



## Slow Steps: The Institutional Development of Slovak Film From Proto-National to National Film 1939-1950

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### Abstract

From 1939 to 1950, Slovak cinema underwent a massive institutional development, war-related setbacks, and finally became nationalized under the control of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Information. This article aims to thematize this understudied time period of Slovak cinema and to reveal how Slovak cinema transformed from a proto-national cinema into a national one.

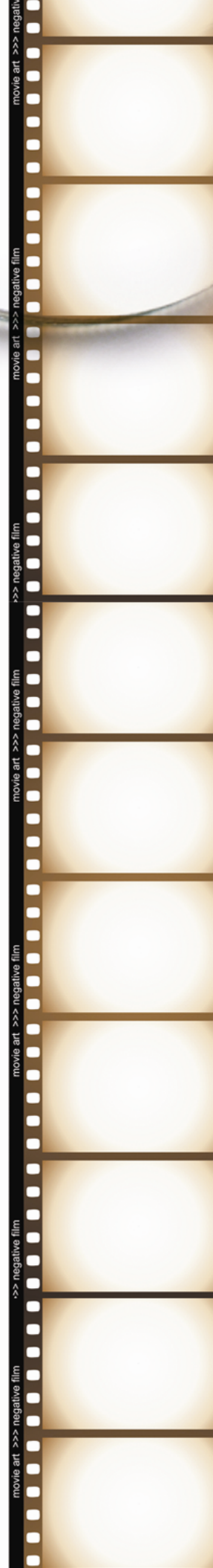
**Keywords:** Slovak film; film development; nationalization; postwar cinema; world war II; Slovakia; Czechoslovakia



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# Slow Steps: The Institutional Development of Slovak Film From Proto-National to National Film 1939-1950

Nicholas David Hudac

## Introduction

One of the glaring omissions in the English language historiography of Slovak film lies firmly in between the industry's first halting independent steps during the late interwar period and the coming of its more popularly known New Wave movement in the early 1960s. While many scholars have done admirable work tracing the nuances of Slovak film and the development of Slovak film production during the New Wave and onward, scarce critical attention (in English or otherwise) has been paid to massive work that was needed to develop Slovak film (an entity which scarcely existed before the first Czechoslovak Republic dissolved in 1939) into a creative force during the 1960s. Of particular importance is the torturous path towards the nationalization of the Slovak film industry in the early postwar period. Although much excellent scholarship has been focused on the well-documented processes and institutional development which aided the transformation of the Czech film industry from a classic studio system to a nationalized system in 1945, comparatively less scholarly attention has been focused on the Slovak film industry and the hurdles it underwent during the same period of time.

This article attempts to correct this omission in English language scholarship by tracing the changes in the foundations of Slovak film and the supporting industrial and legal structures which emerged during the immediate postwar period (the years 1938-1950), structures which would bear fruit in the nationalized Czechoslovak film industry during its golden period of the 1960s. Unlike their Czech counterparts, which had quickly become a national cinema (i.e. a distinct film industry produced by a given nation) by the mid-1920s, the Slovak film industry was faced with two-

pronged problem: firstly, how to expand its rudimentary film production capacity beyond the occasional foreign production shot in Slovakia itself; and secondly, to develop the necessary cinematic infrastructure for a working film industry (e.g. cinemas, technical facilities, distribution, and production facilities). Although Slovak film began with few resources and fewer cinemas, a wide range of political and industrial factors allowed it to transform from a minor producer of wartime propaganda into a much more sizable entity. Firstly, the process of cinefication, or raising access to cinemas and film throughout the Slovak countryside, was initiated which resulted in a sizable expansion of Slovak cinemas and audiences from 1945 to 1950. The second major influence on the development of Slovak cinema during this period was the nationalization process itself; although it was occasionally a source of political and ethnic tension, the nationalization process provided the financial and legal framework to kickstart the development of a cinema industry which had struggled to gain momentum during the interwar and war years.

