

“DEFENDERS OF THE RUSSIAN NATION”: SLOVAK AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE, 1905–1918

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On 12 April 1917, the Slovak nationalist leader Albert Mamatey declared that “our national cause is presently in fine shape. If complications do not arise in Russia, then we can be practically certain that we will achieve our goal”.¹ Mamatey expressed this optimistic view when the Tsarist regime had fallen but the prospects of the Provisional Government effectively governing the Russian Empire remained uncertain. Like many Slovak nationalists at this time, Mamatey looked to Russia to help liberate his people from Hungarian rule. But he did not observe the revolutionary events in Russia from within Austria-Hungary, or even in exile elsewhere in Europe; instead, Mamatey was shaping the future of the Slovak nation from the United States, where a campaign of national liberation of their countrymen in Europe had developed among the half-million strong colony of Slovak-speaking migrants.² The city of Cleveland, Ohio, had an estimated 40,000 Slovak migrants on the eve of the First World War: a Slovak-speaking population larger than any city in Hungary other than Budapest.³ From the 1890s, these migrants established ethnically-Slovak fraternal benefit societies in the United States, such as the National Slovak Society and the First Catholic Slovak Union, whose chief purpose was to provide life and sickness insurance. By 1914, these two fraternal organisations each had nearly forty thousand adult male members: making them among the largest Slovak institutions on either side of the Atlantic.⁴ Mamatey was president

¹ Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, Historical Society of West Pennsylvania Archives, Getting Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 7 of 9, “Milan Getting Sr., Professional Materials, 1917,” “Zápisnica schôdze ústredného Výboru Slovenskej Lígy,” Pittsburgh, PA, 12 Apr. 1917, 13.

² Marián M. Stolarík: *Slovak Immigrants Come to Terms with Religious Diversity in North America*. The Catholic Historical Review, 96:1, 2010, pp. 56–57.

³ Slovak Republic, Bratislava, Ministerstvo Vnútra Slovenskej Republiky [MVSR], Slovenský Národný Archív [SNA], Osobný Fond [O. F.] Pavol Blaho, č. šk. 50, inv. č. 1680, poč. 52, M. Kopcok to Pavol Blaho, Cleveland, OH, 20 Jan. 1914, f. 1; Elena Mannová, ed., *A Concise History of Slovakia* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2000), 188.

⁴ Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Balch Institute/Historical Society of Pennsylvania Archives [Balch Institute/HSP], “National Slovak Society in the U.S.A., Almanac, 1907–1919 (incomp),” Box 2, *Kalendárium 1915: Pamätník Národný Slovenský Spolok v Spojených štátoch amerických, Vydaný z Príležitosti 25-Ročného Jubileumu Národného Slovenského Spolku v Spojených štátoch*

of the Slovak League of America: a political umbrella body that represented Slovak American newspapers, fraternal benefit societies and other organisations within the migrant colony. In the revolutionary year of 1917, the Slovak League asserted the political goals of the 'Slovak nation', ostensibly on behalf of their countrymen living in wartime Hungary. Slovak nationalist perspectives on events in Russia were therefore debated and turned into meaningful political responses on the other side of the globe, within the crucial centre of Slovak nationalism based in the United States.

The impact of the Russian Revolution on east-central Europe has been chiefly sought within the territory that the empires of this region physically controlled in 1917. In the case of Austria-Hungary, a dynastic and multinational empire that soon dissolved into the nation-states that we see in the region today, the spectacular events in Russia have been chiefly understood as a source of potential ideological 'contagion' among its war-weary military forces and civilian population. The most prominent case of revolutionary sentiment spreading to the Habsburg domains occurred in February 1918 when four thousand sailors of the Austro-Hungarian fleet mutinied at their base of Kotor on the Adriatic Sea and raised the red flag above the cruiser Sankt Georg.⁵ This revolt quickly fell apart under the threat of an artillery bombardment, with nearly four hundred participants being court-martialed.⁶ Historians of the late Habsburg Empire such as Mark Cornwall have also identified the return of half a million prisoners of war from the Eastern Front as a destabilising element in Austria-Hungary's civilian hinterland in the final months of the war.⁷ Radicalised by their own experiences of revolution, many of these returning soldiers deserted from military service and joined groups such as the 'Green Cadres': locally organised militia forces who often redistributed land to the peasants and conducted acts of banditry upon the larger landholders and merchants of the Habsburg realm.⁸ By the summer of 1918, seven infantry divisions were stationed in Austria-Hungary's hinterland, rather than on its Italian Front, to counter the revolutionary threat posed by these

amerických, 1890–1915 (Pittsburgh, PA: Tlačou Národných Novín, 1915), 72, 74; Balch Institute/HSP, "Jednota (Katolícky Kalendár, 1898–1919, incomp.)," Box 1 of 1, *Jednota: Katolícky Kalendár 1916* (Middletown, PA: Prvá Katolícka Slovenská Jednota, 1916), 58.

⁵ Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914–1918* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 2nd Ed., 354.

⁶ Idem.

⁷ Mark Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), 59–60, 269; Herwig, *The First World War*, 348.

⁸ Jakub Beneš, "The Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918," *Past and Present*, 236 (2017), 213–215, 222, 224–226, 234–236.

militia groups.⁹ In these ways, the fall of the Tsarist regime and revolutionary appeals to national self-determination, land reforms, as well as socialism have been viewed as contributing to political radicalisation in Austria-Hungary, prior to its final dissolution in October 1918.

While the revolution has been viewed as events of empire-wide significance in Austria-Hungary, their influence on each of the myriad national movements of that patchwork empire has not been fully accounted for. This is despite the geopolitical importance that the collapse of a recognised pre-war great power like Russia had for the minority nationalist movements operating in Austria-Hungary. Outright victory for either the Central Powers or for Russia and her allies such as Serbia in the First World War entailed a planned realignment of imperial borders; the onus was on the leaders of minority nationalist movements of Austria-Hungary to either back the winning side or to mitigate the risks of sympathising with the losers. Through skilful leadership and geopolitical good fortune, some of the national movements managed to keep their options open on both sides for the duration of the war: a strategy that the Czech nationalist politician Antonín Švehla described as “keeping two irons in the fire”.¹⁰

In the case of the Slovak national movement in the Kingdom of Hungary, its leadership opted to demonstrate their loyalty to the Habsburg dynasty and the Austro-Hungarian war effort. In August 1914, the chairman of the Slovak National Party, Matúš Dula, wrote to Hungarian Prime Minister István Tisza to announce that his party would cease its political activity for the duration of the war to demonstrate the Slovak nation’s “patriotic ideals”.¹¹ At the same time, however, a small circle of Slovak nationalist intellectuals in Vienna established contacts with Czech nationalist political parties, who gradually began to incorporate Slovak national demands within their own program first for an autonomous territory within the Habsburg state, and then for an independent Czechoslovak state, established in October 1918.¹² While not having com-

⁹ Ibid., 215.

¹⁰ Victor S. Mamatey, “The Union of Czech Political Parties in the Reichsrat, 1916–1918,” in Robert Kann, Béla Király and Paula S. Fichtner, eds., *The Habsburg Empire in World War I: Essays on the Intellectual, Military, Political and Economic Aspects of the Habsburg War Effort* (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, 1977), 9.

¹¹ SNA, O. F. Matúš Dula, č. šk. 9, inv. č. 206, poč. č. 81, Matúš Dula to István Tisza, [Aug. 1914], Martin, 184/9.

¹² SNA, O. F. Vavro Šrobár, č. šk. 8, inv. č. 562, poč. č. 3, Ján Maršalko to Vavro Šrobár, Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš, 24 Apr. 1918; 5 May 1918, 6/27/4; 7/27/4; James R. Felak, “At the Price of the Republic”: *Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party, 1929–1938* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), 13; Marián Hronský, *The Struggle for Slovakia and the Treaty of Trianon, 1918–*

mitted themselves to the war effort of the Russian Empire, this more radical agenda being pursued by Slovak nationalists with their Czech counterparts relied chiefly on the military defeat of Austria-Hungary in the war to achieve its goal of a Slovak national homeland, and in turn, gave the outbreak of revolution in Russia direct implications for their own nationalist cause.

The relationship between the Russian Revolution and Slovak national liberation from Hungarian rule has been an often politically loaded topic within the historical debate. The Marxist historical tradition established in Czechoslovakia maintained by the Communist regime from 1948 established an officially-sanctioned narrative in which the Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917 acted as the decisive historical event that brought about the collapse of Austria-Hungary and Czechoslovak statehood in the following year.¹³ Slovak historians worked within this ideologically restricted framework to stress the role of the Bolshevik Revolution in bringing about the national – but not social – liberation of Czechs and Slovaks from Austro-Hungarian rule.¹⁴ Even as late as September 1988, the Communist daily newspaper *Rudé Právo* could state that “the liberation struggle of Czechs and Slovaks was imbued with the revolutionary example of the Russian Bolsheviks. Under the influence of Great October, the decisive motive force – the working class – entered this struggle. It became the decisive ally of the Czech and Slovak patriotic bourgeoisie”.¹⁵ While this narrative has in turn been extensively challenged and overturned in the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution of November 1989, it has not been replaced by a coherent evaluation of revolutionary Russia’s real significance to the Czech and Slovak state building project during the First World War.

This study will show how the Russian Revolution acted as a turning-point in the campaign to liberate ‘Slovakia’ from Hungarian rule during the First World War. To explain why Slovak nationalism moved firmly towards a new partnership with the Czechs – leading to the establishment of an indepen-

1920 (Bratislava: VEDA, 2001), 35; Vavro Šrobár, Vol. I, *Oslobodené Slovensko: Pamäti z Rokov, 1918–1920* (Prague: Čin, 1928), 105–106.

¹³ Ján Opat, “On the Emergence of Czechoslovakia,” in *Czechoslovakia, 1918–1988: Seventy Years from Independence*, ed. Harold Gordon Skilling (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 41–42.

