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## THE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN BOHEMIA, MORAVIA AND SILESIA FROM AUSTRIAN RULE TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA \*

### *1. The Czechs and their Schools under the Habsburg Monarchy (1850-1918)*

The Czechs inhabited three lands in the north western part of the Habsburg monarchy: Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. In 1850, 6.9 million inhabitants lived there, 63 % of whom were Czech and 36 % German. This proportion had changed in favour of Czech nationals by 0.8 % by 1910. The highest proportion of Czech population in 1910, 71%, was in Moravia; in Bohemia it was 64 %; in Silesia, within its 1910 borders, it was 22 %. Of the inhabitants in Silesia 33 % were of Polish nationality.

The line dividing the nationalities in the agricultural areas was stable and changed little, but it was watched by nationalists from both sides with great attention. The national character of towns in inner Bohemia, including its capital, Prague, changed because of persistent immigration of workers and craftsmen from the countryside during the period of industrialisation between 1830 and 1880. Immigration into Prague and its suburbs changed proportions of Czech and German inhabitants of the metropolitan area to 86:14 by 1880.

The fact that Prague city government since 1861 had been in the hands of a Czech majority was very advantageous for Czech education, as the Prague City Council put up many buildings for Czech schools and paid teachers relatively well. The situation was similar in other Bohemian towns like Plzeň, Pardubice, Chrudim, Roudnice, etc. In Moravia, the German upper and middle classes retained control in the cities of Brno and Olomouc up to 1918, even if they were surrounded by the predominantly Czech working class suburbs. The City Councils of smaller Moravian towns like Kroměříž, and Uherské Hradiště were in the hands of rich German minorities up to the end of the nineteenth century. In Silesia, the Czech position in local government was even weaker. The changes in the national composition of population in the north west Bohemian coal district (Most) and in Vienna in the last third of the century were due to the immigration of Czech miners and workers, apprentices and home servants, but they could not influence the local government, which ran the elementary school system.

There was a division of responsibility in the supervision of the educational system. The parliament and government in Vienna edited laws regulating the whole structure of schooling and its relations to the Churches and controlled the universities. The Land Committees in Prague, Brno and Opava were responsible for the *gymnasiums* (classical secondary schools) and, to some degree, for offering support to the local authorities which financed the elementary and *Bürgerschulen*, or *měšťanke školy* (non-selective secondary schools) for children aged between 11 and 15. Local authorities decided on the policy towards the teachers. The fact that the Czechs controlled the local governments in inner Bohemia and parts of Moravia and, together with the conservative nobility, the Bohemian Land Committee in Prague, enabled them to build up a well functioning system of elementary schooling and – first in Bohemia and later on also in Moravia – of vocational schools for agriculture, industry and commerce.

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When studying the school system of any state and the school policy of any government, we have to bear in mind that they must be evaluated according to the results they achieve in raising the cultural level of the population. The latter, of course, is difficult to measure statistically, but there are some factors that can be gauged accurately. The first of these is the knowledge of reading and writing, and the second is successful completion of the different levels of education: elementary, secondary and higher. The first can be calculated by using the results of the Austrian and Hungarian population censuses in 1900 and 1910, which also provide the data concerning those who only mastered the simpler of the two basic skills, that is reading and writing. Statistics for higher education are to be found only in the 1961 and 1970 censuses. Both of these were arranged according to decennial groups and so we are now in a position to follow through the levels of schooling of some 50 years before. Even if the statistics cannot be accepted uncritically, other researches made by the author of this paper seem to support their reliability.

According to the official Austro-Hungarian statistics, the degree of literacy among the Czechs was extraordinarily high. In Bohemia, in 1900, only 2.6 per cent of Czech adult population was illiterate, compared with 3.5 per cent of German. The illiteracy rate for Moravia and Silesia was only one point higher. In the period down to 1910 the situation improved a little, and it can be compared with that prevailing in respect of other nationalities in the Austrian half of the monarchy. According to the census of that year, 61 per cent of Ruthenians, 60 per cent of Rumenians, 27.3 per cent of Poles, 13.6 per cent of Slovenes and 10.3 per cent of Italians were illiterate, whereas among the Germans the rate was 3.1 per cent and among the Czechs 2.4 per cent.

