CARPATHO-RUSYN
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A Forum on Carpatho Rusyn Ethnic Heritage

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FROM THE EDITOR

This past year the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center continued its Classics of Carpatho-Rusyn Scholarship series with the publication of *The Rusyns* by Alexander Bonkáló. The author was by training a Slavic philologist and much of his research and writing were devoted particularly to the study of the Rusyns. Like other volumes planned for our series, Bonkáló’s *Rusyns* has never before been available in English. In addition, it is a work bound to provoke questions, for it presents the history of the Rusyns from a Hungarian national point of view.

Of the hundreds of readers who ordered the volume, a few responded in writing to the editor of the *Carpatho-Rusyn American* and the C-RRC. Two of the responses were especially strong in their negative reaction to the book. James Prizant, who has been studying the history of Subcarpathian Rus’ for several years, said in his brief note that he had found the C-RRC’s publications “to be a most helpful and fair-minded source of information.” With regard to *The Rusyns*, however, he added that “had I any inkling of the viscerally anti-democratic, pro-fascist sympathies expressed by its author, I would not have spent one cent of my money to buy this book.”

Florence Orris wrote a much lengthier letter, printed here in full, which may express the feelings of many Rusyn Americans in response to the viewpoint Bonkáló’s study espouses.

Dear Editor:

*Naši bedni l’udi!* The expression used so often by my father, Stephen Pusti, certainly applies to the book I have just completed, *The Rusyns*, written by Alexander Bonkáló. This book, so tragically slanted, was difficult to read with page after page of untruths and excuses justifying the treatment of the Rusyn people by the Hungarians in the past. After reading this book, I considered disposing of it, but when I looked at the title, *The Rusyns*, my heart melted and I placed it on my bookshelf.

We ask ourselves, “Who loves us?,” and the answer must be that “We do.” We must love ourselves enough to stand in the truth that we are not the slave of another nationality to be fragmented with their ways and eventually destroyed. Certainly this is the ultimate goal of these outsiders.

Outside nationalities are so well described for us in the book *The Shaping of a National Identity*, written by Paul R. Magoci, and they have for centuries pulled us apart. We Rusyns are pulled at from all directions just like the false mother in Holy Scripture who would have allowed the baby to be cut in half rather than let the rightful mother have the child. Strangers have made the same decision about us.

How wonderful it would have been to have had a friend in times past who would have helped us develop as a unified people. This never happened, so let us have the courage to face this reality and go on. As Rusyn Americans we are not chained to the past so that we must willingly bow before Ukrainians, Slovaks, Russians, Poles, Hungarians, or any other group that might wish to assimilate us. With willing hearts let us attempt to inspire our Rusyn people in Europe and America to walk only in the truth and to begin anew.

The C-RRC shares the basic views of both James and Florence. In the introduction to *The Rusyns*, the editors of the series state: “Admittedly, we found it difficult to accept the strongly anti-Czechoslovak tone in the chapters dealing with recent historical events and with certain of Bonkáló’s judgments concerning early Rusyn colonization and subsequent cultural developments.” The editors then go on to describe those features of the study which, from the C-RRC’s point of view, “provide a wealth of invaluable information” and make the book unique and essential to those who wish to learn more about Rusyns. The flyer announcing the book also lists these features, noting that the bulk of the volume is, in fact, not necessarily linked to the Hungarian national point of view. The volume does provide an informative “analysis of the differing Rusyn ethnographic groups and their style of life, a survey of Rusyn literature, a discussion of Rusyn folk poetry and customs, and an outline of Greek Catholic and Orthodox religious history.”

At the same time, the editors make clear in the book’s introduction that the Classics of Carpatho-Rusyn Scholarship series will continue to publish a variety of works that may favor “a particular national (pro-Russian, pro-Rusyn, pro-Ukrainian), or political (pro-Czechoslovak, pro-Hungarian, pro-Soviet), or ideological (pro-Democratic, pro-Communist, pro-Christian) stand,” but that this “does not in any way reflect the policy or orientation of the C-RRC.” We feel “that the availability in English of many scholarly studies of varied ideological persuasions is the best way to improve our understanding and appreciation of Carpatho-Rusyn culture.” These last statements are found not only in the introduction to the Bonkáló book, but also in the introduction to the first book in our series, *Rusyn Easter Eggs from Eastern Slovakia*, published in 1987. They will reappear in each of our volumes.

We must admit that our history is anything but dull. The political, ideological, cultural, religious, and linguistic forces operative in our homeland over the past centuries have often led to controversy and struggle as our people sought to express their views and give voice to their identity. We have been a much-claimed people, and our neighbors have frequently had ideas about our destiny which we have not shared.

It is nothing new, then, that there should be a Hungarian or Ukrainian or Russian point of view about Rusyns which radically differ one from the other and which appear “so tragically slanted,” as Florence has observed. But in order to truly know ourselves, we must also see ourselves as others see us. Our measure of maturity as a people corresponds to our ability to explore a variety of views about ourselves without being daunted by them.
The American author and dramatist, Thomas Bell, was born on March 7, 1903, in Braddock, Pennsylvania. By the time of his death less than six decades later, he had become a writer known throughout the world through works translated into many languages. Few people are aware, however, that his father Mychal Belejčak, was a Rusyn from the village of Vyšnij Tvarožec (Šariš county) in the Prešov Region of northeastern Czechoslovakia. The family of his mother, Marija Kračun, also came from the same area. Mychal Belejčak emigrated to the United States in 1890. He married, worked in the mines, and then in the steel factories of Pennsylvania until he died in 1914 at the young age of thirty-nine.

Following the death of his father, Thomas Belejčak, the oldest of four children, had to leave school in order to help support the family. He began working in a glass company, then became an apprentice electrician before moving on to the furnaces in a steel mill in Braddock, Pennsylvania. In 1922, at the age of nineteen, he went to New York City and before long became a sailor. His seaman’s “career” ended after two voyages, and he returned to New York where he worked in a bookstore and began to write more intensively in his spare time. From then on he was known by the pseudonym he had used since the inception of his literary career, Thomas Bell, an abbreviation of Belejčak. Following the example of Jack London, Bell wrote from personal experience. Coming as he did from a poor working-class background, most of his works demonstrate a close relationship with the so-called “left proletarian literature.” Common people, predominantly immigrants from “the old country,” served as the main characters in his novels and dramas.

