the revolutionary traditions of the Czechoslovak and Hungarian people. This

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ondras Libor, *Eugen Suchoň: His Life and Works*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Houston, Moores School of Music, 1999, pp. 52-53.

¹⁴⁵ Maddalena Betti, *The Making of Christian Moravia (858-882): Papal Power and Political Reality*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013, p. 53.

rhetoric consisted of national days that were appropriated by the Communists, i.e. they were pre-existing, such as the anniversary of the foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 on 28 October or the 1848 revolution in Hungary commemorated on 15 March. These days were clearly treated as precursors to the newly introduced commemorations such as liberation day or the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. This commemorative hierarchy was made visible in a number of ways: in Czechoslovakia first through the national day law legislation, then through performative and rhetorical markers, whereas in Hungary it was achieved mainly through the latter. An exemption to this was the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, which in Czechoslovakia was a significant day, whereas in Hungary it was the state holiday, although as I will demonstrate the way in which this day was commemorated in the two countries was largely identical.

In the immediate post-war years, the Hungarian Communists were enthusiastic about the possible messages the anniversary of 15 March could transmit for them. Even so, already during the centenary commemorations in 1948-1949 the contemporary relevance of 1848 was being subsumed into Hungary's liberation by the Red Army in 1945. In 1949, the front page of the Communist daily *Szabad Nép* declared that the masses 'celebrate the people of Pest, the youth, whose actions, not only on 15 March but also in September took the revolution forward. And together with these events — and even before them — we celebrate something else, an event that started with 15 March.'¹⁴⁶ This other September event was 'the fight for independence' that by 1949 allowed Hungary to start building socialism (the article is not particularly clear what this other September event was, however; it may mean the elections of 1947, which the Communists 'won' and which were held on 31 August). This, of course, would not have been possible without the liberation of Hungary by the Red Army and the Soviet Union, but the Hungarian people had to do their part too to gain their freedom, and this is why the 1848 revolution is still a hugely relevant part of Hungarian history.

Once the centenary commemorations were over the Communists in Hungary started on extending this linear narrative that span from 1848 to 1945. The rhetoric the MDP employed during the first half of the 1950s. Internal documents circulated amongst the Secretariat of the Central Committee stressed that they 'have to use the fifth anniversary of 4 April, the

¹⁴⁶ 'Március 15 — Harc a függetlenségért' [March 15 – Fight for independence] in *Szabad Nép*, 15 March 1949, p.1.

celebration of our liberation, to make it our most important national day.’¹⁴⁷ Moreover, the ‘ideological considerations’ that were distributed amongst Secretariat further stressed that 4 April did not only fulfil what was started in 1848, ‘but [its achievements] also went beyond the programme of 15 March: it freed the way to the liberation of the working people, the power is in the hands of the working class, [it freed the way] to the overthrow of capitalism and for the building of socialism.’ The reason for the failure of 15 March was couched in the rhetoric of oppression and anti-fascism/Nazism, blaming the Habsburgs, the Hungarian landowners and Horthy and the Hungarian fascists.¹⁴⁸

The hierarchy between 4 April and 15 March was further underlined. Since too many commemorative days were taking place in February, March, April and May, to make sure that Liberation Day was appropriately commemorated ‘the size of all other commemorative days should be limited, apart from 1 May.’¹⁴⁹ In the new national day calendar, 15 March could not compete with Liberation Day, and presumably as a result of their close proximity the anniversary of 1848 was demoted to a working day, although schools were to be open for ‘a short commemoration’.¹⁵⁰ 15 March in this new narrative was simply a historical stage that did not fulfil its potential. It was Liberation Day on 4 April that achieved what 1848-49 could not.

¹⁴⁷ MOL, M-KS 276-60/1950-69. Ideological considerations for the celebration of 5 years of our People’s Democracy. Dated: 21 February 1950.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ MOL, M-KS 276-60/1951-199. The decision of the Secretariat regarding the commemoration of 15 March. Dated: 10 March 1951.



Figure 7: Liberation Day in Budapest in 1952. Source: Fortepan/ Magyar Rendőr.

The tenth anniversary of Hungary's liberation provided the opportunity for 15 March, 'our traditional national celebration', to be commemorated again 'with greater care'.¹⁵¹ However, the reason for commemorating 1848 was not to promote the revolution, but, again, to promote the achievements of the liberation. The appeal of the People's Front stressed that 'the 15 March commemorations need to be organised in such a way that they further enhance the preparation for the celebration of our country's complete liberation.'¹⁵² Celebrations of the 10th anniversary of the liberation were carried out with great pomp: the military parade lasted for 84 minutes (in 1956 it was scheduled for 50 minutes) with 30 battalions (16 in 1956) and with 20-30 aeroplanes flying overhead.¹⁵³

By claiming to be the heir of the legacy of 1848-49 and placing the 1848 revolution in the timeline of the Soviet liberation, the MDP aimed to cement its legitimacy amongst the Hungarian people as the 'natural' conclusion of a century-long struggle for independence. Even so, once the achievements of the liberation were established, 15 March did not need to be

¹⁵¹ MOL, M-KS 276-56/1955-15 Patriotic People's Front announcement for the 10th anniversary of the liberation. Undated. [hereafter: M-KS 276-56/1955-15]

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ MOL, M-KS 276-56/1956-25. Proposal to the Secretariat on the military parade on 4 April 1956. Dated: 26 January 1956.

emphasised to a great extent. This did not mean, however that the Communists completely abandoned 15 March as a quasi-national day. There were attempts to link it with the birthday of First Secretary Mátyás Rákosi on 9 March as part of his personality cult.¹⁵⁴ The banners that were displayed during the 15 March celebrations were graced by pictures of Rákosi, Lenin and Stalin along with portraits of the ‘heroes’ of 1848, Petőfi, Kossuth and Táncsics. This state of affairs continued until the Hungarian revolution against the communist regime in 1956, which proved to be a significant turning point for the 15 March commemorations. 15 March had become the symbol of opposition once again. The 1956 uprising started with demonstrations on 23 October 1956 by the Petőfi Circle, a student group, one of whose demands was that 15 March must be restated as a national day.¹⁵⁵

The Czechoslovak Communists – similarly to their Hungarian counterparts – were aware that the previously existing national day commemorations needed to be harnessed for their new historical narrative. The anniversary of the foundation of Czechoslovakia on 28 October provided an opportunity for the Communists to incorporate the narrative of revolutionary tradition into the commemorative rhetoric. The long revolutionary tradition of the Czech(oslovak) people had already been established with Jan Hus Day, while 28 October provided a ‘tangible’ (at least for the Communists) link between the Great October Socialist Revolution and the establishment of the independent Czechoslovak state in 1918. As with the case of the anniversary of the 1848 revolution in Hungary, the foundation of Czechoslovakia had not been a success since it had been hijacked by the interest of the bourgeois.

Even so, the Czechoslovak Communists did not reject the meaning of 28 October 1918 but attempted to ‘rectify’ its failures. The 30th anniversary in 1948 was thus an opportunity to make a ‘new start’ with a new, Communist Czechoslovakia. The messages, pageantry and communication of the 30th anniversary commemorations were thus planned in detail and tightly controlled. Preparations were begun by the Ministry of Information and Education at the end of July 1948, while Central Committee of the National Front issued extensive

¹⁵⁴ The personality cult, the veneration of the leader, started with Lenin, although it reached its pinnacle during the Stalinist era. Whilst in Soviet Russia the personality cult centred around Stalin, once it was transported to the Eastern bloc it ‘spread’ to the political leaders there. See: Balázs Apor, Jan C. Behrends, Polly Jones and E. A. Rees (eds) *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships: Stalin and the Eastern Bloc*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004 and Jan Plamper, *The Stalin cult: A study in the alchemy of power*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

¹⁵⁵ István Rév, ‘Holy Days’ in Rév, *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Post-communism*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005, pp. 140-201. p. 155.

guidelines on the ideological content of the celebrations.¹⁵⁶ According to these pointers, the influence of the Great October Socialist Revolution in the establishment of Czechoslovakia, since it was the workers who fought for it. They were then – the narrative continues – betrayed by the ‘great bourgeoisie’, especially in 1938. The liberation of the country by the Red Army in 1945, however created a historical ‘turning point’ in the fate of the workers. Even so, workers still had duties to fulfil, most importantly the establishment of socialism: they had to ‘[f]ight for the definite victory of the people’s democracies and to the rigorous road to socialism’ as well as ‘against the bourgeois residues of capitalism’. According to the pointers, the best way to fulfil these directives and achieve socialism was to follow the two-year plan – signed into law in 1947 – and the next step, the five-year plan. All this was only possible ‘alongside the USSR’.

The Communists thus made full use of the 28 October national day in 1948 as a vehicle for the new national metanarrative they sought to implement, which consisted of allegiance to the Soviets and devotion to the task of building socialism on the part of the workers. This metanarrative needed to be communicated to the general public before the anniversary events. To this end the Communists convened a meeting with the newspaper editors from Prague and other regional papers ‘to discuss the campaign for the 30th anniversary’.¹⁵⁷ Newspapers were asked to prepare ‘thematic, ideological articles regarding the 30th anniversary of the republic.’ Articles were to appear in the newspapers from the beginning of October until the end of December. Many of the articles promoting the new meaning of 28 October were written by leading KSČ officials, such as Václav Kopecký, Minister of Information (later also Minister of Culture) or Rudolf Šlanský, (then still) President Klement Gottwald’s right-hand man. These articles mainly re-enforced what was set out by the National Front in their guidelines. Thus, an article on 10 October claimed that the ‘revolutions of 1918 and 1945 meant the same thing’: in 1945 the Czech nation was liberated from German rule, in the same way as in 1918 it was ‘liberated’ from Austro-Hungarian rule.¹⁵⁸ The article does acknowledge that in 1918 there was some democratic change, but ‘a national democratic revolution did not take place’. Instead, it finally took place in 1945, culminating in ‘Victorious February’ in 1948.

¹⁵⁶ NACR, Národní fronta ústřední výbor [National Front Central Committee] č. f. 357-2, Box 17, inv. č. 5. [hereafter: Národní fronta ústřední výbor, Box 17]

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Dvě národní a demokratické revoluce’ [Two national and democratic revolutions], *Rudé právo*, 10 October 1948, p. 5. See also: Rudolf Šlanský, ‘KSČ v boji za svobodu’ [The Czechoslovak Communist Party in the struggle for freedom] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1948, p. 1.

Other means to communicate the new metanarrative were short films – distributed a week before the anniversary –, and various posters and banners.¹⁵⁹ The latter group were to focus on the friendship between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia and on Czechoslovak independence and were also to be circulated in schools. The posters were to be publicised nationwide. The official brochure for the commemoration was published with the slogan: ‘30 years of the Republic – the victory of the people’s democracies.’ This is an intriguing message of continuity, almost implying that the new republic was the continuation or restoration, in an improved version, of the interwar republic, giving the Soviet-influenced communist republic a national spin. The other underlying message of the slogan is that communist Czechoslovakia was achieving all that the First Republic could not, and that Victorious February had given the country a new lease of life. Such an association with the First Republic was only possible at this very early period in the country’s communist history, when 28 October was still a full national holiday that commemorated the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918. But it provides a fascinating glimpse of how Czechoslovak communists may actually have initially envisaged post-war Czechoslovakia as being not a complete break but the direct continuation of the interwar republic, its foundation date being 28 October 1918. This possible vision was to have no continuation, as 28 October was soon to be demoted and the content of its ceremony revised.

Such initial plans for a Communist 28 October may also have been reflected in the lavish celebrations in Prague, which took place under a double slogan: the one mentioned above, printed on the official brochures, and another slogan promoting the coming chronological period of the ‘5-year plan, the road to socialism.’¹⁶⁰ This supports the argument for implied continuity made above: the first thirty years are being celebrated, as is the next phase, which will take the country to socialism. Although the celebrations of 28 October in the interwar period had been significant, with speeches by signatories, laying of wreaths, the presence of schoolchildren, the event now had taken on (or attempted to take on) the character of mass festivals in a Soviet-style, with a military pageantry. The celebrations included a military parade with an army band and five battalions.¹⁶¹ The army would also send a ‘motorised’ regiment, an artillery regiment and one tank battalion. There were to be two regiments of planes ‘each consisting of four squadrons of nine machines. It is also likely that these will be

¹⁵⁹ Národní fronta ústřední výbor, Box 17.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ ‘Slavností pochod armády, SZNB a lidový ch milic 28. X. v Praze’ [Celebration march of the army, the National Police Force and the People’s Militia on 28 October in Prague], *Rudé právo*, 23 October 1948, p. 3.

accompanied by one or two jets'. The female workers were to wear blue dresses and a red ribbon on the upper left arm, the national (and also Pan-Slavic) colours. There was also to be a decorating competition, with each building on Wenceslas Square showcasing a different interpretation of the economic plan with 'products, statistics and charts'. The article also pointed out that 'the decoration work was done in collaboration with leading artists' and that the 'most original decoration will be awarded a prize by the Ministry of Information.'

The 1949 commemorations of 28 October were in a similar vein as the previous year, although, presumably since this was not a 'round' anniversary as the previous year had been, no parades were held from this year on and there were only occasional demonstrations on a much smaller scale. Greater emphasis now began to be given to the new, Sovietised rhetoric: the influence of the Great October Socialist Revolution on the Czechoslovaks, the betrayal of the working classes and the working people by the interwar bourgeois political elite (especially in 1938) and the importance of Soviet-Czechoslovak friendship. The commemorative slogans no longer connected the foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 with the nation's new goals as expressed in the five-year plan, but made the creation of an independent Czechoslovakia explicitly dependent on the Soviet Union: 'Without 7 November [the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution] there would be no 28 October!' The slogans still promoted the five-year plan, which had been signed into effect by President Klement Gottwald the year before: 'Forward to meet and exceed the 5-year plan!'¹⁶² There were still references to the establishment of the independent Czechoslovak state in 1918 but, as is clear from the slogan, these were very much wrapped up in the influence of the Revolution and the 'betrayal [of the country and the working class] by the bourgeois politicians of the interwar period.'

With the passing of the new national day law in 1951, the 28 October commemorations officially ceased to be about the foundation of the Czechoslovak state in 1918. The day was not only renamed in the new law to Nationalisation Day, it was also demoted to the rank of public holidays from state holiday, the rank it had enjoyed during the First Republic. It was thus still a major event, but was no longer the state's official commemoration of itself (this was now Liberation Day). As with Constitution Day in Hungary (previously St Stephen's Day), Nationalisation Day focused mainly on the achievements of the people's democracy, such as the apparent successes of the five-year plan, the growing economy and the achievements of

¹⁶² Národní fronta ústřední výbor, Box 17.

nationalization.¹⁶³ All this was primarily thanks to the leader Klement Gottwald. The official slogans used on the day exemplified the state's vision of itself and reminded the population that they needed to work hard and follow the economic instructions of the state to succeed: 'Towards peace, [and] for the further expansion of the socialist economy.'¹⁶⁴

The five-year plans must obviously have worked and the socialist economy expanded further as, two five-year plans later, in 1955, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the passing of the nationalisation laws in 1945, *Rudé právo* again reminded its readers of the betrayal of the working class by the leaders of the First Republic.¹⁶⁵ The article could reassure the public that, after 1945, the situation of the working class in Czechoslovakia changed and, thanks to the KSČ and the nationalisation laws, the Czechoslovak economy was now in excellent shape.

Soviet-themed commemorations

Soviet-themed commemorations included 1 May parades, Liberation Day and 7 November commemorating the Great October Socialist Revolution. Whilst the 'national' commemorations emphasised the role played by the Soviet Union, the Red Army or the local Communist parties in fully 'liberating' these nations from their historical struggles, although still acknowledging local events to some degree, this group of Soviet-themed national days focused on the achievements of the workers, the Soviets and the Red Army and were not intrinsic an individual country. These particular national days were shared by Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union and all Eastern bloc countries, thus (it was hoped) creating a sense of unity and fraternity, a shared front against the West.

In Czechoslovakia, unlike in Hungary, Liberation Day was not closely linked to a previous revolutionary tradition, but was linked (initially) to the more recent past: Hitler's occupation of Czechoslovakia and the Red Army's liberation of the country.¹⁶⁶ The liberation of Czechoslovakia was considered to be the most important event in the nation's history, hence its status as a state holiday. This is also evidenced by the amount of money that was spent on the commemorations. In the first half of the 1950s, no expenses were spared for Liberation Day

¹⁶³ See for example: 'Den znárodnění' [Nationalisation Day] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1952, p. 1. and 'Do závěrečných dnů pětiletky' [To the finish line of the five-year plan] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1953, p. 1.

¹⁶⁴ Národní fronta ústřední výbor, Box 17. This slogan was used in 1952.

¹⁶⁵ 'Deset let hospodářství pracující lid' [Ten years in the economy of the working people] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1955, p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ In internal documents it is at times referred to as *Den vítězství* [Victory Day]. See for example: NACR, Národní fronta Ústřední Výbor č. f. 357-2/Box 3, inv. č. 2 (hereafter: č. f. 357-2/Box 3)

celebrations. The 1951 celebrations, for example, amounted to 38.5 million Kč, at a time when ‘the average annual salary was about 28,000 crowns.’¹⁶⁷ In 1952 the costs were ‘reduced’ to 31 million Kč, but the heavy costs meant that soon the annual spectacle was abandoned and it was only performed every five years.

The Czech historian Jan Měchýř believes that the date chosen for Liberation Day, 9 May, was ‘from the beginning mystified’.¹⁶⁸ As he notes, Prague was actually liberated on 8 May by the Prague Uprising, although there were a number of ‘SS units that preferred to fight on. Therefore, in some places, the struggle and shooting lasted until the night of 8 to 9 May’.¹⁶⁹ It is therefore somewhat strange, he suggests, that the date of 9 May was selected, and at a relatively late date of 1951 with the national day law. Internal documents of the Presidium of the Central Action Committee of the National Front, which Měchýř has not utilised, make it clear why. In 1949, the Presidium of the Central Action Committee of the National Front issued a three-page memo in which it was explicitly stated that 9 May was to be considered Liberation Day, while the Presidium also reminded their comrades about what the celebration was about.¹⁷⁰ Liberation according to the Presidium, should be celebrated on 9 May, as this was when Stalin and the Red Army ‘liberated Prague and completed their great struggle that resulted in the crushing of Hitler’s Germany and liberated our subjugated nation’. The efforts of the people of Prague to liberate themselves were to be overlooked and the entry of the Red Army in a mostly already liberated Prague was to be promoted as the actual act of liberation.

Měchýř is partly mystified because, between 1946 and 1950, prior to the passing of the official national day law, the date on which the liberation was commemorated varied: the Czechoslovak Communists appear to have chosen the closest Sunday for the liberation commemorations. Thus, in 1949 the parade took place on Sunday 8 May and in 1950 on Sunday 7 May.¹⁷¹ There could be a number of reasons for this variation, but economic factors may have been a consideration as Sunday was a day-off work already. In the national day law debate in 1951, Zdeněk Vácha had claimed that the Communists had wanted from 1946 to make 9 May a state

¹⁶⁷ Jan Měchýř, ‘O našich památných dnech’ [Our memorable days] in Jindřich Pecka (ed.) *Acta Contemporanea: K pětadesátinám Viléma Prečana*, Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1998, pp. 206-223, 213.

¹⁶⁸ Jan Měchýř, ‘Metamorphosen Staatlicher Feiertage in der Tschechoslowakei (1948-1989)’ in Berthold Unfried (ed) *Spuren des ‘Realsozialismus’ in Böhmen und der Slowakei: Monumente, Museen, Gedenktage*, Vienna: Löcker Verlag, 1996, pp. 130-150, p. 133.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 134.

¹⁷⁰ Č. f. 357-2/Box 3

¹⁷¹ See: Č. f. 357-2/Box 3 and NARC, Národní Fronta Ústřední Výbor č. f. 357-2/Box 4, inv. č. 2 (hereafter: Č. f. 357-2/Box 4)

or memorial day, but this proposal had been blocked by the bourgeois members of the National Front, as well as President Beneš, who had preferred 5 May, when the Prague Uprising broke out. This disagreement within the government perhaps explains why there was no fixed date until the Communists had usurped power.

The results of the liberation were also considered in the memo. The Presidium argued that now the Czechoslovak people can continue with their democratic traditions. After ‘the Munich betrayal we have forever finished with the camp of western imperialists’ and they will now instead rely on the friendship of the Soviet Union.¹⁷² This friendship, they claimed, would provide the Czechs and Slovaks with a number of benefits, such as ‘democracy without capitalism’ and security. The Presidium still gives itself a pat on the back, proclaiming that the liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet troops would not have been sufficient without the achievement of Victorious February of 1948, which ‘clearly showed that [the Czechoslovak people] wanted to shape their new state’. A new state, which would offer ‘political, economic and social independence’ and which would ‘ensure Czechoslovakia’s road to socialism’. The effective coup and purge of non-Communists from the government was presented as embodying the will of the Czechoslovak people.

The letter by the members of the Presidium of the Central Action Committee of the National Front summarised the key points of the Liberation Day commemorations: gratitude to Stalin, the Red Army and the Soviet Union for the liberation; the road to socialism; and the importance of the democratic development of Czechoslovakia. The overall narrative of the Liberation Day parades remained more or less the same throughout the 1950s and the 1960s, although its proximity to (the more popular) 1 May will affect the commemorations.

The commemorations of the liberation usually followed the same script. The programme would start with the laying of wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, followed by the laying of wreath at the memorial for the fallen Red Army soldiers in Olšany Cemetery,¹⁷³ although the highlight of the day was the military parade.¹⁷⁴ Further events were added to this programme on the day before Liberation Day; for example, in 1954 the Central Action Committee of the National Front invited select comrades to a ‘Celebratory Artistic Evening’, which included the

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ See for example: č. f. 357-2/Box 3 and NARC, Národní Fronta Ústřední Výbor č. f. 357-2/Box 9, inv. č. 2 (hereafter: č. f. 357-2/Box 9)

¹⁷⁴ See for example: ‘Mohutná přehlídka bojové připravenosti našich ozbrojených sil’ [A great display of the combat readiness of our forces] in *Rudé právo*, 10 May 1952, p. 2.

Orchestra of the National Theatre, the Czech Philharmonics and the Vít Nejedlý Army Art Ensemble amongst other performers.¹⁷⁵ Whilst this programme of high culture is not usually associated with the Czech Communists, they may have wished to give these events greater weight and stature, and add another dimension aside from tanks and artillery rolling down the street. In Hungary many official commemorative events took place at the Opera House and at the Erkel Theatre.

Apart from settling the date on which the liberation was commemorated, 1952 signalled another change in the celebration of 9 May. The Czechoslovak Communists realised that 1 May was more popular with the masses and started linking the rhetoric of the two commemorative days. A letter from the Central Committee of the KSČ dated 7 March instructed all Regional Committees to organise the 9 May commemorations ‘under the [same] common main slogans as 1 May.’¹⁷⁶ Most of the slogans thanked Stalin, the Soviet Union and the Red Army for the liberation of Czechoslovakia, for their friendship and for helping the Czechoslovak people achieve socialism. But it was not only the slogans of 9 May that were to be the same as on the Feast of Work of 1 May: internal documents also underlined that the festivities in the afternoon of 9 May should be ‘in a similar character as 1 May’. The aim, therefore, was to make 9 May a day of joy and relaxation, when ordinary people felt they were being ‘rewarded’ for their efforts.

Nonetheless, these attempts to link liberation with the Feast of Work did not bear fruit. The popularity of 1 May and its proximity to Liberation Day not only affected the rhetoric of 9 May, but also caused organisational problems for the Communists, not to mention the lack of participation on the part of the general public. A regional report from 1950 noted that whilst the celebrations – held in this particular year on 7 May – ‘were in the whole country good, although participation [...] was significantly lower than at the feast of work celebrations.’¹⁷⁷ The authors of the report give two reasons for this lack of enthusiasm towards Liberation Day: ‘adverse weather conditions and inadequate organisation.’ Reports from Brno painted a similar picture two years later, in 1952, where local officials admitted that ‘[t]he 9 May celebrations of our republic were not as well prepared or secured as the 1 May celebrations.’¹⁷⁸ There were

¹⁷⁵ č. f. 357-2/Box 9

¹⁷⁶ NARC, Národní Fronta Ústřední Výbor č. f. 357-2/Box 6, inv. č. 2 (hereafter: č. f. 357-2/Box 6)

¹⁷⁷ č. f. 357-2/Box 4

¹⁷⁸ č. f. 357-2/Box 9

too many events and preparation for many of these had started only a week beforehand. Perhaps more importantly, ‘we are not happy with the participation of the citizens’.

1 May

The ‘feast of work’ (*Svátek práce* in Czech, *A munka ünnepe* in Hungarian) as 1 May was known in the Eastern bloc countries, was commemorated in both Czechoslovakia and Hungary prior to the Second World War, although in Hungary this was only for a period of approximately six months in 1919 during the Soviet-backed Republic of Councils.¹⁷⁹ After the Republic fell, May Day was banned. May Day celebrations during the Communist era were usually employed to highlight the achievements of the Soviet Union, the Communist parties in their respective countries and international politics. 1 May celebrations were the most ‘international’ in nature with references – visual or spoken – to other Communist leaders and important members of the labour movement.

Parades with mass participation, both of those parading and the viewing public, were of central importance during the 1 May celebrations. In both Budapest and Prague, the first parades were held at ‘national’ sites such as Heroes Square in Budapest or Wenceslas Square in Prague. Attempts were made towards the mid-1950s to replace these routes, and position them along ones that were dotted with statues and monuments of the new order, rather than have them at *lieux de memoire* of the pre-war bourgeois order. In Hungary the parades transitioned from Heroes Square to the neighbouring Stalin Square at *Városliget* (City Park), where, under the newly-built Stalin statue, a tribune was erected from which the seated Party dignitaries could follow the parade.¹⁸⁰ Banners were employed to showcase the results of the five-year plan or to display ‘the outstanding results of some of our factories’, alongside pictures of Stalin and Rákosi and caricatures of imperialist world leaders such as American President Truman or the leader of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito.¹⁸¹ Parade routes as well as houses in villages, towns and cities were decorated days in advance with flowers and also with banners, often showcasing local/personal economic achievements.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Vilmos Voigt, ‘Éljen és virágozzék... (A budapesti május elsejéről)’ [Long live and flourish... (On the May days in Budapest)] *Budapesti Negyed* 3.1, 1994 at http://bfl.archivportal.hu/id-105-voigt_vilmos_eljen_es_viragozzek_a.html [accessed 30 April 2014]

¹⁸⁰ ‘Hatalmas lelkesedéssel ünnepelte meg a magyar nép hazánk felszabadulásának tizedik évfordulóját’ [The Hungarian people celebrated with great enthusiasm the tenth anniversary of our country’s liberation] in *Szabad Nép*, 5 April 1955, pp. 1-2, p. 1.

¹⁸¹ MOL, M-KS 276-60/1951-202. The decision of the Secretariat on 1 May 1951. Dated: 24 March 1951.

¹⁸² MOL, M-KS 276-61/1952-221. Note on 1 May in the countryside. Dated: 3 May 1952.



Figure 8: Marchers carrying an effigy of Truman as a Nazi 'after the economic talks in Moscow' during 1 May parade in 1952. Source: Fortepan/ Imre.



Figure 9: 1 May marchers passing the Stalin statue in Budapest in 1955. Source: Fortepan/ Fortepan.

Unlike Hungary, 1 May had been celebrated in Czechoslovakia during the interwar period. Nonetheless, the Communists still decided to move from the already established venues. Between 1918 and 1938, the different political parties held separate 1 May events: the Communists celebrated their 1 Mays on Republic Square (*Náměstí Republiky*), while the social democrats held their celebrations on Gunner's Island (*Střelecký ostrov*).¹⁸³ After 1948 parades were held on Wenceslas Square – a huge public space dripping with allusions to nationhood and protest. This change in the parade venue signalled the desire of the new Communist regime of Czechoslovakia to connect previously established national traditions with new traditions that the Communists wished to establish.

