



<p><b>Annual meeting Slovak Studies Association Forum Room Thursday 1-3PM</b></p>
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*From the Editor* This month, thanks to the sustained efforts of a number of people, the annual meeting of the AAASS will be highlighted with a reception at the Slovak Embassy. The event is co-sponsored by a number of organizations, but the most important special recognition should go to Helen Fedor, who has been tirelessly planning and interfacing and communicating to make this occasion happen. As many long-time members know, this opportunity to make contact with the diplomatic mission has been often desired, but complicated to achieve, and everyone who has contributed to the actuation of the event is to be congratulated.

Although the RSVP deadline for the reception has passed, you might still contact Helen to find out if there's room for you! The newsletter includes excerpts from her original letter, which is posted on the SSA website, but reproduced here because, among other things, it includes directions to the event.

Please notice that the end of the newsletter contains an information sheet to fill out for the *membership directory*. It is a longstanding policy not to make the directory available to non-members, or to post it electronically. However, it may be useful for members to keep track of those who may share their research interests. Therefore, the membership directory will be mailed in hard copy only, although you may of course submit updated information electronically.

As newsletter editor, I would welcome two things. First, the electronic version of the newsletter facilitates pictorial material, hyperlinks to web sites, etc. So by all means, if

you wish to provide web links to a recent conference paper, or have photographs from your Slovak travels, or other such contributions, please send them along to me. Second, if there is another member of the SSA who would like to co-edit with me, for example a more junior member who would like to become better acquainted with the membership, please let me know.

Remember that announcements can be posted on the SSA website

<http://www.as.uky.edu/ssa/directory.htm>

You can also join the SSA listserv (information on how to do so is reproduced here from the SSA website: The Slovak Studies Association maintains an electronic discussion list for its members called (appropriately) 'ssa'. An electronic discussion list is an electronic service that automatically forwards messages submitted by individual listmembers to everyone who subscribes to the list. The 'ssa' list is intended to facilitate professional communication among SSA members, and while anyone in the world can subscribe to the list to receive the messages that are submitted, only SSA members can actually submit messages to the list. If you would like to participate in the 'ssa' discussion list, follow these [easy instructions](#). If you are unfamiliar with the workings of an electronic discussion list, or if you would like further information concerning specifically the 'ssa' discussion list, contact Mark Lauersdorf, SSA Webmaster, by e-mail at: [lauersdorf@uky.edu](mailto:lauersdorf@uky.edu), or by regular mail at: Department of Modern and Classical Languages; 1055 Patterson Office Tower; University of Kentucky; Lexington, Kentucky 40506-0027, USA.

***In this issue:***

This issue contains two contributions from members. One is the annual contribution by the Rick Steves of the Slovak Studies Association, M. Mark Stolarik, recounting his two-week sojourn across Slovakia. The second is a unique insight—Jan Simko's personal appreciation of the evolution of eighty years of English language study in Slovakia.

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**Reception at the Slovak Embassy  
In conjunction with the AAASS Annual Convention in Washington  
DC**

***Thursday 16 November 2006 7-9PM***



Dear Colleagues and Friends,

The Slovak American Society of Washington and the National Capital Chapter of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society, along with the Slovak Studies Association and the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, invite their members and the members of the AAASS to a reception at the Embassy of the Republic of Slovakia to celebrate scholarship in Slovak studies and Carpatho-Rusyn studies, and to acknowledge Slovakia as a common homeland for Slovaks and for many Rusyns. The reception will run from 7:00-9:00 p.m. on Thursday, November 16. It will feature Slovak and Rusyn ethnic foods and entertainment, and will provide a venue for socializing. Please RSVP to Helen Fedor at [helenfedor@hotmail.com](mailto:helenfedor@hotmail.com).

The Omni Shoreham is located at 2500 Calvert Street, NW (at Connecticut Ave.), not far from the Slovak Embassy, which is located at 3523 International Court NW (202-237-1054). A group will leave from the hotel lobby promptly at 6:30 p.m. to travel to the embassy via the Metro. For those traveling on their own, here are directions: From the hotel, walk a short distance to the Woodley Park-Zoo/Adams Morgan Metro station at the intersection of Connecticut Ave and 24th St. Catch a train going in the direction of Shady Grove and travel two stops, getting off at the Van Ness/UDC station. (The one-way fare will be \$1.35.) Take the stairs exiting the station on the west side of Connecticut Ave. At the top of the stairs, make a U-turn back and head toward Van Ness Ave. Turn right onto Van Ness, walk about 500 yards, and turn right onto International Court. Turn right again where the street forks (by the Egyptian Embassy). This is about a 15-minute walk. For a somewhat busy map (the stairs exiting the Metro are the white arrows in black boxes), go to the following web site:

[http://www.stationmasters.com/System\\_Map/VANESUDC/vanesudc.html](http://www.stationmasters.com/System_Map/VANESUDC/vanesudc.html). The Slovak Embassy is marked, and is located between the Austrian and Egyptian embassies.

We look forward to seeing you.

Sincerely,  
Helen Fedor  
[helenfedor@hotmail.com](mailto:helenfedor@hotmail.com)

## PRESENTATIONS ON SLOVAKIA AT AAASS 2006

Bojan Todosijevic, University of Michigan, "The Underlying Structure of 'Left' and 'Right' in Serbia and Slovakia."

