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# Forgotten Velvet: Understanding Eastern Slovakia's 1989

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**Abstract:** By focussing on the experience of Eastern Slovakia during Czechoslovakia's 1989 Velvet Revolution, this article examines the motivations propelling local revolutionaries who opposed the Communist regime at great risk to themselves and their families. It asks what inspired those who countered the government 30 years ago and argues that, for many, ideological factors were the primary driver, rather than economic considerations. Exploring these questions through the lens of Košice provides a counterpoint to accounts of the Velvet Revolution in Prague and Bratislava, which have come to dominate understandings of Czechoslovakia in 1989 and which obscure the particularities of the revolution in other significant places across the country. The text draws on regional archival and period newspaper accounts which foreground the voices of students, steel workers, dramatists, minorities and local Communist Party leaders. These sources indicate the active but uncertain nature of civil society in those crucial November and December days. The article also underscores the urban rivalry between Bratislava and Košice, which manifested itself when Košice sided with Prague's protest organization over Bratislava's. The 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe provides a timely platform for a glimpse into the largely untold story of Eastern Slovakia's Velvet Revolution.

**Key words:** urban history, labour studies, Slovakia, Velvet Revolution, East European politics, communism

## KOŠICE, EASTERN SLOVAKIA, NOVEMBER 1989

Late November 1989 came to Košice as it had every year for the previous 40 years: the city set up its annual outdoor Christmas market at the north end of Lenin Street (formerly Main Street) near the Prior department store with a giant conifer decorated for the season. Yet in 1989, for the first time in over a generation, the oversized decorative 'presents' under the Christmas tree on Lenin Street were labelled with idealized slogans of hope and challenge. The words "love," "humanity," "freedom" and "truth" adorned the packages under the tree (Vsl. noviny, 1989a).

After the events of November 17, 1989 in Prague and the subsequent developments around the country, Christmas in 1989 could in no way resemble that of previous years. When police used armoured vehicles and clubs against a crowd of

peaceful demonstrators in the capital and over 500 were wounded,<sup>1</sup> many were outraged and some even charged the streets – marking the beginning of what became known as the ‘Velvet Revolution.’<sup>2</sup> Demonstrations, marches and strikes grew for over a month across the country with protestors hailing from a broad range of population demographics, pressing forward with increasing demands for change. The Communist regime seemed to be teetering on the brink, but it was by no means a foregone conclusion that it would collapse.

In fact, those who publicly protested in the immediate days after November 17, 1989 had no guarantee they would not be physically harmed or imprisoned, lose their jobs, have their families blacklisted, or worse. The memory of Soviet tanks invading Czechoslovakia on the night of August 21, 1968 remained a vivid warning in the minds of many citizens, particularly those over the age of 30, of how easily hope could be crushed.<sup>3</sup> In Košice, Eastern Slovakia’s urban centre, it was the younger generation, particularly university students, who initially launched the public uprising. More surprisingly, the students, and the local intellectuals who joined them, did not associate themselves with Bratislava’s ‘Public Against Violence’ (VPN – Verejný proti násiliu) political movement but rather with the ‘Civic Forum’ (OF – Občanské fórum) organization in Prague. However, as this article shows, Košice’s Velvet Revolution was different than the others in Slovakia, notably the capital, Bratislava.

By 1987 Košice had risen from the sixth to the fifth largest city in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic with 227,800 inhabitants (Košice State Archive et al., 1989b). From 1945 to 1987 the city’s population had more than quadrupled with the growth attributed primarily to the establishment of Eastern Slovak Steelworks (Východoslovenské železiarne or VSŽ—today U.S. Steel) in Košice (ibid.). The city’s growth gave added significance to its response to the events of November 17 in Prague. This was especially true regarding the 24,000 workers at Eastern Slovak Steelworks, the largest factory in Slovakia, whose reaction thus became a key litmus test for the stability of the state. Recently-revealed documents indicate that these workers stood as a force which both the Communist Party and the student leadership saw as pivotal in the region’s revolution – or to its failure. Furthermore, the region’s unique concentration of Hungarian, Ukrainian and Rusyn<sup>4</sup> minorities created an unusual constellation of actors, including thespians, who joined together to insist upon nationality rights as well as more universal rights that could not be granted by the Communist regime.<sup>5</sup>

By focussing on the experience of Eastern Slovakia in 1989, this article examines the motivations propelling the Košice revolutionaries who opposed the Communist regime at great risk to themselves and their families. I ask what inspired those who countered the Communist regime 30 years ago and argue that, for many, ideological factors rather than economic considerations were the primary driver. Exploring

these questions through the experience of those in Košice provides a much-needed counterpoint to accounts of the Velvet Revolution in Prague and Bratislava, which have come to dominate understandings of the events of 1989 in Czechoslovakia as a whole and which obscure the particularities and peculiarities of its manifestations in other significant places in the country.

To do so, I draw on regional archival and period newspaper accounts, which foreground the voices of, *inter alia*, students, steel workers, dramatists, minorities and local Communist Party leaders. These sources indicate the active but uncertain nature of civil society in those crucial November and December days. The article also underscores the urban rivalry between Bratislava and Košice, which manifested itself when Košice sided with Prague's protest organisation over Bratislava's. The 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, with commemorative events in Slovakia and the Czech Republic focussed on their respective capital cities, provides a timely platform for a glimpse into the largely untold story of Eastern Slovakia's Velvet Revolution.

The article unfolds in three parts, beginning by situating the piece with regard to extant literature in order to show how I frame this account (and my research) theoretically and methodologically – and why that matters. I then present key aspects of the Velvet Revolution across Czechoslovakia and provide background to the events of 1989 as they occurred in Košice and Eastern Slovakia. Next I draw out some of the peculiarities of the Velvet Revolution in this region, focussing on the city's unique mix of protestors, as this group was comprised of students, intellectuals, dramatists and ethnic minorities, and analyse their reasons for resisting the Communist regime. Finally, I zoom in on a particularly interesting and regionally important societal group, the steel workers of Slovakia's largest industrial conglomerate, and explain why, although approximately 80 percent of them chose not to resist, around one fifth joined the revolution, despite having much to lose. I conclude with reflections on the implications of this regional particularity amidst the blanket collective memories that tend to be applied to the Velvet Revolution.

## THEORETICAL FRAMING

This article contributes to the body of literature explaining Communism's end in Central and Eastern Europe by demonstrating that, aside from the clear influence of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and regional elites such as Lech Wałęsa<sup>6</sup> and Václav Havel,<sup>7</sup> the revolution emanated from civil society<sup>8</sup> at the grassroots level.<sup>9</sup> However, going beyond the general claim that civic activism ultimately toppled the regime, this text investigates the reasons ordinary individuals took part in the Velvet Revolution, which vary across the different groups of participants. A study of official demands articulated by Eastern Slovakia's steel workers as well as theatre troupes and ethnic minority organisations demonstrates that many people in these enclaves

were more concerned with ideological issues than with instrumental economic concerns. However, as the text illustrates, the proportions of those who prioritised political over material benefits also varied across these groups. The Košice example therefore offers support to cultural and political explanations for the disintegration of Communism in the region and maintains that the protestors' behaviour was motivated by values or consciously held beliefs and principles.<sup>10</sup> Those who were ideologically motivated stand in contrast, however, to the majority of the city's 24,000-strong steel collective. This dichotomy between the bulk of steel workers who did not join the revolution and the minority who hazarded tremendous odds to oppose the regime is explained in the case study section of this paper.

In seeking to understand why some living under oppressive regimes would choose to revolt, we can turn to Havel's own work. In his now-seminal 1979 essay "The Power of the Powerless," Havel made the case for "living in truth," which he noted would, even if only practised by a few who would directly suffer the consequences of their actions, have a significant and potentially transformative effect. He also noted that such people were unlikely to be deterred by countermeasures, sanctions or even bribes.

Havel's essay distinguishes between those living within falsehood and those living in truth:

A person who has been seduced by the consumer value system, whose identity is dissolved in an amalgam of the accoutrements of mass civilization, and who has no roots in the order of being, no sense of responsibility for anything higher than his or her own personal survival, is a *demoralized* person. [...]

Living within the truth, [...] is, on the contrary, [...] clearly a moral act, not only because one must pay so dearly for it, but principally because it is not self-serving: The risk may bring rewards in the form of a general amelioration in the situation, or it may not (1979).

Thus, by practically personifying Havel's "deep moral crisis in society," the Košice case corroborates the theory that the remnant of ordinary individuals who risked so much in 1989 did so for ideological reasons, not economic ones (ibid.).

Rather than with structural theorists such as Theda Skocpol or Valerie Bunce, the Eastern Slovak example best aligns with the agency-oriented culturalist position as illustrated in the writings of sociologist and political scholar Daniel Chiot and historian Timothy Garton Ash, among others. They argue that 'culture' (or ideology)<sup>11</sup> gives credence to an individual's inner motivation for participating in revolution, and thus they explore individuals' ideological beliefs, which can spur them to action, however seemingly irrational when measured in instrumental, material terms.<sup>12</sup>

The structuralist position of Skocpol (and scholars such as Bunce who seek to apply her study of the 1979 Iranian Revolution to 1989 in Eastern Europe) assigns too much credit to class struggle, thereby taking agency away from social actors rather than enhancing it. Skocpol argues there is no need to dig into individuals' inner-motives or ideologies.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the Košice example supports a more agency-based explanation, one that sees individuals as actors with multifaceted identities, which influence rather than determine their behaviour. Thus, they are more complex than actors imagined as simply behaving according to their socio-economic status. What, then, motivated these actors in 1989 to take a chance and put their futures on the line by publicly protesting? The best explanation emanates from the culturalist position within the 'agency' camp of scholars.

