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The Czechoslovak Road to Socialism.

The Strategy and Role of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in  
the Development of a Socialist Society in the 1945-1948 Period,  
Discussed against the Background of the Party's Earlier History.

in four volumes

VOLUME I

by Martin Roy Myant

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Social  
Sciences Faculty of Glasgow University in January 1978.

**BROKEN TEXT AND SOME  
POOR QUALITY IMAGES IN  
ORIGINAL THESIS.**

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Unfortunately, time and money have made it impossible for me to return to Prague to check references again and this must have led to errors and oversights. Needless to say, I take full responsibility for all the conclusions and opinions



in this work and for any mistakes and omissions that I have failed to notice.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AP Associated Press.
- CPSU(B) Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks).
- ČKD Českomoravská Kolben Daněk.
- ČNR Česká národní rada; Czech National Council.
- DS Demokratická strana; Democratic Party.
- HSL'S Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana; Hlinka Slovak People's Party.
- JSČZ Jednotný svaz českých zemědělců; United Union of Czech Farmers.
- JZSR Jednotný zväz slovenských roľníkov; United Union of Slovak Farmers.
- Kčs Koruna československá.
- KPD Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands; Communist Party of Germany.
- KSC Komunistická strana Československa; Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.
- KSS Komunistická strana Slovenska; Communist Party of Slovakia.
- LS abbreviated from ČsSL Československá strana lidová; Czechoslovak People's Party.
- NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.
- NKVD Narodny komisariat vnutrennikh del; People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs.
- NS National Socialist, abbreviated from ČsSNS Československá strana národně socialistická; Czechoslovak National Socialist Party.
- PVVZ Petiční výbor "Věrní zůstaneme!"; Petition Committee "We Will Remain Loyal!"



ROH      Revoluční odborové hnutí; Revolutionary Trade Union Movement.

R-3      Rada tří; Council of Three.

SČM      Svaz československé mládeže; Union of Czechoslovak Youth.

SD      Social Democrat, abbreviated from ČsSD      Československá sociální demokracie; Czechoslovak Social Democracy.

SNR      Slovenská národná rada; Slovak National Council.

SDR      Slovenská odborová rada; Slovak Council of Trade Unions.

SVS      Svaz vysokoškolských studentů; Union of Students in Higher Education.

UNRP      Ukrajinská národná rada Prjaševščiny; Ukrainian National Council of the Prešov Diocese.

UNRRA      United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

ÚPK      Ústřední plánovací komise; Central Planning Commission.

ÚRO      Ústřední rada odborů; Central Council of Trade Unions.

ZSP      Zväz slovenských partizánov; Union of Slovak Partisans.

ZVOJPOV      Zväz vojakov povstania; Union of Soldiers of the Uprising.

## SUMMARY

This work attempts to show why socialism, understood in a broadly Marxist sense, <sup>was established</sup> ~~triumphed~~ in Czechoslovakia, but why it took a form ultimately unsuitable for so advanced a society. The first chapter introduces the problem and discusses the methodology and structure adopted for analysing the 1945-1948 period.

Part I is concerned with the inter-war years. Czechoslovakia was created and developed as a small, landlocked state incorporating large, potentially hostile national minorities. This was the background against which political ideas took shape. The situation favoured reformist politicians with a strategy of seeking security through dependence on the West. Hopes for socialist revolution proved to be illusory and led only to a split in Social Democracy out of which the Communist Party was formed.

The history of its strategies in the following years can be characterised as a conflict between two general tendencies both of which are identifiable throughout the party's history. One was a genuine attempt to grapple with Czechoslovak realities: this was most clearly personified by Šmeral. The other was based on sectarian attitudes and simplistic theories. Its inspiration was a natural revolutionary impatience, an insistence on avoiding what were felt to be the betrayals of Social Democracy and a belief that the Russian revolution provided an example to be followed in Czechoslovakia. The Comintern was decisive in ensuring the victory of this trend over Šmeral,

and also in providing a theoretical justification which had a lasting impact on later Communist Party thinking. The history of the party, seen as a conflict between these two tendencies, was therefore contradictory: it laid the basis both for later successes and for later failures.

Part II analyses the destruction of the Czechoslovak state in 1938 and 1939 and the consequent changes in Czech and Slovak national consciousness. The Nazi occupation, with its increasing brutality, led to ideas of restoring a Czechoslovak state while simultaneously radically changing its national, social and political structures. Such thoughts developed at home and among politicians in emigration the most important of whom was Beneš. He established a government in exile in London and accepted the need for reforms which made possible better relations with the Communists who, instead of advocating immediate socialist revolution, were working out relevant and realistic policies.

In spring 1945 Beneš's allies and the Communists joined to form a coalition government. For the former this was intended to be a temporary compromise. Beneš feared that, given the political complexion of the resistance particularly in Slovakia plus the immense strength of the Soviet Union, he might otherwise have been unable to return home as President. The Communists did not clarify their ultimate aims, but were evidently very satisfied with the new government.

Part III details the creation of the basis for a new Czechoslovak republic in the first year after liberation. A deep and sometimes spontaneous process of social change took place confirming the Communist Party as the leading force in politics.

Most of industry was nationalised and new and powerful workers' organs were created. The government increased its control over basic economic mechanisms. The German minority was expelled and land and property given to Czechs. New organs and institutions of power, within which the Communists had great strength, were created.

This revolutionary process did not follow any preconceived plan. In fact it indicated weaknesses in the Communists' ideas as clearly socialist changes were taking place under a coalition government. Nevertheless, the strength of the Communist Party was confirmed in general elections in May 1946. Other parties, owing to their past histories and social and ideological bases, were unable to identify so closely with the revolutionary changes or to command such support. This does not mean that their role was purely a negative one of holding back changes. The Social Democrats were firm partners of the Communists and the others contributed at least by maintaining a control over power so that policy measures had to be discussed and argued for in public before implementation.

Slovakia is treated separately as, owing to the different structure of Slovak society and to its distinctive recently preceding history, the Communist Party did not have so strong a position within society and the revolutionary social changes did not have so deep an impact as in the Czech lands. The Communists failed to evolve a strategy suitable for Slovak conditions and, by early 1946, Slovakia definitely appeared

as a danger for them.

Part IV shows how, with its political dominance confirmed, the Communist Party tried to lead Czechoslovak society further in a socialist direction. The main emphasis was placed on economic policies and a start was made towards centralised economic planning. This became the central axis of social as well as economic policies and consequently the focal point for social conflicts. There was persistent discontent over living standards from all sections of society while civil servants and small businessmen also feared that further revolutionary changes would threaten their security.

The acceptance of planning by the other parties seemed to confirm that further socialist development would not be a sudden revolutionary act, but rather a gradual process of evolution, compatible with a coalition. This, plus the need to defuse continual criticisms from coalition partners, led Czechoslovak Communist leaders to follow Stalin in suggesting that the dictatorship of the proletariat might no longer be necessary. The Communist Party was beginning to adapt its theories in view of its concrete experiences, but the heritage of ideas from the Comintern was still clear. The view that a one-party state would ultimately be the ideal was not rejected. There was also cause for unease within the other parties when the Communists proclaimed the aim of winning an absolute majority in the next elections. Part of the strategy for achieving this aim was an agricultural policy whereby the Communists tried to mobilise

peasant opinion against other parties around proposals for land reform. They also insisted on retaining and strengthening their dominance within the police force.

Part V traces the growing divisions in Czechoslovak politics during the autumn of 1947. Already before that there were tensions and divisions in society stemming from social conflicts and from the strategies of the parties. From mid-1947, however, the tendency towards division began to dominate over the tendency for parties to find compromise agreements within the coalition. The principal cause of this was the changed international situation. US involvement in Europe led to Soviet fears of isolation and Stalin therefore began to insist on consolidating his allies around him.

This coincided with economic difficulties threatenning the Communist Party's strategy of winning popularity from the success of its economic policies. The outcome of these two factors was a vigorous political offensive by the Communists aiming for an absolute majority in the next elections so as to confirm Czechoslovakia as part of a Soviet bloc.

This was opposed by the other parties but they could not form a solid anti-Communist bloc. There were steps towards this, particularly when the Czech right wing gave support to the Slovak Democratic Party when revelations about an anti-state conspiracy gave the Slovak Communists an opportunity for particular belligerence. Generally, however, the different parties responded to the Communist offensive in distinct ways. They

were partly hamstrung by their inability to openly and vigorously propose a credible alternative international orientation to incorporation into a Soviet bloc.

Part VI shows how political tension mounted steadily, giving rise to the February crisis which itself led to deep changes throughout society. The analysis of the actual events shows the miscalculations and blunders by right-wing politicians and also points to two interrelated aspects of the Communists' victorious tactics. The first was their mobilisation of massive support on the basis of their social and economic policies and of their general post-war record as firm defenders of the revolutionary changes. The second aspect was their exploitation of the situation, and also of the key positions of power they had acquired over the preceding period, to establish an effective monopoly of power for themselves.

Although the Communists did not intend an immediate change in social and economic policies, the political power change soon unleashed internal pressures which, when combined with direct pressures from the Soviet Union and when set against the background of the Communists' inability to understand the needs of the new situation, led increasingly to the adoption of the "Soviet model" of socialism.

The conclusion is that the general socialist victory stemmed from the very specific Czechoslovak situation. The possibility was there for a new model of socialism, but the 1945-1948 period was in no sense an ideal. The Communists' activities in February 1948 could even appear as an attempt to overcome

the faults of the multi-party system. In the event they led to the evolution of a model of socialism unsuitable to Czechoslovakia's needs. There were reasons for this in the international situation, in domestic social conflicts and, above all, in weaknesses in the ideas that the Communist Party had developed within the restrictions of the Comintern.



## CHAPTER 1

### ON METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

#### 1.1 The significance of the events in Czechoslovakia in the 1945 - 1948 period

The 1945-1948 period in Czechoslovakia saw two major political changes with far-reaching social implications. The first was the so called "national revolution" of 1945 which followed the defeat of Nazi Germany and led to the creation of a new Czechoslovak republic. The Communist Party won 38% of the votes in general elections but, even before that, under a multi-party coalition government, the Czechoslovak state set out in a socialist direction with the nationalisation of most of the country's industry, a land reform and a foreign policy based on close relations with the Soviet Union. This situation lasted for less than three years: in February 1948 the Communist Party established an effective monopoly of power. This second major political change was followed by further fundamental transformations of social relationships and institutions.

There can be no doubting the importance of this brief period within the history of the Czechoslovak republic. February 1948 appeared to the Communists to be the culmination of their previous history while the power system established at the time, based on the one political party, has not been fundamentally challenged since. Nevertheless, the events of February and the possibilities of the preceding period are inevitably brought into the centre of discussion when questions are raised relating to the method of exercising power in Czechoslovakia. So the fact that Czechoslovakia started to

develop a "model" of socialism containing a genuine plurality of parties can still be a politically important question today.

The subject of this thesis also has a wider international significance. This was clear at the time as the governments of the U.S. Britain and France issued a joint declaration suggesting that the events of February 1948 were a threat to their own political institutions<sup>1</sup>. They were subsequently quoted as a major argument for setting up N.A.T.O. Today they have another international significance as certain Western Socialist and Communist parties are hoping to implement socialist changes within a multi-party system. They do not look back at successful examples of this from other countries' experiences and that inevitably means that their ideas remain schematic and, on some crucial points, vague. Although Czechoslovakia's experience after 1945 can neither prove nor disprove the feasibility of a similar social transformation in another place and at another time, it remains a unique example of a democratically elected multi-party government implementing socialist changes in what, even then, was one of the most advanced countries in Europe. This experience is therefore invaluable for the sharpening and clarification of a number of theoretical concepts that are becoming more topical today.

So, for a number of reasons, the development of Czechoslovak society in the 1945-1948 period is worthy of serious study. There is already an immense body of literature from several different points of view and it would be ridiculous to ignore, or to pretend not to be influenced by this. It is, in fact, an invaluable basis for

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<sup>1</sup> P.E. Zinner: Communist Strategy and Tactics in Czechoslovakia, 1918-1948, London, 1963, p.V.

further investigation because of the empirical data accumulated, the specific controversies raised and because it provides the basis from which the methodology and structure of this thesis was worked out.

The following sections are in no way intended to give a complete or exhaustive coverage of the existing literature, nor do they necessarily mention all the best works. The aim is rather to indicate the various weaknesses. This then serves as a basis for the methodology and structure adopted in this work.

## 1.2. The works of politicians and journalists who emigrated to the West

In discussing the existing literature it is convenient to start with books and articles produced in the West where the beginning was for the most part made around 1950 by post-February 1948 emigrés. They do not all express identical opinions and scholarship is often replaced by diatribe and invective which seems to stem from the bitterness of political defeat. Nevertheless, there are enough general similarities to warrant grouping them all together.

It is very common for them to explain the Communist victory of 1948, obviously the decisive event for those who emigrated as a consequence of it, <sup>in</sup> terms sometimes of their own mistakes plus, and on this they are pretty unanimous, perfidious and deceitful behaviour on the Communist side. Thus it is argued that Czechoslovak politicians in London during World War II should never have sought such close relations with the Soviet Union and the Communist Party, which was apparently the Soviet Union's "Fifth Column"<sup>2</sup>. Unnecessary

<sup>2</sup>J. Brown: Who's Next? The Lesson of Czechoslovakia, London, 1951, p.27-29.

concessions were apparently made giving the Communists important positions of power which they did not deserve<sup>3</sup>.

To complete the argument it is useful to explain why the Western powers could not balance Soviet influence. Here reference is sometimes made to Yalta with the claim that the Soviet Union demanded, within its own "sphere of influence", governments that "blindly fulfilled her wishes and orders"<sup>4</sup>.

Even if this explains the formation of Czechoslovakia's first post-war government, it cannot possibly explain the 1946 election results. To complete the emigré argument it has to be claimed that the Communist victory stemmed from their already holding positions of power. Then the whole 1945-1948 period can be summarised as no more than a gradual infiltration of positions of power by the Communist Party<sup>5</sup>.

This approach is extraordinarily narrow. It obviates the need for the emigres to look more generally at their own political ideas and weaknesses. It also means that the events of 1945-1948 can be explained without any reference to Czechoslovakia's preceding history and how that might have affected the outcome. As everything is reduced to a simple fight for political power there is no need to examine the revolutionary social and economic changes from May 1945 onwards.

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<sup>3</sup> O. Friedmann: The Break-up of Czech Democracy, London, 1950, p.55-59.

<sup>4</sup> H. Ripka: Eastern Europe in the Post-War World, London, 1961, p.56.

<sup>5</sup> Even the more sophisticated writers still essentially take this view e.g. Friedmann: Break-up, p.53-65. For another example see F. Peroutka: Byl Eduard Beneš vinen? Paris, 1950. He, as will be shown, had been able to things more realistically when he lived through the events inside Czechoslovakia.

This has a clear implication for the analysis of post-February 1948 society. It points directly to the theory of "totalitarianism", whereby, in effect, the mechanism of political power is presented as the distinguishing feature of a society<sup>6</sup>. The criticism of this position, which effectively lumps together fascism and communism, is well known: "... the monopoly of power is a means, not an end. Objectives, ideologies, practices are different things."<sup>7</sup> This does not mean that the way how power is exercised is irrelevant: on the contrary it is a recurrent theme within this work. Nevertheless, it is only meaningful when placed within an wider context of the totality of social relationships. By not doing this the emigré writers generally managed to cover up a large part of the reason for their defeat.

Many of the points raised by emigré writers will inevitably have to be discussed throughout the narrative. Particularly important are the questions concerning Beneš's relations with the Soviet Union and with the Communist Party up to the formation of the first post-war government, and the relationship between the Communist Party and the organs of power after liberation.

There were also some, albeit very few, who could see and criticise the lack of objectivity in other emigre writers. An example is Sychrava<sup>8</sup> who was particularly critical of Ripka's major work<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup>For a fairly sophisticated example see C.J. Friedrich & Z.K. Brzezinski: Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy, Cambridge(Massachusetts), 1965.

<sup>7</sup>R. Aron: Democracy and Totalitarianism, London, 1968, p.160.

<sup>8</sup>L. Sychrava: Svědectví a úvahy o pražském převratu v únoru 1948, London, 1952.

<sup>9</sup>H. Ripka: Czechoslovakia Enslaved, London, 1950.

He pointed out that Ripka implicitly admitted to holding different views from the majority of Czechoslovak people on such important questions as the international situation, the nationalisation of industries and the nature of democracy. It would seem ridiculous to try to ignore this when seeking an explanation for the outcome of the events of February 1948.

### 1.3 Some of the more scholarly Western works

Most emigré works were written in the early 1950's. Since then enough time has passed for more serious and objective works to appear, but, unfortunately, there has been no dramatic improvement in the methodological framework used. A serious work already referred to, by Zinner, could still be no more than "a case study of power seizure".<sup>10</sup> Although he tried to give the post-war period a wider perspective by an account of the Communist Party's earlier history, he still saw the period in terms of Communist manoeuvrings and trickery with their "perfidy" finally and conclusively exposed by their apparently sudden and quite unreasonable seizure of undivided power.<sup>11</sup>

One of the most genuine attempts to achieve objectivity was the series of articles written by Skilling during the 1950's and 1960's in which he tried to construct a history of the Czechoslovak

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<sup>10</sup> Zinner: Communist, p.VI.

<sup>11</sup> Zinner: Communist, p.V.

Communist Party from the time of its foundation up to 1948<sup>12</sup>. With this wider view he tried to understand better the real nature of the Communist Party. Unfortunately, the sources available to him were, by today's standards, very inadequate and some of his claims do not stand up to rigorous investigation. Moreover, his methodological framework is too simple to explain the development of the Communist Party. Despite many useful insights he, in effect, argues that depending on the wishes and interventions of the Soviet Union, the Communists could pursue a policy that was in line with or contrary to Czechoslovak traditions. Thus, after 1945, much of its strength could be explained by its assimilation of those traditions.

The weakness in this approach becomes clear when Skilling tries to explain the development of political divisions in post-war Czechoslovakia. Taking just one, seemingly homogeneous, national tradition leaves little scope to explain the fundamental nature of political divisions. So, while giving an account of events that is refreshingly free from propaganda and invective, Skilling ends up with little more than a list of points of disagreement that led

12 The relevant articles by H.G. Skilling are:  
 "The Break-up of the Czechoslovak coalition 1947-1948" Canadian Journal of Economic and Political Science, XXVI, No.3, August 1960;  
 "The Comintern and Czechoslovak Communism: 1921-1929", American Slavic and East European Review, XIX, No.2, April 1960;  
 "Communism and Czechoslovak Traditions", Journal of International Affairs, XX, No.1, 1966;  
 "The Czechoslovak Struggle for National Liberation in World War II", Slavonic and Eastern European Review, XXXIX, No.92, December 1960;  
 "The formation of a Communist Party in Czechoslovakia", American Slavic and Eastern European Review, XIV, No.3, October 1955;  
 "Gottwald and the Bolshevization of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia 1929-1939", Slavic Review, XV, No.4, December 1961;  
 "The Prague Overturn in 1948", Canadian Slavic Papers, IV, 1960.  
 Also relevant is H.G. Skilling:  
Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution, Princeton, 1976, Chapter 1.

ultimately to the February crisis? The feeling of a fight for power with different participants representing different interests and different positions and pursuing definite strategies is obscured.

#### 1.4 Historical studies inside Czechoslovakia in the early 1950's

Turning now to Marxist works, the beginnings were equally uninspiring but later works, particularly in the middle and late 1960's do go a long way to providing an acceptable theoretical framework. The problem at first stemmed from the political situation inside Czechoslovakia which effectively dictated that accounts of recent history had to be subordinated to the needs of propaganda. It was therefore accepted that the Communist Party had always known what it was doing and that it followed a preconceived plan, culminating in the taking of power in February 1948. Thus there was considerable common ground between those suffering from the bitterness of defeat and those filled with the elation of victory: they could both reduce the revolutionary changes to a simple fight for power between two sides although they could also offer different explanations for which side won.

Marxist writers at that time explained away the complexities of social development and of the relationship between social processes and political power by reducing everything, including especially political power, to pure class terms. In Czechoslovakia in the early 1950's over-simplification and distortion went even further as a consequence particularly of the condemnation of "specificity" in roads to socialism. Historians, subordinated to this political position, effectively tried to fit the Czechoslovak experience into preconceived



schematic models derived from some of Lenin's works<sup>13</sup>. The main stimulus was a short work by the Soviet theoretician Sobolev<sup>14</sup> who effectively reduced the novelty of the revolutions in post-war Eastern Europe to the presence of the Red Army and the existence of the U.S.S.R. Otherwise, he argued, they added nothing new to Lenin's views on the 1905 revolution!

This was followed by a surprisingly active debate during which it proved to be extraordinarily difficult to compress Czechoslovak experience into a pre-conceived schematised model<sup>15</sup>. Disagreements arose because of the impossibility of equating 1945 with Lenin's "bourgeois democratic" revolution and hence the difficulty of finding a precise definition for the 1945-1948 period in terms derivable from Lenin's writings. There were attempts to be more flexible with suggestions that "elements" of the dictatorship of the proletariat began in 1945 and were subsequently strengthened and multiplied. It could therefore be concluded that the road was very different from that of the Russian revolution although the "content" was still said to be the same<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Especially important was "Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution" first published in 1905 and included in V.I. Lenin: Selected Works, Moscow and London, 1968.

<sup>14</sup> A.I. Sobolev: Peoples' Democracy, a New form of Political Organisation of Society, Moscow, 1954.

<sup>15</sup> See especially the contributions to a conference of historians in 1955 in Otázky národní a demokratické revoluce v ČSR, Praha, 1955.

<sup>16</sup> Jan Kozák: Strana v boji za upevnění lidové demokracie. Únorové vítězství nad buržoazií (1945-1948), Praha, 1954, esp. p.122 &124.

There were even hesitant suggestions that post-war revolutions stemmed from definitely new conditions so that their real character could only be discovered on the basis of a deep concrete analysis<sup>17</sup>.

Nevertheless, the general view was that 1945 had seen a national democratic revolution - essentially like Lenin's bourgeois democratic revolution - and that a process of "growing over" into a socialist revolution had followed. So all the complexities of the Communist's strategy were simply sub-sumed within the concept of "growing over" which ended with the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This could still enable the Communist Party to claim to have adhered to and successfully applied a definite and unchanging strategy. The propagandist or even apologetic constraints of these historical investigations were even implicitly admitted by one contributor to the discussion who said, "Today we have a great advantage over previous discussions because we now have the theses of the Central Committee on the ten years of development of our Peoples' Democracy. It is now a matter above all of doing our best to present and concretise these theses correctly so as not to come into conflict with the historical facts, with the policy of the party and with the theses themselves<sup>18</sup>."

This reveals the decisive methodological weakness of all these works. Their investigations started not with the facts but with the conclusions and the problem then was to fit the facts into the conclusions. Moreover, by taking a pre-conceived framework they implicitly excluded the possibility of deriving anything new from a

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<sup>17</sup> K. Kára in Otázky, p.322-324.

<sup>18</sup> I. Bystřina in Otázky, p.302

study of Czechoslovak history. The Czech philosopher Kosík could just as well have been referring to these historians when he pointed to the weaknesses of reductionism: "Reductionism is the method of 'nothing more than'.... reductionism cannot rationally explain new and qualitative development. Everything new can be reduced to preconceived conditions and assumptions, the new is 'nothing more than' - the old"<sup>19</sup>.

In the course of the narrative the methodology and framework of these early Marxist approaches will not be adopted. Nevertheless, they do at least raise the question of the relationship of Communist Party strategy to the basic works of Lenin and Stalin that allegedly guided its actions at that time. This point will be taken up in various of the discussions of the Communists' strategic conceptions.

Before looking at further developments of Marxist historiography inside Czechoslovakia, mention should be made of Western Marxists. Very few have tried to confront and analyse the events in Eastern Europe after World War II. Even the most serious attempts have not been based on thorough empirical investigations but have rather been responses to immediate political needs: thus for example, Carrillo was especially keen to argue that the Communists' did not pursue a lasting policy aiming for undivided power<sup>20</sup>.

It is difficult to find even the beginnings of a methodological framework when sophisticated Western Marxist theoreticians can insist that a fundamental aspect of Lenin's teachings is "the only possible historical 'alternative' to the state power of the

<sup>19</sup> K. Kosík: Dialektika Konkrétního, Praha, 1965, p.23-24.

<sup>20</sup> S. Carrillo: Problems of Socialism Today, London, 1970, p.56-63.

bourgeoisie is an equally absolute hold on state power by the proletariat, the class of wage-labourers exploited by capital"<sup>21</sup>. Rigid adherence to this view can only lead back to an interpretation of events as the progressive consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It should be added that a careful reading of the works of Marx and Engels can leave no doubt that their ideas on political power were more complex and more flexible than some of <sup>their</sup> interpreters believe<sup>22</sup>.

#### 1.5. The revival of Czechoslovak Marxist historiography and the debate about the "specific road"

Inside Czechoslovakia historiography followed a different course which was stimulated both by the condemnations of Stalin and by the relaxation of restrictions on access to sources. At first this was not accompanied with outright criticisms of the early methodology - there was anyway nothing to put in its place - and historians accumulating concrete empirical information still tried to fit it with an alleged definite Communist Party strategy of a democratic revolution "growing over" into a socialist revolution<sup>23</sup>.

Particularly after the forceful condemnations of Stalin in 1962 historians acquired the self confidence to search for a methodology on their own. There could even be open and explicit discussions of methodology exposing the weaknesses of past approaches. Two

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<sup>21</sup> E. Balibar: "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat", Marxism Today, XXI, No.5, May 1977.

<sup>22</sup> cf. W. Weselowski: Vrstvy, třídy a moc, Praha, 1968, p.38-58.

<sup>23</sup> e.g. K. Jech: Prohuzená vesnice, Praha, 1963 esp. p.242-243.

articles in particular deserve mention. The first was a collective work pointing to the novelty and complexity of the 1945-1948 period. It pointed out that the period saw not just a fight for power or a process of consolidation of power but rather a process of social change in which new social relationships were created: it was against that background that the fight for power took place<sup>24</sup>.

As the situation is recognised as being more complex, so it becomes possible to look with more objectivity at the crucial question of the subjective intentions of the political parties. It could be recognised again, once the needs of propaganda had receded into the background, that parties did not necessarily have at all times a complete and unchanging conception of what they were doing.

This was the point taken up by Opat in his important article on methodological problems<sup>25</sup> which directed attention to the influence of "the cult of the personality" in deforming earlier accounts of the 1945-1948 period. He argued that the Communist Party had in fact pursued a strategy which, albeit not exactly worked out, corresponded roughly to the "specific road" so vigorously repudiated in the early 1950's. He backed this up with quotes from Communist leaders and completed his argument by trying to show that, as a consequence of a sharpening of political differences inside Czechoslovakia stemming from the heightened international tension, the Communist Party was led to change its strategy during 1947.

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<sup>24</sup> Katedra dějin KSČ a ČSR: "K syntéze našich novodobých dějin. Socialismus", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1963, No.4.

<sup>25</sup> J. Opat: "K metodě studia a výkladu některých problémů v období 1945-1948", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1965, No1  
See also his book; J. Opat: O novou demokracii, Praha, 1966.

It was this that caused the February crisis.

This differs fundamentally from the emigré approach as scope is created, within the concept of the "specific road", for the Communist Party to pursue a strategy broader than just a struggle for power. Apparent changes in strategy are then not reduced to trickery or deceitfulness but are explained within the context of wider political and social conflicts and of a changing international situation. At the same time, Opat fundamentally transcended earlier Marxist works: the mechanical inevitability of events was firmly superseded by a complex process of development in which the various participants pursued different aims and strategies.

In fact, it was on this point that Opat was most strongly criticised. He was said, by fellow historian Belda, to have made the Communist Party too much the object rather than the subject of history by over-stating the flexible "specific" element in its strategy. He allegedly over-looked the party's basic aim which was always the "Soviet model" of socialism i.e. a single party holding a monopoly of power and relegating other organisations to the role of "transmission belts". Specificity could then be ascribed only to the means and not the aim, and Belda could argue that it was the attempts to achieve the aim that generated conflicts within the government coalition. Changes in the international situation did not initiate but only accelerated the process leading to February. From this Belda continued his argument presenting the post-February political structure as almost an adequate precondition for the "deformations" that followed<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> J. Belda: "Československá cesta k socialismu", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1967, No.1, and J. Belda: "Mocensko-politické změny v ČSR po únoru 1948", Revue dějin socialismu, 1969, No.2. These are summarised also in "Some Problems Regarding the Czechoslovak Road to Socialism", History of Socialism Yearbook 1968, Prague, 1969.

Although Belda did place great emphasis on the conscious action of the Communist Party in pursuit of long-standing aims as a source of conflict within society, he ultimately did not reduce the whole history of the 1945-1948 period to that<sup>27</sup>. Perhaps it was to some extent on the basis of this more complete work that Belda was led to accept the possibility of weaknesses in his own argument. In particular, he could not conclusively deny that Communist strategy did change at some point in late 1947<sup>28</sup>.

After the late 1960's this sort of discussion was once again restricted but an interesting contribution was still made in a work produced under conditions of illegality by J. Švec. He was obviously fully aware of the earlier disagreements when he argued that the "specific" elements in Communist strategy were not particularly important but that there nevertheless was a definite change in strategy in late 1947. After that the Communists aimed to establish immediately a monopoly of power and this caused the February crisis<sup>29</sup>. The ultimate source of this change in Communist strategy he identified in the new direction of Soviet foreign policy after mid-1947 with its aim of rapidly consolidating an Eastern Bloc.

Thus the analysis is made more involved as it is accepted that the Communists did make some changes to their policy and that this was, to some extent at least, a consequence of changes in the inter-

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<sup>27</sup> See the collective work J. Belda, M. Bouček, Z. Deyl, M. Klimeš: Na rozhraní dvou epoch, Praha, 1968.

<sup>28</sup> e.g. Belda's review of Opat's book O novou demokracii in Československý časopis historický, XV, No.2, 1967.

<sup>29</sup> J. Švec: Únor 1948, unpublished manuscript, Praha, 1975, esp. p.450.

national situation.

Perhaps the principal inadequacy especially of Belda's approach is that it is still set within narrow terms of reference. By recounting and explaining events within the restricted time period of 1945-1948 it is not made clear why they should have happened then - not earlier or later - or there - not, for example, in France or Italy. To put those events in perspective it is necessary to adopt a longer view involving consideration of the history of the Czechoslovak state from its inception in 1918.

#### 1.6. Bartošek's attempt to give a wider historical perspective

An attempt to fill this gap was the important talk by Bartošek to a conference of historians in 1965<sup>30</sup>. In summarising the relevant aspects of pre-war Czechoslovakia he paid particular attention to the general questions of political power and pointed to the inadequacy of the standard Marxist formulation that the bourgeoisie held power. He was concerned to show, in the very specific conditions of Czechoslovak society at that time, how they held power.

His argument, reduced to its simplest possible terms, was that certain representatives of the bourgeoisie were able to formulate and put into practice policies that satisfied Czech national aspirations. The point was that, as a small state founded only in 1918 within the potentially stormy environment of Central Europe, survival as an independent state required a conscious strategy. This,

<sup>30</sup> K. Bartošek: "Československá společnost a revoluce", Československá revoluce v letech 1944-1948, Praha, 1966.



based on what was termed the Czechoslovak "state idea", included general policies on the relations between nationalities and on the social and political institutions and structures: these had to be compatible with a foreign policy that could afford protection against potentially dangerous neighbours. Owing to the concrete circumstances it was the bourgeoisie's representatives who could solve these problems and thereby ensure "spiritual hegemony"<sup>31</sup>.

This sets the framework within which the Communist Party had to work out its ideas. Bartošek did not review its evolution through the inter-war period but did indicate that it failed to develop a concrete, convincing, positive alternative for Czechoslovak society and therefore could not seriously challenge bourgeois hegemony. New possibilities were opened up with the threat from Nazi Germany culminating in the collapse of the Czechoslovak state and hence of the bourgeois "state idea". The task of the Communists, and of other political forces too, was then to formulate a new "state idea" compatible with the changing situation in Central Europe.

The post-war strength of the Communists can, then, be related to their ability to formulate and practise ideas which corresponded to the needs of Czechoslovak society or, more specifically, which seemed likely to ensure the security of the state as desired by the Czech and Slovak nations.

This, however, in no way exhausts the problems of understanding the events of the 1945-1948 period: if anything, it indicates the need for further concrete analysis. As Bartošek made clear, the post-war

<sup>31</sup> Bartošek: "Československá", p.17.

revolution cannot be seen as a simple negation of the occupation or of pre-war society: it had to be essentially the development of a new and hopefully better society<sup>32</sup>. The details of what that could mean in practice were beyond the scope of his analysis as he was only providing a very general framework. He did, however, emphasise the need to advance historiography with a more careful analytical approach to the concrete state of Czechoslovak society after May 1945. This, <sup>he</sup> argued, was necessary both in the interests of general objectivity and so as to transcend the over-simplified interpretations of the period which portrayed events as if they were part of a definite Communist plan<sup>33</sup>.

#### 1.7. Kaplan's analysis of Czechoslovak society in 1945

A particularly important contribution was made by Kaplan, a prolific writer who helped in a number of advances in Czechoslovak historiography. The particular contribution discussed here involved a detailed analysis of the nature and consequences of some of the revolutionary changes of 1945<sup>34</sup>. The approach adopted was such that, although he discussed only what did happen, he could also implicitly indicate that there was scope for alternatives. The simple historical narrative, in so far as events are explained at all, often gives the impression of inevitability.

<sup>32</sup>Bartošek: "Československá", p.36.

<sup>33</sup>Bartošek: "Československá", p.34.

<sup>34</sup>K. Kaplan: Znarození a socialismus, Praha, 1968.

His analysis started with the nationalisation of most of Czechoslovakia's industry in 1945. This he saw as the principal change after the restoration of the Czechoslovak state and he had no hesitation in emphasising its central place in Czechoslovak society's movement along "the road to socialism"<sup>35</sup>.

The nationalisations were agreed to by all parties within a broad coalition and Kaplan's elucidation of that process indicated that socialism in Czechoslovakia could not be the affair of one party or even of one class. It represented, in 1945, the fulfillment of much wider needs and aspirations and could even be seen as an all-national process with the working class playing a generally leading role but one that could not possibly be defined as precisely as implied in the term "the dictatorship of the proletariat."

To explain how these changes could gain such wide support would require both a detailed investigation of the period and a broader view of Czechoslovak history, along the lines undertaken by Bětošek. Kaplan, however, developed his study in a different direction by undertaking a detailed analysis of Czechoslovak society in 1945 and 1946. By looking at its social and economic structure and at the new institutions and relationships that developed during 1945, he could reveal the possibilities for that society and the problems it was to confront.

This recognition and definition of the complexity of Czechoslovak society in turn led to an assessment of the political parties not in terms of their adherence to <sup>or</sup> understanding of general or abstract

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<sup>35</sup> K. Kaplan: "Československá cesta k socialismu", Československá revoluce v letech 1944-1948, Praha, 1966, p.160.

principles but in terms of the concrete needs and possibilities of Czechoslovak society<sup>36</sup>. He did not look in full at the parties' activities, but restricted himself to their programmatic formulations. He then posed the question of whether these were adequate to the task of leading Czechoslovakia further along the road that it was taking i.e. the road to a socialist society via broad national unity and with the democratic approval of the great majority of the population. Although no party had the programmatic equipment with which to solve all the problems that could threaten to disrupt that process, Kaplan concluded that the Communist Party was the closest to what was required.

With this analysis Kaplan produced a basis for understanding the post-war strength of the Communist Party which is omitted or oversimplified in references to its assimilation of general "national traditions" or even adherence to a pre-existing or independently defined "political culture". Moreover, it indicates an interpretation of some of the changes in the Communist Party's ideas which Kaplan related to the realisation, as forced by actual experience, that the ideas evolved during the life-time of the Comintern were inadequate. The immediate post-war period he in fact characterised as one of searching with nobody able to present clear and convincing ideas of what socialism in Czechoslovakia would look like<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup>This is obviously a very brief account. Kaplan's work is referred to in later chapters.

<sup>37</sup>K. Kaplan: "Historické místo akčního programu", Nová mysl, XXII, No.5, May 1968.

There are, however, problems. Above all, although Kaplan did demonstrate the existence of conflicts within Czechoslovak society, especially between <sup>social</sup> groups, it is not clear that these needed to culminate in so fundamental a change as February 1948. Kaplan's analysis therefore has to be reconciled with a concrete narrative of events to show how the parties were not just their programmatic principles but also pursued definite strategies culminating in the February events.

On post-February society Kaplan also wrote a great deal<sup>38</sup>, but he did not integrate it with his analysis of Czechoslovak society in 1945. He did, however, argue that, whatever the causes and immediate consequences of February, a process of narrowing of the social base for political power took place from 1948 onwards. So, from socialism being an objective need for more or less the whole of Czechoslovak society, it became restricted to a narrowly "social" question, i.e. to the immediate social interests of the working class or of a section of the working class<sup>39</sup>. How this came about and what wider significance it had would require further analysis of the concrete events. For the time being at least, that is restricted by the political conditions inside Czechoslovakia today.

In fact, many of the works on recent history published in the late 1960's could have very direct political implications. Opat, with his argument that February 1948 was at least to some extent a consequence of the cold war, could have been supporting arguments

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<sup>38</sup> e.g. K. Kaplan: Utváření generální linie výstavby socialismu v Československu, Praha, 1966 and "Zamyšlení nad politickými procesy", Nová mysl XXII, Nos.6,7, and 8, June, July and August 1968.

<sup>39</sup> Kaplan: "Historické", esp. p.578.

for a degree of political liberalisation in the easier international climate of the 1960's. Belda seemed to be pointing out fundamental weaknesses in the Communist Party's conception of political power, again a very relevant question in the late sixties. Švec's account would support the view that a change in the method of exercising political power inside Czechoslovakia depends to a great extent on the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. Kaplan's approach is today officially condemned perhaps more vigorously than any other as he was indicating the possibility and even the desirability of seeking alternative "models" of socialism from that which developed after 1948.

Since 1969 the relationship between historical study and practical politics has again been reversed so that the former, even if not a simple servant of the latter, is at least forbidden to carry potentially critical implications. A consequence of this is that, although some very useful works have been produced, there has been no constructive discussion of theoretical or methodological questions.

#### 1.8 The structure of this thesis

As has been indicated, there is already a considerable body of literature on the events in Czechoslovakia in the 1945-1948 period. This is a great advantage as it means that many points have been clarified and many blind alleys closed, but it also imposes a great burden. To make any serious contribution to the subject it is necessary to consider, and in some cases refute, a number of fairly sophisticated arguments. This can only be done on the basis of careful empirical investigation paying considerable attention to

detail.

It is also necessary to construct a complex and sophisticated argument taking as much as is useful from the existing works. This means that this thesis is long, detailed and not constructed in a simple way around a single straight forward line of argument. So, to prevent the general drift of the argument from being obscured, brief summary and discussion sections are included at various points.

The starting point, following the views of Bartošek and Zinner that preceding history is very relevant to an understanding of the 1945-1948 period, is the creation of the Czechoslovak state in 1918. This longer historical view can be justified empirically in the sense that earlier Czechoslovak and Communist Party history was an issue in 1946 elections and that references particularly to the situation in and immediately after 1918 were common in Communist Party statements. There is also a more theoretical justification as it makes possible an elucidation of how the Communist Party formed its ideas and its strategy within the changing Czechoslovak society. This involves a combination of Bartošek's approach with an analysis of Communist Party history in an attempt both to throw light on the roots and meaning of the Communists' post-war strength and also to provide a basis for clarifying the Communists' post-war strategy.

Towards these ends, particular attention is devoted to the 1918-1920 period. This is not intended to be a genuinely balanced history of the period as the centre of attention is the splitting of the Social Democrats. Although the outcome was very different from that of the 1945-1948 period there were a number of illuminating analogies which are useful partly in their own right and partly because they strongly influenced the post-World War II approaches

of the Communists and Social Democrats.

For the rest of the inter-war period the aim is to see why the Communists were unable to challenge the dominant "state idea" and how far they prepared themselves for the new situation of 1945. Unfortunately, owing to the lack of secondary source material, only brief references can be made to the policies of the Social Democrats. No attempt is made to treat thoroughly or objectively the other political movements as the central theme is restricted to the relationship between the Marxist parties and the Czechoslovak "state idea".

It is for the reader to judge how far this approach to the history of pre-1938 Czechoslovakia helps to give depth to post-World War II events. There is however, far less scope for questioning the direct relevance of the history of Czechoslovakia during World War II. Again, no attempt is made at a complete history and attention is directed onto those aspects that most directly affected the post-war situation. Particularly important are the strategies of the main groups in emigration and how they led to the formation of the first post-war government. This then leads to a sound basis for the most difficult part of the thesis, the discussion of the so-called "national revolution" of 1945.

The term "revolution" was widely used inside Czechoslovakia to describe the events of 1918 and of 1945. In the latter case it is certainly justified as what took place involved a thorough-going transformation touching practically every aspect of political and social life. In seeking a framework for analysing the revolutionary changes there is little to be learnt from the Marxist works of the Stalin period which, as has been argued, tried to compress the complexity of the process into a framework of pure class struggle.



Western works on revolution are also of minimal help. One of the apparent classics simply generalises a number of common features of past revolutions<sup>40</sup>; in no way does this lead to a conceptual framework applicable elsewhere. A more recent and typical work tries to restrict revolution to a violent change of government while explicitly excluding discussion of social questions<sup>41</sup>.

The best framework for discussing the Czechoslovak 1945 revolution seems to be an adaption from Kaplan's work. Instead of concentrating solely on the nationalisation of industry, an attempt will be made to show the social transformation in greater complexity including other economic and social changes and the construction of new organs and institutions of power.

From the analysis of this revolutionary process a basis is laid for understanding both the nature of the multi-party system that grew out of it and the sources of conflict within society as a whole. More will be said in the relevant chapter on the analysis of political parties, but it must be emphasised here that an orthodox "systems" approach<sup>42</sup>, whereby a "political system" is implicitly defined separately from the rest of the social being, is totally inadequate.

Instead, parties must be placed firmly within the full complex of social relationships. The parties themselves were closely integrated into the revolutionary changes and especially the Communist Party played a major role in constructing new institutions and

<sup>40</sup> C.C. Brinton: The Anatomy of Revolution, London, 1953.

<sup>41</sup> P. Calvert: Revolution, London, 1970, p.141.

<sup>42</sup> The example discussed later is G.A. Almond and G.B. Powell: Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach, Boston and Toronto, 1966.

relationships which might, in a "systems" approach, be hived off into an ill-defined "political culture".

The approach to the parties as adopted differs from Kaplan's in that it is not restricted to the parties' stated programmes but aims also to analyse how their concrete policies took shape. Above all, the aim is to show, with the help of a concrete narrative of policies and events, how the various conflicts within society ultimately led to the February crisis. This is intended to be a reconciliation of Kaplan's approach with that of Belda.

It would be possible to end the narrative with the February events and the consolidation of a monopoly of power for the Communist Party. That approach has been used in many <sup>WORKS</sup> and inevitably leaves the impression that the central issue in the preceding period was the fight for power. This work, however, includes a final section on post-February society in an attempt to show how the change in political power began to affect other aspects of society. Without this the immediate consequences and possibilities of the February events would not be made clear.

#### 1.9 A note on sources and terminology

The sources and terminology used can both give the impression of an unjustified bias, and every effort has therefore been made to use a wide range of sources on potentially controversial issues and to refer to primary sources wherever possible. This raises a further problem relating to the volumes of collected works and other documents that have been published inside Czechoslovakia. Gottwald's works published in the 1950's, for example, contain many alterations from

the original speeches and articles. Generally these are minor stylistic improvements but occasionally they influence the political content. Unfortunately, it is not possible to check this for those speeches that were published for the first time in the volumes of collected works. It does seem, however, that from the mid-1960's onwards volumes of published documents are far more scrupulous in faithfully reproducing the complete and unaltered original wording.

Nevertheless, even these later works are selective in the documents they publish so that, even if they are the basic sources for some parts of this work, it is reassuring to be able to check their implications against the information contained in some of the more serious Western works.