Edita Bosak, Memorial University of New Foundland, "Slovak Responses to Hungarian Initiatives and Policies during World War I," part of a collaborative panel of the regional area studies associations *Hungarian Policies toward the National Minorities during World War II*. Friday 2:15-4:15, Committee Room

### Panel *Facing the Others: Intra-national and International Attitudes among Neighbors in Central Europe*

Saturday 2-4PM, Council Room

Martin Votruba, University of Pittsburgh, Chair  
James Krapfl, UC Berkeley, "Civic Forum, Public Against Violence, and the Struggle for Slovakia."

Lisa Pohlman, University of Pittsburgh, "Self-Interest, Identity and Attitudes toward the European Union in Slovakia."

Magdalena Vanya, UC Davis, "Embodied and Disembodied Civil Society: Collective Action in Post-Communist Hungary and Slovakia."

Discussant: Stanislav Jozef Kirschbaum, York University

Owen V. Johnson, Indiana University, "Redefining the Nation: Slovak Mass Media, 1938-1945" Saturday 4:15-6:15, Cabinet Room

Panel on *Talking about War: Central European Media 1939-1945* sponsored by the Czechoslovak Studies Association

Panel also includes a paper by SSA member Stanley B. Winters on Czech Opposition to the U.S. Occupation of Western Bohemia in 1945.

### *Skull Session on the Slovak Election: Whose Party is It Now?*

Roundtable Capitol Room Sunday 10:15-12:15

Chair Susan Maria Mikula Christie, Benedictine University

Participants: Kevin Deegan-Krause, Wayne State University  
Karen Henderson, University of Leicester  
Stanislav Jozef Kirschbaum, York University  
Carol Skalnik Leff, University of Illinois  
Martin Votruba, University of Pittsburgh

***Research Query***

Jennifer Knerr writes: “I am attempting a comparative analysis of student movements in Burma and South Korea; and in Ukraine and Slovakia. My goal is somewhat theoretical-- I want to establish a matrix of characteristics of student movements across time and place and use it to assess the potential success or failure of any given movement.”

If the membership has any suggestions on finding information on Slovak student movements, please contact her:

[jenniferk@paradigmpublishers.com](mailto:jenniferk@paradigmpublishers.com)

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***Program Query***

Carol Leff has received informational pamphlets on an intensive semester-long Slovak language study program in Kosice called Word Art Language School, which is described as accredited by the Slovak Education Ministry. It's been around a while, but I am only a political scientist...has anyone more knowledgeable in language study had any experience with this program to know whether it is one to recommend to interested students? Its web-site is [www.wordart.sk](http://www.wordart.sk)

***From the Democracy Research News, #11 October 2005:***

Welcome to *Democracy Research News*, the electronic newsletter of the Network of Democracy Research Institutes (NDRI). The Network is a membership association of institutions that conduct and publish research on democracy and democratic development. It is also one of several functional networks associated with the for World Movement(Democracy ( [www.wmd.org](http://www.wmd.org)). This newsletter is one means of informing democracy scholars and others worldwide about the activities of and publications produced by NDRI member institutes. Additional information about the Network, a listing and profiles of all member institutes, and back issues of this newsletter are available at [www.wmd.org/ndri/ndri.html](http://www.wmd.org/ndri/ndri.html). To submit comments or to inquire about joining the Network, please write to Thomas Skladony ([tom@ned.org](mailto:tom@ned.org)).

***Redesigned AAASS website***

On behalf of the AAASS, it is my pleasure to announce the launch of our new, redesigned web site, [www.aaass.org](http://www.aaass.org).

Please remember that because the Internet publishing is by nature flexible and dynamic, the site's content will be changing and expanding as needed, but the "look" will remain the same.

Also, please note that after November 20 several pages in the "Additional Resources" section that until now have been available to everyone, will be moved to the "Members Only / Registered Users" section, [www.aaassmembers.org](http://www.aaassmembers.org), available by password only to current members. Those pages are: Employment Opportunities, Funding for Research and Study, Prizes for Slavic Scholars, Members' Research in Progress, and the Listing of Summer Programs (which will be published in January).

Calls for Papers and Articles and the Annual Survey of Graduates in Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies will remain in the public domain.

# Eighty Years of English Studies in Slovakia

By Ján Šimko

It was in 1919, the year after World War I, that Comenius University had been founded in Bratislava, and, in 1924, professor of Celtology Josef Baudis (1885-1933) put into practice his farsighted idea of inaugurating English studies at the College of Humanities (filozofická fakulta; FF). His successor, Otakar Vočadlo (1895-1974), was a fully qualified Anglicist. Unfortunately, in February 1939, he was forced to leave. Ironically, when as a freshly enrolled student of English I was about to enter the premises of the English Department, it was at that very moment that Prof. Vočadlo, totally unknown to me, left, never to return! Part of his teaching assignment, that is, older periods of the English language and literature were taken over by František Kalda (1883-1965), professor of Germanic studies, with the newer phases assigned to Leonard Polčík (1900-1966), a Vačadlo PhD, with English studies at Budapest and London to his credit.