His first novel, *The Breed of Basil* (1930), was a romantic adventure that did not meet with success. His subsequent novels, however, drew on the life of the immigrant experience he knew so well. Such themes dominated his next three novels: his partially autobiographical, *The Second Prince* (1935), *All Brides Are Beautiful* (1936), and *There Comes a Time* (1946). It was the overwhelming success of *All Brides Are Beautiful* that prompted MGM studios to invite Bell to Hollywood in order to work as a script writer. After less than a year, however, he became disillusioned with the movie world and returned to New York City. This did not deter the studios from recognizing a box-office hit, and in 1946, RKO made *All Brides Are Beautiful* into a film entitled “From This Day Forward,” starring Joan Fontaine.

Bell’s fourth novel, *Out of This Furnace* (1941), was his masterpiece. It chronicles the saga of three Slovak and Rusyn generations of immigrants from his parents’ native Šariš county. The story is, in fact, the saga of his own family. In the 1960s, the novel was dramatized as “Dva svity” (Two Worlds) for Slovak Television. As a result of this film and his own statements, Slovaks consider Bell to be an American writer of Slovak heritage, even though his father’s origins are in Vyšnij Tvarožec, a Rusyn village. In the end, Bell was to be best remembered for his autobiographical composition, *In the Midst of Life* (1961), written during the last months of life in diary form by an individual stricken with cancer and anticipating death.

We Rusyns are often unaware of the extent of our people’s fame. In recent years, much has been written about the artist Andy Warhol, whose parents were also Rusyns from the Prešov Region. Like Warhol, Thomas Bell had a distinguished career in American cultural circles. In Medzilaborce, the Andy Warhol Society has already been founded and work has begun on a museum in the artist’s honor. At the very least it would be worth considering a memorial plaque or a museum room in Vyšnij Tvarožec, the native village of Thomas Bell’s father.

But prior to this, it is necessary to popularize his works, which are practically unknown among Rusyns in the European homeland. Recently, we learned that on the initiative of Marija Gmyterova (a native of Vyšnij Tvarožec), the district center for education in Bardejov is preparing for publication an introductory pamphlet devoted to Thomas Bell. It is hoped that this publication will herald the beginning of a flourishing interest in our countryman. His relatives, the Belejčaks, continue to live in Vyšnij Tvarožec most likely preserving memories of their ancestor who emigrated to America nearly a century ago.

Mykola Mušynka
Prešov, Czechoslovakia

OUR FRONT COVER

Poster in Medzilaborce, Czechoslovakia, announcing the First World Congress of Rusyns, March 23-24, 1991, 9:00 a.m., at the Cultural Center. All are invited.
In the wake of the enormous political changes that have occurred in East Central Europe since the revolution of 1989, many circles in Czechoslovakia have renewed their interest in Subcarpathian Rus’. That territory had been part of Czechoslovakia between 1919 and 1939; it was annexed by Hungary in 1939; and then it was incorporated as the Transcarpathian oblast into the Soviet Ukraine in 1945. A Slovak journalist Eva Čobejová prepared the following report and interviews with two leading Rusyn cultural activists, one from Czechoslovakia, the other from Soviet Transcarpathia. The article originally appeared in the Slovak-language newspaper, Smena na nedel’u (Bratislava), November 30, 1990.—Editor

When I was returning at the end of July from Subcarpathian Rus’, which already for forty-five years has been called the Transcarpathian Ukraine, I had no doubts about the fact that in that country the feeling of belonging to Czechoslovakia has remained constantly strong. Yet I preferred not to write about it. I dared only to call attention to the fact that under the Carpathians beyond our border [in Soviet Transcarpathia] there still lived a Slovak minority which we have ignored for forty-five years and have calmly left at the mercy of Ukrainianization or Russification. Somewhat later the president of the Republican Party of Czechoslovakia, upon his return from a trip to the former Subcarpathian Rus’, did not hesitate to announce the following:

“We defend the opinion that Subcarpathian Rus’ is still now a part of the Czechoslovak Republic . . . The Republicans demand the annulment of all acts which were adopted on the territory of Subcarpathian Rus’ from the year 1938, that is, from its separation from Czechoslovakia.”

Dr. Sladeck was not the only one thinking about Subcarpathian Rus’. At the end of October in Prague, members of the Society of Friends of Subcarpathian Rus’, which was officially registered by the Ministry of the Interior of the Czechoslovak Republic, came together for their first general assembly. Almost 200 people gathered in Prague. Some were Rusyns who had emigrated from Subcarpathian Rus’, and some were Czechs who had worked there at some point or who had been born and raised there. They issued a proclamation, which among other things stated the following:

“In accordance with the building of the great democratic family of European peoples and states, freedom belongs also to the people of Subcarpathian Rus’ who in a legal sense never ceased being a part of the Czechoslovak Republic. The right to freedom does not end at the border just beyond Košice and Prešov. All the peoples of Europe have the right to democracy and a free life, and this includes Subcarpathian Rus’, whose people also acknowledge the democratic message of the Czechoslovak Republic.”

Six days after this announcement, an interesting piece of news appeared in the papers: The Society of Carpatho-Rusyns, founded in February 1990 in Užhorod, sent an appeal to Mikhail Gorbachev and to the Ukrainian parliament to transform the Transcarpathian oblast of the Ukrainian SSR into an autonomous republic of Subcarpathian Rus’. Besides this, the Society appealed to the United Nations to redress Stalin’s liquidation of the autonomous Subcarpathian Rus’ and the Rusyn people as a violation of international treaties. The question of Subcarpathian Rus’—whether we want to admit it or not—has again become urgent.