Some explanation is needed concerning this curious situation where one of the dominated nations had a lower rate of illiteracy than the ruling nation, even though the difference was not particularly great. The explanation lies in the economic, social and political development of the Czech lands. At the end of the period we are examining, only a third of the population in the Czech lands was agrarian. This was in contrast to the position of Slovakia, which in 1918 joined the Czech lands to make up the new Czechoslovak state. In Slovakia nearly two-thirds of the population depended upon agricultural production. It is clear that the non-agrarian, in contrast to the agrarian, population needed not merely a knowledge of reading and writing but also all the other skills and training they could acquire in the course of their education. Economic and social change connected with industrialisation put greater demands on the cultural level of the agrarian population also. The enlightened absolutist policy of the Austrian government in the second half of the eighteenth century developed an effective system of elementary schools in towns and villages. Data from the 1900 census in Prague and its suburbs demonstrate how illiteracy varied with age group as well as with nationality.

The overwhelming majority of Prague Germans at that time belonged to the upper and middle classes and most of them had been born either in Prague itself or in other towns. On the other hand, the Czechs who constituted 90 per cent of Prague's population included few families belonging to the upper classes, but made up the majority of the middle classes and comprised almost all the workers and poorer craftsmen. In addition, most of them had migrated from villages directly to the city. We may, therefore, conclude that the difference in the ratio of literacy between the Prague Czechs and the Prague Germans was related to their social position. Yet, even among those Czechs who had been born before 1820, 85 per cent were literate.

## ***2. Educational Background***

The school reforms of the 1770s and 1780s associated with Empress Maria Theresia and Emperor Joseph II, and especially with their advisers, Ferdinand Kindermann and Ignaz Felbiger, were particularly successful in Bohemia. School attendance was declared obligatory for children between

the ages of six and twelve, and in 1787, 60% of children in this age group actually attended school. In 1797 the percentage reached 70% throughout Bohemia, with important local differences. Thus in the rich Žatec region school attendance was 90%, whereas in the poor mountain region of Prácheň and České Budějovice only 40% of the children were registered as taking their elementary schooling. Political changes in subsequent decades did not alter the trend toward universal elementary education. In 1834, 500 000 pupils attended elementary schools in Bohemia, that is, 93% of the age group. Of course, their schooling was not intensive. A mere 5400 teachers were employed, that is one teacher for every 90 pupils. Older children attended school only in those winter months when their labour was not needed on the farms. Nor can it be said that teachers were anxious to reduce the size of their classes, since they obtained special allowances on top of their poor salaries when the classes they taught numbered more than 100 pupils.

The dense network of elementary schools, where the language of instruction was Czech in Czech villages and German in German villages, was the real explanation for the high degree of literacy in the Czech lands in the first half of the nineteenth century. The idea of the Emperor Joseph II and his administrators had been to enable peasants and textile home spinners and weavers to read books, instructions and newspapers in order to be able to develop more profitable production, pay more taxes and strengthen the state. As a result, the Czech schools in the first decades of the nineteenth century educated a whole generation of peasants, craftsmen and shopkeepers in villages and small towns. However having become accustomed to reading newspapers, they also they also willingly followed the *Národní noviny* published in 1848-9 by Karel Havlíček, an influential Czech politician and journalist, and became enthusiastic supports of Czech national politicians. It was not accidental that the picture painted by Karel Purkyně, called *Kovář Jech*, showing the village smith and farrier Jech reading Czech patriotic news in his workshop, became one of those colour prints that decorated many inns in Czech towns and villages.

