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SETTING THE STAGE

From Liberation to the April Agreement

THE spring of 1945 brought significant changes to Slovakia. The Slovak Republic, the wartime regime that represented history's first Slovak state ever, collapsed along with its patron and ally, Nazi Germany. The Soviet Red Army drove the German military out of Slovak territory and ultimately, with the help of American forces, out of the Czech lands as well, leaving Czechoslovakia jointly occupied by American and Soviet troops until December 1945, when foreign armies left altogether. The Czechoslovak Republic, destroyed by the events of 1938 and 1939, was reconstituted under its former president, Edvard Beneš.¹ But while Czechoslovakia was back, it came back under very different circumstances and with quite different features. Gone was the situation of the interwar period, when as many as twenty-nine parties, and never fewer than sixteen, competed for parliamentary office, and never fewer than fourteen parties were represented at one given time in parliament.² Now, only a handful of parties would be allowed to operate—the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ),³ the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party, the National Socialist Party, the Czechoslovak People's Party in the Czech lands; and in Slovakia the Democratic Party (DS)⁴ and the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS).⁵ Together they made up the new Czechoslovak government, formally established on April 4 in the newly liberated eastern Slovak city of Košice. Some of interwar Czechoslovakia's most important political parties were banned, namely the Czechoslovak Agrarians, who were (unjustly) accused of collaboration with Nazi Germany in the 1930s, and the HSL'S, which was

likewise accused of collaboration with the Nazis, having run Slovakia during the Second World War under Nazi German auspices. This was particularly significant for Slovakia, as the Agrarians and HSL'S jointly accounted for nearly half of all votes cast in Slovakia's last two interwar parliamentary elections, and for the great majority of the votes cast by Slovaks.⁶

The decisive institution for this markedly limited political spectrum, with the interwar right and even right-center largely eliminated, was the Czechoslovak National Front. The National Front functioned as an umbrella organization for all political parties. Its decisions were binding on the central government, on parliament, and on all organs of local government.⁷ The National Front alone had the right to authorize the existence of new parties. Because the Front insisted that all new parties agree upfront to the government's program, a legal opposition in effect was prohibited. In Slovakia, the Communist Party and Democratic Party established their own Slovak National Front, through which leaders of Slovakia's two political parties maintained regular contact and sought consensus on policy questions.

Another feature of the new Czechoslovak system was the greatly enhanced role of special interest pressure groups, in particular the trade unions, which were unified into the Central Council of Trade Unions, and the various organizations connected with the wartime resistance—partisan organizations, veterans clubs, organizations of former prisoners of war. Overwhelmingly dominated by Communists and pro-Communist left-wing Social Democrats, these groups were mobilized to press for Communist policies and interests at key times during 1945–48. This was especially the case in Slovakia, where the Democrats had very little presence in the trade union movement, and where partisan organizations played a significant role both in Slovak consciousness and society owing to Slovakia's large-scale uprising against the Nazis in August 1944.

Postwar Czechoslovakia also represented a new expression of relations between Slovaks and Czechs. The constitution of the First Republic regarded Czechs and Slovaks as a single Czechoslovak nation, speaking a common Czechoslovak language. Prague was the country's administrative center, and, despite a few nods to local autonomy, the state was essentially centralist, something that caused a considerable degree of discontent in Slovakia across most of the political spectrum. Now the Republic officially recognized the existence of separate Czech and Slovak nations, each with its own separate language, and promised sweeping autonomy to Slovakia. The Košice Pro-

gram, the blueprint for the new Czechoslovakia promulgated in April 1945 by the new Czechoslovak government, promised that Slovaks would be “masters in their Slovak land” and that their relations with the Czechs would be “equal with equal.”⁸ Klement Gottwald, the leader of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, later called the Košice Program the “Magna Carta of the Slovak nation.”⁹ Institutions that were developed by the Slovak Resistance during the war, the Slovak National Council and Board of Commissioners, became an integral part of Slovak government and administration.

As the new Czechoslovak authorities took over in spring 1945, a series of policies were carried out that made the postwar Czechoslovakia even more different from its predecessor, establishing a new type of state known as a “people’s democracy.” First, nearly all of the ethnic German population was expelled from the country, and many from the Hungarian minority were either deported to Hungary or relocated to the Czech lands. Bohemia and Moravia, which together had once been nearly 40 percent German, became almost completely Czech, while the proportion of Hungarians in Slovakia dropped from approximately 17.6 percent in the 1930 census to 10.3 percent by 1950.¹⁰ Second, left-wing dominance in Czechoslovak politics, combined with a public mood increasingly open to socialization, led to the construction of a system in which a large proportion of the economy was nationalized, mainly through the state takeover of large industrial and commercial enterprises. Along the same lines, the state established an expanded social welfare network and instituted a land reform aimed at dispossessing large landholders. Third, Czechoslovakia’s foreign policy orientation underwent an important shift. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Republic was oriented to the West, especially toward France, though from 1935 on, the Czechoslovak government cultivated good relations with the Soviet Union as well. Now, situated in a part of Europe largely occupied by the Soviet Red Army, disappointed by the Western Allies for abandoning it in the Munich Agreement in 1938, fearing German revanchism, led by a government in which Communists and left-wing Social Democrats played a decisive role, and desirous of distinguishing itself in postwar Europe as a bridge between East and West, Czechoslovakia has positioned itself as a solid ally of the Soviet Union, and in some respects leaned more to the East than to the West.

From 1945 to 1948 there was increasing conflict between Communists and their non-Communist rivals in the struggle for political power in the state. The elections of May 1946 were an important milestone in Czechoslo-

vakia's political development at this time. In the Czech lands, the left won a resounding victory, with the KSČ taking 40.1 percent of the vote and the Social Democrats 15.6 percent.¹¹ The Czechoslovak National Socialist Party and Czechoslovak People's Party, themselves rather leftish with respect to issues like nationalization of large industry and state support for social welfare, took the remaining 23.5 percent and 20.2 percent of the vote, respectively, and together constituted what could be called the "Czech Right" in a system that technically did not allow a right wing to exist. This was a remarkably strong showing for the left, though it was not replicated in Slovakia. There, the DS clobbered the KSS by 62 percent to 30 percent (two recently established smaller parties gathered in the remaining 8 percent of the vote). This electoral discrepancy between the Czech lands and Slovakia had a number of significant consequences. It made Slovak Communists far less sympathetic to autonomy for Slovakia and prompted Czech Communists to come out decisively for a reassertion of Prague's control over the area. This played out in the promulgation of the so-called Third Prague Agreement of June 28, 1946, the final in a series of modifications of relations between Slovakia's organs and the central government that diminished Slovakia's powers of self-government.¹² The discrepancy also convinced the Communists that the DS was their most dangerous enemy, and from May 1946 onward, the Communists aimed every weapon in their arsenal at the Democrats. It also made Catholic cooperation with the DS the biggest issue in Slovak politics, as Communists sought to use the very situation that brought the DS victory in order to destroy that party.

When the resurrected and reformed Czechoslovak Republic was established in early spring 1945, Slovakia had two, and only two, political parties—the Communists (or, more specifically, the Communist Party of Slovakia, separate but closely connected with and ultimately subordinate to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia) and the Democrats. Both parties trace their origins to the events connected with Czechoslovakia's demise and incorporation into the Nazi empire. When Czechoslovakia was destroyed in March 1939, Slovakia's Communists were cut off from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and, on the orders of the Comintern, founded a separate Communist Party of Slovakia in May 1939.¹³ By 1943 the KSS was heavily involved in resistance to the Slovak regime. The Democratic Party emerged during the war, representing those Slovaks who opposed the regime but who did not identify with the Communists. The most important element in the

DS was former Slovak Agrarians, and its two most important leaders, Jozef Lettrich and Ján Ursíny, had both been Agrarians in the interwar period. The DS also attracted Lutherans, a group that historically tended to have friendly relations with the Czechs and which found a Catholic dictatorship particularly distasteful and alienating.¹⁴ Beginning in late 1943, Democrats and Communists worked together in the Slovak resistance, forming a legislative body called the Slovak National Council (*Slovenská Národná Rada*), and jointly taking part in the Slovak National Uprising in late August and September 1944, where they managed to liberate a portion of central Slovakia for nearly eight weeks. During the uprising they jointly administered the liberated territories through a board of commissioners (*Zbor Povereníkov*). After the war, Communists and Democrats continued their cooperation, supporting autonomy for Slovakia in the new Republic and successfully arguing for the institutional continuation of the organs they had established during the resistance. These organs were affirmed in the Košice Program as integral to the new Slovakia. Since only two political parties were permitted in Slovakia, positions were distributed evenly between Communists and Democrats in the staffing of these organs.

Though they represented very different political ideologies—atheistic Marxism looking to the Soviet Union for inspiration on the one side; democratic, largely Protestant Christian values on the other—Communists and Democrats cooperated closely on a number of issues. Both were hostile to the wartime regime; both drew their legitimacy above all from their role in the uprising and looked back on it as a fundamental part of their heritage; both favored the reconstitution of Czechoslovakia, but with considerable autonomy left to Slovakia; both favored extensive social programs and nationalization of the economy, though the Communists went farther along these lines than the Democrats; and both favored the nationalization of education.

While substantial numbers of Slovaks identified with either of these two political camps, probably an even larger number identified with neither. These were chiefly Catholic Slovaks—hostile toward the atheistic Communists, leery of the Lutheran dominated Democrats, sympathetic toward or at the very least ambivalent about the wartime regime. With the banning of their party, the HSL'S, which had attracted the votes of nearly 50 percent of Slovaks during the interwar period, they were in a sense political orphans. However, they had the right to vote, and if they voted as a bloc they could decide elections in Slovakia. This meant that the two Slovak parties that defined

themselves in part by their hostility toward the wartime regime had to vie for the votes of a large segment of the population that felt quite differently about the Slovak Republic. This fact, more than anything else, set the stage for the dramatic events that transpired in Slovakia over the next three years—events laden with promise, with danger, and with irony for both sides.

That the Catholic Church, Catholicism, and the issues connected with them figured prominently in Slovakia's political affairs after the fall of the Tiso regime was nothing new. Right from the founding of the First Czechoslovak Republic, religion was a central issue in Slovakia's place in the political order. Already beginning in 1918, relations between the Catholic Church and the First Czechoslovak Republic were troubled in a number of ways, a fact that had significant influence on Slovakia.¹⁵ First off, Czechs were far more likely to take a critical stance toward Catholicism than were Slovaks. Opposition to Catholicism had an important place in the Czech self-understanding. Jan Hus, burned as a heretic in 1415, was a national hero to the Czechs. The Battle of White Mountain of 1620, where a Protestant led rebellion by Bohemian elites was crushed by the Catholic Habsburgs, was remembered as the end of autonomy for the Czech lands. Nationalist Czech radicals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, like their German counterparts, shared the anti-Catholic motto "*Pryč od Říma*" ("*Los von Rom*" or "Away from Rome"). Slovaks, conversely, brought far less baggage regarding the Catholic Church into the twentieth century and generally saw the church as a positive force in their historical development.¹⁶

In the early months of Czechoslovakia's existence, the Catholic Church was attacked on many sides—radicals tore crucifixes off walls of schools and other public buildings and destroyed religious statues, most notoriously the Marian column on Prague's Old Town Square. The new regime instituted policies inimical to Catholic interests, including the seizure of church lands and the takeover of Catholic gymnasia and other educational institutions.¹⁷ Attempts, albeit ultimately unsuccessful, were made to incorporate the strict separation of church and state into the constitution. The administration of Slovakia was placed in the hands of Vavro Šrobár, a lapsed Catholic unfriendly to the Catholic Church. Slovak Protestants (mainly Lutherans) were favored over Catholics in the apportionment of state jobs and other coveted positions.¹⁸ In the Czech lands, some renegade priests founded a "Czechoslovak Catholic Church," which 750,000 Czechs, including President Tomáš G. Masaryk, joined. Thousands of Czech government officials, teachers, and

other professionals moved to Slovakia, many of whom brought with them a hostility to Catholicism and a contemptuous view of the Slovaks as a backward, priest-ridden people.