Initially, the Bratislava studies of English had only few enrollees, for, apart from six high-school level business academies (obchodná académiá), English was taught in only a handful of mid-level high schools (gymnázium) in Slovakia. In 1938-39, however, when the “first” Czecho-Slovakia was about to disintegrate, and our cultural orientation, as a consequence of the far-reaching geo-political events, was undergoing a radical reorientation, the number of students of English began to rise. We were lucky, however. While, in consequence of a number of professors having left the FF, those departments not having resumed teaching, such as those of music and the fine arts, precisely which I had intended to enroll in, English studies, on the contrary, did not suffer that dire fate, so that we could complete our studies of English.

After having been assigned to teach English at the business academy in Humenné (1942-44) in eastern Slovakia, and Bratislava (1944-45), soon after the end of World War II in May 1945 I was appointed to the position of a non-teaching assistant in the FF’s Department of English. We received help from staff members of the newly opened British Institute. After the communist seizure of political power in February 1948, these latter were, however, ordered to leave the country. In consequence, I was asked to begin teaching several courses of the English curriculum as of January 1950. For many years afterwards, we received effective help from Czech Anglicists of Prague and Brno. Details can be found in my “80 Years of English Studies in Slovakia” (ALMANAC, Pittsburgh, 2004).

In spite of the fact that, following the outbreak of WWII on the eastern front on 23 June 1941, Slovakia, too, had found herself in the state of belligerency with the Western allies, English studies at the FF were not affected. This was, however, not the same case with our communist government after 1948, for it was not satisfied merely with the expulsion of our British instructors; it intended, moreover, to “kick out,” that is, to discontinue English studies at FF altogether and concentrate them only in one place, that is, Prague. In Hungary, it was in Budapest only! The main proponent of this insidious idea was the aesthete Mikuláš Bakos, author of a book on Stalin on Art! As an ominous prelude to the intended total elimination of English studies at FF, for three consecutive school sessions in the mid 1950s, we did not receive one English freshman. This heralded indeed the real possibility of a “mortal” danger to the further survival of English studies at the FF. Since not even the communist member of our faculty was in

agreement with the communist “comrades” nefarious plan, thanks to a combined effort we were able to save our Slovak studies of English on the strength of the persuasive argument that the only Slovak university is bound to produce for Slovakia her own Anglicists and teachers of English. Subsequently, the number of students of English began to increase. So much so that, in June 1967, the last month of my activity at FF, as a professor by then, shortly before leaving for the USA, the number of my students in the fifth and last year of study, was twenty! Moreover, during the political “thaw” of 1968, the number of English students rose enormously. By then, however, I was already in the USA.

In the course of the eighteen years of my activity at FF (1950-67), all of that during the rule of the communist regime in Czecho-Slovakia, political-ideological control was fully at work. Following two years of study in England after October 1947, I returned Bratislava in September 1949 to a country in the hands of the communists. When, in January 1950, I began teaching English courses at FF, it occurred to me that the students would be helped towards a better understanding of some less familiar linguistic concepts, if they were compared with some concepts just at that time having become very much part of the political-economic discourse. Thus, I compared the phonetics of a language to the material basis, and phonology, again, with the ideological superstructure. This procedure evidently rankled a newly turned communist zealot, a student-informant, who ran into the dean’s office to accuse me of profaning Marxism! Surprisingly or not, the communist dean did not “bite the bait!”

While I escaped possible censure from a Marxist extremist dean, I was less lucky at a later encounter with a critic of my work. It was in the mid 1950s that I had reported to the department about my word-order study of the 15<sup>th</sup>-century English in the works of Malory and Caxton, on which I had worked in England (1947-49). Eventually, it was published in Halle (Germany) in October 1957. A staunch communist faculty member asked me with a straight face: “How will your work contribute to the construction of socialism in our country?” I argued that it is possible and necessary to study linguistic trends at any period of a language. I could not, however, fail to take as a subtle hint or warning not to pursue this kind of historical language research any more. I had to give it up not only for absolute lack of relevant material from that period in Bratislava but, primarily, for political pressure and interference. Indeed, I accepted the offer to work on a comprehensive English-Slovak Dictionary, first published in 1967, after, again, I was already in the USA! The work of 1443 pages took me 10 years to complete (1955-1965).

For lack or absence of historical studies, the study of, for instance, English cannot be considered complete. A historical study of the development of a language is indispensable for a proper understanding of its present state. This neglect or “a gaping hole” is only too conspicuous in the most recently issued volume of 403 pages of PHILOGICA 2004 of the FF commemorative volume published at the occasion of 80 years of English studies in Slovakia, and at FF in particular. Out of 41 contributions by domestic Anglicists, not one deals with problems of English language or literary history!

It was in 1960 that the political censors went, however, even much farther. On my recommendation, the position of instructor of modern English literature was awarded to Jozefína Janáková, a graduate of the first-rate Prague school of English studies. Nevertheless, ideological spies accused her of not teaching in agreement with the Marxist theory of literature as being a reflection of the class struggle. That is why she was

subjected to public “inquisition”! Since it was I who had recommended her to be appointed to that position, I had to “roll up my sleeves” in a maximum effort to save her from a possible total dismissal, in consequence of which, being considered an ideological-political liability, she would have found it extremely difficult to land any kind of suitable employment. Her “punishment” was, luckily, “only” to be transferred to the Department of Foreign Languages where to teach the English language.

