

*DAV (The Crowd) – Slovak left-wing avant-garde group of
interwar period*

Lukáš Perný

The following Academia ultra-short research paper will be devoted to a short description of the Slovak avant-garde group DAV. Davisti (sk.) or DAV¹ (engl. The Crowd; ger. Menschenmenge)² was a Slovak (and too Czechoslovak) avant-garde leftist and internationalist creative group of interwar period (they published the DAV revue/journal in Bratislava and Prague; published between 1924 and 1937). DAV included important Slovak writers, poets and cultural workers³, scientists and philosophers⁴, politicians and lawyers⁵, literary critics⁶ and graphic designers and visual artists.⁷ According to the editors of the first and second editions, the DAV was a quarterly “*periodical review, which brings together the pioneers of socialist ideas of the young generation in Slovakia, who are active in the field of thought and art*” (DAV, 1924, p. 2; DAV 1925, s. 2). Ladislav Novomeský described the etymology of the name (DAV, Crowd) as follows: “*Only the name was a protest! Protest against the arrogance of the intelligentsia in general and Slovakia in particular, against the contempt and how the*

¹Based on the initials of the first names of: Daniel Okáli, Andrej Sirácky and Vladimír Clementis.

²See: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/DAV_\(Zeitschrift\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/DAV_(Zeitschrift)); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dav_\(journal\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dav_(journal)); <https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Davist%C3%A9>

³**Ladislav Novomeský**, poet, writer, publicist, future the Commissioner of Education; **Ján Poničan**, poet, novelist; **Peter Jilemnický**, writer, journalist and teacher; **Andrej Bagar**, Slovak actor and theater director; **Jozef Tomášik-Dumín**, poet; **Jarko Elen**, writer, dramatist, songwriter and poet

⁴**Andrej Sirácky**, philosopher and sociologist;; **Ladislav Szántó**, philosopher

⁵**Gustáv Husák**, future president of Czechoslovakia; **Vladimír Clementis**, politician, lawyer, publicist, literary critic, author; future Minister of Foreign Affairs

⁶**Eduard Urx**, politician, journalist, translator, literary critic, theorist; **Daniel Okáli**, lawyer, politician, writer and literary critic; **Alexander Matuška**, literary critic

⁷**Ludovít Fulla**, **Mikuláš Galanda**, important Slovak modernists; the journal featured illustrations by **Frans Masereel**, **Marc Chagall**, **George Grosz**, and others

post-war intelligent approached the crowd, the crowd, the collective, the people...DAV has already manifested its connection to the crowd with its name. All other interpretations were only random... “ (Novomeský, Splátka veľkého dlhu, 1992).

DAV was established on the grounds of the project “Free Association of Students-Socialists from Slovakia”, which was founded by Daniel Okáli, Vladimír Clementis and Ján Poničan in 1922 (in Prague). The Prague left-wing avant-garde (contact with the Czech left-wing intelligence) significantly influenced the DAV. The first issue of DAV was published in 1924 with an avant-garde cover by Mikuláš Galanda. It was a quarterly profiled as an artistic and political journal.