¹⁴ Michal Dzvoník, *Ohlas Veľkej októbrovej revolúcie na Slovensku (1918–1919)* (Bratislava: SVPL, 1957); Ľudovít Holotík, *Októbrová revolúcia a národnooslobodzovacie hnutie na Slovensku v rokoch 1917–1918*, (Bratislava: SAV, 1958); Ľudovít Holotík, *Štefánikovská legenda a vznik Československej republiky*, (Bratislava: SAV, 1958); Ján Kvasnička, *Československé légie v Rusku, 1917–1920*, (Bratislava: SAV, 1963).

¹⁵ *Rudé Právo*, [Prague], 24 Sep. 1988, quoted in translation in Peter Petro, “Slovak Literature: Loyal, Dissident, Ěmigré,” in *Czechoslovakia, 1918–1988*, 223.

dent, Czechoslovak state in October 1918 – it is necessary to understand how Slovak migrant organisations in the United States understood the Russian Revolution for two reasons. Firstly, Slovak American leaders had assumed self-declared leadership of the Slovak national movement at the time of the revolution. While the Slovak National Party pledged that it would cease its political activity for the duration of the First World War to demonstrate the Slovak nation's "patriotic ideals" to the Hungarian state as well as the Habsburg dynasty, Slovak nationalists in the United States felt no such restraint in agitating against their nominal rulers.¹⁶ In September 1914, the Slovak League of America published the 'Memorandum of the Slovaks in America,' demanding "full autonomy and the right of self-determination (*sebaurčovanie*) for the Slovak nation in all political, cultural and economic spheres".¹⁷ While Slovak politicians in Hungary remained largely dormant until the final months of the war in 1918, Slovak American leaders put their claim to self-determination into action by exploring alternative, post-war political unions in which full national rights could be conferred to the Slovaks of northern Hungary. The second reason why Slovak American views on the Russian Revolution are worth studying is the high importance that Slovak nationalists placed on Russia as a great power patron for their cause. Both in the guise of the Tsarist autocracy and the liberal republic proclaimed by the Provisional Government in March 1917, many Slovak nationalists looked to Russia either as a protector or a 'liberator' of their nation, depending on the extremity of their aversion to continued Hungarian rule. While historians have studied Slovak American efforts to liberate their countrymen in Europe, they have yet to account for the role that events in Russia played in the wider geopolitical calculations of this migrant leadership.¹⁸ The Bolshevik seizure and retention of power in 1917–18

¹⁶ O. F. Matúš Dula, č. šk. 9, inv. č. 206, poč. č. 81, Matuš Dula to István Tisza, Turčianský Svätý Martin, [Aug 1914], 184/9; M. Pekník, 'Milan Hodža and Slovak Politics', in M. Pekník, (ed.), *Milan Hodža: Statesman and Politician*. Bratislava: VEDA, 2007, p. 153.

¹⁷ The original "Memorandum of the Slovak League" was drafted in July 1914 and was published in the Slovak American press as the European powers were mobilising for war. It called, among other points, for the creation of a 'Slovak district or region, in which Slovaks would enjoy national autonomy within the framework of the Hungarian state'. The amended 'Memorandum of the Slovak League' was published in Slovak American newspapers in September 1914. See *Národné Noviny*, [Pittsburgh, PA], 16 July 1914, 4; *Národné Noviny*, 30 July 1914, 1; *Národné Noviny*, 24 Sep. 1914, 5.

¹⁸ Marián M. Stolarik, (1968), "The Role of the American Slovaks in the Creation of Czechoslovakia, 1914–1918" (MA Thesis, University of Ottawa, 1968); Gregory C. Ference, *Sixteen Months of Indecision: Slovak American Viewpoints towards Compatriots and the Homeland from the 1914 to 1915 as Viewed by the Slovak Language Press in Pennsylvania* (London: Associated University Press, 1995); Claude Baláž, "Účasť Amerických Slovákov na Zahraničnom Odboji

dashed the hopes of most Slovak Americans that their national cause would enjoy great power backing from the east of Europe – pushing these migrant leaders decisively into the arms of the Czechoslovak National Council led by Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and operating under the protection and eventual patronage of Britain, France and Italy.

The response of Slovak Americans also held direct consequences for the course of the Russian revolution. Slovak American leaders were involved in the creation and support of the so-called 'Czechoslovak Legions': an army of sixty thousand, former Czech and Slovak prisoners of war in Russia, who at one point in 1918 famously controlled the key Trans-Siberian railway over thousands of miles from the river Volga to the city of Vladivostok on the Pacific coast.¹⁹ Slovak American organisations collected tens of thousands of dollars to equip the Czechoslovak Legions in Russia and took a keen interest in their activities in Russia through the Slovak American press.²⁰ Dagmar Perman and other historians have understood the value of the legionary units as a form of diplomatic leverage, whose efforts in Russia were used by the Czecho-Slovak National Council to press its case for recognition with the Entente powers.²¹ Yet the capacity for these Czech and Slovak legionaries to directly intervene in Russian affairs following the Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917 gave additional meaning to Slovak American discourse on events in Russia. Slovak American leaders did not merely react to events in distant Russia: through the Czechoslovak Legions, they also had the means to shape the course of the Russian Revolution. Slovak nationalists in the United States sought to influence the course of events in revolutionary Russia through their legionary forces to further their own cause of Slovak national liberation. As this study will show, Slovak American leaders also understood the intervention of the Czecho-Slovak legions in Russia as part of a larger project to revive Slavic power at German expense across Central and Eastern Europe.

v Prvej Svetovej Vojne," in *Slováci v Zahraničí*, ed. Daniel Zemančík and Zuzana Pavelcová, Martin: Matica Slovenská, 2013, 96–107.

¹⁹ Peter A. Toma and Dušan Kovač: *Slovakia: From Samo to Dzurinda*. Stanford, CA 2001, pp. 54–55.

²⁰ Karol Sidor, "Zásahy Slovenskej Lígy v Amerike do politického vývinu slovenského (1914–1939)," in *Slovenská Líga v Amerike, Štyridsaťročná*, ed. Mikuláš Šprinc (Scranton, PA: Obrana Press, 1947), 42.

²¹ Dagmar Perman, *The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State: Diplomatic History of the Boundaries of Czechoslovakia, 1914–1920* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1962), 34–46; Andrea Orzoff, *The Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914–1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 48–52; Betty M. Unterberger, *The United States, Revolutionary Russia and the Rise of Czechoslovakia* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 2000).

This article will examine the interaction between Slovak American leaders and the events of the Russian Revolution in three parts. Firstly, it will identify the cooperation that developed between Slovak nationalist groups in the United States and Tsarist Russia prior to the outbreak of the First World War. Secondly, the impact of the First World War on the existing relationship will be accounted for. While the outbreak of war soon turned the Slovak American leadership towards a broad aim of liberating Slovaks from Hungarian rule, their lobbying tactics as well as final political goal for their homeland were shaped by the unpredictable course of events on the Eastern Front. As Russian forces advanced into Slovak-speaking mountain villages and retreated as swiftly as they had come, the attraction of a Russian-led recalibration of Central and Eastern Europe likewise grew and receded in Slovak American calculations. Lastly, the article will examine the Russian Revolution of 1917 from the perspective of the Slovak American leadership. Applying *realpolitik* and pan-Slavic thought in equal measure to the events in Russia, Slovak nationalists in the United States hastily tried to adjust their political program to salvage the cause of Slovak national liberation. Through the failure of their efforts to 'save Russia from Bolshevism', the decisive shift of Slovak American sentiment towards the western-oriented leadership of the Czechoslovak National Council under Masaryk's leadership was made possible.

Slovak American relations with Tsarist Russia, 1905–1917

The fall of the Tsarist regime in March 1917 was significant to the Slovak liberation campaign because many Slovak American leaders closely associated the fate of their own nation to that of Russia. This tendency can be traced back to the emergence of Slovak migrant political organisations in the United States from the early 1890s. There were two main explanations for the Slovak American emphasis on Russian support for their cause. Firstly, there was an obvious geopolitical calculation that most Slovak nationalists observed: the Russian Empire was the only plausible great power that could substantially affect the internal affairs of their homeland in Austria-Hungary. The Russian tsar had demonstrated this power to a previous generation, by directing his armies to crush the Hungarian Revolution of 1848–49 in the interests of conservatism and dynastic solidarity. Following Russia's exclusion from the post-Bismarck alliance system involving Germany and Austria-Hungary, the government of Tsar Nicholas II embraced a curious alliance of convenience with the French Third Republic from 1894. By placing Russia on the opposite side of the increasingly fraught European alliance system to Austria-Hungary, great power politics made the highly conservative Russian regime at home appear as a vi-

able agent of change to the subject nationalities of Austria-Hungary. In this estimation, Slovak migrant leaders in the United States were no less convinced than the conservative circle of homeland nationalists based in Martin.

A second explanation for the hope invested in Russia by Slovak American leaders before 1914 was the idea of pan-Slavism. While nebulous in practice, pan-Slavic thought centred around the general concept of a larger, Slavic linguistic identity that ought to unify smaller national groups such as Slovaks, Poles, Czechs among others in a spirit of solidarity. Pan-Slavic thinking was often expressed alongside a view of Central and Eastern Europe as being the focus of a great nation or 'racial' conflict – between the 'Teuton' or German nation; and that of the Slav, for whom the Russian Empire existed as the only protector of Slavic interests in that struggle. Pan-Slavic sentiment was promoted by Slovak and other Slavic national minorities throughout the nineteenth century; although contrary to the claims made by Hungarian officials, few Slovak nationalists in Upper Hungary longed for liberation under the guise of the Tsar, nor represented a disloyal fifth column within their country.²² Rather, pan-Slavic solidarity played a more subtle role in shaping the preferences of Slovak nationalists during the episodic international crises that broke out prior to the First World War. As both a likely great power adversary of Austria-Hungary as well as the only viable champion of the Slavic interests in Central Europe (as those influenced by pan-Slavism understood international affairs), the interests of Russia held primacy in the calculations of Slovak American nationalists.

The Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 illustrated these attitudes, as Slovak American leaders used the conflict to conduct pro-Russian agitation in the Slovak American press as well as to cultivate closer ties with the Tsarist regime. Support for the Russian cause in the war was found for example in *Jednota* ['The Union'] – the official publication of the First Catholic Slovak Union fraternal organisation and the leading Catholic newspaper in the Slovak American community.²³ *Jednota* was edited by Štefan Furdek, a practicing Catholic priest in Cleveland, who acted as president of the fraternal organisation and

²² Victor S. Mamatey, "The Slovaks and Carpatho-Rusyns", in J. P. O'Grady (ed.), *The Immigrants' Influence on Wilson's Peace Policies* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 229; Joseph M. Kirschbaum, *Pan-Slavism in Slovak Literature: Jan Kollar – Slovak Poet of Pan-Slavism* (Winnipeg, Toronto: Slovak Institute, 1966); John F. N. Bradley, "Czech Pan-Slavism before the First World War", *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 40: 94 (Dec. 1961), 184–205.

²³ By 1920 the *Jednota* newspaper had an estimated circulation of 45,000 copies per week. Getting Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 9 of 9, "Milan Getting Sr., Professional Materials – Washington, 1920–1921," "Přehled českého a slovenského tisku vo spojených Státech Severoamerických: Denníky Slovenské," Washington D. C., [1920–21], 7.

the inaugural president of the Slovak League of America.²⁴ Furdek set out his position in a December 1904 editorial, declaring that “we are for a Russian victory” in its war with Japan.²⁵ He argued in favour of the Russian cause by contrasting the Christianity of Russia with the Japanese, who Furdek depicted as “a nation without faith in God, without faith in life after death.”²⁶ Furdek further justified support for the Russian imperial cause on the grounds that “the Russians are Slavs, they are our brothers in that [Slav] nation.”²⁷ Furdek’s support for the Russian war effort and Russian foreign policy more generally was also justified by his adoption of an element of pan-Slavic thought: he portrayed the international system as a struggle in which “the whole world is currently assaulting the Slavs.”²⁸ In the case of Austria-Hungary, Furdek argued that only a strong external threat – in the form of a victorious and invigorated Russian Empire – would mitigate the repression of Slovak and other Slav nationalities by German and Magyar political elites within the Habsburg state.²⁹ As the Russo-Japanese War turned into a shambolic defeat for Russia, *Jednota*’s war commentaries lamented that “the foes of Slavdom rejoiced” in the defeat of Russian army at the decisive battle of Mukden.³⁰ Russia’s decision to sue for peace was similarly portrayed by the newspaper as an “enormous blow to the Tsarist Empire and to Slavdom in general.”³¹ The perceived importance of Russia as a sympathetic power towards the grievances of Slovak and other Slav national minorities in East-Central Europe led to a firm association of the Slovak national cause with the success of Tsarist foreign policy among Slovak American leaders.

The National Slovak Society (Národný Slovenský Spolok) – the leading non-denominational, Slovak fraternal organisation in the United States – shared the favourable view of Russia held by their Catholic counterparts. The Society’s official almanac of 1905 accounted for the struggle of their ‘Russian brothers’ against Japanese forces, declaring that:

²⁴ Ohio, Cleveland, Slovak Institute, “Personalities File, Štefan Furdek, 1855–1915,” Michael J. Kopanic, “For God and the Nation: The Rev. Štefan Furdek, 1855–1915,” *Naše Rodina*, 21: 3 (2009), 95.

²⁵ *Jednota*, [Cleveland, OH/Middletown, PA], 14 Dec. 1904, 4.

²⁶ *Jednota*, 14 Dec. 1904, 4.

²⁷ *Idem*.

²⁸ *Idem*.

²⁹ *Idem*.

³⁰ *Jednota*, 15 Mar. 1905, 1.

³¹ *Idem*.

almost the entire world is interested in the war, for it is a struggle between the white-skinned and the yellow-skinned, a Christian nation and idolatry, a European Great Power and a pagan-Asiatic horde [...] But it interests the individual branches of the Slav nations especially – for in this war rests the well-being and progress of all Slavdom.³²

The National Slovak Society backed up its moral support for the Russian cause with more tangible measures of support for the Tsarist regime. In 1904 the Society organised a collection among its membership that raised over one thousand dollars for the Russian Red Cross organisation.³³ As an internal history of the organisation makes clear, there was a twofold purpose to the Society's fundraising exercise. On the one hand, the National Slovak Society's campaign to assist wounded soldiers in the Russo-Japanese War "placed the organisation in a good light before American citizens" as a charitable organisation.³⁴ This fundraising was also intended however to have the same impact on Russian opinion, which as the Society's later internal history noted, was "looked to at that time as the sole power that could liberate the Slovak nation from Magyar tyranny [in Hungary]"³⁵

The National Slovak Society also sought to improve relations between Slovak nationalists and Russia by establishing personal links with leading Tsarist ministers. Leading members of the National Slovak Society presented an honorary membership of their organisation to Sergei Witte in September 1905, as the Russian Foreign Minister concluded the final negotiations of the Russo-Japanese peace treaty in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.³⁶ Anton Ambrose, the organisation's president, informed Witte that "we Slovaks are proud of the magnificent work that you have carried out, both for our Russian brothers and for the Slav nationalities altogether".³⁷ Witte received the honour

³² Balch Institute/HSP, "National Slovak Society in the U.S.A., Almanac, 1893–1905/6 (incomp.)," Box 1, *Národný Kalendár pre rímsko a grécko-katolíkov a evanjelikov na obyčajný rok 1905* (Pittsburgh, PA: Tlačou Amerikánsko Slovenských Novín, 1905), 247.

³³ Balch Institute/HSP, "National Slovak Society in the U.S.A., Almanac, 1893–1905/6 (incomp.)," Box 1, *Národný Kalendár pre rímsko a grécko-katolíkov a evanjelikov na obyčajný rok 1906*, (Pittsburgh, PA: Tlačou Amerikánsko Slovenských Novín, 1906), 44–47.

³⁴ Balch Institute/HSP, "National Slovak Society, National Records, 1915–1974, Box 2, Jubilee Book, 50th Anniversary, 2/3", *Pamätnica k Zlatému Jubileu Národného Slovenského Spolku v Spojených štátoch amerických, 1890–1940*, (Pittsburgh, PA: Tlač Narodných Novín, 1940), 34.

³⁵ Idem.

³⁶ *Národný Kalendár 1906*, 45, 47.

³⁷ Ibid., 47.

with thanks for "the feelings of sympathy expressed for Russia" by the National Slovak Society.³⁸

Slovak American links with Russia were further developed in 1907, when Peter Rovnianek was made an Honorary Vice-Consul at the Russian consulate in Pittsburgh.³⁹ A student who had been expelled from his theological classes in Nitra in May 1887 for displaying Slovak nationalist sentiments, Rovnianek was invited by a Czech acquaintance to complete his seminary training in Cleveland, Ohio. Rovnianek's personality was more suited to the bully pulpit of nationalist journalism to a church pulpit for religious enlightenment though. Rovnianek founded the National Slovak Society in 1890 and served as its president for a full decade. As editor of the largest-selling Slovak newspaper in the United States, *Amerikánsko-Slovenské Noviny*, Rovnianek used his dual position to provide regular financial support to the homeland nationalist movement, including the emerging *Hlas* circle of younger, Czechophile activists as well as the traditional Martin circle.⁴⁰ By the mid-1900s, Rovnianek's publishing and banking empire had made him the dominant business leader of the Slovak American community. His cultivation of the Russian consulate in Pittsburgh fit into Rovnianek's wider, pan-Slavic understanding of his national cause. This is revealed by a pamphlet, written in 1891, in which Rovnianek attempted to inform an American readership about the new Slovak American community that had emerged in the United States. He explained that:

We are Slavonians or as some call us Slovák's [sic]. Slavonians are a branch of the powerful Slavish nationality, whose number exceeds a hundred million souls[...]

To this Slavish Nation we belong. Our native brothers are: the Russians, Polanders, Bohemians, Croates [sic], Servians, Bulgarians and Wends. Although we are divided into several nations, each having its own literature and language, each its great men, the true Slavish feeling and our own cultivation unite us into one generation, one race, one brotherhood.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid., 53.

³⁹ *Pamätnica k Zlatému Jubileu*, 74.

⁴⁰ 'Correspondence of U.S. Slovaks', Reel 2 of 3, Supreme Assembly of the National Slovak Society to Pavol Mudroň, Pittsburgh, PA, 29 Aug. 1899, f. 1.

⁴¹ Peter V. Rovnianek, *Who Are the Slavonians?* (New York: P. V. Rovnianek and Co., 1891), 7, 9.

Rovnianek's willingness to forge ties with the Tsarist government was therefore influenced not only by a geopolitical calculation of how to further the Slovak national cause in his homeland, but also by his own belief in the pan-Slavic solidarity of a single, one hundred million strong 'brotherhood'.