Wenceslas Square, as Roman Krakovsky underlines, was ideal for the 1 May parade from a number of different aspects. The parade could take place in closed space that 'tended to draw the attention of the population to the spot where the principal events of the festivities would occur.'¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, '[t]his had the effect of providing a focal point for the parade, which marked the climax of the event, where the party dignitaries were assembled on a podium to view the passing crowds.' Another advantage of Wenceslas Square was that it is located on a slight slope, descending from the National Museum towards Můstek. Therefore, by placing the tribune full with dignitaries on the bottom of the square, they were able to see the whole parade stretching in front of them.¹⁸⁵

Even so, after the 1948 1 May parade, the official report lamented that the parade resembled a military parade and that it 'stretched through the whole of Wenceslas Square'.¹⁸⁶ The report suggested that Wenceslas square was not large enough 'for a united May celebration' and suggested that in coming years it could take place in Strahov stadium. This proposal was never implemented, however. Instead, the organisers attempted to make Wenceslas Square more accommodating for the large parade by removing all obstacles: flower pots and barriers were removed from the middle of the square, if there was scaffolding on any of the buildings it was

¹⁸³ Roman Krakovsky, 'Continuity and Innovation: Itineraries of the May Day Ritual in Czechoslovakia' in Apor, Balázs; Péter Apor and E. A. Rees *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on the Postwar Period*, Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing, 2008, pp. 135-147, p. 137. [Hereafter: Krakovsky, 'Continuity and Innovation']

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 138.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 139.

¹⁸⁶ č. f. 357-2/Box 3

removed only to be re-erected the next day, even public toilets were closed on the day so as not to impede the flow of the marching masses.¹⁸⁷

The only modification to the normal parade routine in the 1950s was in 1955, when the enormous Stalin statue was unveiled as part of the festivities.¹⁸⁸ On this occasion, the parade route itself remained the same while a contingent proceeded to the statue.¹⁸⁹ The statue of Stalin stood in Letná Park, looking towards Bethlehem Chapel, where Jan Hus delivered his sermons.¹⁹⁰

1 May proved to be one of the more successful national day celebrations in Czechoslovakia. Following Victorious February in 1948 the Communist comrades wished to make sure that ‘the first unified 1 May’ would be commemorated accordingly.¹⁹¹ The outline for the celebration by the National Front stressed that 1 May now became ‘the celebration of all working people, the whole unified nation’. As opposed to ‘the previous capitalist period’, which ‘split people’. To achieve this unified celebration, the Central Action Committee of the National Front issued strict guidelines on 16 February 1948, that stressed not only the political importance of the demonstration, but also the opportunities it offered. The rhetoric, they suggested, needed to express the joy over the Communists’ victory over the reaction; ‘stress the invincibility of the power of democracy, the importance of our alliance with the Slovak nation’; the friendship with the Soviet Union and the role of Klement Gottwald in the implementation of socialism. Moreover, the rhetoric of the celebration also needed to promote the opportunities the workers could now fulfil in the factories and in agriculture that the 28 October of the First Republic only promised.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ Krakovsky, ‘Continuity and Innovation’, p. 140.

¹⁸⁸ ‘Slavnostní odhalení pomníku J. V. Stalina v Praze’ [Ceremonial unveiling of the Stalin statue in Prague] in *Rudé právo*, 2 May 1955, p. 3. See also: Jana Ratajová, ‘Pražské Májové Oslavy 1948-1989’ [Prague May celebrations] in *Kuděj – Časopis pro kulturní dějiny*, No. 1, 2000, pp. 51-64, p. 55. [hereafter Ratajová, ‘Pražské Májové Oslavy’]

¹⁸⁹ ‘Mohutná oslava 1. máje v Praze’ [Great celebration of 1 May in Prague] in *Rudé právo*, 2 May 1955, p. 1.

¹⁹⁰ Mariusz Szczygieł, *Gottland: Mostly True Stories from Half of Czechoslovakia*, Brooklyn and London: Melville House, 2014, p. 127.

¹⁹¹ č. f. 357-2/Box 3

¹⁹² Ibid.



Figure 10: 1 May celebrations in Prague in 1948 or 1949. Source: NACR, Národní fronta ústřední výbor, č.f. 357-2/Box 3.

Czechoslovak May Day celebrations were organised under different lead slogans every year. In the late 1940s and early 1950s the lead slogans were mainly concerned with the road ahead to socialism. As part of the personality cult of the leader, banners also pointed to the person who would make this possible: ‘With President Gottwald towards socialism! (in 1949) or ‘With President Gottwald forward to peace and socialism! With the Soviet Union towards peace!’ (in 1951).¹⁹³ In addition to the lead slogans another 30-40 slogans were also approved for the celebrations each year, usually extolling the results of the Communists’ economic policies (such as the five-year plans) and also the international solidarity aspect of the day.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ č. f. 357-2/Box 3 and NARC, Národní Fronta Ústřední Výbor č. f. 357-2/Box 5, inv. č. 2 [hereafter: č. f. 357-2/Box 5]

¹⁹⁴ See for example: č. f. 357-2/Box 3 or č. f. 357-2/Box 4

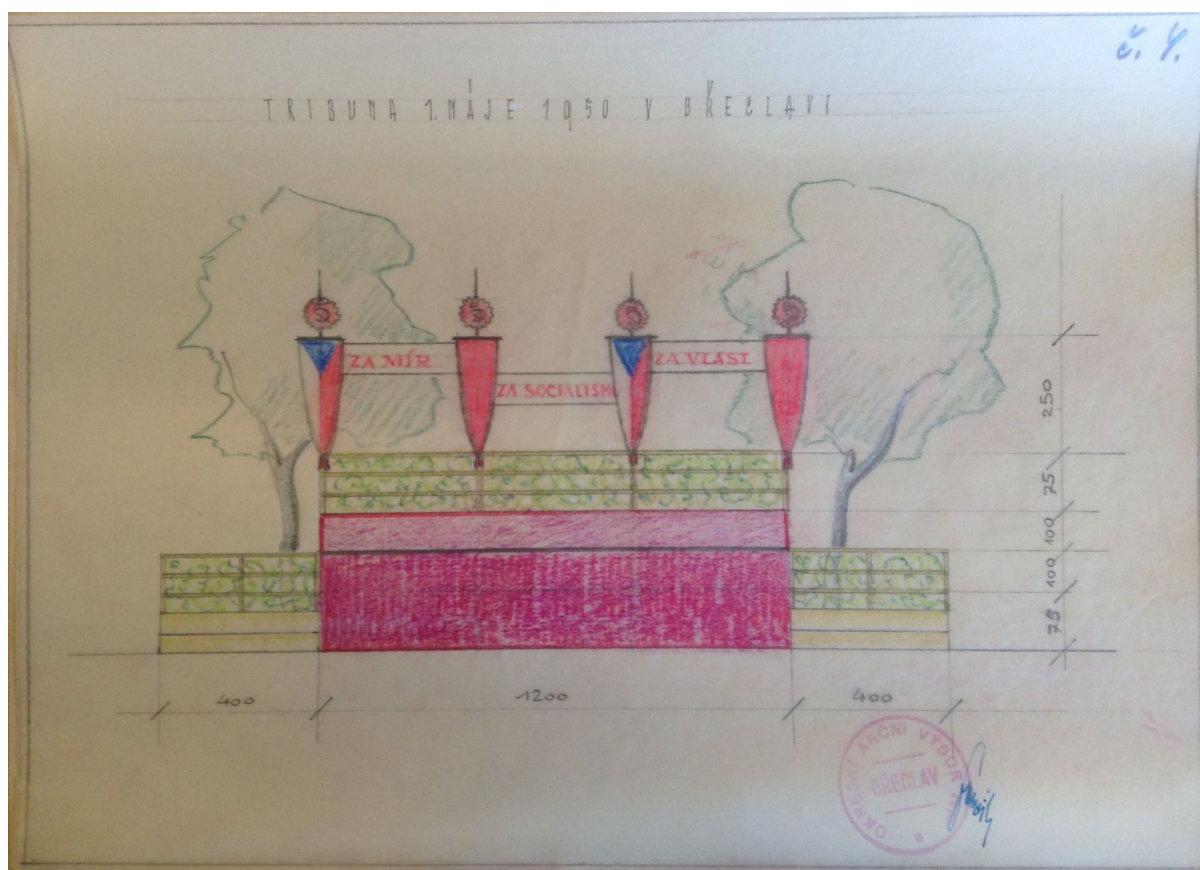


Figure 11: Plans for the 1 May 1950 tribune in Břeclav, south Moravia with popular 1 May slogans: 'For Peace', 'For socialism' and 'For the homeland'. Source: NACR, Národní fronta ústřední výbor, č.f. 357-2/Box 4.

Despite being the most successful national day celebration in Czechoslovakia, there were occasional organisational and attendance problems on 1 May. As mentioned above, in 1948 there were complaints about the parade route and the nature of the parade (military appearance). Two years later, in 1950, the report after the 1 May celebrations noted that the Prague parade was much better organised than in previous years, although there were still some organisational shortcomings.¹⁹⁵ However, in Bratislava the main problem reported was the lack of enthusiasm from the public:

Overall the organisation [...] was well managed. In the future, however we will have to pay attention to our agitation work so that the demonstrations are vivid and that citizens learn to loudly manifest their joyous thoughts, chant slogans, clap, etc.

The rhetoric presented during the Hungarian 1 May commemorations varied depending on a number of factors, such as the international political situation, anniversaries, and events in the

¹⁹⁵ č. f. 357-2/Box 4

bloc (such as Party Congresses). Yet, the key points were always the same: economic achievements (local, national and international) and the role of the Soviet Union. The latter was especially highlighted in 1954, in preparation for the Third Party Congress. The Central Committee of the MDP on the 1 May celebrations decided that the role of the Soviet Union in the global political situation – for example ‘keeping the peace’ or ‘the realization of the collective security of the European people’ – needed to be the focus of that year’s festivities.¹⁹⁶

1 May celebrations were closely monitored by the Central Committee’s Agitation and Propaganda Department to gauge the mood of the people. 1 May was also associated with assemblies throughout the country. Reports in the first half of the 1950s indicated that ‘1 May celebrations in the towns and villages were especially successful. The workers took part in the celebrations with cheer and great enthusiasm.’¹⁹⁷ The Agitation and Propaganda Department was particularly pleased that the youth and women took part in great numbers. The assemblies were also generally a great success, and the peasants even turned up to the in their Sunday best. Even so, another report from 1953 noted that whilst the people ‘listen to the speeches with great attentiveness – in a lot of the assemblies there is a lack of visible enthusiasm’, and there is no ‘cheering, clapping etc.’.¹⁹⁸ The people may have felt obliged to turn up in numbers and be observed in attendance, but in many cases they may have had no real commitment to 1 May.

Whilst the reports were largely positive, organisational mistakes and ‘the activities of the enemy’ were also a concern, especially in towns in the countryside.¹⁹⁹ Such mistakes ranged from parade routes not being secured well, too many motorised vehicles in the parade or speeches being too long.²⁰⁰ Speeches were mainly criticised for being overly long, despite requests from the Central Committee to keep them short: ‘in Szekszárd [county seat of Tolna county in southern Hungary] the two main speakers spoke for more than two hours [...] and in Tótszerdahely [in Zala county, western Hungary] for more than two-and-a-half hours.’²⁰¹ The ‘activities of the enemy’ mainly referred to priests and Church events. The report from the Agitation and Propaganda Department claimed that during May Day ‘[s]ome of the priests organised significantly more church events [than usual].’²⁰² Other ‘hostile elements’ included

¹⁹⁶ MOL, M-KS 276-60/1954-425. Resolution on the celebration of 1 May. Dated: 12 April 1954.

¹⁹⁷ MOL, M-KS 276-60/1951-202.

¹⁹⁸ MOL, M-KS 276-61/1952-221 and MOL, M-KS 276-61/1953-256. Report on the 1 May celebrations in the countryside. Dated 4 May 1953.

¹⁹⁹ MOL, M-KS 276-61/1953-256.

²⁰⁰ See for example: MOL, M-KS 276-61/1952-221 and MOL, M-KS 276-61/1953-256.

²⁰¹ MOL, M-KS 276-61/256 (1953)

²⁰² Ibid.

people '[a]t many smaller assemblies' interrupting meetings. All the offenders 'were denounced on the scene.'

May Days gradually became one of the most successful national day commemorations throughout the Communist period in both Czechoslovakia and Hungary and the rest of the Eastern bloc.²⁰³ The feast of work carried the explicit political message of the international solidarity of the working classes – alongside 'messages' to the imperialist West –, thus creating a(n) (imagined) community for the people of the Eastern bloc. However, 1 May days were also connected to mass assemblies that gradually turned into fun days at the park with various programmes, thus making them more appealing to the masses.

In a similar vein to 1 May, 7 November, the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, was declared a state holiday in Hungary. Yet, although when the national law day was passed 7 November was triumphantly declared the most important Hungarian state day, in practice its commemoration was limited mainly to speeches and the like. The main theme of newspaper editorials and speeches by Party comrades at the different gala events in Budapest was that the Great October Socialist Revolution was a 'historic turning point' and as a result the power is now in the hands of the workers. Other recurring themes were the Red Army's victory over Hitler's fascists and the liberation of the Eastern bloc and its independence.²⁰⁴

In terms of the commemorative displays, 7 November lacked the pomp of 1 May or Liberation Day parades, and its main events took place in the Opera House in Budapest and in theatres ('or in the biggest and most beautiful cultural rooms') outside of the capital.²⁰⁵ These commemorative meetings usually took place on the eve of 7 November. The day of the anniversary was taken up with the laying of wreaths at the Soviet memorial in Budapest and in 'all the towns and villages'. The supposed achievements of the socialism that was made possible by the Great October Revolution were celebrated, however. Factories, for example would take part in a number of different initiatives. In 1952, the decision regarding the commemoration of 7 November urged factories, in the spirit of 'the socialist work-competition', to 'indicate within their yearly commitments what they will finish by 7

²⁰³ See: Gyarmati, György, *Március Hatalma A Hatalom Márciusa: Fejezetek Március 15. Ünneplésének Történetéből* [The Power of March, the March of the Powers: Chapters from the commemorations of 15 March], Budapest: Paginarum, 1998, p. 172. For Czechoslovakia see: Krakovsky, 'Continuity and Innovation', p. 135.

²⁰⁴ See for example: 'Kovács István elvtárs ünnepi beszéde' [Comrade István Kovács's celebratory speech] in *Szabad Nép*, 7 November 1955, pp. 1-2.

²⁰⁵ MOL, M-KS 276-60/1952-318.

November, and for the completion of this they should start a contest.²⁰⁶ The following year factories participated in a '7 November commemorative shift', which lasted from 1-7 November.²⁰⁷ The shift had been mainly proposed by the Central Committee 'to improve the currently stagnating state of the competition'.

In both Hungary and Czechoslovakia 7 November commemorations were more subdued than 1 May or even Liberation Day commemorations. It is possible that, beyond the platitudes of speeches by party cadres and wreath-laying, the Hungarian and Czech Communists did not really know what to do with an anniversary that commemorated events in another country and had little practical connection to their experiences. Although in Czechoslovakia 7 November was connected to the establishment of the First Republic, this could also have been seen as empty rhetoric.

Conclusion

Given that Hungary and Czechoslovakia were both required to follow a Soviet-devised template after 1945, in this period the two countries follow the same model for national days, with local variations. Initially after 1945, Communist parties were permitted to search for the radical traditions in their national histories and to promote a patriotism on this basis. This enabled a focus on historical figures and events such as Jan Hus and 15 March, although by the mid-1950s such events came to be considered suspect. The new national day calendars of the Eastern bloc contained both national aspects, particular in relation to foundation of state or constitutions and nationalisations, and Soviet-inspired days, in particular Liberation Day and 1 May. On these latter days, the wonders that socialism was apparently bringing were propagandised, such as five-year plans, the building of socialism and the need for the workers to be dedicated to their tasks. Liberation by the Soviets in 1945 was presented as ushering in the climax of centuries-old national struggles for liberation.

In this chapter, a main pattern is the way in which events in Hungary and Czechoslovakia mirror each other and appear to be following the same trajectory. After 1956, they begin to diverge. In Hungary, especially with the revolution of 1956, national elements come to the fore,

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ MOL, M-KS 276-61/1953-256.

while in Czechoslovakia they remain at bay until the 1980s. This will be discussed in the following chapter, which culminates with the end of Communism.

Chapter Five

Goulash Communism and Normalisation: National Days in Hungary and Czechoslovakia from 1956-1989

From the full monopolisation of power by the communist parties in 1948 until the Hungarian revolution and beginning of the de-Stalinisation process in 1956, national day commemorations in Hungary and Czechoslovakia followed a similar blue-print: in both countries new, Soviet-themed days were added to the national day calendars, whilst previously existing national days were either repurposed or cancelled. Nonetheless, despite this similar trajectory, 1956 became a point of divergence for the two countries. Following the defeat of the 1956 revolution, the Communist Party of Hungary needed to reinvent itself; the name of the Party was changed from Hungarian Workers' Party [*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja*, MDP] to Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party [*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*, MSzMP] and János Kádár was entrusted with the Party and the country's leadership. These developments, in conjunction with the de-Stalinisation process in Hungary, meant that policy was now approached through a 'national-accommodative' viewpoint, to use Herbert Kitschelt's term. In Hungary, the Communist regime now permitted 'modest levels of civil rights and elite contestation at least episodically, while relying more on cooperation than repression as ways to instil citizens' compliance'.¹ This approach extended to the social, economic and cultural policies of the Hungarian Communist regime, which resulted in the so-called 'goulash Communism'.²

The 'national-accommodative' approach was also reflected in the national day commemorations, and whilst the regime's relationship with the anniversary of 1848-49 remained problematic, previously erased elements of Hungarian history were re-incorporated into the metanarrative. These elements included the founder of the Hungarian state, St Stephen (although now referred to as King Stephen), and the memory of the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, which was made possible by the de-Stalinisation process and the rehabilitation of the Republic's leadership.

¹ Herbert Kitschelt, Z. Mansfeldova, R. Markowski and G. Toka, *Post-Communist Party Systems, Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 24. [hereafter: Kitschelt, *Post-Communist Party Systems*] Kitschelt's main focus is party formation in the post-Communist period, but he traces these developments to the interwar and Communist periods. He argues for three different modes of Communist regime: patrimonial, national-accommodative and bureaucratic-authoritarian.

² See for example: Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 79.

In contrast with Hungary – and Poland, where in Poznań in June 1956 there were protests against the Communist party –, 1956 in Czechoslovakia did not witness any mass unrest. There, de-Stalinisation did not start systematically until the early 1960s, and the political leadership remained the same. Antonín Novotný, for example, First Secretary since Klement Gottwald's death in 1953 and President from November 1957, remained in these positions until 1968. French historian Muriel Blaive attributes this lack of a popular uprising in Czechoslovakia against the Soviet-imposed regime to the country's favourable economic situation, and, additionally, because it was not under direct Soviet military occupation and had escaped the worst of the Red Army's atrocities.³ Moreover, in Czechoslovakia, the Communist Party [*Komunistická strana Československa*, KSČ] had been electorally successful and enjoyed high party membership figures. Blaive also notes that the Czech and the Slovak people were fearful of what was happening in Hungary in 1956, as they worried that the Hungarian minorities in Slovakia would be encouraged to voice irredentist demands.⁴ The party leadership – Novotný, Antonín Zápotocký, Viliam Široký, Karel Bacílek – were loyal Stalinists, fearful about the implications of revelations from the show trials of Rudolf Slánský and others, which they had pursued, and the necessity to rehabilitate them. For these reasons, as well as its pre-war historical legacy, Herbert Kitschelt has described Czechoslovak Communism as 'bureaucratic-authoritarian', in contrast to the 'national-accommodative' model of Hungary.⁵

The Stalin statue at the top of Letná park – unveiled on 1 May 1955 – became the telling sign of the belated de-Stalinisation process in Czechoslovakia. It was not destroyed until the late date of 1962, on orders from Moscow.⁶ As such, unlike in Hungary, national days in Czechoslovakia did not start to re-incorporate previously used national elements until the end of the 1980s. Thus, whilst Hungary's more 'national-accommodative' regime was able to explore ways in which erased figures or events could be reintegrated into the official metanarrative of Communism in the 1960s, in Czechoslovakia – where the regime operated along more 'bureaucratic-authoritarian' lines – this was delayed until the late 1980s.

³ Muriel, Blaive, *Un déstalinisation manquée Tchécoslovaquie 1956*, Paris and Brussels: Editions Complexe, 2005, pp. 101-102 and p. 158.

⁴ Ibid. p. 166-170.

⁵ Kitschelt, *Post-Communist Party Systems*, p. 25-26.

⁶ Zdeněk Hojda and Jiří Pokorný, *Pomníky a zapomínky* [Monuments and Forgetting], Prague: Paseka, 1996, p. 215.

In 1960 a new constitution was adopted, as the Czechoslovak government now felt that it had achieved its goals and could declare that ‘Socialism had been victorious in our country!’⁷ The new constitution was presented as a milestone, through which Czechoslovakia had ‘entered a new period in [its] history’, and started its transition ‘to communism’. This constitution further centralised power in Prague, and Slovak autonomy was seriously limited.⁸ Nonetheless, by the late 1960s pressure for reform had grown, and Novotný was forced out of power in 1968.⁹ His successor as First Secretary was the Slovak politician Alexander Dubček, whose liberalising measures, which included mild democratisation, economic reforms and the liberalisation of politics, sought to introduce what is often referred to as ‘socialism with a human face’.¹⁰

This reforming Prague Spring ended, however, on 21 August 1968 when the Warsaw Pact countries, on Moscow’s command, invaded Czechoslovakia. Another Slovak politician Gustáv Husák now took over the position of First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, whose main task was to ensure that ‘normalisation’ was carried out. The period of normalisation cancelled all the liberal policies Dubček had introduced and attempted to ‘normalise’ life, although, what ‘normalisation’ meant exactly no one, not even the Czechoslovak Communist Party really knew.¹¹ Husák, defined normalisation (or consolidation, as he called it) as a process that provided the means for people ‘to live well and quietly, so that it is worth living.’¹² For Kieran Williams, ‘normalisation’ was primarily about restoring extreme predictability, far beyond the certainty provided, for example, by the rule of law.¹³ In some ways, normalisation could thus be seen as a continuation of de-Stalinisation.

⁷ ‘100/1960 Sb. Ústavní zákon ze dne 11. července 1960, Ústava Československé socialistické republiky’ [100/1960 Constitutional Law of 11 July 1960, the Constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic] at https://web.archive.org/web/20071010101042/http://www.psp.cz/docs/texts/constitution_1960.html [last accessed 28 November 2015]

⁸ Jan, Rychlík, *Česí a Slováci ve 20. století: Spolupráce a konflikty, 1914-1992* [Czechs and Slovaks in the twentieth century: cooperation and conflict], Vyšehrad: Ústav pro Studium Totalitních Režimů, 2012, p. 431. Also see: pp. 425-433. [hereafter: Rychlík, *Česí a Slováci ve 20. století*]

⁹ Rychlík, *Česí a Slováci ve 20. století*, p. 461.

¹⁰ Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath: Czechoslovak politics, 1968-1970*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 14, p. 20 and p. 42. [hereafter: Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath*]

¹¹ Ibid. pp. 39-40. See also Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and his TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University, 2010, p. 3.

¹² Quoted in Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath*, p. 40.

¹³ Ibid. p. 41.

15 March – Hungary

One of the demands of the Hungarian revolutionaries of 1956 was that 15 March, the anniversary of the 1848-49 revolution be reinstated as a full, official public holiday. In a possible show of compromise and to curb further protests the government reinstated 15 March as a full national day in December 1956 by issuing a decree.¹⁴ Even so, for one more time, less than a week before the day was to be commemorated in 1957, 15 March was demoted to being simply a school holiday.¹⁵ Despite its demotion, commemorative events still took place, in addition to the school events. The focus of the commentary in the newspapers was now on discrediting the ‘counter-revolution’ of 1956. As discussed in the previous chapter, the revolutionaries of 1956 not only requested the reinstatement of 15 March as a national day, but they also arranged their demands into Twelve Points, mirroring those of 1848 and thus presenting themselves – and not the Communists – as the true heirs of 1848.¹⁶ One of the main tasks of the new leadership was thus to debunk the message of the ‘counter-revolutionaries’ and re-establish themselves as the true heirs. To do this, they would have to reclaim 15 March, although its revolutionary implications remained problematic for them.

The 1957 official commemoration took place in the Opera House, on the evening of 14 March, so that the next day, the commemorative day itself, the official party newspaper *Népszabadság* could proclaim on its front pages that ‘The heir of the ideals of 15 March is socialist Hungary’.¹⁷ The commemorative speech was given by Gyula Kállai, President of the National Council of the Patriotic People’s Front.¹⁸ Kállai lumped the 1956ers in with the old ruling classes, claiming that the commemorations of 1848 had been hijacked for a hundred years by the squires and the capitalists, when in reality the heirs of the revolution were the working

¹⁴ András Gerő, *Modern Hungarian society in the making: the unfinished experience*, Budapest: CEU Press, 1995, p. 247.

¹⁵ ‘Meggyorsítják a közületek kisépítkezéseit, javaslat az állampolgárságról szóló törvényre, március 15-e iskolai szünnap, minden más területen munkanap’ [The building works of public bodies will be accelerated, proposals to the citizenship law, 15 March is a day-off school, at all other areas it is a working-day], in *Népszabadság*, 9 March 1957, p. 1.

¹⁶ See previous chapter. Also: György Gyarmati, *Március hatalma, a hatalom márciusa: Fejezetek március 15. ünnepelésének történetéből*, Budapest: Paginarum, 1998, p. 139. For the 12 points of 1956 see: pp. 144-147. [hereafter: Gyarmati, *Március hatalma*]

¹⁷ ‘Március 15 eszméinek örököse a szocialista Magyarország’ [The heir of the ideals of 15 March is socialist Hungary], in *Népszabadság*, 15 March 1957, pp. 1-2.

¹⁸ Established in 1954, it was not until after the 1956 revolution that the Front became an image of national unity. It functioned as an umbrella organisation for all aspects of the political system, including social and cultural organisations and even the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party. See: Péter Benkő, ‘A Hazafias Népfrent és a népi mozgalom 1957-ben’ in *Múltunk*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 1995, pp. 73-98.

classes. For the previous twelve years, according to Kállai, the true heirs of the revolution had finally been able to celebrate. The counter-revolution of 1956, however had again ‘dirtied the clean flag of 1848 with mud.’¹⁹ Moreover, they had tried to falsify the ideals of the leaders of the 1848 revolution – including Kossuth, Petőfi and Táncsics – in order to ‘serve [the counter-revolutionary’s] traitorous and repressive politics’. With the help, of course, of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries this threat to the People’s Republic had now been eliminated.²⁰

Despite Kállai’s optimistic spin, the Communist leadership was still aware of the potent nature of the anniversary of 1848, as evidenced by its demotion to a working day. This meant that the adult population had to be kept away from the official commemoration. Hence, after 1958 the main aim of the 15 March commemoration was transformed into educating the youth about the ideals of 1848. For this task – and for the wider control of the youth – the Hungarian Young Communist League (*Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség*, KISZ) was established on 21 March 1957, on the anniversary of the establishment of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919.²¹ KISZ, together with the Patriotic People’s Front, was tasked with the organisation of commemorations that were aimed at the youth (such as 15 March) and it also participated in the organisation of other national day events (such as Liberation Day).

After 1958, the content of the 15 March commemorations was not significantly altered from that of the pre-1956 period. The Communists still presented themselves as the heirs to the revolution. The organisation of the commemorative events was now entrusted to KISZ and to different branches of the Patriotic People’s Front, as opposed to the city councils and various state bodies as before. The events themselves, however, still followed the same pattern: since 15 March was a school holiday, and so secondary schools, colleges and universities usually held their commemorations on the previous day.²² The central commemoration was held on the

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 1.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 2. In 1958 similar rhetoric was presented during the official commemorations. See: ‘Letöröltük a gyalázatot, amellyel az ellenforradalom bemocskolta Kossuth, Petőfi és Táncsics zászlaját’ [We have wiped off the shame with which the counter-revolution dirtied the flag of Kossuth, Petőfi and Táncsics], in *Népszabadság*, 15 March 1958, pp. 1-2.