### Infrastructure Shortages and Cinefication

Even in the interwar infancy of Slovak cinema, the Slovak Lands lagged behind their Czech counterparts in many regards, economically and artistically. Outside of an aborted attempt by American Slovaks in Chicago to establish a Slovak-funded feature-film production company, Tatrafilm, (Mihálik, 1997, p.52)<sup>1</sup> a majority of what little film was produced in Slovakia was either the direct product of Czech private investment in Slovak-themed productions, such as Martin Frič's 1936 feature film *Jánošík*, or various topical newsreels. Some educational or Slovak-targeted productions were filmed by the Czechoslovak state and the Matica Slovenska, a long-running Slovak cultural organization with connections to the larger Slovak diaspora, often through the

efforts of Karel Plicka – a Czech musicologist, folklorist, photographer, and enthusiastic booster of Slovak culture. In particular, Plicka's 1933 cinematic tribute to Slovakia, *Zem spieva / The Earth Sings* was one of the proudest achievements of the nascent Slovak film industry; however, despite international prestige (the film won several awards in international competition) and its incorporation into the educational component of Slovak cultural events in the American diaspora ("Zápisnica z matičnej schôdza"), the film proved to be a disappointment in Czechoslovakia. (Clementis, 1933) Compounding the problem was a lack of cinematic infrastructure; cinemas, soundstages, development labs, trained professionals, and equipment were available in far fewer numbers in the Slovak Lands than in the Czech. For example, in the last prewar count conducted by the interwar Czech journalist Jíří Havelka, Czechs had 1115 active cinemas in Bohemia and Moravia, while Slovakia had merely 153 working cinemas in the entire country. (Havelka, 1939. p. 41)

Tragically, it was to be the dissolution of the Czechoslovak Republic and the creation of the fascist Slovak state which would be the first major catalyst for the birth of the Slovak film industry. On November 4, 1938, the newly autonomous Slovak government began a systematic purge of the cinema industry in Slovak territory in the Second Czechoslovak Republic, aiming to the expel the area's Czech, Jewish, Hungarian, and "bolshevik" elements and appropriate their cinemas, equipment, and film stocks. (Hanáková, 2012) However, despite acquiring several parts of the extant film infrastructure from other minority populations in Slovakia, the nascent Slovak state was unable to produce films on its own initiative. To this end, on June 27th, 1939, the Slovak state launched a nationalized film weekly, *Nástup*, which was soon adapted into a broad commercial enterprise with the aim of become an independent means of film production. In that same year, the newsreel *Nástup* was expanded and formally incorporated with a broad mandate to not only to import and export film equipment, film stock, and other technical equipment necessary for the

fledgling film industry, but also various other fundamental requirements for the new film industry: the establishment of soundstages and development laboratories, schools for the training of new professionals, commercial entities concerned with the sale and purchase of cinematic equipment, and so forth. (NFA, (1939) *Nástup*, [founding legal documents], #1 p.3-5) *Nástup* also assumed the responsibility for the enforcement of legal regulations (licenses, patent applications for new technologies, censorship, and print publications) as part of the wartime nationalization of Slovak film. (NFA, (1939) *Nástup*, [founding legal documents], #1 p. 3-5) *Nástup*'s charter also established several unusual restrictions for its governing board; members of the board could not be, for instance: non-Slovak citizens, possible competitors in the marketplace, distributors, or people convicted of various (unspecified) crimes against the Slovak Republic. (NFA, (1939) *Nástup*, [founding legal documents], #1 p.8)

Although founded as a newsreel/actuality focused production company, *Nástup*'s founding charter showed that the future plans for the company were to encompass a full range of future film production projects, ranging from academic and hobbyist publications to feature-length films. Despite early support from Nazi Germany and Ufa-Film, the early 1940s did not see much progress towards the creation of a functioning Slovak film industry. For much of 1939 and 1940, shortages of trained staff and materials often meant that *Nástup*'s approach to film production was rather more limited than other neighboring national cinemas. Instead of feature films, *Nástup* was limited to producing sound newsreels, covering not just state-propaganda films (28 short films in 1940) and films produced by the Slovak armed forces (16 short films), but also newsreels or (so-called) cultural films covering "Slovak labor and investment" (22 short films), "cultural work" (16 short films), "the propagation of Slovakia's beauty" (11 short films), and so on. (NFA, (1941) *Nástup*, [annual reports], #3) Despite ever larger gross profits during the war which rose from 605,818

