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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 II**

**by Martin Roy Myant**

**Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Social  
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## PART IV

### THE GOTTWALD GOVERNMENT.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK ROAD TO SOCIALISM FROM THE 1946 ELECTIONS TO MID-1947.

Part IV is concerned roughly with the first year after the 1946 elections. During that period the tensions of the election campaign were to a certain extent overcome and a fair degree of co-operation was achieved between the Czech parties. The issues they confronted were less concerned with the first consolidation of the new state power: instead, the emphasis inevitably shifted towards the more detailed shaping of the institutions and relationships within the new republic.

Under these circumstances, the Communist Party was clearly transcending, in their practice and to some extent in their ideas, their earlier conception of a national democratic revolution as centring on a struggle against "reaction". The most prominent feature in the development of their policy was the Two Year Plan for economic development and this was matched by a recognition within the party that the new realities required theoretical advances. This led to the development of the concept of the Czechoslovak road to socialism.

Part IV is therefore concerned with these two related aspects of KSČ policy. As will be argued, the plan itself, as the central axis of economic policy, became the focus of social conflicts, although these of themselves need not necessarily have led to so sharp a struggle as the events of February 1948. There were also contradictions within Communist Party policy as, although prepared



to make real concessions to their political partners on many economic and social questions, there were other fields in which they indicated contempt for the other parties.

So the period was one of good co-operation in some fields alongside uneasy relations in others.

In Slovakia co-operation was much worse and the influence of the Two Year Plan over politics generally was far less. Instead, divisive issues predominated in political life. Slovak development is therefore discussed in a separate chapter showing how, during this period, it was somewhat different from Czech development. That, of course, does not mean that the two did not strongly influence each other.

CHAPTER 25: THE FORMATION OF THE GOTTWALD GOVERNMENT AND DISCUSSIONS  
AROUND THE START TO ECONOMIC PLANNING.

IV.25.1. A new government is formed and all parties accept the  
Communists' strength within it.

Although the KSČ leadership were pleased with the election results, they also fully accepted that they could still only govern in a coalition with all the other Czech parties plus the Slovak Democrats. They had expected no more. In fact, Gottwald could point out that their vote of 40% in the Czech lands was barely short of the 41% expected on the basis of predictions by basic organisations. This he saw as further evidence of how closely they were in touch with the people's thinking<sup>1</sup>: by contrast, the other parties held grossly exaggerated views of their own likely votes.

Communist satisfaction was restricted by three sources of unease. The first stemmed from the Democrats' victory in Slovakia which reduced the overall majority for the KSČ together with the Social Democrats to almost the narrowest possible. The second point was that even in many regions in the Czech lands there was no left majority, and the third was that the election campaigns of the right-wing parties led Gottwald to conclude that they really might want to reverse the achievements of the previous year<sup>2</sup>: he even suggested that they were becoming the mouthpieces for illegal Agrarian groups<sup>3</sup>. From all this Gottwald implicitly concluded that the bloc of socialist parties was finished.

<sup>1</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.76-77.

<sup>2</sup> At the KSČ post-election Central Committee meeting, 30/5/46, Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.75-76.

<sup>3</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.83.

He argued that the only way to take full advantage of the post-election possibilities, while also minimising the dangers, was for the KSC to orientate itself towards all the Czech parties without any differentiation. The hope and expectation was that this would give the best conditions for the development of left oppositions within the National Socialist and People's Parties<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, Gottwald concluded that the KSC had to increase its own strength. This included expanding its influence to challenge the National Socialists' strong position among the urban middle strata<sup>5</sup> and he foresaw a perspective for the next elections of a government that would not have to be based so much on compromise. This was as yet just an unspecific hint that the KSC should aim for an absolute majority<sup>6</sup>.

Following this assessment of the situation, the KSC set about negotiating for a new government and presented a comprehensive draft government programme. It was discussed within the National Front and then quickly agreed to in the government. It appeared, like the Košice programme, as a compromise with some very definite commitments alongside some vague or ambiguous formulations that gave plenty of scope for disputes over the ensuing months.

After agreement had been reached on the programme there were more serious and longer battles over the allocation of particular

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<sup>4</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.82.

<sup>5</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.80.

<sup>6</sup> His words were: ". . .so that we can wash it clean in one go", Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.89.

ministries. The KSC exercised the right, as the party with the most votes, to take the positions of Prime Minister and Agriculture which, formally speaking, was conceded to the KSS. The National Socialists insisted on being given better representation in important posts, but eventually had to content themselves with control over education. The KSC remained adamant that no other party would take the Ministry of the Interior. For reasons explained below it was the Social Democrats who were the most demanding, wanting both Agriculture and the Interior, but eventually they had to accept much less. They still continued to demand that the intelligence service should be taken away from the Ministry of the Interior and put under the Government Presidium. Nevertheless, the new government could be announced on 2/7/46<sup>7</sup>.

IV.25.2. The Communists devote great attention to economic questions and to the idea of a short-term plan.

Much of the new government programme was concerned with completing and consolidating the revolutionary changes and then incorporating them into a new constitution. Nevertheless, political life over the following year was dominated by a different question and a different aspect of the government programme: that was the question of economic consolidation and the KSC proposal for a Two Year Plan.

This followed a confused history of the idea of a plan from the time of liberation. There seemed at first to have been an almost universal belief that "planning" would replace the liberal capitalist

<sup>7</sup> Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.84-86.

economy. As was argued at the time, the notion of a plan was often presented as a panacea without any real understanding of its meaning: it seemed often to stem from a general admiration for the economic success of the Soviet Union. There were, however, important differences between Czechoslovak and Soviet conditions that would have to be carefully considered in relation to planning. Obvious points were the partial degree of state control, the heavy dependence on foreign trade and the very varied consumers' tastes<sup>8</sup>.

At first the official KSČ reaction to calls for a plan was to maintain that they were premature. This was attributed to the inadequacy of complete and accurate statistical data, to uncertainty about property relations, to the chaotic state and low level of production, to disorder in finances and to isolation from international markets<sup>9</sup>. Concern was rather with solving the problems of individual key industries, especially mining and transport, and with organising production better within factories. This led to the encouragement of plans for individual products<sup>10</sup>, but the persistence of shortages and bottlenecks led to variable results. For the first five months of the year, for example, lorry and tractor production was less than 50% of the targets. Motorcycles were exceptionally good at 6019 against a target of 9265<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> J. Halbhuber: Hospodářská politika nového Československa, Praha, 1946, p.17 and p.21. There were even references to the need for a plan from the People's Party, e.g. A. Lambl, LD 27/7/45, p.1.

<sup>9</sup> F.J. Kolár: Dvouletka a její příprava, Praha, 1947, p.7. Laušman, speaking on 17/8/45, took a similar view; Sjezd národních správců, p.60.

<sup>10</sup> RP 30/12/45, p.4.

<sup>11</sup> Československý průmysl v prvním, p.108.

So, even if there were good arguments against a comprehensive plan on the Soviet model, there were also economic problems that could be overcome more quickly if there were some overall co-ordination. Leading economists began to argue that planning could not wait for full recovery, which could be two or three years away, because imbalances and bottlenecks were hindering that recovery<sup>12</sup>. Zápotocký was led to a similar conclusion from a different argument. He felt that the idea of socialist competition could not go beyond just propaganda for more work effort unless it could be systematised within an all-national production plan giving definite tasks to groups of workers<sup>13</sup>. He qualified this, in a radio broadcast in March 1946, with the reservation that a Five Year Plan was not possible, but that a plan for a minimum of one year was necessary<sup>14</sup>.

Despite these ideas, it came as a surprise to the KSČ economists when Gottwald, only three weeks before the election date, suggested that they should prepare an outline for a plan aiming to restore the pre-war production level in two years. They overcame their initial scepticism and soon became convinced of the ingeniousness of the idea<sup>15</sup>. *In a sense it followed logically*. ~~It was, in a sense, a logical development~~ from the party's ~~devotion of increasing attention to~~ *interest in* the economic situation <sup>and it took</sup> ~~taking~~

<sup>12</sup> R. Očenášek: První hospodářský plán v Československu, Brno, 1947, and Mrázek, Nové hospodářství, II, No.1, January 1946, p.11.

<sup>13</sup> Práce 24/2/46, p.1-2.

<sup>14</sup> A. Zápotocký: O socialistickém soutěžení a mzdové politice, Praha, 1954, p.31-32.

<sup>15</sup> Frejka, RP 23/11/46, p.4.

<sup>16</sup> Shortly beforehand they held a conference of economists with 852 delegates and guests: RP 15/3/46, p.1-2, and RP 16/3/46, p.1.

into account the realities of both the economic and, perhaps more important, the political situation.

In the latter half of 1946 there was a great deal of publicity for preparations for the start of the plan which was to be in January 1947. The KSČ itself held a second conference of economists, on 16-17/11/46, to concentrate the party's activities on the plan<sup>17</sup>. Even more attention was devoted to creating factory organisations and linking them up with economic specialists into an economic apparatus<sup>18</sup>. This had already been established by March 1946<sup>19</sup>, but was further expanded in an effort to include party members from all different types of economic activity. Inevitably, it was dominated by those working in industry where the KSČ had given itself a position of enormous power and responsibility<sup>20</sup>. Particular attention was devoted to mines, foundries and big engineering factories where, it was felt, the fate of the plan would be decided. Alongside this was a realisation of the need to turn attention to other parts of the economy where the party was weak and where integration into the plan was more difficult: this included the mass of smaller, but still economically essential, factories<sup>21</sup>.

The party's organisation within the economy was enormous but

<sup>17</sup> For the speeches and resolutions, see F.J. Kolár: Nastupujeme k dvouletému plánu, Praha, 1946.

<sup>18</sup> c.f. Hříbek: K úloze, p.20.

<sup>19</sup> Šťastný, Funkcionář, 16/3/46, p.6.

<sup>20</sup> For a description of KSČ work in the economy see Směrnice pro práci národohospodářských komisí, Praha, 1947.

<sup>21</sup> Funkcionář, 21/1/47, p.1-3.

not unlimited. By mid-1947 the KSČ had 4100 factory organisations while there were 9300 factories with Factory Councils: there were still calls for creating more organisations<sup>22</sup>. In fact, the Two Year Plan so dominated the Party's thinking that there were even attempts to find ways to involve residential branches in ensuring its success<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, as economic policy was closely linked to the party's approach to the different sections of society, so the Two Year Plan became the central axis of KSČ social policy.

IV.25.3. The Communists win the other parties to participate in formulating the plan by a tactful approach which fully recognises the multi-party structure.

While the Communists were very definite in their commitment to the plan and even started the serious work of its preparation before the elections<sup>24</sup>, the other parties kept their options open. The KSČ, however, combined its vigorous initiative with a tactful approach. A government resolution of 16/7/46 created a unique new body by-passing all existing economic organs and incorporating directly the leading economists from all the parties. This later became known as the ÚPK (Central Planning Commission) and had powers to help in formulating the plan and to watch over all economic tasks of the government. It contained four Communists, three National Socialists, two Social Democrats, two from the People's

<sup>22</sup>J. Nezval, Funkcionář, 16/8/47, p.5.

<sup>23</sup>E. Hájková, Funkcionář, 21/3/47, p.4.

<sup>24</sup>F.J. Kolár, RP 19/5/46, p.1.



Party, two from the Democratic Party and one Slovak Communist. In practice it became the effective advisory organ to the government on all economic questions<sup>25</sup>, and was concerned with the actual implementation of the plan<sup>26</sup>. By this means the fact of a plurality of parties was reconciled with the need for a single will in planning.

The argument that planning was impossible within a multi-party system was well-known at the time and Czechoslovak experience was soon presented as disproving in practice that theoretical proposition<sup>27</sup>. In fact the ÚPK always reached unanimous agreement<sup>28</sup> and seemed to be a major factor holding the parties together while other issues were dividing them. There were some criticisms of the ÚPK and suggestions for its reorganisation, but they did not lead to serious conflicts.

The Communists also made it easier for other parties to agree to the plan by leaving its position within their theoretical conceptions and total strategy somewhat ambiguous. Although there was naturally great interest in the Soviet planning system<sup>29</sup> and there

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<sup>25</sup> Očenášek: První.

<sup>26</sup> D. Fišer: Teoretické otázky vrcholných plánovacích orgánů, Praha, 1965, p.86. For more general discussions of the ÚPK see Fišer: Teoretické, and Z. Snítal: "O dvouletce a jejím místě v politice KSČ v roce 1946", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1967, No.5.

<sup>27</sup> e.g. J. Sommer, Nové hospodářství, III, No.7, July 1947, p.134-135, or K. Maiwald, speech, Hospodář, 11/12/47, p.3.

<sup>28</sup> Fišer: Teoretické, p.110.

<sup>29</sup> See the reports of a delegation from the Ministry of Industry to the USSR, O. Berger (ed): Československá průmyslová delegace ve SSSR, Praha, 1946. Another delegation of economists recorded its impressions in SSSR dnes.

were references to the usefulness of understanding the Soviet system as an aid to organising Czechoslovak nationalised industries<sup>30</sup>, it was still left ambiguous how far the USSR was "the great model" as there were continual references to the need to "take our own domestic conditions into account"<sup>31</sup>. Very frequently, though, the different conditions were presented as weaknesses in Czechoslovakia that could, with time, be overcome. There was a lack of statistics and statisticians and there was uncertainty around some of the basic preconditions of planning<sup>32</sup>. F.J. Kolár referred to what he obviously believed was a temporary problem in that Czechoslovakia had not at that time achieved socialism<sup>33</sup>. This suggested that the KSČ largely understood the Two Year Plan as a transitional stage on the way to something much closer to the Soviet model<sup>34</sup>.

Even then, they did not deny that a great deal could be learnt from the organisational principles of their own large companies such as Baťa and Škoda<sup>35</sup> and their knowledge of the Soviet system pointed to a similar conclusion in some aspects. They referred to the need

<sup>30</sup> See Laušman's proposals, RP 11/1/46, p.2.

<sup>31</sup> Laušman, speech, PL 12/6/46, p.1.

<sup>32</sup> B. Glos: Hospodářské plánování v ČSR, Praha, 1946, p.67-68.

<sup>33</sup> F.J. Kolár: Dvouletka, p.14.

<sup>34</sup> "Our distinct approach in the present phase is right, but it does seem that development will lead in the direction of the Soviets", Frejka, SSSR dnes, p.45. This booklet was almost adulatory towards the working of the Soviet economy.

<sup>35</sup> F.J. Kolár: Zestátnění, p.30.

for individual responsibility<sup>36</sup> and for the consistent decentralisation of authority with all organisational units run on their own budgets and with each individual materially interested in the economic results of his team<sup>37</sup>. The general belief seemed to be that this was the Soviet system<sup>38</sup>, although occasionally it was made clear rather that there were attempts in the USSR to reach it<sup>39</sup>. The point remains that many aspects of the planning system in Czechoslovakia, such as the rejection of profit-sharing and the acceptance of loss-making industries, seemed to be in conflict with beliefs about the Soviet system.

Those who did not like planning as such did not need to see divergences from the Soviet model as temporary. For them the plan could be just "to accelerate the return to normal conditions"<sup>40</sup> and not an attempt to build the basis for a later more comprehensive plan. The National Socialists often argued that precise planning could never be possible when so much of production was dependent on foreign trade. This meant that only the broadest outlines of economic growth could be planned<sup>41</sup> and was borne out in the National Socialists' proposal for the later Five Year Plan in

<sup>36</sup> F.J. Kolár: Zestátnění, p.33.

<sup>37</sup> e.g. Československý průmysl 1948, Praha, 1949, p.83, or D. Koutník, Statistický obzor, XXVII, No.1, 25/3/47, p.19-24.

<sup>38</sup> e.g. Frejka, SSSR dnes, p.36.

<sup>39</sup> e.g. I. Kuhn, Nové slovo, 24/5/46, p.9.

<sup>40</sup> Klímek, in parliament, LD 22/9/46, p.1. For a similar view see SS 15/10/46, p.1.

<sup>41</sup> Život strany, 8/11/47, p.2.

which they effectively said no more than the desirability of economic growth<sup>42</sup>. The difficulties were also noted by some Communists<sup>43</sup>, but they tried to devise a solution still compatible with planning<sup>44</sup>.

So in its actual form the first Czechoslovak plan was not based on any pre-existing model. It could be for some a start to planning and for others a temporary expedient to help attain the pre-war economic level. It was not a full plan as many important questions were simply omitted. Investment was only planned in the broadest possible way. Foreign trade was not incorporated into the plan either and neither were long-term questions of Czechoslovakia's international orientation. There was no attempt to co-ordinate with other planned economies<sup>45</sup>.

It was often described as a "partial" plan because of these and other omissions and, above all, because of the way how the plan was formulated. There was not felt to be time, reliable information or adequate personnel to go through the whole complex process involved in plan formulation in the USSR. The so-called "counter plans" were not presented. Instead the centre, having set its aim, divided economic activity into individual tasks for enterprises. Perhaps one third of industry was given definite tasks while otherwise the main contact with the plan was through rigid allocations

<sup>42</sup>SS 10/10/47, p.1-2.

<sup>43</sup>e.g. Švermová, Rádkyně, 1/9/46, p.3.

<sup>44</sup>See below Section V.31.6.

<sup>45</sup>All this is discussed in the official booklet Základy československé dvouletky, Praha, 1946.

of raw materials, equipment and labour, and enterprises were simply asked to produce as much as they could<sup>46</sup>. This could still be seen by the KSC as the most practicable first step towards a full Five Year Plan<sup>47</sup>. It also, and this was perhaps the most important point, could provide an optimistic target towards which economic activity could be directed. Even if not a precise prediction of what would happen the plan could still hope to encourage "a new idealism" and "a great productive effort of the broad masses of town and country"<sup>48</sup>.

With their tactful approach, the KSC were able to ensure government approval for a draft plan. For a time the Communists were still the only ones fully in favour while the Social Democrats had not clarified their position. The National Socialists were also taking their time while the People's Party had definite objections<sup>49</sup>. Nevertheless, agreement could be reached and parliament unanimously accepted a law for the plan<sup>50</sup>: the timing was such that the Two Year Plan could be linked with the historic date of the 28th October. It set the target of raising industrial production above the 1937 level by 10% with a greater weight to heavy industry. Agriculture was to reach the pre-war level only with more emphasis on livestock.

<sup>46</sup>Snítil: "O dvouletce", p.684, and Základy, p.31.

<sup>47</sup>Snítil: "O dvouletce", p.688-689.

<sup>48</sup>Základy, p.25.

<sup>49</sup>Dnešek, 14/10/46.

<sup>50</sup>RP 26/10/46, p.1.

IV.25.4. The Social Democrats try to assert their independence, but the Two Year Plan keeps them politically close to the Communists.

The Social Democrats were naturally disappointed by the election results. They were then further disillusioned by the KSČ response to the election results as they had hoped to be treated as the Communists' special ally. They hoped that co-operation between the two Marxist parties, would be the basis for further progress<sup>51</sup>. They therefore hoped that the KSČ would not exercise their full right to nine ministries<sup>52</sup> and were bitterly disappointed when the KSČ treated them as just another defeated party<sup>53</sup>. Under these circumstances it was inevitable that the party's double defeat would lead to criticisms of the leadership.

Fierlinger insisted that the election campaign, which had generally been polite and principled, had been correct, and he rejected voices from the right wing of the party for moving away from unity with the Communists. He argued that it was extremely difficult to do well against the KSČ because they had so clearly stated their desire to defend democracy and national unity. He suggested that the electoral setback was only temporary and that an honest approach would ultimately bear fruit<sup>54</sup>. Soon there were claims of an influx of new members<sup>55</sup> and this helped to diffuse opposition.

<sup>51</sup> This was, at least, the attitude of the party's left wing; see R. Foustka: Sociální demokracie a KSČ, Praha, 1946, p.2.

<sup>52</sup> PL 4/6/46, p.1.

<sup>53</sup> Nedvěd: Cesta, p.54.

<sup>54</sup> PL 27/5/46, p.1.

<sup>55</sup> PL 15/9/46, p.1.

There still had to be some change. There was a widespread desire for a separate identity from the KSČ without showing basic reservations about the revolutionary changes. This, then, was a tactical point and did not amount to acceptance of the National Socialists' line that the principal danger came from the KSČ. It was suggested that there should be and should have been firmer criticisms of the Communists when they based their policy on the exploitation of positions won during the first revolutionary weeks. Instead, this issue was raised by the National Socialists who incorporated it into their clearly anti-Communist campaign<sup>56</sup>. It was still far from clear what this new approach could mean in practice but it was soon being claimed that there had been opportunities to show Social Democracy as a force independent from the KSČ<sup>57</sup>.

The incidents referred to involved election of National Committee chairmen. It was decided that National Committees would be reorganised on the basis of the general elections and the accepted pre-war practice was to give the post of chairman or mayor to the biggest party in the area. This meant the KSČ in all but a few areas so that they soon had 127 chairmen of District National Committees compared with 18 from the People's Party, seven Social Democrats, eight National Socialists and two undecided in Olomouc<sup>58</sup>. Not surprisingly, the three smaller parties could not accept this

<sup>56</sup> Kojecký, Cf1, 7/6/46, p.339.

<sup>57</sup> Cf1, 5/7/46, p.402.

<sup>58</sup> Lidová správa, 15/10/46.

everywhere. In Olomouc and in Plzeň the Social Democrats allied with the National Socialists. In Plzeň they successfully backed a National Socialist while the People's Party abstained: Laušman was proud of this primarily because it demonstrated independence from the KSČ<sup>59</sup>.

This, however, was as far as the Social Democrats could go. No alternative coherent right-wing line could be formed and direct criticisms of the leadership soon fizzled out<sup>60</sup>. It was noticeable that the party blew their own trumpet more and there was a shift in some theoretical formulations. Thus from previously presenting socialist unity as a central political question and seeing the National Front as "a clear, creative idea" transcending "mere liberal democracy"<sup>61</sup>, they began to insist that relations with the Communists were no different from relations with any other party<sup>62</sup> and that the National Front was no more than a coalition of parties<sup>63</sup>. This was perhaps no more than a recognition of the fact that the bloc of socialist parties no longer existed. Beyond that the Social Democrats were unable to create a full alternative to the KSČ and their assertions of independence often appear artificial or as only minor adjustments. This was particularly the case with

<sup>59</sup> PL 3/7/46, p.2.

<sup>60</sup> Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.75.

<sup>61</sup> Z. Fierlinger: Národní fronta - vychovatelka revoluce, Praha, 1945, p.4 and p.5.

<sup>62</sup> Laušman, speaking at a meeting of the Party's representatives on 14/9/46, PL 17/9/46, p.3.

<sup>63</sup> Cfl, 11/10/46, p.625.



their attitude to the Two Year Plan. They could not fail to be attracted by the KSČ proposal and only indicated a few reservations, such as that it had been prepared hurriedly<sup>64</sup>. Otherwise they could only work for its success and criticise those who were cynical about the idea of planning. They supplemented this with some theoretical independence, but that did not affect their attitude when practical problems arose. A clear example was J. Krejčí who maintained that planning had to take the distribution of income between individuals into account and this should also be included in an assessment of success rather than just looking at the increase in total income<sup>65</sup>. Theoretically, this point cannot be challenged, but it had no immediate practical political consequences.

Generally, the Two Year Plan appeared to be the crucial element preventing the Social Democrats from moving too far away from the Communists. In practice the two parties still appeared to be very close allies with only occasional disagreements until late 1947. This does not mean that some harsh words were not exchanged as the Social Democrats continued to search for a new identity.

IV.25.5. The National Socialists are unenthusiastic about the plan and prefer to emphasise their conception of political democracy. The People's Party has even less to say on the economy.

The National Socialists' attitude towards the plan took time

<sup>64</sup> PL 30/11/46, p.1.

<sup>65</sup> Nové hospodářství, II, No.7, July 1946, p.98, and J. Krejčí: Důchodové rozvrstvení, Praha, 1947. See also Mrázek: Jak zvýšit, p.9, and Maiwald, PL 18/3/47, p.1.

to clarify as they too had to reconcile themselves to the election results. They showed considerable confusion publishing cynical cartoons<sup>66</sup> alongside calls from their Economic Council, which were echoed by Zenkl, for every effort to be devoted to the plan<sup>67</sup>.

Despite their lasting ideological reservations about state intervention in the economy, they could not oppose the plan: perhaps, as was suggested at the time, they were frightened of isolating themselves from it when it could be a success<sup>68</sup>. Instead, they presented a string of six "moral" preconditions for their co-operation. These were, first an "unbiased" purge and speedy completion of the period of validity of the special decrees covering it: secondly, an end to "undemocratic" methods in the police and in the Ministry of Information: thirdly, the "democratic" representation of all parties within trade unions and economic institutions<sup>69</sup>: fourthly, the elimination of "one-sided" political influences in the leadership of economic affairs: fifthly, the reorganisation of the radio and of the film industry and, finally, the provision of more means for "public control and constructive criticism"<sup>70</sup>. They seemed to be trying to shift the centre of political discussions away from purely economic questions and to concentrate on their notion of

<sup>66</sup> e.g. Svobodný zítřek, 1/8/46, p.4.

<sup>67</sup> SS 20/7/46, p.1, and SS 24/7/46, p.1.

<sup>68</sup> Cfl, 14/2/47, p.65.

<sup>69</sup> Economic democracy was later defined as secret ballots within all organs to elect representatives on the basis of proportional representation; SS 28/10/47. p.1.

<sup>70</sup> SS 15/10/46, p.1.

democracy. They even made a definite demand for direct political representation in all leading economic bodies<sup>71</sup>, but Laušman flatly rejected their argument<sup>72</sup>.

So, while proclaiming general support for the plan, they remained far less interested in it than were the Communists<sup>73</sup>. Some National Socialists did believe that the start to economic planning was one of the most important events since liberation<sup>74</sup>, but generally they still emphasised their reservations about economic developments and continued<sup>to</sup> plug the dangers of "totalitarian monopolisation"<sup>75</sup>. They therefore retained reservations about steps towards the centralised organisation of nationalised industries, and opposed the simplification of the banking system into just two banks because "whoever dominates those two banks could dictatorially rule over our whole economy"<sup>76</sup>. They opposed the incorporation of confiscates into the nationalised industries<sup>77</sup>, although later

<sup>71</sup> SS 10/9/46, p.1.

<sup>72</sup> PL 12/9/46, p.1.

<sup>73</sup> Speeches at the meeting of the National Socialists' Economic Council on 6/6/47 evaded any mention of the Two Year Plan and instead Zenkl emphasised that the party's main achievement was to have "saved democracy" in political life; SS 7/6/47, p.1. Another indication of their attitude was the seemingly mechanical comparison between the space devoted to the plan in Rudé právo and Svobodné slovo in the single week 4/2/47 to 9/2/47. In the former there were 1214 lines, in the latter 81 lines; Fakta a cifry, II, No.3, 28/2/47, p.35.

<sup>74</sup> This was revealed in PL 25/12/46 when prominent personalities were invited to list the most important events. National Socialists were noticeably unwilling to mention economic questions.

<sup>75</sup> e.g. SS 7/6/47, p.1.

<sup>76</sup> Zenkl, speech, SS 28/5/47, p.2.

<sup>77</sup> SS 10/9/46, p.1.

qualifying this maintaining that they should only be incorporated if they were a necessary supplement to the nationalised industry in question<sup>78</sup>.

They definitely presented themselves as the protectors of private enterprise but this always appeared as a defensive position and never led to a full-scale attack on nationalised industries. Their emphasis was rather on maintaining the equal status within the plan between state, co-operative and private forms of ownership - as was implicitly accepted by the government programme - although it was never made clear what this could really mean in practice<sup>79</sup>. A rare and ill-fated attempt to go beyond this was an argument from the leading National Socialist businessman and economist Hejda that compensation for nationalised industries could be paid by allowing for private share-holdings<sup>80</sup>. This could conflict with the centralised organisation of nationalised industries which, in practice, did not compel all enterprises to be individually profitable. When elaborated with talk of allowing foreign capital a share<sup>81</sup>, there was such an outcry against his views that they had to be presented as the opinions of an individual and not of the whole party.

Further attacks on nationalised industries as such centred on an argument that they were less economically successful than

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<sup>78</sup> National Socialists' Presidium resolution, SS 8/12/46, p.1.

<sup>79</sup> SS 15/10/46, p.1.

<sup>80</sup> SS 9/11/46, p.1.

<sup>81</sup> SS 18/3/47, p.1-2.

the private sector. Zenkl maintained that production per employee was 30% higher in the private sector<sup>82</sup>. The question was taken up in specialist journals where it was agreed that Zenkl did not understand statistics and was sensationalising for political purposes. Using a variety of success indicators<sup>83</sup> it appeared that there were wide variations between sectors but that nationalised industries generally were overcoming the effects of war damage and were probably overtaking the private sector. The comparison, however, looked very artificial and statistical data did not allow for an isolation of the private sector in industry alone<sup>84</sup>.

The People's Party were even less able to present a clear position on the plan. They suffered from sharp internal disputes after their electoral disappointment and it seemed possible that an emergency congress might be called to defeat Šrámek's leadership. This danger was pre-empted and the National Front policy definitely reaffirmed after the expulsion of Koželuhová<sup>85</sup>. They were, however, reserved in their support for the idea of the plan which was at first dismissed as an election gimmick and then given grudging praise<sup>86</sup>. Soon they were sceptical again, expressing doubts about

<sup>82</sup>SS 12/8/47, p.2. For a similar argument, used as a basis for an attack on the Communists and Social Democrats, see Hejda, SS 30/11/46, p.1.

<sup>83</sup>Profit alone was obviously inadequate as it depended on how prices had been set.

<sup>84</sup>See E. Šlemar, Statistický zpravodaj, X, No.4, April 1947, p.142-145; K. Pány, Hospodář, 28/8/47, p.3; Pány, Průmyslový věstník, XXXIV, No.34, 25/8/47, p.633-635; Koutník, Hospodář, 11/9/47, p.8. All of these refuted Zenkl's argument.

<sup>85</sup>Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.76.

<sup>86</sup>LD 29/5/46, p.4.

the feasibility of some of its basic targets<sup>87</sup>. They generally preferred to avoid comment on economic questions which were not directly related to agriculture.

#### IV.25.6. Summary and discussion.

The elections could have marked the end to effective co-operation between parties within the National Front. Relations between parties had noticeably worsened during the election campaign and the elections anyway seemed to mark the definitive end to the immediate post-war consolidation of the Czechoslovak state during which unity had seemed so essential.

Nevertheless, the Czech parties soon created again effectively the same coalition government. Communist dominance was confirmed as Gottwald became its Prime Minister. At the same time, the KSČ accepted that they could rule neither alone nor in exclusive partnership with the Social Democrats: they therefore had to establish working relations with all parties.

They again presented a detailed programme for the new government which incorporated the idea of a short-term economic plan. This could be understood either as a first step towards the Soviet model of planning, or as a temporary emergency measure to overcome the effects of the war. This ambiguity was expressed in its structure as only some nationalised industries were rigidly incorporated into the plan by means of precise directives. The private sector was only vaguely incorporated.

<sup>87</sup> e.g. Obzory, 13/7/46, p.433-434.

The KSC also adopted a very tactful approach in establishing a new supreme economic organ on the basis of proportional representation for the parties. This was a clear case of them exercising a leading role in partnership with the other parties. Far from being a restriction, this gave the KSC the opportunity to concentrate their huge organisational structure onto the work of economic construction. This was in complete contrast to aspects of KSC policy discussed in some later chapters where co-operation and partnership were actively shunned.

The attractiveness of the idea of the plan made it possible to win at least verbal support from the other parties, although they continued to express doubts, scepticism, suspicions and disagreements on many aspects of KSC policy. The plan could then become the central point for all issues in social and economic policy.

**CHAPTER 26: THE CAUTIOUS DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMUNISTS'  
CONCEPTION OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK ROAD TO SOCIALISM.**

**IV.26.1. Stalin's acceptance that the dictatorship of the  
proletariat may not always be necessary creates  
scope for the further elaboration of KSC policy.**

Pressures for a clarification of the theoretical basis of KSC policy had already been apparent prior to the 1946 elections<sup>1</sup>. Although the Communists' success presumably confirmed the great prestige enjoyed within the party by the Gottwald leadership, the need for clarification was not alleviated: in fact, electoral victory seemed to have given added urgency to these problems by posing the question of how that electoral strength was to be used. One possibility would have been to try to force the other parties to abandon, as quickly as possible, their share of power. This would have corresponded to the thinking of those KSC members who were reluctant to accept the compromises inherent in the National Front and who were therefore likely to advocate a dictatorship of the proletariat as it had been understood in the Comintern. Moreover, co-operation between parties had definitely been damaged by the election campaign which had divided parties from each other often quite sharply<sup>2</sup>.

Gottwald, however, had advocated restoring good relations between parties as the basis for the Two Year Plan. This required

<sup>1</sup> See above Chapter 21.

<sup>2</sup> c.f. Dnešek, 4/7/46, p.227. There were references to co-operation in National Committees ceasing completely; J. Dubský, RP 27/6/46, p.1.



a conscious effort from the whole KSČ and that depended on genuine conviction from the membership. Clarification of the theoretical basis for KSČ policy and its relationship to socialism was therefore all the more pressing.

Although<sup>a</sup> formally independent party, the KSČ was still unable to make major theoretical innovations without approval, or even an initial suggestion, from Stalin. It was therefore crucially important for the KSČ when, in a discussion with British Labour Party leaders, Stalin suggested that there were two roads to socialism - the Russian and the British. The former was apparently shorter but involved bloodshed and should not be regarded as the only possibility. These ideas were repeated to Gottwald when he visited Moscow after his appointment as Prime Minister and their clarification and application to the Czechoslovak situation was the special task for a Central Committee meeting in September 1946.

IV.26.2. Gottwald is too cautious to go beyond Stalin's new ideas. Communists still cannot tackle the concrete problems of democracy and of relations between political parties.

Gottwald's argument seemed to be less theoretically complete than that presented by Havlíček.<sup>3</sup> <sup>Gottwald</sup> He pointed to the possibility, but only the possibility, of another "road to socialism" apart from that via "the dictatorship of the proletariat and soviets"<sup>4</sup>. He pointed out that the road would be "longer, more complicated

<sup>3</sup> See above Vol.II, p.206.

<sup>4</sup> RP 26/9/46, p.1.

and sometimes more roundabout too. But the basic changes in the economic and social structure of the new Czechoslovakia give us faith and self-confidence that we will get there"<sup>5</sup>. He went beyond Stalin's formulation when he suggested that Czechoslovakia had already traversed "a little bit" of the road<sup>6</sup>, later expanding it to "a pretty large bit"<sup>7</sup>, but he did not fully elaborate on what possibilities this presented for the future.

He did, however, firmly link the notion of a Czechoslovak road to socialism with the Two Year Plan which, he argued, could serve as a demonstration of the superiority of planning, and hence of socialism, in practice. He hoped that it could succeed in raising production and then in translating that into a better life for the people<sup>8</sup>. It would then serve both as a start to planning, providing valuable basic experience for fully socialist planning, and as part of a political contest between different conceptions of economic activity. Calling on the whole party to work for its success, Gottwald maintained that after its fulfillment "we will be able to say that we are over the hill and that it will go more quickly to socialism"<sup>9</sup>.

As the Czechoslovak road to socialism was so closely linked to economic policy, it is not surprising that its social and economic

<sup>5</sup> RP 27/9/46, p.1.

<sup>6</sup> RP 26/9/46, p.1.

<sup>7</sup> RP 5/10/46, p.1.

<sup>8</sup> RP 27/9/46, p.1.

<sup>9</sup> RP 5/10/46, p.1.

implications were given further elaboration. That is discussed below in Section IV.26.5. There was, however, a continuing weakness in that the relationship between democracy, in the sense of the methods of exercising political power, and the road to socialism was hardly elaborated at all.

Bareš, responding directly to Peroutka, did maintain that the Communists' loyalty to democracy was "not accidental, nor tactical, nor temporary. . ."<sup>10</sup>. He elaborated on this to indicate how he understood the relationship between post-war and pre-Munich democracy: "we have taken everything positive from Masaryk's democracy, we have taken all the democratic forms and given them a far more real content . . . Our task is naturally not to show that Soviet democracy with its forms and methods is suitable for us. State organisations grew out of the problems and traditions of individual nations. It has been clearly stated that we have set out on our own different road to socialism which grew out of our conditions, out of our national and democratic revolution and out of the whole new historical situation"<sup>11</sup>.

Gottwald had not mentioned the possibility of developing from the basis of pre-Munich democracy and nobody seemed prepared to follow up Bareš's point towards the possible conclusion that Czechoslovakia could establish an actual model of socialism retaining legal competing parties. In fact, Gottwald did not even mention "national traditions", although there were references to them from

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<sup>10</sup> Bareš: Rozhovor, p.39.

<sup>11</sup> Bareš: Rozhovor, p.37-38.

other Communists<sup>12</sup> who could thereby make the "specific road" appear more firmly based. Generally, references to questions of democracy were still far more cautious than, for example, among French Communists who, while still refusing to predict exactly how the future would develop, were talking of continual attempts to democratise the state which ultimately could not be assimilated, so that a point would be reached at which the state would change in its fundamental nature<sup>13</sup>.

Perhaps the KSČ, with its hold on certain key organs of power, did not need to think in such terms<sup>14</sup>. There were also discouragements to the elaboration of the idea of the Czechoslovak road to socialism from the responses of other parties. They were generally unimpressed by references to by-passing the dictatorship of the proletariat<sup>15</sup>, particularly as Gottwald himself indicated considerable distrust towards all his coalition partners. Thus, some Social Democrats could welcome Stalin's original public statement in the hope that it could lead to better co-operation between Communists and Social Democrats<sup>16</sup>. Such hopes seemed to be dashed when Gottwald argued: "If the Communists had a majority, things would go better and faster"<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> e.g. Švermová, Funkcionář, 7/10/46, p.3-4.

<sup>13</sup> P. Hervé, Nové slovo, 1/3/47, p.129.

<sup>14</sup> See below Section IV.29.2.

<sup>15</sup> e.g. Klátil tried to link them up with screening within the KSČ and made references to a crisis "so deep that its bottom cannot even be seen", SS 22/12/46, p.1.

<sup>16</sup> Cf1, 6/9/46, p.550.

<sup>17</sup> RP 27/9/46, p.1 ; Cf1, 11/10/46, p.625.

The KSČ leadership had real difficulty in formulating an approach towards the National Socialists. There was evidently plenty of bad feeling between the two parties. Klátil, for example, lectured the KSČ on the need to educate its members to reject "cheap negation" and to adopt "a positive stand to the state and to government work": he really seemed to be living ten years in the past as he went on to accuse the KSČ of "Trotskyism"<sup>18</sup>. Then, although the Two Year Plan had eventually been accepted by all parties, Gottwald remained unsure of how firmly the National Socialists had committed themselves. He felt that they were playing an irresponsible double game involving demagogic or impossible demands, such as insistence on speedy expulsion of Germans alongside opposition to the measures that would be necessary for mobilising labour within Czechoslovakia<sup>19</sup>. At other times he seemed to believe that they were going to work conscientiously for the plan<sup>20</sup>, and KSČ leaders evidently continued to hope for constructive co-operation when they distinguished clearly between "our friends from the other parties of the National Front" and "outright enemies from the former reactionary parties"<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> SS 25/8/46, p.1.

<sup>19</sup> Speaking in parliament on 12/9/46, Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.213.

<sup>20</sup> Práce, 27/10/46, reproduced in Spisy, XIII, p.244.

<sup>21</sup> Horn, Živnostenské noviny, 6/10/46, p.1.

IV.26.3. Ambiguities in the Communist Party's attitude towards its coalition partners are somewhat clarified by Gottwald's proposal to aim for an absolute majority in the next elections.

The underlying tensions between parties need not of themselves have led to further modifications of the KSČ line. Gottwald had been under no illusions that continuing "with the road of the National Front" would require acceptance of the possibility of "frictions and difficulties" along the road<sup>22</sup>. The point, however, was that continued inter-party tension encouraged scepticism within the ranks of the KSČ about the possibilities for continued co-operation.