School policy in the towns of the Czech part of Bohemia and in Moravia before 1850s was different. Their population was Czech, apart from a small German speaking elite. Nevertheless, in all towns and cities, in most elementary schools and all schools above the elementary level, instruction was entirely in German. A knowledge of the language of the state administration was demanded from all craftsmen who wished to pass the examination required for the title of the master, which was obligatory for all owners of workshops. This policy was to some degree successful. In the first generation of Czech political leaders active in the revolutionary years 1848-9 we find few artisans and merchants, but many millers, brewers and their sons.

At the top of the Josephine educational system, in so-called *normální škola*, or *Normalschule* which provided teacher training in short courses of three or six months' duration, the language of instruction was, again, German. Originally, the *gymnasiums* (classical secondary schools), which provided an education through the medium of Latin for those young people who were going to pursue university studies, were in the hands of the Jesuit and Piarists Orders. However, they were secularised by Joseph II, and German became their language of instruction as well. The same change was introduced in the University of Prague in 1782. However, since about that time, approximately 5 million people in the Czech lands spoke Czech, courses in that language were introduced at university level, first of all at the Military Academy in Wiener Neustadt, than at the University of Vienna and, finally, in 1793 at the Carolo-Ferdinanda University in Prague. Catholic seminars, of course, had always conducted courses on pastoral theology in Czech. Originally, participation in the new courses in Czech at the University in Prague was high, but it waned later. Similarly, Czech language courses which started at the gymnasiums in 1816, attracted a lot of interest, some 2800 pupils taking part in them in the first few years, though numbers declined later.

It is reasonable to conclude that the educational system introduced in the 1780s promoted a rapid increase in literacy among the Czech population of the villages and, partly, of the towns. On

the other hand, contemporary literature is full of complaints about Czech children learning German texts by heart without being able to understand what they were memorising. In 1837 the increasing demand for Czech education in the towns, and especially in Prague, led to the foundation of a private school, called *Budeč*. On eve of the 1848 revolution, the interest of the Czech public concentrated particularly on the need for an education in Czech required by industry. The Union for Industrial Progress in Bohemia (*Jednota pro povzbuzení průmyslu v Čechách*) which was founded by a group of nobles but controlled by young Czech intellectuals, began to publishing a technical journal in Czech in 1837. In the 1840s, under the leadership of Jan Perner, the man responsible for building the railway line between Prague and Olomouc, it organised collections for the creation of a Czech industrial school in Prague. However in April 1847, when the necessary capital had been brought together, the authorities would not permit the foundation of the school because, ultimately, the campaign to raise funds took an openly political character.

The revolutionary year of 1848 also revealed, in the field of education, how important were the social changes that had taken place in the first half of the nineteenth century. In a textbook for the study of the Czech language, published in 1798, František Martin Pelcl, the first Professor of Czech Language in the University of Prague, tried to persuade his students that Czech was a useful language by putting it to the would be officers of the Austrian Army that this would be a way to win the sympathy of their subordinates, so that ‘your soldiers will willingly sacrifice their lives for you, if they see in you their compatriots’. At the time Czech was almost exclusively the language of the peasants. In 1848 Czech industrialists and intellectuals saw the introduction of Czech into higher education as an important instrument in accelerating their own social advance. On the other hand, the increasing Czech self-confidence resulting from literacy should not be underestimated.

Equal rights for both nationalities and both languages were demanded by the ‘citizens and inhabitants’ of Prague in the revolutionary meeting at Svatováclavské Lázně on 11 March 1848. Doctors and students of the university similarly demanded equal rights for Czech and German in their own institutions at their meetings four and five days later. On 18 March the concistory of the Catholic Church also supported the idea. When the Ministry of Education was established in Vienna on 23 March 1848 Pavel Josef Šafařík, the slavonic philologist, became one of its senior officials. Czech lectures were permitted at the university, Czech became the language of instruction in the Academic gymnasium in Prague, and in the gymnasiums in six other Czech towns, as well as in most Prague elementary schools. The demand for a Czech pedagogical faculty was not granted, though a Czech teacher training college at the secondary level was set up in Prague along with a German one.