Slovak koruna in 1940 (NFA, (1941) *Nástup*, [annual reports], #3,) to 981,278 Slovak koruna in 1941 (NFA, (1942) *Nástup*, [annual reports], #4) and declining to 783,225 Slovak koruna in 1943 (NFA, (1944) *Nástup*, [annual reports], #5), Slovak film production did not rise to meet the demand, but remained static or even declined. Indeed, the lack of Slovak film production during the war was a source of considerable tension between the Third Reich and its Slovak client state, which was often seen as unreliable by Nazi officials in Berlin. As the war continued, Slovak cinematic production was produced by an increasingly complicated array of subsidiary film organizations such as Školfilm (which produced educational films) or Slofis, however the total output of the Slovak film industry during this formative period was entirely composed of short films of various different educational or nonfiction genres as well as newsreels, which were by far the most dominant form of cinematic production during the war. (Mihálik, p.122-123, 144-178) No feature films were ever produced during this time period.

Due to the lack of trained professionals and material in the early years of the war, Slovaks employed some innovative techniques to lower the economic and technical bars for film production as much as possible. For example, early newsreels which were produced under the aegis of *Nástup* were often created by Ivan Kovačević in Vienna, using materials compiled for the production of the *Deutsche Wochenschau* weekly newsreel. The shots were assembled in Vienna by Kovačević once per week and then distributed to Slovakia itself; the negatives and all assorted film production equipment remained in Vienna. (Mihálik, p.90) Although strides were made to make *Nástup* more self-sufficient during the war, these chronic supply and equipment shortages remained a problem. In order to offset the starting deficiencies of the Slovak cinematic industry, *Nástup* was forced to frequently rent or purchase cameras, microphones, lights, and film stock from other Nazi-controlled film corporations such as Pragfilm, Ufa, or Ukraine-film G.M.B.H. (NFA (1943) , *Nástup*, [external correspondence], #3) However, *Nástup* was also frequently also

the source of unauthorized "borrowing" of equipment by other Axis powers as well as outright theft and sabotage; internal memos frequently warn against the possibility of theivery and stress the need to secure films, materials, and vehicles, especially as the Soviet and Allied forces closed in Slovakia in late 1944 and the beginning of 1945. (NFA, *Nástup*, [internal memos], 1944-1945)

Due to their origins in the wartime Slovak state, *Nástup*, Slofis and the other state-run Slovak cinema concerns were also hampered by the political and military effects of the war itself, including the anti-fascist resistance. Since the wartime film industry employed Slovaks of all political stripes and affiliations, not all of whom were fascist sympathizers, film productions themselves could even double as covert vectors for anti-fascist resistance. For example, in August of 1944, during the beginning of the anti-fascist Slovak National Uprising (SNP), Paľo Bielik, a well-known Slovak star of stage and screen and a prolific director and screenwriter, used the pretext of working on cultural films to rendezvous with the anti-fascist resistance fighters and join the SNP himself as both a documentarian and a liaison for other resistance groups. As Bielik himself recalled during an interview with Miroslav Janek in *Tvorba, list pro kritiku a umění* in 1961:

“The Uprising caught me in Brezina during the filming of *Hanka sa vydáva / Hanka is Getting Married*. There were 4 other filmmakers with me: Krška, Richter, Plavec, a Sekula. We became lieutenants, they gave us uniforms, and we began to film. I led a group and wrote a scenario under the name ‘Odboj 1944’. [Karol] Krška filmed. It’s thanks to him that we have authentic material from those days.”

