Conflict and Cooperation Among East Central European Immigrants: Slovak Perspectives on Relations with Magyars in Cleveland, 1880-1930

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At the beginning of the twentieth century, Cleveland was home to one of the largest Slovak colonies in the United States. By 1930, there were over 30,000 Slovak immigrants in the city in eight different neighborhoods. They constituted a vibrant ethnic community which considered itself to be in the forefront of Slovak life in America.\(^1\)

The Slovaks were not alone. By 1910, the immigrant population in Cleveland reached 196,170 and was continuing to rise.\(^2\) The Magyars, better known as Hungarians today, counted over 31,000 people in Cleveland according to official statistics, even though the number may have inflated due to Magyarization of other nationalities. Thus Cleveland was also a center of Magyar culture and host to the largest group of Magyars in America.\(^3\)

In the early twentieth century, Cleveland was one of the immigrant centers of the United States and host to a number of other nationalities, particularly those from East Central Europe. Fleeing joblessness, landlessness, underemployment, poverty, and national oppression in their homeland, these peoples sought new opportunities in America. Most often Slovaks found themselves living and working not only among Americans and their own nationality group, but among peoples from nearby areas in Europe—Magyars, Poles, Czechs (Bohemians and Moravians), Slovenes, Croatians, Germans, and Carpatho-Rusyns. These immigrants did not melt into some type of pot when they arrived in America or Cleveland. They retained their languages, traditions and customs, as well as many of their Old World antagonisms within the environment of a multi-national, multi-lingual and changing industrial metropolis.

How well did Slovaks get along with other immigrants and Americans in Cleveland? Slovaks cooperated with other Slavic peoples and Magyars when it was necessary, whether for social or economic purpose, to found a church, or to rally for or against a major political issue in Cleveland or overseas. When needs were not pressing, Slovaks did not pursue cooperation, and in fact would often fight among themselves. Thus in most instances, organized cooperation was born of necessity. The potential for conflict with other nationalities, especially the Magyars, would break out any time a specific issue aroused passions, particularly those associated with their European backgrounds.

During the earliest years of migration, before World War I, there is little evidence of any substantial conflict with English-speaking Americans or their fellow Slavs. Even the struggles with Magyars did not accelerate until the 1890s. The earliest Slovak immigrants usually kept a very low profile and confined
themselves to sections of the city heavily populated with peoples from Central and Eastern Europe with whom they could communicate more readily. The majority of the first Slovaks moved to the Haymarket District east of the Cuyahoga River. The largest concentration lived in the area around Hill, Berg, Commercial and Fourth Streets, where many Czechs also lived.4

Slovaks who migrated to Cleveland during the 1880s often lived in one of the boardinghouses which had traditionally been one of the first domiciles of new immigrants. In order to save as much money as possible, many of the first Slovak immigrants were Slovak men temporarily stayed in boardinghouses run by Polish, Czech, German, Magyar, and later Slovak landlords. At times, the immigrants shared the same room and even the same bed with other boarders working different shifts. Contact with immigrants of other nationalities was frequent and closest during the 1880s.5

Most Slovaks came to America with the intention of building a nestegg and then intended to return home where they could purchase a sizeable piece of land with their savings. In America, wages were five times higher than in their native Hungary. As many as one-third of all Slovaks did return home from the United States, either temporarily to find a mate, reunite with their family, or to purchase a piece of land large enough to live off. This continuous migration back and forth across the Atlantic created a tremendous turnover of labor as well as a first-hand source of information about life in the new world.6

The increasing pauperization of the small peasant in Slovakia and the concurrent demand for labor in Cleveland turned the tide in favor of more and more Slovaks deciding to make Cleveland their permanent home. Once Slovaks had determined that they wished to remain in the United States and become citizens, they strove to make their communities a more permanent part of the city. As their numbers increased, Slovaks moved to other parts of town.7

Several new Slovaks neighborhoods formed during the 1890s and early 1900s. Most were developing simultaneously as Slovaks from overseas and other parts of the United States and Canada sought work in the parts of the city which were developing new industries. The largest concentrations of the Slovak population are easiest to locate by finding the churches which they built as soon as their numbers warranted it. In addition to the original settlement in the Haymarket area, the majority of Slovaks in the Cleveland area moved to the following districts: the Buckeye Road area on the East Side from about East 78th Street to Woodhill Road, and eventually as far as East Boulevard (today Martin Luther King Blvd.); the near East Side area East 14th Street to East 40th Street Central Avenue; the near West Side, especially within a ten block radius of the church of St. Wendelin's at West 25th Street and Columbus Road; in the Tremont area, formerly called Lincoln Heights from West 5th and West 14th Streets; the Newburgh area, especially near East 93rd and Aetna Road; on the
East side near Superior Avenue between East 40th and East 55th Street; in Lakewood, in the so-called "Bird town" area near the National Carbon plant. Two other smaller areas contained a number of Slovaks, but no Slovak churches. The Broadway area near East 55th Street, known mainly as a Czech neighborhood, was also home to some Slovaks who worked in the Cuyahoga factories. Finally, a small number of Slovaks lived in the heavily Polish neighborhood just below Riverside Cemetery on the southern tip of Cleveland.

None of these areas were exclusively Slovak; other immigrants were always in the neighborhood. Magyars as well as Slovaks lived in the Buckeye area. On the West Side Slovaks lived next to Poles, Rusyns, Germans, Ukrainians, Magyars, and other peoples. Birdtown in Lakewood was home to not only Slovaks, but to many Rusyns, Magyars, Ukrainians, and Poles. In northeast Cleveland, the Slovenians were the predominant immigrant group, but Lithuanians, Poles, Croatians, Germans, and Slovaks were interspersed throughout the neighborhoods. Newburg was a hodgepodge of nearly every ethnic group. The immigrants flocked to wherever there was abundant work, formed their neighborhoods, built their churches, and lived within the context of multi-national communities in an American city.

In the early phases of immigration, Slovaks attended the churches of other nationalities such as Germans, Czechs, or Magyars. If they belonged to a fraternal group, it was a Czech self-help organization or occasionally a German socialist or gymnastic club. The Society of King St. Stephen and the Society of St. Andrew Svorad both belonged to the Czech Catholic Union. Both of these small fraternal groups did not emphasize specific national goals. Their interests were more universal, practical and parochial, mainly social insurance in the form of sick and death benefits and the maintenance of the Catholic faith.

