

“Suppressed by swords and lead”: Radical Slovak and Polish Newspapers Combat Colonialism

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Benedict Anderson famously demonstrated newspapers were one of the tools by which nationalist movements created a sense of peoplehood, an “imagined community” in South America, Asia, and elsewhere.¹ Somewhat paradoxically, in the US, newspapers also helped solidify a white identity among immigrants from Eastern and southern Europe. These newcomers to the Caucasian imagined community read stories often dismissive of the national aspirations of people in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, those whom President William McKinley paternalistically discounted as “our little brown brothers.” As scholars such as David Roediger and Mathew Frye Jacobson have shown, for new immigrants from Europe, assimilation to America entailed asserting one’s whiteness and fitness for incorporation into the body politic.²

Between 1880 and 1914, roughly 2.5 million Poles emigrated to America, with half a million Slovaks and a quarter million Rusyns joining them. These newcomers settled into industrial cities of the northeast and Midwest in the era when the US was solidifying Jim Crow segregation toward African Americans at home and championing gunboat diplomacy subordinating people of color abroad. America’s “yellow journalism” conveyed the message of supposed African and Asian inferiority for migrants who could read English.³

While Slovak, Polish, and Rusyn newcomers encountered many American institutions denigrating African Americans and all non-Nordics, Slovak and Rusyn newspapers, too, quickly adopted a condescending, anti-Black tenor. And although many East Europeans were no strangers to subjugation in Mitteleuropa, in the US, immigrants were often unsympathetic to the plight of colonized people. Slovak and Rusyn newspapers applauded gunboat diplomacy and called into question the fitness of Cubans, Puerto Ricans, or Filipinos for self-government. June Granatir Alexander has

identified immigrant newspapers as agents of acculturation, with their frequent features on American pastimes, culture, and history.⁴ But in the early twentieth-century Slovak-language press, such lessons contained racialized meanings, as when papers lectured immigrants on the virtues of the Monroe Doctrine and Teddy Roosevelt's big stick. In papers such as *Slovák v Amerike* (the oldest continuous Slovak paper, in 1919 "enjoying a healthy weekly circulation" of thirty-six thousand); *Jednota* (paper of the First Catholic Slovak Union fraternal society) and *Amerikansky ruscky viestnik* (paper of the Rusyns' Greek Catholic Union), each with forty thousand readers; and *Národné noviny* (newspaper of the National Slovak Society), with twenty-nine thousand subscribers, articles resonated with messages familiar from English-language yellow journalism: Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans were ill-suited to self-government.⁵

Yet not every Slavic-language newspaper slighted anticolonial aspirations of African and Asian peoples. Into the 1940s, the Slovak socialist newspaper *Rovnosť ľudu* (*Equality for the People*) unequivocally condemned American empire and European colonization of Africa and Asia. The paper was the journal of the Communist-affiliated Slovak Workers Society, which was a member organization of the leftist fraternal, International Workers Order, reaching twenty-six thousand five hundred and fifty readers by 1938. In the 1940s, a Detroit-based Polish newspaper, *Głos Ludowy* (*People's Voice*), similarly aligned with Communist-affiliated organizations such as the Polonia Society of the IWO, likewise consistently advocated an end to European and American colonialism. *Głos Ludowy*, according to Dirk Hoerder, topped out at a circulation of ten thousand, although both papers were often purchased by IWO lodges and other leftist sites, so readership was almost certainly larger.⁶

Although *Rovnosť ľudu*, which in June 1935 was rechristened *Ľudový denník* (*People's Daily*), was red-baited out of existence by the end of the 1940s, the Polish paper survived until 1979, and into the 1960s championed African and Asian independence movements and condemned American adventures in places such as Vietnam. These papers often mirrored the policies of the Communist Party USA, including its anticolonial advocacy. Articles from the English-language *Daily Worker* were often reprinted in Slovak or Polish, which the House Un-American Activities Committee would later regard as proof these papers were subservient to an alleged international Communist conspiracy. Both papers, however, produced their own editorials advocating freedom for African and Asian colonies and produced their own content on these matters and incorporated other material such as dispatches from the Federated Press news service, and letters from readers denouncing colonialism or championing Asian and Latin American freedom movements. Such publications suggest some Polish and Slovak Americans rejected the strident anticommunism expressed by many people in America's East European ethnic communities following World War II, as well as resisting the dominant conservative "white ethnic" position on race relations that has been so ably documented by Thomas Sugrue.⁷

Rovnosť ľudu and *Głos Ludowy* both rejected a narrow focus on the immediate concerns of their immigrant communities and instead consistently adopted an editorial

policy with a transnational, anticolonial focus. While in the early years of the Slovak paper a strident denunciation of capitalism ran through coverage of anticolonial struggles, by the World War II-era Popular Front, the paper and its Polish counterpart framed support for colonial independence as commensurate with progressive Americanism, referencing Supreme Court justices, presidents (Franklin Roosevelt chief among them) and documents such as the Atlantic Charter that expressed support for self-determination to back their persistent anticolonialism. The tactics and tenor of the papers' advocacy of anticolonialism changed, as a vision of a potentially progressive strain in American culture was expressed in these papers, but the commitment to African, Asian, and Latin American self-determination remained.

The Communist immigrant newspapers indicate that for a minority of Slavic American workers solidarity with anticolonial struggles was possible across racial and international divides. As Ieva Zake and Joanna Wojdon demonstrate, following World War II anticommunist sentiments predominated in Polonia, Slovak America and other East European communities. Such a position, though, often entailed a strident support of military suppression of anticolonial movements, and even advocacy of the use of nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union, as well as China, Korea, Vietnam, and other countries resisting dominance by the West. The president of the conservative Polish American Congress, for one, urged the US to deploy nuclear weapons against Moscow as well as Communist Asian regimes.⁸

Such armed "solutions" to colonial problems were categorically and consistently rejected by leftist newspapers. The thousands of readers of progressive Polish and Slovak newspapers suggests too, we must question the universality of the paradigm of conservative ethnic Americans hostile to nonwhites. Although *Rovnost' l'udu* and *Głos Ludowy* reached fewer readers than "mainstream" immigrant papers, an examination of their colonial coverage can explore the extent to which interracial solidarity was expressed in a Socialist milieu, as well as resistance to the conservative brand of "whiteness" some immigrants exhibited. These papers saw their readers as part of an international working class, and thus moved beyond a narrow focus on the immediate interests of their readers. Exploring these questions enables scholars to interrogate the universality of the rise of a conservative, "unmeltable white ethnic," and examine how immigrants balanced, class, ethnic, racial, even international solidarities.⁹

"Endless Big Headaches for Uncle Sam"

Nonsocialist papers' coverage expressed little sympathy for nonwhites. In 1902, *Jednota* ran a story headlined "Glorious Cuba," but the article had little praise for passive recipients of American benevolence:

If President [Theodore] Roosevelt had not been at the helm of the United States on this glorious day, the Cuban people today

would barely have a life; ... the president, who himself personally fought for the freedom of the island of Cuba, really made them free ... He has fulfilled all the dreams and hopes of all Cubans and of all the noble people of the world.¹⁰

Such self-congratulatory rhetoric was par for the course in approving America's slide into imperialism. To be sure, Jacobson notes some Polish newspapers such as *Dziennik Chicagoski* sometimes noted the hypocrisy of America policing the Caribbean when it did nothing to curtail lynching of blacks at home. Yet the "prism of race" that Jacobson argues prevented even sympathetic Poles from always affording equal rights to Cubans or Filipinos operated for Slovaks, too.¹¹ When Black Cubans organized to oppose segregation and assert political rights in their country, the Slovak press expressed alarm. Although this mirrored the dread English-language papers expressed, the alacrity with which Slovak-language papers such as *Jednota* adopted this stance is striking. In January 1907 *Jednota* called the prospect of a Black republic in which whites would take orders from those of a different race "a public menace threatening the island." The writer informed readers US troops deployed to Cuba "will never tolerate an impermissible rule of blacks over whites."¹² Five years later, when a Black Cuban political party was successful at the polls, another paper, *Slovák v Amerike*, applauded the use of Marines to suppress the "rebellion" by "bandits" and "great enemies of order."¹³