We Slovaks also know from our own personal experience that the history of Central Europe has not been favorable to small nations, particularly to the Slavic peoples. I might be so bold as to stress that while Slovak history has been marked with a constant struggle for survival, it has nevertheless been a happier history than Rusyn history. Here are some small comparisons: the Slovak language was codified in 1843 and the official standard language from 1918 (although it was lacking grammatical rules). A literary form of the Rusyn language has practically vanished. There is no official language, the language is not taught in schools, and no literature has been written in it, although there is still a living language used by Rusyns. (In 1937, a grammar of the Rusyn language was published, but shortly afterwards the development of Rusyn culture came to a halt.) Yet the Rusyns have not experienced the fate of the Lusatian Sorbs or the Polish Slavs. Approximately 800,000 people still acknowledge that they are Rusyns, but there are still many others as well.

Subcarpathian Rus’, like Slovakia, belonged to Hungary from the eleventh century to 1918. In October 1918, a representative of the Subcarpathian Rusyns signed a declaration in Philadelphia proclaiming freedom for the Central European peoples. In Subcarpathian Rus’ at that time, a polemic was current whether to establish an independent state, to strive for unity with the Ukraine or Hungary, or to join with the Czechoslovak Republic. The idea of joining with the Czechoslovak Republic triumphed. The peace treaties of Saint-Germain and the Trianon treaty, as well as the Czechoslovak constitution all acknowledged this union. Thus began a 20-year cohabitation which Communist historians later would designate as the period when Czech capitalists plundered Subcarpathian Rus’ and subjected its people to bondage and poverty. Witnesses from Subcarpathian Rus’, however, nostalgically recall these years when they were “under the Czechs” and admire that everything was done “by the authority of the Czechs” for the development of Subcarpathia.

In May 1934, the minister of foreign affairs of the Czechoslovak Republic, Dr. Beneš, travelled around Subcarpathian Rus’ and self-assuredly announced before the Rusyns: The destiny of Subcarpathian Rus’ has been decided for all time. Czechoslovakia will never surrender Subcarpathian Rus’. We will never allow any border revision and will protect Subcarpathian Rus’ with our bodies and our blood, when and if this should be necessary.” Not even six years passed before Dr. Beneš himself doubted the future of Subcarpathian Rus’ and said that after the war we would not be able to prevent the Soviet Union from demanding that Subcarpathian Rus’ should be transferred to the Ukraine. Nor can we ignore the years 1938 and 1939 when Subcarpathian Rus’ was seeking autonomy, but had little time to enjoy it. Beginning already October 9, 1938, there was fighting in Subcarpathian Rus’ against Hungarian and Polish terrorist groups, and the Czechoslovak army suffered significant losses. From March 14, 1939, the army fought with Hor- thy’s military detachments, and the last Czechoslovak soldier left Subcarpathian Rus’ by March 18, 1939. It is said that Czechoslovakia submitted to the Germans without a single shot being fired. But this is not the case with regard to Subcarpathian Rus’ and the soldiers who served there.
After the occupation of Subcarpathian Rus' by Hungary, many Rusyns fled eastward to the Soviet Union where they hoped to escape fascism. Instead, they “escaped” to the Soviet gulag. It is not surprising that later when the Czechoslovak military unit arose in the Soviet Union, many Rusyns volunteered for it.

When in the autumn of 1944, a delegation to the Czechoslovak government was elected in Subcarpathian Rus', the Soviet military command there denounced it. Then in Mukachevo a congress of selected members of local national councils was immediately organized. Whether those present wanted to or not, they accepted a proclamation on November 26, 1944, declaring the union of the Transcarpathian Ukraine with the Soviet Ukraine. In June 1945, Czechoslovakia reluctantly signed an agreement in Moscow concerning the union of the Transcarpathian Ukraine and the Ukrainian SSR.

Thus Stalin's strategic goal, formulated long before, was accomplished—to go as far as the Carpathians and to establish a strong military presence there. What did this mean for Rusyns? The forced evacuation of up to 20,000 Rusyns, largely intelligentsia, to far corners of the Soviet Union. It also meant Ukrainianization, as well as an influx of Russians and Ukrainians to towns and villages traditionally populated by Rusyns. Those who could left for Czechoslovakia or Hungary, and many emigrated even further.

For Subcarpathian Rus' Gorbachev's perestroika has meant first a revitalization of religious life. Greek Catholics have begun to demand the return of their churches which were taken over by the Orthodox Church. Roman Catholics have begun to repair their churches and to take their children there so that they not forget their mother tongue. The Roman Catholic religious community is made up largely of Hungarians, Germans, and also Slovaks in their eleven Slovak parishes. In the wake of the religious awakening has come the national awakening. In February [1990] the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns was founded in Uzhhorod. The society intends to fight for the recognition of the Rusyn nationality, for the renewal of the Rusyn language and culture, and also for autonomy. The society has already taken the first steps in this direction.

For Rusyns the greatest danger today is not so much the Kremlin, but moreso the aroused national feelings of the Ukrainians and their national movement Rukh. The Ukraine does not want to surrender its relatively well-developed western segment, Subcarpathia. For the Ukrainians, this is the “rich West,” while for us it is the “poor East.” Ukrainian nationalism can threaten the national reawakening of the “rich West,” while for us it is the “poor East.”

With regard to the discussion about Subcarpathian Rus' we asked Ivan Bicko, a representative of the Rusyn Renaissance Society, an organization founded in March [1990] in Medzilaborce, and Volodymyr Fedynsynec, a representative of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns, founded in Uzhhorod in February 1990.

[Here follows the interview with Ivan Bicko.]

**According to you, should Czechoslovakia still have an interest in the former Subcarpathian Rus’?**

I think that it is precisely Slovakia which ought to deal with the territory of the former Subcarpathian Rus' because Slovaks still live there. We should concern ourselves with the Slovaks living in Transcarpathia with the same vehemence that we concern ourselves with fellow countrymen living in Hungary. So far I haven't seen any such interest, which I explain as part of a general caution toward a large neighbor inherited from the Communists. We don't want to acknowledge that after its religious awakening, the population of Subcarpathian Rus' has begun also to become aware of its nationality.