Although the wartime Slovak government had created some degree of nationalized cinema through their seizure of foreign-owned cinemas and their halting attempts to create a domestic film

production infrastructure, reprisals against Slovak cultural institutions and industries in the wake of the 1944 Slovak National Uprising as well as the encroachment of Soviet forces from the East saw a systematic dismantling of what little film industry Slovakia had managed to create during the wartime period by both sides of the conflict. What equipment and cinematic property was not brought back to German territory by retreating Nazi troops was often destroyed in the fighting or confiscated by the encroaching Soviet forces, disappeared, or, as a telegram from the Slovenská filmová spoločnosť (The Slovak Film Association) director Ladislav Faix, complained, material was simply shipped back to Prague for use in the Czech film industry without notice.

### Consolidation, Cinefication, and Education: The Postwar Nationalization Process

On April 3, 1945, the Soviet Army reached Bratislava, and after a short battle, captured the city the next day. One of the first actions taken by the occupying force was to announce the temporary implementation of the National Front coalition's *Košický vládný plán / Košice Government Plan*, which called for the nationalization of key industries (like cinema) as per the decrees of Edvard Beneš as well as the "preservation and control of all financial and operational means of the former *Nástup*." (Havelka, 1947, p. 105) This included any suborganizations of the wartime nationalist film industry (such as Slofis-Slovenská filmová spoločnosť), as well as all film lending libraries, distribution centers, and still-operational cinemas. Shortly thereafter these umbrella organizations were once again reorganized and put under the control of the unified Československá filmová spoločnosť, although disagreements remained and the process was not formally ratified until September of that year. (Havelka, 1947. p. 106) Furthermore, these decrees also explicitly called for an end to the "Slovak Question" (slovenská otázka), or the often-divisive debates about Slovak economic, cultural, and linguistic assimilation, which had often bedeviled Czech and Slovak cultural relations during the First Republic, and



stipulated a degree of cultural autonomy, at least in the abstract. This coincided with Beneš' decree in August 28th of the same year declaring cinema a national resource to be nationalized and removed from the hands of private film concerns and magnates; however this would not be fully implemented in the Slovak Lands until it was ratified on April 15, 1947 by the Slovak National Council Slovenská národná rada, nearly 18 months after Czech film had begun its own nationalization process. (Macek and Paštéková, 1997, p. 107)

Although, at first glance, the presidential decree to nationalize film appears unusual in that it comes so quickly after the end of the war, in reality, the framework for nationalized film (or film removed from the whims and caprices of interwar studios and powerful industry figures) was established well before hostilities began. Directors and cultural figures such as the writer Vladislav Vančura had been advocating for governmental funding or nationalization of film since as early as 1937 (Kupová, 2013), and these calls for nationalization increased as the decade came to a close and the war began. This progression towards nationalization continued during the post war period through the efforts of the National Front, the ruling coalition of political parties headed by the Communists who advanced it by advocating for increased budgets and spending on cultural fronts, even after the 1948 Putsch. For instance, the budget allotted for cultural activities rose from 48,736,000 Kč per year in 1949 to 157, 975,000 Kč in 1952. (Holikovský, 1952, p.12)

Although the framework for the nationalization of Czech and Slovak film was agreed upon by a large number of film professionals and put into law by a presidential decree, a large number of issues remained after its announcement. While the nationalization process in the Czech Lands was slowed by the complexity of the long-established Czech film industry, the pilfering of cinematic resources by the Nazis, and occasional acts of negligence (or possibly sabotage) during

the early months after the war which destroyed machines and workplaces, (Kuklík, 2010, p.239) Slovak film nationalization had its own difficulties to face in the mid-to-late 40s— namely, a lack of cinematic infrastructure and institutions to nationalize. As Czech film historian Ivan Klimeš notes, the prewar Czechoslovak film industry was "concentrated in the Czech Lands" and limited in its scope due to the lack of cinemas in Slovakia itself. Thus, while Czech industry figures were attempting to consolidate a sprawling film industry, on the Slovak side, more effort would be needed to rebuild, if not build outright, the basic foundations of one. As the newly-organized national Czechoslovak film industry noted in its 1947 annual report:

