

Slovak President steps down

By Christine Spolar=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia -- Slovak President Michal Kovac stepped down Monday, ending a tumultuous five-year term in a political deadlock that has left this young democracy's parliament divided and unable to agree upon a successor.

Kovac, Slovakia's first president, spent most of his time in office in a bitter struggle with Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar in which the two repeatedly battled over democratic reforms and allegations of financial sleaze.

In Kovac's final days in office, Meciar used Slovakia's poorly written constitution -- and the often-wobbly political opposition here -- to engineer a political impasse that has left the largely ceremonial president's office empty. In the process, Meciar acquired much of the office's power during a critical election year. Although its powers are limited, the president does have the authority to convene parliament.

The moves by Meciar -- who has dominated Slovak politics since the country's birth following the division of Czechoslovakia in 1993 -- have further underscored the difficult post-Communist transition underway here and added to Western concern over Meciar's commitment to democracy. U.S. and European officials have criticized Slovakia for the pace and depth of its democratic reforms.

Meciar is "a powerful man now,

and this gives him more influence," said Kalman Petoec of the Hungarian Civic Party, which represents members of Slovakia's ethnic Hungarian minority. "It's really going to be much more of a problem when the election campaign starts. He will have all the power, to sidetrack and to create legal chaos. And he does that well."

Under Meciar, Slovakia's minorities, media and courts have been bruised. But the charismatic and often bullying leader has had a lock on the prime minister's office, save for a brief rout in 1994 that was the first public twist in the Kovac-Meciar saga. A onetime Meciar ally, Kovac split with him over ethical differences and helped push a successful vote of no-confidence in Meciar's government.

That move haunted Kovac when Meciar returned to power after parliamentary elections later in 1994, and the feud between the two men intensified.

"It's led the whole society to be divided," said Brigita Schmognerova, a leader of the Party of the Democratic Left, heirs to the old Communist Party. "On one level, we're a nation between Meciar and anti-Meciar forces. On a broader level, it's a difference of opinion over what makes a democracy."

The Slovak president is chosen by parliament, but with the government and opposition deeply divided, no group in parliament has been strong enough to produce a winner. A first round of voting last month ended in deadlock. On Thursday, parliament

will try again, but neither candidate -- a writer and a railway worker -- stands a chance.

As Kovac, 67, exits without a successor, under the constitution some of the president's powers devolve to the government and, essentially, Meciar. With no specified constitutional timetable for filling the presidency, Meciar will be able to consolidate his powers and thwart the results of parliamentary elections this fall if he chooses to do so.

As the law now reads, Meciar -- in the absence of a president -- will assume the right to convene parliament. But if he doesn't like the makeup of the new parliament, nothing ensures that he, in fact, will call the assembly.

Western observers have concluded the government deliberately botched a referendum last May favored by Kovac but opposed by Meciar that would have allowed voters -- rather than parliament -- to choose the country's president. That referendum's results were voided, and Kovac ordered a new referendum for April 19. The government opposes a new referendum, although the constitutional court has ordered the April vote to proceed.

Even before the latest crisis, Slovakia's democratic report card -- for respecting human rights and legal institutions -- had fallen far short of the neighboring Czech Republic, Poland or Hungary. These weaknesses have left Slovakia out of the first round of NATO enlargement and talks on European Union integration.

2 arrested in major jail food bribe scam

By Josh Meyer and Eric Lichtblau=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES -- Cracking an alleged conspiracy costing taxpayers untold sums, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department has arrested one of its administrators and an independent food contractor on bribery charges involving millions of dollars in padded contracts for jail food.

Authorities said their 15-month investigation -- triggered by a series in the Los Angeles Times in late 1996 -- uncovered a pattern of corruption spanning at least two years.

At the center of the alleged scheme to manipulate contracts was the No. 2 official in the Sheriff's Department's \$20 million food operation -- civilian employee Fredrick Gaio. In interviews with the Times, investigators said that, despite indications of earlier problems, Gaio's alleged wrongdoing went undetected because of serious lapses in management and oversight of food operations in the nation's largest jail system.