The leadership opened an internal discussion on the idea of a Czechoslovak road to socialism with the objective of winning genuine conviction for Gottwald's line and thereby ensuring that the party could behave as a single, united, constructive force within society. Above all, they hoped to encourage real commitment to the Two Year Plan<sup>23</sup>. Inevitably, such a discussion gave the ordinary members a chance to express their doubts and uncertainties and this was probably the principal pressure on the leadership for a further clarification of policy.

There were evidently some strong doubts which could be linked with ideas derived from the Comintern. There were also those much vaguer and more widespread doubts that amounted to calls

<sup>22</sup>RP 26/9/46, p.1.

<sup>23</sup>Resolution of the Central Committee meeting of September 1946, Funkcionář, 7/11/46, p.10.

for clarification of the line<sup>24</sup>. From lower levels in the party there were all sorts of degrees of distrust towards other parties and desires to make clear the separate identity of the KSČ. The leadership could not dismiss these worries as, in Gottwald's words: "almost at every meeting of our party's Presidium, we raise again the questions of whether the road we have taken is leading us to our aim and of whether we have not deviated from the correct road . . ."<sup>25</sup>. Given such doubts, Gottwald was likely to take seriously doubts expressed more widely within the party and he made no secret of the need for a further clarification of party policy. This was the task he set himself at the Central Committee meeting in January 1947.

There was a widespread feeling within the KSČ that relations between parties were worsening. There was said to be a definite right wing developing within Social Democracy expressing itself in approval for the increasingly anti-Communist line of the French Socialist Party<sup>26</sup>. There was concern as the National Socialists continued attacks on the KSČ and, more concretely, presented different policies towards the purge, nationalisations, the Soviet Union and the other Slavonic states<sup>27</sup>. This could not be ignored but it often seemed that it was being exaggerated as, when relations

<sup>24</sup> J. Kozák: "K objasnění postupu ÚV KSČ v boji za získání většiny národa v období před únorem 1948", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, No.2, 1958, p.10-11.

<sup>25</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.282.

<sup>26</sup> RP 15/11/46, p.2.

<sup>27</sup> F. Lužický, Tvorba, 11/12/46, p.798.

at the local level were investigated, there was no real tendency for a coherent bloc to emerge against the KSČ. Rather, local mistakes were being picked on and inflated for party political ends thereby exploiting and also helping to create discontent<sup>28</sup>.

The KSČ tried to make a full assessment of the situation which they found was very varied. Out of 81 Districts in the Czech lands they found good co-operation in 36 and an anti-Communist bloc in 37<sup>29</sup>. It is hard to believe that there could be nothing between these two extremes.

During the course of discussion two attitudes revealed themselves within the KSČ. Gottwald maintained that, on the whole, things were going well. He pointed to difficulties that stemmed from political differences within the coalition, but he did not suggest that all co-operation was impossible or blame "reaction" for all the difficulties. Neither did he suggest that a bloc had been created against the KSČ and he still thought that problems could be overcome by mobilising "the broad public"<sup>30</sup>. "Reaction", he claimed, was fighting a rearguard action and should not be overestimated, even though it still stood some chance of reversing the post-war changes<sup>31</sup>. Nevertheless, he did seem to have hardened his position by stating that the main obstacles to speedier

<sup>28</sup> Lidová správa, 1/10/46, p.1 and p.2.

<sup>29</sup> Nedvěd: Cesta, p.53, and Kozák: "K objasnění", p.11-12.

<sup>30</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.301.

<sup>31</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.299. He evidently felt that some contributors to the discussion were beginning to panic and could foresee only a repeat of the events of 1920. Gottwald effectively ruled out that possibility.



consolidation were subjective, i.e. the balance of forces within the National Front<sup>32</sup>.

The alternative position was considerably sharper. Ďuriš spoke of deliberate sabotage by former Agrarians, especially Feierabend, who he felt were trying to create disquiet in the villages and slow down economic development<sup>33</sup>. He saw "reaction" trying consciously to prevent consolidation as the main problem and he felt it was reflected in opposition from the other parties to economic reconstruction<sup>34</sup>. This sort of approach could be seen in statements that "reaction" was opposing sensible and necessary economic measures because the worse the economic situation, the better their potential chances<sup>35</sup>. It was even expected that the remnants of the capitalists would resist the Two Year Plan<sup>36</sup>.

The differences between these two approaches did not lead to open conflict at the time. Instead, Gottwald clarified his conception of the Czechoslovak road to socialism in such a way as to allow for a sharpening of the fight against other parties, while also not rejecting further co-operation with them. He proclaimed the aim of winning an absolute majority in the next parliamentary

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<sup>32</sup>Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.286 and p.287.

<sup>33</sup>Speech, RP 4/12/46, p.1.

<sup>34</sup>Speaking at the Central Committee meeting of January 1947, V. Adámk: Boj, p.86.

<sup>35</sup>e.g. V. Nový, RP 26/1/47, p.1.

<sup>36</sup>G. Kliment, speech, funkcionář, 7/2/47, p.21. There were occasional isolated reports of deliberate acts of sabotage including an attempt to cause a damaging explosion at the Poldina iron works; RP 20/5/47, p.1.

elections. This then stood alongside the Two Year Plan as the centre of the party's strategy. It was made clear that this was not the same as the infamous 50% that the "Austro-Marxists" had longed for but never achieved. They, so Gottwald argued, had set back and waited for it while the KSČ saw the majority as attainable only by "an active struggle against reaction . . ."<sup>37</sup>. A definite target of 51% could well have been seen as a help in revitalising the party organisations which had been comparatively inactive after the elections. It could also have been expected to encourage active involvement in work for the Two Year Plan which was being linked with this political fight for a majority in the next elections.

IV.26.4. The Communists' stated aim of winning an electoral majority leads to a worsening of relations between parties.

Although Gottwald claimed that the fight was to be with "reaction" and that co-operation with other parties was to continue, the stated aim inevitably meant that all other parties were regarded as untrustworthy. In fact, although the version of Gottwald's speech as subsequently published was more moderate in tone, at the time it was blandly stated that difficulties were due to "reactionary capitalist elements" who were "dangerously influencing" the policies of the other parties<sup>38</sup>.

If these parties had been divided between those following

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<sup>37</sup>Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.292.

<sup>38</sup>Funkcionář, 7/2/47 (special issue), p.4.

reaction and those close to the KSČ, then active campaigning by the Communists around concrete objectives to be achieved within the National Front might have led to divisions within those parties. Instead, that active campaigning was given an aim that conflicted directly with the interests of the other parties and in practice served to unite each one of them. It was, of course, claimed that the KSČ was aiming to involve elements from the other parties in the fight against "reaction". Nevertheless, the new policy was adopted in response to the belief within the KSČ that co-operation between parties was becoming extremely difficult. It could, in practice, only further encourage such attitudes and Slánský was soon revealing the attitudes within the KSČ when he warned against the danger of condemning the two right-wing parties as a whole by "over-generalising the reactionary influences". Instead, he argued that every effort should be made to co-operate with "democratic oppositions" that were opposing "reactionaries" in their leaderships<sup>39</sup>. This indicated fairly general condemnation of the two parties' leaderships and he even seemed to take the same view towards the Social Democrats!

Such an attitude could only encourage further the tensions between parties. It was very noticeable over the following months that even Fierlinger was definitely unhappy at aspects of Communist policy related to the aim of winning 51%. For the National Socialists it could provide a stronger basis for anti-Communist propaganda which was one effective unifier of the diverse social and

<sup>39</sup> Funkcionář, 7/5/47, special issue, p.9.

political positions within their ranks. They firmly denied that "reaction" could have any influence over their policies<sup>40</sup>, and concentrated on steadily more unpleasant attacks on the KSC which they soon started to equate with fascism or Nazism<sup>41</sup>. Their favourite argument was to equate an absolute majority with "totalitarianism". This was easily answered by suggesting that the US or Britain could far more justifiably be condemned as totalitarian for their electoral systems<sup>42</sup>. It was also pointed out that the KSC had shown no desire to establish a one-party government in 1945 and had even made major concessions in allowing parity<sup>43</sup>.

The most authoritative answer came from Gottwald when he reiterated the aim of winning an absolute majority and added an explanation of the aim: "We want to win a majority of the nation not so as to exclude the others but so that our word, which represents the correct policy, should have greater weight. We want to win a majority of the nation not to refuse co-operation with the other parties but to be able to better enforce the correct policy"<sup>44</sup>.

This formulation suggested that the KSC was not intending to eliminate all opposition so that the charge of totalitarianism

<sup>40</sup> e.g. SS 26/1/47, p.1.

<sup>41</sup> e.g. Herben, SS 22/6/47, p.1.

<sup>42</sup> Funkcionář, 11/6/47, p.21.

<sup>43</sup> Lidová správa, 15/2/47, p.1-2.

<sup>44</sup> Speaking at the Central Committee meeting, 5/6/47, Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.66.

appeared to be an exaggeration. Nevertheless, it could be emphasised with added <sup>vigour</sup> when, in a later and more tense political atmosphere, Gottwald implied that political life would ultimately be firmly, if not totally, dominated by one party. In answer to questions from journalists from the New York Herald Tribune he said: "the development of affairs in our country will lead to the creation of one party of the working people. Development itself will also determine the concrete form of this process which at the moment is difficult to foresee"<sup>45</sup>. This ~~point was so touchy with the~~ <sup>prevailing argument so angered Communist leaders</sup> National Socialists that ~~it was~~ <sup>on it</sup> hardly ever repeated <sup>it</sup> and never elaborated <sup>on it</sup> further. Nevertheless, winning an absolute majority would undoubtedly make much easier a merger of socialist parties on terms laid down entirely by the KSC.

The National Socialists' suspicions could be further encouraged as Gottwald did seem to be moving towards a more narrowly partisan approach with the claim that only the Communists could present "correct" policies. Alongside exaggerated criticisms were expression of serious concern that, if consistently applied, the new KSC policy would make genuine and lasting co-operation impossible. Zenkl argued as follows: "Imagine where we would end up if everybody wanted to assert that they alone advocated the correct and unique idea and that all who did not go along with them were breaking unity! Imagine what an enormous quantity of those unities we would then have! So beware of words! Unity is

<sup>45</sup> RP 28/9/47, p.1. He also made it clear during that interview that another revolution would not be necessary.

only that which unites everyone not that which unites only a part!"<sup>46</sup>. Peroutka made a similar point: "it cannot be . . . a common aim of the National Front and will therefore inevitably bring division and unrest into our life"<sup>47</sup>. Even Beneš made a practically unique intervention into disputes between parties with a condemnation of the aim of 51% in a pre-recorded radio broadcast. Apparently that part of his speech was not broadcast<sup>48</sup>.

IV.26.5. The Communists evolve general policies towards non-proletarian social groups as part of their conception of the Czechoslovak road to socialism.

Attitudes towards different social groups were gradually clarified and revealed during the operation of the Two Year Plan and during various disputes with other parties. This could not be based on Soviet experience where the structure of society had been so very different and neither could it be based on pre-war KSČ experience as at that time practically no serious thought was given to the problems of social groups outside the working class. Any ideas that had been developed were of little relevance to the post-war situation.

In 1947 the aims of involving as much of the population as possible in the plan and of winning a majority in the next elections were placed alongside each other as reasons for extending organisational work into broader sections of the population<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Speaking at a National Socialist May day rally, SS 3/5/47, p.2.

<sup>47</sup> Svobodné noviny, 12/10/47, p.1.

<sup>48</sup> SS 9/5/47, p.2.

<sup>49</sup> e.g. Funkcionář, 21/2/47, p.7.

The KSC saw the need to win their voluntary support and began to evolve ideas that could have been developing towards a model of socialism quite distinct from that in the USSR.

Apart from those aspects of social and economic policy that were intended to benefit all working people, there was specific consideration for the differing interests. For peasants there were a number of proposals that could raise their living standards and contribute to the development of their economy. Peasants would even be given more security on their land than had been possible under capitalism<sup>50</sup> and it was clearly stated that kolkhozes would not be organised because high productivity could be reached on middle-sized holdings. Agriculture was not to develop: "by the Soviet road, but by a new road corresponding to the conditions in our countryside which very significantly differ from Soviet conditions. New, individual forms will be created in complete harmony with the overwhelming majority of our peasantry . . ."<sup>51</sup> There were plenty of vague reaffirmations that collectivisation was not intended<sup>52</sup> but they were never backed up with a renunciation of the view that large-scale agriculture is more efficient or with a long-term programme clarifying how Czechoslovak conditions were such as to make Soviet experience irrelevant<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> Nepomucký, Sněm, esp. p.144-145.

<sup>51</sup> F. Pexa, Tvorba, 29/1/47, p.95.

<sup>52</sup> e.g. J. Ďuriš: Scelením půdy a mechanisací výroby k zvelebení československého zemědělství, Praha, 1946, p.21.

<sup>53</sup> Soviet collective farms were generally not mentioned, but there were occasional claims that they had proved very successful, e.g. J. Koťátko: 30 let sovětského zemědělství, Praha, 1947.

In practice KSC agricultural policy was far more complicated and is discussed in a separate section. Things were somewhat simpler with the urban petty bourgeoisie. The KSC was slower to start formulating policies towards them than were the Social Democrats<sup>54</sup>, but did begin to present ideas before the 1946 elections. Communist policy was never as generous to the smallest urban businesses as to the poorer peasants and resisted pressures for an analogous triple price system *which in practical terms would anyway have been administratively very difficult.* There was also a firm distinction made between producers and traders as it was believed that there were far too many shops to allow for a solid existence for them all<sup>55</sup>. Nevertheless, it was maintained that socialism was advantageous for small traders because ultimately ". socialism is the only secure guarantee for them too . ." <sup>56</sup>.

The KSC did want restrictions on the creation of new private businesses, particularly because of the general labour shortage<sup>57</sup>, and this brought them into conflict with all the other parties<sup>58</sup>. The Two Year Plan, as seen by the KSC, set duties for small businesses, but also promised benefits through the proposed insurance scheme and in a tax reform that would be advantageous

<sup>54</sup> Gottwald himself acknowledged this at the Central Committee meeting of 18/12/45; Gottwald: Spisy, XII, p.223.

<sup>55</sup> Horn, Sněm, p.176.

<sup>56</sup> Horn, Sněm, p.180.

<sup>57</sup> Zmrhal, RP 13/5/47, p.1.

<sup>58</sup> RP 16/3/47.



to the majority of smaller businesses, particularly productive ones<sup>59</sup>. Also no doubt was left that all their property was "inviolable"<sup>60</sup> and it was always argued that they had gained from the nationalisation of industries as otherwise big capital would swallow them all up<sup>61</sup>.

The complicated political questions concerning civil servants are discussed in Section IV.28.1. At a more general level it was made clear that there was to be a definite distinction from Soviet experience in the position of the technical intelligentsia. Slánský explicitly pointed to Czechoslovakia's great advantage over Russia in 1917 as the technical intelligentsia welcomed the nationalisation of industry and was actively helping to build a new economic life<sup>62</sup>. This point was emphasised on many occasions.

#### IV.26.6. Communist theoreticians try to keep pace with the evolution of the party's practice.

All these developments were very much part of practical policy. Rather than starting from a firm theoretical basis KSC leaders tended to refer more vaguely to a road following no particular example and confronting problems on the way<sup>63</sup>. Theoreticians were silent for a while but then articles began to

<sup>59</sup> V. Kaigl, RP 18/9/46, and Deyl: "Naše", p.511.

<sup>60</sup> Slánský, speaking at a congress of KSC small businessmen, RP 18/3/47, p.1.

<sup>61</sup> Živnostenské noviny, 16/11/47, p.1.

<sup>62</sup> Speaking at the second KSC conference of economists, Funkcionář, 23/11/46, p.4.

<sup>63</sup> Zápotocký: Nová, p.384.

appear which effectively supported that sort of view. They were not directly concerned with the question of what kind of socialism should be aimed for, i.e. whether the Soviet Union was to be the model, but there definitely could be hints that it need not be. No less an authority than E. Varga referred to the People's Democracies as representing a completely new type of state<sup>63</sup>.

This view that "a specific type of state" had been created which was distinct both from bourgeois democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat was sometimes associated with the attempt to equate Czechoslovakia's development with Lenin's ideas in the 1905 and 1917 revolutions<sup>64</sup>. More generally, the novelty of the state was given prominence so that, even if it was sharply differentiated from a socialist state, nothing could be deduced about what had to be done to attain socialism. This can be seen from a possibly unique article that tried to compare Czechoslovakia with an earlier period in the Soviet Union's development. It firmly rejected a description of the nationalised sector as socialist because of the continuing capitalist profits in part of the economy and because of the possibility that the working people might not have a lasting influence on parliament, government and the state apparatus. Nevertheless, any analogy with "state capitalism" in the USSR or with NEP was rejected because Czechoslovakia was felt to be far further advanced towards socialism<sup>65</sup>.

<sup>63</sup> Nové slovo, 5/7/47, p.444, and p.473.

<sup>64</sup> e.g. G. Bareš: Naše cesta k socialismu, Praha, 1948, p.28 and p.13.

<sup>65</sup> Pexa, Tvorba, 15/1/47, p.52.

This greater willingness to talk about socialism was reflected in an increasingly clear identification of "reaction" with dispossessed capitalist interests, expropriated land-owners and those who had retained some wealth<sup>66</sup>. Theoretical socio-economic analyses of society could also point to the conclusion that, as it was a society on the road to socialism, the remaining capitalist sector was "not consistently peoples democratic"<sup>67</sup>. It must again be emphasised that this did not determine practical policies towards the capitalist sector which were derived from more pragmatic considerations.

There was also a start made from the other end; i.e. to make generalisations from concrete policies and thereby show their relationship to the road to socialism. This was attempted by Frejka who tried to expand on Gottwald's statements relating the Two Year Plan to the road to socialism. Without commenting on purely abstract questions like the nature of People's Democracy he argued that completing the Two Year Plan and winning a majority of the nation were complementary tasks, each one helping the other, which would "open the gates to socialism". Again, socialism was not defined but it was said to require a great majority "for true progress and socialism": this did not necessarily mean only the KSC<sup>68</sup>.

<sup>66</sup> e.g. F.J. Kolár: Ke Kapitalismu není návratu, Praha, 1947.

<sup>67</sup> F. Oliva, Nová mysl, 1947, No.2, reproduced in F. Oliva: Ekonomické studie, Praha, 1967, p.44.

<sup>68</sup> Frejka, Nová mysl, 1947, No.2, p.42 and p.43.

#### IV.26.7. Summary and discussion.

With the formation of the Gottwald government and the agreement between the parties on its programme, the Communist Party seemed to be still more firmly established as the leading force in Czech society. Although that might be expected to encourage complacency by suggesting that the party's policy was adequate, it in fact served also to highlight the contradiction between the party's programmatic conceptions and actual practice. Pressures for a programmatic clarification were therefore strengthened by the party's electoral victory.

This coincided with Stalin's pronouncement that <sup>the</sup>dictatorship of the proletariat was not a universally necessary step on the road to socialism. Gottwald developed from that a vague conception of a Czechoslovak road to socialism which could justify the party's practice in emphasising the Two Year Plan. There were, however, continuing ambiguities and even contradictory aspects in the party's policy.

On social and economic issues the KSČ seemed to accept that a significant contribution could be made by private enterprise and by specialists throughout the economy. This was a continuation of the social conception of national unity and, as that implied that sharp social conflicts could be avoided, was a good basis for a peaceful and harmonious development of society.

Nevertheless, this was generally restricted within the narrow time horizon of the Two Year Plan. The model of socialism to be developed after that was not discussed. Moreover, the place of the road to socialism within Czechoslovak history, i.e. in relation

to the pre-Munich republic, was not clarified and the roles of, and relationships between parties were similarly left vague. There was, then, no systematic attempt to clarify or develop the Communist Party's conception of democracy.

Although generally claimed to be complementary, there seem in practice to have been two contradictory aspects to KSČ policy. One was the concentration on the Two Year Plan which was associated with public campaigning methods, attempts to mobilise supporters and real efforts to win good co-operation from the other parties. The other aspect was a continuing rivalry with, or distrust towards, other parties. This found expression in policies on agriculture and the police force, discussed in Chapters 28 and 29, and in the aim, formulated by Gottwald in January 1947, of winning an absolute majority in the next general elections.

There was nothing inherently undemocratic in this aim, but its enunciation inevitably made co-operation between parties more difficult. It stemmed from a number of causes, including the natural rivalry between parties, the demand for a more militant line from within the party, and even from Gottwald's own doubts about the correctness of the party's general line after liberation. This has led Belda to argue that the conception of the Czechoslovak road to socialism was new only in the means whereby the long-standing aim of a monopoly of power was to be achieved<sup>69</sup>.

This probably overstates the case. The aim of winning a majority in the next elections was not at that time seen as an

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<sup>69</sup> See above Section 1.5.

absolute necessity. Moreover, the fact of the KSČ's role in society meant that their practice was becoming very broad and flexible. It was much more than just a strategy for winning power. So, although no new aim had been formulated, there were two clear developments that could create scope for the gradual evolution of new aims provided Czechoslovakia's internal political life was not disrupted by sharp conflicts. These were the clear renunciation of the notion that there could be no progress towards socialism without taking full and exclusive power, and the recognition that the road to socialism, at least from then on, could be slow and gradual: it could be a process of creating new institutions and relationships rather than being a direct fight for power.

## CHAPTER 27: THE TWO YEAR PLAN AND THE WORKING CLASS.

### IV.27.1. Industrial workers are the social group most involved in the plan.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the social implications of KSC and government economic policies. Two questions are interwoven here. The first is the emerging model of economic management and the position of the KSC within that. The second concerns the economic and social conflicts involving the working class that could be discerned during 1947 and which could contribute to the sharpening political struggle culminating in the events of February 1948.

Although the plan was intended to provide a perspective for the advancement of all economic sectors in co-operation with each other, it was in large-scale industry that the plan's operation was to be directed in the most detail. So industrial workers, often firm supporters or even members of the KSC, were given an important role within the plan. Trade union leaders made no attempt to hide the fact that workers would be asked to make sacrifices and that it would not be easy to convince them that they should forgo their own possible sectional advancement in favour of the state's economic and social policies<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, ÚRO accepted the challenge and emphasised the immense importance of the plan during late 1946<sup>2</sup>. To encourage workers generally to

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. L. Cígler, Práce, 15/1/47, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Růžicka: ROH, p.120-121.

regard the plan as being in their own best interests, they presented a list of 27 demands for the whole working class as part of their resolution supporting the idea of the plan.

First on the list was a social insurance scheme which would give all employees the security enjoyed by civil servants: miners were to be specially privileged by reaching that level at once. Further demands included a 48 hour and six day working week, a "just" wages system with more piece rates, the incorporation of confiscates into nationalised industries and price reductions allowing for a rise in real wages. There was also an expression of opposition to excessive pay for managers in nationalised industries<sup>3</sup>. This was not identical to the KSČ economic programme and suggests that Communist trade unionists saw the need to accept some additional demands so as to ensure the loyalty of trade unionists.

In Section IV.28.1 the question of civil servants and white collar workers in relation to the plan is discussed in detail. The KSČ were particularly keen to present co-operation between the working class and intelligentsia as the key to success in the plan<sup>4</sup> and were concerned to recruit as members the best qualified manpower alongside ordinary workers<sup>5</sup>. It was particularly welcomed that the union of professional engineers, with 13,000 members, promised active help in the economy<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>ÚRD, 26/9/46, p.1.

<sup>4</sup>See the report of the September 1946 KSČ Central Committee meeting, Funkcionář, 21/12/46, p.19.

<sup>5</sup>Funkcionář, 21/1/47, p.1-3.

<sup>6</sup>RP 16/7/46, p.2.



Further from the centre of planning, peasants and small businessmen even started by distrusting the plan. They could not be won to help actively in its preparation<sup>7</sup>. Targets for agriculture were highly ambitious, indicating a 12½% annual increase in production. This was based on the exceptional progress from 1945 to 1946<sup>8</sup>, but ultimately the plan made no difference to actual output and was little direct help to agriculture. Urban artisan producers, through their representative bodies, started with suspicions that the plan would restrict their freedom, but then found themselves involuntarily involved within it through the administered raw material allocation system. They responded with urgent requests for better treatment<sup>9</sup>.

For a favourable, or even tolerant attitude from the private sector towards the plan, there had to be assurances that their property was safe. The government programme therefore made it clear that nationalisations were regarded as completed: this still allowed for ambiguity over the fate of confiscates, and there was scope for distrust and conflicts between the public and private sectors, but they do not appear to have been a major threat to the plan. The crucial question for its success remained the working class in nationalised industries.

<sup>7</sup> Z. Deyl, Z. Snítíl: "K některým problémům hospodářské politiky KSČ v letech 1945-1948", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1965, No.5, p.698-699.

<sup>8</sup> Dvořáková, Lesjuk: Československá, p.101.

<sup>9</sup> Deyl, Snítíl: "K některým", p.700-702, and Kaplan: Znárodnění, p.237.

IV.27.2. The shortage of labour and low productivity are persistent threats to the plan in industry and agriculture.

The expulsion of the Germans led to a striking decline in Czechoslovakia's population as shown in the table below.

Table 22: The population of Czechoslovakia in 1930 and 1947<sup>10</sup>.

Date	Bohemia	Moravia and Silesia	Slovakia	Czechoslovakia
1/12/1930	7,109,376	3,565,010	3,324,111	13,998,497
22/5/1947	5,626,566	3,135,765	3,402,300	12,164,631

The density dropped in almost all parts of the Czech lands with some frontier areas <sup>not</sup> even reaching 50% of their pre-war populations. Prague and its suburbs was an exception as, unlike purely agricultural or industrial areas, its population increased<sup>11</sup>.

Overall there appeared to be an absolute <sup>shortage</sup> of manpower which was sectorally distributed to be particularly acute in agriculture, mining and construction. It was universally believed that there was an excess of office workers and the government tried to transfer civil servants who had originally been working in labour deprived sectors back there<sup>12</sup>. For reasons explained below<sup>13</sup> this made no

<sup>10</sup> Statistická příručka, p.11.

<sup>11</sup> Statistická příručka, p.11-15.

<sup>12</sup> Věstník ministerstva unitra, XXVIII, No.10, 15/10/46, p.106.

<sup>13</sup> See Section IV.28.1.

significant impact. Neither could youth provide a solution as school leavers were naturally selecting the more agreeable jobs even though the labour shortage was less serious there: their individual ambitions were way out of balance with the needs of the economy<sup>14</sup>.

There therefore had to be special solutions for special problems. The first need<sup>was</sup> to fully mobilise the available Czech labour force and to ensure that it was directed to the sectors most in need. A law was prepared and passed giving the government powers to direct labour<sup>15</sup>. In practice voluntary means only were used for those of Slavonic nationality.

An important part of the solution for mining was the help of 30,000 volunteers with 10,000 being changed every four months<sup>16</sup>. These brigades became more systematically organised as nobody could see any more permanent way to overcome the shortage of miners<sup>17</sup>. In agriculture the situation seemed to be at least as bad as the labour shortage was significantly greater than the number of Germans previously working there. The difficulties were accentuated by Czechs who had not returned from war-time work in towns and there was a very marked decline in the employment of women who must have found more agreeable work elsewhere<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> This was revealed by a survey of school leavers, SS 23/4/47, p.1.

<sup>15</sup> RP 10/5/47, p.1.

<sup>16</sup> Fakta a cifry, I, No.9, 31/10/46, p.1.

<sup>17</sup> There was even a public opinion poll on this subject, but it only confirmed that there was no easy solution; Jiskra, 15/5/47, p.2-3.

<sup>18</sup> Stejskal, Statistický zpravodaj, IX, No.12, December 1946, p.374-376.

There seemed to be four possible ways of overcoming the problem. The first was to use voluntary brigades. This was particularly suitable for agriculture owing to the seasonal nature of the work. They were systematically organised and well paid in the expectation that volunteers would be needed for several years<sup>19</sup>. In 1946 there were 300,000 volunteers<sup>20</sup>. In fact the work was not fully voluntary as young people born in 1927 and 1928 were conscripted for three months. Even then, and despite obvious reluctance, the National Socialists accepted the measure as necessary<sup>21</sup>.

The second possibility was to import labour to replace Germans. This was particularly favoured by the People's Party who looked to the labour surplus in Italy. Other parties accepted the idea too and negotiations were also conducted with Bulgaria and Rumania. In fact, remarkably little was achieved apart from the forceful transportation of 11,642 Hungarian families from Slovakia to the Czech frontier<sup>22</sup>. This was hardly a creditable method for a Slavonic state wanting to stand on its<sup>own</sup> feet and in that it related to the third possibility which was to delay the expulsion of Germans until after the 1947 harvest. Ďuriš had not been opposed to this until the U.S. zone began indicating reluctance to accept

<sup>19</sup> Zemědělské brigády - příručka pro zemědělské brigádníky a zemědělce, Praha, 1947.

<sup>20</sup> RP 12/9/46, p.1.

<sup>21</sup> e.g. Vzdělavatel, I, No.8, October 1946, p.299.

<sup>22</sup> Z. Nejedlý: O vyšší životní úroveň, Praha, 1947, p.19-20, and Cambel: Slovenská, p.318.

more Germans. He then thought it better to get them out and face any resulting short-term hardships<sup>23</sup>. In the end Czechoslovakia was left with only 100,000 Germans that the US zone would not take and those judged to be unreliable were moved away from the frontier and scattered in the interior. There were another 100,000 from mixed marriages who were allowed to stay<sup>24</sup>.

The fourth possibility was to raise the technical level of agriculture. For this there were proposals for tractor stations, but that could have no immediate impact. Ďuriš did, however, argue that the consolidation of holdings on half the agricultural land would save up to 20% of labour time which could mean 130,000 workers<sup>25</sup>.

Even though labour shortages still remained in particular sectors, it did seem that, in general, Germans were being replaced by Czechs and Slovaks in most industries. By January 1947 there were only 58,900 Germans left in industry. 166,300 had gone but they had been replaced by 211,200 Czechs and Slovaks<sup>26</sup>. During the whole Two Year Plan period 475,000 Czechoslovak citizens joined the work force in the Czech lands and half of them were

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<sup>23</sup> See his speech in Hradec Králové on 4/4/47, reproduced in J. Ďuriš: Čo pripravuje ministerstvo zemedelstva pre slovenských roľníkov, Praha, 1947, p.9.

<sup>24</sup> Lidová správa, 1/6/48, p.169-170.

<sup>25</sup> J. Ďuriš: Dvouletka v zemědělství, Praha, 1947, p.17.

<sup>26</sup> L. Ruman, Statistický zpravodaj, X, No.3, March 1947, p.92.

women<sup>27</sup>.

Czech labour problems, however, were not simply a question of numbers. Productivity remained generally below the pre-war level as the table below indicates.

Table 23: Industrial production and productivity in 1947<sup>28</sup>  
compared with 1937.

Industry	Production	Employment	Productivity
All	87,0	98,0	88,8
Mining	104,3	139,6	74,7
Energy	164,0	130,6	125,6
Metal work	96,6	107,8	89,6
Chemicals	102,0	113,3	90,0
Glass	84,1	87,8	95,8
Building materials and ceramics	94,3	69,1	136,5
Paper	87,9	101,1	87,0
Textiles	59,6	74,5	80,0
Leather goods	89,2	101,9	87,5
Food	65,2	108,9	59,9

All figures are percentages of the 1937 level.

<sup>27</sup> Stručný, p.377. There had even been estimates that up to 500,000 people were simply avoiding work. This suggested that there was an enormous pool of Czech labour; PL 21/7/46, p.1.

<sup>28</sup> Statistický zpravodaj, XI, No.7-8, July-August 1948, p.279.

So, despite an apparent improvement in labour morale<sup>29</sup>, the KSČ's economic thinking had to give prominence to ideas for moral and material incentives that could raise productivity. They naturally had to be more acceptable than the methods used in the past, but this was one of the issues around which there was scope for conflict between industrial workers and economic policies associated with the plan.

IV.27.3. Difficulties for the Communist Party among industrial workers are revealed by elections to the Factory Councils.

Against this background of labour problems it was natural that the KSČ would attach great importance to the <sup>possible role of the</sup> Factory Councils <sup>in winning</sup> ~~as a means to win~~ workers' conviction for the Two Year Plan. It was assumed by ÚRO that elections, delayed earlier in 1946 because of the parliamentary elections, could be held quickly and followed by an all-state congress of Factory Councils as a demonstration of the unity of the working people around the Two Year Plan<sup>30</sup>. It was suggested that they could play a greater role than before in the process of plan formulation<sup>31</sup> and even that they could become ". . the most important instrument for carrying

<sup>29</sup> Wasted working hours apparently dropped from 20,4% of working time in September 1945 to 8,1% in February 1946 and then continued declining; Fakta a cifry, I, No.9, 31/10/46, p.33.

<sup>30</sup> ÚRO, 26/9/46, p.2.

<sup>31</sup> e.g. J. Dymáček, Věstník závodních rad, October 1946, p.2.

out the Two Year Plan . . ."<sup>32</sup>. In the interests of the plan it was decided to reduce to a minimum the Factory Militia so that all available able-bodied workers could be engaged in production<sup>33</sup>. The militia was still not completely dissolved because, apart from anything else, the shortage of police meant that nobody else could guard factories<sup>34</sup>.

Even then it was impossible for the parties to agree on an election system for Factory Councils. The disagreement was essentially between the National Socialists who wanted proportional representation for political parties and the Communists and ÚRO who insisted that there should be no reference to party affiliations, but beyond that were willing to be flexible on the exact method of elections. Eventually a compromise had to be reached because the KSC desperately wanted the elections before the start of the plan, and their opponents could not go on arguing for ever either as there was even talk of the trade unions organising the elections on their own.

The outcome was a strange system, agreed to on 31/10/46, with trade union groups proposing a list of candidates which then had to be voted on as a block. ÚRO had wanted a longer list so that voters could cross names off but instead they were given a single list which needed 80% of those voting for its approval. If this failed then the list could be changed and needed only a two thirds

<sup>32</sup> E. Erban, speaking to Social Democrat factory organisations, PL 17/9/46, p.2.

<sup>33</sup> Zápotocký, Práce, 23/10/46, p.1.

<sup>34</sup> J. Benedikt, Národní bezpečnost, 5/5/47, p.76.



vote for approval: after that ÚRO could appoint a substitute Factory Council (Náhradní orgán). The National Socialists had wanted unending repeat elections until a proposed list could finally win 80%<sup>35</sup>.

The point about this election system was that 20% opposing an official list could almost always be found where different political parties were organised, so that the election would then inevitably be fought on party-political terms. The National Socialists' strategy was therefore to give maximum publicity to the Factory Council elections presenting the previous bodies and proposed lists as being totally Communist dominated. They made no attempt to raise wider issues like the actual role of Factory Councils. There had been plenty of attempts to criticise Factory Councils for taking too much power and thereby greatly contributing to economic difficulties<sup>36</sup>, but this position was not officially propagated by any party.

At first trade union groups seem to have been over-confident<sup>37</sup> and in fact the overwhelming majority of work-places did elect their Factory Councils on the first round with some quite staggeringly good results. Soon, though, it was being pointed out that the recommended lists were being rejected in the biggest and economically decisive factories. These included Baťa-Zlín, the Vítkovice iron

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<sup>35</sup> Zápotocký, ÚRO, 29/1/48, p.5, and Růžička: ROH, p.179-181.

<sup>36</sup> e.g. O. Schmidt, Hospodář, 22/8/46, p.3.

<sup>37</sup> See the report of an ÚRO plenum meeting, ÚRO, 19/12/46, p.6.

works, many mines in Ostrava-Karvinná coalfield and big engineering factories in Prague<sup>38</sup>. Of fifteen factories with over 3,000 employees, the Factory Council was elected on the first round in only one - ČKD-Libereň<sup>39</sup>. In the enormous Vítkovice iron works the recommended list, made up apparently of 17 KSČ members and 12 others, won only 53% of the votes cast, meaning 44% of the total work force<sup>40</sup>. The two tables below show that the recommended lists were particularly unsuccessful in the main industrial centres and in the basic industries.

Table 24: Percentage of Factory Councils elected on the first ballot: geographical breakdown for the Czech lands.<sup>41</sup>

Prague	63	Karlovy Vary	79
Brno	66	Kolín	75
Ostrava	59	Mladá Boleslav	83
Plzeň	69	Olomouc	57
Most	67	Pardubice	67
Liberec	68	Šumperk	70
Ústí nad Labem	66	Tábor	74
Kladno	70	Zlín	77
Jihlava	75	Znojmo	72
Hradec Králové	90	České Budějovice	75

<sup>38</sup> SS 22/3/47, p.1.

<sup>39</sup> Praga, 1947, p.50.

<sup>40</sup> Sociální demokrat, 21/3/47, p.3-5.

<sup>41</sup> Růžicka: ROH, p.188-189.

Table 25: Percentage of Factory Councils in Czechoslovakia<sup>42</sup>  
elected on the first ballot: breakdown by industrial  
union.

Mining	58	Distribution	67
Transport	62	Banking	66
Metal work	59	Health service	63
Agriculture	80	Internal and foreign service	73
Food	65	Finance	82
Chemicals	58	Justice	76
Printing	72	Education	85
Construction	84	Social services	100
Wood work	80	Police	84
Textiles	76	Diverse professions	79
Glass	68	Artistic and cultural services	59

These figures are particularly remarkable when compared with the claim that about 40% of employees in the big factories in Prague were KSC members<sup>43</sup>. This does not appear to have been mere paper membership. In Walter - Jinonice for example, where 45% of employees were party members, there was 50-90% attendance at 15 membership meetings during 1946 and plenty more forms of participation in workshop meetings<sup>44</sup>.

The election results may to a certain extent have reflected

<sup>42</sup> These figures were worked out from the results of 6,830 elections; ÚRO, 17/4/47, p.2.

<sup>43</sup> Bouček: Praha, p.54. In the Poldina iron works in Kladno membership was apparently about 70% of the work force in mid-1946; Funkcionář, 7/7/46, p.4.

<sup>44</sup> Funkcionář, 21/1/47, p.4-5.

workers' reservations about economic policies. The key point, however, was that the elections were turned into a struggle between parties, or more precisely into a referendum for or against the KSČ. Under these circumstances many employees with doubts about the KSČ would naturally feel it best to take the safe course of voting against or abstaining.

From the start Communists, from their position of strength within the trade unions, had been involved in selecting the recommended lists and the fact of their strength and influence confronted them with a dilemma. They saw a big role for the Factory Councils, and wanted to retain dominance there, but they also had to allow the other parties enough presence for the single list to be acceptable. The other parties, often including the Social Democrats, had no intention of accepting this or, it seems, of proposing any alternative at any stage, and launched campaigns almost on the level of a general election just for voting against the list. Taking the example of Baťa - Zlín, this led to only 58,4% in favour on the first ballot. Zápotocký then came to speak to a mass meeting where there were no objections or attempts to alter the recommended list<sup>45</sup>. Then an almost unanimous decision at the meeting was reversed in the second ballot after a campaign backed by enough money to include the scattering leaflets from aeroplanes. In the end only 64,7% were in favour<sup>46</sup>.

Once the Factory Council elections had receded from the head-

<sup>45</sup> Roušar: Dějiny, p.175-176.

<sup>46</sup> PL 23/4/47, p.2.

lines, they went much more smoothly<sup>47</sup>. There then seemed to be very little more to say as, although the Factory Councils had presumably been somewhat discredited by the whole affair, nothing had really been changed. Certainly the Communists did not enjoy complete and unquestioning authority within the working class, but the other parties had not gained anything either. They had fought simply on whether the Communists were not taking too much power for themselves and not on whether anybody else had any policies or ideas of their own. Their hope had been, presumably, to reach a deadlock forcing elections on their own terms. In this they failed.

The course of these elections may have encouraged the Social Democrats to believe that they could find a working class base in opposition to the Communists. They began persistently publicising cases of "Communist terror" in the journal of their factory organisations. Although many of the incidents mentioned did not warrant so sensational a heading, there evidently were sources of tension between the two parties. Fierlinger even suggested that they were a very serious threat to the plan<sup>48</sup>.