On 2 July 1967 I had left for the USA thanks to study grants. At that time, I did not even contemplate settling in the USA. That is why my family did not come with me to the US in 1967. It was only the infamous invasion of Czech-Slovakia on 21 August 1968 and the threatening prospect of the Marxist doctrine to be re-imposed “with a vengeance” that eventually prompted me to seek political asylum in the US. I became a US citizen on 4 July 1980. Due to my refusal to return to prison (“Hamlet”) Czechoslovakia, I was declared, in 1970, a *persona non grata*. As a consequence, my Bratislava colleagues were frightened to keep further contracts with me, except my good friend, the late Prague linguist Jiří Nosek (1919-2001). He did pay, though, a heavy price for keeping up contacts with me: for about twenty years, although fully qualified, he was not promoted to his deserved grade of professor until after the demise of communism on 17 November 1989!

Surprisingly or not, the Slovak authorities were in no hurry either. It took more than 20 years to name a successor to me in the chair of professor of English at FFUK. The person elevated to that position, but only as late as 1992, was Jozef Olexa, a former student of mine, a literary historian. Alas, on Saturday, 14 December 2002, at about 3 P.M. over there, he, poor man, suffered a stroke, which has damaged some of his vital bodily functions. Ironically, it happened very shortly before my pre-Christmas phone call from the US. Thanks to his initiative, it had been on 27 March 1991 that I had been “rehabilitated,” that is, my academic degrees illegally taken away from me over 20 years earlier, in 1970, were returned to me, and, on 23 October 1993, again, Comenius University awarded me a silver medal. At present, it is again one of my former students through 1967, Eva Tandlichova, specializing in the methods of teaching English, who is chairperson of the Department of English and American studies at FF.

Although, due to extraneous circumstances, I have decided to stay in the US, nevertheless I do consider it my moral duty, irrespective of the great distance separating us, to offer constructive help to Slovak studies of English. In 2001-02 I donated 60 boxes of about 1500 books and professional journals to the department. They have been found to be of good use also to other departments and colleges throughout Slovakia. Moreover, nine of my Anglicist colleagues abroad (4 in Japan, 3 in the US, one each in England and Russia) have been kind enough to accept my invitation to send in their scholarly Anglicist contribution published in November 2004 in the festive volume *PHILOLOGICA* 2004, commemorating 80 years of English studies at Bratislava’s FF of Comenius University.

In the meantime, after a second Slovak university had been founded, during the communist regime, in eastern Slovakia’s metropolis Kosice, with the English Department located in the nearby Presov, the formation of the Slovak Republic on 1 January 1993 led to the establishment of several new universities, each including an English Department: as many as two in Trnava, one each in Nitra and Banska Bystrica. Courses of English are offered also in Colleges of Education (pedagogické fakulty) by the foreign-language

departments, in research institutes and the Academy of Sciences. Slovakia can now boast a host of graduates of English. For the benefit of foreign students, some Slovak colleges offer their courses in English.

The festive PHILOLOGICA 2004 reached me on 24 November. To my delight, it did include the scholarly articles by all the nine foreign colleagues approached by me to contribute. Thanks to their ready efforts, the volume is going to enhance considerably and spread interest, world-wide, in Slovak studies of English, in particular in Slovakia, in general, in all corners of the globe where English studies are conducted.

My own series of four articles appearing under the title: “My contacts with Foreign Anglicists” (*Almanac* of the National Slovak Society, Pittsburgh, PA, published since 2001) and “80 Years of Slovak Studies in Slovakia (ibid., 2004), detail my contacts with those foreign Anglicists.

The 403 page festive volume, PHILOLOGICA 2004, includes 40 Anglicistic articles preceded by Eva Tadlechová’s “Introduction.” 20 articles deal with linguistic topics (15 are by women; 5 by men including 3 foreigners); 14 are literary (by 6 women, 8 men—of them 6 foreigners); 9 articles by women discuss teaching methods; 4 contributions deal with problems of translation (2 each by both men and women); 2 women deal with English studies proper. Altogether, 35 articles are by women, 15 by men (including 9 from abroad). What is striking is the lopsided representation of 35 local women-Anglicists as against only 6 men, that is: a ratio of 6 to 1!

A cursory survey of the titles also reveals, which topics are not discussed, such as: an assessment of the contribution of Slovak studies of English to overall Slovak culture as compared to the contribution to the latter by other foreign languages studied and taught; the development of the English curriculum and of the methods of research; an evaluation of both the doctoral dissertations and of works forming the basis of promotions to higher academic degrees (various levels of professorship, etc.); the scholarly publications of the FF English faculty, etc. Also, it would have been necessary to send out article copies for proofreading by their authors themselves, an absolute necessity abroad. What is also missing is the unification of the procedures used in quoting sources, notes, and the bibliography, all of these governed by the internationally accepted Modern Language Association of America rules. It would have also been informative to include the respective country of origin of foreign contributors. The scholarly contribution of individual articles will be evaluated in professional reviews.

This memorable 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary was also commemorated in a conference held from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2004. The conference reports are to be published, too.

The two memorial volumes will form a substantial, worthy contribution to Slovak studies of English.

