

## Destruction of Democracy in Autonomous Slovakia Analysed by the Example of the Horná Nitra Region<sup>1</sup>

*Róbert Arpáš*<sup>2</sup>

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Declaration of autonomy in October 1938 was a turning point that enabled the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party to grasp the power in Slovakia. As the leader of the autonomist wing it was considered "the only true representative of the Slovak nation". Its far-sighted approach to democracy manifested itself practically immediately, and Slovakia set out on a journey of establishing an authoritative regime. The autonomous institutions were trying to direct the ongoing political transformation even on a local level. However, the results of their endeavour did not always correspond with their idea of the new political system. And that is the case of the analysed region of Horná Nitra as well. Even though the inhabitants of the region were in favour of the People's Party even during the First Czechoslovak Republic, and in this particular region the transfer of the power happened in a relatively smooth manner, various problems occurred here, too.

The reason behind this was that the support of the new regime was in many cases accompanied by personal ambition and vision of one's own profit. Claiming a vacant post at a local authority office often triggered conflicts and disputes. The applicants justified their claims by their long-lasting loyalty to the programme of the People's Party, alternatively by the "sacrifices" they had made in the name of their political belief. Hence, the transfer of the power started turning into a quarrel featuring bragging about applicants' political merits for which, as they believed, they were entitled to be rewarded and honoured once the political hegemony of the HSPP had been achieved.

[Czechoslovakia; Nation; Autonomy; HSPP; Horná Nitra]

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- <sup>2</sup> Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Hodžova 1, 949 74 Nitra; rarpas@ukf.sk.  
Institute of History, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Klemensova 19, 814 99 Bratislava; arpas@savbb.sk.

## Introduction

During the turbulent period of the late 1930's the circumstances presented a great need for a profound reevaluation of a state doctrine that had been applied in Czechoslovakia until that time. It was due to the constantly growing pressure of Hitler's Germany that the Czechoslovak Government was forced to accept and adapt to a different perspective on dealing with minority issues. The then political orientation, which represented the Czechoslovak Republic as a national state of the "*Czechoslovak nation*", had to yield to the reality of the multi-ethnic character of the Czechoslovak state.<sup>3</sup> The *National Statute*<sup>4</sup> project, introduced by the Prime Minister Milan Hodža, was supposed to endorse the status of the minorities. It was assumed that by putting the project into practice, various nationalities living in Czechoslovakia would obtain a significant grade of self-rule.

However, the *National Statute* was not limited only to the minorities. It was the initiative of the Prime Minister himself that aspired the use of the project for resolving the so-called "Slovak issue", which had been traumatising the relationship of both entities of the state's "*Czechoslovak nation*" for a long time. This particular problem, along with other negative factors, had quickly become rather an urgent issue to be tackled. No longer was it only supporters of the autonomy wing, who were demanding the Slovak self-rule, as well as alteration of the economic politics of the Czechoslovak state in favour of Slovakia. At that time, it was not only adherents of the autonomy-focused political parties – Hlinka's Slovak People's Party and the Slovak National Party – who were calling for the respect of the needs of Slovaks, but they were joined also by Slovak representatives of the Agrarian Party, which was the strongest partner of the coalition government.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> According to the 1930 census, the ethnic composition of Czechoslovakia was as follows: Czechoslovaks 66.9%, Germans 22.3%, Hungarians 4.8%, Russians 3.8%, Jews 1.3%, Poles 0.57%. X. ŠUCHOVÁ, Přílohy I. – Obyvatelstvo, in: M. ZEMKO – V. BYSTRICKÝ (eds.), *Slovensko v Československu (1918–1939)*, Bratislava 2004, p. 526.

<sup>4</sup> More about the project, see V. BYSTRICKÝ, Národnostný štatút a štátoprávne programy na Slovensku roku 1938, in: V. BYSTRICKÝ, *Od autonómie k vzniku Slovenského štátu*, Bratislava 2008, pp. 84–99. Also see R. KVÁČEK, Jednání o československý národnostní štatut v roce 1938, in: *Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Studia historica*, 16, 1977, pp. 105–143.

<sup>5</sup> For more about changes in the attitude to the Slovak question in the Slovak wing of the agrarian party, see R. ARPÁŠ – M. HANULA, Postoje hlavných slovenských politických prúdov k českoslovakizmu v medzivojnovom období, in: A. HUDEK – M. KOPEČEK – J. MERVART (eds.), *Čechoslovakismus*, Praha 2019, pp. 182–201.

The “Slovak card” was also played by the Czech far-right National Fascist Community, which used it in their attempt to gain more voters in Slovakia.<sup>6</sup>

Even though the *National Statute* project did not accept all of the demands of the Slovak autonomists it was getting quite close. It seemed that consensus between the Government and the supporters of the Slovak autonomy was finally within hand’s reach. Certain hopes also arose from the talks between the Prime Minister and the representatives of the People’s Party, which took place on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1938. During the meeting, the Prime Minister based his arguments on the postulates of the Pittsburgh Agreement,<sup>7</sup> since the *National Statute* also anticipated creation of the Slovak legislative assembly.<sup>8</sup> Although some of the coalition politicians were reluctant to go the extra mile for the people’s representatives, in the end, they succumbed to the reasoning of the Slovak wing of the Agrarian Party.<sup>9</sup> However, even this sacrifice did not suffice to deliver the expected result. An endeavour to resolve the Slovak issue was negated by the representatives of the Sudeten German Party. Since the *National Statute* was primarily designed to meet the requirements of the German minority the attitude of its representatives was essential and decisive. When taking a stand, the leadership of the Henlein party were significantly limited by the instructions from Berlin, which had no interest at all in stabilising the situation in the Czechoslovak state. Hence, despite the major concessions, the SdP authorized representatives rejected the proposals of the Czechoslovak Government in the second half of August 1938.<sup>10</sup>

### **Autonomy – Slovakia under Control of HSPP (HSLŠ)**

The attitude of the Sudeten German Party representatives meant the end of the whole *National Statute* project. And this went for the Slovak issue initiative of the Government, too. Since the Government alternative

<sup>6</sup> A. HRUBOŇ, „*Blaho vlasti – zákon najvyšší!*“, Ružomberok 2015.

<sup>7</sup> The document was signed at the end of May 1918 by representatives of Czechoslovak compatriotic organizations in the USA with representatives of the Czechoslovak resistance. *The Pittsburgh agreement* assumed that Slovakia would gain autonomy in the Czechoslovak state. Therefore, it was considered as basis of the political program of the Slovak autonomists. J. RYCHLÍK, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století. Česko-slovenské vztahy 1914–1918*, Bratislava 1997, pp. 46–47.

<sup>8</sup> J. K. HOENSCH, *Die Slowakei und Hitlers Ostpolitik. Hlinkas Slowakische Volkspartei zwischen Autonomie und Separation 1938/1939*, Köln, Graz 1965, pp. 73–74.