#### IV.27.4. Industrial workers view with scepticism the Communists' ideas for raising productivity.

While facing difficulties over the Factory Council elections, the KSČ was actively propagating ideas on how to increase productivity by raising labour morale. Essential to this was felt to be competition between factories and between workshops. For this

<sup>47</sup> Růžicka: ROH, p.191.

<sup>48</sup> PL 13/3/47. For further discussion of this, see below Section V.34.5.

to be meaningfully and systematically organised it had to be complemented by a breakdown of tasks within factories. Statisticians were to expect an important role as there were to be figures comparing daily results and graphs showing progress and aims<sup>49</sup>. Apparently this approach did bring results and there was a development of interest among workers in defending the honour of their factories or workshops. As the chairman of a Factory Council wrote twenty years later: "Today it may seem naive to some but at that time there really were heated debates every day before and after shifts and there was no shortage of sharp jokes against those who were not doing well"<sup>50</sup>.

Workers' commitment was demanded from the very start as coal shortages threatened the plan with immediate failure. The crisis was overcome for a time by miners pledging to work extra shifts until the plan had been assured<sup>51</sup>. This was presented as an indication of how the plan was becoming a real force by capturing people's imaginations and encouraging greater productive effort<sup>52</sup>.

Even if there was considerable working class interest in the plan there was also scepticism on some economic questions relating to it. One of these was the wholesale readjustment of the wage structure which generally coincided with the introduction of piece

<sup>49</sup> RP 12/1/47, p.1.

<sup>50</sup> Kozelka: Vzpomínky, p.172.

<sup>51</sup> RP 10/1/47, p.1.

<sup>52</sup> J. Goldmann: Czechoslovakia - test case of nationalisation, Prague, 1947, p.54 and p.58.

rates wherever possible. There were references to a general tendency to condemn any such change<sup>53</sup>, which could hardly fail to tread on some toes. There was probably only distrust rather than outright opposition as it could be claimed that research showed 80-85% of workers welcoming the change and 15% accepting it reluctantly<sup>54</sup>. There were, however, several strikes in big engineering factories against the changes. The most important was in Tatra - Kopřivnice, but it seemed that the intensity of the discontent could be blamed not on the changes, nor on the management acting high-handedly but rather on the failure of the Factory Council to explain both these and other changes to the work-force or the workers' feeling to the management. The outcome of the strike was the same agreement but a new Factory Council that the workers could trust<sup>55</sup>.

A second noticeable element of workers' reluctance was the Stakhanovite movement: the term was used vaguely to apply to voluntary raising of productivity by individuals. There was always encouragement for those who worked particularly well, but a survey of 1200 workers in an engineering factory outside Prague showed that 20% were against this in principle while 50% had definite reservations. These criticisms amounted to equating Stakhanovism with a greater intensity of labour or with one

<sup>53</sup> e.g. in Škoda; J. Vydra, Škodovák, 27/2/48, p.2.

<sup>54</sup> V. Cipro speaking at an ÚRO plenum meeting, ÚRO, 29/1/48, p.4.

<sup>55</sup> Tatra, 1948, No.2, p.6-7; No.3, p.6-7, and No.5, p.6-7.

individual claiming credit for the work of a collective. There were also fears that the output of Stakhanovites might be used as a basis for piece rate adjustments. Even the 30% in favour were not really presenting good arguments as hardly any understood Stakhanovism as it was ideally meant to be, i.e. as the invention of methods of increasing productivity without increasing the intensity of labour.

This was judged at the time to indicate a serious weakness as workers, so it was argued, were not overcoming old prejudices and acquiring the new attitudes to work felt to be suitable for a socialist society. Instead of welcoming attempts to increase productivity their attitude was more reserved. "On the whole the workers favour honest and average work from all employees. The workers reject shirking of work and also high performances of individuals and excessive talk about work"<sup>56</sup>.

IV.27.5. The Communists and Social Democrats channel workers' discontent at living conditions into demands for price reductions and for reorganisation of the private distribution system.

The issue on which workers most clearly expressed discontent was that of living standards. There could be an identifiable enemy in the black marketeering small traders and in the businesses making profits down the distribution chain. The KSC had no hesitation in pointing an accusatory finger at private enterprise, so that the issue of workers' living standards became interwoven with the contentious issues of relations between the public and

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<sup>56</sup>J. Čepelák, V. Čech, ÚRO, 3/7/47, p.7.



private sectors.

The fluctuations in black market relative to official prices are shown in the table below. Obtaining the figures was difficult as the black market was illegal and there were enormous fluctuations and local variations for individual commodities. Nevertheless, the underlying trend clearly was for black market prices to rise again during 1947 and 1948. That was a natural source of working class discontent as many basic necessities were priced beyond their reach.

Table 26: Black market price level as a percentage of the official price level.<sup>57</sup>

Date	Prague	Bohemia	Moravia and Silesia	all Czech lands
March 1946	365	355	279	333
June 1946	329	310	238	289
September 1946	255	247	189	231
December 1946	225	215	178	206
March 1947	192	191	162	186
June 1947	233	226	186	214
September 1947	305	290	219	271
December 1947	366	346	254	318
March 1948	414	377	298	354
June 1948	478	440	356	415
September 1948	629	548	437	514

<sup>57</sup> Statistický zpravodaj, XI, No.2, December 1948, p.427.

In late 1946 the Communists and Social Democrats began pressing for very much stronger laws against black marketeering with the death sentence as the maximum penalty<sup>58</sup>. Tough controls and powers of inspection were introduced but were naturally resented by many traders<sup>59</sup>. There was soon scope in this for party propaganda as evidence was presented of softness by the two right-wing parties to protect their own members when they were caught profiteering<sup>60</sup>. At the same time, there was no direct attempt to suggest that all shortages were caused by the black market. Textiles were particularly scarce and causes for that included labour and raw material shortages restricting production alongside increased demand after the forced restraint during the war<sup>61</sup>. It was believed, however, that far more of the available goods could go onto the legal market if the organisation of distribution were tightened to prevent "leakages". It was being suggested that a major help in this would be the incorporation of confiscates into nationalised industries<sup>62</sup>.

Alongside this was the desire for a simplification of the internal trade system which Gottwald often described as "a jungle". This gave scope for "leakages" and provided profits for private trading companies: it seemed anomalous to call for increased effort

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<sup>58</sup> e.g. PL 10/12/46, p.1.

<sup>59</sup> Lidová správa, 15/12/46, p.13.

<sup>60</sup> e.g. RP 30/1/47, p.1.

<sup>61</sup> See below Sections V.35.5 and VI.40.4.

<sup>62</sup> Zmrhal, radio broadcast, RP 8/2/46. See also the report of the meeting of the Central Union of Trade, Živnostenské noviny, 8/12/46, p.1.

from workers when so much of it would go in profits to wholesale traders<sup>63</sup>, many of whom were judged to be quite unnecessary and involved only in writing down accounts while goods went direct from factories to be sold. This was partly a problem inherited from the occupation when, in the case of textiles, the number of wholesale traders increased from 598 in 1937 so that in 1946 there were 1,058 even though the population was lower<sup>64</sup>.

The Communists had wanted speedy changes even before the 1946 election<sup>65</sup> but nothing was done and even the new government programme said very little concrete<sup>66</sup>. Internal trade was not nationalised but calls for nationalisation and reorganisation were often linked together and supported by employees in big stores<sup>67</sup>. Full nationalisation was, by 1947, politically impossible. Instead there were more cautious proposals for taking a part of wholesale trade, particularly large confiscates, and incorporating it into nationalised industries so that they could compete with private wholesale traders<sup>68</sup>. This could include the nationalised industries themselves organising regional distribution centres<sup>69</sup>. There was, however, no agreement between the parties, so that no action was taken in early 1947.

<sup>63</sup> Zmrhal, speaking in parliament, RP 16/1/46, p.2.

<sup>64</sup> Fakta a cifry, II, No.4-5, 25/4/47, p.19.

<sup>65</sup> See Gottwald's speech to the KSČ Eighth Congress, Gottwald: Spisy, XII, p.369.

<sup>66</sup> See Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.138.

<sup>67</sup> See the report of a big rally in Prague attended by Laušman, ÚRO, 21/3/46, p.2.

<sup>68</sup> RP 8/3/47, p.1.

<sup>69</sup> Živnostenské noviny, 30/4/47, p.3.

At the same time there definitely had been considerable economic recovery allowing somebody's living standards to rise. To ensure that the benefits would not go to private traders, as many workers undoubtedly feared was happening, pressure built up for price reductions. There had been talk of this before the 1946 elections<sup>70</sup> and the government programme referred to price reductions plus the transfer of almost half of workers in industry to piece rates as the means of raising workers' living standards<sup>71</sup>. Later in 1946 the trade unions included both of these among their list of demands and began calling for price reductions. They wanted Factory Councils to look for ways in their own factories to reduce prices even though this conflicted with their own sectional interests deriving from their entitlement to 10% of profits<sup>72</sup>.

Early in 1947 the trade unions, Social Democrats and Communists began systematically pointing to the possibility of price reductions at the expense of profits in the distribution system and linked this with calls for simplification of the distribution chain. Even then there were no immediate results but rather a very slight upward trend in prices. Workers' frustration then led to protest strikes in several large engineering factories in Prague. It was suggested that Factory Councils could not longer hold back the pressure for

<sup>70</sup> e.g. the report of a joint call from ÚRO and the socialist parties; RP 13/4/46, p.1. Some price reductions were later announced, RP 9/5/46, p.2.

<sup>71</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.115.

<sup>72</sup> See Zápotocký's comments to the ÚRO Presidium meeting of 18/10/46, ÚRO, 24/10/46, p.1.

action for immediate wage rises<sup>73</sup>. Soon afterwards, on 21/3/47, the government announced a range of price reductions. The effect on the price index for a working class family is shown below. The figures presumably take no account of any possible purchases on the black market.

Table 27: Index of consumers' goods prices as a percentage of the 1939 level.<sup>74</sup>

Date	Bohemia	Moravia and Silesia	Slovakia	Czechoslovakia
1946	315,0	329,2	339,8	325,1
January 1947	316,6	330,6	334,9	324,8
March 1947	319,4	332,8	331,7	325,9
June 1947	304,0	315,4	308,3	307,9
September 1947	289,8	299,4	293,5	293,1

The parties then reacted to these price reductions in fairly predictable ways considering their economic policies. The KSČ claimed full credit and wanted their achievement widely publicised in "a great agitational drive"<sup>75</sup> claiming there would be a 10% rise in living standards<sup>76</sup>. The Social Democrats complained that the Communists could not claim all the credit<sup>77</sup>, while the

<sup>73</sup>For reports of workers' feelings, see RP 28/2/47, p.1, SS 26/2/47, p.1, and SS 28/2/47, p.4.

<sup>74</sup>Statistická příručka, p.102.

<sup>75</sup>Funkcionář, 7/3/47, front cover.

<sup>76</sup>RP 29/3/47, p.1.

<sup>77</sup>PL 26/2/47, p.1.

National Socialists looked both ways at once. At first there were voices opposing price reductions<sup>78</sup>, then they responded to the Prague strikes by advocating really big price reductions<sup>79</sup> and implicitly approved of the strikes<sup>80</sup>. Later they criticised the speed with which the law on price reductions was passed because they felt there should have been more time for discussing it<sup>81</sup>. There were even calls from National Socialists and People's Party members for a tradesmen's strike because the price reductions were partly at their expense<sup>82</sup>.

IV.27.6. Working class pressure prevents the return of the confiscates to private ownership.

The fate of the confiscates was always a possible source of disagreement and it became an important political issue in early 1947. There were three reasons for this; first, the plan seemed to be threatened by unimpressive results in construction and distribution which were almost entirely in private hands; secondly, the idea of nationalisations in general was still very popular and, thirdly, feelings were raised by attempts to transfer some confiscates back to private ownership.

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<sup>78</sup> e.g. Hejda, Svobodné noviny, 1/1/47, p.10.

<sup>79</sup> SS 26/2/47, p.1.

<sup>80</sup> SS 28/2/47, p.4. The trade unions very definitely condemned strike action, e.g. Zápotocký, Práce, 6/3/47, p.1.

<sup>81</sup> Žáčková - Batková, speaking in parliament, SS 2/4/47, p.1.

<sup>82</sup> J. Jech, Živnostenské noviny, 20/4/47, p.4. See also Deyl: "Naše", p.516.

Three sorts of enterprise were concerned. They were those previously German owned but too small to qualify for nationalisation , those previously belonging to collaborators and those confiscated because of the "anti-social" behaviour of the former owner towards his employees. The real problems arose with sizeable factories (smaller enterprises, it was agreed, would be given to new private owners) which had been confiscated because their previous owners were accused of collaborating with the occupiers. Legal proceedings were often dropped or the accused found not guilty. This led to test cases of particular factories where the former owners claimed their property back and the workers responded with protest strikes. Their case was always backed by ÚRO which had a standing policy of demanding incorporation of "important" confiscates into nationalised industries<sup>83</sup>. The strikes were always opposed by the National Socialists who used every argument to prevent incorporation of any confiscates into nationalised industries. Although they portrayed their opponents' aim as the elimination of competition for the unsuccessful nationalised enterprises<sup>84</sup>, they were always cautious in their positive proposals and demanded the transfer to private hands of only a very few enterprises<sup>85</sup>. The People's Party was less restrained in advocating the sale of confiscates<sup>86</sup>.

83 Všeodborový sjezd ROH duben 1946, Praha, 1946, p.257.

84 e.g. Zenkl, speech, SS 28/1/47, p.2.

85 Život strany, 31/3/47, p.1-2.

86 e.g. Vývoj, 16/11/46, p.197.

The issue came to a head in the small frontier town of Varnsdorf. A textile factory there, which had been confiscated in May 1945, was to be handed back to its pre-war Jewish owner by a court decision. The court even ignored and overruled the District National Committee which disputed the man's claim to ownership and supported the worker's view that he was anti-social<sup>87</sup>. The consequence was a general strike in the area which started spontaneously but was then given order by the trade unions. It was supported by the KSČ but all the other parties dissociated themselves from it<sup>88</sup>. It raised the demand for the definitive incorporation of confiscates into nationalised industries<sup>89</sup>.

While parties could disagree on the justifiability of the Varnsdorf strike, it did demonstrate that workers had strong feelings on this issue. There were other strikes and demonstrations around this period and they led to a National Front meeting, on

<sup>87</sup> The KSČ dominated elected bodies in the District having won 54% of the vote in 1946, Zprávy, p.227.

<sup>88</sup> The Social Democrats expressed definite disapproval, arguing that the same outcome could have been achieved without a strike; Fierlinger, PL 14/3/47, p.2.

<sup>89</sup> For accounts see Růžička: ROH, p.158-164, and the report of an investigation by a parliamentary commission which was critical of the strike and was consequently not accepted by the KSČ; PL 10/7/47, p.1. Another interesting account was provided by the District trade union secretary V. Nýdrle who was a National Socialist. He was attacked by his own party and felt obliged to make clear his disagreements with the KSČ. Nevertheless, he emphasised the genuineness of the widespread determination of workers to prevent the return of their factories to private ownership; Práce 18/3/47, p.1-2 and 22/3/47.



15-18/3/47, at which the right wing effectively capitulated to the demands of the Varnsdorf strikers. They accepted that confiscates could be incorporated into nationalised industries if it generally helped production, but that they could not be returned to private ownership by courts. Instead approval had to be gained from the government in consultation with trade union representatives<sup>90</sup>. This, however, was not to be the end of the story<sup>91</sup>.

A special case that became an issue also in March 1947 was the construction industry. This time the initiative came from positive demands for nationalisation of confiscates. The issue had been raised in 1945<sup>92</sup>, but only really gained momentum in early 1947 with resolutions from workers in bigger construction firms to the Ministry of Industry<sup>93</sup>. The National Socialists opposed this demand<sup>94</sup>, but workers in the industry stepped up their pressure which culminated in a strike of construction workers in Brno. They lobbied a meeting of the Regional National Committee on 11/3/47 and their presence at least helped push through a vote asking the government to decide quickly on the fate of confiscates<sup>95</sup>.

<sup>90</sup> RP 19/3/47, p.1.

<sup>91</sup> See below Section IV.36.2.

<sup>92</sup> e.g. ÚRO, 20/12/45, p.9.

<sup>93</sup> Práce, 25/1/47, p.1, PL 17/1/47, p.1, and PL 6/2/47, p.7.

<sup>94</sup> e.g. R. Matolín, SS 15/1/47, p.1.

<sup>95</sup> Práce, 12/3/47, p.1.

An additional argument for at least some nationalisations was that private enterprise seemed unable to solve the industry's problems. Construction appeared as the weakest sector in the plan reaching only 40% of its target in the first quarter of 1947. There was improvement over the course of the year and overall 69% of the plan target was reached<sup>96</sup>. It faced all sorts of special difficulties including shortages of raw materials and of labour. These problems, however, were amplified by the fragmentation of the industry into masses of small firms using backward technology. It was impossible to control the use of scarce resources and all sorts of "black" or "grey" projects were being undertaken either without any permission or with permission dishonestly acquired. Perhaps one third of all projects were of this type<sup>97</sup>. This could only further accentuate shortages and delay completions. In one area where fifteen new schools could have been built there were instead 105 all still under construction! The point was, then, that the needs of the plan itself led to the demand for nationalised building firms at least to serve nationalised industries<sup>98</sup>. Later experience showed that even then plenty of problems would remain but the demand seemed very necessary at the time and, after the Varnsdorf strike, the National Socialists did allow the conversion of some confiscates into nationalised enterprises.

<sup>96</sup> Průběh plnění hospodářského plánu roku 1947, Praha, 1948, p.207-211.

<sup>97</sup> E. Kafka, Hospodář, 12/2/48, p.3. See also L. Hauptman, Průběh plnění, p.27.

<sup>98</sup> K. Janů, Nové hospodářství, IV, No.5, May 1948, p.87-88.

#### IV.27.7. Summary and discussion.

Owing partly to a persistent labour shortage, the Communist Party devoted considerable attention to raising the productivity of labour particularly in the large-scale nationalised industries. The plan's success depended greatly on the workers there and their representative organs tried to win them, with promises of future benefits, to co-operate towards its success.

Although many were firm supporters of the KSC, these workers did not automatically agree with every aspect of the party's policy. There were indications of discontent or apathy in Factory Council elections. In big factories, where the degree of incorporation into the plan was the greatest and where other parties were organised and could launch campaigns against the KSC, the results were disappointing for the Communist Party.

KSC policies towards workers in nationalised industries can be divided into two broad groups. The first, and least popular, aimed directly to raise labour productivity. Workers were sceptical of the Stakhanovite movement, modelled on Soviet experience, and of wage adjustments which were associated with the spread of piece rates. Evidently, increasing the intensity of labour was unpopular.

The second group of policies aimed to give more immediate benefits to workers without which they could hardly be expected to co-operate fully in the plan. The KSC managed to direct militancy away from demands for wage rises and into pressure for price reductions and for tougher measures against black marketeering by private traders. This led to demands for the nationalisation and

closer incorporation into the plan of part of the distribution network. The idea of nationalisations generally seemed to be very popular among workers as indicated by firm opposition to the return of confiscates to private ownership. There was also positive pressure for nationalisations of some building firms and this could be related to the needs of the plan as construction was failing to meet its targets.

Referring back to the general discussion of the Czechoslovak road to socialism, it seems that, in KSČ policy towards the working class, the needs of the plan and the aim of winning a majority in the next elections were roughly complementary. Nevertheless, there were aspects of KSČ policy that could encourage wider conflicts. In their effort to secure and ensure the loyalty of the workers, they pressed for policies that could lead to conflicts with other social groups and hence with the parties that tried to represent their interests. They also often claimed the credit for economic successes thereby making the plan appear as an exclusively KSČ affair. This could only make more difficult genuine co-operation between parties.

**CHAPTER 28: CIVIL SERVANTS AND LAND REFORM IN RELATION TO  
THE TWO YEAR PLAN.**

**IV.28.1. Civil servants demand improvements in their living standards and the National Socialists try to become their spokesmen.**

The problem of the general shortage of labour became bound up with the problem of pay and differentials for civil servants. These included all those, both manual and nonmanual, working in state enterprises - railways, posts, airlines - and those in central offices and ministries as well as teachers, policemen, army officers and those in the legal apparatus. This amounted to 899,000 people including pensioners of the same origin. Those working for National Committees should also have been included, but figures on them did not exist<sup>1</sup>. Together they enjoyed special privileges in pension rights and job security after a certain period of employment.

There was a general belief that, following the relaxation of war-time controls on the labour market, there had been an economically damaging flight from heavier manual labour into more agreeable civil service jobs. There were some who doubted whether all the growth in the civil service, and particularly in office workers, was so counter-productive as there were manpower shortages in particular sections such as public administration<sup>2</sup>. It was sometimes accepted

<sup>1</sup> Fakta a cifry, II, No.6-7, 31/5/47, p.2-5.

<sup>2</sup> Nosek, speech, RP 1/2/46, p.2.

that there were some very serious shortages alongside surpluses<sup>3</sup>.

One astute observer even suggested that there might be no surplus of office workers at all. There were errors in gathering statistical information that could place supervisors, foremen and even drivers in with office workers. There was clearer evidence from the fact that the job vacancy situation indisputably showed shortages of office workers. It was suggested that this could only be changed by relaxing controls over the economy<sup>4</sup>. This view was supported by a later study which showed the growth in office workers starting before the war, continuing through the occupation and even accelerating afterwards. This trend was unaffected by February 1948 and there was very strong evidence that it went with the administration, control and planning of the economy, with the controlled organisation of labour, the expansion of the rationing system and other activities demanding comparatively unspecialised administrative personnel<sup>5</sup>. This meant that the growth in office workers was an inevitable part of the wider changes in Czech society.

Nevertheless, the argument was not challenged at the time that higher production could be achieved by transferring people back into directly productive activities. In fact the National Socialists were particularly keen to propagate the argument that the administrative apparatus was overgrown<sup>6</sup>, although this might seem

<sup>3</sup> PL 9/8/47, p.2.

<sup>4</sup> Ruman, Statistický zpravodaj, IX, No.7-8, July-August 1946, p.238.

<sup>5</sup> Maňák: "Početnost", esp. p. 403.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. the speeches in parliament on two budgets; J. Firt, SS 28/11/46, p.1-2, and Krajina, SS 13/12/46, p.1.

a disadvantageous argument as they were building support among workers in administration. For the Communists it was even easier to refer to the need to raise the status of manual as compared with mental labour and they linked the need to reverse the "exodus" from manual work with the overcoming of prejudices against it<sup>7</sup>.

This applied within industry too where it was hoped that every factory would work out ways to transfer its employees from unproductive to productive work<sup>8</sup>. This, in fact, coincided with the recruitment of office workers who were required by the system of planning that was being developed<sup>9</sup> and reflected a mistaken belief that a planned economy would simplify and hence reduce organisational tasks so that one of its great advantages would be its ability to limit unproductive employment<sup>10</sup>.

As civil servants were requesting improvements in their living standards instead of just promises, it was suggested that their pay could be raised once their numbers had been reduced by 100,000<sup>11</sup>. It even seemed later to be agreed that there then could be a pay rise while manual workers would have to be content with gains from price and tax changes. Moreover, there would be retention of

<sup>7</sup> e.g. Gottwald, speaking on 31/8/46: Spisy, XIII, p.195.

<sup>8</sup> See Slánský's speech to the KSČ economists' conference of Novemebr 1946, Funkcionář, 23/11/46, p.2.

<sup>9</sup> See above p.64.

<sup>10</sup> Put explicitly by Oliva: Ekonomické, p.43.

<sup>11</sup> RP 7/12/46, p.1.

differentials for output and qualifications<sup>12</sup>. The argument then centred on how to achieve this reduction in numbers, a point on which the government programme had said nothing. Some points could easily be agreed to such as the encouragement of voluntary resignations, the transfer out of those with special skills to where they were most needed elsewhere, an attempt to halt further recruitment and encouragement to older employees to retire early. The real problem arose when all these had failed and involuntary methods had to be found. Gottwald insisted that those sacked should not be those recruited since liberation but rather those whom the occupiers had trusted<sup>13</sup>. He thereby linked reductions in numbers with a thorough purge of the civil service. The National Socialists reacted strongly against this suggestion which they feared would lead to a repeat in public administration of what Factory Councils had achieved in industry<sup>14</sup>.

Naturally, this would have been feared by many senior civil servants, but the extent of the differences between the parties was still further accentuated as the National Socialists tried to secure their support among civil servants. In particular, they ruthlessly distorted a statement by Zápotocký at a conference of civil service unions where he advocated changes in their contract of employment. He argued that even the privileges it gave would soon be made irrelevant by the introduction of similar job security

<sup>12</sup> Gottwald, speaking on 12/12/47: Spisy, XIV, p.214-215.

<sup>13</sup> Speaking on 24/4/47, Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.401 and p.405.

<sup>14</sup> SS 19/1/47, p.2.



for all employees<sup>15</sup>. This was misquoted as indicating a desire to annul civil servants' job security<sup>16</sup>.

The National Socialists, portraying the plight of the civil servants as being particularly desperate<sup>17</sup>, even gave implicit support to one of the civil service unions which demanded a 30% pay rise, apparently to counter the effects of the wage and price revisions of 1945, and a full review of their pay in January 1948: these demands were backed with a threat of strike action<sup>18</sup>.

Although they opposed strikes and extra-parliamentary activities on the issue of the fate of the confiscates<sup>19</sup>, the National Socialists generally supported strike action that was likely to embarrass ÚRD or the KSČ. Alone among Czech parties, they supported the longest strike of the period which was staged by airline pilots demanding better safety standards following a crash. Irrespective of the justifiability of the demands, the National Socialists seemed particularly pleased to emphasise: "Now the Communists in the airlines have got problems, because elections to the airport Factory Council are coming up"<sup>20</sup>.

This time only the far left within Social Democracy indicated

<sup>15</sup> His speech was printed in full in ÚRD, 30/1/47, p.2.

<sup>16</sup> SS 19/1/47, p.2, and Obzory, 25/1/47, p.53.

<sup>17</sup> e.g. SS 27/7/47, p.1.

<sup>18</sup> SS 30/8/47, p.2.

<sup>19</sup> See above Vol II, p.156, and Section IV.27.6.

<sup>20</sup> Zivot strany, 31/3/47, p.8.

public disapproval for the civil servants' threat<sup>21</sup>, but the ÚRO Presidium was obviously embarrassed. They did not deny the civil servants' right to strike but still refused to support them<sup>22</sup>. They had been fully aware from the time of liberation onwards that trade union unity was threatened above all by the issue of the standing of civil servants which was seen as "the most troublesome problem in our construction..."<sup>23</sup>.

IV.28.2. The Communists propose a further land reform but propagate the idea in a way unacceptable to all other parties.

The KSC approach to workers and even to civil servants was closely related to their positions within the Two Year Plan. There was, however, no simple analogy for peasant policy as agriculture was to so great an extent beyond the scope of the plan<sup>24</sup>. At the same time, the peasants still seemed undecided in their political allegiances and there was no reason to suppose that they would again vote as they did in 1946.

So, particularly as the KSC were turning their attention to ways of increasing their electoral support culminating in the open

<sup>21</sup>"For the first time a group of working people . . . is threatening to use the class weapon. It is . . . significant that it is precisely civil servants, whose maintenance consumes a considerable part of the national income, and in no way the working class who have to content themselves with a much smaller share", V. Salus, Cfl, 12/9/47, p.560.

<sup>22</sup>ÚRO, 4/9/47, p.2.

<sup>23</sup>Resolution of the ÚRO plenum of 13-14/12/46, ÚRO, 19/2/46, p.2.

<sup>24</sup>See above, Section IV.27.1.

propagation of a target of 51% of the votes, a special approach was sought for the countryside. Although this was based within the general ideas of the specific, Czechoslovak road to socialism, it was in the presentation of the policy for a new land reform that the KSČ deviated most markedly from the tactful approach with which they initiated the Two Year Plan.

Already prior to the party's Eighth Congress it had been clearly stated that the party was "not planning to somehow create kolkhozes"<sup>25</sup>, and there were two comments on this from within the party during the pre-congress discussions. One was to accept that collectivisation was not an immediate aim but still to insist on publicly stating that it was ultimately in the best interests of the peasants, so that they should gradually be convinced to voluntarily accept it<sup>26</sup>. The other, which could include completely ruling out collectivisation, was for a further land reform with a set upper limit on the size of land holdings<sup>27</sup>.

In practice even this second approach was not adopted immediately, and there were thoughts of dropping any idea of a further land reform so as to minimise divisions and make easier the participation of the other parties in the Two Year Plan<sup>28</sup>. The Social Democrats' desire for a 50ha ceiling was therefore not

<sup>25</sup> Sněm, p.12.

<sup>26</sup> e.g. the view of the Zbrojovka - Brno organisation, Jech: Probuzení, p.175.

<sup>27</sup> Jech: Probuzení, p.172-173.

<sup>28</sup> Jech: Probuzení, p.233-234.

included in the government programme and this was particularly welcomed by the People's Party<sup>29</sup>. Instead, reference was made to revision of the first (post- World War I) land reform and to a number of other reforms. Following preparatory work within the Ministry of Agriculture, these were published as six draft laws. The first was the revision of the first land reform. The second was a law enabling the consolidation of holdings to replace the existing scattered strips of land. The third was to extend hunting rights. The fourth was to give formal property rights to those on land divided up or allocated to them after liberation. The fifth was a law to ensure the agricultural production plan, while the last one aimed to prevent the continual sub-division of holdings.

The first three were controversial roughly in the order of their presentation. The controversy was further complicated when Ďuriš, in October 1946, by-passed the National Front and the government and sent his proposals first of all to JSCZ branches. The reason for this was the expectation of opposition from the right-wing parties which could only be overcome by mobilising peasant opinion. KSC organisations were therefore asked to encourage discussions of the proposals<sup>30</sup>. The Communists thereby took the initiative in the countryside and other parties had to present their positions in response to Ďuriš's six draft laws.

The People's Party, often with nothing much to say on other issues, left little doubt of its support for the biggest farmers

<sup>29</sup> LD 9/7/46, p.1.

<sup>30</sup> Jech: Probuzená, p.248.

and its opposition to a further land reform. Arguments included the interests of efficient production<sup>31</sup>, and the need to move more people to the frontier<sup>32</sup>. An upper limit to land holdings was presented as a restriction on private property<sup>33</sup> and hence as a preparation for kolkhozes<sup>34</sup>. The party combined this with strong opposition to the policies of the Ministry of Agriculture and tried to present an alternative approach, based on a common peasant interest, around issues like the price scissors and labour shortages<sup>35</sup>.

The National Socialists were more cautious. Their attitude towards agricultural questions was extremely vague before the 1946 elections. As the Two Year Plan began their general position on the relation between economic sectors was again evident. Instead of arguing in terms of an organic link between industry and the development of agriculture, they preferred to emphasise competition between the sectors and demanded the same or more attention to agriculture<sup>36</sup>. This had something in common with Agrarianism<sup>37</sup>,

<sup>31</sup> J. Nermut, LD 15/11/46, p.1.

<sup>32</sup> LD 20/12/46, p.2.

<sup>33</sup> "almost confiscation", LD 15/11/46, p.1.

<sup>34</sup> J. Nermut, in a parliamentary committee, LD 11/10/46, p.1.

<sup>35</sup> See the report of a congress of People's Party farmers in Prague, LD 20/12/46, p.2.

<sup>36</sup> e.g. SS 2/2/47, and SS 4/2/47.

<sup>37</sup> c.f. V. Lacina: "K agrárním koncepcím sociální demokracie a národních socialistů v letech 1945-1948", Československý časopis historický, XVII, No.1, 1969. For a discussion of the evolution of the Nationalist Socialists' ideas, see Jech: Probuzená, p.302-309.

and the National Socialists generally opposed measures that differentiated between peasants according to the size of their holdings.

When confronted with Ďuriš's proposals they opposed them at first but soon found it impossible to attack them openly<sup>38</sup>. Their problem was summarised by the former Agrarian Torn who "... was neither against them nor for them. He was not against because it is impossible to go against the tide ..."<sup>39</sup>. Others in the party seemed to express general approval for the idea of a land reform, but then found reasons for delaying it. Krajina warned that it could "disrupt not only all of agriculture, but even the whole of our economy"<sup>40</sup>. Increasingly they joined the People's Party in warning that land reform was just a step towards kolkhozes<sup>41</sup>. This appeared, by the late spring of 1947, to be their best chance as it often seemed to be the only real doubt that many peasants had about the KSC<sup>42</sup>.

The Social Democrats were naturally more approving towards Ďuriš's proposals, but they had some doubts about the exact formulation of the proposal for the revision of the first land

<sup>38</sup> K. Kaplan: "Rolnické hnutí za prosazení 6 zákonů a popularizaci Hradeckého programu", Vznik a vývoj lidově demokratického Československa, Praha, 1961, p.143-144.

<sup>39</sup> Život strany, 31/5/47, p.6.

<sup>40</sup> Speaking in parliament, SS 13/12/46, p.2.

<sup>41</sup> Život strany, 31/5/47, p.5.

<sup>42</sup> e.g. F. Kout and Nezval, Funkcionář, 8/4/47, p.1 and p.9.

reform<sup>43</sup>. Their principal reservation, however, was that the discussions in villages would create disquiet and disrupt work<sup>44</sup>. This view, restricting opposition to Ďuriš's procedure in initiating discussion on the draft laws, soon became the central issue so that the actual content of the proposed laws could be pushed into the background. Then even the People's Party could suggest that the laws as such were not controversial, but that presenting them for discussion in villages was an "undemocratic and terrorist method"<sup>45</sup>.

Not surprisingly, Fierlinger's objections were expressed in a more serious way and he made it clear that he was not trying to find a spurious excuse for opposing all the proposals, although he did want some to be slightly altered. His argument was that the KSC, in by-passing the National Front structure, was using its control over the Ministry of Agriculture to push through its proposals without any regard for the other parties. By going at once to the public, the discussion had to take the form of one proposal against all the other parties who had not even had a chance to state their positions<sup>46</sup>.

As the three non-Communist Parties were opposed to Ďuriš's

<sup>43</sup> PL 4/12/46, p.1. See also the interview with Fierlinger, PL 10/1/47, p.1.

<sup>44</sup> See PL 8/11/46, p.1, and the conclusion of the Social Democrats' conference in Kladno, PL 24/11/46, p.1.

<sup>45</sup> Vývoj, 15/1/47, p.51.

<sup>46</sup> PL 10/1/47, p.1.

procedure, albeit for different reasons, the majority in the Agricultural Committee of parliament could even express open disagreement with the Minister<sup>47</sup>. It was even claimed that he had acted unconstitutionally, but it proved easy to ridicule the implication that "the people" were an "unconstitutional agent"<sup>48</sup>. Moreover, a superficially similar procedure was being adopted by the Minister of Education to perfect one of his proposal laws<sup>49</sup>. A detailed study of the constitution and of past precedents could find nothing to prevent full discussion of proposed laws before their presentation to parliament<sup>50</sup>; formally speaking, this was all that Ďuriš was doing as he emphasised that the ultimate decision would be taken in parliament<sup>51</sup>.

#### IV.28.3. Ďuriš responds to the growing divisions on agricultural policy by sharpening and clarifying the KSČ line

The course of the discussions in the villages on Ďuriš's draft laws quickly made it clear that open opposition would have been politically suicidal. Over one third of Czech villages, hardly any of them in frontier areas, sent in resolutions supporting

<sup>47</sup> RP 12/12/46, p.2.

<sup>48</sup> e.g. Slánský, speaking at the KSČ Central Committee meeting of January 1947, RP 24/1/47, p.1.

<sup>49</sup> RP 9/1/47, p.1, and PL 25/1/47, p.2.

<sup>50</sup> See Gottwald's reply to the Agricultural Committee of parliament, Roľnické hlasy, 29/6/47, p.1.

<sup>51</sup> Speaking to the Agricultural Committee of parliament, RP 9/1/47, p.1.



the proposals while only 2% definitely opposed them<sup>52</sup>. Although the National Socialist and People's Parties had previously seemed dominant in many of these villages, it was still not certain that the KSČ had destroyed their strength in the countryside. There was still scope for opposition to KSČ policy around such issues on the price scissors and quota obligations. At the Central Committee meeting in January 1947 it was also argued that many of the richer peasants were definitely opposing the six draft laws, and were sometimes winning the rest of the peasants to their side<sup>53</sup>. Ďuriš even argued that "reaction" was pinning its main hopes in agriculture where there were signs of opposition to the government programme as a whole and of attempts to persuade peasants to refuse to fulfill quota obligations<sup>54</sup>.

So, at the same time as the KSČ was adopting the aim of winning 51% in the next elections, Ďuriš proposed a broadening and sharpening of the six laws<sup>55</sup>. He still made no attempt to work out a long-term policy for Czech agriculture<sup>56</sup>. Nevertheless, KSČ policy was based on an evaluation of the concrete social and political structure of the Czech village which was evidently believed to be different from the Soviet village in the 1920's.

<sup>52</sup> Kaplan: "Rolnické", p.154-158. As an indication of their authenticity, resolutions were generally ratified by representatives of all four parties.

<sup>53</sup> Jech: Probuzená, p.260-264.

<sup>54</sup> J. Ďuriš: Dvouletka, esp. p.3.

<sup>55</sup> Kaplan: "Rolnické", p.160.

<sup>56</sup> See above Section IV.26.5.

Đuriš, on the basis of 1930 figures, perceived the village as divided into broadly three groups. At one extreme were the small number of rich peasants owning over 50ha, or perhaps over 30ha, while at the other extreme were the mass of poor peasants holding up to 5ha. Although, according to his figures, they constituted 70% of all peasants, they often lacked an independent political viewpoint. They tended to be badly ~~educated~~ educated and badly organised, so that they were easily dominated by bigger landowners. In some cases they seemed to have gained self-confidence but in others they remained subservient.

Between these two extremes were the large number of middle peasants. Đuriš evidently regarded them as crucially important not just for their numbers but because they were more capable of independent thought and action. They could be influenced by "reaction" but they could also challenge the political hegemony of the richest farmers<sup>57</sup>.

Although the aim was apparently to teach the small and middle peasants to develop political independence from the richest<sup>58</sup>, there were also times when the prestige of successful farmers was willingly used as a political tool. In one village where the Agrarians had previously won 100% of the votes, in 1946 the KSC won 100%. A major part of the explanation was that the chairman of the KSC organisation was the richest peasant in the village, so that

<sup>57</sup> See Đuriš: Dvouletka, p.5-8.

<sup>58</sup> e.g. Funkcionář, 23/11/46, p.11.

nobody could see any reason for not voting Communist<sup>59</sup>. From this sort of experience the notion developed of an "authoritative middle peasant" who was respected in the village for his wealth<sup>60</sup>. He had to be a "working peasant" as opposed to a real capitalist who no longer worked. The point could be revealed from an example of a "typical" village in which about 30% of the land was held by owners living elsewhere with huge amounts of land over the country generally. Otherwise the biggest holding was under 40ha<sup>61</sup>.

Not surprisingly, there was reluctance within the KSČ to accept this gradual shift in emphasis. Basic organisations were criticised by the Central Committee for their reluctance in recruiting former Agrarians<sup>62</sup>. The party's strength remained overwhelmingly among the smallest peasants<sup>63</sup>.

Moreover, although KSČ policy was apparently based on an attempt to bring together all working peasants, it evidently never won solid support from the richer peasants.

The key to the sharpening of KSČ policy was egalitarian land reform as, at a JSČZ meeting in April 1947 in Hradec Králové attended by 4,000 peasants, Ďuriš added the aim of buying up and

<sup>59</sup> Funkcionář, 8/4/47, p.9.

<sup>60</sup> Slánský, at the Central Committee meeting 4-5/6/47, quoted in Jech: Probuzená, p.328.

<sup>61</sup> Funkcionář, 16/8/47, p.10.

<sup>62</sup> Dvořáková, Lesjuk: Československá, p.89.