**How should we have conducted ourselves toward the Rusyn people who make up the majority of the inhabitants of the former Subcarpathian Rus'?**

Simply as to a people who were part of the First Czechoslovak Republic and who were never unfaithful to it. To this day Rusyns possess a consciousness of the Czechoslovak Republic. Buildings constructed during the Czechoslovak Republic, for instance, are the most beautiful in Subcarpathia. These are actually monuments of that time period, and the people say about them: “this was built by the Czechs.” The people of Subcarpathian Rus’ clearly felt the Czech cultural expansion. Rusyns from Uzhhorod and the surrounding area had an even better notion of Slovaks whom they frequently encountered. Thus, both Czechs and Slovaks could renew their ties with Rusyns and could recognize that the annexation of Subcarpathian Rus' to the Soviet Union was accomplished under conditions which were not in accord with international law. This was clearly a Communist affair—Stalinist politics—and from the Czechoslovak side an affair of an incompetent leader, Dr. Beneš, who succumbed rather than taking control of the situation.

**At the present time how should we show interest in the situation of people living under the Carpathians on Soviet territory?**

We ought to act as does Hungary which has shown a constant interest in the Hungarian minority in that area. In order not to complicate matters thus far, we ought to take steps which can be taken now. For instance, we should try to represent ourselves in Subcarpathian Rus’ by means of television broadcasts. We ought to establish Czechoslovak cultural centers in that region and find people there who still have a tie with Czechoslovakia and who could become enthusiastic disseminators of information about the Czechoslovak Federated Republic. I think that it is necessary to establish an active work center in the Czechoslovak consulate in Kiev with a view to encouraging intensive contacts between the residents of Subcarpathian Rus' and Czechoslovakia. And what is most essential: our government must establish the conditions for the expansion of Slovak and Czech en-
entrepreneurs, especially those involved in joint ventures with Western firms. It would be good if we could extend our activity into Subcarpathian Rus’. For Rusyns this would strengthen enormously their feelings of belonging and their solidarity with Central Europe. Thus we could aid the return of the people of Subcarpathian Rus’ to the Central European context from which they were forcefully torn.

How might we assess historical events relating to the annexation of Subcarpathian Rus’ by the USSR? Is it time to demand a reconsideration of these events?

In order to prevent the situation from becoming politically tense, and while the people there haven’t yet expressed themselves on the issue, an independent historian ought to be asked to investigate the circumstances of the annexation. For Rusyns, for instance, the fact that the agreement with the Soviet Union was signed by [Czechoslovakia’s Communist foreign minister] Vlado Clementis is not relevant. (For Slovaks he might be a hero because he later became a victim of his own comrades.) It is also necessary to investigate what role in this matter was played by the Slovak National Council in January 1945, and more specifically its delegation for the liberation of lands inasmuch as it was authorized to offer that land to Stalin. (It did this, in fact, but from Stalin it earned the response that this was improper and that the people themselves should have the opportunity to express their wishes.) Perhaps with this the Slovak National Council delegation wanted to ensure that Slovakia not be injured by the fact that during the war it was an ally of German. I don’t know precisely the inner motives of these gentlemen, but for Rusyns this was treason. Historians ought now to be the ones to take over this investigation.

![Image of Ivan Bicko and Volodymyr Fedynynyniec]

[Here follows the interview with Volodymyr Fedynynyniec.]

Does your organization have cultural or political goals?

First and foremost we have cultural goals, but at times we also touch on political questions. We are for the autonomy of Subcarpathian Rus’. Striving for autonomy ought to be the first step, and in time we could become an independent Slavic state—with the understanding that we would be good neighbors to Slovaks, Ukrainians, and Poles. This is my conception of Rusynism, taking into account that we Rusyns are not Ukrainians, nor are we Slovaks, Czechs, or Poles. We are a separate Slavic people, one of the oldest. The first reference to Rusyns, as far as I know, is from the first centuries of our era. We were, in fact, a very stabilized group at that time.

What is the present condition of the Rusyn language? Will it be taught again in the schools?

It probably will be taught—if we have autonomy. At present I am working on grammars, dictionaries, and an orthography for the Rusyn language. We don’t have a literature in Rusyn, but Rusyn is still a living language. We need scholarly investigation of the language so that we can establish the rules of the Rusyn language. When this is done, education in Rusyn will be possible. This is necessary, especially if we want to be an independent state.

What is your opinion about those voices from Subcarpathian Rus’ that are calling for its return to the Czechoslovak Federated Republic?

In general this wouldn’t be bad.

At present what help do you anticipate from Czechoslovakia?

Moral support and some favorable words. More concretely? Joint historical research on the history of Subcarpathia, for example. Until now there has not been a truthfully and comprehensively written history. We have only partial works from the past which, however, can’t be used as a basis for study nor as any final outcome. We need new historical research without political distortions.

Is there now discord between Rusyns and Ukrainians in former Subcarpathian Rus’?

Absolutely not. Ukrainians have united in Rukh and Rusyns have now begun to organize themselves. It’s too bad that up to now there has not been the necessary unity or a feeling of solidarity. But I think that by means of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns we will be successful and that Rusyns who have been calling themselves Ukrainians will return to us.

How many members does the society have?

It’s hard to say, but it continues to be small. We have several thousands, but there are 800,000 Rusyns in Subcarpathia.

Translated by Patricia A. Krafcik

A Forum on Carpatho-Rusyn Heritage

THE CARPATHO-RUSYN AMERICAN

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REVOLUTION OF 1989 UPDATE

Prešov, Czechoslovakia. On March 19, 1991, just three days before the international scholarly seminar on traditional Rusyn culture (see RECENT EVENTS in this issue of the C-RRA), the recently-established Scholarly Society (Naukové Tovarystvo) of the Union of Rusyn-Ukrainians of Czechoslovakia (SRUCH) felt it necessary to convene a "seminar before the seminar" in order to be prepared for the public discussion of the Rusyn question. Headed by the historian, Dr. Ivan Vanat, the pro-Ukrainian Prešov intelligentsia held a round-table discussion which criticized all aspects of the Rusyn movement. Vanat went so far as to conclude that the very use of the word Rusyn is somehow a political provocation.