<sup>9</sup> BYSTRICKÝ, p. 92.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

had failed, the project of autonomy – the latest version of which was introduced by the people’s supporters at the June manifestation in Bratislava<sup>11</sup> – got rid of the competition from the coalition’s side. And due to the republic’s difficulties in the field of its foreign affairs the autonomy supporters became even more intransigent when it came to assertion of their political goals. For the people’s adherents, this situation was propitious not only in the respect of achieving their officially declared goal, which was to secure autonomous status for Slovakia. Once the superpowers reached a decision in Munich at the end of September 1938 the then official political orientation started to be doubted and, by the same token, the political system itself. Suddenly, there appeared many critics of multiple party memberships. Demanding simplification of political life was definitely part and parcel of an unofficial goal of HSPP, which began to occur in speeches of its members more frequently and clearly. By promoting the slogan “*the whole Slovak nation in one political party*” the people’s adherents meant to gain absolute control over the Slovak political scene. Enfeeblement of the central government had opened the door and provided them with opportunity to achieve Slovak autonomy just as they had imagined and desired. Even though there were quite a few left-wing parties who signed the Žilina Agreement on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1938, in fact the whole thing was a dictate of the people’s party.<sup>12</sup>

The mere fact that the people’s adherents did not come across resistance while declaring autonomy in Žilina encouraged them to proceed with the political pressure. If the Slovak self-rule had been achieved, seizure of absolute power over Slovakia by the HSPP was to follow. For the people’s adherents, the potential majority in the first autonomous government was not to be enough,<sup>13</sup> hence they were systematically working on making the HSPP “*the only political representative of Slovakia*”. That meant the elimination of other political parties. The first victims happened to be

<sup>11</sup> The third law proposal on the autonomy of Slovakia was published by the HSPP paper *Slovák* at the day of the demonstration of HSLs in Bratislava, which was part of the pre-election meetings before the municipal elections. Text of the proposal see: Za revíziu ústavnej listiny. Návrh Andreja Hlinku, Karola Sidora, dr. Martina Sokola, dr. Jozéfa Tisu a spol. na vydanie ústavného zákona o autonómii Slovenska, in: *Slovák*, June 5, 1938, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> The process of negotiations in Žilina is closely monitored by the publication R. ARPÁŠ, *Autonómia: víťazstvo alebo prehra?*, Bratislava 2011.

<sup>13</sup> In the first Slovak autonomous government, representatives of the HSPP and the agrarian party had seats in ratio of 3:2, which corresponded with the support from Slovak voters of these two strongest Slovak parties.

political parties, existence of which was considered to be incompatible with the people's adherents' vision of a new Slovakia. Following the call to fight against "the Marxist-Jewish ideology of disintegration", featured in the *Manifesto of the Slovak Nation*,<sup>14</sup> they first focused on the parties which represented the aforementioned worldview.

Hence, as early as 9<sup>th</sup> October the activity of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was stopped completely. Even though on 7<sup>th</sup> October the leader of the Czechoslovak Social-Democratic Party, Antonín Hampl, had immediately accepted the *Žilina Agreement*,<sup>15</sup> the further existence of the Slovak wing of social democracy was not saved. Together with the German social democracy and both Jewish political parties they were all outlawed in the second half of November.<sup>16</sup>

However, the "simplification" of the political system in Slovakia did not finish just by elimination of the left-wing and Jewish parties. The vision of the people's adherents was to create a system of one political party. In the spirit of thinking of the HSPP representatives, the whole political scene was to be led by "the only truly Slovak party", meaning solely the people's party. And that was the reason they were pushing the leaders of the remaining parties into "voluntary" merging with the People's Party. Even though some representatives of the Agrarian Party tried to create a brand-new political subject their counterproposals went unheard.<sup>17</sup> The people's politicians were not willing to accede to a solution which would allow the until-then leader of the political scene to accept defeat. Just the opposite, the process of creating the new political regime was supposed

<sup>14</sup> The *Manifesto of the Slovak Nation* was one of three documents approved by the Žilina Agreement on October 6, 1938 in Žilina. The text of the document see: *Slovák*, October 7, 1938.

<sup>15</sup> J. GEBHART – J. KUKLÍK, *Druhá republika 1938–1939. Svár demokracie a totality v politickém, společenském a kulturním životě*, Praha 2004, p. 80.

<sup>16</sup> The Ministry of Home Affairs of the Slovak country stopped the operation of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party 16<sup>th</sup> November, German Social Democracy 22<sup>nd</sup> November, Jewish Party 24<sup>th</sup> November and the United Socialist-Zionist Workers' Party 25<sup>th</sup> November 1938. E. NIŽŇANSKÝ, *Dvojnásobné zmocnenie sa vlády na Slovensku v rokoch 1938/39 v porovnaní s „Machtergreifung“ v rokoch 1933/34 v Nemecku*, in: M. GETTLER – L. LIPTÁK – A. MÍŠKOVÁ (eds.), *Nacionálno-socialistický systém vlády. Ríšska župa Sudety, Protektorát Čechy a Morava, Slovensko*, Bratislava 2002, p. 190.

<sup>17</sup> J. URSÍNÝ, *Zápisnica z výsluchu pred vyšetrojúcim sudcom v Bratislave*, in: V. BYSTRICKÝ – R. LETZ – O. PODOLEC (eds.), *Vznik Slovenského štátu. 14. marec 1939. Spomienky aktérov historických udalostí, Vol. 2.*, Bratislava 2008, pp. 291–292.

to demonstrate the hegemony of the HSPP on the Slovak political scene. Therefore, the people's leadership insisted on their vision of preserving the existence of the People's Party, which was to become the foundation of a newly created system.

And so, on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1938, the political essence of the change, provided by the Slovak autonomy, was identified with the structures of HSPP. Almost all members of parliament, representing agrarians, national unification, national socialists, self-employed persons and fascists succumbed to the so-called voluntary simplification of the political scene and "*joined the HSPP club and voted for its proposal of Slovak autonomy*".<sup>18</sup>

They all declared their consent by signing the *Response of the Slovak Nation*. The whole process was to be crowned on 20<sup>th</sup> November, which was officially named "the Sunday of brotherhood".<sup>19</sup> After digesting all of these political subjects, the political unity of the Slovak nation was to be represented by the innovative name of the People's Party, which was amended by the subtitle "*Party of the Slovak National Unity*".<sup>20</sup> The same scenario was applied in the case of the Slovak National Party, too. Defending itself by its autonomist history it tried to prevent the merger, yet failed to do so in the end.<sup>21</sup> Thus, by the end of 1938 the people's adherents managed to materialise one of the slogans of their late long-time leader Andrej Hlinka: "*The whole Slovak nation in one political party*".

### Alterations in Municipal Councils of the Horná Nitra Region

In order to grasp real power over the political scene in Slovakia there had to be made certain alterations even on a local level. To be in charge of an autonomous Slovakia with no control over municipal authorities would have been inefficient. The alterations were determined by the Office of the Provincial President, which was the office of the people's nominee Julián Šimko,<sup>22</sup> who was elected the President on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1938. The new Provincial

<sup>18</sup> V. BYSTRICKÝ – L. DEÁK, *Od Mníchova k rozbitiu Česko-Slovenska*, in: ZEMKO – BYSTRICKÝ (eds.), *Slovensko v Československu*, p. 221.