It was opposition to such attacks on their Catholic faith that prompted Andrej Hlinka and a group of fellow Slovak priests in late 1918 to found a Council of Priests and soon thereafter to resurrect the prewar Catholic, nationalist Slovak People's Party.¹⁹ This party went on to become the leading champion of autonomy for Slovakia during the interwar period. Because Czechoslovakia's new regime denied the separate existence of a Slovak nation, opting instead for a "Czechoslovak" nation with a Czech and a Slovak branch, ruled the state in a centralistic manner from Prague, favored Slovak Lutherans over Catholics in the distribution of political and administrative positions, and implemented measures against the interests of the Catholic Church, many Slovaks rallied around the HSL'S and its Catholic, nationalist program. Thus, almost from the birth of Czechoslovakia, a close connection existed between Slovak nationalism and Catholicism.

Interwar Czechoslovakia saw plenty of tensions between church and state. For example, in 1925, the papal nuncio even left Prague in protest against a national holiday in honor of the heretic Hus. Nevertheless, the Czechoslovak regime pursued normalized relations with the Vatican, and in March 1927 the Holy See and the Czechoslovak government reached an agreement, known as the *Modus Vivendi*.²⁰ This pact realigned diocesan borders of the prewar period, making sure that no neighboring bishop or leader of a religious order had jurisdiction over clergy and members of religious orders in Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, the Vatican agreed to have candidates for vacant bishoprics vetted by the government and required candidates for bishop to take an oath of loyalty to the state. Property questions proved thornier, and commissions set up to deal with them had not yet completed their work by 1938, when the First Republic came to an end.

The foray of Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany into central Europe in 1938 brought the Anschluss in March, the detachment of the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia in September, and the establishment of an autonomous Slovakia within a reconstituted Second Czecho-Slovak Republic in October. Less than six months later, Germany occupied the rest of the Czech lands, thereby wiping Czecho-Slovakia off the map and replacing it with a Nazi occupied "Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia" in the west and an independent Slovak state in the east. These momentous changes in the region brought with

them, among other things, equally momentous changes in the place of the Catholic Church within Slovakia's political life.

Jozef Tiso, who succeeded Hlinka as head of the HSL'S in summer of 1938, became president of the new republic. This meant that a Catholic priest was both head of state and leader of the state's dominant party. Catholic clergy were heavily involved in governmental, administrative, and political life.²¹ In the early years of the republic, around 20 percent of the ministers of parliament were priests, as were three members of the eighteen-member state council, including the Bishop Ján Vojtaššák. The mayor of the capital city, Bratislava, was a priest. Dozens of Catholic priests were active functionaries of the HSL'S at all levels. Two of its six county organizations and sixteen of its sixty district organizations were headed by priests, and clergy were well represented at the local level. Since the HSL'S was the only party allowed to represent Slovaks, the role of Catholic clergy in managing Slovakia was considerable.

The influence of the Catholic Church was particularly strong in education.²² Priests served in teaching functions from the university level on down, and nearly all education at the lower levels was parochial, either Catholic or Lutheran. The Slovak state restored crucifixes to the walls and religious education to the curriculum in all the schools, undoing two of the educational policies of the Czechoslovak Republic. Students were obliged to attend Sunday worship, and teachers were not permitted to belong to any antireligious organizations or even marry outside a church.

Church influence increased in a number of other areas as well.²³ Catholic publishing experienced an upswing, church influence in the military was augmented by the requirement that all soldiers attend religious services, and the state considered itself, at least on paper, to be inspired by papal social teachings. Slovakia experienced a boom in church construction and renovation, and priests frequently served on the boards of trustees of private firms.²⁴

Given the favorable position that Catholicism had attained within the wartime state, the collapse of the Tiso regime in conjunction with the defeat of Nazi Germany in the spring of 1945 brought a dramatic change in fortune for the Catholic Church in Slovakia. With the reestablishment of a Czechoslovak Republic, the church now had to face a state that was suspicious of Slovak Catholicism, both because of its ties with separatist Slovak nationalism and its opposition to what most Czechs and leftist Slovaks regarded as progress.²⁵ The

Catholic Church was immediately put on the defensive. All of Slovakia and most of the Czech lands were occupied, until the end of 1945, by the armies of the Soviet Union. Slovakia's Communists were more confident and well placed politically than ever before. Wartime supporters of Tiso's regime faced arrest and detention, including some clergy and even bishops. Every one of the six political parties permitted to exist was suspicious of Slovakia's Catholicism. Right from the start, the new regime tried to reestablish the republic on grounds less favorable to the church than even those of the First Czechoslovak Republic. These included the secularization of education, a ban on Catholic organizations and periodicals, and other progressive/repressive measures. It is in this dramatically new context that we will begin our investigation into relations between Slovakia's Catholics and the two dominant political forces of postwar Slovakia, the Communists and the Democrats.

From the end of World War II through the spring of 1946, Slovakia's two political parties engaged in a pair of closely related yet mutually contradictory undertakings. The Communists and the Democrats worked both to weaken Catholic influence in Slovakia and to woo Catholic voters. The first of these undertakings brought the two parties together; the second fed the rivalry between them. Through the summer of 1945, Communists and Democrats waged a veritable *Kulturkampf* against the Catholic Church in Slovakia, on top of which were superimposed attempts to attract Catholics into their respective camps. Through the fall and winter, pressure on the Catholic Church eased somewhat, while political intrigues from one side or the other grew more intense. Catholics, for their part, sought by an assortment of ways to navigate the postwar situation. Communist efforts to exploit Catholic disaffection both within and outside the DS were foiled when that party's leaders cut a deal with leading Catholics on March 31, 1946. This so-called April Agreement brought the great majority of Slovakia's Catholics into the Democratic camp and constituted a profound alteration of the political constellation in Slovakia.

In the first months after liberation, Slovakia's new authorities instituted a series of decrees and policies aimed at weakening the position of the Catholic Church. The educational system was nationalized, with parochial schools becoming the property of the state. Shortly thereafter, dormitories were likewise nationalized. Catholic clubs, in particular youth organizations, and charitable institutions were dissolved and their property appropriated by the state. A

number of priests and even some bishops were interned, and Catholic periodicals were completely disallowed.²⁶ These and other similar measures provoked a response from the Catholic Church at several levels.

There was no issue where the church felt its rights more violated or where the authorities acted more unyieldingly than that of education. It stood at the center of conflicts over the relationship of church and state, and of conflicts between Communists and Catholics. The takeover of Slovakia's educational system by the state dates to September 6, 1944, when the Slovak National Council issued, during the Slovak National Uprising, a decree nationalizing schools at all levels. In April 1945, the Slovak authorities began assuming control of private and parochial schools along with their moveable and unmoveable property. This prompted a Catholic response. On May 23, Archbishop Karol Kmet'ko, as chairman of the Slovak Bishops' Council, sent a memorandum of protest to the Slovak National Council (SNR), in which the bishops made their case against the nationalization decree.²⁷ To begin with, Kmet'ko argued that in depriving the church of its right to establish and maintain schools, the authorities were violating their pledge that the freedom of the church would be respected and defended. Citing the church's belief that it had the right and obligation to found schools, Kmet'ko expressed the church's feeling of "a very heavy and painful intervention into its life." The memorandum pointed out that parochial schools were allowed in those countries which guaranteed the church's freedom, and noted that France, with its long tradition of secular education, was again reinstating parochial schools.

In the bishops' view, it was not just the rights of the church that were being violated by the nationalization decree, but those of society as well. Kmet'ko asserted that parents "have a natural and indisputable right to educate their child and to determine the direction along which this education takes place when they entrust their children to the schools for the long-term." He also pointed out the undemocratic nature of the decision to nationalize schools. It was simply decreed by the SNR, which itself was not an elected body. Since such a matter was not so urgent that it needed to be dealt with immediately (in contrast to questions involving transportation, military defense, or food supplies), yet important enough to warrant discussion by the elected representatives of Slovakia's citizens, there was no reason why it could not wait until after forthcoming elections were held. Claiming a tradition of popular support for parochial schools in Slovakia, the memorandum held that the state's attempt to monopolize education would never have passed an elected

Slovak representative body. In circumventing such democratic procedure, the government was calling into question its commitment to its own rhetoric about being a “people’s democracy” responsive to the “will of the people.” In defending parochial schools, Kmet’ko also made recourse to the “historic right” of the church in Slovakia to found schools, earned through centuries of commitment to education. “Parochial schools should be preserved and supported out of gratitude,” for, thanks to the church, Slovaks were able to become a “cultured and civilized nation.” Responding to the contention that parochial schools were potentially harmful to state or society, the memorandum pointed out the extensive regulation under which these schools had to operate (e.g., the state approved textbooks, certified teachers, set curricular standards, etc.). Regarding the claim that parochial schools caused division within the nation along religious lines, Kmet’ko argued that it was rather the refusal of the state to respect religious differences, manifested in policies such as the nationalization of schools, that was the real cause of division in society. In conclusion, the memorandum accused the state of starting, by its unilateral and rash actions, a *Kulturkampf* against a church that was eager to cooperate with it in rebuilding Slovakia. Kmet’ko urged that the nationalization decree not be implemented.

The Catholic response to the nationalization of schools did not end with Kmet’ko’s memorandum. The bishop of Banská Bystrica, Andrej Škrábik, wrote to Kmet’ko on May 29, recommending that the church organize a petition drive against the nationalization. Škrábik argued that the memorandum “was sure to remain only an academic matter,” while “among the ‘people’s democratic’ government only the will of the people, manifested in hundreds of thousands of signatures, would carry weight.”²⁸ The bishops were aware that the assault on parochial schools had agitated Slovak Catholics. Both Škrábik’s letter and Kmet’ko’s memorandum mentioned localized demonstrations by Catholic parents and students against such matters as the mixing of Catholic and Protestant students in classes, the tactless assignment of teachers of a religion different from their pupils, and the removal of religious symbols from the schools.²⁹

Although Škrábik urged that the petition action be presented as something instigated by lay Catholics,³⁰ the campaign was launched in churches across Slovakia on July 8 with the reading of a pastoral letter issued jointly by Slovakia’s bishops.³¹ The state’s response was swift and forceful. The police searched Kmet’ko’s office as well as those of several other bishops and a num-

ber of priests, and they arrested a number of clergy.³² Among other things, the police confiscated some allegedly incriminating material, including the draft of a pastoral letter (never issued), and the text of a prayer asking Jesus Christ to “not allow Your enemies, through godless schools and faithless education to deprive [children] of faith and innocence and so tear them away from You.”³³ Communist dominated professional organizations, such as the Union of Educational and Cultural Workers, as well as more localized bodies of school inspectors and teachers, condemned the petition drive and expressed themselves strongly for state schools.³⁴ Local administrative bodies and factory councils did likewise. On July 16, the Slovak National Front (SNF) held an extraordinary session,³⁵ where the top leaders of the KSS and DS issued a “Proclamation on the Misuse of Religion for Politically Subversive Actions.”³⁶

The proclamation said in fact very little in defense of the nationalization of schools. Rather, it concentrated on attacking the church’s involvement in politics that it saw the petition campaign as representing. It stressed the state’s commitment to equal rights for religious believers and freedom of religion and argued that, because catechism classes were allowed in the state schools, the policy violated neither principle. The proclamation addressed the petition campaign not as an attempt to defend parochial schools per se, but as the thin wedge of an effort by reactionary Catholics to restore and rehabilitate the HSL’S. To this end, the documents confiscated at Archbishop Kmet’ko’s office came in quite handy. Particularly useful to the state authorities was the draft of a pastoral letter that spoke not about education but rather issues connected with postwar justice in Slovakia.³⁷ The draft spoke favorably of those Slovaks who worked for the good of the Slovak nation in the past, including those who were imprisoned simply for serving the wartime Tiso regime. Their imprisonment was likened to punishing a ship’s captain for attaching his boat to another ship in order to keep it from sinking. Condemning hurried trials and convictions without sufficient proof as characteristic of postwar Slovakia, the draft asserted that many people were being held in prison unjustly, needlessly causing harm to their families. Arguing that the Slovak nation was too small to afford a bloodletting, the draft condemned the practice of making denunciations of one’s enemies for personal reasons as a terrible sin for which one would have to answer to God. While admitting that some people were indeed guilty (i.e., of enriching themselves from the war, of injustice and violence), it portrayed the system of people’s courts set up to deal with war criminals and collaborators as animated more by personal revenge than by

justice. The draft concluded by calling on Catholics to stand united in the present crisis situation and to be proud, not ashamed, of being Catholic.