But not all agreed with the tenor at this "preparatory" gathering. In the words of one observer: "Those present spent two and a half hours trying to convince themselves of what they all already believed. Obviously it is easy to conduct such meetings, because there is no need to find strong arguments against people of opposing views. But, then, aren't we falling into the same kind of discussions that we regularly had at various meetings in the past?"

"And, so, what was the result of this meeting? We expected that it would result in the approval (often a concrete analysis) of a convincing presentation to be given by the historian Ivan Vanat at the international seminar against the theory of Rusynism of Professor P.R. Magocsi and others who support such ideas. But this did not happen. Thus, the conclusion is that perhaps we need to learn much more before we can become participants in heated polemics and in particular draw from such polemics concrete and logical results necessary for our further work." (A. Pliska, "Píhotovka pered seminarom," Nove žytia, March 25, 1991, p. 1)

After the international seminar finally took place in Prešov on March 22, it received wide coverage in the local press. Oleksander Zozuljak, editor of Nove žytia, the weekly newspaper for Czechoslovakia's Rusyn-Ukrainians, summed up his impressions the following way:

"The discussion was intense, although I did not like the 'attacks' at the seminar by certain Ukrainian-oriented scholars, who spoke out harshly against Rusynism and accused all of them of propagating political Rusynism. Is history repeating itself? Is it that we cannot live without threats? Just as in the 1950s, the threat was against Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism, so now in the 1990s they are frightening us with accusations of political Rusynism. Unfortunately, in the past, our scholars did little to provide our people with their true history, to explain to them our evolution, or to help resolve the serious problems in our national life. If their work had been good and its results positive, then perhaps they would not have to divert the public's attention with unfounded threats of political Rusynism." (Nove žytia, April 2, 1991, p.1)

Medzilaborce, Czechoslovakia. On March 23, 1991, several Rusyn-language writers who came to the First World Congress of Rusyns met together to discuss their common problems. Those present were Olena Duc and Petro Trochanovskij from the Lemko Region in Poland, the Reverend František Krajnjak from the Prešov Region in Czechoslovakia, Volodymyr Fedynysyn'ev and Ivan Petrovicj from Soviet Transcarpathia, and Vasyl' Petrovaj from Marijupil' in the far southeast Soviet Ukraine.

The meeting was organized by Dr. Paul R. Magocsi of the C-RRC and Ljubomir Medješi of the Rusyn Matka in Yugoslavia. The writers discussed the issue of codifying a Rusyn literary language, which each is doing for his/her region; the financial difficulties of publishing Rusyn magazines and books; and the immediate need for accessible grammars and readers for school children. In order to continue the all-important dialogue regarding a literary standard, it was agreed that a Rusyn philological congress should be convened in the near future.

FIRST WORLD CONGRESS OF RUSYNS

On March 23-24, 1991, the First World Congress of Rusyns took place in Medzilaborce, a Rusyn-inhabited town of 6,000 inhabitants located in the far northeastern corner of Czechoslovakia. The gathering was a historic first, since never before have individuals and organizations from all areas where Rusyns live—Soviet Transcarpathia (historic Subcarpathian Rus'), the Prešov Region, the Lemko Region, the Vojvodina (historic Bačka), and the United States—ever come together to share their common problems and goals.

The congress was organized by the Rusyn Renaissance Society (Rusyn'ska Obroda) at the initiative of its chairman, Dr. Vasyl' Turok from Prešov, and local activists in Medzilaborce, Dr. Mychal Turok-Hetes and Mychal Bycko. The setting was the newly-opened Cultural Center in Medzilaborce, an imposing white marble structure on the main road leading to the town. The congress was funded by the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak government in Bratislava with assistance from discretionary funds from the federal Czechoslovak government in Prague.

Nearly three hundred people arrived for the two-day meeting. As they entered the main hall of the Cultural Center, all were struck by the aesthetically impressive stage dominated by large banners that spelled out a verse in Rusyn from the nineteenth-century poet Aleksander Pavlovýč. Framing the banners were three colorful crests with the of-
official emblems of the Czechoslovak state, the Slovak Republic, and the red bear facing seven blue-and-gold stripes which had been the symbol of interwar Subcarpathian Rus’ and which now serves as the symbol for all Carpatho-Rusyns, regardless where they live.

The first day of the congress began promptly at 9:00 a.m. with a male choir from the neighboring village of Njagov singing the Rusyn national anthem, “Podkarpats’ki rusyny, ostavte hlubokij son” (Subcarpathian Rusyns, Arise from Your Deep Slumber). This was followed by a poem of Aleksander Pavlovyc recited by Jaroslav Sisak, the talented actor and director of the professional Aleksander Duchnovyc Theater (the former Ukrainian National Theater) in Prešov.

These two opening events set the tone for the rest of the congress, since they embodied what virtually everyone felt: a sense of joy and relief that after nearly half a century of wartime and totalitarian Communist repression Rusyns finally were able to gather together in a public forum and proclaimed with pride their national and cultural identity. As the talented Lemko Rusyn poet Petro Trochanovskij said at the very end of the congress: “For the past two days I simply have been overwhelmed with the need to cry for joy.”

The congress was chaired by Aleksander Franko, a former diplomat in the Czechoslovak foreign service. Seated at the podium were members of the presidium consisting of the chairman of each of the Rusyn organizations: Dr. Vasyl Turok, Rusyn Renaissance Society (Czechoslovakia); Dr. Paul R. Magocsi, Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center (United States); Vasyl Sočka-Boržavyn, Society of Carpatho-Rusyns (Soviet Transcarpathia); Andrij Kopča, Society of Lemkos (Poland); and Ljubomir Medjesi (Yugoslavia). Also on the podium were representatives from the following bodies: the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, the Advisory Commission for National Minorities to the Slovak government, the town of Medzilaborce, and the Union of Rusyn-Ukrainians of Czechoslovakia in Prešov.