In contrast to the structuralist explanation (as advocated by Skocpol and Bunce), Chirot insists on the primacy of ideology rather than on class-based explanations for the 1989 revolutions. He neatly expresses why ideology was at the heart of mobilising civic participation in 1989. His piece "What Happened in Eastern Europe in 1989?," written just ten years after the end of Communism in Eastern Europe, proves insightful and even prescient, considering the events unfolding around the globe today (Chirot, 1999). Although he acknowledges economic factors and Gorbachev's pivotal role, he places chief importance on the "changing moral and political climate of Eastern Europe" as being the primary cause of revolution (ibid.: 26). He argues, "Revolutions occur only when elites and some significant portion of the general population – particularly intellectuals, but also ordinary people – have lost confidence in the moral validity of their social and political system" (ibid.).

Chirot explains why Communism held a great deal of moral legitimacy in Eastern Europe immediately after World War II. The region's middle class had suffered the consequences of the calamitous Munich 1938 decision by the great 'democracies' of the West, and they perceived Communism as a potentially positive alternative to the democracies that had failed in so many East European interwar nation states. Yet, as he points out, 1968 was the "decisive turning point," especially for those born after the war and educated in Communist universities (ibid.: 27). When tanks from five Warsaw Pact countries invaded Czechoslovakia on August 21, 1968, many of those who were still 'believers' in the system, lost faith. From that point on, the unjust "tyranny" resulted in the "fall of elementary social trust" or "utter moral rot," as Chirot identifies it (ibid.: 28, 38). The generation of 1968–1989 was raised in an environment that society acknowledged as morally bankrupt. He summarizes, "If understanding economic problems is fundamental, it is nevertheless the changing moral and political climate of Eastern Europe that really destroyed communism there" (ibid.: 28–29).<sup>14</sup>

This type of agential and political interpretation, in contrast to one that is structural and economic, underpins much of what follows. However, as will be seen in my analysis of the steel workers' motivations for revolting – or *not* revolting – it becomes clear that economic considerations also weighed heavily on groups that had more to lose, materially speaking. Nonetheless, the very split in the steel worker constituency demonstrates the role of agency and choice, rather than determinism, in the events that played out in Czechoslovakia in 1989.

### THE VELVET REVOLUTION ACROSS CZECHOSLOVAKIA

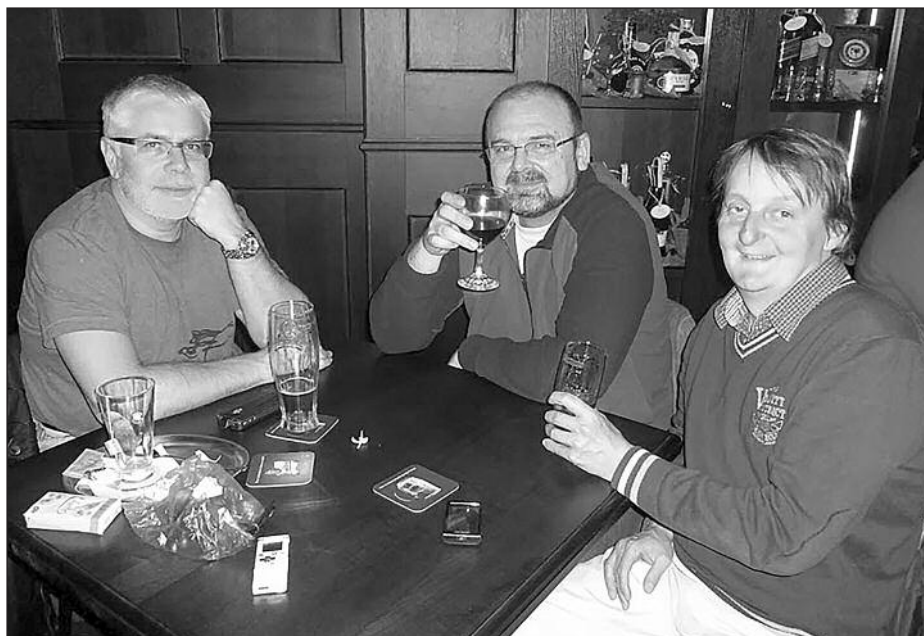
In an effort to set the stage for the forthcoming economic-versus-ideological analysis, the following chronology narrates the highlights of the revolution, particularly as it happened in Eastern Slovakia. Friday, November 17, 1989 was the International Day of Students and the anniversary of the date on which Prague university student Jan Opletal was killed after protesting against the Nazis in 1939.<sup>15</sup> Fifty years after his death, thousands of Czechs and Slovaks gathered on Prague's National Avenue (*Národní třída*) to remember him. Police used armoured vehicles and clubs against the crowd, and over 500 were wounded. This response of police brutality against peaceful protestors was enough to enrage the public and mobilize many of them. Over the following two days Prague university students as well as artists, religious dissidents and others went on strike against the violent suppression that occurred on November 17, 1989. The opposition movement 'Civic Forum' (known in Czech as *Občanské fórum* and in Slovak as *Občianske fórum* or OF<sup>16</sup>) was established November 19 by Prague's Drama Club. Activists in Bratislava similarly formed the organization known as 'Public Against Violence' (*Verejnosť proti násiliu* or VPN) on the same day (Antalova, 1998: 275; Gál, 2009: 22).

While Košice's primary dissident Marcel Strýko<sup>17</sup> and others established the local chapter of Civic Forum on November 20, it was university students who organized the city's first public demonstrations. In Bratislava also, the initial public protests were led by students. Prominent personalities such as actor Milan Kňažko and Roman Catholic dissident Ján Čarnogurský spearheaded Bratislava's opposition and were joined by now-legendary sociologists Fedor Gál and Martin Bútora as well as environmentalist Ján Budaj (Szomolányi, 1998: 19).

Clearly, students were ubiquitous among the protestors in cities and towns across Czechoslovakia (Tůma, 2001: 181) and Eastern Europe in 1989, but the point here is that the first representatives of Košice's opposition were unknown, politically inexperienced youth who could easily have succumbed to violence and police provocation. Instead, as the following sources indicate, the students maintained notable discipline among the thousands who marched through the city with them. Juraj Vetrák and Miroslav Ondruš,<sup>18</sup> electrical engineering majors at the Technical University, quickly became the leaders of the first two days of strikes in Košice.<sup>19</sup> Their



first meeting took place in the lobby of the mining students' dorm (Ondruš, 2009: 88). After forming the first 'strike committee' they and other students stayed up all night compiling a list of ten demands to put forward to municipal leaders. These demands included an investigation into the events of November 17 in Prague, free elections, a multi-party political system, and an end to the Citizen's Militia as well as Party organizations at work (ibid.; Vetrák et al., 2012).



*Juraj Vetrák, Miroslav Ondruš and Jozef Vrábel, students at Košice's Technical University in 1989, recounted their experiences during the Velvet Revolution in 2012. Vetrák and Ondruš quickly became the leaders of the first two days of strikes in Košice. Credit: Photo by author.*

As events unfolded at an alarming rate, regional Party leaders met to evaluate and, if possible, manage the situation. First Secretary and chief Communist Party leader in Eastern Slovakia Michal Špak went so far as to admit that regional Party leaders had underestimated the student influence: "The mistake was that we dedicated little attention and Party effort toward the young generation with its energetic involvement in societal processes and we did not assess the legitimacy of their requests in time" (Košice State Archive, 1989a). State Security (*ŠtB* or *Štátna bezpečnosť*) officials also considered Košice's undergraduates to be high-priority targets. Local Civic Forum member Daniel Liška notes, "State Security evaluated the activity of the electrical engineering students at the Technical University as highly revolutionary" (2009: 105). Košice youth were rapidly becoming the principal threat to the regime's integrity in Eastern Slovakia.



The state was right to be concerned. That same Monday night (November 20), Vetrák and Ondruš informed the head of Košice's Technical University that students would not attend class the next day but instead demonstrate in front of the large auditorium at the university. Rector František Zábranský requested that the students demonstrate behind the school, in a more secluded location, but they refused (Ondruš, 2009: 88).

Tuesday, November 21 was the first day citizens in Košice joined in publicly demonstrating against the regime. In Košice at 8:00 A.M., approximately 3,000 students gathered in front of the main auditorium at the Technical University while the student leaders read their demands and officially affiliated with the students in Prague (Vsl. noviny, 1989b; Pravda, 1989; Ústav pamäti národa, 2009–2019b [1989]: 22/11/1989, No. 4/1).<sup>20</sup>

By nightfall on the 21st, 200–300 citizens had gathered downtown close to Liberator's Square, where seven people were shot in 1968, to light candles in their honour.<sup>21</sup> The posters carried by demonstrators reflect their motivation for publicly attending. As described by a State Security report labelled "Top Secret": "The whole procession of university students proceeded quietly with lit candles, carrying banners with texts reading: '20 Years of Stagnation is Enough,' 'We Want Freedom and Democracy,' and 'We are Not Alive'" (Ústav pamäti národa, 2009–2019b [1989]: No. 1). Furthermore, silent demonstrators wrote the words "We will not forget" on the sidewalk in chalk. The local State Security account of the evening confirmed that the whole incident transpired quietly and "without emotion or provocation" (ibid.). The people of Košice gathered peaceably yet forcefully at the very location where seven were killed by Soviet invaders 20 years earlier, allowing the words on their banners to speak for them as they protested the regime's failure to soften after 1968. Yet the very next day there was an even greater display of self-control.