In commenting on this draft, the SNF proclamation stated that “these words make it clear that several highly positioned church dignitaries do not hesitate to misuse their position to try to justify fascist criminals . . . they do not hesitate to misuse their position to justify a politics of fascist Populist separatism . . . they do not hesitate to misuse their position to try to terrorize the courts of the people, who have their mandate from the orphans and widows and sacrifices of the martyrs of our national struggle.”³⁸ Thus, the confiscated draft gave the Communists and Democrats the opportunity to shift the discussion from the justice of the state monopoly of education to the question of the punishment of collaborators and clerical intervention on their behalf. By combining the contents of the draft with those of another document found in Kmet’ko’s office, an unsigned letter in Latin containing the sentence “It is necessary to work with all means in order that a third political party be established,”³⁹ Slovakia’s political leaders were able to depict the petition drive as the opening salvo in a campaign aimed at reviving and restoring the HSL’S. As the proclamation states regarding the HSL’S, “all attempts at its political renewal, or political actions undertaken in its spirit, are illegal and directed against the living interests of the Slovak nation and the Czechoslovak Republic.”⁴⁰ On July 20, the chief daily newspapers of both Slovak parties published the proclamation, along with favorable commentary on it.⁴¹

Three days later, Kmet’ko penned his public reply, as chairman of the Slovak Bishops’ Council.⁴² His statement began by expressing the church’s disappointment over the SNR’s nationalization of education, and in particular over the SNR’s refusal to consult the church before implementing the decree, despite alleged earlier assurances that it would. He pointed out that by early July he still had not received a reply from the SNR to his memorandum of May 23. He also reiterated the church’s responsibility to defend parochial education, citing both canon law (no. 1372f) and Pope Pius XI’s encyclical of December 31, 1929, on the Christian education of youth. Kmet’ko denied that parochial education was opposed to national unity and pointed to a number of places where it was permitted, including Belgium, Holland, China, India, and even France, and mentioned that the Catholic University in Soviet occupied Lublin, Poland, was reopened immediately after the war.

Kmet’ko also defended the petition campaign, denying that it was political or antistate, but rather the exercise “of the most elementary right of every

person, the right of petition and appeal.” For exercising this legal right, the church was subjected to searches of episcopal and pastoral offices, confiscations of written material and typewriters, and a hostile press campaign. With regard to the allegedly incriminating documents, Kmet’ko pointed out that the confiscated draft of a pastoral letter was among a number of proposals, complaints, etc., normally sent to church leaders by local Catholics and that the draft in question was in fact rejected by the bishops, who prepared instead a very moderate pastoral letter. As far as a third party was concerned, he denied that the church had given any directive to organize such a party and pointed out that leading Slovak and Czechoslovak statesmen themselves had called for a third party in Slovakia. Kmet’ko’s statement concluded with a reminder that the Catholic Church in Slovakia had already expressed its “sincere joy” over the renewal of the Czechoslovak Republic and its desire to cooperate with Slovakia’s new rulers, along with the expectation that its rights and freedoms would be respected.

The conflict over education lay at the heart of the conflict between the church and state authorities. Unlike some other issues of conflict—for example, whether criminal proceedings should be initiated against collaborationist clergy or whether church lands should be confiscated and redistributed in a land reform—education meant far too much to both church and state to be settled satisfactorily to both sides in the given context. There was an insurmountable conflict between the way the political leaders and church leaders viewed education and its place in society. At the same time, both sides held significantly different understandings of relevant terms and concepts.

First, church and state had very different ideas of what religious freedom ought to entail. For the church, the freedom to establish schools was an essential element of religious freedom, as was the freedom for parents to send their children to schools operated in accordance with their religious beliefs. The state defined religious freedom far more narrowly. It meant merely the freedom to affiliate oneself with whatever religious confession one wished and the freedom to worship and engage in other purely religious activity. Similarly, both sides differed sharply in their understanding of just what the social role of the church should be. The state favored a narrow construction—the churches were to be concerned about the spiritual needs of their flocks while everything else lay in the domain of the state. Thus, churches were expected to refrain from political activity, follow the lead of the state in social, eco-

nomic, and cultural matters, and serve as cheerleaders for and cooperators in reconstruction work initiated and directed by the state.

Catholic social teaching, on the other hand, saw the church's role as something quite different. The church had the right, and indeed the obligation, to address matters of political, economic, social, and cultural import. The seminal documents of modern Catholic social teaching, such as Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum* and Pius XI's 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*, established and affirmed this teaching. Moreover, a series of popes, including Pope Pius XII, specifically asserted the church's right to educate Catholics in her own schools.

"Democracy" was another term that was understood quite differently by church and state, most tellingly as it pertained to education. According to the church, if Slovakia was indeed a democratic country, then the will of the people should decide the matter of parochial schools. To the state authorities, particularly the Communists among them, democracy meant that the state was to be governed according to democratic principles, which allegedly included separation of church and state. For the Communists, democracy meant rule by the elites, who dominated organizations purportedly representing the people, such as the KSS and Communist dominated veterans organizations, trade unions, and other social organizations. Thus, if these groups opposed parochial education, they were being "democratic," even if the large majority of the population wanted them.

"Antistate" was another term that church and state viewed quite differently. For the state, it was defined very broadly, meaning anything that opposed the basic program of Czechoslovakia's postwar government. Thus, if one opposed the nationalization of education or of certain industries or enterprises, one was antistate. The church regarded antistate activity much more narrowly—that to oppose and work to change government policies was not identical to opposing the state. To be antistate, one really had to be working against Czechoslovakia's new regime. Of course, because Slovakia's new rulers defined nationalization of education as an essential component of a people's democratic regime, from their perspective, to challenge the state in this matter was to attack it at its very roots and was tantamount to treason.

Hanging over the entire debate on education was Slovakia's recent past. Because the church had a privileged position under the Tiso regime, where it dominated an educational system that was essentially parochial, its pres-

ent embracing of the principles of pluralism and freedom in education was branded as “opportunistic.” The church, of course, could not disagree. It was simply adapting itself to changing circumstances, as it had done for nearly two millennia, in pursuit of its interests and religious and social vision.

When Slovakia seceded from Czechoslovakia in 1939, the Catholic Church assumed an influence in education that it had not known for decades. The postwar regime, reacting against the church dominated education of the Tiso regime, which was itself a reaction against the aggressive secularizing of the First Republic, banned parochial education altogether. When the Catholic Church contested this, it was seen by the authorities as harboring sympathy for the Tiso regime and could thus by implication be associated with all the other aspects of the wartime years that looked bad in 1945—the destruction of the Czechoslovak Republic, the wartime alliance with Nazi Germany, the privileged position of Germans in Slovakia, the Hungarian occupation of southern Slovakia, the internments of opponents of the regime, discrimination against Protestants, military defeat, and the inhumane deportation of Jews to Nazi death camps. In the eyes of the postwar regime’s propagandists, parochial education carried with it all these negative associations.

Catholic defenders of parochial education sought to limit discussion strictly to the issue of education itself. They complained that the state was imposing on Slovakia a foreign model that negated Slovakia’s traditional educational patterns.⁴³ They complained that the Catholic Church was not consulted regarding the reform but simply handed a *fait accompli*, and that the leading positions in education were entrusted to non-Catholics.⁴⁴ They argued that moral-religious education was a critical social need, especially in the wake of the war, and one that the state simply could not do effectively on its own. In trying to fulfill this role, the state was overstepping its bounds and aggrandizing itself via an “educational totalitarianism.”⁴⁵

Alongside the major issue of the nationalization of education, Catholic leaders complained about a number of policies that, though not essential to a nationalized school system, likewise damaged Catholic interests and offended Catholic sensibilities. These included the ban on crucifixes, prayer, and Catholic greetings from classrooms; the transfer of teachers belonging to religious orders to places where they would be unable to live in common life with their coreligionists; and the assignment of non-Catholic teachers to schools where the student body was completely Catholic.⁴⁶ Such measures, variously aimed at secularization, social engineering, and efficiency, provoked angry opposi-

tion among Catholics at all levels. One such issue was the fate of teachers in religious orders, of whom Slovakia had 272 at war's end.⁴⁷ They ran forty-six schools and taught in an additional sixty-three. In 1945, 102 teachers from religious orders were reassigned by the state, with little consideration given for locating them in places where they could live the community life, or even where there was a Catholic church. In response to popular protest in various parts of Slovakia, including Nitra and Topoľčany, and complaints from the bishops, the Commission of Education, led by the Communist Ladislav Novomeský, took some steps to address Catholic concerns. Though this resulted in greater attention to the religious needs of the teachers in religious orders, the situation remained unsatisfactory as a number of such teachers remained at considerable distance from their religious houses.⁴⁸

Another area where state policy encroached on church interests and independence was in the seizure of various Catholic institutions, including dormitories, orphanages, social service organizations, and clubs. These included, significantly, Catholic youth and women's organizations. Similar to the nationalization of education, these measures served both to weaken the church's social influence and to aggrandize the state by giving it an advantage over its main competition in the battle for the hearts and minds of Slovaks, and by increasing the scope of its social functions. The nationalization of dormitories was a particularly touchy issue, as Catholic and Protestant churches in Slovakia had long been used to having their own dormitories, whose importance would be all the greater in fostering a religious identity in students now that schools were nationalized. In fact, nearly two-thirds of Slovakia's one hundred college and high school dormitories were under church administration.⁴⁹ Novomeský made the case for nationalization to the SNR on July 2 and 25, 1945. State-run dormitories would eliminate the problem of the interwar period, where dormitories like the Catholic Svoradov in Bratislava became "hotbeds of reaction" and produced the younger generation of Populists.⁵⁰ It was also, according to Novomeský, the logical corollary to the nationalization of schools, a step toward overcoming religious differences and thereby fostering national unity.⁵¹ Finally, it was more efficient, giving the state greater flexibility in locating dormitories where they were needed and allowing for a maximum utilization of available space. Novomeský's policy passed the SNR and was implemented, but not without a debate in which Protestant representatives argued that only formerly "fascist" dormitories should be nationalized, not formerly democratic ones.⁵² Ľudovít Šenšel, for example, pointed

out that the Štefánik House in Bratislava, a Lutheran dormitory, nurtured students in a democratic, tolerant spirit and produced a number of members of the Slovak wartime resistance to the Nazis and the Tiso regime. Indeed, Novomeský himself had lectured there during the war.⁵³

Another issue that posed a constant irritant between the regime and the Catholic Church, though not as intensely and overtly as education, was the so-called minority question. This meant above all what to do with the relatively large Magyar population remaining in Slovakia at war's end, as well as the smaller numbers of ethnic Germans.⁵⁴ Slovakia at the war's end had well over half a million Magyars, most of whom lived in the southern regions bordering Hungary.⁵⁵ While a significant minority of Magyars were Calvinist, most belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. In mid-1946, Slovakia had 305 Roman Catholic priests and 125 members of religious orders of Magyar ethnicity.⁵⁶ The Košice government program decreed that all German and Hungarian citizens of the Czechoslovak Republic would have their state citizenship rights abrogated, except for those who had actively struggled in the past against "the Henleinists and the Hungarian irredentist parties."⁵⁷

In dealing with Magyar clergy, Magyar parishes and other religious institutions, and Magyar believers, the state pursued a number of policies. It sought to confiscate the property of Magyar religious institutions, ban worship in any language but Slovak, end or severely curtail state financial support for Magyar clergy, deprive them of the right to teach, and ban intrachurch correspondence in the Hungarian language.⁵⁸ These repressive measures constituted part of a much broader minority policy, which initially entailed placing large numbers of Magyars in internment camps in hopes of their eventual deportation abroad. As these hopes faded when the Great Powers refused to allow a wholesale expulsion of Slovakia's Magyars, as they did with the Germans in the Czech lands and Poland, the authorities in Slovakia pursued alternative solutions—the deportation of Magyars to the Czech lands to be settled in territories left vacant by the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans; a population exchange with Hungary, according to which ethnic Slovaks in Hungary would be resettled in Slovakia, while a comparable number of Magyars from Slovakia moved to Hungary; and a "re-Slovakization" campaign, whereby Magyars in Slovakia could officially claim Slovak ancestry and identity, thereby regaining citizenship rights in exchange for national reidentification. Communists and Democrats often quibbled over minority policy, for example, over whether to privilege the worker and peasant classes in re-

Slovakization, or whether policy toward the Magyars should be in the hands of experts or the police.⁵⁹ Each party also sought to woo Magyars into its camp while accusing their rival of doing the same.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, on the most fundamental aspects of minority policy, all parties were in general agreement as to the proper approach. It was the Catholic Church, rather, that came into conflict with the regime over its policies on a number of levels.