The key-note speech was delivered by Dr. Paul R. Magocsi of the C-RRC, who addressed the question whether Carpatho-Rusyns are a “new or revived people” (full text of his remarks will appear in a future issue of the C-RA). Then followed shorter statements by the chairmen of the Rusyn organizations in the presidium. In his remarks, the Chairman of the Rusyn Renaissance Society, Dr. Vasyly Turok, summed up what many felt: “The very fact that we can speak out as a distinct national entity creates in our hearts a sense of pride and joy. We believe that everything we have received from our ancestors can now in even greater measure be passed on to our descendants, although until recently it seemed as if our generation would not live to see such joy.”

For most of the rest of the congress, nearly thirty writers, teachers, and cultural activists were given an opportunity to express their concerns. All spoke in Rusyn and all in their own way demanded an end to the Ukrainian national orientation in the countries where they lived and for the official recognition of Rusyns as a distinct national minority with the right to schools and cultural organizations. The concerns were for cultural rights, and with one exception no one asked for political autonomy or any change of international boundaries.

The tone of the several speakers was summed up in the words of Vasyl’ Petrovaj, a Rusyn novelist from the Prešov Region who for most of his life has resided in the far southeastern Soviet Ukraine: “We don’t want anyone to try to convince us who we are! We know best who we are. We are a great people, which neither Magyarization, nor Russification, nor Ukrainianization has been able to destroy. This proves the Rusyns are a great people which only needs its freedom. And why don’t they give us the right to our own nationality! Worst of all, such a situation has been created by our own fellow Slavs.” More measured were the remarks of Dr. Zoreslava Mitrovka from Užhorod: “We must tell the whole world that we want to live and develop, to be ourselves, to have the right to know our own history (and not one which has been deformed in every way), and to have the right to our own language and culture. Yet at the same time we must not forget our closest Slavic brethren, the Ukrainians, whose history, language, and culture we must respect—no more but no less than our own.”

The congress organizers also made provisions for a cultural program. On Saturday evening, the Aleksander Duchnovycz Theater of Prešov performed in Rusyn the play “Maruška.” At the end of the congress on Sunday afternoon, the theater’s world famous folk ensemble, formerly known as the Duklia Ukrainian Ensemble and now simply as PUL’S, gave an hour-long performance of its most popular Rusyn songs and dances. The ensemble closed its program and the congress by leading the audience in singing the “second” national anthem—“Ja rusyn byl, jesm i budu” (I Was, Am, and Will Remain a Rusyn). The entire congress was covered widely on Czechoslovak and Yugoslav television, radio, and the press.

At its closing session, the congress approved a declaration prepared by the presidium which stated that “Rusyns are not
a part of the Ukrainian people, but a distinct people that in
the future wishes to decide for itself what it needs.” Future
congresses will be held every two years; the magazine, *Rusyn*,
with an interregional editorial board will serve as the con­
gress organ; and a Rusyn delegation will be sent to join the
Federal Union of European Nationalities based in Denmark.

The First World Congress of Rusyns made it clear that the
revival among Rusyns in the homeland is not the concern of a
few individuals, but rather of an ever-increasing number of
people organized together in five new Rusyn associations and
represented by new Rusyn-language newspapers and
magazines. As Oleksander Zozuljak, the editor of *Nove žytt–
ja* (April 2, 1991, p. 1) observed: “The congress has made the
world know that Rusyns exist and will continue to exist
whether one likes it or not. Spring is that time of the year
when everything comes alive. There is a certain symbolism in
the fact that in these first days of spring the First World
Congress of Rusyns took place and that Rusyns have come alive.
But whether there will be a productive harvest depends on
them alone and on their everyday detailed work of which
there is much that awaits them.”

Philip Michaels

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**A UNIQUE DOCUMENT**

The recent political changes in the Soviet Union have made
possible the re-legalization of the Greek Catholic Church
that had been banned by Soviet authorities between 1946 and
1949. The former “underground” Greek Catholic bishops
from the Soviet Ukraine were received for the first time at the
Vatican by the Pope in July 1990, and they were officially in­
stalled in their eparchies by a papal decree in January 1991.
Finally, in March 1991, the seat of the Ukrainian (Greek)
Catholic Archdiocese of L’viv, headed by Myroslav Cardinal
Lubachivsky, which had been in exile in Rome, was
established in L’viv.

The reestablishment of the Ukrainian (Greek) Catholic
Church in the Soviet Ukraine raises the question of eparchial
jurisdiction. The Eparchy of Mukachevo in the province
(oblast) of Transcarpathia with its seat in Uzhhorod was never
under the jurisdiction of the Archeparchy of L’viv. Since
1945, however, the Mukachevo Eparchy finds itself for the
first time within the borders of the same state as that of the
Archeparchy of L’viv, the Ukrainian SSR. The hierarchy of
the Ukrainian (Greek) Catholic Church headed by Cardinal
Lubachivsky claims that on religious and national grounds
the Eparchy of Mukachevo should be subordinate to the
L’viv Archeparchy. However, two of the three bishops as well as
the vast majority of the priests in the Eparchy of Mukachevo,
who adamantly refer to their church by its historic name
Greek Catholic, not Ukrainian Catholic, do not want a
change in the jurisdicitional status of their eparchy. In that
regard, they argue that the Eparchy of Mukachevo should re­
main directly under the Vatican, like the neighboring Greek
Catholic eparchies of Prešov (in Czechoslovakia) and Haj­
dudorog (in Hungary) which had once been part of the
Mukačevo Eparchy.