<sup>63</sup> Figures from 1946 show that in the Kolín area 83% of KSČ peasants owned under 5ha and only 2% over 10ha. Around Kladno only 7½% owned over 10ha; Kozák: "Význam", p.38.

allocating to poorer peasants all land held by any one family in excess of 50ha. Holdings up to that size were then to be constitutionally guaranteed<sup>64</sup>, so that this implied a definitive solution to the question of private property thereby answering the incessant rumours about kolkhozes.

Although Ďuriš argued that the enemy was "reaction", this policy was evidently intended as part of a sharp fight against other Czech political parties. It was not primarily a response to the needs of agriculture at the time, although some of Ďuriš's proposals did respond to those needs. Instead, a plan for the political mobilisation of the peasants, and inevitably this meant the poorer ones, was worked out to involve deputations to the parties and to parliament in Prague. Ďuriš even worked out the timing of the campaign such that a militant peasant congress could be held in Prague prior to the elections. The peasants could then call a demonstration to parliament, possibly with working class support, and refuse to disperse until their demands were met. This would thereby decide "the defeat of reaction and ; . the elections even before the elections"<sup>65</sup>. He seemed already to be equating his political opponents with reaction by assuming that they would stubbornly refuse to allow the passing of his proposed laws.

<sup>64</sup> RP 5/4/47, p.3.

<sup>65</sup> Jech: Probuzení, p.321.

IV.28.4. The conflicts between parties over agricultural policy are intensified as they clarify their respective positions.

Đuriš's proposal for a further land reform became the central part of his so-called Hradec programme. Its announcement was followed by tense debates in parliamentary committees and then in parliament itself over his original six laws. Particularly the People's Party and the Slovak Democrats were causing delays with masses of counter-proposals but never outright opposition. Nevertheless, as Đuriš's proposals had been well received in villages, it was not difficult to organise deputations of peasants who came throughout June and July to lobby their MPs and to follow the debates. Naturally, the People's Party regarded this as a "terrorist" measure, but were embarrassed to discover that some deputations were even formed on a parity basis<sup>66</sup>.

This pressure forced the People's Party to clarify their own agricultural policy as a response to the Hradec programme. At a rally on 13/7/47 on Kunětická hora near Pardubice they presented a set of general peasant demands. The only reference to land reform was a strong insistence on private property without any constitutional stipulation of a ceiling for the size of holdings<sup>67</sup>. There were the familiar references to "collectivism" being equivalent to slavery, but it was never made any clearer how opposition to an egalitarian land reform could be deduced from such ideas. Instead,

<sup>66</sup> Funkcionář, 16/8/47, p.1.

<sup>67</sup> Obzory, 26/7/47, p.426.

a 4-50ha range of sizes. Presumably they thought that, once a land reform had established this situation, the village would be largely free from social conflicts<sup>71</sup>.

The National Socialists apparently genuinely feared that KSC policy would win enough peasant votes to bring the target of 51% within reach<sup>72</sup>. Nevertheless, they could not present a clear policy of their own. They were still interested in incorporating prominent former Agrarians and it was the latter who became the centre of a major controversy in mid-1947.

The issue was an attempt to reactivate the "Selská jízda" which was an organisation for equestrian sport with a military style structure and apparently a past record as one of the most aggressively partisan of all pre-war Agrarian organisations<sup>73</sup>. It had, it was claimed, continued an illegal existence<sup>74</sup>, and chose to renew its activities in July 1947 in the village of Nechanice near Hradec Králové. This, given the choice of venue, the political situation and the political pasts of the rich farmers supporting it, was obviously intended to be a political demonstration of strength<sup>75</sup>.

<sup>71</sup> See Jech: Probuzená, esp. p.299, and Lacina: "K agrárním", p.47.

<sup>72</sup> See the report of a National Socialist meeting in which Ripka allegedly indicated this; RP 8/7/47, p.1.

<sup>73</sup> Jech: Probuzená, p.314.

<sup>74</sup> According to Feierabend the Supreme Court had taken the different view that the Selská jízda was a non-party organisation and therefore not automatically banned along with the Agrarian Party; Feierabend: Pod vládou, p.120.

<sup>75</sup> Jech: Probuzená, p.315-316.

larger farms were said to be justified on economic grounds while those wanting land were accused of unjustified "jealousy"<sup>68</sup>. This might seem to conflict with the professed principle of wanting more rather than less private property but the point was obscured behind repeated warnings that an upper limit on the size of landholdings was a step towards the abolition of all private property. Ďuriš and Smrkovský were even accused of having lowered the upper limit to 30ha and then to 20ha indicating that in no time at all they would demand "the slavery of the kolkhoz"<sup>69</sup>.

In essence, then, the People's Party placed their faith in and represented the interests of wealthier farms. They tried also to direct their propaganda towards the mass of middle peasants by generating fears that the Hradec programme was a step towards the elimination of private property. This may have indicated real fear that the KSČ would win more peasant votes, but the People's Party probably retained plenty of rural support too.

The Social Democrats, by contrast, broadly supported the Hradec programme. They differed from the KSČ by seeing the need to settle for good the question of kolkhozes with a clear long-term programme for the following twenty years<sup>70</sup>. They seemed no longer to believe that large-scale farming was necessarily more efficient and articles indicated a desire for holdings to fall within

<sup>68</sup> Obzory, 21/6/47, p.354.

<sup>69</sup> Rozehnal, speech, LD 13/9/47, p.2.

<sup>70</sup> See Z. Fierlinger: Zemědělská politika čs. sociální demokracie, Praha, 1947, esp. p.18.

The Ministry of the Interior decided that the event was illegal as it was organised by an illegal body. In this they overruled the District National Committee and enforced their decision with a massive police presence. This incurred the wrath of the Social Democrats, including Fierlinger<sup>76</sup>, who apparently had members among its former-Agrarian organisers<sup>77</sup>. Although no actual clashes occurred it was even described as "the first armed offensive by the security organs against the peasantry"<sup>78</sup>.

IV.28.5. Agreement seems possible around Āuriš's six laws, but the Communists are losing interest in compromises.

Even though agricultural policy was the subject of such tension and controversy, the KSC was able to push Āuriš's draft laws through parliament. They had to accept amendments, some of which they felt to be very important. As an example, the revision of the first land reform was to be entrusted to a special commission of all parties which would in practice create scope for lengthy disputes over each individual case. Nevertheless, agreement had been reached and it caused surprise when Āuriš suddenly openly accused "them" of trying to defend the interests of large land-owners<sup>79</sup>. This suggested that the KSC still hoped to be able to

<sup>76</sup> J. Jeřábek, PL 10/8/47, p.1.

<sup>77</sup> RP 16/7/47, p.3.

<sup>78</sup> J. Smetáček, Svět práce, 7/8/47, p.1. By contrast, the Communists described the incident as an "Agro-fascist" provocation and would accept no criticisms of the police; RP 8/7/47, p.1.

<sup>79</sup> RP 4/10/47, p.1-2.



correct the laws back to <sup>the</sup> form of the original proposals<sup>80</sup>.

One particularly important concession concerned the organizational form of JSČZ. Discussions had become deadlocked in late 1946. Among the difficulties was a Communist belief that former Agrarians, including Feierabend and Suchý, were attempting to turn JSČZ into a fifth party. There was evidence for this in reports of illegal meetings<sup>81</sup>, in an attempt to disrupt a public meeting at which Ďuriš was speaking<sup>82</sup> and in a circular received by KSČ members who had formerly been Agrarians<sup>83</sup>. Discussions were, however, resumed when the KSČ conceded that the JSČZ need not be organised like a trade union with voluntary membership, and that elections could be indirect, secret and on the basis of proportional representation for the parties. They attached a condition to this that elections should take place in three property groups, those under 10ha, those owning 10-20ha and those with over 20ha. By this means they hoped that the richest peasants would not be able to dominate. The Social Democrats were slower to make this concession and tried to keep their own "independent" position that JSČZ should be organised like a trade union<sup>84</sup>.

Just as they made this concession, the KSČ started looking for

<sup>80</sup> c.f. Jech: Probuzená, p.350.

<sup>81</sup> Ďuriš, speech, RP 4/12/46, p.1.

<sup>82</sup> RP 17/12/46, p.1.

<sup>83</sup> RP 8/1/47, p.1.

<sup>84</sup> For a full account, see M. Kovář, Svět práce, 15/5/47, p.1.

an alternative form of peasant organisation. At the Central Committee in June 1947 no firm decision was taken but there was considerable <sup>discussion</sup> of reviving Peasant Commissions<sup>85</sup>. Soon there was great emphasis on organising them wherever possible and they began to create structures covering whole regions<sup>86</sup>. This was obviously a good way to separate the smaller from the bigger peasants as Peasant Commissions were uniquely concerned with the issue of land reform. In this, they seemed, at least in part, to contradict the broader approach the KSČ had been evolving, albeit against the instincts of many party members. Apparently there was a significant decline in the representation of middle peasants in later campaigns<sup>87</sup>. This was related to the different approach increasingly adopted by the KSČ from mid-1947 and discussed in Part V.

#### IV.28.6. Summary and discussion.

Civil servants could not be as closely incorporated into the plan as the workers in nationalised industries. Nevertheless, the Communist Party's attitude towards them was closely related to the general needs of the plan. The belief was that there could and should be a reduction in the number of civil servants - and of office workers generally - so as to release labour for directly productive activities. The KSČ therefore firmly opposed demands

<sup>85</sup> Jech: Probuzení, p.329-330.

<sup>86</sup> Jech: Probuzení, p.351.

<sup>87</sup> Kaplan: "Rólnické", p.172.

for wage rises until this redistribution of labour had been achieved.

Although the administrative apparatus was probably not overmanned, all the parties believed that it was. Nevertheless, the social aspirations of civil servants became a source of potentially more serious conflicts when the National Socialists, in an effort to win popularity, began supporting civil servants' demands for a restoration of their earlier differentials.

Agriculture seemed to be still less dependent on the plan and it was in this field that the Communists' social policies deviated most markedly from the approach that had made the plan possible. They pressed vigorously for further land reform and encouraged villages to send resolutions and deputations to parliament in support of these demands. Despite accusations to the contrary from all the other parties, there was nothing inherently undemocratic or "totalitarian" in this. Nevertheless, as the KSC started the process before consulting with the other parties, it did indicate a degree of contempt towards their partners which caused considerable annoyance even to the Social Democrats.

All parties then had to clarify their respective agricultural policies. The National Socialist and People's Parties seemed at best reluctant to support further land reform, but they did let some laws through parliament albeit in amended form. The Social Democrats were the most constructive: they supported land reform and also presented a long-term programme for agriculture.

The KSC said very little about the long term. This gave their

opponents the opportunity to accuse them of planning a forced collectivisation of agriculture. Although they never renounced the view that large-scale farms are the most efficient, they seem in fact not to have considered how such a transformation of agriculture could be achieved. Instead, their ideas reflected a subordination of systematic, long-term thoughts to the immediate needs of the struggle against other parties and to the aim of winning a majority in the next elections.

Throughout 1947 they became more aggressive in this and tensions between parties consequently increased.

## CHAPTER 29: FURTHER DISAGREEMENTS OVER THE CREATION OF NEW ORGANS OF STATE POWER.

From mid-1946 to the autumn of 1947 the new Czechoslovak state seemed secure against sudden upsets: its internal stability was pointed to with pride by many politicians and journalists. It is therefore not surprising that less attention was paid to the basic consolidation of the state. There were, however, still deep disagreements over how to construct and control new organs of public order and administration. A particularly sharp conflict arose over the punishment of collaborators and this very probably strengthened the belief among many Communists that co-operation within the existing coalition could not be permanent.

### IV.29.1. Comparatively light sentences for the Protectorate ministers reopen controversies over the role of legality.

The punishment of traitors and collaborators was a permanent subject of bitterness and disappointments. Its time limit was repeatedly extended until May 1947 after which there were still plenty more unsettled cases. In the end 132,509 cases were investigated, 40,000 were not even brought to trial and only 21,340 were tried and punished. A very large number of those accused seem to have escaped punishment by one means or another<sup>1</sup>. Not

<sup>1</sup>A. Čepička, in parliament, RP 26/3/48, p.1. There are very similar figures in Dvořáková, Lesjuk: Československá, p.44.

surprisingly, there were protests from the KSČ and resistance organisations. The Union of the National Revolution even called for a renewal of all processes against traitors and collaborators that were deemed to have had an unsatisfactory outcome<sup>2</sup>. Grňa left no doubt about his deep disappointment<sup>3</sup>, while the KSČ claimed that a basic part of the Košice programme had not been fulfilled<sup>4</sup>.

Unease was increased by legal actions against partisans for their wartime activities. In one case two were sentenced to twenty years imprisonment for carrying out the orders of their commander and were released only after protests<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, the fate of the purge affected ownership questions as the National Socialists opposed the confiscation of property when evidence of transgressions during the occupation was small<sup>6</sup>. Their position generally was that the prospect of the purge was creating "fear" in the nation which they linked up with claims of "gestapism" in the police force<sup>7</sup>. In 1947 Drtina was suggesting a general amnesty<sup>8</sup>. Authentic looking documentary evidence, published very quickly after the February events, suggests that even before that

<sup>2</sup>RP 3/10/47, p.1.

<sup>3</sup>RP 22/3/47, p.1.

<sup>4</sup>A. Gregor, RP 25/4/47, p.2.

<sup>5</sup>RP 11/7/47, p.1.

<sup>6</sup>e.g. F. Martinec, Svobodný zítřek, 10/7/47, p.2.

<sup>7</sup>e.g. Hora, quoted in Tvorba, 25/6/47.

<sup>8</sup>Speaking in parliament, RP 11/12/47, p.5, and in the government meeting of 18/2/47; Cestou k Únoru, p.198.

Drtina was using his position as Minister of Justice to help at least a few minor collaborators who he expected to become solid National Socialists<sup>9</sup>.

If this evidence only confirmed Communist suspicions then there were others who had been very reluctant to criticise the legal system. Fierlinger, for example, maintained that the slowness of the legal processes was not a consequence of incompetence or sabotage but rather of Czech thoroughness<sup>10</sup>. It certainly was true that cases were very difficult to prove. Even this, however, could not explain the outcome of the trial of the Protectorate Ministers which was to be the implicit test-case and example for smaller processes elsewhere, and could obviously be taken as a precedent affecting the whole further course of the purge.

The National Court was established in January 1946 and started by trying and sentencing to death K.H. Frank. The trial of the Protectorate Ministers began at the end of April and progressed slowly. Slánský was even led to complain that Czechoslovakia was probably the only liberated country not to have passed a sentence on any minister of a traitor government<sup>11</sup>. Finally, on 31/7/46, the trial ended and none of these Czechs received more than a prison sentence: one of them was found guilty but given no

<sup>9</sup>RP 4/3/48, p.1; RP 9/3/48, p.1; RP 20/3/48, p.3; RP 27/3/48, p.5. He apparently left all the information easily accessible in his office when resigning because he assumed that the resignation would not be accepted.

<sup>10</sup>PL 29/11/46, p.2.

<sup>11</sup>RP 11/7/46, p.2.

sentence. This caused an outcry from the KSČ<sup>12</sup> and from resistance organisations. The ČNR was suddenly revived around demands for a retrial and it held a rally with speeches by its leaders, including the non-party chairman Pražák who seemed to be very concerned at the course of the purge generally<sup>13</sup>.

The National Socialists insisted that the sentences could not be altered. They very firmly insisted on the principle of the independence of the courts which they seemed to understand to mean freedom from any outside pressures. Their view was cautiously challenged by a leading legal expert who, while not completely rejecting the principle, insisted that courts could not possibly be completely divorced from the thinking of the people, and that was particularly true in a "revolutionary" period<sup>14</sup>. Many of the revolutionary changes were, strictly speaking, illegal. Even Beneš's claim to be President was highly dubious. It seemed obvious that, to some extent at least, "in a revolutionary period the legal convictions of the people replace the constitution and are the highest authority in the state"<sup>15</sup>. Nobody publicly took this to the extreme of rejecting any sort of legal system: rather it appeared

<sup>12</sup> RP 1/8/46, p.1. They evidently would have liked death sentences which the same court later meted out to six of the fifteen MPs and senators of Henlein's party; PL 15/2/47, p.1. In all, special courts gave death sentences to 713 people, 234 of whom were Czechs; Dvořáková, Lesjuk: Československá, p.44.

<sup>13</sup> His speech was printed in Dnešek, 26/9/46, p.417. For a full report of the rally, see ÚRO 29/8/46, p.7.

<sup>14</sup> A. Hobza, RP 4/9/46, p.2.

<sup>15</sup> Hobza, RP 4/9/46, p.2.



to state the obvious that legality, far from being completely independent, is created by people.

This, of course, raises the question of how people create laws and legal institutions. The KSČ did not at the time clarify further their views on this.

The National Socialists also indicated that they felt the sentences were satisfactory as they amounted to a condemnation by an independent court of the whole Protectorate system<sup>16</sup>. This attitude drew a bitter response. Those who had fought, suffered and even died in the resistance had not felt it necessary to sit around and wait for an independent court to tell them how they should judge the Protectorate. If that was the only aim of the legal processes then they were an unnecessary charade. This only strengthened fears that something was wrong in the legal system.

Nevertheless, a viable compromise was reached in the government. It was accepted that the sentences were too mild and contravened the Košice programme and the Gottwald government programme. They were not to be used as a precedent for a soft line in other trials of war criminals. This much was the Communist's view, but the National Socialists could feel satisfied that the result of the trial was confirmed as being final<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup>SS 1/8/46, p.2.

<sup>17</sup>RP 7/8/46, p.1, and SS 7/8/46, p.1.

IV.29.2. Despite opposition from other parties, the Communists retain their strength in the police force.

The definitive organisational form for the new police was to be settled by a new law, but it proved very difficult to find a formulation acceptable to all the parties. The government programme reflected this deadlock with the simple statement that there should be a law<sup>18</sup>. After lengthy arguments a law was passed on 7/9/47 with the KSČ making some concessions: in particular, the law did not recognise the function of special education officers<sup>19</sup>. Despite this, it broadly followed the Communists' ideas. They claimed to be seeking a reconciliation of the two opposite conceptions of a centralised military organisation and of maximum power to decentralised National Committees. Nevertheless, they insisted absolutely that the Ministry of the Interior should head an independent police organisational structure and thereby retain full control over personnel questions<sup>20</sup>.

Discussion of these questions was closely bound up with continuing attacks, particularly from the National Socialists, on the KSČ for dominating the police force. There were still no definite figures to illustrate this and the National Socialists had enough strength there to establish their own organisation and hold a meeting attended by 500 members<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>18</sup>Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.150.

<sup>19</sup>Ovořáková, Lesjuk: Československá, p.43.

<sup>20</sup>Lidová správa, 21/10/45, p.2-3, and subsequent issues of the same journal.

<sup>21</sup>SS 6/6/47, p.2.

Nevertheless, to make convincing their claim that the Communists were about to institute "totalitarianism", they gave great publicity to alleged instances of improper practices by policemen: these were labelled "gestapism". Many of the specific cases were easily answered<sup>22</sup>, but even the Union of Liberated Political Prisoners, while otherwise closer to the KSČ, expressed concern at isolated police transgressions<sup>23</sup>.

When presenting concrete proposals, the National Socialists were extremely vague. Their main spokesman on the subject, Hora, referred to the importance of experience rather than party allegiance. He opposed not only education officers but seemingly all education within the police. He spoke a great deal about freedom but had nothing to say about an organisational form that could ensure it<sup>24</sup>.

As usual, the Social Democrats were both more constructive in their suggestions and more serious in their criticisms. Following the 1946 elections they published a small number of cases which seemed to amount to the police helping the KSČ to search other parties' premises<sup>25</sup>. The Communist response was to blame unspecified transgressions on the exhaustion of policemen who were having to

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<sup>22</sup> The strongest allegation was that a man had died from methods of police interrogation, but the Ministry of the Interior persuasively argued that he had died from cancer after three months in hospital; SS 26/4/47, p.2, and RP 24/5/47, p.1.

<sup>23</sup> SS 6/5/47, p.3.

<sup>24</sup> e.g. Život strany, 31/3/47, p.4-5.

<sup>25</sup> e.g. PL 1/8/46, p.1.

work 12-16 hours daily without holidays<sup>26</sup>. There were no more references to this type of incident and the Social Democrats, although they were beginning to criticise the police more generally, always seemed to be controlled and unhysterical on the issue<sup>27</sup>. They complained more vigorously when it was decided that the police should be present at political meetings and rallies and seemed to be taking the opportunity to assert their independence from the KSC<sup>28</sup>. Even then, they did not make the mistake of implying that the police in the pre-Munich republic had been free from criticisms<sup>29</sup>. Consequently their proposals looked for means to ensure what they saw as a further democratisation of the police force to give it more trust from the public. This was to include full control by the Regional National Committees rather than the Ministry of the Interior<sup>30</sup>.

This particular suggestion would, obviously, have given them more power over the police at the expense of the Ministry of the Interior. It was therefore unacceptable to the KSC, but the Social Democrats could still feel that they had had an influence as their suggestion for the organisation of education was accepted<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> RP 24/9/46, p.2.

<sup>27</sup> e.g. Kubát's speech in parliament, PL 11/10/46, p.2.

<sup>28</sup> PL 23/3/47, p.1. See also the report of their Central Executive Committee meeting of 14/4/47, PL 15/4/47, p.1.

<sup>29</sup> e.g. Kubát, speech, PL 29/3/47, p.3.

<sup>30</sup> For a full discussion, see Jeřábek, PL 15/1/47, p.2.

<sup>31</sup> PL 12/6/47, p.2.

IV.29.3. There are disagreements over proposals for the future organisational form of National Committees, but they do not lead to major conflicts between parties.

The argument over National Committees was already set in the discussions over the government programme which led to the deletion of clear statements on decentralisation and the extent of their powers<sup>32</sup>. At the same time National Committees were generally, pushed back further from the centre of political attention. There were to have been National Committee elections in 1946 but the KSČ won acceptance for a proposal that they should simply be reorganised on the basis of the general election results. Then they wanted no further elections until the end of the Two Year Plan "in the interests of economic consolidation"<sup>33</sup>.

At the same time, the Communists were noticeably most active in their broad defence of National Committees, in trying to improve their work and in insisting that they should remain in contact with and under the control of the people through regular meetings<sup>34</sup>. This included definite efforts to combat complacency among Communists, who were content to boast about the election results, and did not immediately see that they had to work hard to make the National Committees succeed<sup>35</sup>. This was backed up with definite efforts to educate representatives in National Committees<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Compare Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.96-97 and p.122.

<sup>33</sup> Gottwald, at the Central Committee meeting of 23/1/47: Spisy, XIII, p.302.

<sup>34</sup> e.g. the account from Česká Lípa, Funkcionář, 11/6/47, p.6. See also Cihlář, Funkcionář, 23/11/46, p.12, and Bertelmann: Vývoj, p.167-168.

<sup>35</sup> Cihlář, Funkcionář, 7/7/46, p.11.

<sup>36</sup> See over page.

They still had to face blanket hostility to the idea of administration at local levels being led by elected representatives<sup>37</sup>. This attitude could be supported by those "specialists" who were still not reconciled to their new subordinate position. There was a continuing source of conflict in this as National Committees did not have the power to appoint their own officials<sup>38</sup>, but only very rarely did this lead to open disputes<sup>39</sup>. A particular case was the legal apparatus which, as the National Socialists insisted, was to be quite independent from the National Committees, so that it could be a control over them<sup>40</sup>. Particularly in some frontier areas, where National Committee members often abused their authority, this control was very useful. There<sup>were</sup>, however, a few serious conflicts over the fate of confiscates in Varnsdorf and other places<sup>41</sup>.

Broadly speaking, then, the National Committees became accepted as permanent organs although there were different views on the extent of their powers. The People's Party and the Slovak Democrats did not work out a coherent position but could find common ground with

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<sup>36</sup>(From previous page.)

A school was held for District National Committee chairmen on 15-17/1/47. Speeches were delivered by Gottwald, Nosek and Čepička and reproduced in Větší moc národním výborům, Praha, 1947.

<sup>37</sup>e.g. B. Bobek, LD 11/7/46, p.1.

<sup>38</sup>Bertelmann: Vývoj, p.213-214.

<sup>39</sup>Bertelmann: Vývoj, p.221-222.

<sup>40</sup>See the report of the National Socialists' Presidium meeting of 1/7/47, SS 2/7/47, p.1 and p.2.

<sup>41</sup>Bertelmann: Vývoj, p.164-165.

the Social Democrats and National Socialists who, in one sense or another, saw Regional National Committees as an independent counterweight to the central government. This was a natural tactical position owing to their weak representation in the Ministry of the Interior and was not connected to an argument for further decentralisation<sup>42</sup>. They tended to support greater independence for National Committees, for example in finance, while simultaneously qualifying this with considerable limitations to their field of competence, so that a great deal could be administered separately by specialists.

The Communists differed from this by seeing the National Committees essentially as executive organs of the state. Certain things, such as railways, posts and the army, would be excluded from their competence, and the importance of their functions generally meant that they had to be more definitely subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior<sup>43</sup>. This won them the accusation of being supporters of the most rigid centralism<sup>44</sup>. They certainly seem to have emphasised the need for clearer subordination of National Committees to the Ministry of the Interior as tension between political parties increased and particularly after the Nechanice incident<sup>45</sup>.

While arguing that the National Committees were essentially to

<sup>42</sup> Bertelmann: Vývoj, p.195 and p.86-88.

<sup>43</sup> For a review of the different positions see Svobodné noviny, 12/2/48, p.1.

<sup>44</sup> e.g. A. Novotný, Svobodné noviny, 5/2/48, p.1.

<sup>45</sup> e.g. Nosek, interview, RP 5/7/47, p.1.

be just an administrative apparatus, the KSČ did want the apparatus to be as efficient as possible and above all to be close to the people being administered. For this, and probably also to remove a powerful potential counter to the Ministry of the Interior, they advocated the dissolution of the Regional National Committees and a decentralisation of their powers into a number of smaller units. This would strengthen the position of elected over unelected workers and would be linked with a further shifting of functions downwards in the apparatus<sup>46</sup>. The most interesting response was from the National Socialists. They tried not to commit themselves and advocated delay before making any changes. Finally, though, they accepted that in principle the idea was good and based their opposition on the belief that "units would be created which would be under Communist influence"<sup>47</sup>. A comment applicable to any elected organ, but less true of the existing Regional bodies.

#### IV.29.4. Summary and discussion.

Although the KSČ placed the main emphasis on social and economic issues, there were also important and revealing disputes over the shaping of the new organs of power and of public administration. It is as if there were three aspects to KSČ policy. For the Two Year Plan they wanted maximum public involvement and co-operation from the other parties. In agriculture they wanted to mobilise

<sup>46</sup> The arguments were persuasive and repeated many times. See esp. Lidová správa, 1/3/47, p.3, and Fakta a cifry, 28/12/48, p.88-94.

<sup>47</sup> Život strany, 15/10/47, p.5 and p.6.



public opinion against the other parties. In the police force they effectively denied the need for any widespread public involvement or control.

The KSČ refused to accept criticisms of the police and dismissed the continuing demagogic and exaggerated attacks from the National Socialists. They did make minor concessions to the more serious proposals of the Social Democrats', but still refused to weaken the Minister of the Interior's control over personnel questions.

This contrasted strikingly with their attitude towards the trials of traitors and collaborators. They encouraged public protests when the former ministers in the Protectorate government were given comparatively light sentences. The National Socialists, however, insisted that the decision of the court was final and this view prevailed. The KSČ and resistance organisations were still deeply disappointed by the activities of special courts generally.

The Communists also believed that public administration should be as close as possible to the people. They therefore wanted the widest possible field of competence for National Committees (this, of course, excluded real power over the police) alongside a further decentralisation of their structure and general subordination to the Ministry of the Interior. Generally speaking, the other parties advocated a narrower field of competence for National Committees, but greater freedom of action within that narrower field. They could thereby hope to create a possible counter to the Communist dominated Ministry of the Interior.

There were, then, some important disagreements over these questions. Particularly the KSČ attitude towards the police,



## CHAPTER 30: THE GOTTWALD GOVERNMENT AND SLOVAK DEVELOPMENT.

### IV.30.1. The Communists are extremely concerned at the implications of the Slovak election results, but find a way to hamstring the Democratic Party without disrupting the parliamentary system.

The Slovak election results seemed to the KSS to indicate the re-emergence of the same bloc as had signed the Žilina agreement. It was even suggested that the Democratic Party had degenerated into a mask for fascists<sup>1</sup>, and that the April agreement had been part of the HSL'S underground's plan to find a legal platform inside Slovakia within a united front of all anti-Communist forces. The intention, it seemed, was to make no attempt to renew the Slovak state until the international situation became more favourable: in the meantime, the underground wanted a right-wing Catholic party that could work closely with the Czech People's Party<sup>2</sup>.

Even if former fascists were not the only Catholic force behind the April agreement, Kempný did distribute a statement over the whole of Slovakia appealing openly to those loyal to the ideas of the Slovak state to vote for the Democrats. There were even cases of campaigning on the basis that the Democratic Party was the same as the HSL'S, and calls after the election for Tisó to replace Beneš as President<sup>3</sup>. A seven member investigating team sent by the Ministry of the Interior revealed that the election campaign had

<sup>1</sup>RP 29/5/46, p.2.

<sup>2</sup>RP 6/6/46, p.1.

<sup>3</sup>RP 7/6/46, p.1.

been marred by the exploitation of religion, the active involvement of priests and the glorification of the Slovak state and its leaders. There were even Democratic Party parliamentary candidates who had previously been photographed in SS uniform and some elected MPs were still awaiting trial before People's Courts<sup>4</sup>.

Concern among Czech politicians extended beyond just Communists. Only Obzory seemed able to reassure itself that the Slovak Democrats were "clearly Czechoslovak"<sup>5</sup>. This meant that the KSČ could find enough Czech support to greatly restrict the Democrats' influence without contravening the accepted parliamentary practices.

Within the KSS there were even strong doubts about continuing with the National Front strategy<sup>6</sup>, but it was difficult to see any practical alternative. Possibilities like mobilising the partisans for armed struggle or administratively dissolving the Democratic Party were rejected as that would have amounted to dissolving the newly elected parliament in which the KSČ was the dominant force. The idea of dissolving the Democratic Party while leaving its parliamentary representation was also felt to be wrong because it could only have led to disorder in Slovakia with blame ultimately going to the Gottwald government. Even keeping the Democrats out

<sup>4</sup> RP 9/6/46, p.1. Election leaflets included slogans like "Only Jews and dogs vote KSS", "We want a Czechoslovakia - without Jews and Communists" or, more simply, "Death to Jews"; Nové slovo, 7/6/46, p.5.

<sup>5</sup> Obzory, 22/6/46, p.385.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. Valo at the KSS Central Committee meeting of 1/8/46, KSS dok, p.473.

of the government would have been very dangerous as they could then behave as a purely opposition party: the resulting heightened tensions could even have resulted in civil war. Under certain circumstances that might invite intervention from the West<sup>7</sup>.

So these possibilities were both dangerous and unnecessary as they overlooked the dominant fact of the election results which was the KSČ victory. Moreover, although there were voices dismissing the Democrats as a whole<sup>8</sup>, more generally the Communists felt that the April agreement had brought not only over 60% of the votes but also sharpened conflicts of interests within the party<sup>9</sup>. There was therefore no point in flatly refusing to form a government with the Democratic Party as that would in no way encourage divisions within its ranks<sup>10</sup>.

The need, then, was to find a means to expose and intensify ~~the~~ divisions and that involved placing certain conditions before the Democrats could join the government. In particular, Gottwald demanded a clear statement from the Democrats on their attitude towards Tiso and also an acceptance of the definite subordination of

<sup>7</sup> Široký, speaking at the KSS Central Committee meeting of 1/8/46, KSS dok, p.479-480. This was essentially an expansion of Gottwald's argument at the KSČ Central Committee meeting of 30/5/46, Spisy, XIII, p.80-81 and p.85.

<sup>8</sup> e.g. Kopecký at the government meeting of 27/5/46: "That whole formation is in its essence separatist and anti-Czechoslovak . .", KSS dok, p.421.

<sup>9</sup> Široký, 1/8/46, KSS dok, p.478.

<sup>10</sup> KSS dok, p.430.

the SNR to the Prague government<sup>11</sup>. It would then be possible to accept a reorganisation of the SNR in line with the election results.

Such tough conditions could be imposed because of the continuing "Czechoslovakism" of the National Socialists. It was also important that the Democrats' ability to resist was limited as their electoral victory did not represent a homogeneous and mobilisable strength. This became apparent when HSL'S supporters, openly interpreting the election results as their own victory, staged public demonstrations in Bratislava. The SOR called a counter-demonstration and then print workers bluntly refused to print the Democratic Party's daily Čas from 2/6/46 until, on 5/6/46, the Democratic Party's leaders made clear their approval for the uprising and the Košice programme and publicly dissociated themselves from the pro-fascist demonstrations<sup>12</sup>.

Following this the Slovak situation was discussed at a National Front meeting on 12/6/46 and the outcome was the "Third Prague Agreement" of 28/6/46. In this the SNR accepted that its legislative powers and the appointment of Commissioners were subject to the approval of the government<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> KSS dok, p.424.

<sup>12</sup> Jarošová, et al: Odbory, 109-110.

<sup>13</sup> S. Falt'an: Slovenská, p.222.

IV.30.2. The Communists stress the Two Year Plan as the centre of their political strategy: a start is made to Slovak industrialisation.

Slovak Communists accepted the new arrangement from two different standpoints. Some regarded it as a regrettable but necessary concession that they thought would be only temporary. Others, such as Široký, could see nothing to be gained in any independence for Slovak organs which he saw as a concession to reactionary Slovak separatism<sup>14</sup>. As he continually argued: "It is stupidity to think today about a centralist policy when a Communist heads the Government"<sup>15</sup> so that, in his view, the only danger was from Slovak reaction and not Czech centralism<sup>16</sup>.

Anyway, in practical terms, the only way for Slovak Communists to overcome their electoral setback was to pursue those policies that would be given overwhelming backing from a majority of the Czech parties. This did not mean pursuing identical policies to the KSČ in the Czech lands but it did mean avoiding certain issues, like general land reform, that would be unpopular there. Instead, emphasis was placed on Slovakia's special role within the all-state Two Year Plan: this encountered difficulties partly from Czech opposition<sup>17</sup>. On land reform the policy remained timid so that, ultimately, the best issue for challenging the Democrats' hegemony

<sup>14</sup> S. Faltán: Slovenská, p.226-227.

<sup>15</sup> Speaking at the KSS Central Committee meeting of 16/12/46, KSS dok, p.497.

<sup>16</sup> Speaking on 31/7/46, KSS dok, p.426.

<sup>17</sup> See below p.124.

and reasserting KSS leadership in Slovakia seemed to be that of traitors and collaborators. This was both an important issue inside Slovakia and one on which the KSS could expect strong Czech support.

At first, however, the Two Year Plan was presented as the best basis for overcoming the widespread demoralisation in the KSS. It was even accepted as the principal point in the programme of the new Board of Commissioners formed in September 1946. This body contained representatives of the two biggest Slovak parties in proportion to their electoral performances. The Democrats took the key posts of Agriculture and Information. The KSS even had to concede control over the Interior which was taken by the non-party soldier Lt-col. Ferjenčík. Husák then took the important position of the Chairman of the Board.

Despite their numerical strength, the Democrats could "not come forward with even one concrete suggestion", so that the KSS still seemed to hold an initiative<sup>18</sup>. They controlled industrial affairs and were dominant within the managements of nationalised industries<sup>19</sup>, so that they had an excellent basis for starting the industrialisation of Slovakia. This, seen as the precondition for overcoming poverty and the effects of over-population, was given increasing emphasis throughout 1946 as the KSČ turned its attention generally towards economic questions. Some of the tasks could yield results

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<sup>18</sup>Široký, speaking at the KSS Central Committee meeting of 17/12/46, KSS dok, p.521.

<sup>19</sup>Laluha: Február, p.65.



quickly: these included the reconstruction of the transport network. There were also advances that could be made from the existing base, such as developing industries using or related to wood and agriculture. The objective of raising Slovakia to the economic level of the Czech lands appeared to be a more distant prospect<sup>20</sup>.

The Communists believed that Slovak industrialisation would be greatly aided by the rejection of any sort of economic separatism and by the creation of a single Czechoslovak economy in which the most backward areas could be helped to develop as quickly as possible<sup>21</sup>. Slovak industrialisation could also be justified from the Czech viewpoint as a way to strengthen Czechoslovakia by making Slovaks feel more at home within the common state<sup>22</sup>, or within an all-state context as a sensible concomitant to the general proposed Eastward shift in economic orientation<sup>23</sup>.

For the KSS the start of industrialisation, as was envisaged in the Two Year Plan, was believed to be of paramount political importance. Široký argued that, as in the Czech lands, "we can only prove the correctness of our policy through the economic field"<sup>24</sup>. He was aware of the difficulties to be faced. The KSS had established only

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<sup>20</sup> See J. Bránik's speech to the KSS Central Committee on 12/3/46, KSS dok, p.367-405.

<sup>21</sup> Bránik, RP 10/10/46, p.2.

<sup>22</sup> Frejka, RP 26/2/46, p.1.

<sup>23</sup> Souček: Znárodnění, p.47.

<sup>24</sup> Speaking at the KSS Central Committee meeting of 13/5/47, KSS dok, p.583.

a few factory groups<sup>25</sup> and there were repeated references to deeper problems, particularly the shortage of highly qualified manpower<sup>26</sup>. Figures for "engineers" in transport, public works and finance showed a dramatic decline from 1228 in 1938 to 590<sup>in</sup> 1945. Moreover, those left tended to be old, accentuating the urgency not only of strict controls to ensure their most efficient utilisation, but also of long-term education measures<sup>27</sup>.

It is clear from their approach that the KSS regarded the Two Year Plan as a task essentially for industry alone. There was a vision of a modernised agriculture within an industrialised Slovakia but it required enormous changes and only the first beginnings could be accomplished during the Two Year Plan. The key political question was therefore the extent to which industries could be developed and the major advance in this was to be based on transporting equipment from the depopulated Czech frontiers.

It had seemed a logical solution as soon as the Czech administration in frontier areas found it necessary to rationalise the allocation of labour by closing down some factories<sup>28</sup>. Laušman discussed the idea in Bratislava in June 1945 but no real initiatives were

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<sup>25</sup> Laluha: Február, p.72.

<sup>26</sup> e.g. Husák and Čulen at the KSS Central Committee, 1/8/46, KSS dok, p.471.

<sup>27</sup> Bednárík, Nové slovo, 1946, No.5, p.11.

<sup>28</sup> There were often references to factories being closed permanently in frontier areas in late 1945. Apparently 35% of enterprises were closed at least temporarily in the Ústí nad Labem area, PL 18/5/46, p.7.

taken until after the 1946 elections when Široký and Laušman jointly proposed a plan to relocate existing industry to bring 24,000 jobs to Slovakia. They hoped all this would be completed by March 1947<sup>29</sup>.

The original delay was largely due to political opposition to the idea. Although Široký tried to argue that it was in the interests of the whole state<sup>30</sup>, there were counter-arguments that the Czech economy would somehow suffer<sup>31</sup>. Such views were even expressed in public and backed up by the claim that Slovakia never could be raised to the economic level of the Czech lands<sup>32</sup>.

Evidently, such arguments could find significant support even in 1947. In Cheb all four parties and their representatives in the District National Committee opposed the removal of industrial equipment which, they claimed, was important to the local economy. There was even a brief protest strike which the trade union leadership vigorously condemned<sup>33</sup>.

These delays enabled the Democrats to gain political capital by portraying the operation as a failure. They pointed to its slow progress, to the obsolescence of the equipment and to the minimal impact in Eastern Slovakia<sup>34</sup>. The KSS tried to make capital out of

<sup>29</sup> J. Bušniak, Výstavba Slovenska, II, No.3, March 1947, p.13-14.

<sup>30</sup> Speaking at a conference of KSS economists in Bratislava, RP 13/2/46, p.2.

<sup>31</sup> Referred to by Frejka, RP 26/2/46, p.1.

<sup>32</sup> J. Kabel, LD 22/1/46, .1.