On terminology, the aim has been to minimise the scope for objections that are not central to the main argument. Terms such as fascism, revolution, revolutionary change, social class or social groups are not rigorously defined. They are often simply used in the way they were in the period under discussion without the terms themselves representing any deeper ideological or theoretical standpoint. The terms, "reaction", "terror", and "totalitarianism" cannot be treated in this "neutral" way as they were a source of direct political contention and played a role in political propaganda battles between parties.

The term socialism has also been given different meanings and can be defined in a multitude of ways. To give it too precise a definition would only create scope for unnecessary controversy, but it must be given some general meaning if it is to have relevance to the changes that did take place in Czechoslovakia. It will therefore be used in the broadest Marxist sense to refer to a social and economic

system historically superseding capitalism and based on some form of social ownership of the basic means of production.

PART I

THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY  
OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA UP TO 1938.

For reasons explained in the introduction, the events of the 1945-1948 period cannot be treated in isolation from the rest of Czechoslovak history. In particular, there was a striking analogy with the events at the end of World War I although at the same time there were profound differences. The similarities were obvious in the emergence of a Czechoslovak state and in the important role in setting the future direction of that state played by groups who had spent the war in emigration. There was also a similar hope, or even assumption, held by much of the population that the new state would be of a socialist character.

For the purposes of this work, the principal difference between the two periods can be related to the frustration of that hope after 1918 and to how the socialist movement reacted to its disappointment. Thus by 1921 Social Democracy, seemingly unable to understand and cope with events, had split into two parties thereby significantly weakening the direct Marxist influence in Czechoslovak politics. Over the following years the two Marxist parties developed their distinct policies and practices.

The aim in the following chapter is to show how the Marxist parties confronted the problems posed by the creation of the Czechoslovak state as a basis for seeing how prepared they were to deal with the possibilities and problems of the 1945-1948 period.

## CHAPTER 2: THE CREATION OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK STATE

### I.2.1. Masaryk evolves a Czech strategy in emigration but most Czech politicians ignore him. The Social Democrats do not oppose the Austrian war effort.

Masaryk, a university professor and member of the pre-war Austrian parliament with liberal and socially progressive views, based his strategy from the start on the belief that Austria would be militarily defeated<sup>1</sup>. He therefore worked from abroad trying to win the West and Russia to support his aim which, although at first not clearly formulated, was for the establishment of an independent Czechoslovak state. The centre of this strategy was the recruitment of a Czechoslovak army out of Czechs living abroad and prisoners of war and those who surrendered to the armies of the Entente. The greatest possibilities were in Russia, but the Tsarist regime would not allow the creation of separate Czechoslovak units: that only became possible after the February 1917 revolution. The total Czechoslovak army reached the impressive size of 128,000 with 92,000 in Russia, 12,000 in France and 24,000 in Italy<sup>2</sup>. This facilitated the acceptance of the idea of a Czechoslovak state in the West as Czechoslovakia could claim to have fought against the Central Powers.

At first the majority of Czech politicians at home kept no more than casual contacts with Masaryk and his associates. In this they

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<sup>1</sup> T.G. Masaryk: The Making of a State, Memories and Observations 1914-1918, London, 1927, Chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> T.G. Masaryk: Making esp. p.265. For a reasonably good Czech account see J. Krížek: Říjnová revoluce a česká společnost, Praha, 1967. Formally speaking these troops were subordinated to the French Army command and known as legionnaires.

were complying with the dominant mood among the population which stopped short of outright opposition to the Austrian war effort<sup>3</sup>.

The Social Democrats were no exception to this and, noticing how easily anti-Austrian politicians were imprisoned and hence eliminated from political life, they complied with the regime even to the extent of stopping all activities of their local organisations<sup>4</sup>. The party then existed only in its top leadership which directed its activities into talks with bourgeois politicians while the rest of the party went into hibernation.

There was a rational justification for this policy as the only alternatives to the Austrian empire seemed to be Tsarist Russia or Germany itself. The first was quite unpalatable to any socialist while the latter would leave the way open for a complete Germanic dominance of central Europe leaving the other nationalities of the Austro-Hungarian empire hopelessly outnumbered. Thus there was scope for an Austrian patriotism transcending nationality and this received articulation within the strategy of the Social Democrats thanks particularly to Bohumír Šmeral. He rose to a position of prominence within the party precisely because he seemed able to justify compliance to the regime within a Marxist framework<sup>5</sup>.

His starting point was the national question which had gradually divided the working class into Czech and German movements. Šmeral, like other Marxists at the time, was opposed to this process in

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<sup>3</sup> F. Soukup: 28. října 1918, Vol 1, Praha, 1928, p.283-290.

<sup>4</sup> Z. Kárník: Habsburk, Masaryk či Šmeral?, Praha, 1968, p.21.

<sup>5</sup> All this is excellently expounded in Kárník: Habsburk, Chapter 1.



principle. He rejected the aim of an independent Czech state and favoured instead a solution to the nationalities question in Central Europe based on progressive federalisation with Austria-Hungary as the nucleus. He argued that this, involving the overcoming of national pre judices, could become a state allowing full rights to all nationalities while "balkanisation" of the Austrian empire would create a mass of non-viable statelets<sup>6</sup>. He warned particularly against Czech national aspirations being satisfied at the expense of the rights of the German nationality<sup>7</sup>.

Šmeral attached great importance to the national question because he saw internationalism as the very basis of socialist ideas<sup>8</sup>, so that a Central European Federation would be the next step towards a socialist Europe.

Towards this aim, and incidentally revealing how far Šmeral was from Lenin's position on the state, he advocated a policy of "conscious caution, of conscious opportunism" which was aimed at conserving strength and winning influence for the struggles to come after the war. By developing contacts with other Czech politicians and creating a united "Austrophile" front, Šmeral hoped ultimately to become a "sharer of power"<sup>9</sup>. Then, in conjunction with the German Social Democrats, they would have the strength to reform the old empire from within in the interests of the oppressed small nations.

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<sup>6</sup> K. Gorovský: "Bohumír Šmeral", Revue dějin socialismu, 1970, No.1 p.119-122.

<sup>7</sup> B. Šmeral: Historické práce 1908-1940, Praha, 1961, p.75.

<sup>8</sup> Šmeral: Historické, p.28-111. This article was originally published in 1909.

<sup>9</sup> Speech on 1/5/17, quoted in Kárník: Habsburk, p.60.

The logic of this strategy led Šmeral to displays of unquestioning loyalty to the Emperor, but there were still only isolated signs of discontent within the party<sup>10</sup>. In fact, Šmeral appeared as the dominant politician on the whole Czech scene as well as the unchallenged leader of Social Democracy<sup>11</sup>. This however, was changed by the course of the war itself, particularly during 1917.

I.2.2. Economic difficulties at home and the two Russian revolutions radically change the domestic political situation. Divisions begin to appear within Social Democracy.

The first point was that the strain of the war and blockade began to tell on the economy resulting in widespread shortages and a disastrous drop in even the most basic foodstuffs<sup>12</sup>. This was reflected in strikes which, although opposed by the Social Democrats' leaders, were welcomed by Masaryk as a major anti-Austrian act that could help his claim to represent the genuine feeling of the Czech people<sup>13</sup>. In fact, rather than forming a left opposition within Social Democracy, the leaders of these spontaneous strikes linked their opposition to the Austrian empire with radical nationalism rather than internationalism and thereby formed the nucleus for a revival of the non-Marxist National Socialists<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Kárník: Habsburk, p.30-31.

<sup>11</sup> F. Peroutka: Budování státu, Vol I, Praha, 1933, p.501, and F. Soukup: 28 října 1918, Vol II, Praha, 1928, p.858

<sup>12</sup> Stručný hospodářský vývoj Československa do roku 1955, Praha, 1969, p.105-107. see also Soukup: 28, Vol II, p.925.

<sup>13</sup> T.G. Masaryk: Making, p.339.

<sup>14</sup> Kárník: Habsburk, p.65-67.

1917 was also the year of the two Russian revolutions which deeply affected the Czech political situation. The first one greatly helped Masaryk as, particularly after the U.S.A. entered the war, defeat for the Central Powers seemed certain and most Czech politicians began shifting from their pro-Austrian positions to support for a Czech or Czechoslovak state<sup>15</sup>. This applied even to many Social Democrats who no longer feared lest Austria's defeat should lead to domination by Tsarist Russia. Šmeral, however, stuck to his previous position even though he was aware of its unpopularity<sup>16</sup>. In September 1917 opposition within the party compelled him to resign from some of his positions but, while later acknowledging accusations of opportunism, he did not fully accept that his policies had amounted to national betrayal or had stemmed from cowardice<sup>17</sup>.

It was into this atmosphere of social discontent and nationalist feeling that the first reports penetrated of the October revolution in Russia. This may have encouraged the working class militancy displayed in immense strikes over the Austrian empire in January 1918. Generally, however, the impact of the October revolution was complex and contradictory. Its most direct effect was to remove one of Austria's enemies from the military and diplomatic arena: in a sense,

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<sup>15</sup> Soukup: 28, Vol I, p.422.

<sup>16</sup> He believed that 95% of the Czech population were completely anti-Austrian; Soukup: 28, Vol I, p.540, quoting a speech from June 1917.

<sup>17</sup> e.g. Protokol XII, řádného sjezdu čs sociálně demokratické strany dělnické, Praha, 1919, p.45. See also Šmeral's account of a discussion with Radek in B. Šmeral: Pravda o sovětovém Rusku, Praha, 1966, p.50.

then, it strengthened the Central Powers and weakened the fight for Czech statehood. This was even more obvious after Brest-Litovsk. It is therefore not surprising, particularly as Bolshevik statements on the rights of nations to self-determination were scrupulously censored<sup>18</sup>, that even Social Democrats were susceptible to portrayals of the Bolsheviks as German Agents<sup>19</sup>. In so far as they felt a class sympathy for the Russian revolution it conflicted with the desire for national liberation; so they tended to place even more hope in the West and consequently in Masaryk<sup>20</sup>. This was the attitude emerging spontaneously from the strike movements among Czech workers which therefore served only to divide them still further from their German work-mates<sup>21</sup>.

The October revolution appeared to be still more distant from the Czech national struggle when the Czechoslovak troops in Russia came into armed conflict with the Bolsheviks in mid-1918. They had been withdrawing from Russia across Siberia aiming to rejoin the war in France when, apparently in response to British wishes<sup>22</sup>, they started a consciously anti-Bolshevik campaign quickly taking control of the trans-Siberian railway. It remains unclear how the conflict began, but Masaryk and Beneš seem not to have been opposed to it believing that it could create the basis for a powerful intervention

<sup>18</sup> Soukup: 28, Vol. II, p.589-590.

<sup>19</sup> Křížek: Říj nová, p.38.

<sup>20</sup> Kárník: Habsburk, p.169.

<sup>21</sup> Kárník: Habsburk, p.189, 196 and 197.

<sup>22</sup> O. Perman: The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State: Diplomatic History of the Boundaries of Czechoslovakia 1914-1920, Leiden, 1962, p.34.

from the East against the new Russian regime<sup>23</sup>. The real point, however, was that Czechoslovakia's prestige was suddenly raised in the West<sup>24</sup>. Although it is more likely that the sudden willingness, particularly of the U.S.A, to support Masaryk's aim of an independent Czechoslovak state was primarily a consequence of the realisation that the Austrian empire could not survive to play the role of a counter-balance to German influence in Central Europe<sup>25</sup> the anti-Bolshevik actions of the Czechoslovak troops were at the time presented as a major factor helping Masaryk's activities. Beneš himself described them as the "strongest political factor at the end of the war and during the peace conference"<sup>26</sup>. This view found adherents among some Social Democrats who, by accepting Beneš's position were led to outright hostility towards the October revolution.<sup>27</sup>

I.2.3. October 1918. The Social Democrats accept subordination to bourgeois politicians as the Czechoslovak state is born.

As Austria's collapse appeared to be imminent so leading Czech politicians made preparations for a transfer of power. The brain behind the plan was the Agrarian A. Švehla<sup>28</sup> who successfully argued

<sup>23</sup> E. Beneš: My War Memoirs, London, 1928, p.370-371. See also V. Vávra: "K historiografické interpretaci poměru T.G. Masaryka vůči sovětskému Rusku v roce 1918", Československý časopis historický, XXI, No.1, 1973 and Perman: Shaping, esp. p.38-39.

<sup>24</sup> T.G. Masaryk: Making, p.255

<sup>25</sup> T.G. Masaryk: Making, p.251, J. Křížek: "Proti sovětské vystoupení čs. legii a změna vztahu Dohody k čs. Zahraničnímu odboji v roce 1918", Historie a vojenství, XV, No.1. 1966, p.1-37.

<sup>26</sup> Beneš: War Memoirs, p.368

<sup>27</sup> e.g. Modráček, Protokol XII, p.89

<sup>28</sup> For a complementary account of who he was see A. Paleček: "Antonín Švehla: Czech Peasant Statesman, Slavic Review, XXI, No.4, Dec. 1962.

for a supreme "National Committee" to be constituted out of the Czech political parties in proportions corresponding to their votes in the 1911 elections<sup>29</sup>. The first meeting was held on 13/7/18 and produced a statement of open commitment to the "Czechoslovak revolution abroad"<sup>30</sup>. Otherwise, however, activities amounted to little more than waiting for Austria to collapse<sup>31</sup>. Preparations were restricted to the first laws needed to proclaim the new state<sup>32</sup>.

The Social Democrats accepted a subordinate position within this movement. Although there were plenty of signs of general radicalisation among the Czech people, they were in no fit state to provide leadership for the national movement. Instead, the idea of merging with the expanding and radicalised National Socialists was seriously muted<sup>33</sup>. In fact, although the two parties came closer together and established a "United Socialist Council" on 6/9/18, the move was surprisingly easily defeated by Šmeral<sup>34</sup>. It would have meant the disappearance of an independent Marxist party.

Despite Šmeral's success in this, the party could not use their Marxist principles to formulate a new policy. Instead they seemed, in one of the most fateful moments of their history, to be paralysed by their own confusions and divisions. They could not provide a clear and united answer on any of the questions confronting the Czech nation. This applied to the question of the Czechoslovak state and

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<sup>29</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol I, p.18.

<sup>30</sup> Soukup: 28, Vol II, p.830.

<sup>31</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol I, p.16-21.

<sup>32</sup> Soukup: 28, Vol II, p.834-843.

<sup>33</sup> Soukup: 28, Vol II, p.890-892.

<sup>34</sup> Kárník: Habsburk, p.207.

self-determination, the attitude towards the Sudeten Germans, towards peace demands, the international socialist movement and the "Bolshevik" state against which Czechoslovak troops were fighting. The party was contenting itself with declarations of loyalty to the state while looking to the National Committee for solutions to difficult problems<sup>35</sup>.

At one time it was usual for Communist historians to maintain that mass radicalisation was of such a form as to open the way for socialism. It then followed that failure stemmed from subjective cowardice or even betrayal by the leadership. It seems fairer to ascribe their inability to lead to <sup>"the</sup> heritage of the past and the weak state of the workers movement disrupted by serious conflicts"<sup>36</sup>.

These subjective weaknesses were greatly accentuated by the objective weakness of Soviet Russia and hence its inability to directly assist the Czech desire for national liberation. As the Czech opposition to the Austrian empire definitely took primarily a national form, the credibility of political movements was largely dependent on their ability to ally with some international force that could secure and guarantee the Czechs' national aspirations within the potentially dangerous environment of Central Europe. Apart from a pro-Western or pro-Austrian orientation, the only alternative seemed to be faith in a world revolution that would destroy all existing power blocs and rid all states of aggressive intentions.

Such a notion was too abstract to <sup>appeal</sup> the Czech working class, but it was taken seriously in Russia where there was even an attempt to

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<sup>35</sup> According to J. Stivín, quoted in Kárník: Habsburk, p.277.

<sup>36</sup> B. Čerešňák: Dělnické hnutí na jihovýchodní Moravě v letech 1917-1921, Brno, 1969, p.25.

form a Communist Party on a programme rejecting participation in the bourgeois fight for national independence and staking everything on a world revolution<sup>37</sup>. There were even hopes of winning Czechoslovak soldiers to become the centre for such a world revolution<sup>38</sup>.

Šmeral's perspective of a reformed Austria seemed just as unrealistic because Austria itself was coming closer to Germany and the Austrian Social Democrats, following this trend, were advocating a unified German state which would in practice leave no scope for Czech national aspirations<sup>39</sup>. There was then seemingly no alternative to subordination to the National Committee.

Within this body the two socialist parties could at least prevent bourgeois politicians from gaining a complete monopoly and they even undertook some independent action. A general strike, approved by the National Committee, was called on 14/10/18 and, although not opposed to the bourgeois leadership, it did strengthen their demands by, for example, calling explicitly for a Czechoslovak republic. The action did not develop into an attempt to take power and in that sense only confirmed the subordination of the socialist parties. Nevertheless, it brought nearer Austria's collapse because it succeeded in its immediate aim of preventing a transfer of food supplies to Vienna<sup>40</sup>. Paradoxically, it may even have made the government more willing to surrender power to the National Committee which appeared to be the

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<sup>37</sup> Dějiny KSČ, Praha, 1961, p.123.

<sup>38</sup> Z. Kárník: První pokusy o založení Komunistické strany v čechách, Praha, 1966, p.20.

<sup>39</sup> Kárník: Habsburk, p.286-287.

<sup>40</sup> Soukup: 28, Vol II, p.955.



only reliable barrier to "Bolshevism" once the workers began taking direct action<sup>41</sup>.

In the meantime Masaryk and Beneš exploited the degree of recognition they had already won to form a provisional government on 14/10/18 even before they had a definite territory for the proposed state<sup>42</sup>.

Still nervous that they might be by-passed by negotiations in Prague or Vienna, they sent messages assuring the National Committee that everything had been won in the West<sup>43</sup>. It was therefore sufficient to wait patiently for Austria's collapse without undertaking any decisive action.

On 27/10/18 Austria's Foreign minister Andrássy replied to President Wilson's peace terms in a carefully ambiguous way that was interpreted by the Czech people as conceding their right to a state<sup>44</sup>. Massive and spontaneous demonstrations began the following day which has subsequently been taken as marking the foundation of the Czechoslovak state. The National Committee, true to its own philosophy, acted extremely cautiously and continued to look to Vienna for "instructions". It was still negotiating with Vienna on 29/10/18 and only assumed full power with the implicit blessing of Vienna<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol I, p.53-54. See also Beneš's message to Berthelot of 29/10/19 in: Boj o směr vývoje československého státu, Vol I, Praha, 1965, document(hence forth dok)1, p.13.

<sup>42</sup> Soukup: 28, Vol II, p.961.

<sup>43</sup> Soukup: 28, Vol II, p.960-961.

<sup>44</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol I, p.103.

<sup>45</sup> See the account in Peroutka: Budování, Vol I, p.106-134.

Even the first acts of the National Committee after that were full of cautious conservatism as the legal statement proclaiming the new state gave prominence to the maintainance of all existing laws<sup>46</sup>.

Once successful in Prague, similar coups were implemented in other Czech towns where local National Committee emerged to proclaim the new state<sup>47</sup>. The Prague committee was then enlarged into a National Assembly with the Czech parties represented according to their votes in 1911. It soon elected Masaryk as President and the first government, a coalition of these parties, was formed with the right-winger Kramář as Prime Minister and Beneš as Foreign Minister.

#### I.2.4. Summary and discussion

The Czechoslovak state was born in 1918 out of the defeated Austro-hungarian empire. Although this was immensely popular with Czech people, few Czech political leaders had consistently predicted this end to the war and most were therefore forced to quickly adapt themselves to the new situation. Masaryk won an automatic position of leadership because he had based a strategy on the correct prediction that the Central Powers would be defeated by the West.

The Social Democrats had great difficulty in facing the new situation and divisions developed within their leadership. Some effectively subordinated themselves to Masaryk while others, especially Šmeral, were very suspicious of the viability of a small independent Czechoslovak state. Their fears were not unjustified but they were unable to articulate them into an attractive and convincing

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<sup>46</sup> Beneš: War Memoirs, p.453.

<sup>47</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol I, p.141 and Soukup: 28, Vol II, p.1073.

alternative.

It may have been that both trends within Social Democracy could have made a greater impact by vigorously championing the Czech national cause and trying to ensure that it had a more lasting socialist content. There was, however, no simple analogy with 1945 because of the very different international situation. In the first place, Austria was not Nazi Germany and in second place - and this was the decisive objective factor weakening the forces that could advocate socialist revolution - there was no great power able and willing to defend a socialist Czechoslovakia.

The next chapter shows how the subjective weaknesses and objective difficulties led to the division of Social Democracy and to the creation of a Communist Party.

### CHAPTER 3: THE SPLITTING OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND FOUNDING OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

#### I.3.1. Working class militancy falls short of revolutionary socialism

The atmosphere in the new republic has justly been described as one of nationalist euphoria gripping the whole Czech population including the working class. Although there were many spontaneous demonstrations and strikes, reflecting the sheer desperation of the workers at food shortages<sup>1</sup>, this cannot be interpreted as opposition to the regime: rather it reflected the belief that such demands could at last <sup>be</sup> met. In addition, there were demands of a clearly nationalist nature, for example, for the removal of previously strongly pro-Austrian officials<sup>2</sup>. Explicitly socialist demands such as the nationalisation of industries were never linked with any direct actions: there seems rather to have been a quiet confidence among workers that the establishment of an independent state would lead naturally to socialism.

This belief was encouraged when the Social Democrat Ministers succeeded in passing urgent social reforms such as the eight-hour day, social insurance measures and emergency unemployment benefits.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, aware of the absence of an army or reliable police force, bourgeois leaders were looking for other means to stave off what they

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<sup>1</sup> Z. Kárník: Za československou republiku rad, Praha, 1963, p.69.

<sup>2</sup> Many resolutions are contained in Boj o směr, Vol I. See also A. Pěnička: Kladensko v revolučních letech 1917-1921, Praha, 1954, p.41-42, J. Kolečka: Revoluční dělnické hnutí na Moravě a ve Slezsku 1917-1921, Praha, 1957, p.110 and 114 and Čerešňák: Dělnické, p.28 and p.44.

<sup>3</sup> Křížek: Říjnová, p.68, and Kolečka: Revoluční, p.115.

thought was a threat of immediate revolution. In the prevailing atmosphere it was impossible to pose openly as conservatives so Kramář instead urged the full exploitation of Masaryk's "unused, unwilting popularity" which could "hold socialism in rein"<sup>4</sup>. Statements made by Masaryk in emigration certainly suggested that he favoured socialist change and all parties were persuaded to mention the nationalisation of large enterprises specifically to lighten the task of the Social Democrat leaders in convincing their membership that socialism did not need to be fought for<sup>5</sup>. By creating the illusion that socialism was inevitable it was also made easier for the government to order the dissolution of the National Committees. In some cases, generally when forced to do so by the desperation of the workers, these had exceeded their powers as conceived by the government and appeared as potentially revolutionary organs<sup>6</sup>: but when the government ordered their dissolution by a unanimous resolution on 4/12/18<sup>7</sup>, protests were minimal. This was simply another indication of the thinking of the working class leaders who could see no further function for such organs once the state had been established and certain basic reforms implemented<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Beneš No. 24/11/18; Boj o směr, Vol I, dok. 127, p. 145-146.

<sup>5</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol II, p. 543-536. This applied even to National Democracy, the most explicitly bourgeois party, Peroutka: Budování, Vol IV, p. 2338-2339.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. The report of the National Committee's activities in Kladno dated 10/11/18; Boj o směr, Vol I, dok. 117, p. 130-133.

<sup>7</sup> Boj o směr, Vol I, dok. 130, p. 151.

<sup>8</sup> This was true even in Kladno as indicated by Pěnička: Kladensko, p. 47-48, 51 and 52. See also Kárník: Za československou, p. 47.

Although there was undoubtedly an element of conscious manipulation whereby a real socialist revolution was averted, this does not mean that socialist leaders and many of their followers were simply tricked. Šmeral explained a deeper aspect of the problem to Lenin saying that the Czech workers were "nationalistic because they are afraid that victory in a social struggle is a castle in the air and that the German workers would exploit this social struggle for their own irredentist national aims"<sup>9</sup>.

This undoubtedly was the crucial point: Masaryk and Beneš could present a fairly coherent policy following on from their war-time activities and placing reliance on the Western powers for the establishment and consolidation of the Czechoslovak state at its centre. In the existing world situation it must have seemed that any radical socialist alternative would lead only to disaster.

I.3.2. Masaryk and Beneš consolidate their dominance over Social Democracy thanks to their ability to present credible, positive policies.

Beneš, fully aware that the new state was being established against the wishes of Germans and Hungarians, was present at the peace conference which took place in a number of stages throughout 1919 and 1920. This reflected his pragmatic assessment of the importance of winning powerful friends abroad and he consciously tried to fit Czechoslovakia into <sup>the</sup> French plan for the reorganisation of Central Europe<sup>10</sup> whereby several small states were to take over Austria's role as the counter-balance to Germany<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Šmeral: Pravda, p.306-307.

<sup>10</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol II, p.581.

<sup>11</sup> Perman: Shaping, esp. Chapter 4.

He used all his shrewdness and diplomatic abilities to avoid offending Britain and the U.S. although they were sceptical of the plan.

The new state, then, was never intended to be internationally neutral but was anti-German and anti-"Bolshevik" from the start. This had to be reflected in internal policy. When a broad, but seemingly unorganised German opposition to the state showed itself in strikes and demonstrations, armed force was used against them. Beneš, while warning against too much bloodshed, sent assurances from Paris that the government should "take very energetic steps" as there was strong anti-German feeling at the peace conference<sup>12</sup>. This could only further divide Czech and German socialists: the latter tried to co-ordinate their activities with the Austrian parliament and were still calling effectively for the destruction of Czechoslovakia in late 1919<sup>13</sup>. Leading Czech Social Democrats responded by concluding that no conflict with the West could be allowed particularly while Russia was so weak<sup>14</sup>.

At the same time Beneš exploited to the full reports reaching Paris that "Bolshevism" was rampant in Central Europe<sup>15</sup>. He advocated the avoidance of any policies at home that could be a prelude to "Bolshevism" so that he could present Czechoslovakia as an

<sup>12</sup>Peroutka: Budování, Vol II, p.777-778.

<sup>13</sup>Z. Požárský: Založení komunistické strany v Severních Čechách, Ústí nad Labem, 1971, p.15.

<sup>14</sup>R. Bechyně: Pero mi zůstalo, Praha, 1947, p.167.

<sup>15</sup>Perman: Shaping, p.71; see also Beneš's memorandum to allied governments of 3/11/18 in Boj o směr, Vol I, dok.5, esp.p.17, and his note to the U.S. Secretary of State of 20/12/18 in Boj o směr, Vol I, dok.24, p.32-33.

island of stability deserving speedy recognition and clarification of its frontiers<sup>16</sup>. It was argued that the dangers from surrounding states and from an alleged "Bolshevik" army advancing on Czechoslovakia justified a request for Western troops as the best way to consolidate the state<sup>17</sup>. In practice this did not happen but a Czechoslovak army was built up by French officers and under the ultimate command of Marshall Foch.

Beneš also exploited the actions of Czechoslovak troops in Russia<sup>18</sup>, but their importance was only shortlived. Once the new state was formed they ignored the fiery anti-Bolshevik rhetoric of their commanders<sup>19</sup> primarily because they believed their struggle to be over and wanted only to return home. Also, as they tended to be politically on the left, they were reluctant to help a fight which seemed to aim not for democracy but for restoration of the old order<sup>20</sup>.

There was anyway no immediate sign of active intervention from the Western powers so that Masaryk and Beneš, although opposed in

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<sup>16</sup> Note from the Ministry for Defence to Beneš on 2/12/18 in Boj o směr, Vol I, dok.17, p.28-29, and then Beneš's note to Clemenceau on 25/3/19 in Boj o směr, Vol I, dok.60, p.85-86.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Kramář to Beneš on 24/11/18 in Boj o směr, Vol I, dok.127, p.145-146.

<sup>18</sup> "...our people continue to shed their blood in defence of our common interest on the far away Siberian plains", wrote Beneš to the U.S. Secretary of State on 20/12/18; Boj o směr, Vol I, dok.24, p.33.

<sup>19</sup> e.g. Štefánik, on 28/11/18 denounced "Bolshevism" as "anarchism . . threatening our state too . .", Boj o směr, Vol I, dok.15, p.27.

<sup>20</sup> Boj o směr, Vol I, dok.37, p.54-55, and dok.55, p.80-82. For the legionnaires' programmatic statement of 16/1/21, in which they described themselves as socialists, see Boj o směr, Vol II, dok.183, p.173-174. For a fuller discussion see Z. Sládek: "Československá politika a Rusko 1918-1920", Československý časopis historický, XVI, No.6, 1968 and J Kvasnička: Československé legie v Rusku 1917-1920, Bratislava, 1963.



principle to the Russian revolution, yielded easily to pressure from Social Democrats who had no sympathy for Denikin and Kolchak<sup>21</sup> and sought a more "realistic" approach to the Soviet regime. This was strongly opposed by Kramář who advocated active intervention believing that the Bolsheviks could easily be defeated and a new Russian regime would emerge guaranteeing Czechoslovakia's existence indefinitely<sup>22</sup>. Such illusions were not widely held and Kramář soon fell from power.

Nevertheless, approaches to the Soviet regime were still very cautious and dependent on initiatives from the West: only gradually did Czechoslovakia's isolation look so potentially serious that they began to consider friendlier approaches in case Soviet help might one day be needed against Poland, Hungary or Germany<sup>23</sup>.

### 1.3.3. Social Democracy tries to adapt its policies to the situation in the new state

In the new situation after the foundation of the Czechoslovak state, the Social Democrats were confronted with the task of formulating new policies to accommodate to the new realities. At their congress in November 1918 they could clear up disputes over war-time policy which had been made irrelevant by events themselves. Šmeral could be rehabilitated and the campaign of vilification against him, was denounced. It had been started by Švelha in an attempt to shift all responsibility for the earlier pro-Austrian policies of all Czech

<sup>21</sup>R. Bechyně speaking on 9/10/19, quoted in Peroutka: Budování, Vol II, p.1323-1324.

<sup>22</sup>Boj o směr, Vol I, dok.43(on 11/2/19) and dok.44(on 14/2/19), p.67-70.

<sup>23</sup>Křížek: Říjnová, p.63.

politicians onto Šmeral alone<sup>24</sup>. This, however, could not prevent the emergence of disagreements over policies in the new situation and there was some continuity from Šmeral's former supporters to an embryonic left opposition<sup>25</sup>. The logic behind this would be that those previously "pro-Austrian" were less easily satisfied by national independence and less inclined to sacrifice social change for its defence<sup>26</sup>. There were, however, new voices demanding attention to "the idea . . . of revolution . . ." and particularly prominent among them was A. Zápotocký, the spokesman for Kladno, who had taken no part in war-time debates<sup>27</sup>.

The outcome of the congress was, however, a resolution approving the leadership's strategy of participation in the coalition government. While it was accepted that the most important task was co-operation "in the consolidation of the republic", the expectation was also expressed that the bourgeois parties would "implement the most needed reforms jointly with the working class without having to be forced into this by pressure". The crucial point was that, should the demands, which were for "absolute democracy" and for widespread expropriations of banks, land and industries, not be met quickly, then the Executive Committee was to call another congress to decide on further action<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup>Peroutka: Budování, Vol I, p.517. Apparently many people honestly believed that Šmeral was the devil and "jokes against mothers-in-law and against Šmeral were about equally common". An Agrarian journal promised to publish conclusive evidence that he was an agent of the Austrian police; Peroutka: Budování, Vol I, p.501&519.

<sup>25</sup>Šmeral: Pravda, p.307.

<sup>26</sup>Peroutka: Budování, Vol I, p.478.

<sup>27</sup>Protokol XII, p.96 and p.171.

<sup>28</sup>Protokol XII, p.209-210.

With the benefit of hindsight the debate appears to have been sterile. There had been controversy within Social Democracy about participation in a government when the issue had been posed as an abstract problem. In 1918 practice itself had given an answer and very little could have been gained by withdrawing from the government. Nobody actually proposed that. Nevertheless, the issue was posed in the blanket terms of support for or opposition to the coalition; there was no debate around the real problem of how the Social Democrats should use their positions in the government. They could offer no more than the prospect of another congress if drifting within the coalition did not take Czechoslovakia in a socialist direction.

It was, in fact, very easy for other parties to delay consideration of "socialisations" when even Social Democrats accepted the argument that they "would not even benefit the working class"<sup>29</sup>; presumably they were accepting the view of business circles that labour discipline and hence production would be damaged<sup>30</sup>.

Undoubtedly the strongest argument persuading the Social Democrats not to fight for socialisations was the belief that such potentially controversial issues should be set aside until the state apparatus<sup>3</sup> gained the strength to withstand its enemies.<sup>31</sup> There were even voices explicitly counterposing socialism to the interest of the

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<sup>29</sup> Protokol XII, p.197.

<sup>30</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol I, p.338-339 and Vol IV, p.2339-2343.

<sup>31</sup> See the speeches by A. Hampl and R. Bechyně in July and December of 1919 respectively, quoted in Čerešňák: Dělnické, p.58.

republic<sup>32</sup> and Bechyně later came close to this view by proclaiming the irrelevance of Marx's teachings to Czechoslovakia: he argued that socialism at once was impossible but maintained that it could be reached eventually by "the development of capitalism, of industry and of the consciousness of the working masses"<sup>33</sup>. This amounted to an argument for indefinite subordination to Beneš's strategy.

A logical complement to the coalition strategy was rejection of the relevance of the Russian revolution for Czechoslovakia. It seemed to be generally agreed that its "methods" were unsuitable<sup>34</sup>, although this was later often placed alongside expressions of support for the Russian revolution<sup>35</sup> and combined with the lasting faith that Czechoslovakia was heading towards the same aim albeit by a different method. An example was Stivín, generally tending towards the right of the party, who said: ". there are two people whom the workers love: Our President Masaryk and the President of the Russian Soviet Republic, Lenin. . Masaryk is a socialist too and advocates the notion that communism is the highest form of socialism: he is, however, searching for a different way there from Lenin".<sup>36</sup>

In 1918 the Bolshevik's ideas were even less known than in 1920 and references to the "methods" they used often reflected knowledge

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<sup>32</sup> This position was taken by Modráček who, rather than waiting to be expelled, left the party in 1919. He rejoined in 1924; Peroutka: Budování, Vol II, p.856, and Sociální demokrat, 28/2/19, p.5.

<sup>33</sup> Protokol XIII. řádného sjezdu československé sociálně demokratické strany dělnické 27, 28 a 29/11/20, Praha, 1921, p.93.

<sup>34</sup> e.g. Šmeral: Protokol XII, p.107.

<sup>35</sup> e.g. even Soukup, Protokol XIII, p.78.

<sup>36</sup> His speech of 28/3/20, Boj o směr, Vol II, dok. 259, p.243-245.

derived only from highly distorted press reports. The most favourable view at first was that the Bolsheviks might not be responsible for everything bad in Russia - and this was suggested by one of the most radical of all Social Democrat organisations<sup>37</sup>. This, it soon became clear, did not mean that there was absolute hostility to the Russian revolution. There was at least enough sympathy to lead to a desire for more information.

This was put to the test when A. Muna, and other former soldiers who had become Communists while in Russia, returned to Czechoslovakia to give eye-witness accounts of the revolution. Workers, particularly in Kladno, defended their right to speak<sup>38</sup>. By contrast Beneš warned how this could harm Czechoslovakia's case at the peace conference<sup>39</sup> and the Social Democrat leaders tried to avoid embarrassment by asking Muna, portrayed in the bourgeois press as the embodiment of all evil, to quietly leave the country<sup>40</sup>. Although he refused to do this, he was aware of the limited nature of his support and understood that Czechoslovakia was not on the verge of revolution: he therefore postponed his original intention of forming a Communist Party and took the opportunity to work within the Social Democracy<sup>41</sup>. This

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<sup>37</sup> Contribution of the delegate from Hodonin, Protokol XII, p.119-120.

<sup>38</sup> Pěnička: Kladensko, p.54 shows that this did not mean agreement with their views.

<sup>39</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol II, p.577.

<sup>40</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol II, p.564.

<sup>41</sup> Z. Kárník: První pokusy o založení Komunistické strany v Čechách, Praha, 1966, p.22-24, and Z. Kárník: "Založení KSČ a Kominterny", Revue dějin socialismu, 1969, No.2, p.171-174.

meant that during the first period of its consolidation the new government was not confronted by any alternative programme on its left.

Nevertheless, discontent among socialists over the attempts to limit democratic rights showed itself as the state machine began to reassert its authority with the application of the Austrian laws restricting free assembly and allowing for pre-publication censorship of newspapers. At first, workers' organisations had been able to ignore these laws, and the police had not enforced them<sup>42</sup>. The question of democratic freedoms then came to a head over the imprisonment of Muna on 21/6/19. A protest strike in Kladno, the town supplying Prague with coal, led to the dropping of treason charges and he was amnestied in May 1920<sup>43</sup>. There could, however, be no doubt that the state's power was beginning to be used against the left with the aim of preventing "Bolsheviks" from putting their case<sup>44</sup>.

#### I.3.4. Consolidation of a capitalist Czechoslovakia encourages divisions in Social Democracy.

The key to the unity of Social Democracy at its first post-war congress had been the expectation that a socialist society would be allowed to emerge spontaneously. It was therefore inevitable that problems should arise within the party as post-war consolidation led towards a capitalist and not a socialist state. This was quickly apparent in economic policy as private enterprise was presented by

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<sup>42</sup> Kolářka: Revoluční, p.111.

<sup>43</sup> Pěnička: Kladensko, p.85, and Peroutka: Stavování, Vol III, p.1838-1840.

<sup>44</sup> e.g. Brno police report of 20/6/19, Boj o směr, Vol I, dok.211.

the government as a panacea. Talk of "socialisations" were made irrelevant when the term "nationalisation" was interpreted as meaning transfer to Czech private ownership. In this way the financial empire of the Živnobanka was established: it could claim genuine Czech-ness as it had refused to give war loans to the Austrian empire thereby, perhaps to its own surprise, saving itself enormous financial losses<sup>45</sup>.

Parallel~~ing~~ the creation of powerful Czech capitalist groupings was the consolidation of a conservative force in the countryside. This was of particular political significance because, despite their economic strength, explicitly bourgeois parties could never command mass voting strength in Czechoslovakia. Instead, the backbone of conservatism was the Agrarian party. They built their strength on a land reform directed against the old nobility: they sold confiscated land particularly to larger peasants. Considerable amounts of land also went to middle peasants or were returned to the previous owners, but landless labour~~ers~~<sup>er</sup>s received nothing<sup>46</sup>.

The right wing within the party was nervous of even this much and was also suspicious of any participation in a coalition containing socialists. Švehla, however, was astute enough to see that small farmers might otherwise be attracted to socialism<sup>47</sup>. In practice, despite some dissatisfaction with the slowness of the reform, the Agrarians were able to dominate the villages thanks to their organised campaigning for land to remain in private ownership<sup>48</sup>: they could

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<sup>45</sup> J. Veselý: O vzniku a založení KSČ, Praha, 1952, p.79-80, and M. Volf: Sociální a politické dějiny Československa, Praha, 1948, p.238-240.

<sup>46</sup> For detailed figures see M. Otáhal: Zápas o pozemkovou reformu, Praha, 1963, p.196 and p.199-200.

<sup>47</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol II, p.901, and Otáhal: Zápas, p.119-121.

<sup>48</sup> Otáhal: Zápas, p.160.

shape the law in such a way that they ultimately controlled its implementation<sup>49</sup>. The outcome was a very slowly implemented reform, but the Agrarians could always claim credit for it.

In this they were indirectly helped by the unimaginativeness of the Social Democrats who, although causing the first government crisis in March 1919 by insisting on the need for land reform proposals, never actively campaigned on a consistent policy<sup>50</sup>. They seemed happy just to boast of having been the first to advocate land reform while actually scared of its consequences. Their concrete policy proposals were rejected even by some of their own members<sup>51</sup> (they advocated nationalisation rather than the subdivision of estates which they claimed would not have helped the propertiless<sup>52</sup>; they offered nothing for the politically powerful middle peasants). The real point may have been that they feared land reform and even opposed some strikes because they feared the exacerbation of urban food shortages<sup>53</sup>. This led Bechyně effectively to accept the existence of an irreconcilable conflict of interest between workers and peasants so that the latter would never favour socialism<sup>54</sup>. It was therefore only natural that land reform should be left to the Agrarians<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup>Peroutka: Budování, Vol II, p.865-873, and Otáhal: Zápas, p.171-176.

<sup>50</sup>Peroutka: Budování, Vol II, p.781-798, and Otáhal: Zápas, p.168-169.

<sup>51</sup>Otáhal: Zápas, p.158.

<sup>52</sup>Protokol XII, p.196-198. The resolution was inspired by Modráček.

<sup>53</sup>Cerešňák: Dělnické, p.96.

<sup>54</sup>Otáhal: Zápas, p.103.

<sup>55</sup>Otáhal: Zápas, p.187.



If this subordination of Social Democracy to Agrarians was most obvious in agricultural policies, then it was perhaps just as important within the coalition in a more general way. Despite enormous electoral strength, revealed in local elections in 1919 which gave them 30% of the Czech vote, Social Democracy was incorporated as an unquestioning defender of the emerging bourgeois democratic system.

Marxist historians were for a long time unable to understand the meaning of this for the creation of a political-power structure as they tended to imply that Czechoslovakia was simply capitalist and therefore ruled by the bourgeoisie. A more concrete analysis revealed a less rigid structure including the President, the coalition parties and big business. The relationship between these three centres had already assumed a fairly permanent form by, at the very latest, the end of 1919<sup>56</sup>. The relationships within the coalition were an important part of this and were exemplified by a secret agreement between Masaryk and Švehla giving the right-wing Social Democrat V. Tusar the post of Prime Minister. Far from being a step towards "socialisation" this was intended only to give the government a socialist appearance to help withstand the dangers of Bolshevism<sup>57</sup>. Švehla himself took the key post of the Interior so as to dominate the police force which he regarded as the "backbone of the state"<sup>58</sup>. The committed socialist Vrbenký was dropped from the government

<sup>56</sup> V. Mencl, J. Menclová "Náčrt přehledu a vývoje vrcholné sféry předmnichovské československé mocensko-politické struktury", Československý časopis historický, XVI, No.3, 1968, esp. p.344.

<sup>57</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol II, p.1164.

<sup>58</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol II, p.1141-1143.

and references to "socialisations" were replaced with calls to "support entrepreneurial activity"<sup>59</sup>. There were even concessions on points of principle in the proposed constitution<sup>60</sup> which was consciously modelled on the principal Western examples<sup>61</sup>.

1.3.5. The Marxist Left is created but proves unable to formulate a positive policy.

While the consolidation of the Czechoslovak state and the incorporation of Social Democracy within the coalition inevitably led to discontent within that party, there were also sources of discontent elsewhere. Particularly important was working class militancy which could not die down as post-war recovery was proceeding extremely slowly and living standards were for some time well below the pre-war level<sup>62</sup>. By late 1919 strikes and demonstrations around these issues were merging with demands for state ownership, particularly of mines. This forced the Social Democrat Ministers to consider the issue again, but their proposals, heralded as a start to "socialisation", did no more than confirm the existing powers of workers' organs in mining<sup>63</sup>. Further immediate action was rejected by Masaryk who advocated a slow, step by step process to be started only

<sup>59</sup> V. Tusar's presentation of the government programme in parliament on 10/7/19, Boj o směr, dok.82, p.72.

<sup>60</sup> Sociální demokrat, 5/12/19, and Peroutka: Budování, Vol III, p.1483.

<sup>61</sup> Kárník: Za československou, p.149, and Peroutka: Budování, Vol III, p.1442.

<sup>62</sup> Stručný, p.133 and 134. According to Kárník (Za československou, p.117 and p.148) living standards in the spring of 1920 were only 46% of the 1914 level.

<sup>63</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol II, p.1363-1365, and Kárník: Za československou, p.133. See also the resolution of 26/11/19 from striking miners in Most, Boj o směr, Vol II, dok.224, p.208.

after a "precisely formulated programme" had been produced. As if searching for the best way to avoid openly renouncing socialism but simultaneously preventing any steps towards it he, to the approval of his parliamentary audience, added that it had to be "agreed to Internationally"<sup>64</sup>.