²¹ The establishment of KISZ was announced in *Népszabadság* on 17 March 1957. ‘Az MSZMP ideiglenes Központi Bizottságának határozata az ifjúság nevelésének néhány kérdéséről és a Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség megalakításáról’ [The interim Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party’s resolution regarding some questions of the education of the youth and the establishment of the Hungarian Young Communist League] in *Népszabadság*, 17 March 1957, pp. 1-2.

²² See for example: MOL, M-KS 288-22/1965-1. Proposal to the Political Committee on the organisation of the 1965 spring celebrations. Agitation and Propaganda Department. Dated 6 January 1965.

morning of 15 March in Budapest, with wreath-laying ceremonies at the statues of Lajos Kossuth and Sándor Petőfi. Representatives of KISZ and the Patriotic People's Front would give short speeches in front of 400-500 mobilised youth.²³

Despite the seemingly unchanging nature of the 15 March commemoration after 1958, in reality the day had now slid even further down the hierarchy of national days than even its status as a work day would suggest. De-Stalinisation gave the Communist leadership the opportunity to incorporate the anniversary of the establishment of the 1919 Hungarian Soviet into the revolutionary traditions, along with 1848 and the liberation of Hungary in 1945. The three dates were grouped together under the banner of Revolutionary Youth Days (*Forradalmi Ifjúsági Napok*), organised by (mainly) the Young Communist League in 1967. In this way, 15 March became submerged into these other, very Communist-focused events, officially identifying it only with the Communist tradition and stripping it of its potency as a vehicle for protest against repressive regimes.

21 March – Hungary

With the squashing of the 1956 revolution, the Communist regime of Hungary not only had to rebrand itself, but it also needed to explain to the masses what had happened. For this, they turned to the First Hungarian Soviet Republic. Although the First Hungarian Soviet Republic, established on 21 March 1919, lasted for less than six months, it could have provided the post-war Communist regime with a point of origin within Hungarian history. Even so, in the years between 1949 and 1956 the memory of 1919 proved to be difficult to include in the historical narrative of revolutions – although it was commemorated within the Party – for a number of reasons.²⁴ After its collapse, 1919 became a topic that divided the Left, with the émigrés – who fled the ensuing White Terror – and those who remained in Hungary blaming each other for its failure.²⁵ More pertinently, it would have been difficult for the Hungarian Stalinist regime to explain the demise of the leader of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic, Béla Kun, during the Stalinist purges of the 1930s.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Péter Apor, *Fabricating Authenticity: The Afterlife of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in the Age of State Socialism*, London, New York and Delhi: Anthem Press, 2014, p. 14. [hereafter: Apor, *Fabricating Authenticity*]

²⁵ Ibid. p. 7.

With de-Stalinisation, however, which coincidentally started in 1956, the year of the Hungarian revolution, all this changed. The First Hungarian Soviet Republic became a memory that could be used to explain what had happened during the 1956 ‘counter-revolution’. Béla Kun’s demise could now be excused as one of Stalin’s crimes, following Khrushchev’s ‘Secret Speech’ at the 20th Party Congress, attacking the cult of personality and Stalin’s crimes.²⁶ The Hungarian historian Péter Apor has identified two stages in the rehabilitation of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic.²⁷ First, the events of October and November 1956 were labelled a dangerous ‘counter-revolution’, in the same way that the White Terror unleashed by Miklós Horthy had been after the fall of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. The new Communist leadership, with János Kádár at its helm, heavily promoted this apparent link between Horthy, his White Terror and the counter-revolution of 1956 in the first volume of the White Books (*Fehér Könyvek*), published by the Hungarian government in five volumes between 1956 and 1958.²⁸ In the first volume, at just over 300 pages, the word ‘Horthy’ or ‘horthyist’ appeared over 80 times.²⁹ Thus, during the last months of 1956 and throughout 1957, the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was not necessarily itself elevated but was used as an explanatory framework that, on the one hand, explained to the masses what happened during the events of autumn 1956, and, on the other, warned people of what could have followed if the counter-revolution was not squashed, i.e. something equivalent to Horthy’s White Terror.

The second shift in the use of the Hungarian Soviet Republic came in 1958, when the Communist leadership began to attempt ‘to shed new light on a broader set of events, including 1848’.³⁰ On the 110th anniversary of the 1848-49 revolution, *Népszabadság*, the Party’s official newspaper, published a front-page article entitled: ‘We have wiped off the shame with which the counter-revolution dirtied the flag of Kossuth, Petőfi and Táncsics’.³¹ The

²⁶ For the secret speech and its consequences see: Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953-70*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013, pp. 24-49.

²⁷ Apor, *Fabricating Authenticity*, p. 155.

²⁸ The *White Books* (*Fehér Könyvek*) bore the title *The counter-revolution in Hungary 1956*. The first volume, published in December 1956, aimed to unfold ‘the ideological preparation of the counter-revolution by its main supporters and leaders, the role of the Western imperialist circles and the organisation of the domestic counter-revolutionary forces and the role of the treasonous revisionist faction of Imre Nagy – Losonczy.’ In: *Az ellenforradalom Magyarországon 1956, Tanulmányok I.*, Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1958, p. 6. [Hereafter: *Az ellenforradalom Magyarországon 1956-I*. This is a later edition, although unfortunately no edition number is given.] See also: Apor, *Fabricating Authenticity*, pp. 66-71.

²⁹ Word search by author in *Az ellenforradalom Magyarországon 1956-I*.

³⁰ Apor, *Fabricating Authenticity*, p. 155.

³¹ ‘Letöröltük a gyalázatot, amellyel az ellenforradalom bemocskolta Kossuth, Petőfi és Táncsics zászlaját’ in *Népszabadság*, 15 March 1958, pp. 1-2, p. 1.

beginnings of the new historical narrative that the Communists would construct over the next year had started to emerge:

Searching amongst the glories and failings of Hungarian history after 15 March 1848 there are two dates that are the most striking and bear the most importance. One is 21 March 1919, the other is 4 April 1945. During the few months of the Republic of Councils the Hungarian people were at the forefront of progress.³²

Placing the Hungarian Soviet Republic into the previously established linear narrative of revolutionary traditions also allowed the Communists to elevate it from being simply an explanatory framework for the events of 1956, to being an important event in its own right. This new importance attached to the anniversary of its establishment, 21 March, was reflected in its new commemorative practices. Before 1956, there were only small commemorations within the Party. The 1957 commemorations were still on a small scale, but there were tentative calls to honour those who had participated in 1919. In 1958 a celebratory event was organised in the Erkel Theatre in Budapest; but these events were not national in their nature, and the main driving rhetoric still centred around the counter-revolution (both Horthy's and 1956).³³

The 40th anniversary of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1959 provided the opportunity to up the scale. The Communist party started to plan the 40th anniversary celebrations in early 1958, whilst the Institute of Party History already in the summer of 1957 began preparations for an academic conference.³⁴ Organised together with the Institute of History and the Institute of Military History, the conference theme was the influence of 1919 on other Communist movements and how foreign Communists had helped the Hungarians. The aim was to invite historians from the other People's Republics and other countries with a Communist party/tradition – such as Italy, France or Britain – for a four-day conference to coincide with and complement the 40th anniversary celebrations. Organising such an 'international' conference demonstrates the Communist leadership's eagerness to establish 1919 as an event central to the

³² Ibid.

³³ For 1957 see: Apor, *Fabricating Authenticity*, p. 76. For 1958: 'A kommunizmus eszméje, amelyet a magyar munkásosztály 1919-ben magáévá tett, elvezeti népünket a teljes győzelemig' [The ideology of Communism that the Hungarian working classes made their own in 1919, will lead us to complete victory] in *Népszabadság*, 21 March 1958, pp. 1-2.

³⁴ For the start of the official preparation see: MOL, M-KS 288-22/1958-1. For the conference organised by the Institute of Party History (IPH) et al see: MOL, M-KS 288-22/1958-7. Memorandum dated 5 March 1958. The Memorandum specifies that the IPH 'asked the Soviet Union and the sister organisations of other People's Republics, alongside Yugoslavia, Austria, Italy, France and the Central Committee of the British Communists to call on all Marxist historians: prepare studies, collect documents on how the Hungarian Republic of Councils influenced the[ir] [respective] countries' proletariat and how they supported the Hungarian Republic of Councils.'

Hungarian historical narrative, yet also to link the ‘revolution’ to the theme of internationalism.

For the first time, internal Party documents also proscribed that ‘[t]he celebrations need to be organised on a national level’.³⁵ The celebrations were also intended to educate the masses, so they could ‘acquaint themselves with the progressive traditions of the Hungarian workers’ movement, with the glorious struggles of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the Communists’ Hungarian Party.’³⁶ This ‘educational’ work was mainly done through exhibitions, but also thorough more popular means such as films.³⁷ For example, the film entitled *39-es dandár* (The 39th Brigade) also premiered as part of the commemorative events.

It was not only the general masses that were to be involved in the commemorations, but the veterans and survivors of 1919 were also mobilised. On 6 December 1958, Jolán Szilágyi, the widow of Tibor Szamuely, wrote a letter by hand from her hospital bed to the Communist leadership, urging them to commemorate the anniversary in an appropriate manner.³⁸ Szamuely had been a prominent member of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and occupied a number of positions; most notably, he had been People’s Commissar for Military Affairs and was thus responsible for much of the Red Terror. His notorious bodyguard unit was referred to as the ‘Lenin Boys’. His widow’s many commemorative suggestions included inviting the still living Lenin Boys ‘and those who remained loyal to the ideals of Communism’, to show respect to those who made great sacrifices for the Soviet Republic. She also pressed the leadership to make 21 March into a larger commemoration, as the day needed to be rid off ‘the angry slander that the fascist Horthy regime put on it’.

From the official programme we can see that many of Szamuely’s widow’s demands were met (although not necessarily in response to her suggestions). The scale of the commemorations is apparent from the number of official participants and the different delegations: eleven ‘friendly countries’ sent delegations, party delegations were also sent from Indonesia, Canada, Austria and the United States of America, 80 veterans of the Hungarian Soviet Republic came from

³⁵ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1958-1. Proposal for the celebrations of the Communists’ Hungarian Party and the 40th anniversary of the Hungarian Republic of Councils. Agitation and Propaganda Department. Dated 9 July 1958.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ The commemorative exhibition on the Hungarian Soviet Republic opened on 17 March 1959. MOL, M-KS 288-22/1959-1. Proposal for the commemoration of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Operative Committee for the 40th anniversary commemorations of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Dates 12 March 1959. [hereafter: M-KS 288-22/1959-1. Proposal, 40th anniversary]

³⁸ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1958-1. Letter by the widow of Tibor Szamuely. Dated 6 December 1958.

‘neighbouring friendly countries and from the GDR and Austria’, alongside 24 historians from abroad for the conference of the Institute of Party History.³⁹ Furthermore, another 150 veterans attended from counties all over the country.

The commemorative events started with the opening of the conference organised by the Institute of Party History on 16 March.⁴⁰ The following day, the Memorial Exhibition of the Hungarian Soviet Republic opened under the auspices of Ministry of Culture and the Modern History Museum. 18 and 19 March were mainly taken up with entertaining the foreign delegations with sightseeing, meetings and dinners. The most important events took place on 21 March, including enacting the legislation for including the anniversary of the establishment of the Hungarian Soviet Republic into the national day calendar. Prime Minister Ferenc Münnich, a veteran of 1919, proposed the legislation,⁴¹ which further made the connection between the revolutionary traditions of the Hungarian people and the revolution in 1919:

In 1919 our people, after so many heroic struggles, made the aims of hundreds of years of freedom fights into a reality and [made into a reality] the aspirations of the best [people] of our nation, [and] defeated the feudal capitalist rule, won the freedom of our nation and took its faith into its own hands.⁴²

It is also no surprise whose model the Hungarian revolutionaries of 1919 were following: ‘[t]he Hungarian working class, the poor peasants and the intellectuals who were ready to fight for the progression of society, for national independence, followed the example of the Russian proletariat, and after the Great October Socialist Revolution, were the first to step on the road of the revolution.’⁴³

The second significant event, which placed the Hungarian Soviet Republic within the physical space of the city, was the unveiling of the Pantheon of the Workers’ Movement (*Munkásmozgalmi Pantheon*) in Kerepesi Cemetery. Kerepesi Cemetery had been promoted as

³⁹ M-KS 288-22/1959-1. Proposal: 40th anniversary.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Apor, *Fabricating Authenticity*, p. 155. See also: M-KS 288-22/1959-1. Proposal: 40th anniversary. Although in the draft programme here the enactment of the law is scheduled for 20 March.

⁴² ‘1959. évi II. törvény a Magyar Tanácsköztársaság emlékének törvénybeiktatásáról’ [Law No. II of 1959 regarding the enactment into law of the memory of the Hungarian Soviet Republic] in *Törvények és rendeletek Hivatalos Gyűjteménye 1959*, Budapest: A Magyar Forradalmi Munkás-Paraszt Kormány, 1960, p. 12.

⁴³ Ibid.

‘the National Pantheon’ by the Communists in May 1956, before the revolution,⁴⁴ and it had been the city’s most prominent since the late-19th century.

The 40th anniversary commemorations of the Hungarian Soviet Republic went from being a small commemorative Party event in the first half of the 1950s to one of the largest national day commemorations. Whilst Liberation Day – on 4 April – had usually been considered the most important national day in the communist period, in 1959 the anniversary of the Hungarian Soviet Republic impacted even on 4 April: ‘The celebrations should not be confined to only 21 March, but should encompass the spring and summer months. [...] We should celebrate 4 April and 1 May in the spirit of the 40th anniversary.’⁴⁵ Now that the Hungarian Communists were able to celebrate themselves and their previous achievements, they did so wholeheartedly. From an explanatory framework for what happened in 1956, 1919 became a national day in its own right from the late 1950s. Even so, once 21 March became part of the Revolutionary Youth Days, its role was marginalised yet again.

Liberation Day (4 April)

Liberation Day in 1957 (and 1958) was all about damage control. The stakes were high, since what the ‘counter-revolution’ had attacked – according to the Communist propaganda – during the autumn months of 1956 were the core values of Liberation Day, the establishment and achievements of the socialist system, and the friendship between Hungary and the Soviet Union. The 1957 commemorations of 15 March and 21 March can in this way be seen as ‘dress rehearsals’ for Liberation Day a few weeks later.

The message the Communists wished to transmit on 4 April was splashed across the front page of *Népszabadság*: ‘Hungary can only progress, can only be independent and free within the socialist camp’.⁴⁶ During the official ceremony at the Opera House Defence Minister István Dobi once more extolled the achievements of the previous twelve years, making sure to praise the role of the Soviet Union in confronting the ‘counter-revolution’:

⁴⁴ István Rév, *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Post-communism*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, pp. 99-100.

⁴⁵ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1959-1. Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party – Agitation and Propaganda Department. Resolution regarding the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Dated 14 January 1959.

⁴⁶ ‘Magyarország csak a szocialista táboron belül fejlődhet, lehet független és szabad’ [Hungary can only progress, can only be independent and free within the socialist camp] in *Népszabadság*, 4 April 1957, pp. 1-3.

The Soviet soldiers smashed the armed force of the counter-revolutionaries and made it possible for us to defeat the counter-revolutionary powers in all fields, they not only protected the independence of our people, but also saved the unimpeachable achievements of our socialist building work.⁴⁷

In this way, the invasion of Hungary by Soviet forces and their defeat of the ‘counter-revolution’ became an act that yet again saved the country from the enemy forces and protected the Hungarian people.

Yet, although the rhetoric of Liberation Day did not differ greatly from the previous years (with the Soviet Union as the liberator of Hungary and the Hungarian people from fascism, and now from the counter-revolutionaries), the programme of the day was changed significantly. In previous years, the commemorative events, including a military parade, took place in front of the Stalin statue on Parade square.⁴⁸ The military parade was cancelled this time, presumably because the Communist leadership realised it might not look good for tanks to roll down the streets of Budapest so soon after the crushing of the revolution. Instead, the ceremony took place in the Opera House on the eve of Liberation Day, whilst on the day itself a number of wreath-laying ceremonies were held in Budapest.⁴⁹

Liberation Day 1957 could be deemed a success for the Communists. A report from Szolnok county – located in the middle of east Hungary, neighbouring Pest county to the east – noted that no disturbances were reported during the ceremonies held in the local community centres and theatres, and the wreath-laying ceremonies were well attended.⁵⁰ In the town of Szolnok – the seat of the county – 720 people attended the ceremony and around 12,000 people turned up for the wreath-laying.⁵¹ The situation in Jászberény – the second largest town in the county

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 1.

⁴⁸ See for example: ‘Ragyogó díszszemle hazánk felszabadulásának 8. évfordulóján’ [Glorious parade on the 8th anniversary of the liberation of our country] in *Szabad Nép*, 5 April 1953, p. 1. or ‘Hatalmas lelkesedéssel ünnepelte meg a magyar nép hazánk felszabadulásának tizedik évfordulóját’ [The Hungarian people celebrated the tenth anniversary of the liberation of our country with great enthusiasm] in *Szabad Nép*, 5 April 1955, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁹ ‘Koszorúzási ünnepségek április 4-én’ [Wreath-laying ceremonies on 4 April] in *Népszabadság*, 6 April 1957, p. 1.

⁵⁰ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1957-2. Memo on the celebration of 4 April. Szolnok county. Dated: 8 April 1957. [hereafter: M-KS 288-22/1957-2, Szolnok county]

⁵¹ The total population of Szolnok in the 1960 census was 45,600 persons. See: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal [Hungarian Central Statistical Office], *1960. évi Népszámlálás, Szolnok megye Személyi és Családi Adatai* [The 1960 Census, Szolnok County Data on Persons and Families], Budapest: Állami Nyomda, 1962, p. 41.

after Szolnok – was even more promising: in the community centre 700 people crammed into a space that was designed for only 600.⁵²

The relative success of the 1957 Liberation Day celebrations was a relief for the Communist leadership, which felt that it could now return to the established traditions of the day. Even so, the rhetoric still referred to the events of 1956, often described as the ‘mournful month of 1956’, whilst parallels were also drawn between the ‘counter-revolutions’ of 1919 and 1956. The difference being that whilst in 1919 Horthy’s ‘counter-revolution’ succeeded, in 1956, with the help and friendship of ‘the great and strong Soviet Union’, the counter-revolution was stopped.⁵³ Liberation Day could once again be commemorated with full pomp, and the military parade was restored to the programme. *Népszabadság* added that not only was the pomp returning to the celebrations, but people would celebrate the day ‘with their heart, clear heads, with a more mature political consciousness, and with devotion to civic duties’.⁵⁴

By 1958, the rhetoric of Liberation Day had returned to its intended mode: looking forward to a socialist future and the building of socialism with the friendship of the Soviet Union.⁵⁵ Liberation by the Red Army had brought significant changes to the social, cultural, political and economic make-up of the country and, along with the friendship of the Soviet Union and the other People’s Republics, Hungary could now look forward to further progress in all areas. This rhetoric remained stable and at the centre of the Liberation Day commemorations until the late 1980s, and was particularly emphasised during ‘round anniversaries’, i.e. 20th, 25th, 30th, etc. anniversaries.

In this respect, for the 20th anniversary of the liberation in 1965, the MSzMP Agitation and Propaganda Department – in an effort to popularise their economic reforms – proposed that: ‘The focus of the celebrations should be the achievements of our people’s republic in the last twenty years as well as of the third five-year plan and the presentation and popularisation of our twenty-year plan, if these are ready by this time.’⁵⁶ The celebratory programme was also

⁵² M-KS 288-22/1957-2, Szolnok county.

⁵³ ‘Ünnep előtt’ [Before the celebration] in *Népszabadság*, 30 March 1958, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ ‘A szocialista országok történelmi küldetésének felelősségét átérezve, a jövőben is együtt haladunk a béke és a szocializmus útján’ [With the feeling of the historical mission of the socialist countries, in the future we are proceeding together on the road of peace and socialism] in *Népszabadság*, 5 April 1958, pp. 1-4.

⁵⁶ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1963-1. Proposal to the Committee of Agitation and Propaganda on the preparation for the celebration of the 20th anniversary of our liberation. Dated: 5 August 1963.

to popularise the building works that were (scheduled to be) finished in 1965, such as the university in the city of Győr in west Hungary, or the ironworks on the Danube.

The 20th anniversary celebrations were not only richer but also more widespread than in previous years. Apart from the central commemoration in Budapest, flagship celebrations were planned in Szeged and Debrecen as well, with the whole process starting in October 1964, i.e. six months before the celebrations in the capital.⁵⁷ In Szeged the ‘liberation’ of the town in October 1944 was commemorated, whilst in Debrecen the establishment of the Provisional National Assembly in December 1944 was the subject of the ceremonies. In Budapest celebrations took place on 12 February, commemorating the liberation of the capital in 1945. Besides the more widespread commemorative events, the Agitation and Propaganda Department also suggested that a larger number of state honours be awarded than usual, and a commemorative award should be given to those comrades who had been with the Party for more than twenty years. Moreover, the ‘historical significance’ of the liberation was also made into a law in honour of the 20th anniversary.⁵⁸

This keenness to emphasise the achievements of the Communist party since the liberation could be attributed to Hungary’s economic situation in the 1960s. With the 1956 revolution a short rupture was created in the fabric of the Hungarian Soviet model that needed to be bridged by the new Communist leadership. This rupture, Hungarian historian János M. Rainer argues, led to the rebuilding of the socialist system in Hungary from November 1956 to 1962-1963, which mirrored the processes of 1947-1953.⁵⁹ This included the complete take-over of private property in agriculture between 1958 and 1961 (before 1956 mainly large and mid-sized industrial companies and companies of foreign trade were nationalised) and the return to a ‘forceful industrialisation [and] to a centralised command economy’, especially during the second five-year plan between 1961 and 1965.⁶⁰ A large part of the economic reforms were aimed at increasing the welfare of the population; replacing the shortages of goods that was so

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ ‘Törvény a magyar nép felszabadulása történelmi jelentőségének törvénybe iktatásáról’ [Law regarding the enactment of the historical significance of the liberation of the Hungarian people] in *Népszabadság*, 4 April 1965, p. 2. See also: MOL, M-KS 288-22/1965-1. Proposal to the Political Committee. Dated: 1965.

⁵⁹ János M. Rainer, ‘A “hatvanas évek” Magyarországon’ [The ‘sixties’ in Hungary], Conference paper presented at the 15th National Congress of History Teachers at <http://www.tte.hu/toertenelemtanitas/toertenelemtanarok-orszagos-konferenciaja/6742-a-8222-hatvanas-evek-8221-magyarorszagon> [last accessed 14 October 2015]

⁶⁰ Ibid.

prevalent in the 1950s with a (seemingly) well-functioning economy.⁶¹ The point of Liberation Days was thus not simply to praise the wonders of the Soviet Union and its liberation of Hungary, but also to promote the new socialist society that Hungarians were being asked to build with the oversight of the Soviet Union.

Revolutionary Youth Days

*‘Our party’s foremost task is the socialist education of our youth’ – János Kádár, 1966*⁶²

Although the anniversaries of the 1848-49 revolution, the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic and the ‘liberation’ of Hungary by the Soviet forces had been linked together in terms of their revolutionary narrative content since 1957, in 1967 they were officially connected with the creation of the so-called Revolutionary Youth Days (*Forradalmi Ifjúsági Napok*). The organisation of the commemorative series was primarily entrusted to KISZ, thus signalling a shift in the desired audience for these events. Since the establishment of the Communist regime in Hungary, the ideological education of the youth had been a primary concern of the leadership. Before the establishment of the Hungarian Young Communist League in 1957 this task had been carried out by the Working Youths’ League (*Dolgozó Ifjúság Szövetsége*); however, this earlier organisation was not as far-reaching as KISZ, as ‘they did not take into account the age specificities of the youth, the differences between their levels of education and the needs of the different strata of youth.’⁶³ Moreover, they failed to build networks on the ground, mainly due to general unpreparedness.

Officially connecting these three days had its advantages. The events followed in a chronological order from 1848 to 1919 to 1945, as did their respective dates from 15 March, to 21 March, to 4 April. Even more fortuitous for the Communists, the ascending chronology of the dates also correlated with the hierarchical order and weight that the Communists attached

⁶¹ János, M. Rainer, *Magyarország Története: A Kádár-korszak, 1956-1989* [The history of Hungary: The Kádár era, 1956-1989], Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 2012, Lcoation, 486 (e-book, mobi format) [hereafter: Rainer, *Magyarország Története*]

⁶² Quoted in Gergely, Ferenc, *KISZ. A Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség Története, 1957-1989* [The History of the Hungarian Young Communist League, 1957-1989], Budapest: Holnap Kiadó, 2008, p. 68. [hereafter: Gergely, *KISZ*]

⁶³ ‘Az MSZMP ideiglenes Központi Bizottságának határozata az ifjúság nevelésének néhány kérdéséről és a Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség megalakításáról’ [The interim Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party’s resolution regarding some questions of the education of the youth and the establishment of the Hungarian Young Communist League] in *Népszabadság*, 17 March 1957, pp. 1-2, p. 1.

to each event: 15 March anniversaries were mainly focused on schools and universities (since it was still a working day); this was followed by 21 March, which by the 1960s was less about explaining the counter-revolution and more about addressing the issue of what makes a revolution;⁶⁴ culminating in 4 April, when the achievements and future directions of the socialist system were extolled and extrapolated. The pomp of these commemorations also increased from one commemorative day to the next, with Liberation Day being the most spectacular.

The introduction of the Revolutionary Youth Days signalled a more youth-oriented focus, the main aim being '[t]o take care of the revolutionary traditions of the Hungarian people' by making sure that the youth understood these traditions and felt that they were their own.⁶⁵ The aim of these days was succinctly summarised in a 1974 proposal by the Agitation and Propaganda Department's proposal to the Secretariat regarding the 15 March commemorations: 'We must make the youth conscious that for us today the revolutionary and true patriot is the person who serves the building of socialism with historical awareness and with hardy everyday activity.'⁶⁶ The Revolutionary Youth Days aimed to target a new generation of Hungarian youth, who had grown up after the 1956 revolution. Since during the events of 1956 young people had played a central role, the MSzMP was anxious to ensure that the ideological education of the youth was more robust, and that the message was clear: causing disturbances was not revolutionary.

Despite this new orientation, the rituals of the actual commemorative days did not change significantly. 15 March and 21 March still consisted mainly of wreath-laying ceremonies and speeches by party dignitaries, the only addition being the frequent interjections regarding the importance of the education of the youth.⁶⁷ To incorporate the youth into Liberation Day – and

⁶⁴ Péter Apor suggests that this shift in the focus of 21 March could be explained by the global fascination with revolutions in the 1960s and the 1970s. By emphasising the revolutionary aspect, the Communists ensured that 'the audience experienced the ideas and emotions of revolutionary radicalism by means of connecting it to historical events, thereby also moving them back to a safe temporal distance.' See: Apor, *Fabricating Authenticity*, p. 206.

⁶⁵ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1967-1. Proposal to the Political Committee on the anniversary celebrations of the first half of 1967. Agitation and Propaganda Department. Dated: 16 January 1967.

⁶⁶ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1974-2. Proposal to the Secretariat on the celebration of 15 March 1974. Agitation and Propaganda Department. Dated: 30 January 1974.