<sup>33</sup> Onešek, 6/2/47, p.723, and G. Kliment, Práce, 11/2/47, p.1.

<sup>34</sup> e.g. Čas 20/7/47, p.3.

what was being achieved claiming, in the summer of 1947, that 188 factories had already been shifted and provided employment for 12,000 workers: more were coming to provide another 14,000 jobs<sup>35</sup>.

There is no doubt that the policy could be very popular as there were appeals from all sides for factories<sup>36</sup>, but it was still only a drop in the ocean and of itself could not significantly change the complexion of Slovak society. Beginnings in fact were made to the industrialisation of Eastern Slovakia but many areas lacked even the most basic preconditions. First there had to be a proper transport and electricity network and that could only really be begun under the later Five Year Plan<sup>37</sup>. The inevitable tendency therefore was to place factories in areas already partly industrialised. Still, over the whole Two Year Plan period 25,980 jobs were provided by this means in Slovakia with 40% in engineering. Although some of the equipment was obsolete, much of it could provide a real basis for further industrial development<sup>38</sup>.

#### IV.30.3. Czech land reform policies still have little impact in Slovakia.

After the elections some prominent Slovak Communists began referring again to general land reform and to the benefits for the poorest peasants that could follow from a 50ha ceiling on holdings<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> Pravda 22/8/47, p.1.

<sup>36</sup> Laluha: Február, p.94.

<sup>37</sup> M. Hrušovský: Výstavba Slovenska, II, No.11, November 1947, p.11.

<sup>38</sup> Laluha: Február, p.103.

<sup>39</sup> e.g. Vašečka, Nové slovo, 14/6/46, p.3.

Siroký, in line with the strategy that he and Gottwald were evolving for the KSS, opposed this and insisted again on rapidly completing the first land reform<sup>40</sup>. At first there seemed to be considerable successes. A special apparatus was established and decided on the confiscation of 217012ha in the short period 8/7/46 to 2/10/46<sup>41</sup>.

Then there followed the familiar delays, discussions on who should receive land, and attempts to reverse many of the decisions. In practice the land could not be divided up before the spring sowing<sup>42</sup>. This meant that the KSS was still trying to develop a campaign for completing the first land reform at the time when the KSČ was publicising Ďuriš's six laws and the Hradec programme.

It appears that the six laws were not very widely known in Slovak villages. The KSS was still weak in the countryside and many villages did not even receive a single party publication. Moreover, the KSS was preoccupied with other issues such as the first land reform, settling Slovaks in the South and the political activities around the trial of Tiso<sup>43</sup>. From mid-1947 however, as in the Czech lands, more attention was paid to the possibilities of a further land reform. The Hradec programme was published in Slovak<sup>44</sup> and Vašečka seized on the opportunity to argue, with a mass of

<sup>40</sup> Speaking at the KSS Presidium meeting, 14/7/46, quoted in Cambel: Slovenská, p.274.

<sup>41</sup> Cambel: Slovenská, p.280.

<sup>42</sup> Cambel: Slovenská, p.284-285.

<sup>43</sup> Cambel: Slovenská, p.332-334.

<sup>44</sup> J. Ďuriš: Čo pripravuje.

statistics, that the first land reform simply could not provide enough land. A maximum holding of 50ha would, he claimed, release roughly enough land to bring the minimum holding up to 5ha<sup>45</sup>.

IV.30.4. The Communists propose intelligent and tactful policies on education and religion.

The KSS was the only Slovak party to put forward clearly formulated proposals for an education policy which could be linked to the needs of an industrialising society and to raising the general cultural level of the nation. As a response to the acute shortage of skilled manpower there were even ideas for the speediest possible education of specialists - somewhat like the policies used to create the "new intelligentsia" after 1948<sup>46</sup>.

Education was also closely linked to more general cultural questions and Novomeský's policy was for developing the traditions created during the uprising while also expanding education to make them available to the whole population. Not surprisingly, the most receptive area for such ideas was in Central Slovakia where the uprising had held power<sup>47</sup>. The most serious opponent was the Catholic church which still demanded the right to control at least part of education. It bitterly attacked the trade unions when they asked teachers to sign a statement of loyalty to the Czechoslovak republic and to the aim of united state schools: this, they claimed, was "deliberate terror"<sup>48</sup>. Novomeský, however, was very careful to

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<sup>45</sup> Nové slovo, 5/4/47, p.216-217 and 19/4/47, p.255.

<sup>46</sup> Prehľad, p.359-361. See below Section VI.41.5.

<sup>47</sup> Laluha: Február, 107-116.

<sup>48</sup> Katolícke noviny, 20/4/47, p.5.

insist that statisation of schools was not related to any question "of some ideological anti-religious struggle". The aim, he said, was to keep the same amount of time for religious education, but to give it a better form than in church schools so that it could serve to educate young people to be "self-confident, active" and to "rely on their own powers of reasoning . . ." <sup>49</sup>. This was a far milder position than that which "demands the exclusion of the teaching of religion from all schools and to replace it with secular ethics" <sup>50</sup>.

IV.30.5. The Democratic Party does not formulate policies with which to direct Slovak political life, but remains a powerful force.

The Democrats, being neither Marxists nor socialists, did not see a role for themselves in constructing a new social order. The ideas and policies they evolved were therefore generally far less specific than those of the KSS. Nevertheless, by presenting themselves as the only genuinely Slovak party and as the representative of the peasants, they were able to hold together the diverse interests within the party and within their broad body of support.

Their task was eased by their ability to exploit politically the restrictions placed on Slovak organs by the Third Prague Agreement. During discussions on the new constitution the Democrats placed enormous emphasis on retaining the gains of the uprising and

<sup>49</sup> Speaking in the Cultural Committee of parliament, Pravda 12/7/47, p.2.

<sup>50</sup> Resolution from the KSS District organisation in Zvolen, 2/8/45, KSS dok, p.164.

condemned proposals presented by Gottwald as "openly anti-Slovak"<sup>51</sup>. As long as the central government did not bring major social advances to Slovaks through industrialisation or a general land reform, this approach could probably assure the Democrats of continued strength.

In fact, in economic questions too, the Democrats counterposed the sweeping conceptions of "centralism" and "decentralism" and advocated the latter<sup>52</sup>. This was attacked by the KSS as a mask for the real nature of the struggle between two conceptions of Slovak economic development. One, which could be seen as a continuation from the Slovak state, wanted to cling to Slovakia's economic "specificity" - i.e. as the Communists saw it, its backwardness. This could be linked, so it was argued, with their insistence on economic liberalism rather than planning. It contrasted with the KSS aim of raising Slovakia to the Czech level and building a united Czechoslovak economy - a scheme that was inconceivable without centralised planning.

The repetition of these accusations and the prominence of economic questions within political discussions effectively forced the Democrats to try to clarify their economic thinking. To this end they held a congress of economic workers in February 1947.

On ideological questions they remained as non-committal as in 1944: Lettrich maintained that his party stood neither for "individualism"

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<sup>51</sup>e.g. Čas 4/6/47, p.1.

<sup>52</sup>e.g. I. Karvaš, Budovatel, New Year 1947, p.1.



nor for "collectivism", but advocated something between the two. In concrete terms, he called for raising Slovakia to the economic level of the Czech lands and attacked the slow pace of shifting industry into Slovakia. He did not attempt to comment on the Communists' view that a degree of all-state centralisation and planning was a precondition for Slovak industrialisation. The final resolution placed its principal emphasis on peasants' private property and on the creation of "an independent peasantry as the foundation of the state"<sup>53</sup>.

In fact, the Democrats' social and economic policy often appeared to be essentially a peasant policy. This in turn, according to Kvetko, centred on the defence "of the private property of all farmers irrespective of the area of land"<sup>54</sup>. In practical terms, this meant opposition to further land reform and defence of larger farms which were said to be more productive<sup>55</sup>. To the mass of peasants, then, their appeal hinged on fears of collectivism and on those issues, such as the price scissors, that could unite all those working on the land.

Even if they did not work out policies likely to win active working class support away from the KSS, the Democrats did know that many workers had voted for them. Moreover, working class organisations seemed demoralised after the elections and trade union membership slumped from 242,084 in April 1946 by 100,000 at the end

<sup>53</sup> Budovateľ, 21/2/47, p.3.

<sup>54</sup> Cambel: Slovenská, p.335.

<sup>55</sup> Cambel: Slovenská, p.165.

of the year<sup>56</sup>. There were also signs of discontent over living standards but the trade unions, as in the Czech lands, claimed to be taking full responsibility for the economy and resisted wage demands. By late 1946 there was a real danger that they could lose much of the trust the workers had in them<sup>57</sup>.

This gave the Democrats a real chance. They established their own factory organisations and tried to oust the trade union committee members in elections in late 1946 and early 1947<sup>58</sup>. They did not indicate any sympathy with the ideas of trade unionism, but based their appeal on the familiar argument of Communist domination of the movement. They evidently felt themselves to be in a stronger position than the National Socialists as Lettrich seriously threatened that, if the unions were not "depoliticised", the Democrats would establish their own trade union organisation<sup>59</sup>.

The real test of strength was the Factory Council elections. The Democrats could point with satisfaction to a considerable number of abstentions<sup>60</sup>, and in the Škoda works in Dubnica the recommended list was not even elected on the second round: some voting slips were returned with the slogan "Long live Tiso"<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup>Jarošová, et al: Odbory, p.138-139.

<sup>57</sup>Jarošová, et al: Odbory, p.143-144.

<sup>58</sup>Jarošová, et al: Odbory, p.128-129.

<sup>59</sup>Čas 14/1/47, quoted in Jarošová, et al: Odbory, p.162.

<sup>60</sup>Čas 13/7/47, p.8.

<sup>61</sup>Jarošová, Jaroš: Slovenské, p.198.

That, however, was not enough, at least at that time, to oust the KSS from its leading position in the trade unions.

IV.30.6. The Slovak Communists launch an offensive against the Democrats over the issue of traitors and collaborators.

In the Czech lands the Two Year Plan and Ďuriš's land reform proposals were the centre of KSČ policy. The hope and expectation with the plan was that it would demonstrate the superiority of socialist economics and thereby ensure that the KSČ could retain its leading position in Czech politics. As the previous sections of this chapter have shown, the same could not apply in Slovakia. The KSS was therefore naturally led to seek an alternative approach. Any lingering hopes of real unity with the Democratic Party were abandoned<sup>62</sup>. The Communists instead advocated developing "from top to bottom, at every level . . . a broad offensive against the Democratic Party". The central issue in this, by early 1947, was the trial of Tiso which was to be given maximum publicity so as to "influence public opinion"<sup>63</sup>.

The issue of traitors and collaborators was a natural one for the KSS to choose as the centre of their campaign. Apart from the the possible danger they could become to Czechoslovakia, there was every chance of even the National Socialists supporting tough

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<sup>62</sup> There were, in fact, long periods without a meeting of the Slovak National Front and there were no joint public activities throughout the latter half of 1946; Nové slovo, 1/2/47, p.68.

<sup>63</sup> Resolution of the joint meeting of the Presidia of the KSČ and KSS on 2/12/46 in Prague, KSS dok, p.492.

measures. Moreover, it was the most natural way to strike at the fundamental weakness of the April Agreement which had brought together elements who <sup>had</sup> fought on opposing sides during the war.

There were some partial successes for the KSS in preventing many former active members of fascist organisations from taking positions in National Committees<sup>64</sup>. Generally, however, legal processes against former fascists were a real disappointment to the Communists. In many areas People's Courts were not even organised<sup>65</sup>.

This centred attention on the public trial of Tiso, Ďurčanský, who had emigrated, and Mach. It lasted from 2/12/46 to 19/3/47 and ended with Tiso and Ďurčanský sentenced to death while Mach received thirty years imprisonment. The accusations included their roles in the Munich crisis, their general help for the German war effort, their role in inviting foreign troops against the uprising and crimes against humanity including their policy towards Jews<sup>66</sup>. The strongest defence argument was that the leaders of the Slovak state had done the best they could and chosen the "lesser evil"<sup>67</sup>: they could also derive support for milder sentences from the verdicts against the Protectorate Ministers in Prague<sup>68</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> Lahuha: Február, p.50-54.

<sup>65</sup> Lahuha: Február, p.125-126.

<sup>66</sup> I. Daxner: Ľudáctvo pred národným súdom 1945-1947, Bratislava, 1967, p.168-169.

<sup>67</sup> Daxner: Ľudáctvo, p.188

<sup>68</sup> Daxner: Ľudáctvo, p.171.

The trial was accompanied by considerable activity from the HSL'S underground, including leaflets calling for an uprising to save Tiso<sup>69</sup>. Controversy was greatly heightened when Archbishop Kmeřko was called as a witness in early January. He insisted that Tiso, who was a priest, was not a "sinner" and even described him as "the second Slovak leader" after the legendary figure Svatopluk<sup>70</sup>. Beneř reacted strongly with a public statement when Kmeřko also claimed that the Slovaks would like their own state but that, as that seemed to be impossible, they would accept the Czechoslovak state. Beneř saw this as an indication of a willingness to try to create a Slovak state at a later stage should external circumstances make it possible. He argued that another crisis of Czech-Slovak relations would not lead to a Slovak state but more probably to Slovakia's incorporation into the USSR: the Czech lands would then be left isolated between Germany and Russia<sup>71</sup>.

Following the sentence a plea for clemency was sent to Beneř. He referred the issue to the government where the Communists, Social Democrats, National Socialists, Svoboda and Masaryk were all strongly for implementing the death sentence<sup>72</sup>. It was carried out on 18/4/47 and its announcement in Slovakia was met with no visible unrest.

This inevitably created acute difficulties for the Democratic Party's

<sup>69</sup>Prečan: Slovenský, p.134.

<sup>70</sup>Prečan: Slovenský, p.141.

<sup>71</sup>RP 16/2/47, p.1.

<sup>72</sup>Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.172.

leadership as one of the promises of the April agreement had not been fulfilled. There was from then on a greater emphasis among HSL'S elements on underground work and considerable disillusionment with the legal party framework. As an indication of this, 40,000 people stopped their subscriptions to Čas just two days after the execution<sup>73</sup>.

Despite this setback, the Democrats did not split or change their publicly stated policy. Instead they pushed a decree through the SNR Presidium, within which they had a majority, removing Daxner from his post as chairman of the National Court in Bratislava. Although the ostensible reason was the mild sentence for Mach<sup>74</sup>, the move was generally interpreted as a veiled revenge for Tiso's execution. The government therefore overruled the SNR Presidium on the grounds that their action had threatened the independence of the courts by giving precedence to political judgements<sup>75</sup>. The Democrats did not accept this and even accused the government of acting unconstitutionally: they thereby finally succeeded in isolating themselves from all Czech ministers<sup>76</sup>.

<sup>73</sup> Daxner: Ľudáctvo, p.173, and Dvořáková, Lesjuk: Československá, p.95.

<sup>74</sup> There apparently were extenuating circumstances for him as he had helped save the lives of many anti-fascists; Daxner: Ľudáctvo, p.174-176.

<sup>75</sup> RP 4/6/47, p.1.

<sup>76</sup> Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.175.

#### IV.30.7. Summary and discussion.

While the Czechoslovak road to socialism in the Czech lands could be based on the Two Year Plan and a hope of winning a majority in the next elections, in Slovakia the Communist Party was faced with a far more difficult situation. They had first to accommodate themselves to their electoral failure and this encouraged persistent ideas of abandoning the existing parliamentary framework.

Gottwald opposed such ideas and insisted that the KSS could be successful by relying on the strength of the KSČ in the government. KSS policy was therefore initially an attempt to apply Czech policies to the Slovak context. At the centre of this was the Two year Plan which set for Slovakia the aim of starting on an ambitious programme of industrialisation. Unfortunately, the immensity of the tasks and Czech reluctance to help meant that this had no major immediate political impact.

This therefore did not threaten the popularity of the Democrats who were very sceptical of the merits of planning. Their economic thinking generally was very vague and concentrated on opposing the alleged "centralism" associated with the plan and on consolidating their strength in the countryside.

So Gottwald's conception of the Czechoslovak road to socialism did not promise great success in Slovakia. The Democrats were in a much stronger position than the Czech right wing and could even threaten the Communists' working class base. The KSS therefore decided for a different approach from that applied in the Czech lands. They placed the main emphasis on a political offensive aiming to divide and weaken the Democratic Party. The central

issue was the supporters of the former Slovak state and it came to the fore over the trial and execution of Tiso.

It seemed by mid 1947 that the Democrats had been weakened, internally divided and isolated from their potential Czech allies. The KSS could then choose between sticking to an offensive around the individual issue of traitors and collaborators, or ☐ launching a wider offensive aiming to completely transform Slovak politics. The choice they made, and the reasons for it, are discussed in Part V.



PART V

DEEPENING DIVISIONS

THE SHARPENING CONFLICTS IN CZECHOSLOVAK POLITICS  
FROM MID 1947 AND THE DECISION BY THE COMMUNIST  
PARTY TO LAUNCH A MAJOR POLITICAL OFFENSIVE.

As has been made clear throughout Parts III and IV, post-war Czechoslovak society was by no means free from conflicts. There were unmistakeable social tensions that could find expression in the differing social policies of the parties. There were continuing conflicts over the general issue of nationalisations and tension was generated by the natural rivalry between parties.

Nevertheless, at least until mid-1947, there did not appear to be an unbridgeable gulf. Even the Communist Party's stated aim of winning an absolute majority and perhaps even of ultimately establishing effectively a one-party state need not have been totally disruptive of the existing coalition. Aims could have changed, or been postponed indefinitely, in line with the practical realities of politics and so as to keep political tensions at a low enough level in the interests of cooperation on other issues.

It is possible to conceive of Czechoslovakia developing, broadly under Communist leadership, with a gradual extension of economic planning and some further nationalisations. This would have involved some sharp disagreements, but not necessarily a sudden break in social and political life. Ideas on the future of the private sector and agriculture could then have evolved gradually, in line with the possibilities opened by the reconstruction and further development of industry. Collectivisation of agriculture could have been encouraged considerably later, when justified by the potential for mechanisation.

This process would have been reinforced by an increase in the Communist vote, but to hope for 51% as early as 1948 was probably both over-ambitious and unnecessary. Czechoslovakia seemed at the

time essentially safe from the machinations of "reaction" and the Social Democrats would have helped and enriched rather than opposed such a road of socialist development.

There were, of course, other possible lines of development for Czechoslovakia to follow, but the conflicts within Czechoslovak society do not seem adequate to explain the sudden change that took place after mid-1947. From then on tension mounted rapidly: disagreements on individual points multiplied and amplified leading to a struggle for power which, although not involving much physical violence, was pursued with great determination at least by the Communist Party.

Part V is concerned with identifying the origins and course of this change. The crucial point was not the gradual aggregation of disagreements, but a conscious decision by political parties.

Instead of working to reconcile the various conflicting interests they were trying to represent, they switched to intensifying those conflicts as part of a new strategy of fighting for - at the minimum - a much greater share of power.

This partly reflected exasperation at the number of issues on which they disagreed, but the principal cause of this change in strategies was the international situation. The division of Europe encouraged the belief that the existing National Front could not last much longer. Czechoslovak politics began to divide roughly into three trends. One was firmly for the Soviet Union. One was for the United States, but was unable to say so openly. The third could see no satisfactory policy for Czechoslovakia if Europe was to be divided and could therefore only look on in horror.

Part V therefore begins with a general discussion of the international situation as it affected Czechoslovakia. The following chapters show how the fight for power took shape in the following months, ultimately setting the scene for the confrontation of February 1948.

## CHAPTER 31: THE IMPACT OF THE DIVISION OF EUROPE ON CZECHOSLOVAK POLITICS.

### V.31.1. The first signs of the cold war in 1946 do not sharpen political differences inside Czechoslovakia.

Although there were important differences on foreign policy<sup>1</sup>, the international situation immediately after Czechoslovakia's liberation was such that in practice they only led to minor disputes which were hardly ever aired in public. In the Gottwald government's programme the Communists had to compromise by giving slightly less emphasis than they had wanted to the USSR and other Slavonic states and also by including references to friendship with Britain, France and the United States<sup>2</sup>. This did not seem to matter so long as all those states were on friendly terms, and there was a universal hope that they would remain so. This was reflected in very widespread disapproval for signs in the West of hostility towards the USSR. Particularly Churchill's speech in Fulton was regarded with horror and Stalin's reply to it very widely welcomed<sup>3</sup>.

In the autumn of 1946 divisions between the great powers seemed serious. Czechoslovakia was particularly disappointed at the Paris peace conference where the West firmly opposed their proposal to expel much of the Hungarian minority<sup>4</sup>. It appeared in general that

<sup>1</sup> See above, especially Chapter 11.

<sup>2</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIII, p.114 and p.143.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. PL 15/3/46, p.1, or Ducháček, Obzory, 23/3/46, p.183.

<sup>4</sup> The US advocated a compromise whereby Czechoslovakia would cede some territory to Hungary; J.B. Schechtman: Postwar Population Transfers in Europe 1945-1955, Philadelphia, 1962, p.141.

a minority, formed particularly of Slavonic states that had suffered most during the war, was being repeatedly outvoted by the West. There were even accusations that Czechoslovakia was a Soviet satellite, but nobody in Czechoslovakia openly accepted this: instead it was claimed that the foreign policy being pursued was "the only healthy and genuinely Czechoslovak policy"<sup>5</sup>. Disappointment at the rejection of this policy in the West was accentuated by the realisation that potentially the most difficult and crucial of all issues - the fate of Germany - was still to be discussed<sup>6</sup>.

Czechoslovakia's views on the German question were as uncompromising as ever. Beneš insisted that Germany must be disarmed for ever<sup>7</sup> and his view that Czechoslovakia stood not between East and West but between Russia and Germany was repeated by several others in late 1946<sup>8</sup>. This meant that the closeness of Soviet and Czechoslovak foreign policies followed from a basic common interest rather than any relationship as a satellite<sup>9</sup>. A forceful reminder of this was the realisation that the expulsion of Germans had only partially solved the problem. One of its consequences was a mass of Germans, who were being allowed to organise legally in the US zone, and who hated Czechoslovakia more than ever before, so that the alliance with the USSR was even more essential<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Stránský, SS 15/9/46, p.1.

<sup>6</sup> A. Simone, RP 17/10/46, p.2. See also Simone interviewing J. Masaryk, RP 6/10/46, p.1.

<sup>7</sup> PL 21/11/46, p.1.

<sup>8</sup> e.g. Drtina, Svobodný zítřek, 19/12/46, p.1.

<sup>9</sup> c.f. Ripka, SS 7/11/46, p.1.

<sup>10</sup> Zenkl, speech, SS 4/4/47, p.1.

Up until early 1947, then, it appeared that the division of Europe was not causing divisions inside Czechoslovakia. Rather there was a growing disillusionment with the West and with its most aggressive leaders such as Churchill<sup>11</sup>. There were even National Socialists pointing to signs of change in US policy making it a possible threat to Czechoslovak interests so that a Slavonic orientation was all the more necessary<sup>12</sup>.

V.31.2. US involvement in European economic and political questions causes acute embarrassment to the National Socialists.

There was scope for more open disagreements because of differing conceptions of international economic policy. At first the need had been just for economic recovery without any particular long-term considerations. Transport difficulties meant that the first contacts ran easiest to the East and the Soviet Union was willing to provide raw materials without anything concrete being given in return<sup>13</sup>. As the economy recovered, so the idea of replacing Germany's role as the industrialised state serving Eastern and South-Eastern Europe became popular. It seemed particularly sensible as those countries themselves would have enormous needs as they embarked on

<sup>11</sup> After the Paris peace conference an opinion poll revealed that 38% of Czechs had changed their opinion of Churchill. 92,5% of them viewed him less favourably; What is Your Opinion?, p.18.

<sup>12</sup> L. Gut, SS 4/10/46, p.1.

<sup>13</sup> Ripka, speech, RP 11/11/45, p.2.

industrialisation plans<sup>14</sup>. It corresponded with the desire to find a stable market so that Czechoslovakia's economy could be planned despite its dependence on foreign trade. There was at the time a fear among Marxists of an imminent economic crisis in the West<sup>15</sup>.

The National Socialists advocated a policy of trying to win friends wherever possible without any particular economic orientation<sup>16</sup>. They had nothing more specific to say about the very real problems of Czechoslovakia's international economic position. Perhaps they based their hopes, for the economy and to a certain extent also for political developments<sup>17</sup>, on a substantial loan from the US. For a time this hope seemed to be fading as the US seemed to be turning its back on Eastern Europe.

This contrasted strikingly with the Soviet attitude after the 1946 elections. They evidently judged developments in Czechoslovakia to be favourable for them and seemed more amenable than ever, as if they wanted to present themselves as Czechoslovakia's disinterested benefactor<sup>18</sup>. By contrast, the United States caused concern by willingly giving aid to Franco's Spain but then setting extremely tough demands concerning internal policy before Poland could be

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<sup>14</sup> See the two reports of Laušman's tour of Rumania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Poland and Austria, PL 22/11/46, p.1, and O. Berger: Cesta za mírem, Praha, 1947.

<sup>15</sup> Varga, quoting Stalin, Tvorba, 1/1/47, p.15-16.

<sup>16</sup> e.g. Ripka, speech, SS 15/11/46, p.1.

<sup>17</sup> See above, Vol. I, p.166.

<sup>18</sup> See Gottwald's broadcast on 26/7/46 after the return of a government delegation from Moscow, Gottwald Spisy, XIII, p.164-165.



given any help<sup>19</sup>. Then the US suddenly announced that it was cancelling a loan because Czechoslovakia had allegedly joined, "in its press and at the peace conference with the unjustified accusations of the Soviets that the US is pursuing an imperialist economic policy"<sup>20</sup>. This US action was universally condemned inside Czechoslovakia, although there were reminders that no article should be published attacking any aspect of US foreign policy<sup>21</sup>. Other accusations, which included questions of compensation for nationalised industries, were carefully refuted<sup>22</sup>. It seemed as if the United States had just picked on any available pretext to break economic relations with Czechoslovakia. This trend seemed to be confirmed when it was announced that UNRRA would end its activities and be replaced by bilateral agreements. For, despite Communist suspicions, UNRRA had not been an instrument of US domination. The new danger was that the US would use its economic strength so that many states "even against their own will would have to return to the liberalistic economy as practised before the last war"<sup>23</sup>. Then even the Western policy towards Germany began affecting the Czechoslovak economy. The military authorities in the bi-zone demanded payment for transport in dollars which Czechoslovakia simply could not afford. This therefore appeared as an attempt to

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<sup>19</sup> PL 4/7/46, p.1.

<sup>20</sup> SS 18/10/46, p.1.

<sup>21</sup> SS 20/10/46, p.4.

<sup>22</sup> Clementis, speaking in a parliamentary committee, RP 1/11/46, p.1.

<sup>23</sup> PL 17/11/46, p.2.

help Germany's revival at Czechoslovakia's expense<sup>24</sup>.

Then the United States announced aid to Turkey and Greece as part of the so-called Truman doctrine. As was pointed out, they could hardly pretend to be defending democracy in those particular countries<sup>25</sup>. <sup>A survey of US press comments in a Social Democratic journal could provide quotes suggesting</sup> Even a brief perusal of US papers indicated that a major reason for their new policy <sup>was the desire for</sup> could be the excellent military bases within easy striking distance of important centres in the USSR<sup>26</sup>. It certainly seemed clear that US policy was no longer concerned with co-operation between the great powers<sup>27</sup>. Even if the analysis of this presented by the Communists and Social Democrats may not appear complete today, the fact remains that they alone could confront and attempt to analyse developments<sup>28</sup>. By contrast, the right wing was confronted with an acutely embarrassing situation. They would have liked closer relations with the West, but this was impossible if a Western bloc, supporting a German revival, was created against the Soviet Union<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Hospodář, 13/3/47, p.1, and p.3.

<sup>25</sup> Even Tigris had seen the previous British policy in Greece as a cause for concern that the West might be "reactionary"; LD 4/8/46, p.1.

<sup>26</sup> Svět práce, 10/4/47, p.1. and RP 15/4/47, p.2.

<sup>27</sup> See the carefully documented articles by A. Simone, Světové rozhledy, I, No.3, April 1947, p.215-220 and I, No.4, May 1947, p.312-313.

<sup>28</sup> This was the purpose of the KSČ journal Světové rozhledy.

<sup>29</sup> The People's Party seemed to find it easier than the National Socialists to frankly admit their dilemma (e.g. Vývoj, 23/7/47, p.659) and to condemn developments in the West. They made clear their rejection of Churchill's idea of a united Europe  
(continued overleaf)

The Truman doctrine, however, seemed to reveal the start of a major division inside Czechoslovakia. The left were vigorous, articulate and expansive in their condemnations: the right were embarrassed and reluctant, even tending to be undecided. The National Socialists, however, actually welcomed the Truman doctrine. They were unique in not even reporting Soviet comments on it and preferred to quote only the enthusiastic welcomes from Churchill and the Greek government<sup>30</sup>. They did not elaborate on this later to explain in full how they understood US policy but presumably the point was that the US had shown a definite will to intervene in European politics. Presumably they still hoped that this would not lead to the creation of two opposing blocs and that the US would still allow Czechoslovakia to retain a close alliance with the USSR. The key to this had to be US economic strength. Apparently Ripka had convinced US ambassador Steinhardt of how important economic aid could be<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> (continued from previous page)  
against the USSR (LD 1/10/46, p.1.), and pointed critically to the one-sided information available in the USA which was concerned only with attacking the Soviet Union; Obzory, 14/9/46, p.577, editorial (the editor was Ducháček). They could even, for a time, see tension in Europe as stemming from US attempts to correct what had been agreed to at Yalta and to develop a new policy directed against the USSR; Obzory, 19/10/46, p.657-658. Then, as international tension began to affect Czechoslovakia's internal politics, the discussion of these issues in the People's Party press effectively ceased.

<sup>30</sup> SS 15/3/47, p.1, and SS 16/3/47, p.1.

<sup>31</sup> Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.44.

V.31.3. Czechoslovakia's economic difficulties are such that aid from the US would be an enormous help.

The potential significance of US aid for Czechoslovakia became all the more obvious as enough time passed for post-war trends to be discernible. At first it had been possible to boast of a rapid economic recovery when compared with other countries directly affected by the war. Unfortunately, a great deal more had changed in the world and exports did not seem to be recovering rapidly enough. This pointed to the need to compare with those countries that had suffered no war damage, and then there was nothing to be pleased about<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, difficulties faced by other countries were not helping Czechoslovakia's competitive position so much as leading it to reduce imports. Following a spring trade fair in 1947 the heads of nationalised industries made no secret of their disappointment and concern. To be able to export successfully, Czechoslovakia needed to dramatically improve the competitiveness of its products in terms of quality and price<sup>33</sup>.

These worries were given greater urgency by the reappearance of a trade deficit in mid-1947. The immediate cause was the need to pay for imports that had previously been donated by UNRRA<sup>34</sup>. Even then, a persistent trend was not obvious as monthly figures showed

<sup>32</sup>S. Řezný, Statistický obzor, XXVII, No.1, 25/3/47, p.95-97.

<sup>33</sup>R. Šimáček, Hospodář, 15/5/47, p.6.

<sup>34</sup>Ruman, Hospodář, 10/7/47, p.4. The value of UNRRA aid up to June 1947 was over 264 million dollars of which 119 million were food, soap and cigarettes and 72 million were industrial and other goods: Statistická příručka, p.97.

considerable fluctuations and a review of 1947 as a whole could suggest that all was well<sup>35</sup>. Nevertheless, two particular worries were mentioned. The first was an absolutely persistent deficit with the £ and \$ areas. It was large enough to be unmistakable<sup>36</sup>. The second was the failure of traditional pre-war exports such as textiles, leather, ceramics, wood and paper. The new leading exports were machinery and heavy capital equipment<sup>37</sup>. This was a consequence of changes in the world economy including the development of industries in many previously backward countries. It meant that, even when raw materials had become available, exports of textiles could not pass one third of their pre-war level<sup>38</sup>.

All this seemed to strengthen the argument for closer economic relations with Eastern Europe and gave further cause for welcoming the development of close political relations, including the signing of friendship treaties, with Poland, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia<sup>39</sup>. Unfortunately, even that could not be a complete solution because, when firm long-term trade agreements were negotiated with Eastern European countries, so it was realised that those agreements could not be honoured without raw materials available only from the £ and \$ areas. For this a significant loan from the West would be almost

<sup>35</sup> e.g. Hospodář, 1/1/48, p.1.

<sup>36</sup> For details see Statistický zpravodaj, XI, No.3, March 1948, p.132.

<sup>37</sup> Hospodář, 4/9/47, p.1.

<sup>38</sup> Hospodář, 2/10/47, p.1.

<sup>39</sup> e.g. Hospodář, 3/7/47, p.1.

essential<sup>40</sup>. Even if the exact situation was not universally understood at the time, nobody doubted the importance of economic relations with the West and quite explicit references were being made to the great usefulness of a US loan as UNRRA wound up its activities<sup>41</sup>.

V.31.4. US aid is offered through the Marshall Plan, but Stalin insists that Czechoslovakia should not participate.  
The National Socialists are disappointed and disoriented.

The growing awareness inside Czechoslovakia of economic difficulties coincided with the initial discussions around Marshall's proposal to aid European economic recovery. It was not immediately clear what strings would be attached, but the KSC was suspicious from the start because the proposal seemed to be in complete conflict with the Truman doctrine<sup>42</sup>. Naturally, the National Socialists were very pleased. They wanted to assert that Czechoslovakia was culturally part of the West<sup>43</sup>. They were trying everything to prevent what seemed to <sup>be</sup> growing isolation from the Western powers.

There already seemed to them ~~to be a real~~ danger as illustrated by disagreements over a proposed treaty with France. The National Socialists wanted to accept a formulation that would make it applicable against Germany alone without mentioning

<sup>40</sup> L. Chmela: Problémy československého hospodářství, Praha, 1948, p.7.

<sup>41</sup> e.g. K. Walters, Central European Observer, 2/5/47.

<sup>42</sup> e.g. M. Galuška, RP 1/7/47, p.2.

<sup>43</sup> Zenkl, speech, SS 10/6/47, p.4.

Germany's allies. It would also not be brought into operation immediately Czechoslovakia was attacked. This gave the treaty very little relevance to Czechoslovakia's security, particularly when considered against the background of Munich. The point rather was to retain links with the West.

Stalin, however, intervened directly to prevent the signing of such a treaty. Ripka argued that this too was not out of concern for Czechoslovakia's security, but rather so as to minimise Czechoslovakia's links with the West<sup>44</sup>.

The case of the Marshall Plan was more serious as it could have been genuinely beneficial to Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, before real discussions could begin to see what was being offered, Czechoslovakia announced its withdrawal. The decisive factor had been an insistence from the Soviet leadership, in private, that they believed Marshall's offer to be part of the US strategy of isolating the Soviet Union. They would therefore regard participation in the Marshall Plan as an unfriendly act towards the USSR<sup>45</sup>. Czechoslovakia had no choice but to comply with this as "the German question has not been solved"<sup>46</sup>. The National Socialists could not indicate any public opposition to the government's decision, but they were

<sup>44</sup> Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.86-95. See also Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.125-128.

<sup>45</sup> J. Belda, M. Bouček, Z. Deyl, M. Klimeš: "K otázce účasti Československa na Marshallově plánu", Revue dějin socialismu, 1968, No.1, esp. p.96-97.

<sup>46</sup> Dnešek, 17/7/47, p.242.

extremely disappointed<sup>47</sup>.

Their position was noticeably different from that of the Communists who were soon arguing that the whole Marshall plan was against Czechoslovakia's interests as it would help rebuild German war industry<sup>48</sup>. The National Socialists, however, were convinced that something had been sacrificed. They often argued that the economic loss was inevitable: "it would be irresponsible to give up political certainty - and the only certainty that we have at the moment - for the mere possibility of economic gain"<sup>49</sup>. They still could not cope with the new international situation so that while the Communists were increasingly pointing to the necessity for a Slavonic orientation, they were still clinging to the idea of a "Czechoslovak" policy to be based on a close alliance with the USSR plus close friendship with the West<sup>50</sup>. They still tried to insist that they were as loyal to the USSR as were the Communists but they combined these claims with a noticeable shift in their attitude.

Judging from their later actions they must have been hoping to be able to accept a loan from the West. It is not clear how far they had worked out their position or how far they were drifting

<sup>47</sup> Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.63. Majer too apparently opposed the government's decision; V. Majer: "Czechoslovakia", The Curtain Falls, London, 1951, p.89.

<sup>48</sup> e.g. Slánský, speech, RP 12/8/47, p.2, or Inž. M. Reiman, interviewed in Hospodář, 17/7/47, p.3.

<sup>49</sup> Zenkl, speech, SS 22/7/47, p.1.

<sup>50</sup> Resolution of the National Socialists' Executive Committee meeting of 31/10/47, SS 8/11/47, p.1.



in response to events, but for their hope to become a reality either or both of two conditions were necessary. In the first place, the Soviet leadership's determination to prevent Czechoslovakia from accepting such a loan would have to be weakened. The National Socialists may have hoped that US military strength could somehow bring this about as they gave enormous publicity to new weapons being developed in the USA.

The second condition was that the Czechoslovak government would have to find the courage to call what might just have been Stalin's bluff. In practical terms that presumably required a weakening of the Communists, and the National Socialist leadership apparently concluded at this point that the KSČ were the main enemy and that, if possible, a bloc of parties should be formed against them<sup>51</sup>.

In September Ripka and Drtina informed Beneš of the plan to start a more active and energetic campaign against the Communists<sup>52</sup>. Although this was an immediate response to internal tensions it could, along with their subtler indications of a pro-Western stand, have been partly aimed to curry favour in the United States, but the offensive was crucially weakened because the Soviet leadership did not yield to the economic or military strength of the USA. It was therefore still impossible for the National Socialists to present a pro-Western position without taking the domestically suicidal stand of appearing to want to end Czechoslovakia's close relationship with

<sup>51</sup> Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.110.

<sup>52</sup> Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.102.

the Soviet Union.

Unable to formulate a coherent position on the world situation, they seemed to be looking two ways at once. There were no open attacks on the USSR but plenty of satirical articles. There was nothing rigorous or analytical, but a hesitant and growing tendency to simply quote Western views and also a strange willingness to give maximum coverage to reports of the alleged military supremacy of the USA and of its willingness to give economic help. There was also a disappearance of highly complementary articles about the USSR and of critical ones about the West.

V.31.5. The Soviet leadership changes its policy, and aims for the speedy consolidation of its own bloc. This leads to the creation of the "Imformbureau" and to sharper divisions inside Czechoslovakia.

It is impossible to analyse Soviet foreign policy<sup>here</sup>, but it does seem that a change took place during 1947. US involvement in Europe, the Truman doctrine, the exclusion of Communists from Western governments, disagreements over Germany and then the Marshall Plan all caused concern in the Soviet leadership. Fearing that, as before World War II, they would be internationally rejected and isolated, the Soviet leaders abandoned any hope of an all-European policy and instead concentrated on strengthening relations with Eastern European states.

This was achieved through treaty arrangements, through economic agreements and by direct pressure on smaller states to weaken their links with the West. Then, in September 1947, a possible new agency for the consolidation of a "Soviet bloc" was created in the form of the Information Bureau of nine Communist Parties. The nine chosen

were those in Eastern European governments plus the French and Italian parties.

This new body differed from the old Comintern as it did not issue explicit directives to its constituent organisations and neither was it directly concerned with world revolution. Nevertheless, its influence on its members was enormous from its first meeting as the new Soviet analysis of the European situation was presented and, of course, not criticised. The central thesis was that the division of Europe was a fact and had been caused by the application of a US strategy aiming for world domination. This involved destroying democracy and supporting reactionary forces everywhere in the world in preparation for a new war<sup>53</sup>. Although the KSČ did not greatly publicise the Informbureau, they certainly accepted this deep concern at the fluid and seemingly dangerous international situation. Their exact views were not published at the time, but Central Committees of both the KSČ and the KSS contained lengthy discussions of the international situation and of the dangers of war<sup>54</sup>.

KSČ involvement within the Informbureau had two important consequences for internal Czechoslovak politics. The first was to arouse suspicion from the right wing. It was claimed that the KSČ

<sup>53</sup> Funkcionář, 15/10/47, p.1.

