

As a member of the Slovak National Council (1948–1954), farmer Ondrej Beňo (1880–1961) represented resettlers from Hungary



Resettled Slovaks from Hungary (Levice, April 1947)



Resettlement of the Hungarians from Slovakia. Loading of the cattle

“Population exchange aggravated national differences and had serious moral consequences. The process divided families, and highlighted disparities between those departing and those remaining. It was followed by difficult years of coexistence between the original Slovak citizens that remained in Hungary, and displaced Hungarians – mostly Catholic – who came from purely Hungarian places in Slovakia to Slovak-inhabited and largely evangelical villages in Hungary. Most Slovaks from Hungary also reached Hungarian, mostly Catholic, villages in Žitný ostrov, where the older generation learned the Hungarian language. The local Slovaks often held such settlers in contempt due to their archaic Slovak language.”

Milan Lásik,
Slovak pedagogue
and national activist in Hungary



21 June 1948. Yet Slovak resettlers' wish to live in wholly Slovak territory was in vain, because they – except for workers and miners – had to settle in the mostly Hungarian area of southern Slovakia. Most displaced Hungarians were also rehoused in hitherto almost wholly Slovak municipalities. Thus, the most significant result of the population exchange was the inevitable disintegration of homogeneous minority communities. This process, however, most strongly impacted the Slovaks in Hungary, who had lost their most nationally-minded conscious and educated fellow citizens.

CHRONOLOGY

- 25 May 1945:** Slovak National Council Regulation no. 44/1945, state and public employees of German and Hungarian nationality (except anti-fascists) were sacked.
- 1 August 1945:** Representatives of the Soviet Union, the United States and Great Britain approved the expulsion of Germans from the Czechoslovak Republic, Poland and Hungary.
- 2 August 1945:** Constitutional Decree of the President of the Republic no. 33/1945, persons with German and Hungarian nationality (except anti-fascists) were denied Czechoslovak citizenship.
- 25 October 1945:** Decree of the President of the Republic no. 108/1945, all property and movable assets were expropriated

without compensation from persons with German and Hungarian nationality (except anti-fascists), with the exception of daily necessities (food, clothing, bed linen, household needs, and work tools).

- 27 February 1946:** Agreement on population exchange signed between the Czechoslovak Republic and Hungary.
- 21 June 1948:** Governments of the Czechoslovak Republic and Hungary agree to halt population exchange.
- 25 October 1948:** Act no. 245/1948, Czechoslovak citizenship returned to Hungarian nationals.
- 13 December 1949:** Government Decree no. 252/1949, Czechoslovak citizenship returned to German nationals.

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POPULATION EXCHANGE BETWEEN CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND HUNGARY (1946–1948)

During the World War II, the Czechoslovak foreign resistance's aims included the restoration of the Czechoslovak Republic (ČSR) as the national state of Czechs and Slovaks, to exclude non-Slavic minorities. After the WWII, the communists inflamed national feelings and tensions. The Košice programme of 5 April 1945 applied the principle of collective guilt to members of the German and Hungarian minorities for Czechoslovakia's break up in 1938 – 1939. On the basis of the Decrees of the President of the Republic (commonly known as the Beneš decrees) and Slovak National Council regulations, the German and Hungarian population had citizenship withdrawn, property expropriated, and schools and cultural facilities shut down.

