

ŠTEFAN HORVÁTH 1913 – 1993

We will begin a brief account of Štefan Horváth's life in an unorthodox way. Imrich Karvaš, first governor of the Slovak National Bank, expressed the following view at the end of the 1970s: „Mr. Horváth was one of the best young Slovak economists of the time.“

He was born on 23rd June 1913 at Staré Hory, although some documents give nearby Dolná Turecká as his birthplace. From 1923 to 1931 he studied at the Andrej Sládkovič Gymnasium in Banská Bystrica. He studied economics at the Czech Technical College in Prague, which included the Commercial College in that period. During his studies in Prague, he was a member of the Slovak academic society Detvan and for certain time its chairman. He graduated in May 1935 with the title of engineer. He belonged to the small group of Slovaks chosen for study abroad on the basis of academic success, and so gained the opportunity to widen his knowledge in France and improve his French. He also had good knowledge of German, English, Polish and partly Hungarian.

From 15th March 1939, he held the position of personal secretary to the minister of the economy Gejza Medrický, and later from 1st May 1940 to the end of May 1950 in the Headquarters of the Association of Slovak Industry, the general secretary of which was Peter Zaňko. Therefore, he was in direct contact with people who substantially influenced the economic development of Slovakia, built up the Slovak economy and endeavoured to prevent its domination by German capital. In this way, he also got to know governor Karvaš.

Š. Horváth was also present, when they took steps in the summer of 1944 to place sufficient stocks of strategic materials in central Slovakia. In spite of this, after the end of the war, his activity was evaluated as „service to capitalism“ and he was designated a supporter of Slovak bourgeois national economic theory. This, and probably also the hostility of Gustáv Husák, with whom he came into conflict as a student because of different views, was enough to get him imprisoned on remand for three months. Like many others, he was permanently marked by these events, although the charges were proved to be unjustified.

On 1st June 1950, he was accepted for work in the



financial accounts office of the Slovak Magnesite Works in Bratislava, but after only three months (28th August 1950) he moved to work at the newly formed State Bank of Czechoslovakia in its Bratislava Regional Institute (Oblasťný ústav), where Pavol Majling was director. The Regional Institute, and later from 1958 the Bratislava Regional Branch, gained in Horváth a defined personality for all im-

portant and conceptual work. He was involved in the creation of important materials of an analytic, conceptual and instinctive character, and in producing a whole series of essential banking documents, such as the volume of papers from a conference on payment methods in June 1959. These had a long-term influence on banking practice in Slovakia. However, it was difficult and complicated to reduce the negative results typical of the Soviet system of payments by means of „collection orders“. Š. Horváth organized and led training, courses and consultation on introducing new methods in credit or payments, introduction of new accounting methods in companies and institutions.

He wrote many expert books, banking instructions and university textbooks. Writing and publishing were the dominant component of his creative activity. This was why his work at the state bank ended on 1st April 1964, „on the basis of a request from the Economics University in Bratislava“. He gained the academic rank of senior lecturer (docent) there and positively influenced a whole generation of bankers, including the author of this text.

Together with R. Návrat and J. Valach, he was a member of the banking periodical „Hlas banky“ (Voice of the Bank), which had its seat in Bratislava, but served the whole of Czechoslovakia. In difficult times, when mindless centralism, dogmatism and the cult of personality were consistently applied, these three men published a periodical filled with different ideas, intended to improve banking activity and relations between people. „Hlas banky“ was a continuation of „Slovenský peňažník“ (The Slovak Financier), which struggled with slightly different problems but of a similar character. They wrote things the leadership did not like to read.

Š. Horváth also became one of the first amateur historians of Slovak banking. The team of „Hlas



banky“ were the first to present facts about the past of finance in Slovakia from its origin until 1950 in three volumes of „Peňažníctvo na Slovensku“ (Finance in Slovakia) in cooperation with a series of voluntary assistants, who collected information from bank staff throughout Slovakia. The cultivation of banking language was also connected with writing of the history of finance in Slovakia. This was not only to prevent the language of banking being corrupted by inappropriate expressions penetrating into Slovak from Prague circulars. Precise language made it possible to speak and publish the truth.

Thus, Štefan Horváth was a man of the pen. His translations of literature from French and German also confirm this. The bank official and later teacher

was able to find the time to translate such demanding authors as Romain Rolland, Stendhal, Lion Feuchtwanger, Louis Aragon, Guy de Maupassant, Alphonse Daudet, Gustave Flaubert, André Malraux, Pierre Boule, Robert Merlee, Franz Werfell. He enriched Slovak culture with the intellectual worlds of these and other world personalities.

The banking official, university teacher Ing. Štefan Horváth had many fine human qualities: tenacity, good-nature, self-sacrifice, unlimited willingness and consideration for others. He gave from what he had without self-interest and did not expect much in return. He died on 22nd May 1993 in Bratislava.

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