Filipinos resisting rule by Uncle Sam were also labeled "bandits," restless "savages," and worse,¹⁴ while Haiti's periodic resistances to American hegemony were cause for critique. "This little republic of black citizens has supplied endless big headaches for Uncle Sam," *Jednota* complained in 1908,¹⁵ while the Marines' occupation of Haiti, beginning in 1915, was celebrated by *Národné noviny* as just punishment for a nation of "bandits" contemptuous of private property.¹⁶ *Jednota* likewise mixed English terms—"Monroe Doctrine," "the big stick"—in its coverage of the necessity of intervening in Haiti.¹⁷ In the early twentieth century, assertions of self-government by Black or Asian people were axiomatically labeled banditry in Slovak accounts. Such papers were crucial mechanisms for transmitting tenets of United States culture and history, June Granatir Alexander and other scholars have noted. That such messages were racialized is less often remarked.¹⁸

Articles in immigrant papers treating the rebellious Black Haitians as bandits mirrored the mainstream press's frequent contempt for nonwhites. Condescension of Caribbean peoples, though, occasionally was mixed with an uncomfortable awareness American colonization replicated Old World patterns. The Rusyn paper *Amerikansky rusky viestnik* in 1919 described in a mix of Rusyn and English the pretensions of San Juan's "black gentlemen" and "black ladies" (*čiernych džentlemenov, čiernych lejdis*), following minstrelsy's pattern of lampooning nonwhites' pretensions. The writer, though, admitted, "[t]he Puerto Ricans are a little like the black Carpatho-Rusyns,"

who had recently won their freedom from Hungary. Atypically, at least rhetorical solidarity was expressed with Puerto Ricans, suggesting immigrants' stance toward colonized peoples could be fraught.¹⁹

While the Rusyn paper said nothing on the colonized status of *čiernych džentlemenov* of Puerto Rico, who would not gain even limited self-government until 1952, Communist *Rovnost' l'udu* was not so silent. As early as 1928, in an article titled "Give me Liberty or Give me Death," the paper noted a goodwill tour of Puerto Rico by Charles Lindbergh was interrupted by an appeal by islanders for self-rule, echoing Patrick Henry's famous words in the resolution presented to the aviator.²⁰ *Rovnost' l'udu* noted Lindbergh "did not notice this mighty cry of the slaves for freedom at all," instead focusing in his speech on aviation, "perhaps because if they are really serious about 'liberty or death,' airplanes can easily fulfill their last request ... [T]hey can bring several thousand pounds of explosives with them." The article also noted Lindbergh's visit to Guatemala was similarly disrupted by demonstrators cheering for Nicaraguan freedom fighter Augusto Sandino, then battling US Marines occupying his country.²¹

In 1928 US bombs did rain down, on Nicaragua. An editorial, "American Imperialism and Nicaragua," hailed resistance by Sandino, "otherwise called a bandit by the American imperialists." The editorial said it was not freedom or civilians' lives the US was interested in protecting, rather the billions Wall Street invested there. Sandino continued fighting the Marines occupying his country until his murder in 1932.²² Similarly, *Rovnost' l'udu* charged "American Imperialism Strangles the Republic of Panama" in reporting on the Coolidge administration's demand to nullify Panamanian election results. "In other words," the article charged, "the government in Washington has the right to laugh at the domestic affairs of a foreign land, all for the sake of American capitalists who want to seize the natural wealth in Panama."²³

During the CPUSA's "Third Period," the Slovak paper was strident in denouncing US suppression of Latin American countries, framing this as proof of the moral bankruptcy of capitalism. While the paper's anticolonialism persisted, by World War II and its aftermath the paper, as well as the Polish-language *Głos Ludowy*, advocated a Popular Front line in which it framed support for anti-imperial independence movements as consistent with the better, progressive strains of American institutions and history.

In the late 1920s and early thirties, though, assertive anti-imperialist reportage resonated with some Slovaks. Chicago teenager Anna Lacko wrote to *Rovnost' l'udu*, denouncing military intervention in China and Nicaragua. Noting a protest demonstration against intervention in Nicaragua had been violently broken up by the police, Lacko concluded, "[c]onditions in the US are getting worse every day and therefore it is our duty to help our parents fight against the bosses and Wall Street. We must help our parents protest this sending of marines etc. to foreign countries, because it creates enemies." Readers of *Rovnost' l'udu* were learning to equate exploitation at home with suppression of colonized peoples abroad, sentiments rarely expressed in mainstream newspapers.²⁴

When it came to Africa and Asia, nonradical Slovak newspapers suggested it was something intrinsically backward about Africans and Asians, not colonialism, that kept them impoverished. *New Yorkský denník* and *Slovák v Amerike* both reported on cannibalism, deploying a neologism, “ľudožrúti” (“people chewers”) to convey the savagery of colonized peoples.²⁵ A reporter reassured nervous readers Sumatrans were said not to have a taste for white meat, and in any case the practice was “lingering” but “dying,” sure to “be destroyed by the penetration of European culture.”²⁶ Such articles were often accompanied by stereotyped illustrations of cannibals displaying human skulls outside their huts.

Only *Rovnosť ľudu* among Slovak papers questioned the veracity of tropes of non-European savagery, arguing in 1930 the Dutch rulers of New Guinea exaggerated tales of native savagery as a pretext for “terrorism” against anticolonial revolts.²⁷ The same year, the paper published accounts of the French military bombarding “Indo-Chinese” villages to suppress an anticolonial uprising. Despite French colonial “extreme terrorism,” “[t]he whole of Indochina ... is boiling over in revolution,” the paper reported. *Rovnosť ľudu* hailed the revolt as “the culmination of the uprising of awakened Asian nations against their oppressors.” The newspaper went on to state “53 bombs were fired at [Co An] village, ... which killed 23 natives and injured many. When the natives tried to save themselves by escaping to the rice fields, they were strafed by machine guns.”²⁸ The plight of the Vietnamese, under French and then American sovereignty, would in subsequent decades be highlighted in radical papers.

Nonleftist Slovak newspapers, however, had earlier portrayed any anticolonial demonstrations as a sign of nonwhite dysfunction; rebellion was depicted as indicative of irrational, uncivilized behavior. In 1911, for example, West Africans rebelling against French rule were dismissed by *Slovák v Amerike* as “ceaselessly restless savages,” with no consideration of whether resistance to colonial government had any merit. Similar diagnoses had pathologized fugitives from slavery in antebellum America; now immigrants read of the “unstable natives” of Africa.²⁹

As M. Mark Stolarik and Konštantín Čulen have noted, there were dozens of Slovak-language publications in the US, many only lasting a few years. These papers represented various religious and secular fraternal societies, as well as independent commercial dailies and weeklies such as *Slovák v Amerike* and *New Yorkský denník*.³⁰ On many other matters, these papers expressed editorial differences. In coverage of colonized peoples, however, during the early twentieth century, the more long-lasting papers representing large fraternal societies such as *Jednota* (of the First Catholic Slovak Union), *Národné noviny* (of the National Slovak Society), *Amerikanský ruský viestník* (of the Greek Catholic Union), as well as *New Yorkský denník* and *Slovák v Amerike* followed the jingoistic lead of English-language “yellow journalism” in publishing condescending and contemptuous portrayals of Asians and Africans. Tropes of “savagery,” “bloodthirsty,” and “deceitful and treacherous” behavior by “fanatical” bandits frequently recur in all these papers in reports on Africa and Asia.³¹