⁶⁷ See for example: M-KS 288-22/1967-1; MOL M-KS 288-22/1968-1 Proposal to the Political Committee on the celebration of the political anniversaries of the first half of 1968. Dated: 16 January 1968.

to continue with the Revolutionary Youth Days theme – the new members of the Hungarian Young Communist League had their oath-taking ceremony as part of the 4 April celebrations.⁶⁸

‘Round’ anniversaries at times modified the hierarchy of the 1848-1919-1945 triumvirate. For example, in 1969 the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Soviet Republic provided the opportunity to showcase the Hungarian people’s traditional revolutionary and internationalist nature. The concept behind the Revolutionary Youth Days of 1969 was to emphasise the connection between 1848-49 and 1919, arguing that these two revolutionary events put ‘the Hungarian people at the forefront of human progress’.⁶⁹ The Hungarian Soviet Republic was presented as ‘the highpoint of the international revolutionary wave and one of its greatest achievements’,⁷⁰ although still with the usual line that this revolutionary wave had been started by the Great October Socialist Revolution. At least for this particular year, the Soviets repaid the compliment by holding a conference on the Hungarian Soviet Republic in Moscow.⁷¹

The biggest event was the unveiling of the memorial to the Hungarian Soviet Republic on the spot where the Stalin statue, destroyed during the 1956 revolution, once stood on Parade Square – Béla Kun’s posthumous revenge on Stalin.⁷² For the unveiling of the memorial the Agitation and Propaganda Department proposed that ‘50,000 people should be invited from the districts [of Budapest] and 100-member delegations from the counties.’⁷³ The need for the commemorations to have a nationwide character was stressed, and to encourage this the Agitation and Propaganda Department urged towns and villages to recall ‘the local traditions of 1919.’⁷⁴

⁶⁸ M-KS 288-22/1968-1. See also: ‘Április 4-én: nagyszabású ifjúsági fogadalomtételi ünnepség Budapesten’ [On 4 April: Monumental taking of the oath ceremony of the youth in Budapest] in *Népszabadság*, 2 April 1969, p. 1. The paper reported that ‘12,000 secondary school pupils, vocational students and young workers will take the oath.’

⁶⁹ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1968-1. Proposal to the Political Committee on commemoration of the 1918 civic democratic revolution, the establishment of the Communists’ Hungarian Party and 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Agitation and Propaganda Department. Dated: 6 June 1968.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ ‘Tudományos konferencia Moszkvában a Magyar Tanácsköztársaságról’ [Scientific conference in Moscow on the Hungarian Soviet Republic] in *Népszabadság*, 13 March 1969, p. 5.

⁷² ‘Hirdesse a Tanácsköztársaság örök emlékét és dicsőségét. Felavatták a Tanácsköztársaság emlékművét’ [Let it proclaim the eternal memory and glory of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The Memorial to the Hungarian Soviet Republic was unveiled] in *Népszabadság*, 24 March 1969, pp. 1-2. [Hereafter: ‘Felavatták a Tanácsköztársaság emlékművét’]

⁷³ M-KS 288-22/1968-1 Dated: 6 June 1968.

⁷⁴ Ibid. The official report on the unveiling ceremony in *Népszabadság* did not give an exact figure, but informed its readers that ‘many thousands’ gathered at the square from the early morning. See: ‘Felavatták a Tanácsköztársaság emlékművét’, p. 1.

Despite this showcasing of the Hungarian Soviet Republic on its 50th anniversary in 1969, in all other years Liberation Day was the primary event. By the late 1960s Liberation Day had settled into a rhetoric of extolling the achievements of the socialist system that enabled the Hungarians to fulfil ‘the boldest dreams and aims of our nation’s great sons, our country’s democratic and socialist transformation.’⁷⁵ This established rhetoric was intensified for the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Hungary. The Agitation and Propaganda Department sought to celebrate the quarter-century anniversary with great pomp and circumstance that would overshadow previous anniversaries. The 25th anniversary commemorations were indeed splendid. A new State prize was established, to be awarded to those who ‘achieved great results in the sciences, technical developments, in the organisation and leadership in production [...] medicine and educational work to help build socialism.’⁷⁶ To further display the achievements of the socialist system the first section of Line 2 of the Budapest metro was opened for the anniversary.⁷⁷

The biggest and most spectacular event was the military parade, which was attended by 60,000 people, who ‘flooded’ Dózsa György Street along the front of Városliget, City Park ‘to take their place on the two sides of [Parade] square, alongside the tribunes’.⁷⁸ For the 25th anniversary of Liberation Day, the choreography of the central commemorative event aimed to encapsulate the whole Hungarian revolutionary tradition, accentuating the message that the liberation by the Soviets of 1945 was the culmination and fruition of all previous efforts at revolution.

⁷⁵ ‘Nemzeti érdekeink és a proletár internacionalizmus elvei azonosak’ [Our nation’s interests and the principles of proletarian internationalism are the same] in *Népszabadság*, 4 April 1969, pp. 1-2, p. 1.

⁷⁶ ‘Kiemelkedő ünnepi események április 4-én, felszabadulásunk 25. évfordulóján’ [Outstanding celebratory events on 4 April, on the 25th anniversary of our liberation] in *Népszabadság*, 8 March 1970, p. 1.

⁷⁷ ‘Felavatták a budapesti metró első szakaszát’ [The first section of the Budapest metro was inaugurated] in *Népszabadság*, 3 April 1970, p. 1.

⁷⁸ ‘A felszabadulás 25. évfordulóját méltón ünnepelte meg az ország népe’ [The 25th anniversary of the liberation was worthily celebrated by the people of the country] in *Népszabadság*, 7 April 1970, pp. 1-2, p. 1. [hereafter: ‘A felszabadulás 25. évfordulója’]



Figure 12: Memorial to the Hungarian Soviet Republic on Parade Square in 1970. Source: Fortepan/ Fortepan.

The event started at ten o'clock with a speech by Lajos Czinege, defence minister. This was followed by military parade – by now only held on 'round' Liberation Day anniversaries. In a nod to the 1848-49 revolution, the parade was accompanied by a performance of the Klapka-march song [*Klapka induló*], one of the most popular marching songs of the 1848-49 revolution.⁷⁹ The parade started with the equestrian divisions, who 'were authentically dressed [in period military uniforms] that reminded the spectators of the Rákóczi freedom fight [1703-1711], the 1848 freedom fight, the great fights of the armed forces of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, and the heroes of the partisan fights [of the Second World War].'⁸⁰ The outfits were

⁷⁹ Ibid. The music was originally penned by the composer and actor Béni Egressy in 1846, but became known only in 1849 whilst Egressy was serving in György Klapka's army defending the fortress of Komárom. See: Lujza Tari, 'A szabadságharc népzenei emlékei – Indulók' [The folk music memories of the freedom fight – Marching songs] at <http://48asdalok.btk.mta.hu/peldatar/indulok> [last accessed 1 November 2015]

⁸⁰ 'A felszabadulás 25. évfordulója', p. 1.

complemented by flags from the different periods. In this way, the parade also served as a visual means to connect the different episodes in Hungary's supposed struggle for freedom, eventually only fully achieved by the Communists with the aid of the Soviets. Many members of the Soviet leadership and Soviet army veterans were also present to witness the parade, alongside leading politicians of the sister countries, including Czechoslovak First Secretary of the Communist Party Gustáv Husák.⁸¹

The revolutionary symbolism was not limited solely to the pageantry of the parade, but also the physical landscape in which it was held. Dózsa György Avenue – thus named in 1945 from Aréna Street – had been named after the historical revolutionary György Dózsa, who led a peasant revolt against the landed nobility in 1514. Parade Square, as it was unofficially known (officially it was part of Dózsa György Road), had been known between 1953 and 1957 as Stalin Square (this is where the statue of Stalin that had been famously toppled by the 56ers, leaving only his boots, stood).⁸² The previous year, 1969, for the 50th anniversary of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic, the 1919 memorial had been erected.

Dangerous 15 March

15 March may have been included in the triumvirate of Revolutionary Youth Days but it evoked the potentially most dangerous symbolism of all Hungarian national days in the Communist (and not only) period. However much the regime attempted to claim ownership of the day and its meaning as the anniversary of the outbreak of the 1848 revolution, this day had a long tradition among all Hungarians, in particular the liberals and right-wing nationalists who could in no way be claimed as communist sympathisers. 15 March also symbolised rebellion against any oppressive regime, and hence provided the opportunity for protest against the Communist government. Indeed, one of the main demands of the 1956 revolution was that 15 March be restored as a full national day and public holiday. 15 March's association with youth – the original revolutionaries of 15 March 1848 had been known as the 'March Youth' – was also problematic. The 1956 revolution had been started by students, while by the mid-1960s a whole generation had grown up since the start of the war who would have had no personal experience of pre-war life or the hardships of the war. The Communist authorities thus felt the

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Mihály Ráday, (ed.), *Budapesti Utcanevek A-Z* [A-Z Street names of Budapest], Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 2013, p. 202. In 2006, the square was officially renamed 56ers Square.

need to educate the youth in the values of the revolution and communism and this concern was partly behind the establishment of the Revolutionary Youth Days.

Although since 1956 the authorities had managed to control the possibility of incidents on 15 March anniversaries, by the early 1970s young people started using the day as an opportunity to protest and express dissent. The protestors were primarily students, mostly at the Eötvös Loránd University (hereafter ELTE) – mainly students of philosophy, history and ethnography – and at the Law University who were dissatisfied not only with the educational reforms the Communists were implementing, but also with KISZ.⁸³ The Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia made the situation between the students and the regime even more tense. From 1970 to around 1975 a series of student demonstrations took place each year on 15 March. These were not organised events, they were not staged by any kind of organised opposition group, but were more-or-less planned by word-of-mouth. They were never particularly large events and what their aims were is not clear, but they reveal the potency that 15 March still held.

On 15 March 1970 various groups of youths were reported to be congregating in Budapest by the district police precincts and the Ministry of the Interior. These groups mainly visited the statues of Kossuth and Petőfi, sang songs connected to 1848, but were generally peaceful, although some did voice their disapproval about 15 March not being a public holiday.⁸⁴ Two students were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct, although because they had no previous convictions and they were released with a warning.⁸⁵

Over the following years, informers supplied the police with a stream of reports regarding disturbances on 15 March, with some groups also planning to disrupt the commemorations of the anniversary of the Hungarian Soviet Republic on 21 March.⁸⁶ By 1972 the disruptions on the day were starting to cause a headache to the authorities and the punishments increased accordingly.⁸⁷ The Pest County Court handed out sentences following the disturbances on 15

⁸³ Gergely, *KISZ*, p. 83.

⁸⁴ János Kenedi, *Kis Állambiztonsági Olvasókönyv: október 23. – március 15. – június 16. a Kádár-korszakban. Második kötet* [Small State Security Reader: October 23 – March 15 – June 16 in the Kádár era. Volume 2], Budapest: Magvető, 1996, p. 9.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 20.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 22.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 39.

March that ranged from six months to two years in prison. The heavy-handed sentences were explained by the judge:

The behavioural conduct of the accused was in line with the phenomena in Budapest in the last one to two years that youth, in small, organised groups during our various national days held nationalist meetings. It is well known that exactly because of the democratic system of our state we also celebrate [these days], but the above mentioned group of youths used every opportunity to celebrate separately, and used the various national days to voice anti-democratic, indeed hostile and not on one occasion pronouncedly anti-revolutionary slogans [...]⁸⁸

Such harsh language from the judge makes clear that that these protests had anti-Communist elements and perhaps harked back to pre-war modes of commemoration. The judge's reasoning and the heavy sentences were intended to prevent further disruption of the 1848 anniversaries, but these attempts were unsuccessful. The following year there were again demonstrations. The Ministry of the Interior had received a tip-off prior to 15 March that protests were planned on the day.⁸⁹ As a precautionary measure the police in Budapest around 150 people were either arrested, placed under surveillance or were cautioned by the police. Despite these preventative measures a large number of incidents were reported all over the country. In Budapest during the official commemorations in the Museum Garden a group of 250-300 people left for the Petőfi statue in Petőfi Square. At the statue the police called on the people to disperse, but instead the crowds started to chant anti-Soviet, anti-Party and nationalist slogans.⁹⁰ The situation escalated even further by the evening. Gatherings continued in Petőfi Street and by seven o'clock in the evening there were around 1,500 people.⁹¹ Gatherings were also reported in other parts of the city, although these dispersed once the police started making arrests.

The Agitation and Propaganda Department proposed to the Secretariat that the Party should 'use 15 March, and in general the spring celebrations to draw the attention of society, and within that of the youth, and with our political work, to the important social, political, economic and international questions.'⁹² The Proposal also elaborated on how the youth needed to be engaged during the celebrations: 'We have to make the youth conscious [of the fact] that for us today, the revolutionary and true patriot is the person who serves the building of socialism

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 133.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 134. Petőfi Street is just a few streets behind the Petőfi statue in Petőfi Square. Presumably the protestors had been blocked from getting to the statue but still wanted to protest in a public space symbolic of Petőfi.

⁹² MOL, M-KS 288-22/1974-2. Proposal to the Secretariat on the celebration of 15 March 1974. Agitation and Propaganda Department. Dated: 30 January 1974.

with historical awareness and with hard, everyday work.’⁹³ In short, someone who is not causing trouble on the streets during the celebrations, but who follows the regime’s principles without question and works hard to sustain its economic model.

Since it had been students and other young people who attacked the official commemorations as not worthy of the traditions of 15 March – their main gripe being that it was not a day off work –, and therefore organised their own unofficial commemorations, the Agitation and Propaganda Department took steps to ensure that ‘the good atmosphere’ of 15 March was kept and ‘for the avoidance of the scattered disturbances of order [that we experienced] the previous year’.⁹⁴ Lajos Csendes, the deputy leader of the Agitation and Propaganda Department, produced a memorandum with recommendations, ranging from detaining ‘[t]hose secondary school pupils, and university and college students who have proven to have taken part in the disturbing of the peace’, to of the youth on what 15 March meant.⁹⁵ To this purpose, the importance that the events of 15 March and its current relevance ‘should be discussed at schools not only on the day, but also in the build up to the day’. Csendes also instructed the teachers that they should ensure that they also enjoyed the day: ‘The pupils must feel that the teachers are not simply there to look after them, but that they themselves are celebrating.’

The Budapest City Police was also out in full force to secure no protests took place.⁹⁶ Perhaps as a result of the police presence and the increasing repercussions the 1974 commemorations and the commemorations for the rest of the 1970s passed without major problems or disturbances.⁹⁷ In the following years, the rhetoric of 15 March was reduced to a repetition of Hungarian revolutionary traditions and the role of the youth, but it soon became clear that the audiences were no longer receptive to these slogans on 15 March with further protests and demonstrations happening on the day from the mid-1980s.⁹⁸

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1974-2. Memorandum of Comrade Lajos Csendes, deputy leader of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee on the organisation of 15 March celebrations at schools. Dated: 9 January 1974. (The memorandum was distributed to various Ministries according to the handwritten text on the front page of the document.)

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Kenedi, *Kis Állambiztonsági Olvasókönyv*, pp. 171-178.

⁹⁷ Gyarmati, *Március hatalma*, p. 173.

⁹⁸ Ibid. pp. 174-175.

Liberation Day at 40

By the early 1980s, the concept of the triumvirate of Revolutionary Youth Days was dying out – it seems that the Hungarian Communist regime realised that their youth-education oriented policy was not capturing the hearts and minds of all Hungarian youth – and the regime was anxious to focus on its own time in power and the apparent achievements of the system it had introduced. Liberation Day was thus to be emphasised in its own right, and not necessarily as the culmination of 1848 and 1919. The Agitation and Propaganda Department proposed that media coverage focus exclusively on 1945 and its aftermath, with no reference to the earlier ‘revolutions’: ‘The press, radio and TV should not [...] go back to the pre-4 April 1945 period’.⁹⁹ Instead, the media should present the following historical sequence: liberation (1945); ‘the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat’; ‘the defending of the workers’ power, and [...] the re-organisation of the party’ (1956); ‘the re-organisation of agriculture, and [...] the finishing of the laying of the basis of socialism’ (1962); and, finally, ‘the modernisation of the management of the economy’ (1968).¹⁰⁰

This was partly to ensure that the focus was solely on the act of liberation for the Liberation Day anniversary, but perhaps also to act as stronger propaganda for the Communist regime and its own proclaimed achievements over the past 40 years, at a time when the Hungarian economy had been deteriorating gravely. In 1982 the country had almost been bankrupted and was obliged to join the IMF and the World Bank. By late 1984 Hungarian economists were advising János Kádár that serious economic reforms and cuts in public spending were needed, but Kádár refused to contemplate the short-term decline in living standards this would bring.¹⁰¹ Hence, the emphasis on the Hungarian Communist regime’s own apparent achievements.

This strategy was most explicit during the 40th anniversary of Liberation Day in 1985, when, again, the priority was for the education of the youth and ‘improving [their] historical knowledge’.¹⁰² To this end, the Agitation and Propaganda Department proposed that the anniversary needed to address certain historical issues – but not, however, the traditional ones of the Hungarian revolutionary tradition, but those of right-wing authoritarianism and fascism.

⁹⁹ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1981-45. Media plan for the execution of the resolution of the Political Committee on 28 April 1981. Agitation and Propaganda Department. Dated: 18 July 1981.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Rainer, *Magyarország Története*, loc. 1223-1243, and 1398.

¹⁰² MOL, M-KS 288-22/1983-1. Proposal to the Agitation and Propaganda Committee on the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of our liberation. 23 September 1984-4 April 1985. Agitation and Propaganda Department. Dated: 23 November 1983.

For example, it was to be highlighted that the Horthy regime came to power as a result of a counter-revolution (although no mention of the Hungarian Soviet Republic was made in the Agitation and Propaganda Department's proposals). The role of the Arrow Cross and the 'anti-people policies', the German occupation and 'the greatest genocide in Hungarian history' were also to be presented.¹⁰³ A deeper analysis was needed of Hungary's role in the Second World War and the responsibility of the ruling classes needed to be clarified. The anti-fascist movement of the Communist Party and the party's establishment also needed to be showcased.

This 'educational' work was to be done in the build-up to the 40th anniversary in schools and universities, in Marxism-Leninism classes at evening secondary schools, on courses on 'Current ideological, political and societal questions', and with general talks on the liberation at 'various workplace collectives' and other mass organisations. In conjunction with these, a so-called 'party education assessment' was carried out,¹⁰⁴ with the aim of gauging: 'How did the work carried out in connection with the 40th anniversary of our liberation help to strengthen the political unity of society and the identification of the people with the tasks of building socialism?' The assessment was carried out in all Hungarian counties in March-April 1985 through 'an exchange of views, debates and consultation' between 'the propagandists (the moderator)' and the participants.¹⁰⁵

The questions ranged from assessing the historical awareness of the masses, their understanding of the achievements of socialism (and the Party's role in it) or the success (or failure) of the Party's mass political education. They included: 'Do the students understand why 4 April is our greatest national day?'; 'To what extent do they understand that the last 4 decades had been a revolutionary new era in the past of our nation, that connects our whole history?'; 'How well do they know and appreciate the achievements of the last 4 decades of socialist building work, how do they identify with its results?'; 'How do people judge the leading role of the Party in the birth of these achievements?'; 'In your opinion, to what extent and how did the mass political work connected to the 40th anniversary of the liberation helped to strengthen the political unity of society?'; 'What do the students think about the present and future of socialism?'; and, 'How did the mass political work carried out for the jubilee

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1985-21. The programme of conducting the 1984/85 party education assessment. Zala county. Dated: 30 January 1985. I will mainly use the examples given in Zala county, the assessment was carried out in all the counties with more or less the same questions.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

contribute to the love of the socialist country and to the strengthening of international solidarity?’¹⁰⁶

The general findings were rather encouraging for the Communists; the agitation work was a success, although there was always more to be done.¹⁰⁷ Many of the reports also pointed out that the mass political work that was carried out by the Agitation and Propaganda Department, the Hungarian Young Communist League and other organisations ‘strengthened the identification of the people [with the socialist building work], and a wider social strata realised that we can only achieve our aims and results in peaceful conditions.’¹⁰⁸ Either the people were indeed happy with the work for the building of socialism or they were simply expressing the opinions that they believed the authorities wished to hear. The latter suspicion is strengthened by the fact that when they were required to show their knowledge, as opposed to simply registering their content, the respondents disappointed and the revolutionary educational work had failed.

In Fejér the county officials found that despite ‘the courses of the KISZ political centre, the Marxist students’ academies, debates [...]’ the assessment again proved that the youth ‘hardly know the history of the workers’ movement, and very few people even know the history of the Hungarian Young Communist League.’¹⁰⁹ Another weakness in the teaching of history arose in the report from Bács-Kiskun county, where it was pointed out that the younger generation – those below the age of 35 – believed that the period before the 1956 revolution (i.e. 1945-1956), ‘was all bad, they only see the negative in those years.’¹¹⁰ The older generation – especially those who had been (young) adults during the liberation in 1945 – saw the achievements of the socialist system and the improvements during their lifetimes, and ‘felt that these achievements belong to them.’¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1985-21. Considerations for the 1984/85 party education assessment. Zala county. Dated: 1 February 1985.

¹⁰⁷ See for example: MOL, M-KS 288-22/1985-21. Assessment report from Heves county. Dated 31 May 1985.; Assessment report from Bács-Kiskun county. 20 May 1985. (hereafter: 1985-21. Bács-Kiskun county.) MOL, M-KS 288-22/1985-22. Assessment of the experiences of the mass political work carried out in connection with the 40th anniversary of the liberation. Fejér county. Dated: 27 May 1985. (hereafter: 1985-22. Assessment. Fejér county.)

¹⁰⁸ 1985-22. Assessment. Fejér county.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ 1985-21. Bács-Kiskun county.

¹¹¹ 1985-22. Assessment. Fejér county. Similar sentiments were also voiced in the report by the Bács-Kiskun county committee, where the officials reported that the older generation evaluated the pre-1956 period in a more positive light. See: 1985-21. Bács-Kiskun county.

The reports reveal an important point as to why young people felt less attached to the messages presented by the regime on Revolutionary Youth Days: having been born after the supposed climax of the Hungarian revolutionary tradition of 1945, they had no real sense of what greatness the revolution had apparently brought them as they had little sense of what came before. Indeed, the decline in the Hungarian economy in the 1970s and 1980s made it difficult to tell just what the achievements of the revolution and the building of socialism were.

The final fall

This lack of engagement was again apparent in the second half of the 1980s when protests by mainly pupils and university students occurred once more on 15 March. The main difference between these protests and those on 15 March in the early 1970s was that whilst those of the earlier period were purely student-led protests with no ‘enemy organisations’ behind them (this was acknowledged even by the Communist secret police), in the 1980s the presence of political and civic organisations was overt and undisguised.¹¹²

With the loosening of the political scene and the increasing social and economic problems Hungary faced in the 1980s, it is no surprise that the students and youth yet again turned to the day that symbolised protest against the regime. The first protest in 1983 was on a small scale – only 40-50 students took part–,but in 1985 and 1986 the protests escalated.¹¹³ The demonstrations of 1986 prompted the Executive and Administrative Department of the Party to ask for a body that would solely be responsible for all measures during the commemorations, since ‘[b]ased on the experiences of previous years it is important and timely that we are prepared for a possible march, or public event aside from the official 15 March 1987 event.’¹¹⁴ In the end, no such body was established. Changes were, however, made to the government: for example, the new Chairman of the Council of Ministers – the second most powerful position – became Károly Grósz, who acknowledged the necessity of opening up the market. Pál Losonczi, who had been Chairman of the Hungarian Presidential Council for 20 years, was replaced by Károly Németh who represented the more liberal wing of the Party. Possibly as a

¹¹² Gyarmati, *Március hatalma*, p. 191.

¹¹³ Ibid. pp. 188-189.

¹¹⁴ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1986-18. Memorandum on the preparation for 15 March 1987. The Executive and Administrative Department of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party's Central Committee. Dated: 1 December 1986.

result of these governmental changes, there were no major demonstrations on 15 March 1987.¹¹⁵

Another suggested attempt by the regime to retake control of 15 March also never materialised. A month before the 1988 anniversary, the Central Committee of the Agitation and Propaganda Department declared that, 'There are growing signs that the general public is increasingly missing a central monument to the heroes of the 1848-49 revolution and freedom fight.'¹¹⁶ The Committee stressed that the monument would have to be inclusive of all the heroes of the revolution (presumably to include aristocratic participants such as István Széchenyi), and should be located in Budapest. Since the country was in the midst of an economic crisis, the funds for the monument would have to be fundraised. For this, KISZ would set up a Kuratorium and the fundraising appeal would be presented to the general public during an episode of the TV programme *Hol-Mi* (Where-what).¹¹⁷

Such a monument was never constructed, but its proposal indicated a shift in the meanings and symbolism that were to be attributed to 15 March, at a time when the rapidly declining economy, Solidarity shipyard protests in Poland and *perestroika* of Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union meant that huge changes would have to take place. It was not at this point, however, foreseen just what cataclysmic changes were to occur just over a year later.

With the increasing presence of alternative political parties and organisations, the Communist Party promoted the inclusive nature of the 15 March in 1988. It was thus no longer only for the revolutionary youth: instead, it was a 'national day, therefore it is the celebration not only of the youth, *but all Hungarians*, it is the *celebration* of all the citizens of the Hungarian People's Republic.'¹¹⁸ Addressing the problems of 15 March commemorations in the previous two decades, and how this affected some of the Party members' attitudes towards the commemoration, Ernő Lakatos, head of the Agitation and Propaganda Department and author of the proposal, commented that the actions of the youth 'led some of the party members to not pin the traditional cockade [on their coats], so the shadow of being against the system would

¹¹⁵ Gyarmati, *Március hatalma*, p. 191-192.

¹¹⁶ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1988-1. Proposal to the Agitation and Propaganda Department. Central Committee of the Agitation and Propaganda Department. Agitation and Propaganda Department. Hungarian Young Communist League's Central Committee. Dated: 12 February 1988.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1988-1. Proposal to the Agitation and Propaganda Committee on the political concepts related to 15 March 1988. Agitation and Propaganda Department. Dated: 27 January 1988.

not fall on them.’¹¹⁹ Therefore, for the day to become (again) acceptable for the Communists if it was ‘clearly state[d]: the celebration of 15 March is fundamentally a political question, and the party bodies, party organisations have to treat it accordingly.’¹²⁰ This statement is, of course, an admission that the MSzMP feared the protest potentials of 15 March and had attempted to undermine its significance.

Lakatos therefore attempted to redefine and expand the meaning of 15 March for the 1988 commemorations. The Party still considered itself to be ‘the heir of the traditions of the revolution’, but new openings were also necessary not only to avoid large-scale demonstrations against the Party, but also to appear to be more open and democratic. Thus, ‘the unofficial commemorations’ and ‘other spontaneous events’ were no longer seen ‘as threatening manifestations’ as long as ‘they do not serve fundamentally contrary aims to our societal system, politics, or hostile political goals.’¹²¹ In reality, most of the demonstrations and unofficial commemorations would be critical of the Party, since the majority, if not all, the demonstrators and organisations wanted a change to the current system. What the Communists really meant becomes clear further down in Lakatos’ proposal: spontaneous commemorations by those who did not think that the official commemorations were sufficient were to be permitted, but disturbances by ‘hostile opposition groups’ that wished ‘to use the celebration for their own political goals’ were not. One particular concern of the Communists was that the fiscal austerity measures that needed to be implemented were to come into effect at the beginning of the year, making the 15 March commemorations ‘the first events of the year that could turn into “mass demonstrations”” against the regime.’¹²²

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid. As to what was and was not considered to be ‘disorderly conduct’ the proposal by the Agitation and Propaganda Department defined this in several pages of the proposal. The following did not come under the category of disorderly conduct: recital and singing of the national anthem, the National Song or the *Szózat* (Appeal – considered to be the second national anthem of Hungary); the singing of the songs of 1848-49; the recital of poems connected to the revolution, especially Petőfi’s poems; and the laying of flowers, etc. at historical memorials. Acts that were considered to be a ‘public order issue’: the provocative and conscious obstruction of police work, abuse of official persons/police, ‘enduring and permanent obstruction of traffic’; and ‘offences against societal or personal property’. Acts that ‘must not be tolerated’: the desecration of state symbols or the symbols of the workers’ movement; the questioning of the alliance with the Soviet Union; crass attacks against the political and legal order; incitement to lynching; and irredentist or nationalistic incitement. Lastly, some acts needed to be evaluated depending on the mood of the crowds. These included: collecting money or signatures for samizdats; ‘[s]inging of irredentist songs, repeatedly’; ‘unsystematic whistling, shouting especially in front of public buildings’; and the enigmatically worded ‘Other, not yet foreseeable actions’.



Figure 13: Opposition demonstration on 15 March 1988 with banners demanding the freedom of the press and freedom of assembly. Source: Fortepan/ Hodosán Róza.