Dr. Ján Šimko, Professor of English Philology (rtd.), Washington, D.C.

## Member News and Activities

***Introducing a new SSA Member:*** Magdi Vanya

After completing a degree in Sociology, Public Policy, and Social Work at the Masaryk University in Brno, the Czech Republic, I completed a Master's in Gender and Culture at the Central European University in Budapest, Hungary. Currently, I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of California—Davis. My areas of interests include social movements, civil society, citizenship, and gender in a comparative perspective, and qualitative methods of research. My previous research focused compared perceptions and the legal discourse on domestic violence in the US and the Slovakia. My dissertation explores framing and mobilizing strategies used by different collective actors to construct a public discourse around domestic violence in Hungary and Slovakia. I am also interested in how publicizing domestic violence affects emerging civil societies and civic engagement in the region.

**John Berta** gave a paper on “The Preservation of Slovak Heritage in ‘Smalltown’ America: Cases in Broome County, New York, Middletown Pennsylvania, and Fayetteville, North Carolina,” at the 2006 meeting of the World Congress of the Czechoslovak Academy of Arts and Sciences in Ceske Budejovice in June.

**Edita Bosak** prepared a paper on ‘An Uneasy Relationship: Bratislava and Slovakia’s Roma,’ for presentation at the 2006 meeting of the World Congress of the Czechoslovak Academy of Arts and Sciences in Ceske Budejovice in June.

**David Cooper** edited the poetry volume by Milan Rúfus, *And That's the Truth (Poems in English & Slovak)*, selected and ed. Milan Richter, illus. Koloman Sokol, trans. Ewald Osers and Viera and James Sutherland-Smith, ed. David L. Cooper (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2006).

**Kevin Deegan-Krause** kept a fascinating blog on Slovak elections of 2006 [www.pozorblog.com](http://www.pozorblog.com). The web-site also includes post-election analysis by Kevin and by Grigorij Meseznikov, President of IVO (Institute for Public Affairs) in Bratislava [www.ivo.sk](http://www.ivo.sk)

An article by **James Felak** entitled "The Democratic Party and the Execution of Jozef Tiso," appeared in the journal *Slovakia*, Volume XXXVIII, Nos. 70-71, (2005), pp. 33-51 He participated in the Christianity in Eastern Europe Project, and presented research on how Roman Catholics responded to the post-World War II situation in Slovakia at its conferences in Grand Rapids, Michigan and Warsaw, Poland. He also gave presentations this past February at Stanford University on Communist attitudes and policies toward Catholics in Slovakia, and at the University of California, Berkeley on how Slovak Catholics responded to the rise of Communism.

He was also honored by being named to a three-year term as Jon Bridgmen Endowed Professor in History at the University of Washington in recognition of distinction in teaching European history to undergraduates.

**Gregory Ference** prepared a paper on the “Memorandum of the Slovak League of America,” at the 2006 meeting of the World Congress of the Czechoslovak Academy of Arts and Sciences in Ceske Budejovice in June.

**Owen V. Johnson** was one of four international experts who addressed “How Free is Freedom of Speech,” at the Estonian Media Conference 2006 in Tallinn, Estonia, October 5. Johnson presented an American’s European perspective on freedom of speech in the United States. During his Tallinn stay, Johnson also was interviewed by several Estonian journalists. One of the interviews, published in the investigative weekly *Eesti Ekspress* can be accessed online

<http://www.ekspress.ee/viewdoc/666E3D77B01771E8C2257202004880EA>

Johnson gave a paper, “Begetting & Remembering: Creating a Slovak Collective Memory in the Post-Communist World“, at a workshop, “Historical Revisionism in Central Europe after 1989“, in Prague, October 19-20. His paper paid special attention to the role of mass media in the creation of collective memory. The workshop was organized by the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences as part of Euro 2000, a project of the European Union to study developments since the fall of communism. Scholars from Northern Ireland, Hungary, Germany, Belarus, Ukraine, Romania, England and the Czech Republic also attended the proceedings.

Earlier in his Czech visit, Johnson gave a lecture, “Media and Nation in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Slovakia,” at a special seminar at Charles University, Prague’s more than 600-year old university.

Johnson has written the introduction for the book, **The Portrayal of Czechoslovakia in the American Print Media, 1938-1989**, edited by **Gregory C. Ference**, which was scheduled for distribution by Columbia University Press on October 28, the 88<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia. The book tells the history of a country caught up in four major world crises from 1938 to 1989 and how the U.S. print media represented these events. The contributors discuss how U.S. journalists and political cartoons portrayed, and in some cases stereotyped, Czechoslovakia during this period. They also study the relationship between the foreign policy of the United States and its press coverage. Johnson’s introduction, “Shadows in the Searchlight: An Introduction to American Media Coverage of Czechoslovakia,” reviews the literature on foreign press coverage, with particular attention to Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe.

Johnson gave a paper, “National Censorship in a Multi-National State: Communist Slovakia Before the ‘Prague’ Spring,” at the 2006 World Congress of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences, České Budějovice, Czech Republic, June 25-July 1.