"The hard task of the state film, was to build and to organize the cinema, which during the Slovak National Insurrection [Slovak National Uprising] and mainly by invasion, had been destroyed and the fittings dragged away by the Germans. Of the 260 cinemas of the former 'Slovak state', only 165 were in action. By the common work of all interested sections, since 28. VIII. 1945 -- 122 cinemas have been restored and in this way, we have now 287 cinemas in action. In the two years plan, we are planning, to establish a farther 250 cinemas, but the scheme meets with difficulties in consequence of the shortage of adaptable accommodation. The new buildings must be built and existing buildings must be adapted." (p.53-54)

Thus, of all the concerns of the postwar nationalization program, perhaps the most pressing concerns was not the production of films themselves, but of *kinofikácie* or "cinefication"-- that is, restoring or creating cinematic infrastructure to make the showing of films viable once again. Although both halves of Czechoslovakia were devastated by Nazi plundering of film resources, materials, and equipment, Slovakia was challenged by a lack of infrastructure even during the interwar period. As mentioned in the previous section, by the beginning of the fascist period, Slovakia had only 153 operational cinemas (including many that were seasonal or mobile), mostly

concentrated in the larger towns and cities. Although the wartime state did initially make some degree of progress towards cinefication between 1939 and 1945, reprisals, looting, and confiscation by various groups led to only a net gain of 12 additional cinemas during this period, as we can see in the table below:

TABLE 1: TOTAL AMOUNT OF SLOVAK CINEMAS 1945 - 1950 <sup>2</sup>

YEAR	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950
Total Number	232	263	280	358	460	564

Given these paltry gains, the postwar government's focus on expanding cinema to areas which had previously little to no access to film was quite logical. While the interwar period saw a number of Slovak cities with multiple cinemas, by 1950, only 17 out of 525 total Slovak municipalities with access to cinema had multiple theatres; only the largest cities (such as Bratislava and Košice) had upwards of 4 or more theatres, 14 municipalities had 2 cinemas, and the remaining 508 municipalities had only one cinema. (Havelka, 1970. p. 270) By contrast, 15 Czech municipalities had 4 or more cinemas, and an additional 68 cities or towns had between 2 to 3 cinemas apiece. (Havelka, 1970. p. 222) By 1950, the process of cinefication was being incorporated into the larger process of industrializing and modernizing largely rural Slovakia by the ruling communist party and its political allies. The development of the film industry was often thus as a practical parallel to the process of transforming Slovakia's traditional industries of agriculture and forestry to newer, more urbanized and modernized aims (Pavlík, 1950); in other words, the cinefication of Slovakia was also the transformation of Slovakia from a pastoral and agricultural area into more industrialized component of the post-war Czechoslovak state.

Although cinefication proceeded at a rapid pace during the postwar years, the recruitment and training of qualified film professionals to work in the newly nationalized film industry would prove to be another obstacle which was necessary to overcome. While Czech cinema was founded on the broad commercial interests of entrepreneurs like Miloš Havel and Tomáš Baťa, whose companies were directly involved not only in the production and distribution of films, but also in the training of film industry professionals, Slovakia did not have the reserve of talent or capital which was already extant in the Czech Lands. Attempts to establish a pedagogical institution for training budding film professionals of all disciplines were limited towards the end of the interwar period, when the Czech director/photographer (and enthusiastic champion of Slovak culture) Karel Plicka was invited to create a curriculum at the the Škola uměleckých remesiel (The School of Applied Arts) in Bratislava in 1938. The School of Applied arts had begun its brief life in 1928 as one of the many academic institutions founded by local and national governments following the creation of the newly liberated Czechoslovakia, and the first public institution in the Slovak lands to offer specialized instruction in visual arts. (Možjišová, 1992) Despite the presence of the famously pro-Slovak Plicka, the school was closed in 1939 and its Czech staff (including Plicka) were soon expelled.