<sup>19</sup> R. LETZ, *Slovenské dejiny IV. 1914–1938*, Bratislava 2010, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> The process of negotiations that led to the merging of the parties, see: P. ČARNOGURSKÝ, *6. október 1938*, Bratislava 1993, pp. 186–199. See also: J. URSÍNÝ, *Z môjho života (Príspevok k vývoju slovenskej národnej myšlienky)*, Martin 2000, pp. 120–122.

<sup>21</sup> J. ROGULOVÁ, *Slovenská národná strana 1918–1938*, Bratislava 2013, pp. 297–301.

<sup>22</sup> V. BYSTRICKÝ, *Slovenská autonómia za druhej republiky a vznik Slovenského štátu*, in: B. FERENČUHOVÁ – M. ZEMKO (eds.), *Slovensko v 20. storočí. V medzivojnovom Československu 1918–1939*, Bratislava 2012, p. 491.

President issued an order “*Municipal Councils – Dissolving*”<sup>23</sup> on 19<sup>th</sup> October of the same year. This order provided the government power with the opportunity to intervene in the functioning of the municipal authorities. Based on the order, all inconvenient municipal councils were eliminated and replaced by state commissioners. Nonetheless, in some municipalities of the Ponitrie region the municipal councils, elected in the previous elections, remained untouched. It was probably due to the fact that the Horná Nitra region was the region under significant influence of the People’s Party and mayors of many municipalities in this region were members or adherents of the party, which was also one of the factors that helped the People’s Party to take over power on the regional level.

Following the legal requirements, municipality leadership elections took place at the first seatings of the newly elected municipal councils. In this manner, the mayors of municipalities within the authority of the district notary office in Krušovice<sup>24</sup> were elected as soon as July 1938. By the end of August there had been newly elected mayors of other municipalities, as for example in Klíž, Klížske Hradište<sup>25</sup> and in Janova Ves (nowadays a part of Klátova Nová Ves). However, in some municipalities it took more time to agree on a suitable candidate for a mayor, so new mayors took over the office as late as in September.<sup>26</sup>

The names of the newly elected mayors were posted to the district councils by authorized notaries. The District Chief in Topoľčany collected the names and on 31<sup>st</sup> July and 14<sup>th</sup> October sent the lists to the Presiding Committee of the Provincial Office in Bratislava, since the elected mayors had to be approved by the Provincial President. The nominated mayors were endorsed by the District Chief as reliable and spirited people who

<sup>23</sup> E. NIŽŇANSKÝ, *Zásahy do samosprávnych orgánov (najmä mestských a obecných zastupiteľstiev a rád) v období autonómie Slovenska 1938/39*, in: *Studia historica Nitriensia*, 9, 2001, p. 125.

<sup>24</sup> State archive in Nitra, workplace Archive Topoľčany (hereafter SA Nitra, w. Topoľčany), fond (hereafter f.) Okresný úrad (hereafter OÚ) Topoľčany, Inventory Number (hereafter I. Nr.) 215, box (hereafter b.) 101, signature (hereafter sig.) 140/39 prez. Obvodné notárstvo v Krušovciach. Voľby starostov obcí v obvode notárstva krušovského v roku 1938 – potvrďovanie.

<sup>25</sup> At present, Klíž and Klížske Hradište are united into one village called Veľký Klíž.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. the villages Kovarce and Súlovce. SA Nitra, w. Topoľčany, f. OÚ Topoľčany, I. Nr. 215, b. 101, sig. 140/39 prez. Notársky úrad v Kovarciach: okres Topoľčany. Kovarce, potvrďovanie volieb starostov obcí. SA Nitra, w. Topoľčany, f. OÚ Topoľčany, i. n. 215, b. 101, sig. 140/39 prez. Notársky úrad v Kovarciach: okres Topoľčany. Kovarce. Potvrďovanie volieb starostov obcí. Obec Súlovce.



would do well in their positions. There was only one person he considered slightly problematic. It was the mayor of Nitrianska Streda, *“as he is a member of the Communist Party, which has been dissolved, other than that, however, he is statewise and civicwise reliable”*.<sup>27</sup> The Provincial Office confirmed the elected mayors on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1938.<sup>28</sup>

Yet not all municipal councils stayed in the same form after 6<sup>th</sup> October. Even if they continued to exist, they could not avoid expelling members of the prohibited political parties.<sup>29</sup> Once such reconstruction took place, the members of municipal councils commenced the process of additional elections in which they elected mayors, who were also supposed to be approved and confirmed by the Provincial President.

The fact that the attitude of the offices was heavily influenced by the political engagement of a candidate running for a mayor is corroborated also by the approach of the District Chief towards election of Jozef Halma in Brodzany, a village in the Topolčany district. Even though Halmo was a candidate of the Republican Party in municipal elections, when the HSPP absorbed all the other non-left-wing parties in November, Halmo also became a member of the HSPP. And that is why the District Chief in Topolčany recommended the Provincial Office to confirm his election, *“because he is very skilled and wise citizen, prudent and worth the office”*.<sup>30</sup> Also a newly elected mayor of Solčany village, Štefan Babčan, had his share of personal experience with the influence of his previous political activity and willingness to accept the new rules. The District Chief filed a complaint against his appointment in February 1939, and he did so at the beginning of April 1939, shortly after declaration of the state autonomy. He reasoned that *“this person was elected a mayor for the Republican Party and is not popular among the people of the village”*. His approval in the office was allegedly merely a consequence of a mistake made by the former notary,

<sup>27</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. OÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 215, b. 101, sig. 140/39 prez. Okres Topolčany, potvrdenie obecných starostov.

<sup>28</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. OÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 215, b. 101, sig. 140/39 prez. Prezídium krajinského úradu v Bratislave.

<sup>29</sup> As an example we can mention the exclusion of the members of the municipal council elected as a social democratic party in the village Súlovce. SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. OÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 238, b. 421, sig. 3668/39 prez. Okresný úrad v Topolčanoch. Súlovce, rozpustenie obecného zastupiteľstva.