Rovnianek's position as honorary Vice Consul soon exposed the limitations to Slovak American cooperation with the Tsarist regime though. In the aftermath of its humiliating defeat to Japan and the abortive revolution of 1905, Russian foreign policy gravitated towards the need to obtain a period of reduced tensions with Austria-Hungary, culminating in secret talks to settle their interests in the Balkan region in September 1908.⁴² To bring about improved relations with the Austro-Hungarian ministry however, the Russian consulate in Pittsburgh could not be seen to be honouring the views of an anti-Hungarian polemicist like Rovnianek. His newspapers were strident critics of the Hungarian government owing to its refusal to grant national rights to the Slovaks – a conflict that was heightened by the Černová massacre⁴³ of 1907, in which fifteen Slovaks were killed and nearly one hundred injured when their crowd was fired on by Hungarian gendarmes.⁴⁴ In this way, the great power interests of the Russian state clashed with the nationalist agitation Slovak Americans like Rovnianek, who was already well-known to the Hungarian government as "a pernicious and dangerous pan-Slav agitator".⁴⁵ When Russian diplomats pressed Rovnianek to curb his criticism of the Hungarian regime and the Slovak editor refused, he was obliged to resign his position within the Pittsburgh consulate.⁴⁵ In such a conflict between the foreign policy aims of the Russian government and the nationalist agitation of Slovaks, the latter would always be obliged to give way. Rovnianek and other Slovak American leaders could act as lobbyists or potentially useful clients, but not as equal brothers of a Slavic nation. When Tsar Nicholas II and his government then themselves gave way to Austrian pressure and yielded both their own and Serbian demands during the subsequent Bosnian crisis of 1908–09, the eclipse of the pan-Slavic idea seemed to be complete. Slovak American interest in foreign affairs was revived not by a change in Russian policy but rather the Balkan Wars, whereby the 'Slavic' powers of Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria

⁴² Francis Roy Bridge, Vol. VI, *From Sadowa to Sarajevo: The Foreign Policy of Austria-Hungary, 1866–1914* (London: Routledge, 2014), 2nd Ed., 301.

⁴³ Roman Holec, "The Černová Tragedy and the Origin of Czechoslovakia in the Changes of Historical Memory", in Dušan Kováč (ed.), *Slovak Contributions to the 19th International Congress of Historical Sciences* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2000), 9.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Marián M. Stolárik, "Immigration and Urbanization: The Slovak Experience, 1870–1918" (University of Minnesota, PhD thesis, 1974), 142.

⁴⁵ *Pamätnica k Zlatému Jubileu*, 74.

worked in concert to dismember the remainder of the Ottoman Empire in Europe. Slovak American opinion initially hailed the Balkan Wars, welcoming the prospect of a “friendly union of our brother Slavs in a free Balkans”, while deploring the subsequent conflict between the coalition partners over the territorial spoils as a breach in the spirit of pan-Slavic brotherhood.⁴⁶

As both a great power rival of Austria-Hungary and the nominal protector of a greater Slavic nation, Russia was understood to be the key great power patron for the Slovak national cause and was courted by Slovak American leaders accordingly. Notably, there is no evidence of liberal distaste among migrant leaders for such a partnership: their experience of living in a republic of guaranteed civil rights like the United States did not temper their desire to work with the Tsarist autocracy. Such a relationship was inherently one-sided owing to the gulf in political power between both parties – it obliged Slovak American activists like Rovnianek to either subjugate their polemic nationalism to the short-term interests of Tsarist foreign policy or forfeit their position of favour they held with the Russian government. Slovak nationalist aspirations therefore had to fully align with Russian great power designs to produce a viable partnership. While Slovak Americans could not control this process, their development of a polemical migrant press, fraternal organisations consisting of some 200,000 members, as well as an umbrella political leadership in the form of the Slovak League of America made them well positioned to take advantage of any future opportunity to advance the Slovak national cause. In June 1914, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the resulting diplomatic crisis presented Slovak American nationalists with an ideal opportunity to mobilise their resources on behalf of the Slovak nation and their Russian patron.

Slovak Americans, Russia and the First World War

The clash between Russia and the Central Powers of Austria-Hungary and Germany gave Slovak American activists ample opportunity to link their national cause to that of Russian geopolitical aims in the First World War. Not only did the conflict present a chance for the Habsburg domains to be either reconstituted or even dismembered in the wake of a Russian victory, but the identity of the antagonists on the Eastern and Balkan fronts also allowed Slovak Americans to revive the spirit of pan-Slav solidarity. Following the declaration of war on Serbia by Austria Hungary on 25 July 1914, some Slovak American activists already broke with their nominal allegiance to

⁴⁶ *Slovenský Evanjelický Kalendár 1915*, Pittsburgh: Tlačou Slovesného Hlasníka, 1914, 134.

both the Habsburg dynasty and the Hungarian state and threw their lot in with their 'brother Slavs' - Serbia and Russia – who stood on the other side of the conflict. Slovak migrant organisations joined other Slav groups in the United States in an effort to prevent Austria-Hungary from conscripting its estimated two hundred thousand reservists who were currently living in the United States.⁴⁷ On 30 July, the editors of the leading Slav newspapers in the New York region, including the Slovak titles *Slovák v Amerike* and *Slovenský Sokol*, released a joint statement calling on these migrant reservists to avoid enlistment, declaring that they would "consider a traitor of the Slavonic idea everyone who should, from fear or without knowledge, join the Austrian flag to fight against our own brethren" – the 'fellow Slav' armies represented by Serbia and Russia.⁴⁸ At a further protest meeting against Austro-Hungarian aggression held by Czech, Russian and South Slav migrant groups in New York in August 1914, the radical Slovak American journalist Milan Getting declared to the crowd that:

when the despotic monarchy of Austria-Hungary calls the Slovaks to its defence [...] the Slovaks remember that it was Austria-Hungary that has permitted the destruction of the national life of the Slovaks, and so it is that the Slovaks before the civilized world give answer that they will not permit themselves to be used as ammunition for Austro-Hungarian cannons.⁴⁹

The mobilisation of Slovak American sentiment against fighting on behalf of Austria-Hungary was soon joined by outright support for the Slavic powers in the war. In September 1914 the official newspaper of the National Slovak Society, *Národné Noviny*, set out its desired outcome of the European war:

We cannot identify with the politics of Austria-Hungary nor with the politics of Berlin, because neither have signified any good for ourselves [...] but we shall identify with and trust those who in their great sacrifices are now struggling against these killers of Slavdom and against the Pan-German hydra! We shall, and we must declare openly that we believe in Russia, that we welcome its efforts and that we believe in its stated ambitions [...]

⁴⁷ 'Servian Editors Appeal', *New York Times*, 30 July 1914, 3.

⁴⁸ *Idem*.

⁴⁹ 'Slavs Here Pledge All Aid to Serbia', *New York Times*, 2 Aug 1914, 5.

The victorious advance of our Russian brothers in the cause of liberating every Slavic nation must fill the hearts of every true Slovak and Slav with great joy.⁵⁰

The Society's almanac for 1915 similarly portrayed the Russian war effort as "a battle for the cause of Slavdom" and expressed regret that Slovak soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian army had to "fire at their own brothers, the Serbs and Russians... who are fighting for Slovak freedom and the breaking of Austria and German power".⁵¹ These sentiments were shared by Slovak Catholic leaders such as Jozef Hušek, the newly appointed editor of the *Jednota* newspaper. On 5 August 1914, Hušek portrayed the war as "a fight between Germandom and Slavdom [...] a life or death struggle" for supremacy in Eastern Europe.⁵² Hušek further claimed that Slovaks in Europe had been merely "servants to the Habsburgs" rather than loyal subjects of the imperial dynasty in previous times and argued that "Slovak freedom will sprout from the defeat of this German-Magyar regime".⁵³ At the same time as Slovak politicians in Hungary sought to demonstrate their unquestionable loyalty to the Habsburg war effort, their counterparts in the United States adopted an independent and far more radical stance – calling for the defeat of Austria-Hungary and national liberation with Russian assistance.

Slovak American efforts to decouple their nationalist cause from Austria-Hungary were also stimulated by Russian attempts to exploit the 'nationalities question' of the Habsburg Empire to its strategic advantage. In September 1914, the Russian commander in chief Grand Duke Nikolay Nikolayevich issued a 'Proclamation to the Peoples of Austria-Hungary', that declared Russia to be a great power that had "shed blood many times for the liberation of nations from a foreign yoke"; it now pledged to bring to the Slavs of the Habsburg Empire "freedom and the fulfilment of your national aspirations".⁵⁴ This proclamation reached the Slovak League of America in January 1915 and was duly circulated to the Slovak American press.⁵⁵ A *Jednota* editorial in February 1915 captured the increasingly radical sentiment of Slovak Ameri-

⁵⁰ *Národné Noviny*, 24 Sep. 1914, 4.

⁵¹ Balch Institute-HSP, "National Slovak Society in the USA, Almanac, 1907–1919 (incomp)," Box 2, "Európska vojna," *Kalendárium 1915*, (Pittsburgh, PA: Tlačou Národných Novín, 1915), 64, 75.

⁵² *Jednota*, 5 Aug. 1914, 4.

⁵³ *Idem*.

⁵⁴ *Jednota*, 20 Jan. 1915, 5; *Národné Noviny*, 14 Jan. 1915, 4.

⁵⁵ Ference, *Sixteen Months of Indecision*, 69.

can leaders at this time by arguing that "the Slovak nation is spilling its most sacred blood on the frontlines in the interests of their oppressors; if we were the masters of our own destiny... we would fight in the ranks of the Slavs – alongside the Serbs and Russians".⁵⁶ Support for the Russian war effort and a disavowal of loyalty to Austria-Hungary therefore defined the response of the most powerful Slovak American organisations to the outbreak of the First World War. While the genuine desire of the Tsarist ministry to follow up its wartime promises to the Slavs of Austria-Hungary was doubtful, there was no benefit to Slovak nationalists in the United States by downplaying its meaning.