Authorities said they managed to trace more than \$9,000 in alleged bribes from food contractor Rick Hodgkin to Gaio but that they suspect far more money changed hands. Gaio allegedly received lease payments for a car and an all-expenses paid trip to Las Vegas -- complete with limousine

Europe these days. The "Communist Manifesto" has in many ways become a relic and a museum piece. Under the guise of rejecting narrow-minded interpretations of Marx, President Jiang Zemin has embraced capitalist economic reforms including mergers and acquisitions, stock ownership, privatization, and worker layoffs -- all measures Marx and Engels might have viewed dimly.

It is only the latest chapter in a history of adapting the "Communist Manifesto" to Chinese characteristics.

The manifesto was first translated in part into Chinese in 1906. But the translator took some liberties. For example, the translator used the term "common people" instead of "workers," because largely rural China would have to rely on peasants to rise up against the imperial regime.

The historian Jonathan Spence has noted that the manifesto's classic conclusion was altered in the translation. The original read: "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite!"

The Chinese translation read: "Then the world will be for the common people, and the sounds of happiness will reach the deepest springs. Ah! Come! People of every land, how can you not be roused?"

Marketing Marx in China

By Steven Mufson=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

BEIJING -- Entrepreneurs of the world, step right up! Get them while they last!

China is issuing a special limited edition of the "Communist Manifesto" to mark the anniversary of the tract written 150 years ago by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Written as revolution was spreading across Europe in 1848, the manifesto has now been turned into a marketing opportunity. Never mind the masses. China is issuing 5,000 commemorative copies of the work and 500 copies of a collectors' edition, the state-run New China News Agency said last week.

"In China the manifesto has fostered generations of Communist stalwarts and proletarian revolutionaries," the agency said. And now those who have struck it rich during the eco-

nomie-reform era can buy a special one. It didn't say how much a copy will cost.

The new editions feature replicas of the cover and contents page of the original German-language edition as well as reproductions of Marx's handwriting.

Although enshrined as one of the Chinese Communist Party's basic texts and still routinely given homage at major party functions, the "Communist Manifesto" is out of step with the current policies of the ruling Communist Party in Beijing.

Marx and Engels called for revolution, but the current Chinese government craves stability. Marx sought equality; China has created vast inequalities as it tries to create financial rewards for its most productive workers and business people.

Marx and Engels criticized excessive returns on capital; the Chinese government is striving to boost returns on foreign capital. Marx and

Engels appealed to the workers to unite, whereas the Chinese government now is trying to prevent the uniting of workers -- especially the 10 million who are either on furlough with subsistence wages or who have been laid off from state-owned enterprises.

Marx looked to China for solace in 1853, as revolution was fading in Europe. He predicted the imminent demise of the Qing Dynasty -- 59 years prematurely -- and said that collapse in China would spark revolution in Europe.

"It may safely be augured that the Chinese revolution will throw the spark into the overloaded mine of the present industrial system and cause the explosion of the long-prepared general crisis, which, spreading abroad, will be closely followed by political revolution on the continent," Mark wrote.

Instead, China is trying to export industrial products, not revolution, to

end corruption in tribal government, protect sovereignty rights and give local communities authority over their own affairs. And on a reservation where unemployment has hovered around 50 percent for decades, he promised to bring financial health to the tribe's 250,000 members by promoting locally owned small businesses.

A few weeks ago, his proposal to close reservation borders for one day as an exercise of sovereignty was attacked by other Navajo leaders as inflammatory -- and by whites who threatened to run so-called "sovereignty roadblocks" with firearms.

Then came the offer from special prosecutor Chris Smith: Resign in exchange for a promise that criminal charges would not be pursued.

The charges against Hale could have sent him to prison for 50 years. He allegedly allowed Xerox Corp., which has significant contractual agreements with the tribe, to pay his \$2,250 entry fee for a golf tournament in Phoenix, as well as lodging and meal expenses totaling \$4,000.