On November 22<sup>22</sup> approximately 8,000 students rallied in front of Košice's Technical University, and then marched three-quarters of a mile silently to the State Scientific Library (*Štátna vedecká knižnica*), where they were met by fire trucks (Sedláčik, 1989; Ondruš, 2009: 89; Liška, 2009: 105; Ústav pamäti národa, 2009–2019b [1989]: No. 7).<sup>23</sup> Fortunately, no one was injured as the procession was peaceful and orderly. In fact, L. Sedláčik, former editor of Eastern Slovak Steelworks' newspaper *Eastern Steel* (*Ocel' východu*), noted the following in his article on the student demonstrations, "Seven Days That Shook the Republic": "One more small detail. There is a grave-like silence down the whole of Lenin Street, unlike any night that ever was before. It is 6:30 P.M. ..." (Sedláčik, 1989). He described another student procession that took up the length of Komenský Street as maintaining "unbelievable discipline" (ibid.). The young protestors knew that if they wanted to succeed in their mission, they would have to refrain from provoking the police.<sup>24</sup>

Thursday, November 23 saw a total of 10,000 university students from Eastern Slovakia go on strike at Košice and Prešov campuses (Vsl. noviny, 1989m).<sup>25</sup> The following day, just one week after the student demonstration in Prague, where hundreds were injured by police, local Party leaders in Košice officially *allowed* students to strike. That same afternoon the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and General Secretary Miloš Jakeš officially resigned their positions.

Sunday, November 26 was the beginning of the regular public gatherings on Lenin Street in front of the State Scientific Library. Not only students but Košice citizens of all ages met here every afternoon in bitter cold temperatures. Various protest and interest group leaders, such as Peter Kolár of the Hungarian organization *Csemadok*, took turns rallying the public from a platform equipped with a microphone. Liška recalled that almost 40,000 came together in front of the library on November 27, the day of the critical countrywide strike, and also on December 20 when Havel addressed the city from the balcony of the State Scientific Library (2009: 106).



Locals turn out by the thousands on Košice's "Lenin Street" to support the national General Strike on Nov. 27, 1989. Credit: *Východoslovenské noviny* [Eastern Slovak News – newspaper no longer in circulation], Nov. 28, 1989 (Photo by author).

The end of 1989 saw Havel elected as President of Czechoslovakia and Alexander Dubček as head of the parliament. Six months later the country experienced its first free parliamentary elections since 1946 and seven political parties were voted into

the Slovak parliament – the top three being Public Against Violence – garnering 29 percent of the vote, the Christian Democratic Movement (*Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie* or KDH) with 19 percent and the Slovak National Party (*Slovenská národná strana* or SNS) with 14 percent (Ogurčáková, 2010).

Anyone familiar with Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution invariably learns of the importance of Havel and Prague's Civic Forum organization in the winter of 1989 and if they look to Slovakia, they will learn about VPN and the Bratislava dissidents. But more was happening at regional levels than these capital-focussed accounts show. In fact, very little communication and cooperation was occurring between Bratislava and Košice. The following section underscores the urban rivalry between Slovakia's first and second cities at this time and explains why Košice, and indeed a majority of Slovak towns, acted in accordance with Prague's Civic Forum (OF) rather than with Bratislava's Public Against Violence (VPN).

### Urban Rivalry between Slovakia's First and Second Cities

Košice's experience of the Velvet Revolution was distinct from that of Bratislava, and a good deal of resentment over the ill-treatment of Slovakia's Second City by its capital festers even to this day. Košice was the first Slovak city to launch its own chapter of Civic Forum on November 20, 1989 (Liška, 2009: 104; Krapfl, 2013: 116) and, furthermore, was the last Slovak city to yield to Bratislava's directive to disband its Civic Forum branch, its members finally merging with Public Against Violence (Krapfl, 2013: 129).<sup>26</sup> It likely would not have done so if it had not been purportedly pressured to do so by activists in Bratislava, as the following account details.

Typical of the dynamics between capital and second cities, tensions already existed between Bratislava and Košice well before November 1989. However, with the fate of the regime uncertain, these rivalries rose to the surface. Located to the west of the country, Bratislava, the Slovak capital since 1918, has long dominated Slovakia's government administration, finances and employment opportunities. This was especially true after the National Assembly federalized the country in the wake of the 1968 Prague Spring movement.<sup>27</sup> Eastern Slovakia, by contrast, has registered among Slovakia's most impoverished regions since the inception of Czechoslovakia in 1918.

Activists from Western Slovakia in 1989 seemed to think that Košice opted to establish a Civic Forum affiliate instead of a Public Against Violence affiliate due to ignorance among Eastern Slovakia's activists. Indeed, newspaper reports from both cities chronicle the "Train of the Velvet Revolution" sent from Bratislava to Košice to awaken a "backward" or "slow" Eastern Slovakia to this critical revolutionary opportunity (Krapfl, 2013: 59).<sup>28</sup>

On December 6, a train from Bratislava arrived in Košice carrying Bratislava actors, Public Against Violence members and university students (Új Szó, 1989). Interest-

ingly, their destination was the Eastern Slovak Steelworks Culture Center, which was packed with steel laborers, machinists and students to greet the train (Vsl. noviny, 1989c). The famous Bratislava comedian Oldo Hlaváček, who rode the train, summarized the purpose of their dispatch to Košice:

The Train of the Velvet Revolution stood for a long time on dead-end tracks, stuck. We caught it in time and I think that its name is completely appropriate. You ask why the actors don't perform?<sup>29</sup> I think that in this era everyone acts in the play to which citizens bought tickets more than 20 years ago. We arrived here, reportedly, to awaken Košice, to pluck up their courage. We took each other firmly by the hand and now we move forward (Vsl. noviny, 1989c).

However, not everyone in the east appreciated Bratislava's seemingly patronizing effort to introduce the revolution to Košice, which many locals viewed as an insult. Another article from a newspaper in the Eastern Slovak town of Bardejov (to which the train proceeded) reported rather cynically:

Emissaries [from Bratislava] came to inspire the citizens of our district not only to paste up posters (of which there are many) but also to gather in personal meetings which were held during the two days. [...] They had heard not only about the citizens' hesitancy and their problems here but also about the fear of and hindrances to expressing [our] real feelings (Podduklianské novinky, 1989).

Slovakia's only Hungarian newspaper (published in Bratislava) listed several intentions of the mission – one being that the train travelled to Košice because Eastern Slovakia was not very well-informed about recent events (primarily because of its distant location). Another reason was that people who wanted to join the movement were supposedly being threatened and, as a result, those on board the train endeavoured to bring information, strength and courage to those in the East (Új Szó, 1989). There was some truth to the idea that Košice did not have current information about the strikes in the Czech and Slovak capitals. In fact, on December 19 another train was sent from Košice to Prague carrying approximately 200 university students from the electrical engineering department at Technical University to participate in and learn from the demonstrations in Prague (Vsl. noviny, 1989k). Yet even in 2011, the Košice *Romboid* journal contributor Peter Bilý referenced the “‘revolutionary train’ with posters and zealous students who went ‘to awaken Košice,’ because in the [Bratislava] dorms they had been led to believe that in the second Slovak city the ‘Velvet’ still hadn’t started” (2011: 125).<sup>30</sup>

The tension expressed in these articles reflects the genuine frustration felt especially by the leaders of Košice's opposition group Civic Forum. Civic Forum had begun in Košice just a day after it was established in Prague and Public Against Violence in Bratislava, yet it had managed to mobilize thousands. This was clearly not recognized in Bratislava. Comedian Oldo Hlaváček's public statement that the purpose of the train ride to the east was to "awaken" Košice betrays not only the degree of ignorance (expressed as condescending superiority) amongst revolutionaries in Bratislava but also the lack of communication between the two cities during the early revolutionary days.



*Technological University student Jozef Vrábel' (bottom, right) rides the "Train of the Velvet Revolution" from Košice to Prague to participate in the General Strike on Nov. 27, 1989. Credit: Jozef Vrábel'. Used with permission.*

### **Why Košice Followed Prague over Bratislava**

Multiple factors contributed to Košice's preference for Prague, which, geographically, stood much further away from Eastern Slovakia than did Bratislava. Košice had closer ties to Prague than Bratislava in respects that became significant during the Velvet Revolution. To begin with, most *samizdat* literature throughout the 1970s and 1980s emanated from Prague rather than Bratislava as Slovak dissidents were not as



numerous or prolific as their Czech counterparts.<sup>31</sup> As historian James Krapfl notes in his investigation of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, *Revolution with a Human Face: Politics, Culture and Community in Czechoslovakia, 1989–1992*, “In most of Slovakia [...] this literature was strongly oriented toward Prague. As a result, Prague set the tone of much of the public debate in Slovakia [...]” (2013: 118). As evidence he cites the unusual mix of Czech and Slovak languages in revolution-era slogans and posters as evidence of the Czech influence on Slovak protestors’ ideas (ibid.). A 2010 article in Slovakia’s *Sme* (We Are) daily newspaper notes the transfer of news between Košice and the federal capital: “The east during totalitarianism was closer to Prague. That is primarily why in the initial days after November 17, 1989 the city [Košice] remained independent from the Bratislava centre. The information Košice citizens learned came almost exclusively from Prague” (Ogurčáková, 2010). This early “crisis of information” is cited by multiple published and interviewed sources and appears to have contributed to Košice’s patterning itself after Prague (Valeš, 2018: 152).<sup>32</sup> Yet, as will be discussed, it is unlikely that dissenters in Košice and a majority of Slovak towns favoured Prague simply because they were unaware of the Public Against Violence alternative. The city was actually part of a wider preference among Slovak cities and towns for Civic Forum – this element of choice and preference again undermines structural explanations and supports agential ones.