### ***3. Education in the Second half of 19<sup>th</sup> Century***

The defeat of the revolution and the introduction of neo-absolutism in Austria in the 1850s not only retarded the developments of Czech as a language of instruction but also produced setbacks in both the university and the gymnasiums. The reintroduction of German as a language of instruction in the academic gymnasium in Prague in 1853, and the suspension of a number of Czech professors in this school, were seen by the Czechs as a serious defeat of the Czech national movement. This change was brought about by the bureaucratic administration, which saw in the increase in the intensity of instruction in Czech the danger of disintegration of the multi-national monarchy.

The dominant position of bureaucracy in the neo-absolutist interlude in Austria (1851-60) was oriented towards the reintroduction of German as the language of instruction in all gymnasiums in Bohemia. In Moravia they were all German up to 1867, when two Czech gymnasiums were opened. One year earlier, Czech gymnasiums were reopened in Bohemia, originally eight of them. The gymnasiums – as well the universities – were state schools and the professors were paid by the

Austrian Ministry of Education, but allocated to different schools by the school authorities in Prague and Brno. In the Czech gymnasiums in Bohemia, German language was only an optional subject right up to 1918, because the Germans tenaciously opposed any attempt to introduce Czech as an obligatory subject into German gymnasiums, where it had been compulsory between 1861 and 1868 (thought in many cases only in theory). In the latter year, the German dominated Bohemian diet in Prague abolished the law enforcing the learning of what was considered by the Germans to be a useless language (*sprachenzwang-gesetz*). The effectiveness of optional teaching of Czech in German gymnasiums (except in Prague) was minimal, but the knowledge of German achieved by many Czech pupils in the gymnasiums, where nearly all of them attended optional lessons of this language, was not very good either.

The establishment of new Czech gymnasiums was one of the goals followed by the Czech politicians, because of the need for qualified specialists and for reasons of national prestige. In the 1870s the city councils of Czech towns founded Czech gymnasiums, built impressive buildings for them and started to pay their teachers. Then, in the 1880s, after the Czech representatives had taken part in the 'Iron Ring' coalition supporting the Taaffe government, these schools were taken over by the state. By then, however, there was quite a dense network of such schools; in 1877 there were 26 Czech gymnasiums in Bohemia.

The existence of a large number of Czech gymnasiums prepared the way for the division of the Prague Polytechnic and the university. Up to the division of both institutions had been bilingual *de jure*, but predominantly German *de facto*. The governor of Bohemia at the time, Philip Weber, argued against the proposed foundation of the Czech university as a measure unavoidably leading to the disintegration of the Habsburg empire in his memorandum sent to the Prime Minister on 21 January 1881.

The German speaking state bureaucracy tried to delay the expansion of Czech schools at secondary and higher rather than elementary level. This policy was, for a relatively long time, successful in Silesia, where the first and only Czech gymnasium was founded in Opava as a private school in 1883 and became a state school in 1889. The autonomous Land Committee succeeded in preventing the foundation of other Czech secondary schools in the crownland. The Czechs studied, of course, in the schools in neighbouring Moravian towns, especially in Moravska Ostrava. The situation in Moravia, where the German liberal party, together with liberal aristocracy, controlled the Land Committee was different. The Czech gymnasiums were founded later. In 1877 only six schools of that type existed there, but just before the war there were 32 such schools for the 1.6 million Czech inhabitants of Moravia. This number was generally considered by Czech public opinion as satisfactory. Nevertheless, it was small in comparison with 36 German gymnasiums in Moravia for its 700 000 German inhabitants. However, the German politicians in Moravia did not allow the foundation of a Czech university in Moravia during the existence of the Habsburg Monarchy. There was only a Czech polytechnic, which had been in existence in Brno since 1899, alongside the German one, founded in 1849. In Prague, the real centre of Czech national life, a Czech polytechnic had also existed since 1869, alongside the German one. All the lectures and examinations in the two polytechnics and in the Czech University in Prague, were from 1882 in Czech. The only exception was the state examinations at the Czech faculty of law, which had to be taken partly in German because Emperor Franz Joseph demanded the knowledge of the language of state service from all potential state official.