An immediate concern for the church in Slovakia was the pastoral impact of imprisoning minority clergy or otherwise stripping them of their clerical functions. Already on March 11, 1945, Bishop Jozef Čársky sent a complaint to Slovakia's commissioner of the interior that twenty-nine minority priests had been removed from their functions, including thirteen who had served at predominately Slovak parishes.⁶¹ As the postwar regime continued to implement its harsh policies toward the Magyar minority, Slovakia's bishops began to raise humanitarian concerns. Kmet'ko sent a letter to the Slovak National Council's presidium on September 5.⁶² He asked that the Magyars and Germans interned in camps be treated humanely and that those who had not transgressed against the interests of the nation and state be promptly released. He also urged that any "transfer" of the minority population be done in accordance with international agreements with the affected governments. Finally, Kmet'ko asked that religious services be allowed in the internment camps and that Catholic charities be permitted to minister to the internees. In a pastoral letter published in *Katolícke noviny's* November 4 issue, Slovakia's bishops condemned the notion of collective guilt, writing that "every person should be judged according to his actions, not his racial or national affiliation. For this reason . . . the bishops appeal to the authorities to deal with Catholics in a humane and Christian manner, without regard to nationality."⁶³ In mid-November, bishops from Slovakia and the Czech lands met jointly in Olomouc and sent to the Czechoslovak government a letter of their concerns. Regarding the minority situation, the letter pointed out that "how the Germans and Magyars are sometimes being treated is not in accordance with Christian sentiment and with the good name of our nation."⁶⁴ The pastoral letter issued by the bishops at this same conference also made some reference to the minority situation.⁶⁵ Though the bishops did not condemn population transfers per se, they asked that any transfers of population be carried out peacefully and humanely. Remarkably, the letter stated, "We cannot allow even a shadow of the cruelty of the former concentration camps to stain us, because history has penetrating sight and in future years every blunder could

be placed on the pillory the way today we are pillorying the cruelty of the camps at Dachau, Auschwitz, and elsewhere.”⁶⁶ Citing the specific request of Pope Pius XII that minorities be treated justly, the bishops asked that the innocent not be punished along with the guilty, and that those deprived of their freedom have access to Christian clergy.

Catholic leaders kept up their protests and appeals on behalf of persecuted Magyar Catholics, especially clergy, through the immediate postwar years. A central focus of Catholic concern was the language of worship.⁶⁷ Though by law Magyar worship was permitted in those churches that had it before November 1938, in practice local authorities often tried to restrict or shut it down completely, not infrequently aided by anti-Magyar lay Slovak Catholics.⁶⁸ This issue was particularly acute in the regions of Slovakia inhabited by Magyars, for with the elimination of Hungarian political parties, national organizations, and schools, the churches were one of the few places where Magyars could give public expression to their language and culture. The church came to the Magyars’ defense, based on its principle that worship should be in a language that the believers understood.⁶⁹ In Kmeťko’s view, it was the right and duty of the church to proclaim God’s word in a language intelligible to the people. To fail to do so also undermined the goals of the preacher, whose success was dependent upon his being understood by his hearers.⁷⁰ Slovak bishops in the affected regions again and again tried to counter attempts to ban or severely restrict Magyar worship, not without success. For example, Bishop Pavol Jantausch protested sharply to the commissioner of the interior, Július Viktory, when police officials ordered some local Magyar clergy to preach and sing in Slovak.⁷¹ Viktory accommodated Jantausch by instructing the police to stop mixing into purely religious affairs. When local authorities tried to restrict Magyar language worship in Košice to a single small church and forbid singing in Magyar, Bishop Čársky refused their request, correctly citing both Czechoslovak and canon law on his behalf.⁷² When local Magyars and Slovaks got into conflict over the language of worship, the bishops usually settled the issue through compromise, either by providing two masses, one in each language, or using Slovak and Magyar alternatively in a single Mass.⁷³

Closely connected to the language issue was the status of Magyar clergy. Here there were two central issues—the state’s halting of financial support for Magyar clergy (the so-called *Congrua*) and the state’s attempts to deport Magyar clergy to Hungary as part of a population transfer or exchange.

Given that their loss of salary or pension put many Hungarian clergy in dire economic straits, the church repeatedly lobbied the authorities for its restoration, or at least that government loans be made available to them.⁷⁴ Failing to address the issue or even to implement stopgap measures that had been passed, the state dragged its feet right up to February 1948. The church also repeatedly expressed its concerns that Magyar priests not be categorically deported, which would leave many Hungarian Catholics without pastors who spoke their language.

A final issue that took a long time to settle was the question of the church property that was in Magyar hands at war's end. The state regarded such property as belonging to enemies of the Czechoslovak Republic, and hence to be confiscated. The church regarded it not as Magyar property but as church property and sought merely to transfer it from the control of Hungarian bishops or religious orders to Slovak ones. The state, for instance, assumed control of the property of Hungarian religious orders, took over their schools and other social organizations, and, despite protests, generally kept the former Magyar controlled property from passing to the church in Slovakia.⁷⁵

The press was another domain in which the state sought to restrict Catholic influence. Permission from the commissioner of the interior was needed for any periodical to operate in postwar Slovakia, and the Slovak authorities refused to grant that permission until September 1945, when permission came to issue *Katolícke noviny*, a weekly newspaper. (In the Czech lands, Catholic periodicals were allowed from June 1945.) By the end of 1945, a number of other Catholic periodicals were permitted, nearly all of which dealt exclusively with themes such as faith, family, and devotion. *Katolícke noviny*, by contrast, distinguished itself in its coverage of and commentary on current political developments of concern to Catholics. Though the SNR had resolved in June to allow a Catholic weekly only if a group of "progressive Catholic priests" could be found to run it, the newspaper that emerged in September 1945 was in the hands of men committed to defending Catholic interests in the face of inimical policies by the regime. Henceforth, *Katolícke noviny*, and in particular its brash columnist Jur Koza-Matejov, would repeatedly come into conflict with Slovak authorities, and in particular with the KSS.⁷⁶ Despite the concessions in the form of Catholic periodicals in the fall of 1945, Church leaders complained that they had been allowed far fewer periodicals than during the interwar period, and that *Katolícke noviny*, unlike a number of other Slovak newspapers, was allowed to come out only weekly and was limited to four

pages.⁷⁷ Moreover, *Katolícke noviny's* editors were regularly called to the office of the KSS's press division, to be criticized and threatened for publishing material that the Communists regarded as offensive or inappropriate.⁷⁸

Another pressing conflict between the church and the authorities was over the internment of Catholic clergy after the collapse of the Tiso regime. Dozens of clergy were interned, including two bishops, Ján Vojtaššák and Michal Buzalka. While Buzalka was released on June 27, 1945, Vojtaššák remained in detention until the fall of 1945, and Catholic complaints focused on his case. Vojtaššák was interned "for reason of state security and the consolidation of the situation" in Slovakia.⁷⁹ Specifically, he was deemed particularly unreliable for a number of reasons. During the war, he was decorated by the Tiso regime and a member of its state council. Furthermore, Vavro Šrobár, acting as Minister of Education for the Czechoslovak government in exile, reported to the SNR that he had met with Vojtaššák while on a visit to Spišská Kapitula in the winter of 1945, and that Vojtaššák had expressly refused to recognize the new Czechoslovak government, professing instead his allegiance to the crumbling Slovak Republic.⁸⁰ Through the summer of 1945, the Communist press attacked Vojtaššák, pointing out his membership on the state council,⁸¹ citing letters he wrote in 1944 which referred to the Partisans as "bandits" and which closed with the words "Na stráž!"⁸² and alleging that he was an enemy of the children of workers and peasants.⁸³ Lacking a press of their own, Catholics could not respond to these charges publicly. In September, however, the SNR resolved to release Vojtaššák from internment, and by November he was able to return to his episcopal see and functions in Spiš.⁸⁴

Despite the release of Vojtaššák and the allowance of some Catholic periodicals, a number of irritants remained in relations between Catholics and the new regime. In January 1946, Slovakia's bishops met with Czechoslovakia's President Edvard Beneš in Prague and presented him with a list of their complaints regarding the situation of the church and Catholics in Slovakia. Alongside the already mentioned issues involving education, Catholic organizations and institutions, and the press, the bishops had a number of other complaints—that the land reform was threatening to confiscate and parcel out the so-called *patronáty* (i.e., lands owned by the church and used to finance various Catholic spiritual and social undertakings); that the state salaries for clergy, the so-called *Congrua*, were raised in the Czech lands, but not in Slovakia, where clergy received exceedingly low salaries and pensions; that many Catholics had been sitting in prison since the end of the war without

proof of wrongdoing or for relatively minor transgressions, without access to religious services or sacraments, and with family members who were being denied jobs, housing, and access to food on account of them.⁸⁵ The bishops also protested that the social, sanitary, and religious conditions of the 20,800 Magyars, Germans, and Slovaks still in internment camps in Slovakia were “very unpleasant and unbearable,” a violation of “basic notions of humanity,” and they called for a fundamental improvement. The bishops also asked that any exchange of population with Hungary be carried out “in accordance with mutual agreements of the interested states and the precepts of humanity.”

The ebb and flow of tensions between the church hierarchy and the state authorities ran simultaneous with, and was much affected by, the vying of Slovakia’s political parties for the Catholic vote. Both Communists and Democrats sought to attract Catholics into their respective camps, or at the very least keep them from helping their rival. This led to a tug-of-war over Catholics between a party that was run by Lutherans whose relations to many politically involved Catholics had been quite strained over the past two and a half decades, and a party imbued with an atheistic ideology historically hostile to Christianity, especially Roman Catholicism. This situation, strange as it may seem, is quite understandable in the context of postwar Slovak politics.

The KSS followed a three-pronged policy with regard to the religious question in Slovakia. The Communists’ goals were simultaneously to weaken the Catholic Church, to sow dissension and division within the Democratic Party, and to attract the support of Catholics, clerical and lay. Wooing Catholics would entail some sort of outreach both to Catholic clergy and to former Populists. In December 1944, as the front raged across Slovakia, Communist leader Václav Kopecký reproached the Slovak Communists for having no representatives of the moderate wing of the HSL’S in the SNR, which he labeled as the council’s greatest weakness.⁸⁶ In February, Gustav Husák, one of Slovakia’s leading Communists during the wartime resistance, reported for the Communist leadership on the religious situation in Slovakia.⁸⁷ While arguing for the need for a radical purge of Catholic institutions, Husák believed that the church would, for tactical reasons, profess its loyalty to the new regime and not mix into politics. He believed that Catholicism could be won for the new regime and argued that tensions between Catholics and Protestants could be used to the KSS’s advantage given Catholic suspicions about Lutheran domination of the DS. At the March 13, 1945, meeting of the Central Committee of the KSS, Edo Friš confirmed this view in a report on

“the inclination of the Catholic priesthood to the KSS for confessional reasons.”⁸⁸ The KSS was clearly examining the potential for attracting Catholic priests alienated by the Lutheran dominance in the DS.