“Civilization Lies Only in Europe”

When Italy in 1911 invaded Libya, reports of Italian brutality against resistance appeared in American papers, but these were quickly dismissed as unfounded rumors. *Národné noviny*, newspaper of the NSS, leaped to Italy’s defense, even though in other contexts Slovak papers published stereotypes of Italian migrants as innately violent and criminal. But in the battle to spread European rule in Africa, the paper depicted Rome as a beacon of civilization unjustly accused of wrongdoing. Any Italian “sharp rigor” against the “Arabs” of Libya was justified, the paper argued, by “Arabs’ treachery.” As further proof Italy was the injured party, *Národné noviny* printed a Slovak translation of a letter an Italian professor had sent to the *New York American* defending his country’s Libyan expedition. The Slovak paper offered no criticism of his assertion it was the “rebellious natives” who “used dirty tactics against the Italians.” How a people defending their homeland against invasion could be “rebellious” the scholar did not say. Reflecting the Social Darwinist hierarchy prevalent in the early twentieth century, *Národné noviny* accepted his assertion “Civilization lies only in Europe.” The irony that US immigration restrictionists in this era dismissed Slavic and Italian migrants as unfit for inclusion in the “white” republic went unremarked.

The implications for European “civilization” at large were spelled out by the professor, for if Libya succeeded in defeating Italy, he warned “the Arab and Muslim populations in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco after their decades-long wars and struggles would now easily rise in revolt, following the flags of holy war. This would deal a fatal blow to European rule in Africa.”³² Readers of *Národné noviny* were urged to see Italians as fellow Europeans, civilizers facing savage foes.

As late as 1937, *New Yorkský denník* similarly editorialized that European imperial rule, even in places such as Rhodesia, was bringing civilization to Africa.³³ Only radical journals discounted the dominant narrative of benevolent empire; where *Národné noviny* saw “savages,” *Rovnosť ľudu* saw freedom fighters. In *Rovnosť ľudu* prospects of “a fatal blow to European rule in Africa” were welcomed, an editorial policy much in line with the anticolonial policy of the Communist International (CI), to which the US Workers (Communist) Party belonged. In this respect, the paper’s editors acted more in line with their socialist allegiances than with the explicitly Slovak concerns of non-leftist immigrants.³⁴

The paper was almost gleeful in reporting on “England’s fear of Bolshevik propaganda in Africa.” Great Britain’s foreign secretary traveled to Paris and Rome seeking agreement “with the French government as holder of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia and with the Italian government as holder of Tripoli ... on the danger to the Great Powers towards Communist propaganda in the African and Asian colonies, where the action of the emissaries creates confusion everywhere and revives rebellions.”³⁵ While the Soviet-led CI indeed supported anticolonial movements in Africa and

elsewhere, such uprisings were indigenous affairs, not instigations hatched in Moscow, as conservatives such as Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain feared—or editors of *Rovnost' l'udu* hoped.

Still, a series of cartoons reprinted from the Workers (Communist) Party's *Daily Worker*, with Slovak captions, demonstrates the paper's commitment to anticolonial movements. "Depicting the United Front on May Day in the Far East" by Robert Minor portrays strong, pick-, hammer-, and rifle-wielding giants, "China," "India," and "Africa," greeting revolutionaries.³⁶ In the middle of them, a tiny "Kipling" scribbles in a notepad, "The East is the East and the West is the West and Never the Twain Shall Meet," but a class-conscious cockroach tells him, "You're a Liar."³⁷ Another cartoon condemned "social democrats' work in parliament" supporting suppression of the Rif rebellion in Morocco. A lackey, "Imperialist Socialist Flunkeys," shines the boots of a preening, uniformed "French Imperialism" rooster. A biplane is ready to fly "To Morocco," with boxes labeled "Poison Gas," "Ammunition," "Bombs."³⁸ Indeed, the French and Spanish brutally suppressed the Rif rebellion, solidifying European rule for another thirty years.³⁹

Editorials condemned imperialism in Morocco and Tunisia and its enablers, noting French Communists were active in opposing colonial empire.⁴⁰ A cartoon by radical artist O'Zim depicted a hapless rooster, "Imperialist France," chained to a ball, "Militarism," and mired in "Financial Quicksands." An American eagle with a top hat labeled "Morgan," though, flies to the rescue with "Rations" and the "Dawes Plan" in its talons. US financiers and governments continued to bail out bankrupt European colonial empires for decades.⁴¹

"Bring on Your John Bull!"

Despite European brutality in suppressing rebellions, *Rovnost' l'udu* was confident liberation was near. Great Britain was skewered as a cook broils imperialists in a frying pan marked "Colonial Revolt." "India! Egypt! Bring on your John Bull!" he shouts.⁴² The frustration of colonists facing newspaper headlines "China, India, Africa in Revolt" again delighted O'Zim. A simian thug of a millionaire waves the newspaper at a young priest and exclaims, "You have served your God Very Inefficiently—What the Hell Do You Think I Endow Missions For?"⁴³ The folly of Europe clinging to its imperial dreams in spite of growing anticolonial unrest was frequently pointed out by the paper's cartoonists. In 1935, *Ludový denník* (as the paper was rechristened) ran a cartoon, "Trifling with Toys," showing a foolish, top-hatted "Imperialism" juggling with bombs marked "Europe," "Africa," and "Far East."⁴⁴

Following the lead of the CI's position on oppressed nations, in *Rovnost' l'udu's* analysis only "if the proletariat succeeds in bringing the peasantry and the oppressed peoples under its leadership" would capitalism be toppled. The paper noted a new scramble for Africa was occurring, with the Spanish aiding the Rif rebellion against French control of Morocco until their forces were attacked, too. Then the Europeans

agreed on a division of Morocco. Similar agreements were detailed in Somalia, Sudan, and elsewhere to divide the colonies “peacefully,” or at least so no European wars developed. “That’s how the capitalists keep bumping into each other in the colonies,” the paper surmised. “The world is so small for the needs of capital that everywhere the great powers step on each other’s toes and this helps the natives, of course.” Fortunately, it added, European workers knew they were the ones asked to sacrifice in blood and money to prop up empires. With perhaps too much faith in class solidarity across racial lines, the paper added that white workers “must also know that it is in their interest when blacks, Indians, Chinese, and Arabs drive the European capitalists out of their countries.”⁴⁵ Unfortunately many English, French, and other predominantly white workers remained committed to the racialized “psychological wage” DuBois wrote of in maintaining their support for empire in places such as Kenya and Algeria well into the 1960s. Confidence that class solidarity would triumph over white privilege was sometimes misplaced.⁴⁶

Indeed, the pages of the Slovak paper often provided ample evidence Britain and France were in no hurry to relinquish their colonies. The paper noted one hundred fifty years of British control of Sierra Leone had brought nothing but misery to those under colonial rule; a second article asserted “[m]ost, if not all of Africa is a land of slavery, where the natives are, if not openly, but really the slaves of the whites. ... [M]ostly the emphasis is only on their exploitation and little or nothing is done for their mental and economic uplift.”⁴⁷

The paper’s condemnation of white rule in Africa was unrelenting.⁴⁸ “Dead Children in Africa, Indicters of Imperialism,” reported the abysmal mortality rates of Black infants, which in Johannesburg were more than five times greater than for whites.⁴⁹ The horrible conditions already by 1929 spurred demonstrations by Black South Africans in Durban and elsewhere that were lethally suppressed by white authorities. “This is how civilization will claw its way through the jungles of Africa!” *Rovnost’ l’udu* sardonically concluded.⁵⁰

The situation in the Belgian Congo, which at the turn of the twentieth century had been exposed as the site of particularly egregious atrocities, had not, *Rovnost’ l’udu* argued, improved in any way by 1929. Famines that killed thousands were the direct result of Belgian misrule. Practices of forced labor in colonial industries enriching Brussels “result in men dying like flies in the prime of their lives.” Similar horrors of French “bourgeois imperialism in Africa” were revealed.⁵¹

During the 1930s and into World War II, as Communist Party members entered Popular Front coalitions with progressives in the labor unions of the Congress of Industrial Organizations and fraternal benefit societies such as the Slovak Workers Society of the IWO, there was a change in tone to some of the paper’s anticolonial coverage. Independence movements in the so-called “Third World” were portrayed as in line with the progressive strains of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, as well as earlier progressive figures from American history. Some of these ideas on colonial liberation advo-

cated in *Rovnosť ľudu* also seem to have gained a wider purchase. Anticolonialist rhetoric became more accepted, with critiques of empire and colonialism sometimes appearing not just in socialist journals but in *Národné noviny*, organ of the National Slovak Society and the mainstream *New Yorkský denník*, papers formerly accepting the dominant hierarchical view of non-Europeans as unfit for self-government.