#### **4. Elementary schools**

Since the elementary and secondary schools were financed by the local authorities, the language of instruction there was also determined by them. Up to 1919, local authorities were not obliged to

establish special schools for national minorities, although this was demanded by Czech minorities in German towns and villages in north western Bohemia, Silesia and Vienna. The law of 1919, however, put communities under an obligation to establish minority schools wherever there were at least 40 children of a respective nationality living in a given town or village.

From 1890 the minority schools became a subject of fervent national struggle. On the one hand Czech local authorities in inner Bohemia tried in their towns to abolish German schools that had existed there since the late eighteenth century, as schools for children from the families of nobles, officers, officials and Jews from the time when the magistrates of the towns had come under the control of the German speaking bureaucracy. After 1880 fewer and fewer pupils attended such schools, as Jews in inner Bohemia began to prefer sending their children into Czech schools. On the other hand, German local authorities in northern and western Bohemia resisted opening Czech minority schools.

An elementary education system based on interconfessional schools requiring eight years of compulsory attendance was introduced in Austria in 1868. With it came an improvement in the social position of teachers. The system also diminished the influence of the Catholic Church in education, and it was therefore accepted by Czech teachers, even though it was introduced by a German liberal government which was strongly opposed by Czech political representation. Only a few private religious schools (Catholic and Jewish) were still active in the 1870s and they gradually disappeared soon afterwards. The state schools had a good reputation, were free of charge and, therefore, were attended by 99 per cent of children.

Even when there existed equal opportunities for Czech children in schools in Bohemia and Moravia, in the last decades before the First World War, some problems connected with the position of the Czechs as the non-dominant nation existed right down to 1918. One such problem was particularly acute in Prague and in Moravian towns, where some of the Czech families sent their children to German elementary schools.

## 5. Secondary and University Education

The *reálka* or *Realschule* (non-classical commercially oriented secondary school) held a special position among Czech schools of *gymnasium* type. It was the school that was intended to prepare its pupils for industry, business and studies in the polytechnic. Such schools also existed in other part of the monarchy, and in Bohemian lands there were even some with German as language of instruction. But their strong representation among Czech schools was linked with highly developed industry and modern agriculture there.

The increase in the number of pupils in Czech schools of gymnasium type – in which category the Prague higher school for girls and, from 1890 *Minerva*, the gymnasium for girls in that city also belonged – was significant for the cultural emancipation of the Czechs. The pupils of *gymnasiums*, together with their teachers were at the centre of Czech public life, especially the cultural life of Czech towns. On leaving school they joined the ranks of the Czech *intelligentsia* which, in the absence of a Czech aristocracy, played a disproportionately important role in the life of the nation. Among the pupils at such schools, with few exceptions, no aristocrats were to be found. The proportion of children of peasants was surprisingly large, though this can be explained by the relatively high economic and cultural standard of prosperous Czech peasant families, as well as the dense network of *gymnasiums*.

The reasons for attending this type of school varied. In the poorer districts of Bohemia and, to an even greater extent, of Moravia, most of the pupils subsequently continued their studies in Catholic seminaries. Down to 1890s Czech from Bohemia and until later from Moravia, were over-represented in the theological faculties and the diocesan schools. Later, their interests changed

radically, and all regions followed a strong preference for studying at the faculties of law and at technical universities.

The number of new Czech gymnasiums founded in small towns was so high that, in 1880s even emperor Franz Joseph had to intervene to oppose the establishment of such new schools, warning against the danger of overproduction of intellectuals since they were the potential bearers of revolutionary ideas. When the Czech secondary school system in Bohemia reached approximately the same level as the German system, both the Czech public and its political representatives became anxious to extend the use of Czech language at Prague University. Even though Czechs and Germans had formally enjoyed an equal status there since 1848, the number of lectures given in Czech was much smaller than that given in German and, of more importance, German was the language used in examinations. This meant that all students were forced to attend lectures in German and to study with the help of textbooks in that language. From 1860s onward, Czech professional organisations and local government representatives, as well as the students themselves, increasingly demanded a real equality in the use of the two languages.

