

SUMMARY

From the History of the Democratic and Totalitarian Regimes in the 20th Century Slovakia and Czechoslovakia
The 70th Jubilee of the Historian Ivan Kamenec

The Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences honors with this collective monograph the 70th jubilee of the one of its outstanding colleagues and friends – PhDr. **Ivan Kamenec**, CSc. Although Mr. Kamenec studies and interprets the modern Slovak history of the 20th century in its complexity, his lifelong scientific interest belongs to the Slovak Republic during World War II, especially its political history and personalities. He is to be counted to the top rated Slovak historians in this field. But in the first place his name in the history of the Slovak historical science is connected with the pioneer role in researching the Holocaust in Slovakia. Before 1989 he had been the first to open this taboo theme and the years later his research results inspired the whole group of new historians and brought Dr. Kamenec the international respect among Holocaust specialists.

The collective monograph *From the History of the Democratic and Totalitarian Regime in the 20th Century Slovakia and Czechoslovakia* deals with not yet fully researched areas of the history of Slovakia and the Slovaks and its international context and relations. The texts are aimed at some historical events in the period of the first, interwar Czechoslovak Republic, at the phenomena in the history of the Slovakia during WWII and at the development before and after communist takeover after the war. All the chapters are written by outstanding specialists in the given themes, coming from the Institute of History of SAS, from the other history institutions and universities of Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

The book begins with the two texts dealing with the professional life and the scientific work of Ivan Kamenec. In the first one **Herta Tkadlečková** – the former university teacher of I. Kamenec – remembers in an essay like form “how has become the modest student a reputable historian”. Taking as an example the birth and its circumstances of the Kamenec’s books, she depicts the complicated lot of a historian dealing with the modern history. The second text written by **Nina Paulovičová** compares the crucial “Holocaust” book of Ivan Kamenec *On the Trail of the Tragedy* with some same topic books published in abroad. Showing various aspects of the author’s interpretation of the Jewish fate in war time Slovakia she prizes not only the scientific value of this monograph, but also its social and moral importance.

The next part of the book already speaks about some aspects of the (Czecho-) Slovak history in the time between the two world wars. **Milan Zemko** analyzes the political system of the first Czechoslovak Republic from the point of view of the political parties acting in the National assembly. He shows the changing picture of their antagonisms and cooperation, being more and more based upon nationalism and resulting in the hard confrontation between “Czechoslovak” (Czech and Slovak) political parties and the political representative bodies of the national minorities – German and Hungarian. **Lubica Kázmerová** has aimed her attention at the development of the Slovak educational system in the given period. Comparing the differences and common features of the Slovakia and Czech lands, she presents how at the beginning the disastrous educational situation in Slovakia positively changed in the first two decades of the existence of the Czechoslovak Republic. The third text of this part of the book written by **Peter Švorc** is a sound into the regional and local history of the small Spiš town – Spišská Belá. The author deals with the local political life represented by leftist and right wing political groupings and concentrates in the case of Jewish inhabitation on the interethnic relations.

Wartime Slovak state, Jewish question and the Slovak uprising are the main subjects of the second part of the monograph. **Eduard Nižňanský** states that the anti-Semitic politics was characteristic not only for the wartime Slovak Republic (from March the 14th, 1939), but its basic features had developed already in the last phase of the Czecho-Slovakia’s existence – in the period of the Slovak autonomy. This statement author documents on the case of the Anti-Jewish pogrom in Piešťany in early March 1939. The term “Jew” and its place in the law system of the wartime Slovak state examines in her text **Katarína Zavacká**. Analyzing the corresponding legal acts, she shows the parallel between depriving the Jews of their civil rights and the decay of democratic system. On the contrary to the Jews, who were not acknowledged as a minority, in the Slovak Republic existed three officially declared national minorities – German, Hungarian and Ruthenian. At the problem of their legal status in the political system of the wartime Slovak Republic is aimed the text of **Ondrej Podolec**.

From the point of view of international context the historians deal in the given period with the two aspects – first there are the international relations of the Slovak Republic, and second aspect are the activities of the Slovak Pro-Allied exile. The less known events in the official relations between Slovak republic and U.S.S.R. examines **Dagmar Čierna-Lantayová**. Based upon the archival research in Moscow the text shows the development of the diplomatic relations from their beginning to the time, when the Slovak army entered the war against Russia. The exile problem represents the writing of **Vilém Prečan**. It comments four here-published documents, which show the unknown facts and the chain of circumstances of the detention of

Vladimír Clementis – the prominent Slovak communist – during his stay in France in 1939. About the French attitude to the Slovakia and Slovak question writes also **Pavol Petruf**. In the text he concentrates on the given problem at first till the defeat of the France in 1940 and then on the attitude of the Vichy and the de Gaulle's Free France to the Slovak Republic and in the same time to the Slovak exile.