The ordinary of the Mukačevo Eparchy, Bishop Ivan
Semedij, and his auxiliary, Bishop Josyf Holovač, have been
pressured by other hierarchs in the Soviet Ukraine and in the
West to become part of the L’viv Archeparchy. The Ukrai­
nian press in the West has criticized the “separatist actions”
of Bishop Semedij and Holovač, who, in the words of the
Ukrainian Catholic synod, are attempting “to tear away the
Mukačevo Eparchy from the mother Greek Catholic
Church.” The Mukačevo Eparchy’s second auxiliary, Bishop
Ivan Margityc, resident in Chust, favors joining with the
L’viv Archeparchy and often acts toward that end without
the approval of the eparchy’s ordinary, Bishop Semedij.

Here, in the form of an open letter to Pope John Paul II,
follows the official position of the Eparchy of Mukačevo on
this matter. Bishop Semedij has requested that it be brought
to the attention of the faithful abroad.

Uzhhorod
January 15, 1991

Holy Father!

In July 1990, on the eve of our return from Rome to
Uzhhorod, I and my auxiliary bishop, Josyf Holovač, prepared
a letter for Your Holiness. In that letter we described the
situation in which the bishops of the L’viv Metropolia headed
by his Beatitude Cardinal Myroslav Ivan Lubachivsky tried
to pressure us to agree to unite the Eparchy of Mukačevo
with the L’viv Metropolia. We could not accept this, because
such an agreement might become the cause of unforeseen
results which would have negatively influenced the saving
of human souls.

According to official statistical sources, as of January 12,
1990, there are 1,252,300 inhabitants in Transcarpathia. Of
these, there are 976,749 Rusyns and Ukrainians; 155,711
Magyars; 49,458 Russians; 29,485 Romanians; 12,131 Gyp­
sies; 7,329 Slovaks; and 21,437 Germans, Jews, Belorussians
and others.

For centuries our Mukačevo Eparchy was an “ecclesia sui
juris” [jurisdictionally distinct church community]. Therefore,
we request in the name of the majority of our
faithful and clergy that in the future Your Holiness preserve
for our Mukačevo Eparchy its status of “ecclesia sui juris,”
which places us directly under the Apostolic See.

We are ready to meet and to cooperate with the hierarchy
of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, but we want to preserve
our own national and religious freedom and independence.

Presenting before Your Holiness the filial devotion of our
faithful monks, sisters, and priests, and in the hope that our
requests will be addressed, I close by expressing respect and
love toward you, Holy Father, and toward the Holy Roman
Apostolic Throne of Peter.

Your and the Holy Throne of Peter’s faithful sons,
Josyf Holovač
Auxiliary Bishop
Ivan Semedij
Bishop of Mukačevo

[Then follow the names and signatures with the final state­
ment: “Of the 95 priests of the Greek Catholic Eparchy of
Mukačevo, 73 priests signed this statement.”]
RECENT EVENTS

Minneapolis, Minnesota. On February 2, 1991, the Rusin Association of Minnesota held its Sixth Annual Duchnovyc Dinner in Minneapolis. The event was attended by almost 100 people, some wearing traditional Carpatho-Rusyn folk clothing. President of the association, Lawrence Goga, spoke on the Rusyn revival in the homeland. In addition, the association’s oldest member, ninety-year-old Michael Gladis, whose parents were part of the earliest Carpatho-Rusyn immigration from the European homeland, was honored at the dinner. The meal included traditional Rusyn foods, among them malanka (mushroom soup), pyrohy, and holubky. Carpatho-Rusyn music was provided by the Rusin Players under the direction of the Reverend Vladimir Lecko of St. Mary’s Orthodox Cathedral of Minneapolis.

The Rusin Players performing at the Sixth Annual Duchnovyc Dinner. From the left: David Lucs, Peter Langlais, Tom Korba, and Anne Voytovich.

Bratislava, Czechoslovakia. On March 15, 1991, Dr. Paul R. Magocsi delivered a lecture, “The Revolution of 1989 and National Minorities in East Central Europe,” at the Historical Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. The basic theme of the lecture was that the future well-being of minorities will be possible only when the countries in East Central Europe join the rest of the European Community in which international boundaries will lose their significance after 1992. Slovak historians welcomed what they called Magocsi’s vision of Europe, but they are fearful of what will occur between now and the several decades before the new Europe is formed.

Užhorod, Soviet Union. On March 17, 1991, over 250 people attended a lecture by Dr. Paul R. Magocsi entitled “Carpatho-Rusyns: A New or Revived People,” which addressed the theoretical and practical issues facing the present Rusyn revival in Europe. The event was sponsored by the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns, and following the lecture a cultural program of Rusyn songs and dances was performed in honor of the guest from North America.

Užhorod, Soviet Union. On March 18, 1991, a seminar entitled, “The Persistence of Regional Cultures: Rusyn-Ukrainians in the Carpathians and Abroad,” took place in the chambers of the Transcarpathian National Council (parliament) in Užhorod. This was the first time the Rusyn question was discussed in public by a group of scholars from several countries and of differing intellectual convictions. The seminar was co-sponsored by the Ukrainian National Committee of the International Association of Ukrainianists (MAU), the Ukraina Society, and the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center.

Six speakers discussed the status of Rusyns (only two of whom described them as Ukrainians) in the six countries where they live: Dr. Oleksa Myšánč (Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR, Kiev) on Soviet Transcarpathia; Dr. Mykola Mušýnka (Šaľárnik University, Prešov) on the Prešov Region in Czechoslovakia; Olena Duc-Fajfer (Jagiellonian University, Cracow), on the Lemko Region in Poland; Dr. István Udvari (Bessenyei Pedagogical Institute, Nyíregyháza) on Rusyns in present-day Hungary; Ljubomir Medješi (Ruske Slovo, Novi Sad) on Rusyns in the Vojvodina in Yugoslavia; and Dr. Paul R. Magocsi (University of Toronto) on Rusyns in the United States. Nearly 200 people attended the public seminar, and the questions and sometimes passionate discussion reflected a split between those in the audience of a pro-Rusyn and those of a pro-Ukrainian national orientation. Among the formal discussants were several professors from the University of Užhorod, including Dr. Pavlo Čučka and Dr. Jurij Bâlaga, as well as the Lemko specialist Ivan Krasovskýj from L’viv and Professor Julijan Tamaš from the University of Novi Sad in Yugoslavia.