Slovak American leaders continued to identify Russia as the most important member of the Triple Entente powers as the First World War progressed, for any form of national liberation seemed dependent on a Russian military victory over the Central Powers. Russian promises to the Slav nationalities of Austria-Hungary appeared likely to be tested in the spring of 1915, when a Russian offensive entered the Carpathian Mountains and briefly occupied parts of north-eastern Hungary, including some Slovak-speaking villages.⁵⁷ Despite the general retreat of Russian armies eastward as the war progressed, reports of the conflict in the Slovak American press continued to highlight instances of Russian heroism on the Eastern Front.⁵⁸ The 'Brusilov Offensive' during the summer of 1916 in particular revived Slovak American hopes that the Russian army would break through the Carpathians and destroy the Austro-Hungarian state.⁵⁹ A *Jednota* editorial pointed to the capture of 108,000 Austro-Hungarian soldiers in a single week of the Brusilov Offensive as the beginning of this process, arguing that "the vast number of prisoners [captured] in such a short space of time clearly shows that the army of old [Emperor] Franz Jozef is quickly losing its moral calibre; with such an army, Austria cannot win any great victory".⁶⁰ Even Russian defeats were identified in the Slovak American as the outcome of the perfidy of their Western allies. A *Jednota* editorial in September 1915 for example complained that "two thirds of the German, four-fifths of the Austro-Hungarian and two-thirds of the Turkish armies are fighting Russia". Jozef Hušek therefore called on Britain to commit a far greater army to the Western Front to relieve the military burden placed on Russia.⁶¹

⁵⁶ *Jednota*, 2 Feb. 1915, 4.

⁵⁷ *Národné Noviny*, 25 Mar. 1915, 1; 15 Apr. 1915, 1.

⁵⁸ Ference, *Sixteen Months of Indecision*, 72–75.

⁵⁹ *Národné Noviny*, 15 June 1916, 1; 22 June 1916, 1; *Jednota*, 14 June 1916, 1; *Jednota*, 28 June 1916, 1.

⁶⁰ *Jednota*, 14 June 1916, 4.

⁶¹ *Jednota*, 29 Sep. 1915, 4.

Slovak American support for the Russian war effort was not solely of a vicarious nature, as migrant leaders also tried to provide material assistance to their Russian allies. In January 1916, the leading members of *Slovenský Sokol* (Slovak Sokol), a branch of the Slavic gymnastic organisation with nearly ten thousand Slovak members in the United States, sent a letter to the Russian consulate in New York proposing that Sokol delegates be used to facilitate the supply of weapons, munitions and cars to the Russian military from factories in the United States.⁶² The letter, drafted by the Sokol officer and radical journalist Milan Getting, declared the Slovaks to be “a small, Slav nation in Hungary, whose every hope of liberation rests with great and heroic Russia, being our strongest Slavic brother”.⁶³ Getting also advised the Russian government that captured Slovak prisoners of war on the Eastern Front could help its domestic war industry; it boasted that Slovaks represented “the most industrialised nation of Hungary” owing to the relatively high degree of manufacturing that had existed in northern Hungary before the war.⁶⁴ While there is no evidence that the Russian consulate took these exaggerated claims of the Slovak Sokol seriously, the letter demonstrates that Slovak American support for Tsarist Russia was not an entirely passive stance. Even from afar, Slovak migrant leaders sought to assist the Russian war economy to bring about the military victory and national liberation.

Slovak Americans also looked to Russia as a great power patron for their project of creating an independent, Czechoslovak state in East-Central Europe after the war. The first step towards realising this project was the Memorandum of the Slovak League of America, published in September 1914, whereby Slovak Americans demanded “full autonomy and the right of self-determination (*sebaurčovanie*) for the Slovak nation in all political, cultural and economic spheres” as an outcome of the war for their countrymen in the Habsburg Empire.⁶⁵ This declaration marked a shift in the political outlook of Slovak nationalism from being a movement for national rights (and, if possible, territorial autonomy) within a reformed Kingdom of Hungary, to a cause that could attach itself to other nationalist and state-building movements in Central and Eastern Europe. Crucially, however, no leading Slovak American activist envisaged or even argued for an independent ‘Slovakia’ to be created at the end

⁶² Slovak Republic, Martin, MSVR, Archív Matice Slovenskej, Fond Kultúrny a Spolkový Život Slovákov v USA [Fond KSZ], č. šk. 15, inv. č. 118, por. č. 466, Milan Getting to Štefan Erhart, New York, 15 Jan. 1916, 1.

⁶³ Idem.

⁶⁴ Milan Getting to Štefan Erhart, New York, 15 Jan. 1916, 1.

⁶⁵ *Národné Noviny*, 24 Sep. 1914, 5.

of the war – all considered it necessary for their homeland to enter a political union with another partner. The price for Slovak American participation in any joint independence movement was the promise of “full autonomy” within the territory of northern Hungary, that would be detached to become the Slovak national homeland. After much internal debate between various Slovak American leaders, the Slovak League of America eventually concluded the ‘Cleveland Agreement’ with the Bohemian National Alliance, an organisation of secular and Protestant Czechs in the United States.⁶⁶ The Cleveland Agreement defined the wartime political goal of both émigré groups to be “the joining of the Czech and Slovak nations in a federal state, with complete national autonomy for Slovakia.”⁶⁷ Both organisations then organised invaluable financial support for the Czechoslovak National Council, a body that had been formed in exile by the Czech nationalist politician Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and agitated for Czechoslovak statehood in the capitals of Britain, France, Russia, as well as in neutral Switzerland.⁶⁸ In April 1916, the Slovak League approved the dispatch of two official delegates to Europe to coordinate the activities of Masaryk’s Czechoslovak National Council in Western Europe as well as a more dispersed set of Czech and Slovak émigré groups based in Russia.⁶⁹ The delegates sent to accomplish this task were Gustav Košík, a journalist and leader of the Slovak Catholic Sokol organisation, and Štefan Osuský, a lawyer from Chicago.⁷⁰ The Slovak League instructed Košík and Osuský to secure the acceptance of Czechoslovak émigré organisations in Western Europe and Russia to the terms of the Cleveland Agreement – full autonomy for Slovakia in a future Czecho-Slovak state – as the basis for political cooperation.⁷¹ The delegates were also tasked with gaining the goodwill of the Entente powers for the Czechoslovak project.

As the formal, essentially diplomatic instructions issued by the Slovak League to the delegates make clear, the organisation considered the support

⁶⁶ *Národné Noviny*, 28 Oct. 1915, 4.

⁶⁷ *Jednota*, 24 Nov. 1915, 4–5.

⁶⁸ Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State That Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 29.

⁶⁹ Getting Family Papers, Box 4, Folder 3, Getting, Milan sr., [trans. Milan P. Getting jr], “American Slovaks and the Evolution of the Czechoslovak Concept During the Years 1914–1918, Part I,” 1933, 104, 107–108; Stolárik, “The Role of the American Slovaks,” 49.

⁷⁰ Stolárik, “The Role of the American Slovaks,” 49.

⁷¹ O. F. Vavro Šrobár, č. šk. 20, inv. č. 931, poč. č. 8, “Úprava pre slovenských poľných vyslancov Slovenskej Ligy do Európy,” Pittsburgh, PA, 24 May 1916, 3/23/4.

of Russia to be the most valuable prize among the Entente powers. The Slovak League instructed Košík and Osuský that:

The main emphasis of activity must be among the upper elements [of society], chiefly and above all else in Russia. The focus of our delegates' political activities must lie in Petrograd and Moscow: where they should pay attention to powerful political statesmen both in and out of government, strive to arouse their sympathy and confidence [in us], and so gain their active support for our Slovak political claims.⁷²

Gustav Košík travelled to Russia with Milan Štefánik, the chief Slovak member of Masaryk's Czechoslovak National Council, where they worked with a faction of Czech and Slovak émigrés to establish a Russian branch of the National Council that would be loyal to Masaryk and his circle of exiles in Western Europe.⁷³ These efforts were formalised in August 1916 by their signature and circulation of the 'Kiev Agreement', a further political declaration of Czech and Slovak émigrés in Russia for "Czechs and Slovaks [...] to form a single, indivisible and free Czechoslovak nation, under the support and protection of the Four Powers [the Russian Empire, Britain, France and Italy]."⁷⁴ The Kiev Agreement's assertion of a single and indivisible "Czechoslovak nation" provoked uproar among many Slovak American activists, who sensed that such a framing of the new state made no provision for Slovak political and economic autonomy. Košík's decision to accept the wording of the document without the Slovak League of America's prior consent led to a debate about whether to censure their delegate prior to his return to the United States in May 1917.⁷⁵ In reality, the Slovak League found that it could do little to constrain the activities of their delegates, once separated from them by an ocean. Osuský, the Slovak League's other delegate to Europe, played an even more independent role than Košík in Russia. He took up a position in the Czechoslovak National Council's activities in Paris, established a Czechoslovak Press Bureau in Geneva and eventually served as secretary of the

⁷² "Úprava pre slovenských poľných vyslancov," 3/23/4.

⁷³ SNA, Fond Slovenská Līga v Amerike [SLA], č. šk. 3, "Korešpondencia Alberta Mamateya, 1912–1920," poč. č. 487, Cablegram, Gustav Košík to Albert Mamatey, Petrograd, 19 Aug. 1916, 1; Getting, "American Slovaks and the Evolution of the Czechoslovak Concept," 108; Stolárik, "The Role of the American Slovaks," 64–65.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Sidor, "Zásahy Slovenskej Ligy," 36.

⁷⁵ Idem; Getting, "American Slovaks and the Evolution of the Czechoslovak Concept," 120; Stolárik, "The Role of the American Slovaks," 54, 66–67.

Czechoslovak delegation at the Paris Peace Conference – essentially trading in his representative status for the Slovak League for an official position within Masaryk's circle of activists in Western Europe.⁷⁶ The wartime activities of Osuský are better known to historians today – yet his independent decision to attach himself to Masaryk's organisation in Western Europe rather than proceed to Russia ran contrary to the formal instructions provided by the Slovak League of America.⁷⁷ The focus of the Slovak League's interests lay in Russia until the revolution of 1917 – a stance that mirrored the decisively pro-Russian and pan-Slavic stance of the Slovak American press and migrant organisations it represented.