The following documentation from Krapfl’s work sheds light on why Košice, and indeed a majority of Slovak towns, adopted Prague’s Civic Forum instead of Bratislava’s Public Against Violence. Contrary to the notion that the Bratislava-based Public Against Violence was the dominant organization Slovaks chose to voice their dissent against the Communist regime, he calculates that in 21 out of Slovakia’s 38 districts in 1989, Civic Forum was the primary political movement, and it existed in an additional seven districts (2013: 113).<sup>33</sup> Thus, in over half of Slovakia (including regions far east of Bratislava), cities and towns chose to follow Prague’s Civic Forum instead of Bratislava’s Public Against Violence (ibid.). The primary reason for this phenomenon was that Slovaks perceived Public Against Violence as less welcoming to towns that initiated chapters outside Bratislava whereas Prague’s Civic Forum urged all towns across Czechoslovakia to join. Based on a comparison of the flyers distributed by Civic Forum and Public Against Violence, Krapfl finds that Civic Forum immediately and repeatedly encouraged locals to start their own chapter: “they [Civic Forum] emphasized that ‘anyone can join Civic Forum’ and that it was ‘a movement of both our nations’” (cited in Krapfl, 2013: 118). In contrast, he notes that Public Against Violence did not expressly invite towns outside Bratislava to initiate their own branches until November 29, a full ten days after both groups established themselves (2013: 119).<sup>34</sup>

Ultimately, Košice’s Civic Forum (OF) conceded and came under the mantle of the Bratislava-based Public Against Violence. Why? Was the city directly compelled by the Slovak capital to do so? After all, a November 29 statement from the



Public Against Violence (VPN) headquarters in Bratislava strongly urged that like-minded Slovak protest groups “should refashion themselves as VPNs” (2013: 122).

Local research of printed sources as well as eye-witness reports garners a mixed impression as to whether Bratislava’s Public Against Violence directly ‘pressured’ Košice’s Civic Forum to dissolve and join them. The basic consensus among those interviewed who participated in Košice’s revolution, is that Bratislava’s intelligentsia induced or persuaded the city that Slovakia’s Public Against Violence stood a better chance in the June 1990 elections if it ran as a united Slovak party (VPN) rather than as a factionalized party splintered into two divisions (VPN and OF). Furthermore, Bratislava made it clear that the ‘Slovak choice’ was Public Against Violence whereas running two parties in the elections reflected an allegiance to and even a dependence on Prague. In his 2009 article, local Civic Forum member Daniel Liška called Bratislava’s pressure a “cooptation” (2009: 106). Other 1989 activists, namely Ľubomír Badiar,<sup>35</sup> Rudolf Bauer<sup>36</sup> and Ľubica Blaškovičová,<sup>37</sup> agree with this view (Badiar, 2012; Blaškovičová, 2012; Bauer, 2011).<sup>38</sup>

On the other hand, the former student leaders Ondruš and Vetrák disagreed that Bratislava’s influence should be labelled as “pressuring” Košice. Jozef Vrábek, an electrical engineering classmate and friend of Ondruš and Vetrák, summarized their perspective: “It wasn’t that way, that Bratislava ordered us to become VPN. It was chaos at that time. We changed from OF to VPN because that’s what Slovakia was... and we were Slovak, so we joined VPN” (Vetrák, Vrábek, and Ondruš, 2012). Košice activist Vladislav Chlipala testifies similarly: “It was still called OF until just before the elections, when we realized that it was a battle of political signs; thus VPN-OF went by the wayside...” (cited in Krapfl, 2013: 129).

Krapfl concludes that any rivalry between the competing organizations did not indicate tension between the Czech Lands and Slovakia but rather signified a strain within Slovakia itself as Bratislava’s Public Against Violence strove to convert the more-prevalent Civic Forum chapters across Slovakia (2013: 113–114). In his words, the real contest was for the “power to represent Slovakia” in the process of going forward into the presumed post-Communist era (2013: 114). As I will show below there were also other peculiarities of the Velvet Revolution as it played out in Eastern Slovakia beyond Košice’s rivalry with Bratislava.

## **PARTICULARITIES OF KOŠICE AND EASTERN SLOVAKIA’S VELVET REVOLUTION**

In Eastern Slovakia theatre actors joined the students and intellectuals in protesting against the regime and came to play a prominent role, as they had in Bratislava and Prague – one need only recall the role of Havel and his theatre associates in the latter case.<sup>39</sup> However, in addition to the cultural elites in the capitals, in the realm of

theatre we also find strong connections with the Hungarian, Rusyn and Ukrainian minority groups in Košice and nearby Prešov, who also rallied against the regime and for equal rights as official nationality groups.<sup>40</sup> This section illustrates how the combination of these two sets of actors and their demands for national minority rights gave Eastern Slovakia's Velvet Revolution a particular character different to that in Prague or Bratislava.

### The Role of Theatre Actors and Ethnic Minorities

Five theatres participated in the Velvet Revolution in Košice and Prešov, many temporarily suspending shows to prove their support for the revolution and to open their doors as public gathering places (Košice State Archive et al., 1989c). Košice's *Thália* Theatre, and Prešov's Ukrainian National Theatre became centres where minorities articulated demands for their own national identities to be recognized and promoted. After all, despite the marginal advances minorities won as a result of the 1968 Prague Spring movement, Hungarians and Rusyns held an inferior status to the Czechs and Slovaks, who remained the only officially recognized nationalities in Czechoslovakia in 1989.

It is not, however, completely surprising that ethnic minorities used their respective theatres as central coordinating locations. After all, one of the key requests Košice's significant Hungarian minority petitioned for in 1968 was for the reinstatement of the Hungarian theatre 'Thália' because they saw the expression of Magyar culture as being at the centre of their national consciousness.<sup>41</sup> The state granted their request and from 1969–1989 *Thália* served as one of only two Hungarian theatres in the Slovak lands, with the other in Komarno.<sup>42</sup> It was a timely coincidence that precisely during these November and December days in 1989 *Thália* celebrated its 20-year anniversary of being reinstated after the crushing of the Prague Spring.

In an interview with Peter Kolár,<sup>43</sup> the 1989 Secretary of Košice's chapter of the nationwide Hungarian ethnic organization known as 'Csemadok'<sup>44</sup> or the Cultural Union of Hungarian Workers in Czechoslovakia (*Csehszlovákiai Magyar Dolgozók Kulturális Szövetsége*), he added his perspective on the minority stirrings during the revolution. He estimated that 3,000–3,500 locals met in *Thália* each day during the revolution to discuss concrete problems regarding the political situation, as well as Hungarian issues (Kolár, 2012). As reported by *Eastern Slovak News*, approximately 400 attended a Csemadok meeting in *Thália* on December 11 and "in a practical way [participants] aired their questions about nationality life, school and cultural politics [that had transpired] since the beginning of the Republic" (Vsl. noviny, 1989h). The author of the article emphasized that this ability to openly express complaints was a first for the minority group, which normally had to "carry inside themselves" their grievances (ibid.).



*Famous Slovak actor Milan Kňažko was among the revolutionaries in Bratislava who quickly emerged after November 17, 1989 to help lead the movement against Communism. He returned to Eastern Slovakia in 2019 to tell his story to secondary students at Šrobárova Gymnázium. Credit: Marek Rušin for Gymnázium Šrobárova. Used with permission.*

Košice State Theatre workers even invited Party, state and economic representatives to join in the public dialogue on their premises. They were well-aware that the secret police were listening-in, as was also noted by Kolár. He recounted that informants sometimes attended local *Csemadok* meetings undercover but at other times they announced that they represented the state and were present to monitor the gathering.

Two local actors in particular became the faces of the Košice dramatist opposition. Spouses Peter Rašev and Ľubica Blaškovičová had been actors at Košice's State Theatre since 1978. Neither had political experience before 1989, but the revolution launched them into the political spotlight. That fall, Rašev became a committee member of Civic Forum and Public Against Violence in Košice while Blaškovičová assisted. In an interview on December 15, 1989, Rašev told *Východoslovenské noviny*,

For the first time in our lives we saw that the theatre became a public forum for the expression of one's own positions and opinions. During [the past] three weeks we did not speak the language of our [acting] personas from the stage, which somebody wrote and put into our mouths, but we were forced – and this is good – to express our own thoughts and to bring them to light [so] that we are not only soulless performers (Vsl. noviny, 1989g).

The thespians also recognized the need to enlist the support of the city's largest employer, Eastern Slovak Steelworks (VSŽ). Peter and Ľuba were quickly chosen by local opposition leaders to be spokespersons. They toured factories (including VSŽ) and even the Communist establishment 'National Front' (*Národná fronta*) to rally citizens (Blaškovičová, 2012). On November 21, as many as 200 local actors and employees from Košice's State Theatre visited the VSŽ steel mill's Revolutionary Trade Union Culture Centre (*ROH dom kultúry*) (ibid.; Ústav pamäti národa, 200 – 2019b [1989]: No. 4/3).<sup>45</sup> Their aim was to participate in a public discussion (at which state and Party leaders were also present) and to arouse working class enthusiasm for protesting against the regime (ibid.). *Východoslovenské noviny* (Eastern Slovak News) on November 22 described the event as "a rich, over two hour discussion [where participants] ardently spoke also about real problems which concern workers and youth and they looked for a suitable perspective" (Vsl. noviny, 1989d). I return to the Steelworks below, but first it is useful to further elaborate on how demands for national minority rights also shaped the particularity of Eastern Slovakia's Velvet Revolution.

### Rusyn, Ukrainian and Hungarian Minorities Demand Nationality Rights

The Ukrainians and Rusyns of Eastern Slovakia could form a weighty force of discontent when they united against authority, especially considering the amount of damage they inflicted 20 years prior during the fight over Greek Catholic and Orthodox church properties (Mullins, 2016: 331–354). Historian David Doellinger calculates that by 1988 the Greek Catholic Church (with many of its members espousing Rusyn or Ukrainian ethnicity) possessed an estimated 300,000 members, most of them in Eastern Slovakia (2013: 24).

Prešov's Ukrainian and Rusyn minorities joined the Velvet Revolution as the 'Ukrainian-Rusyn Initiative Group of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic' and established themselves on November 26, 1989 (Vsl. noviny, 1989l). The group protested the 1950–1968 imprisonment and defamation of Greek Catholic Bishops Gojdič and Hopko as well as hundreds of priests who were imprisoned and discredited, being accused of "Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism" (ibid.).