As Slovakia’s liberation proceeded and Košice fell into the hands of the Soviet Red Army, Husák developed ties with Pavol Čarnogurský, who became his liaison with Catholic circles, including the church hierarchy.⁸⁹ Čarnogurský was an appropriate person for the task. He had personal relationships with Communists dating to the prewar period, and knew Husák and Novomeský well; he also had the ear of a number of Slovakia’s bishops. Though a parliamentarian for the HSL’S during the war, he was among the most moderate Populists. Moreover, he was interested in reconciling Catholics to the changing political environment and getting them positively engaged in the new situation. Husák and Čarnogurský kept in regular contact, and Čarnogurský sent him weekly reports on matters pertinent to relations with the church. As an indication of KSS interest in the Catholic Church, top-level Slovak Communists met on April 25, 1945, in Košice with Čarnogurský, the Croat priest and resistance veteran Tomislav Kolakovič, and two representatives of Bishop Jantausch.⁹⁰

It is clear from Communist documents that the KSS, with some qualms, was attracting former members of the now-banned HSL’S into its fold. In the summer of 1945, the Communist Gustav Husák stressed that even a religious believer can be a KSS member, and that “the little people . . . who have not committed any crimes can be good patriots and they have a place in our ranks, if they agree with our program.”⁹¹ In July 1945, at a joint meeting of the Central Committees of the KSČ and KSS, Friš mentioned that “a not inconsiderable portion” of the members of the KSS “were former HSL’S members or under the influence of that party for a whole six years. . . . Thus we run into remnants of the Populist ideology not only in the local communist organizations but even at the district and regional conferences.”⁹² It was not uncommon, in Slovakia as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, for collaborators in the crimes of the wartime regime to seek refuge in the Communist Party. Democratic Party officials from Bánovce nad Bebravou noted, in situation reports of October and November 1945, that war criminals were joining the KSS out of fear of the Communists, who were accepting them as a means to win the support of former Populists.⁹³

An important aspect of the KSS’s approach toward Catholics was its efforts to find sympathetic priests and laymen who could be co-opted by the

party. Toward this end, the Slavic Catholic Committee (SKV) was set up in Košice in late March 1945.⁹⁴ The SKV exhorted Catholics to support the Communist Party line with respect to “the eternal brotherhood of all Slavic nations,” and the Czechoslovak-Soviet alliance that resulted from and manifested that brotherhood.⁹⁵ Composed mainly of unknowns, the Communists hoped to use the SKV to attract, concentrate, and coordinate “progressive” Slovak Catholic clergy (i.e., priests who had Communist sympathies).⁹⁶ The most prominent such priest was Jozef Straka. Born in 1903, Straka was a priest in the Banská Bystrica diocese and an activist in the Slovak branch of the Czechoslovak People’s Party during the interwar period.⁹⁷ He clandestinely joined the Communists in 1941 and fought in a Partisan unit during the Slovak National Uprising.⁹⁸ After the war, he was active in the SKV, served as the head of the religious affairs department of the Commission of Education, and was the chief commentator on religious affairs in the Communist press. He also took part in the arrest of Vojtaššák in March. In the summer of 1945, Straka tried to interest the KSS in expanding its cooperation with progressive Catholic clergy. In two meetings with a party official, he stressed “the sincerely democratic thinking” of part of the Catholic priesthood and their desire to engage themselves in building up the new people’s democracy within the framework of the KSS. Straka argued that if the party was supportive of these progressive priests and provided them with opportunities for educational work among the Catholic clergy and population, it could enlist many of the younger generation of priests to its cause. He also proposed, in the name of the SKV, that he be granted permission to revive the weekly newspaper *Katolícke noviny*, in order to educate the Catholic masses in the spirit of people’s democracy and Slavic reciprocity. He proposed several priests for its editorial board, all cofounders of the SKV.⁹⁹

Reporting on his conversations with Straka, a Communist official stressed the urgency of the party taking action regarding cooperation with priests, given their great influence in Slovakia and given the fact that the DS had already taken some priests into its leadership at its recent party congress.¹⁰⁰ He urged the Central Committee to consider whether to appoint at least one Catholic priest as a KSS representative to the SNR and whether to direct local and district KSS bodies to name priests to the national committees in their locales. While these latter suggestions were apparently not accepted, the party did resolve on July 13 to group all progressive Catholic priests around the SKV and increase its activity, to put the St. Vojtech Society in progressive hands,

and to arrange that a Catholic weekly be set up as soon as possible, exclusively run by progressive Catholics.¹⁰¹ This latter resolution, in fact, had been approved already on June 25 by the presidium of the bipartisan SNR.¹⁰²

Alongside the SKV, the KSS sought other ways to attract Catholics through the officially sponsored Pan-Slavism. Each year, All-Slavic Day celebrations were held in early July, which included a rally near the ruins of Devín Castle outside Bratislava. Communist intentions with respect to Catholics are clear in a report on the preparation for the first celebration of 1945, given by Novomeský at the June 13 meeting of the KSS's Central Committee. According to Novomeský, the event was to stress the Slavic Cyrilo-Methodian tradition,¹⁰³ and "these celebrations must be placed on ideological foundations which are very close to the Catholic folk (*ľudová*) base of society, thus giving us ideological access to the wide Catholic masses."¹⁰⁴

An important aspect of the Communist effort to woo Catholics was the way Catholicism and the church were treated in Communist periodicals. *Pravda* and *Nové slovo* dealt with church related questions rather frequently, and alongside the expected defenses of nationalized education and attacks on collaborationist clergy, one can find dozens of articles aimed at winning Catholics over to the Communist camp. The Communist relationship to Catholicism was developed along at least four lines in the Communist press—(1) neither the KSS, nor the Soviet Union, nor Communism in general, are enemies of Christianity, but rather defenders of its freedom; (2) Christianity was a positive historical force, both for Slovakia and for Europe and the world; (3) most Slovak Catholics were good people, with nothing in common with the Tiso regime and its abuses; and (4) Tiso and his supporters were actually bad Catholics, harming the church and pursuing policies condemned by church leaders, including the pope, in the service of anti-Catholic Nazism.

In asserting the Christian friendly nature of Communism, the Communist press carried articles on religious freedom in the Soviet Union. *Pravda*, on November 11, 1945, praised the Soviet constitution for its recognition of the freedom to perform religious rites, which led religious believers to rally in appreciation behind the Soviet state in the war against Hitler. As evidence of the current positive situation for religious believers in the Soviet Union, the article cited remarks by the Moscow Patriarch on his recent visit to Prague, where he praised the freedom of confession current in the Soviet Union and the Soviet regime's willingness to give the church whatever help it needed.¹⁰⁵ On May 31, 1945, *Pravda* published an article by a Slovak Catholic priest

entitled “Red Army Returns Religious Freedom to Poland,” which argued that the Soviets saved Polish churches and cultural monuments from the vandalism of “neopagan” Nazism, and pointed out how Catholic organizations, seminaries, press, and the Catholic University in Lublin were all reactivated under Soviet occupation.¹⁰⁶ But Slovak Communists did not need to look abroad to find Christianity benefiting from the Red Army. In Slovakia herself, as KSS Secretary-General Štefan Baš'ovanský argued in a lead article in *Nové slovo*, the Red Army and Communists exposed the lie of fascist propaganda. Despite predictions that a Soviet occupation would mean the murder of priests, persecution of believers, desecration of religious symbols, and destruction of churches, Baš'ovanský argued that “after ten months there has not been a single case of antireligious violence in Slovakia.”¹⁰⁷

Communist writers also depicted Christianity in a rather positive light. Both Baš'ovanský and Straka made reference to the Cyrilo-Methodian tradition in Slovakia in an effort to orient Catholics to the Orthodox Slavic East rather than to their German-Hungarian neighbors.¹⁰⁸ Straka also praised the great work of “national construction” by prominent Slovak Catholics in the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁹ Husák, a former Catholic, not uncommonly made religious references in his speeches and articles. In his Christmas message of 1945 in *Nové slovo*, he quoted St. Luke, the Old Testament, St. Francis of Assisi, and Dante. In line with the Communist interpretation of the past, he praised the progressive character of early Christianity, with its concepts of love and justice, attacked “pagan values,” called for cooperation between Communists and Catholics, and branded opponents of progress as “false prophets.”¹¹⁰

In appealing to Catholics, Communist propaganda was careful not to identify the Tiso regime with Catholics or Catholicism. In fact, in a series of articles in December 1945, the Communist press went to pains to dissociate Tiso from Catholicism. Front-page lead headlines, with titles such as “The Protest of the Vatican Against Tiso’s Policy,” “The Vatican Against Tiso,” and “Tiso Betrayed Even Catholicism,” drove home the point. These articles, responding to the publication in *Katolícke noviny* of a Vatican protest on May 5, 1943, against Tiso’s deportation of the Jews, asserted that Tiso disregarded Vatican protests against his racist policies and the persecution and deportation of Jews because, for Tiso, “the authority of Hitler was higher than the authority of the head of the Catholic Church. His own reactionary aims took precedence over the principles of Catholicism.”¹¹¹ “Tiso sinned not only against the interests and future of the Slovak nation, but also against

the teachings of the Catholic Church,” despite warnings from the pope.¹¹² Slovakia’s bishops, some of whom were being branded by the Communists individually as collaborators, were collectively set in opposition to Tiso for their pastoral letter of March 21, 1943, which condemned the policy of the Slovak regime toward the Jews as a violation of general legal civil norms and the moral and religious law.¹¹³

In seeking to discredit Tiso in the eyes of Slovakia’s Catholics, Communist rhetoric also stressed the anti-Catholic and anti-Christian character of Nazism, which was labeled as “neopagan,” or even “satanic,” and pilloried as a persecutor of Catholics and Christians in general.¹¹⁴ In contrast to Tiso and his supporters were the good clergy, those who were imprisoned by the Germans for their ties to the Czechoslovak London government in exile, for helping the Slovak National Uprising and for being loyal to “Czech-Slovak reciprocity.”¹¹⁵ These priests, according to Straka, wanted a purge of the collaborationist clergy who supported the Tiso state.

While Communists sought ways to woo Catholics, they nevertheless were strongly committed to crippling Catholic social, political, and cultural influence. At the Central Committee meeting of July 13, 1945, KSS leaders debated party policy toward the Catholic Church. Coming in the wake of the church’s petition campaign in defense of parochial education and a controversy over the All-Slavic Days at Devín, the meeting dealt with “our standpoint toward the Catholic Church and its clergy in view of recent events.”¹¹⁶ Both Husák and Novomeský claimed the church was taking advantage of Communist goodwill in attempting to mobilize Slovakia’s Catholic population in defense of its political interests, which the Communists equated with those of the HSL’S and the Tiso regime.

Husák presented a program for dealing with the church, leading to a series of proposals being accepted by the committee. Among other things, the KSS resolved that police measures be taken against priests who zealously championed the Tiso regime, and that “politically compromised” Catholic clubs be dissolved. At the same time, efforts to nationalize and laicize the education system were to be carried out through to completion, with compromised clergy and members of religious orders removed from their posts if they did not pass the verification procedures implemented by the Communist led Commission of Education. The party and its press were authorized to launch a large-scale campaign calling for church lands to be parceled out as part of

the land reform, and the possibility of seizing other church property, such as Salesian athletic halls and fields, was to be examined.

The KSS was careful to couple its antichurch measures with increased efforts to unite progressive Catholics in the SKV, and to found a progressive Catholic weekly and get the St. Vojtech Society into the hands of Catholic clergy willing to collaborate with the Communists. At the same time, Communist efforts to both weaken the church and court Slovak Catholics were bound closely to and complicated by KSS relations with the DS. The KSS line in relations with the DS called for close cooperation.¹¹⁷ The KSS perceived that the DS was undergoing a “differentiation process,” with an intensifying conflict between a “progressive” wing open to cooperation with the KSS on the basis of the Košice Government Program and a “reactionary” wing that sought to harbor Tiso supporters and appeal to HSL’s veterans.¹¹⁸ Communist policy was to foster this division in the DS. At a meeting of the KSS Central Committee on July 14, 1945, Husák urged that “the KSS must concentrate on supporting the progressive wing of the DS, also from below.”¹¹⁹ He stressed the need to engage the Democrats, via the Slovak National Front, in a struggle against reaction in Slovakia, arguing that the campaign against reactionary clergy was a good opportunity for implementing this policy. A day earlier, Bašt’ovanský told a meeting of the KSS’s Broad Presidium that “it is necessary to enlist the DS and National Front to the full degree in a campaign against the Catholic clergy, in order that this must not be an action of the KSS alone.”¹²⁰ One result of this Communist policy was the proclamation of the Slovak National Front against the alleged misuse of religion issued in July. By making sure the DS got some of the credit, and blame, for public attacks against clerical activism, the Communists tried both to deepen rifts within the DS over the issue and to alienate Catholic voters from that party.