Ad hoc attempts to create a talented workforce through the war were limited, as was film production, despite the efforts of the wartime Slovak Republic to build a nationalized film production industry along the lines of the Nazi model. Directors who were the most active during the war had often worked in the interwar Czech film industry (such as Paľo Bielik) or received training from Germany during the war. Following the war, this training gap remained between the Czechs and Slovaks. Thus Slovakia's greatest hope for developing a film industry lay not only in the nationalization of the means of film production (e.g. the studios), but also through the establishment of nationalized film schools such as the *Filmová a televízni fakulta Akademie*

múzických umění v Praze, better known as FAMU, in 1946 or the Bratislava-based Vysoká škola múzických umění (VŠMU). (Macek and Paštéková, 1997, p. 122) Indeed, the nationalized Czechoslovak Motion Picture company enthusiastically greeted this news:

"Great sums are destined for good schooling of the rising generation [of Slovaks]. The Slovak people get the practical experience in the modern film ateliers in Prague, [thanks to their] study in the Film High School of the Academy of Musical Arts in Prague [sic], which was founded by the help of the State Film Association." (p. 52)

The establishment of FAMU and VŠMU assured Slovak students of receiving the most modern training in the film industry, plus a more comprehensive education in the creative and artistic fields which the wartime Slovak film industry had neglected. Students such as Eduard Grečner, a Slovak director who attended FAMU from 1950 to 1954, often remarked on the vast difference that initially existed between the incoming Slovak students and their Czech compatriots - differences which would be largely leveled by the beginning of the 1960s. ("Eduard Grečner...", 2015)

### Features or Short Films: Battles Over the Frameworks of Slovak Film

Although the nationalization of film provided Slovak filmmakers and film professionals with a legal and industrial framework for the production of their art, transforming the budgets and legal guarantees into tangible results was not instantaneous. Indeed, several Slovak critics and film professionals found the process frustrating and mystifying and took to the press to air their concerns. Writing in the Slovak arts and cultural magazine *Národná obroda* in January of 1948 (just weeks before the revolution), the Slovak film and theatre critic Ján Rozner said:

"Since this war and the nationalization of film, it has been clear that our possibilities are unprecedented. The plans for Slovak film have acclimated to the possibilities. The wording of the plans were enormous. They announced feature films, which we have finally begun to produce, but they barely even spoke about short films, and this would be an incredibly normal thing, that we will produce short films of all kinds.

From [film's] nationalization and for the past two years up until today, we can see the beautiful and great plans with which Slovak film began. In the meantime, the situation is thus: one full-length feature film was made last year, that is, one full-length film was not completed, and short films did not even use up all the money which they had at their disposal, including the subsidies which short films had received."

Another critic, writing in response to the 1948 Days of Slavic Film - Dni slovanského filmu festival in Bratislava also voiced their disapproval of the nationalization process in a more subtle way: "On the one hand, we saw examples of Slavic production which can completely satisfy us. It is particularly instructional in regard to our own conditions, when Czechoslovak film has been nationalized for three years already and it is still searching and is not able to find its own artistic form of expression at all, as well as cinematic works which would suit it." ("Po slovanskej filmovej prihliadke")

Both of these critiques reveal the perceived and real inadequacies of Slovak film production during this time period. In terms of raw production, Slovak film obviously lagged behind its Czech counterpart. Tables 2 and 3 below show the years of production and the types of films produced illustrates the vast difference between merely the colorized films produced by the Czech film industry and the entire output of Slovak film production during the same post-war time period:

TABLE 2: TOTAL SLOVAK FILM PRODUCTION 1945-1950<sup>3</sup>

YEAR	SHORT FILMS	FEATURE FILMS	NEWSREELS	TOTAL
1945	2	0	0	2
1946	6	0	0	6
1947	8	1	0	9
1948	9	1	0	10
1949	23	2	54	79
1950	17	5	52	74

TABLE 3: CZECH COLORIZED FILM PRODUCTION 1945-1950<sup>4</sup>

YEAR	SHORT FILMS	FEATURE FILMS	NEWSREELS	TOTAL
1945	19	3	58	80
1946	69	12	130	211
1947	108	21	196	325
1948	113	19	161	293
1949	167	26	207	400
1950	151	31	188	370

As we can see in both, the predominant feature of Slovak filmmaking during this period was a preference for shorter film genres, which were far cheaper to produce and could be screened in a variety of different locations on a variety of different projection formats such as improvised rural cinemas or multipurpose community centers using older projectors. Colorized productions were mostly limited to newsreels (52 in 1949 and 1950 respectively) with a few exceptions for short "cultural" or educational films, especially those highlighting the Slovak countryside; however, as noted in the Czech language trade periodical *Kino*, the vast majority of Slovak film productions during the early years of nationalization were shot in black and white.