Evidently the government's reinstatement of the Greek Catholic Church in 1968 was not enough to satisfy the country's Eastern Slav minority. They claimed the following:

The year 1968 did not bring fundamental changes to our lives. Instead, people who wanted to work and correct mistakes from the past for 20 years were expelled from our cultural, political and nationality life. Major wrongs were committed in our school system. The period of so-called normalization

after the years 1968–1970 expressed itself very negatively in the social-economic sphere but especially in the cultural-nationality life of Ukrainian-Rusyns (*ibid.*).

In a warning not to repeat the dissent and violence from 20 years prior, the Prešov District's Ukrainian-Rusyn Organization for Reconstruction called both the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Bishops (as well as lay teachers, scholars, artists, doctors, etc.) to put aside their differences (the article mentions lingual, religious and political disparities) and instead join forces toward the unity of their Ukrainian-Rusyn nationality. The District Organization then iterated specific demands which were similar to those made by the Hungarian minority, including the following: that Czechoslovakia would be a "legal and democratic state of the two nations of Czechs and Slovaks and [other] nationalities," that "every right be granted to Ukrainian-Rusyns in universal, spiritual and cultural development without regard to political affiliation, confession...," "that all those wrongly accused [in the past] be rehabilitated in full measure," "that our children have the possibility to learn in their mother tongue," that "Ukrainian be permitted to be spoken in state and public offices and that a joint democratic state be built on the principle of equality of Czechs, Slovaks and other nationalities, [contributing to] the well-being of every citizen" (*ibid.*). Clearly, these were ideologically-driven petitions.

Košice's Hungarians likewise expressed their petitions, particularly when Kolár himself addressed a crowd of approximately 15,000 in late November from the platform in front of the State Scientific Library (Kassai Fórum, 1990a).

... people would like to misuse some feelings of nationality with the goal of dividing and weakening our fight for freedom and justice. [...] The citizens of Hungarian nationality in Eastern Slovakia demand sound autonomy. [...] We, as until today, want to live and work together with our Slovak brothers and fight together with them for the revival of our country (*ibid.*).

Slovak-Hungarian cooperation during the revolution is evidenced by the fact that the Forum of Czechoslovak Hungarians was established in both Bratislava and Košice on November 24, 1989 for the Magyar population living in Czechoslovakia (*ibid.*; Popely, 2006). Furthermore, the 'Independent Hungarian Initiative' was established as a political action group in Czechoslovakia on the evening of November 18 (Krapfl, 2013: 114). Championing rights for the Hungarian collective in Czechoslovakia, it was endorsed by Havel on December 15, 1989 and quickly lent its support to Civic Forum and Public Against Violence (Ústav pamäti národa, 2009–2019a [1989]).

It has been particularly emphasized that during the Velvet Revolution, Slovaks and Hungarians put aside ethnic tensions in order to fight the common Communist enemy. Television reporter Peter Ďurišin, who is not of Hungarian ethnicity, participated in the 1989 revolution in his hometown of Trebišov in Eastern Slovakia. He described the situation by explaining, "But in '89 all this Hungarian-Slovak-Ukrainian antagonism was not there because there was one clear enemy: Communists" (Ďurišin, 2011).<sup>46</sup>

As sociologist Rogers Brubaker notes of the 1989 revolution in Cluj, Romania, "The most salient we/they distinction was between ordinary people and the universally hated regime, not between Hungarians and Romanians" (2008: 117). He cites a Hungarian resident of Cluj in her description of the revolution: "We were all depressed, we were all oppressed, we were all exploited, and so we were all in it together" (cited in Brubaker, 2008: 117). Kieran Williams adds (regarding the Velvet Revolution), "Differences in culture and economic development notwithstanding, no division ran so deeply between Czechs, Slovaks and the Polish, Rusyn, and Hungarian minorities that a common front could not be maintained" (2009: 116).



*The balcony of Košice's State Scientific Library, where Václav Havel once addressed thousands in 1989, is decorated for anniversary celebrations in 2019. Credit: Zdenka Bencúrová for the State Scientific Library in Košice. Used with permission.*



Perhaps Zoltán Balassa, leading member of Košice's Hungarian minority and co-editor of its first post-Communist Hungarian newspaper *Kassai Fórum* (*Košice Forum*), said it best when he addressed the crowd gathered in front of the local library on November 26, 1989:

We are nations and nationalities, not classes standing against each other, but upright and conscientious people against dishonest and callous [people]. A long road awaits us. But it must be a road of tolerance, honesty and love of man for man, without any kind of lingual, religious or other differences. [...] We live in one homeland, we were enslaved together, together hand in hand we fight for freedom for all, for a European standard. [...] (*Kassai Fórum*, 1990b).

Both ethnic and religious minority groups which had been at odds joined hands to overthrow a common enemy and concurrently push for their rights during the November and December upheaval. The core issue behind the Hungarian, Rusyn and Ukrainian demands was not materialistic but rather equal recognition as nationalities on par with Czechs and Slovaks. However, as I show below, the situation was more ambiguous for another key group – the workers of the Eastern Slovak Steelworks (VSŽ).

### **CHOOSING (NOT) TO LIVE IN TRUTH: EASTERN SLOVAK STEEL WORKERS**

Over 20 percent of Košice steel workers participated in the revolution – and they had much to lose by protesting the Communist administration. As members of the heavy-industrial proletariat they enjoyed higher wages, access to paid vacations and quality medical care, among other benefits. Nevertheless, the fact that approximately 5,000 of the 24,000-strong workforce at Eastern Slovak Steelworks risked it all and publicly gave their names to reporters, wore the tricolour while striking at the factory campus, or even joined the thousands downtown during the November 27 General Strike indicates that they were motivated more by ideological than material concerns. Although the steel labourers who joined the revolution were indeed the minority, they constituted over 20 percent of Slovakia's largest conglomerate. More than one-fifth of the total was not an insignificant amount, but they were precisely the type of moral vanguard that Havel had anticipated in the "Power of the Powerless" – namely those willing to "live in truth."

Documents indicate that the steel workers stood as a force which both the Party and the student leadership saw as pivotal in the region's revolution. Would the working class heed the call to challenge the regime, or would they instead cling to the generous benefits associated with their proletariat status and thereby favour secu-

city over risk? The labour force's decisions and the factors contributing to their choices prove to be surprising.

Indeed, Košice's students, dramatists and intellectuals turned their focus toward convincing local labour to support the movement. Party administrators were likewise mindful of the potential damage that employees at Eastern Slovak Steel could inflict if they threw their weight behind the revolution. In addition to the fact that Eastern Slovak Steelworks constituted the largest industrial firm in Slovakia by December 1989, it also ranked as the greatest exporter in the entire Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (Vsl. noviny, 1989f; Ocel' východu, 1989c).

Nine days after the November 17 incident in Prague, Košice's City Communist Party Secretary Jozef Lukáč both reassured and warned committee members that directors of local industries were prohibiting activists from inciting employees (Košice State Archive et al., 1989c). The threat was real – as had already been underlined by a November 21 memo from Prague's Central Party Committee to leaders of the country's regional committees. In it the Presidium directed: "... the leading workers must go to workers' collectives to prevent efforts to call a General Strike, which the forces of the opposition are planning for 27 November" (cited in Tůma, 2001: 183).

Student leaders also recognized the power Košice labour could wield if they chose to do so. Their understanding that Eastern Slovak labour would play a crucial role in the upcoming General Strike is demonstrated by the increased interaction between undergraduates and blue-collar workers in the days leading up to the countrywide strike. At a November 21 gathering of university students crammed inside the Jedlíkova dormitory's Youth Centre (*Domov mládeže*), two labour representatives daringly addressed the crowd of attendees from the Schools of Mining, Electrical Engineering, Medicine and Law. Their audacious pledge was carefully recorded in the next day's State Security report:

the most serious moment in the course of the meeting occurred when it was discovered that two so-called representatives of the working class were present [...] who officially called the students to demonstrate openly and emboldened them [with the information] that the working class is on their side and they have their [the working class's] full support, which would be manifested in their participation in the [initial] November 22 strike at 7:00 P.M. At the same time, the students urged [the workers] to take to the streets and factories with requests to support their efforts among the working classes (Ústav pamäti národa, 2009–2019b [1989]: No. 5).

The importance of worker support was also emphasized to the masses assembled on Prague's Wenceslas Square on November 23. There, Czech Catholic priest Vá-

clav Malý declared that over 500 of the country's industrial firms were planning to strike (Tagliabue, 1989).<sup>47</sup> It was precisely this worker response that Party leaders throughout Czechoslovakia most feared. As the *New York Times* reported on November 24, 1989, if workers across the country joined the proposed national strike on November 27, government sources predicted that the only measure which could prevent a total dissolution of the government would be the instatement of a new leader (to replace Czechoslovak General Secretary Miloš Jakeš) in addition to a radically new political programme (ibid.).

Newspaper articles from the time indicate that many workers were initially opposed to the students' call to join the nation-wide strike on November 27. In the early days of the revolution, workers would have been understandably wary to incriminate themselves by articulating public statements against the regime. Yet this also makes those who did declare their opposition all the more remarkable.<sup>48</sup> For example, just one week after the revolution broke out in Prague, Daniel Pašut, operator of VSŽ's metal finishing shop no. 2, chose not to support the pro-democracy revolutionaries in an interview with the factory newspaper. His response to the journalist on November 24 is as follows:

It's necessary to state that the opinions among workers on these events are varied. In one thing we are completely united: that students belong at their school desks, actors on the stage and the solving of problems at the discussion table. ... In our collective we are of one mind in that we will not allow the subversion of socialism (Ocel' východu, 1989a).