1945



Czechoslovak Resettlement Commission propaganda posters

1946



Chairman of the Czechoslovak Resettlement Commission Daniel Okáli (1903-1987)



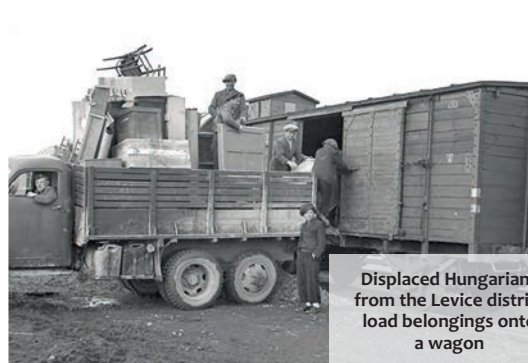
Slovak resettlers at Pítvaros railway station bid farewell to relatives who remain in Hungary before leaving for Slovakia

February 1946



State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Vladimír Clementis and Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs János Gyöngyösi sign the exchange agreement

1947



Displaced Hungarians from the Levice district load belongings onto a wagon



Resettlers from Pítvaros to Sered are welcomed on 13 April 1947

Germans and Hungarians were forbidden from working in state institutions, lost pension entitlements, and could not vote or organize politically. Only those involved in the anti-fascist resistance were exempt from these measures. The state's „cleansing“ of non-Slavic minorities was to be achieved through all Germans and Hungarians being expelled from Czechoslovakia.

POPULATION EXCHANGE AGREEMENT

The expulsion of most of Czechoslovakia's German population was implemented on the basis of a decision by anti-Hitler coalition powers. After the ceasefire was signed between Hungary and the Allies on 20 January 1945, approximately 30,000 Hungarians were deported from southern Slovakia, which after the First Vienna Award had held key positions and offices. As the victorious Allies had denied the Czechoslovak government's proposed mass deportations of other Hungarians, most of the Hungarian minority was expelled from Slovakia on the basis of a population exchange agreement between Czechoslovakia and Hungary as of 27 February 1946.

This agreement allowed for equal numbers to be exchanged, whilst the Hungarian side also pledged to receive those identified as 'war criminals' of Hungarian nationality. Those being resettled could take all movable property to their new

homeland, whilst being compensated for abandoned properties – which was only partly successful. The Czechoslovak-Hungarian Joint Commission had responsibility for this exchange. In order to publicise and organize the movement of Slovaks from Hungary, the Czechoslovak Resettlement Commission was established in Budapest, led by communist politician Daniel Okáli. The first Slovak emigrants left Hungary in June 1946.

EXCHANGE PROCESS

While Hungarian Slovaks could voluntarily go to Czechoslovakia, state authorities imposed the resettlement of Hungarians from Slovakia. This was enforced through lists of names given to the Hungarian side by the Czechoslovak government on 26 August 1946. As such, the Hungarian Government considered the population exchange to be disadvantageous and therefore deliberately circumnavigated its implementation. This situation only changed in November 1946 after the Czechoslovak authorities forcibly deported Hungarians from southern Slovakia to the Czech border, from which the Germans had already been displaced. Deported people were also made do forced labour.

After the population exchange process resumed in April 1947, while 95,421 people had expressed interest in emigrating from Hungary eventually only 71,787 actually left for

Czechoslovakia. This was because Slovaks that had registered for resettlement faced obstruction and intimidation from Hungarian authorities. The emigrants were mainly from the Békéscsaba area, Pilis hills and also Nyírség; although most were workers and small-holding farmers, four thousand educated Slovak 'intelligentsia' also left Hungary. The Czechoslovak government had wanted to relocate at least one-third of the approximately 540,000 Hungarian minority, yet only 89,660 were actually deported, of which 59,774 in exchange. Up to 85% were from Bratislava, Žitný ostrov, Nové Zámky, and the Galanta area. They included richer peasants, landlords, tradesmen, and civil servants, who the Czechoslovak state authorities perceived as the least politically reliable members of the Hungarian minority whilst also having the most property. According to Hungarian sources, altogether about 119,000 people came to Hungary.

AFTERMATH OF THE EXCHANGE

After the communist regime was established in Czechoslovakia in February 1948, gradual pressure from the Soviet Union led to the Hungarian minority's basic civil rights being incrementally restored, albeit within the restrictive framework of the totalitarian regime. The population exchange between Czechoslovakia and Hungary was officially completed on the basis of an intergovernmental agreement on