It was against the background of this gradual clarification of the direction of the Czechoslovak state that the "Marxist Left" emerged. At first there was only a journal, Sociální demokrat, which provided a platform for discussion aiming to represent the traditions of Social Democracy against the most open right wingers within the party<sup>65</sup>. Space was allowed for Communists to give their view of the Russian revolution, but the formation of a separate Communist Party was vigorously opposed. In fact the left was still close to the leadership in maintaining that "... the methods used in Russia ... are not suitable for the conditions in Central Europe."<sup>66</sup>

Continued ambivalence to actual revolutionary struggles was revealed during Czechoslovak intervention against the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The Czechoslovak army was quickly defeated and Hungarian advances made possible the establishment of a Soviet republic in Eastern Slovakia from 16/6/19 to 7/7/19. This could only win the sympathy of the poorest sections of society because the advances of liberation were denied and private property in general was rejected. The appeal could only be based on an abstract and "pure" internationalism because Hungarians were still generally associated with the ...

<sup>64</sup> on 28/10/19; Boj o směr, Vol II, dok.104, p.87,88 and 89.

<sup>65</sup> Sociální demokrat, 28/2/19, p.1.

<sup>66</sup> Sociální demokrat, 27/6/19, p.1.

previous imperial domination. The result was that, once Hungarian troops withdrew, the Soviet republic disappeared without any lasting impact on the Slovak socialist movement<sup>67</sup>. The Czech left, seemingly embarrassed by the episode, also evaded comment : the point must have been that, despite a certain feeling of sympathy for the Hungarian revolution, its development threatened Czechoslovakia's territorial integrity<sup>68</sup>.

So the developing left was still tied to the mainstream of Czech politics. Nevertheless, it took organisational form as a temporary body bringing forward issues for discussion for the party's next congress. A strongly worded programmatic statement called for "training the masses in mass action", developing workers' councils and ultimately establishing the "dictatorship of the proletariat" as the necessary pre-condition for socialisation.<sup>69</sup> Much of this remained empty rhetoric as Sociální demokrat, in deference to the party leadership and presumably from fear of being condemned as "Bolshevik"<sup>70</sup>, hardly mentioned workers' councils and made no attempt to involve itself in workers' struggles. Rather than trying to add to the developing movement, the left remained as a commentator on events believing that, as the immediate euphoria from independent state-hood receded, so their support would grow and the government would change without any direct pushing<sup>71</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> Prehľad dejín KSČ na Slovensku, Bratislava, 1971, p.108-110.

<sup>68</sup> Sociální demokrat, 13/6/19, p.1 and 8/8/19, p.2. See also Čerešňák: Dělnické, p.34 and p.3839, Pěnička: Kladensko, p.71 and Peroutka: Budování, Vol II, p.1020-1021.

<sup>69</sup> Sociální demokrat, 21/1/20, p.1.

<sup>70</sup> Sociální demokrat, 28/3/19, p.1 effectively admits this.

<sup>71</sup> Čerešňák: Dělnické, p.52.

Alongside the hollowness of initiatives from Prague, the left developed in different ways in other parts of the country. Simple and direct militancy, lacking in any theoretical refinement, was strong in areas with previously weak working class traditions such as Slovakia and parts of Moravia: organisations there were new and reflected war-time radicalisation. There was a different approach in Kladno where Social Democracy had deep roots. The town was based on mining and iron works giving it the ideal social structure for the development of a disciplined and class conscious labour movement. Even agriculture was dominated by large estates employing wage labour and it was therefore not surprising that the movement was understood in purely proletarian terms without reference to the needs of peasants or the petty bourgeoisie generally. This was reflected in the conception of workers' councils which, while remaining a slogan in the rest of the country, were actually formed in Kladno<sup>72</sup>.

The decisive difference between Kladno and areas with a similar industrial structure was undoubtedly its location both near to the capital city where decisions were taken and far from any disputed frontier so that internal Czechoslovak policy questions always took precedence over border disputes and their concomitant nationality conflicts<sup>73</sup>. Nevertheless, this did not enable the left in Kladno to produce a coherent alternative to the direction of the state's development as represented by Masaryk and accepted by the party's right wing.

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<sup>72</sup> Their role in relation to other organs and institutions was never fully clarified. See Pěnička: Kladensko, p.64-66 and Kárník: Za československou, p.98-100.

<sup>73</sup> Kárník: Za československou, p.95 and H. Káňa: KšČ na Ostravsku v bojích na obranu republiky proti nebezpečí fašismu a války (1934-1938) Ostrava, 1962, p.35.

The logic of their position was expressed in a conference of the Marxist Left chaired by Zápotocký on 7/3/20. This presented in effect the left's position for the first parliamentary elections which were held on 18/4/20. While forcefully opposing the leadership's coalition policy, the only alternative presented was an "oppositionist" policy in parliament allowing M.P.s to take up a "pure and principled proletarian stand".<sup>74</sup> This proved to be enough to persuade the party's leadership to adopt a strongly worded election programme setting out the need to direct all activity "to the socialisation of the republic".<sup>75</sup>

Social Democracy could then enter the elections with a united programme and emerged with 25.7% of the votes. There was a decline in the Czech lands against 1911 but a dramatic increase in Slovakia. Thanks particularly also to big gains by the German Social Democrats, the socialist parties together won 47.5% of the vote. This showed both a growth in the desire for radical social change and that much of the population still remained immune to socialist ideas.<sup>76</sup>

The left responded to these results by opposing the formation of a new coalition preferring to leave responsibility for "the collapsing capitalist regime" to the bourgeoisie.<sup>77</sup> This naive belief that the regime would fall on its own made it easy for Tusar to win the party's representatives for a new coalition with the Agrarians without any conditions on its programme as no other government seemed possible.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Sociální demokrat, 18/3/20, p.2.

<sup>75</sup> Boj o směr, Vol II, dok.132, p.114.

<sup>76</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol III, p.1699-1707.

<sup>77</sup> Sociální demokrat, 29/4/20, p.1.

<sup>78</sup> J. Skalák in Sociální demokrat, 6/5/20, p.1.

The left complied with this decision, but the government still appeared to be only a provisional arrangement pending some future act of clarification<sup>79</sup>. The fundamental weakness was within Social Democracy as the leadership could not avoid betraying its own policies and incurring the uncontrollable wrath of the left.

I.3.6. The right counter-attacks: divisions within Social Democracy deepen: Šmeral starts to formulate a new programmatic position and strategy for the left.

Tusar, increasingly aware that he faced defeat at the party's forthcoming congress, used constitutionally dubious means to alter the composition of the delegates. Even this seemed hopeless so the Social Democrats withdrew from the government and Tusar successfully advocated the creation of a "government of officials" excluding all parties and headed by the conservative former Austrian civil servant Černý. The government, formed on 15/9/20, had no programme and was intended only to guarantee "law and order". Parliamentary support was ensured by secret negotiations among the leaders of the five main Czech parties which gradually evolved into the lasting institution known as the "pětka" (the five) whereby backstage manoeuvrings could ensure the outcome of parliamentary debates.<sup>80</sup> While in fact happy with this new government Social Democracy's former Ministers could suddenly pose as genuine socialists again as they no longer had to

<sup>79</sup> Peroutka: Rudování, Vol III, p.1744-1758.

<sup>80</sup> Peroutka: Rudování, Vol III p.1937-1954 and Vol IV, p.2161-2172.

back words with actions<sup>81</sup>. They could also claim that there was no longer any urgency in holding the congress as the central issue of dispute - participation in the coalition - had been resolved.

The left was at first taken by surprise by this initiative but soon realised the need to hold the congress even without the right. This took place on 25-28/9/20 and was successful in attracting the great majority of the previously elected delegates after which division into two separate parties was inevitable. The real task for the congress, however, was to formulate definite policies as the left could no longer survive on little more than opposition to the right. This onerous task was taken up by Šmeral whose lengthy speech dominated the proceedings. He saw the need to bring together individual policies towards social change, the Czechoslovak state and the Russian revolution into one coherent whole. He had to answer the central point in the right's argument which was that the "methods" of the Russian revolution were unsuitable for Czechoslovak conditions so that there was no alternative to the coalition policy. He had to answer arguments not only from the right but also from those who advocated immediate affiliation to the Comintern by total acceptance of the 21 conditions that had just been published<sup>82</sup>. In fact many delegates did support immediate affiliation to the Third International but they seemed to understand its significance as no

<sup>81</sup> e.g. Tusar claimed to have resigned to avoid following Kerensky's example and presented nationalisations without compensation as a point of principle: he similarly rejected the idea of a coalition with the bourgeoisie; Protokol XIII, p.105. See also the congress resolutions on p.115 and 151.

<sup>82</sup> They were adopted at the Comintern's Second Congress in August 1920 and are reproduced in J. Degras(editor):The Communist International 1919-1943 Documents, Vol I, London, 1956, p.168-172.



more than the clearest expression of a militant class position just as their knowledge of the Russian revolution suggested that it's essence had been revolutionary spontaneity: nothing was known of the problems and preparations that preceded and surrounded it.<sup>83</sup> As before, attempts to relate allegiance to Soviet Russia to foreign policy led into the blind alley of abstract sloganising about "world revolution"<sup>84</sup>.

Against this position Šmeral, having rejected the discredited politics of the Second International, had to explain the lessons of the Russian revolution for the Czech movement in the new situation characterised by the creation and consolidation of the Czechoslovak state.

Šmeral himself had declined an offer of a Ministerial post and withdrew from active politics in late 1918. After an assassination attempt he left the country<sup>85</sup>. The failure of his war-time policy led him to a deep rethinking of his ideas and this took him to Russia in early 1920. He met the Bolshevik leaders and tried to learn from their ideas, while also suggesting some new thoughts of his own. Although he was "not at once understood" on some points, his ideas fitted with a condemnation of "left-wing communism" and the notion that Russian revolutionary experience could be directly applied elsewhere without reference to national peculiarities. This

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<sup>83</sup> c.f. Čerešňák: Dělnické, p.131.

<sup>84</sup> e.g. Sociální demokrat, 11/3/20, p.3.

<sup>85</sup> For an account of his activities in this period see K. Čorovský: "Bohumír Šmeral", Revue dějin socialismu, 1970, No.1.

was also the view of some Bolshevik leaders, especially Lenin and Radek<sup>86</sup>. At the congress he could build on these thoughts from Russia. Also, although always accepting condemnations of his former "opportunist" policies, he seemed to be resurrecting some of his previous thinking only within a different framework.<sup>87</sup>

He started with a general characterisation of the situation arguing that capitalism was in very deep crisis so that, although revolution was not on the doorstep, conditions were by no means "normal". The main body of his speech answered the problems raised by the emergence of the Czechoslovak state, the Russian revolutionary example and the alternative to coalition policy.

He rejected claims that the left's aim was the destruction of the Czechoslovak state: instead, he accepted it as "the given base and assumption of the class, social, revolutionary struggle" which would only be disrupted and delayed if nationalist feelings were once more inflamed by border disputes. He went on to deny the security of the existing state maintaining that militarism and conservatism could not protect it: ultimately the only security for a small nation in Central Europe was a "brotherhood of nations" which, Šmeral, argued, was synonymous with a "United Socialist States of Europe". The applause this received indicates how strongly the left understood the need to combine nationalism with an international perspective. At the same time, the rest of the party and of the population were

<sup>86</sup> Sociální demokrat, 30/9/20, p.4. Accounts of his discussions with Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Radek were published in his book: Pravda o sovětovém Rusku, originally published in 1920. He seemed to have found considerable understanding from Radek; See Pravda, p.52-55.

<sup>87</sup> His full speech was printed in Sociální demokrat, 30/9/20, p.1-5.

seemingly more convinced by Beneš's approach of placing faith in the strength of the existing and victorious Western Powers. From Šmeral's position followed opposition to the suppression of minorities within Czechoslovakia and the advocacy of a different idea on which to base the state: "the idea of socialism must triumph over the idea of nationalism".

Šmeral laughed at the suggestion that the left was following "orders from Moscow" pointing out that the Russian example was not a general blue print. The Bolsheviks were to be followed in their dedication, creativity and loyalty to the revolutionary cause but not in the details of particular tactics: " . . . in precisely this question we are the only one among European states to differentiate our tactics from the start from the model tested by the Russian comrades".

The principal divergences from Russian conditions were seen as the impossibility of staging an isolated revolution in Czechoslovakia - owing to its size and geographical position - and the higher level of economic and social development so that, unlike the Russian revolution, the winning of political power would be associated with positive support for socialism from the majority of the population<sup>88</sup>. From this followed a different approach to the creation of a Communist Party which by then seemed to be accepted as the inevitable ultimate consequence of the division of Social Democracy. As revolution was dependent on events in neighbouring countries, particularly Germany, and on winning support of the mass of workers, there

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<sup>88</sup> For his understanding of the Russian revolution, See Šmeral: Pravda, p.164-168.

seemed to be every justification to proceed cautiously. An attempt could be made to win over the whole of the two Social Democrat parties rather than rushing to create a Communist Party as a small sect as had been done in Russia and then in Hungary. Šmeral believed that the creation of a mass Communist Party would be almost inevitable as the euphoria of national statehood receded: an over-hasty attempt to form a new party would go against this natural development and thereby hamper it. This, then, was an implicit justification for the policies of Communists who had resisted pressure from Moscow for speedy creation of a Communist Party and had worked within the Marxist Left. It was a policy that had been followed, Šmeral put it later, "sort of instinctively"<sup>89</sup>.

As an alternative to acquiescence within the coalition Šmeral proposed an action programme to direct the party towards class struggle. The central point was the expropriation of large landholdings, banks and industrial enterprises while smaller ones were to be left in private ownership. This, it was hoped, would inspire the working class and unite the different nationalities: it was intended to correspond to ". . . the public opinion of the immense majority of the working population of the republic and . . . (be) . . . an important part in the conception of the social revolutionary overthrow of capitalism . . ."

From this followed Šmeral's careful definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat. He believed that active campaigning around a positive programme could lead to a parliamentary majority for the

<sup>89</sup> From the Founding Congress of the KSČ in May 1921, Protokoly sjezdů KSČ, I. Svazek: Ustavující a slučovací sjezd KSČ roku 1921, Praha, 1958, p.150.

three socialist parties (i.e. Czech and German Social Democracy and the Czech National Socialists) and hence the possibility of a workers' government. He thought, however, that "the present holders of power in the state" would react like the leadership of Social Democracy and try to impose a "dictatorship of the minority" once the basic interests of the bourgeoisie were threatened. He then argued that the workers would have to "organise a firm government, a dictatorship of the proletariat in the interests of the majority for the enforcement of socialist aims."<sup>90</sup> Although a parliamentary majority was an essential part of this process Šmeral did not see it as sufficient on its own: he also advocated immediate preparation for that "firm government" by establishing workers' councils. It should be added that he never elaborated on the political form of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" although it was clearly counterposed to the parliamentary system. He saw the need ultimately for a "dictatorship" to enable the planned use of resources for the benefit of all and so as to "declare world war" on hunger, misery, unemployment, and premature mortality.<sup>91</sup>

Within Šmeral's general immediate perspective affiliation to the Comintern did not seem to be important and he therefore played the question down. It was left to Skalák to discuss the 21 conditions and he, faced with the doubts of many delegates about them, suggested that they were either being applied or were negotiable.

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<sup>90</sup> In a speech a few months later, on 13/1/21, Šmeral spoke clearly of "a government of workers and small peasants of all nations" as the first step towards this; Šmeral: Historické, p.145.

<sup>91</sup> Speech to the Founding Congress of the KSČ, Protokoly sjezdů, p.122-123.

The outcome was a clear statement of intent to affiliate but no hint of urgency.<sup>92</sup>

1.3.7. The left still fails to take the initiative. An attempt is made to stage a general strike but it is defeated.

Although it proved possible to win the majority of Czech Social Democrats with this policy, it was not possible to win over the whole of the two Social Democrat parties or to form a workers government. There obviously were still objective difficulties but the left also weakened its chances by failing to make any serious effort to implement their action programme. Before the congress they allowed an attempt to force the nationalisation of the Poldina iron works in Kladno to remain politically isolated: the workers delayed direct action after empty promises that their demands would be discussed.<sup>93</sup> After the congress too there was no real attempt to coordinate or lead extra-parliamentary struggles or to create workers' councils outside Kladno. It was accepted that struggles should be kept out of trade unions, shop stewards' committees and workshop meetings: this left the right dominant in these bodies so that continuing working class discontent seemed to be quite separate from the struggle for leadership within Social Democracy.

Nevertheless, the left succeeded in organising the majority of the old party within its ranks. They were weaker than the right only in a few places the most important of which were Ostrava, where the working class was sharply divided on nationality lines, and Plzeň

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<sup>92</sup> Sociální demokrat, 7/10/20, p.3-4 and 15/10/20, p.2-5.

<sup>93</sup> Sociální demokrat, 17/6/20, p.7, and Pěnička: Kladensko, p.109-111.

where many of the workers owned and farmed small land holdings<sup>94</sup>.

The inner-party conflict reached its climax over the property of the formerly united party. Irrespective of legalistic niceties, the real point was that the right used the power of the state machine to defeat the majority of the old party's members and to regain control of the party headquarters. The Marxist Left had no choice but to call a general strike for which they had made no serious preparations.

At first the response from the membership was one of confusion, embarrassment and even a lack of enthusiasm as the first statements from the leadership suggested that the action was only a protest over specific events in Prague. This was partly corrected the next day when calls for big wage increases and the resignation of the government were included to make the strike an affair of the whole working class regardless of party allegiance<sup>95</sup>. Nevertheless, the strike remained confused, unco-ordinated and lacking in leadership. It reached its peak at different times in different parts of the country - sometimes starting just before the leadership of the Marxist Left called it off<sup>96</sup>. This makes it very difficult to estimate the numbers participating and claims range between 160,000 and one million<sup>97</sup>.

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<sup>94</sup> Kárník: Za československou, p.95, and V. Lastovka: Stále v boji: KSČ na Plzeňsku v boji protihladu, fašismu a válce, Plzeň, 1966, p.12.

<sup>95</sup> RP 11/12/20, p.1. The evening edition of the paper made the point even clearer.

<sup>96</sup> This was particularly true in Moravia; Čerešňák: Dělnické, p.129 and p.131.

<sup>97</sup> e.g. Peroutka: Rudování, Vol III, p.2098, and Kolečka: Revoluční, p.209.

The strike lacked any clear aim<sup>98</sup>, but it was attacked as "a continuation of Šmeral's Austrian policy"<sup>99</sup>, an attempted putsch, or a crazy attempt to follow "Russian methods"<sup>100</sup>. It was followed by the imprisonment of 3,000 participants and a trial of the leaders from Kladno (including Zápotocký) where the strike had been understood by some as a seizure of power. . . Although charged with treason and threatened with the death sentence, they were eventually sentenced only to short terms of imprisonment<sup>101</sup>.

I.3.8. After the failure of the general strike pressure mounts within the left for speedy affiliation to the Comintern.

The strike should not be presented as deciding the question of political power or of the character of the Czechoslovak state. Rather it confirmed the existing direction of the state and hence also the division of Social Democracy<sup>102</sup>. It also showed to the left its own weaknesses and encouraged the search for new ideas. In this it was a blow to Šmeral's ideas too as his hope for a socialist coalition government seemed quite unrealistic<sup>103</sup>. Instead the feeling grew for the speediest possible affiliation to the Comintern.

<sup>98</sup>Peroutka: Budování, Vol III, p.2100.

<sup>99</sup>PL 11/12/20, p.2.

<sup>100</sup>PL, 12/12/20, p.1.

<sup>101</sup>G. Holub: Boj o stranu, Praha, 1971, p.104-105.

<sup>102</sup>Reconciliation between the two wings seemed impossible as the right was portrayed as going over to the side of open counter-revolution; Sociální demokrat, 24/12/20, p.1.

<sup>103</sup>This was accepted in Sociální demokrat, 24/12/20, p.4.



This grew naturally out of the Czech situation, but related to a different view of how the Comintern could help from that expounded by Šmeral, who continued to fear "becoming a component of a great whole" if that meant that "decisions about us will no longer depend on us . . ." <sup>104</sup> The alternative view was that, after the failure in the general strike, it was impertinent to criticise or question the 21 conditions: implicit in this approach was the notion that revolution was such a simple process that the application of "orders from Moscow" could alone bring it about <sup>105</sup>.

The imprisoned Kladno leaders shared the belief that joining the Comintern would give them the line whereby "communism must win" <sup>106</sup> and there was also pressure from Slovakia for immediate acceptance of the 21 conditions <sup>107</sup>. More important was pressure from the German left which had developed differently from the Czech left. As German Social Democracy was not in the government, divisions within it did not develop over concrete questions of policy but rather over theoretical issues. Moreover, the starting point for the left was acceptance of the Czechoslovak state as a fact and this meant denial of the national aspirations of the Germans. The German left was therefore led to a theoretical position based on "pure" internationalism

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<sup>104</sup> K. Gorovský: "O založení KSČ - draždanská konference v dubnu 1921", Revue dějin socialismu, 1968, No.3, p.444.

<sup>105</sup> e.g. the argument presented by "Jesen", Sociální demokrat, 4/3/21, p.1-2.

<sup>106</sup> See their message to the congress founding the Communist Party in Protokoly sjezdů, p.83-87. They later denied having anything in common with those who opposed Šmeral; e.g. B. Hůla, Komunismus, September - October 1922, p.436 and 439.

<sup>107</sup> Prehľad, p.117 and 118.

within which all nationalism was rejected. In this they were trying to eliminate from discussion disputes over the border and hence overcome distrust of Czech towards German workers:<sup>108</sup> but a logical by-product was suspicion of Šmeral's cautious policy of respect for the reality of Czech nationalism. So, after the German left had been defeated at a party congress, they could see no future as an independent body and advocated the creation of an internationalist party uniting the various nationalities in the Czechoslovak state and seeking the speediest possible affiliation to the Comintern.

Šmeral continued to argue against this even in May 1921, suggesting that the Czech and German organisations should grow together gradually as a premature merger might lead to a later bitter separation<sup>109</sup>. This view was not understood by Zinoviev and Béla Kun in the Comintern and, during early 1921, they applied pressure on Šmeral to hasten with the establishment of a Communist Party. They tried direct instructions to Šmeral<sup>110</sup> and even mandated a separate group to form a Communist Party without him<sup>111</sup>. These attempts failed and Šmeral was able to delay the Founding Congress of the KSČ from March to May when he succeeded in winning practically the whole of the Marxist Left for the new party. This congress, however, excluded Polish and German groups as Šmeral continued to argue against an over-hasty merger into one united party believing that instead the

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<sup>108</sup> This is of necessity only a brief and over-simplified summary of the complex argument in Požarský: Založení. See also K. Kreibich: Těsný domov - širý svět, Liberec, 1968.

<sup>109</sup> Protokoly sjezdů, p.140-142.

<sup>110</sup> Kárník: "Žaložení", p.182.

<sup>111</sup> Gorovský: "O založení", p.444.

nationalities could somehow grow together in joint actions<sup>112</sup>.

Kreibich of the German left believed this slowness to be damaging<sup>113</sup> and the dispute came into the open at the Comintern's Third Congress where Zinoviev and Kreibich asserted that Šmeral was an enemy of Bolshevism. Lenin opposed this and moderated their criticisms: he accepted Šmeral's argument that delay in forming a Communist Party had been a purely tactical question but persuaded Šmeral that there was no case for further delay. The Czechoslovak delegation returned home united and the KSČ was founded as an international party at a congress held from 30/10/21 to 4/11/21. Šmeral and Kreibich worked closely together during the party's early years and the main left opposition emerged independently of nationality questions.

So the Communist Party was finally formed with a membership of around 170,000. It was at this time one of the largest sections of the Comintern, but its membership subsequently declined fairly steadily to a low point of barely over 20,000 during the depression. After that it gradually increased again<sup>114</sup>. Behind these figures lies a more complex history than one of a party simply and directly preparing itself for power. The difficult road that led ultimately to a party able to take advantage of the possibilities of 1945 is discussed in the following chapters.

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<sup>112</sup> Protokoly sjezdů, p.140-142.

<sup>113</sup> He stuck to this view years later; Kreibich: lěsný, p.289-290.

<sup>114</sup> For figures see Skilling : "Gottwald", p.645.

### 1.3.9. Summary and discussion

After its creation the Czechoslovak state fairly rapidly took shape with a comparatively liberal political regime, a capitalist economic and social set up and a generally subordinate position for the German minority. Initial Czech working class militancy did not conflict with support for the political leaders who seemed to have won, and to be able to maintain, independent statehood. Their strategy, as worked out particularly by Beneš, was to win favour with France as the best guarantee against a revival of Germany or Austria-Hungary.

The Social Democrats had to accommodate to the new situation of a Czechoslovak state containing large national minorities, surrounded by potentially hostile neighbours and able to expect protection from the West. In practice they participated in the government and could ensure the implementation of some reforms. Despite great electoral strength they could not, because of the international situation and their own failings, relate the fact of Czech national success to their socialist aims. It was this that led to a gradual split, with the right unable to add anything substantive to Masaryk's ideas and the left convincing itself that nationalist euphoria would recede and give way to demands for socialism. It was obvious that socialist revolution was not immediately imminent and there was therefore no attempt to create a Communist Party outwith the existing Social Democrat organisations.

By mid-1920 divisions within Social Democracy had deepened and threatened the viability of the coalition government. The right-wing Social Democrat ministers therefore resigned from the government and allowed the appointment of a "government of officials" which was

intended to ensure "order". This was followed by the definitive splitting of Czech Social Democracy and the defeat of the left in a general strike in December 1920. Shortly afterwards the Communist Party was formed by a merger of the left-wings of Social Democratic parties of the various nationalities of the Czechoslovak state.

The history of the creation of this new party was the historyX of the failure of the old Social Democratic parties. It had, however, if it was to be successful, to present better answers than the old Social Deomocracy to the concrete problems confronting the Czechoslovak state. A real beginning towards this was made by Šmeral within the left-wing of Social Democracy in September 1920. He argued that ultimately only friendship between <sup>nations</sup> could ensure the future of the Czech nation. Beneš's strategy of Czech national dominance and reliance on the West, he believed, would lead to national disaster.

Šmeral did not lead the party into decisive, conscious action but he did make a serious effort to answer the dominant arguments. His reasoned internationalism led him naturally towards the Comintern which he hoped would allow scope for the formulation of a specifically Czechsollovak policy. Others in the left had a less sophisticated approach and, in effect, believed that a revolution could be achieved by accepting full subordination within the Comintern. Already by 1921 two approaches were clearly visible: they were to provide the roots for later inner-party conflicts.

Even if Šmeral's strategy had been fully accepted and implemented within the new party, it would probably not have been accepted by the majority of the Czechoslovak people. It still owed a great deal

to his war-time ideas which had been superseded by the creation of the Czechoslovak state. He still underestimated the strength and permanence of Czech nationalist feelings.

The Communist Party, despite its size, was therefore isolated from the mainstream of political life and this Šmeral saw as a serious weakness. The next chapter shows how he tried to overcome that but how he was restricted by the "left" within the party and ultimately by the Comintern.

#### CHAPTER 4: THE 1921-1924 PERIOD: ŠMERAL'S LEADERSHIP

##### I.4.1. The roots of conflicts within the Communist Party and the "left's" attitude towards Šmeral and the Comintern.

Even if agreement had been reached on the formation of a single united Communist Party, this did not prevent sharp internal conflicts over the following years. The main protagonists were Šmeral, who was backed up by Kreibich and Zápotocký, who became the party's General Secretary after <sup>his</sup> release from prison in 1922, and Jílek who was the party's first General Secretary from November 1921 until February 1922. At the time of the party's foundation Jílek and his supporters held a majority in the leadership. In September 1922 the balance of strength had changed and Jílek was expelled. He appealed against this to the Comintern Executive and his case was supported<sup>1</sup> even though his actual political position was to be condemned at the Comintern's Fourth Congress.

This was the beginning rather than the end of damaging strife within the KSČ. All sorts of explanations have been provided for this phenomenon which was general to the Comintern but particularly pronounced within its larger sections. One view is that disputes stemmed from a clash between Moscow's hegemony and an attempt to work within Czechoslovakia's specificity<sup>2</sup>. There is something in this but it cannot be the fundamental explanation of the conflict:

<sup>1</sup> M. Hájek: Jednotná fronta, Praha, 1969, p.40, and E.H. Carr: Socialism in One Country, Vol III, London, 1972, p.174-175.

<sup>2</sup> This view is implicit in R. Luža: "The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Resistance, 1939-1945", Slavic Review, XXVIII, No.4, December 1969, p.561-563.

as Šmeral himself pointed out, there seemed to be far more criticism of his policies at home than in the Comintern's Fifth Congress<sup>3</sup>. Before that the Comintern leadership had definitely been supporting him against the opposition. Radek put it very bluntly: "they could not present any contrary line to Šmeral's policy because that policy was correct"<sup>4</sup>.

Within the Comintern there were attempts to argue that internal strife might stem from the party's social base, but it was pointed out that the KSČ was one of the most solidly working class sections of the Comintern<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, differentiation among members seemed to relate rather to when and how they had joined the party with post-war recruits tending to be more critical of Šmeral<sup>6</sup>. This point was accepted by Manuilsky who argued that those joining since the war were not troubled by Social Democratic "survivals" but lacked important experiences while those who had been active before the war had the converse advantages and disadvantages. He could therefore hope that they were not irreconcilable<sup>as</sup> the ideal solution would be a synthesis of the two<sup>7</sup>.

More convincing was Šmeral's own explanation. Radek pointed out that the opposition to Šmeral was entirely negative in form. Šmeral himself was "without question the most sober and farsighted

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<sup>3</sup> Protokol II. Řádného sjezdu Komunistické strany Československa 31/10/24 - 4/11/24, Praha, 1925, p.32.

<sup>4</sup> Komunismus, July 1922, p.327.

<sup>5</sup> e.g. Manuilsky, Protokol II., p.15.

<sup>6</sup> B. Hůla, Komunistická revue, 4/9/24, p.417.

<sup>7</sup> Protokol II, p.19.



leader of Czech communism" but precisely this was <sup>being</sup> interpreted as a lack of revolutionary enthusiasm<sup>8</sup>. This was expanded by Šmeral who emphasised that the doubts about his policies went far wider than just the leading oppositionists whose arguments could easily be refuted. Alongside them were many more who took those arguments seriously or showed some measure of distrust towards the party's leadership. Their attitude followed from a natural fear, following their previous disillusionment with the reformist leaders, that the KSČ leadership might not also be tending towards opportunism and away from a revolutionary communist policy. Suspicions were aroused as, having been saved for political life precisely by emphasising the revolutionary nature of the period<sup>9</sup>, they saw Communist Parties accepting a more defensive role and turning attention to the day to day "seemingly non-revolutionary" demands of the working class. From this, Šmeral argued, stemmed a decline in the authority of the leadership, a spirit of opposition and the generation of primitive views on Communist tactics<sup>10</sup>.

So it seems quite natural that, with the Communist movement so young and optimistic, critics of Šmeral's line had plenty of attentive listeners. Rather than two clearly defined lines within the party based on careful analyses of the situation there seems to have been

<sup>8</sup> Komunismus, July 1922, p.327.

<sup>9</sup> This could apply even more to those introduced to political life in the post-war years. They were most likely to expect very rapid changes.

<sup>10</sup> Protokol prvního řádného sjezdu Komunistické strany Československa 2,3,4a 5/2/23, Praha, 1923, p.52. For a similar view see M. Hájek: "K problému levičáctví v Komunistické internacionále", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1965, No.5.

only one serious line which was being developed by Šmeral and is discussed later. The alternative, based on optimism curiously fused with suspicion rather than analysis, could go along with every form of discontent within the party<sup>11</sup>. It seemed to be united by a completely negative attitude towards Šmeral and, perhaps most important of all, a desire "to demonstrate that they are better and more solid Communists than Šmeral: and they want to show it particularly to people abroad"<sup>12</sup>. This naturally included attempts to show that Šmeral had opposed the creation of the KSČ and had always been hostile to the Comintern<sup>13</sup>, and was even backed up with allegations that Šmeral had negotiated with Švehla to join a coalition government<sup>14</sup>.

Starting from this attitude towards Šmeral, the left opposition could evolve some more general ideas, although they were rarely if ever stated explicitly. The first was its understanding of what the Comintern was. This followed directly from the opposition that had emerged in early 1921. The fundamental problem of revolutionary strategy in Czechoslovakia, it seemed to argue, was the loyalty of the leadership to the revolutionary cause. This was essentially a very simple problem that could be solved best of all within a centralised Comintern structure. This view seems to have been supported by Zinoviev but he was not the leading figure in the Comintern after mid-1921. By the mid-1920's, however, the left opposition was in

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<sup>11</sup> This was Šmeral's accusation; Protokol prvního, p.46.

<sup>12</sup> Skalák said this at the Founding Congress in 1921; Protokoly sjezdů, p.183.

<sup>13</sup> e.g. Neurath, Protokol II, p.40.

<sup>14</sup> Protokol prvního, p.48-50.

favour again in Moscow. One reason, going way beyond the scope of this work, was probably their willingness to condemn the Trotskyist opposition in the Soviet Union. Šmeral and Kreibich were condemned very forcefully by Zinoviev and also from within the KSČ for their reluctance to do so<sup>15</sup>. This did not reflect agreement with all of Trotsky's policies but rather approval for Radek as against Zinoviev within the Comintern and, to judge from the arguments used, an unwillingness to intervene in the internal affairs of other parties and a hope that in turn they would be able to develop their own policies without direct interference.

A second aspect of the left's position was the desire to proclaim the uniqueness and purity of the Communist Party, again without reference to the concrete situation in Czechoslovakia. This could be seen in references to the need for a "military - political" party with the rigid discipline of a well trained army as opposed to the developing mass party<sup>16</sup>. Similarly, there was no interest in maintaining united trade unions. Rather, in the decisive period in 1921 when the KSČ could possibly have won a majority there, the most important Communist trade union leaders were ignoring any attempts to win over the whole movement and preferred to concentrate on purely Communist unions. In this, Jílek, with a majority over Šmeral in the party's Executive Committee, gave support<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Protokol II, p.6. See also Neurath's accusations, Protokol II, p.51.

<sup>16</sup> Jílek, Komunismus, 1/12/21, p.37.

<sup>17</sup> V. Dubský: KSČ a odborové hnutí v Československu na počátku dvacátých let, Praha, 1966, p.93-95.

I.4.2. Šmeral develops his earlier ideas into a strategy for the KSČ.

Šmeral himself never held a position in the party above an ordinary place on the Executive Committee. Nevertheless, there is no doubting his dominance in evolving the party's strategy under the difficult conditions created by the continual blanket criticisms from the left opposition which were aimed primarily against him personally. At the same time, he was helped by the Comintern leadership and particularly Radek who seems to have had much in common with Šmeral. There was as yet no complete subordination within the Comintern and Šmeral seems to have seen its role as at most a guiding force helping the KSČ to find solutions to Czechoslovakia's particular problems.

The key point, however, was that Šmeral did not believe that a revolution in Czechoslovakia was on the immediate agenda. At times he seemed almost to be waiting for the expected German revolution as the key to change inside Czechoslovakia<sup>18</sup>. At other times he clearly stated that capitalism was not about to collapse: ". . . We are standing in the middle of a long drawn out process of decay rather than in front of an immediate catastrophe . . . we cannot say that the tendency is only for worsening: there are also noticeable signs of a certain partial improvement"<sup>19</sup>. From this analysis of the situation he could not conclude either that the revolution would be so simple a task as to require no more than the desire to achieve it as seemed to be the view of the opposition. Instead, he often repeated his

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<sup>18</sup>RP 27/2/21, p.3, and Protokoly sjezdů, p.124.

<sup>19</sup>Protokoly sjezdů, p.127.

view that it was several years away and this meant that he had to confront the concrete immediate problems facing Czechoslovakia and then to relate them to a possible means of transition to socialism.

I.4.3. Šmeral tries to confront the problem of the security of the Czechoslovak state.

The first real problem was, as in 1918, the security of the Czechoslovak state which was threatened again in October 1921 by an attempted Habsburg restoration in Budapest. Beneš, who was Prime Minister at the time, called for a mobilisation of the army which went remarkably smoothly but in fact came after the attempted restoration had failed<sup>20</sup>. This incident presented a real problem for Šmeral who was unprepared for a situation in which more right-wing governments should emerge in the surrounding states rather than socialist revolutions: it was no longer a question of accepting the Czechoslovak state as a fact, it had to be actively supported or opposed.

Šmeral and Kreibich, without time to consult the rest of the leadership, decided to support the mobilisation. They defended this with careful arguments emphasising that a socialist revolution was not immediately possible so that the real alternative to supporting Beneš was to stand idly by thereby tacitly supporting the Habsburg restoration and also isolating themselves from the mass of the people<sup>21</sup>. The opposition's position was to "utilise the chaos and war tension to

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<sup>20</sup> Peroutka: Budování, Vol IV, p.2415-2429.

<sup>21</sup> Šmeral's speech at the Merging Congress of October - November 1921, Protokoly sjezdů, p.363-380.

free the road to socialist revolution which alone can really solve the organisation of European relations"<sup>22</sup>. The extent of the differences between these two approaches could for a time be masked as the danger passed so quickly and the party could be reunited essentially around the left's position.<sup>23</sup>

There were attempts from those close to Šmeral to find a solution to this dilemma. A draft for a party programme mentioned the need to help defend the Czechoslovak state in the event of a "monarchist or fascist reaction in Germany or Hungary, during which the KSČ will fight together with the bourgeois government of the ČSR but will retain its independence and expose the imperialist aims of its government". This was still linked with seemingly opposite calls "to accentuate class conflicts . . . into civil war"<sup>24</sup>, but it was definitely an advance on the party's First Congress of February 1923 which had simply condemned the Versailles system and called for a revolution over the whole of Europe<sup>25</sup>. Moreover, it was only a short step to argue definitely for the Czechoslovak state which was extremely rare among Czech Communists. Perhaps the most explicit was Šverma who described the creation of the new state as "a necessary transitional stage on the long and tortuous road to the final victory of the proletariat in the Czech nation . . ."<sup>26</sup>. Even he, however, did

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<sup>22</sup> J. Haken, Komunist 28/10/21, p.2 and Vajtauer, Protokoly sjezdů, p.411-417.

<sup>23</sup> Protokoly sjezdů, p.481, and Peroutka: Udování, Vol IV, p.2434.

<sup>24</sup> Komunismus 4/10/23, p.393.

<sup>25</sup> Protokol prvního, p.11.

<sup>26</sup> Komunistická revue 15/4/24, p.186.

not argue that the significant expansion of democratic rights in the new state indicated that independent statehood had been a definitely progressive step.

There was also an attempt to find an international support for the Czechoslovak state related to the idea of a workers' united front which is discussed below. As this involved setting aims less ambitious than a full socialist revolution so too it involved finding an international support prior to a German revolution. Šmeral argued that this could be Soviet Russia which he thought was militarily stronger than many believed and could also provide a welcome market for Czechoslovakia's industrial goods<sup>27</sup>.

#### 1.4.4. The KSC is still cautious on the nationalities question.

Also, if the Czechoslovak state was to be taken seriously, the problem of national minorities had to be tackled. At first it was suggested that cultural and linguistic rights should be advocated but that territorial autonomy would be contrary to the needs of administrative efficiency<sup>28</sup>. This attitude was changed and attention was directed to a completely new nationality problem by the growth of a conservative Catholic nationalism in Slovakia represented by Hlinka's party (the HSL'S - the Hlinka Slovak Peoples' Party).

The strength of the Catholic church in Slovakia cannot fully explain the crystallisation and growth of this form of Slovak nationalism particularly as Social Democracy had been electorally so successful in Slovakia. Two additional important points were the unsatisfied social demands of the Slovak people which were

<sup>27</sup> Komunismus, April - May 1922, p.205-211.

<sup>28</sup> Komunismus, 4/10/23, p.380-382.

being expressed in nationalist terms<sup>29</sup>, and the conscious intervention into the political arena by the backward looking church hierarchy. They saw the liberalism of the Prague government as leaving the way clear for dangerous revolutionaries and saw it as their mission to combat this. Towards this end they demagogically exploited the first disappointments with liberalism and Social Democracy to encourage anti-Czech nationalism<sup>30</sup>. They were loyal to the Czechoslovak state but their political philosophy later led them to cite Poland, Germany and Italy as examples to be followed in their policies towards Communists<sup>31</sup> and they wanted Czechoslovakia to join "the anti-Communist front of nations which are guided by Christian principles"<sup>32</sup>. At first, however, their demand was just for Slovak autonomy on terms that Masaryk had accepted in the USA in May 1918<sup>33</sup> but which had not even been included in the constitution.

Kreibich pointed to the importance of this Slovak nationalism as, once Slovak nationhood was accepted and the concept of a single Czechoslovak nation rejected, there would no longer be any single nationality with a majority in the Czechoslovak state. Czechoslovakia would therefore have to be seen as a "state of nationalities"<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> e.g. the response to the depression in Slovakia discussed by V.S. Mamatey in V.S. Mamatey and R. Luža: A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1948, Princeton, 1973.

<sup>30</sup> See J. Kramer: Slovenské autonomistické hnutie v rokoch 1918-1929, Bratislava, 1962. This is a surprisingly serious study for the time with an English summary.

<sup>31</sup> Prehl'ad, p.202.

<sup>32</sup> J. Lettrich: History of Modern Slovakia, London, 1956, p.80.

<sup>33</sup> For the text of this so called Pittsburg Agreement see Lettrich: History, p.289-290.

<sup>34</sup> komunistická revue 1/7/24, p.321-322.



Although welcoming this, he saw the need to take the wind out of the sails of the clerical nationalists in Slovakia and of the Nazis in German areas. He therefore proposed abandonment of administrative centralisation<sup>35</sup>. He emphasised that his proposals for autonomy were not national but territorial as Hungarians would gain too: he in fact made<sup>no</sup> mention of such abstract principles as the rights of nations to self determination.

I.4.5. The united front and workers' government. Šmeral's position is strengthened by support from the Comintern leadership.

Šmeral and his associates were hesitant and cautious in their ideas on the Czechoslovak state and on nationality questions. They rarely went beyond abstract generalisations. This was not true of their ideas on the tactical approach to the Czech working class within a stable parliamentary democracy. In this Šmeral was very willing to develop on the Comintern's line in the period of Radek's dominance.

Šmeral had, already at the Founding Congress of the KSČ, seen the splitting of the old Social Democracy not as a positive step in that it led to the creation of a Communist Party but rather as a regrettable event which cut off direct access to those workers who went with the right-wing<sup>36</sup>. He naturally wanted to find a way to re-establish contact and made vague references to achieving this through a united front with working class elements among National

<sup>35</sup> Komunistická revue 1/7/24, p.326 and 331.

<sup>36</sup> Protokoly sjezdů, p.111.

Socialists, Agrarians and Catholics<sup>37</sup>. This could be expressed more definitely and more forcefully when the Comintern itself advocated the creation of a united front around basic anti-capitalist demands of the working class. This was to involve approaches to the leaderships of Social Democrat organisations as had already been done in Germany although it was believed to be "almost a rule" that the right-wing socialists would be exposed by their own unwillingness to cooperate with Communists even on the most basic issues<sup>38</sup>

The economic situation seemed to justify this approach, although there was no collapse, there certainly was a smouldering crisis with considerable unemployment and employers attempting to cut wages. Šmeral therefore proposed to the Executive Committee on 5/1/22 that an attempt should be made to establish a united front around these issues<sup>39</sup>. Shortly after this Jílek was demoted and Šmeral won a narrow majority. This gave scope for further elaboration of the idea of the united front.

There were always doubts about whether the policy was understood purely as a "tactic", i.e. just a means to expose reformism, or whether the united front was intended to become a reality. Radek's answer was to argue that if Social Democracy agreed to cooperate on the terms he laid down then both sides of the agreement would benefit: if not, then indeed Social Democracy would be exposed as betraying

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<sup>37</sup> Protokoly sjezdů, p.132.

<sup>38</sup> Burian's report from the Comintern's Third Congress quoting the arguments presented by Radek, Trotsky and Lenin, Protokoly sjezdů, p.317.