The first success came in 1869 with the division of the Prague *Polytechnic*, but the most important Czech political success came with the division of the old Carolo-Ferdinanda in 1882. When most of its existing staff moved over to the German University, the new Czech University drew in fresh young and active professors, Czech by nationality, who subsequently assumed leading positions in Czech cultural and political life. Seven of them were later on ministers in Austrian Governments and one, T.G. Masaryk (1850-1937), became the first President of the Czechoslovak republic.

Even if the Czechs in Moravia did not succeed in establishing a second Czech university, by the first decade of the twenty century a complete educational system with Czech as a language of instruction existed in the Czech lands. Once the Czechs had their own school system, it was possible for an independent Czechoslovak state to emerge and improve that system still further. Nevertheless, under the conditions of fervent national struggle in the Austrian half of the monarchy, the problems of schools in general, and of the language of instruction in particular, remained one of the central areas of dispute.

## ***6. Education in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century***

The assimilation tendency, represented by the attendance by Czech pupils of German schools, still had some importance in the early twentieth century in Moravia and Silesia. Among a series of laws connected with the so called *nationality compromise* of 1905, the Moravian *diet* agreed to a law (*lex Perek*) forbidding the admission to respective national schools of children without prior knowledge of the language of instruction. However, it was not so much this law, as the growing national consciousness among the Moravian Czechs, that brought to an end the practice of sending Czech children to German schools in Moravia cities and towns.

This practice, however remained common in Vienna where attendance at German schools had a considerable effect in germanising many Czech immigrants. About half a million people had come to Vienna from Czech lands between 1850 and 1910, from both Czech and German districts. In 1900 and in 1910, some 100 000 inhabitants of Vienna declared Czech to be their everyday language. However Czech private schools in Vienna operated under unfavourable circumstances, due to legal obstacles placed in their way, administrative persecution and the tendency of the Czech immigrants there to assimilate. Although, after 1918, the legal status of Czech immigrants in Vienna improved, they found little encouragement to continue their use of Czech for employment reasons, as most of them there workers, so the interest in Czech private school in Vienna declined.

Yet Czech minority schools, including a gymnasium, persisted as an important part of the minority educational system in the Austrian republic down to 1938.

The teachers of these schools were, naturally, frequently torn between two loyalties – to the emperor, state and Church on the one hand, and the liberal and, gradually, more anti-Catholic Czech nationalism on the other. In the decades between 1848 and 1914 national loyalty came fully to overshadow loyalty to the dynasty, and the behaviour of Czech teachers had many features common with that of the famous Josef Svejek. The syllabuses, those in Czech language and history especially, were very much at loggerheads with Czech political programme resting on the continuity of legal existence of the kingdom of Bohemia. The most popular history textbook for gymnasiums in the last pre-war decade (Josef Pekar's History of Our Empire) was de facto Czech national history. With the addendum dealing with the first World War and Masaryk's struggle for independence, it was subsequently reedited many times as Czechoslovak History.

### ***7. Education of the Slovaks under the Hungarian Rule (1850-1918)***

The Slovak population in 1847 was, according to data given by the Hungarian statistician Elek Fenyes, 1 722 000 and 91% of them lived in the territory of Slovakia, with the rest in other parts of Hungary. An overwhelming majority of Slovaks were peasants or agricultural workers. The predominantly agrarian character of the country can be illustrated by the occupational structure of the population of Slovakia. In 1910, 63% of the inhabitants derived their income from agriculture; 18% from industry and building; and 8% from trade and transport. The percentage of agrarian population among Slovaks was over 63%.

The towns in northern Slovakia, inhabited by Slovaks, were small. The somewhat larger towns in southern, central and eastern Slovakia were in the hands of German and Hungarian middle upper classes, with Slovaks living there being mostly servants and workers. Some, however, were craftsmen.

