

Cornelius Lehmann: “Pan-Slav Agitators” or “Loyal Wends”? The Image of the Sorbs in the Imperial German Daily Press

The Lusatian Sorbs were given little attention in the Imperial German daily press compared to the Polish, French and Danish minorities. Between 1871 and 1914 they were only mentioned in passing, along with the Frisians, Cassubians or Lithuanians. Reports on the Sorbs only appeared in the local press, in rare cases also in the national press, on the occasion of singing festivals or other folkloric events. This provided an opportunity to express mostly Pan-Slav conspiracy theories. The Sorbian people were then portrayed as the ally of Russia and of the Poles or the Czechs.

But to assume that the image was an overwhelmingly negative one would be to give a false picture. After all, when there was national interest in the Sorbs, then the descriptions were overwhelmingly positive and supportive. It is true that they were not free from stereotypes; the Sorbian people was often portrayed by the German media as the “the minority loyal to the Empire”, and therefore presented as different from the Poles, French and Danes who were living in the Reich. In this connection the Sorbs were looked at less from a religious, linguistic or territorial point of view, unlike present-day research, but rather subdivided according to educational level. In this sense, those adherents of Pan-Slav conspiracy theories also saw the Sorbian rural majority as fighters for the people and the Fatherland, and Sorbian intellectuals (above all the clergy and teachers) as traitors to the Fatherland.

Piotr Palys: The Scientific Committee in Poland for Academic Questions in Relation to the Sorbs

A national Polish institution designed to coordinate activities in relation to the Sorbs was created in Poznań on 5 and 6 October 1946. The main focus was on the current development of the Sorbs and Lusatia after the war, together with the organisation of courses in Sorbian studies and research. All institutions involved in this question in Poland met in Cracow on 30 January 1947. A statute relating to this work was put together, which assigned individual tasks and elected Professor Tadeusz Stanisław Grabowski as chairman of the committee. The task of the scientific committee, as it was called, was to find a solution to the Sorbian or Lusatian question.

Several options were discussed in this respect: they ranged from remaining in Germany within an autonomous province, or the possibility of becoming part of Czechoslovakia or Poland, to the creation of an independent Sorbian state. Contacts existed on the one hand with the Domowina in Lusatia, and on the other hand with the Sorbian National Committee operating in Prague. In addition, the scientific committee composed a memorandum, which demanded the free development of the Sorbian nation. But already by November 1947 the organisation was forced to suspend its political activities in relation to the Sorbian question, as Poland did not want to get into a political conflict with the Soviet Union. The committee only remained active to a limited extent in academic matters.

Walter Wenzel: The Name of the Village of Dohna and Traces of early Old Czech Settlement in Saxony

The close connections between the Old Czech and Old Sorbian language areas have frequently been the subject of academic investigation. The last investigation by Ernst Eichler came to particular conclusions on these problems, using the name of the village of Dohna as his starting point; these will be supplemented here by new findings. They not only include phonological features, which point to the existence of speakers of Old Czech in the region of Nisane and the adjacent area in the early medieval period, but also to particular place names, including above all the archaic names of Kosobudy/Žornosěky. The development of settlement patterns in the early Slav period can be illuminated more precisely in this way, and also our historical and archaeological knowledge can be extended through the use of revealing details.

Robert Lorenz: Brusnica und Brunica. Thoughts on the History of Mental Attitudes in the Lusatian Mining Area

In 1924 the first settlement in Central Lusatia, Neu-Laubusch/Nowy Lubuš, fell victim to open-cast mining for lignite. Thus arose a conflict about cause and effect in an industrial society, and the history of discourse relating to this extends into the present day, developing as a result into an important element in individual identity in this area. This essay uses selected examples from fiction, poetry and functional literature to trace some dominant features of this discourse.

This process results in a division into three parts, which coincide with historical turning points. Up to 1945 a basic narrative pattern develops, which oscillates between welcoming progress and melancholy over the loss of the traditional rural homeland. In the GDR period this bipolar narrative structure is continued against the background of the construction of socialism, in which the search to locate “the Sorbian component” together with that for a new image of the homeland appear as additional facets. The period after 1990, which was initially characterised by a reduction in industrial activity, and finally a discussion over the future energy policy of Germany, resulted in a diffuse picture of narratives, which were partly competing with each other, and which reveals a broken, shifting identity landscape for Lusatia.

Detlev Rein: The Financing of National Minorities in Germany

The author firstly analyses the needs of national minorities and their associations according to their specific financial requirements. He substantiates and justifies these needs by pointing to the fact that the members of a national minority have a different identity from the majority population and have a desire to preserve it; their needs cannot be satisfied adequately by what the state can offer, especially in the areas of language, culture and education.

In his search for standard guidelines, which grant minorities and/or their members the right to appropriate state support, the author establishes that both the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages do in fact contain the relevant calls for action to member states, but no quantifiable and enforceable rights for minorities.

Also, analysis of German law and administrative practice at federal and state level does in fact reveal fundamentally positive statements on the protection of national minorities, but – with the exception of the very clear right to establish private schools in Schleswig-Holstein – no standard regulations, which would grant an adequate, enduring and legally enforceable financial framework to an individual minority. The author recommends that minorities and their associations should present their legitimate needs effectively at a political level.

Konstanze McLeod: Support Structures and Financial Mechanisms for the Gaelic Language in Scotland

The funding structures for the support and promotion of Gaelic in Scotland involve a large number of different organisations and discrete mechanisms. It is not really meaningful to think in terms of a single budget whose components could be determined and reallocated on the basis of a single decision process. Most obviously, the funding structures for Gaelic broadcasting, Gaelic education and Gaelic development are entirely distinct. Decisions concerning broadcasting are ultimately made by the UK Government and the Scottish Government. Decisions concerning education funding are made by the Scottish Government, by individual local authorities and by Bòrd na Gàidhlig. The latter is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) that is responsible for the implementation of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 and also directly in charge of funding decisions for general Gaelic development. A small number of Gaelic projects have been co-funded by other organisations (public as well as private), and 2013 saw the first ever crowd-funded initiative in support of Gaelic, but the extent of such contributions is negligible in light of the overall amount required for the maintenance of current Gaelic institutions and services. By far the largest share of funding decisions for Gaelic can thus be said to be in the hands of politicians elected by Scottish voters at the local and national level, rather than chosen directly by the Gaelic community, with the members of Bòrd na Gàidhlig being appointed in a standard public appointments process.