He also allegedly accepted \$1,700 from political appointees to pay his travel expenses to attend the 1996 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, used the Navajo Nation jet for personal reasons, allowed the Conoco Corp. to buy him dinner and accepted free rooms from a hotel in Albuquerque, N.M.

Given the pitfalls, Hale -- who has publicly apologized for any wrongdoing he committed while serving as the 11th Navajo leader -- said that in retrospect, "I must have been crazy when I took that job."

Only three years ago, Hale radiated confidence and ambition after winning a nine-way race on his vow to

and gambling money -- to steer county business to Hodgkin and his food-vendor clients.

"I'm sure there are a lot of things we will never prove, never find," said Sgt. John A. Nemeth of the Sheriff's Department Internal Criminal Investigations Bureau.

The bribery scandal comes at a time when the sheriff's custody operation is under fire on several fronts.

Last week, for example, the department was hit with allegations that its deputies provoked assaults on suspected child molesters, possibly leading to the death of one inmate, a matter under investigation.

Jail officials also have been criticized for providing inadequate medical care and for keeping some inmates in custody too long because of paperwork snafus, costing the public tens of thousands of dollars in legal settlements.

Sheriff Sherman Block has scheduled a news conference for Monday to discuss the food-operation probe, conducted by the Sheriff's Department with the assistance of criminal investigators from the county's auditor-controller's office.

Gaio, 52, and Hodgkin, 41, both of Long Beach, were arrested Friday.

Gaio, who has worked in the sheriff's food services division for more than 15 years, remained in cus-

tody over the weekend, unable to post the \$45,000 bail, authorities said. He has been on administrative leave, with pay, since November, when search warrants were first served at his home. As of Monday, he will be suspended without pay, pending the outcome of the criminal case.

Hodgin is free on \$30,000 bail. Neither of the two men, nor their attorneys, could be reached for comment.

According to investigators, Hodgkin allegedly paid the bribes beginning in 1995 while working for a Florida-based company called Joy Food Service Inc., which at the time was receiving millions of dollars in food contracts from the jail. When Hodgkin later became director of sales for the California-based Harvest Farms, that company suddenly corralled much of the lucrative business.

The investigation of the food operation was launched in November 1996, after the Times published an investigative series that exposed deep fiscal abuses in the Sheriff's Department.

The series disclosed that the department was spending millions on such things as outdated computers, three cars for Block, \$466 toasters and high-grade food for inmates, much of it at a cost exceeding what other vendors were willing to charge.

Hunters and farmers take to streets

By John Burgess=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

LONDON -- Whatever the differences in the crowd of a quarter-million, everyone knew how to do a proper winter walk.

Never mind whether they were fox hunters, chicken farmers, wealthy Londoners with weekend cottages or opponents of pollution caused by far-off city lights, they came with the requisite thick-soled shoes and woolen sweaters and caps, and a cheerful determination that more than lasted them the length of a three-mile route through central London Sunday.

They also shared a conviction that the "countryside" way of life is under assault in Britain. This was their response, the largest demonstration this city has seen in close to a decade, taking nearly five hours to pass a single point.

The fox hunters, blowing brass horns from time to time, were protesting a bill that would ban the beloved chase. To farmers, the big issue was government measures against "mad cow" disease. Owners of country homes large and small were riled about plans to develop protected land and give walkers the "right to roam," that is, the right to cross their property.

Whatever their issue, people described it as interrelated, part of a process of government getting too big and striking at something fundamental in the rural soul.

"We've been dictated to about what we should do, about what we should eat," declared Kathleen Hardwick, a lifelong country resident from the Cambridge area, as the crush of the march forced it to a temporary halt at Trafalgar Square. "Soon they'll be telling us what to think."

Marchers were overwhelmingly polite and peaceful, coming in chartered buses and trains, standing by patiently as marshals herded them this way and that on a route that took them to London's oasis of the country spirit, Hyde Park, with its horse trails and planted walks.

With a few, however, the mood changed when they passed occasional animal rights counter-demonstrators, such as Beryl Clifton and Christine Adams, who from the curb held up a large picture of a fox bearing the words "Listen to Him!" Boos sounded occasionally, and at least one sandwich was hurled their way. "They really are so aggressive," said Clifton. "I find it dreadful."