He gave another paper, “Radio & the Making of a Nation: Slovak Radio in World War II and the Cold War (1938-1968),” at the annual meetings of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, held in San Francisco, August 2-5. The paper was given the “top first faculty award,” designating it as the best from among about 100 papers submitted to the Association’s International Division. He also notes that the 2008 SVU Congress is tentatively scheduled to be held in Ružomberok.

**James Krapfl** is doing research and writing in the Czech Republic this year. He has recently published the chapter "Revolution and Revolt against Revolution: Czechoslovakia 1989," in Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe, ed. Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe (Oxford: Berg, 2006) He also presented a paper "Emplotting the Gentle Revolution: Narrative Strategies in Czech and Slovak Discourse, 1989-1992." at the 2006 World Congress of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts & Sciences, in Ceske Budejovice in June

**Carol Skalnik Leff** presented a paper "The Domestication of Transnational Influences: European Integration and The Electoral Connection in the New State of Slovakia," Warsaw East European Conference, "Post-Communist World: 25 years of Changes," Warsaw University, Poland, July 2006

**Daniel E. Miller** presented "Antonín Paleček: novinář, ale i politik a historik" [Antonín Paleček: Journalist but also Politician and Historian] at a conference titled "Osobnosti agrární politiky 19. a 20. století" [Personalities in Agrarian Politics in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century], Uherské Hradiště, Czech Republic, Slovácké muzeum, on 25 May 2006.

**M. Mark Stolarik** was editor and translator of "Life Was Different Here," by Andrej Potocky, in Norman Hillmer & J.L. Granatstein, The Land Newly Found: Eyewitness Accounts of the Canadian Immigrant Experience ( Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2006), 133-139. He also contributed two articles "Slovak Archives in the USA and Canada," and "Some Archival Problems and their Resolution," in the volume edited by Miloslav Rechcigl, Czech and Slovak American Archival Materials and their Preservation (Ceske Budejovice: Prague Edition, 2004), 111-115, 156-157. This summer he presented "The Slovak League of America and the Canadian Slovak League in the Struggle for the Self-Determination of the Slovak Nation, 1907-1992" at the conference on "Emigration to the English-speaking World," Catholic University of Ružomberok, Slovak Republic, May 19, 2006.

# SLOVAKIA IN 2006

by  
M. Mark Stolarik

Ever since the Communists surrendered power in November of 1989, traveling to Slovakia has gotten easier and better. There is no more need to get a visa, to wait for hours at the Petržalka border crossing, and to fear the secret police. Now, if one flies to the Vienna airport from North America (there are direct flights by Austrian Airlines from New York, Montreal and Toronto), one can order an air-conditioned taxi from Bratislava for 45 Euros (about \$55.00 U.S.) and travel in comfort to the Jarovce border-crossing and avoid the long line-ups of trucks and tourists at the Petržalka crossing. Of course, one needs a Slovak passport to use this crossing, but that is no problem for anyone who was born in Slovakia or whose parents hailed from that country. Indeed, as of this year, Slovakia is issuing European Union passports, which open up all of Europe to citizens of the Slovak Republic.

Bratislava is looking better every year. Many of its buildings, which used to be owned by the government under the former communist regime, have now been privatized and they have been spruced up. Indeed, the very busy “Obchodná ulica” (Shop Street) is torn up and getting a face-lift. No matter. The shops and restaurants are open and the very popular “Slovak Pub,” where one can order authentic Slovak dishes such as sauerkraut soup and “halušky” for reasonable prices is busy as ever

Individual Slovaks are also becoming more entrepreneurial. If you choose not to stay with friends in Bratislava, you now have a wide variety of accommodations at your fingertips. If you wish to stay in first-class hotels (the Danube, the Carleton, etc.), you can do so, but at first-class prices—\$200.00 to \$250.00 a night. On the other hand, if you wish to have more friendly, spacious, and reasonably-priced accommodations, you may wish to stay at one of dozens of private apartments. For instance, a very enterprising lady owns and rents ten different apartments in the city, most of them in the historic Old Town. They range in price from \$60.00 to \$175.00 a night and start at two rooms with bath and go all the way up to four rooms with bath. They are beautifully-appointed, clean and have magnificent views. They are called “Bratislava Apartments” and can be found on the Internet.

Hviezdoslav square in Bratislava has become something of a paradox. On the one hand, it features rock bands and folk crafts at its western end, but “tactical squads” at its eastern end, near the American embassy. Fear of terrorist attacks has led to the construction of a massive fence around the embassy, the closing of the entrance to the recently-completed underground parking garage just in front of the embassy, and even a truck loaded with bricks to block the rear entrance to the embassy. Meanwhile, very wealthy customers in expensive suits patronize the over-priced Slovak Restaurant across the street from the embassy.

Crossing Slovakia by car is becoming a bit easier. Super highways now exist from Bratislava to the outskirts of Považská Bystrica in the north or to Nitra in the south. Unfortunately, only sporadic short sections exist after that. This lack of essential infrastructure testifies to the neglect of Slovakia by the previous Prague-based communist government, which always favored the Czech lands, and saw to it that they had a

completed super-highway from one end of Bohemia to the other end of Moravia well before the downfall of communism.