Once the number of Slovaks warranted it, they gradually bought their own homes, built their own churches and schools, and formed their own national fraternals and politically active local groups. This trend was evident by February 1890 when members of the society "Garfield" became Branch Four of the young National Slovak Society. In September of that same year, some of the above members broke away and founded the First Catholic Slovak Union (Jednota), which emphasized Catholicism above all. A couple of years later, St. Ladislas became the first fully Slovak church in the city, but only after a bout with the Magyars whom they had previously shared the parish with.

The amount of conflict and/or cooperation between Slovaks and other nationality groups depended largely upon the times and particular circumstances. In his History of Cleveland and Lakewood Slovaks, Ján Pankuch does not record incidents of nativism against Slovaks by Americans. Rather the "Irish, German and other older immigrants incited their children, sons and daughters to make life unpleasant for the hated Slovak immigrant." Those who had experienced discrimination more recently were quicker to
mete it out to the newer arrivals. For this reason, as well as their cultural affinities, recent Slovak immigrants had moved to areas where Poles, Magyars, Bohemians, Rusyns, and other European immigrants lived. Since many of the latter also worked in many of the lower-paying, labor intensive jobs in the steel mills and manufacturing industries, they could also be closer to their places of employment. The rents were also usually lower in these immigrant neighborhoods with modest housing.13

When Slovaks first came to Cleveland during the 1870s-80s, few of their countrymen were around to help them. Their small numbers and their ignorance of the English language brought Slovaks closer to other Slavic peoples such as the Czechs (Bohemians and Moravians). But many Slovaks who understood Magyar and had no nationalist inclinations also associated with the Magyars and their societies.14 The Czechs, however, had a decided advantage. A fairly large number of Czechs had moved to Cleveland since the middle of the nineteenth century and had already organized several of their fraternal organizations and churches. Since the Czechs also were fairly small in numbers, they even called some of their organizations "Czechoslov," or Slavic, with the intention of welcoming all brother Slavic peoples.15 This was an extension of a Pan-Slavic movement which was popular among some European Slavic intellectuals, but sharply criticized by Magyars who suspected such manifestations of Slavic solidarity as evidence of being traitorous to Hungarian interests.16

In addition to belonging to Czech and German clubs or fraternal groups, Slovaks also attended German or Czech churches before they began founding their own during the 1890s. The Reverend Stephen Furdek, who is known as "the father of the American Slovaks," obtained his first job in 1882 working in a Czech parish, St. Wenceslas. A year later, he became pastor of the new Czech parish, Our Lady of Lourdes, where he remained until his death in 1915. While some Slovaks would join the parish, the majority of the parishioners remained Czech. Furdek, who had studied at a seminary in Prague, wrote and spoke Czech, knew German, and quickly mastered English as well. During his lifetime, he served as the intermediary between the Slovak and Czech Catholics. In the upcoming struggles with the Magyars, Furdek would serve as the leader of the Slovak community.17

Despite the mixing of Slovaks with other Slavic peoples during their early years in Cleveland, both Slovaks and Czechs preferred having a priest of their own nationality speaking their own native language. During the 1880s, the majority of Slovak Catholics attended the German Franciscan Church of St. Joseph's on Woodland Avenue. Since the Roman Catholic liturgy was in Latin, the language of the priest made little difference during the Mass. But Slovaks wanted a priest who could speak Slovak during the sermon and after church services. They pleaded to Bishop Gilmour for permission to have Father Furdek come to one mass. Beginning in 1884, Father Furdek delivered a weekly sermon in Slovak.18
Slovak national consciousness was clearly on the rise among immigrants in America. The history of the Slovaks in Cleveland provides a case study of how nationalism often proved to be the basis for conflict and/or cooperation with other immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe.

Slovaks and Magyars--Conflicts in Europe and America

The sharpest conflicts between any two Central European immigrant groups in Cleveland were those between Slovaks and Magyars. Both nationalities had founded one of their largest colonies in America in Cleveland. The city became the center for some of their major fraternal groups, newspapers, and political organizations. Slovak-Magyar tensions were rising in Hungary while at the same time immigrants continued to pour into Cleveland. Conflicts were inevitable.

Oddly enough, one of the largest Slovak colonies emerged in the Buckeye Road area, in the very same district where the Magyars, their greatest European adversaries also established one of their principle settlements in Cleveland. Despite their language differences, culturally Slovaks and Magyars had much in common. They came from the same country, Hungary, and the largest number of immigrants to America came from the northern Hungarian counties, i.e., Slovakia. Southern Slovakia was populated with a mixture of both Slovaks and Magyars who often lived in the same villages together. Thus Slovaks often understood Magyar, and Magyars frequently understood Slovak.19

Living in America meant transplanting their conflict and cooperation with one another to a new setting. But unlike in Hungary, both nationalities were legally on equal footing in America. In Hungary, where the official language was Magyar, there had been a systematic attempt to deny the national distinctness of the Slovaks. The Slovaks had only developed their own standard literary language during the 1840s, and many Slovaks still professed no allegiance to any nationality group. While national self-consciousness was still weak, Magyars had hoped to unify Hungary by making all citizens Magyars, whether they be Rumanian, Croatian, Serbian, German, Rusin, or Slovak.

For the majority of Slovaks who came to America, national consciousness was something new. Being in a new land where they could freely publish their own newspapers awakened national self-identity such that Slovak-American became more nationally conscious than many of their brothers and sisters in Europe.20

Major conflicts in the homeland between Slovaks and Magyars almost always had repercussions in the Cleveland communities where the two peoples lived in close proximity. Magyar-Slovak antagonisms in Cleveland intensified when Slovaks became increasingly more aware of the discrimination against their Slovak language and culture. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Slovaks in Hungary were suffering mounting pressure to
abandon their own tongue and Magyarize, i.e. become Magyar. Despite Nationality Laws which on paper ensured equal rights for all peoples of Hungary, in 1875, the Hungarian authorities had closed the only three Slovak gymnazia in Slovakia as well as the Slovak cultural institution, Matica Slovenska (literally, the Queen Bee of Slovakia). Magyarization efforts continued through the First World War and became more acute in the first decade of the twentieth century. The struggle to retain and spread Slovak national consciousness became the focal point of conflict with Magyars, and a central theme of Slovak history.