Slovak American views on the Russian Revolution

The Russian Revolution of March 1917 was a momentous event for the Slovak American community and one that all nationalist activists had to account for. With the attention of the Slovak American community having been fixated on the importance of Russian patronage and lack of provision for an autonomous Slovakia, the fate of Russia seemed twinned to their cause of Slovak autonomy within a Czecho-Slovak state. Slovak leaders could have had many possible responses to the transformed political situation in Russia: they could have supported the liberalising agenda of the Provisional Government; backed the radicalised successor regime put in place by the Bolsheviks six months later; or called for the restoration of the exiting Tsarist autocracy. As this article will show, Slovak American responses to the revolution were conditioned chiefly by *realpolitik* – their need for Russia to remain in the war to bring Austria-Hungary to total defeat and so achieve national liberation. Slovak American activists expressed their ideological preferences in the revolution only to the extent that they would help achieve that strategic goal. The alignment of Russian great power interests and Slovak national goals that had been brought about by the outbreak of war 1914 had to be maintained at all costs. It is only through the failure of attempts to restore this viable partnership that the willingness of Slovak Americans to embrace a more Western-oriented strategy of lobbying and activism in the final year of the war – and ultimately subsume themselves under the authority of Masaryk's branch of the Czecho-slovak National Council – can be understood.

⁷⁶ Stolárik, "The Role of the American Slovaks," 50–51; Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary*, 205; Piotr S. Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies, 1919–1925: French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from the Paris Peace Conference to Locarno* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 23.

⁷⁷ Stolárik, "The Role of the American Slovaks," 50–51.

The prevailing response to the 'February Revolution' among Slovak migrant leaders was to embrace the rhetoric of democracy and freedom, hailing the fall of the Tsar as a progressive step for Russia and the wider world. The National Slovak Society's newspaper, *Národné Noviny*, received news of the fall of the Tsarist regime on 22 March 1917 with relief, describing how "this great Slavic realm suffered shockingly in this terrible, world war under the yoke of the autocrats, who through their pro-German politics have caused greater evils to afflict Russia than the Germans have caused themselves".⁷⁸ The newspaper's editor Anton Bielek declared that "this mighty call of the Russian people has shaken the consciousness of the entire world... The cry of the entire Russian nation – "Long live the Republic!" – will mean the death of absolutism in all other countries as well. The dawn of a new, free and democratic age in Russia has implications beyond description for the whole of Slavdom and the entire, civilised world".⁷⁹ The Catholic newspaper *Jednota* concurred with this view, with its editor Hušek arguing that "this revolution is a victory for Slavdom; [for] German influence in Russia has ceased to be an important factor. Today Russia is governed by pan-Slavs to their last drop of blood".⁸⁰ Hušek welcomed the creation of the Provisional Government, declaring that "every Slav nation will have greater confidence and greater hope towards this free and democratic Russia, rather than a Germanophile and aristocratic Russia" – as Hušek and other Slovak American leaders now characterised a Tsarist regime that they had courted for decades.⁸¹

While some liberal-minded Slovak American leaders were no doubt sincere in supporting the overthrow of autocracy, Slovak American organisations had shown no appetite for even reform in Tsarist Russia prior to the revolution. Slovak nationalists in the United States had been ardent supporters of the Russian state before and during the First World War. Slovak organisations expressed their support for key members of the late Tsarist regime, including not only Sergei Witte but also the conservative Minister of the Interior Pyotr Stolypin – whose illegal restructuring of election laws in 'Stolypin's coup' undid many of the gains of the 1905 revolution. Upon the assassination of Stolypin in 1911, the *Jednota* newspaper praised this repressor of opposition political movements as a leader "whose goal was for a powerful Russia, internally and in the wider world".⁸² Its editor Jozef Hušek went further in denouncing Masaryk

⁷⁸ *Národné Noviny*, 22 Mar. 1917, 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁰ *Jednota*, 21 Mar. 1917, 4.

⁸¹ *Idem.*

⁸² *Jednota*, 20 Sep. 1911, 4.

and other "freethinking Czech democrats" for publicly welcoming the fall of Stolypin's regime in Russia.⁸³ The difference in outlook between Slovak American leaders and Masaryk – who would assume leadership of their common Czechoslovak cause just a few years later – was starkly exposed. In both words and deeds, Slovak American leaders did not express support for a liberal and democratic Russian state until the Tsarist regime had already collapsed. Their embrace of Russian democracy came only as a *fait accompli* of the February Revolution. The strength of the Russian regime in comparison to other great powers, not its ideology, determined Slovak American attitudes towards it.

Slovak American leaders primarily viewed the course of the Russian revolution in terms of its foreign policy implications – for this was the principal threat to their project of liberating their countrymen from Austro-Hungarian rule. The most likely danger posed by the February Revolution to Slovak nationalists was the prospect of the Provisional government withdrawing from the war by signing a separate peace treaty with the Central Powers; for as *Jednota* editor Jozef Hušek argued, "without Russia, the Allies cannot win this war".⁸⁴ With their objective of creating an independent Czechoslovak state relying on a decisive Entente military victory, Slovak American support for political factions inside Russia was determined chiefly by their commitment to the war effort. The broadly favourable Slovak American view of the Provisional Government can be best understood in this context – for the newly instated Russian Foreign Minister Miliukov quickly stated his government's intention to maintain its military commitments to its Entente partners and to launch a new offensive against Germany and Austria-Hungary in the summer of 1917.⁸⁵ Slovak American goodwill for the regime was deepened in May 1917 when the Provisional Government backed the creation of a 'Czecho-Slovak Brigade' – a force that was formed of captured Czech and Slovak prisoners of war who volunteered to fight against the Central Powers under Russian military command.⁸⁶ This brigade accomplished itself well in its first engagement at the Battle of Zborov in June 1917, leading to the creation of additional volunteer divisions of Czech and Slovak soldier in Russia with the support of the Provisional Government.⁸⁷ Over time, these so-called 'Czechoslovak Legions' grew into an effective fighting force in Russia and their service to the

⁸³ Idem.

⁸⁴ *Jednota*, 1 Aug. 1917, 4.

⁸⁵ Georg M. Schild, *Between Ideology and Realpolitik: Woodrow Wilson and the Russian Revolution, 1917–1921* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1995), 22.

⁸⁶ Stólarík, "The Role of the American Slovaks," 66–67.

⁸⁷ *Národné Noviny*, 12 July 1917, 4; Unterberger, *Rise of Czechoslovakia*, 69.

Entente powers also proved to be an important source of diplomatic lobbying power for Czechoslovak cause.⁸⁸ By committing Russian forces to the Entente war effort and by allowing the formation of volunteer Czechoslovak military units, the Provisional Government secured the overwhelming support and sympathy of Slovak leaders in the United States.

In contrast to the highly favourable Slovak American view of the new governing regime, the Russian socialist movement was viewed with increasing hostility by Slovak American opinion. The Slovak American press blamed the failure of the Russian summer offensive on the socialist opposition within Russia, with one Slovak American newspaper complaining that "Russian socialists have contrived to sow disorder and unruliness within a few divisions fighting in Galicia".⁸⁹ Jozef Hušek argued that the socialist opposition had "gravely blotted its copybook" by undermining the Russian war effort in this manner, concluding that "were Russia to return to Tsarist rule, they [Russian socialists] would receive their just desserts" for having weakened the Provisional Government.⁹⁰ In this context, the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in November 1917 was greeted with dismay by Slovak American organisations. The National Slovak Society's newspaper broke the news of the fall of the Provisional Government by describing the Bolsheviks as "the greatest plague in free Russia".⁹¹ Its editorial listed the family names of Bolshevik ministers such as Trotsky and Zinoviev in order to demonstrate to its readers that "with the exception of Lenin the leaders of the Soviet of workers and soldiers are not Germans, nor Russians of German origin, but simply Jews – who for German gold have placed the Soviet into the hands of the Kaiser and his allies".⁹² The *Jednota* editor Jozef Hušek concurred with this view in arguing that "the Russian Revolution, Russia, and Slavdom have all been sunk" by the Bolshevik coup.⁹³ He declared that "Russia... the great Slavic empire no longer exists"; from this belief Hušek held a similarly bleak outlook for Slovaks and other Slav nations in Central and Eastern Europe, who "without a great and powerful Russia can only struggle on in German servitude".⁹⁴ While Slovak American leaders were generally hostile in principle towards the ideology of the Bolshevik regime, their chief concern remained the impact of the new regime's

⁸⁸ Orzoff, *The Battle for the Castle*, 48–52.

⁸⁹ *Jednota*, 1 Aug. 1917, 4.

⁹⁰ *Idem*.

⁹¹ *Národné Noviny*, 15 Nov. 1917, 1, 4.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹³ *Jednota*, 6 Mar. 1918, 4.

⁹⁴ *Idem*.

attitude towards the war. Hušek characterised the international socialist movement as merely "a German red international" – a fifth column element "that is responsible for [the fate of] Belgium, Serbia, Armenia and Russia".⁹⁵ It was this aspect of the radical socialist movement in Russia that Slovak American leaders objected to most during the revolutionary year of 1917.

Anti-Bolshevik sentiment among Slovak American leaders became more significant once Lenin's government signed a separate treaty with the Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. President of the Slovak League of America Albert Mamatey expressed his dismay at the treaty for having "changed the situation greatly to the disadvantage to our cause".⁹⁶ Jozef Hušek similarly denounced the Bolsheviks for agreeing to terms with the Central Powers, stating that "Slav nationalism must be pitted against German nationalism. If the Bolsheviks were not such fanatics and were more open to mature and more sensible ideas than their own, they would finally realise that only [Slav] nationalism can beat [German] nationalism".⁹⁷ Russia's withdrawal from the war was described by Hušek as "a ceaseless question in the hearts and minds" of the Slovak nationalists in the United States due to the threat that it posed to the cause of their countrymen's liberation from Habsburg rule.⁹⁸ In March 1918, the *Jednota* editor declared that "the essential aim of the war today is not a resolution of the Czechoslovak question, but rather how to save Russia. If Russia can be saved then all other matters will resolve themselves".⁹⁹ This sentiment was shared by *Národné Noviny*, which held that "the liberation of Russia from German subjugation is the main condition required for our own freedom".¹⁰⁰ The decision of the Bolshevik regime to withdraw from the war represented such a serious blow to Slovak American leaders that the prospect of intervention in Russia was already being openly discussed within days of the treaty being signed.