The following day the members of the seminar were guests of the University of Užhorod where they met and engaged in an often lively public discussion with the over 300 students, faculty, and guests, including members of the executive committee of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns in Užhorod.

Cracow, Poland. On March 19, 1991, in the impressive auditorium of the Polish Academy of Sciences of Jagiellonian University, nearly 100 faculty, students, and interested public came to the seminar on Rusyns (speakers and topics the same as described above under Užhorod, Soviet Union). The seminar, under the chairmanship of the distinguished Slavist Dr. Wiesław Witkowski and conducted by Dr. Andrzej Zigba, was co-sponsored by the Institute of East Slavic Philology and the Chair of Ukrainian Literature at Jagiellonian University, the Institute for Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center.

Among the formal discussants was the Lemko-language poet and cultural leader, Petro Turovanovskij. The audience included the leading Polish specialist on Lemkos, Dr. Roman Reinfuss, observers from the Polish government, and leading activists from the two Lemko organizations: the pro-Lemko Association of Lemkos and the pro-Ukrainian Union of Lemkos. The following day, the seminar participants met at Jagiellonian University’s Institute of East Slavic Philology to observe the progress being made by that institution on its Lemko dictionary project.

Prešov, Czechoslovakia. On March 21, 1991, the international seminar on Rusyns (speakers and topics the same as described above under Užhorod, Soviet Union) was held in
the Rusyn center (Rus'kij Dom) in Prešov. The seminar was co-sponsored by the Philosophical Faculty and Department of Ukrainian Language and Literature of Šafárik University; the Association of Ukrainiains in Slovakia—a national branch of the International Association of Ukrainiains (MAU); and the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center. Over 160 persons attended the day-long seminar.

The discussants, including Dr. Jurij Bača and Dr. Mykola Šteč of Šafárik University, as well as the vast majority of the audience, consisted of the pro-Ukrainian intelligentsia in Prešov. Many of the comments by scholars like Dr. Fedir Kováč and Dr. Mychajlo Roman or by writers like Mychajlo Šmajda and Stepan Hostynjak were critical of what they called the "politicized" pro-Rusyn views of four of the six seminar speakers. Other scholars, like Dr. Vasyl Choma and Dr. Mychajlo Molnar from Bratislava and Dr. Zdeněk Nejedly from Prague commented positively on the scholarly approach of the seminar.

Johnstown, Pennsylvania. On March 23, 1991, the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown (UPJ) held its sixth annual Ethnic Festival. For the fourth consecutive year, the event included a Carpatho-Rusyn cultural and informational exhibit organized by Keith Koshute of Windber, Pennsylvania. He was assisted by Dave Felix of Johnstown and Richard Custer of Palmyra, Pennsylvania. This year’s display was the largest to date at the festival and featured items from the collections of Jerry Jumba of Herminie, Pennsylvania; Pauline Fiorina of Bensenville, Illinois; and Keith Koshute. The exhibit included books distributed by the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, two maps of the Carpatho-Rusyn homeland, icons, Rusyn cultural items, books borrowed from the Penn State Library, Rusyn costumes, videos relating to Carpatho-Rusyns, handouts about Rusyns, and Richard Custer’s photographs of Pennsylvania churches founded by Galician and Subcarpathian Rusyns.

Also participating in the festival was Christ the Saviour American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Cathedral. The Cathedral sold food items, as well as articles from Christ the Saviour Seminary Bookstore. In addition, the Cathedral’s folk dancers performed.

Kucura, Yugoslavia. On March 24, 1991, at the cultural center in Kucura, the second largest Rusyn-inhabited town in the Vojvodina, Dr. Paul R. Magocsi of the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center and Dr. Mykola Mušynka of Šafárik University in Prešov lectured to a gathering of local Rusyn cultural activists and local inhabitants. Magocsi spoke about the current status of Yugoslavia's Rusyns in the context of the 1989 revolutions in East Central Europe; Mušynka reported on the earliest description of Yugoslavia's Rusyns from the 1890s that was authored by a native of Kucura and recently found in Kiev.

Novi Sad, Yugoslavia. On March 25, 1991, the international seminar of Rusyns (speakers and topics the same as described above under Užhorod, Soviet Union) took place in Novi Sad, the cultural center of Rusyns in Yugoslavia. The seminar was co-sponsored by the Rusyn Society (Ruska Matka) and the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center. About 75 teachers, professors, writers, and cultural activists attended the seminar, which was given wide coverage on Yugoslav television, radio, and in the media.

The following day the seminar participants went to Ruski Kerestur, the largest Rusyn-inhabited town in the Vojvodina, where they participated in a meeting with teachers and upper level students at the Petro Kuzmjak Elementary and Secondary School. This institution, with over 700 students, is the only school in the world in which all subjects, from literature and history to physics and computer sciences, are taught in Rusyn. The students and local cultural leaders, like the school’s principal Mychal Varga and editor Djura Papahrhaj, were particularly pleased with how the seminar placed the Rusyns in an international scholarly context.

New York, New York. On Tuesday, March 26, 1991, Professor Janusz Rieger, President of the Research Council of the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences since 1990 and Head of its Ukrainian Language Section since 1972, lectured at the Linguistics Department of New York University on the subject of language in the Carpathian Mountain region. The lecture was sponsored by New York University’s Slavic Department and the Russian/American Interest Society at New York University.

Professor Rieger discussed the development of the Rusyn language, concentrating on the three dialects, Hucul, Bojko, and Lemko, and examining the ethnic and geographical influences exerted on each of them. He drew an analogy between the development of the Rusyn and Macedonian languages, both of which have long struggled to establish their languages internationally as valid literary languages. Macedonian achieved this status soon after the end of World War I. Rieger does not, however, share the optimism of many Rusyns regarding the future of Rusyn language and culture.