Communists also at this time put pressure on Father Augustín Pozdech, who as an opponent of the Tiso regime was named a dean for the church in Bratislava and was active in the DS. At a meeting of the SNR’s presidium on June 18, Husák complained that Pozdech was too slow in fulfilling his promise to purge Slovakia’s monasteries of dubious characters.¹²¹ Communists also expressed their displeasure when Pozdech, in advance of the All-Slavic Days in early July, sent a circular to Bratislava’s Catholic parishes, urging them not to attend the state sponsored celebrations and proposing a Catholic alternative instead. Pozdech was pressured into rescinding his plan and coming out

publicly in support of the All-Slavic Days.¹²² The KSS interpreted Pozdech's initial action as a Catholic attempt to use the festive days as an occasion for a political demonstration.¹²³

On July 8, the same day that the Catholic petition action against the nationalization of schools forced the religious question to the top of the Communist agenda, the DS was holding its party congress. Gauging the place religion played at the congress depends upon where one looks. A list of resolutions passed by the congress makes no mention of any church related issues and even omits religious freedom from the list of civil rights.¹²⁴ Likewise, a DS report entitled "Our First Congress" ignores religious policy questions altogether.¹²⁵ The document outlining the party's programmatic principles, however, lays out the important components of DS policy as it stood in the summer of 1945.¹²⁶ The party opposed discrimination on the basis of church or religious affiliation and hailed religious conviction as "one of the fundamental rights of a free man." It regarded religion's task as being to cultivate among the people "love and truth, a sense of moral excellence, and universal and eternal values." Religion thus understood was to be a component of national education. The educational system itself, however, was to be state-run, and the DS's programmatic principles contained a strong affirmation of the necessity of nationalizing education at all levels. Religious institutions were to have a claim to the state's protection and support, but "only to the degree that they actually carried out functions in accordance with genuine religion." The use of religious institutions for nonreligious, mainly political goals was to be prevented. Regarding the role of Christianity within the DS itself, the party stated the rather tepid and vague principle that "Western Christian culture was and remains the basis of our whole national awareness and development. We desire to and must maintain these bonds in the interest of the further development of our whole civilization."

More extensive and assertive was the speech given at the party congress by Ján Ursíny, DS chairman from its founding during the war and a deputy chairman of the Czechoslovak government, thus, along with newly elected chairman Jozef Lettrich, the highest ranking member of the DS. In a speech published by the DS as a brochure entitled "The Way of the DS," Ursíny commented, among other things, on the religious question.¹²⁷ Alongside the typical affirmations of freedom of confession and religious equality and homage to "Christian values," Ursíny called for the cooperation of all churches and the end to religious hostilities. He asserted that the DS "is not a party of

a single confession, but a Christian party, including adherents of all Christian churches, and not excluding non-Christians either.” Since the DS was predominately in the hands of Lutherans, this comment was surely aimed at Catholic voters. It was Ursíny’s comments on religion as it related to patriotism, politics, and education, however, that displayed his most serious outreach to Catholics. He stated, “We do not place religious interests into conflict with national interests, because they are not in opposition. As [nineteenth century Czechoslovak poet and national awakener Ján] Kollár wrote, nationality and religion are sisters. One cannot impede the other.” But, Ursíny went on to warn, “never can they be allowed to come into conflict with the interests of the state.” He praised clergy who, with but a few exceptions, supported and aided the Partisans during the Slovak National Uprising. Regarding the role of clergy in politics, Ursíny said that

We do not consider it as correct or proper that clergy be excluded from political life. This would lower them to a second-rate position. At the same time, political life cannot be directed by them alone. Nor in the future can it happen again that the Church becomes an instrument of politics and thereby damages itself. The recent past has shown us how the Church and nation can get on the wrong path.

Here we see Ursíny once again combining an olive branch to the churches with a warning that there are lines that must not be crossed.

Nowhere did Ursíny woo Catholics more forcefully than in his commentary on education. While the DS’s programmatic principles strongly affirmed the nationalization of education and spoke vaguely about the need for Christian values in schools, Ursíny framed his views within the context of a broader understanding of religious freedom. He wrote the following:

Religious freedom is not supposed to mean simply that a religious spirit is cultivated only in churches. It is supposed to mean that a religious spirit is maintained at school and everywhere a Christian demands it. While we do not want anyone to have a religious conviction forced upon them by someone via whatever sort of means, at the same time we do not want to deprive anyone of that which they consider as necessary for their soul. We have already seen such a religious freedom—it was like that at the beginning of our republic, after the First

World War: although we had religious freedom, many people made a mockery of high Christian values.

This jab at the religious policy of the First Republic, which had caused much bad blood among Slovaks and helped to fuel the rise of the HSL'S back in the early 1920s, was certainly designed to woo Catholic voters to the DS.

The coincidence of Ursíny's remarks with the Catholic petition campaign (they occurred on the same day), however, put the DS in a position whereby it had to pull back the hand it was offering to Catholics for a time and clasp hands with the KSS, who insisted on a joint proclamation against clerical abuse of politics. Nevertheless, it was becoming increasingly clear that the DS was serious about making a pitch to Catholics.

The DS's party congress elected Lettrich as the new party chairman. Like Ursíny, Lettrich recognized the vital importance of reaching out to Slovakia's as yet largely uncommitted population of Slovak Catholics. At a DS rally in mid-June, Lettrich addressed the question of relations between Catholics and Protestants. According to him, the important thing was not whether someone was a Catholic or Protestant, but whether they were a good person or a bad one. He expressed his party's desire that the churches help to consolidate, not divide, the nation and avoid superfluous conflicts.¹²⁸ At the meeting of the SNR's presidium on June 27, Lettrich mentioned Catholic opposition to the nationalization of dormitories and expressed a desire to discuss with Novomeský the implementation of that policy with the aim of carrying it out "more benevolently." What Lettrich had in mind was allowing the nationalized dormitories to remain denominationally specific in their student composition as a way to satisfy church circles.¹²⁹

Despite the hullabaloo over the Catholic petition action in July and the subsequent SNF proclamation against the misuse of religion, the DS took some significant steps in the summer of 1945 aimed at improving its relations with the Catholic Church and winning over Catholic voters. In July, Lettrich met with the lawyer of interned bishop Vojtaššák, Ľudovít Obtulovič, to discuss Vojtaššák's release.¹³⁰ In August, the DS proposed as representatives to the Provisional National Assembly in Prague two prominent Slovak Catholics, Canon Andrej Cvinček, a former functionary of the Czechoslovak People's Party in Slovakia, and Jozef Kempný, a representative of the young Slovak intelligentsia.¹³¹

The Communists had their own ideas about what to do about the large

mass of Slovaks who were not sympathetic to Communism but at the same time leery of the Protestant dominated DS. Everyone in Slovak politics was aware that in the hands of these noncommitted Catholic voters, who Husák estimated at roughly 33 percent of Slovakia's voters and some placed as high as 55 percent, hung the balance of the first parliamentary elections.¹³² The KSS took pains to prevent the DS from presenting itself as more Catholic friendly. We have already mentioned Communist pressure to get the DS to join with it in the SNF proclamation in July. In August, when the DS presented its nominations for Slovakia's representatives to the Provisional National Assembly, the Communists objected to a number of the proposed names but not to the Catholics Cvinček and Kempný.¹³³ They also agreed to the release of Vojtaššák from internment, which led to his eventual return to his diocese in Spiš on November 30.¹³⁴ Finally, the Communists agreed to the reissuing of *Katolícke noviny* as a weekly, the first issue of which appeared on September 9, 1945.

The case of *Katolícke noviny* is quite telling. On June 25, the SNR authorized the Commission of the Interior to give permission for the establishment of a Catholic weekly, if a group of "progressive Catholic priests" is found and requests such a periodical.¹³⁵ The Communists reiterated the same policy at their party presidium meeting of July 13.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, the Catholic weekly that was allowed to emerge in September 1945 was not run by clergy the Communists would regard as "progressive." Prominent among the editors of *Katolícke noviny* were Pavol Čarnogurský, Rudolf Čavojský, and Jur Kozamatejov, men who, while hardly reactionary were quite unlike Straka in that they were willing to defend what they regarded as Catholic interests in the face of political and administrative pressure. Already by early October the KSS secretariat complained that these men, "collaborators who belong before the National Court," should be replaced by Straka and other "democratic priests," and that the newspaper should be published by the Slavic Catholic Committee.¹³⁷ Communists, though they would threaten and harass *Katolícke noviny* regularly, never achieved these objectives until they seized power in Czechoslovakia in February 1948 and were free to alter all publishing in accordance with their wishes. The fact that the KSS allowed a Catholic periodical to emerge outside its control is most likely explicable as a way to keep Catholics from being drawn into the Democratic camp. A similar concession, dating from approximately the same time, was the establishment of the Central Catholic Chancellery (ÚKK),¹³⁸ a church body founded to coor-

dinate Catholic activity throughout Slovakia.¹³⁹ Though these concessions to the Catholic Church were connected with the rivalry between the DS and the KSS for the support of noncommitted Catholics, the bishops helped pave the way when, on August 22, they issued a ban on political activity by priests and proclaimed their positive attitude toward the Czechoslovak Republic.¹⁴⁰

The fall of 1945 saw a continuation of the rivalry between Slovakia's two political parties for the Catholic vote. Catholics themselves, for the most part, remained aloof. Some, like Pozdech, were active in the DS, and others, like Straka, collaborated with the KSS. Most, however, took a "wait-and-see" attitude.¹⁴¹ Despite the recent relaxation of tensions, the regime and the Catholic Church remained in fundamental conflict over issues such as education. Many Catholics continued to regard themselves as people without representation, forced to choose between an atheistic and a Lutheran party.

Among those Catholics who were not taking sides, some other options existed. First, there was the Slovak underground. Rather than a coordinated, centralized movement, the Slovak underground consisted of a hash of individuals and small groups who began displaying their hostility to Czechoslovakia's people's democratic regime and sympathy for Slovak independence and the Tiso regime through various illegal or semilegal means—publishing and distributing leaflets and broadsheets, posting provocative slogans in public view, occasionally engaging in petition actions, demonstrations, and acts of violence and vandalism.¹⁴² Generally, localized and acting on their own without directives, these individuals and groups were mainly composed of young Catholics, in particular college students or recent graduates.¹⁴³ A typical example was the group led by Jozef Bačkor, a college student and soccer star in Bratislava. In the summer of 1945, he and some friends formed a secret group aimed at infiltrating the state administration in preparation for the renewal of an independent Slovakia. The group was exposed in November 1945 and its members arrested.¹⁴⁴ While underground activists often took part in Catholic initiatives such as the petition drive in defense of parochial education, and sometimes had ties with local priests, they did not receive the backing of the Catholic bishops or the church as a whole, which was careful after the war to stress its loyalty to the new regime.¹⁴⁵

One aspect of the underground that greatly concerned Czechoslovakia's authorities were the links, real or imagined, that some members of the underground had with the Slovak political emigration, in particular with the circle around Ferdinand Ďurčanský in Rome.¹⁴⁶ Regarding the London-based

Slovak émigrés as too cautious, Ďurčanský in January 1946 founded a rival center in Rome, the Slovak Action Committee (SAV).¹⁴⁷ Based in a Roman monastery, he placed his hopes in a future war between the United States and the Soviet Union that he believed could lead to a resurrection of the Slovak Republic. The SAV issued a number of memoranda arguing for the legal continuity of the Slovak state, including three sent to the peace conference in Paris. Ďurčanský also transmitted illegal radio broadcasts and sent agents to Slovakia, with meager success, with the aim of establishing ties with Slovakia's homegrown resistance. Though his influence in Slovakia was marginal, he was for the authorities, as well as for the Communists, the *bête noire* whom members of the underground were suspected of serving.¹⁴⁸

While the underground was virulently anti-Communist and anti-Soviet, there also existed an option for those Catholics who were not averse to cooperation with Communists and the Soviet Union. This was the group around the Croat émigré priest, Tomislav Kolakovič. Kolakovič left Croatia in 1943 at age thirty-seven on account of his pro-Russian and antifascist views. He soon developed a following in Slovakia, among clergy, intellectuals, and especially university students. His core disciples were known collectively as the "Family." Kolakovič combined Russophilism with a strong desire for social justice. During the war he participated in the Slovak National Uprising and hid in the forests with Partisans. After the war, he visited the Soviet Union, hoping to meet with Stalin and get permission to evangelize Russia. Not permitted access to Stalin, he did meet with some Soviet officials and claims to have baptized several Soviet security officers that he encountered during his travels.¹⁴⁹ Internationally, Kolakovič favored a rapprochement between the Vatican and the Soviet Union, advocated a Czechoslovak foreign policy that was equally aloof from East and West and harbored hopes that Russia would experience a Christian revival thanks to what he perceived, incorrectly, as a greater openness on the part of the Soviets after World War II. Kolakovič combined Pan-Slavism, admiration for the Eastern Orthodox Church, and social justice to form a worldview that placed great hopes in Russia while not ignoring its past brutality and shortcomings. In the tradition of papal social teaching and the teachings of Catholic philosophers such as Jacques Maritain, he saw the need for Catholics to engage more zealously in social justice issues, both because of the demands of the Gospel and as a way to block Communist inroads among the lower classes.¹⁵⁰ At the same time, he was open to cooperation with Communists on social questions. In terms of Slovakia's domestic

politics, Kolakovič and his followers kept aloof from both political parties but were more leery of the DS than of the KSS. They regarded the DS as a party of Protestant sectarians, following anti-Catholic policies, especially in the realm of education. They also saw the DS as characterized by “bourgeois capitalism,” which ran counter to Catholic social reformist goals, and as politically reliant on the United States, which would only serve to antagonize the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia’s Communists. While Catholic cooperation with the DS could scare the Soviet Union and have dire consequences for the church should Czechoslovakia fall into the Soviet sphere, cooperation with the KSS would help the church find a *modus vivendi* should Slovakia become Communist dominated.