Events in Russia soon made Slovak views on the Bolshevik regime more significant than could have been anticipated. In May 1918, the local Bolshevik authorities in the city of Chelyabinsk sought to disarm volunteer units of the Czechoslovak Legion – the legionaries resisted the order and defeated the regime's forces in the area in battle. The revolt quickly spread to other Czecho-

⁹⁵ Idem.

⁹⁶ Fond SLA, č. šk. 1, "Korešpondencia Slovenskej Lígy v Amerike," poč. č. 82, Albert Mamatey to Charles Pergler, Pittsburgh, PA, 28 Mar. 1918, 1.

⁹⁷ *Jednota*, 13 Mar. 1918, 4.

⁹⁸ Idem.

⁹⁹ Idem.

¹⁰⁰ *Národné Noviny*, 21 Mar. 1918, p. 4.

slovak units, so that during the summer of 1918 the Legions seized control of almost the entirety of the Trans-Siberian Railway: dissolving local Soviet governments throughout Siberia and capturing the Pacific port of Vladivostok.¹⁰¹ This remarkable feat brought the Czechoslovak cause to international attention and also created the opportunity for an Entente intervention in Russia. Acting in his role as commander in chief of the Czechoslovak Legions – as assented to by the volunteers themselves – the head of the Czechoslovak National Council in exile, Tomáš Masaryk, set out the objectives of the Legions in Russia as the “placing the whole of Siberia under one government and enabling the Russians there to organize an army”.¹⁰² Writing to a general in command of the troops in Siberia, Masaryk further speculated whether “our army, properly armed, could reach Moscow” in the event of a swift collapse of the military position of the Central Powers.¹⁰³ At the same time, the Slovak American press called for the Entente powers to assist the Czechoslovak Legions in removing the Bolshevik regime from power entirely. A *Národné Noviny* editorial declared that:

The time for the liberation of Russia is at hand. Around the banners of the Czechoslovak armies are rallying Russian patriots disgusted with the treason of the Bolsheviks. They are sincere friends of Russian democracy. They want to see Russia free and German influence removed. Intervention of the Allies is taking on concrete form [...] but Russia needs more than a teaspoonful of help. Russia must be saved from Germany if the world is to be saved from her.¹⁰⁴

Slovak American leaders favoured a significant Allied campaign in Russia to re-establish an Eastern Front in the war. Owing to the objections of President Wilson, however, the Allies launched only a limited expedition to Vladivostok to support the evacuation of the Czechoslovak Legions from Siberia, a task that was completed in 1920.¹⁰⁵ The unforeseen conflict that broke out between the Czecho-Slovak Brigades and the Bolshevik authorities in the

¹⁰¹ Brent Mueggenberg, *The Czecho-Slovak Struggle for Independence, 1914–1920* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2014), 10–12; Unterberger, *Rise of Czechoslovakia*, 266.

¹⁰² Getting Family Papers, (Add. /Misc.), Box 1, Folder 4, “Getting Family Papers: Czechoslovak Classroom – Masaryk Papers,” “Agreement with General Janin on the Situation in Siberia,” 21 Sep. 1918, 31.

¹⁰³ ‘Getting Family Papers, “Czechoslovak Classroom – Masaryk Papers,” “Some Notes to the Memorandum of Sep 21st 1918,” 27 Sep. 1918, 32.

¹⁰⁴ *Národné Noviny*, 19 Sep. 1918, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Unterberger, *Rise of Czechoslovakia*, p. 235.

summer of 1918 raised the prospect of a substantial Allied military intervention in Russia: a policy that Slovak American leaders were agitating for since the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed. While the aims of the Allied military expedition proved to be more limited in practice, the willingness of Slovak American leaders to use their own volunteer units in Siberia to remove the Bolshevik regime from power demonstrated their hostility to the final outcome of the Russian revolution. Rather than being driven by ideological differences, however, the breach between Slovak nationalists and the new regime in Russia was caused primarily by the Bolshevik conclusion of a separate peace with the Central Powers.

The failure of a reinvigorated and more reliably 'pan-Slavic' Russian state to emerge from the revolution of 1917 led to a decisive shift in the focus of Slovak American agitation. Having previously invested much of their efforts in securing Russian patronage for the project of Czecho-Slovak statehood, Slovak American leaders now fell into line with the activities of the Czecho-slovak National Council in Western Europe, led by Masaryk. To be clear, there were other good reasons for Slovak Americans to put their full weight behind Masaryk's leadership by 1918. The famous Slovak astronomer and aviator Milan Rastislav Štefánik had assumed a prominent role within Masaryk's circle of émigré activists, which gave the Czechoslovak National Council a Slovak voice to the outside world.

In this capacity, Štefánik travelled to the United States in 1917 to secure its government's permission for Czech and Slovak volunteers to enlist in a Czecho-Slovak Legion, to fight for the Entente on the Western Front. With American acquiescence and a subsequent campaigning drive fronted by Štefánik, around 4,000 Slovak American volunteers were shipped across the Atlantic, where they fought in France before continuing to Czechoslovakia to provide temporary support to the newly established regime after 1918.¹⁰⁶ The Slovak League of America had already been underwriting the Czechoslovak National Council's activities in Western Europe since signing the Cleveland Agreement of 1915, but the degree of the Slovak American commitment to Masaryk's National Council changed decisively in the aftermath of the Russian revolution. In 1917, the Slovak League of America sent four times as much funding to support Czecho-Slovak groups inside Russia than it did to Masaryk's émigré group in Western Europe.¹⁰⁷ Having received just \$5,000 in subsidies from the

¹⁰⁶ Baláž, "Účasť Amerických Slovákov na Zahraničnom Odboji v Prvej Svetovej Vojne", 97, 99.

¹⁰⁷ Sidor, "Zásahy Slovenskej Lígy", 42.

Slovak American umbrella body in 1917, Masaryk then obtained a comparative windfall of \$120,000 from the Slovak League in the final year of the war.¹⁰⁸

This shift in the focus of Slovak American activity was demonstrated at the congress of the Slovak League of America in February 1918. The assembled delegates of Slovak American journalists and fraternal organisations removed the League's secretary Ivan Daxner – who had been a long-standing sceptic of political union with the Czechs – and replaced him with Ján Janček. Janček had been a nationalist within the Hlasist faction of Slovak nationalists in Hungary, who favoured a close partnership with their Czech counterparts before the war. Having voluntarily crossed the lines into Russian captivity in 1915, Janček was quickly released and had worked among the Czech and Slovak émigrés in Russia for a common political programme, signing the Kiev Agreement that pledged their desire to create “a single, indivisible and free Czechoslovak nation”. A supporter of a close political union with the Czechs, Janček was despatched to the United States in December 1917 to bring the distinct activities of the Czech and Slovak American organisations under a collective organisation and for a common cause.¹⁰⁹ On its new secretary Janček's initiative, the Slovak League and their Czech counterparts agreed to form ‘The Czechoslovak National Council in the United States.’¹¹⁰ Made up of an equal number of Czech and Slovak American members, the American branch of the National Council took responsibility for coordinating the fundraising activities and agitation of the migrant organisations. They also placed themselves under the overarching leadership of Masaryk's group in Western Europe.¹¹¹ Milan Getting, a Slovak activist who favoured full political union with the Czechs after the war, characterised the February 1918 congress of the Slovak league of America as “the peak of success as far as the concept of Czechoslovak national unity is concerned.”¹¹² The timing of events in Russia is key to understanding this shift in Slovak American attitudes. In February 1918 as the Slovak League congress was being held, the Bolsheviks were extricating Russia from the war and would shortly sign away much of Eastern Europe to the Central Power's control in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Crucially, the Czecho-Slovak Legions were also not yet in revolt to challenge Lenin's

¹⁰⁸ *Idem*.

¹⁰⁹ Slovak Institute, Personalities File, Ján Janček, (st. a ml.), 13, 15.

¹¹⁰ Stolárik, ‘Role of American Slovaks’, 83.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹¹² Getting Family Papers, Box 4, Folder 3, Getting, Milan sr., [trans. Milan P. Getting jr., 1978], “American Slovaks and the Evolution of the Czechoslovak Concept During the Years 1914–1918, Part I”, 208.

regime, but were instead attempting a peaceful transfer out of Russia to fight again on the Western Front. Deprived of a viable path through Russia, the Slovak League was obliged to bet exclusively on Masaryk's National Council in Western Europe to deliver the liberation of their countrymen.

Lastly, events in Russia undermined one of the key goals that Slovak Americans had upheld throughout their wartime agitation – political and cultural autonomy for a Slovak national homeland after the war. This demand had been a precondition of Slovak American cooperation with their Czech counterparts. Its inclusion within the Cleveland Agreement of 1915 kickstarted joint agitation between the Czech and Slovak American organisations, as well as the Slovak League of America's support for the émigré Czecho-Slovak National Councils in Europe. In contrast, the assertion of "a single, indivisible and free Czechoslovak nation" in the Kiev Agreement of the following year scandalised many officers in the Slovak League, who attempted to recall and censure their delegate in Russia for having neglected to defend the principle of Slovak autonomy. The minority faction of Slovak Americans who favoured full political union with the Czechs, such as Milan Getting, rightly hailed the Slovak League's congress of February 1918 as a breakthrough for their competing vision of how an independent, Czechoslovak state ought to function.