<sup>30</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. OÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 215, b. 101, sig. 140/39 prez. Obec Brodzany, okres Topolčany, návrh na potvrdenie volby starostu.



who termed Babčan a People's Party member. The whole affair resulted in the appointment of a state commissioner.<sup>31</sup>

Many self-government officials tried hard to keep away from the non-democratic tendencies, while displaying their ignorance towards the concept and style of using political power represented by the people's adherents. And this was the reason why they started becoming a target of criticism from local HSPP activists. One of those who refused to surrender and succumb to new political conditions was the mayor of Šimovany, Ján Jančich. According to the representatives of the local HSSP organisation, as stated in their letter sent to the Provincial Office in December 1938, "*until this day he is still not willing to yield to the rules of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party*". Therefore, they recommended his immediate replacement. They proposed Jozef Šútorá to take his place. Quite typically, it was not his qualifications that were mentioned as the candidate's premium quality, but it was Šútorá's political engagement that was particularly celebrated, as he "*deserves this position due to his merits in the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, in which he also holds the post of a chairman and also because of his national conviction*".<sup>32</sup>

### National Committees – A New Player on the Political Scene

The process of creating new alternative structures – national committees – had started even before the Provincial President's October order on dissolving the municipal councils came into force. The author of the idea and the initiator of putting it into practice was a member of the HSPP leadership, Karol Sidor, who had already come up with this idea during the critical September days of 1938. According to Sidor's plan, these new local institutions in close co-operation with the newly created paramilitary organisation, Hlinka Guard, were supposed to take power over Slovakia.<sup>33</sup> During the hectic finish of September, Sidor was forced to temporarily resign from the above-mentioned plan but new conditions after the declaration of autonomy provided his intention with significantly greater chances of success. Hence, after 6<sup>th</sup> October

<sup>31</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topoľčany, f. OÚ Topoľčany, I. Nr. 215, b. 101, sig. 140/39 prez. Okres Topoľčany, obec Selčany, potvrdenie voľby starostu Štefana Babčana, sťažnosť.

<sup>32</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topoľčany, f. OÚ Topoľčany, I. Nr. 238, b. 421, sig. 3431/39 prez. P. T. Krajinský úrad v Bratislave.

<sup>33</sup> J. PAULÍNÝ-TÓTH, Ako došlo k 14. marcu 1939, in: BYSTRICKÝ – LETZ – PODOLEC (eds.), *Vznik Slovenského štátu*, p. 66.

there quickly started to appear the intended new bodies in numerous municipalities. The main authority of this newly created apparatus was the *Central National Committee* presided by Karol Sidor,<sup>34</sup> who was at the same time the Commander-in-Chief of the Hlinka Guard. Doing so, he had become a very powerful player on the Slovak political scene despite the fact he was not a member of the autonomous government.

Also, in the region of Horná Nitra new institutions were coming into existence on initiative of the adherents of the people's party. The HSPP had a strong base in this region even in the previous years. In consequence, it came as no surprise when, under new circumstances of the Slovak autonomy, the members and adherents of the people's party commenced their activities attempting to force their political opponents out of the posts they held. In that manner, 58 delegates from all around the district gathered in the Topolčany Catholic House on 16<sup>th</sup> October. At this gathering, the Secretary of the HSPP district organisation, Štefan Streicher, made a speech which featured the total elimination of the Marxist left-wing and the exclusion of Jewish population. The Secretary stressed out that *"we shall not hold meetings with communists, Jews and Marxists anymore, and that is why it is inevitable to create a district national committee, which would represent the unified will of Slovaks, cleared of Marxist-Jewish burden"*. The present delegates unanimously agreed upon establishing the District National Committee, which was to have just as many members as the until-then district council.

By the same token, election of all 24 members of the newly established institution took place. Štefan Streicher<sup>35</sup> was appointed the chairman, and this actually meant seizure of power by the people's adherents also on the regional level.

In Topolčany itself there was quite a visible attempt to make changes in the town's structures, too. On 15<sup>th</sup> November 1938, the Provincial Office issued a notice on the dissolution of the Topolčany municipal council. At the same time, it ordered the authorized the district office to *"adopt measures concerning temporary administration of municipal affairs, that is to appoint a state commissioner"*, who was supposed to take over the administration of the municipality. The district office reacted promptly and as soon as

<sup>34</sup> ČARNOGURSKÝ, pp. 163–164 and pp. 212–213.

<sup>35</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. OÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 214, b. 98, sig. 1494/38 prez. Výpis zo zápisnice napísanej dňa 16. októbra 1938 o priebehu zasadania delegátov okresu topolčianskeho v Topolčanoch v Katolíckom dome.

on 19<sup>th</sup> November appointed Ľudovít Csáp a state commissioner.<sup>36</sup> Once introduced to the office, Csáp assured citizens in the local periodical, called *Topolčany News*, “that their rights and entitlements related to the town will be fully respected and fulfilled”. And so, as in many Slovak municipalities, also in Topolčany the new conditions and the abandoning of the idea of the common Czechoslovak statehood were manifested in the public space by renaming of the streets. According to the state commissioner, names of “the men who have not contributed to gaining of independence of the Slovak nation and those who were not Slovaks”, would be replaced by “names of the men who lived and died for welfare and independence of our nation”.<sup>37</sup>

State institutions had to be flexible in responding to the establishment of parallel power bodies, which were founded on no legal grounds. Hence, as early as on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1938, the Presidency of the Slovak Autonomous Government issued a directive defining the relationships of national committees and the official authorities. According to the Government interpretation, national committees, representing “unification of civic forces in a positively creative manner, as well as in a manner supporting national cohesion and discipline”, were supposed to be assisting and consulting bodies for the already existing offices. At the same time, however, the local institutions were to try, discreetly and unobtrusively, influence the activities of a respective national committee. The directive also took into consideration possible personal antipathies and local struggles for power, which could result in founding other competing bodies. The representatives of the state power were supposed to prevent such a scenario. Wherever “formations, parallel with the National Committee, have already come into existence”, state institutions were expected to work on their merger.<sup>38</sup>

### **Conflicts of Power in Municipalities – Dispute over “Credits”**

While in some municipalities there occurred confrontations of the self-governing bodies, which had been established based on the results of the preceding municipal elections, and the self-proclaimed parallel national

<sup>36</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. Okresný notársky úrad (hereafter ONÚ) Topolčany, I. Nr. 163a, b. 4, sig. 120/38 prez. Krajský úrad v Bratislave. Obec Topolčany, rozpustenie obecného zastupiteľstva.

<sup>37</sup> Ľ. CSÁP, Vyhlásenie, in: *Topolčianske noviny* 10, 1938, Nr. 23–24, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. OÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 214, b. 98, sig. 1386/38 prez. Predsedníctvo slovenskej vlády v Bratislave. Národné výbory na Slovensku, – ich pomer k úradom.

committees, other municipalities had to put up with coerced reconstruction of municipal councils or with their dissolving and subsequent appointment of a state commissioner. If possible, this post was supposed to be held by a screened supporter of the new government. However, the reality did not always correspond with visions and intentions of the creators of the autonomous Slovakia's developing regime. The dispute over the post of a state commissioner in Diviacka Nová Ves, in the Prievidza district, serves as one of many proofs of harsh fights over power, often using foul-play tricks and intrigues, even on a municipal level. This post was desired by Juraj Géczy, who was a founding member of the local HSP organisation and had served as a mayor of the municipality for some time. However, he lost the post due to the results of the preceding municipal elections, which took place in June 1938. Yet, he was planning to use the changes, which came along with declaration of Slovak autonomy, and make them work in his favour. Following his plan, he initiated a meeting of the local HSPP organisation as early as on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1938. And just as in other municipalities, the people's adherents gathered by J. Géczy, required the District Council to remove the current leadership of the municipality and appoint Juraj Géczy a state commissioner. The meeting's attendants criticised the party membership of the then mayor, Jozef Mišeje,<sup>39</sup> who was a social democrat.<sup>40</sup>