The rules, regulations and preventative arrests – by now 10,000 – did not stop the masses from turning 15 March 1988 into the first serious protest against the regime since 1956.¹²³ This year the crowds were not only in the region of 4-500, but in the region of tens of thousands, as they marched through the iconic and symbolic spaces of the 1848-49 revolution. A new set of Twelve Points – echoing the original Twelve Points of 1848 – were formulated and included freedom of the press, true democracy, a timeline for the withdrawal of Soviet troops, Hungary's entry into the 'community of Europe', and 'friendly cooperation with the people of East-Central Europe with the eventual hope of a federacy'.¹²⁴ The protesters again demanded the reinstatement of 15 March as a full national day and public holiday, and the establishment of a national day in October commemorating 1956.

The Communist Party leadership took note and in September 1988 the Agitation and Propaganda Department examined a number of scenarios to amend the national day calendar.¹²⁵ In the end, however, they proposed that things remain as they are, as: 'at the moment there is a balance between 15 March, 21 March and 21 December; none of them is a

¹²³ Gyarmati, *Március hatalma*, p. 194.

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 195.

¹²⁵ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1988-1. Proposal to the Political Committee for the amendment of celebrations and days off work. Agitation and Propaganda Department. Dated: 28 September 1988.

public holiday, but they are “red-letter days”.¹²⁶ Moreover, changing the national day calendar would only increase the already simmering tensions within society. Any changes, they argued would ‘not serve the strengthening of the party unity, but would act against them and exacerbate the political problems’ the Party was already facing.¹²⁷

Despite the Agitation and Propaganda Department’s urgings, the anniversary of the 1848-49 revolution become a full national day commemoration in 1989. This was due mainly to internal changes within the Communist Party. The more liberal Károly Grósz, who in the previous year had been elected to the second most powerful position within the Party, and his circle took control over the Party. János Kádár, who was by now ill and was to die in July 1989, was demoted to President of the Party, a position that did not carry any power.¹²⁸



Figure 14: Wreaths placed at the foot of the Petőfi statue by the ‘Hungarian Democratic Opposition’ on 15 March 1988. Source: Fortepan/ Hodosán Róza.

The Party’s liberalisation also involved opening up to the opposition groups and parties that were emerging – a certain indication that tremendous changes would soon be taking place. The

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Rainer, *Magyarország Története*, loc. 197.

first signs of this, on the level of symbolic politics, was the invitation of these opposition groups to the official 15 March commemorations in 1989. KISZ was tasked with communicating with these 'alternative organisations' in Budapest to arrange for a common celebration.¹²⁹ The pro-democracy organisations and parties approached rejected this proposal, according to the Ministry of the Interior of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (*Magyar Demokrata Fórum*). Fidesz, established in 1988 and at the time an anti-communist, liberal party, did so as they disapproved of the fact that not all the major alternative organisations were invited. The Patriotic People's Front also reached out to the Church and other organisations countrywide, but they too reported that about two-thirds of the organisations they reached out to rejected holding the commemorations with the Communists. Their main objection was that a common commemoration would divert attention from the deep tensions between the Party and society. The Alliance of Free Democrats (*Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége*) also openly urged all other organisations not to commemorate together with the Communists. This was hardly surprising, given that the regime that had not permitted these parties and organisations in previous years to commemorate, but now in the name of 'national unity' they wanted these organisations to participate, in order to make the Party seem more open and democratic.

Of particular interest here is the way in which 15 March could be presented – even if only by the Communists – as a unifying force embodying the nation and which could potentially unite all the disparate and oppositional groupings, alongside the government. A more cynical view could also be that the Communists wished to undermine the opposition groups' commemorations of 15 March – with all its revolutionary implications – by having a joint commemoration, rather than them having separate events at which the Communist government could be criticised.

The official, Communist Party commemoration, as in previous years, took place on the steps of the National Museum, where 50-70,000 people were expected by the Party. However, the Party did hold a commemorative assembly at Parliament, which had not happened since 1948, i.e. just prior to the monopolisation of power by the Communists.¹³⁰ The Communists were

¹²⁹ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1989-2. Information on the preparation of the celebration of 15 March and proposal for further tasks. Dated: 15 February 1989.

¹³⁰ For the commemorative assembly see: 'Ma ünnepi ülést tart az Országgyűlés' [Today Parliament is holding a commemorative assembly] in *Népszabadság*, 14 March 1989, p. 1. For the commemoration at the National Museum see: MOL, M-KS 288-22/1989-1. Memo to the Political Committee on the preparation for the 15 March 1989 celebration. Dated: 27 February 1989. [hereafter: 1989-1. Memo for 15 March 1989.]

still hopeful that some of the alternative organisations, or the Church would agree to celebrate with them.¹³¹ The slogans for 15 March also indicated a much more open, democratic, but still socialist, approach to 15 March by the Communists.¹³² These slogans included: '15 March belongs to the whole nation!', 'National unity – YES, dissension – NO!', 'Democratic socialism!', 'If there is no democracy, there is no socialism!', 'Democratic Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party!' or 'Cheaper state, less bureaucracy!'

On the other side, the 31 alternative/opposition organisations agreed to commemorate the day together. A new set of Twelve Points were also agreed upon that demanded a real democracy, freedom of speech and the press, the right to strike, a functioning market economy, the dismantling of the bureaucratic system, freedom and self-determination, working ethnic policies, the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the establishment of 23 October (the anniversary of the 1956 revolution) as a national day, and a free and independent Hungary.¹³³ The commemoration of the opposition groups was by far the more successful one: around 100,000 people participated, as opposed to the 20-30,000 people who turned up to celebrate with the Communists (despite their original projections of 50-60,000 people).¹³⁴

By 15 March the following year, the Communist system only had months left. Free, alternative commemorations were held this year, without any repercussions, in a similar manner as in 1988. By now it was clear that Hungary was embarking on a transformation process from Communism to democracy. A week after 15 March, so-called Opposition Roundtable [*Ellenzéki Kerekasztal*] was established, comprised of the alternative organisations and parties, and in June 1989 the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and the Opposition Roundtable agreed to work out the requirements of a system change in a series of roundtable talks.

Constitution Day and the return of the king (and his Crown)

Apart from the anniversary of the 1848-49 revolution, the other previously existing national day commemoration in Hungary was 20 August, which before 1949 commemorated the creation of the Hungarian state and its founder St Stephen. In 1949, the Communists renamed

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² 1989-1. Memo for 15 March 1989.

¹³³ Gyarmati, *Március hatalma*, pp. 200-201.

¹³⁴ Tamás Hofer, 'The Demonstration of March 15, 1989, in Budapest: A Struggle for Public Memory' in *Program of Central and Eastern European Working Paper Series #16* at http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~ces/publications/docs/pdfs/CEE_WP16.pdf [last accessed: 17 November 2015], p. 4.

it Constitution Day and stripped it of its original meaning and erasing St Stephen from its content. In 1957, as with the other national day commemorations, the rhetoric of Constitution Day was used to warn the people of the dangers the 1956 counter-revolution posed. The focus now was on the dangers to the state, to the ‘people’s power’ (since according to the Stalinist Constitution, ‘In Hungary all power belongs to the people’), and to the supposed achievements of the Constitution.¹³⁵ István Dobi, Chairman of the Presidential Council (i.e. president), in his Constitution Day editorial piece published on the front page of *Népszabadság* for 20 August 1957, ominously warned of the dangers the counter-revolution posed and commented on the international backlash against Hungary. Dobi urged the Hungarian people ‘to be mindful of the renewed attacks from the West against the socialist world and against Hungary, and of their internal echoes, so we never again get a surprise like in last October.’ In other words, he sought to imply that the counter-revolutionaries were agents of the West, out to undermine Hungary and its constitution. Reflection on such issues ‘is especially important [...] on anniversaries like this, the celebration of the Constitution.’

Of course, it was again only with the help of the Soviet Union that it had been possible to protect ‘the Hungarian worker-peasant power’ against a Western plot. Otherwise, there would have been an ‘outbreak of World War Three’. The report by the five-member Committee of the United Nations on 1956 allegedly only fuelled the anti-Eastern bloc/anti-Soviet propaganda even more. Such attacks would continue, Dobi warned, ‘as long as America will have the money to finance’ them. The Hungarian working-class, workers and peasants need to be vigilant, work ‘hard and purposefully [...] on the building of socialism’ then the socialist bloc ‘could be surrounded by the flooding hatred of the capitalist world, the whole of the West can slander and attack us, but if at home we are united’ then they cannot harm the People’s Republics.¹³⁶ The Hungarian people could also count on the support of the other People’s Republics as well.

Far from the great celebration of heritage and national identity that 20 August commemorations had been before the war, 20 August, as Constitution Day, was now seen as symbolising the Communist order, both within Hungary and internationally. It was a propaganda tool to be used to attack any attempts to reform that order. There was also the problem of attendance. Whilst

¹³⁵ István Dobi, ‘A néphatalom ünnepére’ [For the celebration of the people’s power] in *Népszabadság*, 19-20 August 1957, pp. 1-2, p. 1.

¹³⁶ Ibid. pp. 1-2.

20 August and St Stephen's Day was amongst the most popular commemorations in Hungary between 1918 and 1948, with the stripping away of all of its traditional meaning from the day – particularly by renaming it Constitution Day – the day fell out of favour with the masses. The Hungarian Communist Party was keen to gauge the people's attitudes by keeping statistics on attendance. Constitution Day fared rather poorly. A 1957 report by the Agitation and Propaganda Department compared attendance on the 1 May festivities and 20 August celebration in Bács-Kiskun county in southern Hungary, where attendance of 20 August festivities was in decline, especially in the towns.¹³⁷ In Kecskemét, for example, 20,000 people attended the 1 May festivities, but only 8000-9000 people were present at the 20 August events. The numbers for Kalocsa were 5000 and 400-450 and for Kiskunfélegyháza 12,000 and 600 respectively. This was particularly disappointing given that this was an agricultural area – the merry markets of 20 August were not able to draw the local farming people. The report blames the low turnout on the disorganisation of the local Party, complaining that with some of the 'party organisations we cannot get them to understand what it means that 20 August should be prepared and celebrated in the spirit of the popular front.' This decline in 20 August attendance is perhaps why in the 1960s there was a greater push from the Agitation and Propaganda Department for 'the spirit of the popular front' and the creation of a 'popular mass festival character' with 'worker-peasant meetings, harvest celebrations, merry markets, cultural and sporting events nationwide.'¹³⁸

By the 1960s the efforts to change the meaning of 20 August and to erase St Stephen appear to have been successful, at least on the surface. On the eleventh anniversary of the new Constitution the Agitation and Propaganda Department could report that: 'The St Stephen characteristic of 20 August has been completely relegated to the background for the majority of the people.'¹³⁹ The report gives the example of the town of Eger, in northern Hungary, where a mass took place in the Basilica at the same time as a political rally was held in the city's stadium. About 50-60,000 people attended the political rally, whereas the Church mass 'was attended by significantly fewer people than in previous years.' Of course, it may not be that Stephen had been 'completely relegated to the background for the majority' but that in a climate where he was disapproved of by the regime, the majority felt they could not publicly

¹³⁷ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1957-2. The main experiences of the celebration of 20 August. Bács-Kiskun County Management Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. Dated 23 August 1957.

¹³⁸ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1965-1. Proposal to the Secretariat on the commemoration of 20 August. Dated: 17 June 1965.

¹³⁹ MOL M-KS 288-22/1960-4. Report on 20 August. Dated: 23 August 1960.

commemorate him in a church service. The report states that only in one small town in Veszprém county did a speaker at the commemorative Council meeting openly commemorate the memory of Stephen I. In the smaller towns and villages it was more difficult to erase his memory: during the 20 August commemorations in 1962 the Agitation and Propaganda Department of Heves county in northern Hungary reported that in two villages, Kisnána and Egercseki, women exiting the church after mass commented that it was the Day of King Stephen.¹⁴⁰ During the mass, these women must have been hearing about St Stephen, so it is interesting that they apparently refer to him as king. The report also noted that in Kisnána the priest organised a procession – presumably a religious procession for Stephen – at the same time as the official local party meeting for Constitution Day.

Yet, an ambiguity towards Stephen always remained among the Communists and we can observe, after the initial erasing of his figure, an attempt by the Communist authorities to squeeze Stephen into a Marxist national history narrative. This may partly be in response to the fact that, as explained above, Stephen still survived in the memory of the population, and of fears that a 1956 uprising may occur yet again. Moreover, since the early 1960s the Hungarian Communist government had been developing good relations with the Vatican and the Pope, as well as with the Protestant and other Christian churches.¹⁴¹ The more liberal ‘goulash communism’ that had also developed from the early 1960s focused on pleasing the public and the population’s needs. In this context, a greater openness to Stephen made sense.

On 20 August 1966 *Népszabadság* published an article – albeit hidden on page 17 – by the historian István Dolmányos entitled ‘Új vélemények az István-korról’.¹⁴² Dolmányos claimed that historical knowledge is always evolving and we should examine again the role of King Stephen through the lens of the ‘Marxist writing of history’. Removing the ‘Saint’ and adding ‘King’ further underlined how the Communists sought to add Stephen to their rhetoric. Instead of a religious figure, the focus was on his political and social achievements. Dolmányos argued that the figure of St Stephen had been hijacked in previous eras when ‘it was not Stephen himself who was in the foreground but the figure of the saint.’ The Habsburgs employed this saint figure ‘to hinder some of the attempts of Hungarian progress.’ In contrast, ‘in the eyes of

¹⁴⁰ MOL M-KS 288-22/1962-3. Summary of the 20 August celebrations. Dated: 22 August 1962.

¹⁴¹ Sabrina P. Ramet, *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990, p. 161.

¹⁴² István Dolmányos, ‘Új vélemények az István-korról’ [New opinions on the era of Stephen] in *Népszabadság*, 20 August 1966, p. 17.

Marxist science, Stephen was a pioneer of a new, daring social order.’ This was further argued in *Népszabadság* on 20 August 1969, where it was argued that Stephen ‘revolutionised Hungarian society’ and was thus an important figure for the Communists, although ‘first we need to cleanse the figure of King Stephen from the mythologising of his figure throughout history.’¹⁴³

This gradual attempt at rehabilitating King Stephen and restoring him to the commemorative calendar became official in 1970. The preparation for the millennial commemoration of King Stephen’s birth was carried out by the Patriotic People’s Front. On 4 May 1970 the Secretariat of the Patriotic People’s Front sent its proposal regarding the ‘Stephen jubilee’ to the Agitation and Propaganda Department.¹⁴⁴ The proposal concerned the thousandth anniversary of Stephen’s birth and the associated events for the years 1970-71. In it we learn that the agreement to jointly commemorate ‘the 25th anniversary of the liberation of our homeland, the 1000th anniversary of King Stephen’s birth and the 20th anniversary of the formation of the Priests’ Peace Movement’ had been agreed by the World Federation of Hungarians, the State Office of Church Affairs, the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Secretariat of the Patriotic People’s Front and the Interior Secretariat of the Patriotic People’s Front. Stephen had once more come to symbolise the whole Hungarian nation and in its political dimension too. Intriguingly, a religious aspect was also included in these commemorations through the inclusion of the anniversary of the Priests’ Peace Movement, even though it had been formally abolished.

Stephen was not, however, to overshadow the achievements of Socialist Hungary, and the proposal underlined that ‘the progress of the Hungarian People’s Republic in the last 25 years must stand in the centre of the commemorations taking place in churches as well.’ It is almost as though the figure of Stephen is being integrated precisely to endear the Hungarian People’s Republic to the people. Indeed, the Patriotic People’s Front was aware that the figure of Stephen had been very popular, thus alongside the Church events there were also to be ‘certain civic commemorations’. These civic events would need to cover a number of points: wreath-laying at King Stephen statues in Buda Castle, and in the towns of Esztergom and

¹⁴³ László Benczédi, ‘Hagyományok: István király’ [Traditions: King Stephen] in *Népszabadság*, 20 August 1969, p. 7.

¹⁴⁴ MOL M-KS 288-22/ 1970-3. Proposal regarding the 1000th anniversary of King Stephen’s birth. Dated: 3 May 1970.

Székesfehérvár. In Esztergom there was also to be a Church event ‘and it would be right if the newscasters would also report on the civic commemorations’ next to the religious ones. Further underlining the Communists’ newfound connection with Stephen, the Budapest Committee of the Patriotic People’s Front prepared to publish a picture magazine in which ‘in its historic part – in a proper form – there will be a reference to the state founder’s figure and his historical role.’ To further reincorporate Stephen into the narrative of the 20 August commemorations in 1970-71 the People’s Front also suggested that at the beginning of the school year, teachers should commemorate Stephen in one of the first history classes.

The millennial celebrations were also supported by a number of new publications. The official publication, recommended by the Front as an aid for those interested in politics and wishing to understand Stephen’s place in the national discourse, was *King Stephen I*, written by historian Antal Bartha.¹⁴⁵ A slim volume, the first thirteen pages gave a general history of King Stephen, his activities and era.¹⁴⁶ Bartha elucidated why Stephen is an important figure for Hungarian history. He acknowledged that Stephen’s aim was to strengthen the feudal system that led to class oppression. But Bartha also attempted to defend Stephen, noting that he ‘was raised in an era of medieval Christian ideas that sanctified feudal class oppression, and these ideals guided his actions.’¹⁴⁷ Moreover, although Stephen was not a ‘revolutionary’ Bartha noted that ‘[o]ur history does not only consist of great revolutionaries’, but also of figures ‘who served historical progress’, such as Stephen. Stephen was a ‘[g]reat statesman, whose actions cannot be expunged from our history, from the memory of our people’, as he was the one who ‘first built the structures of our state’. The Communists, and especially János Kádár, First Secretary of the Party, were placed in a direct, historical line with Stephen. Stephen’s achievements, according to Bartha, were not revolutionary, but they represented progress and what the times called for. This was exactly how the Communist Party saw and represented itself: agents of progress and change.

The report by the Patriotic People’s Front proclaimed 20 August 1970 a success. The dual commemoration – the 21st anniversary of the Constitution and the millennium of King Stephen – was observed everywhere.¹⁴⁸ Around 1.5 million people took part in the day’s events, with

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Antal Bartha, *I. István király* [King Stephen I], Budapest: Hazafias Népfront, 1970

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 15.

¹⁴⁸ MOL M-KS 288-22/ 1970-3. Report on the celebrations of 20 August. Patriotic People’s Front. Dated 28 August 1970. [hereafter: M-KS 288-22/1970-3]

512,000 participants in Budapest alone: 20 August 1970 was the largest national day so far in the Communist era. Aside from the good organisation of the events, the reason for such a large turnout was, according to the Report, because ‘20 August – especially amongst the peasantry – is starting to become a tradition, while the commemorations concerning the anniversary of Stephen I attracted large sections of our population.’ There were slight hiccups in the organisation of the festivities in some places: in Székesfehérvár, for example, before the local Party congress held on the same day, beer was sold and many were drunk by the time of the meeting – perhaps reckoning that this was the only way they could sit through it.¹⁴⁹

The role of the Church and its celebrations were also mentioned in the report. The Catholic episcopate’s pastoral letter ‘spoke only of “St Stephen” and did not go past the idea of the state foundation.’¹⁵⁰ The report claims that the letter was problematic and should also have referred to the political dimensions of the anniversary by explaining Stephen’s relevance today. Moreover, the Communists objected to the reference to St Stephen, as opposed to King Stephen I. The Protestant Church, on the other hand, ‘commemorated Stephen I in the correct way, as the founder of the state and talked positively about the socialist system.’¹⁵¹ There were also worries that the Church commemorations were enabling the clergy ‘to widen their base support’. Nonetheless, the report attempted to downplay this possibility by claiming that, although around 15,000 people had attended the two masses held at St Stephen’s Basilica in Budapest, most of these were simply curious intellectuals, who watched the procession of the priests into the Basilica and left during the actual mass.¹⁵²

Despite, therefore, the earlier attempts to delegitimise Stephen, his memory was still potent. It thus became easier for the Communists, in order to secure popular support, to claim some sort of political legacy from his figure. Even so, some criticised this strategy and the ‘rapprochement’ with Stephen. In the town of Győr in west Hungary, ‘some people’s disapproving opinions could be heard of the celebrations of King Stephen I in the press, [and] on the radio.’¹⁵³ Moreover, some Party members, concerned that the Church might gain from

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. The relationship between the Communist leadership and the Protestant Church was good: ‘[o]ur relations with the Protestant and other churches is even better than with the Catholics.’ See: MOL, M-KS 288-22/1962-5. Report on Churches – Religion. III. Information on the activities of the Hungarian churches and the situation of our church policies.

¹⁵² M-KS 288-22/ 1970-3.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

this, also questioned ‘why it was necessary to celebrate Stephen I: ‘if Nixon gives us the Crown back, then it made sense, otherwise not’.¹⁵⁴ The commemorations also provided the opportunity for citizen criticism of the Communists: in Budapest, ‘nationalist’ voices could be heard amongst the crowd, who thought commemorating Stephen I was purely tactics from the Communists.¹⁵⁵

The Communist leadership had to wait a little longer for the return of the Holy Crown. Although there had been previous attempts by the Communist regime of Hungary to get the Crown from as early as the 1950s, it was not until the late 1960s and 1970s that its return started to appear a real possibility.¹⁵⁶ The first round of negotiations to this purpose took place between Hungary and the United States of America between 1969 and 1971, but it was not until the mid-1970s that relationship between the two nations had improved, mainly thanks to the Carter administration’s new policy – initiated by the previous President Gerald Ford and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger – to improve relations with the region.¹⁵⁷ The Policy review Committee – the joint Committee of the State Department and the National Security Council – at their 23 August 1977 meeting finalised plans for a closer cooperation.¹⁵⁸ These were then published on 13 September in the Presidential directives, and stated that: ‘The United States will indicate its willingness to return the Crown of St. Stephen, providing Hungarians will give acceptable assurances about its continuing display.’¹⁵⁹ The return of the Crown was also marked the beginning of trade negotiations between the two countries. The Hungarian side was informed of the decision to return the Crown on 1 October 1977 by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, who notified Frigyes Puja, Minister of Foreign Affairs during a meeting at the United Nations.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. For the return see: ‘Nemzeti ereklyénk’ [Our national relic] in *Népszabadság*, 6 January 1978, p. 1. It is interesting to note that, although they had previously generally shown disapproval for Stephen, many Communists thought the return of his crown was desirable.

¹⁵⁵ M-KS 288-22/ 1970-3.

¹⁵⁶ For the attempts in the 1950s see: Martin Mevius, ‘A Crown for Rákosi: The Vogeler Case, the Holy Crown of St Stephen, and the (Inter)national Legitimacy of the Hungarian Communist Regime, 1945-1978’ in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 89 No. 1, 2011, pp. 76-107. Especially pp. 89-103.

¹⁵⁷ Tibor Glant, *A Szent Korona Amerikai Kalandja, 1945-1978*, [The American Adventure of the Holy Crown, 1945-1978] Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 1997, pp. 66-67. For Ford and Kissinger see: p. 75. [hereafter: Glant, *A Szent Korona Amerikai Kalandja*]

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 76.

¹⁵⁹ Quoted from the Presidential Directive of 13 September 1977 in Ibid. For the original see: <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/pddirectives/pd21.pdf> [last accessed 12 December 2015]

¹⁶⁰ Glant, *A Szent Korona Amerikai Kalandja*, p. 76.

The decision to return the Crown, along with the Coronation regalia, which was also held in the US, was not welcomed by everyone. Within the US many were worried what this gesture would mean politically, with its potential legitimisation of a Communist regime. One of the loudest dissenting voices was that of Mary Rose Oakar, Member of the US House of Representatives for Ohio's 20th district, which had a large Hungarian population.¹⁶¹ Hungarian-Americans, many of whom had been involved in the 1956 revolution and were generally opposed to the Communist regime, were particularly against the return of the Crown and Coronation regalia. They saw the return of the Crown 'to the Communist occupiers' of Hungary as a 'slap in the face for the Hungarian community' of the US.¹⁶² They may also have been concerned about the political symbolism of the Crown, which was believed to represent the Hungarian nation as a political collective and whoever possessed the Crown was seen as a direct successor to Stephen.

The Crown and regalia returned to Hungary on 6 January 1978.¹⁶³ The American delegation was led by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and also included émigré Hungarian historian István Deák and Nobel Prize-winning Hungarian physiologist Albert Szent-Györgyi, alongside American senators, journalists, businessmen, Catholic clergy and others.¹⁶⁴ The Hungarian delegation that met them on the runway consisted of Frigyes Puja, Minister of Foreign Affairs, János Péter, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, the Vice-President of the Patriotic People's Front, Secretary of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Archbishop of Esztergom, László Lékai (successor of Cardinal Mindszenty), amongst others.¹⁶⁵ In other words, the Crown and regalia – and warming relations with the US – were welcomed with a grand and high-level reception.

The events of the 1970 millennium commemorations and the return of the Crown in 1978 paved the way for Stephen to return to the national day calendar, and not only in his political form as king but also in his religious form as saint. By the 1980s, Stephen was again the integral part

¹⁶¹ Ibid. p. 91.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ 'Itthon a magyar korona' [The Hungarian Crown is home] in *Népszabadság*, 6 January 1978, p. 1. [hereafter: 'Itthon a magyar korona']

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. István Deák's inclusion in the American delegation was rather controversial. Deák had been banned from receiving a visa to Hungary in 1973, after a research trip to Hungary the previous year, and was told that 'if he behaves himself, then in five years' time he might get a visa'. Tibor Glant believes that one of the biggest battles between the Hungarian Ministry of Interior and the American State Department was to get a visa for Deák. See: Glant, *A Szent Korona Amerikai Kalandja*, p. 108. For the background of the so-called Deák affair see: Glant, *A Szent Korona Amerikai Kalandja*, pp. 56-57.

¹⁶⁵ 'Itthon a magyar korona', p. 1.

of the commemorative narrative of 20 August celebrations. It was now a day that praised ‘tradition and progress’, commemorating not simply the 1949 Communist constitution, but ‘the beginning of a historical process which has been a constant factor in our nation’s existence’ as Gyula Kállai, President of National Council of the Patriotic People’s Front, put it in 1983.¹⁶⁶ 1983 also saw the premiere of the rock opera *Stephen, the king* (*István, a király*), ‘a celebration of the life and work of Stephen as a national hero’,¹⁶⁷ with a live performance two days before the 20 August celebrations that year in Városliget (Budapest City Park). The main storyline deals with the rivalry between Stephen (Christianity) and his uncle Koppány (paganism), who attempts to prevent the conversion of the Hungarians to Christianity. The religious element is thus central to the rock opera, and as Christopher Hann has observed, ‘Christians in the audiences were not made to feel that their saint was being distorted to fit a socialist mould.’¹⁶⁸ The rock opera was a huge success. Around 100,000 people attended the live event and, when the film version, premiered in the cinema more than 1,000,000 people bought tickets to see it. The soundtrack also sold extremely well when it was released.¹⁶⁹ The rock opera soon became an annual tradition, with the film version been screened every year on 20 August, continuing until today.

This restoration, not simply of the figure of Stephen, but also his specifically religious status continued in the 1980s. Both the Communists and the Catholic Church sought to shore up their public support through St Stephen.¹⁷⁰ In 1988, Stephen was once again officially commemorated as a Catholic saint when, for the first time since 1947, the Holy Right procession was held at St Stephen’s Basilica in Budapest.¹⁷¹ The customary 20 August article in *Népszabadság* acknowledged that in the last decades different aspects of the day had been emphasised, from the celebration of the New Bread to the celebration of worker-peasant friendship.¹⁷² These often blurred not only the memory of St/King Stephen, but also the celebration of the Constitution. There were times, the article claims, when Stephen was

¹⁶⁶ Gyula Kállai, ‘Hagyomány és haladás’ [Tradition and progress] in *Népszabadság*, 20 August 1983, p. 1.

¹⁶⁷ Christopher M. Hann, ‘Socialism and King Stephen’s Right Hand’, *Religion, State and Society*. 18, 1990, 1, pp. 4-24, p. 13.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 14.