In the more progressive framework of the Great Depression and World War II other Slovak papers joined *Rovnosť ľudu*'s critique of quasi-colonialism. A 1937 *New Yorkský denník* editorial outlined Latin American discontent, for

the “dollar diplomacy” of the United States started to treat the countries of Latin America with a heavy hand. ... American military vessels often were sent to various Caribbean ports and the American marines have often controlled the political situation in Honduras, Haiti, Nicaragua, and the Mexican borderlands.

The editorial applauded the “Good Neighbor Policy” of Roosevelt, “thus showing the American republics the path to peace—through economic and cultural cooperation.”⁵²

While the paper seemingly accepted the days of neocolonialism were over, it nevertheless toed the country's white line in its coverage of Puerto Rico's Ponce Massacre, which it reported was the result of “Nationalist fighting,” not the firing on peaceful marchers that it was. The police shooting on Palm Sunday 1937 resulted in nineteen deaths and more than two hundred people wounded. The article, though, blamed the “considerable unrest” in Ponce on the Nationalists, alleging “witnesses saw some rebels shoot at and battle with the police officers.” The brief article also argued “Pedro Albizu Campos, leader of the Nationalist Party, ... wanted to establish his own private army.”⁵³

Thousands of Slovaks and other Slavs belonged to the International Workers Order, the International Labor Defense and other left-leaning organizations and could have read in the *Labor Defender* those marching in support of the pro-independence Albizu Campos were unarmed and ambushed by military police. An article written for the *Labor Defender* in April 1937 by Congressman Vito Marcantonio says it all: “Uncle Sam in Puerto Rico: A Complete Exposure of Yankee Imperialism's Attempt to Crush the Movement for Independence Among the People of Puerto Rico.”⁵⁴ In mainstream Slovak sources, however, Puerto Rico's plight was treated unsympathetically. As Lorrin Thomas notes, outside of Hispanic and radical circles, Puerto Rican aspirants to independence had few friends, even in the liberal Roosevelt years.⁵⁵

Of the Slovak papers it was only *Ľudový denník* that denied Albizu Campos's followers were culpable for the Ponce Massacre. Already in 1936 the radical paper denounced the “Terror in Puerto Rico” it saw in the imprisonment of leaders of the Nationalist Party. In a Slovak translation of a *Daily Worker* editorial, the paper declared, “[t]he leaders of the nationalist movement in Puerto Rico are now being persecuted

everywhere, and the eradication of every sign of freedom on the island is now the order of the day.”⁵⁶ *L'udový denník* asked: “Can the people of the United States remain silent at this demonstration of Roosevelt’s ‘good neighbor’ policy in Puerto Rico?” and immediately concluded, “[g]ood neighbor? Good lynchers of colonial freedom fighters!”⁵⁷

“Mounds of Corpses”

Similarly, the Communist paper printed articles supportive of Filipino independence campaigns in America’s Pacific colony, noting with indignation the bloody military suppression of demonstrators. In focusing the editorial gaze on America’s complicity in colonial lands’ subjugation, the paper was atypical; by linking racial segregation and violence against nonwhites at home to ongoing imperialism, the paper was likewise unique in the Slovak community. In 1930, the paper reported that in Manila “labor organizations, nationalists and students have organized large demonstrations throughout the islands against the persecution of Filipino workers in California, where a few days ago white chauvinists murdered a Filipino just because he danced with a white girl at a party.”⁵⁸ Although ruled by the US, Filipinos were treated as second-class subjects, Asians ineligible for citizenship or even permanent emigration to the mainland, and in California segregated from white Americans. The paper predicted “the demonstrations will give a new impetus to the independence movement.”⁵⁹

When the Sakdalista movement organized to demand independence, in large part because of the racism directed toward Filipinos by white teachers, demonstrations were quashed by the military, whom the paper called “Wall Street lackeys.”⁶⁰ Sixty-five demonstrators were killed as Sakdalista opponents of rule by Washington were “suppressed by swords and lead.”⁶¹ Rejecting government assertions Sakdalistas, whose name means “accuse,” were planning armed insurrection, the paper accused the US of tyrannical purposes, asserting “it is absolutely obvious that this is a bloody and brutal suppression of peaceful demonstrations against the imperialist constitution.”⁶² Official pronouncements that “peace and order have been established,” the report added, “can only mean that Wall Street will carry out its intention to keep the Philippine Islands an American colony even at the cost of mounds of corpses.”⁶³

L'udový denník continued, too, to be a lonely voice advocating African independence, as when the paper denounced fascist Italy’s 1935 invasion of Ethiopia. The mood of most white Americans toward Mussolini’s conquest of Addis Ababa can be gauged by a *New York Sun* story mocking the disinterest Harlem residents displayed in Communist-sponsored attempts to raise troops and funds to defend Ethiopia. “There are no tom-toms beating on Lenox Avenue and New York’s Negro population is not advancing with shield and assegai upon the unoffending residents of nearby Little Italy,” the paper reported.⁶⁴ Only small groups of Blacks were said to be engaging in “keen speculation as to what, if anything, the rest of the civilized world will do in the

event that Mussolini issues the order to fire.” With or without “shield and assegai,” Harlem was not quite part of the civilized world. The *Sun* allowed “[o]f course, there are certain elements which are more demonstrative than this. The Harlem Communists, for instance, are raising the usual rumpus.”⁶⁵ A *New York World-Telegram* article a month later noted a Communist-led “Hands Off Ethiopia” parade in Harlem drew more white than Black marchers.⁶⁶

On the danger the fascist invasion of Ethiopia posed to world peace, the Slovak paper did what it could to raise “the usual rumpus,”⁶⁷ and in tandem with other publications and organizations in the Communist orbit, publicized solidarity rallies like the one derided by the *World-Telegram*.⁶⁸ At one rally, the paper reported, Black Communist Harry Haywood urged support for Addis Ababa.⁶⁹ Other rallies collecting funds and medical equipment for Ethiopia were publicized.⁷⁰ But the unwillingness of the government to intervene in support of Addis Ababa was condemned, and the Slovak paper also criticized the country’s English-language press for libeling Ethiopians fighting the Italian army as “bandits.”⁷¹ The deaf ear the international community turned toward Ethiopia’s pleas for help was likewise faulted. “The League of Nations wants to be rid of Ethiopia,” the paper complained.⁷²