The District Council in Prievidza approached assessment of the request in a highly responsible manner and asked the local notary for his statement.<sup>41</sup> However, by the time the requested statement was delivered, the Provincial Office in Bratislava had issued a decree for dissolution of the municipal council<sup>42</sup> on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1938, and Juraj Géczy was appointed a state commissioner.<sup>43</sup> Although to an uninformed observer it may have seemed that the process of taking over the power in the

<sup>39</sup> State archive in Trenčín, w. Archive Bojnice (hereafter SA Trenčín, w. Bojnice), f. OÚ Prievidza, b. 81, File Number (hereafter F. Nr.) 20/44. Slávnemu Okresnému úradu v Prievidzi.

<sup>40</sup> SA Trenčín, w. Bojnice, f. OÚ Prievidza, b. 81, F. Nr. 20/44. Kandidátna listina Československej sociálne demokratickej strany robotnickej pre voľbu obecného zastupiteľstva v Diviackej Novej Vsi dňa 12. júna 1938.

<sup>41</sup> SA Trenčín, w. Bojnice, f. OÚ Prievidza, b. 81, F. Nr. 20/44. Okresný úrad v Prievidzi. Obec Diviacka Nová Ves, rozpustenie obecného zastupiteľstva.

<sup>42</sup> SA Trenčín, w. Bojnice, f. OÚ Prievidza, b. 81, F. Nr. 20/44. Krajský úrad v Bratislave. Obec Div. Nová Ves, rozpustenie obecného zastupiteľstva.

<sup>43</sup> SA Trenčín, w. Bojnice, f. OÚ Prievidza, b. 81, F. Nr. 20/44. Okresný úrad v Prievidzi. Telefonogram.

municipality was a natural part of the scheme of political changes, the background of events in this particular municipality was way more complicated. Due to family conflicts, in the last preceding municipal elections of inter-war Czechoslovakia, which in Diviacka Nová Ves took place on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1938, there were registered two lists of candidates of the people's adherents. Just to oppose Juraj Géczy,<sup>44</sup> another list of candidates was registered by one of his relatives, Štefan Král.<sup>45</sup> And after elections, it was him who became the mayor's deputy. He strongly disagreed with his removal from office in November 1938 and "*claimed he considers the affair unjust and he will demand rectification*".<sup>46</sup> Emanuel Schubert, a priest in Prievidza and the district leader of the HSPP, did realise the delicacy of this dispute, in which both sides were trying to use their contacts in search of an endorsement even on the highest posts of the newly established regime. As the date of elections to the Assembly of the Slovak Country was approaching, Schubert intended to resolve the situation by finding a compromise,<sup>47</sup> which was, however, virtually impossible due to highly tense personal relationship of the main characters of the dispute.

Also, according to a report of the district chief, Štefan Král had every right to feel aggrieved. Based on the information concerning the case, which was gathered by the district chief, he stated that "*Juraj Géczy is not a well-liked citizen and his appointment triggered discontent of the major part of the municipality population*". Therefore, the chief concluded "*to consider replacement of the person of a state commissioner by Štefan Král, who would allegedly be the best suited candidate for a deputy mayor and who has been also a reliable member of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party*".<sup>48</sup> The District Office did not investigate the case any further and with its prompt decision contributed to escalation of the tense atmosphere in the municipality, which affected the political scene, as well. However, such needless complications while

<sup>44</sup> SA Trenčín, w. Bojnice, f. OÚ Prievidza, b. 81, F. Nr. 20/44. 4 Kandidátna listina Hlinkovej slovenskej ľudovej strany pre voľbu obecného zastupiteľstva v Diviackej Novej Vsi dňa 12. júna 1938. Vedie: Juraj Géczy.

<sup>45</sup> SA Trenčín, w. Bojnice, f. OÚ Prievidza, b. 81, F. Nr. 20/44. 2 Kandidátna listina Hlinkovej slovenskej ľudovej strany pre voľbu obecného zastupiteľstva v Diviackej Novej Vsi dňa 12. júna 1938. Vedie: Štefan Král.

<sup>46</sup> SA Trenčín, w. Bojnice, f. OÚ Prievidza, b. 81, F. Nr. 20/44. Okresný úrad v Prievidzi. Obec Diviacka Nová Ves, rozpustenie obecného zastupiteľstva.

<sup>47</sup> SA Trenčín, w. Bojnice, f. OÚ Prievidza, b. 81, F. Nr. 20/44. Okresný úrad v Prievidzi. Obec Diviacka Nová Ves, rozpustenie obecného zastupiteľstva.

<sup>48</sup> SA Trenčín, w. Bojnice, f. OÚ Prievidza, b. 81, F. Nr. 20/44. Okresný úrad v Prievidzi. Obec Diviacka Nová Ves, rozpustenie obecného zastupiteľstva.

taking over the political power were not in interest of the people's adherents. On contrary, they were trying to create an impression of spontaneous consent of the population.

In order to redress its mistake, the District Office tried to find a solution that would prevent any further escalation of tension in the municipality. And so, the whole affair was to be resolved by a compromise and an impartial person was to become the new state commissioner. The chosen candidate was Anton Šmotlák, a priest from the neighbouring village, Diviaky nad Nitricou, who became a state commissioner in Diviacka Nová Ves in February 1939.<sup>49</sup>

Despite all effort to ease the tension, the situation in the village was not stabilized and under control for another few years. It was due to the removed state commissioner, Juraj Géczy, who had no intention to give up his fight for the post, while his opponent, Štefan Král, also displayed his permanent interest in gaining the post again with broad support of the local population. On the other hand, however, the present state commissioner, Anton Šmotlák, was trying to get removed from the office as soon as possible. Hence, the rotation of state commissioners continued even during the period of the Slovak state. And it was at this time that the issue of Aryanization of the local Jewish large farm entered the fight for political power over the municipality. Yet, at the same time, there also occurred a declaration of interest of the President's Office to resolve this long-standing conflict once and for all.<sup>50</sup>

Unlike in Diviacka Nová Ves, the existence of the municipal council in neighbouring Diviaky na Nitricou was preserved during the whole duration of the Slovak autonomy. Dissolving of the council and the appointment of a state commissioner only took place at the end of 1939. The state commissioner post was given to Štefan Ďurčo, who until then had been a mayor of the municipality. The sheer magnitude of the endeavour of the regime to obtain full control on all levels can be seen also by the example of the reasoning of the alteration made. Just in the manner of the regime, the district secretariat of the HSPP in Prievidza justified the request for a state commissioner as follows: *"Despite many offers, none of the present members of the municipality council has accepted an invitation to join*

<sup>49</sup> SA Trenčín, w. Bojnice, f. OÚ Prievidza, b. 81, F. Nr. 20/44. Okresný úrad v Prievidzi. Obec Diviacká Nová Ves. Vymenovanie vládneho komisára.