The Saint Ladislas Controversy

A look at Cleveland's immigration history mirrors the increasing tensions in European Hungary. The first major conflict between Slovaks and Hungarians erupted in 1891 over the ownership of the Roman Catholic church of St. Ladislas, in the Buckeye Road area on Cleveland's East Side. Paradoxically, in 1887 and 1888, Slovaks and Magyars had cooperated in building the church together because they lacked sufficient numbers to have their own separate parishes. Cooperation was easier when practicality necessitated it. The church was to be for Catholic immigrants from Hungary, and most considered religion to be a much more important common interest than nationality. In order to accommodate language differences, an 8 o'clock morning service had a Magyar sermon, while Father Furdeh delivered a Slovak sermon at the 10 a.m. mass.

Conflict ensued as the numbers of both immigrant groups were increasing at a rapid rate. The Magyars took the initiative in seeking to convince the administrator of the Diocese of Cleveland, the Right Rev. Monsignor Boff, that the number of Magyars had become so great that they required the church for their people alone. When Slovaks discovered the initiative, they countered that St. Ladislaus should be a Slovak parish, for "the Catholics coming from Hungary to America are almost exclusively Slovaks." The Magyars should build their own new church.

Old World antagonisms contributed to the problems in Cleveland. A letter by a Slovak committee to the Rev. Boff provided a Slovak view of the treatment of their people in Europe and how the Magyars "oppress the non-Magyar nationalities in a most unscrupulous way." The letter also claimed that the Magyars who belonged to St. Ladislaus were really Magyaronies, or Slovaks who had abandoned their own tongue and adopted the cloak of the Magyar. They were referred to as "so-called Magyars," who were not content to have a Mass at 8 a.m. with a Magyar sermon.

The tensions over the future of the church mounted and both Slovaks and Magyars resorted to name-calling and a bit of violence. At controversy exploded. A Slovaks letter to the Diocese described their version of what happened. "The wild Huns jumped on the pews, hissed, cursed, swore, went in the sanctuary, and desecrated the house of the Lord. Their wives threatened to assault
the priest with stones. These rioters then spread calumnies against the priest in the public press. The unruly group settled down only after police arrived.25

The Magyars hired a lawyer and appealed to the Diocese with a claim that only 25 Slovak families lived in the area near the church, whereas there were 1,200 Magyars. Moving quickly, the Magyars arranged a meeting with the Rev. Boff, and stacked it with their own people. Slovaks discovered the meeting was to take place, and Father Furdek turned it to the Slovak's advantage. He argued that if so many Magyars belonged to the parish, they surely needed a larger church. Thus the Rev. Boff announced he would give St. Ladislas to the Slovaks on the condition of a $1,000 compensation for the new Hungarian church. Both Furdek and Boff had to flee the hall for all the booing and threats.26

For many years, the St. Ladislas incident and the continuing tensions in European Hungary contributed to Slovak-Magyar conflicts. The episode proved extremely important because it set the tone for Magyar-Slovak relations in the city over the next three decades. Living in the same city together and oftentimes in the same neighborhoods provided potential for both cooperation and conflict. But living together did not mean loving together. Rather an uneasy truce prevailed. Specific issues or events could at any time ignite the explosive powderkeg of tensions. And they did.

Slovak Calvinists

Experiences similar to the St. Ladislas affair affected other Slovak groups which had tried cooperation with the Magyars. If Slovaks regularly wished to worship in their native tongue, they would have to establish their own Slovak church. The Lutherans realized this and established their own parish of the Holy Trinity Evangelical Congregation in 1892.

During the early years, Slovaks and Magyar Calvinists were sparser in numbers than Catholics or Lutherans, and thus they worshiped in the same churches in many American cities. Slovak Calvinists were scattered throughout Lakewood and Cleveland, and attended services in one of the three Hungarian churches. After an initial visit in 1906, the Rev. William Regnemer occasionally visited the Slovak Calvins and catered to their spiritual needs. In 1912, three ministers (the Reverends Molnár, Bogar, and Garay) made their way to Lakewood for services. An unsuccessful attempt to secure an Oberlin College student, Andrew Rybars, for regular Slovak services in Lakewood lasted no more than a few weeks.28

The Slovak nationalism aroused during the First World War led in 1917 to a split of the Slovak Calvinists from a Magyar fraternal-benefit society. They formed Lodge No. 33 of the Slovak Calvinistic Presbyterian Union in America. Meeting regularly, the Slovak lodge paved the way for establishing their own parish. Four years later, the Slovaks obtained a minister, the
Rev. Frank Uherka, and formed the Slovak Calvinist Presbyterian Church. The break with the Magyars was complete.29

The Slovak Flag Controversy

Nationality conflicts also affected Slovak fraternal lodges. Several years after the founding of of the National Slovak Society (N.S.S.) 1890, another struggle with the Magyars broke out in Cleveland Branch Number Four, "Garfield," the first N.S.S. group in the city. The object of conflict was symbolic—a flag. Would the branch use the Hungarian colors of red-white-green or the Slovak colors of white-blue-red?30

During first years of the National Slovak Society, many Magyarones as well as nationally awakened Slovaks belonged to early Slovak fraternals. They had been eager for members and had accepted them without much regard to particulars. The First Catholic Slovak Union (usually referred to as just Jednota) encouraged embracing all Catholics from Hungary, including those with Magyar preferences. The slogan of Jednota was "Za Bohu a národ (For God and country). Faith came first to Jednota's founder, Father Furdek; nation was second. But the National Slovak Society specifically placed a high priority on cultivating Slovak national life.31

The members of Branch Four decided to adopt the Slovak flag. This outraged Magyarones who held some of the highest offices in the lodge. Those favoring the Hungarian flag labeled the other lodge members "Moscovites" and "traitors to their country." In retaliation, they secretly planned to walk out of a future meeting and join a Magyar fraternal group.32