An *Eastern Slovak News* interview of the same day with the joint (worker) assemblies of 90 Košice metallurgical construction firms reflects a similar reluctance to say anything that could be interpreted as anti-regime:

Our opinion is unequivocal: only with diligent work, order and discipline can we achieve the results of further production increases. That is why we decisively condemn any kind of strikes and disruptions of steady work [that come from] various discussions. [...] We will not allow the conscientious work that labourers complete to be ruined. The masses' problems need to be solved in a peaceful way, without allowing any failure in production to happen because it will not contribute to an improved standard of living (Vsl. noviny, 1989j).

Days later, however, steel worker responses were bolder. VSŽ furnace operator Juraj Kočíš declared the following in an article published November 27 in the Bratislava newspaper *Práca* (Work), despite the fact that factory director Milan Ondaš appeared on television, prohibiting employee participation in the strike:

In no way do I associate with the television interview of our leaders. I am convinced that here in the factory we are with the students. And with the strike. Of course we won't stop [operating] the blast furnace. Continuous operations will carry on. How could our director speak in the name of others when he didn't ask for our opinions? (Práca, 1989).

Slag man on blast furnace no. 2 Július Gábor agreed: "The director can talk about the production programme, about what we will buy and sell, but he can't say that he has conveyed the opinion of every worker when he hasn't. A maximum of one-tenth agree with him and we total 24,000" (ibid.). In an article published on December 1, VSŽ railroad worker Vojtech Mitra admitted the following:

Changes need to be made at every position and not only [to those] above. I'm requesting cancellation of my [Party] membership because I don't want to survive another disgrace [referring to 1968]. I am in support of the students. We Party members should be ashamed that young people have to correct our mistakes (Ocel' východu, 1989b).

A similar sentiment was published in the same day's *Eastern Slovak News* article covering the Worker's Council meeting:

... we agree with the university students and we will support them. Whoever wants [to do so] should actively strike. Whoever can't or doesn't want to actively participate in the strike should express his solidarity passively by striking (in the workplace) by working with his tricolour pinned on him (Vsl. noviny, 1989f).

Labour opinions were becoming more vocal against the regime as anti-Communist movements gained momentum within but also beyond the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.



Václav Havel and Slovak actor Milan Kňažko visit Eastern Slovak Steelworks on Dec. 20, 1989. Credit: *Východoslovenské noviny* [Eastern Slovak News – newspaper no longer in circulation], Dec. 21, 1989 (Photo by author).

The turning point at which the steel workers began to openly assert negative opinions of the regime occurred after the countrywide General Strike on Monday, November 27, in which approximately 5,000 VSŽ workers, or more than one-fifth of the steel mill's employees, participated in the strike at the factory campus (Ocel' východu, 1989d). The strike manifested itself downtown with 40,000 locals demonstrating peacefully on Košice's Lenin Street (Šutaj, 2009: 84). The 5,000 who chose to strike that day at Eastern Slovak Steelworks took a risk. Even after Director Ondaš had discouraged their participation and under the watchful eye of departmental managers, they joined protestors across the country, unsure if their support for the revolution would backfire. What is more, the strike itself emboldened workers who had been hesitant to go on the record by answering local newspaper reporters' questions. A protestor from the central Slovak town of Banská Bystrica summarized this enlivened atmosphere: "The General Strike of 27 November was like a cathartic surgical intervention to remove embedded fear and widespread civic passivity. [...]" (cited in

Krapfl, 2013: 56) That the majority of Košice's steel collective was afraid to strike on November 27 is evidenced by the fact that approximately 80 percent of the 24,000 at Eastern Slovak Steelworks chose *not* to participate. The following sections indicate why so many workers hesitated, yet the article further probes what *did* propel the over 20 percent of the labourers who openly opposed the regime.

### Mindful of the Consequences of 1968

A primary reason that Eastern Slovak Steel employees chose not to join the revolutionary movement was that many remembered the 1968 Soviet invasion and the consequences for those who publicly opposed it. The reality that 1968 significantly factored into worker considerations is demonstrated in their responses to journalists' questions during the weeks from late November until late December 1989. They needed to keep their jobs at the steel mill to provide for their families, but also wanted their children to have opportunities to advance in life by attending university. Many who resisted the invasion in 1968 had been fired from their jobs and their children were blacklisted, and prevented from attending university – a prime tool of oppressive leverage that Havel discussed in the "Power of the Powerless." Workers were forced to consider not only themselves but also their families when deciding whether or not to go on the record against the regime.

Observe the following quote from Demeter Struk, Party man and chair of the steel mill's Revolutionary Trade Union Movement or ZV ROH (*Závodový výbor, Revolučné odborové hnutie*). Regarding the question as to whether or not to strike, he replied, "We think that there is no reason to strike...." On the [journalist's] request that [the interviewees'] names be connected to their opinions he stated the following: "We have experience from two decades ago. We have children, families. We are afraid that by your public expression of our opinions, we would be targeted" (*Oceľ východu*, 1989b). When asked *how* they would be targeted, he offered several examples, among which was the possibility that they would be moved to a lower-paid position (*ibid.*). Blast furnace no. 1 operator Štefan Hudáčka added, "... Until now people are afraid to publicly tell the truth. Because Party functionaries wanted to hear only what they wanted to hear. ..." Nevertheless he concluded, "My conviction matches the students'" (*ibid.*).

Košice's steel workers, many remembering the penalties for revolting 20 years previously, had to evaluate the potential consequences of joining the 1989 strike. In his recent investigative survey of Communist Czechoslovakia, historian Kevin McDermott accentuates the sense of dangerous uncertainty citizens took on when they chose to lead or participate in the revolution:

Aside from the possibility of armed suppression, there was no guarantee for the students and dissidents who led the revolution that the 'masses' would support them. [...] no-one knew whether industrial and white-collar workers would



be shaken out of their apathy and conformity to add crucial weight to an 'intellectual' revolution. [...] As a Brno [now the second city of the Czech Republic] theatre director candidly said: "the inescapable fact is that every one of us will have to decide for himself. Take a risk and believe that everything will work out, and if it doesn't, then reconcile yourself to the fact that you are in for it" (McDermott, 2015: 195–196).

Yet, in Eastern Slovakia, local labour had more to lose than ordinary jobs, as they could also forfeit their positions' generous fringe-benefits if they publicly opposed the regime.

### **Satisfied with the Job Perks**

The second reason that the majority of Košice labour did not strike was because they benefitted from significant advantages associated with their working-class status. As noted by anthropologist Juraj Buzalka, the high degree of worker satisfaction in 1989 was a prime reason why Eastern Slovak Steel employees chose not to join the revolution. A Professor at Bratislava's Comenius University, Buzalka has studied the steel-labour community (particularly those living in Šaca, the village on the outskirts of Košice where the factory is located) (Buzalka, 2012).<sup>49</sup> In an interview he emphasized that steel labourers in 1980s Czechoslovakia enjoyed a "privileged status." As workers specially educated in not only producing basic steel but finished, sophisticated products, they enjoyed perks unknown to the average citizen of Czechoslovakia.

In Czechoslovakia's late socialist period, VSŽ and Party funds contributed toward rearing promising engineers and workers in education classes preparing them to work for the factory. Once they began working for the firm, they benefitted from advantages (provided by the Party trade union) available only to the subgroup of the working class the regime considered particularly indispensable: the well-educated workers. Buzalka summarized, "From cradle to grave you were taken care of by the factory" (*ibid.*).

Examples of such perks include paid summer and winter vacations at local swimming and ski resorts, free public transportation passes, regular tickets to the wellness spa, access to the brand-new hospital built in Šaca, etc. Buzalka added that some workers even began building their own homes in Šaca from the wages they received at the steel mill: "... they earned very good money and were taken care of exceptionally well when compared with other workers in other professions." A December 16, 1989 article corroborates this claim, noting that the revolution had made such inroads at the steel mill that by mid-December Košice's 'Prior' department store had opened a branch on the factory's campus (ironically occupying the space that the Communist People's Militia had recently vacated) and had begun selling colour televisions, toys, cosmetics, textiles, etc. there, estimating that the branch would make 22 million Czechoslovak crowns per year (*Vsl. noviny*, 1989i).<sup>50</sup> As Buzalka under-

scored, "VSŽ workers were not under economic or social threat; they got even what they dreamt about (under socialist standards)" (Buzalka, 2012).

This high level of worker satisfaction at the Eastern Slovak Steelworks stood in direct contrast with the average Czech and Slovak citizen in the mid- to late 1980s. The revolution in Czechoslovakia reflected citizens' dissatisfaction with the economic stagnation that had emerged within the Communist world by the 1980s as a result of the 1970s oil crises and the lack of consumer goods (or even apartments) available to Czechs and Slovaks. Such shortages were endemic across the Soviet-controlled region at that time (see Suk, 2016 and Kaplan, 2000).

Eastern Slovakia was one area that seemed to escape this feeling of privation. It can even be said that in the 1980s, the region was booming. Government funds poured into the operation of Eastern Slovak Steelworks and the privileges incentivizing its workers. Besides the state-of-the-art hospital built to service the steel mill employees (approximately five miles from the steel mill), there were the new hotels near the local Štrápa lake resort (where many workers vacationed with their families), for example. It is conceivable that because it lay on the periphery and had not 'caught up' with the capital cities, Košice and its surroundings were not feeling the pinch as Prague and Bratislava were. Buzalka painted the following picture of everyday life for a VSŽ worker in the late 1980s:

Your parents have a good pension, the road in your village was just paved, you [...] earn more than a university professor, you can't vacation [just] anywhere but you certainly could vacation in Romania, you could even express your anti-Communist opinions to an extent because you were not a teacher or one who influenced others (Buzalka, 2012).

In short, the workers at VSŽ enjoyed a comparatively comfortable lifestyle, a significant factor which reveals why four-fifths of the 24,000 at the steel mill chose not to protest. What, then, did mobilize the participation of the approximately 5,000 who risked losing their economically-privileged position?