The great changes in the national structure of the population between 1880 and 1910 were principally due to political than economic reasons, even if emigration overseas in the first quarter of the twentieth century played an important role in the northern districts of Slovakia. There were a number of factors for politically induced changes. Strong pressure existed on Slovak nationals to declare Hungarian as their nationality. Hungarian policy was supported by many influential persons in the hierarchy of both the Catholic and Protestant Churches, while there was a strong opposition to it among a part of the lower clergy, supporting the Slovak national movement.

In towns the magyarisation had ostensibly been successful since the 1880s, and reach its peak in the first decade of the twentieth century. But it was superficial, and many 'new Magyars' who registered as members of the ruling nation in 1910 declared their nationality as Slovak under the new conditions 11 years later. By 1921, the dominant nationality was Slovak. Some change was caused by the fact that people who so wished could register their nationality as Jewish in 1921. That possibility had not been given in 1910, when even people using the Yiddish language in their daily life (not very numerous in Slovakia) had only the choice of German, Magyar or, possibly, some other non Jewish nationality. In most towns in 1921, 3 to 8 per cent of the population declared Jewish nationality. The percentage was higher in larger towns: from 9 to 11 per cent.

### ***8. Educational Background of the Population***

The adult population of Slovakia was still predominantly illiterate in 1880, and the increase in literacy rates in the following decades, though stable, was not very fast. The differences in literacy

rates between the various nationalities and the different parts of the country were considerable. The highest illiteracy rate in 1910 was in the north eastern districts while the lowest was in southern and western districts. In Bratislava only 19 per cent of the adult population were registered as illiterate. In this context the religious background of the population seems to have been important. The districts with high numbers of Protestants had a lower illiteracy rate than districts inhabited exclusively by Catholics. The situation was even worse in the districts where the Greek Catholics prevailed.

The relatively high illiteracy rate in Slovakia in 1910 demonstrates that the system of education in elementary schools in the country was not effective enough in the course of the nineteenth century. A more sustained progress in this respect cannot be traced before 1920. The main reason for this was that many children did not attend schools: as late as 1907 the percentage was as low as 20 per cent throughout Hungary. This situation was in sharp contrast to the school system in the neighbouring Czech and Austrian areas, where universal school attendance had dominated the scene since 1800.

The school system in Slovakia was complicated. In 1899 there were 4086 elementary schools run by the Churches, state or municipal authorities and private persons. The language of instruction in the schools was as follows: Hungarian 51%, Slovak/Hungarian 29%, Ruthene/Hungarian 3%, German/Hungarian 3%, Slovak 13%, Ruthene 1% and German (negligible in percentage terms).

The overwhelming majority of schools were in the hands of the Churches. Teachers were paid by them and the teacher's second – and sometimes even first – duty was to take care of church music. Up to the 1880s, no systematic long term training of would be teachers existed in seminaries. There were only preparatory courses and 16 % of active teachers did not possess any professional training. The professional level of teachers did improve in the years following 1889, but quality of education of non-Magyar children became worse in most school, as more stress was put on training in Magyar. Without satisfactory knowledge of the language of instruction, the Slovak children mostly only memorised the contents of their lessons without a real understanding.

## ***8. Educational Policy and the Question of Magyarisation***

The pressure for magyarisation developed by Hungarian representatives in the administrative centres of different Churches was strong, but resistance to it was offered for some time by Slovak and German representatives in the Lutheran Church. In 1900 more than one million and two hundreds persons were registered as Lutheran religious adherents in Hungary. Of these 37% were Slovaks; 33% Germans and only 29% Magyars. But even the resistance within this religious community was broken in the campaign led by the state against the Slovak gymnasiums, which were accused of being centres of pan-Slavist agitation and closed in 1874.