The Slovak nationalist faction was warned of the surprise and prepared a coup of its own. The nationalists invited the N.S.S. Supreme President, Peter Rovnianek, to the assembly at Giessen's hall. The crowd broke out in applause; the Magyarones appeared "like wet chickens who had lost their wings and grumbled cursing at the 'Moscovites.'" The split was complete; instead of staging a coup, the Magyarones were expelled and took very few members with them.33

The Kossuth Monument Controversy

The next serious conflict erupted in 1902 over the proposed erection of a monument to Louis Kossuth in Public Square. This was perhaps the biggest Slovak-Magyar conflict in the history of Cleveland because it spilled over into city politics and embroiled many other nationalities in the controversy. The Slovaks used the issue to show that they would fight for their rights and would not be trampled over as in Europe. The struggle evolved into a public symbol of their individuality as a distinct nationality. As the Plain Dealer put it, "There is to be a war to the knife against placing the Kossuth monument on the Public Square."
After the gun barrels were dry, many more people in the city were acquainted with the nationality policies of Hungary.34

Kossuth had been the liberal leader of an independent Hungary during the Revolution of 1848, but Kossuth was exiled and in 1851-52, had traveled extensively throughout the United States, where he found a sympathetic ear to calls for a parliamentary government in Hungary. In early 1852, Kossuth had spent several days in Cleveland, and the Magyars of the city wished to commemorate their hero.35 Cleveland Hungarians presented their request before the Director of the City Parks, Charles P. Salen, and it was quickly approved.36

When Slovaks discovered the monument was to be erected in such a prominent place, predictably they were furious. On July 31, 1902, Pankuch's newspaper Lutheran printed an article about the affair: ". . . as the month of September nears, the Magyar Jews were making a greater cry in the newspaper. This angered the architect Cudell [a prominent German architect] so much, that he delivered a public protest against the building of the Kossuth memorial in the heart of the city. The Slovaks did not consider the affair a joke, but on the very same day when Cudell's protest was published, they formed a self-appointed committee and visited leading Slovak and Slavic newspapers and requested help in the struggle against this enterprise. . . ."37

In response, disconcerted Slovaks formed an ad hoc committee and selected the Rev. Furdek as their spokesperson. Other prominent Slovak members included Jozef Dovalovský, Ján Puhalla, Ján Pankuch, and Ján Gerak. In order to broaden their impact, the Slovaks also invited other Slavs to participate in the struggle against the Kossuth monument. Jozef Pivonek, a Czech public notary and friend of the Slovaks, accompanied Furdek when they first visited Mayor Johnson.38

On the day after approval had been received, Friday, July 25, 1902, the above committee arranged a meeting with Mayor Tom Johnson. At the meeting, the committee explained how Kossuth had tried to denationalize the Slovaks and other peoples of Hungary. Mayor Johnson replied that he would look into the historical background of Kossuth's life, but stated that it would be difficult to change the decision of City Council regardless.39

The Slovaks considered the possibility of legal action and challenged the authority of Salen's granting permission without City Council's deliberation. They also hosted a meeting of 300 delegates from various Slavic societies on Sunday, July 28, in Giessen's hall. A fund of $2,000 was pledged to carry on the battle and employ the necessary legal aid if their protest failed to revoke the permission.

The committee also threatened to build a rival monument if the Kossuth project in Public Square went through. If the Magyars could have permission to have a statue in the heart of the city, the Slavs would as well. The sums of money collected
would be "used to erect a statue of some Slavonian general near that of Kossuth."40

The Slovaks decided to request that a statue of one of their historical personages also be built. Polish representatives suggested a memorial to their Polish hero, Thaddeus Kosciusko. Other nationalities began thinking about which person would represent their group.41

While strongly denouncing the Magyar effort among their own people and other Slavs and Rumanians, the organizers displayed a keen understanding of the American political mind. Instead of attacking the Magyar wish to erect a monument, they made their protest broad and relatively moderate so as to attract the maximum number of supporters. The committee secretary, Jozef Dovalovsky, stated, "We are not fighting against the erection of the Kossuth statue. We are fighting against its location on Public square. We do not want the square to look like a graveyard. I think the other nationalities should join with us in our fight. The matter is of vital interest to all citizens." Only those statues of American patriots, he said, should occupy such a central place in an American city.42

The Slovaks in cooperation with other Slavic peoples launched a petition drive with this moderate demand taken to the people of Cleveland. Slovak fraternal groups spearheaded the petition drive, but Polish, Croatian, Czech and Rumanian groups participated as well. The petitioners canvassed many Cleveland neighborhoods and obtained thousands of signatures from virtually every ethnic group in Cleveland.43

In order to rally all Cleveland opponents of the Kossuth Monument in Public Square, the committee organized a huge rally to be held in the Bohemian National Hall on August 8, 1902. The meeting of protest was advertised widely and called Slovaks and other Slavs to rally behind the Slovak Committee. A poster read, "Hor sa Slovak, maj sa k ďinu!" (Arise Slovak, to action!) "Every Slovak man and woman, every brother Slav, Czech, Pole, Russian, Croatian and Slovenian are respectfully requested to come to the meeting. Come all regardless of difference [of nationality]. The committee speakers will be present. The mayor of the city, Tom Johnson, will speak." Everything was in place for one of the biggest Slavic protest rallies in the history of the United States.44

Cleveland City Council considered reneging on the permission granted because the politicians wished to avoid adverse publicity before the upcoming November elections. The city's Magyars refused to consider any alternative. They insisted that the statue of Kossuth would be in Public Square or nowhere. Slovaks answered with vitriolic newspaper editorials in their own papers, but more conservative statements in American English-language newspapers, so as not to appear to be a group of wild radicals. For example, articles in English stated that Slovaks did not wish to transfer Old World conflicts into this free country. Therefore, the
statue should be put in some distant park, and not in the center of the city where it would insult thousands of Cleveland residents, perhaps as many as one-fifth of the city.