### Analysis of Demands

For the roughly 20 percent of steel workers who participated in the 1989 revolutionary movement, the vast majority of their demands were ideological. As reported in the factory newspaper *Ocel' východu* (*Eastern Steel*) on December 1, 1989, thirteen points were put forward by the working collective on the same day as the General Strike, November 27. The substance of the demands reads as follows:

- 1) We decry the crackdown against peacefully demonstrating students on November 17, 1989 and demand an investigation.
- 2) Abolish the constitutionally-mandated leading role of the Communist Party in society.

- 3) Expedite implementation of free and democratic elections.
- 4) Pass legislation permitting free press and free exchange of information.
- 5) Expedite roundtable discussions between all politicians and societal elements.
- 6) Establish a National Reconciliation Commission composed of competent representatives of every national element without respect to National Front affiliation.
- 7) We demand that the document "Lessons Drawn from the Crisis Development"<sup>51</sup> be invalidated.
- 8) Abolish Communist Party organizations in the workplace. These should only be allowed in places of residence.
- 9) Immediately expel or suspend Party membership for every discredited member and initiate prosecution against those who illegally seized assets from the Treasury.
- 10) Only allow trade unions to represent the workers' interests.
- 11) We demand a thorough solution to the ecological situation in Eastern Slovakia and especially in Košice.
- 12) We pronounce our agreement with the resignation of the leadership of the Central Committee of Trade Unions, above all because they were installed without membership support.
- 13) We demand the abolishment of the People's Militia (Ocel' východu, 1989d).

The value-based direction of these demands, coupled with a consideration of the monetary advantages they hazarded, makes clear that the Košice steel workers who did resist the regime were not bartering for higher wages, improved living conditions or better pensions. Rather, they were inspired to correct a deficient political system that had enforced severe restrictions on everyday life.

This analysis is corroborated by Krapf's examination of November and December 1989's posters, fliers, speeches and other materials. He determines that moralistic concerns transcended materialistic petitions during the revolution (2013: 79–80). What he refers to as the "ideals of November" included calls for "democracy," "freedom," "nonviolence," "fairness" and "humanness," and these were far more prevalent than those for lower taxes or better working conditions (2013: 74, 79–80). Regarding these principled ideas, he concludes: "Workers either invoked these principles in their declarations to justify particular demands or argued for their general application in political and social life. It may be possible to dispute the degree of popularity of particular ideas, but not the general emphasis on ethics" (2013: 80).

Furthermore, sociologist and Velvet Revolution activist Fedor Gál, in his first-hand memoir of Public Against Violence's development from 1989 to 1991, duplicates the February–March 1990 survey response from approximately 5,000 readers of Slovakia's *Verejnost'* (*Public*) publication regarding the order of problems most acutely-felt just months after the fall of the regime in Czechoslovakia. Least among the 23 issues listed was the "low standard of living for workers," which garnered only approximately 40 votes (2009: 81). Other, more troublesome issues that re-

spondents were concerned about were the persistence of the mafia and environmental concerns (approximately 1,000–1,200 votes), followed by the high cost of living (900 votes) and poor interpersonal relationships (800 votes) (*ibid.*). It appears then that the motivations of the steel workers who went on strike were in line with the principled reasons inspiring the rest of the populace to oppose the government.

The fact that over one-fifth of Eastern Slovakia's advantaged labour collective were concerned enough with ideals to jeopardize being stripped of their jobs, the associated perks, or their children's academic prospects points to the conclusion that they protested not for but in spite of the possibility of losing these generous material benefits. To them, ideological principles overshadowed economic anxieties and even worries about their own security. It is a wonder that approximately 5,000 of the Eastern Slovak Steel workers participated at all in the General Strike.



*Secondary students and faculty at Košice's Šrobárova Gymnázium hear from Velvet Revolution leader Milan Kňažko on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the collapse of Communism in Czechoslovakia. Credit: Marek Rušin for Gymnázium Šrobárova in Košice. Used with permission.*

## CONCLUSION: IDEOLOGICAL OVER ECONOMIC CONCERNS

As we now commemorate 30 years since the collapse of Communism and have witnessed the vicissitudes of democracy in Eastern Europe, it is instructive to remember the distinct ways in which the old system fell, particularly in the forgotten regions of the Visegrád Four.<sup>52</sup> Košice's experience of the Velvet Revolution reflects the complexity and consequences of distinct choices made by various groups who forged

their own revolution. They were the agents of change on the ground, who acted on the basis of their own myriad ideas, considerations and constraints – as well as moral compasses – rather than merely responding to surrounding structural edifices and pressures. Their experience adds to established narratives of the events of 1989 and nuances the insights gained from them. This nuancing and enrichment provides a timely reminder of the value of looking outside the usual sites – and beyond the usual suspects – to understand the complexity of momentous events, then and now.

While in some ways similar to Prague and Bratislava's account of 1989, Košice and Eastern Slovakia's experience of the Velvet Revolution retains unique features that merit investigation. Connections with Prague and discouragement from Bratislava led the city's intelligentsia to establish a branch of Civic Forum rather than one of Public Against Violence. Although the city's initial public demonstrations were spearheaded by university students, they were soon joined by intellectuals, actors and even ethnic minorities, who were potentially in an already vulnerable position, to protest against the regime. Their motives for doing so often combined desires for an improvement in individual and collective conditions and opportunities with moral arguments regarding tolerance and the upholding of universal rights.

However, a majority of the city's steel workers, the largest labour collective in Slovakia, chose not to participate in the revolt. As evidenced by period sources, many steel workers feared potential consequences such as had been inflicted upon their colleagues who resisted the country's 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion. Others feared losing the substantial monetary benefits and non-monetary perks associated with their jobs as workers in a key heavy industry. In fact, only approximately one-fifth of the 24,000-strong Eastern Slovak Steel workers joined the country's General Strike. Based on an analysis of the demands put forward by the approximately 5,000 steel labourers who did join the revolution, it becomes evident that, like the students and ethnic minorities who protested, they did so primarily for ideological reasons and not economic ones.

This piece thus substantiates the power of ideological or moral arguments in persuading 'ordinary people' to hazard tremendous odds and risk something extraordinary. This analysis of the complexity and unevenness of the demands, motivations and actions of various groups shows the importance of agency and choice, rather than simply looking to structural explanations for political change. Košice's 1989 thus adds to explanations for the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe in that it provides a local perspective, yet one with broad implications – and shows the value of looking into the forgotten folds of the Velvet Revolution.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> It was also rumoured that one student was killed in the initial demonstration, but this turned out to be false.

<sup>2</sup> As Czechoslovakia's transition from Communism to democracy in late 1989 was bloodless, it has been characterised as a 'Velvet' revolution.

<sup>3</sup> In August 1968 the Warsaw Pact countries forcefully suppressed what they considered to be Czechoslovakia's intolerable relaxation of socialist principles, known as the Prague Spring.

<sup>4</sup> The Rusyns are ethnic descendants of the Ruthenians primarily inhabiting the area of today's North-eastern Slovakia and Western Ukraine. For more on the Rusyns see Magocsi (2015; 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, a study of the Roma's role in Eastern Slovakia's Velvet Revolution was not possible at the time this article was researched due to the fact that archival files on the Roma were unavailable and 'unprocessed.'

<sup>6</sup> Wałęsa led Poland's Solidarity Movement, which became famous in the 1980s as the first trade union to exist independently of the Communist state. He earned the Nobel Prize in 1983 and served as Poland's President from 1990–1995.

<sup>7</sup> Havel was an author, playwright and dissident who later served as the first post-Communist President of Czechoslovakia, elected in December 1989. He was one of the founding members of the Charter 77 initiative as well as co-founder of VONS, the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted (1979). After the Nov. 17, 1989 demonstration in Prague, Havel rose to the forefront as the leading Czech spokesman against the regime.

<sup>8</sup> 'Civil society', as used in this article, refers to individuals or groups acting outside the government's control.

<sup>9</sup> See Garton Ash (1990); Kenney (2003); McDermott and Stibbe (2006); and Bútorá, Krivý and Szomolányiová (1989).

<sup>10</sup> Culturalist perspectives include Opp, Voss, and Gern (1995); Bunce (1999); and Skocpol (1979; 1994).

<sup>11</sup> Culturalist adherents typically define 'culture' as follows: "... classic social-scientific views of culture generally have perceived it [culture] as a system of shared beliefs that guide human behavior." [...] "beliefs" are understood very broadly as both cognitive knowledge and moral and aesthetic guidelines, including [...] political ideologies, normative kinship rules and religious beliefs about the realm of the sacred and supernatural, but also including other institutional belief-spheres concerning economies, expressive (aesthetic) culture, law, and so forth" (Timothy Wickham-Crowley in Foran, 1997: 40).

<sup>12</sup> Surely at the very beginning of the wave of mass expression the perceived costs of participation outweighed its benefits and therefore participation was irrational. This kind of illogical motivation has been well-researched by scholars such as Steven Pfaff, Timur Kuran, Karl-Dieter Opp and others. They query why individual behavior is sometimes counterintuitive and concentrate (particularly in the East German case) on the role of religion (the Protestant Church), history, political leaders/elites and ideology



in accounting for the thousands who took to Leipzig's streets on October 9, 1989. See Kuran (1991) and Pfaff (2006).

<sup>13</sup> Note William H. Sewell Jr.'s counter of Skocpol's theory: "My quarrel with her is that she has not made her causation multiple enough – that she has not recognized the autonomous power of ideology in the revolutionary process. In her account, ideology remains conflated with class struggle or state consolidation, just as the state's has usually been conflated with class in Marxist theories of revolution." He continues, "To admit that ideologies have a strong causal impact on revolutions would appear to give people's conscious intentions a much more significant role in the revolutionary process than Skocpol thinks they deserve" (Sewell qtd. in Skocpol, 1994: 170, 172).