<sup>39</sup> V. Dubský: "Utváření politické linie KSČ v období šmeralova vedení", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1967, no.5, p.665.

the workers' interests<sup>40</sup>. Within the KSČ there were diverse answers with some essentially rejecting the idea of even the most transient unity. Others presented the united front as essentially by-passing existing reformist organisations and creating factory councils as new organs of working class unity<sup>41</sup>. Šmeral, however, understood the united front as aiming for unity between parties within a parliamentary democracy and proved this by elaborating on the idea to give it more definite aims.

The immediate opportunity was an engineering strike in Prague in May 1922. Previously these workers had been regarded as a bastion of reformism but 30,000 struck after the employers contravened a previous contract and demanded a 25% wage reduction. Communists gained in prestige and influence and pressure from shop stewards forced the official leadership to call for an expansion of the strike: this culminated in a one day general stoppage in Prague. Ultimately the strike was ended by a compromise agreement although the majority of workers were opposed to its acceptance<sup>42</sup>.

This did not lead to the creation of lasting grass roots organisations of a united front<sup>43</sup> but it did greatly strengthen the left, led by Vrbenský, within the National Socialists. The party's leadership even declared its support for the strike and then entered discussion with the KSČ on the possibility of leaving the existing

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<sup>40</sup> At a meeting with the leaders of the Second International in Berlin, 2-5/4/22, quoted in Hájek: Jednotná, p.36-37.

<sup>41</sup> e.g. J. Doležal, Komunismus, 1/1/22, p.1, and S. Ruda, Komunismus, 28/11/23, p.474.

<sup>42</sup> Dubský: KSČ, p.118-123.

<sup>43</sup> S. Ruda, Komunismus, 1/6/23, p.202.

coalition if a feasible alternative could be proposed<sup>44</sup>. Although shortly afterwards the left was expelled from the National Socialist Party<sup>45</sup>, Šmeral was led to propose the notion of a workers' government at a plenum of the Comintern's Executive in June 1922. He saw this as a means of transition between the demands presented by the united front and the dictatorship of the proletariat<sup>46</sup>. This fitted in with ideas developing elsewhere in the Comintern, particularly Germany, and Šmeral expressed the view that a workers' government was "very probable" there and also in Czechoslovakia<sup>47</sup>.

Šmeral was still cautious about the possibilities emphasising that a workers' government would be "no real strength on which we could count for the implementation of significant measures against ownership and the economic order". He characterised it as no more than "an interesting phenomenon" with "definitely a great influence on the subjective maturity of workers in Czechoslovakia"<sup>48</sup>. He expanded on this at the party's First Congress in February 1923 by referring to the workers' government not as a synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat but rather as an attempt to carry out a working class policy within the framework of bourgeois democracy

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<sup>44</sup> M. Klír: "Úloha B. Šmerala při vypracování strategicko-taktické orientace KSČ", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1965, No.1., p.12.

<sup>45</sup> They continued to exist for a time as an independent force but ultimately merged into the KSČ; V. Friedich, Komunismus, 15/4/23, p.134-137, and J. Možná: "Vývoj centrismu v českém dělnickém hnutí na počátku 20.let," Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1967, No.5., p.740.

<sup>46</sup> Klír: "Úloha", p.13.

<sup>47</sup> Komunismus, August 1922, p.378.

<sup>48</sup> Komunismus, August 1922, p.378.

and with the proletarian mass movement<sup>49</sup>.

In the following months the idea of a workers' government was taken ever more seriously with more attention to working out the concrete details of what it could mean in Czechoslovakia. Zápotocký pointed to the urgency of this because he believed it to be an imminent possibility<sup>50</sup>. This was followed by articles recognising the enormous complexities of the economic tasks that would confront a workers' government and hence the impossibility of achieving everything by one revolutionary act. Instead a process of "revolutionary evolution" was visualised during which the government would announce measures from above while factory councils would implement them and control production. It was left open when the decisive struggle for power would arise<sup>51</sup>.

I.4.6. Šmeral's hopes for socialist unity prove unrealistic both because of the unwillingness of the other socialist parties to unite with the Communists and because the Comintern begins to change its approach.

The KSČ could go no further than this in developing its own conception of a road to socialism. Its ideas were still very fluid and there was plenty of scope for debate, clarification and further development. From the autumn of 1923, however, Zinoviev gained greater influence within the Comintern and started to play down the

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<sup>49</sup> Protokol prvního, p.12.

<sup>50</sup> At the Comintern Executive on 14/6/23, quoted by V. Dubský: "Utváření politické linie KSČ v období Šmeralova vedení", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1967, No.6, p.831-832.

<sup>51</sup> J. Choráz, Komunismus, 15/8/23 and 4/9/23. See also the draft for a party programme in Komunismus, 4/10/23, p.391-393.

significance of the concept of the workers' government. At the same time, Šmeral's position within the KSČ was weakened by the adamant refusal of the government socialist parties to contemplate leaving the existing coalition. This meant that talk of a workers' government inevitably retained the appearance of abstract sloganising.

The Social Democrats had re-entered a coalition in 1922 having shown no serious opposition to the governments of officials before that. They had indulged in a great deal of talk about socialisation but only in the context of general and programmatic statements where it did not worry capitalists at all<sup>52</sup>. At the same time they were regaining their self confidence after a victory in the trade union movement which was achieved often by clearly undemocratic means<sup>53</sup> including a thorough purge of the unions in the engineering industry after the important strike in Prague in 1922<sup>54</sup>. This proved to be an extremely important success for the Social Democrats as Communists were never able to establish viable rival trade unions. They lacked experience in such work and, more importantly, regarded it as entirely subsidiary to political struggles. They therefore created a highly centralised union organisation suitable rather for calling a revolution than for the day to day defence of workers' interests. This weakness was fully exploited by the Social Democrats<sup>55</sup>.

In general, relations between the two parties were dominated by

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<sup>52</sup>Peroutka: Budování, Vol IV, p.2349.

<sup>53</sup>Dubský: KSČ, p.97 and p.107-109.

<sup>54</sup>Dubský: KSČ, p.123 and p.126.

<sup>55</sup>Dubský, KSČ, p.132-150.

extreme bitterness and a mutual expectation that the other one would soon collapse and therefore did not need to be considered in long-term plans<sup>56</sup>. The Social Democrats became more committed to participation in the existing coalition. This was said to be only a tactical question<sup>57</sup>, but in practice they never challenged the right-wing dominance within the coalition. They still seemed to have no interest in seeking any alternative to the existing coalition and accepted effective subordination within it. They opposed any idea that could involve using extra-parliamentary strength as a counter to the right's backing from big business<sup>58</sup>. They still claimed to be loyal to the principle of class struggle but in practice never showed any desire to join with Communists in leading any such struggles. Instead they placed great emphasis on what divided them from the Communists and, alongside an extremely distorted presentation of the Communists' united front policy, they vigorously took up the defence of those persecuted in the USSR. This was obviously an embarrassing point for the KSČ but was combined with sweeping condemnations of the Soviet regime culminating in its characterisation as absolutely nothing more than a brutal dictatorship<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> e.g. references to "the period of definitive disruption" of Social Democracy, Hůla and Vaněk, Komunismus, September - October 1922, p.432. From the other side was the counterposition of "the decline of communism" to "the new, great and imposing rise of Social Democracy", Protokol XIV řádného sjezdu československé sociálně demokratické strany dělnické 19-22/2/1924, Praha, 1924, p.59.

<sup>57</sup> A. Meissner, Protokol XIV, p.38.

<sup>58</sup> Z, Hradilák: "Československá sociální demokracie a zmocňovací zákon v roce 1933", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1967, No.1, p.29-30.

<sup>59</sup> Protokol XV sjezdu československé sociálně demokratické strany dělnické v Praze 1927, Praha, 1927, p.17. See also Protokol XIV, p.49-50.

This does not mean that the Social Democrats or the National Socialists made no difference to the government's policies by participating in the coalition. Rather they defended the status quo against both alternatives - both a shift to the right and a shift to the left<sup>60</sup>. Apart from a short spell from 1926-1929 they were permanent features in the coalition but still made no attempt to use those positions to press for the socialist changes advocated in their programmes.

#### 1.4.7. Summary and discussion

The early years of the KSČ were a period of searching for new ideas on which to base the party's policy. It found itself shut off from the actual centres of power and also from the other Czech socialist parties which were content to re-enter a coalition with the right-wing parties. It had to reconcile itself to the continuing consolidation of the Czechoslovak state plus the lasting possibility of an external threat.

Divisions within the party must have reduced its general attractiveness while also hampering its ability to work out and practise definite policies. In fact, the "left" seemed unaware of the need to confront Czechoslovakia's concrete problems and concentrated instead on attacking Šmeral who was trying to develop a serious revolutionary strategy. His ideas were close to those of Radek and the Comintern for a time supported his conception of a workers' government. Šmeral, however, was unable to win for the KSČ

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<sup>60</sup> c.f. J. Harna: "Československá strana socialistická ve vládě a v parlamentě (1918-1922)", Československý časopis historický, XX, No.3, 1972.



a place in the centre of political life. The two principal, fundamental reasons for this probably were, first, that the great majority of the Czech people still expected national statehood to be the best guarantee of their social interests and, secondly, that the KSČ attitude towards the Czechoslovak state was still only one of tacit acceptance rather than firm support.

Even if the KSČ faced such objective obstacles as to make success impossible in that early period, it could still have been working out ideas in readiness for a favourable situation later. Unfortunately, as is shown in the next chapter, the experiences of Šmeral's leadership were never built upon. The KSČ was never able to recapture the level of theoretical sophistication of those discussions on the means of transition.

There were still important ambiguities on questions that inevitably arose later. Although the means of transition evidently involved respect for the institutional framework that had grown up since 1918 - especially the parliamentary system - nothing concrete was said about the ultimate forms of political power in a socialist society. This was not purely an abstract question as both their suggestions that Social Democracy might soon disintegrate and the realities of political power in the Soviet Union could serve to devalue offers for cooperation between parties. The KSČ never clarified the role of political parties within its conception of democracy and it was undoubtedly a weakness later that it did not develop beyond those of Lenin's polemical pamphlets which pointed only to the class nature of political power.

This, however, was not the principal reason for the KSČ's lack of success in the early 1920's. Their weakness lay rather in their

understandable reluctance to embrace any particular single nationalism: their very concept of a workers' government and of the alliances they wanted to create was not to be based on the existing Czech national development. Instead, it was to be explicitly socialist and unreservedly internationalist thereby demanding a fundamental change in the direction of the thinking of most Czechs.

## CHAPTER 5: BOLSHEVISATION

### 1.5.1. Difficulties of formulating a strategy and uniting different attitudes within the party are aggravated by Comintern intervention.

The Comintern's Fifth Congress (17/6/24 to 18/7/24) saw the victory of Zinoviev's position and the propagation of the new slogan of the "bolshevisation" of the Communist parties. It was made quite clear that the slogan arose in the struggle against the danger of "right opportunist" interpretations of the united front tactic<sup>1</sup>. Radek's views were over-ruled, the idea of a workers' government was equated with the dictatorship of the proletariat and an armed uprising was presented as the only means to reach that dictatorship<sup>2</sup>. This, it was implied, amounted to "utilising the experience of the Bolshevik Party. . . in its application to the concrete situation of the given country"<sup>3</sup>. It looked more like a denial of that experience - particularly because of its extraordinary inflexibility - and also of the preceding few years of Comintern activity.

There was ready support for Zinoviev's position within the KSČ but it still could not win without greatly increased intervention from Soviet representatives within the Comintern. Thus at the KSČ Second Congress in late 1924, where a self criticism for "right opportunism" had to be made after the party had been condemned by

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<sup>1</sup> At the fifth plenum of the Comintern's Executive, J. Degras (editor): The Communist International 1919-1943 Documents, Vol II, London, 1960, p.189.

<sup>2</sup> Hájek: Jednota, p.91-93.

<sup>3</sup> Zinoviev at the Russian Communist Party's Fourteenth Congress; Degras: Communist, Vol II, p.188.

the Comintern, the most authoritative speech was made by Manuilsky. This was, as he said, the first time that a representative of the Russian Party could speak at a KSČ Congress<sup>4</sup>. He did not press for a complete victory for the left opposition but did want a great strengthening of their position up to at least half the new Executive Committee<sup>5</sup>. There was opposition to the implication that anybody had the right to intervene in the Congress's conduct of elections<sup>6</sup>, but Šmeral later explained how the Comintern's intervention "reached the character of an ultimatum . ." <sup>7</sup>.

Tension continued within the party between the two groups in its leadership<sup>8</sup> and ECCI discussed its problems again in March 1925. This time it was Stalin who produced an analysis of the party's ills. He saw the problem in purely political terms with the party divided into three trends. Šmeral was said to be in the centre but taking a soft line against the dangerous right. As his goodwill was not questioned the way was still clear for a compromise whereby he could stay in the leadership<sup>9</sup>.

Following this ECCI meeting the KSČ held its Third Congress in September 1925. There was a strong tendency there, and ECCI

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<sup>4</sup> Protokol II, p.14.

<sup>5</sup> Protokol II, p.19.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. A. Zápotocký, Protokol II, p.27.

<sup>7</sup> Kommunistichesky internacional, April 1925, p.37, quoted in V. Plevza: Československá štátnosť a slovenská otázka v politike KSČ, Bratislava, 1971, p.99.

<sup>8</sup> See Šmeral's account at the KSČ Third Congress, in Protokol III řádného sjezdu Komunistické strany Československa 26-28 Září 1925, Praha, 1967 (new edition), p.126.

<sup>9</sup> Protokol III, p.131-132, and Skilling: "The Comintern", p.238-39.

encouraged it, to play down internal dissensions in view of an imminent general election. Calls for much stronger condemnations of Šmeral, particularly from Slovak delegates<sup>10</sup>, were rejected. Nevertheless, the trend was clear enough as Jílek was re-elected general secretary. The, shortly after the general election in November in which the KSČ received a creditable 13.2% of the vote which was more than any other socialist party, Šmeral left Czechoslovakia to work in the Comintern and was followed shortly afterwards by Kreibich. This, the equivalent of demotion, kept the two of them away until the mid-1930's.

I.5.2. Bolshevisation leads to an attempt by the KSČ leadership to formulate new policies.

There were still plenty of weaknesses and unanswered questions in the ideas being developed by Šmeral and his associates. It was therefore not surprising that criticisms were made. In this new situation, however, they amounted to a complete condemnation of his whole approach rather than a development from and improvement on the basis that he had been laying. In practice, far from overcoming the faults in the KSČ strategy, the trend was to divorce it further from the needs of Czechoslovak society by the underlying sectarianism of the new approach. An important example was the development of nationalities policy which was based on propagation of the abstract principle of the right of national self-determination up to separation. This was said to be the best guarantee of the coexistence of nationalities within one federal state<sup>11</sup>, and it led to greater

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<sup>10</sup> See the contribution of Leonorovics of Žilina, Červen of Vrútky and also Pieck's report to ECCI after the congress in Protokol III, p.168-169, p.173 and p.459 respectively.

<sup>11</sup> Manuilsky, Protokol II, p.20.

attention to the Slovak question. The KSC in Slovakia started at an extremely low educational and ideological level<sup>12</sup>, so that its cadres were largely of Hungarian, German or Czech nationality: there was a conscious policy from 1923 of sending Czechs to take over from the non-Slavonic nationalities<sup>13</sup>. This internal structure of the KSC in Slovakia, reflecting as it did the absence of any independent Slovak socialist traditions, was inauspicious for appreciation of the relevance of the Slovak national question.

The issue was forced by hints from the Comintern and by the success of Hlinka's party in the 1925 general elections. Unfortunately the Communists so grossly over-estimated their own strength as to be unable to formulate a policy relevant to the realities and political diversities of Slovak society<sup>14</sup>.

"Bolshevisation" was also associated with the view that the party should broaden its activities beyond the working class. Although there had been a real weakness in this before, condemnations of Šmeral brought no real improvement. In fact, he had repeatedly pointed to the need to win over much of the "intelligentsia" while others had referred to the importance of winning the peasants<sup>15</sup>. In practice, not very much was done throughout the 1920's. Moreover, condemnation of Šmeral's general ideas meant that approaches to peasants had to be based on the notion of the dictatorship of

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<sup>12</sup> Prehl'ad, p.135.

<sup>13</sup> F. Beer, A. Benčík, B. Graca, J. Křen, V. Kural, J. Šolc: Dějinná křižovatka, Praha, 1964, p.23, and Plevza: Československá, p.91.

<sup>14</sup> Prehl'ad, p.154.

<sup>15</sup> e.g. Friedich, Komunismus, 1/8/23, p.283.

the proletariat. This amounted to ignoring the presence and permanence of non-proletarian social groups or of other political trends and had little chance of finding genuinely broad support.

Another element in "bolshevisation" was attention to raising the political level of the party generally and increasing its ability to provide leadership in particular actions. This involved replacing the traditional organisational structure of Social Democratic parties, based on local branches, with a structure of factory cells. This corresponded to a shift in orientation away from election work to organising factory workers for the defence of their immediate interests and then for a revolutionary uprising.

Such an organisational structure would have been extremely useful in 1920 and Zápotocký seems to have been perfectly willing to accept this reorganisation but wanted to take time to ensure that it would be done seriously and systematically<sup>16</sup>. He thought it would be possible to convert the whole party into a "Bolshevik" organisation and this contrasted with the desire of some, including Slánský, to greatly reduce the size of the party down to a "pure nucleus"<sup>17</sup>.

I.5.3. Stalin's triumph over Bulharin. Divisions within the KSC are accentuated by Comintern intervention until the party is brought to the brink of disaster.

Ultimately the real test for the party's new leadership was not just its ability to formulate general policies but rather its

<sup>16</sup> Protokol III, p.48 and p.67.

<sup>17</sup> A. Zápotocký, Protokol II, p.24.

ability to make a political impact in practice. It was for a time given plenty of scope to show its capabilities as Jílek seemed able to master internal differences and to consolidate his authority. Those supporting Šmeral evidently could see no point in a direct confrontation within the party which would also be a confrontation with the Comintern. A Trotskyist group emerged and was expelled from the party. It did not seriously challenge the leadership either. It made no attempt to develop Šmeral's earlier ideas and Trotskyists later condemned him from a position similar to Zinoviev's<sup>18</sup>. Those in Czechoslovakia evidently did not understand the need to develop a policy relevant to their particular conditions and concentrated rather on publicising struggles within Soviet leadership claiming that Trotsky was the "natural successor" to Lenin. They pointed to the Comintern's failures only in very general terms and saw no need to pose an alternative policy<sup>19</sup>.

Jílek, however, came under pressure through 1928 from precisely the same sort of position from which he had been supported against Šmeral. The stimulus was a series of abysmal failures in a number of strikes followed by a fiasco in a "Red Day" on 6/7/28. This was intended to demonstrate the party's revolutionary strength and willingness to defy increasing legal restrictions. Its failure brought into the open once again the deep crisis within the KSČ. It seems that the Jílek leadership was ultimately bound to face such

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<sup>18</sup> For a summary of the Trotskyist view see L. Trotsky: The First Five Years of the Communist International, Vol I, New York, 1972, Second Edition, p.355.

<sup>19</sup> Věstník komunistické oposice, 24/9/27, 25/10/27 and 12/11/27.



problems: it has been accused, probably with justification, of combining bureaucratic methods and inadequate mass work with radical phrasemongering that could only encourage impatience<sup>20</sup>.

Changes within the KSČ leadership were not based on such an analysis. Instead they followed changes within the Comintern generally associated with Stalin's defeat of Bukharin. This involved a further lurch to the "left" with the failure of socialist revolution everywhere apart from the Soviet Union attributed to the failure to eliminate the danger from the "right". This could give grounds for optimism that, given the correct policies, there could be a revolutionary upsurge. Moreover it was claimed that capitalism, far from becoming more stabilised, was in fact becoming less stable. Retrospective support for this was provided by the world economic crisis<sup>21</sup> but, in fact, the belief had been that instability would show itself in inter-imperialist rivalries and war: nobody predicted the immensity of the economic crisis<sup>22</sup>.

The belief that revolution was imminent was associated with a number of further axioms. There was it was said, to be no intermediate stage within the advanced capitalist countries before the dictatorship of the proletariat and the revolution itself was to be an armed uprising. Any united front "from above" was completely rejected and Social Democratic parties condemned: the term "social

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<sup>20</sup> J. Koudelková: "Rudý den 1928", Revue dějin socialismu, 1969, No.3, p.390-411.

<sup>21</sup> e.g. Program Komunistické internacionály a usnesení VI. sjezdu KSČ, Praha, 1931, p.59, and Outline History of the Communist International, Moscow, 1971, p.295.

<sup>22</sup> Hájek: Jednotná, p.144-145 and p.166.

fascist" was gradually used to characterise them. All this was presented as a policy of "class against class". It had, of course, always been the belief of Communist Parties that their policies were based on the principles of class struggle. The distinguishing feature of the policy in the 1928-1934 period was rather that it presented capitalist society as rapidly polarising in such a way that only Communists could represent the working class while all other political trends were condemned together as representing the bourgeoisie. As the capitalist crisis was believed to be becoming more intense, so increasingly repressive measures were being used against the revolutionary movement and these were said to be leading towards fascism.

Despite the inaccuracy of this position it could have an appeal within the Communist movement. It included an explanation for past failures and hence an articulation for the hope that success was imminent. Its blanket condemnation of all other political movements seemed to give a clear and unmistakable justification for a separate existence. It appeared to be the sort of policy most in line with the thinking of the left opposition within the KSČ, which had been so suspicious of Šmeral's attempts to work out a line which was more complicated but more realistic and which had conflicted with their hope that a revolution could come at once.

Nevertheless, intervention from the Comintern was again essential to ensure Jílek's defeat and then to install a new leadership. This happened at the KSČ Fifth Congress held from 18/2/19 to 23/2/29. Gottwald was elected General Secretary with particularly strong support from Slovak, German and Ukrainian areas. The new Central Committee was largely working class dominated by young and little

known individuals who were generally founding members of the party but lacked experience in the old Social Democracy. This made it easier for them to condemn the old leadership and Šmeral in particular. In fact, from the party's original leading group, only Zápotocký was still elected to the Central Committee.

Very quickly it became clear that, even if there was widespread acceptance of at least some criticisms of Jílek's leadership, Gottwald was not universally accepted as the answer. He was unable to dramatically improve the party's position and was very soon attacked from a "left" position. These attacks, particularly strong in Plzeň and Slovakia, were easily defeated<sup>23</sup> as they were not supported by the Comintern, but there were more serious criticisms of the leadership after the congress from a different position. Charges were made against Gottwald for "ultra-leftism" and these were supported by a number of leading trade unionists and by the majority of party's M.P.s and senators. After some hesitation, perhaps because the inner-party crisis looked so destructive, the leadership responded with expulsions to reassert its supremacy<sup>24</sup>.

Not surprisingly, there was a catastrophic drop in membership and a decline in the party's vote in general elections on 27/10/29 to 10.2%. Although this still indicated a significant body of support, it was behind Social Democracy and could suggest to its enemies that the KSČ would soon "be condemned to complete insignificance"<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> K. Gottwald: Spisy, II, Praha, 1951, p.28-29, Lastovka: Stále, p.48 and Prehl'ad, p.171-172.

<sup>24</sup> Dějiny KSČ, p.266-267, and Naše doba, 1929, p.551.

<sup>25</sup> Naše doba, 1930, p.91.

1.5.4 The Gottwald leadership begins to formulate new policies in line with the sectarian position of the Comintern.

Gradually, though, the KSČ did recover and develop new policies. These contained grave errors but it seems impossible to completely condemn Gottwald's leadership<sup>26</sup>. It seemed to be more competent than its predecessor and gradually did win back a body of support.

At first, however, an application to Czechoslovakia was developed of the Comintern's condemnation of the right deviation. It's central theme was a denunciation of "Šmeralism". This involved ascribing to Šmeral many views that he never actually held so as to prove that he represented "left social democratic" ideology<sup>27</sup>. It was also felt necessary, as it was Jílek and not Šmeral who was being defeated, to make the farfetched assertion that a bloc had been formed with a "merging" of their two ideologies<sup>28</sup>. On this basis new policies were worked out towards the Czechoslovak state, the national minorities, the peasants and the socialist parties all as a direct antithesis to policies Šmeral was said to have advocated and all within the concept of "pure class struggle" and the expectation of an early armed uprising<sup>29</sup>.

The KSČ attitude towards other political movements was, in line with the Comintern, one of condemning them totally. Masaryk was

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<sup>26</sup>For assessments see Protokol V. řádného sjezdu Komunistické strany Československa 18-23 února 1929, Praha, 1971, (new edition) p.7, and Hájek: Jednotná, p.159.

<sup>27</sup>P. Reiman, Protokol V, p.660.

<sup>28</sup>Protokol V, p.352.

<sup>29</sup>See Plevza: Československá, esp. p.105 and p.119-123 for this and for discussion of developments in Slovakia where, for the first time, an all-Slovak KSČ organisational structure was established.

condemned as playing "the leading role in fascisation of the state apparatus"<sup>30</sup> and Social Democracy as "the main implementer of the fascisation of the state apparatus" and as "social fascist"<sup>31</sup>.

Despite the complete incorrectness of labelling all other political parties as fascist there certainly was plenty of scope for criticising Social Democracy which, after rejoining the coalition in 1929, made no attempt to press for the implementation of its socialist programme. In fact, a new programme was even produced packed with strong statements of principle and proclaiming the need for the working class to win political power<sup>32</sup>. They argued that the fact of the economic crisis made the arguments for socialism even stronger<sup>33</sup>, but still consistently opposed any working class actions against the dreadful social consequences of the crisis.

Having previously justified class collaboration on the grounds that capitalism could be stabilised, the argument seemed to be reversed: workers and capitalists had a harmony of interests in their aim of overcoming the crisis. Bechyně in fact argued that the worse things became, so the more justification there would be for staying in the government and holding on to their positions as the only defense against fascism<sup>34</sup>.

The contradiction within their position was not exposed by the

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<sup>30</sup> Program Komunistické, p.73.

<sup>31</sup> Program Komunistické, p.72.

<sup>32</sup> Protokol XVI sjezdu Československé sociálně demokratické strany dělnické v Praze 27-29/9/30, Praha, 1930, p.182-203.

<sup>33</sup> e.g. Večerník Právo lidu 14/2/31, or A. Hampl, Protokol XVI, p.12.

<sup>34</sup> Protokol XVI, p.43. See also Hradilák: "Československá", p.33.

Communists' blanket insults to which the Social Democrats responded by almost equating the KSČ with fascism and the Soviet Union with the fascist states<sup>35</sup>. They often presented the KSČ as opening the way to fascism<sup>36</sup> and the resolution of their Sixteenth Congress portrayed the Soviet leadership as facilitating the victory of fascist counter-revolution<sup>37</sup>. Generally, however, they saw no particular need to answer the KSČ policies: being confronted with empty insults they could respond in the same way believing the KSČ to be disintegrating as shown by its internal crisis and a small but significant trickle of members across to Social Democracy<sup>38</sup>. They were only compelled to take the Communists more seriously when Communists succeeded in taking the offensive in developing and leading actual mass movements<sup>39</sup>.

I.5.5. Gottwald's leadership shows surprising competence in formulating a policy for the economic crisis.

Alongside blanket condemnations of other parties, the KSČ did try to formulate its own policies on the issues confronting Czechoslovakia. There seemed to have been a change since the early 1920's with the Czechoslovak state becoming more firmly established so that the question of its possible defence was not even raised.

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<sup>35</sup> R. Dechyně, Protokol XVI, p.38 and p.42.

<sup>36</sup> A. Weissner, Protokol XVI, p.94.

<sup>37</sup> Protokol XVI, p.139.

<sup>38</sup> A. Hampl, Protokol sedmnáctého řádného a jubilejního sjezdu Čs. sociálně demokratické strany národní 26 až 29. října 1933 ve Smetanově síni Ústředního domu hlavního města Prahy, Praha, 1933, p.10-11.

<sup>39</sup> Laštovka: Stále, p.81.

Instead, the new KSČ line seemed to go to the other extreme by maintaining that it was a fully imperialist state in its own right <sup>40</sup> with the Czechs suppressing the other nationalities. Although the KSČ was accused of wanting to dismember the Czechoslovak state and supporting Nazi expansionism, and that would certainly be the implication of continued insistence on the rights of minorities to secede, no practically realisable alternative to the existing state was posed. Kopecký was the most explicit defending "the right for the joining of all parts of the German nation into one whole". He added that this was "not at all possible on the basis of the imperialist expansion of German capitalism . . . but only by proletarian revolution"<sup>41</sup>. It seemed then to indicate renewed illusions of a coming German revolution.

Perhaps the real point was that, for part of the population at least, issues like the fate of the Czechoslovak state were pushed into the background by the acuteness of the economic crisis. This could provide something of a social base for the new KSČ line although, as has been argued, its actual origins are to be found elsewhere. Nevertheless, there was scope for the KSČ to become actively involved in struggles on social issues and this helped to shape the development of its ideas. This was becoming clear at its Sixth Congress in 1931 when, rather than putting socialist revolution on the immediate agenda, the emphasis was placed on actually

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<sup>40</sup> Šmeral had not been concerned with classifying Czechoslovakia as an imperialist or neo-colonial state. This became an important part of Comintern thinking in the later 1920's and a first attempt had characterised Czechoslovakia as "politically completely dependent on French imperialism", Protokol II, p.21.

<sup>41</sup> V. Kopecký: Vlast v nebezpečí?, Praha, 1931, p.24.

organising struggles for the defense of the daily interests and demands of the working people<sup>42</sup>. This was the meaning given to the Comintern's policy of creating a united front "from below" whereby unorganised and organised masses could be won for the KSČ policy.'

A major success in this was the movement of unemployed workers which was led effectively exclusively by the KSČ around a minimum demand of proper unemployment benefit to be paid for by the state<sup>43</sup>. Most other parties rejected any government responsibility for the unemployed. The Social Democrats took the safe course of minimising comment on the demands raised but, once the movement became really powerful, they clearly opposed any form of extra-parliamentary activity. They tended to condemn Communists for calling demonstrations<sup>44</sup> rather than the police who opened fire killing or wounding demonstrators<sup>44</sup>. At times even they did indicate indifference towards those workers who failed to qualify for unemployment benefit by sneering at the Communist press for becoming "the organ of the unorganised"<sup>45</sup>.

#### I.5.6. The Most miners' strike. The Communists try to adapt some of their sectarian ideas.

The high point of the unemployed workers movement, possibly the most organised in any capitalist country<sup>46</sup>, was reached in the

<sup>42</sup> Program Komunistické, p.80.

<sup>43</sup> K. Kořalková: Hnutí nezaměstnaných v Československu v letech 1929-1933, Praha, 1962, p.57. At the time benefits were paid only to members of recognised trade unions and then the union had to pay 50%. The system had been worked out by right-wing trade union leaders in 1920; Kořalková: Hnutí, p.21-22.

<sup>44</sup> PL, 5/2/31.

<sup>45</sup> A. Hampl, Přetokol XVI, p.132.

<sup>46</sup> Kořalková: Hnutí, p.320.



winter of 1931-1932 particularly in the strike by miners in Most when the strikers took up the demands of the unemployed<sup>47</sup>. This strike was of deeper significance for Communist strategy as it seemed to reveal both strengths and weaknesses in the party's previous positions. The point was that among unemployed workers or even poor peasants there was generally no other political organisation apart from the KSČ so that it did not present immediate problems if other parties were indiscriminately and totally condemned. Among employed workers the situation was different and no serious action could be undertaken without involving the members of other parties and trade unions. This meant that a more tactful approach was required and this could appear as a first hesitant step towards later ideas of anti-fascist unity<sup>48</sup>. It must be emphasised that only a beginning was made and that in some respects the experience of the Most strike confirmed the party's sectarian line.

The strike began on 23/3/32 against attempted sackings in one mine. The Social Democrat trade unions opposed strike action from the start but, "under pressure of the people"<sup>49</sup>, gave tacit support. The stoppage then spread rapidly through the whole coalfield: leadership went to elected committees dominated by Communists but also

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<sup>47</sup> Kořalková: Hnutí, p.260.

<sup>48</sup> For discussion of this see J. Pokorná: "K taktice "třída proti třídě" v hospodářských bojích československého proletariátu (1929-1932)", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1964, No.1; Z. Hradilák: "Třídní boje československého proletariátu v roce 1933 a taktika KSČ", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1964, No.3; Z. Hradilák: "Josef Guttman - konflikt rozumu a svědomí", Revue dějin socialismu, 1968, No.4; Z. Hradilák: "On the Process of the Constitution of the 'Definitive' Form of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (1929-1936)" in History of Socialism Yearbook 1968.

<sup>49</sup> PL, 25/3/32.

including Social Democrats and even Czech and German National Socialists<sup>50</sup>. The strike was still violently opposed by the Social Democrat leaders who saw it as "an irresponsible action of Communists and Nazis"<sup>51</sup>. They used the argument that the miners' case was just but that a strike was unnecessary as their own government ministers could win the demands<sup>52</sup>. They even tried to sound particularly radical with talk of presenting that long awaited draft for a law nationalising all coal mining<sup>53</sup>. The strike, however, remained solid and even seemed to be spreading. The government therefore decided to use repression to break the strike and succeeded in killing a number of miners<sup>54</sup>. Finally work was resumed after the official union leadership had negotiated a compromise. Although at first only a few miners answered their call for a return to work the effective strike leadership could see no alternative as otherwise the fight would be with the owners, the government, the trade unions and a slowly increasing section of the work-force too<sup>55</sup>.

The course of the strike could seem to indicate the correctness of the KSČ thesis that the miners were "not involved only with the coal-owners, the soldiers and the gendarmes" but that they had "at their backs an enemy far more dangerous, because more treacherous:

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<sup>50</sup> PL, 6/4/32, p.2 and Z. Fröhlichová: Mostecká stávká 1932, Most, 1967, p.8-10.

<sup>51</sup> PL, 2/4/32, p.1.

<sup>52</sup> PL, 25/3/32, and PL, 30/3/32.

<sup>53</sup> PL, 31/3/32, p.1.

<sup>54</sup> Fröhlichová, Mostecká, p.13-16.

<sup>55</sup> Fröhlichová: Mostecká, p.19.

the social fascist leaders!"<sup>56</sup>. It would appear also that the united front "from below", spanning nationality and political allegiance, had come into being. There was, however, a difference: this unity had been established by playing down references to "social fascists" and by concentrating rather on the immediate demands of the strike. This led to certain adaptations of the KSČ approach which brought it into closer harmony with reality while not challenging the fundamentals<sup>57</sup>.

The new ideas were presented to the Central Committee which met on 9-10/7/32 in a mood of optimism at the remarkable recovery of KSČ influence in the preceding months. It was concluded from the experience particularly of the Most strike that there was hidden revolutionary potential even within the workers influenced by reformism but that this potential could be used only for their gradual conversion on the basis of their own experience. While still regarding the socialist leaders as agents of the bourgeoisie within the workers' ranks, the term "social fascist" was no longer understood as equivalent to "national fascism". Gottwald even expressed the view that, as a means to influence the ordinary workers more easily, a dialogue should be opened with the socialist leaders. This cautious and hesitant proposal for a united front "from above" as well as "from below" was published in Rudé právo on 24/7/32 in response to von Papen's putsch in Prussia. Soon afterwards, the broadening of KSČ thinking beyond just "social" issues and the possibility of unity against the threat of fascism was presented to the Twelfth Plenum of ECCI. There were clear criticisms of the KPD

<sup>56</sup>RP, 26/3/32 (editorial).

<sup>57</sup>Hájek: Jednotná, p.186.

for which Gottwald was severely reprimanded and staged a partial, but not absolutely complete, retreat<sup>58</sup>.

On 21/8/33, after Hitler's victory in Germany, the Comintern's Political Secretariat searchingly discussed the situation in the KSČ and insisted that there be no further criticism of the KPD line. Inside the KSČ there was a hunt for and condemnation of alleged opportunist errors and Gottwald, Šverma and Reiman made self-criticisms. Guttmann, the Rudé právo editor, rejected the Comintern line and was expelled from the KSČ: his application to rejoin in mid-1934 was refused, even though he could argue that changes in the Comintern line amounted to a recognition that he had been right.

There was some justification for the return to the "social fascist" position as repressive laws<sup>59</sup>, aimed and used to a certain extent against the German fascists, were combined with increasing repression of the KSČ making legal work extremely difficult. During 1933 and early 1934 there were long periods when all KSČ publications were banned, some M.P.s were removed from parliament and the activities of many organisations associated with the party were stopped. There were discussions in respectable circles suggesting that dissolution of the KSČ might in the long run even help relations with the USSR, now being looked to as a possible ally against Hitler<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> Hradilák: "On the Process", p.51-53.

<sup>59</sup> c.f. Hradilák: "Československá".

<sup>60</sup> Naše doba, 1934, p.548.

### 1.5.7. Summary and discussion

In the later 1920's and early 1930's the KSČ went through a number of important changes which stemmed from both its own internal problems and the increasingly direct interventions from the Comintern. The Comintern's Fifth Congress led to the removal of Šmeral and the condemnation of his ideas: then, in the Comintern's so called "third period", the condemnations were strengthened still further and a new KSČ leadership emerged around Gottwald. Internal strife seemed to threaten the party with disaster and the Comintern's sectarian line, which involved completely rejecting all other parties and advocating an armed uprising as the means to achieve socialism, did not allow it to formulate ideas relevant to Czechoslovak conditions.

This was a crucial formative period for the KSČ as the leading group that was eventually to take power in 1948 was created. Those hostile to the KSČ have often tried to present the period as if it revealed the real essence of the KSČ<sup>61</sup>, while Skilling argued that it amounted to the destruction of the party that had been created by Šmeral<sup>62</sup>. Both these views are exaggerated as there had been very sectarian attitudes within the party before and some of Šmeral's ideas seemed to continually reappear.

There was a certain continuity in KSČ history but it would be naive to search for a simple "essence". The point was rather that the party had set itself very ambitious hopes and aims but then had to reconcile them to the complex realities of Czechoslovak society.

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<sup>61</sup>e.g. Zinner: Communist, Chapter 3 effectively argues this.

<sup>62</sup>Skilling: "The Comintern", p.247.

There was always a tendency to subordinate analysis to a simple proclamation of Communist identity, of exclusive loyalty to the Communist Party and hence of opposition to all other parties. This, in practice, meant concentrating only on advertising the aims and led consequently to political isolation and impotence.

There was also always a tendency to grapple with the changing complex reality and to seek a political strategy within the existing society. Gottwald soon began cautiously working out ideas that were not identical to the Comintern line. Later, as shown in the next chapter, the notion reappeared of a government of socialist parties. This, seemingly a logical step within any practical strategy, was repeatedly condemned as a non-revolutionary policy. The Comintern was decisive in ensuring its defeat and perhaps restricted the elaboration of the idea even in later years by providing a theoretical veneer to sectarian ideas. This proved to be a real restriction on the ability of the KSČ to formulate theoretical concepts relevant to its own political practice right through to 1948.

In a sense, then, Bolshevisation was not important primarily in directly shaping the KSČ ideas but rather in preventing the development of a more sophisticated approach. This was the case even in the Popular Front period, discussed in the next chapter, when the Comintern to some extent encouraged, but also held in check the development of KSČ policy.

## CHAPTER 6: THE POPULAR FRONT IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

### 1.6.1. Attempts by Czechoslovakia's Communists to apply and develop the Comintern's new policy are restricted by the Comintern leadership.

The victory and rapid consolidation of the Nazi regime in Germany could not fail to have a deep impact on Czechoslovakia's political life. Henlein's Sudeten German Party grew to win the largest number of votes in the Czech lands in the elections of May 1935. Many on the right of Czech politics, especially within the Agrarian party, looked admiringly towards Germany. Masaryk and Beneš did not share this view and sought better relations with the USSR against possible German expansion. The Social Democrats responded to the new dangers by sticking ever more firmly to their coalition policy: given the President's opposition to a fascist dictatorship, they maintained that it was safest to stay within the government so as to dissuade the right from attempting to establish fascism<sup>1</sup>.

There were also changes in the KSČ following Dimitrov's rise to prominence in the Comintern and exposition of the Popular Front strategy. Gottwald was in Moscow from September 1934 after he had been threatened with arrest on a treason charge inside Czechoslovakia for a leaflet accusing Masaryk of working to establish a fascist dictatorship. He quickly became an enthusiastic supporter of Dimitrov's ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. The contributions by Meissner and Dérier to the Seventeenth Congress, Protokol sedmáctého, p.53 and p.69.

This left Šverma, Slánský and, from early 1935, Šmeral as the main architects of KSČ policy. Their first attempt to apply the more flexible approach developing in the Comintern involved a reversion to the idea of a government of socialist parties and they even definitely proposed this to the Social Democrats in November 1934. The government was to implement policies generally in the interests of the working class but it was left ambiguous, and the Social Democrats picked on this as a reason for rejecting the proposal outright, whether the government was to support and defend the Czechoslovak state<sup>2</sup>.

Paradoxically, it was the Comintern leadership that prevented the further development of this line. They insisted that there had been no retreat from "class against class" policies<sup>3</sup> and reaffirmed that a workers' and peasants' government was synonymous with the dictatorship of the proletariat<sup>4</sup>.

The Comintern's line was further clarified by Dimitroff's speech at the Seventh World Congress. This needs to be interpreted carefully as it has often been presented as a renunciation of all past revolutionary policies and their replacement with direct subservience to the immediate aim of Soviet diplomacy which was to create an international alliance against Germany and Japan<sup>5</sup>. This may have been one part of the reason for the Comintern changing course but even

<sup>2</sup>Hradilák: "On the Process", p.65.

<sup>3</sup>Hájek: Jednotná, p.240.

<sup>4</sup>Hradilák: "On the Process", p.66-67.

<sup>5</sup>e.g. F. Borkenau: World Communism, Michigan, 1962, p.386-400.



Trotsky, a major critic of the Popular Front, ultimately admitted that the true situation was more complex<sup>6</sup>.

More realistically, it would appear that the new line emerged as a compromise in which advocates of the "old" position still held influence and were willing to concede only so long as they were not roundly condemned<sup>7</sup>. It could also be left ambiguous whether the new policy represented a real change in strategy or was just a "tactical" change i.e. an attempt to find a new and more subtle way of "exposing" the reformist parties and hence bringing about their destruction<sup>8</sup>. Dimitrov's speech contained some of these contradictions, but essentially it left no doubt that, with the basic aims of Communist Parties unchanged<sup>9</sup>, the situation required restriction to unity "against fascism, against the offensive of capital, against the threat of war, against the class enemy"<sup>10</sup>. Although on the one hand suggesting that this should develop into a movement "steering towards the organisation of a mass political strike"<sup>11</sup>, Dimitrov also presented the idea of a workers' united front, broadened by other social strata into an anti-fascist "Popular Front", and leading to

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<sup>6</sup> L. Trotsky: Writings of Leon Trotsky, (1938-1939), Second Edition, New York, 1975, p.62.

<sup>7</sup> Hájek: "K problému", p.715.

<sup>8</sup> For a thorough discussion of this see "Místo VII Kongresu Kominterny v dějinách mezinárodního a československého dělnického hnutí", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1966, No.1, p.24-105.

<sup>9</sup> G. Dimitrov: For a United and Popular Front, Sofia, undated, p.187.

<sup>10</sup> Dimitrov: For a United, p.136.

<sup>11</sup> Dimitrov: For a United, p.140.

a government that might be supported by Communists.

Again, even within the conception of this government, there were signs of the contradictory idea of it being no more than a spring-board for a revolutionary uprising. It was still denied that there could be "a special democratic intermediate stage lying between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the dictatorship of the proletariat"<sup>12</sup>. So the criticisms of Šmeral's ideas of the early 1920's still remained.

These contradictions and ambiguities in the Comintern line were soon to show themselves within the KSČ. The party's leaders inside Czechoslovakia were understandably reticent to commit themselves on controversial issues like the possibilities for a government of socialist parties. Nevertheless, they did open a discussion on how the new line should be applied with the hope that wide sections of the working class would express their views<sup>13</sup>. Socialism was not mentioned, even though Dimitrov had called on individual parties not to be afraid to seek new means of transition to socialism<sup>14</sup>, as all the emphasis was placed on the fight against fascism and the need to defend the republic - an aim which was now openly proclaimed.