Finally, the affair was brought before a meeting at City Hall on August 4, 1902. Councilman Springhorn suggested that Public Square should not have a statue which would offend many of the city's citizens; only American statues be placed in such a prestigious place. Magyars present protested and several other speeches followed. Then a vote was taken. The Slovak view prevailed. City Council rescinded the original decision and determined that the Magyars may have their statue put up, but not on Public Square. Instead the statue would be placed in University Circle.  

The Slovaks were ecstatic with joy about the decision. It was clearly a victory for the Slovaks and other non-Magyar nationalities of Hungary. Slovaks across America hailed the final verdict as a decisive triumph. Over fifty telegrams of congratulations poured in from around the country. A headline in a Pittsburgh Slovak paper read "Praise to Our Brother Czechs and All Slavs." A New York Slovak paper, Slovak v Amerike, commented on the significance of the event. "Not less serious are the circumstances, that the appearance of Cleveland Slovaks is unavoidable proof of the political and national abilities of the Slovaks, . . ." This was a moral and national victory which would propel American Slovaks to take a more active role in both national and international politics.

With such enthusiasm in the air, the committee decided to take advantage of it. Instead of cancelling the massive protest rally scheduled for August 8, 1902, the committee turned into an occasion for a mass victory celebration. All Slavs were invited to participate and every Slavic society in the city of Cleveland was requested to send at least one delegate. The preparation committee, with the Slovak Jozef Dovalovsky as acting secretary, included prominent community leaders from every Slavic group: Tomáš Pivonek, Václav Snajder, Vincent Hlavin, N.P. Kniola, Alojs Lausche, Alex Rossen, and Mathias Brajdich.

The celebration at the Bohemian National turned into a monumental success. The main body of the hall and even the galleries were so packed with people that several hundred crowded around the doorways to catch a glimpse if possible or at least hear the thunderous applause. The hall echoed with speeches about Kossuth in the "Bohemian and Slavonic languages." According to the Plain Dealer, the spectacle "was something remarkable, each sentence of the invective and denunciation of Kossuth being answered by a most vociferous round of applause. There was no praise for him that evening, no kindly words, no encomiums to his efforts. Instead he was denounced as a traitor of traitors, an aristocrat who had bartered away the rights of his own people, who had fought only for personal aggrandizement." In a fiery speech, the Czech Václav Svarc traced the historic background of Kossuth and aroused the crowd with what became the
motto of the assembly—"All the world hates a renegade." The relentless Kossuth-bashing was an emotional release of pent up frustrations after many years of Magyar domination.  

In placing so much hope in having the Kossuth Monument in Public Square the Magyars had put their foot in their mouths. Seeking to profit from the new statue once it was in place, some Magyar businesses had even begun selling Kossuth souvenirs—"Kossuth tobacco," "Kossuth hats," and various other articles. The strong reaction against Kossuth and his monument in the center of the city forced the businesses to remove these labels.  

On September 28, 1902, the statue of Kossuth was placed in University Circle. Over 50,000 onlookers witnessed the grand unveiling ceremony, including some Italians in souvenir Kossuth hats. Fearing retribution from other nationalities, the Magyars had a guard posted at the monument for fear that it might be desecrated.  

Previous studies have pointed out that the Hungarian government encouraged projects such as the Kossuth Monument in order to fan loyalty for the homeland. For that reason, in 1902 the Hungarian flag was being sent on a tour of different American cities. It was hoped that the staging of large ceremonies would harness the participation of Magyars as well as Slavs and Rumanians from Hungary. The flag was also to play a role in the unveiling of the Kossuth statue in Cleveland. Slovak societies in Cleveland prepared for a battle over the flag as well. When the Magyars failed to secure Public Square for the Kossuth Monument, they kept the flag out of sight. Several rowdy Slovaks had prepared to throw rotten eggs at the first sign of the Hungarian flag. Slovak-Magyar relations had deteriorated to the point that there existed the potential for a violent reaction. Only the restraining leadership perhaps prevented such an outbreak.  

Slavic Solidarity  

Increased Slavic solidarity directly resulted from the Kossuth Monument controversy. At the suggestion of the Slovak anti-Kossuth Committee, in late 1902, it was decided to organize an association with representatives from the Czech, Slovak, Polish, Slovene, Russian, and Croatian peoples.  

Delegates from 74 Slavic societies as well as many other interested individuals attended a December meeting which founded the Cleveland Slavic Alliance (Sváž Clevelandských Slavianov). The Slavic Alliance only lasted a couple years. When Poles in the Old Country began to rebel in Russia, at Slavic Alliance meetings fights continually broke out between the Pole and Russians. Tired of the quarrels at every meeting, the Alliance simply dissolved as people stopped attending. Without specific larger issues to pull them together in Cleveland, the Old World conflicts shattered Slavic solidarity.
There were other efforts to bring all Slavs in Cleveland formally together, especially shortly before and during the First World War. Some of the instances discussed below will show that the non-Magyar peoples of Hungary joined forces when Magyar politicians came to Cleveland. But these manifestations of solidarity remained temporary reactions to specific situations. No permanent formal Slavic society could last long after the immediate issue at hand had disappeared.

In 1912, 1915, and 1918, huge gatherings were held to raise money for victims of the Balkan Wars and World War I. Occasionally the Slavic and Rumanian peoples would hold rallies or celebrations together. The nationalities jointly collected money and clothing for the Serbian nation when a war with Turkey broke out in the Balkans in 1912. The annual Slavic Day afforded another opportunity to gather and socialize with one another. But these meetings were few and accomplished little. Most of the war efforts were organized and carried out by individual nationalities themselves, or as in the case of the Slovaks, with Czech cooperation.⁵⁶

Slovak–Magyar Conflicts Continue

A high level of tension persisted between Magyars and Slovaks in Cleveland and the Kossuth episode remained vivid in the memories of Slovaks for many years to come. In 1910, Slovak newspapers were still mocking the statue of Kossuth in their newspapers. They were especially fond of mentioning the mischievous follies of students from the Case School of Applied Sciences. The students frequently dressed Kossuth up in torn clothing with a bottle of beer in his hand. Another time they placed a dead cat on his raised hand. In yet another escape they colored him white with chalk. Finally, outraged Magyars demanded that the police protect the statue "in the name of Magyar freedom."⁵⁷