The last block of this part of the book pays attention to the various, less known aspects of the Slovak National Uprising in 1944. It begins with the first research results on the anti-resistance propaganda in the uprising and on the uprising, including the German official media. The military campaigns of rising are not perceived here as an object of research, but as case of escalation of the social conflict, widely covered by printed media. The author – **Marína Zavacká** widely analyses and interprets the vocabulary of this propaganda. The print-media are the subject also of the text of **Jan Rychlík**. In this case the author in details documents, how the official newspapers in Protectorate reflected the course of the uprising and how they used it for their own propaganda. The closing text crosses the chronological line of this part. It looks at the uprising from the point of view of historical memory. Its author – **Elena Mannová** – using the social-historical and cultural-historical approach is searching for various interpretations of the rising and their reflection in the collective memory from 1945 to the end of the century.

Mannová's text leads the reader to the part of the monograph dealing with the post-war period before and after the communist takeover. In the first text **Michal Barnovský** gives the brief characteristics of the function, structure and the activities of the National Front in Slovakia in 1945-1948. After analyzing them the author states that although the monopoly of power of the NF made the communist takeover in February 1948 easier, its existence had not been the necessary condition for it. The communist *coup d'état* had been victorious because of using the material power and the Soviet pressure. The second text dealing with the given period is from **Edita Ivaničková**. She tries to document the foreign policy interests of the Slovaks in 1944-1948, shows their possibilities, limits and their outcomes. Being concentrated on the solution of the Slovak question within the post-war republic, the Slovak politicians paid less attention to the foreign policy and loosing their fight for democracy they also lost the opportunity to develop their foreign policy interests. Another text dealing with the international aspects has written **Slavomír Michálek**. He depicts the case – known in its time in the West as “the freedom flight” – when the three Czechoslovak citizens trying to escape the communist regime highjacked in 1953 the airplane and landed in the U.S. occupation zone of Germany. The following diplomatic incident between United States and Czechoslovakia was the only constructive solved matter in that period of the fully frozen bi-lateral relations. Being Michálek's text based upon the archival research, the next one – by **Jozef Leikert** – is an interesting combination of Oral History and the study of the

contemporary material. It shows one period of the life of the well-known Slovak writer and journalist Ladislav Mňačko, when he was as a young communist working in the daily paper *Pravda* and supporting the Stalinist regime in Czechoslovakia. The next text written by **Vladimír Goněc** concentrates on another personality, this time from the camp of the communist opponents. He analyses the activities and above all the ideas of the one of the leaders of the émigré organization – the Council of Free Czechoslovakia – Hubert Ripka. The reader may get acquainted with his opinion in the second half of the 50-ties not only on the development in the Central Europe, but on the global policy as well. With the text of **Jan Pešek** the book turns back to the inner development of Slovakia within the Czechoslovak state. The author describes one fragment in the history of the Slovak communist party with long reaching consequences – the changes in its leading positions in 1962-1964. It means the fall of the old functionaries connected with K. Gottwald and A. Novotný and the coming of a new guard of communist leaders (e.g. A. Dubček) not directly burdened by the unlawfulness of the past. The next text by **Miroslav Londák** follows up chronologically with the previous chapter. The author analyzes the Czechoslovak economic reform in the 60-ties and its break down after the invasion in August 1968. He states that the base and the scope of the reform plans had been incompatible with the given socialist system in Czechoslovakia and it undermined its fundamentals. The new democratic Czechoslovakia and its break down is the theme examined by **Jozef Žatkuliak**. He goes through the discussions about the new relations between the Czechs and the Slovaks in a federal republic after 1989, follows the proceedings of various political groupings and their leaders up to the end of the Czechoslovakia and the birth of the independent Slovak state in 1993.

The last part of this collective monograph deals with the themes of democracy, individual and collective ideological consciousness in the 20th century Slovakia. **Dušan Kováč** writes about democracy, political culture and the heritage of totalitarianism in the historical process. He states among others that in Central European countries is the experience with the life in democracy very limited. Czechoslovak republic in the inter-war period was only a single country with the real parliamentary democracy. Introduction of the general suffrage and the plural political party system was not without danger in Central Europe and in other post-communist countries. Functioning democracy needs a relative high level of political culture. Without this could democracy shrink to the electoral machinery connected with populism and with the growth of nationalism. **Roman Holec** returns back into the end of the 19th and the first half of 20th centuries and introduces the “forgotten Slovak leftist intellectual” – Hugo Matzner. He follows his life from his youth up to the death in 1948. Through Matzner’s activities in the social-democratic party and his leftist intellectual maturity the author indirectly shows the development in Slovakia from the last period of Austria-Hungary till the communist take over in 1948. Another

portrait of the well-known Slovak personality Alexander Matuška – the best representative of the Slovak literary critique and essay in the 20th century – closes the summarized monograph. **Vlasta Jaksicsová** in her text goes through the key moments of his life and writings, where he presents himself as an original and severe critic of the Slovak past and present and the commentator on the Slovak characteristic features. And she underlines, that Matuška is a favorite author also for Ivan Kamenec and that the writer and the historian have many common features.

Edita Ivaničková