The Magyar language was introduced as an obligatory subject into all Lutheran schools and, from 1894, this Church was subject to a policy of full magyarisation and those teachers who opposed this policy were dismissed. Other occasions for dismissal lay in the examinations that tested for an adequate knowledge of Hungarian, which was obligatory for all teachers. From 1902, the minimum of hours per week in which instruction had to be in Magyar was 18. This process found its final expression in the Apponyi laws of 1907, which declared that the aim of the elementary school system was for all non-Magyar pupils to be able to express themselves in Hungarian both orally and in writing by the end of the fourth year of school attendance.

The Apponyi laws strongly prohibited any involvement of the teachers in Slovak national activities. Even earlier, measures of an administrative character were taken to counter any contacts by teachers with the national movement. In 1895, when some 2800 teachers were still Slovaks, only

128 of them subscribed to the pedagogical journal in Slovak *Domov a škola*. In the census of 1910, 409 elementary school teachers in Slovak districts declared their nationality as Slovak, compared with 5672 teachers of Magyar nationality. In gymnasiums and secondary schools 11 teachers were Slovaks and 828 were Magyars. This was the result of the great pressure exerted upon the schools by the Hungarian government.

In 1909, the Apponyi law was supplemented by a ministerial instruction, introducing Magyar as the obligatory language of religious instruction in all schools. Official statistics indicated that the magyarisation campaign following Apponyi law was a success.

The fate of Slovak primary schools was pre-determined by the fate of Slovak *gymnasiums*. The Hungarian government, politically controlled by the Liberal party, saw a danger of pan-Slavism in the strengthening of the Slovak national position in education and cultural life and was determined to prevent it.

### ***9. The Question of Assimilation***

The reasons behind the really catastrophic position of elementary instruction of Slovak pupils in their mother tongue were the subject of many discussion by politicians before 1914, and are still a subject of polemics between Slovak and Hungarian historians today. The earlier polemics of considerable interest are, going back to the end of the 1870s. The key problem was whether the reasons that more and more Slovak children learning in Hungarian were to be sought in the state policy of magyarisation, or in the tendency towards voluntary assimilation in the Slovak population.

It could be argued that the number of people affected by assimilation in the nineteenth century was not very high, but many of them belonged to the potentially leading stratum of Slovak society. The Slovak speaking gentry, who had played an important role in the Slovak national life up to 1867, largely disappeared, apart from very few individual exceptions, in the following decades as a result of voluntary magyarisation. However, toward the end of the nineteenth, and early in the twentieth century, when the number of Slovak schools was declining, the number of Slovak industrialists and tradesmen was growing. Were the children of these people interested in a voluntary assimilation to Magyar national community? Clearly, they were forced to do so because school attendance was obligatory and no Czech schools existed in their towns and villages. Nevertheless, we could find some parents who wanted their sons to be able to speak and write in the language that enabled them to apply for employment in the state service, the post office or the railways in Slovakia and, indeed, throughout Hungary. Some looked toward working in Budapest where their knowledge of Hungarian was likely to open for them improved professional opportunities. Hungarian was the only language of higher education in the country, and all who wished to study in a gymnasium or in the universities had to possess a faultless knowledge of Hungarian.

### ***Conclusions***

The foundation of the Czechoslovak republic in 1918 completely changed the position of the Slovak language in the school system. Even if the primary schools were still linked with the Churches, the status of the teachers and their income came to equal those of their colleagues in the Czech lands. It was a necessary change, because many Czech teachers from Bohemia and Moravia came to teach in Slovak schools, especially in gymnasiums and secondary schools established after 1918.

Schooling in Slovakia remained a political problem even after 1918, despite a general improvement in its position in the following years. Conflicts between the Czechoslovak state and



the Catholic Church, between young Slovak graduates and Czech teachers and professors in gymnasiums and the University of Bratislava, were an important political development in the late 1920s and in the 1930s. In the 1938 many of the Czech teachers and professors had to leave Slovakia, and were replaced by those who had completed their education in Slovak gymnasiums and the Czechoslovak University of Bratislava within a relatively short period of 20 years, 1918-38.