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Svetozar Miletić's Slovak Enthusiasms

Abstract: The author points to the ties between Svetozar Miletić, throughout the years of his intense political activities, and other non-Hungarian nations from the Hungarian state area, with a special emphasis on Slovaks. Trying to show the permanence of these ties, the author points both to the significant biographical data from Miletić's life and to important political moments when the historical scene witnessed the appearance of nationally conscious Slovaks, Miletić's friends, associates, as well as those who personally chose death to prove their loyalty to common Slavic struggle for national emancipation.

The most eminent figure of the Slovak national revival, *Ludovít Štúr*, is in the research focus since he had a crucial influence on the political formation of the future pivotal figure of Serbia/Vojvodina.

Keywords: Svetozar Miletić, *Ludovít Štúr*, Serbs, Slovaks, Hungary, Slavs, unity, freedom

Svetozar Miletić entered political history as a great fighter for national rights and freedom of Serbs, Slovaks and Romanians in former Hungary. He became quite popular and beloved among the Slovak people, just as *Štúr* was among the Serbs. His name was spoken with great respect throughout Slovakia. In 1866, Svetozar Miletić and Đorđe Stratimirović, the leader of Serbian rebellions in Vojvodina, became honorary citizens of Martin, the seat of *Matica slovenska* (Slovak Matica) to date. When *Matica slovenska* was forcefully closed in

1875, Miletić, as a Serbian member of the Hungarian Parliament, fiercely protected against that act. His protest was also heard in the European public, and in a gesture of respect and gratitude, medals with Miletić's image were awarded all over Slovakia (Krajčovič, 1970, p. 437).

Due to his advocacy for the rights of the oppressed nations, the Hungarian authorities accused and charged Miletić, while Jozef Škultéty mentions the sacrifice of one Slovak as an important contribution to Serbian-Slovak brotherhood. Namely,

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Svetozar Miletić, lithograph from 1867

Photo: Wikipedia

Bohuslav Tomašik, the nephew of Samuel Tomašik, committed suicide so that he would not be the prosecutor at Miletić's trial (Škultéty, 1927).

Svetozar, the most prominent Vojvodina/Serbian politician, spent three school years in Bratislava.

He studied philosophy at the Evangelical Lyceum (1844–1846) and the second year of law at the Catholic Academy (1847–1848). Miletić's schooling in Bratislava coincided with the time when the Serbian youth in Slovakia was most active and when

Ludovít Štúr, the spiritual leader of the Slovak people, was ideologically and politically most agile.

Miletić formed his views under the direct influence of *Ludovít Štúr*, as stated by Kovijanić (Kovijanić, 1976): “He was his brightest model. With his natural talent, strong energy and enthusiasm, fighting revolutionary spirit, sacrifice in the struggle for people’s rights and freedom, for the unification of Yugoslav peoples, with his views of the world and goals of human life, with his work and preaching Pan-Slavic reciprocity, Svetozar, or Sveslav in Bratislava, irresistibly resembles his great Bratislava teacher *Ludovít Štúr*, an enthusiastic follower and advocate of Pan-Slavic ideas of Kollár, Khomyakov and Mickiewicz. In the 1860s and 1870s he became “the national idol” just as *Štúr* was in the 1840s and 1850s” (Kovijanić, 1976, p. 63).

Miletić began writing poems in the final grade of his grammar school. The journal *Peštansko-Budim-ska skoroteča* of 18th May 1844 published his poem “Obituary on the occasion of Konstantin Marinković’s death”, in which he mourns his professor of religious instruction and ethics, the “wise mentor” who “placed the root of humanity” in his students. At the end of his grammar school, Miletić wrote a decasyllable poem entitled “Eclogue or shepherd’s play”.

In Bratislava, Miletić continued writing poetry which was published in different journals. In 1844, the *Serbian Folk Journal* (No. 15) published his poem “Miloš’s farewell”. In this poem, Miletić depicts Miloš Obilić’s parting from his darling in the eve of the Battle of Kosovo. As the editor of the magazine *Serbian Falcon*, Miletić published a number of his poems in it. Only one of them is well known – “To the Serbian Falcon”, the introductory poem in the first issue of this magazine (January 1846), which was published by Miša Dimitrijević in *Defender*

(*Branik*) for the year of 1885 (No. 5) (Kovijanić, 1976, pp. 41–42).

Miletić became well-known as a poet for youth in the *Slavs (Slavjanci)* (1847). In this journal he published six patriotic and pan-Slavic poems: “To Slavjanka”, “Stefan Dušan the Mighty, Emperor of Serbia”, “Fairy Choir”, “To Serbia”, “Boatmen” and “Salvation Night”. With great enthusiasm he wrote about Slavdom in “From the Urals to the Tatra Mountains, from Ladoga to Shkodra”:

I am a Slav of Serbian descent,
With a fire burning in my chest,
For a new Slavic life.
O, Slavs, dear brothers,
Our hour has struck...

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Risto Kovijanić reveals the fact that Subotić censored Miletić’s poetry and omitted the following verses:

Don’t go to the Labe, oh Vltava,
Flow, flow to the Danube...
We shall destroy our devil (Kovijanić, 1976, p. 51).

There, from all over the Slav region
The boatmen’s’ shout is heard
From the Neva, the Vistula and the Danube
And the Vltava, where the junction is
To Mutuality towards the Mountain
Where the Slavic choir echoes
Giving shape to the future...

The east blazes like dawn,
The flame of the glorious star.