To admit their inability to answer in advance all of Czechoslovakia's problems, and therefore to try to initiate so wide a discussion, did indicate a major change in the Communists' approach.

<sup>12</sup>Dimitrov: For a United, p.175.

<sup>13</sup>J. Šverma, Plamen 15/11/35, p.4.

<sup>14</sup>e.g. Dimitrov: For a United, p.175.

This was also reflected in their involvement in the immediate problems of Czechoslovak politics and, in particular, in their support for Beneš's Presidential candidacy. Masaryk had abdicated to leave the way open for his natural heir, but the Agrarians tried to organise support, including Henlein's party, for an alternative candidate. The KSČ then decided to support Beneš, not as part of a definite Popular Front strategy, but rather out of fear at the dreadful consequences that could have followed Beneš's defeat. This fitted with Dimitrov's advice to become an active agent in political life capable of influencing actual events.

In fact, the KSČ made a significant impression in national politics by, alone among parties, taking the issue of the Presidential elections outside the parliamentary arena. They held meetings in many parts of the country involving other organisations. They defied the Agrarian controlled Ministry of the Interior which banned all meetings on the subject and even proposed on one occasion a one hour general strike<sup>15</sup>. All this activity played a certain role in disintegrating the Agrarians' right-wing bloc and in preventing the formation of a new coalition excluding all socialist parties. It did not, however, lead to a Popular Front government as the other parties supporting Beneš had no interest in such a change. Instead the old coalition was restored and Beneš was elected by parliament on 18/12/35 with an enormous majority<sup>16</sup>.

It is impossible to say how the KSČ line could have developed

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<sup>15</sup> Káňa: KSČ, p.135-136.

<sup>16</sup> c.f. J. Novák: "Proměškaná příležitost", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1966, No.5. p.643-681.

from there. In February 1936, when ideas were still in a flexible and formative state, Gottwald returned from Moscow. The party's forthcoming congress was delayed and he closed the discussion that Šverma and Slánský had initiated by roundly condemning their interpretation of Comintern policy<sup>17</sup>. He made no mention of the Presidential election and the political crisis that had developed around it<sup>18</sup> and concentrated his attack on the party's support in parliament for parts of the budget and for strengthening the armed forces. This had been advocated by O. Synek who claimed that the army could be filled with "the idea of anti-fascist defence"<sup>19</sup>. Gottwald, however, regarded this as an "opportunist" position and ridiculed the suggestion that an army commanded by one of Kolchak's former generals could embrace genuinely anti-fascist ideas<sup>20</sup>. The criticisms were accepted by Slánský and Šverma but the Rudé právo editor Budín was expelled from the party.

It seems that criticism of the KSČ line originated in Moscow in response to sectarian elements within the Comintern and Trotskyists who had been using the KSČ as an example with which to condemn the whole Comintern line<sup>21</sup>. To answer these criticisms, which Stalin's purges suggest were taken with the utmost seriousness by the Soviet

<sup>17</sup> RP, 13/2/36 and RP, 29/2/36 in K. Gottwald, Spisy, Vol VII, Praha, 1953, p.11-38 and p.39-51.

<sup>18</sup> Kopecký, who had been in Moscow with Gottwald, evidently did feel that Beneš should not have been supported and wrongly attributed this view to Gottwald too; V. Kopecký: ČSR a KSČ, Praha, 1960, p.168.

<sup>19</sup> RP, 1/11/35, p.2.

<sup>20</sup> Gottwald, Spisy, VII, p.24-28.

<sup>21</sup> Hradilák: "On the Process", p.78-79.

leadership, Gottwald seems to have wanted a clearer differentiation of the party's position from Social Democracy so as to leave no scope for the view that there had been a change to full support for "bourgeois democracy".

So Gottwald could probably even find some reassurances in accusations from Social Democrats and others that he was returning to the KSČ policy of old and that the offer of a united front was just another tactical manoeuvre<sup>22</sup>. Gottwald insisted that any new policy would still require a fight against the reformist leaderships as the Social Democrats, he claimed, could not be won as a whole for united action<sup>23</sup>. This gave the opportunity for the Social Democrats to overcome their first bewilderment at changes in the KSČ and insist that there had really been no change at all: the aim was apparently still the destruction of other parties<sup>24</sup>. A similar feeling of reassurance probably replaced earlier bewilderment within the KSČ too as many Communists had been unwilling to apply the new line in practice<sup>25</sup>, but had been strangely silent before Gottwald's return<sup>26</sup>.

#### 1.6.2. Gottwald clarifies the Communists' policy at the party's Seventh Congress.

The KSČ congress was finally held in April 1936 and, not surprisingly, was dominated by Gottwald's exposition of the party's

<sup>22</sup> J. Thelen, Přítomnost, 11/3/36, p.148-151; J. Martínek, PL, 14/2/36, p.1, or Naše doba 1936, p.361.

<sup>23</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, VII, p.30-33.

<sup>24</sup> e.g. O. Berger: Nová politika KSČ, Praha, 1936, p.4.

<sup>25</sup> Káňa: KSČ, p.124.

<sup>26</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, VII, p.46.

policy. He made it clear beyond any doubt that the KSČ had adopted the defence of the Czechoslovak state as <sup>the</sup> central aim. This no longer needed to conflict with friendship with the USSR or with support for revolutionary struggles in Europe because, under the actual conditions prevailing in Europe at the time, defence of the republic meant opposition to Nazi expansionism. Moreover, the Soviet Union was militarily more powerful than ever before and Gottwald's faith in the Red Army was such that he could even advocate a foreign policy of almost exclusive friendship with the USSR<sup>27</sup>.

The central theme for domestic policy was the strengthening of the republic's defensive capabilities. To this end Gottwald opposed any alliance or compromise with bourgeois parties and insisted instead on class struggle against the bourgeoisie. This was to be conducted around four sets of demands which Gottwald claimed were attainable without a socialist revolution. These were; first, the social and economic demands of the working people of town and country; secondly, greater democratic rights and freedoms; thirdly, equal rights for the different nationalities and fourthly democratisation and purging of the army<sup>28</sup>. The issue of the KSČ conception of democracy proved to be the most controversial and is therefore taken last.

It was hoped that, with enough "pressure from below" around these demands, the government socialist parties could be persuaded to abandon the existing coalition and form a government of the left, following the examples of France and Spain. The desired new align-

<sup>27</sup> Protokol VII sjezdu Komunistické strany Československa, Praha, 1936, p.34-35.

<sup>28</sup> Protokol VII, p.32-33.

ments were already emerging in a few localities as a "socialist bloc" and the KSČ hope was that they would adopt clear programmes rather than remaining little more than electoral alliances<sup>29</sup>.

Although particular demands were not outlined for the working class it was repeatedly emphasized that economic struggles, which the KSČ should encourage irrespective of any agreement from other parties, could help overcome working class divisions<sup>30</sup>. Much of the congress discussion was taken up with suggestions for achieving this unity outside parliament. There was to be unity in factories<sup>31</sup> and an effort was to be made to unite the trade unions on the basis of class struggle<sup>32</sup>. Zápotocký made definite criticisms of previous KSČ policy insisting that, rather than trying always to sound the most militant and insulting other political parties, the Communists should try to prove themselves as the best trade unionists. Only then could they hope to challenge the reformists' strength<sup>33</sup>.

There was plenty of discussion of nationalities policy and particularly of the German question. Incorporation of the German areas into Nazi Germany was still completely rejected: nevertheless, it was hoped that the granting of full national rights alongside the other anti-fascist policies of social advance could win the German minority for loyalty to the Czechoslovak state. There was also an

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<sup>29</sup> Štětká, Protokol VII, p.157-159.

<sup>30</sup> e.g. Protokol VII, p.153.

<sup>31</sup> Protokol VII, p.165.

<sup>32</sup> A. Zápotocký, Protokol VII, p.111-124.

<sup>33</sup> Protokol VII, esp.p.120.

attempt to formulate a clear policy for Slovakia: the fight against national oppression there was to be linked with the fight for the economic betterment of the working people<sup>34</sup>.

On military policy Gottwald changed dramatically from the Šverma leadership advocating defence of the republic, in coordination with the Red Army, by the liquidation of the regular army which was to be replaced by "Jacobin" defence<sup>35</sup>. So much importance was attached to this that Communist leaders even suggested that they would be unable to join any government that tried to strengthen the existing armed forces as they might at some stage be used against the working people<sup>36</sup>.

The issue of democracy was felt by Gottwald to centre on special laws for the protection of the state. New powers had been introduced in 1934 and, although the Social Democrats had realised that they could be used against democracy<sup>37</sup>, they were accepted by the government parties in the interests of strengthening the republic. The KSČ felt themselves to be the main sufferers particularly as workers' political freedoms were restricted in factories related to military production<sup>38</sup>.

There were also general administrative methods against the KSČ which, although not as serious as in 1933 and 1934, were still being

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<sup>34</sup> K. Bacflek, Protokol VII, p.56.

<sup>35</sup> Protokol VII, p.33.

<sup>36</sup> J. Šverma in parliament 21/4/36 quoted in Protokol VII, p.317.

<sup>37</sup> Protokol sedmnáctého, p.49-50.

<sup>38</sup> Contributions by the Kladno delegate and by V. Široký, Protokol VII, p.160-161 and 208.



supported by the other socialist parties. As an alternative the KSČ proposed a conception of democracy that would give maximum freedom to all who opposed fascism but would allow no compromise with those who supported fascism.

This, of course, does not exhaust the problems surrounding the Communists' conception of democracy. They had indicated their willingness to defend the bourgeois democratic Czechoslovak republic and they advocated the creation of a new coalition government of socialist parties still within a parliamentary framework. At the same time they assiduously avoided suggesting that such a government could implement truly socialist measures and indicated considerable distrust towards the other socialist parties and especially towards Beneš and the so-called "left-wing of the bourgeoisie"<sup>39</sup>.

There were clear indications that, in so far as it had clarified its ideas at all, the KSČ saw the Popular Front as no more than a tactic, or as a brief introductory period before a socialist revolution which was understood just the same as before - as the exclusive affair of the KSČ. Any references to an armed uprising or the creation of soviets were enthusiastically received by the Congress, particularly if it was suggested that they were on the agenda for the very near future. Šverma was thunderously applauded for criticising his own failure to understand "that we are building a party that has to lead an armed uprising and revolution in Czechoslovakia!"<sup>40</sup> and Slánský argued that "the era of reformism is

<sup>39</sup>e.g. Klíma, Protokol VII, p.71.

<sup>40</sup>Protokol VII, p.82.

ending<sup>41</sup>". There was applause for the insistence that defence of bourgeois democracy was only a very temporary aim as the working class would not stop at a national defensive war but only at the defeat of both the Czechoslovak and German bourgeoisies<sup>42</sup>. In other words democracy, or the defence against fascism, could very soon become the exclusive affair of the KSČ rather than <sup>the</sup> joint affair of a number of parties.

Perhaps it was only with such radical sounding phrases that the position of "sectarian dogmatism", which simply took an automatic analogy with the Bolsheviks' position of 1914-1918, was reduced to so small a size. Gottwald answered their claim that no war should be supported by pointing out that Germany was quite indisputably the aggressor threatening small nations and, above all, the USSR<sup>43</sup>.

Even though the Popular Front in Czechoslovakia was adopted as a policy containing ambiguities and contradictions with no precise conception of what form it would take, there can be no doubt about the serious desire of the KSČ leadership to achieve some sort of Popular Front: Gottwald announced: ". . . come what may a united front of the workers and a popular of all working people must be achieved. Come what may so as to defend peace, to win bread and freedom and to protect the republic against fascism"<sup>44</sup>. Further prospects, however, depended ultimately on the response from the leaders of the government socialist parties and they remained remarkably unmoved.

<sup>41</sup> Protokol VII, p.151.

<sup>42</sup> V. Synek, Protokol VII, p.76-77.

<sup>43</sup> Protokol VII, p.31 and p.314.

<sup>44</sup> Protokol VII, p.243.

I.6.3. The Popular Front in practice. The Communist Party makes a greater political impression than before but fails to change the government.

It was soon clear that, irrespective of the ambiguities in their position, the Communists were making enough of a political impact to force comments from socialists and from those close to the President who had previously been content to dismiss them as irrelevant. There was a sudden spate of articles and pamphlets trying to discredit the KSČ by going either that it had completely capitulated to Social Democracy and hence had no further justification for an independent existence<sup>45</sup>, or that it really had not changed its policies at all<sup>46</sup>. There was even an extraordinarily bitter attack from Peroutka in an article that he must have later regretted, in which he firmly rejected any thought of co-operation with Communists. Perhaps forgetting that the world had not been quite perfect before November 1917, he described Communism as "... the bacillus behind everything that is bad and horrible in Europe today. Communists, if we take a good look, stand at the root of all contemporary evil"<sup>47</sup>.

There were a very few attempts to argue with KSČ policy by picking on what must at the time have appeared to be a basic contradiction. The Communists, it was claimed, were arguing that "... first of all the Czechoslovak people must be divided and only then can its effective defence be guaranteed ..." while the question

<sup>45</sup> e.g. P. Vilemský, Přítomnost, 1/6/38, p.346-348.

<sup>46</sup> e.g. Berger: Nová, esp.p.3.

<sup>47</sup> Přítomnost, 9/6/37, p.354.

apparently had to be "the defence of this existing state"<sup>48</sup>.

Generally, then, none of the other parties showed any interest in abandoning the existing coalition. The Social Democrats, although willing to drop their earlier bitter attacks on the Soviet Union and to seek any help that could be available against Nazi Germany<sup>49</sup>, still stuck to their policy of coalition with the Agrarians. Bechyně, in a rare exposition of his party's assessment of the situation, argued that such a coalition remained the "lesser evil". The alternative of "fierce class struggle" would, he believed, force the right-wing "to threaten the very existence of the state by an experiment of the fascist type"<sup>50</sup>.

Uninterested in joining with the KSČ either to implement traditional socialist policies<sup>51</sup> or to oppose the fascist threat, the Social Democrats demanded that unity could only be achieved once the Communists admitted all their past policies to have been erroneous and effectively accepted in full the practice of Social Democracy: no scope was left for any unity at a lower level - in trade union activities or in localities - until these basic points had been clarified<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> Přítomnost, 22/4/36, p.244. This was very similar to the Social Democrats' argument and, although it must have appeared to many at the time to refute the KSC position, ten years later it could not even be mentioned.

<sup>49</sup> e.g. Protokol sedmáctého, p.81.

<sup>50</sup> Přítomnost, 2/10/35, p.610.

<sup>51</sup> Bechyně actively opposed talk of state takeovers of industry maintaining that socialism would ultimately come on its own as "a state and economic necessity", Přítomnost, 2/10/35, p.659.

<sup>52</sup> Berger: Nová, p.19 and p.40, and J. Koudelka, Pl, 16/4/36, p.1.

I.6.4. The Communists develop and adapt their ideas as the Nazi threat grows.

So, although political life was deeply affected by the ideas of the Popular Front, there was no move towards the desired changes in government. Censorship and repressive measures against the KSČ continued: from 23/10/37 all political meetings in Slovakia were banned and no direct mentions were allowed in any of the press of the danger of a German attack - this even included warnings against it by KSČ M.P.s<sup>53</sup>.

Did this mean that the Popular Front exhausted itself having revealed the unwillingness of the government socialist parties to change their policies? Dimitrov enticised the KSČ in May 1936 for seeming to take this view and Gottwald in response developed the idea of a government without Agrarians as the first step towards the Popular Front government<sup>54</sup>. At the same time existing policies were developed further and in more detail. There was no immediate retreat on the policy of "radical social reforms"<sup>55</sup>, and the policy was in fact given a more concrete shape. Only in mid-1938 did the threat to the republic become so obvious that the KSČ modified their unrealistic notion of Jacobin defence and called for universal military training of the population<sup>56</sup>. By July, instead of organising strikes, they opposed the attempts of Henlein's party

<sup>53</sup> Prehl'ad, p.234 and p.235.

<sup>54</sup> Hradilák's contribution in "Místo VII", p.91-92, and Gottwald: Spisy, VII, p.232.

<sup>55</sup> e.g. K. Gottwald: Spisy, VIII, Praha, 1953, p.157.

<sup>56</sup> V. Široký, RP, 28/5/38.

to misuse strikes for the destruction of the republic<sup>57</sup>.

Developments in nationalities policy came more quickly particularly with reference to Slovakia where the need for "Slovakisation" of the party there, i.e. the training of genuine Slovak cadres, was at last appreciated in early 1936<sup>58</sup>. The ideas from the Seventh Congress still failed to inspire a united opposition to the growing influence of the HSL'S, so a conference was held in Banská Bystrica in May 1937 to present and publicise the so-called "Plan for Economic, Social and Cultural Advancement of Slovakia". The right of national minorities to secede was no longer mentioned as they contained large fascist separatist movements. Instead it was argued that Slovaks and Hungarians should support the existing Czechoslovak state along with much of its political centralism as an anti-fascist bastion in Central Europe.

It was argued that for these national minorities to accept and defend the Czechoslovak state under these terms major reforms would be needed. The central demand was for the industrialisation of Slovakia with the aim of attaining the same level of development as the Czech lands. There was also to be a land reform based on the distribution of land holdings over 50ha to peasants and agricultural workers<sup>59</sup>. The policy proved inadequate to win over the Slovak and Hungarian minorities and the KSČ vote declined in local elections

57 O. Káňa: Mnichov na Ostravsku k událostem roku 1938 ve Slezsku a na Hlučínsku, Ostrava, 1963, p.92-93.

58 Prehl'ad, p.226.

59 in V. Široký: Za šťastné Slovensko v socialistickom Československu, Bratislava, 1952, p.8-27.

in mid-1938<sup>60</sup>: the idea was then propounded of giving autonomy in such a form that political power would go to "democratic Slovaks"<sup>61</sup>. Even this could do nothing against the Slovak and Hungarian separatist movements of 1938.

Foreign policy could not remain static either particularly when the KSČ started to link defence of Czechoslovakia with active help in the defence of republican Spain. There was open obstruction of all sorts of help, including mere collections of money, and Beneš even turned a blind eye to arms from Czechoslovakia reaching Spanish fascists. The argument for this, propagated particularly by the Agrarians but also echoed by Social Democrats, was the desire not to damage Czechoslovakia's prestige internationally and particularly not to offend Germany<sup>62</sup>. The Social Democrats' behaviour was pathetic: Spain received only passing references at their Eighteenth Congress, unlike some other smaller countries. At the same time Spain's struggle was apparently proof that a small nation "enthusiastic for its own cause, disciplined, prepared and properly armed can resist the military pressure of the fascist states . . ."<sup>63</sup>.

In the final local elections in the 1938 the KSČ gained significantly in solidly Czech areas while the Social Democrats were losing ground. For the latter it was a particularly unhappy period as they had consciously suspended pressing for their

<sup>60</sup> Plevza: Československá, p.150-151, and Beer, et al: Dějinná, p.25.

<sup>61</sup> Beer, et al: Dějinná, p.25.

<sup>62</sup> F. Kružík: "Odjezdy čs dobrovolníků do Španělska 1936-1938", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1966, No.4, p.533-554.

<sup>63</sup> A. Meissner, Protokol osmnáctého řádného sjezdu Československé sociálně demokratické strany dělnické 15-17 Května 1937, Praha, 1937, p.140.

programmatic aims in the interests of defending the republic. With the imminent demise of the republic they were left, as a party, with little to point to by way of achievements<sup>64</sup>. Seemingly aware of this their very last appeal in local elections was that voters should remember all the articles in which they had criticised some feature of internal political life: they did not point to what they had achieved in the past or to what they hoped to achieve in the future<sup>65</sup>.

#### 1.6.5. Summary and discussion.

With the policy of the Popular Front some of the basic ideas for the KSČ policy of the war and post-war periods began to take shape. The Comintern's role was both to encourage and at times to restrict the development of KSČ ideas: the restrictions were not based on an actual assessment of the situation inside Czechoslovakia.

The crucial change was in the international situation. The threat to Czechoslovakia could have been interpreted as proving the correctness of Šmeral's earlier internationalist ideas but, instead, the KSČ felt it both possible and necessary to advocate defence of Czechoslovakia with Soviet help against the Nazi threat. They argued that this required a number of important internal changes including a possible coalition government of the socialist parties.

Although by seeking unity with other parties the KSČ indicated a considerable change in its approach, there was no general condemnation of its earlier sectarian policies and the other socialist

<sup>64</sup> Hradilák: "Československá", p.51.

<sup>65</sup> PL, 22/5/38, p.1.



parties could find grounds for doubting the Communists' sincerity in offering unity. Although the KSČ did seem to be trying to broaden its notion of democracy to include all those who opposed fascism, it also seemed unable to relinquish the perspectives of an imminent armed uprising associated with the decomposition of other parties and leading to a "dictatorship of the proletariat" understood just as it had been before.

So the change in KSČ strategy should not be exaggerated and it did not lead to the accomplishment even of the immediate aims set. Nevertheless, it was adequate to move the party back towards the centre of Czechoslovak politics.

This was how the KSČ stood in 1938, on the eve of the destruction of the Czechoslovak state. Looked at in the abstract, its history can appear uninspiring. It had been gripped by internal strife with wild accusations and condemnations against various of its leading figures. It had destroyed a number of its leaderships and seemingly almost itself. For a time it seemed to have pursued extremely sectarian policies with relevance only to the needs of small sections of Czechoslovak society. Then it suddenly reversed its approach to one of supporting the state that it had been attacking. Viewed in this way it would seem incredible that the KSČ could have maintained a fairly steady body of support and then enormously increased it after World War II.

Evidently, KSČ history has to be viewed differently. Its faults have to be compared with those of other parties and, in particular, the other socialist parties. It often seemed to be the only party defending and fighting for the interests of many industrial and rural workers and maintaining the promise of a better, socialist future. It

probably maintained a reputation and a degree of respect as a workers' party among more than just its own voters.

The real test, however, was in the defence of the republic. Despite the weaknesses in its policies, history was to suggest that the KSČ had been right to argue that the Soviet Union was militarily strong enough to save Czechoslovakia from Nazi Germany and that it was the right-wing parties of the coalition rather than the KSČ who were lukewarm in their defence of the Czechoslovak Republic.

So, as the downfall of the Czechoslovak state approached, the KSČ already had almost two decades of development behind it. Plenty of people were totally opposed to it because they rejected all it stood for. Others may have been made cynical by the way how it conducted its internal life: some of those who had been expelled in various periods were already active in other parties, but some were to return to the KSČ in the changed circumstances of 1945.

Alongside these attitudes the KSČ had built itself a body of support and above all a reputation sufficient for many Czechs later to forget its mistakes and failings. It had also developed a body of ideas which were flexible enough to form a basis for a fairly clear strategy in the later years of the war.

## PART II

### WORLD WAR II, THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK STATE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR A NEW CZECHOSLOVAKIA

At this point the narrative has to be broadened. To understand the political and social set up that emerged in May 1945 and gave such a strong position to the KSČ, it is quite inadequate to concentrate only on the developments within, and the strategy of the KSČ. The Communists were strong as part of a broader unity which involved effectively a compromise between themselves and Beneš who, for reasons that will have to be explained, was led to seek unity with the KSČ.

The relationship between these two was one of rivalry within a shaky unity which can only be understood against the background of the common fight against Nazi Germany and of the social and political changes taking place within Czechoslovak society. This was the basis from which they shaped their ideas and found areas of common ground alongside areas of continuing disagreement.

For the purpose of this work, a full and balanced assessment of Czechoslovakia during the war years is not necessary. Instead, the account starts with <sup>the</sup> activities and strategy of the Nazi occupiers in the Czech lands to show how they created the objective conditions within which the Czech political trends evolved their various general ideas and strategies.

Particular attention is devoted to the process of Czechoslovakia's liberation during which those ideas were tested and shaped in practice. It was then that the relative strengths of Beneš and the KSČ were revealed thereby deciding the political form of Czechoslovakia after May 1945.

## CHAPTER 7: THE NAZI OCCUPATION

### II.7.1. The Czechoslovak state is destroyed.

On 29/9/38, following a summer of strong pressure from Nazi Germany co-ordinated with the activities of Henlein's Sudeten-German party, Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini met in Munich and agreed on an ultimatum demanding that the Czechoslovak government should immediately abandon all areas where Germans were more than 50% of the population. Beneš himself considered resisting and would have received massive support from the Czech people, the left-wing parties and the armed forces. Nevertheless he decided to acquiesce although it later emerged that the Nazis themselves were very cautious of entering a military conflict<sup>1</sup>. He also ignored the possibility of Soviet help partly because he thought it might not be adequate<sup>2</sup>, but also because of its internal and international political implications<sup>3</sup>.

Some months after this easy success the Nazis, although the Munich agreement guaranteed the existence of a truncated Czechoslovakia, used strong threats to persuade the Slovak leaders to proclaim an independent state. Using the pretext that Czechoslovakia had ceased to exist, the Czech lands were occupied on 15/3/39 and the "Protectorate" was established.

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<sup>1</sup> W. Churchill: History of World War II, Vol I, London, 1948, p.246.

<sup>2</sup> J. Křen : Do emigrace: západní zahraniční odboj 1938-1939, Praha, 1969, Second Edition, p.48.

<sup>3</sup> V. Král: Záříjové dny 1938, Praha, 1971, p.146.

II.7.2. The political aims of the Nazi occupiers. How they ensured Czech compliance with their authority.

At first there was no clear Nazi plan for the Czech lands: the immediate rationale for the sudden occupation had been the desire to pre-empt any anti-German action from Czechoslovakia at some point in the future. Gradually, through successive changes and modifications, they evolved a definite strategy<sup>4</sup>. Their first consideration was ensuring control and this was achieved both by exploiting the unwillingness of many Czech leaders to actively oppose the occupation and by progressively strengthening the position of specifically German institutions. They were willing to allow a Protectorate government powers that at first appeared to be greater than those enjoyed by any Czech institution within the Austrian empire. They even allowed a single Czech political party, the "National Union". This could appear to Czechs to be leading some sort of resistance but in practice it helped in the repression of real political opposition and could do nothing against "Germanisation" policies<sup>5</sup>. These involved giving marked privileges to the German minority while denigrating the Czech language and culture. The most dramatic anti-Czech measure was the closing of Czech universities on 17/11/39 and the execution of student leaders following street demonstrations on 28/10/39. Although presented as if a response to political opposition, this was also part of a plan to eliminate Czech education and was followed by instructions

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<sup>4</sup>Accounts in English are V. Mastny: The Czechs under Nazi Rule: The Failure of National Resistance, 1939-1942, New York, 1971, and J. Doležal, J. Křen: Czechoslovakia's Fight 1938-1945, Prague 1964.

<sup>5</sup>Edboj a revoluce 1938-1945, Praha, 1965, Part I, Chapter 3.

for the gradual limitation even of Czech school education<sup>6</sup>.

The eventual aim was to "Germanise" the Czech lands by persuading most Czechs to accept German nationality: the more stubborn ones were to be executed or forcibly removed from Central Europe<sup>7</sup>. Solid refusal from Czechs to renounce their nationality forced the occupiers to postpone their plan<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, the necessary research for such a project was started whenever the Nazis thought victory was at hand particularly after the fall of France and to some extent also when Moscow's fall seemed imminent.

In the autumn of 1941 the war situation, the activation of Czech opposition to the occupiers and the refusal of the Czech nation to accept voluntary "Germanisation" all contributed to a shift in Nazi strategy. This was personified in the appointment of the ruthless Heydrich as Protector in 1941. He did not anticipate rapid "Germanisation" but took a far tougher line with active opposition so as to maintain political stability and steady military production. He dissolved the Protectorate government and ordered the execution of Prime Minister Eliáš. Even though terror was never far below the surface, he did not unleash the barbarity used in Poland, Yugoslavia or parts of the Soviet Union. There was always space left for compliance so that active

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<sup>6</sup> Dokumenty z historie československé politiky, Vol II, Praha, 1966, dok.438, p.602-603.

<sup>7</sup> Documentary evidence of Nazi plans is collated in Chtěli nás vyhubit, Praha, 1961.

<sup>8</sup> Apparently only 300,000 Czechs and Slovaks chose German or Hungarian nationality during the war. That includes the areas occupied immediately after Munich; V. Nosek, RE, 1/2/46, p.1. In the Protectorate itself the numbers were probably very small.

resistance never appeared as the best means of survival.

Moreover, there was always scope for believing that things could be worse and this feeling was fully and subtly exploited. So, when on 27/5/42 Heydrich was assassinated by parachutists sent from London as part <sup>of</sup> Beneš's plan to win international recognition,<sup>9</sup> the response was one of carefully controlled ruthlessness. Active resistance organisations were demolished so that, with a few exceptions, they disappeared or had to be rebuilt from scratch again afterwards. The mass of the people, however, were terrorised into passivity by these widespread executions and above all by the massacre of the villages of Lidice and Ležáky. These were not the usual Nazi atrocities, ordered by a local commander to avenge a local partisan attack, but were centrally decided and widely publicised acts deliberately accompanied by rumours of the impending liquidation of the Czech nation<sup>10</sup>. Although this may have discouraged active resistance it simultaneously encouraged a feeling of helplessness leading to grim hatred for Germans in general who, in the Czech lands at least, actively applauded the act<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> See below Section II.8.2.

<sup>10</sup> Čtělí, p.161.

<sup>11</sup> Čtělí, p.159 and p.187-188. The Nazis' success in forcing compliance from the Czechs was demonstrated by their ability to leave much of the administrative apparatus in Czech hands. For every one German administrative worker there were 790 Czechs: in France and Denmark the comparable figures were 5872 and 42696; J. Doležal: Jediná cesta, Praha, 1966, p.25-26.



### II.7.3. How the Nazis exploited the Czech economy.

As the Czech economy became more essential to the Nazis, so their economic and social policies changed. At first the impact on the economy was less striking than the attack on Czech nationhood. Many capitalists could even have welcomed greater opportunities for profit from Germany's expansion<sup>12</sup> and larger land-owners could take comfort at the land reform being definitively ended<sup>13</sup>. Workers' living standards probably dropped at all times<sup>14</sup> but not dramatically at least until 1941. Moreover, conscious efforts were made to win over the working class, which the Nazis thought would be the easiest section of the population to "Germanise"<sup>15</sup>. The favourite Nazi tactics were demagogic assertions of their socialist credentials and appeals to anti-intellectualism<sup>16</sup>: some credibility could be given to this as there was a tendency for income differentials among workers to decrease<sup>17</sup>.

The more striking immediate social changes were by-products of "Germanisation". The property of Jews was taken by Germans while, during the course of the occupation, about 60,000 Czech peasants were ousted by Germans and converted into landless labourers. This was part of a policy of complete "Germanisation" of land ownership

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<sup>12</sup> V. Král: Otázky hospodářského a sociálního vývoje v českých zemích v letech 1938-1945, Vol I, Praha, 1957, p.134-138.

<sup>13</sup> Křen: Do emigrace, p.171.

<sup>14</sup> e.g. the report by the Protectorate Interior Ministry on 10/6/41, Dokumenty z historie, Vol II, dok. 445, p.610-612.

<sup>15</sup> Chtěli, p.47-48 and p.72.

<sup>16</sup> Mastny: The Czechs, p.77.

<sup>17</sup> V. Král: Otázky hospodářského a sociálního vývoje v českých zemích v letech 1938-1945, Vol III, Praha, 1959, p. 156.

but started with the creation of strategically placed German islands in the Czech interior<sup>18</sup>.

Gradually, however, as the war set greater demands on the economy, central controls were strengthened and the whole structure of the Czech economy was changed and distorted. The central Nazi aim was, quite simply, to raise military production. The Czech lands could help them in two ways: the first was by providing labour for German industry thereby replacing German workers who were needed in the armed forces. The second was by raising the military output of the industries within the Czech lands. The first <sup>became</sup> aim<sup>so</sup> imperative after the German defeat at Stalingrad that all young Czechs born within a particular year were drafted into Germany: this probably affected in all 600,000 Czechs and 200,000 Slovaks who returned home with even less love for Germany<sup>19</sup>. The second aim, which increased in importance from late 1943 as bombing affected industry in Germany itself involved, as soon as August 1942, the compulsory lengthening of the working week to 60 hours<sup>20</sup> and then the expansion of the labour force by drafting in peasants, the urban petty bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia, office workers, housewives, former students, the old and even invalids. As these sources were exhausted, so labour was transferred from useful consumers' goods industries. In August 1944 all production not directly related to the war was prohibited.

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<sup>18</sup> Stručný, p.268-269.

<sup>19</sup> F. Mainus: Totální nasazení, Brno, 1970, p.95-96. For higher estimates, suggesting that there were that number in Germany at the end of the war alone, see below Vol II, p.52.

<sup>20</sup> Král: Otázky, Vol III, p.333.

II.7.4. The policies of the Nazis occupiers helped create the "objective" basis for the subsequent revolutionary changes.

Nazi economic policy, with the progressive proletarianisation of the Czech nation and concentration of workers into bigger factories, could appear like the economic prelude to a socialist revolution leading to a planned economy. This, however, cannot be concluded from the situation in the Czech lands. Concentration was associated entirely with military production and hence declining living standards: one of the first post-war tasks would have to be a reversal of this trend. Moreover, to judge from the nature of Nazi repression and how it was most widely felt, the objective conditions were being created for a national, rather than a socialist revolution. Although social or socio-economic aspects of repression became important particularly towards the end of the war, they could never take precedence over or stand independently from national repression. Czech historians have therefore argued that "the basic contradiction of society . . . was . . . between the majority of the nation and the occupiers plus those who linked their social and individual destinies with them"<sup>21</sup>.

To refer to national repression in this way raises the question of how united a national resistance could be. Simple opposition to the Nazi occupation could increase through the war and, with the widespread social consequences of the occupation, could serve to bring the nation together. At the same time, and particularly those trying to develop an active resistance movement at the time had to recognise this, it did not necessarily point to any one

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<sup>21</sup> Národní fronta a komunisté, Praha, 1968, p.31.

alternative. A natural possibility was a restoration of the Czechoslovak state and there was a widespread longing for this. There were, however, necessarily reservations as the Czechoslovak state had in fact collapsed so that the desire for its restoration alone could not be enough. It was a common feature of all active political trends that they tried to supersede the old ideas on which the state had been based i.e. its inclusion of large national minorities, its dependence on France and its capitalist system. This last point was potentially divisive even though the nation was drawn closer together against the occupiers. The point was that those who had suffered from a socially subordinate position before had been willing to reconcile themselves to the realities of the situation partly because of the threat to the state. It seemed, though, that the sacrifices made by them and by their representatives in the government had led only to disaster. It is therefore not surprising that ideas about the restoration of the Czechoslovak state were often associated with fundamental changes in its social system and corrections of its earlier failings. In fact there was a strong tendency among active resisters to seek the causes of Czechoslovakia's collapse in its internal social and political system as well as in its nationalities policies and international orientation. At the same time, there was a rough division in resistance organisations over the degree to which the social and economic relationships in the new Czechoslovakia were to be a return to, or a revolutionary rejection of, the old Czechoslovakia.

So the Nazi occupation created the objective conditions for a very broad opposition, covering almost the whole Czech nation, which could not be completely united in its aim. Nazi strategy

was also such that opposition tended not to take active forms. The obvious centre for resistance activity would seem to be the armaments factories where large numbers of Czechs were forced together and could hopefully even find some way to acquire arms. The Nazis, however, were extremely severe with strikes and astutely combined this with better rations to workers in armaments factories as a reward for acquiescence. Moreover, the social divisions within the Czech nation were present even within the working class as those who had been forced into the factories from more prestigious work tended not to accept their new social role: there was therefore considerable tension reducing the scope for united action<sup>22</sup>. Consequently, even in big factories resistance rarely went beyond individual sabotage acts: it is unclear to what extent they contributed to declining productivity<sup>23</sup>.

The general picture, then, was of a Czech nation which deeply hated the occupiers but showed this primarily in small individual acts of defiance.

#### II.7.5. Summary and discussion

From mid-1938 the Nazis set about destroying the Czechoslovak state: the Czech lands were incorporated into Germany while Slovakia was given formal independence. This chapter concentrates on the developments in the Protectorate where Nazi strategy evolved gradually throughout the war. Up to the autumn of 1941, repression

<sup>22</sup> V. Mencl, O Sládek: Dny odvahy, Praha, 1966, p.137-138.

<sup>23</sup> Comparing 1944 with 1939 industrial production was 18% up, employment 35% up and productivity 13% down; Stručný, p.273.

was comparatively mild. Then, in response both to a more active Czech opposition and to the need for security in the interests of increased military production, they took a tougher line against active resisters. This was always part of a wider strategy for ensuring political control and they therefore did not resort to unrestrained savagery. There was always scope for Czechs to acquiesce before their authority.

The ultimate aim was the "Germanisation" of the Czech lands and steps towards this led to a Czech feeling of national oppression. As the demands on the economy increased, this merged with a wider social oppression so that the Czech people felt the effects of the occupation in a number of ways.

From this followed the wider changes in political thinking and consciousness which created the basis for the post-war revolutionary changes. Despite some similarities, the situation was very different from that of 1918. Two important differences were, first, that the Nazi occupation represented a far more serious threat to the Czech nation than had the repressive measures used by the Austrian authorities, and secondly, that this time the Czechoslovak state had existed for twenty years and thereby won for itself a firm place in the Czech national consciousness.

A number of consequences followed from these facts and they all tended to strengthen the hand of the KSČ. This time acceptance of Nazi authority was impossible for any Marxist and the KSČ was not confronted with Šmeral's dilemma: instead it was the Czech right-wing who were more confused in their attitude towards the occupiers. Further consequences of the Nazi occupation were three general and widespread feelings which had no precise analogies in 1918; first,

there was a deep hatred for the occupiers and for Germans generally and this led to a determination that measures would be taken to prevent for ever a repeat of the tragic events of 1938 and 1939; secondly, there was a craving for unity to bridge the differences within the Czech nation as they seemed trivial in comparison with the Nazi threat; thirdly, there was a tendency to seek real or imagined failings in the pre-Munich republic which might have weakened its ability to withstand Nazi pressures. This last point was likely to strengthen the standing of those advocating revolutionary changes while the other points to some extent restricted and defined the direction of those revolutionary changes.

## CHAPTER 8: CZECH POLITICS DURING THE NAZI OCCUPATION - COLLABORATORS AND BENEŠ

As a more comprehensive study is not possible within the context of this work, Czech political thinking will be divided into three trends reflecting orientations towards three power blocs - Germany, the West and the USSR. All could claim to provide a way forward for the Czech nation with the first regarding German hegemony as a fact which had to be accepted.

There were many and diverse resistance organisations that developed at different times within the Protectorate, but they are not discussed separately here. They were subjected to continual repression and disruption by the occupiers and ultimately were not decisive in creating Czechoslovakia's post-war political and social system. Rather it was the organised groups in emigration that created the first post-war government. Resistance organisations and activities were important in influencing the ideas of those in emigration and also ultimately in strengthening the position of the KSČ in Moscow relative to Beneš in London. They are therefore discussed within the sections on those two emigration centres.

### II.8.1. Elements of the Czech right-wing accept the strategy of acquiescence to the Nazi occupation.

The phenomena of acquiescence and collaboration evolved slowly alongside the changing strategy of the Nazi occupiers. There was some support for this approach at first from the Agrarians and their allies but gradually the Nazis had to rely on an ever narrower base among Czechs. At first, however, the Agrarians had risen from a position of strength within the pre-Munich republic to



still greater dominance before the occupation encouraging the trend towards "totalitarianism" by banning the KSČ, merging the right-wing parties - including even the National Socialists - into a party called National Unity, and allowing Social Democracy to transform itself into the non-Marxist National Labour Party which played the role of a docile opposition. This period was important later as so many politicians and journalists who accused the KSČ of "totalitarianism" could never answer for their own statements and actions. At the time, though, there was considerable disillusionment with the former multi-party system so that many saw the trend towards "totalitarianism" as an advance.

Following the Nazi occupation the same political currents tended to comply. This very rarely amounted to active collaboration<sup>1</sup> and many of those who for a time complied with the occupation later went into emigration or were imprisoned. Particularly after Heydrich's arrival it became harder to argue that, by staying in office, one was preventing a still worse fate. Nevertheless, after Stalingrad the Nazis, seeking every possible method to win acquiescence from the Czechs, gave freedom to those Czech right-wingers who were willing to propagandise the likely horrors should "Bolshevism" triumph.

As collaboration changed through the occupation and at first seemed to merge with resistance, it is difficult to give any precise meaning to the term. This became an important issue after the war

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<sup>1</sup> Despite Nazi backing, uncompromisingly pro-fascist movements never commanded the support of more than 1% of the Czech population; T. Pasák "K problematice české kolaborace a fašismu za druhé světové války", Příspěvky k dějinám fašismu v Československu a v Maďarsku, Bratislava, 1967, p.137.

when a definition was needed for legal purposes. Arguments were then produced suggesting that, as so few had been involved in dramatic displays of resistance, effectively the whole nation collaborated by its passivity. This ignores the very widespread ways in which the population did oppose and frustrate the occupiers' hopes: for example, they convinced the Germans that no Czech army could be allowed even to fight the USSR. It must be emphasised that the contradiction between the occupiers and the nation was more complex than a simple question of organised resistance. There were all sorts of ways in which the Nazis' hopes and plans were frustrated or restricted<sup>2</sup>. The argument also has a political significance as it means that collaboration was nothing special: this could excuse those few Czechs who actively helped the Nazis achieve their aims or who made profits out of the Nazi war effort and were punished after the war.

II.8.2. Beneš establishes his supremacy and formulates a strategy for the emigration and for the domestic resistance.

The pro-Western trend was led by Beneš who was pressurised by Germany into resigning the Presidency after Munich and then went into emigration. He began political activity again only after the establishment of the Protectorate and then gradually won a position of dominance within the expanding Czechoslovak emigre community. His strength was based on his standing as the former President,

<sup>2</sup>c.f. J. Šprysl: "K problematice postavení českého rolnictva v letech 1939-1941", Historie a vojenství, 1967, No.4, p.593-630, in which the blanket condemnation of peasants for allegedly "collaborating" is fittingly rebuked.

on his claim to be the only leading non-Communist Czechoslovak emigré to have opposed Munich and on his ability to formulate a definite plan for the re-establishment of the Czechoslovak state<sup>3</sup>. His plan was derived from the experience of World War I and centred on the notion that the Czechoslovak state, as it was destroyed by external forces, still legally existed and that he was still legally its President. He resolved to create in emigration the trappings of a constitutional state including a government, a parliament, called the State Council, ministers and an army<sup>4</sup>.

To justify to the Western powers the restoration of a Czechoslovak state, he had to explain why it had failed. His answer was that the principal reason was betrayal by its Western allies and he hoped that the outbreak of war would convince them that they had miscalculated in 1938. He therefore based himself in Britain, where there had been opposition to Munich, and set about persuading influential circles that he should be recognised as the legal President of Czechoslovakia. A logical consequence of this was his extreme sensitiveness to suggestions that Czechoslovakia should have fought alone in 1938: that would have implied that he was not "forced" to resign and that Czechoslovakia's downfall was partly his own fault.

Convincing the West was a slow process and ultimately it was only after the Soviet Union had been brought into the war and taken

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<sup>3</sup>J. Křen: "Beneš - problém politického vůdcovství (1939-1940)", Revue dějin socialismu, 1968, No.2, p.182.

<sup>4</sup>For a succinct account of Beneš's aims and activities in emigration see E. Taborský's chapter in Mamatey and Luža: A History.

the initiative in recognising Beneš's government in exile that Britain followed suit. Then, a year later, Britain was behind the Soviet Union again in categorically renouncing the Munich agreement. Prior to that there had been a degree of recognition from the Western governments and this greatly helped Beneš establish his supremacy in emigration. He had rejected the democratic means of a congress of emigrés because, owing to the predominance of Jews and Germans among Czechoslovak emigrés, he feared that Communists would have dominated<sup>5</sup>. Instead, he created a government in exile specifically excluding all political parties. By carefully manipulating the government's composition he managed to incorporate and thereby eliminate most opposition<sup>6</sup>. This still excluded some on the far right and also some Social Democrats and the Communists. Considerably later he was willing to include the latter in his government even without demanding the dissolution of their organisation.