This reliance on short nonfiction film as dominant artistic medium was often seen as the "traditional" method of Slovak filmmaking for much of the nationalization period. As the 1947 report on the nationalization of the film industry noted:

"Slovak film production had in the past neither the financial, nor the technical possibilities, to be expanded to such a degree, as it is among the nations, which are greater or richer. The production of the full-length films was not regular for want of capital and also in consequence of the restricted exploited territory. Naturally, the Slovak filmmakers elected another way -- the way of the short film, which gave more real and more favorable possibilities, to form their artistic and creative ideals." (p.49)

Organizationally speaking, in 1945, newly nationalized Slovak film production was divided into 4 main categories according to their discipline or focuses: 1) artistic/feature film production, 2) popular scientific film production, 3) documentary film production, and 4) the technical section, film laboratories, and ateliers, although these initial categories would be expanded or contracted according to the whims and needs of centralized planning. (Havelka, 1970. p. 244) However, despite the incorporation of Slovak film into the nationalized framework of Czechoslovak film,



not all "Slovak" films were produced in Slovakia. As the trade publication *Radostná práce* noted in a 1945 article "V předvečer velkých událostí" ("On the Eve of Large Events"), due to the limited amounts of production facilities in Slovakia itself, feature films that were often set in Slovakia were filmed in Prague film ateliers such as Barrandov or Hostivář. In 1947, the same publication noted that a lack of materials and trained artistic and technical professionals continued to plague Slovak productions well into the nationalization period, which often saw delays or cancelations of projects. ("Činnost slovenských filmových pracovníků") Resources and personnel destined for Slovak productions were occasionally reassigned to other more prestigious or well-funded projects-- mostly Czech, but also including a variety of Soviet or international productions as well.

When many Slovak politicians complained about the favoring of Czech film productions, highly placed Czech politicians reacted vigorously against the accusations. Among the most militant officials in opposition to Slovak demands for greater resources for the nationalization of film was Václav Kopecký, Communist party ideologue and Czech Minister of Information from 1945 until 1953. On November 6, 1947, Kopecký furiously denounced Slovak complaints against his ministry's nationalization plans for Slovak film in an "exposé" which was subsequently published by the Československé filmové nakladatelství, the official literary publishing arm of the nationalized Czech and Slovak film industries. Kopecký writes:

"I do not want to be malicious, and I do not want to talk about whether or not the **Commissioner for Information [František Zupka]**, should be afraid of the publication of the judgement from the parliamentary budgetary and control commission, given that he interprets the autonomy of his authority in the Slovak film industry in any way that he wants, and that in the national budget of the [Slovak] Ministry of Information he so **terribly sought the figures for the Slovak film**

**industry** that he also angered his own party colleagues from the parliamentary budget and control commission." (Kopecký, *O znárodněném filmu...* p. 6)

In an effort to quell criticism of the nationalization efforts (or the lack of results), some Slovak communists turned to unlikely sources to bolster support for the movement. On September 10, 1948, the official newspaper of Eastern Slovakia's communist party, *Východoslovenská Pravda* ran an article entitled "Dr. Beneš a film : Film musí byť obrazom národného života" ("Film Must be a Picture of National Life"), almost exclusively consisting of quotes from former president Edvard Beneš in support for the nationalization of film, although addressing few of the concerns of Slovak critics of the movement, concluding only that "the credits of the second Czechoslovak president, Dr Edvard Beneš, towards our film will not be forgotten. They are our common task."