<sup>50</sup> SA Trenčín, w. Bojnice, f. OÚ Prievidza, b. 81, F. Nr. 20/44. Prezídium župného úradu v Nitre. Diviacka Nová Ves, návrh na zmenu vládneho komisára.

*the HSPP and so, following the order of the General Secretariat, the above-stated proposal is sufficiently justified.”<sup>51</sup>*

### **Under Supervision of the Hlinka Guard**

The war of the autonomous Slovak Government against the “anti-Slovak elements”, which got transformed into anti-Jewish atmosphere, was abused by various speculators and criminals. They saw the situation as an opportunity to enrich themselves. One of such people was also Robert Valuch, an 18-year-old unemployed boy from Topolčany. Despite his young age he had already been convicted of several thefts, yet his vision of easy money made him break the law again during October and November of 1938. His plan was quite simple. He was going around to Jewish shopkeepers offering them a book called *District of Topolčany*, from the sale of which he was promised a 20% commission, and at the same time he requested financial contributions for clothing of the Hlinka Guard members. Valuch’s activity was actually a sort of “racketeering” since he offered the shopkeepers protection for their contributions. Those who refused to buy the book, or who already possessed it, were asked to “*give at least something for the Hlinka Guard, and they would not have their windows smashed at nights*”. Alternatively, he would warn them that “*probably there will be plunder and those who will pay the Hlinka Guard will be assigned an armed Guard member who will protect them against the looters*”.<sup>52</sup> In total, Valuch went around to 54 shopkeepers, out of which as many as 42 had bought the book. As a result, his commission amounted to 410 Crowns and another 1090 Crowns were given to him as a donation for the Hlinka Guard. The money was used for his own needs. During interrogation at a police station in Topolčany on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1938 he admitted selling the book and collecting donations, however, he did not admit authorization by the Hlinka Guard.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> SA Trenčín, w. Bojnica, f. OÚ Prievidza, b. 81, F. Nr. 20/44. Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana (Strana slovenskej národnej jednoty). Obvodný sekretariát v Prievidzi. Diviaky n/Nitricou – menovanie komisára a por. sboru obce.

<sup>52</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. OÚ Topolčany, i. Nr. 237, b. 413, sig. 21584/38 prez. Četnícka stanica Topolčany, okres Topolčany. Valuch Robert z Topolčian, podvod. The carrying of weapons by members of the HG was against the regulation of the country President Nr. 65463 prez. 1938 of 14<sup>th</sup> October 1938, according to which all holders of weapons and ammunition were obliged to hand them over to the district office or gendarmerie station.

<sup>53</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. OÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 237, b. 413, sig. 21584/38 prez. Četnícka stanica Topolčany, okres Topolčany. Valuch Robert z Topolčian, podvod.



Valuch's case is an illustrative example of problems caused by absence of legislation concerning the status of the Hlinka Guard. Its members abused this fact not only to intimidate the Jewish and Czech inhabitants, but also to act independently of the existing bodies of the state power, which they did not approach as a potential partner but as competition. Moreover, the Guard members asked the state and municipal bodies for subsidies. The regional headquarters of the HG in Topoľčany also addressed the town's state commissioner with a request "*for granting subsidy for equipping of the H. G.*". As a reason for their request they stated a prepared act of solemn oath the Guard members were supposed to perform "*at the presence of the Chief Commander, MP K. Sidor, as well as a representative of the Slovak Government, a minister Dr. F. Ďurčanský*". According to the regional headquarters of the HG, the town was to contribute "*in the interest of this national event*" to secure equipment for the Guard members taking an oath.<sup>54</sup>

Once the municipal council approved the requested subsidy on 7<sup>th</sup> December,<sup>55</sup> the state commissioner complied with the request on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1938 and remitted an amount of 5,000 Crowns. Another evidence of the state commissioner's obligingness is a fact that the subsidy was approved despite the absence of any financial reserve in the municipality budget that could possibly serve to pay the subsidy from. It was presumed that the money in need would be acquired by transfers within the budget chapters. There was also no objection against the decision of the municipal council from the side of the district committee in Topoľčany which subsequently approved the decision at the end of May 1939.<sup>56</sup>

Not everyone, however, was willing to accept, or at least to overlook, the pressure demeanour, threats, and attacks of the HG members, who were massively joined by people like Valuch, hoping that their Hlinka Guard membership would serve as a ticket to a great career. Quite naturally, the biggest critics of this situation were the citizens affected. Yet not only them. The offices started to receive several complaints concerning

<sup>54</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topoľčany, f. OÚ Topoľčany, I. Nr. 237, b. 413, sig. 22338/38 prez. Oblastné veliteľstvo Hlinkovej Gardy v Topoľčanoch. Žiadosť o udelenie podpory na vystrojenie H. G.

<sup>55</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topoľčany, f. OÚ Topoľčany, I. Nr. 237, b. 413, sig. 22338/38 prez. Okresný úrad v Topoľčanoch. Obec Topoľčany, udelenie podpory pre H. G. v Topoľčanoch.

<sup>56</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topoľčany, f. OÚ Topoľčany, I. Nr. 237, š. 413, sig. 22338/38 prez. Výtah zo zápisnice napísanej v Topoľčanoch dňa 7. decembra 1938.

the anti-Czech and anti-Jewish behaviour of the HG members.<sup>57</sup> Such independent conduct of the Guard members, with no exact definition of the HG status within the state structure and no exact limitation of their authority, also did not suit the autonomous Prime Minister, Jozef Tiso, and his political party wing, which had become a target of frequent attacks from the side of some of the Guard representatives. Therefore, Tiso was trying to achieve subordination of the HG to the People's Party.<sup>58</sup> Arrangement of the HG status was passed in a form of the Government Decree No. 70 on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1938, which approved statutes of the HG and by the same token dissolved all sports clubs.<sup>59</sup>

More specific instructions on liquidation of the sports clubs were introduced in the Order No. 6, issued by a state minister and the HG Chief Commander on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1938, stating the *"liquidation of the dissolved sports clubs"*, whose property was to be assigned to the Hlinka Guard. The document featured six steps outlining how the dissolution process would be conducted. It was supposed to be realized by *"the authorized notary offices with assistance and presence of a local organisation of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, temporary Chief of the HG and a mayor of the municipality"*. Committees formed in this manner were supposed to draw up an inventory of the club's property for which it was in charge until ruling of the Legal Department of the HG. The liquidation of sports clubs was to be carried out without any delay and finalised by the end of 1938. The Chief Commander did warn against failing to fulfil or carrying out the order wrongly: *"Different liquidation of the dissolved clubs, concealing or incorrectly listed property, incorrect inventory as well as improper manipulation with the assigned property will be strictly penalised."*<sup>60</sup>

The Government Decree No. 70 was followed also in the case of the liquidation of the Sporting Club Orol in Chynorany. Since the property

<sup>57</sup> National Archives of the Czech Republic (hereafter NA CR) Praha, f. Předsednictví ministerské rady – Sekretariát (hereafter PMR-S), b. 208, sig. 418/3, „Připomínky k nynějším poměrům na Slovensku“, NA CR Praha, f. PMR-S, b. 208, sign. 418/3, Nr. 8694, správa Ústředního svazu československých průmyslníků o protižidovských a protičeských výtržnostech 3. a 4. 11. 1938 v Bratislave.