His aim in establishing these constitutional structures was essentially that they would return home as the recognised supreme bodies at the end of the war. This meant that, despite occasional claims to the contrary<sup>7</sup>, he regarded the domestic resistance as subordinate to and a servant of his own emigration action. In turn, domestic groups often saw themselves as supplements to Beneš's activities and concentrated on sending back messages of value to

<sup>5</sup> Křen: Do emigrace, p.489-493.

<sup>6</sup> See J. Smutný's account of 22/3/40, Dokumenty z historie, Vol I, Praha, 1966, dok.69, p.92.

<sup>7</sup> e.g. his speeches of 11/12/40 and 25/11/41 in E. Beneš: Šest let exilu a druhé světové války, Praha, 1946, p.270 and p.291 respectively.

Western intelligence services or helping individuals to emigrate<sup>8</sup>. One important group based on former officers in the disbanded Czechoslovak army went beyond this and formulated a completely unrealistic plan for an uprising to be staged once German power began to collapse. Even those activities were restricted to conspiratorial preparation and did not involve any attempt to extend mass political influence<sup>9</sup>.

Beneš was happy to maintain contacts with the Protectorate government and particularly with Eliáš. Seemingly he hoped that, at the decisive moment, they would transfer allegiance to him so that the existing organs of the Protectorate could form the basis for a new state. In practice, although they claimed to be pursuing a "two irons" policy - basing themselves on the practice of Czech politicians during World War I when compliance had not led to disaster<sup>and</sup> even professed allegiance to Beneš, they progressively subordinated themselves to Nazi authority as the course of the war made liberation from the West seem less likely<sup>10</sup>. After the Soviet Union was brought into the war Beneš, fearing lest contacts with the Protectorate should alienate Soviet sympathy<sup>11</sup>, ordered the

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<sup>8</sup> V. Krajina: "La résistance tchécoslovaque", Cahiers d'histoire de la guerre, No.1, February 1950. See also the relevant chapter by R. Luža in Mamatey and Luža: A History.

<sup>9</sup> J. Křen: "Vojenský odboj na počátku okupace Československa (1938-1940)", Historie a vojenství, X, No.2, 1961. Throughout the course of the war a number of groups were formed which understood the re-establishment of Czechoslovakia as a purely constitutional process and worked out in punctilious detail how they thought this could be achieved. As an example, see the account of Derer's activities; M. Bouček, M. Klimeš, M. Vartíková: Program revolúcie, Bratislava, 1975, p.167-169.

<sup>10</sup> Křen: Do emigrace, p.183-190, and Odboj a revoluce, Praha, 1965, p.110-111.

<sup>11</sup> Dokumenty z historie, Vol II, dok.446, p.613.

Protectorate government to resign. Despite these instructions only Eliáš, perhaps the most genuine resister in the government<sup>12</sup>, refused to accept complete subjugation to the occupiers. Even then, Beneš made excuses for members of the Protectorate government until after Lidice when his London government had won full international recognition.

Despite such equivocations, Beneš's activities in emigration won him popularity at home. An image was created of him as the legendary future liberator of the Czech lands<sup>13</sup> and this spread beyond those who accepted his strategy. Most interesting was PVVZ - "Petition Committee We Remain Faithful" - which developed out of organisations of left Social Democrat intellectuals<sup>14</sup>. Its analysis of the sources of Czechoslovakia's failure was broad. It emphasised the problems caused by the large German minority and pointed also to social questions such as the mass unemployment of the 1930's<sup>15</sup>. Although not contesting Beneš's right to be President it implicitly rejected his absolute supremacy by formulating a programme for a future Czechoslovak state<sup>16</sup>.

There is an enormous amount of evidence that, following the fall

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<sup>12</sup> He probably maintained contacts not only with Beneš and former army officers but even with the KSČ; J. Eliášová, T. Pasák: "Poznámky k Benešovým kontaktům s Eliášem ve druhé světové válce", Historie a vojenství, XVI, No.1, 1967, p.108-140.

<sup>13</sup> Křen: "Beneš", p.188-189.

<sup>14</sup> For its origins see J. Kublík: "Petiční výbor věrni zůstaneme v období Mnichova a za druhé republiky", Československý časopis historický, XVII, No.5, 1969.

<sup>15</sup> J. Grňa: Sedm roků na domácí frontě, Praha, 1965, p.40-41.

<sup>16</sup> Za svobodu. Do nové československé republiky, Praha, 1945.

of France, national morale revived with faith being placed in the Soviet Union. This could have surprising consequences with hopes that Soviet expansion, as in Bessarabia and Bukovina, would continue, and bring liberation to the Czech lands. Even many capitalists were hoping for this as the only way to retain Czech nationhood<sup>17</sup>. In this situation, the only way to withstand "Bolshevism", feared by PVVZ as well as the right<sup>18</sup>, seemed to be to adopt a radical socialist programme while accepting the leadership of the West<sup>19</sup>. This meant that even right-wing Czechs felt obliged to accept the PVVZ programme<sup>20</sup>, while PVVZ itself called on Beneš to adopt more forceful policies implying a break with the Protectorate government.

II.8.3. Beneš works out the policies for a new Czechoslovakia: revolution is to be held in check by radical reforms.

While messages from clandestine groups were indicating the radicalisation of the resistance movement and the growing hope that the USSR would help defeat Nazism, Beneš himself accepted that, as after World War I, there would be a danger of revolution for a short period at the end of the war. To weather this and to ensure the

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<sup>17</sup> See the messages to London of July and October 1940, Dokumenty z historie, Vol II, dok.411, p.553-554, and dok.426, p.578 respectively. Also revealing is B. Reicin's account to the KSC leadership in Moscow in October 1940; "Situace a odboj v Protektorátě v letech 1939-1940", Z počátků odboje, Praha, 1969, esp. p.104.

<sup>18</sup> Message to London PVVZ, 19/4/40, Dokumenty z historie, Vol II, dok. 397, p.536.

<sup>19</sup> Message to London dated 1/10/40, Dokumenty z historie, Vol II, dok. 423, p.573.

<sup>20</sup> See K. Veselý-Štainer: "Odbojová organizace Obrana národa", Z počátků, p.201, and V. Kural: "Cesta k programu nacionálního odboje", Revue dějin socialismu, 1968, No.1, p.72-73.

re-establishment of a stable parliamentary democracy, the idea of a military or Presidential dictatorship was often proposed, both in emigration and among resistance organisations. Beneš himself, unlike some of his closest associates<sup>21</sup> but like PVVZ, also emphasised the importance of implementing far-reaching reforms. This left Marxist historians with problems in defining Beneš's position as he sometimes appeared as a radical socialist. Perhaps fairest was the characterisation of him as standing "on the extreme left of the bourgeois camp"<sup>22</sup> indicating his willingness to bring forward ideas on social change when confronted with the possibility of a revolutionary situation. Crucial on all points, however, was his belief that these reforms would simultaneously limit further reforms and eliminate the objective basis for Marxism<sup>23</sup>.

This is most striking in his idea to restrict the number of political parties to two or three. According to Táborský this was the most important of his proposals<sup>24</sup> and responded to criticisms of the excessive fragmentation of pre-Munich political life. It was also intended to incorporate and thereby silence the KSČ within a broader

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<sup>21</sup> e.g. J. Smutný and J. Stránský's views of 2/11/40, Dokumenty z historie, Vol I, dok.109, p.139. Táborský seems to have shared their view in E. Táborský: Czechoslovak Democracy at Work, London, 1945.

<sup>22</sup> J. Křen: "O úloze benešovského křídla buržoazní emigrace v období války", Československá revoluce v letech 1944-1948, Praha, 1966. Beneš presented his own ideas in his book Demokracie zítra a dnes, Praha, 1946, Second Edition.

<sup>23</sup> Beneš: Demokracie, p.245.

<sup>24</sup> E. Táborský: "The Political Institutions of Czechoslovakia", Jacques Métadier (editor): Solidarity, London, 1943, p.161.



left party<sup>25</sup>.

Land reform, which Beneš insisted should be completed this time, was to create a mass of peasants resilient to Communist ideas<sup>26</sup> and nationalisations of considerable large-scale industry would, it was hoped, create a society in which Communists would no longer have any relevance<sup>27</sup>. Much of this Beneš hoped to achieve through measures against Germans. He even formulated the notion of a combined national and social revolution<sup>28</sup>.

In fact, his nationalities policy originated primarily in the need to convince the Western powers that Czechoslovakia could be recreated as a viable state even though nationalities problems had been so important in its previous downfall. Beneš therefore advocated expelling most of the German minority<sup>29</sup>: this was dependent on the agreement of the great powers as it was effectively an international question. Britain showed some reluctance, agreeing only in June 1942 when renouncing the Munich agreement. The USSR prevaricated until the middle of 1943.

Contrary to some claims<sup>30</sup>, this policy was very popular with

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<sup>25</sup> See Beneš's discussion with Ripka on 8/5/42, Cesta ke květnu, Praha, 1965, p.44-45.

<sup>26</sup> His comments of 9/6/42 and 4/7/43, Dokumenty z historie, Vol I, dok.221, p.271 and dok.286, p.344.

<sup>27</sup> His comment of 5/7/41; Dokumenty z historie, Vol I, dok.195, p.238.

<sup>28</sup> E. Beneš: Memoirs: From Munich to New War and New Victory, London, 1954, p.212 and p.218.

<sup>29</sup> It was never stated how many although Beneš suggested that 80% of the Germans were pro-Nazi; Beneš: Memoirs, p.214. The best accounts of how he developed the idea of mass expulsions are in his own memoirs and in R. Luža: The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans, London, 1964.

<sup>30</sup> e.g. Y. Gluckstein, Stalin's satellites in Europe, London, 1952, p.123-124.

non-Communist domestic resistance organisations. Even PVVZ demanded it independently from very early in the war and, particularly after Lidice, it was effectively a universal demand. Only the domestic KSC evaded any comment.

The Slovak national question was for Beneš less fortunate and led eventually to conflict with the domestic resistance. He firmly adhered to the "Czechoslovakist" position whereby only a single "Czechoslovak" nation was recognised. This, he argued, was the only way to convince the great powers that a Czechoslovak state could be viable: admission of a separate Slovak nation would either justify a separate Slovakia or a Czechoslovak state with no national majority and consequently no justification for denying equal rights to all the minorities<sup>31</sup>. So, to justify renunciation of Munich, Beneš required an admission of responsibility for Czechoslovakia's collapse from the Slovaks and a proclamation of loyalty to himself as President. He even claimed that this would be the only way for the Slovaks to avoid being regarded as a defeated nation at the end of the war<sup>32</sup>. Not surprisingly, he enthusiastically believed reports reaching him in early 1943 suggesting that the great mass of Slovaks accepted his authority<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> E. Beneš: Úvahy o slovanství, Praha, 1947, Second Edition, p.335. Beneš even regretted the development of the separate Slovak language.

<sup>32</sup> See his comment of 20/2/43, Slovenské národné povstanie: dokumenty, (abbreviated henceforth to SNP), Bratislava, 1965, dok.4.

<sup>33</sup> SNP, dok.11, p.75. The strongly worded government statement made on this basis in fact provided valuable ammunition for the Bratislava government against Beneš; J. Jablonický: Z ilegality do povstanie, Bratislava, 1969, 140.

II.8.4. Beneš hopes the USSR will help him re-establish a Czechoslovak republic.

Beneš's attitude towards and relations with the USSR were crucial to his whole strategy. The existence and possible role of this new power made an exact repeat of his World War I strategy impossible. Following Munich the Soviet Union appeared as the only state in Europe at all sympathetic to Beneš's cause<sup>34</sup> and, even during the September 1939 to June 1941 period, Beneš tried to avoid a final break. He kept some distance from the more vigorous propaganda campaigns against the USSR in late 1939 and never seriously doubted that the Nazi-Soviet pact was a tactical necessity forced on the Soviet Union<sup>35</sup>. Unlike the British government, he believed that the USSR would play a role in defeating Nazi Germany<sup>36</sup> and therefore tried always to keep the door open for renewed co-operation: contacts were in fact resumed and developing after the fall of France<sup>37</sup>.

Beneš always had mixed feelings about the USSR. Broadly speaking he understood their foreign policy as either a desire to export revolution, which he naturally feared, or as the pragmatic actions of a great power, which he could understand or even welcome. The Nazi-Soviet pact and then the desire for cooperation

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<sup>34</sup> Křen: Do emigrace, p.315-318.

<sup>35</sup> Particularly revealing is Smutný's study of Soviet foreign policy of April 1941: Dokumenty z historie, Vol I, dok.166

<sup>36</sup> Beneš: Memoirs, passim. See also R.H.B. Lockhart: Comes the Reckoning, London, 1947, p.72.

<sup>37</sup> J. Křen, V. Kural: "Ke stykům mezi československým odbojem a SSSR v letech 1939-1941", Historie a vojenství, XVI, No.3, 1967, esp. p.732-733, and Krajina, SS 8/6/47, p.12.

with the West seemed to indicate the supremacy of the latter element but Beneš, particularly during and after Soviet military successes in mid-1943, feared the possibility of the USSR defeating Germany alone and deciding the fate of Central Europe<sup>38</sup>. To avert this danger Beneš firmly advocated East-West cooperation hoping that it could continue even after the war, giving the West a say in Central Europe. He believed, and he had supporting evidence, that the USSR would see a strong, democratic, anti-Nazi Czechoslovakia as being in their own best interests<sup>39</sup>. Recognising the alleged inapplicability of Communist ideas to Czechoslovakia and still needing the cooperation of the West to rebuild their economy<sup>40</sup>, the Soviet leaders might see the pointlessness of trying to force revolution onto Czechoslovakia<sup>41</sup>. He tried to reassure himself that changes in Soviet foreign policy would be reinforced by changes inside the Soviet Union in the direction of his own conception of democracy. Often he seemed optimistic but at other times he acknowledged that no basic changes could be expected.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Lockhart: Comes, p.269, and C. Mackenzie: Dr. Beneš, London, 1946, p.261.

<sup>39</sup> Mackenzie: Dr. Beneš, p.296, and Z. Fierlinger: Ve službách ČSR, Vol II, Praha, 1948, p.101. Fierlinger was a left-wing Social Democrat who Beneš appointed ambassador in the USSR as part of his strategy for winning the trust of the Soviet leadership.

<sup>40</sup> Mackenzie: Dr. Beneš, p.296. and E. Táborský: "Beneš and Stalin: Moscow 1943 and 1945", Journal of Central European Affairs, XIII, No.2, July 1953, p.155.

<sup>41</sup> e.g. his comments of 28/9/43, Dokumenty z historie, Vol I, dok.310, p.378.

<sup>42</sup> e.g. Fierlinger: Ve službách, p.2 C.

During 1943, as his hopes of liberation and fears of its consequences mounted, Beneš began discussions on a treaty of friendship with the USSR. This caused considerable suspicion in British government circles<sup>43</sup> but approval was finally given. Beneš could eventually travel to Moscow after the leaders of the three anti-Nazi powers had agreed to meet in Teheran. His aim was, as a part of and further encouragement to East-West cooperation, to ensure that the Soviet leaders firmly recognised the restoration of a Czechoslovak state with him as President as one of their war aims: this he described as "non-interference" in Czechoslovakia's internal affairs<sup>44</sup>.

The outcome of his discussions with Stalin and Molotov left him in a state of elation: they seemed to regard him as a basic part of their plans for Central Europe<sup>45</sup>. Beneš also held discussions with the KSČ leaders during which he generally gave non-committal or subtly flattering replies to suggestions for resistance strategy and measures in post-war Czechoslovakia<sup>46</sup>. His main conclusion in fact was that the Communists, albeit with some reservations,

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<sup>43</sup> Beneš: Šest let, p.357, and Memoirs, p.243.

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of Beneš's aims and reactions, see E. Táborský: "Benešovy moskevské cesty", Svědectví, I, No.3-4, 1957. He had, on 12/7/41, expressed fears of a possible Soviet backed alternative government including the KSČ, Fierlinger and Nejedlý; Dokumenty z historie, Vol I, dok.198, p.241.

<sup>45</sup> Táborský's record of these discussions appeared in Svědectví, XII, No.47, p.479-489.

<sup>46</sup> A record of these discussions from the Communist side was published in Cesta ke květnu, p.40-59.

acknowledged his right to be President<sup>47</sup>. This recognition meant that the London government could make detailed preparations for returning home and governing<sup>48</sup> thereby effectively ignoring the different ideas of the KSČ. Beneš even completely ignored the KSČ ideas on Czechoslovakia's future political structure - as outlined in Section II.9.5. - and proclaimed that the National Front stretched from left to right<sup>49</sup> and that there should be three parties - left, centre and conservative<sup>50</sup>.

The major concession from Beneš seemed to be advocacy of active armed struggle against the occupiers<sup>51</sup>. This, however, did not represent acceptance of its correctness or a concession to KSČ pressure. The reason was rather pressure from the Soviet, and possibly also British governments, so that Beneš felt obliged to make some gesture to consolidate his internal recognition<sup>52</sup>.

Even promises to the Soviet leaders of important internal economic changes and co-ordination with Soviet plans<sup>53</sup> appear

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<sup>47</sup> Beneš regarded the actual content of these discussions as being so trivial that he gave the meeting only a passing reference as as the twenty third point out of twenty four in a London government circular of January 1944 assessing the outcome of his visit to Moscow; SNP, dok.39.

<sup>48</sup> Speech to the State Council on 3/2/44, Beneš: Šest let, p.394-395. For the preparations see Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.26 and B. Lastovička: V Londýně za války, Praha, 1960, p.367-368.

<sup>49</sup> Broadcast from Moscow on 23/12/43, Beneš: Šest let, p.241.

<sup>50</sup> Speech of 3/2/44, Beneš: Šest let, p.389. Apparently he felt confident that the Communists would win only 15-20% of the votes in post-war elections, so that they could only wield more power than him with the help of direct Soviet intervention; V. Král: Osvobození Československa, Praha, 1975, p.20.

<sup>51</sup> Beneš: Šest let, p.222 and p.385.

<sup>52</sup> See his statements of 10/7/44 and 10/10/42 in SNP, dok.91, p.226, and Dokumenty z historie, Vol II, dok.502, p.702 respectively.

<sup>53</sup> Fierlinger: Ve službách, p.191-192.

unconvincing as trade with the USSR was only expected to be 15-20% while Beneš's Finance Minister was negotiating agreements in the U.S. and Canada for post-war Czechoslovakia<sup>54</sup>. More likely, and this was a crucial consideration, Beneš thought the economic strength of the USA could help restore Western influence in Central Europe even after a Soviet military victory.

Beneš's confidence was further raised in May 1944 by an additional treaty giving power to a "government delegate" rather than the Soviet authorities in Czechoslovak territory as it was liberated<sup>55</sup>. The delegate appointed was the right-wing Social Democrat F. Němec and he left for Moscow in August 1944 accompanied by an advisory committee of the Slovak Communist Valo, the Social Democrat Laušman, Uhlíř of the National Socialists and Hála from the Peoples' Party<sup>56</sup>. On the eve of Czechoslovakia's liberation, all seemed to be set for a restoration of the republic in the form desired by Beneš.

#### II.8.5. Summary and discussion

One possible viewpoint on the Nazi occupation was that it had to be accepted as the Czechoslovak state had not been a viable proposition for the Czech nation. This was the justification for those, generally from the right, who helped the Nazis achieve their aims by willingly acquiescing or even actively collaborating.

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<sup>54</sup> Král: Osvobození, p.202, See also the message from Ripka to the Czechoslovak ambassador in Geneva of 1/11/44 quoted in Král: Osvobození, p.401-402.

<sup>55</sup> This treaty was reproduced in Beneš: Šest let, p.475-477.

<sup>56</sup> Bouček, et al: Program, p.109-110.

At first they followed the dominant Czech policy of the 1914-1918 period, but the consequences for them were far worse because of the nature of the occupation.

Beneš set about trying to restore the Czechoslovak state by relying on the West. He too followed his World War I strategy and hoped to be able to convince the Western powers that they had made a dreadful mistake at Munich. He was flexible and far-sighted enough to see that, if he was to return home as President, there would have to be major reforms in the new Czechoslovakia to prevent socialist revolution. These included nationalisations and land reforms and he even advocated expulsion of the German minority which was widely accused of actively aiding in Czechoslovakia's downfall.

The most controversial aspect was his policy towards the Soviet Union. He visited Moscow in 1943 and signed treaty agreements with the Soviet leaders. This, however, in no sense represented a full commitment to the USSR. Rather it was an insurance policy for in case the Soviet armies should dominate Central Europe. As an exercise in purely diplomatic manoeuvring, Beneš's war time strategy was well thought out and probably achieved as much as was possible. Chapter 11 shows how Beneš was forced to move closer to the USSR and it appears very distorted to suggest that he was excessively trustful of Stalin.

Beneš, however, did ultimately fail to achieve his political aims so that he must have wrongly assessed the situation somehow. His error can be summarised as a general failure to understand how different things <sup>were</sup> from 1918. In particular, he was greatly hampered by his underestimation of the development and strength of Slovak



nationalism and he still held a stereotyped view of what a revolution was so that he misunderstood the basis and nature of the strength of the KSČ.

Had he recognised more accurately how Czechoslovak society was changing, he would have needed to fundamentally revise many of his ideas. This, however, would hardly have made him more conservative. He was, of course, always restricted by his desire to win favour with the British government so that he was scared of appealing to them to be too radical. Thus his expertise on the international diplomatic arena restricted his scope for formulating a fully satisfactory political strategy.

## CHAPTER 9: COMMUNIST STRATEGY DURING WORLD WAR II

While Beneš was evolving his ideas on the future shape of Czechoslovakia and preparing to put them into practice, the KSČ too were forced by the objective situation to work out new ideas. These followed a tortuous path of development from the time of Munich through to the spring of 1945, when the Communists could propose a programme for Czechoslovak society which was adopted by the first post-war government.

The narrative omits the important question of Slovakia, which is discussed in a separate section later, but follows the development of KSČ thinking throughout the whole period from September 1938. This is necessary partly because the war-time record of the various parties became a major issue after liberation so that the question, for example, of KSČ strategy during the period of the Nazi-Soviet pact was an issue in the 1946 elections. It is necessary also so as to reveal the internal consistency and permanence of KSČ ideas in 1945: the aim is to show how complete and how deeply rooted aspects of that strategy were and also how, and to what extent the KSČ can be seen as the "leading force" in Czechoslovakia in 1945.

### II.9.1. The Communists respond to Munich and the occupation by fumbling towards the idea of a National Front.

At first the KSČ, like the whole Czech nation, was disoriented by Munich. They had centred their activity on the willingness of the government socialist parties to resist and, when they and Beneš capitulated, there seemed to be no sense in attempting "Jacobin"

defence<sup>1</sup>. During the Second Republic the KSČ tried to develop unity to defend what was left of pre-Munich democracy, but this proved to be an illusory hope as political developments led instead to the banning of KSČ. Communists were again surprised by the sudden Nazi occupation and many were quickly arrested<sup>2</sup>.

Nevertheless, the KSČ alone among parties held out against the right-ward, pro-German trend in Czech politics while its leaders sought safety in emigration. Only a few went to Moscow, probably because of the Soviet leadership's fear of foreigners<sup>3</sup>, and most went to France. Work in emigration was organised from the start and indicated how important the KSČ believed "the great democratic states like France, England and the USA" would be in deciding Czechoslovakia's fate<sup>4</sup>. Unlike Beneš, however, they directed their activities towards the anti-fascist and working class movements rather than governments and ruling circles. Moreover, domestic activity was regarded as the party's primary work so that a major task for the emigration was the formulation of programmatic principles for domestic work as well.

By mid-1939 the KSČ in Paris, led by Šverma and obviously

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<sup>1</sup>R. Vetiška: Skok do tmy, Praha, 1966, p.63.

<sup>2</sup>The party later became self-critical of its inactivity in this period, but did not pinpoint specific errors. Probably Šverma initiated the suggestion that the KSČ should have created authoritative organs among the people rather than relying entirely on bourgeois democrats during the Munich crisis; Odboj a revoluce, p.63, Národní fronta, p.22-23, and J. Šverma: Za socialistickou vlast Vybrané spisy, Praha, 1949, p.276-277.

<sup>3</sup>J. Novotný: "KSČ v ilegalitě (1938-1939)", Z počátků, p.42-43, and Křen: Do emigrace, p.494-495.

<sup>4</sup>KSČ directive on work in Paris, June 1939, Za svobodu českého a slovenského národa, Praha, 1956, p.84.

maintaining good contacts with Moscow, had formulated their assessment of Munich. They argued that Czechoslovakia should and could be restored within the international context of a world-wide anti-fascist front with the USSR wielding a powerful influence in Europe<sup>5</sup>. From this followed the tasks for the emigration and for the domestic resistance which, for both, was to create broad national unity, the term "National Front" even appeared<sup>6</sup>. Leadership within this, it was argued, could be taken only by the KSČ<sup>7</sup>. This followed from the view that Munich did not represent just a betrayal of Czechoslovakia by its Western allies but also an active betrayal by the Czechoslovak bourgeoisie in line with their own class interests. Even the "democratic wing" of the bourgeoisie, as represented by Beneš, had vacillated and capitulated so that, the KSČ argued, "only the working class is competent and able to lead the nation's struggle for liberation"<sup>8</sup>.

They were wrong in believing that Beneš had completely discredited himself and also unduly optimistic in believing that the Protectorate was completely isolated at home from the very start<sup>9</sup>. Nevertheless, the KSČ's solid rejection of any form of collaboration could well have won them a position of genuine leadership in the

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<sup>5</sup> Za svobodu českého, p.92-93 and p.103.

<sup>6</sup> O. Janeček: "Zrod politiky Národní fronty a Moskevské vedení KSČ", Revue dějin socialismu, 1969, No.6, p.808-812, quoting an article written by Šmeral and intended for publication in Paris.

<sup>7</sup> Za svobodu českého, p.99-100.

<sup>8</sup> From an article originally published on 10/7/39, Šverma: Za socialistickou, p.270-277.

<sup>9</sup> Křen: Do emigrace, p.177.

nation as the Protectorate government gradually did become isolated. Instead, the start of World War II, for which the KSČ in Paris had been implicitly working, brought a sudden switch in Comintern strategy amounting to a subordination to the tactical needs of Soviet foreign policy.

II.9.2. The Nazi-Soviet pact. Disastrous sectarianism reverses the development of KSČ policy towards a concept of national unity.

At first the KSČ domestically and in Paris seem to have accepted the Nazi-Soviet pact purely as a tactic and even seen its revolutionary potential as the war would, they presumed, follow a similar course to World War I. This would enable the USSR to intervene in a revolutionary way when the warring powers had exhausted themselves<sup>10</sup>. Perhaps the dominant aspect of KSČ activity - fully in line with such a perspective - was waiting, trying to learn the methods of underground activity and conserving an organisation "in deep illegality not only from the German police but also from the nation"<sup>11</sup>. This was encouraged by the savage repression of demonstrations in October and November 1939 after which immediate mass action was regarded as being too dangerous both by Beneš in London and by the KSČ in Moscow.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> e.g. Šverma's conversation with Beneš in the autumn of 1939, Beneš: Memoirs, p.140-141.

<sup>11</sup> J. Fučík: Reportáž psaná na oprátce, Praha, 1957, p.134.

<sup>12</sup> e.g. K. Gottwald: Spisy, Vol. IX, Praha, 1954, p.36. For Beneš's view of 3/12/39, see Dokumenty z historie, Vol II, dok.374, p.391.

There seems to have been confusion in Moscow<sup>13</sup> as well as at home but, albeit gradually, there was a definite acceptance of increasingly sectarian attitudes within the KSČ. Despite claims that the KSČ collaborated<sup>14</sup>, they never held even a neutral attitude towards the occupation. Nevertheless, although some contacts were maintained, the KSČ leadership in Moscow denounced any sort of unity with Beneš or with those who accepted his leadership. They evaded anything that could give preference to one side or the other in the war and, on the grounds of fighting anti-German "chauvinism", effectively isolated themselves from Czech nationalism. In practice the KSČ cut itself off from the nation's main hope of liberation which remained Beneš and the West<sup>15</sup>. Activities were restricted to workers' economic struggles<sup>16</sup>.

It must be said that the Communists could find considerable justification for the Comintern's line not from its own strength or consistency but from the weaknesses of possible alternatives. It was impossible to choose an anti-fascist war instead as the West was involved in "phony war" associated with the most forceful anti-Communist propaganda since the Russian revolution. Beneš,

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<sup>13</sup> There were long delays between messages from Moscow to the domestic KSČ and important aspects of the line were clarified only slowly. The radio messages were published in "Depeše mezi Prahou a Moskvou 1939-1941", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1967, No.3.

<sup>14</sup> J. Křen: V emigraci: západní zahraniční odboj 1939-1940, Praha, 1969, p.541-542. The story probably originated from the Gestapo as is argued in F. Janáček, J. Novotný, A. Hájková: "Nová orientace", Historie a vojenství, XVIII, No.4, 1969, p.657-658.

<sup>15</sup> Reicin: "Situace", esp. p.99.

<sup>16</sup> For more information see "Depeše", the relevant documents in Za svobodu českého, and Král: Otázky, Vol III. Also useful is A. Hájková: Strana v odboji, Praha, 1975.

although cautious towards the USSR, was very cutting about the KSČ. Moreover, Soviet territorial expansion seemed to suggest greater progress for Communism than the strategy of anti-fascist unity had yielded<sup>17</sup>.

Then the Comintern leadership was shaken by the easy fall of France which upset their most basic prediction on the course of the war<sup>18</sup>. This was followed by a growing awareness of the importance of national liberation struggles by the Communist Parties in Greece and Yugoslavia after those countries were occupied<sup>19</sup>, and as fears mounted in Moscow that a Nazi attack was imminent<sup>20</sup>.

In this new atmosphere the KSČ leadership in Moscow held wide-ranging discussions on their strategy. According to Kopecký, they undertook a reassessment of the 1918-1920 period on the basis of Lenin's works on the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. It was argued that the left's strategy had been for an immediate socialist revolution while the concrete tasks confronting them made possible only a national democratic revolution, analogous to the bourgeois democratic revolution discussed by Lenin. By ignoring broader issues, the revolutionary working class movement, so it was claimed, allowed itself to be isolated from the peasants and was therefore defeated in the 1920 general strike<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>17</sup>Křen: V emigraci, p.558-560, and F. Janáček, et al: "Nová".

<sup>18</sup>E. Fischer: An Opposing Man, London, 1974, p.354-358.

<sup>19</sup>Beer, et al, Dějinná, p.84.

<sup>20</sup>W. Góra in Národní fronta, p.364.

<sup>21</sup>V. Kopecký: Gottwald v Moskvě, Praha, 1946, esp. p.16.

Such ideas undoubtedly did develop before the end of the war and the view outlined by Kopecký became the orthodox KSČ position. A similar notion of a two stage revolution was, in fact, being proposed by Šmeral in mid-1939 and again in late 1940<sup>22</sup>. Nevertheless, in published documents in late 1940 and early 1941 at least, the re-emphasis on national liberation was linked very directly with socialist revolution and there was no mention of a definite separation or of the process of "growing over" to which Lenin had referred. In a message to the domestic KSČ in early January 1941 Gottwald argued: "Our line in the fight for the national liberation of the Czech nation remains the same. At the same time the connection between national and social liberation, between national liberation and socialism, stands out ever more clearly. The working class, led by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, has today a great chance to gain leadership in the national liberation movement"<sup>23</sup>.

II.9.3. The Nazi attack on the USSR: the KSČ suddenly switches its strategy.

Whatever changes may have been taking place within the Comintern x in early 1941, the decisive change in June and July came not from any rethinking of revolutionary strategy but - just as had been the case in 1939 - as a sudden and empirical reaction to a major world event. The Nazi invasion of the USSR meant that all else was suddenly subordinated to the aim of preventing the defeat of the

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<sup>22</sup> Janeček: "Zrod", p.808-812. Interestingly, Kopecký specifically mentioned that Šmeral took part in the discussions; Kopecký: Gottwald, p.18.

<sup>23</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, IX, p.35-36.



USSR. A more complete policy only evolved with time particularly as the Soviet Union's position improved in 1943. Major landmarks for the KSČ were a Comintern resolution of 5/1/43 and then the dissolution of the Comintern, although direct advice to the KSČ leaders from Stalin and Dimitrov was still very influential. Then, roughly coinciding with Beneš's visit to Moscow, the journal Československé listy started publication in Moscow. It was not an exclusively KSČ publication, but it did provide a platform for semi-programmatic articles, which enabled the KSČ to work out the policies that were eventually to become the basis for the first post-war government.

At first, however, the KSČ leaders were cautious. They gradually raised their own prestige by a conscious evasion of any reference to proposals for the post-war republic in the interests of the maximum immediate national unity<sup>24</sup>. This then, was not an exact return to the Popular Front policy of the late 1930's. It appeared rather as aiming for a two stage revolution: the first was to be victory in the war and only then could the question of socialism be raised.

The KSČ naturally followed the Soviet government's policy of avoiding actions likely to cause misunderstanding in the West.

Beneš was seen as a likely proponent of East-West cooperation and

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<sup>24</sup> e.g. Gottwald's speech to the Czechoslovak army units in Buzuluk on 27/5/42, K. Gottwald, Spisy, X, p.39-50. Czechoslovak units, ultimately under the command of Beneš, were formed both in the West and in the Soviet Union. The latter were at first extremely hostile to the USSR because so many of the soldiers had been sent to prison camps there. Gradually, however, KSČ influence grew and the Czechoslovak units fought actively in the war: this was contrary to Beneš's original conception as he had wanted lightly armed units that could be flown in to keep order in Czechoslovakia on its liberation; O. Janeček: "Boj o hegemonii v čs vojsku v SSSR (1942-1945)", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1964, No.2, p.199-227, and Odhoj a revoluce, p.184-185 and p.279-281.

Dimitrov therefore insisted that no platform should be constructed aimed against him - for example with left Social Democrats<sup>25</sup> - and the re-establishment of the Czechoslovak state was clearly recognised as a war aim.

Nevertheless, it would be very wrong to present KSČ policy as a simple compliance with the needs of Soviet diplomacy. Comparison with Yugoslavia and Poland reveals the real point<sup>26</sup>. In those countries, although for different reasons, unity with London emigré governments proved to be impossible. Communists therefore, against the wishes of Moscow, began adopting programmes containing considerable although different degrees of social radicalism. In some parts of Yugoslavia this even appeared as the essential basis for an active resistance movement as the idea of restoring the Yugoslav state was actually unpopular<sup>27</sup>. In the Czech lands the situation was very different: Beneš commanded immense prestige and was much more friendly to the Soviet Union and Communists generally than others in the West. Moreover, national liberation alone was the obvious first demand from the Czech people and that meant, in practical terms, restoration of Czechoslovakia with Beneš as President.

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<sup>25</sup> Janeček: "Zrod", p.832.

<sup>26</sup> At a conference of historians from the three countries in 1966 they could not even agree on a definition of the term "national front". See the contributions in Národní fronta. Also revealing is Opat's conclusion in V. Kotyk (editor): Střední a jihovýchodní Evropa ve válce a v revoluci 1939-1945, Praha, 1967.

<sup>27</sup> According to M. Apostolski and P. Hamjanović, Národní fronta, p.462 and p. 523 respectively.

There could, then, be no serious resistance movement rejecting Beneš and all his diverse followers. The domestic KSČ therefore enthusiastically followed the line of establishing the broadest possible national unity. They even claimed, in October 1941, to have established a united central organ including themselves and pro-Beneš groups<sup>28</sup>. This is denied by all non-Communist sources and<sup>29</sup> seems unlikely as the programmatic statement would have been unacceptable to Beneš.

This does not mean that there were not serious disagreements between Beneš and the KSČ. In fact, the latter disagreed so strongly on questions of resistance strategy that they refused to join the London government even when it would probably have boosted their own prestige. There was a wider significance to this as, by avoiding too close an association with Beneš and by refraining from comment on possible future forms of the republic, the KSČ were keeping their options open. The war could have ended by revolution inside Germany or by complete Soviet domination of Central Europe, in which case Beneš might have been an irrelevant embarrassment to the KSČ. Later they insisted that the London government should never return home in office and this greatly worried Beneš<sup>30</sup>. At first, however, the Communists' sole concern seemed to be with resistance strategy. Their line was transmitted in radio broadcasts which started shortly after the USSR was attacked: there was

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<sup>28</sup> Rudé právo 1939-1945, Praha, 1971, p.228.

<sup>29</sup> e.g. Krajina, SS 8/6/47, p.11.

<sup>30</sup> see below p.198.

probably no direct contact with the domestic KSČ organisations so that this was their only external source of political advice.

II.9.4. The Communists insist on the need for an active resistance.

The essential point was that the KSČ presented the questions of collaboration, passive acquiescence or resistance as the principal ones confronting the emigration. The London government, it was argued, should regard developing an active domestic resistance as their first task. Three main reasons were given for this; the interests of the Czechoslovak people in a rapid victory in the war, the duty of the London government as representing a state at war with Nazi Germany and the likely dependence of Czechoslovakia's future international standing on its role within the common war effort<sup>31</sup>.

The methods to be used changed at different periods of the war but the KSČ always presented the responsibility for resistance as a general one for the whole population. At first, showing how avidly the population had been awaiting Soviet entry into the war, there was an outburst of strikes in the late summer of 1941 which led to Heydrich's arrival in Prague and the use of "severe, ruthless" measures<sup>32</sup>. Nevertheless, this led the domestic KSČ to advocate the idea of a sudden mass general strike as the prelude to an

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<sup>31</sup> K. Gottwald: Spisy, Vol. XI, Praha, 1955, p.259-260.

<sup>32</sup> Heydrich's words; Doležal, Křen: Czechoslovakia's, p.52. For an account of the strikes see L. Lehár: Pražští kováci v boji za svobodu (1939-1941), Praha, 1965, p.98-111.

armed uprising<sup>33</sup>. This view was not shared in Moscow where encouragement was given to individual sabotage acts. After this there was to be development into sabotage groups and eventually partisan units.

This last point was particularly controversial as London government circles insisted that partisan warfare was impossible in the Czech lands. Even Gottwald was sceptical but he finally succumbed to Soviet pressure after Lidice and adopted the Comintern line which was for the immediate formation of partisan units<sup>34</sup>. In practice this met with immense difficulties. Although there were some beginnings both from KSČ organisations and around groups of escaped Soviet prisoners who had no contacts with underground political organisations<sup>35</sup>, it proved impossible to develop any serious partisan activity. The principal obstacles were the lack of arms - the Czech resistance had shortly beforehand been completely disarmed<sup>36</sup> - and the Nazi occupiers' strategy which gave plenty of scope for passive acquiescence.

Nevertheless, the Comintern's arguments could not be faulted. Subsequent experience showed that armed uprisings could only be serious when preceded by partisan actions. It also proved impossible to maintain a permanent and lasting political leadership relying only on underground methods: it had to be protected by the armed

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<sup>33</sup>"Vojensko - politická linie KSČ a domácí odbojová fronta v okupovaných českých zemích (červen 1941- duben 1944)", Historie a vojenství, 1974, No.4, p.71-72.

<sup>34</sup>Janeček: "Zrod", p.831.

<sup>35</sup>Doležal: Jediná. contains the best account.

<sup>36</sup>Mencl, Sládek: Dny, p.49-50 and p.65.

strength of partisans, as in Yugoslavia. The KSČ found itself defenceless before the Gestapo who were able to penetrate its organisations with informers, reaching at times the very top: without armed units the KSČ could do nothing to prevent this from paralysing their activities.

The Moscow KSČ hoped to be able to overcome the objective difficulties. They emphasised their disbelief in arguments that partisan warfare would involve unnecessary sacrifices on the grounds that the Czech nation would vanish if the Nazis were not defeated. In the interests of encouraging broader participation in resistance activities, they called for a stronger propaganda line from London against collaborators. This included the demand for immediately passing a law against collaboration so as to frighten them<sup>37</sup>.

11.9.5. The Communist leadership in Moscow develops its ideas on post-war Czechoslovakia. The starting point is the notion of political leadership in the resistance.

Gottwald always believed that collaboration and resistance were primarily political questions. The Protectorate leaders were not only displaying cowardice but also making a definite choice and presenting their policies as the best possible way forward for the Czech nation. Gottwald argued that their ideas did find a degree of acceptance as shown in the strength of "attentism" - the philosophy of waiting passively until everybody else was willing to take action - and from that followed his view that there had to be conscious and active political leadership to encourage resistance<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XI, p.261. See also the Comintern's resolution of 5/1/43, SNP, dok.1, p.40.

<sup>38</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XI, p.294; from Československé listy, 1/2/44.

This could be provided only by those who had never betrayed the nation's interests and who had the social base and political past to differentiate themselves from collaborators. He argued that this pointed to a bloc of socialist parties which should be seen not as the representative of the left, but as the representative of the whole nation. Gottwald added that this bloc should also lead in the new republic<sup>39</sup>.

The KSČ even argued that right-wing parties, which were judged to have betrayed the republic in the fateful Munich period, should be allowed no legal existence at all. Slánský presented the case for banning the Agrarians with the optimistic claim that the peasants had come to see that they had no conflicts with the towns so that they could be politically represented by the socialist parties. The Agrarians' basic philosophy of a separate peasant interest could no longer expect any support<sup>40</sup>. This did not mean that all the former members or supporters of right-wing parties were condemned: they could still find a place in political life so long as they did not attempt to revive the ideas of Agrarianism which were said to have led ultimately to the Munich betrayal. This meant that the demand for banning these parties could have some common ground with Beneš's desire to simplify the party system and that gave it a much greater chance of success.

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<sup>39</sup> See Gottwald's article in Československé listy, 1/2/44, in Spisy, XI, p.289-296, and Šverma's article of 1/5/44 in Cesta ke květnu, p.123-124.

<sup>40</sup> R. Slánský: Za vítězství socialismu, Vol I, Praha, 1951, p.370-377. The article was originally published in Československé listy, 1/3/44.

Beneš, as has been argued, did not accept the Moscow KSČ ideas. Nevertheless, following his visit to Moscow, the Social Democrat and National Socialist organisations were re-established in London and joined with the KSČ in discussions in a "Socialist Bloc". Although there was considerable common ground, the discussions gradually stagnated. The point was that particularly the National Socialists still regarded the London government as the supreme organ so that the bloc remained an anomalous institution with, to them, no obvious purpose<sup>41</sup>.

II.9.6. The Communists have to reconcile their ideas on political leadership in the national democratic revolution with their earlier conception of a dictatorship of the proletariat.

The conception of a particular form of political leadership in the national struggle was the main connecting link in KSČ thinking between resistance strategy and the future form of the republic. It indicated that the KSČ aimed not for a simple restoration but rather for a fundamental transformation from pre-Munich democracy. This left open the question of how this new democracy related to the ideas on political power developed within the Comintern.

There was an obvious likeness to the Popular Front period as democracy was presented effectively as the antithesis of fascism. Diversity was quite acceptable within the democratic camp, but it had to be diversity within firm anti-fascist unity excluding those political currents that, despite their alleged commitment to

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<sup>41</sup> ka květnu  
Cesta p.135-136, and Lastovička: V lundýně, esp. p.344 and p.349. See also Jaroslav Stránský's account, SO 10/12/45, p.2.



democracy, had been found wanting in 1938.

This, however, leaves the same ambiguities as had the Popular Front policy. Czech politicians in London naturally doubted whether the KSČ had abandoned the view that it alone could lead Czech society<sup>42</sup>. To facilitate cooperation with Beneš and his associates, the KSČ had to try to answer this. They often gave the careful response that, with the need for active support from the overwhelming majority of the population to surmount the immense obstacles presented by liberation and reconstruction, it would be absurd for the KSČ to try to take on the task alone<sup>43</sup>. Gottwald presented the argument as follows: "We cannot govern alone and they cannot govern alone either. There remains the necessity for co-operation with the other political group which is forced to cooperate with us"<sup>44</sup>. The National Socialists could be assured: "if you had not existed, we would have had to create you"<sup>45</sup>. This suggested the hope for a fairly lengthy period of cooperation, but it was always left ambiguous exactly where it could lead to. The Communists, while in many respects developing new ideas on revolution, seem to have stuck to their belief that the only state form for socialism was similar to that existing in the USSR with a single party

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<sup>42</sup> See below Section II.9.11.