The paper took aim at Rome’s claim it was “civilizing” Ethiopia, exposing in an editorial what such colonial civilization had meant in the Congo and other European-run corners of Africa. “Civilization in the true sense of the word means looting and tormenting the indigenous population. A whole wagonload of paper would not suffice to describe the incredible atrocities perpetrated on the native population by the imperialist ‘civilizers.’ ... [H]undreds of thousands, if not millions, of African natives were so mutilated in the Congo alone by [the] King of Belgium.” The horrible record of imperialists necessitated support for Ethiopia’s cause, but also “because an independent Abyssinia will always be a model for all colonial nations that will be able to win independence if they fight against their enslavers.”⁷³

The paper publicized the positive role model Ethiopia had been for the colonized Black world. Demonstrations from the Caribbean to Egypt to South Africa in support of Ethiopia also heard speakers denounce their own colonized state, evidence, the paper reported, “of rising national consciousness and increasing unity in the struggle for independence.”⁷⁴ Black dockworkers in Durban, South Africa, refused to load cargo for Italy, while thousands of people in Britain’s African colonies donated money and volunteered to serve in defense of Addis Ababa. *Ľudový denník* reprinted the words of the *African Morning Post* of the Gold Coast (Ghana) to explain why colonized Africans saw Ethiopia’s cause as their own: “If we let Ethiopia, the only black kingdom, be broken, then all our hopes are doomed and our aspirations extinguished ... On the other hand, let a new Africa be launched in the humiliation of Italy by Ethiopia, for which a grateful and friendly Africa will work and respond with all comradely people, black, white, yellow, or red.”⁷⁵ For progressive Slovaks receptive to *Ľudový denník*’s coverage, messages of international, interracial solidarity seem to have resonated no less strongly.

During World War II, some sympathy for nonwhites appeared in mainstream papers, too. *Národné noviny*, newspaper of the National Slovak Society, called for better relations with Caribbean and South American nations. The paper ran a reprint from the *CIO News* on “Why We Fight,” explaining the importance of dealing justly with “Our Colonial Allies.” “The United Nations’ cause has today millions of allies whose strength has not yet been fully used,” the article said. “The peoples of the South Pacific, the populations of India, of Africa, and even of South America have not yet thrown their full strength into the battle.”

The article argued the lingering bitterness from the “big stick” policy had prevented enthusiastic participation of Latin Americans in the Allied cause. Particularly condemned was “[o]ur policy in Puerto Rico, holding it in the deepest subjection, economic and political,” which the writer called “a black spot on America’s honor.” Anticolonialism was twinned with a call to end “anti-Negro discrimination in this country,” which had aided Japan in “seeking to win the peoples of the South Pacific to their side by propaganda about ‘co-prosperity,’ and the fight against white supremacy.”⁷⁶ Whether sincere or borne out of wartime necessity, the newspaper called for an end to colonialism.

A brief window of possible anticolonialism had opened up. In reporting of Gandhi’s release from prison after a fast, *Národné noviny* noted

the Indian people for years have demanded freedom from English domination. Maybe a time will come when the Atlantic Charter will also enter into force among the countries of colonial peoples. Surely the crowds of millions of people would ... butt in that the Atlantic Charter must be applied all over the world—and not just to the big shots.⁷⁷

This is not to say Slovaks entirely jettisoned the white privilege they had worked so hard to claim. While the Indian independence movement was acknowledged as deserving of respect, *Národné noviny* and *New Yorkský denník* had little to say about whether Britain and France should loosen their grips on Africa. And while the National Slovak Society’s paper ran articles proclaiming “Race Hatred is Sabotage,”⁷⁸ other Slavs, like their fellow white ethnics, participated in neighborhood improvement associations to bar Blacks from their neighborhoods, and when this failed, joined white-on-Black race riots in Detroit, Chicago, and elsewhere.⁷⁹ Were articles on the need to give India or Puerto Rico a fair shake embraced by every Slovak reader? Doubtful. The paper went out to forty thousand National Slovak Society members, many of whom lived in places where neighborhood improvement associations proliferated, suggesting race thinking had developed among some of *Národné noviny*’s readers. Even editors who otherwise applauded anticolonialism and racial unity, when bristling at anti-immigrant and anti-Slav sentiments expressed by William Randolph Hearst and the Daughters of the American Revolution, declared, “the Slovaks will not be treated like [N-word] or Mongolians

in America, nor like little hop frogs in Australia.”⁸⁰ Immigrant newspapers were palimpsests of race, and during World War II there was much to choose, progressive as well as retrograde, in colonial and racial matters.

Fortunately, leftist media advocated anticolonialism without slipping into racist thinking. In Detroit, Stanley Nowak assumed editorship of Polish *Głos Ludowy*, but already in 1941 hosted a weekly Polish-language radio program. As a former United Automobile Workers organizer and sitting Michigan state senator, Nowak devoted much of his program to advocacy of New Deal social programs and support for CIO unions directly benefiting his constituents, but he found time to condemn racial discrimination and weighed in on the necessity of anticolonialism. On June 29, Nowak declared,

We must work towards the defeat of the Nazis, towards the establishment of the right of all nations to their independence, including even those nations which are today subject to Great Britain, such as India. The defeat of Nazi Germany cannot mean a replacement of the German empire with any other empire. All empires and all imperialism, either German or British, or any other, must be done away with.

Two months later, Nowak assessed the Atlantic Charter for his audience, saying Roosevelt and British prime minister Winston Churchill had to go beyond their promise they desired no territorial annexations from an Allied victory. “In my humble opinion, much more should be said on this question,” Nowak broadcast. “Not only that the nations fighting Hitler should not desire to acquire any new territory, but a clear statement as to the future of such colonial nations as India. We cannot effectively fight Hitler’s imperialism as long as we condone the subjugation of any nation by another.” At other times Nowak championed African Americans’ civil rights, urging both Michigan and the United States to adopt permanent fair employment practices committees. His newspaper, as well as Slovak *Ľudový denník*, likewise forcefully editorialized for racial equality. Evidently enough Polish and other white ethnic Detroiters saw no cause for alarm in Nowak’s progressive stances, for he was elected for ten years to the State Senate.⁸¹

The Polish paper similarly editorialized on the need for an Allied commitment to anticolonialism, stressing the Atlantic Charter had to apply to India and “colonial nations” had to be convinced the war was really about freedom. In calling for Indian independence, the paper said, “[i]n general, it must be said that the English policy in India threatens all of the United Nations.” Nowak’s radio addresses on the matter were reported, and a cartoon faulted “Britain” for sitting on top of a struggling India as “Japan” watched and grinned.⁸² “Let him get up and fight!” the paper urged.⁸³ France’s heavy hand in its North African colonies came in for criticism, too.⁸⁴

In nonleftist circles, rhetoric of colonial self-determination quickly disappeared with the Allied victory, and a European hold on colonies continued for another twenty years. But within weeks of war's end, the Communist Slovak paper pushed back against rapid Allied backsliding. A cartoon hailed "Indo-Chinese patriots" holding aloft a banner, "Democracy," and defiantly resisting French attempts to reimpose colonialism. "They are not our enemies," ran the caption.⁸⁵ This 1940s anticolonialism sought to fit calls for Asian independence into a progressive Allied, and American, effort, with homages to the Atlantic Charter. While earlier, the paper had denounced US foreign policy as thoroughly orchestrated by Wall Street, now the actions of the president were praised—provided support for democracy extended to Asia and Africa.