The increasing pressure for Slovaks in Slovakia to magyarize stimulated Slovak unity in Cleveland perhaps more than any other factor. In late 1906, a shooting in Slovakia polarized the Slovak–Magyar communities. At Cernova, Hungarian gendarmes shot into a crowd and killed a number of Slovak civilians. The event caused a storm of indignation among American Slovaks, particularly in Cleveland where newspapers such as Jednota and Hlas (The Voice) closely reported developments in the homeland.⁵⁸

Cleveland Slovaks also reacted to the Cernova Massacre by forming a Slovak National Committee (Slovenský Národný Výbor) to represent all Slovak societies in Cleveland. Similar national committees were formed in other cities as well. Jan Pankuch acted as president and the committee succeeded in raising a considerable sums of money to aid the victims of Magyar injustice at Cernova and help elect Slovak delegates to the Hungarian parliament. The rising Slovak population in the city and the growing interest in affairs in the Old Country led to the founding of the newspaper Hlas by the Slovak National Committee in 1907.
The committee later changed its name to "The Cleveland Slovak Association" (Sdruženie Slovákov v Clevelande). Subsequently, continual conflicts between the Jednota and the National Slovak Society fraternals led to its demise. During World War I, the organization was incorporated into the Slovak League of America.59

Cleveland also hosted the National Slovak Congress of 1907 which led to the founding of the Slovak League of America. A local committee spearheaded by the Rev. Furdek sought to bring together all Slovak organizations under the banner of nationalism. Furdek wrote that "in our work for the nation we must not divide ourselves over political or religious differences." The convocation of the first Slovak League Congress in Cleveland was one of the most significant events in the history of the Slovaks of the city. Over 7,000 people, including many Rusins and other Slavic peoples attended the May 26 congress at Grays Armory. It was the largest gathering of Slovaks in the United States up to that time.60

Count Apponyi's Visit to Cleveland

While frequent articles appeared in Slovak newspapers criticizing Magyarization in Hungary, no major incidents occurred involving Slovaks and Magyars in the city of Cleveland until 1911. The occasion was the visit of Count Albert Apponyi to the United States. Apponyi was extremely unpopular among the nationalities from Hungary because in 1907 he had authored a series of the Education Acts which required the use of Magyar as the language of instruction in grammar schools. Slovak-Americans denounced these as an assault upon their native tongue and culture. Apponyi's tour offered an opportunity to attack the denationalization policies of the Hungarian government.61

Slovaks prepared for Apponyi's trip to Cleveland at a large assembly in Acme Hall on February 16, 1911. Slovak League officials from Pennsylvania participated as well as a good number of Rumanians, Croatians, and Czechs. Jan Pankuch read a resolution to be presented to Apponyi. It questioned his position on matters such as freedom of speech, assembly, and press, and challenged him to explain the shootings at Cernova and the internment of political prisoners in Hungary. The Slovak Committee challenged Apponyi to answer these questions at a lecture to be held in Engineer's Hall. The resolution was presented to a reporter from the Cleveland Leader, and the following day, the paper featured a derisive caricature of Apponyi on the front page.62

Violent reprisals against the Hungarian count appeared imminent. Apponyi was just coming from Chicago where an angry crowd of 2,000 Czech, Slovak, Slovenian, Polish, and Rusin immigrants held a mass protest and pelted him with rotten eggs and vegetables and chased him off the stage. Fearing for their leader, a delegation of Cleveland Magyars sought assurances of security from City Hall and requested a 200-man body guard. In order to keep the peace, a group of Catholic priests led by the
Rev. Furdek issued a proclamation signed by several Slovak, Czech, Rumanian, and Croatian priests. They granted assurances to City Hall that there would be no violence.

Nonetheless, the immigrants let their feelings be known. Slavic and Rumanian critics as well as Hungarian socialists attacked Apponyi in their newspapers and printed pamphlets denouncing him in both English and their native languages. When Apponyi arrived at Erie Railroad Station on February 18, he was greeted with applause by a crowd of Magyars. Another motley crowd of Hungarian socialists and various non-Magyar peoples booed and hissed. Some Slovaks shouted out, "Down with the Magyar murderer," and "Down with the murderer of Slovak children." Police had to weave their way through the hostile crowd and whisked Apponyi away to his hotel for refuge. In all likelihood, the priests curbed what might have otherwise turned into a much uglier riot.63

No other trouble broke out. Police kept security tight for Apponyi's speech at Engineer's Hall, his visit to Saint Elizabeth Church, and a wreath-laying ceremony at the Kossuth Monument. When asked if he would answer his critics, Apponyi answered "poof," and refused to comment any further.64

The Slovaks and other opponents of Apponyi and Hungarian politics considered the outcome a triumph. While avoiding any serious violence, Slavic and Rumanian immigrants worked together and at the same time alerted the American public about the continuing subversion of non-Magyar peoples and the working class in Hungary. Relations between Magyars and other East Central European immigrants remained bitter through the First World War.

Indignant Magyar nationalists in Cleveland sought to strike back for the Apponyi affair at the first opportunity. In the "Cosmopolitan Alliance," an American political organization bringing 14 different nationalities together in 1912, Slovaks and Magyars were constantly at odds. Jan Pankuch, the Slovak delegate, accused Magyars and Jews of attempting to dominate the organization. The tensions between the nationalities caused the Cosmopolitan Alliance to dissolve in 1915. Behind the scenes, a Slovak-Magyar battle raged primarily in the press. When Pavel Blaho, a prominent nationalist politician from Slovakia, visited the United States in 1912, the local Magyar paper Szabadsag published what Hlas termed "a very vengeful" attack on him. It accused Blaho of being a Panslav who came here to make money and incite hatred against the Magyars. The Magyar paper claimed that Slovaks lived "in silence with the Magyars until now."65

Slovaks took similar aim when another Hungarian politician, Count Michael Karolyi, visited Cleveland on April 15, 1914. They united with Rumanian and Croatian societies and presented Karolyi with an open letter protesting the maltreatment of non-Magyar nationalities in Hungary. An abridged version of the letter was published in the Cleveland Leader and the Plain Dealer as well as a conciliatory answer from the more liberal-minded Karolyi.66
World War I and Czecho-Slovak Independence

The Slovak-Magyar tensions over the international situation in their homeland peaked during World War I and shortly afterwards. Slovaks in Cleveland had even less faith about the possibility for finding a solution to their national dilemma within the framework of Hungary. Officers of the Bohemian National Alliance and the Slovak League met in Cleveland on October 22, 1915, and announced their intention to work for the dissolution of Austria-Hungary and create an independent Czecho-Slovak state. The two peoples pledged to strive to form a federal state with full autonomy for the two equal peoples. The Cleveland Agreement of 1915 marked the first time anywhere in the world that Slovaks and Czechs agreed in principle to unite in order to form their own state. Not until November 14, 1915, did the Czecho-Slovak Foreign Committee issue a declaration which declared war upon the Habsburgs and demanded an independent Czecho-Slovak state.