<sup>58</sup> A. RAŠLA, – E. ŽABKAY, *Proces s dr. J. Tisom*, Bratislava 1990, p. 152. See also: ČARNOGURSKÝ, pp. 225ff.

<sup>59</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. OÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 237, b. 413, sig. 21826/38 prez. Okresnému úradu v Topolčany.

<sup>60</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. OÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 237, b. 413, sig. 21826/38 prez. Rozkaz čís. 6. štátneho ministra Karola Sidora, hlavného veliteľa Hlinkovej Gardy vo veci likvidovania rozpustených telovýchovných spolkov.

of Orol was supposed to be taken over by the Hlinka Guard, the local headquarters of the HG in Chynorany performed an inventory of the property they assumed. The act of the takeover happened on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1938 at the presence of the Orol Club Secretary, Vojtech Kákoš, the club's booking clerk, Šimon Marko and the local Chief of the HG, Ján Beňadik. The HG Chief took over the property worth more than 15 thousand Crowns, however, together with a debt of 410 Crowns.<sup>61</sup> Once the takeover was finalised, the District Council in Topoľčany decided the dissolution of the Orol organisation and its erasure from the list of clubs on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1939.<sup>62</sup>

### The Course of Elections to the Legislative Assembly of the Slovak Country in Topoľčany

Even though the People's Party was already taking over the power in Slovakia and reforming it according to its plan, it still did not have any legal definition in the Constitution. The elite of the party was fully aware of the fact and that was why they insisted on expedited legalization of the Slovak autonomy. The signatories of the Žilina Agreement had already adopted the people's bill on the Slovak autonomy in the document itself. By the same token they made a commitment "to join our forces and try our best to pass this law at the National Assembly no later than on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1938".<sup>63</sup> However, with respect to the complicated situation, which had come about consequence of the territorial changes after the Munich Treaty and the Vienna Arbitration, the autonomy began to be an issue for discussion in the Czechoslovak Parliament only as late as in second half of November. The Chamber of Deputies received the bill on 17<sup>th</sup> November, and both readings passed with no discussion on 19<sup>th</sup> November. In the first reading, the submitted bill was approved with a slight modification by a voting ratio of 142:21,<sup>64</sup> and in a subsequent second reading it was approved by 144 deputies and rejected by 25 deputies. Once it was passed, the chairman

<sup>61</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topoľčany, f. OÚ Topoľčany, I. Nr. 237, b. 413, sig. 21649/38 prez. Miestne veliteľstvo H. G. v Chynoranoch. Zápisnica o prevzatí majetku a inventáru Telocvičnej jednoty „Orol“ v Chynoranoch.

<sup>62</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topoľčany, f. OÚ Topoľčany, I. Nr. 237, b. 413, sig. 21649/38 prez. Okresný úrad v Topoľčanoch. Spolok Jednota čsl. Orla so sídlom v Chynoranoch rozpustenie, výmaz zo spolkového zoznamu.

<sup>63</sup> The text of the Žilina Agreement see e.g. Žilinská dohoda, in: *Slovenský denník*, October 9, 1938, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> The Joint Czech-Slovak Digital Parliamentary Library, National Assembly 1935–1938, Chamber of Deputies, Debate, Stenoprotokol from meeting Nr. 155, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1938, <https://www.nrsr.sk/dl/Browser/Document?documentId=45996> [2020-11-07].

of the sitting, Jan Malypetr, tersely stated: *“The bill has been approved by the qualified three-fifth majority of the actual number of deputies, hence the Chamber of Deputies has approved the bill in the second reading as an constitutional act.”*<sup>65</sup> In a similar manner, approving of the act at the Senate on 22<sup>nd</sup> November was also performed in a shortened process. Under chairmanship of František Soukup, the bill went through two readings, and after walkout of the Communist Party senators, it was approved by a voting ratio of 78:0 in both of them.<sup>66</sup> Once published in the statute book on 23<sup>rd</sup> November the law came into force as the Constitutional Act No. 299 on the Autonomy of the Slovak Country.<sup>67</sup>

The autonomous Slovak Government did not hesitate and as soon as on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1938 resolved to announce elections to the Slovak Assembly<sup>68</sup> on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1938. The public notice concerning the elections was published in the Official Newspaper and in the Provincial Bulletin on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> November, which in fact gave interested parties only one day to submit their lists of candidates. Since the lists of candidates were supposed to be submitted at least three weeks prior to the day of elections, the deadline was already on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> November,<sup>69</sup> which was a non-working day. The intention of preventing other competing parties from submitting their lists turned out successfully. Regulation of the Provincial Office from 28<sup>th</sup> November 1938 informed the subordinate district offices that *“on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1938 there was only one submitted list of candidates and that was: Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party (Party of Slovak National Unity)”*. The absolute control of the People’s Party is also evident in a part of the regulation concerning creating of the election committees: *“Since there is only one political party listed in the elections, it is only this party that is entitled to enter members of the election committees.”*<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup> The Joint Czech-Slovak Digital Parliamentary Library, National Assembly 1935–1938, Chamber of Deputies, Debate, Stenoprotokol from meeting Nr. 155, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1938, <https://www.nrsr.sk/dl/Browser/Document?documentId=45996> [2020–11–07].

<sup>66</sup> The Joint Czech-Slovak Digital Parliamentary Library, National Assembly 1935–1938, Senate, Debate, Stenoprotokol from meeting Nr. 123, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1938, <https://www.nrsr.sk/dl/Browser/Document?documentId=46848> [2020–11–07].

<sup>67</sup> *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*, Nr. 99, Ústavný zákon o autonomii Slovenskej krajiny, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1938, pp. 1161–1164.

<sup>68</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. ONÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 194, b. 16, sig. 9610/38 prez. Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej krajiny v Bratislave. Voľba do prvého snemu Slovenskej krajiny.

<sup>69</sup> R. LETZ, *Slovenské dejiny V. (1938–1945)*, Bratislava 2012, p. 37.

<sup>70</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. ONÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 194, b. 16, sig. 9610/38 prez. Okresný úrad v Topolčanoch. Voľba do snemu Slovenskej krajiny.