To make up for their weakened position, supporters of Slovak autonomy pressed Masaryk during his agitation tour of the United States in the spring of 1918 to clarify the nature of Czech and Slovak relations within the new state through a joint memorandum of understanding between Masaryk and assembled Slovak and Czech American leaders. The subsequent 'Pittsburgh Agreement' of 31 May 1918 pledged that Slovakia would have "its own administration, parliament and courts" within an independent Czechoslovakia – but crucially, its final clause left all final settlement of the structure of the new state to homeland politicians following liberation. When the subsequent Czechoslovak National Assembly produced a largely centralised state with no political or administrative autonomy for Slovakia in 1920, its Slovak American critics pointed to the provisions of the Pittsburgh Agreement as having been betrayed by Masaryk as well as other politicians in Europe. Lacking a binding declaration, supporters of Slovak autonomy had hoped that Masaryk's personal signature of the document would provide a moral imperative to fulfil its vision within the future Czechoslovak Republic. Masaryk evidently disagreed, and as President of the Czechoslovak Republic pointed to the decision of the National Assembly to choose a centralised state as the final word on the ques-

tion of Slovak autonomy.¹¹³ He further argued in his published memoirs that the Pittsburgh Agreement was only concluded “in order to appease a small Slovak faction which was dreaming of God knows what sort of independence for Slovakia, since the ideas of some Russian Slavophiles... had taken root even among the American Slovaks”.¹¹⁴ While Masaryk conflated a desire for autonomy with ‘independence’ for political reasons – for few Slovak nationalists in the interwar period viewed Slovakia as a viable sovereign state – his aversion to the ‘Russian Slavophil’ tendency among Slovak Americans is telling. What Masaryk viewed as a token gesture to placate a ‘small faction’ of radical pro-autonomy leaders had until recently been the dominant current of thought within the migrant leadership. It was eclipsed not by sudden enthusiasm for Masaryk’s political outlook among Slovak American journalists and fraternal officers, but rather by the geopolitical context of the Russian revolution. In their acquiescence to Masaryk’s National Council in Western Europe as the only realistic hope left to liberate their countrymen, Slovak American activists were obliged to leave their goal of Slovak autonomy as a hostage to fortune.

Conclusion

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was critically important to the cause of Slovak national liberation, conducted largely by migrant activists in the United States. In addition to supporting the national cause in the ‘old country’ by using the relatively greater wealth and organisation of the migrant community, Slovak American leaders consistently sought to cultivate good relations with Russia before the First World War. This focus on Russian affairs was partly driven by a conventional geopolitical understanding that Russia’s military power and diplomatic rivalry with Austria-Hungary made it the most likely foreign power to intervene on behalf of the Slovaks of Hungary. At the same time however, Slovak Americans also viewed international affairs through a prism of pan-Slavic idealism. This amplified Slovak American support for Russia as a ‘fellow Slav’ nation, in its fight against “Asiatic hordes” in the Russo-Japanese War and the struggle against the ‘Teutonic’ states of Germany and Austria-Hungary for mastery of Central and Eastern Europe. While the expedience of Tsar Nicholas II’s foreign policy sometimes contradicted the model of pan-Slav fraternity, for Slovak American leaders the two justifications to court Russian favour were mutually reinforcing. Once the First World War broke out, Slovak American writers and fraternal officers proved as willing

¹¹³ Tomáš G. Masaryk, *The Making of a State: Memories and Observations, 1914–1918* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1927), 209.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

to embrace visions of Russian 'liberation' as their most conservative, Slovak nationalist counterparts in Austria-Hungary before 1914.

This favourable view of the Russian Empire as a 'fellow Slav' state and a potential Great Power patron was central to the program of national liberation embraced by Slovak American activists following the outbreak of the First World War. While Slovak nationalists within the Habsburg domains declared their loyalty to Austria-Hungary, the Slovak American community quickly dissented and asserted the right of Slovaks to self-determination following the war. This opened the prospect of creating a breakaway national homeland for the Slovaks and leaving Hungarian rule for good. With the conclusion of the Cleveland Agreement of October 1915, the Slovak League of America decided on this future, as part of a federal political union with their Czech nationalist counterparts. As late as 1917, however, the key backers of this scheme from President of the Slovak Albert Mamatey to leading journalists like Jozef Hušek still anticipated that this Czechoslovak state would be established under Russian hegemony. For this reason, the Slovak League of America's agitation was focused on cultivating Russian support – the western-oriented émigré group led by Masaryk was also subsidised, but it was of secondary importance to the Slovak American leadership.

The catastrophic progress of the war for the Tsarist state and the subsequent revolution of 1917 compelled Slovak American leaders to rethink their vision of the post-war order. The Provisional Government won the overwhelming support of Slovak American opinion because of its desire to continue fighting the Central Powers, as well as its support for the formation of volunteer, Czecho-Slovak Legions to fight alongside Russian forces. The failure of the 1917 summer offensive and the subsequent collapse of Russia towards chaos and the Bolshevik coup of November 1917 were serious blows to Slovak American hopes for liberation. Slovak American hostility towards the Bolshevik regime was driven by a sense of geopolitical betrayal – Lenin's desire to abandon Russian participation in the war. The pan-Slavic ideas that many Slovak Americans held shaped their hostility in racial terms as well. In the same way that the Tsar's regime was subsequently denounced as being 'German' following its downfall, Slovak American opinion castigated the Bolsheviks as being both 'Jewish' and 'German'. Only a faithfully 'Slav' regime, it followed, could save both Russia and wider Slavdom from the prospect of domination by the 'Teutonic' powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary. The uprising and famous exploits of the Czecho-Slovak Legions during the Russian Civil War from May 1918 raised Slovak American hopes of reviving both Russian and Slavic power, but the collapse of the Central Powers would soon relegate this goal to secondary importance.

The Bolshevik coup of November 1917 played a key role in realigning the outlook of the Slovak American leadership towards the Czechoslovak National Council led by Masaryk. With this final failure of their hopes of Russian patronage, Slovak American leaders were obliged to lend their full support to Masaryk's leadership. This change of stance was marked by the replacement of multiple officers who had been sceptical of the Czechoslovak project within the Slovak League of America in February 1918 and the creation of an American branch of the Czecho-Slovak National Council, that coordinated migrant fundraising activity and placed itself under the auspices of Masaryk's leadership in Europe. This secured the final ascendancy of the Western-oriented vision for Czechoslovakia that Masaryk's National Council had been advocating since the start of the war, over the Russophile stance that Masaryk rightly detected among Slovak Americans at that time. Masaryk's unchallenged leadership of the liberation movement was far from inevitable and could not have been anticipated at the beginning of 1917. Only the revolutionary chaos in Russia, combined with the collapse of the Central Powers in the autumn of 1918, made possible the creation of a Czechoslovak Republic without Russian influence and with the Western-oriented Masaryk supported by all parties as 'President-Liberator' of the new state.

One element of the Slovak American platform that was lost in this process was their demand for full political autonomy for Slovakia in the new state. Having been obliged by the failure of their Russian hopes to place themselves under Masaryk's leadership, the bulk of Slovak American leaders who viewed Slovak autonomy as an essential feature of Czecho-Slovak union could not obtain a binding commitment. Both the will to pursue autonomy within the Slovak League (owing to the Czechophile shift in leadership in February 1918) as well as the leverage to extract this concession from Masaryk's National Council no longer existed. The memorandum of understanding known to history as the 'Pittsburgh Agreement' provided only a moral case at best for the politicians of the Czechoslovak Republic to establish Slovak autonomy after gaining independence in 1918. Once the National Assembly opted for a centralised republic, the cause of Slovak autonomy would prove a lingering divide between many Slovak Americans as well as homeland nationalists from the regime that they had helped to establish in wartime.

Reflecting on the stunning achievement of Slovak national liberation at the end of the First World War, the almanac of the National Slovak Society summed up the changing Slovak American standpoint towards the Russian state. It described how:

Liberation did not come to us from Russia, as we and our leaders in the old country once dreamed of! On the contrary – it was a heroic small army, assembled from the warriors of the Czechoslovak nation, who defended our great but badly stricken Russian brother from German slavery, protected its honour and in doing so saved this future, great democracy of the world. It was not the Russians who liberated us, but we – our heroes in this dark and critical hour – who defended Russia and the Russian nation.¹¹⁵

While this commentary proved optimistic in its view of a great democratic Russian state to come, it underlined the transformations that occurred within Slovak American opinion because of the 1917 revolution. Having treated Russia as a patron for the cause of the Slav nations under Habsburg rule, the relationship between Slovak nationalists and Russia was transformed. The exploits of the Czecho-Slovak Legions allowed Slovak Americans to briefly view themselves as the protectors of Slavdom against German hegemony. This understanding of the need to defend Russia from foreign domination precluded any notion of liberation being delivered to Slovakia from the east though. Instead, Slovak Americans turned to the leadership of Masaryk and his Czechoslovak National Council with relatively little dissent in the spring of 1918. This would bring about a united effort that successfully achieved the creation of Czechoslovakia in October 1918; it would also however leave the question of political autonomy for Slovakia open to dispute throughout the twenty-year life of the First Republic.

SUMMARY

*"DEFENDERS OF THE RUSSIAN NATION": SLOVAK AMERICAN ATTITUDES
TOWARDS THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE, 1905–1918*

The Russian Revolution held great significance beyond the empire's borders. As a 'Slav' state and a key member of the Entente alliance, Slav nationalists appealed to the Tsarist regime and its successors to liberate their countrymen living in Central and Eastern Europe. This article studies the relationship between Slovak migrant nationalists in the United States and

¹¹⁵ Balch Institute-HSP, "National Slovak Society in the USA, Almanac, 1907–1919 (incomp)", Box 2, *Kalendárium 1919* (Pittsburgh, PA, Tlačou Národných Novín: 1919), 51.

the Russian Empire. Acting as a second centre of Slovak national life before 1914 and as the self-declared leaders of their political cause in wartime, Slovak American organisations adjusted their attitudes towards the Tsarist state and its successor regimes according to geopolitical calculations rather than ideological convictions.

Keywords: nationalism; Russia; Russian Revolution; Slovakia; Slovak Americans

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