Once America entered the war and as it became clearer that Germany and Austria-Hungary would lose the war, Magyar reformers hoped to salvage historic Hungary by offering the Slovaks autonomy. Cleveland Slovaks newspapers discredited any Hungarian efforts of promised reform. Most Slovaks wholeheartedly supported the movement complete self-determination in building a common state with the Czechs.

Denný hlas questioned the loyalty of Magyars in the United States in the face of their actions during the war. In the American Trust Building in Cleveland, the Hungarians set up a new Magyar society, the New Freedom Society of America, which proclaimed its loyalty to the United States and vowed its support for a new liberal and democratic government under Count Karolyi. The Slovaks rejected the idea and expressed their fears that it was a political trick, "for "there was no other nationality as loyal to the Germans as the Magyars were."

Once the independent Czecho-Slovakia was created, the Slovak press in Cleveland continued to attack Hungarian revanchism. The majority of articles concerned the Old Country, and not Magyars in Cleveland. There were no anti-Magyar demonstrations such as those before 1918.

Small incidents received press attention. In 1924, a Magyar Lutheran was allegedly ordained as a Slovak priest in a Slovak Lutheran church. A common topic in Slovak newspapers was the treatment of the Slovak minority in Hungary, which had few rights and was still threatened with Magyarization.

In 1920, Denný hlas accused the Poles of joining with the Hungarians in a propaganda war to detach Slovakia from Czecho-Slovakia. Another controversy broke out in Cleveland when a Slovak Magyarone, Dr. F. Jehlička, published a 16-page brochure in Cleveland, dated November 10, 1920, under the title Ctitelie Pravyd a Spravodlivosti (Admirers of Truth and Justice). Although
published primarily as a Catholic reader for liturgy, the pamphlet contained accusations that Slovak nationalists were traitors.72

Several years after the war, when it was clear that the Czechoslovak Republic was there to stay, nationality conflicts with the Magyars did appear less frequently in the news. At most, one will find in Denny hlas occasional rebuttals to statements made in the local Magyar press. Usually the editors were attacking anti-Czechoslovak opinions and attempts to resurrect historic Hungary. In Magyar, German, and English-language newspapers, Magyars were writing that Slovaks and Czechs had been forced together and never dreamed of living in the same state together.73

Among the socialists, Slovak-Magyar relations actually improved and there were instances of cooperation. Slovaks socialists walked hand in hand with their Magyar comrades at the May Day demonstrations in 1919. The march represented a deliberate manifestation of worker solidarity in an attempt to show that class conflict divided labor, not nationality. When the police brutally broke up the peaceful march, both nationalities suffered injuries.74 At the same time, Slovak socialists in Cleveland supported the creation of an independent Czech-Slovakia. When the reactionary regime of Admiral Horthy seized power in Hungary, neither Slovak nor Magyar socialists disagreed about the bankruptcy of the new government.

A major shift of conflict occurred in 1919 as Slovak journalists in Cleveland led a new struggle for the rights of Slovaks vs. the Czechs in Czecho-Slovakia. Denny hlas took the lead in denouncing efforts to Czechicize the Slovak population and make all Slovaks "Czechoslovaks," without the hyphen.75

For the most part, exchanges between the Hungarian and Slovak press gradually cooled after the war and the average Slovak lived with his Magyar neighbor in relative tranquility. Children teased one another about their nationality and even sang little rhymes about one another.76 But no major incidents occurred which rallied the entire Slovak population against the Hungarians as before the war.

Some mutual respect among immigrants for individuality was gradually beginning to develop in the late twenties as Slovaks and Magyars were becoming more American. The second-generation's feelings of antipathy towards the Hungarians were muted by the fact that many of them were educated in America and did not personally experience the pressures of Magyarization. The spirit of cultural diversity and relative tolerance manifested themselves at the All Nations Festival in March, 1929. There were no bitter comments in the Slovak press; it was a celebration of ethnic diversity.77 Slovaks and Hungarians were not on the best of terms with one another, but former conflicts gradually gave way to a hostile truce which did not heat up again until Hungary occupied southern Slovakia in late 1938.
NOTES

1. Jednota, May 29, 1912, p. 5. For census tracts with maps see Howard Whipple Green, Population Characteristics by Census Tracts: Cleveland, Ohio, 1930 (Cleveland: Plan Dealer Publishing Co., 1931), p. 29. Jan Pankuch and many other Slovaks at the time believed the number of Slovaks was underestimated because of the confusion with Hungarian before 1918, and with Czechs or Czechoslovak after 1918. In 1918, a church estimated there were about 35,000 Slovaks. Eleanor Ledbetter, The Slovaks of Cleveland (Cleveland: Cleveland Americanization Committee, 1919), p. 16.

2. Huldah F. Cook, the Magyars of Cleveland (Cleveland: Cleveland Americanization Committee, 1919), p. 8. For a survey of the Magyars of Cleveland, see Susan Papp, Hungarian American and Their Communities of Cleveland: A Socio-Economic Study (Cleveland: Cleveland State University Press, 1974).