Eastern Slovakia, meanwhile, which is not yet connected by a super-highway to western Slovakia, continues to suffer from 20% unemployment. This is in stark contrast to Bratislava, where unemployment has fallen below 4%, and where the average wage of 25,000 crowns per month (\$1.00 U.S. = 30SK) is twice that of eastern Slovakia. One can only hope that the European Union, of which Slovakia is now a member, will continue to invest in Slovakia's super-highways in order to finally unite the east with the west, and to make it possible for individuals and corporations to invest in the east and to be able to then transport manufactured goods from east to west. Meanwhile, the east continues to lose its young people to the west, whether it is to western Slovakia, the Czech lands, the European Union or North America. The same phenomenon which drove so many eastern Slovaks to the United States of America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (lack of work) has reappeared since the downfall of communism (by practicing "featherbedding," the communists provided work for everyone). Lack of work also plagues the Kysuce region in the north and parts of southern Slovakia.

Despite its poverty, eastern Slovakia is very beautiful. The two metropolises of the east—Košice and Prešov—have lovely down towns, with both having converted their "Old Towns" into pedestrian zones. However, while Košice does exhibit some nightlife after dark, especially in the vicinity of its illuminated "singing fountains" just in front of its 19<sup>th</sup> century neo-baroque theater, Prešov is a different story. Many young people have fled to the west in search of work and its streets are eerily quiet, even on a Saturday night. On Sunday morning the church bells peal and people flock to their parish churches. In Prešov there are four large churches—the Roman Catholic and the Greek Catholic Cathedrals on main street, the Lutheran church just behind the Roman Catholic one, while the Orthodox Cathedral is just off to the side. Indeed, the belfry of the Gothic St. Nicholas Roman Catholic Church affords a splendid view of this metropolis of the former Šariš county.

Villages in eastern Slovakia are very picturesque, but are missing their young. Nevertheless, the locals are busy repairing their churches, which remain their most important buildings. As we drove north on a Sunday morning from Presov and then south around the Slanské mountains, we noticed long lines of people walking to their village churches. Amazingly, I even heard the celebration of a mass on the radio at a gas station that same morning. Religion is still very important to eastern Slovaks, much more so than in the west. The drive from Prešov to Vranov nad Topľou and thence to Humenné, Snina and Ubl'a was spectacular. We passed by the ruins of iava castle and the back side of the Vihorlat mountains, the largest in the former Zemplín county. Ubl'a, which is the last village in Slovakia before the Ukrainian border, has a beautiful, new, Orthodox church surrounded on all sides by a lush forest. The drive from Ubl'a to Sobrance through many switchbacks was exciting, as we descended from the hills unto the fertile plains.

Besides sweet Tokaj wine, Zemplín is famous in Slovakia for its large, artificial lake called "Zemplinská Širava," which lies just to the south of the massive "Vihorlat." Hundreds of cottages line this lake, as do hotels and restaurants, because it is a favourite vacation destination for eastern Slovaks. Unfortunately, its waters do not move fast enough to keep the lake clean and government engineers are trying to find ways to solve this problem.

A short-super-highway runs from the “Zemplinská Širava” to the local town-center of Michalovce. This city traces its roots to the Great Moravian Empire of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and was its easternmost outpost, as the recently-discovered ruins of a church rotunda attest. Michalovce also boasts Slovakia’s oldest pedestrian-only city center, which is lined with shops and restaurants. The road west from Michalovce to Košice leads through three mountain passes of the “Slanské vrchy”. The summits of the passes feature monuments to the Red Army, which struggled mightily against the German army at these locations during World War II. After the third summit, the beautiful city of Košice appears, with its magnificent St. Elizabeth Cathedral, the largest in Slovakia, serving as a magnet to the town center. Now one is again surrounded by many cars speeding to their destinations. This city is alive and well, compared to many others in eastern Slovakia, which are barely getting by. The town center is a feast for the eyes, with its “singing fountains,” its cathedral, its theater and former Jesuit and other churches. It is also linked by a super-highway to its sister-city of Prešov, just 30 kilometers to the north through the picturesque Košice valley.

As a part of the east-west super-highway construction, the formidable Branisko pass has finally been penetrated by a highway tunnel. Unfortunately for us, the tunnel was closed for maintenance as we approached it! However, it is now linked to a four-lane super-highway on the Prešov side and we managed to pass all of the heavy trucks before we got to the pass. Thus, we avoided crawling along at 10mph behind smelly diesel trucks and were able to climb the pass at a more reasonable 20-30 mph. As we drove down the many switchbacks on the other side, we were treated with a view of the magnificent Spiš fortress, which used to guard this road into the former Spiš county.

The city of Levoča is always a treat to visit. It is still completely walled and boasts the largest town square in all of Slovakia. It also has the cathedral of St. Jacob, with its magnificent late-gothic carved wooden altars of Master Paul of Levoča. Next to it is one of the nicest of all renaissance city halls in Slovakia. Most of the town square is also lined with renaissance palaces and one of them has recently been converted into a four-star restaurant. Lunch here is truly an epicurean and visual delight.

A view of the High Tatras is always the highlight of a trip to Slovakia. This year was no exception. They loomed high and wide as we passed the city of Poprad and, starting at the picturesque village of Važec, enjoyed driving down a piece of the not-yet-completed super-highway across Slovakia’s north all the way to the outskirts of Ružomberok.