When London backpedaled on this commitment, however, England, too, was criticized for suppressing independence movements in Asia and for police violence against demonstrators in Delhi. When Churchill, now leader of the opposition, advocated continued British imperialism, the paper ran a cartoon, "This is what Churchill calls 'freedom' and 'democracy.'"⁸⁶ A gangsterish "British-US Imperialism" in a millionaire's top hat pointed a gun at a hand waving a banner, "Colonial Freedom," from a jail cell's window. Indeed, while India gained independence in 1947, Britain took few other steps to dismantle its empire. This prompted the paper to warn, in another cartoon, "Explosives in British Pot May Burn the Cook." A fearful colonizer-cook watches in alarm as "India," "Egypt," and other comestibles explode.⁸⁷

"Winnie the Moocher"

The rapidity with which Churchill called for an Anglo-American alliance against the Soviets also was condemned by *Głos Ludowy*. In 1946, a Polish American veteran writing to the paper belittled the Conservative leader's efforts, noting "[i]t seems as if it were only yesterday that Winston Churchill had paraded around Moscow in a Russian turban, begging alms for the future of his imperialist policies, while most of us thought his ambitions were to fight to knock out Fascism. Today, we see 'Winnie the Moocher' attired in a new kind of chapeau."⁸⁸ Mocking the British statesman with the Cab Calloway tune may have elicited some chuckles but calls for an Anglo-American alliance against the Soviets and a tight British hold on her colonies made leftists' blood boil. Then, too, this reader's comments suggest the paper was more than recirculator of the Communist Party's official line or reprinter of *Daily Worker* articles. A week later, the paper published a photo of picketers demonstrating at a hotel where Churchill was speaking. "Churchill War Mongering Means American Blood" read one sign. Another said, "The Sun Never Sets on the British Empire. God Does Not Trust Churchill in the Dark."⁸⁹

African American leftists continued to champion African independence and *Głos Ludowy* publicized their campaign.⁹⁰ A "great gathering of the Council on African Affairs at Madison Square Garden," readers learned, heard from Paul Robeson and passed a resolution urging President Truman and the United Nations to see that "all

the promises of democratic rights and self-determination of all peoples be realized immediately” and “all colonial nations [were] accepted into the family of the United Nations.”⁹¹ Again, the paper now tried to portray anticolonialism as fully in line with Allied and US commitment to democracy; twenty years earlier, it would have been inconceivable for the Slovak paper to have said a nice word about a president. Nevertheless, even in 1946, the possibility of US support for anticolonialism was questioned by another speaker, CIO vice president R. J. Thomas, who asked: “How can you expect Jimmy Byrnes of South Carolina and Tom Connally of Texas to bring freedom to the colonial nations?” The Secretary of State and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee were products of the segregated South, where, Thomas noted, “90% of the black people ... were denied the vote.” The twinning of Jim Crow segregation and disfranchisement at home and continuing colonial oppression abroad was in 1946 an unusual pairing by a Slavic publication. Whatever the impediments, the article asserted, “American Slavs are joining in this call for freedom for African nations and the abolition of imperialism.”⁹²

Subscribers to *Ludový denník* and *Głos Ludowy* continued to read of the necessity of interracial, international solidarity. The Polish paper likewise belittled Byrnes’s hypocrisy in criticizing the Soviet Union’s human rights record while defending segregation at home and British colonialism abroad.⁹³ *Głos Ludowy* also ran a flattering book review of *Africa Fights for Freedom* by the CAA’s Alphaeus Hunton. The review, written by Louise Thompson Patterson, African American vice president of the IWO, presented for Polish Americans “the urgent need of strengthening their alliance and common struggle with the Negro people against American reaction. One important path toward strengthening this alliance, this united front, is an understanding of and all-out support for the fight which the 180 million people of Africa are waging today for their freedom.”⁹⁴ Many Polish Americans were already by 1950 engaged in violent resistance to Black residential mobility or other attempts to gain civil rights. Here a Polish paper presented an African American Communist’s argument that “all of us who are interested in cementing Negro-white unity must pay more attention to Africa and the African people.”⁹⁵

The linkage between anticolonialism and commitment to racial equality for African Americans at home in *Ludový denník* and *Głos Ludowy* was atypical in the Slavic press. But in this their editorial policy mirrored the policies enunciated by Robeson and the Council of African Affairs, progressive commitments the papers continued to avow in the face of Cold War backlash.

After red-baiters got done with immigrant communities, for nonleftist Slavs the brief Popular Front focus on America’s “black spot” in Puerto Rico ended, and Slovak newspapers of the 1950s dismissed anticolonialism as dangerous Communism. Of the growing conflict in Vietnam, *New Yorkský denník* warned Moscow was aiding a rebellion against “the legal government of Indochina.”⁹⁶ No mention was made that this “legal government” was Paris’s colonial regime. The paper reported the Secretary of State declared Ho Chi Minh was merely a Soviet agent, no friend of true Vietnamese

independence. Already Cold War battle lines were drawn as the Slovak daily repeated accusations that would justify another twenty-five years of American intervention in Asia.⁹⁷

By 1954, the paper warned of the “[l]arge new offensive by the Communists in Indochina.”⁹⁸ The paper noted American B-26s had already intervened in the conflict, and the Secretary of State had some “serious advice for the Allies about Indochina,” advice highlighting the “red menace” to America’s interests.⁹⁹ The article omitted any consideration of Asian peoples’ right to self-government. Coverage of anticolonial struggles in the mainstream Slavic-language press mirrored most English-language dailies, where during the escalating Cold War, consideration of “Third World” independence movements was assessed through the Manichean prism of anticommunism.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, by 1950, *New Yorkský denník* was labeling “Communism a tool of armed imperialism”; the paper ignored the brutal suppression by Britain and France of African and Asian attempts to end actual imperialism.¹⁰¹ By the post-World War II years, the nonradical papers’ brief flirtation with anticolonialism during the Popular Front was a path they, like most Slavic Americans, had already forgotten was even considered.

“Exporters of Death”

Yet *Ludový denník* and *Głos Ludowy* resisted the embrace of white backlash as well as punitive government harassment leveled at radical organizations, and continued to champion freedom for Africa and Asia. As noted, the Slovak paper was red-baited out of existence by 1948,¹⁰² but the Polish paper managed to outlive the Red Scare, even though editor Nowak was threatened with deportation before he was exonerated in 1957. *Głos Ludowy* continued to publish, and into the early 1960s advocated colonies’ independence. *Głos Ludowy* even presciently faulted America’s growing involvement in squelching Vietnam’s quest for self-rule.

To be sure, following World War II, negotiating the changing politics of Polonia was often difficult for *Głos Ludowy*. The paper ignored mounting evidence of atrocities committed by the Soviet Union in Poland and elsewhere and continued to hail Moscow as a peace-loving regime and to advocate rebuilding wartime US–Soviet friendship. Such stances likely made it difficult for many Polish readers to give any credence to the paper’s advocacy of anticolonialism in Africa and Asia, even if they had been willing to be persuaded. As Ieva Zake notes, following World War II, Polish and other East European displaced persons offered a vocal brand of anticommunism in their organizations and newspapers, perhaps understandable for refugees from Stalinism.¹⁰³ But in the rapidly escalating Cold War, leftwing Poles were caught in the crosshairs. Within months of World War II’s end, conservative Poles in Detroit were lambasting *Głos Ludowy* editor Nowak and his political allies as “communistic” for ignoring Poland’s “rape” by “Russian Mongol soldiers” and serving as “Stalin’s Lublin agents in Detroit,” equating the state senator with the quiescent Communist government the Red Army installed in Lublin.¹⁰⁴ In the same flyers and newspapers, however, the growing racial

insensitivity of many Polish Americans was exhibited, too. Articles in Polish and English warned “Poles Should Know Facts About Negroes Moving In,” and denounced Nowak’s and mayoral candidate Richard Frankenstein’s advocacy of residential integration.¹⁰⁵ “White Neighborhoods Again in Peril,” headlines screamed alongside denunciation of *Głos Ludowy* for condoning the crime of Yalta.¹⁰⁶ Anticommunism was deployed against Nowak and his paper, but such sentiments coincided with hostility to “Negroes,” labeled “an element which breeds crime, immorality and rowdyism,” indicative of the difficulty the leftist paper faced in advocating for people of color.¹⁰⁷