<sup>54</sup> See esp. Široký's speech to the KSS Central Committee meeting of 4/12/47, KSS dok, p.617-620. Gottwald apparently started his speech with references to the Informbureau and indicated that he expected unfriendly acts from the USA when he addressed the KSČ Central Committee on 27/11/47, but his full speech has yet to be published; Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.174.

had deviated from the Košice programme by associating itself with outright attacks on Britain and the US<sup>55</sup>. The People's Party were more willing to portray it as a coordinating centre for plotting seizures of power<sup>56</sup>, but they could reassure themselves that they were by no means defeated by suggesting that the Informbureau's declaration was defensive rather than offensive in tone<sup>57</sup>. Nevertheless, it appeared that Communist policy was changing and becoming less predictable: that could only heighten political tensions.

The second consequence was in encouraging a more systematic political offensive from the KSČ. Far from yielding to the National Socialists' desire for the alliance with the USSR to be loosened by friendly relations with the West, the KSČ began insisting that the Informbureau had to be the basis for Czechoslovakia's foreign policy. Any attacks on the USSR or on Slavonic states were equated with treason and with aid to "foreign reaction" which was accused of preparing "a new Munich"<sup>58</sup>. As Kopecký also warned strongly against those "pretending" friendship with the Soviet Union, this could only mean that the previously stated aim of winning 51% in the next elections was not just a vague target, but was becoming an absolute necessity. Only then could Czechoslovakia's incorporation into a "Soviet bloc" be firmly guaranteed.

<sup>55</sup> SS 7/10/47, p.1-2, and SS 9/10/47, p.2.

<sup>56</sup> e.g. they claimed that a KSČ representative had spoken at a PCI Congress of plans to win power before the elections. It was claimed that the congress had been an unofficial session of the "Cominform", but the whole report was factually wrong on many points; Vývoj, 21/1/48, p.1.

<sup>57</sup> Ducháček, LD 7/10/47, p.1.

<sup>58</sup> V. Kopecký: Zápas o nové vlastenectví, Praha, 1948, p.26 and p.27. See also G. Bareš: SSSR a naše samostatnost, Praha, 1947, p.31.

V.31.6. The Communists are best able to formulate an economic policy in line with the new international situation.

In the autumn of 1947 the KSČ presented the most rigorously argued proposal for the Five Year Plan which was to begin in 1949. The central theme was the idea of a structural transformation to be achieved by slowing the growth of some sectors while greatly expanding the production of heavy machinery which could be exported to the East. Exporting textiles no longer seemed important because, starting even before 1937, the countries they had been sold to had developed their own industries. It would therefore have been pointless to concentrate on trying to modernise this and other "traditional" industries. Moreover, they had been particularly hard hit by the expulsion of Germans. It therefore seemed better to continue with the shift in the structure of the economy that had begun before the war and then been further accentuated during the occupation: this meant developing heavy engineering. Firm contracts with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe already accounted for more than Czechoslovakia's total capacity. This seemed to present a tremendous opportunity<sup>59</sup>. This, of course, still did not preclude economic links with the West, but the main emphasis was on an Eastern orientation<sup>60</sup>.

The Social Democrats were not quite so clear or united in their

<sup>59</sup> See Goldman's articles in Hospodář, 16/10/47, p.5, and Nová mysl, 1974, No.4. For a full discussion of all the proposals, see K. Kaplan: "Úvahy o první pětiletce", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1967, No.5.

<sup>60</sup> There were soon explicit references to the need to be as independent as possible from the West: no loan was to be accepted if any strings were attached; Frejka: 25.únor, p.27, and p.28.

proposal and, while generally accepting the need for structural change, they were more cautious than the KSČ and saw no need to accelerate the existing trend. They differed too on some other points, for example, by pointing again to the need to consider the distribution of the national income as well as its overall growth<sup>61</sup>.

Generally, although both proposals contained weaknesses or inconsistencies, there was scope for reaching an agreement between the two. The Social Democrats had rushed to present their proposal first so that they could boast of being the pioneers of planning<sup>62</sup> and this meant that they left several ambiguities. When they saw the Communist proposal, they generally responded favourably.

The National Socialists disagreed with the idea of a structural transformation, although at least one of their economist did not reject it<sup>63</sup>. They did not present a precise proposal and seemed to believe that, in contrast with the Two Year Plan, exact aims could not be set<sup>64</sup>. Presumably their hopes for the economy were still based on hope for aid from the US, which they could not mention. The other parties were even less open about their aims so that, if they thought about the economy at all, they too must have believed that a panacea from the West would be found.

<sup>61</sup> e.g. Krejčí, Hospodář, 23/10/47, p.3.

<sup>62</sup> PL 30/8/47, p.1, and Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.138.

<sup>63</sup> E. Šlechta, SS 11/10/47, p.1-2.

<sup>64</sup> e.g. Hejda, SS 14/10/47, p.1.

V.31.7. Summary and discussion.

In view of Czechoslovakia's size, geographical location and recent past, it was natural that international events would have a very deep impact on its internal politics. At first, however, they did not lead to sharp conflicts. Instead, the apparent general harmony between the great powers encouraged harmony between the Czechoslovak political parties.

The beginnings of the cold war began to affect Czechoslovak politics in late 1946 when the United States suspended proposals for loans. There were even accusations that Czechoslovakia was a Soviet satellite, but they were widely rejected. It was claimed in reply that Slavonic states had a common interest in their fear of German revival, so that Czechoslovakia was naturally led to a close alliance with the USSR.

US policy was a great disappointment to the National Socialists who hoped to develop economic contacts with the West as a counter-balance to the political alliance with the USSR. Even an economic strategy based on integration with Eastern Europe, as was proposed by the KSČ, would have benefited greatly from Western credits.

The National Socialists were therefore enthusiastic at Marshall's ideas for aiding European recovery. Then, just as discussions were about to begin, Stalin effectively vetoed Czechoslovakia's participation by arguing that it would be regarded as an unfriendly act, because he believed Marshall's proposals to be part of the wider US strategy of isolating the Soviet Union.

This was perhaps the decisive event in mid-1947 which led

ultimately to the breakdown of the existing National Front. The National Socialists, although they could not publicly say so, wished they could accept the US offer. From then on they determined to greatly weaken the KSČ in the next elections.

There was also a major change in Soviet policy marked particularly by the creation of the Informbureau. This body propagated the Soviet analysis of the European situation and, by highlighting the dangers of another war, led the KSČ to press for a still closer alliance with the USSR. To achieve this, they set about their aim of winning an absolute majority in a more determined way than before.

So the changed international situation led to changes in the parties' strategies and hence to sharpening divisions inside Czechoslovakia with each side determined to weaken the other.



CHAPTER 32: THE SHARP POLITICAL STRUGGLE OVER THE SPECIAL TAX ON MILLIONAIRES.

V.32.1. The Communists' economic strategy is threatened by a severe drought.

Despite the enormous importance of changes in the international situation in increasing divisions inside Czechoslovakia, the first really sharp, open conflict arose in connection with internal economic problems. That does not mean that the division of Europe was of secondary importance, rather it encouraged the KSČ to respond to these economic problems with a vigorous political offensive, as it seemed that the Two Year Plan would not yield sufficient benefits to guarantee victory in the next elections.

Throughout the first half of 1947 it seemed that the plan was successful. Those sectors most directly planned seemed to be doing best while failures or shortcomings were most serious in agriculture, construction and foreign trade: all of these were predominantly private. There were also disappointments in the whole economy because of delays in investment projects and a striking failure for productivity to rise as hoped<sup>1</sup>. This could be serious, but certainly did not threaten the credibility of planning as such. Arguments that the plan was unrealisable or that it merely predicted what would have happened anyway seemed to have been refuted<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Průběh plnění, p.47.

<sup>2</sup> See J. Goldmann, J. Flek: Planned Economy in Czechoslovakia, Prague, 1949, esp. p.36-37.

Agriculture, though, presented more serious problems. The labour shortage that had threatened the whole economy became largely a problem of agriculture<sup>3</sup>. The work-force there declined throughout 1947 while it was rapidly rising in other sectors and even the importing of foreign workers could not reverse the trend<sup>4</sup>. Ďuriš still claimed that peasants were only marginally behind targets<sup>5</sup>, but then everything was completely changed by an exceptional drought which was particularly severe in the most productive agricultural areas. The harvest yielded only 63% of the planned quantity of wheat. For potatoes the figure was 48%. For all plant products this represented an even lower figure than had been reached in 1945. It was under 62% of the pre-war level<sup>6</sup>. This represented a major threat to the Communists' strategy. Living standards would inevitably fall and the leading party in the government could hardly fail to take some of the blame. All this at the same time as the changes in the international situation and the expectation that the National Socialists would try to exploit everything available to discredit the KSČ. Instead of waiting for this, the Communists did not hesitate to take the initiative.

<sup>3</sup>See above Section IV.27.2.

<sup>4</sup>Průběh plnění, p.187-189.

<sup>5</sup>J. Ďuriš: Jak pomáhá vláda a ministerstvo zemědělství rolníkům poškozeným suchem, Praha, 1947, p.3.

<sup>6</sup>Stručný, p.353.

V.32.2. The Communist offensive begins with a major political campaign around the demand for a millionaires' tax. Political tensions rise to an unprecedented level.

The initial issue was compensation for the losses suffered by peasants. The suggestion was first made by the Social Democrats<sup>7</sup>, but was quickly taken up by Communists who added that compensation should be financed from a special millionaires' tax<sup>8</sup> which, it was claimed, would raise 2,500 million Kčs<sup>9</sup>. It seemed from the start that the suggestion was intended primarily to have a political impact. Very soon National Socialists were presented as the defenders of the millionaires<sup>10</sup>, but the details of the proposal were not worked out so that it remained unclear whether enough money could be raised. At first it seemed that 100,000 would be taxed<sup>11</sup>, but this was then altered with references to a total of 44,000 capitalists and farmers owning over 50ha<sup>12</sup>. Then of these it seemed that only 35,000 would be taxed: apparently they owned about 5% of the national wealth<sup>13</sup>.

When the question of compensation for the peasants was discussed in the government, it was agreed that there should be a

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<sup>7</sup>PL 21/8/47, p.1, and PL 23/8/47, p.1.

<sup>8</sup>RP 22/8/47, p.1.

<sup>9</sup>RP 24/8/47, p.1.

<sup>10</sup>RP 24/8/47, p.1.

<sup>11</sup>Dolanský, speaking in the government meeting of 27/8/47; V. Adámek: Boj, p.106.

<sup>12</sup>Fakta a cifry, II, No.10, 19/9/47, p.34.

<sup>13</sup>Frejka, Hospodář, 11/9/47, p.3, and Funkcionář, 16/9/47, p.27.

special tax on luxury goods, but the idea of the millionaires' tax was rejected by a majority vote. The only Social Democrat present was Laušman and he abstained. Instead of accepting defeat the Communists published details of the government meeting and of how individual ministers had voted. They threatened to bring the issue before parliament<sup>14</sup> and there were suggestions that the debate might be broadcast live over the radio<sup>15</sup>. All this was part of a wider campaign to portray the other parties as the defenders of the millionaires. It found a ready response in big factories where meetings were organised by the trade union bodies.

There seems no reason to doubt that Communists were making headway with members and supporters of the other parties<sup>16</sup>. Apparently in the period from 4/9/47 to 22/9/47 about 2000 resolutions were sent to the government: they were often signed by the basic organisations of the other parties too<sup>17</sup>. This was an acutely embarrassing situation for their leaderships. There was, however, no possibility of a coherent bloc against the KSČ as each party felt obliged to respond to the Communists' offensive in an individual way.

The People's Party were the most negative. They tried claiming that there were no millionaires, but that was very easily disproved by a glance at adverts for houses at very high prices carried by

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<sup>14</sup> RP 3/9/47, p.1.

<sup>15</sup> RP 10/9/47, p.1.

<sup>16</sup> See the fairly sober and credible claims in RP 4/9/47, p.1.

<sup>17</sup> Dvořáková, Lesjuk: Československá, p.107.

their own paper<sup>18</sup>. Generally they tried to dismiss the Communist proposal as no more than political demagoguery. Their own proposals excluded the idea of a special tax<sup>19</sup> and generally amounted to propaganda points, such as the suggestion that nationalised industries should pay<sup>20</sup>. They were happy to allow inflation, i.e. force everyone to pay<sup>21</sup>, and only gave the vaguest consideration to raising income tax<sup>22</sup>. The central point in their response was the accusation that the Communists really wanted to damage all private enterprise and not just the wealthiest<sup>23</sup>.

The Social Democrats were worried by the conversion of the issue into a mass campaign. They wanted agreement within the National Front. They rejected the Communists' proposal because it was not fully worked out and, they thought, would not work<sup>24</sup>. They tried to prevent their own members from supporting meetings and resolutions by pointing out that Majer, Fierlinger, Svoboda and Masaryk all opposed the Communists' suggestion<sup>25</sup>. They supplemented this with concrete proposals of their own which they wanted presented to the meetings that were being organised in factories. They even tried to take the initiative on economic policies away from the KSČ

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<sup>18</sup> See Fakta a cifry, II, No.10, 19/9/47, p.20-25.

<sup>19</sup> J. Novák, Hospodář, 11/9/47, p.4.

<sup>20</sup> Rozehnal, speech, LD 13/9/47, p.2.

<sup>21</sup> LD 12/9/47, p.1.

<sup>22</sup> R. Reska, Obzory, 20/9/47, p.561.

<sup>23</sup> e.g. LD 4/9/47, p.1, editorial.

<sup>24</sup> PL 5/9/47, p.1.

<sup>25</sup> PL 6/9/47, p.1.

by formulating a general action programme for the whole economy which included calls for immediate increases in the lowest wages and a progressive income tax system<sup>26</sup>. Fierlinger also presented concrete proposals for raising the finance needed to compensate the peasants. He doubted whether the Communist proposal would raise enough and preferred emphasis on police-type measures to beat tax evasion. He wanted a renewal of "tax commissions" to help track down the "nouveau riche" who had profited from black marketeering<sup>27</sup>. This was not very far from the Communists' position<sup>28</sup>. The tax changes desired had even been proposed long before by the KSC<sup>29</sup>.

The National Socialists, as usual, had difficulty in formulating a consistent position. They tried to stop the growth of the campaigning and to discredit in any way possible the resolutions being sent in from factories. Their approach was rather to attack the Communists than to make definite proposals of their own. They suggested that the KSC had become dominated by "reactionary elements" who wanted to split the National Front<sup>30</sup> and they started referring in enormous headlines<sup>to</sup>, "communo-fascism"<sup>31</sup> alongside their familiar

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<sup>26</sup> PL 5/9/47, p.1.

<sup>27</sup> V. Erban, Hospodář, 11/9/47, p.3-4.

<sup>28</sup> Significantly, the similarity was forcefully emphasised by the trade union leaders; ÚRO, 11/9/47, p.1.

<sup>29</sup> PL 4/9/47, p.1.

<sup>30</sup> See the report of the National Socialists' Presidium meeting of 4/9/47, SS 5/9/47, p.1.

<sup>31</sup> e.g. SS 6/9/47, p.1.

references to "terror" in factories. Tension between themselves and the Communists reached an unprecedented level. An illustration of that was the response of the two parties to the announcement that bombs had been sent through the post to the three government ministers J. Masaryk, Drtina and Zenkl. The incident was immediately incorporated into mutual accusations. The National Socialist view was that, irrespective of what the police investigations might reveal, the culprits were the Communists because of the campaign they were conducting at the time<sup>32</sup>. Slánský paralleled this by claiming that there were masses of provocations at the time being made to look as if they came from the KSČ. This one, he suggested, was aimed to divert popular criticism away from the National Socialists and onto the Communists<sup>33</sup>.

At the same time the National Socialists tried to discredit, rather than openly oppose, the Communists' proposal. They did not deny the existence of millionaires but said there were not 35,000 but between 7,000 and 8,000<sup>34</sup>. They tried to suggest that the tax would hit "all middle farmers and small businessmen"<sup>35</sup>, meaning 100,000 tax payers or 400,000 people in all<sup>36</sup>. The aim could even be to

<sup>32</sup> SS 12/9/47, p.1.

<sup>33</sup> RP 12/9/47, p.1. Much more came to light about the bombs in the following months. See below Section VI.36.3.

<sup>34</sup> See the report of the government meeting of 2/9/47, Cestou k Únoru, p.220-221.

<sup>35</sup> Ripka, speech, SS 9/9/47, p.2.

<sup>36</sup> SS 10/9/47, p.1.

liquidate all private property<sup>37</sup>. This argument was reinforced elsewhere as it was claimed that nobody had the necessary amount of wealth in liquid form so that the purely financial problem would remain while the tax could only be paid through the effective confiscation of property<sup>38</sup>. Even this would not prove that the Communists' aim was to confiscate property. The point rather was that their proposal had not been carefully worked out when first presented as it was primarily intended to have a political impact.

In an attempt to appeal to the working class great play was made of the salaries of top managers in nationalised industries. It was claimed that the Communists were trying "to divert attention from the new privileged strata . . ."<sup>39</sup>. Unfortunately, this argument could easily be made to appear ridiculous. If the National Socialists wanted to tax this "nouveau riche" then why had they opposed the proposal which only asserted the general principle that there should be a special tax on the richest? They could instead have proposed a concrete amendment<sup>40</sup>. Similarly, their claim that they wanted millionaires to pay but did not think the Communist proposal would ensure this<sup>41</sup>, hardly seemed valid grounds for the position they took in the crucial government meeting. When actually forced to present their proposals it was clear that they differed fundamentally

<sup>37</sup> Svobodný zítřek, 18/9/47, p.4.

<sup>38</sup> Svobodné noviny, 7/9/47, p.3.

<sup>39</sup> SS 5/9/47, p.1.

<sup>40</sup> Kárný, Tvorba 10/9/47, p.711.

<sup>41</sup> SS 5/9/47, p.1.



from the Communists and Social Democrats. They did not want millionaires to cover the full cost but argued instead: "A lower national income will bear a lower burden of public and investment outlays. It is therefore necessary to search for part of the essential compensation in savings in the state budget"<sup>42</sup>. This, of course, was precisely what the Communists wanted to avoid as it would have meant cutting the living standards of their own supporters or abandoning projects within the Two Year Plan.

V.32.3. The Communists try unsuccessfully to revive the Socialist Bloc. Finally an agreement is reached within the existing National Front.

As political tension mounted so all parties seemed to be going separate ways. The Social Democrats, in fact, seemed to be more vociferous than ever before in denouncing "Communist terror". The Communists in turn seemed to be making ever more general attacks on the other parties for allegedly harbouring reactionaries. Then, suddenly, they called for a renewal of the bloc of socialist parties<sup>43</sup>. This then seemed to be becoming a reality when an agreement was announced between the Communists and leading Social Democrats. The KSČ presented this as a major step towards rebuilding cooperation between the two parties starting with a common platform on the question of compensation for peasants, and then to be followed by renewed cooperation at all levels<sup>44</sup>. Their hope that this would

<sup>42</sup> Firt, Hospodář, 11/9/47, p.3 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>43</sup> Slánský, speech, RP 9/9/47, p.1.

<sup>44</sup> RP 12/9/47, p.1.

lead to a restoration of the effective dominance they had enjoyed in 1945 seemed to be confirmed by several reminders that the bloc agreement was still valid<sup>45</sup>.

The leading Social Democrats seemed at first to welcome this attempt to restore the bloc<sup>46</sup>. The National Socialists, however, were absolutely opposed to it<sup>47</sup>. There was also clear opposition from some Social Democrats and Majer, who had not even been consulted before the agreement was reached, tried to resign from the government in protest.

Whatever Fierlinger's original intentions had been, the agreement was then reinterpreted as an attempt to restore cooperation in the National Front. It started with the KSČ only because that was the biggest party. Then the Social Democrats held talks with the leadership's of the other two Czech parties and afterwards claimed considerable credit for the subsequent calming of the political atmosphere<sup>48</sup>. They seemed to have been the only bridge between the two sides.

Despite this apparent back-peddling, the agreement was of enormous importance in shaping and confirming the situation in the trade unions and in factories. Apparently relations between the two parties had been tense there<sup>49</sup>, but the agreement was followed

<sup>45</sup> e.g. Funkcionář, 16/9/47, p.5.

<sup>46</sup> PL 12/9/47, p.1. See also the interview with F. Tymeš, PL 14/9/47, p.2.

<sup>47</sup> See their Central Executive Committee's statement, SS 24/9/47, p.1.

<sup>48</sup> Laušman, Svět práce, 2/10/47, p.1.

<sup>49</sup> V. Cipro, Práce, 23/9/47, p.1.

by meetings in Prague factories with Fierlinger among the speakers. Unanimous resolutions were passed for compensation to be paid to the peasants, and for it to be financed by a special tax on the excess profits of exploiters and by the confiscation of the property of profiteers<sup>50</sup>. Even before that, the only available accounts of meetings in factories suggest that there had been effective unanimity for resolutions that demanded that millionaires and exploiters should pay<sup>51</sup>. This was vague enough to be quite compatible with the Communists' and the Social Democrats' position and could not be opposed by the National Socialists' either.

Soon, however, the campaigning atmosphere calmed down. Finally, at a government meeting on 21/10/47, Dolanský's definite proposals were accepted<sup>52</sup>. This could be presented by the Communists as a victory because the principle of taxing millionaires to pay the compensation had been accepted. The National Socialists also claimed to have been proved right as there seemed to be only 12,000 and not 35,000 millionaires<sup>53</sup>. The Social Democrats could be even happier as their suggestions seemed to have been accepted by Dolanský. The People's Party seemed the least content, still verbally opposing the idea<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> Práce, 17/9/47, p.1.

<sup>51</sup> See the report of the orderly and restrained meeting held in Zbrojovka-Brno and addressed by MPs of the three socialist parties; Svobodné noviny, 7/9/47, p.2. See also the ÚRO Presidium's account of the resolutions it was receiving; Svobodné noviny, 7/9/47, p.2.

<sup>52</sup> RP 22/10/47, p.1.

<sup>53</sup> SS 22/10/47, p.1, and LD 22/10/47, p.1.

<sup>54</sup> V. Mixa, LD 26/10/47, p.1, and R. Reska, Obzory, 8/11/47, p.275.

#### V.32.4. Summary and discussion.

Coinciding with the worsening international situation, were deep economic problems inside Czechoslovakia. On top of other difficulties the Two Year Plan was threatened by an exceptional drought. This could have meant enormous losses for peasants plus food shortages for others.

So as to avoid losing popularity from this, the KSČ proposed compensation for the peasants which was to be financed out of a special tax on millionaires. They were outvoted in the government, but decided not to yield. There is no information on exactly how the Communist leadership formulated their tactics, but they seem to have seen and seized on the opportunity to launch a major campaign against the other parties.

They publicised the way how each government minister had voted and mobilised public opinion, especially in factories, around their original proposal. Formally speaking, there is nothing undemocratic in this. But it conflicted totally with the accepted practice of the coalition whereby all ministers accepted the majority decisions of the government.

The Communists' action therefore implied that they had changed their thinking from June 1946 and were seeking an alternative to the existing government. This seemed to be confirmed when they began pressing for a renewal of the Socialist Bloc and then announced a top-level agreement with the Social Democrats.

Political tensions and mutual insults reached an unprecedented level and the Social Democrats, although they had common ground with the KSČ proposals for the special tax, drew back from the full

implications of their agreement. They tried to mediate to bring together the Czech parties. Soon they could claim some success as the government agreed on a new proposal that included the idea of the special tax.

The whole incident undoubtedly terrified the National Socialists, but the Communists probably learnt a lot too. They had not won a complete victory and had shown no real determination to change the government. They had, however, learnt a lesson in the methods and consequences of mass campaigning.

They had been isolated in the government but this actually seemed to have been beneficial. They had mobilised working class opinion around their position and no other party had been able either to stop this or to mobilise support around an alternative position.

Instead, the other parties had become confused and disunited: there was certainly no sign of them forming a bloc as each was determined to put their own distinctive proposals.

Although there is no evidence of the KSČ leadership making a clear and thorough assessment of all this, it is hard to believe that they did not learn a great deal for their tactics in early 1948.

### CHAPTER 33: THE SLOVAK CRISIS OF AUTUMN 1947.

The mounting political tensions in the Czech lands coincided with the deepening political crisis in Slovakia. Its roots were already clearly visible in early post-war Slovak development which was characterised by lasting division rather than an easy cooperation later shaken by changes in the international situation. Nevertheless, events in Slovakia became an important influence on political relationships in Prague. They therefore warrant discussion prior to an account of the further changes in the Czech political parties' strategies.

#### V.33.1. The Communists step up their campaign for a thorough purge of former fascists: the Slovak political crisis develops.

It must have seemed to the Slovak Communists in June 1947 that they would be able to win enough Czech support to press home their advantage and perhaps even force the humiliated Democrats to announce the reversal of the April agreement. Gottwald certainly believed that a major offensive was possible and necessary as he felt Slovakia to be the weakest part of the republic both politically and economically. He advocated demanding from the other Czech parties cooperation in removing, and perhaps even imprisoning, the HSL'S trend within the Democratic Party<sup>1</sup>.

Attacks were being directed against the Catholics within the

<sup>1</sup> Speaking at the KSČ Central Committee meeting of June 1947, KSS dok., p.586 and p.587.

party leadership. As early as May 1947 it was being claimed that Kempný, Bugár and Staško were working for the HSL'S underground. Evidence from Tiso's trial apparently indicated that they had met with Ďurčanský before Hitler's downfall and worked out a plan for winning key positions of power so that, in favourable international and internal conditions, they could destroy the Czechoslovak state<sup>2</sup>. Evidence of the direct involvement with the underground of these individuals was not clear, but there was enough conviction in the Czech parties that the permanent crisis in the Slovak National Front was a consequence of the April agreement for the Czech and Slovak National Front to establish a parity committee to investigate the situation within the Democratic Party<sup>3</sup>.

This was less than the Communists had hoped for. The National Socialists were already displaying nervousness about blanket condemnations of the Democrats<sup>4</sup>. The first reports were appearing in the Western press of alleged preparations for a Communist coup in Slovakia on 11/6/47, the date of the National Front meeting<sup>5</sup>. Although the National Socialists rejected such claims, they did point to the similarities between the Communists' attacks on the Democrats and methods used shortly beforehand in Hungary and Bulgaria<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> L. Holdoš, speech, RP 21/5/47, p.1.

<sup>3</sup> RP 21/6/47, p.1.

<sup>4</sup> KSS dok, p.587.

<sup>5</sup> J. Kodíček completely dismissed the story that originated in the Daily Mail, Central European Observer, 27/6/47.

<sup>6</sup> Svobodný zítřek, 26/6/47, p.1.

Irrespective of the true situation in those countries, the National Socialists' cautiousness redirected attention back to initiatives inside Slovakia. Gottwald delivered a major speech at Devín on 5/7/47 in which he placed considerable emphasis on the dangers for Slovakia from "remnants of the old fascist regime". He maintained that they had become a serious threat because they had gained important positions in political life, in the state administration and in the economy. He concluded that for Slovakia's development it was essential "to complete the purge in Slovakia of those who zealously served the former fascist regime and who even today would like to return Slovakia to the past. And it is necessary for the Slovak people themselves to understand that the main enemy, the enemy of Slovakia, is in Slovakia . . ." <sup>7</sup>. There was no explicit attack on the Democratic Party but, obviously aware of how best to win support in the West and in the Czech lands, the Democrats portrayed Gottwald's speech as an attack on their party as a whole. They vigorously reaffirmed their commitment to the Czechoslovak state <sup>8</sup>.

In this increasingly tense situation the next initiative came from the Communist dominated Union of Slovak Partisans who opened a conference on 19/8/47 demanding measures "to fight against leading compromised figures who are obviously receiving orders from abroad

<sup>7</sup>Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.87.

<sup>8</sup>Čas 8/7/47, p.1. Lettrich emphasised that the Czechoslovak state, far from being an artificial creation, reflected deeper ethnic, cultural and historical factors; Čas 5/8/47, p.2.



and are hindering the successful development of our state"<sup>9</sup>. They passed a resolution calling for arms to join the fight against "Banderovci"<sup>10</sup> and for the removal by 20/9/47 of all functionaries of the former regime who held important positions in the state<sup>11</sup>. They sent a delegation to Gottwald who agreed with their view that the problem was not just one of a few conspirators but rather of "a considerable circle of people, who were the base of the Tiso regime."<sup>12</sup>

Although in some respects the partisans may have over-dramatised the situation, there is no reason to doubt the genuineness of their concern. They were complaining of active discrimination against themselves and were still liable for imprisonment for their actions during the war<sup>13</sup>. Their demands could gain support from other resistance organisations. They also acutely embarrassed the Democrats who could not deny that plenty of people needed to be purged, but insisted that the question concerned all political parties equally, and that any purge should adhere to normal legal methods without any special measures<sup>14</sup>. In this situation the Board of Commissioners accepted the partisan's demands and special commissions were established to check employees' past records on the basis of

<sup>9</sup>S. Faltan, speech, Pravda, 21/8/47, p.1.

<sup>10</sup>See below Section V.33.6.

<sup>11</sup>Pravda, 21/8/47, p.1.

<sup>12</sup>Pravda, 23/8/47, p.1.

<sup>13</sup>Huml: "Svaz", p.550-551 and p.554-555.

<sup>14</sup>Cas 23/8/47, p.1.

evidence presented by partisans. Undecided cases were submitted to a commission headed by Ferjenčík<sup>15</sup>. Apparently nothing was done where Democrat Commissioners were in control, but there were changes in the office of the Commissioner for the Interior. Although it was claimed that only the most superficial evidence was needed to bring about suspension pending trial<sup>16</sup>, there were some seemingly quite staggering cases. One of the top officials under Ferjenčík had held a senior position in the Slovak state and also in the Hlinka Guard: he was referred to as being very reliable in the files of the former regime<sup>17</sup>.

The Democrats could not openly oppose the partisans' demands even when the campaign for a speedy purge was sharpened. Demonstrations were held in many parts of Slovakia on 14/9/47 and Kettich was even among the speakers at a rally in Lučenec. He praised the partisans for their role in the resistance and pledged himself to the fulfillment of their "justified demands"<sup>18</sup>, but in later speeches he reiterated his insistence that any purge should be slow and rigorously confined within the existing legal framework<sup>19</sup>.

Then the Communists' hand was suddenly strengthened by the announcement of the discovery of another conspiratorial organisation

<sup>15</sup> S. Faltan, Pravda, 21/9/47, p.1.

<sup>16</sup> Svobodné noviny, 1/10/47, p.2.

<sup>17</sup> See S. Faltan's account of the course of the purge, Pravda, 21/9/47, p.1.

<sup>18</sup> Pravda, 16/9/47, p.1 and p.2.

<sup>19</sup> See his speech at the later joint conference of resistance organisations, Čas 23/9/47, p.1.

of former supporters of the Slovak state. The typical conspirators were, apparently, those former activists who had either gone unpunished or received laughably low sentences and had worked their way back into high positions after the April agreement<sup>20</sup>. The eventual plan seemed to be an uprising against the Czechoslovak state which could be helped by cooperation with Banderovci<sup>21</sup>. More was revealed over the following days and it appeared that the organisation was extensive. It was not, however, proven that it was linked directly with the Democratic Party's leadership and it certainly did not have the means to take power alone.

Nevertheless, its discovery seemed to underline the urgency of a really thorough purge and pressure was stepped up with a united resolution from a joint conference of resistance organisations on 21/9/47. This was then discussed at a meeting of the Slovak National Front on 22/9/47 and the demands were accepted as being justified. Representatives of the resistance organisations were even able to attend the National Front meeting, so that the Communists' long-standing hope for a broader organisational basis for the National Front began to look realisable<sup>22</sup>. Soon there were reports of suspensions from National Committees in line with the resolution of the resistance organisations.

It must have seemed to the Communists that they had firmly

<sup>20</sup> Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.176.

<sup>21</sup> RP 16/9/47, p.1.

<sup>22</sup> Pravda, 24/9/47, p.1-2.

taken the initiative into their own hands. Some of the Democrats were even supporting their demands for a rigorous purge and Lettrich was expressing caution rather than outright opposition.

V.33.2. Economic difficulties accentuate political tensions: the Communists mobilise working class militancy.

During the spring of 1947 the black market seems to have been in decline: workers' living standards began to rise<sup>23</sup>. Then, in the summer, shortages reappeared and the drought dramatically confirmed this new trend. The inadequacy of rations, always prominent in workers' complaints, was forced right to the front of the political arena. An all-Slovak miners' conference placed great emphasis on the issue, while the Two Year Plan, the need to increase production and the shortage of labour all appeared to be secondary issues<sup>24</sup>. The situation was particularly serious for those workers living in areas where agriculture was minimal: it was, of course, there that the traditions of the uprising and of working class militancy were generally the strongest<sup>25</sup>. Some areas apparently had no flour at all<sup>26</sup>, while it was later claimed without elaboration, that workers were being forced to buy 80% of the necessities of life on the black market<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Jarošová, et al: Odbory, p.171.

<sup>24</sup> Pravda 15/7/47, p.1 and p.3.

<sup>25</sup> See the resolution from workers in Podbrezová; Láluha, Február, p.134 and p.171.

<sup>26</sup> Pravda, 13/7/47, p.3.

<sup>27</sup> F. Zupka, speaking to the ÚRO plenum of 16/10/47, ÚRO, 18/12/47, p.

The trade union leaders continued to reject pressure for wage increases which could have enabled workers to buy food and other consumer goods on the black market. Instead they directed activity towards campaigning for a better organised supply system with tighter controls over distribution and tough measures against black marketeers<sup>28</sup>. This developed into the demand for safeguarding the Two Year Plan by ensuring supplies of food and textiles to workers in those factories incorporated into the plan even if that required a separate distribution system run by the factories themselves<sup>29</sup>. This would have helped particularly the politically most active and powerful section of the working class.

Discontent about the supply system naturally encouraged dissatisfaction and suspicion towards the Democratic Party's Commissioners in charge of food supplies and agriculture: the former, Filo, was a Catholic while the latter, Kvetko, had participated in the uprising. Generally accusations against them were carefully worded. It was suggested that the Commissioner for Supply had no interest in correcting faults in the system and saw no need to stop wheat going straight from farms onto the black market<sup>30</sup>. Sometimes, however, militant workers had no hesitation in accusing Filo and Kvetko not just of incompetence but of "sabotaging the Two Year Plan and

<sup>28</sup> The Slovak system differed from the Czech one in that it lacked the strict controls and quotas throughout the production process; M. Dado, Budovatel, 5/9/47, p.1.

<sup>29</sup> Zupka, speaking at a meeting of trade union functionaries in Bratislava, Pravda, 12/9/47, p.1.

<sup>30</sup> RP 28/8/47, p.1.

deliberately provoking chaos so as to reverse the gains of our national and democratic revolution against the interests of the working people"<sup>31</sup>.

The Democrats naturally rejected these accusations and at first denied that a real disaster was imminent<sup>32</sup>. This view was contradicted by the parliamentary committee responsible for supply policy which visited Slovakia in July 1947. Organisational failures were identified as the root of the trouble as peasants seemed to be fulfilling their obligations, but somehow nobody was receiving their full ration of flour and black market prices were five or six times the official level. Strong measures against the black market were therefore recommended<sup>33</sup> and Majer called for a united all-Czechoslovak supply system<sup>34</sup>.

The Democrats continued to find grounds for complacency until, when the situation after the drought was accepted as being "extremely unfavourable", the onus of responsibility could be shifted elsewhere. Improvement, it was claimed, could only come from "accelerated and effective measures by the Government of the Republic, which has reserved decision making in supply questions for itself."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Resolution from Čierny Balog, Čas 29/6/47, p.3.

<sup>32</sup> Dado, Budovateľ, 6/6/47, p.1.

<sup>33</sup> Pravda 5/7/47, p.3 and 11/7/47, p.2.

<sup>34</sup> Pravda 29/7/47, p.2.

<sup>35</sup> Resolution of the Democratic Party's Presidium meeting of 13/10/47, Čas 16/10/47, p.1.

Alternatively, it was argued that there was no cause for special concern in Slovakia because the situation was just as bad in the Czech lands<sup>36</sup>. One way or another, the Democrats seemed determined to direct criticism away from themselves and onto "Prague centralism". Undoubtedly, food shortages and the Democrats' attitude towards them served to heighten the combativeness of the trade unions. They had begun to reassert themselves particularly after the failure of the protests against Tiso's execution<sup>37</sup>. By the summer of 1947 workers seemed eager to show their collective strength in a small number of strikes against the return of confiscated factories to private ownership. They received support and solidarity from all over Slovakia<sup>38</sup>.

This combativeness was reflected in the trade union leadership where there was growing disillusionment with the idea of the National Front<sup>39</sup>. Zápotocký visited Slovakia in July and argued strongly that the existing government policies would lead to success in Slovakia as in the Czech lands. He dismissed the alternative of " . . . taking machine guns and going up into the mountains" as being pointless<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Budovatel', 24/10/47, p.4.

<sup>37</sup> Jarošová, et al: Odbory, p.174-175.

<sup>38</sup> Jarošová, et al: Odbory, p.171-174.

<sup>39</sup> See the views expressed at the SOR Presidium meeting of 24/6/47; Jarošová, et al: Odbory, p.179-180.

<sup>40</sup> His speech to the SOR Presidium meeting of 15/7/47, Jarošová, et al: Odbory, p.185.

Although he appeared as in a sense a moderating influence, he made no attempt to smooth over differences between the Slovak Communists and Democrats and analysed the Slovak situation in the same way as had Gottwald<sup>41</sup>. His visit even seemed to have heightened tension when Cas described it as "unwelcome" and suggested that he had no more in common with the Slovak people than the Nazi Karmasin. His visit was allegedly an attempt "to interfere in Slovakia's domestic affairs and . . . questions which Slovakia decided on 26/5/46 in the first free parliamentary elections"<sup>42</sup>. There was even talk again of establishing a "democratic" trade union organisation and the Czech People's Party seemed willing to lend support<sup>43</sup>.

The existing Slovak trade union organisations, however, without any directives from above, began preparing for strike action in response they said, to the insulting attacks on Zápotocký and to calls for the effective dissolution of the united trade union movement. The leadership tried to calm the atmosphere somewhat with reassurances that normal methods could still bring results so that "extreme revolutionary measures" were not yet necessary. Anger was diverted into protest meetings in factories 21/7/47 which sent resolutions to the SNR Presidium<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> See above p. 178.

<sup>42</sup> Cas 19/7/47, p.1.

<sup>43</sup> e.g. Obzory, 9/8/47, p.458-459.

<sup>44</sup> Pravda, 23/7/47, p.1.



V.33.3. The Communists formulate their tactics for a major offensive aiming to transform the political situation in Slovakia.

Perhaps if the KSS had concentrated solely on the issue of known prominent officials of the former Slovak state, then they could have achieved some sort of reversal of the April agreement. By the autumn of 1947, however, they sought a more fundamental change. Working class discontent was pushing them towards an offensive and the first meeting of the Informbureau, with the urgency that was attached after it to securing Czechoslovakia in the closest possible alliance with the USSR, undoubtedly also had an influence. Slánský and Baššovanský, who attended that meeting, advocated sharpening the general fight against "reaction" by means of a mass mobilisation of the Slovak people against conspirators<sup>45</sup>.

The KSS Presidium decided, on 29/9/47, to step up their campaigning and to consciously link together the issues of collaborators, the millionaires' tax, food supplies and peasants' demands<sup>46</sup>. They still left flexible their precise immediate aim, but there was no doubt that they hoped "to change the whole political structure of Slovakia". This could involve expelling the Democrats from the government, dissolving their party completely, or placing firm conditions on their continuing in the government<sup>47</sup>.

Presumably it was assumed that the National Socialists could be persuaded to support such measures. Široký argued that the

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<sup>45</sup> Jarošová, Jaroš: Slovenské, p.232.

<sup>46</sup> KSS dok, p.609.