“The city of Andrej Hlinka,” as Ružomberok is called by the locals, is also very picturesque. If one ignores the giant pulp-and-paper mill on its eastern outskirts (sold to Slovakia by Canada in the 1980’s), Ružomberok is truly enchanting. Five streets (a pedestrian zone) converge on the city centre, which is dominated by the “Cultural Home” built by the Rev. Andrej Hlinka in the 1930’s, and which now serves as the luxury “Hotel Kultúra.” Up on the hill, which was fortified in the middle ages, stands a Gothic church, a neo-classical City Hall, and a long, forested boulevard, at the end of which appears the former Jesuit church and gymnasium. Beside it stands the neo-classical headquarters of the newly-created (2000) Catholic University of Ružomberok.

Universities in Slovakia differ in many respects from those in North America. One of the major differences is that campuses of North American universities are usually centralized in one spot. In Slovakia (and Ružomberok is no exception), they are spread

out all over the city. Thus, while the “rektorat” (the main administration building) is on top of the hill beside the former Jesuit church, the classroom buildings are scattered in the city below. Furthermore, there is no central library. Instead, each faculty houses its own library, and these vary in quality. They are also very expensive to administer since they require so many librarians. One of my greatest surprises at this university was the large number of students who spoke fluent English. Not only does this university teach this international language, but it also holds regular classes in English.

Ružomberok serves as an ideal headquarters for touring the countryside. A few kilometers to the south and west is the preserved 19<sup>th</sup> century village of Vlkolinec, a UNESCO heritage site. Here one can rent an authentic two-room log cabin for a few hundred crowns and live as did Slovak peasants over a hundred years ago. A few kilometers to the southeast of Ružomberok, on the road to the village of Ludrová, stands an ancient Gothic church, complete with medieval frescoes depicting various scenes from the bible. Just to the north of the city, in the village of Martiniek, stands another gothic church, high on a hill, and it, too, is covered with beautiful frescoes, although they date from the Renaissance. In any case, one can only gaze in awe of these frescoes, which have survived centuries of neglect and whitewashing, and which have only recently been uncovered and restored to their early splendour.

In Ružomberok itself is the museum of L’udovít Fulla, one of Slovakia’s greatest artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The museum is actually his former residence. Even the communists recognized his talent and built him an ultra-modern home, which became a museum upon his death. Here one can view the originals of many of his paintings, including scenes from the extremely popular book of nursery rhymes entitled *Varila myši\_ka kašičku* (1970). Unfortunately, the roof leaks, and there are pails catching the drops of water all over the upper floors, as well as on the walls. Many of the paintings have been removed to prevent water stains. The curator assured us that the leaks would be fixed. I can only shake my head at this neglect of a national treasure and also at the short-sightedness of modern architects who design flat roofs for museums in rainy valleys.

Like many cities in northern Slovakia, Ružomberok also boasts several “salášes” high up in the hills. These are former shepherd’s huts which have been converted into restaurants with rustic wooden furniture. One overlooks Ružomberok on its south side in the foothills of the Low Tatras. Here one can order “halušky s bryndzou” which is the Slovak national food, made with the equivalent of “gnocchi” and sharp sheep’s cheese. One can wash them down with sour sheep’s milk (“žinčica”), also a local specialty. If one is not enamoured of milk and cheese, one can order some excellent home-made “klobásky” with rye-bread and beer. These local delicacies are well-worth the trip up a steep mountain on a one-lane country road. The view of the High Tatras to the east is also spectacular.

My wife and I also visited with family and friends in the cities of Dolný Kubin, Martin, Žilina, Čadca, Holíč and Trnava. Since I have described these locations in previous articles, I will not repeat myself. However, I do have a tip for visitors to northwest Slovakia. If you are driving from Bratislava north to Žilina, it is wise to avoid the construction of the super-highway (and the switchbacks) from Povážska Bystrica to Žilina. Instead, one can cross the Váh river to Púchov and drive on the picturesque left bank of the Váh through Bytča to Žilina. This route is a little longer but it has very little

traffic and the road is good. My late uncle, who was a truck driver, recommended this route to me and I will forever be grateful for his advice.

After having seen so much beauty all across Slovakia, my wife was not prepared for the “pièce-de-résistance” of our vacation. Nestled at the tail-end of the White Carpathians in western Slovakia is the magnificent Smolenice castle. Its roots go back to the middle ages but it was completely rebuilt in a neo-gothic romantic style by gróf (count) Palffy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the era of communism, after Palffy was driven into exile, the communists gave the castle to the Slovak Academy of Sciences and it was off-limits to the general public. Now that it has been privatized, it is open to paying customers. We spent our second-last night in a corner suite of this castle, with a splendid view of the valley below, and only the castle ghosts to keep us company, as the only other inhabitant that Sunday night was the gatekeeper! The next morning, when the staff returned, we had a delicious breakfast in a lavishly-decorated dining room full of antique furniture, where even the wooden chandeliers were hand-carved into intricate ornaments. We could not believe our good fortune in having booked a night between conferences, when the castle was empty. Such are the surprises that await the adventurous tourist in Slovakia.

My only regret is that we visited Slovakia for only two weeks. The country is so beautiful, and it holds so many surprises, that we could have spent the whole summer touring it. Perhaps when we are retired.....

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