In addition, opponents of the march

worked surreptitiously Sunday when hackers briefly took control of the signal of the march's official radio station. "Broadcasting to the nation's bigots, wherever they are," said a pirate voice.

Like Washington, London has a long history of people taking their grievances into the streets. As long ago as 1381, a man named Wat Tyler led a peasant army that sacked the Tower of London and other parts of the city.

Politicians are scrambling to dodge or direct this present-day continuation of the tradition. William Hague, leader of the opposition Conservative Party, showed up at the march. "There's a tremendous mixture of people here today and they deserve to be listened to," Hague declared to a TV interviewer.

The Labor Party government of Prime Minister Tony Blair was the target of many of the marchers, who feel it rules with a "Tony Knows Best" approach. It sent only two ministers to take part. In recent days, it has been floating compromises on the marchers' issues, which include a voluntary code, rather than a law, to give access to private lands, and more funding for farmers.

By far the biggest issue for the marchers, organizers agree, is a bill making its way through the House of Commons to ban fox hunting. Bill supporters say that the sport is cruel and that public opinion polls consistently show that a majority of British citizens -- even in the country -- favor its abolition.

Anger over such a move brought close to 100,000 people to a rally in Hyde Park last July. Fox hunters were very much in evidence Sunday, though organizers asked them not to wear their red jackets, out of fear of images of elitism. (They got lots of cheers from the gentlemen's clubs that lined much of the parade route.)

The National Working Terrier Federation was there, as was a basset hound group.

Hunting has "been a traditional way of life in the countryside and we want to keep it that way," said Alan Crowther, who was on a hunt just yesterday. Many hunt supporters, such as composer Andrew Lloyd Webber, who lent his name to the cause today, argue that hunting is simply a means of protecting livestock.

Marching with them were farmers. They feel besieged by a government that keeps coming up with they consider unnecessary steps against "mad cow" disease.

Navajos divided over conduct of tribal leaders

By Louis Sahagun=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. -- Two weeks after Navajo Nation President Albert Hale resigned amid charges of ethical and financial misdeeds, American Indian officials here are scrambling to heal a tribe divided over how to interpret conduct on the part of its leaders.

Hale, 47, stepped down to avoid facing charges of accepting illegal gifts from companies with tribal contracts -- and to prevent a repeat of the deadly riots that followed the ouster of Navajo Chairman Peter MacDonald in 1989 on corruption charges.

Hale, a lawyer, insists that accepting gifts is a Navajo custom. Not so, say critics -- including the former chief of staff to the president's office, who resigned a week ago saying such practices are "contrary to the way the law is written."

Now the new president, Thomas Atcity, and possibly other officials are believed to be under investigation for similar alleged misdeeds.

"We're waiting for the other shoe to drop -- or a bushel basket of other shoes," said Navajo Nation spokesman Ted Rushton. "The problem here is a lack of clarity in the law. What Hale has done, every other elected official has done."

Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, R-

Colo., a northern Cheyenne and chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, wouldn't go quite that far. But he did say this crisis underlines the ethical razor's edge that American Indian leaders tread.

"What I'm doing is child's play compared to what they do; Indian politics is mean," Nighthorse Campbell said. "You're always on the edge of living within your traditions ... and falling off into an abyss of illegal activity from a white man's legal standpoint."

Tribal leaders are expected to accept gifts, and give away what they have because they have access to power and jobs," he said. "Yet if you don't refuse a gift, you break the white man's law. Give a starving relative a job and you're accused of nepotism. Don't give him that job, and you're guilty of the worst kind of abandonment."

As the dispute heats up, residents in this 25,000-square-mile reservation of red rock canyons and mesas are worrying as always about alcoholism, soaring crime and school-dropout rates, chronic unemployment, dwindling federal funds for social and medical programs, eroding cultural traditions and pressure from corporations to develop mineral resources at the expense of sovereignty rights.

But for the time being, tribal officials are focused on a political process complicated by cultural do's-and-