Six years later *Głos Ludowy* reported that a “gang of DP’s [displaced persons] of Lithuanian descent” broke the windows of the Chicago home of the editor of *Vilnis* (*Wave*), a leftwing Lithuanian newspaper, then attacked his newspaper’s building and beat up a reporter who tried to stop what the Polish paper called “Storm Trooper tactics.” Many East European displaced persons who entered the postwar US indeed had at least some history of collaboration with the Third Reich. In the Chicago incident, what particularly angered the Lithuanian DP’s was that *Vilnis*’s editor was hosting Black delegates to an American People’s Congress for Peace, suggesting the muscular anticommunism of East European displaced persons at least sometimes coexisted with hostility toward interracial organizing.¹⁰⁸

Despite the Cold War’s challenges, *Głos Ludowy* remained a strident critic of imperialist foreign policy. “Is America Becoming the Slaughterer of the World?” a columnist wanted to know. “Washington speaks a language of concern for human rights,” “Polonicus” wrote. “But every thug and former fascist and international gangster can be confident of receiving assistance if he proposes to drown out the democratic longings of his fellow countrymen in seas of blood.”¹⁰⁹ Examples of military aid sent to squelch rebellions in Korea, Indochina, and Greece were offered. The American Slav Congress’s magazine, the *Slavic American*, similarly noted the *New York Post* had editorialized against US militarism in Greece, China, and elsewhere, lamenting, “[w]e are exporters of death to parts of the world which have only corpses for export.”¹¹⁰

By 1953, columnist Casimir Nowacki explained for *Głos Ludowy*’s readers “Why the U.S.A. is Losing Friends.” President Eisenhower’s shipment of arms to Indochina to protect what he called a source of America’s vital natural resources rankled Nowacki, who commented “if the President took some time off from his golfing, he might become aware that a different situation exists in Asia, which is not so conducive to the harboring of such views.”¹¹¹

The paper also publicized the few political figures who by the 1950s still questioned dominant Cold War militarism. Supreme Court justice William Douglas, the Polish paper noted, had published in *Look* magazine an indictment of US militarism in Asia. Pentagon policymakers, Douglas argued, ignored Asian peoples’ “intensive nationalism” and “burning concept of equality for the colored races, a resolve to restore the colored people to a place of dignity and respect.”¹¹² Allowing generals to set foreign policy, combined with axiomatic anticommunism, “means we have become

partners (in the eyes of the peasants of Asia) with the corrupt and reactionary political powers of that continent.” The justice faulted US saber-rattling in Korea, which he argued had made war inevitable. Douglas, though, singled out for condemnation military aid for French colonizers in Vietnam. “If any power had done to us what the French have done to the people of Indo-China, we would produce the most glorious revolution the world ever witnessed,” he wrote. The persistent appeals to a Popular Front brand of progressive Americanism again is a difference in tone from *Rovnost’ l’udu’s* earlier virulent denunciations of Wall Street-backed militarism. No capitalist newspaper or Supreme Court justice in 1920s America was deemed worthy of praise. But now commitment to anticolonialism could dress in American clothing, the Polish paper hoped. Still, while Douglas’s article appeared in one of the country’s most popular magazines, it had little effect on US policy as the country continued wading “waist deep in the big muddy,” as singer Pete Seeger put it.¹¹³

Although a minority voice, *Głos Ludowy* continued to question US militarism in Asia, faulting Washington’s arming of South Korea’s dictator Syngman Rhee as the real aggressor in the Korean War. The paper noted Rhee was calling for an invasion of the North a year before war broke out; when war erupted in June 1950 the paper called for an end to US intervention, and cited reports of South Korean police brutality and executions of Rhee’s enemies to question Seoul’s democratic credentials.¹¹⁴ The paper published letters to the Korean people from George Wucinich, an American Slav Congress (ASC) official and World War II veteran of the Office of Special Services (the Central Intelligence Agency’s precursor), saying many Americans wanted no part of President Truman’s “police action.”¹¹⁵ The paper also reported on an ASC resolution sent to the president and UN secretary general calling for the war’s end. Particularly alarming to the ASC was some congressmen’s call to use atomic weapons in Korea—a demand echoed by the conservative president of the anticommunist Polish National Alliance.¹¹⁶

Atomic warfare was avoided, but columnist Nowacki decried America’s use of napalm against civilians in Korea. “This diabolical use of napalm bombs to terrorize and annihilate people has isolated the American war makers,” Nowacki wrote. “America is alone in this shameful venture. The people of the world recognize such Hitlerian tactics as the mark of an enemy of mankind. The ‘reservoir of good will’ has been emptied.”¹¹⁷ In Korea, thirty-two thousand tons of napalm were dropped on civilian populations, causing tens of thousands of deaths. The flammable gel was even more extensively, and lethally, deployed in Vietnam; in neither war were American authorities brought to justice for using this deadly flammable chemical.¹¹⁸

American involvement in Vietnam, too, raised alarms for *Głos Ludowy*. The paper exposed French colonists’ concentration camps, where women working for the independence movement were incarcerated in abysmal conditions.¹¹⁹ All such measures by the newspaper proved unavailing, and by early January 1954 the paper reported the French had announced their army had been decimated by the Vietnamese People’s Liberation Army. US vice president Nixon, in visiting Indochina, encouraged

Paris to keep fighting, but the Polish paper noted the US was already funding the bulk of the French military effort.¹²⁰ The paper also reminded readers near World War II's end that President Roosevelt had written in support of Indo-Chinese independence. "France has milked it for 100 years," he wrote. "The people of Indochina are entitled to something better than that."¹²¹ Regrettably, FDR's words were forgotten as the US replaced France in opposing Ho Chi Minh. In the leadup to the Geneva Convention to hammer out Vietnam's postcolonial future, the Polish paper printed an article to counter Washington propaganda. The paper noted even military analysts cited in *Newsweek* admitted "98 percent of the Indo-Chinese population would vote in favor of the Ho Chi Minh government in a free election." The paper also commented: "The American people looks on with horror and opposition to the possibility of blundering into the new Korea."¹²² The paper reported "stiff opposition" from Congress met "Vice President Nixon's unofficial announcement that the United States is prepared to send troops to Indo-China." One senator "spared no words to condemn such a move. He said such an intervention in Indo-China 'will cost at least 500,000 US troops and at least \$100 trillion in borrowed money.'"¹²³ Regrettably, resistance to militarism was ephemeral, although the prediction of the number of troops deployed to Vietnam at the height of US involvement in 1968 proved prescient. The same senator exclaimed, "[t]he current crusade to send troops to Indo-China, with incalculable costs and incalculable results, is the most insane gamble in American history," perhaps an accurate forecast in hindsight.¹²⁴

Again, a more nuanced view of America's democratic potential emerges here than in the earlier, Manichean portrayal by *Rovnost' l'udu* of a thoroughly immoral Wall Street-dominated capitalist America. Some political and editorial voices, the Polish paper allowed, spoke in opposition to the suppression of Asian independence movements, an admission that in the CPUSA's 1920s to early 1930s "Third Period" had been inconceivable.