<sup>14</sup> At the end of his 1999 article, Chirot articulates an almost-prophetic projection of the political oscillations we have witnessed in East Central Europe, and indeed around the globe, over the past three decades: "... we must come to realize that in the twenty-first century there will still be economic problems, political instability, and revolutions. But more than ever, the fundamental causes of revolutionary instability will be moral. The urban middle and professional classes, the intellectuals and those to whom they most directly appeal, will set the tone of political change. Regimes to which they do not accord legitimacy because these regimes are seen as unfair and dishonest will be shaky" (Chirot, 1999: 39–40).

<sup>15</sup> One month later the Nazis closed the universities in the Czech Lands for three years, sent thousands of students to concentration camps and killed nine.

<sup>16</sup> The Slovak term is used throughout the remainder of the text.

<sup>17</sup> Stryko was a dissident, a philosopher, a signer of the seminal opposition document (authored by Václav Havel and others) known as 'Charter 77,' a painter and the author of numerous *samizdat* works (Sme, 1997). Charter 77 was a grassroots-led project uniting a community of various professions and religious beliefs to promote human and civil rights. When Havel and other figures published the "Charter 77" document in 1977, it was quickly signed by over 200 individuals, who then became targets of the Communist state. See Skilling (1981).

<sup>18</sup> Vetrák was head of the Mining Department's Socialist Youth Association (Socialistický zväz mladých or SZM) and Ondruš (age 23 in 1989) eventually served as representative to the Slovak Parliament from 1990–1992 and as Deputy of Slovakia's Democratic Party from 1993–1995.

<sup>19</sup> Law students at Košice's *Pavol Jozef Šafárik* University met with electrical engineering students from the Technical University but the two groups parted ways when it became clear that the technical students wanted to take a more activist direction (i.e., to strike) than the law students. For example, the law students disagreed with the technical students about the meaning of 'political pluralism' (Ondruš, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> The local ŠtB report for that day records only 700–1,000 students present at the demonstration (Ústav pamäti národa, 2009–2019b [1989]: No. 4/1).

<sup>21</sup> The event was organized by local activist Peter Kalmus (Eliáš, 2009: 83).

<sup>22</sup> That same day, November 22, the members of Košice's Civic Forum again met in Zbyněk Prokop's flat, this time to sign the charter as founding members of the organization. Signers included Ľubomír Badiar, Erik Groch, Peter Kalmus, Štefan Lazorišák, Peter Neuwirth, Zbyněk Prokop, Slavomír Stračár [a VSŽ steel manager who became head of the plant after the November revolution], Marcel Stryko and others (Liška, 2009: 106; Ogurčáková, 2010).

- <sup>23</sup> The Sedláčik article puts the number at 7,000, but the ŠtB report from the following day estimates the figure at “around 8,000” participants in the demonstration (Ústav pamäti národa, 2009–2019b [1989]: No. 7).
- <sup>24</sup> It is important to point out the incredible discipline and organization exercised by the students, who could have easily resorted to violent clashes with police. Not only does this restraint speak well of the young organizers, but it directly contradicts allegations, such as one of those made by historian Stephen Kotkin in *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment*, that Communism did not end in Eastern Europe due to civic activism because it was too unorganized and rather resembled a “bank run” (Kotkin and Gross, 2009).
- <sup>25</sup> The city of Prešov lies approximately 38 km (24 miles) north of Košice and is the home of a major university, to which many students from Košice commute.
- <sup>26</sup> It should also be noted that an independent branch of Public Against Violence did spring up in Košice during the revolution as well.
- <sup>27</sup> The 1969 federalization of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Socialist Republic and the Slovak Socialist Republic intended to put both states on equal footing in representation in Prague’s administration and legislative assembly as well as to allow Slovakia to govern its own affairs rather than having them dictated by Prague. The materialization of this intention has been widely contested by Slovaks.
- <sup>28</sup> See Vsl. Noviny (1989c); Új Szó (1989) and Bilý (2011): 125. Prague started this trend when it sent university students across the republic via train to inform distant locales about the demonstrations (Krapfl, 2013: 59).
- <sup>29</sup> This refers to the fact that actors across Czechoslovakia went on strike in November and December to show their support for the revolution.
- <sup>30</sup> Throughout the course of my interviews, although several locals who were active in the 1989 revolution echoed the sentiments of frustration at Bratislava’s somewhat arrogant attitude toward Košice’s importance in the Velvet Revolution, several Košice activists told me they did not believe the train was sent in a condescending manner and instead fully appreciated the gesture.
- <sup>31</sup> *Samizdat* refers to the underground self-reproduction of banned materials during the Communist era. Although Slovak dissidents did not publish as many *samizdat* texts as those which were disseminated from the Czech Lands, the grassroots Slovak resistance was nevertheless active and effective. See Doellinger (2013).
- <sup>32</sup> Political scientist Lukáš Valeš adds, “Despite security threats, a communication line existed between Prague as the main center of *samizdat*-production and Slovak towns (including Košice)” (Valeš, 2018: 152).
- <sup>33</sup> It was common for towns to establish both Civic Forum and Public Against Violence chapters during the 1989 revolution, yet one usually proved the leading representative of the municipality.
- <sup>34</sup> This data thus helps to dispel the notion that the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in January 1993 can be directly traced to tensions between Prague and Bratislava or Slovakia during the revolutionary days of 1989.
- <sup>35</sup> Ľubomír Badiar was a graphic artist active in the group of local artists who opposed the regime in 1989. He was also a signer of Košice’s Civic Forum charter.

- <sup>36</sup> Bauer has served as Mayor of Košice (1993–1994), Member of Parliament for Slovakia's Christian Democratic Party (1998–2001 and 2006–2010), first District Governor of Košice's self-governing region (2001–2006), and Provost of Košice's Western Quadrant (2010–2014).
- <sup>37</sup> Blaškovičová and her husband Peter Rašev were actors with Košice's State Theatre and became spokespersons for the dramatists who joined the revolution in 1989. She has served as a representative for Košice's Old Town in local politics since 1990.
- <sup>38</sup> Blaškovičová explains that Košice only maintained its slogan "Civic Forum" for about six weeks before hyphenating its name to Civic Forum-Public Against Violence (OF-VPN) and then Public Against Violence-Civic Forum (VPN-OF); the organization's name eventually became simply Public Against Violence.
- <sup>39</sup> Famous Slovak actors such as Milan Kňažko and Andrej Hryc quickly emerged in Bratislava after November 17 to help lead the movement demonstrating against Communism. They, of course, took their cue from Václav Havel and other dramatists in Prague.
- <sup>40</sup> Recall that in 1968 the state reversed its 1952 policy banning all official use of the distinctive 'Rusyn' language and instead permitted the classification of 'Rusyn' alongside that of 'Ukrainian' until 1989. This article therefore references the distinct Rusyn and Ukrainian minorities as well as the self-identifying 'Ukrainian-Rusyn' collectives.
- <sup>41</sup> *Thália* had been a recognized fixture on Košice's Main Street from 1816 to 1945, when it was closed by the state until 1969, when the local Hungarian *Csemadok* association collected 38,000 signatures and petitioned the government to reestablish the theatre, although in a different location. It has been in operation in Košice since 1969 and still maintains a full performance repertoire today.
- <sup>42</sup> *Thália* is named for the theatre muse.
- <sup>43</sup> Kolár was Chief Secretary of the Eastern Slovak County *Csemadok* Committee from 1980–1990 and in 1989 he was elected as Chairman of *Csemadok*'s Central Committee in Bratislava. The following year he was voted Chair of *Csemadok* in Czechoslovakia and held that title until 2000. Kolár also served on the Commission for National Minorities in the Slovak Republic from 1999–2004.
- <sup>44</sup> *Csemadok* was the official organization for Hungarians sanctioned by the Czechoslovak Communist government. However, during the 1968 Prague Spring era of reform, *Csemadok* pushed to become more of a political interest group than a Communist dogma-conscious ethnic organization.
- <sup>45</sup> According to a State Security report, actors from Bratislava's Slovak National Theatre had appeared that same day at Košice's State Theatre to "spur [citizens] to solidarity with the actors of Czech theatres and university students," but there is no mention of the Bratislava actors' visiting the steel mill (Vsl. Noviny, 1989g; Ústav pamäti národa, 2009–2019b [1989]: No. 4/3).
- <sup>46</sup> Ďurišin produced the documentary film *1989: Revolúcia v malom meste* [Revolution in a Small Town].
- <sup>47</sup> Malý became a spokesman for Civic Forum during the Velvet Revolution and was appointed in 1997 by Pope John Paul II to serve as Prague's Auxiliary Bishop.
- <sup>48</sup> Additionally, the evolving degree of state censorship on the press during the revolution was an immense factor in determining what kinds of statements were published.
- <sup>49</sup> Buzalka is the author of multiple works, including *Proti vetru: reflexie k životnému jubileu sociálneho antropológa Juraja Podobu* [Against the Wind: Reflections on the Occasion of the Jubilee of the Social

Anthropologist Juraj Podoba] (Olomouc: Burian a Tichák, 2018); *Nation and Religion: The Politics of Commemorations in South-East Poland* (Münster: Lit., 2008) and *Slovenská ideológia a kríza: Eseje z antropológie politiky* [Slovak Ideology and Crisis: Essays from Political Anthropology] (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> "The former Prior department store presently stands as a Tesco supermarket.

<sup>51</sup> This is a reference to the document "Lessons Drawn from the Crisis Development in the Party and Society," which was produced after the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. This 'Action Programme' was adopted by the Party's Central Committee on April 5, 1968.

<sup>52</sup> The Visegrád Four refers to the cultural and political alliance of the neighbouring states of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.

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