Thus, Kolakovič’s vision consisted of a paradoxical mix of pessimistic pragmatism (i.e., the need for Catholics to prepare for a future in a Communist dominated bloc) and fantastical hopes (of converting Russia to Christianity). Its appeal was to Catholics who were leery of the West and of capitalism, who wanted to more energetically match the Communists in work for social reform, and whose Russophilia outweighed any reservations about the Soviet Union and its sinister past. Unlike Straka, however, Kolakovič never equated Catholic interests with those of the KSS. In early 1946, several students with ties to him were arrested as members of underground networks, which led to Kolakovič’s arrest, several months of being investigated while in detention, and eventual release in July 1946, after which he emigrated to Belgium.¹⁵¹

Another option for Catholics was legal passive resistance. Simply waiting for their bishops to convey to the authorities Catholic dissatisfaction with the new regime and desire for redress of their grievances was not enough for many Catholics. In December 1945, large numbers of them, especially students, began wearing small metal crosses, generally affixed to their lapels.¹⁵² While far less dangerous than involvement in the underground, the so-called Cross Action drew immediate attacks from the Communists. The KSS took the Cross Action very seriously, regarding it as a blatant political provocation. The Communist press attacked the action as the work of antistate elements, namely supporters of the wartime regime trying to hide behind Christian symbols.¹⁵³ From its very beginning, the party tried to find out who was wearing the crosses, where they came from, and how they got them.¹⁵⁴ By January, Communist run commissions were taking administrative measures against the action. The Commission of Education, for example, sent a circular to the directors of every school in Slovakia, asking them to identify wearers of cross-

es, investigate how they got them and why they were wearing them, and take measures to ban their display.¹⁵⁵ Communist rhetoric encouraged violence. For example, after a rally of Partisan organizations in late January in Banská Bystrica, cross-wearing Catholics were harassed and assaulted on the street, their crosses forcibly removed.¹⁵⁶ *Hlas oslobodených*, the organ of the Communist dominated Union of Anti-fascist Political Prisoners in Slovakia, urged in early March that it was time to put the cross-wearers in their place.¹⁵⁷ *Katolícke noviny* rallied to the defense of the cross-wearers. While acknowledging that there may be cases of people wearing crosses for antistate reasons, the newspaper interpreted the action as a popular expression of people's Catholic faith and their disapproval of the anti-Catholic measures taken by the state since it came to power in spring 1945.¹⁵⁸ It also pointed out that these were the same crosses worn in conjunction with the Statewide Congress of Catholics of the Czechoslovak Republic held in Prague in 1935. On February 12, the Commission of Education issued a ban on the wearing of any sort of insignia at high schools, trade schools, and teachers training schools, except for the symbol of the Czechoslovak Republic and ribbons in the national colors.¹⁵⁹

Besides the cross, another rallying point for Slovak Catholics was the person of Jozef Tiso. Catholic actions on Tiso's behalf ran the gamut from peaceful interventions by the bishops with the state authorities to acts of vandalism. The KSS was extremely concerned about Tiso, and at the meeting of its Central Committee on November 26, 1945, party leaders discussed Tiso and his upcoming trial in great detail.¹⁶⁰ Friš gave the main report, laying out the party's goals and the means toward achieving them. The trial was to be used not only against Tiso, but also against the Populist movement, Slovak separatism, and clericalism. It was to be combined with a purge of Slovak public life. The KSS was to make an effort to isolate Tiso from Catholicism by stressing his betrayal of Catholic Poland and his alliance with Nazis, racists, and neopagans, all condemned by the Vatican, and by engaging Catholic clergy in the anti-Tiso campaigns.¹⁶¹

The party planned and began implementing a multifaceted and multi-layered propaganda campaign, involving newspapers, radio broadcasts, film presentations, photographic exhibits, posters, and leaflets. Communist controlled organizations, including Partisan and wartime resistance organizations, were to organize rallies across Slovakia, at which participants would call for Tiso's execution. Collections for the widows and orphans of fallen Partisans were linked with the anti-Tiso campaign. Friš recognized that the

trial had far-reaching political significance, especially with respect to Slovak Catholicism, and proposed that the SNR appeal to the Slovak bishops to take a clear position regarding Tiso and other priests suspected of war crimes. He also stressed the importance of getting the DS involved in the anti-Tiso campaign, though he recognized some serious obstacles to this—the DS’s desire to attract the former Populist vote and the fact that some of the DS’s functionaries, as Agrarians, had cooperated with Tiso when Slovakia got autonomy in October 1938.¹⁶²

At the time the Communists were formalizing and launching their anti-Tiso propaganda campaign there were sporadic manifestations of pro-Tiso sympathy among the Slovak population. These included the distribution of illegal leaflets protesting Tiso’s arrest and imprisonment, local petitions calling for his release and a referendum on his guilt or innocence, applause when Tiso appeared on newsreel footage before movies, the smashing of windows at the Czechoslovak Foreign Information Office where a photograph of Tiso in chains was displayed, and pro-Tiso shouts at rallies.¹⁶³ The KSS and the Slovak police looked upon these localized, sporadic incidents with great concern.

Tiso also found some support in more official places. On January 8, 1946, Kmet’ko and five other Slovak bishops wrote a letter on Tiso’s behalf to the presidium of the SNR.¹⁶⁴ The bishops justified their intervention both on the grounds that Tiso was a priest and that his case would have “far-reaching influence on the opinion and behavior of parts of the Slovak nation towards the ČSR and its representatives.”¹⁶⁵ They went on to make the following case. First, they contended that Tiso was known as a zealous priest who lived a blameless life, never personally enriching himself from his career. Second, they argued that in public life he strove for the good of the whole and that the majority of Slovaks are convinced that his intentions were the best. Third, they criticized the one-sided judging of Tiso in the Slovak media at the time. Rather, his accomplishments needed to be taken into account along with his mistakes, and it was the bishops’ belief that the former outweighed the latter. Furthermore, Tiso had to be evaluated in accordance with the context within which he operated. The bishops pointed out that the events connected with the Žilina Agreement, where Slovaks demanded and received autonomy on October 6, 1938, from a Prague leadership reeling from the trauma of the Munich Agreement, was not the work of Tiso and the Populists alone, but “of almost all Slovak political parties.” (The bishops left unsaid, but it is clear from the context, that this included some DS leaders now in the postwar leadership

of Slovakia.) They also pointed out that Slovakia's declaration of independence of March 14, 1939, which was seen as Tiso's ultimate act of betrayal of the republic, was, as documents released after the war showed, a result of an impending threat from Hungary. Regarding the notorious anti-Semitic decrees of the Slovak state, the bishops argued that Tiso nearly resigned in protest against them and worked to moderate them and to prevent a greater evil. Finally, the bishops asserted that efforts to evoke hatred of Tiso were socially divisive, precisely at a time when national unity was needed for the daunting task of postwar reconstruction facing Slovaks. In conclusion, they urged that Tiso's case be solved "in a tactful way and not with ruthless rigidity."

Thus, Slovak Catholics, in the fall and winter of 1945–46, pursued a number of options that were independent of or went beyond the circumscribed party politics of postwar Slovakia. Some Catholic intellectuals and activists, however, began to seek a place for Catholics in those politics by supporting the creation of a Catholic party. They were joined, in October 1945, by a number of disgruntled Catholics from the DS. During that month, sixteen Catholic parliamentary representatives from the DS met at Kempný's office to discuss secession from the DS and the formation of a new party.¹⁶⁶ They were disaffected because they held disproportionately fewer seats among the DS contingent in Parliament than they felt they deserved, because they had relatively little influence in the DS and because they did not get along with the Protestant parliamentarians in their party.¹⁶⁷ Of the sixteen representatives in attendance, all but two voted to create a new Christian Republican Party (KRS).¹⁶⁸

When it came to determining the character of that party, however, its founders were divided. While most could agree that it should be a progressive party in its view of political and socioeconomic life, there were differences regarding the party's relations to the question of Slovak nationalism and autonomy.¹⁶⁹ Some wanted to unite the party with the efforts of Vavro Šrobár to found a party in Slovakia, efforts which had the backing of President Beneš.¹⁷⁰ Most, however, realized that Šrobár, a lapsed Catholic with a well-justified reputation as a staunch supporter of a centralized Czechoslovakia and opponent of a distinct Slovak national identity, would be unable to generate more than a minimal following in Slovakia. Others, namely Kornel Filo and Ján Ševčík, wanted a party that stressed the connection with the Czechs but which was manifestly Catholic and not connected with Šrobár. Kempný, and Miloš Bugár, a former secretary of the Czechoslovak People's Party in Slova-

nia, favored a party that stressed Slovak nationalism and had a modern character similar to the Christian Democratic parties then emerging in Western Europe. This view resonated with that of many members of the young Slovak Catholic intelligentsia outside the DS, whose leader, Čarnogurský, had been pursuing the idea of a Catholic party already since at least July.¹⁷¹ In early December, the circle of activists around Čarnogurský held a joint meeting at the offices of *Katolícke noviny* with the Catholic secessionist group from the DS and other Catholic intellectuals, where they came to agreement on key questions regarding programmatic and personnel concerns of the new party.¹⁷²

The Communists and Democrats responded very differently to Catholic attempts to establish a new political party. For the Communists, this new development was seen as an opportunity to lure voters away from the DS and divide the large non-Communist vote in Slovakia. A second non-Communist party could thereby enable the KSS to win a plurality. The idea of using a third political party as a means to split the DS was on the minds of some Communists already in the springtime, and they broached it at a joint meeting of the central committees of the KSČ and KSS on July 17–18, 1945.¹⁷³ New KSS chairman Viliam Široký became the prime advocate of this tactic, arguing that a third party “will ease the situation in the National Front; discussion will not be between two, but between three parties; at times, we can rely on the right, at other times on the left party.”¹⁷⁴ This, of course, presupposed that the third party would indeed be more leftist than the DS. Some Communist leaders feared, rather, that a Catholic party in Slovakia would be clerical and reactionary, concentrating and energizing those forces who formerly supported the HSL'S.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the KSS not only took steps in late summer of 1945 to improve its relations with the church and with certain Catholic intellectuals, but it began to encourage Catholics in the DS to form their own party. According to Kempný, Široký even visited him at his office to encourage him to submit a proposal for a new party to the Slovak National Front.¹⁷⁶ Čarnogurský likewise notes that, around the same time, a group of Communists from Nitra visited Bishop Kmeťko's residence in order to convey their approval of a Catholic party.¹⁷⁷

The DS had even greater reason to fear a Catholic party than the Communists had for placing hopes in it. First, it would entail a rift in the DS and mean the secession of the Catholic faction, effectively undermining Democratic attempts to draw Catholics into their fold. Second, it would present a formidable new rival for the DS in the upcoming election. Catholics who

may have voted for the DS as the lesser evil, out of fear of Communism, would now have a potentially more attractive alternative. Nor was the possible reinvigorating of the Populist current in Slovak political life something many Democrats would welcome.