<sup>43</sup> e.g. Gottwald: Spisy, XI, p.222.

<sup>44</sup> K. Gottwald: Spisy, <sup>Vol</sup>XII, Praha, 1955, p.21. This referred specifically to Slovakia where cooperation was always more difficult, but the same principle could apply to cooperation with Beneš and his associates.

<sup>45</sup> Kopecký at a meeting of the three socialist parties in Košice, 13/4/45, Cesta ke květnu, p.609.

accepting the Communists' programme and dominating political life to the extent that it would be illegal to attack it<sup>46</sup>. This could seem to contradict the ideas being developed on the political leadership for the national democratic revolution and in rebuilding the new Czechoslovakia. A possible way to reconcile the two was the expectation that the socialist would gradually come closer together and eventually merge to leave a single party effectively dominating political<sup>47</sup>.

#### II.9.7. The Communists develop ideas on further aspects of Czechoslovak democracy.

Although the bloc of socialist parties was placed at the centre of the future political power structure, it was not suggested that democracy was an issue for parties alone. With the socialist parties as its core there was to be a broader National Front including other organisations and possibly other parties. Trade unions were an example: ideas on their role were explicitly developed from an explanation for their failure to resist the capitulation during and after Munich. The trouble, it was argued, had been their sub-division and subordination to political parties which had paralysed them and prevented them from expressing the people's will during the Munich crisis<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> "Insulting Communists here is not punishable by law - one day it will be", Gottwald, Spisy, XII, p.22.

<sup>47</sup> Kopecký argued this at a KSČ Central Committee meeting on 6/2/46, quoted in Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.36.

<sup>48</sup> J. Šverma, Československé listy 1/6/44, reproduced in Z dějin odborového hnutí na Slovensku (1944-1946). Dokumenty, Bratislava, 1970, p.16-18.

There was also to be a democratisation of local government with greater power for elected representatives. Perhaps this too owed something to Šverma's analysis of the KSČ failure during the Munich crisis<sup>49</sup> as the starting point was to be the emergence of National Committees, as in 1918, only this time they were to assume much wider powers. Although presented as an expedient for a brief period only - coinciding with the transition period of a few months which Beneš foresaw separating liberation from the re-establishment of a parliament - the KSČ evidently hoped that National Committees would become permanent. In this they saw the transition period not just as the speediest possible return to "normal" conditions but as an opportunity to test and prove these new institutions. National Committees were to start as uniting and co-ordinating organs for the resistance and then were to take over from the existing state machine at the time of liberation. Their tasks were defined extraordinarily widely as the liberation of other countries showed what problems could be expected. They were to be responsible for organising armed guards, confiscating enemy property, ensuring food supplies, purging public life of fascists and collaborators and ensuring the continuation of production and economic life in general. Powers over revolutionary courts were later added<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> See above p.170.

<sup>50</sup> For the most detailed concrete proposals, which were worked out in London during 1944, see Cesta ke květnu, p.169-172. General questions were outlined by Šverma, Československé listy, 1/9/44, in Šverma: Za socialistickou, p. 399-408.

II.9.8! The KSČ evolves a new nationalities policy which dovetails with an international orientation of reliance on "Slavonic" unity.

Any serious programme for a new Czechoslovak republic had to confront the issues of the German minority, of Czech-Slovak relations and, to a lesser extent, of the Hungarian, Polish and Ukrainian minorities. The KSČ tried for a time to keep its options open, but could not equivocate indefinitely as the activation of a resistance movement was partly dependent on clear and unambiguous answers to these sorts of questions.

The KSČ was particularly reluctant to accept Beneš's idea for mass expulsions of Germans sticking for as long as possible to hopes that an anti-Nazi movement would develop among Sudeten Germans and that a future Czechoslovak republic could solve nationality questions on the basis of equality<sup>51</sup>. Gradually, however, hopes of this faded and the KSČ moved remarkably close to Beneš's notion of a combined national and social revolution. This was reflected in calls for reducing "to a minimum the number of Germans remaining inside the frontiers of the new republic"<sup>52</sup>. Land reform proposals assumed that Germans would "leave the Czech land"<sup>53</sup> and that this would leave scope for satisfying much of the Czech peasants' desire for land reform. Gottwald could even argue, during the discussions over the government programme<sup>54</sup>: "our situation is different from Poland and Hungary and it may not be

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<sup>51</sup> Comintern resolution of 5/1/43, SNP, dok.1, p.42. See also the notes prepared by Gottwald in April 1944, Cesta ke květnu, p.106.

<sup>52</sup> J. Kořátko, Československé listy, 1/7/44, reproduced in Za nové Československo, Praha, 1945, p.138.

<sup>53</sup> Kořátko, Za nové, p.135.

<sup>54</sup> See below Section II.11.3.

necessary to touch Czech landowners"<sup>55</sup>

Towards Slovakia the KSČ more obviously clashed with Beneš. They tried at first to retain an ambiguous position - not clearly favouring either an independent Slovak or a Czechoslovak state<sup>56</sup>. Gradually, however, closer relations with Beneš required a clearer stand and they then tried to convince him of the need to clearly recognise the existence of a separate Slovak nation within a future Czechoslovak state as the precondition for an active resistance in Slovakia. Slovak historians have criticised the timid way in which Kopecký in Moscow approached this question<sup>57</sup>, but the KSČ leaders were left with little scope to develop their ideas without incurring the extreme wrath of Beneš. He expressly requested that there be no questioning of his positions on Slovakia and on Munich<sup>58</sup> as, for reasons already explained, this was essential to his plan for regaining the Presidency.

The KSČ also viewed favourably the Polish and Ukrainian minorities. It opposed the suggestion that any of them should be expelled and argued that the new Czechoslovakia, although not to be based on a single nation, was to be based on several Slavonic nationalities while Germans and Hungarians were to be "weakened

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<sup>55</sup> Cesta ke květnu, p.421.

<sup>56</sup> Beer, et al: Dějinná, p.117-118. Remarkable also is Gottwald's careful ambiguity in welcoming the renunciation of Munich, i.e., "the right of Czechs and Slovaks to independent state existence". Gottwald: Spisy, X, p.125. The ideas of Slovak Communists themselves are discussed in Section II.10.1.

<sup>57</sup> e.g. S. Faltán: Slovenská otázka v Československu, Bratislava, 1968, p.153-154. Kopecký's articles in Československé listy are reproduced in SNP.

<sup>58</sup> Fierlinger: Ve službách, p.219. The KSČ seem to have largely complied with this even though acceptance of the pointlessness of resistance after Munich obviously made it harder to argue for an active resistance later.

and ousted"<sup>59</sup>. This related closely to the "Slavonic idea" that was actively propagated within the USSR. It was welcomed by Beneš who saw it as a deviation from "Bolshevik" thinking and eagerly sought assurances that it was to be a permanent element in Soviet policy<sup>60</sup>.

For the KSČ the "Slavonic idea" meant complete faith in the USSR such that it replaced any hopes that Czechoslovakia's liberation or future security might be assured by a German revolution<sup>61</sup>. They went beyond this to justify the anti-German policy in terms of Stalin's war-time attitudes on nationality questions which could be related to a "Slavonic idea". The national character of the revolution was even given a status within Marxist theory by Gottwald who claimed that Lenin had presented the main problem of every revolution as "which class, which nation has power in its hands and into which nation's or class's hands that power is passing"<sup>62</sup>. It was thereby possible to present the strong measures against German and Hungarian minorities as a logical part of the national democratic revolution. It would probably have been better not to try to incorporate them so firmly into a Marxist theoretical framework but rather to regard the expulsion of large numbers of Germans,

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<sup>59</sup> Kopecký, Československé listy, 1/2/44, reproduced in SNP, dok.44, p.151.

<sup>60</sup> Fierlinger: Ve službách, p.183.

<sup>61</sup> At the same time, KSČ leaders made it clear that they expected no direct Soviet interference in Czechoslovakia's internal affairs beyond military liberation; e.g. Gottwald's broadcast of 11/5/44, in Spisy, XI, p.321-324.

<sup>62</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XII, p.80.

irrespective of social position, as a regrettable necessity which limited the degree to which the revolution can be described as democratic<sup>63</sup>.

II.9.9. The Communists are non-committal about the social and economic tasks of the national democratic revolution: they seem to be left for a later socialist revolution.

Economic measures during the transition period followed from the need to prevent immediate economic collapse - the influence of Lenin's "Threatening Catastrophe" is obvious<sup>64</sup>. This meant that National Committees and Factory Committees were to take over the property of Germans and collaborators as quickly as possible. The ultimate fate of this property was carefully left open until an elected parliament could decide. Although the Communists were very much opposed to returning it to pre-war owners, they consciously evaded advocating any explicitly socialist measures<sup>65</sup>.

They likewise refrained from formulating any new ideas on how socialist industry might be managed. Their view of trade unions was essentially purely of mass organisations exerting a political influence in the state in general on behalf of the working class<sup>66</sup>. Possible roles for workers' organisations in changing methods of management were considered only after the Slovak national uprising<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> c.f. K. Bartošek: "Antifašistická revoluce v Československu 1944-1945", Revue dějin socialismu, 1969, No.5, p.673.

<sup>64</sup> F.J. Kolár: "Vzpomínky na komunistu", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1965, No.2, p.

<sup>65</sup> Slánský: Za vítězství, Vol I, p.378-379. The article was originally published in Československé listy, 1/4/44.

<sup>66</sup> Sverma, Československé listy, 1/6/44, reproduced in Z dějin, p.16-18.

<sup>67</sup> See below Section II.10.6.

when there were also a few references to nationalisations<sup>68</sup>.

One argument is that this followed from a fear that such suggestions would disrupt national unity<sup>69</sup>, but Beneš and his associates were quite willing to accept that there would be state ownership of many industries<sup>70</sup>. There may well have been direct advice from Stalin to ensure that the KSČ did not mention nationalisations<sup>71</sup>. The outcome was a KSČ conception of revolution : placing primacy on political power questions. Slánský put it bluntly: "A favourable solution to all economic problems assumes that representatives of those strata capable of asserting the general interests of the nations of our land . . . get into the decisive positions in the administration of the state"<sup>72</sup>.

Putting together the various specific aspects discussed above, KSČ policy, as it gradually evolved and took shape, appeared as a rigorous definition of the most immediate tasks alongside evasion of other issues that might hinder effective national unity. This was reflected in the characterisation of the revolution as "national democratic" in such a way as to counterpose it to socialist revolution<sup>73</sup>. This provided the theoretical justification for

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<sup>68</sup> e.g. the articles by F. Pexa-Voda and J. Kolský in Československé listy, 28/10/44 and 15/2/45 respectively. Both are reproduced in Z dějin.

<sup>69</sup> F.J. Kolár: Zestátnění průmyslu a peněžnictví, Praha, 1945, p.21.

<sup>70</sup> e.g. Ripka's letter to Feierabend of 18/9/44, Cesta ke květnu, p.234.

<sup>71</sup> For indirect evidence see K. Kaplan: "Poznámky ke znárodnění průmyslu v Československu 1945", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1966, No.4, p.9.

<sup>72</sup> Slánský: Za vítězství, Vol I, p.382.

<sup>73</sup> e.g. Gottwald's notes of April 1944, Cesta ke květnu, p.106.



cooperation with other political trends centring on the bloc of socialist parties which the KSČ insisted should be referred to as a national bloc because its purpose was apparently not the implementation of socialist aims<sup>74</sup>.

That means that the question of the political leadership in the later, socialist revolution was left open. It could still be restricted to the KSČ alone while the social involvement could also be narrowed down to the working class, instead of the broad national unity - bringing together workers, peasants, small businessmen and intellectuals - as advocated by Gottwald for the national democratic revolution<sup>75</sup>. There was, of course, no direct answer to this question, Kopecký's account of the discussions allegedly held in 1940<sup>76</sup> fully justifies evasion on questions that should be left to a later socialist revolution.

It was therefore never even stated whether that second revolution was to involve a violent confrontation. Nevertheless, the hope that the socialist parties would peacefully merge into a single party<sup>77</sup> suggested that it might not. Gottwald's views on the class struggle, which he insisted would not end with the national democratic revolution, point to a similar conclusion. He saw the class struggle continuing in a new form the issue being which political and social force could provide the best leadership

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<sup>74</sup> Gottwald at a meeting of the socialist parties 13/4/45, Cesta ke květnu, p.611.

<sup>75</sup> e.g. Gottwald: Spisy, XI, p.296.

<sup>76</sup> See above p.174 .

<sup>77</sup> See above p.185.

for the nation<sup>78</sup>. Interestingly, it was not suggested that there was any logical necessity that the working class should lead the revolution: workers were encouraged to be as active as possible so as to have the greatest influence in the future republic<sup>79</sup>, but the KSČ leadership in Moscow was able to observe from the published lists of Czechs executed by the Nazis that active resistance was not restricted to any one section of the nation<sup>80</sup>.

Emphasis on this form of class struggle was in itself a justification for continuing cooperation within a National Front and was used as such by Gottwald when he was confronted with impatience from some Slovak Communists. In fact, during the Slovak national uprising, the KSS leaders visualised a rapid and definitive solution to the question of political power through an all-Slovak congress of National Committees<sup>81</sup>. There were similar ideas about the transient nature of cooperation with other political forces in liberated Eastern Slovakia in early 1945<sup>82</sup>. Gottwald was then, for the first time, compelled to explain the relationship between the national revolution and the later socialist revolution. His argument was that, from the point of view of its political power, the bourgeoisie's position was greatly weakened by the war and its outcome. It was, for example, unable to use a state apparatus

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<sup>78</sup>Gottwald: Spisy, XII, p.23 and 24.

<sup>79</sup>Šverma, Československé listy, 1/6/44, in Z dějin, p.16.

<sup>80</sup>Comintern resolution of 5/1/43, SNP, dok.1, p.38.

<sup>81</sup>G. Husák: Svědectví o Slovenském národním povstání, Praha, 1970, p.295-297.

<sup>82</sup>See below Section.III.22.1.

from the pre-Munich republic, from the period of occupation or one constructed in emigration. Moreover, the programme that had been adopted by all political parties gave further scope for undermining the bourgeoisie in the name of a national revolution. The laws against traitors and collaborators in general and in relation to land reform and the confiscation of property were presented as examples.<sup>83</sup> Although Gottwald's argument was expressed in terms of the situation in April 1945, it was probably worked out in general terms considerably before.

II.9.10. Communist organisations inside the Czech lands evolve a strategy compatible with that developed in Moscow.

The extent of repression inside the Protectorate greatly restricted the ability of KSČ organisations at home to formulate any coherent ideas. In all there were five Illegal Central Committees, each one created after its predecessor had been decimated. Only a very few people could remain active in resistance organisations throughout the whole occupation. Either the strain of illegal work was too much for them, or they were arrested and either executed or imprisoned in concentration camps.

Despite immense practical difficulties, Communist organisations did continue throughout the war. The ideas that they evolved, both in underground organisations and in concentration camps, were similar but not identical to those developed in Moscow. Particularly important was the period after the Comintern's resolution of 5/1/43 had been brought to the Third Illegal Central Committee by Vetiška.

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<sup>83</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XII, p.13-19. This was after the formation of the Košice government, discussed in Chapter 11.

He had difficulties convincing the domestic leadership that the Comintern's optimistic predictions of an early end to the war should be acted on at once. Finally, however, his line was accepted and one immediate consequence was an insistence on the action readiness and hence centralised organisation of the illegal KSČ. Unfortunately, the leadership was already riddled with informers so that this could only expose the whole party to devastating blows from the Gestapo.

This led partly to demoralisation but also to forced decentralisation with Communist groups forming themselves independently of each other and of the leadership<sup>84</sup>. The most important of these was the group Předvoj (Vanguard) which was led primarily by a group of former students who had no pre-war political experience at all. They followed a widespread trend of searching for the causes of the party's setbacks in political errors and in particular in ambiguities about theoretical questions and the future form of the republic<sup>85</sup>. They therefore approached the problems of the resistance from a different angle from Moscow although in general justifying the line of national liberation struggle as received from Moscow Radio.

Unlike Moscow, and Vetiška, who distinguished the coming revolution from 1918 only in the fierceness of the fight that would be need to defeat the Nazis<sup>86</sup>, they emphasised from the start and

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<sup>84</sup> The best accounts of this period are Vetiška: Skok, and Mencl, Sládek: Dny. The latter centres on the Předvoj group.

<sup>85</sup> There is an obvious development from the Central Committee's resolution of April 1944 (in Cesta ke Květnu, p.113-118) to Předvoj's ideas, also in Cesta ke květnu.

<sup>86</sup> e.g. RP 24/7/43 in Rudé, p.424-425.

unequivocally its social content. Czechoslovakia, they argued, was ripe for socialism so that the revolution would be "social in content and national in form"<sup>87</sup>. Interestingly, they avoided any reference to the dictatorship of the proletariat but elaborated a programme of social changes fully consistent with their notion of a revolution of all the working people led by the working class. Demands for the workers, it being implicitly assumed that the whole bourgeoisie had betrayed the nation, included democratisation of management and steps towards pay equalisation<sup>88</sup>. A policy for peasants included land reform and there was no mention of collectivisation<sup>89</sup>.

Plenty of points remained unanswered. There was no mention of the world context, of Beneš or of other political parties: presumably the future political structure was to be based on a single<sup>party</sup> and National Committees. The relationship of the revolution to socialism was unclear: they could have been contemplating a new "model" or they could have expected a further evolutionary process to the dictatorship of the proletariat. On the German minority they were completely silent but on Slovakia they took a strong stand in favour of the position adopted by<sup>the</sup> KSS during the Slovak national uprising.

Some of these ambiguities were answered by Aktiv, another group with which they maintained contacts. Aktiv referred to the need for a national revolution that should neither restore the old republic nor be socialist. It should have "social aims corresponding to the current level of consciousness of the masses" which meant "a system

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<sup>87</sup> Cesta ke květnu, p.149.

<sup>88</sup> Cesta ke květnu, p.134-135.

<sup>89</sup> Cesta ke květnu, p.174.

of peoples' democracy". This was not the final aim "but only an important point on the flow of development".<sup>90</sup>

Although most of the Předvoj leadership were arrested in October 1944 the remainder joined with other groups and factory organisations in creating the Fourth Illegal Central Committee. This produced a programmatic resolution reflecting a growing concern with the international situation following the conflicts between British forces and the Greek resistance<sup>91</sup>. Immediate demands for nationalisations of industries and land reform were included<sup>92</sup>. Similar demands appeared in the programme of the illegal trade union organisation and post-liberation events leave little doubt that they accurately reflected the workers' feelings.

#### II.9.11. Beneš is very distrustful of the Communist strategy.

The KSČ inside the Czech lands, perhaps operating in such deep illegality as to be unable to estimate the political diversity to be expected in the new republic, was able to simply assume Beneš out of existence. The party's leadership in Moscow, however, had deliberately formulated its ideas in the hope that an agreement with Beneš could be reached. It is therefore important to consider how Beneš responded to their ideas.

There is an analogy to his over-simplified interpretation of Soviet policy as, broadly speaking, Beneš could understand the KSČ policy either as subordination to his authority or as an attempt to stage a revolution against him. Suspicions of the latter possibility

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<sup>90</sup> Bouček, et al, Program, p.155.

<sup>91</sup> For the impact this had on the domestic KSČ see Mencl, Sládek: Dny, p.189, p.195, and p.199-200.

<sup>92</sup> RP January 1945, in Cesta ke květnu, p.330-335.

were aroused by the Communists' attitude towards Slovakia which Beneš interpreted as an attempt to weaken the republic making it a more willing instrument of Communist policies<sup>93</sup>. After the discussions in Moscow, Beneš was particularly worried at the suggestion that his London government should not return home: he preferred to alter its composition after a period "in which a certain stabilisation of conditions at home could occur"<sup>94</sup>.

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There were also doubts in London, giving wide powers to the National Committees. Gottwald's proposals on this were interpreted as demonstrating the aim of a "soviet revolution"<sup>95</sup>. Fears of "dual power" and arguments that there was no need to "smash" the state as the London government could simply return home with its apparatus<sup>96</sup> all pointed to the desirability of limiting the life-span and powers of National Committees. According to the London government's Interior Minister, their aim was to be simply ensuring "the speediest possible return to normal legal conditions"<sup>97</sup>. They would therefore be dissolved after they had elected a Provisional National Assembly<sup>98</sup>. Even during the transition period, their role was to be limited.

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<sup>93</sup> His comments of 28/9/43, Dokumenty z historie, Vol I, dok.310, p.378-379.

<sup>94</sup> Fierlinger: Ve službách, p.207.

<sup>95</sup> Jaroslav Stránský at a National Socialist meeting on 3/5/44, Cesta ke květnu, p.137.

<sup>96</sup> e.g. P. Maxa at a National Socialist meeting on 7/6/44, Cesta ke květnu, p.142.

<sup>97</sup> J. Slávik's speech of 8/3/44 quoted in K. Bertelmann: Vznik Národních výborů, Praha, 1956, p.90.

<sup>98</sup> Slávik's speech of 28/2/44, Cesta ke květnu, p.94-97.

Beneš, who often suggested that they should be lasting organs<sup>99</sup>, even argued that the existing state bureaucracy should continue to operate ". . so that daily life can continue as normally as possible . ." while National Committees would "begin to function in cooperation with the bureaucracy"<sup>100</sup>.

Beneš was very confident that, thanks to his understanding with the Soviet leadership, he would be able to return home with his government and prevent such a "soviet revolution". He was somewhat shaken in the summer of 1944 by reports of Soviet help to the KSČ in sending partisan groups into Slovakia. This was presented to him as a "Comintern" plan to win the Czechoslovak people for federation with the USSR<sup>101</sup>. Nervousness was heightened as various plans for an uprising in Slovakia seemed to be clashing. The most dramatic consequence was a worsening of Czechoslovak-Soviet relations culminating in a unanimous vote in the London government for the recall of Fierlinger, their ambassador in Moscow, who supported the Soviet actions in Slovakia. Beneš refused to accept his recall and a Social Democrat conference successfully demanded reversal of the decision<sup>102</sup>.

It seems, then, that Beneš was too suspicious of KSČ and too sceptical about their likely future influence to accept the need to make concessions to reach a compromise agreement with them, although

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<sup>99</sup> Beneš: Demokracie, p.336 and 340, and E. Táborský: Czechoslovak Democracy at Work, London, 1945, p.128.

<sup>100</sup> Message to the domestic resistance on 6/7/44, SNP, dok.99, p.241.

<sup>101</sup> Message from Píka, the senior Czechoslovak army officer in Moscow, to Beneš's Minister of Defence on 25/8/44, SNP, dok.153, p.320-321.

<sup>102</sup> Fierlinger: Ve službách, p.324-325.



he was definitely convinced of the need to avoid unnecessarily antagonising the Soviet Union. This was the situation on the eve of the uprising in Slovakia which it will be argued, when followed by the gradual liberation of Czechoslovakia from the East, ultimately forced Beneš to change his views.

#### II.9.12. Summary and discussion.

The KSČ leaders based themselves in Moscow and the policies they worked out were naturally strongly influenced by the changing policies of the Soviet leaders. There was not a steady development but rather a number of stages starting with the KSČ response to Munich. For a time they seemed to believe that broad national unity could be established, under their own leadership, to restore the former Czechoslovak state.

The Nazi-Soviet pact and subsequent change in Comintern policy replaced this idea with a policy of sectarian isolationism which damaged the party's reputation and delayed the development of policies based on broad, anti-fascist unity. Then, after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, the KSČ was very cautious in building again on their earlier policies. A major further restriction was the Soviet insistence that they should not unnecessarily offend Beneš. This did not mean that they fully subordinated themselves to his ideas. Other options were still kept open and they made no secret of disagreements over domestic resistance strategy.

Particularly after the dissolution of the Comintern, the KSČ began working out a conception of a "national democratic revolution" which, although different from Beneš's strategy, was to be carried

out in agreement with him. It was to involve an active resistance culminating in a national uprising whereby a new Czechoslovak state would be created. The concept of this national revolution was based on an understanding of previous Czechoslovak history and of changes in Czech national consciousness. Although based on an attempt to learn from KSČ history, it seemed to owe nothing to ideas that had developed in the KSČ before 1935.

There was scope for flexibility in the exact measures that were to be implemented, but it was made clear that, in the interests of the broadest possible unity, socialist measures were to be delayed to a later revolution. It was a weakness, although not a crippling one, that the relationship between these two revolutions was never clarified. Nothing was said about what socialism would look like in Czechoslovakia and that meant that none of the weaknesses implied in the KSČ's <sup>earlier</sup> policies were definitively overcome.

By excluding social questions from the national revolution its essence was effectively reduced to a question of political power. Similarly, it was presented as a step towards socialism purely in that it weakened the bourgeoisie politically. Although there was some notion of a democratisation of power with the proposed role for National Committees, it was not elaborated in such a way as to contradict simplistic views of power whereby the KSČ, in line with so much of its past history, could believe itself fully capable of satisfactorily representing Czechoslovak society alone.

There were still ambiguities and omissions in KSČ policy. After liberation the rigid insistence on a two stage revolution in particular was to require modification. Nevertheless, the ideas evolved in Moscow were good enough to help the KSČ gain a very strong position in 1945.

## CHAPTER 10: THE SLOVAK NATIONAL UPRISING

As the situation in Slovakia during World War II was very different from that in the Czech lands, it is necessary to devote a separate section to Slovak development. Those war-time differences were carried through into a distinctive post-war development which is discussed in later separate chapters. During the war itself the central event was the Slovak national uprising which was important for Czechoslovak development in two respects. First, it was instrumental in forming political relations in post-war Slovakia and, secondly, it served to strengthen the position of the KSČ in Moscow relative to Beneš in London.

Although the uprising was the central event, its nature, its consequences and the position of the Communist Party within it can only be understood against the background of the creation and evolution of the Slovak state.

### II.10.1. The consolidation of the Slovak state leads to the political isolation of the Communist Party inside Slovakia.

It was an obvious difference from the Czech lands that the Nazis felt no immediate need to occupy Slovakia as they could rely on the subservience of a formally independent Slovak state led by a right-wing Catholic movement. Although there were differences within the Slovak leadership, some wanting closer allegiance to the German model while others looked rather to Catholic Italy, there was unity in hatred of Communism and the Soviet Union and in the lasting fear of Hungarian expansion. So, as German strength grew, the Slovak government had to orient itself more clearly towards Nazi

Germany as the only protection for the newly independent state.

Although the Slovak state was created with some reluctance and doubts about its viability, a considerable mass support was created during 1940 and 1941<sup>1</sup>. The government could genuinely claim to represent a "lesser evil" as Slovakia was able to retain formal independence and to keep out of the war. This made it easy to incorporate the pre-war bourgeois parties within one ruling party while repressive measures were never so strong as in the Czech lands.

Slovak Communists formed a separate party - the KSS - which was still ultimately subordinated to the KSČ within the Comintern. The sectarian line of the Comintern from September 1939, despite its fundamental errors, could find a particularly strong support among Slovak Communists. Owing to the peculiar situation in Slovakia at the time, the most plausible alternatives could not have been attractive. There was no sense in a purely national liberation struggle and neither was there scope for unity with bourgeois forces that were not interested in unity with Communists against the Slovak state. It could therefore seem to be most sensible to concentrate on economic struggles in unity with only some Social Democrats<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, Soviet expansion seemed to provide justification for a hope that socialist revolution might be brought by the incorporation of Slovakia into the USSR as happened in the Baltic

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<sup>1</sup> According to Husák's account of 5/2/45 in SNP, dok.576, p.945. For general coverage of the Slovak state see Beer, et al: Dějinná. Emigre supporters of the Slovak state have also found spokesmen in J. Kirschbaum: Slovakia: Nation at the Crossroads of Central Europe, New York, 1960, and J. Mikus: Slovakia in the Drama of Europe, Milwaukee, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> For a general account of KSS activities see Prehl'ad, Chapter 9.

states. This, again, could appear as an interpretation of and hence justification for the Comintern's line. It was expressed in the slogan of a "Soviet Slovakia" which developed inside Slovakia but was rejected by Moscow in the spring of 1941<sup>3</sup>.

Nevertheless, this notion and more generally sectarian attitudes still persisted within the KSS even after the change in Comintern line in mid-1941. There were still no serious potential allies for a broad anti-fascist struggle and even in late 1942 the KSS was not advocating the Czechoslovak state but rather an undefined close relationship with the USSR<sup>4</sup>. The anti-fascist struggle was still understood as a more or less direct route to Communist power without requiring any compromises to broaden the anti-fascist movement<sup>5</sup>. The scope for such broader unity was only gradually created during the war.

German domination was visibly increasing as shown in the privileges given to the German minority, the subordination of the economy to German war needs, anti-Jewish measures culminating in their sale to Germany<sup>6</sup>, and military subordination leading to involvement in the war in the East. These, however, were not simple processes. Leading economists could argue that close relations with Germany were

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<sup>3</sup>Prehl'ad, p.54. For a general discussion of the problems of KSS strategy see Beer, et al: Dějinná, p.74-80.

<sup>4</sup>Prehl'ad, p.268-269, and Beer, et al: Dějinná, p.121-123.

<sup>5</sup>Beer, et al: Dějinná, p.103.

<sup>6</sup>L'. Lipták: "Slovenský štát a proifašistické hnutie v rokoch 1939-1943", Historický časopis, XIV, No.2, 1966, p.194-195.

a sound basis for advance<sup>7</sup> and the economy did indeed seem to be functioning better than before<sup>8</sup>. Jewish property was given not to Germans but to Christian Slovaks and this was by no means universally opposed<sup>9</sup>. Also the ubiquitous presence of German advisers was associated with great advances for Slovaks at the expense of Czechs. The size and influence of the Slovak intelligentsia actually increased<sup>10</sup>. Even peasants were generally able to prosper from the war even though a land reform which was promised was not fully implemented.<sup>11</sup>

So, the Slovak state could appear to many Slovaks as, on balance, an advance for the Slovak nation and certainly as the best possible arrangement under the circumstances. This does not mean that there was ever much enthusiastic support: in <sup>many</sup> areas it proved impossible to create lasting branches of the ruling party or the fascist Hlinka Guards.

II.10.2. Problems in creating a united leadership for the resistance are gradually overcome. The uprising begins.

The tenuousness of the regime's support was demonstrated particularly in 1943 after Soviet military successes and Italy's defection from the Axis. Reliance on Nazi Germany then seemed to

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<sup>7</sup>Beer, et al: Dějinná, p.49.

<sup>8</sup>According to Husák, SNP, dok.576, p.949, and L. Lipták: Slovensko v 20.storočí, Bratislava, 1968, p.203-204.

<sup>9</sup>e.g. message to London of 12/3/43, SNP, dok.6, p.67, and Lipták: Slovensko, p.203-204.

<sup>10</sup>S. Falt'an: Slovenská, p.109-111.

<sup>11</sup>Lipták: Slovensko, p.204-205.

threaten the Slovak nation with disaster and the regime soon seemed to be collapsing at all levels. This was particularly noticeable in Central Slovakia where there was a significant working class and a large Protestant population which could articulate discontent even within the peasantry. Fascist organisations were always weak there and in many villages they were either never formed or collapsed. Even state officials began expressing a preference for a new Czechoslovakia and the security forces themselves seemed to be joining a general disintegration<sup>12</sup>. They lost the power to dominate the courts and sometimes even turned a blind eye to resistance organisations<sup>13</sup>. Even some of the highest figures in the state prepared to change sides and, in one way or another, helped the preparations for the uprising<sup>14</sup>.

In many cases this may have been no more than "alibism" - an attempt to ensure a secure future after the war by having helped the winning sides - but there were also many genuine resistance groups<sup>15</sup>. As Beneš was the only alternative to the USSR, they generally favoured restoration of a Czechoslovak republic. Closest to Beneš's idea of constitutional continuity was the group around V. Šrobar but there were also many more. One of the most serious

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<sup>12</sup> M. Tichý: Z bojov komunistov banskohystrickej oblasti, Vol II, Bratislava, 1966, esp. p.112, 122, 168, 172, 174 and 94.

<sup>13</sup> See the message from a resistance group to London, March 1944, SNP, dok.55, p.186.

<sup>14</sup> Many also felt unable to break from alliance with Nazi Germany because of their hatred for the USSR; Kirschbaum: Slovakia, p.144.

<sup>15</sup> The fullest account is in Jablonický: Z ilegality.

was led by the Protestant former Agrarians Ursíny and Lettrich.

They could see the Communists becoming more active in 1943 and trying to organise partisan units. As Slovakia was likely to be liberated from the East they were aware of how powerful the KSS could become and therefore began thinking of creating a very broad movement to incorporate the KSS<sup>16</sup>. They may well also have seen the KSS as the only effectively organised resistance force<sup>17</sup>.

The Communists too saw the need to broaden their appeal by creating a joint platform with a bourgeois group and made the first approaches to Lettrich and Ursíny in mid-1943<sup>18</sup>. Their sectarian past was not completely forgotten but a new leadership had been established around K. Šmidke, a pre-war M.P. who returned to Slovakia with the Comintern's resolution of 5/1/43. He brought the line of a united anti-fascist movement culminating in a national uprising and headed a new Central Committee composed of himself, Husák and Novomeský<sup>19</sup>.

The essential point of agreement between the KSS and Ursíny and Lettrich was acceptance of the Czechoslovak state but simultaneous insistence on Slovakia's rights within it. Other differences had to be ironed over.

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<sup>16</sup>J. Lettrich: "Odboj a povstanie", Zborník úvah a osobných spomienok o Slovenskom národnom povstaní, Toronto, 1976, p.74-75.

<sup>17</sup>Jablomický: Z ilegality, p.203.

<sup>18</sup>Lettrich: "Odboj", p.75.

<sup>19</sup>The only complete accounts of KSS activity in this period are Husák: Svědectví, and Husák's report of 5/2/45 in SNP, dok.576. The few other documents in SNP suggest there may have been more flexibility and diversity within the KSS than Husák was willing to admit.



Husák and Novomeský had to definitively renounce ideas of a "Soviet Slovakia", although apparently they were at first reluctant to do so<sup>20</sup>. There were disagreements on the nature of democracy with Ursíny and Lettrich placing emphasis on diversity and plurality while the Communists argued that, to defeat facsism for ever, a firmer unity would be required than that of the pre-Munich republic<sup>21</sup>. On foreign policy the Communists had to qualify their desire for a firmly and uniquely Slavonic orientation<sup>22</sup>.

By reaching compromise formulations on these and other questions the two sides could agree to a single platform in December 1943 and establish the "Slovak National Council" (SNR) as the potential supreme representative of the Slovak nation. The hope was, by gradually incorporating more groups, <sup>to</sup> broaden the organ, but Šrobár was probably not incorporated<sup>23</sup>. Even more important, the most influential anti-fascist group in the Slovak army always owed allegiance to Beneš before the SNR. This group was led by army chief of staff J. Golian in Banská Bystrica: he represented a powerful desire within the army, particularly after its best units were destroyed in the USSR, to transfer allegiance to Czechoslovakia and to Beneš.

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<sup>20</sup> Lettrich: "Odboj", p.79.

<sup>21</sup> Lettrich: "Odboj", p.80.

<sup>22</sup> Lettrich: "Odboj", p.79-80.

<sup>23</sup> For suggestion that he was included, se Fierlinger: Ve službách, p.330-331, and SNP, dok.157, p.332. Both record Šmidke's report to Moscow immediately prior to the start of the uprising. Husák, however, insisted in 1963 that no attempt had been made to meet Šrobár; SNP, p.451.

Golian's plans were essentially for an army putsch apparently prepared entirely by conspiratorial means. The Soviet command regarded this with great scepticism as the Slovak army would be fighting, very probably, under conditions of German encirclement<sup>24</sup>. The KSČ leaders also regarded Golian's plan, which reached them through London, as "a bit fantastic and certainly exaggerated, because we know that 'conspiracies' like this do not have much chance of success"<sup>25</sup>. Instead they favoured maximum encouragement to partisans in Slovakia aiming for "... a mass transition of Slovak soldiers and of Slovaks generally to the partisan units ..."<sup>26</sup>. This seemed to them to be the best way to help the general Soviet advance.

The KSS inside Slovakia, however, had rejected the aim of destroying the army. Instead, noting the changes at all levels of the army, they hoped to win it for an anti-fascist uprising<sup>27</sup>. This still meant encouraging the growth of partisan units as a necessary precondition for a genuinely mass uprising rather than a military putsch, but the uprising itself was to be co-ordinated with the army. It proved possible for Golian and the SNR to agree roughly on the military plans for the uprising and Šmidke and Lt-Col. Ferjenčík then went to the USSR to try to coordinate their

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<sup>24</sup> Král: Osvobození, esp. p.43-44 and p.64.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Šverma to Slánský, who was then working in the partisan command base in Kiev, 12/8/44, quoted in Husák: Svědectví, p.158.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Slánský to Gottwald, 29/7/44 quoted in Čer, et al: Dějinná, p.278.

<sup>27</sup> Husák: Svědectví, p.33, and Široký, Za svobodu českého, p.311.

plans with the Soviet army. There were, however, unexplained delays and then a dramatic political change in Rumania which made Slovakia irrelevant to Soviet military plans. The Slovak uprising therefore started without any great power expecting it.

Towards the end of August partisan units, finding that the Slovak army did not oppose them, started major offensive actions occupying several towns in Central Slovakia where National Committees emerged to take power. Their aim, in line with their orders from Kiev, was simply to create the maximum difficulties for the German armies: they were therefore not too worried at the prospect of a German occupation of Slovakia because they considered it effectively inevitable. On August 29th Nazi troops crossed the frontier to suppress the developing uprising. The decisive question then became the Slovak army as the partisans alone could not resist for long. Although absolute generalisations are difficult, it seems that when the action was restricted to a conspiracy among officers, the uprising was easily disorientated by the Nazi attack which was officially welcomed by the government in Bratislava. Where the movement was genuinely broad, including the army, partisans, political groups and industrial workers, then it was most successful. This applied to much of Central Slovakia where a consolidated area was quickly established. In the crucially important Eastern area, where well equipped units were to have opened a route through the Carpathians for the Soviet army, vacillations and isolation of the army command allowed the German army to quickly consolidate control<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup>For a region by region account of the start of the uprising, see Jablomeický: Z ilegality. His conclusions are summarised in Prehl'ad, Chapter 10.

In military terms the uprising was then isolated and there was little hope for survival. Confined to a consolidated area and able to mobilise perhaps 80,000 men, the uprising could last for two months after which a fairly successful partisan war was continued until liberation. Effective defeat by a Nazi force of 30,000 was a consequence of shortages, particularly of heavy equipment and good officers: otherwise the Slovak army and partisans, joined by escaped prisoners and anti-fascists of numerous other nationalities, gave no evidence of a particularly low state of morale until their military inferiority had been exposed<sup>29</sup>.

II.10.3. Soviet and Western aid to the uprising: still a confused and controversial question.

Help from the great powers could conceivably have altered the balance of military forces and there have been plenty of accusations, against both the West and the Soviet Union, that help was deliberately restricted so that the uprising would fail. There could be reasons for this as the Soviet side, so it has been argued, feared the political consequences of the uprising and preferred to ensure that only their own army liberated Slovakia. The West too could doubt the political consequences of the uprising and could also fear that it would enable the Soviet army to advance rapidly towards Vienna. The issue is greatly complicated as no great power could admit such cynicism and had to make at least a token gesture of attempting to help the uprising so as not to lose all political prestige among anti-fascist Slovaks.

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<sup>29</sup> Král: Osvobození, p, 179-180.

In fact, the initial Soviet attitude seems to have been one of suspicion towards the uprising. Gottwald, however, following discussions with Šmidke, made a special point of convincing Molotov that this was not a repeat of the Warsaw uprising and that its leadership was friendly to the USSR. He therefore argued that it should be given every assistance<sup>30</sup>. As a response to this the Soviet army launched the Carpathian operation which, despite enormous losses, failed to open a route into Central Slovakia until after the uprising had been defeated. Evidently they did not believe that the uprising could succeed if left in isolation and therefore did not concentrate major efforts on air-lifting supplies and men, although a certain amount was sent. Despite later claims that this was somehow inadequate,<sup>31</sup> Beneš's own representatives in Slovakia during the uprising, Ortina and Uhlíř, were quite emphatic in rejecting the argument that inadequate Soviet help caused the uprising's defeat<sup>32</sup>.

Aid from the West was nowhere near so important. The US expressed no interest at all in giving any help<sup>33</sup>. Britain made it clear, in private negotiations with Beneš, that they required a definite assurance from the Soviet Union that there would be no objection to

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<sup>30</sup> Gottwald to Molotov, 2/9/44, SNP, dok.223, p.404.

<sup>31</sup> e.g. M.J. Ličko: "K otázke spojeneckej pomoci v Slovenskom národnom povstaní", Zborník úvah, p.225.

<sup>32</sup> SNP, dok.560.

<sup>33</sup> e.g. Ličko: "K otázke", p.246. Fortunately documentary evidence of the course of negotiations with the great powers is reproduced in SNP. Particularly revealing is the report prepared by Beneš's Ministry of Defence on 12/12/44; SNP, dok.561, p.867-875.

aid being sent. Apparently there <sup>is</sup> still no evidence of a Soviet veto but there was felt to be Soviet reticence which, for some reason, dissuaded Britain from taking any action<sup>34</sup>. A note from Fierlinger indicated that there was unlikely to be any objection from the Soviet side<sup>35</sup>, but British military help was still minimal. The exact reasons remain unclear but it was extremely embarrassing for Beneš as it inevitably gave the impression that the West was not interested in Slovakia's liberation. Perhaps through misinformation or perhaps in an attempt to cover up for the West, he exaggerated the Soviet response claiming that they had forbidden Britain from sending any help because Slovakia was to be within their "sphere of influence"<sup>36</sup>. This claim was repeated by such knowledgeable participants in the uprising as Lettrich, Laušman and Ferjenčík when writing in emigration.

#### II.10.4. The spirit of the uprising.

If international help to the uprising appeared to be a political as well as a military question, then the overall significance of the uprising was even more definitely political or moral rather than military. It demonstrated that Slovak nationalism need not be allied with reactionary forces in the world. The Communist poet Novomeský developed this argument with great force. He believed that the Slovak nation and the guiding ideas to be linked with its national consciousness were still in the process of formation. The

<sup>34</sup> Ličko: "K otázke", p.241.

<sup>35</sup> Fierlinger: Ve službách, p.357.

<sup>36</sup> Beneš: Memoirs, p.283. For a thorough discussion of this problem, see Král: Usvobození, p.151-158.

uprising represented a new high point in national action; it was the first ever great armed action by the Slovak nation and could therefore occupy a central position in Slovak national consciousness and traditions simultaneously linking them with the anti-fascist forces of the world<sup>37</sup>. Beneš's arguments about how he could help Slovakia avoid being regarded as Hitler's ally were no longer so powerful and certainly could not be used as a justification for Slovakia returning to a subordinate position within a new Czechoslovakia. Instead, Slovakia's status within the new republic would logically have to reflect its newly emphasised national consciousness.

Because of this central importance of the uprising, many of the political forms it created were consciously readopted in the new republic. Different political philosophies have tried to claim the uprising as their own although, as a precondition for its breadth, it had in practice to bring together many different political ideas. Perhaps the most objective assessment was made by one of Beneš's informants who reported that the Communists were certainly the most impressive with their serious hard work but that they alone could not win the peasants, the intellectuals and <sup>the</sup> whole army for revolutionary action<sup>38</sup>. The uprising's strength was in fact derived from its ability to bring together such diverse social and political forces into a genuinely national movement which no single grouping has any right to claim for itself alone.

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<sup>37</sup> Československé listy, 1/1/45, in SNP, dok.570, p.922-927.

<sup>38</sup> Message sent via Istanbul, September 1944, SNP, dok.260, p.460.

II.10.5. The Slovak National Council establishes its dominance in Central Slovakia and challenges Beneš's supremacy.

Alongside this general moral impact, the uprising had an immediate importance in the balance between the London government and the domestic resistance ultimately leading to a boost for the KSC in Moscow. From the start the London government tried to present the uprising as their own operation as if they had initiated and led it at all times<sup>39</sup>. Naturally, they hoped for statements of unqualified recognition from the leaders of the uprising.