"Providence Has Given Us a Hydrogen Bomb"

Such progressive voices, though, were often drowned out by the Red Scare's anticommunist chorus. More immediately alarming in 1954 were calls to deploy hydrogen bombs to bring Ho Chi Minh to bay. *Głos Ludowy* reported that Karol Rozmarek, president of the stridently anticommunist Polish National Alliance (PNA), had called for the use of hydrogen bombs on the recalcitrant Việt Minh. Rozmarek "also called for the sacrifice of US troops to stifle the national aspirations of the country's people," a demand that soon came to fruition. Following World War II and what was perceived by many Slavic Americans as America's sacrifice of their homelands to the Soviets at Yalta, organizations such as the PNA, with nearly three hundred thousand members, became fervent supporters of hardline brinkmanship. Rozmarek's call for nuclear warfare to "save" East Asia from Communism was echoed by figures such as Air Force General Curtis LeMay, who threatened to "bomb [North Vietnam] back into the stone

age.” Rozmarek’s bellicose remarks alarmed the leftist paper, which quoted his speech at length. “If America’s help is necessary to stop the Reds in Indo-China, let’s hold them back with hydrogen bombs and the breasts of American soldiers,” he told a Chicago convention. “Providence has given us a hydrogen bomb in this current crisis. It is the only effective weapon to save the already conquered countries.”¹²⁵ While nuclear warfare did not come to pass, US officers infamously shrugged off the saturation bombing, fragmentation-device, and napalm attacks that devastated wide swatches of “free-fire-zone” Vietnam. “We had to destroy the village to save it,” one major told a reporter. Many Polish and other Slavic Americans by the 1950s linked Americanism to a fervent anticommunism, and moved further to the right, in their eyes a rational response to revelations of atrocities such as the wartime Soviet murders of Polish officers in Katyn Forest. It also, however, in the case of figures such as Rozmarek, inured them to the brutality of America’s actions abroad. *Głos Ludowy*’s opposition to military adventures in East Asia was a minority view among Slavic Americans, who embraced a muscular anticommunist crusade. In this, Polish conservatives reflected, too, the position of Washington policymakers, who could only assess the validity of anticolonial movements through the prism of Manichean Cold War thinking, whether such movements benefited a capitalist “us” or Communist “them.”¹²⁶

Głos Ludowy, though, resisted such thinking, and frequently foregrounded Africa’s growing anticolonial movements, too. Reporting in 1951 and 1952 on protests from Egypt to Sudan to Rhodesia, the paper crowed, “Western Imperialism Threatened in Africa.” “The independence movement, engulfing all of Africa today like a great flame,” would soon expel foreign exploiters, the paper predicted, highlighting protests at mines in French Morocco and British Rhodesia. The mines were controlled, it noted, by conglomerates whose directors included former Secretary of State Byrnes and General Lucius Clay, former commander of Berlin’s US sector. Noting the miserable wages of Arab workers at the Moroccan mine and the violent suppression of demonstrations, the paper said, “[t]he peoples of color are fed up with exploitation, slavery, and poverty. They want bread, freedom, and peace.”¹²⁷ A second article commented, “We are conscious that the wave of national liberation movements is reaching the most distant and backward places. ‘All Africa will be lost to us’—thus alas, speaks the correspondent of the Americans’ *New York Times*!—‘when the 200 million Negroes inhabiting the heart of the Dark Continent at last start claiming their rights.’”¹²⁸ Most of the paper’s venom was directed at the worst atrocities of British and French colonial regimes. In Kenya, the colonial government brutally suppressed Kenyan rebellion against Britain’s white settler regime, with hundreds of thousands herded into open-air concentration camps behind barbed wire. Starvation was rampant in the camps, situated in the colony’s most arid lands. The Polish paper highlighted British ferocity, running photos of “Kikuyu tribesmen” charged with supposed membership in the “Mau Mau” society. “This charge is an excuse used by the British to smash the nationalist movement in the colony,” the paper said. “At the heart of the problem is the seizure of the best land by the British, and the desperate plight of the natives in their own

country.”¹²⁹ Caroline Elkins convincingly demonstrates it was the Kikuyu people who were the victims of Britain’s terrorism.¹³⁰ In 1950s Slavic America, *Głos Ludowy* was one of the few voices speaking this uncomfortable truth to colonial power.¹³¹

The paper exposed the roundup of six thousand villagers near Nairobi, and subsequent torching of the ethnically cleansed villages by police and white settlers. In an apt reference resonant for Slavic Americans, the paper said Kenyans “suffered the same fate as the Czech village of Lidice during World War II.” The Nazis had destroyed Lidice in retaliation for the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich. In Kenya, the paper noted “[t]he white government issued instructions for white settlers—men, women and children—to shoot black natives if they appeared suspicious to them.” Elkins has demonstrated many white Kenyans avidly, bloodily complied in what the Polish paper accurately labeled “British terror.”¹³²

Worse followed:

An area of 2,000 square miles, inhabited by the Kikuyu tribe, which is the fiercest group against colonial oppression, has been turned into one large concentration camp. The cattle belonging to this tribe, which are the only source of income for the population, were confiscated and cultivated by the colonial authorities. ... To this day, there is probably not a week without new news about the mass shooting of the local population.

Whites’ “massacres and pogroms” were condemned for uprooting millions of Kikuyu onto “reservations,” likely, even the *London Observer* admitted, to cause mass starvation. The Kikuyus’ plight was twinned with atrocities in Rhodesia, but the paper was confident “[t]he heroic resistance of the Kenyan people echoes widely among the oppressed colonial nations of Africa, awakening the spirit of the struggle for national and social liberation.”¹³³

France’s regime in Algeria was likewise condemned, but by 1960 the paper was gratified President Charles de Gaulle realized continued colonial rule was untenable. Soon, though, white settlers in Algeria rebelled against the grudging decolonizing policy in a *pied noirs* revolt, and military officers stationed in Africa waged war against the president’s policies.¹³⁴

White settlers’ attempts to hold onto their homes and an “anachronistic colonial system in Algeria” suggest white supremacy’s durability. But just as the French populace was divided on the Algerian question, in America, Slovaks and Poles, sometimes perceived as quintessentially conservative white ethnics, were not univocal in their reactions to race and colonialism. Leftwing papers were minority voices, but nevertheless strident voices for inter-racialism and anticolonialism. *Głos Ludowy*, for one, was confident “the colonial nations are winning.”¹³⁵

Conclusion

An exploration of *Rovnost' l'udu* and *Głos Ludowy* enables one to see the Polish and Slovak immigrant communities as more capacious politically than is sometimes portrayed. Further, the case of these papers' readers may create room to nuance explorations of the ways in which immigrants "became white." The editions of these Slovak and Polish papers suggest not all immigrants were prone to invariable "white ethnic" hostility to people of African and Asian heritage. Both the Slovak and Polish leftist papers were consistent in their analysis of the justice of anticolonial struggles in these continents. The framing of anticolonialism underwent a change, with the Slovak paper's 1920s to early 1930s characterization of the unalloyed evil of American capitalist society altered during the Popular Front and early postwar era to an appeal to the progressive strains in US politics and culture to back democracy for non-Europeans. The country's "better angels," President Roosevelt, Justice Douglas, and the liberal *New York Post*, were praised in a manner that was absent in the earlier era. The commitment to anticolonialism remained consistent, however. Moreover, these papers suggest we must rethink whether all Americans of East European heritage were so reflexively anticommunist as is sometimes alleged. These positions were not unanimously embraced, as figures such as Stanley Nowak and his *Głos Ludowy* demonstrate. Interracial solidarities were possible on the left, in papers where conservative demands for nuclear war against Vietnam, or even Moscow, were condemned, not celebrated. The sympathy and solidarity expressed toward anticolonial movements in such newspapers suggest scholars may have to broaden a consideration of the varying degrees to which class allegiances, interracial solidarity, and white Americanism contended to win immigrants' "hearts and minds."

Notes

- ¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).
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- ¹¹⁷ “Protest the Terrible Crime of Napalm Bombing,” *Głos Ludowy*, November 15, 1952, 2 of 2nd section.
- ¹¹⁸ “Why They Hate Us” by Branko Marcetic, *Jacobin Magazine*, November 22, 2017, https://jacobin.com/2017/11/korean-war-united-states-nuclear-weapons?fbclid=IwAR3zhoOzIGfrpSzB4vD1bWtBCulr8y9Ubpmi_8sARqtYdMXphzbytm6KJUs
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