¹⁶⁹ Béla Szilárd Jávorszky, ‘István, a király (1983)’ [Stephen, the king] at <http://www.jbsz.hu/component/content/article/59-303-lemez/330-istvan-a-kiraly-1983.html> [accessed 12 November 2013].

¹⁷⁰ Klimó ‘A nemzet Szent Jobbja’, p. 55.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p. 54.

¹⁷² Brunó F. Straub ‘István király történeti üzenete: Cselekvően alkalmazkodni a világhoz’ [The message of King Stephen: actively adapting to the world] in *Népszabadság*, 20 August 1988, p. 1.

mistakenly represented as a cruel ruler who ‘exterminated his own people for his ideals’. Even so, now the Communists had returned to the original ideals of Stephen, the founder of the state and the legislator. Despite allowing the Holy Right procession to take place, however, this was still very much a Communist-version of King Stephen, and not of the saint and state founder.

Czechoslovakia – 28 October

In Czechoslovakia, de-Stalinisation was delayed until the beginning of the 1960s. Therefore, unlike in Hungary, where following 1956, a new, more national narrative was implemented over the course of the second half of the 1950s and the 1960s, in Czechoslovakia, the main elements of the rhetoric of the national day commemorations remained relatively unchanged until the beginning of the 1980s. A distinctive difference with Hungary is that national days – current ones and abandoned interwar dates - were not used in Czechoslovakia as opportunities for protest, until the very late 1980s, even though there was a strong ‘dissident’ or ‘underground’ movement.

In the interwar period, 28 October, as Foundation of State Day, had been the most important national day. Yet, after 1951 the Communists maintained the date of 28 October but gave the day a new meaning, one that no longer commemorated the foundation of the 1918 state but was instead dedicated to the nationalisation of industry in 1945. The day was now officially known as Nationalisation Day. Nonetheless, a review of the press after 1951 shows that there were occasional references to 1918 and the original purpose of the day, which appear to increase after the federalisation of Czechoslovakia in 1968.¹⁷³ Nationalisation Day remained public holiday until 1975, when it was downgraded to a memorial day and hence a work day. In contrast with the celebrations of the interwar period, throughout the Communist period, 28 October was not a day of organised commemorations but its main focus involved speeches by political leaders at Prague Castle. This perhaps accentuated the dullness and repetitiveness of the political rhetoric attached to this day, which almost each year repeated the same tropes of

¹⁷³ See for example: ‘Den znárodnění’ [Nationalisation Day] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1952, p. 1.; ‘Deset let hospodáři pracující lid’ [Ten years of the management of the working people] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1955, p. 1.; ‘Správná cesta’ [The right way] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1956, p. 1.; ‘Dvanáct let svobodné práce’ [Twelve years of free work] in *Rudé právo*, 27 October 1957, p. 1. or ‘Spolehlivý základ naší výstavby’ [Reliable foundation for our development] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1959, p. 1. This article compared Czechoslovak industrial production before and after nationalisation and with other, mostly western, countries. It claimed that before the nationalisation of key industries, that is during the years of the First Republic, growth was around 2%, whilst ‘in the last decade the growth has been an average 11.7% annually.’ The message being that state ownership supposedly worked.

building socialism, the achievements of socialism (particularly until the 1960s), and the role of the Great October Socialist Revolution in creating the opportunities for Czechoslovak independence.

The establishment of the First Republic only returned to the official rhetoric on the occasion of its 40th anniversary in 1958. The *Rudé právo* headline declared: ‘Forty years ago – on 28 October 1918 – the struggle of the workers under the influence of the Great October Socialist Revolution gave birth to our Czechoslovak Republic.’¹⁷⁴ The accompanying two-paragraph article announced that district meetings were to be held for the anniversary, to ‘illuminate the historical forces that led to the establishment of an independent Czechoslovak state, the struggle of ordinary people for a free state and the particular impact of the October Revolution, without which there would not have been an independent Czechoslovak state.’¹⁷⁵ An assembly meeting was also organised in the Municipal House in Prague, which took place under the now familiar slogan: ‘Without the Great October Socialist Revolution, there would not be an independent Czechoslovakia.’ Not only was the post-war liberation and building of a socialist society thanks to the Soviets, but so was the creation of independent Czechoslovakia itself.

Nonetheless, according to the Communist rhetoric, the First Republic and its bourgeois leadership had deceived the working people and established a ‘bourgeois democracy’.¹⁷⁶ The trope of the deception of the workers by the leaders of the First Republic had been a staple of the anniversary of 28 October for the Communist Party, since 1945 and even during the First Republic itself, as, unlike in Hungary, the Communist Party was legal in Czechoslovakia. The general narrative attached to the First Republic under Communism was that whilst an independent Czechoslovak state was a step in the right direction, the manner in which it was ruled was oppressive for the workers.¹⁷⁷ Thus, although 28 October marked the creation of an independent Czechoslovakia, it could not be the symbol of genuine national independence. The Communist rhetoric acknowledged that ‘28 October is the day of our free state and independence, the day of the birth of our first republic.’¹⁷⁸ However, this ‘was a significant step only in comparison with the existence [within] the semi-feudal Austria-Hungary.’ Hence,

¹⁷⁴ *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1958, p. 1.

¹⁷⁵ ‘40 výročí Československé republiky’ [40th anniversary of the Czechoslovak Republic] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1958, p. 1.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ ‘Skončila konference k 20. výročí znárodnění’ [The conference on the 20th anniversary of nationalisation ended] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1965, p. 1.

¹⁷⁸ ‘28 říjen’ [28 October] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1966, p. 1.

28 October no longer commemorated the foundation of the First Republic, although the date itself was retained as Nationalisation Day. On significant anniversaries, however, such as the 40th or 50th anniversary of the foundation of independent Czechoslovakia, the events of 1918 were also commemorated.

The 50th anniversary of the establishment of Czechoslovakia took place under different circumstances from that of the 40th, with the crushing of the Prague Spring just over two months beforehand. Perhaps because of this, and, more pertinently, with the passing of the new federal constitution, the Communist regime attempted to stage huge celebrations in 1968, the biggest celebrations of Czechoslovakia's foundation since 1948. Various events were also scheduled to commemorate the 50th anniversary in a number of towns such as Košice, Ústí nad Labem, České Budějovice, Ostrava, Bratislava and, of course, Prague.¹⁷⁹

More pertinently, on 28 October 1968, Czechoslovakia underwent a form of re-establishment, as on this day the Czechoslovak National Assembly 'unanimously approved' the federalisation of the republic.¹⁸⁰ The plenary session of the Assembly 'was devoted to the constitutional affirmation of the relations between two equal nations, which is based on a federal union in a joint socialist republic.'¹⁸¹ Federalisation satisfied long-standing Slovak demands, and the Slovak newspaper *Pravda* reported that the new 'constitutional law... on the 50th anniversary of our republic [allows us] to enter into a new period of its life as a federal state of two equal brotherly nations; the Czechs and the Slovaks.'¹⁸² The law was signed by the President of the Republic Ludvík Svoboda on 30 October in Bratislava Castle. The coming into force of the new constitution on the 28th and its signing by the president in Bratislava on 30 October appears to be a way of 'rectifying' the errors of the First Republic, which had seemingly sidelined the Slovak contribution to the creation of Czechoslovakia by making 28 October Foundation of State Day. The legacy of 1918 was still honoured, as the new constitution also came into effect on the date of 28 October, but it was also 'admonished' by having the president

¹⁷⁹ 'V městech a obcích naší republiky začaly oslavy 50. výročí vzniku Československa' [The towns and municipalities of our republic started the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Czechoslovakia] in *Rudé právo*, 26 October 1968, p. 1.

¹⁸⁰ *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1968, p. 1.

¹⁸¹ 'K padesátému výročí Československé republiky: Plenární schůze Národního schromáždění' [The fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic: Plenary Session of the National Assembly] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1968, p. 1.

¹⁸² *Pravda*, 28 October 1968, p. 1.

sign the constitution on 30 October – when interwar Slovaks had argued the foundation of Czechoslovakia should be commemorated – in Bratislava.

The coverage of the passing of the law was similar in both the Czech and Slovak Communist newspapers, although the Slovaks took a more historical approach that was more sympathetic to the Czechoslovakia founded in 1918. The coverage in the Czech newspaper *Rudé právo* also offered a historical interpretation of the day, focusing on the traditional communist narrative of the assistance of the Great October Socialist Revolution and the Soviets, as well as the general strike of 14 October 1918. It also accentuated the negative effects of the bourgeois rule of the First Republic, marginalising President Masaryk and even Edvard Beneš.¹⁸³

In the Slovak *Pravda*, however, it was declared that henceforth ‘28 October will not only be the day of nationalisation, but also the day of the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic’, referring to the Czechoslovakia of 1918.¹⁸⁴ The article complained that, since the 1950s until 1967, ‘the day of the establishment of Czechoslovakia, was either ignored or in other ways downgraded’. Furthermore, ‘Everybody attempted to defeat or to evaluate our rich national and state history and our rich national traditions to their liking.’ Yet, before 1918 the Czechs and the Slovaks worked closely together, ‘despite the fact that our nations lived separate lives’. In official Slovak eyes, 1918 was seen not only through Soviet-themed historical narratives – as was presented in the Czech press – but also through the history of the Czechs and Slovaks and their joint state, reprimanding those who (like the *Rudé právo* discussed above) denigrated it.

In the *Pravda* article, the usual rhetoric about bourgeois elites and class cleavages are toned down; instead, the (historical) unity of the nation is central, and the importance of the First Republic in overthrowing ‘German and Hungarian oppression’ underlined. The Great October Socialist Revolution played an important role, but so did Masaryk and Beneš, who are here praised:

The founding of the Republic was the result of the revolutionary masses of the people that was set in motion under the influence of the Great October Socialist Revolution, but also by the first foreign resistance, especially the fruit of the enormous diplomatic efforts of T.G. Masaryk,

¹⁸³ See for example: ‘Dělnické hnutí před 50 lety: Socialisté a národní osvobození 1918’ [The workers’ movement 50 years ago: Social and National Liberation 1918] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1968, p. 3. Masaryk is only mentioned once in the two-column article, simply as the leader of the Czech politicians.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Do ďalšieho polstoročia’ [The next half century] in *Pravda*, 28 October 1968, pp. 1-2, p. 1.

Dr Edvard Beneš and Milan Rastislav Štefánik. Our nations were thus rid centuries of German and Hungarian oppression.¹⁸⁵

The Czechoslovakia of the interwar period was still described as a '[b]ourgeois democracy with all its concomitants and consequences', but this era also had its positive aspects: as a democracy it 'allowed for the further development of class struggle of the Czech and Slovak working classes under the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, and this paved the way for a new milestone in the history of the Czechoslovak Republic – 9 May 1945.' The article still complains of negative treatment of Slovakia and the Slovaks during the interwar republic; despite the contributions of the Slovak people to the Republic 'a new form of oppression' was inflicted on them, since for the bourgeois political elite 'the Slovak nation did not exist, but only the unified Czechoslovak nation.' It is this treatment of the Slovaks by the Czech political elite that also enabled 'Hitler's inner fascist forces' to come into power.

Why was the Slovak Communist mouthpiece expressing such loyalty to the 1918 foundation of Czechoslovakia, when in the interwar period they had continuously complained about their position in it and been less than enthusiastic about commemorating 28 October? One reason may be that the Slovak political representatives had to show a certain enthusiasm as Slovakia had just been granted an elevated status in the new federal Czechoslovakia. Another reason may be an attempt to distance Slovakia from the wartime Slovak Republic, and 'Hitler's inner fascist forces' who operated it, by confirming Slovakia's position within Czechoslovakia. This may also be an instance of normalisation, especially normalisation as de-Stalinisation, as the 1968 federal constitution was rectifying the more 'Stalinist' centralising constitution introduced in 1960 under Novotný.

Normalisation

Despite this acknowledgement of 28 October as commemorating the foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 and its Czechoslovakia in 1968, in practice the main focus of the official commemorations was still the nationalisation of industry and the economic achievements of the Party. The historical aspects, such as independence in 1918, were woven into the general narrative of the day mainly on 'round' anniversaries.¹⁸⁶ The message of the commemoration of 28 October tended to be dull repetitions of socialist rhetoric, in particular

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Jan Měchýř, 'O našich památných dnech' [On our memorable days] in Jindřich Pecka (ed.) *Acta Contemporanea: K pětadesátinám Viléma Prečana*, Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1998, pp. 206-223, p. 208. [hereafter: Měchýř, 'O našich památných dnech']

with the standard trope of ‘If it had not been for the Great October Socialist Revolution, there would not be a Czechoslovakia.’ This dullness is partly due to the policy of normalisation, but also to the inability of the communist state to relate to the people in national terms. Instead, everything was reduced to the issue of ‘economic progress’, even the anniversary of the creation of the independent Czechoslovak state. Moreover, 1918 could not be seen as a greater ‘liberation’ than the liberation by the Soviets of 9 May 1945.

The Great October Socialist Revolution was also linked to another event in October 1918 that did not have the problematic bourgeois connotations of the First Republic, namely the general strike of the workers on the 14th of the month. The proletariat were the protagonists of this event, the ‘most tangible and most prominent appearance of the proletariat in the struggle for national and social liberation came on 14 October 1918’,¹⁸⁷ which Communist rhetoric claimed was inspired by the Great October Socialist Revolution. Nothing was possible without the October Revolution. As *Rudé právo* claimed in the run-up to 28 October 1969:

It is necessary to emphasise first of all the continuity between the ideas of the Czechoslovak Republic and the ideas of the October revolution that impressed the Czech and Slovak proletariat, especially because it showed that there was a real possibility to overthrow the Austro-Hungarian imperialism and implement a national and social liberation.¹⁸⁸

Rudé právo was still concerned to demand that the link between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union should not be commemorated only on 28 October, but also during the forthcoming 7 November – the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution – and during Liberation Days. It even argued that ‘without the help of the Soviet Union, there would not be socialism in Czechoslovakia’ – perhaps referring to the crushing of the Prague Spring the previous year.¹⁸⁹

In 1975, 28 October was cancelled as a public holiday and until 1988 (when it was restored as an official state day) it was simply a significant day.¹⁹⁰ The new law also dropped the category

¹⁸⁷ ‘Říjen a naše samostatnost’ [October and our independence] in *Rudé právo*, 26 October 1969, pp. 1-2, p. 1.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ ‘56. zákon ze dne 11. června 1975, kterým se mění zákon č. 93/1951. Sb. o státním svátku, o dnech pracovního klidu a o památných a významných dnech’ [Law 56 of 11 June 1975 amending Law No. 93/1956 regarding national days, public holidays and memorable and significant days], in *Sbírka zákonů Československá socialistická republika*, Prague: Statistické a evidenční vydavatelství tiskopisů, 1975, pp. 195-296. For the 1988 law see: ‘141 Zákonné opatření předsednictva Federálního shromáždění ze dne 21. září 1988, kterým se mění a doplňuje zákon č. 93/1951 Sb. o státním svátku, o dnech pracovního klidu a o památných a významných dnech’ [141 Legal measure of the Federal Assembly of 21 September 1988, regarding the amendment and supplementation of Law 93/1951 on national days, public holidays and memorable and significant days] in *Sbírka*

of memorial days, effectively removing Cyril and Methodius Day and Jan Hus Day all together from the national day calendar. In practice, this downgrade in the status of 28 October changed very little as the day had always commemorated on a small-scale, involving speeches by political officials, and a similar media coverage continued. The demotion of the day (and the abolishment of Cyril and Methodius Day and Jan Hus Day) could be explained by a number of factors, relating to normalisation. After the Prague Spring a new ‘social contract’ was devised between the state and its citizenry, ‘which exchanged “socialist consumerism” for ritualised public expressions of political loyalty’.¹⁹¹ Despite this social contract, in the 1970s (and 1980s) the leaders of the Communist Party feared ‘nationalist sentiment, especially among the Slovak intelligentsia’ stemming from the failure and limitations of the federalisation.¹⁹² Moreover, dissent and a ‘counter-culture’ were becoming more keenly felt with the trials against members of the bands The Plastic People of the Universe and DG307 and others in 1976 and the creation of Charter 77, resulting in a crackdown against dissent.

In this respect, it is interesting to note the continuing symbolic use of Jan Hus as an expression of opposition to the regime. For example, after the death of the philosopher and Charter 77 spokesman Jan Patočka, a few days after he had been interrogated by the police, the poet Jan Zábřana wrote in his diary: ‘The line is clear: Hus, Komenský, both Masaryks, the boy Palach, and now Patočka.’¹⁹³ This is a very different national historical narrative of Jan Hus than the one being presented by the Czech Communists. Similarly, Julius Tomin, another Charter 77 activist, founded the Jan Hus Educational Foundation in 1980 in exile as a way for western scholars to support academics, mainly philosophers, in Czechoslovakia who were prevented from giving philosophy seminars by the regime.¹⁹⁴ Rather than being a usable symbol for the Communists as an early ‘revolutionary’, Hus had evolved into a symbol of intellectual freedom used by the opponents of the regime. However, in contrast with the Hungarians, who in every historical era used the revolutionary tradition of 15 March for public protest, Czech anti-Communists did not tend to use 6 July, what was or had been Jan Hus Day, as an opportunity for protest. This may be because the Czech opposition was more intelligentsia-based, but also

zákonů Československá socialistická republika, Prague: Statistické a evidenční vydavatelství tiskopisů, 1988, p. 830.

¹⁹¹ Kevin McDermott, *Communist Czechoslovakia 1945-89: A Political and Social History*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015, p. 183. [hereafter: McDermott, *Communist Czechoslovakia*]

¹⁹² Ibid. p. 164.

¹⁹³ Quoted in Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2014, p. 160.

¹⁹⁴ See: Barbara Day, *The Velvet Philosophers*, London: The Claridge Press, 1999.

because in Hungary the day of 15 March itself had a much more deep-rooted tradition of mobilising people. Moreover, 15 March as a commemorative day was popular throughout Hungary, whereas creating a Jan Hus Day in Czechoslovakia had been a divisive exercise.

Over the 1970s, the ‘nationalisation’ aspect of the 28 October was gradually reduced, perhaps partly because the Czechoslovak economy was in trouble and it was increasingly difficult to present state control of the economy as a success. By the 60th anniversary of the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1978, the usual rhetoric of extolling the successes of nationalisation was largely absent. *Rudé právo*’s front page was adorned with the headline: ‘Long live the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic!’ and a celebratory assembly was held in Prague Castle.¹⁹⁵ In his commemorative speech Gustáv Husák, now president, remunerated the standard line: ‘The emergence of the independent Czechoslovak state was an event that marked a significant watershed in the life of the people of [the] country. The six decades that have passed since were years of dramatic struggles and they are a source of great lessons for the present and the future generations.’¹⁹⁶ Nonetheless, when the Czechoslovak Republic was established 60 years before, the ‘ruling bourgeoisie’ back then had ‘tried to instil in the minds of the workers’ certain ‘legends, myths and illusions regarding the character of the state’. The reality, however, was that ‘the pre-Munich republic was a state of exploitation, poverty, unemployment, strikes and deep class struggles.’¹⁹⁷ In response to this, the Communist Party had been founded in 1921, playing an important role in the interwar republic. This involved fighting for workers’ rights, the defence of the freedom of Czechoslovakia against the fascist occupiers during the Second World War, followed by the renewal of the state, a ‘progressive foreign policy orientation’ – as opposed to the foreign policy orientation of the First Republic, it was implied – and the establishment of a fair national and social justice system for the workers.¹⁹⁸

This ever greater focus on the past and the absence of rhetoric referring to nationalisation became even more conspicuous in the 1980s. Historical victories and events were used to distract from current economic woes and the apparent failure of nationalisation as well as the growing movement for dissent. The standard socialist economic rhetoric would not suffice in an era when *perestroika* was only a few years away. Although the communist regime certainly

¹⁹⁵ ‘Slavností shromáždění na Pražském hradě’ [Celebratory assembly in Prague Castle] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1978, pp. 1-2.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

did not identify with the First Republic, it sought connections with the interwar period, to provide a more national twist: the Soviet Union of necessity continued to be lauded and presented as the great facilitator, but its centrality to the Czechoslovak narrative was softened and the agency of the Czechs and Slovaks themselves was foregrounded. Hence, again in 1980, the influence of the Great October Socialist Revolution was presented in the official newspaper coverage as an opportunity for the Czech and Slovak working classes to shape the future of Czechoslovakia, first during the general strike of 14 October 1918, and then a little over two years later in December 1920, when another general strike was called.¹⁹⁹ Although these general strikes did not succeed in their immediate aims, they were not ‘futile’, as especially out of the 1920 general strike, ‘the necessity of founding a new type of political party, a Leninist party arose’,²⁰⁰ leading to the formation of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in 1921.

In 1984, the nationalisation of industry once again returned to the *Rudé právo* coverage, but almost as a historical event, not in relation to the present situation. The nationalisation of 1945 was presented as ‘another important revolutionary event, which was a qualitative step forward in the history’ of Czechoslovakia.²⁰¹ The federalisation in 1968 was described as ‘a new chapter’. All these achievements, *Rudé právo* argued, were possible because of the leadership of the Communist Party, which had also protected the nation against the Munich Agreement and during the Second World War. The ‘journey’ to socialism was started by the ‘Slovak National Uprising and then the May uprising of the Czech people’, followed by the liberation of the Red Army.²⁰² Victorious February, ensured the existence of the socialist state and through the political, social and cultural policies of the Communists ‘[t]oday Czechoslovakia has a powerful economic and spiritual potential.’²⁰³

From the mid-1980s a number of external and internal factors influenced the Czechoslovak Communist Party’s policies, a huge external factor being Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev’s *perestroika* from March 1985 and later *glasnost*. The main issue of *perestroika* for the Czechoslovak Communists ‘was that many of Gorbachev’s innovations bore uncanny resemblances to Dubček’s “socialism with a human face” and this implicitly undermined the

¹⁹⁹ ‘Rozvíjíme pokrokový odkaz’ [Developing progressive heritage] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1980, p. 1.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ ‘Zavazující tradice 28. října’ [The binding traditions of 28 October] in *Rudé právo*, 27 October 1984, p. 1.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid. The same metanarrative was presented in the following years – the last few years of communism – as well. See for example: ‘Historie žije dneškem’ [History lives today] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1986, p. 1.

entire legitimacy of the regime.’²⁰⁴ Moreover, by the mid-1980s the Party also faced a number of internal issues; the economy was in serious decline and there were also problems within the Party. As a result, it became clear that the social contract that came into effect after 1968 had started to crumble. As Pavel Kolář argues, the contract ‘no longer made sense’ since now there were political alternatives to Communism, ‘such as perestroika, nationalism, or human rights.’²⁰⁵

The breakdown of the social contract was particularly apparent between 1987 and 1989. A number of different oppositional groups started to voice their opinions, street demonstrations and protests were organised, *samizdats* were published and different artistic performances were organised.²⁰⁶ Significantly, on 21 August 1988 a large demonstration commemorated the invasion of the Warsaw Pact in 1968. Perhaps, hoping that a show of compromise from the Communist Party would ease the social unrest,²⁰⁷ 28 October was once more made a public holiday and even further upgraded to the status of a state holiday, alongside Liberation Day.²⁰⁸

President Husák’s speech – which lasted nearly an hour²⁰⁹ – and the other developments around the anniversary of 28 October signalled change in the Communist identity of Czechoslovakia and a growing acceptance by the regime of the country’s pre-war history. One of the most conspicuous absences from the content of 28 October discourse under communism had been positive references to the President of the First Republic, Tomáš G. Masaryk.²¹⁰ In his speech in 1988, Husák reminded the listeners (and readers) that the First Republic was the result of ‘many years of struggle of the Czech and Slovak people against the national and social oppression of the Austro-Hungarian empire.’²¹¹ He also made specific reference to Masaryk,

²⁰⁴ McDermott, *Communist Czechoslovakia*, p. 184.

²⁰⁵ Pavel Kolář, ‘Communism in Eastern Europe’ in Stephen A. Smith (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 203-219, p. 210.

²⁰⁶ McDermott, *Communist Czechoslovakia*, p. 184.

²⁰⁷ Karen Gamelgaard, ‘The Czech and Czechoslovak 28 October: Stability and change in four presidential addresses 1988-2008’ in Šarić, Ljiljana, Karen Gammelgaard and Kjetil Rå Hauge *Transforming National Holidays: Identity discourse in the West and South Slavic countries, 1985-2010*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012, pp. 231-250, p. 232.

²⁰⁸ ‘Slavností zasedání k 70. výročí republiky’ [Celebratory session marking the 70th anniversary of the Republic] in *Rudé právo*, 28 October 1988, p. 1. For the law see: ‘141 Zákonné opatření předsednictva Federálního shromáždění ze dne 21. září 1988, kterým se mění a doplňuje zákon č. 93/1951 Sb. o státním svátku, o dnech pracovního klidu a o památných a významných dnech’ in *Sbírka zákonů Československá socialistická republika*, Prague: Statistické a evidenční vydavatelství tiskopisů, 1988, p. 830.

²⁰⁹ Měchýř, ‘O našich památných dnech’, p. 208.

²¹⁰ As mentioned above, the Slovak Communist daily, *Pravda*, praised Masaryk, along with Milan Rastislav Štefánik and Edvard Beneš, as the leaders who, thanks to their diplomatic expertise, freed the Czechs and the Slovaks from Austro-Hungarian yoke. See: ‘Do ďalšieho polstoročia’ in *Pravda*, 28 October 1968, pp. 1-2, p. 1.

²¹¹ Ibid.

acknowledging the diplomatic work he achieved along with Milan Rastislav Štefánik and Edvard Beneš, the other founders of Czechoslovakia, as part of ‘the leaders of our resistance abroad’.²¹² Not only was Masaryk partially rehabilitated, but also the Czechoslovak Legionnaires of the First World War, who had generally been considered too right-wing and nationalist for the Communists’ taste. Husák praised those who ‘selflessly fought’ for the Czechoslovak state ‘in their tens of thousands [...] in France, Italy, Serbia and in Russia’ where ‘they joined the Czechoslovak foreign troops – the legions.’²¹³

Yet, despite this acknowledgement of the progressive traditions of the First Czechoslovak Republic, Husák still adhered to the standard rhetoric about a bourgeois interwar republic. The post-Munich Agreement and Second World War era were again presented as an era of Communist resistance against the fascists.²¹⁴ The nationalisation of industry – what was supposedly being commemorated – was mentioned, nonetheless, in just one sentence: ‘The nationalisation, announced on 28 October 1945, was an important step.’²¹⁵

This shift away from a strict communist rhetoric to a more open and historically accommodating one was thus a response to the changing mood among the population and the growth of organised opposition groups, such as Charter 77. In 1988 the regime rightly feared that the public mood was turning overtly against them. They thus attempted to undercut any large protest attempts on 28 October (more likely, given that the day was now a holiday from work) by moving the official celebrations to the day before, the 27th, in front of the National Museum, where ‘the usual suspects... gave formal speeches before a solemn crowd of dutiful supporters.’ Even so, on 28 October, 10,000 demonstrators gathered on Wenceslas Square and later Old Town Square, for a demonstration organised by the opposition the Movement for Civic Freedom, who had issued a manifesto for political engagement two weeks earlier. In the run-up to 28 October, the major opposition groups had issued calls for people to protest on 28 October. The police tried to breakup the demonstration with the use of water cannons and mass arrests.²¹⁶ This was a new development in Czechoslovakia, where national days had not been used for protests under communism.

²¹² ‘Projev soudruha Gustáva Husáka na počest 70. výročí vzniku Československé republiky’ [Speech of Comrade Husák....] in 28 October 1988, p. 3. [hereafter: ‘Projev’, 1988]

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid. See also: Měchýř, ‘O našich památných dnech’, p. 208.