3. Edward M. Miggins and Mary Morganthaler, "The Ethnic Mosaic, The Settlement of Cleveland by the New Immigrants and Migrants," The Birth of Modern Cleveland, 1865-1930, ed. Thomas F. Campbell and Edward M. Miggins (Cleveland: The Western Reserve Historical Society), 1988, p. 105: When Slovaks first began to settle in the city, there were only 92,000 people. By 1910, Cleveland was a city of 560,000 and still growing. (p. 11)


7. Megles, pp. 125-38; Pankuch, p. 6; Ledbetter, p.
8. See the Immigration Bureau map at the Cleveland Public Library. The map was done in 1915, and Ledbetter used it for her map of Slovaks in Cleveland (p. 11). Also useful are the city maps in the works of Howard Whipple Green (1930). But Green's maps are less useful because he lumped Slovaks and Czechs together as "Czechoslovaks."

9. Unfortunately only the 1929 Cleveland City Directory listed the residents by street as well as in alphabetical order. M. Mark Stolarik, "Slovak Migration from Europe to North America, 1870-1918," Slovak Studies, XX (Cleveland-Rome: Slovak Institute, 1980), 28-35.

10. Dr. Anthony Sutherland told this author that he had read one of Konstantin Culen's articles which stated that during the first years in Cleveland, some Slovaks had belonged to the German gymnastic and socialist societies. (Middletown, Pa., 5/19/88) Conversations with Joe Kopco, April 21, 1988; Pankuch, p. 31.

11. Megles, p. 115; Pankuch, pp. 31-32.


13. For a survey of all the immigrant groups see Ethnic Communities of Cleveland, ed. Michael Pap (Cleveland: Cleveland State University, 1977).

14. Barbara Reinfeld studied the Moravians in the 19th century and found a separate Moravian identity to exist. She presented a paper on the topic at the XII World Congress of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences in Toronto, October 1984.

15. For instance, Slovanská Lipa was a benevolent, literary and political society open to all Slavs. Cuyahoga County Archives, Records Office, "Societies: Religious, Fraternal, etc., v. II, pp. 40-41. In 1874, the society was located at 211 Croton Avenue, an area heavily populated with Czechs and Slovaks.

16. Hans Kohn, Panslavism: Its History and Ideology (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1953). The opening chapter provides an excellent summary of the key role of some Slovaks such as Jan Kollar in developing Panslavic thought.

not being accepted by the Czechs at first. See "Sage of Broadway," Cleveland Plain Dealer, Sept. 19, 1954.


22. Useful for additional information are the church anniversary books—Remembrance St. Ladislaus Church Diamond Jubilee October 15, 1961; Pamätný Program oslavy 5-ročného jubilea zlaté jubileum osady Sv. Ladislava, Cleveland, Ohio, 1889-1939 (Cleveland, 1939); 1880-1914 Pamätník Dvatsat päť rokov v osade sv. Ladislava (Cleveland, 1914). A brief history of St. Ladislas and all the Slovak Roman Catholic parishes is found in "Slováci Katolíci v Cleveland, Ohio," Jednota, May 29, 1912, 5-8, and "Predmluva k dejinám slovenských osad v Cleveland, Ohio," Furdek, July 15, 1926, 17-23; Ledbetter, 15-16.


24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.


30. Pankuch, p. 34.


33. Pankuch, 36.

34. Plain Dealer, July 28, 1902, p. 3.


36. Plain Dealer, July 28, 1902, p. 3; Pankuch, p. 50.

37. Franz E. Cudell (1844-1916) was a German immigrant from Aachen who played an important role in the construction of churches and commercial blocks. His protest obviously played a significant role in arousing indignation among the Cleveland population and this helped bring the Germans into the controversy. (Pankuch, p. 45).


40. Plain Dealer, July 28, 1902, p. 3.


42. Plain Dealer, July 28, 1902, p. 3.

43. Cleveland City Hall Archives, Proceedings of City Council, Petition file nos. #39115, #39118, #39119.

44. "Kossuthová socha," Slovak Institute (Cleveland).

45. Ibid., Pankuch, pp. 50-53.

46. Plain Dealer, August 9, 1902, p. 3.


49. Pankuch, pp. 64-65.

50. Plain Dealer, August 9, 1902, p. 3.

51. Pankuch, p. 60.

52. Pankuch, p. 54; "Clevelandského Kossutha strážia," 1910? Slovak Institute (Cleveland).


54. Luterán, Oct. 23, 1902; Pankuch, pp. 64-65.

55. Luterán, Dec. 11, 1902; Pankuch, pp. 64-65.

57. Pankuch, pp. 60-62.


59. The Černova incident erupted over blessing of their new local church by a native son, the Rev. Andrew Hlinka. Because Hlinka was a Slovak nationalist, the bishop had refused him permission to carry out the blessing, and the government dispatched gendarmes to enforce the decision. Violence erupted on October 27, 1907, when an indignant crowd refused to allow another priest to perform the blessing. After a brief scuffle with the crowd, Hungarian gendarmes fired upon a defenseless crowd of people which included men, women, and children.

The shooting aroused Slovaks in their native land and elsewhere; the violence stimulated national consciousness. *Jednota* and most every Slovak-American newspaper featured detailed reports of the bloody encounter. Slovaks in America took up a collection for the widows and orphans of Černova. (*Jednota*, Nov. 27, 1907, 4.)

The Černova events and the general oppression of the Slovaks also garnered the attention of prominent foreign personages such as the Scottish historian, R.W. Seton-Watson, the Norwegian writer Bjorn Bjornson, and the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy. Seton-Watson soon published a classic work in English about the conditions of the Slovaks, *Racial Problems in Hungary* (1908).


57. Pauco, p. 66; Pankuch, pp. 79-86.


61. Scotus Viator, pp. 96-97.


64. *Plain Dealer*, Feb. 20, 1911, pp. 1, 4.

66. Hlas, April 15, 1914; Pankuch, 99-104; Jednota, July 8, 1914, p. 1; Plain Dealer, April 11, 1914, p. 1.


68. Denný hlas, Jan. 25, 1918, 2; Jan. 31, 1918, 2; Feb. 1, Feb. 2, Feb. 6, 1918, p. 2.

69. Denný hlas, Oct. 16, 1924, 2.


71. Denný hlas, Nov. 18, 1920, p. 2.


73. Denný hlas, May 10, 1921, 1.

74. Rovnost ľudu, May 21, 1919, pp. 2-3; June 11, 1919.


76. Informal conversations with an 80 year-old Slovak woman.