The DS had its work cut out for it in the winter of 1945–46. The party needed to thwart the establishment of a Catholic party and thereby prevent a split in its own ranks. But simply forestalling the establishment of a Catholic party would not be enough. At the time, there were indications that many Catholics might vote for neither Communists nor Democrats in the upcoming parliamentary elections, but rather turn in blank ballots (so-called *biele lístky*). A DS activist in the region around Topolčany reported that former Populists were urging this move, which was supported by the local Catholic clergy. Democrats needed to counter this campaign, as it would serve to strengthen the KSS by keeping the non-Communist forces in Slovakia united. With elections slated for spring 1946, the DS urgently needed to woo Catholic voters.¹⁷⁸

During the winter of 1945–46, the DS energetically sought to reach out to Catholics through articles in its periodical press. Democratic writers placed increasing stress on the party's Christian worldview,¹⁷⁹ and *Čas* and *Nové prúdy* went to pains to deny that the DS was anti-Catholic. Past Catholic contributions to the Slovak national cause, and past cooperation between Catholics and Protestants in Slovakia, were praised.¹⁸⁰ DS speakers and writers, such as the Catholic priest Jozef Lukačovič, denied Communist accusations that the DS was a Lutheran party.¹⁸¹ Like the KSS, the Democrats made a rhetorical distinction between those Populists who betrayed Czechoslovakia, and the Catholic and even HSL'S rank and file. Lukačovič warned against confusing political Catholicism with religious Catholicism.¹⁸² An article in *Nové prúdy* in February denied that the Catholic people and clergy were to blame for problems in relations between Czechs and Slovaks in the interwar period. It went on to argue that Slovak Catholics were against Slovak independence and wanted a resurrection of the Czechoslovak Republic. It pointed out that many Catholics fought in the Slovak National Uprising, including predominantly Catholic Slovak units which helped liberate parts of the Czech lands. The author asserted that it was individuals seeking personal glory and profit, not Slovak Catholicism, that betrayed Czechoslovakia.¹⁸³

While denying Catholic charges of repression of Catholicism and persecution of the Catholic Church, Democratic writers acknowledged and

condemned certain excesses in government policy against Catholics. These included an overreaction to the petition action of the summer of 1945 (an overreaction that DS leaders at the time themselves took part in), the removal of crosses from schools, and the codes against clerical dress by teachers, which served to exclude from the teaching profession teachers from religious orders.¹⁸⁴ DS periodicals were sure to point out all the party had allegedly done, and was planning to do, to further the interests of Slovak Catholics. DS representatives in the SNR were given credit for championing church-run dormitories, schools run by religious orders, and higher state salaries for clergy.¹⁸⁵ An article in *Nové prúdy* stated, “The leadership of the DS is not only ready, but considers it as its obligation to satisfy the claims of the Slovak Catholic majority for seats in the SNR and National Assembly, which would finally stop the gossip about it being a Lutheran party. It has decided to respect the religious divisions in drawing up its candidate lists and give to each what belongs to him.”¹⁸⁶

Evidence of a reinvigorated DS committed to attracting Catholics was seen in the party’s internal publications and correspondence. *Zápisník*, the newsletter of the DS secretariat, wrote in its February 25, 1946, issue that “finding peace between Catholics and Lutherans is one of our primary goals. . . . To a genuine Democrat it is all the same whether a Catholic or a Lutheran stands at the head of his district or local organization; we want and require only that he be capable and morally, politically, and nationally spotless.”¹⁸⁷ Democratic Party officials were instructed to encourage good relations between Lutherans and Catholics, and not to blame Catholics for the destruction of the First Czechoslovak Republic. *Zápisník* also urged local party secretaries to be sensitive to the local context in which they were operating, including its religious composition.¹⁸⁸ The regional secretary in Nitra, for example, on February 14 instructed party secretaries in his district to make sure that party functionaries were chosen above all from the ranks of Catholics.¹⁸⁹ The DS also took care not to condemn the wearing of crosses that swept Slovakia at the turn of 1946.¹⁹⁰

Another way the DS sought to attract Catholics was by distinguishing itself from the Communists on the crucial question of religious education. Both the KSS and the DS came out officially against parochial schools right from the beginning. Yet neither party advocated the sort of radical secularization of public education to which, for example, many Americans have been accustomed in the latter part of the twentieth century. The KSS, so as not to

alienate religious believers who made up the vast majority of Slovaks, favored students taking religious instruction classes at school, with specific teachers for each confession. In their pitch to Catholics in early 1946, some Democrats went much farther, proposing religious education across the curriculum—that is, education permeated by a Christian worldview.¹⁹¹

The tug-of-war between Democrats and Communists over the issue of a Catholic party can be seen in several developments from late winter of 1946. On January 9, *Pravda* reported that the KSS's Broad Presidium at its recent meeting in Košice had announced that it had no objection to a change in the party political structure in Slovakia that would contribute "to a consolidation of the progressive and democratic forces."¹⁹² In the wake of this apparent Communist endorsement of a Catholic party, Lettrich met with high church officials to discuss the possibility of meeting Catholic demands within the framework of the DS.¹⁹³ At the same time, Rudolf Fraštický, a leading Democrat and commissioner of Food and Supply, met with Čarnogurský and other Catholic intellectuals and urged them to seek their goals within the DS and negotiate with Lettrich and Ursíny.¹⁹⁴ In mid-February, Lettrich, at a working conference of the DS in Žilina, gave a report in which he rejected the idea of a Catholic party on the grounds that sooner or later such a party would be taken over by reactionary and antistate forces, "the heirs of fascisized clericalism," as he put it.¹⁹⁵ *Pravda* responded by defending those Catholic circles in the DS that supported a Catholic party, arguing that the Catholic opposition in the DS "originated out of dissatisfaction with the reactionary policy of the leadership of the DS."¹⁹⁶ Then, on March 11, the DS's executive committee resolved to replace its two commissioners who were involved in organizing the new party, Filo and Ševčík. The KSS came to the defense of these dissident Democrats, and by blocking acceptance of the DS move in the SNF and attaching unacceptable conditions to it, enabled Filo and Ševčík to remain in their posts.¹⁹⁷

Meanwhile, plans to establish a Catholic party were proceeding apace. In early January, its organizers met with a delegation of church dignitaries, led by Archbishop Kmet'ko, where they discussed issues of interest to the church, especially education.¹⁹⁸ The bishops had no objection to the formation of a Catholic party. Other obstacles, however, presented themselves. Any changes in the political party structure in Slovakia needed the approval of the Slovak National Front, which was composed of representatives from the DS and KSS.¹⁹⁹ While the DS was hostile to the idea of a Catholic party, even the

KSS had certain qualms. As Barnovský writes, the Communists “wanted the new party to emerge at the expense of the DS and be ‘more democratic’ than the DS, to rouse Catholics but not be a new Catholic, confessional form of the HSL’S, to be a mass party of influence but not more influential than the KSS, to be an independent party, but at the same time obedient.”²⁰⁰ Beneš, at first favorably inclined to a Catholic party in Slovakia, became cool to the idea after it became clear that the party was unlikely to end up in the hands of Šrobár and his supporters. On March 5, the KRS submitted its request to the SNR for recognition. As justification for the new party, the KRS’s organizers pointed to the fact that there were four parties in the Czech lands but only two in Slovakia, and that a party was needed for those citizens of Christian, democratic, and republican sentiments who had not found a place in the existing parties.²⁰¹ The party’s program stressed that it was for Slovak justice, Christian justice, and social justice.²⁰² Its rather vague program made no mention of Catholicism specifically, nor of any particular policies that the party advocated. Basically, the KRS shared the support for land reform and nationalization of big industry and finance common to all of Czechoslovakia’s postwar parties. It stressed cooperation of all Christian churches and condemned confessional intolerance. It stressed Christian education and wanted schools to educate in a Slovak and Christian spirit.²⁰³ On March 9, the Central Committee of the KSS resolved to meet with the organizers of the new party to discuss Communist objections to its name and to clarify its programmatic points.²⁰⁴ On March 13, the presidium of the Slovak National Front met and resolved to accept the party, provided that it met two conditions. The first was that the party change its name, dropping the words “Christian” (too divisive) and “Republican” (too reminiscent of the banned Agrarian party, whose official name was the Republican Party of Agriculturalists and Small Peasants). The second was that the new party sign the proclamation of the Slovak National Front, in which the KSS and DS committed themselves to the main principles of the Košice government program. Significantly, these included the condemnation of Tiso and those active in his regime, and the nationalization of schools and dormitories. The KRS had surely hoped to remain silent or ambiguous about these issues, which, if successful, would have distanced them from positions of the DS that were unpopular with many Slovak Catholics. The National Front, however, thwarted this possibility by its insistence that the new party sign on to its proclamation.²⁰⁵

On March 20, Cvinček wrote to the Slovak National Front on behalf of

the new party.²⁰⁶ He defended the original and proposed name, arguing that the term “Christian” reflected the party’s commitment to Christian principles, was nonconfessional, and conflicted in no way with any SNF resolutions. He defended the term “republican” as in no way an attempt to claim the legacy of the Republican Party, but rather as a way to affirm his party’s commitment to the democratic republican form of the state. Cvinček hoped that the SNF would now accept the KRS, but if not, he proposed the alternate name of Party of Freedom (*Strana slobody*). He concluded by agreeing to sign on to the SNF proclamation.

Despite Cvinček’s assurances, the organizers of the new party were in fact divided over whether to accept the conditions for permission to operate. A number of them had qualms about the conditions and doubts about the potential success of the new party,²⁰⁷ and, while willing to go to Prague for the SNF meeting scheduled for March 27 to discuss the matter, still kept the option of a deal with the DS on the table. When this SNF meeting was put off until early April owing to a scheduling conflict with the Czechoslovak Communist Party Congress, several leading Catholics perceived a delaying tactic aimed at depriving the new party of sufficient time to prepare for the spring parliamentary elections. Consequently, Cvinček authorized Kempný and Bugár to draft an agreement between the Catholics and the DS, which they did at the Slavia Café in Prague on March 27. That evening, the draft was presented to Ursíny, and the next day DS and Catholic representatives met to finalize the agreement, which was signed on March 31 at Lettrich’s apartment in Bratislava as an inner-party document. Because it was not ratified until the DS’s presidium met on April 5, and the public informed of it only on April 7, it became known as the April Agreement.²⁰⁸

The April Agreement read like a Catholic wish list. The DS’s presidium was reconstructed to include Cvinček, Kempný, Bugár, Filo, and another Catholic activist, Emanuel Böhm. Cvinček became a deputy chairman of the party, and two new top administrative posts were created for Kempný and Bugár—general secretary for economic affairs and general secretary for organizational affairs, respectively. It was agreed that Catholics would be represented in all party organs as well as economic and financial enterprises connected with the party at a 7:3 ratio with Protestants. Representation on ballots for parliament and the SNR was to be allotted at a 2:1 Catholic to Protestant ratio, and the newspaper *Demokratické hlasy* was to be transformed into a daily catering to Catholics. Potentially having the most far-reaching electoral

appeal was one of the few stipulations that dealt not with personnel but with policy. Article I-3 stated, "As far as education, both in school and out, is concerned, the party leadership holds the view that the party's line should agree with the views of the Christian churches, above all the Catholic Church, and that the DS should pursue this position, if necessary, with regard to the present political situation."²⁰⁹ Thus, the DS appeared to be committing itself to making the Catholic Church's views on education its own, albeit within the constraints of the current political situation.

The April Agreement marked the culmination of the opening period of Slovakia's postwar political realignment. The Communists saw their efforts to court Catholics pay few dividends, and now had to face the fact that Slovakia's largest potential voting bloc was allying with their sole political rival. If Democrats could convince Slovakia's Catholics to vote for them, a smashing electoral victory was on the horizon. However, the April Agreement threatened to bring disadvantages and dangers to the DS along with benefits. The Catholic Church, for its part, now had a major Slovak political party taking up its cause, but under circumstances that would expose it to some of the same dangers and disadvantages that would plague the DS.