²¹⁶ Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 245. [hereafter: Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*]

By October 1989, the Communist regimes of Poland and Hungary were effectively over. The Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior was, rightfully, worried about the upcoming anniversary.²¹⁷ The inclusion of Masaryk in the speech the previous year by Husák, and the promotion of 28 October to state day status, did not signify the complete acceptance of the President of the First Republic by the Communist regime. The report by the Ministry of the Interior stressed that ‘the internal enemy’ had been distributing – ‘by means of anonymous letters, flyers’ – in order to ‘ensure the widest possible participation of citizens (most of all youth) in organised provocative gatherings during which the celebration of 28 October will be used to glorify T. G. Masaryk and the bourgeois state.’²¹⁸ Even so, the state itself was sending mixed messages, since a delegation from President Husák’s office laid a wreath at Masaryk’s grave with ribbons in the Czechoslovak national colours.²¹⁹ President Husák himself did not attend. Thus, on the one hand, the memory of the President of the First Republic was, according to the Ministry of the Interior, inciting anti-socialist behaviour, yet on the other hand, it was being officially endorsed by the state, which was honouring him as the founder of Czechoslovakia.

Another major concern of the Ministry was the possible presence of ‘anti-socialist forces from Hungary’, namely members of *Fidesz* (*Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége* – Alliance of Young Democrats) and the Hungarian Democratic Forum (*Magyar Demokrata Fórum*).²²⁰ Intelligence reports claimed that members of *Fidesz* were planning to travel to Prague as tourists in order to ‘organize a swift and conspiratorial courier service between Prague and Budapest to secure prompt information about the course of the “celebrations” for Hungarian media.’²²¹ The American television companies, CBS and NBC were also in Prague, ready to ‘inform the American public about the “troubles” in the CSSR with the aim of presenting them as the continuation of the disintegration of the eastern bloc’.²²²

²¹⁷ ‘October 25, 1989. Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior Memorandum, ‘The Security Situation in the CSSR in the Period before 28 October’, Wilson Center Digital Archive at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117220> [last accessed: 25 November 2015] [hereafter: ‘The Security Situation in the CSSR in the Period before 28 October’]

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Měchýř, ‘O našich památných dnech’, p. 208.

²²⁰ ‘The Security Situation in the CSSR in the Period before 28 October’. Individuals from Poland with similar intentions as the Hungarians was also mentioned in the report.

²²¹ Ibid. This was not the first time young Hungarian opposition figures visited Prague. Just over two months before, on 21 August 1989, during the anniversary of the Warsaw Pact invasion, 10,000 people gathered in the centre of Prague to protest, including 50 members from *Fidesz*. Tamás Deutsch and György Kerényi unfurled a banner that read: ‘We have come with flowers, not tanks’, referring to Hungary’s part in the invasion of 1968. Both Deutsch and Kerényi were arrested. See: Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*, p. 268.

²²² ‘The Security Situation in the CSSR in the Period before 28 October’

The Czechoslovak government sought to prevent developments like those in Hungary and Poland, and the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior made all efforts to prevent a demonstration on the anniversary of the foundation of the republic. As a preventative measure 43 people were detained, and mostly released with a warning, although some were kept under surveillance.²²³ Foreigners known to Czechoslovak officials as being anti-socialist were stopped at the border, while those who slipped through border control and managed to ‘penetrate onto Czechoslovak territory with the intent to participate in enemy acts, will have their stay shortened by administrative means.’²²⁴ In the event of a ‘silent march’, the identity papers of those taking part would be checked and, in case of disturbances, ‘disciplinary units will be called in to drive the crowd out of the area’.

Despite the government’s efforts, 28 October witnessed mass demonstrations on St Wenceslas Square, a signal of the Velvet Revolution that would start on 17 November.²²⁵ The official Communist daily predictably described the demonstrations as ‘unauthorised’ and an abuse of 28 October.²²⁶ What is particularly revealing about the 28 October demonstrations in 1989 is that this was the first time since the establishment of Communism in Czechoslovakia that national days (in particular from the interwar period) were used in order to protest against the regime. They are the exception that proves the rule, underlining how, in contrast with Hungary, even those national days with an interwar origin resonated little with the Czechoslovak people and did not express a Czechoslovak national ideal that could be mobilised to protest the illegitimacy of the Communist regime. The 1989 demonstrations were therefore less about using the symbolism and meaning of the day to protest Communism, but using the opportunity the day presented at a time when *perestroika* was in full swing and Communist regimes in other Eastern bloc countries, Hungary for example, had already begun to be dismantled.

Liberation Day – 9 May (Czechoslovakia)

Liberation Day on 9 May was, theoretically, the most important national day (specifically, state day) in Czechoslovakia during the Communist period. It was a major and lavish event, at least up until the mid-1960s, when it was decided that the military parade would no longer be held

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Měchýř, ‘O našich památných dnech’, p. 208.

²²⁶ ‘Zneužili 28. října’ [The abuse of 28 October] in *Rudé právo*, 30 October 1989, p.2.

annually but only every five years, primarily as a result of financial concerns.²²⁷ Even so, up until the mid-1960s, military parades were the main attraction of the day and newspapers extensively reported on the new technologies that were showcased during the parade.²²⁸ After this interruption the parade took place again in 1970, and then every five years thereafter until 1985.²²⁹ The military parades tended to be of a similar nature, with new military equipment, seas of soldiers and tanks rolling down Letná park.

As with 28 October, Liberation Day offered the Czechoslovak Communist regime the opportunity not only to praise once more the country's liberation by the Soviet Union, and the dangers the Red Army had saved the Czechoslovak nation from, namely Hitler's fascism. It also served as a platform to warn the people of imminent dangers and issues. On the twelfth anniversary of the liberation, in 1957, Bohumír Lomský, Minister of Defence weaved 'the counter-revolutionary coup in Hungary and the war in Egypt' into his anniversary speech.²³⁰ Lomský used these two events to illustrate that 'the imperialists' were still working 'to turn the wheel of history'. Thus, 'the struggle to build socialism' still required 'the strengthening of the ideological and political unity of the people.' Lomský warned his audience of 'the monopolistic ruling circles of the USA' and the imperialists who were taking 'an aggressive line', as evidenced by the allegedly 'irrefutable facts' that 'show that the imperialists are preparing a nuclear war and they want to achieve these aggressive goals with the West German Bundeswehr'.²³¹ He ended his speech by exclaiming: 'Long live the Soviet Union and its glorious Soviet army – our liberator [...]' and 'Long live the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the National Front government, who are our leader to victorious socialism!'

This speech reveals the surrealistic horrors of the Cold War in their fullest dimension: the imperial circles of the West who will destroy the world in a nuclear war; and the Soviet Union

²²⁷ Měchýř, 'O našich památných dnech', p. 213.

²²⁸ See for example: 'Lud Československa oslavil trinást vítězných roků' [The people of Czechoslovakia celebrated 30 victorious years] in *Pravda*, 10 May 1958, p. 1. or 'V pevné jednotě s SSSR bděle střežíme mírovou budovatelskou práci' [In the solid unity with the USSR we vigilantly guard our peace building work] in *Rudé právo*, 10 May 1965, p. 1.

²²⁹ 'Tři generace bojovníků za socialismus' [Three generations of fighters for socialism] in *Rudé právo*, 11 May 1970, pp. 1-2.; 'Čestně střežíme odkaz vítězných let' in *Rudé právo*, 12 May 1975, pp. 1-2.; 'Pevně na stráži socialismu a míru' [We firmly guard socialism and peace] in *Rudé právo*, 12 May 1980, pp. 1-2. and 'Věrní slavným bojovým tradicím' [We are true to the great fighting traditions] in *Rudé právo*, 12 May 1985, p. 1.

²³⁰ 'Radostné oslavy 12. výročí osvobození Československa' [Joyous celebration of the 12th anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia] in *Rudé právo*, 9 May 1957, p. 1.

²³¹ Ibid.

who will save Czechoslovakia from this frightening prospect, as it has saved the country from many trials in the past. Liberation Day itself was proof of this, as were the tanks and troops on the military parade. By the late 1950s and for most of the 1960s, the speeches and media coverage had settled into the same rhetoric, with the yearly newspaper reports repeating the same tropes.²³²

Liberation Day in 1968 took place in the middle of the Prague Spring and reflected the internal changes within the country, the move to federalisation and the opening up of government. There was no military parade this year, although a reception was held at Prague Castle, where a delegation from the Soviet army was also present.²³³ Military symbolism and Soviet assistance had been pushed to the side-lines. The efforts at liberalisation were reflected in *Rudé právo*, which proclaimed that the KSČ ‘is currently [...] at the forefront of the struggle for the revival of the democratic attributes of socialism’ – an admission that socialism had not been so democratic recently.²³⁴ The Communists were ‘spearheading the implementation of ideas of brotherhood of both nations and nationalities of our country [the Czechs and the Slovaks], united under the living traditions of humanism, democracy and tolerance, resting on the firm basis of socialist society’. This ‘revival programme’ would keep the country ‘moving towards improvement, [and] it is a programme that will create an equal community of Czechs and Slovaks on a federal basis.’²³⁵

This ‘progressive’ rhetoric of Prague Spring socialism did not last once the Warsaw Pact countries invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968. On Liberation Day 1969 a celebratory assembly was held at the Park of Culture and Recreation, next to the Industrial Palace in Prague, again with a delegation from the Soviet Union in attendance.²³⁶ In contrast with the rhetoric of democracy the previous year, the people of Czechoslovakia were once more reminded that ‘Liberation Day [...] is the common celebration of the Soviet and Czechoslovak people, and the bloodshed of our common struggles forever cemented the friendship between

²³² See for example: ‘Přehlídka mohutné síly a manifestace věčné družby se Sovětským svazem’ [A great show of force and the manifestation of our eternal friendship with the Soviet Union] in *Rudé právo*, 10 May 1962, pp. 1-2. or ‘V pevné jednotě s SSSR bděle střežíme mírovou budovatelskou práci’ in *Rudé právo*, 10 May 1965, p. 1.

²³³ ‘Recepce na Pražském hradě’ [Reception at Prague Castle] in *Rudé právo*, 9 May 1968, p. 1. and ‘Delegace Sovětské armády na oslavách našeho osvobození’ in *Rudé právo*, 9 May 1968, p. 1.

²³⁴ ‘O dovršení odkazu 9. května’ [On the accomplishments of the heritage of 9 May] in *Rudé právo*, 9 May 1968, p. 1.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ ‘Devátý květen se stal symbolem míru a svobody’ [9 May became the symbol of peace and freedom] in *Rudé právo*, 12 May 1969, p. 1.

the people of our countries.²³⁷ Gustáv Husák, who had displaced the liberalising Alexander Dubček as First Secretary, contributed a front-page article to *Rudé právo* in which he informed readers that 9 May ‘is a symbol of peace and freedom.’²³⁸ The liberation of Czechoslovakia from Nazi Germany ‘took much blood, much suffering and hardship. And we know who had to make the biggest sacrifice. Ten thousand graves of Soviet soldiers are on our territory, and they all died for the freedom of the Czechoslovak people.’ Husák was attempting to justify the Warsaw Pact intervention of the previous year not only through the historical example of the liberation, but also through the new policies the party was implementing.

This pro-Soviet rhetoric continued through the Liberation Days of the 1970s and the 1980s, with continuous reminders of the heroic liberation of Czechoslovakia from the Nazi yoke, which thus made 9 May the anniversary of freedom.²³⁹ Similarly to Hungary, Liberation Day, was at times tied together with other events on ‘round’ anniversaries. Thus, in 1977, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, parallels were drawn between the Revolution and the Liberation: the events of 1917 created the Soviet Union, ‘the first socialist state’, while in 1945 it was the Soviet Union that liberated Czechoslovakia.²⁴⁰

The final Liberation Day celebration took place in Prague in 1989. Although in Hungary and Poland the system change was already under way, in Czechoslovakia, 9 May appeared determined to stay exactly the same. During the celebratory speech, President Gustáv Husák showed none of the more accepting tone he had used the previous year in his 28 October speech, although this is also due to the different nature of the two events. Going through the old motions, he described Czechoslovakia as ‘one of the first victims of Nazi aggression’, praised the liberation struggle that was, he argued, led by the Communists and was achieved with the liberation of the Red Army in 1945, culminating in Victorious February in 1948.²⁴¹ Husák also praised the achievements of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia, ‘the rebuilding of society’ and the economic modernisation that the Party implemented.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Gustáv Husák, ‘Mír a svoboda’ [Peace and freedom] in *Rudé právo*, 9 May 1969, p. 1.

²³⁹ See for example: ‘Projev presidenta republiky soudruha Ludvíka Svobody’ [Speech by the President of the Republic Comrade Ludvík Svoboda] in *Rudé právo*, 11 May 1970, pp. 1-2.; ‘Projev soudruha L. Štrougala’ in *Rudé právo*, 12 May 1975, pp. 1-2.; ‘Třicet pět’ [Thirty-five] in *Rudé právo*, 9 May 1980, p. 1.; ‘Ve jménu míru a družby’ [In the name of peace and friendship] in *Rudé právo*, 10 May 1983, p. 1. or ‘Z rozkazu prezidenta ČSSR’ [By the order of the President of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic] in *Rudé právo*, 7 May 1989, p. 2.

²⁴⁰ ‘Zdroj svobody’ [Source of our freedom] in *Rudé právo*, 7-9 May 1977, p. 1.

²⁴¹ ‘Z rozkazu prezidenta ČSSR’ [The orders of the President of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic] in *Rudé právo*, 7 May 1989, p. 2.

Liberation Day was thus the most ‘Soviet’ of Czechoslovak national days, where the rhetoric and symbolism were almost entirely focused on the greatness of the Soviet Union. This was further underlined by its being laden with the rhetoric of Soviet internationalism and tirades against the west. The accompanying military parade, although no longer annual after the mid-1960s, encapsulated all the military pageantry of a Soviet/Eastern bloc mass event. Although the military pageantry followed a similar line in Hungary, the accompanying rhetoric tended to be more accommodating, with a greater inclination to respond to concerns amongst the population and a less hard-line attitude towards the West. This difference could partly be explained by the greater loyalty towards the Soviets that the Czechoslovak Communists had initially displayed.

*The Feast of Work in Hungary and Czechoslovakia*²⁴²

From the second half of the 1950s onwards, 1 May was celebrated not only as ‘the traditional feast of work’ and as ‘the day of international solidarity’, but also as the ‘triumph of Leninism’.²⁴³ The main 1 May slogan in Czechoslovakia in 1956 announced: ‘Under the banner of Leninism towards new victories in the struggle for peace, towards socialism!’ This ‘banner of Leninism’, it was clarified, ‘is the banner of peace, democracy, free nations and socialism.’²⁴⁴

In Hungary, 1 May in the late 1950s was, as with all the other commemorations, more about damage control. An editorial in *Népszabadság* made a comparison between the Feast of Work in 1945 and 1957, the ‘first free 1 Mays’, claiming that since the ‘sad and mournful October’ of 1956 the people of Hungary ‘can still feel the bitterness and the shame’. Nonetheless, now that the counter-revolution was defeated there was ‘hope’.²⁴⁵ Despite this hope, the 1 May parade in 1957 stopped at Heroes’ square, instead of the usual Parade square, where the remains of the Stalin statue had stood until being toppled by the ‘counter-revolutionaries’.²⁴⁶ 1 May

²⁴² As I have discussed in the previous chapter both the Hungarian and the Czechoslovak regimes were not quite sure how to appropriate the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution on 7 November. Since the situation did not change significantly after 1956, the day will not be discussed in detail in this chapter.

²⁴³ NACR, KSČ – Ústřední výbor, 1945-1989 č. f. 1261/karton 197, inv. č. 288. Speech by Antonín Novotný on 1 May in Prague, 1956. (hereafter: č. f. 1261/karton 197)

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ ‘Májusi seregszemle’ [May muster] in *Népszabadság*, 1 May 1957, p. 1.

²⁴⁶ Vilmos Voigt, ‘Éljen és virágozzék... A budapesti május elsejéről’ [Long live and prosper... On 1 Mays in Budapest] in *Budapesti Negyed*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1994 at <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00003/00003/voigt.htm> [last accessed: 2 December 2015] [hereafter: Voigt, ‘Éljen és virágozzék...’]

1957 was the first mass event after the events of 1956 and according to the official statistics between 250,000-500,000 people turned up, although Vilmos Voigt, a Hungarian comparative philologist, in his article on 1 May celebrations in Hungary warns that these figures were grossly exaggerated.²⁴⁷ Surprisingly, no incidents were reported, although this might be explained by the fact that the parade was closely watched, even by planes from the air. In 1958, the parade had returned to Parade square.²⁴⁸

1 May always possessed an internationalist characteristic, embodied by the slogan: ‘Workers of the world, unite!’. The day’s message of international solidarity was already present from the early 1950s, although at this time it was mainly a general point: ‘the international solidarity of the working classes and workers of the world [...] against the imperialist inciters of a new war’.²⁴⁹ At times more specific references were made to other Communist countries, such as China and ‘the heroic people of Korea’.²⁵⁰

A central discourse of 1 May commemorations in the Eastern bloc countries was ‘the contemporary anti-colonial struggle’,²⁵¹ which usually presented itself in the ‘peace camp vs. imperialist West’ trope. To advance this trope, more and more references were made to colonialism. For example in 1956 Antonín Novotný, talked of the ‘former workers of the colonial world’ who are ‘also demonstrating, who were freed from slavery and the dominion of the imperialists and who are firmly committed to a new life.’²⁵²

For Communist politicians in both Czechoslovakia and Hungary in the 1960s Vietnam presented the perfect model: the Vietnamese Communists struggling against the imperial United States. Despite the encouragement from the party leaders and from Moscow for showing solidarity with the people of Vietnam, for example, the populations of the two countries were less enthusiastic and this solidarity could only be expressed ‘at state sponsored events’.²⁵³ 1 May celebrations, precisely because of their internationalist characteristics, were the perfect spaces for this. During 1 May celebration Czechoslovak Communists argued that American aggression ‘is not only a brutal wartime action against a small nation, which is

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ NARC, Národní Fronta Ústřední Výbor č. f. 357-2/karton 4, inv. č. 2.

²⁵⁰ NARC, Národní Fronta Ústřední Výbor č. f. 357-2/karton 5, inv. č. 2.

²⁵¹ James Mark, Péter Apor, Radina Vučetić and Piotr Oseka, “‘We Are with You, Vietnam’: Transnational Solidarities in Socialist Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia’ in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 50, No. 3, 2015, pp. 439-464, p. 442. [hereafter: Mark *et al*, ‘We Are with You, Vietnam’]

²⁵² č. f. 1261/karton 197

²⁵³ Mark *et al*, ‘We Are with You, Vietnam’, p. 450.

fighting for its freedom, but it is also a threat to world peace and to the peaceful development of mankind.²⁵⁴ In Hungary from the mid-1960s all 1 May celebrations included slogans against the US, who were fighting the Communist Viet Cong in the Vietnam War, such as: ‘Warm, brotherly greetings to the heroic people of Vietnam, who are fighting against American aggression!’ in 1965; ‘Long live the heroically fighting people of Vietnam! Hands off Vietnam!’ in 1968 or ‘Peace for Vietnam!’ in 1974.²⁵⁵

The solidarity with Vietnam went as far as the Warsaw Pact countries offering to send volunteers to the conflict, although this never actually happened.²⁵⁶ Even so, by 1968 the solidarity drive was waning and banners proclaiming solidarity with Vietnam started to disappear from the 1 May parades. Their last Hungarian appearance was in 1974. The Agitation and Propaganda Department made its first proposals for the 1 May 1974 slogans to the Political Committee on 25 March 1974.²⁵⁷ The original proposal did not contain any slogans pertaining to Vietnam. Three weeks later, however, the Agitation and Propaganda Department submitted another proposal, this time to the Secretariat, recommending that the following slogans be added: ‘Safe Europe!’, ‘Peace for Vietnam!’, ‘Just settlement in the Near East!’ and ‘Down with the fascist dictatorship in Chile!’.²⁵⁸

In 1968, in Czechoslovakia the main focus of the 1 May celebration was less on international solidarity, which was in any case on the decline by then, but on national events. By 1 May 1968 Czechoslovakia was in the throws of Dubček’s ‘Action Programme’. In line with this, 1 May 1968 broke with previous traditions of top-down organisation and attempted to democratise the preparations.²⁵⁹ This resulted in a little chaos, however. Whilst in previous years 1 May parades were organised months in advance, in 1968 the Prague City Council reported on 10 April, less than a month before the celebrations, that it was struggling with the organisation.²⁶⁰ The first reports on the preparation did not appear in the newspapers until 21 April, and journalists even

²⁵⁴ č. f. 1261/karton 197.

²⁵⁵ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1965-1. Proposal for the slogans of 1 May 1965. Dated: 7 April 1965.; MOL, M-KS 288-22/1968-1. Dated 27 March 1968. Proposal to the Political Committee on the Central Committee’s slogans on 1 May. and MOL, M-KS 288-22/1974-2. Dated: 25 March 1974. Proposal to the Political Committee on the slogans of 1 May 1974. [hereafter MK-S 288-22/1974-2. Proposal on 1 May slogans to the Political Committee.]

²⁵⁶ Mark *et al*, ‘We Are with You, Vietnam’, p. 454. The declaration was issued in Bucharest on 6 June 1966.

²⁵⁷ M-KS 288-22/1974-2. Proposal on 1 May slogans to the Political Committee.

²⁵⁸ M-KS 288-22/1974 2. Dated: 16 April 1974. Proposal to the Secretariat on additional 1 May slogans.

²⁵⁹ Roman Krakovský, *Rituel du 1er Mai en Tchécoslovaquie, 1948-1989*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004, p. 163. [hereafter: Krakovský, *Rituel du 1er Mai*]

²⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 164.

pointed out that this year the City Council was relying even more on the citizens and workers' collectives to organise 1 May.

This relative disorganisation was very much visible during the parade itself. On 2 May *Rudé právo* reported on the previous day's events, even mentioning that 1968 was the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic.²⁶¹ During the parade people would climb up to the tribune to shake the hands of Dubček and Svoboda, and there were what the newspaper termed 'Autogramiáda', where people sent '[i]nvitations, postcards, newspapers, pictures and [even] pioneer scarves' up to the podium for the two men to sign. The newspaper even featured a photograph of a child being lifted up towards the stands, with Dubček patting its head.²⁶² Roman Krakovský writes that because of the disorganised nature of the parade there were no official statistics on the number of participants, although the British *The Times* newspaper estimated that around 400,000 people were present.²⁶³ In Prague the parade lasted for five hours, in Bratislava for four.²⁶⁴

The 1 May parade was a fitting representation of Dubček's 'socialism with a human face'. The leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party were no longer stern, unapproachable figures waving regally at the crowds from their tribunes, watching for hours as the crowds filed past. Moreover, whilst 1 May commemorations were always organised in conjunction with different organisations and with volunteers, in 1968, the Prague City Council, as noted above, relied even more on these grassroots elements to make the parade happen. In this instance the barrier between the leaders and the marchers was further lifted and a more democratic relationship developed not only through the behaviour of the crowds (and the leaders as well), but also through the democratisation of the organisation process.

After the success of the 1968, 1 May parade four proposals were put forward for the 1 May parade of 1969, all aiming at its democratisation and ranging from keeping the parade at Wenceslas square to having different celebratory events throughout the city.²⁶⁵ The invasion by the Warsaw Pact countries in August 1968 put a stop to this, and on 1 May 1969 the traditional form of May Day returned. 1 May 1969 was the first major demonstration since the invasion. The Communists were not sure how to handle the event – for example, no clear

²⁶¹ 'Máj našeho nového života' [May, our new life] in *Rudé právo*, 2 May 1968, pp. 1-2, p. 1.

²⁶² Ibid. p. 2.

²⁶³ Krakovský, *Rituel du 1er Mai*, p. 165.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 166.

²⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 167.

instructions were given at the regional level – although Prague officials warned the local party committees to respect the local conditions. In Prague, the official parade was cancelled, although an indoor rally did take place, and there was also a gathering at the Julius Fučík Park of Culture and Recreation, surrounding the Industrial Palace in Prague.²⁶⁶

In the 1970s the Czechoslovak leadership sought to return to the ‘traditional’ 1 May standards of the 1950s, with carefully planned and coordinated parades.²⁶⁷ In 1974 the 1 May parade was removed from Wenceslas square to Letná Park, on the other side of the Vltava river.²⁶⁸ According to the anthropologist Robert Rotenberg, who attended the Prague May Day celebrations in 1975, when they were again at Letná park, the official explanation for the change of venue was because of the construction of the metro station at Wenceslas square.²⁶⁹ Even so, another reason could also have been that since 1969, there had been small-scale protests, in the form of graffiti and pamphleteering, along the previous parade route.²⁷⁰ The move to Letná marginalised the event, by moving it from the symbolic centre of the city to a park on the other side of the river. Liberation Day parades had taken place in Letná park since the 1950s, but these were of a different nature as they often had a military parade.

The decreasing popularity of Prague 1 May celebrations is also reflected in the number of participants. Whilst there was an increase from 1970 to 1982 and 1983 (150,000 to 190,000 and 280,000 respectively), these numbers were far below those of the first half of the 1950s (962,516 in 1952 and 886,600 in 1953), which the Communists harked back to.²⁷¹

In Hungary, in contrast to Czechoslovakia, 1 May remained popular until the end of the 1980s.²⁷² Its main attraction, however, was definitely not the political aspect of the day, but the entertainment attached to it. As in Czechoslovakia, in Hungary the preparations were set in motion months before the parade, with the slogans decided upon about a month before. The festivities were usually organised by the Budapest Party Committee, the Committee of Unions and the National Committee of the Patriotic People’s Front.²⁷³ The organisers were mainly

²⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 168.

²⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 173.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 174.

²⁶⁹ Robert Rotenberg, ‘May Day Parades in Prague and Vienna: A Comparison of Socialist Ritual’ in *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 2, 1983, pp. 62-68, p. 68, Note 3.

²⁷⁰ Krakovský, *Rituel du 1er Mai*, p. 176-177.

²⁷¹ Ibid. p. 178.

²⁷² Vilmos Voigt in his article on 1 May celebrations in Budapest during Communism even decried the absence of a truly mass celebration like 1 May after 1989. See: Voigt, ‘Éljen és virágozzék...’

²⁷³ See for example: MOL, M-KS 288-22/1965-1. Dated 6 January 1965. Proposal to the Political Committee on the organisation of the 1965 spring celebrations.

preoccupied with the number of participants – 200,000-250,000 ‘on a completely voluntary basis’ – and who should be sitting at Tribune A.²⁷⁴ The Hungarian Communists also attempted to make sure that their 1 May parade did not differ significantly from other 1 May parades in the Eastern bloc.²⁷⁵ Ten thousand portraits were ordered of Marx, Engels, Lenin, the Hungarian leader János Kádár, Jenő Fock, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Pál Losonczi, Chairman of the Hungarian Presidential Council and Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese Communist leader. The Agitation and Propaganda Department argued that all the three Hungarian Party leaders needed to be presented on the banners since 1 May was an international celebration and photographs and coverage of the event would appear in other countries. Hungarian radio and television also showed the parades of other countries and the Department claimed that if the Hungarian portraits differed from the banners of other countries it ‘could lead to talking and guessing, especially abroad.’

The final Communist 1 May parades happened in Czechoslovakia and Hungary under somewhat different circumstances. In Hungary, 1 May 1989 took place during the first meetings between the government and the opposition. The Agitation and Propaganda Department proposed that it would not make recommendations to the counties as to how they should celebrate 1 May that year, but they should decide for themselves.²⁷⁶ The parade in Budapest was also scaled back: ‘The decoration of the [Parade] square should be worthy of the celebration, on the parade the usual externalities (living pictures, gymnastics elements, decorations on cars) should be left off.’²⁷⁷ *Népszabadság* proclaimed on its front page on 2 May that, ‘The country celebrated 1 May in the new spirit’.²⁷⁸ As a sign of the new times the tribune on Parade square – until now the symbol of power and official hierarchy – had remained empty. Members of the Presidium were seated on a smaller podium. More importantly, in a definite sign of serious change, instead of the Internationale, the Hungarian national anthem was played, although red flags still dominated the square.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1968-1. Dated: 7 March 1968. Proposal to the Political Committee on the portraits and posters for 1 May.