The regulation on elections was put up in Topoľčany as soon as it had been pinned onto the official notice boards of the town, about which the citizens were informed by the town's drummer. According to the instructions of the District Chief, copies of the regulation were supposed to be displayed for 14 days, that is until 10<sup>th</sup> December.<sup>71</sup> The same lists of voters that were created on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1938 were used also for the purpose of the elections to the Assembly of the Slovak Country. Following orders of the Ministry of the Interior, they were to be updated by the authorized offices so that they would reflect actual number and conditions on the day of elections.<sup>72</sup> While completing the lists of voters with the names of newly entitled voters there occurred certain problems concerning those citizens who came from the areas that had been annexed to Hungary or Poland on the grounds of the decision of the superpowers.<sup>73</sup> In the case of Topoľčany district, this issue concerned mainly citizens of the Southern Slovakia, which had been taken by Hungary.

The dilemma whether to allow the refugees to vote, and if so then on what condition, was resolved in favour of their right to vote. The conditions on which the refugees – Slovaks – would be allowed to vote were stated in a memo of the Provincial Office from 15<sup>th</sup> December. At the same time, it was recommended to *“vote only at a particular election committee, and only that committee would be provided with a form for setting up a voting list of refugees”*.<sup>74</sup> In Topoľčany in particular there was a place especially designed for them at the town's Community Centre. There was, however, one condition and that was *“each person must bring and display a permanent stay or a certificate of Czechoslovak citizenship, a birth certificate, those who were in the army will bring their military service book, those who were not in the army will bring a document of a kind that would prove that they have lived in Slovakia since 26<sup>th</sup> November 1937 – the annexed areas including.”*<sup>75</sup> In the town of

<sup>71</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topoľčany, f. ONÚ Topoľčany, I. Nr. 194, b. 16, sig. 9610/38 prez. Okresný úrad v Topoľčanoch. Voľba do snemu Slovenskej krajiny.

<sup>72</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topoľčany, f. ONÚ Topoľčany, I. Nr. 194, b. 16, sig. 9610/38 prez. Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej krajiny v Bratislave. Voľba do prvého snemu Slovenskej krajiny.

<sup>73</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topoľčany, f. ONÚ Topoľčany, I. Nr. 194, b. 16, sig. 9610/38 prez. Krajský úrad v Bratislave. Voľba do snemu Slovenskej krajiny, volebné právo utečencov – Slovákov.

<sup>74</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topoľčany, f. ONÚ Topoľčany, I. Nr. 194, b. 16, sig. 9610/38 prez. Krajský úrad v Bratislave. Voľba do snemu Slovenskej krajiny, volebné právo utečencov – Slovákov.

<sup>75</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topoľčany, f. ONÚ Topoľčany, I. Nr. 194, b. 16, sig. 9610/38 prez. Bubnovat – ihneď.

Topolčany there were created eight voting precincts altogether.<sup>76</sup> Due to hectic preparations, the instructions for the election committees were issued by the Provincial Office only on 7<sup>th</sup> December. Since the elections were in fact a plebiscite featuring only one permitted list of candidates, the voters were left with only two options: “yes – no”. Even though secrecy of voting and free will of a voter were greatly emphasized, they were not reflected in the way of voting itself. And for this reason, it was not presumed anyone would come to vote against the party.<sup>77</sup>

In order to promote the elections, there was also a plan to use a new mass media means – the radio. There was a series of lectures of the prominent politicians that had been planned to be broadcast from 11<sup>th</sup> December. To ensure the biggest possible number of listeners the Provincial Office approached the district offices and notaries with a request to *“arrange public listening to the daily radio lectures at 19.00 hrs by setting up a municipality’s radio in some of the public premises during the week mentioned and to enable the broad public and those who do not own a radio apparatus to listen to the lectures. Wherever it is possible, may the lectures be broadcast via loudspeakers of the municipal radio”*.

The Provincial Office also sent a list of the lecturers together with exact times of their performance.<sup>78</sup> A festive characteristic of the elections was to be underlined by special decoration of the town. And so, in the morning of 16<sup>th</sup> December the town’s drummer in Topolčany announced an appeal to the citizens for *“decorating their houses with Slovak flags to celebrate the first sitting of the Assembly of the Slovak Country, putting the flags up at noon of 17<sup>th</sup> December 1938 and leaving them displayed until the morning of 19<sup>th</sup> December 1938.”*<sup>79</sup> Moreover, to secure dignity of the elections and prevent indecent behaviour, the sale of alcohol was prohibited from 14.00 hour of 17<sup>th</sup> December till 17.00 hour of 18<sup>th</sup> December.<sup>80</sup> All preparations had one goal only and that was to fulfill the ambition of the People’s Party to

<sup>76</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. ONÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 194, b. 16, sig. 9610/38 prez. Okresný úrad v Topolčanoch. Členmi obvodnej volebnej komisie pre voľbu do Slovenského snemu v Topolčanoch dňa 18. decembra 1938 ustanovujú sa.

<sup>77</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. ONÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 194, b. 16, sig. 9610/38 prez. Krajský úrad v Bratislave. Voľba do prvého snemu Slovenskej krajiny, pokyny pre volebné komisie.

<sup>78</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. ONÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 194, b. 16, sig. 9610/38 prez. Krajský úrad v Bratislave. Voľba do snemu Slovenskej krajiny, verejné počúvanie rozhlasu.

<sup>79</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. ONÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 194, b. 16, sig. 9610/38 prez. S!

<sup>80</sup> SA Nitra, w. Topolčany, f. ONÚ Topolčany, I. Nr. 194, b. 16, sig. 9610/38 prez. Okresný úrad v Topolčanoch. Voľba do prvého snemu Slovenskej krajiny volebné vyhlášky.

present the elections to the Assembly of the Slovak Country as a “*historical event*”. And the expected result appeared as the only list of candidates obtained 97,3% of votes.<sup>81</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Even though this period of autonomy in the history of Slovakia represents only a short stretch of time, it did affect the Slovak history significantly. At that time, Slovakia was officially still a part of Czechoslovakia (ever since the autonomy of Czecho-Slovakia was enacted), however, power in the Slovak area was fully being taken over by the Slovak institutions with assistance and in close co-operation with the newly established revolutionary bodies – the national committees and Hlinka Guard. It was the endeavour of the Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party to manage the whole process. As a leader of the autonomy movement, it usurped the post of “the only authorized representative of the Slovak nation”. Hegemony of the People’s Party in autonomous Slovakia was clearly demonstrated by the organisational course as well as the results of the elections to the Assembly of the Slovak Country themselves. Proceeding erosion of democratic institutions and transformation of the elites was gradually spreading from the centre to a local level.

The autonomous government was trying to maintain control over the whole transformation process, yet the results of their work did not always meet the anticipated goals. Even though the takeover of power in the region of Horná Nitra was relatively smooth, certain problems occurred there, too. They were caused by quarrels over merits and from them arising claims to offices. The fights featured issues such as who was a “bigger people’s adherent”, who had greater political credit, who had suffered more for their loyalty to the People’s Party and so deserved to be honoured and rewarded adequately. In such a manner, some conflicts bore literally “fratricidal” features.

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<sup>81</sup> LETZ, p. 38.