Further disagreements over both the effectiveness and speed of the nationalization effort continued into the immediate post-putsch era. As it was becoming difficult to produce enough feature films, Czech or Slovak, to fulfill production quotas, in 1949, the Ministry of Information announced the creation of a new division responsible for the creation of short films, along the lines of the "Soviet model." (Kopecký, *Osvětu...* p. 28) This division of short films would be the primary focus of Slovak film production efforts, not only because of the relative ease of production and cost effectiveness of this model, but also because the Slovak film industry had already been focused in this direction through the war years and into the nationalization period. In many senses, it was less of great leap forward, and more of a return to a familiar model of filmmaking which was already a foundational part of the Slovak film industry.

From the official point of view of Václav Kopecký and the Ministry of Information, the unfulfilled film quotas from the early communist era were attributable to "the lack of creators and dramaturgical work, which are a basic condition for the successful development of film

production." (Kopecký, *Osvětu...* p. 28) Although earlier cinema production in Slovakia often resulted in works that were, in the words of an anonymous film critic from the communist weekly *Tvorba* "cut from 'Slovak fabric'" under the auspices of Czech directors (*Tvorba* 360-361), from 1945 until 1950, Slovak-language feature filmmakers were more often than not, Slovak. Of the 9 Slovak feature films produced between 1945 and 1950, 7 were produced by Slovak directors (Paľo Bielik, Ivan Bukovčan, Pavel Dubovský, Ondrej Jeriabek, Ján Kádar) while the other 2 were produced by well-known Czech directors (Martin Frič and Václav Wassermann), a trend which would not re-emerge until well into the post-Stalinist 1960s when an increasing amount of Slovak directors would emerge as viable artistic forces in feature film production. (Havelka, 1970. p. 247-249) An additional boost to the efficiency and quality of Slovak film production can also be attributed to the establishment of various temporary production facilities in Slovakia itself in various unused Czechoslovak Radio and Slovak Stockman Association (Slovenské dobytčárske družstvo/Slodob) buildings from 1948 - 1950. Although not as modern as the Czech production facilities, these temporary studios were furnished with equipment borrowed from Barrandov and served as the most sophisticated Slovak film production facilities until the completion of Koliba studios in 1953.

## Summary

At the beginning of World War II, the Slovak film industry was nearly non-existent, limited to its own ill-gotten resources and dependent upon the wartime state's political benefactors (such as Nazi Germany) to provide both equipment and training. Although attempts were made by the newly formed Slovak state to create a domestic film industry equal to that of its Czech and Austrian

neighbors, a lack of cinematic infrastructure, trained professionals, and equipment greatly hindered its development. As a result, for much of the war period and into the early nationalization period, Slovak film production was heavily focused on short films and other easily produced, affordable genres like newsreel, often shot in black and white. It was only with the postwar nationalization of film in the Czech and Slovak lands that Slovak film was able to create a cinematic infrastructure strong enough to support the emergence of a more sophisticated film industry. This process was spurred on by the emergence not only of state sponsored cinema production but also the cinefication of Slovakia-- a process that was also ultimately tied into the governments attempts to industrialize and modernize the Slovak Lands in general. Finally, by 1950, the nationalization of the Slovak film industry had begun to show tangible results, in terms of both increasing the number of films produced, but perhaps most importantly in establishing the necessary cinematic infrastructure for incubating its own nationalized cinema and developing an individual voice during the Slovak New Wave of the 1960s.

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#### ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Tatrafilm's birth and failure remains an understudied period of Slovak cinema history which nonetheless highlights the initial connection between the American Slovak diaspora and the struggle for Slovak cultural production in the First Republic.

<sup>2</sup> Figures taken from: Havelka, J.(1970) *Čs. filmové hospodárství 1945 - 1950*. Praha: Český filmový ústav. p. 268

<sup>3</sup> Figures taken from Havelka, J. (1970) *Čs. filmové hospodárství 1945 - 1950*. Praha: Český filmový ústav, 1970. p.245

<sup>4</sup> Figures taken from Havelka, J. (1970) *Čs. filmové hospodárství 1945 - 1950*. Praha: Český filmový ústav, 1970. p.80.