<sup>47</sup> Široký, speaking at the KSS Presidium meeting of 11/10/47, KSS dok, p.610.

discovery of the conspiracy could convince more than just Communists and Social Democrats of the allegedly dangerous situation in Slovakia<sup>48</sup>. It was soon to appear that the strength and breadth of the KSS offensive itself alarmed the National Socialists and gave the Democrats the chance to find support in Prague.

The central point in the KSS plan was to be mass mobilisation of the organised working class involving meetings and rallies and a Congress of Factory Committees. The details and even the precise demands were left open until the KSS Presidium meeting of 18/10/47 when it was decided to place the main emphasis on economic and social questions: the <sup>issue of</sup> traitors and conspirators was to be secondary<sup>49</sup>. Above all else, the supply situation was presented as the reason for calling the congress<sup>50</sup>.

It was also realised that support had to be demonstrated from the peasants and, in practical terms, that could only be achieved by pressing vigorously demands for further land reform. A KSS action programme for peasant work was formulated in September 1947. Ďuriš was to pay far more attention to Slovak agriculture and spent two days in October holding discussions with peasants' representatives from all over Slovakia<sup>51</sup>.

Even if the issue of the conspiracy seemed to be receding into

<sup>48</sup> Speaking to a KSS meeting in Bratislava on 26/9/47, Pravda, 28/9/47, p.1.

<sup>49</sup> Jarošová, et al: Odbory, p.203 and p.204.

<sup>50</sup> Pravda 23/10/47, p.2.

<sup>51</sup> Cambel: Slovenská, p.383-384.

the background, it still retained an important position within the Communists' campaign. Increasingly it was included as an explanation for the supply shortages and delays over land reform thereby linking it up with social demands. Workers' resolutions often linked together the two issues of the conspiracy and the food shortages. There were strong hints from KSS leaders that there was a definite causal connection. Zupka, for example, possibly alluding to the earlier Hungarian events, claimed: "Experience from other states teaches us that the enemies for the people's gains and of the state direct their destructive activity at food supply and thereby undermine economic construction"<sup>52</sup>.

It was always possible to point to Democratic Party Commissioners holding back the implementation of measures they disliked, but it was a very different thing to prove that they deliberately caused difficulties. Even in the Commissioners' Office for Supply, which had been headed by the Catholic Filo, it was only possible to point out that several former supporters of the Tiso regime had held high positions there<sup>53</sup>. Even in December the supply problems were not being blamed on conscious sabotage: there were only references to a coincidence of the supply situation with "seriously threatened state-security interests"<sup>54</sup>.

Difficulties were even greater over the land reform. There

<sup>52</sup> Speaking to trade union functionaries in Bratislava, Pravda, 12/9/47, p.1.

<sup>53</sup> Pravda, 15/10/47, p.1.

<sup>54</sup> Široký, speaking at the KSS Central Committee on 4/12/47, KSS dok, p.623 and p.621.

were plenty of cases quoted indicating sabotage of the land reform, but it was impossible to link Kvetko with the conspiracy. In fact, although not known to the KSS at the time, Kvetko personally seems to have been more amenable to demands for land reform than others within his party who kept pressure on him<sup>55</sup>.

Nevertheless, even if there was no precise relationship between the conspiracy and social and economic questions, it could still be asked how anyone could trust the Democratic Party which could be seen following the policies of fascists: even Lettrich could be accused of this in education policy or in the Tiso case<sup>56</sup>.

So the KSS still missed no opportunity to give maximum publicity to the conspiracy. They worked out how to ensure that the legal investigation did not slip into the hands of the Commissioner for Justice and insisted that members of the KSS dominated Seventh Section of the police were present during all investigations. They also worked out how to use their strength within the radio in Prague so as to play up the importance of the conspiracy<sup>57</sup>, and the Ministry of the Interior published, with amazing haste, a booklet presenting the evidence against the conspirators<sup>58</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> Cambel: Slovenská, p.296-297.

<sup>56</sup> So argued S. Janči who concluded "where can be the certainty that the Democratic Party is not involved in the conspiracy?", Nové slovo, 4/10/47, p.631.

<sup>57</sup> This was discussed at the KSS Presidium meeting of 11/10/47, KSS dok, p.611.

<sup>58</sup> Spiknutí proti republice, Praha, 1947.

V.33.4. The Democratic Party defends itself by trying to discredit the revelations about the conspiracy and by appealing for help from the Czech right wing.

While the KSS was presenting the crisis as a consequence of the changed character of the Democratic Party<sup>59</sup>, the Democrats themselves portrayed the issue very differently. They consistently presented themselves as great defenders of parliamentary democracy, as opponents of Prague centralism and as full supporters of the government programme. They made no references to differences within their party so that KSS activities could be presented as attempts to destroy the whole Democratic Party and establish a monopoly of power. Otherwise the KSS was portrayed as if it had no particular aims or policies but just a mass of meaningless and ever changing positions. The Democrats could then appeal to the Czech right wing claiming "The fate for the Democratic Party is the fate for Czechoslovak democracy! It is not just the party affair of one party, nor is it a local Slovak affair . . ." <sup>60</sup>.

In practical terms this meant somehow discrediting the revelations about the conspiracy. From the start the Democratic Party Presidium pointed to the suspicious fact that the revelations had come at a remarkably convenient time - coinciding with political tension "provoked by some resistance elements" <sup>61</sup>. Embarrassment was evident

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<sup>59</sup> This view was still held by Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.179-180.

<sup>60</sup> Čas 5/10/47, p.3.

<sup>61</sup> Čas 17/9/47, p.1. This quote is remarkable enough when compared with the Democrats' general acceptance that the resistance organisations had justified demands.

as they reiterated the alternative line that they had taken an absolutely clear stand on the issue from the start, but that no particular party was involved in the conspiracy so that they could accuse the KSS of exploiting it for party-political ends<sup>62</sup>.

Then they clarified their position maintaining that the real conspiracy was from within the KSS. An alleged quote from Holdoš on 6/6/46, without proof of its authenticity or evidence that it was applied as the KSS line, showed the aim "of breaking the Democratic Party that fascist- populist camp, and taking power into our own hands. We must at any price prove anti-state activity inside the Democratic Party and on the basis of such convictions dissolve it!"<sup>63</sup> Apparently this was being done by the Communist dominated Seventh Section which discovered the conspiracy<sup>64</sup>.

The need to present such an argument was increased as the Democratic Party leaders Kempný and Bugár seemed to have had at least some contact with the conspirators<sup>65</sup>. There was also incriminating evidence against O. Obuch who was in charge of Ursíny's office and Hodža was involved in an attempt to cover up for him at the last minute<sup>66</sup>.

The objectivity of the police was, however, defended by Ferjenčík who insisted, both in a parliamentary committee and in the

<sup>62</sup>Cas 18/9/47, p.1.

<sup>63</sup>Cas 5/10/47, p.1.

<sup>64</sup>Cas 7/10/47, p.1.

<sup>65</sup>See Spiknutí.

<sup>66</sup>RP 23/10/47, p.1.

Board of Commissioners, that neither agents provocateurs nor false documents were used<sup>67</sup>. Polák felt obliged to praise the sober and objective way Ferjenčík reported the investigations: the problem of HSL'S remnants was not necessarily linked with the Democratic Party but the Democrats' claim that it was "a conspiracy to order" was implicitly rebutted<sup>68</sup>.

Soon there seemed to be clear evidence that Obuch had used his position to get information on secret government meetings and on political, military and economic questions which was then sent to Ďurcanský<sup>69</sup>. When this became clear, Ursíny resigned without any attempt to suggest that the charges might be untrue<sup>70</sup>. Lettrich still tried to save something by claiming that Obuch had been forced to confess by police brutality, but Ferjenčík and Nosek visited the prison and convinced themselves that Lettrich's claim was untrue<sup>71</sup>.

It would appear, then, that the evidence for illegal groups with some contacts in the Democratic Party leadership was undeniable. It was a very different situation from the trials of the early 1950's as this time confessions were very subsidiary parts of the

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<sup>67</sup> Spiknutí, p.6.

<sup>68</sup> RP 23/10/47, p.1; Polák's comments were reported in Pravda, 24/10/47, p.1, and then in Čas 25/10/47, p.1.

<sup>69</sup> Ferjenčík, speaking in a parliamentary committee, Čas, 28/10/47, p.3.

<sup>70</sup> Čas 1/11/47, p.1.

<sup>71</sup> Pravda, 21/11/47, p.1 and 27/11/47, p.1. Lettrich later stuck to his claim that there had been gross malpractices in the security forces, Lettrich: History, p.252.

evidence and there was plenty of documentary material that could be published. Moreover, although the KSS did make every effort to exploit the conspiracy in the interests of their political aims, links were not as clear as they might have liked with the Democrats' leaders if the aim had been to discredit the party as a whole. Ferjenčík, in fact, continued to insist that the political allegiances of all the conspirators were not known<sup>72</sup>. Moreover, it proved impossible to show the links between the conspirators and either economic difficulties, or the Banderovci which could have made them a far more serious threat to the state.

Nevertheless, the Czech right wing had no hesitation in accepting the Democrats' explanation that the real issue was the Communist aim of "the total Communisation of Czechoslovakia"<sup>73</sup>, and that the KSS aimed to outlaw the Democratic Party and seize power<sup>74</sup>. Implications of leading Democrats' involvement in the conspiracy were dismissed it being maintained, for example, that Bugár and Kempný were always 100% Czechoslovak and the victims of evidence planted against them<sup>75</sup>. So to a great extent the Czech right wing was united in its defence of the Democratic Party.

<sup>72</sup>RP 13/1/48, p.1.

<sup>73</sup>e.g. K. Fára, Obzory, 4/10/47, p.591-592.

<sup>74</sup>SS 5/10/47, p.2.

<sup>75</sup>Vývoj, 22/10/47, p.972. Lettrich later referred to Bugár, Cvinček and Filo as former members of the People's Party who had been involved in underground wartime activity; Lettrich: "Odboj", p.67. Ripka apparently knew in advance that there was strong evidence against Obuch, but was never convinced that Bugár and Kempný were involved in conspiratorial activities, Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p. 112-114.



The National Socialists were sometimes unsensationalist in their criticisms of the KSS. They pointed out how the Communist press seemed to be condemning the Democrats even before the matter had gone before the courts. They also found it suspicious that such importance was attached to arms finds among conspirators, while larger stores held by KSS members could be discovered with little comment<sup>76</sup>. This certainly indicated how the KSS was using the conspiracy as part of a wider political campaign, but it was a completely different matter to argue that they had invented it themselves. This seems even to have been accepted by some on the Czech right wing who still argued that the Democratic Party should be defended. Pointing to the events in Hungary, where the peasant party had been broken, it was even implied that it was better to forget the issue of traitors and collaborators: "... Without Communists there would be no purge of collaborators in Slovakia. But without the Democratic Party there would be no Slovak democracy..."<sup>77</sup>.

Presumably, although they could not openly admit it, the National Socialists reasoned essentially in this way. They were more frightened of Communists than of former fascists who did not present an immediate threat to the Czechoslovak state or to the policies the National Socialists wanted pursued in the government.

<sup>76</sup> V. Charvát, SS 10/10/47, p.1-2.

<sup>77</sup> F. Kafka, Dnešek, 13/11/47, p.511.

V.33.5. The Democratic Party, relying on support from the National Socialists, refuses to make major concessions to the Communists' demands.

The attitude of Czech parties was to prove decisive as the Slovak political situation would inevitably be decided in Prague. This was not immediately clear as the trade union organisations, in late October and early November, seemed to be mobilising their members in preparation for a major struggle inside Slovakia. A Congress of Factory Committees was called and, in an introductory message, the SOR pointed to six points of particular concern to the trade unions. These were; first, disorder in the distribution system highlighted by the three week period after the resignation of the Commissioner for Supply during which no replacement had been appointed; secondly, the vague and general claim that reaction was deliberately sabotaging the Two Year Plan; thirdly, the growth in the black market which was nullifying social advances made by the working people and forcing them to pay high black market prices; fourthly, the claim that former fascists were known to be occupying responsible positions; fifthly, the claim that reaction was disrupting the Košice programme and, finally, the claim that reaction was trying to break the united trade unions<sup>78</sup>.

The congress was held in Bratislava on 30/10/47 with 1836 representatives of workers and other employees in attendance. Its resolution was largely an expanded form of the SOR message, but there was also a categorical demand for the resignation of the existing Board of Commissioners. This was supported by the

<sup>78</sup> Pravda, 31/10/47, p.1

resistance organisations and led to the resignation of the KSS representatives and of Ferjenčík<sup>79</sup>.

The Democrats, however, refused to be bound by the views of the main mass organisations and, already assured of National Socialist support if they rejected all the Communists' demands<sup>80</sup>, took the issue to the full Czech and Slovak National Front. During the discussions that followed the two sides in the Slovak crisis tried to demonstrate their popularity inside Slovakia. Meetings were held in work-places on 5/11/47 expressing enthusiastic support for the resolution from the Congress of Factory Committees<sup>81</sup>. There were even some factories beginning preparations for a general strike<sup>82</sup>.

Perhaps a more significant success for the KSS was an all-Slovak Congress of District Organisations of the JZSR and Peasant Commissions on 14/11/47 which was attended by 2,000 to 3,000 delegates. The original suggestion came from Ďuriš who was present, but Lettrich and Kvetko, although invited, did not attend. The resolution passed at the congress expressed loyalty to the Czechoslovak Republic and the Gottwald government. There was great attention to specifically peasant demands including Ďuriš's six laws and the Hradec programme. There was also an expression of full solidarity

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<sup>79</sup> Pravda, 1/11/47, p1.

<sup>80</sup> Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.116.

<sup>81</sup> Pravda, 7/11/47, p.2.

<sup>82</sup> Jarošová, et al: Odbory, p.211.

with the demands of the Factory Committee Congress which itself approved of the peasants' demands<sup>83</sup>.

Although<sup>there</sup> can be little doubt that the KSS was gaining more influence in the countryside, it was and is still not clear how representative the conference really was. Communists were therefore still nervous that the Democrats might be able to mobilise peasant support for demonstrations which they called on 16/11/47 to oppose the alleged KSS attempt to take power. They claimed that 30,000 answered their call in Bratislava and that there were also big and successful demonstrations in Košice and Zvolen<sup>84</sup>. Obviously, the KSS presented them as a complete fiasco<sup>85</sup>, but in private too the KSS leaders seemed to be pleased that the Democrats had mobilised less support than they claimed and that the demonstrations were not big enough to affect the negotiations within the National Front<sup>86</sup>.

These took the form of a lengthy and complex struggle from their opening at a meeting in Prague on 4/11/47. Gottwald took the opportunity, with mass organisations so obviously becoming a more important part of the Slovak situation, to try to re-establish his broader concept of the National Front at an all-state level.

<sup>83</sup> Pravda, 16/11/47, p.1 and p.3, and Cambel: Slovenská, p.390-391.

<sup>84</sup> Čas, 18/11/47, p.1.

<sup>85</sup> Pravda, 18/11/47, p.1.

<sup>86</sup> KSS dok, p.615. According to one serious estimate, there may have been 20,000 in the three centres. That certainly proved that the Democrats still had support. The KSS were also aware of weaknesses even in their own position in trade unions and in factories; Jarošová, Jaroš: Slovenské, p.252-253.

He invited all four Slovak parties, the Czech and Slovak trade unions and resistance organisations. At this the three main right-wing parties agreed to boycott the meeting which consequently had to be abandoned<sup>87</sup>.

The following day a government meeting entrusted Gottwald with the task of going to Slovakia to form a new Board of Commissioners<sup>88</sup>. He argued, as did Fierlinger, that no party should have an absolute majority<sup>89</sup>, but the other parties were suspicious of this. Fearing that the aim was to increase KSS representation, the National Socialist emphasised that Gottwald could not impose a solution as only the SNR had the right to appoint a Board of Commissioners<sup>90</sup>.

Gottwald found his task far from easy. The KSS was at first demanding a new Board made up of the KSS, "honourable" Democrats<sup>91</sup>, the other two parties, the trade unions and the resistance organisations. They also considered a temporary solution with Husák taking personal responsibility for Supply and for Agriculture<sup>92</sup> but, presumably recognising the need to come closer to the National Socialists' position, they were soon emphasising public

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<sup>87</sup> RP 5/11/47, p.1. Šrobár's Freedom Party may have joined in the boycott, as claimed in Svobodný zítřek, 13/11/47, p.3.

<sup>88</sup> RP 6/11/47, p.1.

<sup>89</sup> V. Adámek: Boj, p.113.

<sup>90</sup> Svobodný zítřek, 13/11/47, p.3.

<sup>91</sup> This term was inevitably vague. It implied those not involved in the conspiracy, but the Communists' offensive had been broadened beyond that to include very strong condemnations of Kvetko who stood politically on the left of the Democratic Party.

<sup>92</sup> KSS Presidium meeting of 25/10/47, KSS dok, p.612.

support for the demands of the two smaller parties for representation in the Board<sup>93</sup>.

The Democrats were prepared to accept changes, but they wanted to retain their majority<sup>94</sup>. Above all, they refused to yield the key posts of Agriculture, Supply and Justice which, the KSS suggested, should be given to Communists plus one non-party specialist<sup>95</sup>. Gottwald, in a final attempt to reach an agreement, proposed that there should be no increase in KSS representation but just the exchange of Justice for one other post: Agriculture and Supply were to go to the two smaller parties. The Democrats refused to concede this and Gottwald returned to Prague empty handed<sup>96</sup>.

The new Board of Commissioners was finally formed after two days of discussion in the Czech and Slovak National Front on 17 and 18/11/47. The changes are listed below. The Democrats were deprived of their overall majority and lost the important position of Justice to a Social Democrat who was presented as a non-party specialist<sup>97</sup>. They retained the other two controversial posts even though their Catholic representatives were removed.

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<sup>93</sup> Pravda 11/11/47, p.1.

<sup>94</sup> Cas, 11/11/47, p.1.

<sup>95</sup> Pravda, 12/11/47, p.1.

<sup>96</sup> Cas, 12/11/47, p.1, and Pravda, 12/11/47, p.1.

<sup>97</sup> Pravda, 20/11/47, p.1.

Table 28: Slovak Boards of Commissioners appointed on 14/8/46<sup>98</sup>  
and on 19/11/47.

Post	Name	Party affiliation	Name	Party affiliation
Chairman	G. Husák	KSS	G. Husák	KSS
Vice-Chairman	R. Fraštacký	DS	M. Polák	DS
Interior	M. Ferjenčík	non-party	M. Ferjenčík	non-party
Agriculture	M. Kvetko	DS	J. Styk	DS
Finance	M. Josko	DS	M. Josko	DS
Information	S. Belluš	DS	J. Lukačovič	DS
Industry	J. Púll	KSS	J. Šoltész	KSS
Justice	I. Štefánik	DS	A. Búza	non-party *
Supply	K. Filo	DS	M. Kvetko	DS
Transport	K. Bezek	KSS	K. Bezek	KSS
Posts	J. Lukačovič	DS	P. Blaho	Freedom Party *
Social security	J. Šoltész	KSS	J. Púll	KSS
Education	L. Novomeský	KSS	L. Novomeský	KSS
Health	E. Böhm	DS	J. Bečko	Party of Labour *
Technology	J. Styk	DS	I. Štefánik	DS

The asterisks indicated posts that were lost by the Democrats.

<sup>98</sup> Bouček, Klímeš: Dramatické, p.367.

V.33.6. Nervousness is aggravated by "Banderovci" in Eastern Slovakia.

The political crisis in Slovakia was further complicated and intensified by the reappearance in Eastern Slovakia of armed groups of Ukrainian right-wing nationalists. They were the remnants of an earlier political movement that had visualised a Ukrainian state formed at the expense of Poland, Czechoslovakia and the USSR. During World War II they had been used by the Nazis but never allowed to achieve their aim. After the war, however, armed units that had been created from 1943 onwards were left particularly in South-East Poland. In 1947 exceptionally tough measures were taken against them - including dispersing the local Ukrainian population over other parts of Poland. The name "Banderovci" was derived from the name of the movement's leader - Bandera - who fled to West Germany at the end of the war to escape charges of war crimes against Ukrainians<sup>99</sup>.

Groups entered Eastern Slovakia several times and in one operation in late 1945 killed eighteen Jews or Communists<sup>100</sup>. Otherwise they seem to have limited violence seeing themselves primarily as a political force and making a conscious effort to influence the 1946 elections. Their ideas might have had at least some appeal as the Ukrainian areas of Eastern Slovakia were very backward and suffered considerable war damage. There was scope for nationalist discontent within Czechoslovakia as help was slow in

<sup>99</sup> I. Bajcura: Ukrajinská otázka v ČSSR, Košice, 1967, p.99-102.

<sup>100</sup> J. Fiala: "Banderovci a politická krise v Československu v roce 1947", Revue dějin socialismu, 1969, No.5, p.709.



coming and attempts to begin industrialisation had only minimal impact. There had, in fact, been a strong feeling in the spring of 1945 for affiliation to the USSR, but this had been opposed by the SNR<sup>101</sup>, and instead Ukrainians were allowed their own special representative body - the UNRP<sup>102</sup> - with clear restrictions on its powers by the SNR.

The UNRP was a non-class, non-party organisation aiming to represent the interests not of an area but of a nationality group within Eastern Slovakia<sup>103</sup>. Although it always had some unsatisfied demands within the Czechoslovak Republic, there seems to have been little sympathy for the aims of the Banderovci which appeared to be realisable only within the context of another world war. In fact, the KSS received its highest votes in those areas where the Banderovci had been operating.

Nevertheless, the Banderovci became a serious political question when several groups, numbering a few hundred in all, tried to cross Czechoslovak territory to escape from Poland to the West. Although they did attempt some political propaganda their principal contact with the population was threats and theft to acquire food for their journey. The partisans, however, claimed to have evidence that the Banderovci had links with the HSL'S underground and might therefore

<sup>102</sup> Ukrajinská národná rada Prjaševščiny; the Ukrainian National Council for the Prešov Diocese.

<sup>101</sup> Bajcura: Ukrajinská, p.75-76.

<sup>103</sup> For a description and evaluation of the UNRP's activities, see Bajcura: Ukrajinská, p.89-99.

be planning to stay in Slovakia to make the government's position more difficult<sup>104</sup>. As the army seemed to be having difficulty in controlling Slovakia's frontier, partisans demanded arms to join the fight against the Banderovci.

The National Socialists treated the partisans' demand with the utmost suspicion arguing that it coincided with calls for a purge of Slovak public life and therefore indicated a desire to influence internal-political questions<sup>105</sup>. They developed this into the claim that the partisans' sole aim was to arm themselves so as to influence internal politics. There were even attempts to justify this by dismissing the Banderovci as "a couple of hundred ragged outlaws from somewhere in the East" who were "trying to cross our land to somewhere in the West". Then came the comment: "They must have their reasons. It really would be wiser to let them pass to where they think they will find peace"<sup>106</sup>.

It did, however, appear to be militarily sensible to use partisans, with their experience of that kind of fighting, so the government decided on 16/9/45 to give them the opportunity to volunteer. In practice not many did and the regular army was still the principal force fighting the Banderovci. By early November they had killed or, far more frequently captured practically all the Banderovci, and the partisans were largely disarmed again long before the February events<sup>107</sup>.

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<sup>104</sup> Pravda, 23/8/47, p.1. The subsequent trials of conspirators failed to prove that links had actually been established; Fiala: "Banderovci", p.707-709.

<sup>105</sup> Zenkl, speech, SS 26/8/47, p.2.

<sup>106</sup> SS 24/8/47, quoted in RP 27/8/47, p.1. Apparently this was cut from later editions of the paper.

<sup>107</sup> Fiala: "Banderovci", p.719-120.

V.33.7. The Democratic Party is left in a state of paralysis, able only to follow initiatives from the Czech lands.

Although the Democrats never openly admitted that the April agreement had been one of the causes of the crisis, an interesting statement slipped out at the height of the crisis: " . . . the famous internal agreement in the Democratic Party of 31st March 1946 is no longer an inner-party factor . . . the party's Executive Committee will make it the subject of discussion at the meeting it has already called with the intention of announcing it invalid and non-binding<sup>108</sup>". Whether this was meant genuinely or not, the fact was that Catholics already began losing key positions as many were implicated in the conspiracy and the Democrats later joined in a unanimous resolution of the new Board of Commissioners on 7/1/48 expressing full confidence in Ferjenčík: this was an implicit repudiation of charges made against the security forces by Lettrich on 16/11/47<sup>109</sup>.

This could be expected to lead to a crisis within the Democratic Party between its two wings. In fact the Catholic wing had no strength at all to present an independent position. The church itself was quieter than ever seeming to tread with the utmost caution after the arrests of Kempný and Bugár. A pastoral letter from Slovak bishops, on 28/10/47 placed emphasis on a positive attitude towards the Czechoslovak Republic, called for support for the Two Year Plan and condemned anti-state activities<sup>110</sup>. There was still

<sup>108</sup> Čas 11/11/47, p.1. The "famous" agreement had, of course, still not been published inside Slovakia.

<sup>109</sup> Pravda, 9/1/48, p.1.

<sup>110</sup> Prečan: Slovenský, p.201 and p.205.

stubborn resistance to the confiscation of church land. It was the usual contradictory position of regarding wage labour as equivalent to slavery so that all should own and work their own land: this could be derived from papal encyclicals. The church, however, apparently needed land to make money "for service to the public..."<sup>111</sup> It was claimed that the church or an individual bishop was totally different from a capitalist exploiter and that employees on church land had shown this by, on at least one occasion, opposing the subdivision of the land<sup>112</sup>. Altogether this appeared to have been only a rearguard action.

The Democratic Party's Congress, ending on 25/1/48, appeared in this situation as something of a non-event. It was apparently preceded neither by a pre-Congress discussion<sup>nor</sup> by the election of delegates<sup>113</sup>. It seems to have said very little about preceding events and not to have changed anything either. Things were left in a strangely undecided state: Kempný and Bugár were not expelled from the party and nobody was nominated to take their places<sup>114</sup>. There was, however, some drama added by the emergence of a new trend in the party led by Kyselý, the former Catholic mayor of Bratislava.

He had been imprisoned on suspicion of participation in anti-

<sup>111</sup> Katolícke noviny, 15/2/48, p.4, and p.1.

<sup>112</sup> Katolícke noviny, 29/2/48, p.3.

<sup>113</sup> RP 27/1/48, p.1.

<sup>114</sup> Pravda, 27/1/48, p.1.

state activities but on release from police custody he started work towards creating a new party and this involved making contacts with "representatives of another party". He was therefore physically prevented from attending the congress<sup>115</sup>. Pravda published Kysely's statement in which he indicated complete disillusionment with the past policies of Catholicism and of the Democratic Party. He had therefore tried to group around himself the young Catholic intelligentsia and to change his party's policy. This soon seemed to him to be a hopeless task, so he held discussions with all other parties so as to win approval within the National Front for a new party. It was to represent a complete and openly admitted change of direction for Catholics, being loyal to the Czechoslovak state and favouring social progress<sup>116</sup>.

V.33:8. Disappointment at the outcome of the crisis leads to disagreements among Slovak Communists over their future tactics.

There was plenty of cause for dissatisfaction within the KSS at the outcome of the Slovak crisis. Although the Democratic Party had been weakened, the aims set by Široký<sup>117</sup> had in no way been achieved. It is therefore not surprising that doubts appeared within the party about accepting and supporting the new Board of Commissioners. It seemed to some that there could only be

<sup>115</sup>Cas, 27/1/48, p.2.

<sup>116</sup>Pravda, 27/1/48, p.3 and 28/1/48, p.1 and p.2.

<sup>117</sup>See above p.187.

continuing crisis until the Democratic Party made greater concessions<sup>118</sup>. Zupka and Kušík, following the SOR Presidium meeting of 20/11/47, indicated that they felt no need to express confidence in the personal composition of the Board of Commissioners<sup>119</sup>. They even doubted the usefulness of continuing with a political structure centred on coalition and parliament.

Their position was condemned at the KSS Central Committee meeting of 4/12/47 where Široký argued that there was no choice but to accept the new Board of Commissioners as a fact. He optimistically listed its tasks as ensuring food supplies, solving agricultural problems, liquidating the anti-state conspiracy and completing the purge of public life<sup>120</sup>.

This could not allay doubts within the KSS leadership. Šmidke even proposed a definite alternative to the existing National Front such that the KSS could be the leading force politically in Slovakia even if they could not win a majority in the forthcoming elections. Essentially he wanted a new organisation of the National Front to regain the 1943-1945 situation when National Committees served as KSS dominated bodies incorporating a diversity of other political forces. Subsequently, he argued, National Committees had become organs of state power, so that a separate network of National Front organs should be created at all levels to link together parties and mass organisations. This, he thought, would be well received

<sup>118</sup> Jančí, Nové slovo, 15/11/47, p.723.

<sup>119</sup> Jarošová, et al: Odbory, p.215.

<sup>120</sup> KSS dok, p.627.

owing to the popular craving for unity and it would prevent the Democratic Party from again becoming a coalition of "genuine democrats" and the far right<sup>121</sup>.

There was some analogy with Yugoslav and Bulgarian political structures, but Šmidke was in fact basing himself primarily on Slovak experience and not trying to import a foreign model. There was a surprisingly strong reaction to his views within the Central Committee: nobody could dispute his basic argument, but it was condemned as an attempt to follow a foreign example.

These differences within the KSS did not mean that the party was splitting. They rather reflected disappointment that the Democratic Party had not been split and totally humiliated as a result of their offensive. In practical terms, the issue was whether to accept the existing realities, or whether to try to find some way within Slovakia to change them.

This meant that, once the protection the Democrats were receiving from Prague was removed, the KSS could act with complete unity and forget its earlier internal disagreements.

#### V.33.9. Summary and discussion.

Political tension in Slovakia rose steadily throughout 1947 and culminated in a major crisis in the autumn. The two sides naturally gave conflicting accounts of its origins, thereby trying to place all the "blame" on the other. The Democrats blamed the political offensive launched by the KSS, which certainly appeared as the

<sup>121</sup> KSS dok, p.668-673.

immediate cause of the crisis. The Communists blamed the penetration into the Democratic Party of former active supporters of the Slovak state. This reflected a lasting aspect of the Democratic Party's policy, especially since March 1946, which was to unite as broad an anti-Communist front as possible.

This suggests that the roots of the crisis should be sought in the nature of the Slovak political parties against the background of the structure and development of post-war Slovak society, but its timing and immediate nature was the consequence of a conscious decision by the KSS - given special urgency by the international situation - to fundamentally weaken the Democratic Party.

The Communists' first targets were former HSL'S elements. They hoped for support even from the National Socialists and encouraged the mobilisation of resistance organisations inside Slovakia around demands for a more thorough purge. They played up to the full the discovery of a conspiratorial organisation of former fascists.

The Democratic Party was clearly embarrassed and had to make some concessions. The KSS then decided to broaden the offensive by mobilising their working class and peasant support. Workers were already becoming militant and were deeply dissatisfied with the supply situation. The trade union organisations were willingly reflecting this militancy and responded to gross insults from the Democratic Party against Zápotocký with preparations for a general strike.

The KSS tried to contain this militancy within the existing political framework while also directing it against the Democrats. This led to a Congress of Factory Committees which demanded the resignation of the existing Board of Commissioners. It was, how-



ever, impossible to reduce the Democratic Party's representation to less than half the seats on the Board. The key factor was that the Democrats could rely on support from the National Socialists who had become more scared of the danger of a Communist victory than of a revival of Slovak fascists.

Nevertheless, concessions were made. The Democrats renounced the April agreement and many Catholics lost their positions. The Democratic Party was left disoriented and unable to take further initiatives. It was dependent for its tactical moves on the National Socialists.

The Slovak Communists were also dissatisfied, but had to accept their own inability to change the situation in Slovakia on their own. They too were dependent on initiatives in Prague.

The Slovak crisis probably taught the Communists a great deal. Just as in the campaign over the millionaires' tax, they could learn about the methods and possibilities of mass mobilisation. They could also have concluded that they would need to launch a more consistent and determined offensive later. There were perhaps two reasons for this. First, it appeared that mobilisation of opinion was insufficient to force the right-wing parties to yield: they could simply refuse to make concessions beyond a certain limit because such mobilisations had no direct effect on the supreme positions of power. Secondly, there seemed to be no way to change the situation in Slovakia without a major confrontation in Prague. The National Socialists seemed to be holding together the anti-Communist forces and therefore had to be seen as the principal enemy. That pointed to the need for a broader offensive based on

issues on which the Czech working class could first become totally exasperated with, and then be actively mobilised against the National Socialists. Chapter 35 discusses how the KSČ prepared to do this.

CHAPTER 34: ATTEMPTS TO REFORMULATE SOCIAL DEMOCRAT AND NATIONAL  
SOCIALIST STRATEGIES IN THE LIGHT OF THE COMMUNISTS'  
AGGRESSIVE NEW APPROACH.

V.34.1. The political atmosphere is permanently changed by the  
campaigning for the millionaires' tax. All parties have  
to reassess their positions.

While the Slovak crisis was developing, the Czech parties, already shaken by the experience of the campaigning over the millionaires' tax, began to rethink their ideas and their relationship to each other. Political life seemed to be becoming more tense and less predictable. It was suggested that the election campaign had already started so that facts and statistics were no longer being handled seriously. Instead they were becoming the instruments of party-political agitation<sup>1</sup>. The main protagonists were the Communists and the National Socialists with each over-simplifying the other's position in an attempt to portray the other in the blackest way possibly. As part of this each accused the other of causing divisions. Placing "blame" on one side or the other is somewhat meaningless as both sides saw the need to do everything to strengthen their own position.

Nevertheless, over the millionaires' tax the Communists definitely took the offensive. Immediately beforehand Gottwald had claimed that internal political difficulties were due to "reaction" which, he claimed, had become "established in some parties of the National Front"<sup>2</sup>. Fears expressed by the National Socialists of "totalitarianism"

<sup>1</sup> Hospodář, 11/9/47, p.1, editorial.

<sup>2</sup> RP, 26/8/47, reproduced in Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.102.

are always difficult to assess as the exaggeration of such fears was a major part of their propaganda at all times. They could, however, have been much more genuine as tension rose with the unexplained assassination attempts and then the sudden agreement between the two Marxist parties. It could all suggest that the Communists were aiming to create a real government crisis<sup>3</sup> and then a new government more firmly dominated by themselves.

Gottwald made plenty of assurances to the contrary. He expressed the belief that <sup>a</sup>united solution could be found without breaking the National Front<sup>4</sup>. He continued to insist that a majority in the next elections was intended only to make easier what was already being done<sup>5</sup>. Even later, when his ideas really were changing, he could still argue that "the system of cooperation of the parties in the National Front government" was "the most advantageous for the prosperous and peaceful development of the state"<sup>6</sup>.

It was difficult to see what this could mean in the fluid international situation and when relations between parties were worsening. It was not obvious either how the Informbureau would change KSC thinking. It was certainly unlikely to encourage further development and elaboration of the ideas of a Czechoslovak road to socialism. Stalin very probably made his original comments

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<sup>3</sup>SS, 23/9/47, p.1.

<sup>4</sup>RP, 13/9/47, p.1.

<sup>5</sup>RP, 28/9/47, p.1.

<sup>6</sup>In an interview with New Masses, reproduced in RP, 25/12/47 and in Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.221.

to Labour Party leaders as part of an attempt to prevent or delay the division of Europe. Their application to Czechoslovakia was invariably accompanied by assessments of the international situation. Husák, for example, had maintained that the whole of Europe was developing towards socialism although within this there were three situations. In the Slavonic states he thought the question was more or less decided, in Britain he thought the direction was identifiable despite his rejection of British foreign policy, while in France and Italy strong Communist Parties were a sure defence against the attempts of reaction and "de Gaullist adventures"<sup>7</sup>. One point here, as also emphasised by Gottwald in 1946, was that the general situation was certainly not leading to a new war and that Czechoslovakia's international standing seemed to be quite good<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, Husák's optimistic view of European development was rarely repeated and the firm international base for the "specific road" became restricted to the precedents in Yugoslavia, Poland and Bulgaria<sup>9</sup>.

Fears of another world war could appear, then, as a threat to the notion of a Czechoslovak road to socialism. Although nothing was actually renounced, there was a definite change with all emphasis being placed on the "consolidation" of People's Democracy<sup>10</sup> and the

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<sup>7</sup> Nové slovo, 23/11/46, p.1.

<sup>8</sup> RP 26/9/46, p.1.

<sup>9</sup> This was Gottwald's position, RP, 5/10/46, p.1.

<sup>10</sup> Kaplan, Reiman: "Naše", p.117. The Informbureau had condemned the French and Italian Communists in a way that could have been interpreted as a veiled condemnation of the KSC but, to judge from Clementis' revealing exposition to the KSS Central Committee on 4/12/47, it was not seen as that; KSS dok, p.645.

alliance with the USSR. This was elaborated at a Central Committee meeting at the end of November and a conference of theoreticians on 9-11/1/48 with Bareš, Nejedlý, Kopecký and Frejka contributing.

In the meantime, the aim the Communists' were seeking in their political offensive remained unclear. It was clarified only gradually as other parties and organisations formulated responses to the new situation. For that reason the changes in the KSČ are discussed separately after the presentation of the responses of the other parties to its generally more aggressive approach.

**V.34.2. An opposition emerges within the trade unions, but is defeated.**

The trade union movement seemed to be firmly united until the middle of 1947. Then minor divisions began to appear over the issue of civil servants' pay. After the active involvement of union organisations in the campaign for the millionaires' tax, differences became more open. The start was an attack on ÚRO policies by the National Socialist A. Vandrovec at an ÚRO Presidium meeting. The leadership at first tried to silence him with an accusation of "fractional activity", but the charge was soon withdrawn and his views were published<sup>11</sup>. This initiated a full debate, at an ÚRO plenum on 16-17/10/47, on the role of trade unions.

The National Socialist line was to present the problem as the domination of the unions by one party. It was easy to point to the absurdity of this when they suggested that those unions they totally

<sup>11</sup> Růžička: ROH, p.209, and SS 27/9/47, p.2.

dominated were exemplary and hence, presumably, free from domination by one party<sup>12</sup>.

A number of Social Democrats, including Kubát, made a more serious attempt to formulate a conception of non-political trade unionism. They wanted a great restriction of activities to "trade union" questions while potentially divisive issues should be evaded. The centre of attention should be wages. There should not have been any comment on the question of compensation for the peasants<sup>13</sup>. Here the argument fell. The principal reply, as put most articulately by Zápotocký, was that such a question quite obviously directly affected the workers' most basic interests and could therefore not possibly be avoided. The outcome of the debate was a clear victory for continuing with full involvement in all aspects of social and economic policy. Conflicts between some parties and the trade unions were said to stem not from the domination of the unions by one party but from the deviation of some parties from the programme of the national and democratic revolution<sup>14</sup>.

Trade union unity seemed to be confirmed again at the end of the debate with a unanimous resolution expressing exasperation with the distribution system and supply situation which was particularly serious in Slovakia and in Czech frontier areas. It was maintained

<sup>12</sup> Zápotocký, speaking at the ÚRO plenum of 16/10/47; A. Zápotocký: Jednota odborů oporou bojů za socialisaci, Praha, 1951, p.371-372.

<sup>13</sup> All contributions to the discussion which took place at the ÚRO plenum on 16/10/47 were published in issues of ÚRO over the following weeks.

<sup>14</sup> ÚRO, 23/10/47, esp. p.6.

that the drought alone was not enough to explain the enormous amount of speculating, profiteering and black marketeering. Demands were therefore put for the toughest measures available under the law as otherwise, it was ominously suggested, some people might take the law into their own hands disrupting the stability necessary for production. There were also demands for more positive action in incorporating confiscates into nationalised industries as, despite the earlier National Front agreement, very little seemed to have been done. A millionaires' tax was supported in general terms<sup>15</sup>.

V.34.3. The Social Democrats respond to the Communist offensive by a change of leadership: they try desperately to assert their own individuality.

The Communists' campaign over the millionaires' tax and the agreement signed by the party's leadership with the KSC strengthened a belief among Social Democrats that Fierlinger was unable to give their party a new and distinctive identity. It appeared, as their congress in November drew nearer, that this could only be achieved under a new leadership.