In practice, despite some confusion at the very beginning, the SNR established itself as the supreme political organ. This required the liquidation of an attempt by Šrobár to take the initiative in Banská Bystrica. He lacked backing from the rest of Central Slovakia where Communist dominated National Committees had taken power and even the army refused to back him when partisan units entered Banská Bystrica as a further demonstration of Communist influence<sup>40</sup>. The SNR was then broadened to include Šrobár as joint chairman with Šmidke and, in the following days, it firmly established itself with a "Board of Commissioners" - effectively a Council of Ministers<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> The aim, as Drtina explained it on 11/12/44, was "to exploit the uprising on the international forum in London as it was in fact the first great fighting action of the Czechoslovak people at home . . .", SNP, dok.560, p.865.

<sup>40</sup> This incident remains very unclear. The only full account is in Husák: Svědectví, p.221-222. Also see below p.222.

<sup>41</sup> Reports of its meetings confirm the impression that cooperation within the SNR was good from then on, but the army never fully accepted the SNR's authority and for a long time resisted demands for its own purging, although its failures were being blamed on political weaknesses; e.g. Husák at the SNR meeting 22/9/44 in SNP, dok.337, esp p.560. In (Continued overleaf)



Now, the point was that the SNR had already clearly stated its views on the relationship between the domestic resistance and the emigration. In a statement in July 1944, they accepted continuity with the pre-Munich republic "only with respect to foreign countries and in international relations, while in the organisation of domestic affairs this cannot in any way prejudice new arrangements of internal political relationships". They argued that only a clear statement that Czech-Slovak relations would be on the basis of equality could win the ordinary working people to fight for Czechoslovakia<sup>42</sup>.

This inevitably led to sharp conflicts between London and the SNR. The intransigence of London enraged absolutely all Slovak leaders who decided to send a delegation there: this was composed of Ursíny, Novomeský and Lt-Col. Vesel. Their hand was strengthened when Němec, who was the London government's official representative inside Slovakia, himself conceded on 18/10/44 that the right of the SNR to govern all of Slovakia could no longer be questioned.<sup>43</sup> Drtina followed this on 19/10/44 by acknowledging the existence of the Slovak nation<sup>44</sup>. Beneš, however, could not agree with the SNR who, in their statement of 2/11/44, took the

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<sup>41</sup>(Continued from previous page)

turn, the Communists resisted attempts to subordinate the partisans to the army, and hence ultimately to Beneš, and even successfully demanded reversal of a command from Kiev on this; SNP, dok.303, p.524, and Cesta ke květnu, p.223. Formally speaking, as decided at its meeting of 12/9/44, both were subordinated to the SNR; SNP, dok.277, p.480.

<sup>42</sup>SNP, dok.112, p.259 and p.261.

<sup>43</sup>SNP, dok.461, p.726.

<sup>44</sup>Cesta ke květnu, p.279.

KSČ position of recognising his right to be President but not the right of the London government to return home<sup>45</sup>. He made only minor concessions by rewording his position<sup>46</sup>. His hopes were raised again when the defeat of the uprising suggested that the SNR might not be a permanent organ<sup>47</sup> and he even returned to his stubborn rejection of Slovak nationhood<sup>48</sup>.

II.10.6. The Communist Party emerges as the most powerful political force in the uprising but events encourage some modifications in its strategy.

Another consequence of the uprising was the creation of a party-political structure based on two parties. At first the KSS seemed to be almost completely dominant as it was the only organised political force within the uprising and defined its aims within the broad anti-fascist struggle rejecting both immediate socialist revolution and simple subordination to Beneš. General conformity of this with the Moscow KSČ line was confirmed when Šmidke returned to Slovakia on 9/9/44 and then when Šverma arrived with some other Communist leaders on 28/9/44. They then re-established radio contact with Moscow.

KSS dominance within the working class was clearly demonstrated when the party held a congress on 17/9/44 accomplishing a merger with the Social Democrats. This was a complete surprise to both

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<sup>45</sup> SNP, dok.521, p.798-799.

<sup>46</sup> SNP, dok.530, p.806-810.

<sup>47</sup> S. Falt'an: Slovenská, p.181-182.

<sup>48</sup> Beneš: Úvahy, p.353.

Moscow and London<sup>49</sup>, but it was achieved easily within Central Slovakia. This reflected both the desire for maximum national unity during the uprising<sup>50</sup> and the feeling of most Social Democrats that the failure of the pre-Munich republic was also the end of their former raison d'être as a reformist party<sup>51</sup>. This attitude was likely to be particularly prevalent in Central Slovakia where the KSS had always been stronger and where Social Democrats were involved in resistance activity and in the SNR largely as an appendage to the Communists.

During the early 1950's the KSS leaders of the uprising suffered persecution for alleged "bourgeois nationalism". A highly voluntaristic argument was constructed whereby objective difficulties were ignored. The uprising's failure was attributed entirely to these Communist leaders who apparently deliberately subordinated their actions to the bourgeoisie and the Slovak army thereby holding back the Soviet backed partisans and National Committees in the localities. Subsequent studies of the uprising have completely superseded such views but that does not mean that the KSS had an identical line to the Moscow KSČ.

At the start the KSS took a position very similar to Moscow. Political-power changes were seen as most pressing with precedence given to the establishment of National Committees and the dissolution

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<sup>49</sup> Kopecký: ČSR, p.374-375, and B. Laušman: Pravda a lož o slovenskom národnom povstaní, Petrovec, 1951, p.33.

<sup>50</sup> J. Nedvěd: Cesta ke sloučení sociální demokracie s komunistickou stranou v roce 1948, Praha, 1968, p.29.

<sup>51</sup> Pravda 17/9/44 (editorial).

of fascist organisations. To ensure that this was done, Husák insisted on becoming Commissioner for the Interior. Questions like land reform and nationalisation of industries, it was thought, could be delayed as they would threaten the unity of the anti-fascist front and thereby hinder mobilisation for the armed struggle<sup>52</sup>. There were, however, many difficulties with the National Committees and often the old apparatus retained effective power<sup>53</sup>. Perhaps this, along with other difficulties in mobilising the nation, encouraged the suggestion that social demands would actually strengthen the anti-fascist struggles<sup>54</sup>.

The urgency of this was emphasised by Beneš's continuing "Czechošlovakism" which could only encourage the revival of the idea of a "Soviet Slovakia"<sup>55</sup>. This was particularly apparent at the conference of Factory Committees which the KSS organised in Podbrezová on 15/10/44 to help mobilise the working class for the uprising. So strong was opposition to the Czechoslovak state that Husák had to abandon his draft speech and instead strongly emphasise that the new Czechoslovakia would have an extremely close relationship with the USSR<sup>56</sup>. Šverma too fortified his previous language calling

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<sup>52</sup> Husák: Svědectví, p.226.

<sup>53</sup> Šverma's report of 14/10/44 and Husák's of 5/2/45; SNP, dok.433, p.689-690, and dok.576, p.972 respectively.

<sup>54</sup> Husák, Nové slovo, 24/9/44, p.1.

<sup>55</sup> Husák, Nové slovo, 15/10/44, p.49-51.

<sup>56</sup> Husák: Svědectví, p.273.

for a Slovakia in which the ruler would not be "the German, the Hungarian even the Czech or Slovak capitalist, but the Slovak working people"<sup>57</sup>.

So towards the end of the uprising it was being definitely accepted that mobilisation of the working class would come primarily around "social" issues<sup>58</sup>. Wages were the most obvious issue of deep concern, but economic realities indicated the dangers rather of declining living standards, rising unemployment and even impending economic collapse<sup>59</sup>. Moreover, the uprising itself required sacrifices and demanded that workers assist in redirecting production towards war needs. The resolutions from Podbrezová therefore made only ambiguous references to wages while calling rather for workers' involvement in the running of their factories and a legal guarantee of the continuation of the powers being assumed by the most active Factory Committees. These included the right to an equal say with management in all decisions. They even called for the immediate statisation of the property of enemies and domestic traitors<sup>60</sup>. It was also suggested that full nationalisation would probably be necessary before the Factory Committees' powers could be assured<sup>61</sup> and this amounted to introducing fully socialist measures into the

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<sup>57</sup> Pravda 17/10/44, p.2.

<sup>58</sup> e.g. J. Púll, Nové slovo, 22/10/44, p.67.

<sup>59</sup> See Kubáč's report to the SNR meetings of 14/9/44 and 19/9/44 in SNP, dok.288, p.496, and dok.308, p.529. Also revealing is Šverma's report to Moscow on 14/10/44, SNP, dok.433, p.690.

<sup>60</sup> Pravda, 17/10/44, p.1.

<sup>61</sup> Púll at the SNR meeting of 20/10/44, Z dejín, p.43

anti-fascist revolution. The uprising was collapsing before any formal legal changes could be made, but all subsequent programmatic statements produced inside Slovakia referred clearly to nationalisations<sup>62</sup>.

With peasants and land reform events were less dramatic but the KSS leaders again differed from the Moscow KSČ. Their ideas were not fully worked out but they broadly advocated a "general" land reform on "class" lines<sup>63</sup>. Čulen, who flew in from Moscow, advocated land reform on national and anti-fascist lines, by the expropriation of Germans, Hungarians and traitors<sup>64</sup>. This followed from the view held in Moscow that land reform could be closely linked to national liberation with Slovakia described beforehand as effectively German occupied<sup>65</sup> and the German minority as an instrument of foreign imperialist domination<sup>66</sup>. The question of widespread expulsion of Hungarians was not raised at all as the SNR hoped Hungary would remain neutral towards the uprising and therefore did not even raise the issue of Slovakia's southern frontier<sup>67</sup>.

In practice, although there were disagreements between Šverma

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<sup>62</sup> e.g. the SNR programme of 4/2/45, Cesta ke květnu, p.486-488.

<sup>63</sup> e.g. M. Faltán, Nové slovo, 15/10/44, p.60, and Husák: Svědectví, p.285.

<sup>64</sup> Cesta ke květnu, p.267-268.

<sup>65</sup> E. Friš, Československé listy 15/4/44 reproduced in Za nové, p.112.

<sup>66</sup> E. Friš, Československé listy 15/7/44 in Za nové, p.89.

<sup>67</sup> L'. Lipták: "Maďarsko v slovenskej politike za druhej svetovej vojny", Príspevky k dejinám fašizmu, p.268.

and Husák, preoccupation with military affairs prevented any start to land reform<sup>68</sup>. Nevertheless, this bias towards the social aspects of the revolution was revived by the KSS later when it could be given the stamp of approval of the uprising. The lessons drawn by the Moscow KSČ at the time did not include this. Rather they strengthened their emphasis on National Committees, a speedy purge and on the need to recognise the importance of Slovak nationalism.

#### II.10.7. The Democratic Party is formed, but only slowly takes shape.

Slovakia's second party grew from a merging of the diverse and scattered non-socialist groups in direct response to the strength and initiative of the KSS. They saw the need for unity as the Communists seemed to have the potential to dominate all political life with their strength in partisan units and their ability to incorporate and thereby silence even the "Czechoslovakist" right-wing of Social Democracy. It would have been folly for the right to allow again the fragmentation of its own forces that existed in the pre-Munich republic.

Genuine unity was, however, restricted by old party loyalties and this made it much easier for the KSS to take the initiative in the early days of the uprising<sup>69</sup>. The formulation of new programmatic

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<sup>68</sup>S. Cambel: Slovenská agrárna otázka 1944-1948, Bratislava, 1972, p.38.

<sup>69</sup>see R. Fraštacký: "Zo Slovenska cez Freya", J. Lettrich: "Odboj a povstanie", and M. Kvetko: "Na prelome dvoch epoch; V ilegalite a v povstaní", all in Zborník úvah. Kvetko's account is particularly revealing, esp. p.118-120 and p.132-133.

principles was also cumbersome. Nothing approaching a united guide for action was created and moves towards a programme always appeared like an artificial attempt to find space between the KSS and the Slovak state. Programmatic statements appeared in many important places as an evasive response to events that had superseded former ideas rather than a programmatic basis for social change or national revival. Private property and free competition were first supported in principle but then characterised as an "out-dated construction" needing to be restricted in the interests of the broad masses of the nation. Socialism was rejected as being ". . in some respects practically unrealisable"<sup>70</sup>.

The Democratic Party really began organising after liberation and its strength was then derived not from clarity of principles but rather from flexibility. It could claim joint credit for the uprising and thereby appear as a genuinely anti-fascist and also non-Communist force able to hold together very diverse tendencies. In 1946 this characteristic became still more prominent.

This two party system was not the only possibility. Beneš himself wanted the National Socialists to be revived as a Czechoslovakist force but this was opposed vigorously by the KSS and the Democrats could not be persuaded either. Uhlíř represented Beneš's position in Slovakia and tried to convince Lettrich of the need for a third party. He argued that the KSS might win outright in an election against only one opponent. They had, he argued, a head's start with a clear programme, organisational unity, an energetic young

<sup>70</sup> SNP, dok.383, p.623-624.



leadership and, unlike the Democrats, a definite refusal to entertain people associated with the previous regime. Lettrich, however, believed that a majority could be won without positive policies but by exploiting widespread fears of Communism accentuated by the indiscipline of some partisans<sup>71</sup>.

#### II.10.8. Summary and discussion.

The Slovak state was created after Nazi pressure in 1939 and always owed its existence to German approval. It could, however, win some mass support as the lesser evil compared with the complete German domination experienced by the Czech lands. It also seemed able to keep to a minimum Slovakia's direct involvement in the war.

As the course of the war changed and Germany's defeat seemed probable, so the scope increased for an active opposition which could unite around the aim of a new Czechoslovakia. This culminated in the Slovak national uprising in the late summer of 1944. In military terms it was unsuccessful and was largely subdued by the German army. It nevertheless had a great influence in Czechoslovak politics, because it symbolised the emergence of a new, anti-fascist Slovak nationalism which demanded recognition within the new Czechoslovakia. Particular Slovak political trends have tried to claim the credit for this uprising but, in fact, its strength was derived to a great extent from its breadth and diversity.

Within Slovakia it provided the names for new Slovak institutions, it created a two-party political structure and had a strong influence

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<sup>71</sup> Uhlíř's report to the State Council, 14/12/44, SNP, dok.563, p.898-899.

on the ideas within both parties. In a wider Czechoslovak sense it weakened the position of Beneš in London because the new Slovak organs challenged his authority. He barely began to recognise the need to make concessions to this new Slovak nationalism.

The KSČ in Moscow could see the uprising, in a very general sense, as confirming their line. It proved that the anti-fascist movement was broad - much broader in fact than the bloc of socialist parties - and that it included very diverse political forces. There were indications that the KSČ conception of an anti-fascist revolution was incomplete and that they had not fully understood the nature and meaning of Slovak nationalism. They did not, however, significantly revise their conceptions. Instead, as argued in the next chapter, the KSČ leaders saw the emergence of this new Slovak nationalism as a trump card against Beneš within the context of a general strategy that placed primacy on reaching an agreement with Beneš.

CHAPTER 11: THE FORMATION AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE KOŠICE GOVERNMENT.

II.11.1. Beneš is forced to make major concessions as Soviet troops begin the liberation of Czechoslovakia.

If Beneš had hoped that the defeat of the Slovak national uprising meant that, as Czechoslovak territory was liberated, so organs of power would emerge to express unquestioning loyalty to his London government, then he was quickly disappointed by events in the first part of pre-Munich Czechoslovakia to be permanently liberated. That was the Sub-Carpathian Ukraine, an area occupied by Hungary in 1939. Beneš had ignored it seemingly regarding its incorporation into the USSR as inevitable and even desirable<sup>1</sup>. It had far less reason than Slovakia to desire re-incorporation into a Czechoslovak state and the arrival of the Soviet army was greeted with a powerful movement for incorporation into the Soviet Ukraine. As it did become part of the USSR, no detailed and objective account exists of how far this was instigated or encouraged by the Red Army or the NKVD<sup>2</sup>. The different accounts of this period do, however, roughly agree on the ultimate breadth and strength of this movement which led to the gradual isolation of Němec after his arrival as representative of Czechoslovakia<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie: Dr Beneš, p.290, quoting an interview in May 1944, and F. Němec, V. Moudrý: The Soviet Seizure of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, Toronto, 1955, p.129 and p.162-163.

<sup>2</sup> For their activities in Slovakia, see below Vol II, p.44.

<sup>3</sup> The relevant documents are in Fierlinger: Vn službách, Němec, Moudrý: The Soviet, and Cesta ke květnu. The only real disagreement was whether, as Gottwald believed, Němec was completely isolated from the start or whether, as he claimed, he did have some support for a time.

Local Communists, who had been the only active opposition to Hungarian rule, took the initiative in creating National Committees, and then established an independent party<sup>4</sup>. Then followed a congress of National Committees on 26/11/44 which unanimously adopted a resolution for joining the USSR. All army recruitment was then directly into the Red Army and Němec, as the representative of Czechoslovakia, was asked to leave forthwith<sup>5</sup>.

Beneš was then confronted with an extremely embarrassing situation. Despite Soviet hopes that he would simply relinquish any claim to the territory, he felt bound to stubbornly resist. His notion of constitutional continuity meant that no concessions should be made as that would weaken his bargaining position in the West over disputed borders with Germany, Poland and Hungary and over the unsettled question of expelling non-Slavonic minorities.

Even more immediately, he had no control at all over the local organs that emerged. The Soviet authorities seemed to be if anything encouraging them despite the May 1944 treaty. There was nothing to stop them repeating this among the Ukrainians of Eastern Slovakia and then in Slovakia generally. The London government might gradually find itself as irrelevant to events at home as its Polish counterpart.

The London government's only weapon against the USSR was to threaten to break relations and hope that the Soviet side, owing to

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<sup>4</sup> This was in defiance of the line of the Moscow KSČ; e.g. Slánský's article in Československé listy, 15/5/44, reproduced in Za nově. He visualised a Czechoslovak state based on three Slavonic nations enjoying equal rights.

<sup>5</sup> Cesta ke květnu, p.463-466.

its desire for post-war economic help from the West, could be persuaded to actively resist such spontaneous revolutionary movements<sup>6</sup>. This, however, aroused concern in the Soviet leadership. They evidently understood their treaty with Beneš not just as an insurance against "non-intervention" but rather as willingness to proceed in unison in international questions<sup>7</sup>. An analysis of Soviet policy is beyond the scope of the present study but it seems likely that their attitude towards Czechoslovakia was based neither on a desire to dominate absolutely nor on an altruistic desire to provide disinterested assistance. Still less were they concerned with "exporting" their revolution. Rather their first concern was for Czechoslovakia as an ally to a certain extent against the West where, the Soviet leaders feared, many influential people would like to conduct a policy directed against them. Already fearing the cold war, the Soviet hope was that Beneš would follow their wishes in international policy. Beneš, of course, had different hopes and expectations which conflicted with those of the Soviet leaders. He did not at this stage seem to understand Soviet expectations or fears and even Němec became deeply perturbed by London's course arguing: "there must be no doubt about our sincere desire to be a loyal ally of the USSR"<sup>8</sup>

Beneš stuck to the constitutionally correct position over the Sub-Carpathian Ukraine only formally ceding the territory in June

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<sup>6</sup> This is discussed in Král : Usvobození, Chapter 5.

<sup>7</sup> Fierlinger: Ve službách, p.482.

<sup>8</sup> Fierlinger: Ve službách, p.485.

1945. Otherwise, however, he had to make major concessions. As Slovakia was being liberated, so the government delegate was once more shown to be irrelevant so that Beneš's authority was minimal. Instead, National Committees, often completely dominated by the KSS, took power often on the day of liberation. The Soviet and Czechoslovak armies established direct contacts with these organs of power or even helped in their creation. They recognised the SNR as the supreme authority simply because it was the only body with any authority<sup>9</sup>. So, far from being liberated or defeated, the uprising proved itself to be of all-Slovak significance. Although the Communists in liberated Slovakia faced many doubts and difficulties and often committed serious errors<sup>10</sup>, this did not help Beneš at all. Then the prospect of the SNR playing a role like the Polish Lublin government was reaffirmed when hopes of even the Czech lands being liberated from the West faded with a renewed and vigorous Soviet offensive in January 1945.

Beneš finally started making real concessions. The vague and ambiguous decree on National Committees issued on 4/12/44<sup>11</sup> was followed by recognition of the Lublin government, acceptance at last that the Agrarian party could not be renewed in any form and the signing of a law on punishing collaborators meaning that a Minister in any Protectorate government could go before a special court<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> The best accounts are J. Jablonický: Slovensko na prelome, Bratislava, 1965, and S. Cambel: "Vztahy červenej Armády a slovenských národných orgánov po oslobodení", Príspevky k dejinám KSČ, 1965, No.2.

<sup>10</sup> See below Section III.22.1.

<sup>11</sup> Cesta ke květnu, p.317-318.

<sup>12</sup> Bouček et al: Program, p.195-197.

The hardest concession of all was acceptance that the London government could not return home and that a new government would be formed on the basis of discussions in Moscow. Although sometimes presented as a mistake, Beneš's decision appeared as the only way to retain influence at home as the country was being gradually liberated from the East. He hoped that it would be only a temporary concession with free elections roughly reaffirming the pre-war political situation<sup>13</sup>.

II.11.2. The two main non-Communist participant parties prepare themselves for the discussions on a new government.

The discussions were held in Moscow between 22/3/45 and 29/3/45. Beneš took no direct part and behaved instead as a non-party President leaving the formulation of policies to a meeting of the three socialist parties. The Catholic People's Party was also represented but in practice that made no difference to the course of the discussions. The conclusions from the meeting were presented to representatives of the SNR who argued only on the question of Czech-Slovak relations. The National Socialists and Social Democrats had no firm organisation in emigration or at home so that their representatives in the Moscow discussions and subsequent government were in effect the new leaderships of the parties.

The Social Democrats were demoralised and divided in emigration and it remains unclear how their representatives were chosen<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Král: Osvobození, p.229.

<sup>14</sup> For the right-wing view see V. Majer: "Moskevská cesta", Československá sociální demokracie v exilu. Osmadesát let Československé sociální demokracie 1878-1958, London, 1958, p.144-145.

Dominance went largely to the party's left-wing which had been taking shape from 1940 with Laušman and Fierlinger playing important roles<sup>15</sup>. Although their ideas were distinct from those of the Communists, disillusionment with previous failures even led to thoughts of a merger with the KSČ<sup>16</sup>. Paradoxically, when this happened in Slovakia, their response was rather a confirmation of independence<sup>17</sup> and the development of their own programme. Central points were close friendship with the USSR and an assessment of the main error in 1918-20 as hesitancy which let slip a golden opportunity for socialism<sup>18</sup>; they thought conditions in 1945 would be even more favourable and were therefore surprised by the Communists' moderation<sup>19</sup>. They must, however, have welcomed the chance to take part in forming a new government in Moscow.

The National Socialists, in reviving their organisation, also changed <sup>their</sup> form. They started incorporating former members of right-wing parties<sup>20</sup> and their programmatic documents suggested fear of the KSČ rather than concern with the concrete problems of liberating and rebuilding the country<sup>21</sup>. In all discussions in Moscow

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<sup>15</sup> Nedvěd: Cesta ke sloučení, contains the best account.

<sup>16</sup> Fierlinger: Ve službách, p.125.

<sup>17</sup> e.g. Nosek's letter to Gottwald on 13/11/44, Cesta ke květnu, p.305.

<sup>18</sup> Cesta ke květnu, p.359.

<sup>19</sup> Fierlinger: Ve službách, p.588-589.

<sup>20</sup> Bouček et al: Program, p.100.

<sup>21</sup> e.g. Cesta ke květnu, p.585-587.



and then in Košice their recurrent theme was fear of one party establishing a monopoly of power. They even defined their justification for existence not with ideas about how the new republic should be constructed or changed but as no more than the need "to ensure democratic competition, control and criticism . . ." <sup>22</sup>.

Not surprisingly, they were very nervous of discussions in Moscow <sup>23</sup> and balanced this with a more pro-Western tactic. Ripka remained in London to provide continuity in relations with the Western powers and, revealingly, Zenkl went straight to London on his release from Buchenwald. Zenkl stood firmly on the right of the party but had been mayor of Prague and was hailed by the National Socialist as their saviour <sup>24</sup>. He was elected party chairman in Košice in April 1945 in his absence. This aroused left-wing suspicions that the outcome of the Moscow discussions was provisional and open to revision particularly should the US Army liberate Prague <sup>25</sup>.

II.11.3. The Communists' draft is accepted as the new government programme with only minor changes.

During the actual discussions the KSČ took the initiative and directed attention first and foremost onto the programme of the new government. They presented a 32-page draft which was accepted as the only basis for discussion. Although there was considerable

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<sup>22</sup> Česká pravda, 12/5/45, p.1. How these ideas were developed later is discussed in Chapter 18.

<sup>23</sup> e.g. Ripka: Czechoslovakia, Chapter 3.

<sup>24</sup> e.g. Jaroslav Stránský, SS 10/12/45, p.2.

<sup>25</sup> Fierlinger: Ve službách, p.591.

disagreement on some points, the draft was generally accepted with only stylistic corrections<sup>26</sup>.

The programme appeared, like KSČ policy generally, as a clear statement of general principles for the creation of a new, anti-fascist Czechoslovakia on those points where agreement was possible. At the same time, a major compromise had to be made and these principles were often expressed only in terms of immediate tasks within the transition period before a parliament could be established. At various points in the discussions the KSČ representatives made explicit the temporary nature of the programme so as to avoid deadlock or outright concessions on points of principle. This gave the National Socialists real grounds for hoping that the programme could be altered fairly quickly, particularly as the government was given only a very limited life expectancy with plans for its alteration very soon after liberation.

The biggest disagreements arose over Czech-Slovak relations. Policies towards Germans and Hungarians were less controversial presumably because the mild tone of expelling only those who had immigrated after Munich or who were found guilty of a definite crime against the republic could not be made stronger until international agreement was forthcoming. The Slovak question, however, was still an explosive issue.

The KSČ approach was dominated by discussions involving Dimitrov who had on 6/12/44, advocated a symmetrical arrangement of Czech-Slovak relations each having their own governments alongside a

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<sup>26</sup> The full dialogue is in Cesta ke květnu, p.391-453.

common federal Czechoslovak government<sup>27</sup>. Gottwald never committed himself to any definite state form largely because this advice conflicted with the tactical need, as reiterated by Stalin, to be accomodating towards Beneš.<sup>28</sup>

By evading a statement of definite aims on the Slovak issue and instead subordinating it to the need of a compromise with Beneš, the KSČ gained enormously in the Moscow discussions. Slovak presence was in the form of a united SNR delegation basing itself on a programme presented by the KSS: this prevented the formation of a united front of Czech and Slovak right-wingers<sup>29</sup>. Nevertheless, Gottwald felt obliged to persuade the KSS to weaken their position on Czech-Slovak relations so as to avoid a major conflict with Beneš's followers<sup>30</sup>.

The National Socialists refused to accept even this. They objected to any recognition of the Slovak nation or of the SNR as its supreme representative. At one stage they withdrew from the discussions but finally accepted the draft with an additional let-out sentence giving the final decision on the powers of <sup>the</sup> SNR to elected representatives of the Czech and Slovak people. This gave the programme the character of a temporary agreement rather than a statement of principle.

It remains unclear why Slovakia should have become the issue of such open dispute. Gottwald interpreted the National Socialists'

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<sup>27</sup> Cesta ke květnu, p.519.

<sup>28</sup> Husák: Svědectví, p.523.

<sup>29</sup> Husák: Svědectví, p.528.

<sup>30</sup> Beer, et al: Dějinná, p.486-487.

position as an attempt to win votes on the basis of anti-Slovak feeling in the Czech lands<sup>31</sup>. Perhaps also the National Socialists feared that, unless the KSČ clearly stated the SNR's subordination to Czechoslovak institutions, the country could still be split in two should Prague be liberated from the West. It is certainly noticeable that the Slovak question never appeared as the major dispute after the republic was consolidated.

II.11.4. Agreement is reached on the composition of the first post-war government: the Communists can feel satisfied with the results.

Perhaps equally fierce were disagreements over the actual composition of the government, although the record of the discussions shows only unanimous agreements. The National Socialists wanted some of the "key" ministries and were not averse to Gottwald becoming Prime Minister<sup>32</sup>. Perhaps this would have made it easier to completely change the government later on the grounds that it was Communist dominated. In practice Fierlinger, particularly disliked for being <sup>more</sup> "Soviet than the Soviets"<sup>33</sup> and for writing "articles angering capitalist circles"<sup>34</sup>, was accepted as Prime Minister with a "Government Presidium" containing one representative of each party. These were Ursíny (DS), Široký (KSS), J. David (NS), Šrámek (LS) and Gottwald (KSČ). The whole government was then

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<sup>31</sup> Cesta ke květnu, p.436.

<sup>32</sup> Fierlinger: Ve službách, p.593, and Cesta ke květnu, p.441 and 442.

<sup>33</sup> Jan Stránský: East Wind over Prague, London, 1950, p.196.

<sup>34</sup> Beneš in Moscow in December 1943, Cesta ke květnu, p.51.

agreed to and individual Ministers were required to express agreement with its composition and programme. This became known as the Košice programme because the government formally assumed office there.

The rest of the government was as follows, showing that the KSČ had ensured that the most important posts were taken either by themselves or by "non-party specialists":

Interior	V. Nosek	(KSČ)
Information	V. Kopecký	(KSČ)
Agriculture	J. Ďuriš	(KSS)
Foreign Affairs	J. Masaryk	(non-party)
Defense	L. Svoboda	(non-party)
Finance	V. Šrobár	(DS)
Industry	B. Laušman	(SD)
Food Supply	V. Majer	(SD)
Foreign Trade	H. Rípka	(NS)
Justice	Jaroslav Stránský	(NS)
Posts	F. Hála	(LS)
Health	A. Procházka	(LS)
Internal Trade	I. Pietor	(DS)
Transport	A. Hasal	(non-party)
Education	Z. Nejedlý	(non-party)
Social Security	J. Šoltész	(KSS)* (see overleaf)

There were also three "State Secretaries" to give Slovaks representation in Ministries which had no equivalent in the Board of Commissioners:

Foreign Affairs	V. Clementis	(KSS)
Defense	M. Ferjenčík	(non-party)
Foreign Trade	J. Lichner	(DS)

So the Communists had a strong but not completely dominant position. They were represented both as the KSČ and through the SNR as the KSS, although this was not really an independent party. Several non-party Ministers would be unlikely to oppose the Communists in a crisis: particularly important was Svoboda who had been appointed commander of the Czechoslovak forces during the Dukla operation.

Not surprisingly, emigré writers have often characterised the outcome of the Moscow discussions as a disaster for their side<sup>35</sup>. They had, however, made an important gain simply in the form taken by the discussions. Despite KSČ ideas of a bloc of three parties or of a much wider National Front to include mass organisations, the programme had been agreed in emigration by four Czech parties and the government gave equal representation to all of them. This enabled the National Socialists to return home with more prestige as a political party than their role in the domestic resistance warranted.

They could help build a political system based on competing political parties, in line with Beneš's conception of democracy, and look forward with optimism to free elections. In Slovakia too the

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<sup>35</sup> The defensive tone of the National Socialist leaders after liberation about the concessions they had made is striking; e.g. Jaroslav Stránský, SS 10/12/45, p.2, or J. Firt, SS 2/3/47. As Ripka realised, the composition and programme of the Košice government meant that preparations made in London were wasted; Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.38.

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\*(from previous page)

The abbreviations for parties are: KSČ - Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, KSS - Communist Party of Slovakia, DS - Democratic Party, SD - Social Democracy, NS - National Socialist, LS - Peoples' Party: a full explanation is given in the list of abbreviations on p.

Democrats, who had previously accepted the idea of a National Front including the mass organisations and within which they would in practice have been swamped, could take heart from the Moscow discussions and reduce the National Front to an agreement between two political parties<sup>36</sup>.

But the creation of the government and agreement on its programme was still not enough to ensure its return home or that it would survive in a liberated Czechoslovakia. Beneš, in fact, felt that the KSČ was over-represented following their "trick" over the Slovak ministers. He still expected the alleged conservatism of the Czech lands to show itself after liberation and to force changes in the government<sup>37</sup>. He kept his own options open by refraining from approving the Košice programme. A great deal was still undecided and could depend on how Prague was liberated and on what political character the Czech resistance would assume in the last days of the war.

II.11.5. The Košice government enters Prague after an uprising in the Czech lands which was saved by the arrival of Soviet troops.

Even as liberation drew nearer the Czech resistance could not overcome its fragmentation. Different groups with different origins continued to operate in isolation from each other cautious of broadening their contacts for fear of becoming enmeshed in the network of Gestapo informers. So, although resistance groups often

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<sup>36</sup> Jablonický: Slovensko, p.418-422.

<sup>37</sup> e.g. his comments in March 1945 to Harriman, the US ambassador to the Soviet Union: Foreign Relations United States 1945, Vol IV(Europe) Washington, 1968, p.432-433.

developed similar ideas, they looked to the emigration centres for a uniting idea and programme.

They looked to the emigration not only for ideas but also for concrete help. This was provided by parachutists from both East and West. Those from Britain brought the old idea of reviving the underground military networks in preparation for an uprising. Their hopes were totally unrealistic<sup>38</sup> and, disappointed with the atmosphere of depression and resignation among so many of their contacts, they either sank into passivity or betrayal, or were led to the partisans<sup>39</sup>. Messages back to London often reflected this with requests for immediate arms deliveries<sup>40</sup>.

Soviet parachutists came for a short time in 1941 and began appearing again as the front drew closer in 1944. It was soon learnt that groups of 15 to 20 experienced partisans were the most effective as they could establish themselves outside the civilian population. They could then grow and make contact with illegal political organisations from a position of safety<sup>41</sup>. This, however, remained a local phenomenon as partisan groups lacked contact with each other so that their political activities could not go beyond creating local National Committees.

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<sup>38</sup> e.g. the plans for an uprising in Moravia to coincide with the Slovak uprising; K. Veselý-Štainer: Cestou národního odboje, Praha, 1947, p.133-135, and Grňa: Sedm, p.147.

<sup>39</sup> O. Sládek: Krycí heslo: svoboda - Hnutí odporu v jižních Čechách, Česká Budejovice, 1967, p.294-295, and Doležal: Jediná, passim.

<sup>40</sup> e.g. Veselý-Štainer: Cestou, p.118.

<sup>41</sup> Their activities are described by Doležal who estimated that there were 7,500 partisans in the Protectorate in the spring of 1945; Doležal: Jediná, p.179.



Political groups too were creating National Committees. Their composition and origins reflected the diversity of the movement: initiatives came from the KSČ, partisans, ill-defined anti-fascist groups or clearly right-wing groups who saw the need to take action to prevent the KSČ from dominating everything. Once the fighting was over, the majority of National Committees could be seen to be dominated by Communists or these who quickly joined the KSČ<sup>42</sup>.

Amid this picture of fragmentation - as if the same uprising were being prepared by a multitude of different groups - attempts were made to create a united central leadership. The most important was the Czech National Council (ČNR) which was based on the KSČ, ÚRO, (an underground trade union organisation which developed from within the Protectorate unions and was close to the Communists' position) and R-3. All of these claimed credit for the initiative<sup>43</sup>, but only R-3 had contacts with the outside world through London. It had developed after Heydrich's assassination out of the remnants of pro-Western groups. It started from the PVVZ programmes and stood somewhere to the left of Benes while fully recognising his right to be President. Alongside radicalism on social issues and a very strong line against Germans, it contained ideas of a Presidential dictatorship and of rejecting all previous political parties. Perhaps most important, R-3 rejected "attentism" and started actively encouraging partisan groups: this brought them closer to the KSČ<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup>Doležal: Jediná, p.193, and Král: Osvobození, p.330.

<sup>43</sup>e.g. V. Koucký: Ilegální KSČ a Pražské povstání, Praha, 1946, p.11-12, and E. Erban, A. Lvořák: ÚRO v Pražském povstání, Praha, 1946, p.30.

<sup>44</sup>Two leading members of the group have both written excellent accounts of its activities and ideas; Veselý-Štainer: Čestou, and Grňa: Sedm.

There were, however, continuing difficulties in maintaining contacts between these constituent groups of the ČNR as repression did not abate: the Fourth Illegal KSČ Central committee was discovered by the Gestapo in March 1945. Nevertheless, the ČNR was formally founded at the end of April. It remained firmly under the dominance of trade unionists - especially J. Kubát and E. Erban - and Communists led by J. Smrkovský<sup>45</sup>. An attempt was made to broaden representation by including, among others, members of underground army groups and of the political parties represented in Košice government. This gave it a somewhat artificial appearance and, unlike the SNR, it accepted from the start that its existence was only temporary and that it was completely subordinated to the Košice government<sup>46</sup>.

Although there could be no authoritative organ without the three founders of the ČNR, it did not initiate the uprising. Instead, with the German and Hungarian armies completely demoralised, there were diverse local uprisings taking power and disarming the occupiers from 3/5/45 onwards. The initiative came variously from partisans, National Committees, strikes in factories or even the police. Sometimes events appeared as a simple repeat of 1918 and it was common for the new organs of power to reach a modus vivendi with the occupiers to prevent armed clashes. This often led to the spectacle of arms, seized from the Germans with the advantage of surprise, being handed back when the occupiers so demanded. Rather

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<sup>45</sup> U. Machotka: "Česká národní rada za revoluce", and J. Kotrlý: "Moje účast v Pražském povstání", both in Pražské povstání 1945, Washington D.C., 1965.

<sup>46</sup> See the ČNR statement of 5/5/45, Costa ke květnu, p.685.

than representing betrayal or cowardice, this seems to have been a consequence of the lack of a clear aim for the uprising. Local groups could not see the situation as a whole and had to judge things according to the local situation<sup>47</sup>.

Even in Prague the uprising began spontaneously particularly from the large factories on 5/5/45. This was two days before the date planned by the ČNR<sup>48</sup>. Caution was shared by the KSČ who, following the experiences of Warsaw and Slovakia, were terrified of a premature beginning unco-ordinated with the Red Army<sup>49</sup>. Nevertheless, once the uprising began it quickly seized the initiative and showed an energy surprising even to its leaders<sup>50</sup>. Moreover, it transformed the situation in the Czech lands as a whole as all resistance groups were presented with a clearly defined task: arms had to be provided for Prague to prevent the immensely superior Nazi forces from regrouping, crushing the uprising and demolishing the city.

On 9/5/45 the uprising was saved by the arrival of Red Army units. This, however, marked the end for the ČNR which, in recognition of its own weakness, had sought gains through negotiations with the Nazi authorities. Soviet distrust, leading to categorical

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<sup>47</sup> The best account is in Doležal: Jediná. An illustration of the precariousness of the situation was the Kladno National Committee which, armed with two rifles, a pistol and a sabre, tried to bluff 4000 well armed but demoralised Germans into surrendering by spreading rumours of thousands of partisans hiding in the woods; Průběh národní revoluce na Kladně, Kladno, 1945.

<sup>48</sup> K. Bartošek: Pražské povstání, Praha, 1960, p.39.

<sup>49</sup> Bartošek: Pražské, p.48.

<sup>50</sup> Veselý-Štainer: Cestou, p.291.

demands for the ČNR's dissolution, was engendered by the right-wing's approaches to Vlasov's forces and a strange compromise of 8/5/45 whereby German forces were to be allowed to keep their arms and pass through Prague to escape from the Red Army and surrender in the West<sup>51</sup>. In turn Smrkovský, as leading KSČ representative in the ČNR, has been and sometimes still is strongly criticised for this<sup>52</sup>.

The greatest difficulty facing the ČNR, apart from their own shortage of arms, was their ignorance of the rapidly approaching Soviet forces and of the complex intrigues involving foreign help and intervention. Beneš had already disappointed R-3 by not sending arms and even argued in Košice that it was too late<sup>53</sup>. Infuriatingly, this was combined with continuing calls from London for armed action. This was<sup>a</sup> cause of bitterness to Grňa who attributed the comparative weakness of the Czech partisan movement entirely to the absence of such outside help<sup>54</sup>. There is no clear evidence that it can all be attributed to a refusal from Stalin to allow the delivery of arms that had already been loaded into British aircraft<sup>55</sup>. The

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<sup>51</sup> Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.40, and Král: Osvobození, p.360.

<sup>52</sup> e.g. Král: Osvobození, p.355. Earlier it had been emphasised that Smrkovský had acted in good faith; e.g. Koucký: Ilegalní, p.37.

<sup>53</sup> Grňa: Sedm, p.308 and p.282-283, and Veselý-Štainer: Cestou, p.280-282.

<sup>54</sup> Dnešek, 9/1/47, p.659.

<sup>55</sup> This claim is made in O. Machotka: "Vznik České národní rady a její předrevoluční činnost", Pražské povstání 1945, Washington .D.C., 1965, p.20-21.

alternative suggestion, that Britain was refusing to help any such uprising as would directly aid the Soviet advance<sup>56</sup>, also lacks substantiation. Beneš and his associates in London were always conspicuously silent on what the explanation could be.

Meanwhile Rika, still in London, negotiated over a possible US advance to Prague. This would have been fairly easy as German commanders agreed not to oppose the US army<sup>57</sup>. There were voices within the State Department for taking the opportunity to secure a strong bargaining position against the Soviet Union and Churchill pressed strongly for this<sup>58</sup>. Eisenhower, however, saw the need to reach agreement with the USSR on any such operation as otherwise the two allied armies could clash and also because he lacked the resources for a confrontation with the USSR while the war with Japan continued. The US army therefore halted in Western Bohemia<sup>59</sup>.

The Soviet leadership was also fully aware of the political significance of liberating Prague. Fierlinger expressed opposition to allowing US troops into Prague as it would help "conservative elements"<sup>60</sup> and Marshall Koniev himself emphasised the political significance of a speedy action to prevent any direct Western share in Prague's liberation<sup>61</sup>. The Soviet military operation to reach

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<sup>56</sup> Král: Osvobození, p.252.

<sup>57</sup> Message from the US ambassador in France to the Secretary of State 11/5/45, Foreign Relations 1945, p.451.

<sup>58</sup> His message to Truman, 30/4/45, Foreign Relations 1945, p.446-447.

<sup>59</sup> Král: Osvobození, p.304-307.

<sup>60</sup> Král: Osvobození, p.329.

<sup>61</sup> Král: Osvobození, p.359-360.

Prague, which had already been prepared before the uprising<sup>62</sup>, was therefore quickly set in motion. On 9/5/45 Soviet tanks reached the capital.

So Czechoslovakia's new political life could start with the Košice government arriving on 10/5/45 from the East and the ČNR clearly subordinating itself in joint discussions<sup>63</sup>.

#### II.11.6. Summary and discussion.

It was during the actual liberation of Czechoslovakia that the balance of strength between Beneš and the KSČ was decided. During that period Beneš gradually recognised his own weakness and saw the need to make important concessions. His position had seemed to be guaranteed by the treaties with the USSR but he was shaken by the events of November 1944 in the Sub-Carpathian Ukraine. The Soviet authorities did nothing to resist a movement for the incorporation of the territory into the Soviet Ukraine. Beneš feared that this could be repeated in Slovakia where the Communists were strong but where nobody seemed to be unquestion<sup>ing</sup>ly loyal to him. Then the Soviet government put pressure on him to follow more closely Soviet foreign policy. This he resisted until the Soviet military offensive of January 1945 after which he could foresee complete Soviet domination of Central Europe.

Beneš, cut off from the situation inside Czechoslovakia and fearing that the Soviet leaders might even support an alternative

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Král: Osvobození, p.307, and Bartošek: Pražské, p.88.

63 PL, 12/5/45, p.1.

government, then conceded on a whole number of points of international and internal policy. He even agreed to return home via Moscow where a new government was formed including the Communists. In the discussions for that government the KSČ had an enormous initiative because they had prepared a definite programme and they could manipulate the divisions between Beneš and the Slovak representatives. The government although still a compromise seemed, in its composition and policies, to be the best they could hope for.

Beneš was still hopeful that the KSČ could be weakened once the political feeling of the Czech lands had shown itself. In this he was disappointed. The Czech uprising, centring on Prague, confirmed the strength of the KSČ within a broader revolutionary movement. Moreover, there was no help for Beneš from the West as the Soviet leaders vetoed a US request to advance to Prague and instead ensured that it was their own troops who took the credit.

So Beneš returned to Prague as President but with a coalition government that gave the Communists a strong position.