Revue was also a mediator of books by socialist writers (especially poets) like Ján Rob Poničan (Som, Dva svety), Jiří Wolker (Večer, Sborník proletárských básní), Laco Novomeský (Neděľa) and others. In the magazine, they also promoted the Slovak form of surrealism – nadrealizmus (they defended against the attacks the nadrealist writer Rudolf Fabry). Czech writers such as Marie Majerová, Zdeněk Nejedlý, Július Fučík, Ivan Olbracht, Ivan Sekanina and even the Russian writer Il'ja Erenburg have also published in DAV. The design of the DAV was created by important Slovak visual artists (important modernists) Ľudovít Fulla and Mikuláš Galanda. The members of DAV also had influence in the Youth Club (sk. Klub mladých), which joined to the Art discussion club of Slovakia (sk. Umelecká beseda), which together with the DAV organized book-reading parties with poetry of important Slovak writers like Lukáč, Smrek, Novomeský, Okáli and. They also organized lectures about Freud and modern theater and in DAV they published important cultural critics (especially Daniel Okáli). After 1929, the focus shifted from literature and art to political, social, economic and ideological issues. After the outbreak of the economic crisis in the 1930s, the authors of the DAV mediated demonstrations, protests and all popular actions against the government in order to point out the contradictions of interwar Czechoslovak capitalism. The DAV actively reflected on the tragic events in Košúty (May 1931), where protesters were shot and killed during a workers' strike. DAV dedicated to this event the all issue of the journal and organized the *Manifesto of Slovak Writers* (they were also signed by E. B. Lukáč, J. G. Tajovský, M. Urban, J. Smrek and G. Vámoš). Clementis wrote letters to important writers like Romain Rolland and Maxim Gorky). DAV members also wrote about the conflicts in Polomka or about the killing of a worker on the construction of the Červená Skala - Margecany railway.

In the Czechoslovak policy context,⁸ the DAV was in stiff opposition against: 1. the autonomists, 2. against national conservatives, 2. against the agrarians and Czechoslovakists,

⁸From a political point of view, the following groups are being formed politically in Slovak part of Czechoslovak republic: moderate nationalists, radical autonomists and radical nationalists (division also according to catholics and lutherans), Czechoslovakists and agrarians (and social democrats) and communists.

and also against 3. the Social Democrats (they criticized them mainly for opportunism and minimal social policy). After separating from social democracy, DAV and communists promoted Marxist and Leninist philosophical and political line (in the journal but can be found on one side quotes Trotsky and Stalin, but it should be added that in the first volumes). Klement Gottwald, next president of Czechoslovakia after war, also supported them in interwar period, paradoxically sending them (authors) to prison in the 1950s. DAV supported internationalism on the one hand, and too equality between Slovaks and Czechs (in the first period they stood in radical opposition to conservatism; later they found their own concept of national continuity with the social progressive movements of the past). The concept of DAV magazine connected the political line on the one hand, and the aesthetic line on the other hand.

They support the newly formed Soviet Union and have also published reports from the commune of Interhelpo. They opposed the censorship of movies like *Mother and Battleship Potemkin*. The DAV mediated translations of world literature and reviews of works by authors such as H. Barbusse, T. Mann, G. B. Shaw, F. Nansen, J. London, U. Sinclair, and others.

They also anticipated the rise of fascism they warned against. They also took part in the Spanish Civil War. At the congress of Slovak writers in the town of Trenčianske Teplice, organized by a member of the DAV Novomeský, they collectively defended themselves against barbarism and fascism together with other movements. After the ban on the DAV project (by representatives of the new Slovak Republic), individual members (Urx, Novomeský, Husák, Clementis) participated in the organization of the Slovak National Uprising 1944 (Eduard Urx was even executed by the Nazis; Gustav Husak was one of the most important organizers of the Slovak National Uprising 1944). They became part of the government in exile (in London) and after the end of the war they took part in taking power (Husák, Novomeský, Okáli, Clementis). However, already in the 50s they are imprisoned for the so-called bourgeois nationalism (Vladimir Clementis was executed). In the 1960s, they are rehabilitated and take part in initiating the federation. Ex-DAV's contributor, Gustáv Husák, becomes the president of Czechoslovakia.

The short text shows: The DAV played an important role in shaping 1. philosophical and political ideas in Slovakia; 3. Slovak left-wing politics and 3. in establishing modernist tendencies in Slovak visual art and literature. This ultra-short research paper is just a brief introduction (encyclopedic entry) to the issues I plan to discuss in more detail in future texts.⁹

⁹I am a co-author of a text about a DAV on Czech Wikipedia and autor of book about member of DAV, Ladislav Novomeský (*Kultúrna revolúcia Laca Novomeského*). I plan to write a separate book about DAV and special international study.