²⁷⁶ MOL, M-KS 288-22/1988-1. Dated: 5 December 1988. Proposal to the Political Committee on the political celebrations of the first half of 1989.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ ‘Új szellemben ünnepelte május elsejét az ország’ [The country celebrated 1 May in a new spirit] in *Népszabadság*, 2 May 1989, p.1.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

In Czechoslovakia, the 1 May parade stuck to the rhetoric of the previous decades. This attempt at defying change can also be seen in the return, after 16 years, of the parade to the centre of Prague, to Wenceslas square.²⁸⁰ The celebrations took place under the slogan: ‘United on our way to democracy, to socialism!’ *Rudé právo* noted the infrastructure achievements that had taken place since the parade left the square: the metro station had been built (the official explanation why the parade had to leave the square), there was now a pedestrianised zone in Wenceslas square, and the square was also covered in a carpet of flowers. In his address to the crowds, Miloš Jakeš, General Secretary of the Party, welcomed the return of the parade to the square, to ‘the heart of the capital’, as if the return of the parade to the heart of the city (and also its symbolic centre) was an attempt to win back the hearts (and minds) of the people of Prague. In examining the official photographs of 1989, a clear distancing is visible between the officials and politicians on the tribune and the people in the parade, thus it seems their efforts were not rewarded. The marchers, as Roman Krakovský observes, are not turning to look at those standing on the tribune, as in the past, but were simply looking straight ahead.²⁸¹

Conclusion

By 1990, Communism had ended and the new democratic political groupings in Hungary and Czechoslovakia were attempting to restore the interwar national days. St Stephen, St Wenceslas and Jan Hus were to be rehabilitated. Constitution and Nationalisation Days were to revert back to their original function as Foundation of State Days. The ensuing Czech Republic maintained Liberation Day as a national day but it was now to be held on 8 May, to show that the Czechs had been liberated by the Americans as well as the Red Army.

The carefully constructed national day calendars devised by the communist regimes of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, with a template from Moscow, were intended to transmit the concept of a new era and a new world, which was made possible only by the guidance of the Soviet Union. National days – with their often elaborate and military pageantry, political symbolism, organisation of urban space, rhetoric ceremony and ritual – were one of the most effective ways in which the communist regimes could establish their legitimacy and consolidate their control through a social relationship with the people. Through national days,

²⁸⁰ ‘Naše vlast důstojně oslavila 1. máj 1989’ [Our homeland celebrated 1 May 1989 with dignity] in *Rudé právo*, 2 May 1989, p. 1.

²⁸¹ Krakovský, *Rituel du 1er Mai*, p. 183. Krakovský does not include the photographs in his book, however.

they could define social reality and articulate their values. This is, of course, true for any historical era but was particularly pertinent for the Communist period as they were attempting to create a new (socialist) culture, and one that was borrowed from/imposed by an outside power, namely the Soviet Union.

Within this socialist culture there was always a conflict with the national. The national implied a potential loyalty to something other than the socialist regime. In this respect, dates that had represented national days in the interwar period (e.g. 20 August in Hungary and 28 October in Czechoslovakia) were stripped of their national content and given a socialist one, with their themes focusing on the (socialist) constitution, nationalisation, and the building of socialism.

In Hungary, 15 March was maintained as a national day (although not always a holiday) throughout the Communist period, while its Czech parallel, Jan Hus Day, had effectively been dropped. Although the Hungarian Communists had tried to position themselves as the natural and exclusive heirs to the 1848-49 revolution, they still considered it a threat because of its anti-government symbolism and potential for protest, and had thus early on made it a working day, even if still a national day. It had in fact been a demand of the 1956 uprising that 15 March be made a full public holiday again. By the early 1970s, 15 March had again begun to function as a catalyst for anti-government protest, while 20 August (now Constitution Day, no longer commemorating St Stephen) was also a day when the people were observed expressing ideologically suspect opinions.

In contrast, the old interwar national days in Czechoslovakia (which in the Czech part of the country was pretty much only 28 October after 1956) did not attract such potential protest against the regime until the very end of the communist era. This is despite the fact that the protests against the crushing of the Prague Spring revealed deep anti-Communist feeling and the strong dissident and underground activity in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s. In this sense, the old differentiation between national days in Hungary and Czechoslovakia that could be noted in the interwar period continued: in Hungary there was a strong and long-lasting tradition of a national historical narrative that had great mass appeal, whereas this was still not the case in Czechoslovakia for all the known cleavages discussed for the interwar period.

Conclusion

The end of the Communist era in Central Europe in 1989 signalled dramatic political, social and cultural changes, characterised by a turning away from the Soviet Union and towards Europe, and an effort to transition to democracy. The most profound changes were on a political and economic level, with the transition from a one-party to a multi-party system and to a market economy. The physical space of towns and cities was also transformed as part of the de-Communisation process Hungary, Czechoslovakia and other now former Eastern bloc countries. Street names were changed and statues of Communist memory were destroyed or removed and were increasingly replaced by figures of 19th- and early 20th-century patriots.¹ Nationalism – previously suppressed by the Communist regimes – also returned to Central and Eastern Europe.²

To this end, not only were the Communist national day calendars in both Hungary and Czechoslovakia abolished, but national days that had been established in the interwar period – a period which symbolised a pre-Communist ideal – were re-established and their ‘original’ meanings restored, supplemented by a number of national day commemorations that were intended to symbolise the democratic traditions of these nations in times of oppression. Yet, national days tell a more nuanced story about the transition from communism to democracy, one not simply of rupture but also of continuity, suggesting that the changes of 1989 were not as dramatic as the phrase ‘the fall of Communism’ implies, because from the mid-1980s there had already been the Communist regimes of Hungary and Czechoslovakia had already been gradually restoring some of the interwar national days, and downplaying Soviet-inspired days.

¹ See for example: Beverly A. James, *Imagining Postcommunism: Visual Narratives of Hungary's 1956 Revolution*, College Station: Texas A&M University, 2005; Emilia Palonen, ‘The city-text in post-Communist Budapest: street names, memorials, and the politics of commemoration’ in *Geojournal*, Vol. 73, 2008, pp. 219-230; Duncan Light and Craig Young, ‘Public Memory, Commemoration, and Transitional Justice: Reconfiguring the Past in Public Space’ in Lavinia Stan and Nadya Nedelsky (eds), *Post-Communist Transitional Justice: Lessons from Twenty-Five Years of Experience*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 233-251. or Richard S. Esbenshade, ‘Remembering to Forget: Memory, History, National Identity in Postwar East-Central Europe’ in *Representations*, No. 49, Winter 1995, pp. 72-96. See especially pp. 72-73.

² See for example: Jacques Rupnik, ‘The Reawakening of European Nationalism’ in *Social Research*, Vol, 63, No, 1, pp. 41-75. and Mark R. Beissinger, ‘How Nationalisms Spread: Eastern Europe Adrift the Tides and Cycles of Nationalism Contention’ in *Social Research*, Vol, 63, No, 1, pp. 97-146.

As discussed in Chapter Five, the Communist regimes from the later 1960s onwards could not simply impose their ideology, as they had attempted to do in the 1950s. They now found themselves forced to respond to social demands, or at least to establish a new ‘contract’ with society. Particularly from the mid-1980s, with *perestroika* and a more challenging economic environment, the regimes had to be mindful of newly-emerging opposition groups and increasing public protests. Part of the strategy to appease this social discontent was to reintroduce interwar national days. Thus, in Hungary, after a string of protests from the mid-1980s, 15 March, the anniversary of the 1848-49 revolution, became a full public holiday again in 1989. An even greater indication that the Communist cultural symbolism introduced in the late 1940s and early 1950s could not be used to support or legitimate the regime is the restoration in 1988 of the Holy Right procession as part of that year’s 20 August festivities. In Czechoslovakia, 28 October was again proclaimed the foundation day of the First Republic in 1988.³

Pertinently, there was even a Communist contribution to the ritual content of these commemorative days, which has survived even until today. The symbol of the New Bread, for example, which the Hungarian Communists introduced to the 20 August commemorations in 1949 (although by then they called the day Constitution Day) is still a prominent element of St Stephen’s Day. Similarly, it is now an annual tradition to show the film of the rock opera *Stephen, the king* first screened in 1984 (the rock opera was first performed live in 1983), on television on St Stephen’s Day. In Czechoslovakia, and the Czech Republic today, the performative aspect of 28 October is very similar to what President Gustáv Husák introduced in 1988, such as the Presidential speeches given in Prague Castle.⁴

Specifically Soviet-themed national days, such as the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, were, however, cancelled with the fall of the Communist regimes and, very soon after the ‘system change’ of 1989, the newly-elected democratic governments passed

³ Karen Gamelgaard, ‘The Czech and Czechoslovak 28 October: Stability and change in four presidential addresses 1988-2008’ in Šarić, Ljiljana, Karen Gammelgaard and Kjetil Rå Hauge (eds) *Transforming National Holidays: Identity discourse in the West and South Slavic countries, 1985-2010*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012, pp. 231-250, p. 232.

⁴ Ibid. p. 237. Although it should be pointed out that Presidential addresses during the commemorations of 28 October were not a new ‘invention’ in 1988. Presidents Masaryk and Beneš both gave Presidential addresses during the interwar period and Beneš even continued to give addresses on the day whilst heading up the government-in-exile in London during the Second World War. Even so, these speeches did not occur in the Castle. See: Ibid. 232.

national day laws that mirrored the national day calendars of the interwar period.⁵ The new Czechoslovak national day law, passed in 1990, established, or in some cases re-established, three public holidays: the anniversary of the foundation of the state in 1918; the Day of the Liberation of Czechoslovakia from Fascism on 8 May, and Cyril and Methodius Day. One interwar national day that was not restored was 28 September, St Wenceslas Day, although a Czech Statehood Day was established a decade later in 2000. Although this day does not explicitly commemorate St Wenceslas, in reality it does. Alongside the civic holiday, the Catholic Church revived its pilgrimage from Prague to Stará Boleslav, abandoned in the communist period, bearing the alleged skull of Wenceslas and with heavy religious and ritualistic overtones.⁶

Additionally, as was typical with Czechoslovak national day calendars, a number of memorable and significant days were also included in the 1990 law: the anniversary of the Prague and the Slovak National Uprisings, Jan Hus Day and 17 November under the new name the day of Struggle for Freedom and Democracy.⁷ In both Hungary and Czechoslovakia the foundation/establishment of state days were promoted to state holiday status, i.e. these were the most important national days.⁸

The usual complication in Czechoslovakia over disagreements between Czechs and Slovaks over how their joint state should be commemorated was soon resolved with the actual breakup

⁵ '1991. évi törvény a Magyar Köztársaság Állami ünnepéről' [Law of 1991 on the State Holiday of the Hungarian Republic] in *Magyar Közlöny*, Vol. 29, 1991, pp. 651-652. [hereafter: '1991. évi törvény a Magyar Köztársaság Állami ünnepéről'] and '167 zákon ze dne 9. května 1990, kterým se mění a doplňuje zákon č. 93/1951 Sb., o státních svátcích, o dnech pracovního klidu o památných a významných dnech, ve znění pozdějších předpisů' in *Sbírka zákonů České a Slovenské Federativní Republiky Ročník 1990*, Prague: Statistické a evidenční vydavatelství tiskopisů, 1990, p. 661. [hereafter: '167 zákon ze dne 9. května 1990']

⁶ Pilgrimages to Stará Boleslav had already been taking place since after 1989, but these were intensified and the Church's role made more official since 2000. In a further push for the revival of a Wenceslas cult, civic as well as religious, the flop 1930 film *Saint Wenceslas* was restored and re-released, also as a DVD, in 2010. There was a special gala screening of the restored version on 28 September 2010, at the Rudolfinum in Prague, in the presence of the Czech prime minister Petr Nečas, the Archbishop of Prague Dominik Duka, and other luminaries. The original film score was performed by the Czech Radio Symphonic Orchestra and the event was screened live by Czech national television and radio. See 'Czech Statehood Day 28 September 2010' at <http://www.vlada.cz/en/udalosti/vyznamne-dny/czech-statehood-day-28-september-2010-76055/tmplid-676/> [last accessed 13 January 2016].

⁷ Although first Jan Hus Day was listed as a significant day, nine days after the passing of the original law, an amendment was passed that made Jan Hus Day a public holiday in the Czech part of the Republic. See: '204 zákon České národní rady ze dne 18. května 1990, o prohlášení šestého července, dne upálení mistra Jana Husa, za státní svátek České republiky' [Law 204 of the Czech National Council on 18 May 1990 on the declaration of 6 July, the day of Jan Hus' burning, as a national day of the Czech Republic] in *Sbírka zákonů České a Slovenské Federativní Republiky Ročník 1990*, Prague: Statistické a evidenční vydavatelství tiskopisů, 1990, p. 839.

⁸ '1991. évi törvény a Magyar Köztársaság Állami ünnepéről' and '167 zákon ze dne 9. května 1990'

of the country in January 1993. The so-called Velvet Divorce did not result in changes in the new Czech Republic's national day calendar, which continued to commemorate the national days of Czechoslovakia, a further admission that the Czechoslovak national day calendar had been very much a Czech-oriented one. 28 October remained and still remains the state holiday, even though it now commemorates a state that no longer exists (again, revealing that the original selection of 28 October had been very much a Czech affair). In Slovakia, a complete overhaul of the national day calendar was carried out. 28 October was cancelled, replaced by the Day of the Establishment of the Slovak Republic (1 January), and the Day of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic (1 September)

In Hungary the new national day calendar was, as always, much simpler and streamlined. 20 August again became Foundation of State Day and 15 March, as the anniversary of the 1848-49 revolution, was officialised. There was a new addition commemorating the outbreak of the 1956 revolution and the proclamation of the Hungarian Republic in 1989, which both occurred on 23 October.⁹

As far as national day commemorations went, the transition from Communism to a post-Communist era in both Hungary and Czechoslovakia was relatively smooth, with the key national day commemorations already shifting towards their 'original' interwar meaning. There were few great arguments over which events or figures should be commemorated, in large part because the template of the national day calendar had already been established in the interwar period and developments after 1989 were in the most part an attempt to restore that calendar. Moreover, this restoration had already begun in the late Communist period, particularly in the late 1980s. Despite the Communists' claims that they had ushered in a new

⁹ Since the passing of the Fundamental Law of Hungary in 2011, 23 October only commemorates the 1956 revolution. See: 'Article J' in *The Fundamental Law of Hungary* at <http://www.kormany.hu/download/e/02/00000/The%20New%20Fundamental%20Law%20of%20Hungary.pdf> [last accessed 14 February 2016]. The cancellation of the anniversary of the proclamation of the Hungarian Republic in 1989 is not surprising. Viktor Orbán, the leader of Fidesz and Prime Minister of Hungary during his 2010 victory speech following the elections stated that '[t]oday a revolution happened at the voting booth'. Fidesz had received two-thirds of the seats in Parliament, giving them absolute majority. The results meant, Orbán continued, that the people of Hungary had shown that 'the system cannot be changed, systems can only be toppled and overthrown, overthrown and built anew'. Thus, 1989 did not bring about a complete system change, as, it was implied, certain elements of the Communist system (coded language for the Socialist party) were still in place. Fidesz' victory, with two-thirds of the seats in Parliament, signalled the real change in the political system of Hungary. See: Viktor Orbán, 'Forradalom történt a szavazófülkében' [A revolution happened in the voting booth] 25 April 2010 at http://orbanviktor.hu/beszed/forradalom_tortent_a_szavazofulkeben [accessed 20 February 2012]. For the feeling of 'unfinishedness' after 1989 see also: James Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

era and a new culture, even from the late 1940s they still had to contend with the interwar national days that they had ostensibly abolished – for example, although they abolished St Stephen's Day and Czechoslovak Foundation of State Day they still maintained their dates of 20 August and 20 October respectively as dates on which a national day was held.

Continuities and 'returning narratives' are thus a thread throughout this thesis, alongside apparent ruptures and unsuccessful attempts to suppress national memory. As I hope to have demonstrated, national days have been utilised by the state in its many incarnations during the 20th century not only to transmit the ideology of the state (or that of the political forces in control of the state), but also how these national days have often also been used to challenge the power of the state. While each successive political system or regime attempted to introduce its own national days, or its own interpretations of existing national days, they were also beholden to popular national symbols and the existing cultural traditions that had evolved. The enduring nature of many of these events throughout the turbulent decades of the 20th century shows the potency of these days and their accompanying symbols and narratives.

During the interwar period both Hungary and Czechoslovakia embarked on a policy of nation-building for their newly independent states. National days were an integral part of this. In both countries two types of national days were adopted: those that historically justified the existence of the states by pointing to the political precedents symbolised by medieval saints and martyrs, and those that commemorated events from the modern history of the nation. Yet, despite the similarities in the types of national day both countries adopted, and the fact that both were successor states of the Habsburg Empire, their contrasting political backgrounds and different levels of ethnic homogeneity meant that they experienced very different processes of creating and performing national day calendars. In Hungary, which was a homogenous society with a coherent national narrative, there was a relative continuity from the Habsburg past. The disputes here were less about which days should be commemorated, but what the message of the day, figure or event was. The authoritarian regime of Miklós Horthy was able to exploit the grievances over the Treaty of Trianon to monopolise 20 August, St Stephen's Day. By the same stroke, he was obliged to make 15 March a national day, even though it had what for him were savoury revolutionary aspects and had come to be associated with the Social Democrats.

In Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, the new state sought to distance itself from the Habsburg past and also had to contend with the Slovaks and its minorities. These ethnic and social

cleavages were reflected in the debates and disputes around national days in interwar Czechoslovakia, with the battle lines drawn not only along ethnic (for example, whether 28 October should be foundation of state day), but also along religious lines (for example, whether the religious martyr Jan Hus, favoured by the governing elite, should be commemorated, or the Catholic saints Wenceslas and Nepomucký).

During the Second World War, Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia experienced how outside influences could shape national days. In Hungary, as a result of the regime's close connections to Nazi Germany, some of the grievances regarding the 'lost' territories, which were voiced especially during commemorations of St Stephen's Day, were 'rectified' with the return of parts of the *Felvidék* and of Transylvania. Whilst in Hungary the continuity from the interwar period is hardly surprising since the regime mostly remained the same, it is perhaps more surprising that the Nazis retained the interwar national days in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, with the exception of 28 October, which was cancelled. St Wenceslas' Day became especially important for the Protectorate officials since through this day they could present the historic friendship between Czechs and Germans and thus justify and legitimise their rule. Thus, even though the country was under occupation and its national history was being rebalanced to showcase Czech-German connections since the Middle Ages, the occupying powers attempted to introduce a sense of normalcy within society.

For the Slovaks the situation was rather different, since they became an independent state following the occupation of Czechoslovakia. This allowed the Slovak leadership to introduce national day commemorations that represented the Slovak historical narrative, whilst national days, such as the anniversary of the establishment of Czechoslovakia, that did not match this new historical narrative were cancelled. What may be surprising in this case is that the Nazis allowed the Slovaks a certain leeway: rather than celebrating historical connections with the Germans, as the Czechs were obliged to, the Slovaks were able to showcase aspects of their medieval past that suggested a historical hostility towards the Germans.

The Communist era was another period when outside forces – this time from Moscow – dictated the order of national day commemorations. Even so, in contrast with the Second World War the historical narratives of both these nations were rewritten to serve a teleological historical narrative where all previous struggles led up to the socialism. From the mid-1940s to the beginning/mid-1950s there were feeble attempts made by the Communist regimes in

both countries to include national days with a national revolutionary potential such as Jan Hus Day or the anniversary of the 1848-49 revolution. Foundation of state days were completely recreated to serve the Communist narrative: in Czechoslovakia 28 October became Nationalisation Day, whilst in Hungary 20 August became Constitution Day. Yet, although the content may have been rewritten, the symbolic values of the dates themselves were strong enough for the Communists to retain them. Since Hungary and Czechoslovakia were now both under Soviet influence, the changes made to the national day calendars in countries in the Stalinist period followed the blueprint set by Moscow, and the processes were therefore almost identical.

In the post-1956 period, however Hungary and Czechoslovakia started to diverge in their treatment not only of national days, but also in their social, political and economic policies. The combination of Khrushchev's secret speech and the 1956 revolution accelerated de-Stalinisation in Hungary. From the 1960s, the new regime of János Kádár ruled through a 'national-accommodative' system.¹⁰ This system enabled the regime to re-introduce events that had previously been cancelled into the historical narrative of Hungary, including the memory of the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic and King (previously Saint) Stephen.

In sharp contrast with Hungary, in Czechoslovakia the de-Stalinisation process was largely delayed by the political elite, who had been closely aligned with Stalin until the beginning of the 1960s, and in particular after the brief respite of the Prague Spring in 1968 the Czechoslovak regime pursued a 'bureaucratic-authoritarian' form of rule.¹¹ National day commemorations reflected this delayed de-Stalinisation process and the 'bureaucratic-authoritarian' system of rule as previously cancelled national elements did not return to the same extent as they had in Hungary until the second half of the 1980s.

As this summation of the main findings of the thesis shows, key dates in the national day calendars of both Hungary and Czechoslovakia were maintained in both countries almost without a break in the course of the 20th century. The long timeframe used in this thesis, covering approximately eighty years, facilitated a broader and more nuanced perspective of these developments, than if I had studied only one period. More pertinently, these 80 years

¹⁰ Herbert Kitschelt, Z. Mansfeldova, R. Markowski and G. Toka, *Post-Communist Party Systems, Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 24.

¹¹ *Ibid.* pp. 25-26.

contained different political regimes, each of which attempted to overturn the previous regime's national day calendar or appropriate or recreate the national day calendars in their own image. Taking a long timeframe thus enabled me not only to explore how particular national days were created, for the most part, in the interwar period, but also how various successive regimes responded to their legacies. What this timeframe revealed is not only how the different political elites attempted to shape national days to express their own aims, goals and ideals, but additionally how they were also constrained by the legacy of the traditions that were already established and could not easily abandon them.

Although each new regime – which almost invariably saw itself as overthrowing the ideology of its predecessor – aimed to establish its own historical narratives and cultural symbols, they were unable to completely abandon the traditions that had been official national days in the interwar period. Even the interwar elites had to conform to national commemorative traditions that had a much longer pedigree: for example, Horthy was obliged to accept 15 March as a national day while in Czechoslovakia Jan Hus Day was adopted despite the opposition of Slovaks and Czech Catholics.

Even the ensuing totalitarian regimes of the Nazis and the Communists saw that it was in their interest to maintain some links to the interwar national day calendar. The Nazis deliberately chose to retain certain national days (in an adapted form, if necessary) in order to sustain a sense of continuity and normalcy, when in fact everything had changed. Particularly in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, it was Nazi policy to continue with the St Wenceslas commemorations exactly as they had been held in pre-war years. Nazi officials believed that Wenceslas represented good historical relations between Germans and Czechs, which would make German oversight more acceptable and also make it easier to 'Germanise' the Czechs.

Similarly, the Communists in both Hungary and Czechoslovakia attempted to introduce a their own specific national day culture, yet found that, rather than help them consolidate their control, abandoning traditional national days in fact undermined it. Therefore, they too, although at different stages in each country, had to incorporate elements of the interwar national days. These efforts were accompanied by attempts from time-to-time to integrate pre-war national heroes, such as St (or King) Stephen and Jan Hus into a communist version of national history, primarily through the apparent revolutionary tradition.

Authoritarian regimes in this period thus utilised national days in two different ways. They firstly sought to carve out their own symbolic and historical traditions, but also wished to be seen as a continuation or fulfilment of previous historical traditions either in the recent past or in the distant past. At the same time, they also had to deal with the lingering traditions of their predecessors, whom they often claimed to have overthrown. My thesis has shown that, rather than omnipotent systems that ruled every facet of social, cultural, economic and political life, totalitarian regimes also had to make compromises and trade-offs and could not simply impose their cultural systems and symbols, but eventually ended up adopting aspects of the previous regime. The findings of the thesis, therefore, could be of interest to scholars of everyday life and political culture in totalitarian regimes, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe but also elsewhere.

The combination of the long timeframe, the comparative approach and the study of the full national day calendar opened up the field of study but they also posed certain limitations on the thesis. With approximately 80 years, at least three different regimes, two countries and the full national day calendars it was only possible to follow the major, official, state-led developments. Whilst I attempted to include the main criticisms of and opposition to the official national day commemorations, I was limited to official sources, such as police sources and the government media, and to secondary literature. An interesting starting point for future research would be to go beyond the official sources, and include material from non-government actors, and opposition organisations and individuals.

Nonetheless, this combination of structural elements – the long timeframe, comparative study and full national day calendar – is what has enabled my thesis to provide new and innovative insights. Focusing on one particular period would certainly have produced a deeper, more nuanced analysis of the commemoration of specific national days in that period, but I would not have been able to appreciate the significance of changes to the commemorative calendar or the rewriting of the national historical narrative without being aware of what had preceded, and therefore how the new regimes attempted to respond to it.

Similarly, if I had limited my inquiry to the major national days, such as 20 August or 28 October, then the significance of continuity from regime to regime would not have been apparent. The impression would be that St Stephen's Day ended in 1948, to be revived again forty years later, and that Czechoslovak Foundation of State Day was abolished in 1939, briefly

revived in 1946 and abolished again as foundation of state day in 1951, only to be revived again almost fifty years later. The debates and disputes among different stakeholders, the controversy of certain days, and the concerns to create a balanced national day calendar would also have been overlooked.

Another parameter was the choice of capital cities. Budapest and Prague are the places where the official state commemorations are held, with the participation of politicians, and also contain most of the physical relics or sites of memory associated with the commemorated events or figures. Moreover, capital cities are fixed, i.e. Budapest and Prague were and still are the capitals of Hungary and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic respectively, hence a diachronic study could be done using the same criteria throughout the whole period. While an investigation into national days in, for example, border regions would produce different yet, equally fruitful results, relating to municipal politics, ethnic conflict in mixed areas, national loyalty and localism, etc., over an 80-year period the nature of provincial border cities is more likely to change than that of capital cities: what in 1920 may have been a small border town with a mixed population, by 1980 may have become a large, ethnically homogenous town.

The comparative framework facilitated a richer and more complex understanding of the processes at work, but also enabled me to avoid taking the narratives presented through the national days at face value. This was particularly so given that both countries went through the exact same historical experiences at the same time. Nonetheless, there were still significant differences between the two: the homogeneity of Hungary and the fragmentation of Czechoslovakia; the relative ease with which Hungary created national day calendars in comparison with the more tortured processes in Czechoslovakia; Hungary as authoritarian and Czechoslovakia as democratic in the interwar period, yet during Communism Hungary was less authoritarian whilst Czechoslovakia took longer to shake off Stalinism. The comparison allowed me to ask a broader and more pointed set of questions of each country case, which I may not have considered if I had been looking at only one country. This, I believe, also makes the findings of my thesis transferable to scholars of other Central and East European countries, in particular the Habsburg successor states and other former Communist countries.

Additionally, as a Hungarian, the comparison with Czechoslovakia enabled me to be more self-reflective than I would have been if I had been examining Hungary alone, and to avoid becoming engrossed in contemporary political debates regarding the nation, nationalism,

symbols and national days. A comparative analysis of these two countries in particular, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, with their entangled pasts, also made me more attuned to the experiences of the Slovaks and the Hungarian minorities in Slovakia, which I believe would have been more likely if I had focused on only Hungary or only Czechoslovakia.

This thesis has demonstrated that, each successive regime in Hungary and Czechoslovakia between 1918 and 1989 retained (to a greater lesser extent) the national days that had been established in the interwar period. The appropriation of these days by various successive and contrasting regimes is a good illustration of why Michael E. Geisler describes national days as ‘unstable signifiers of national identity’, especially in relation to other national symbols, such as flags and national anthems.¹² It is precisely this ‘instability’ and the ability of some of these days and the figures and events they commemorate to be used as multivocal or reconfigured symbols that makes them so powerful. The very debates, arguments and passions they inspire, at least in the cases of Hungary in Czechoslovakia in the 20th century, is what enables national days to offer such a revealing insight into the changing social, cultural and political landscape of 20th century Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, it is this ‘instability’ of national days and the fact that the events and figures that they commemorate are open to different interpretations that has enabled different regimes to adapt their messages to their own needs.

¹² Michael E. Geisler, ‘The Calendar Conundrum: National Days as Unstable Signifiers’, in David McCrone and Gayle McPherson (eds) *National Days*, pp. 10-25. p. 14.

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