The poem “Salvation Night” has 1,100 verses and is composed in a dramatic form. It is symbolically divided into three cantos: *Evening*, *Dead Hour* and *Dawn*. The third canto predicts the future of the Slavs, in the spirit of Štúr’s thoughts and aspirations. Genius came from Greeks and Romans to Germans, and from Germans it will go to Slavs:

Genius will soon come to Glory (Slavia)
 Now it is still in infancy,
 The future is at its very beginning...

 And the last letters are still rare
 And ring like a riddle,
 The genius of Glory is carrying the keys,
 So that all peoples worldwide can learn it.

Miletić began dealing with politics early, back in Bratislava, where he became the leader of the Serbian youth circles as a staunch advocate of Pan-Slavic ideas. As a Pressburg student and editor of *Slavjanka*, according to Skerlić, he was the soul of the Serbian youth movement at the time; in Buna, he rang the alarm bells in Šajkaška... Back in 1864, in his speech in the Parliament, one Hungarian minister said the following about Miletić’s Novi Sad: “the rebellious Serbian town gave him a headache more than 24 Slovak counties” (Skerlić, 1987, p. 93). At the time of Miletić’s studies, Bratislava was the political centre of Hungary, where Miletić attracted the attention of the Austrian police by his *Proclamation* of 8th February 1847, inviting the Serbian youth to gather around *Slavjanka*.

In his letter of the 17th... 1848 from Pressburg, Štúr wrote in Serbian to Atanas Jovanović: “Dear friend, these are the circumstances into which

our dear brother Svetozar, the most honest Slav, arrives in Vienna, to get insight into everything, particularly into your present intentions and aspirations. Please tell him everything and trust him with everything. It is of great importance for us to know it...” (Popović, 1925, p. 268)

Štúr’s influence on young Miletić was enormous; to him, Štúr was a great model. It can be seen from the letter of 21st February 1856, written by Miletić to Hadžić on the occasion of Štúr’s tragic death: “For nurturing the idealistic enthusiasm, both in me and many chosen young Serbian men, I have to be grateful to Štúr... with his unfortunate fate after the uprising, was a living role model for me, who contributed most to my thoughts shifting from the world of ideals to the field of practical life.” (Savić, 2015, p. 97). Štúr had “an immeasurable influence” on Miletić, according to Mihailo Polit-Desančić (Savić, p. 94).

Immediately after his arrival in Bratislava, young Miletić joined with great enthusiasm the Pan-Slavic ideas promoted by Štúr. His Slavic ideals were inspired by the tradition founded in Novi Sad Grammar School run by Šafárik. Miletić’s activities in Bratislava were permeated by Štúr’s ideas and Pan-Slavic thoughts, which can be seen from his letters, writings and poems. In them, he constantly uses the following terms: “son of Serbian descent” and of great “Slav people”. Miletić always dreams and writes poetry about the great homeland – “Mother Slavia”, “Glory/Slavia”, “Saint Sava’s Slavdom”, from the Urals to Shkodra. “It is Jan Kollár’s *Pan-Slavism*, our homeland, the homeland “from the Adriatic to the Urals” of Štúr’s and all his followers, Hodža’s “Slav Mother, the bright star” from the youth almanac *Plody* (1836), as well as Miletić’s mother

„Glory/Slavia”, “the bright star” and “white dawn” from the youth *Slavjanka*, thus named by Miletić, in which he added “Sveslav” to his name as a symbol of ideological aspirations, just as *Štúr* had taken the name of “Velislav”, or Hurban and Hodža took the name of “Miloslav”, while many of his staunch supporters also took similar names (Pravoslav, Bojislav, Horislav, Dobroslav, Jelislav, Duboslav etc.), according to Kovijanić (Kovijanić, 1976, p. 153)

Štúr also influenced the political orientation of young Miletić. “*Štúr* schooled, among others, national fighter Svetozar and famous scientist Đura Daničić”, according to Jozef Škultéty (Škultéty, 1927, p. 93). “The fact that Serbian people in its critical moments of the 19th century had such a decisive and infinitely selfless leader, who was guided by high awareness of the determination and commitment of the Serbdom and Slavdom, is the merit of great *Ludovít Štúr*”, according to Mita Klicin (Mráz, 2015, p. 70).

Štúr was extremely popular and beloved in scientific, literary and political circles of Serbian Vojvodina and the former Principality of Serbia, and that is why he was appointed a member of the

Serbian Learned Society in Belgrade (present-day Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts). Mráz claims that *Štúr* was planned to take the “position of professor of political science at the University of Belgrade” (Mráz, 2015, p. 70).

Štúr was a personal friend of Jovan Hadžić's, another Miletić's patron, and was in contact with Belgrade, Novi Sad and Karlovci, with the Serbs in Vienna and Pest, with Vuk, Prince Mihailo, Nikanor Grujić, Teodor Pavlović and other outstanding Slavs (Jerković, 1991, p. 95).

Following his teacher *Štúr*, between 1866 and 1882, Miletić delivered several significant speeches in the Hungarian Parliament, defending the rights of the Slovaks. The most important speech is from 1868, entitled “The Question of Nationality”, in which he explicitly defended the Slovaks' right to speak their native language. Because of his pro-Slovak aspirations, Miletić was charged by the Hungarian authorities and he was sentenced to three-year imprisonment. In this manner, he built not only his thought, poems and ideas, but also his own self, in the Serbian-Slovak cooperation and brotherhood.

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