Laušman appeared to be the only credible alternative chairman as he could command support throughout the party. He was definitely associated with the nationalisation of industries, but seemed more committed to an independent identity for Social Democracy, and less associated with Fierlinger's critique of the party's past. He had even announced his desire to resign his ministerial post because of

<sup>15</sup>ÚRO, 23/10/47, p.2.



"systematic disturbances of nationalised enterprises and the irresponsible calling of unnecessary strikes in nationalised enterprises . . ." He did not elaborate to specify what in particular he was referring to<sup>16</sup>.

At the congress Fierlinger refused to resign voluntarily and the issue was taken to a vote. Out of 467 Laušman received 283 votes, Fierlinger 182 and John just one<sup>17</sup>. There were changes in the Executive Committee including the removal of E. Erban. Apparently Laušman insisted on this before he would stand for chairman<sup>18</sup>.

The significance of this change was not immediately obvious. There was no open division over policies and it could even be presented as a change of personalities only<sup>19</sup>. The Communists doubted this but had to accept, at least in public statements, that only time would tell whether there would be a move to the right<sup>20</sup>. Changes of Social Democrat representation in the government were not conclusive either. Both Fierlinger and Laušman resigned from the government. Fierlinger was replaced by Tymeš who had supported Laušman who was in turn replaced by L. Jankovcová - a firm Fierlinger supporter. This made it hard to assess the importance of the revival of a real right wing which was most vociferous in its support for

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<sup>16</sup>PL 7/9/47, p.1.

<sup>17</sup>PL 18/11/47, p.2.

<sup>18</sup>Svobodné noviny, 18/11/47, p.1.

<sup>19</sup>e.g. O. Gráf, Svět práce, 20/11/47, p.1.

<sup>20</sup>Nový, RP, 23/11/47, p.1.

Laušman. Prominent in this were the pre-war ministers Meissner and Dérer who condemned Fierlinger<sup>21</sup> and even suggested that real democracy, as had apparently existed in the pre-Munich republic, had still to be restored<sup>22</sup>. This was very different from Fierlinger's emphasis on the importance of never returning to pre-war anti-Communism<sup>23</sup>.

Another sign of a possible rightward trend was condemnation of the merger with the KSS in 1944 as an outright mistake. The Slovak Party of Labour was incorporated to make Social Democracy the first all-state party<sup>24</sup>. This, however, need not have been any more than a defensive response aiming to strengthen the party's independent existence against the Communists' offensive. Concrete policies on other issues were still not clear and Laušman does not seem to have really known what he was going to do<sup>25</sup>. It was still very difficult to formulate a genuinely independent and distinct policy.

V.34.4. The international situation is a major restriction on the Social Democrats' attempt to formulate a non-Communist but not anti-Communist policy.

At their congress the Social Democrats tried to reconcile themselves with the new international situation with a vague and agree-

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<sup>21</sup> Svobodné noviny, 18/11/47, p.1.

<sup>22</sup> PL 16/11/47, p.1 and p.2. Laušman too had become milder in his condemnations suggesting that the first republic "had its faults, but it was progressive . . .", PL 20/5/47, p.1.

<sup>23</sup> PL 16/11/47, p.2.

<sup>24</sup> PL 15/11/47, p.1, and PL 18/11/47, p.1.

<sup>25</sup> See Laušman: Kdo, p.96-97.

able sounding formulation of determination to "reject any external interventions wherever they should come from. . ." <sup>26</sup>. This could hardly suffice, particularly when combined with recognition of the regrettable fact that divisions were growing between the victorious powers. In fact the Social Democrats had been developing an international orientation facing very definitely to the East. They were suspicious of ideas of reviving the Second International which had been anti-Communist and contained pro-Munich elements <sup>27</sup>. They could not ally with German Social Democracy because of its vague position on the expulsion of Germans and its support for the Truman doctrine <sup>28</sup>. They rejected the French Socialists whose vote had declined after they lacked the courage to implement socialist policies <sup>29</sup>. Instead, they tried to build unity with Socialists and Social Democrats in Eastern and Central Europe. There was agreement there for cooperation with Communists and for friendship with the USSR. Austrians would not go along with this, but parties from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria and Hungary could hold three days of discussions in Budapest. There were still differences between Hungarians and Czechoslovaks but there was full agreement on the prospects of close economic cooperation between the states <sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> PL 18/11/47, p.1.

<sup>27</sup> e.g. J. Hájek, Cíl, 18/1/46, p.18.

<sup>28</sup> PL 18/6/47, p.1.

<sup>29</sup> Laušman, speech, PL 26/1/47, p.1.

<sup>30</sup> PL 22/5/47, p.1. See also the account of an earlier meeting, PL 11/12/46, p.1 and p.2.

In this the Social Democrats implicitly propagated and developed the idea of an "Eastern bloc". They had no sympathy for Western interpretations of events there. Over changes in Hungary, for example, they were not at all surprised at claims that there were plenty of "reactionary" elements in high places there. They were, however, somewhat shaken at the reception given in the US to Hungary's former right-wing Prime Minister<sup>31</sup>. In response to the heightening internal tensions and the creation of the Imformbureau they put still more emphasis on close links with Eastern socialists. They gave maximum publicity to party delegations that visited Poland, Bulgaria and Rumania<sup>32</sup>. Later this ground was to be knocked from under their feet as those parties merged with Communists. There seemed, however, to be no alternative. On the right of the party were hesitant voices openly condemning the Imformbureau<sup>33</sup> and praising the British Labour Party by claiming that the extent of nationalisations in Britain was greater than in many Eastern European countries<sup>34</sup>. This seemed to support the view that they should look not only to the East for socialist unity<sup>35</sup>.

It was, however, impossible to find allies in the West. The notion of a "third force" as proclaimed by the French Socialists was

<sup>31</sup> e.g. Svět práce, 19/6/47, p.1.

<sup>32</sup> PL 3/10/47, PL 4/10/47 and PL 5/10/47.

<sup>33</sup> e.g. Bernard, Cíl, 10/10/47, p.609-610.

<sup>34</sup> Bernard, speech, PL 16/11/47, p.3.

<sup>35</sup> As argued by Majer, PL 20/5/47, p.1.

unacceptable because, far from being an independent position, it appeared as cooperation with the liberal right wing and strong rejection of Communists<sup>36</sup>. From Britain too there was bad news as Bevin was reported as stating in parliament that Britain should stand in the forefront of a Western bloc. This was presented as the first official admission of the existence of such a bloc<sup>37</sup>. In practice, then, the division of Europe gradually divided the Social Democrats from the West and narrowed the international base for a non-Communist but still not anti-Communist position.

V.34.5. Social Democracy proves incapable of formulating a socialist position clearly distinct from that of the Communists.

Domestically too there was still plenty of common ground between Communists and Social Democrats. The obvious point of division was the so called "Communist terror". Reference to unpleasant "tactics and methods" by the Communists was made even by E. Erban<sup>38</sup>, and the Executive Committee had unanimously expressed the hope that "KSC terror" would stop<sup>39</sup>. It was still all very vague with only very

<sup>36</sup> vb. (V. Bernard?), Cíl, 13/2/48, p.65-66.

<sup>37</sup> RP 23/1/48, p.1. Only the KSC press fully reported such speeches. Bevin's attack on the Soviet Union effectively implied that it was to blame for all Europe's troubles. He seemed to dismiss the whole of Eastern Europe and called for the "consolidation of Western Europe" along with the US and Latin America; Hansard, Vól.446, esp. columns 395,396, 397 and 402. Nobody in Czechoslovakia could possibly have publicly supported Bevin's position which could only be a further demoralising embarrassment to those who wanted help from the West.

<sup>38</sup> Speaking to a congress of Social Democrat railwaymen, Sociální demokrat, 17/10/47, p.1.

<sup>39</sup> PL 17/9/47, p.2.

occasional references to employees being sacked for their political affiliations<sup>40</sup>. Generally the practice was to publicise particular facts or actions of Communist organisations and then challenge the party leadership to put things right. It was difficult to evolve a consistent theoretical position out of this to really differentiate Social Democracy from the KSČ but various attempts were made. Thus it was suggested that part of KSČ membership "consider themselves to be privileged citizens"<sup>41</sup> or that a "new aristocracy" was developing in nationalised industries including the Factory Councils<sup>42</sup>. This was put in its most sophisticated way by Věltuský who could convince himself that the KSČ stood on "the extreme right" of the National Front and was dominated by a "bureaucracy" which he related to the increasing number of civil servants. He did not give any real definition to this "bureaucracy" but counterposed its interests to those of the working class<sup>43</sup>. He later related his arguments to the Factory Council elections pointing to the ease of generating an anti-vote against the KSČ when they controlled management and Factory Councils: he then stated that this was all the Communists wanted to do. In his view they were interested only in winning power for themselves and had no interest in the working class otherwise<sup>44</sup>.

Apart from other faults in his argument, of which there were

<sup>40</sup> e.g. Fierlinger, speech, PL 29/6/47, p.1.

<sup>41</sup> Sociální demokrat, 7/3/47, p.1.

<sup>42</sup> Salus, Cíl, 15/8/47, p.488.

<sup>43</sup> Cíl, 27/9/46, p.594-596.

<sup>44</sup> Cíl, 30/5/47, p.308-310.

many, there were two basic problems which, while not in themselves invalidating Veltruský's argument, prevented Social Democrats from consistently developing such a theory and relating it to political practice. The first was that they could not deny, explain away, nor seriously challenge the great strength of the KSC within the working class. The second was that they too were being accused of having taken disproportionately many leading positions within the economy and of helping Communists to get positions too<sup>45</sup>. This made it seem very strange when they pointed to dangers to the Two Year Plan both from reactionaries and from careerists reaching high positions through the patronage of an unnamed powerful party<sup>46</sup>. Their references to "Communist terror" could therefore never appear as more than individual complaints about mistakes by individual Communists.

V.34.6. The National Socialists respond to the Communists' offensive by trying to broaden and strengthen their social base, but they cannot launch a serious counter-offensive.

Already prior to the campaign for the millionaires' tax, the National Socialists probably decided for a more vigorous line against the KSC<sup>47</sup>. This, however, was given greater urgency by the KSC offensive. Although it was still believed that the Communists aimed

<sup>45</sup> e.g. Krajina, at the National Socialists' Fourteenth Congress, SS 2/3/47, p.2, or Cato, Dnešek, 22/5/47, p.117.

<sup>46</sup> PL 25/1/47, p.1.

<sup>47</sup> See above Section V.31.4.

to fight the elections rather than trying to take power before them,<sup>48</sup> there did seem to have been a frightening change in KSČ policy.

A Svobodný zítřek editorial<sup>49</sup> conceded that to aim for 51% was natural for any party, but argued that the real point was the means used to achieve that aim and the purpose for which it was intended. The means that caused particular concern were silence on the party's long-term aims<sup>50</sup>, the frontal attack on the Democratic Party which allegedly used the issue of the purge as a mere excuse, and the agreement with the Social Democrats which led to a crisis within that party.

There was at all times a powerful element of exaggeration in the interests of propaganda and above all an attempt to portray the root of all conflicts as being KSČ policy. Nevertheless, the National Socialists seemed to have been very genuinely concerned at the new direction of KSČ policy. They could see the Communists deliberately raising the political temperature when the actual political disagreements were not so great as to indicate that cooperation and compromise were impossible<sup>51</sup>. They feared that such incidents were going to become a normal part of KSČ behaviour in what they believed

<sup>48</sup> There were some suggestions that means other than elections were to be used; e.g. Dnešek, 11/9/47, p.365. This appeared less credible after the crisis over the millionaires' tax had settled.

<sup>49</sup> Svobodný zítřek, 2/10/47, p.1-2.

<sup>50</sup> This point was being raised again quite frequently, e.g. "Explain without duplicity how you want to carry on . . . in the next five, fifteen or twenty five years. Don't work only for the present. . .", Cato, Dnešek 11/9/47, p.366.

<sup>51</sup> e.g. Zenkl, speech, SS 16/9/47, p.1-2.



would be a desperate bid for 51% of the votes.

To counter this danger the National Socialists evolved a strategy for a political counter-offensive. This included vigorous propaganda against the KSČ, measures to reinforce their own support in preparation for the next elections and, perhaps most significantly of all, a conscious policy of trying to create alliances with anybody available who would oppose the KSČ. Presumably they thereby hoped to prevent the struggle from going beyond their purely parliamentary conception of politics. This was not an unrealistic hope as even Fierlinger, to judge from his attitudes towards the millionaires' tax and towards land reform proposals, could be expected to oppose the more aggressive aspects of KSČ policy.

The National Socialists tried to gain some political capital out of economic difficulties by placing the blame on the KSČ. They tried to maintain that the bad harvest was at least partly due to policies pursued by the Ministry of Agriculture<sup>52</sup> and former Agrarians were particularly prominent in presenting such views<sup>53</sup>. They were, however, more cautious than the People's Party which had earlier been able to express opposition to price reductions in explicit awareness that economic failures could be expected to damage the Communists' prestige<sup>54</sup>. By the autumn of 1947 it was being claimed that the "critical economic situation was the inevitable

<sup>52</sup> Zenkl, speech, SS 9/9/47, p.1.

<sup>53</sup> e.g. Torn, in parliament, SS 1/10/47, p.1.

<sup>54</sup> e.g. Vývoj, 12/3/47, p.235.

consequence of economic policies pursued since liberation and perhaps even the inevitable consequence "of every socialism anywhere, as can be seen in Europe today"<sup>55</sup>.

The National Socialists' rhetoric on economic questions was less exaggerated and they also backed up their propaganda with attempts to improve their own organisational structure which, to judge from the basic points they were discussing, was still very loose<sup>56</sup>. In particular, they emphasised the importance of organising among the working class in factories. Their overall economic and social policies could give very little basis for such organisations which were in fact given the aim of "trying to break the terror in factories" and of pressing "for a purge of the trade unions . . ."<sup>57</sup>. They evaded references to economic questions and did not even try to represent the interests of all workers. Instead they claimed that their organisations were just to protect their own members against "KSČ terror"<sup>58</sup>. This related to their attempt to present economic questions as irrelevant to the political atmosphere which they attributed to "an agitation psychosis"<sup>59</sup>. Against this background it is impossible to believe extraordinary statements about their working class strength: they claimed to have more members than the KSČ in Prague

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<sup>55</sup> J. Kolár, Obzory, 27/9/47, p.575.

<sup>56</sup> See the report of their Central Executive Committee meeting on 21/9/47, Život strany, 27/9/47, p.1-3.

<sup>57</sup> SS 5/10/47, p.2.

<sup>58</sup> Život strany, 15/10/47, p.15.

<sup>59</sup> Zenkl, speech, SS 9/9/47, p.1.

factories<sup>60</sup>. That seems rather to suggest that their organisation was still pretty sloppy.

They could, however, win support elsewhere. In alliance with the People's Party they won sweeping victories in student elections<sup>61</sup>.

They also made a determined effort to consolidate support among civil servants. During the crisis over the millionaires' tax they publicly advocated a 30% pay rise to be backdated to January 1947 for all civil servants. Even the People's Party characterised this as cheap agitation aimed purely at winning votes<sup>62</sup>. The Communists regarded it as "an assassination attempt on our economy" because it would lead to immediate inflationary chaos<sup>63</sup>. They were aware of

the danger if they could not persuade the civil servants themselves to reject the demand. Dolanský tried to put it in a broader context as an attempt "to divert attention from the millionaires and to tear one group out of the mass of the working people and to place it against the other working groups. Precisely on the old model from the times of the pre-Munich republic"<sup>64</sup>.

The National Socialists' demand had already been backed with a strike threat and ÚRO did not deny them the right to strike<sup>65</sup>. To prevent direct action ÚRO had to do something concrete and started

<sup>60</sup> Život strany, 27/10/47, p.3.

<sup>61</sup> For the full results, see Dnešek, 18/12/47, p.592.

<sup>62</sup> F. Matýsek, LD 20/9/47, p.1.

<sup>63</sup> RP 25/9/47, p.1.

<sup>64</sup> Dolanský, speech, RP 27/9/47, p.1.

<sup>65</sup> See above p.83-84.

by accepting that a comparison should be made of pay between civil servants and equivalent employees in the "economic sector". The comparison showed that civil servants were worse paid especially in higher grades<sup>66</sup> and ÚRD responded by proposing an immediate 900 Kčs gift to civil servants<sup>67</sup>. They thereby disregarded the findings of the comparison which indicated the justifiability of a large pay rise. Zápotocký, however, had never been interested in the comparison that was made. Instead he wanted a comparison with workers' wages<sup>68</sup>. He warned very strongly against any illusions that workers were somehow "favoured in pay" pointing out: "Discontent is general. Everybody would like higher pay"<sup>69</sup>. He illustrated his point with figures showing that the average pay for workers in industry was 89% of the average for civil servants<sup>70</sup>. A comparison of pensions was far more striking as civil servants received on average twice as much as miners and three to four times the average for workers as a whole<sup>71</sup>. The point was therefore not just the exact cost of a substantial pay rise for civil servants but also its likely impact on much wider wage demands and hence on the ability of ÚRD to remain united around a policy of considerable wage restraint.

<sup>66</sup>J. Laube, Svobodné noviny, 25/10/47, p.2.

<sup>67</sup>See the account in Sociální demokrat, 12/2/48, p.1.

<sup>68</sup>Speaking to civil servants' representatives on 15/1/48, Zápotocký: Jednota, p.711.

<sup>69</sup>Zápotocký: Jednota, p.713.

<sup>70</sup>Speaking in parliament on 11/12/47, Zápotocký: Jednota, p.114.

<sup>71</sup>Speaking on 15/1/48, Zápotocký: Jednota, p.723.

The National Socialists also tried to win more solid support in the countryside. This led them once more to try to exploit the alleged prestige of former Agrarians, including Feierabend, who dominated agricultural policy and found their way into the party's leading bodies<sup>72</sup>. The National Socialists came closer to proclaiming themselves to be the heirs of the Agrarians at a congress of their farmers which ended with the laying of a wreath at Švehla's grave. Ripka even openly admitted to creating "in a certain sense a new party" rather than continuing with previous National Socialist traditions<sup>73</sup>. This, however, did not mark a shift to an aggressively right-wing agricultural policy as they were at the time accepting the need to allow through parliament some of Duriš's laws.

In industrial policy too, there was a greater willingness to accept the implications of the party's broadened social base. Capitalists were given scope to formulate their demands, but they too were unable to propose an offensive policy or point to positive achievements. They could only indicate what had been prevented. Towards planning they seemed to be an acceptance of its inevitability with the argument that "it closely affects our existence and we must take part in this construction as a section organised like a trade union and politically"<sup>74</sup>. They still could not, either openly or in private, firmly challenge the view "We have set out on the road of

<sup>72</sup>For details, see Fakta a cifry, II, No.10. 19/9/47, p.46.

<sup>73</sup>SS 23/11/47, p.2. See also Jech: Probuzená, p.305.

<sup>74</sup>RP 17/1/48, p.1. This credible looking document was presented as a circular produced by an organisation of capitalists within the National Socialist Party.

socialisation - there are no roads back"<sup>75</sup>.

Their defence of the Slovak Democrats, both during and after the Slovak crisis, was perhaps the most obvious real change in National Socialist policies. They continued to maintain that a dangerous attack "on the democratic structure of the National Front" had been resisted<sup>76</sup> and that the KSČ had been trying to convert it into a "totalitarian" organ<sup>77</sup>. Nevertheless, even behind their attempt to portray the roots of the Slovak crisis entirely in the KSČ offensive, their own position suffered from some indecision and confusion. They were apparently divided in the parliamentary vote on whether to remove parliamentary immunity from Kempný and Bugár<sup>78</sup>.

So, even as their propaganda against the KSČ became more powerful, the National Socialists - restricted particularly by the international situation - remained uncertain on several important aspects of policy. Nevertheless, their attitude was interpreted by the KSČ as indicating that the character of their party had been changed by non-socialist members who had shifted it markedly to the right<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup>A. Klatovský, Dnešek, 31/12/47, p.607.

<sup>76</sup>Svobodný zítřek, 27/11/47, p.3.

<sup>77</sup>SS 5/11/47 and 6/11/47, p.1. This was a reference to the attempt to include mass organisations in the National Front. It should be remembered that no votes were taken within that body, so that the presence of trade unions and resistance organisations would not have converted it into a body automatically expressing and giving greater credibility to the KSČ line.

<sup>78</sup>RP 17/10/47, p.1. Krajina was among those who voted against.

<sup>79</sup>e.g. V. Dolejší, Tvorba, 22/10/47, p.830.

#### V.34.7. Summary and discussion.

The Communists could only clarify the precise immediate aims and methods of their political offensive against the background of the behaviour of the other parties. This chapter therefore discusses non-Communist responses to the new situation created by the Communist offensive.

Particularly reassuring for the KSČ was the failure of an attempt within ÚRO to challenge the general line of trade union policy. More worrying was a change in the Social Democrats' leadership at their congress in November 1947. This was associated with some revival of the party's pre-war right wing and reflected the lasting hope to appear more independent of the KSČ. In practice this did not lead to a fundamental change in policy: the Social Democrats could formulate no united, comprehensive and convincing alternative either in foreign or domestic policies. Despite disagreements, they therefore remained close to the KSČ.

The National Socialists were genuinely frightened that the KSČ would use means like the campaign for the millionaires' tax in a desperate effort to win the elections. They also saw the danger of the KSČ trying to provoke a final struggle for power before that. In response they evolved a strategy based on three elements. The first was sharp propaganda against the KSČ. The second was maximisation of their support in preparation for the elections: towards this end they advocated large pay rises for civil servants and thereby headed for a confrontation with ÚRO. The third element was a willingness to ally with anyone who opposed the KSČ: this was reflected particularly in their attitude towards the Slovak situation.

There were serious weaknesses in the National Socialists' strategy. More than ever before they were trying to hold together very diverse elements. It was therefore very difficult for them to pose positive alternatives to the KSC in social, economic or foreign policies. Alongside belligerent propaganda, they still yielded some ground, for example over Duriš's proposed laws.

Their weaknesses were to become even clearer in February 1948 but, as the next chapter shows, Gottwald was to express the fear that they might have been gaining enough strength to drive the Communists from the government.



## CHAPTER 35: THE COMMUNIST PARTY IN LATE 1947.

### V.35.1. Nervousness develops within the Communist Party as political life becomes more tense and less predictable.

The KSČ had become more belligerent during the autumn of 1947 and had deliberately raised the political temperature in their campaign for a special tax on millionaires. As has been argued, their change in approach was due ultimately to two factors. The first was the worsening international situation leading to their desire to "consolidate" people's democracy by winning an absolute majority in the next general elections, and the second was the internal economic difficulties which could easily damage the Communists' prestige.

It is not clear how far they had worked out their new aims before starting the campaign over the millionaires' tax, but the immediate consequence seemed to be an increase in tension without any real certainty that they were making major political gains. In fact, fears for the future could be increased by the National Socialists' attitude during the Slovak crisis, the change in the Social Democrats' leadership and, finally, by continually worsening relations between parties even within the government.

Continuing economic difficulties added a new dimension to this. Previously it had been assumed that the Two Year Plan would yield definite benefits and thereby advertise the superiority of socialism ensuring that Communist support was increased, ideally to 51%. By late 1947 it seemed that 51% was a necessity, but also that it would be much harder to achieve. A new means to win support had to be found in addition to the continuing emphasis on the plan. The

argument was later put explicitly by Čepička who maintained that the KSČ leadership became convinced of the need "... also to fight against exploiters"<sup>1</sup>. In practice, this meant using the party's massive organisational strength not just within a system of management of the economy, but increasingly to mobilise opinion against the other parties. Its full meaning was clarified gradually in late 1947 and particularly at the Central Committee meeting of 27/11/47.

V.35.2. Reports from Communist Party organisations reveal deep discontent at the economic situation and the Communists try to use this to discredit their political opponents.

Before jumping to any hasty conclusions the leadership wanted to be sure of the situation in the country. Information was therefore gathered and collated from the party's basic organisations. It left no doubt that the centre of public attention absolutely everywhere was the shortages of basic necessities of life<sup>2</sup>. There were even signs of developing panic with those in towns making accusations against villages<sup>3</sup>. Very often, though, Communists were held responsible as they dominated the government. This did not necessarily mean unversally growing scope for support for the other parties as, particularly among workers in big towns and big factories, discontent

<sup>1</sup>Čepička, speech, RP 20/1/48, p.1.

<sup>2</sup>This was hardly surprising as some rations had been reduced to below the 1945 level; Jech, Václavů: "Některé", p.243. All food had to be rationed and bread rations were reduced by almost 40%; Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.25.

<sup>3</sup>Kozák: "K objasnění", p.25-26.

was expressed in the belief that the government was being too soft: strong measures against speculators and black marketeers were demanded<sup>4</sup>.

Basic organisations were also asked to make their own assessment of reasons, apart from the drought, for the shortages. A wide range of causes were suggested including the incompetence of the ministry responsible, which was headed by Majer, the weakness of National Committees when they should have been using mild force to get agricultural products from the peasants and the very natural attempt by very wide strata of the peasantry to keep some reserves for themselves<sup>5</sup>.

Interestingly, Gottwald's speech to the Central Committee took its ideas on the supply crisis more or less exactly from these contributions from lower levels within the party. There was, however, a marked tendency to emphasise those ideas that could help the campaign against political opponents, thereby implying that difficulties could be overcome if the KSČ had more power.

It seemed that the needs of party-political propaganda were dominating in considering the impact of the drought. Everybody was trying to attribute at least some degree of blame to their political opponents. Majer was an obvious target and, in contrast to the faith that had been placed in him during the Slovak crisis, he was vigorously condemned for relying too much on imports and not paying enough attention to domestic sources<sup>6</sup>. He wasted no time in counter-

<sup>4</sup>Kozák: "K objasnění", p.33-34.

<sup>5</sup>Kozák: "K objasnění", p.27-32.

<sup>6</sup>Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.197.

attacking by blaming the Ministry of Agriculture and by pointing out that it had been the Communists who had for so long optimistically denied that anything drastic needed to be done about food supplies<sup>7</sup>.

Thus attacks on other parties were increasingly linked to their attitudes towards those most immediate economic issues which were causing discontent. It would have been perfectly valid to argue that the National Socialist and People's Parties had been lukewarm in their support for the Two Year Plan, and also that they were happy to exploit politically economic difficulties so as to discredit Communist economic policies<sup>8</sup>. The new situation led the KSČ to try to implicate them in the far more serious practice of not opposing, and hence of implicitly supporting, politically motivated economic sabotage which, it was claimed, was being carried on by "reaction" in the private sector. Sometimes the argument was presented cautiously. Švermová, for example, wrote: "There is not much separating any of the reactionaries from the black market and there is not much separating any of the black marketeers from the reactionary underworld. They are enemies of the republic who rejoiced over the drought and were delighted that food supplies would be threatened. They wanted to profit from the nation's misfortune"<sup>9</sup>. Others made the link clearer accusing "reaction" of consciously organising

<sup>7</sup> PL 30/11/47, p.1. Among Gottwald's earlier comments on the situation were "... nobody need worry about food supplies here because we are well safeguarded until the next harvest", and "... food rations here are higher than anywhere else in Europe", Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.102 and p.114.

<sup>8</sup> See above Section V.34.6.

<sup>9</sup> Funkcionář, 7/11/47, p.3.

economic chaos<sup>10</sup>.

The comparative failure of industries dominated by private enterprise meant that it certainly could later be argued that the need for further nationalisations had followed logically from the experience of planning<sup>11</sup>. The disappointments in construction and distribution could be supplemented with blame for the deficit in the £ and \$ balances being attributed to the natural behaviour of unplanned private foreign trade firms<sup>12</sup>.

This, however, was very different from shifting the blame for the serious and immediate difficulties onto private enterprise. Clear evidence for their guilt was never presented and Frejka admitted that it was "necessary to determine concretely" how capitalists, by that time effectively equated with "reaction", were "disrupting" the economy<sup>13</sup>. After February 1948 a book was published<sup>14</sup> in which all this was made more explicit. It left the clear impression that private enterprise could have unpleasant economic consequences, but deliberate sabotage with the aim of discrediting the government was not proven.

<sup>10</sup> Horn, Živnostenské noviny, 17/12/47, p.1.

<sup>11</sup> Outrata, Průběh plnění, p.12.

<sup>12</sup> Outrata, Průběh plnění, p.10.

<sup>13</sup> Frejka: 25. únor, p.26.

<sup>14</sup> Černá kniha kapitalistického hospodaření před únorem 1948, Praha, 1948.

V.35.3. Gottwald portrays the political situation as dramatically as possible and tries to blame changes in the other parties for the mounting political tension.

While trying to direct some of the popular anger about the economic situation against their political rivals, the KSČ also tried to blame them for the rising political tension. Even if the National Socialists were not immediately and directly accused of joining in economic sabotage, they were condemned in the most general possible way. They had, it was claimed, capitulated to "reaction" and opposed every aspect of People's Democracy<sup>15</sup>. The target of attacks became the whole National Socialist leadership and its policies as a whole. Even if not exactly equated with "reaction" there was no attempt to make any differentiation either, and heightening internal political tension was definitely blamed on "reaction", apparently taking its initiative from US world policy<sup>16</sup>.

There hardly seemed to be any scope for continued cooperation as Slánský listed the National Socialists' alleged transgressions. They included foreign policy, filibustering in parliament, the spreading of panic stories, the presenting of impossible demands that would lead to inflation and, perhaps most important, their position over the Slovak crisis. In all, he effectively accused them of treason<sup>17</sup>. This was added to by Gottwald who pointed to the apparent acceptance of Agrarianism by the National Socialists<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup>Nový, RP 12/10/47, p.1.

<sup>16</sup>e.g. Slánský, RP 29/8/47, p.1.

<sup>17</sup>Speech, RP 12/10/47, p.1.

<sup>18</sup>Speaking at the Central Committee meeting of 27/11/47, Spisy, XIV, p.187.

It certainly was true that the National Socialists were becoming more aggressively anti-Communist, and they were trying to unite all other political forces against the KSČ. This was partly a consequence of their assessment of Czechoslovakia's withdrawal from preparations for the Marshall Plan<sup>19</sup>, and it is conceivable that they were appearing more stubborn so as to encourage the US to take a positive interest in Czechoslovak politics<sup>20</sup>. Nevertheless, the determination with which they pursued their anti-Communist policies appears primarily to have been a response to the determination with which the Communists pursued their own offensive.

The KSČ analysis that the National Socialists, or "reactionaries" who were dominating their policies, were responsible for political tensions therefore appears to have been an exaggeration and oversimplification in the interests of political propaganda. It also undoubtedly reflected a fear that the National Socialists might prove capable of launching a real political offensive. Gottwald expressed the fear that, by exploiting the economic difficulties, "reaction" was aiming to create a bloc of parties around demands that the KSČ simply could not accept. This would then lead to a crisis, a vote of no confidence and hence the resignation of the government. A "government of officials" could then be created as had happened in 1920<sup>21</sup>. The danger of this was increased both by the changes in Social Democracy which Gottwald

<sup>19</sup> See above p.154-155.

<sup>20</sup> See below Section VI.38.2. for information on the US attitude towards events in Czechoslovakia.

<sup>21</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.190.

expected to lead to a fundamental shift in that party's policies<sup>22</sup>, and by the belief that the US would somehow try to intervene in Czechoslovak politics<sup>23</sup>.

Nevertheless, there is no evidence of a plan at that time to exclude the KSČ from the government prior to the elections. Far more realistic for them were fears that they would fail to substantially increase their vote and would find themselves isolated within the government. Again, they were trying to portray the situation in the most dramatic way possible in the interests of their own political propaganda.

V.35.4. The Communist leaders, worried by the possibility of electoral failure, or of setbacks before that, prepare to abandon the existing National Front framework.

In public the KSČ indicated every confidence in their ability to win an absolute majority in the coming elections. On 24/8/47 Gottwald had set the target of one and a half million members expecting that, given the previous ratio of members to voters, this would lead to over 50% of the votes<sup>24</sup>. This target certainly did not seem impossible and in early 1948 there was still greater emphasis on election campaigning. At least as early as February local organisations were being encouraged to work out which

<sup>22</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.182-184. Perhaps this was just preparing for the worst, but there were plenty of indications that the other parties also expected the new leadership of Social Democracy to cooperate more willingly with them; e.g. Vývoj, 19/11/47, p.1.

<sup>23</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.174.

<sup>24</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.103.



individual's votes would be needed for a majority in their locality - or even within their small block of flats - and then persistent personal agitation was to ensure those votes<sup>25</sup>. Recruitment was stepped up too and a few frontier districts began announcing that over 50% of their voters had joined the KSČ: the first was the frontier mining area of Falknov<sup>26</sup>. There was also an attempt to present the election campaign, as in 1946, as a contest in constructive work. A huge announcement was given for a proposal to provide thirty million hours of voluntary work for the republic<sup>27</sup>. This met a very sceptical response from other parties with the familiar suggestions that everybody should work a normal eight hour day irrespective of their party affiliations<sup>28</sup>. Some of the more sensible objections raised were answered in subsequent suggestions that labour would be directed to those sectors where it was most needed such as agriculture, construction and the repairing of war damage. National Committees, it was suggested, should work out how the voluntary labour could best be utilised<sup>29</sup>. Soon the operation was under way and members of other parties were often said to be joining in<sup>30</sup>.

This, however, could not be the totality of the KSČ election

<sup>25</sup> Funkcionář, 10/2/48, esp. p.2.

<sup>26</sup> RP 4/1/48, p.1.

<sup>27</sup> RP 18/1/48, p.1.

<sup>28</sup> e.g. Cíl, 30/1/48, p.34, or SS 25/1/48, p.1.

<sup>29</sup> Lidová správa, 1/2/48, p.34.

<sup>30</sup> RP 5/2/48, p.1, and RP 8/2/48, p.1.

campaign as<sup>there</sup> were doubts within the leadership about the party's ability to win in the elections by these means alone. Apparently some prominent figures even thought of taking power by somehow completely overruling the existing parliamentary framework<sup>31</sup>, but Gottwald still thought that the elections could be the decisive arena of struggle. He did, however, implicitly accept that the KSČ alone was unlikely to win an absolute majority. He therefore advocated, as "an essential part of the preparation of the election campaign and of our electoral victory"<sup>32</sup>, creating a broader platform to include left elements from all parties. Approaches were in fact made to likely participants in this electoral front<sup>33</sup>.

This Gottwald referred to as a "new" National Front, to replace the old framework which had become unworkable, and he fully expected a strong trend to develop within the National Socialists to change the course of their party's policy or to ally with the KSČ<sup>34</sup>. The new National Front was also to include the left Social Democrats who had supported Fierlinger. They, however, were

<sup>31</sup> J. Švec: Únor, p.422. Such views were probably held by Ďuriš, Kopecký and Smrkovský.

<sup>32</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.192.

<sup>33</sup> V. Pavlíček: Politické strany po Únoru. Příspěvek k problematice Národní fronty, Praha, 1966, p.100, and Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.198. One report at the time claimed that dissatisfied representatives of the domestic resistance, such as Pražák, Grňa and E. Erban, might participate in such a front along with a number of Social Democrats: Obzory, 24/1/48, p.34. All this was meant to be kept secret and only extracts from Gottwald's crucial speech were published at the time. Kopecký, however, did refer in public to the need for a new sort of National Front and that caused extreme apprehension among Social Democrats; Laušman, Kdo, p.92.

<sup>34</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.187-188.

criticised for lack of initiative as they seemed to see nothing disastrous in the change in their party's leadership<sup>35</sup>. Communists were therefore expected to help develop a more belligerent left wing. Gottwald even saw fit to set its tactical aim which was to regain control of the party and work closely with the KSČ. Communists were obviously to be closely involved in developing this left as they were to "advise and support" it and to "create organisational and technical possibilities for direct contact with the left from top to bottom"<sup>36</sup>.

This could hardly fail to create more tension between parties. It seemed to confirm the fears that the KSČ in fact wanted an absolute majority so as to be able to dispense with their existing coalition partners, and that they were prepared to break the understandings underlying the existing National Front so as to achieve their aim.

At the same time, there were still reassurances that Czechoslovakia was to follow "a peaceful, non-violent road and on no account the road of the dictatorship of the proletariat"<sup>37</sup>. Kopecký explained it as follows: "We have no reason to resort to other means for power than people's democracy. We have a great share of power which the people have given us and we are convinced that the people will give us still more power . . . It is reaction that is cultivating putchist plans . . . We stand by the law, the

<sup>35</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.183.

<sup>36</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.185-186.

<sup>37</sup> Kopecký: Zápas, p.41.

law of the new republic"<sup>38</sup>. In the Central Committee meeting he explained his meaning in the only way that seemed consistent with the new KSČ attitude towards the other parties: "We will choose the moment to apply that strength such that nobody can criticise us for abandoning the democratic road"<sup>39</sup>.

In other words, even if the KSČ leaders were still firmly opposed to putchist methods, they did recognise that they could hardly achieve a political transformation leading to a new National Front without a major struggle. In this they were prepared to use all the strength of their immense organisation plus their positions within the police<sup>40</sup> and the media, as a development of their tactics in the campaign for the millionaires' tax and during the Slovak crisis.

The key to any political transformation remained the economy and the question of who could be held most responsible for difficulties that were largely due to objective causes. The Central Committee meeting presented a list of measures with the principal emphasis on overcoming supply difficulties and putting order into the distribution system<sup>41</sup>. These could have been the centre of a purely Communist election campaign or that campaign could have led to the creation of a broader front following divisions within other parties. Perhaps Gottwald really believed that the other parties would do

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<sup>38</sup> Kopecký: Zápas, p.43.

<sup>39</sup> Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.196.

<sup>40</sup> See below Section VI.36.3.

<sup>41</sup> Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.205-206.

everything to block the measures he felt were necessary and was surprised to find that there was still some scope for agreement. It certainly appears that he would have welcomed deadlock in the government if that gave the KSČ a chance to use their extra-parliamentary strength. There was, however, still scope for the existing coalition to function.

V.35.5. Communist proposals for a reorganisation of textile distribution are supported by the Social Democrats.  
A major confrontation on the issue of the black market is averted.

The fight against the black market was seen to be extremely important. As shortages had developed so black market prices had risen and black marketeers had profited<sup>42</sup>. There had been a toughening of police measures early in 1947 which coincided with a downward trend in prices: then there was a relaxation during the summer and in the late autumn of 1947 very much tougher measures were used<sup>43</sup>. There were recommendations within the KSČ for public trials of black marketeers and it was made clear that this could have a tremendous political impact. "You will see how you profit politically among those strata that had rejected us before!"<sup>44</sup> Such tough measures were also welcomed by the Social Democrats who, however, blamed the Ministry of the Interior for delays in starting these trials<sup>45</sup> while the Communists blamed the Ministry of

<sup>42</sup>See above p.67.

<sup>43</sup>F. Vandrovec, Věstník ministerstva vnitra československé republiky, XXX, No.1-2, 15/2/48, p.13-15.

<sup>44</sup>F. Vosyka from Říčany u Prahy, Funkcionář, 21/11/47, p.31.

<sup>45</sup>PL 17/12/47, p.2.

Justice<sup>46</sup>.

A limitation of the black market was also associated with rationalising and controlling the distribution system. Textiles were the main problem as, following a steady improvement in supplies, they had suddenly become scarce again. This was partly an indirect consequence of the drought<sup>47</sup>, but blame was also attributed to the accentuation of shortages by speculators who could go unchecked within the diffuse distribution system<sup>48</sup>. It was also suggested that textiles were being smuggled out of the country: that could account for 30%<sup>49</sup> or 10% of production<sup>50</sup>.

The Communists therefore proposed a new distribution system with central and local centres ensuring control from the factories right down to the shops. This would effectively replace the mass of wholesalers<sup>51</sup>. The National Socialists accepted that all was not well but argued for only a reduction of wholesalers from over 900 to 300-400. They insisted that the distribution system should be completely separate from the producers<sup>52</sup>. As there were two proposals there inevitably was some delay while both<sup>were</sup> discussed, but the Communist proposal was accepted fairly quickly thanks to

<sup>46</sup> RP 17/12/47, p.1.

<sup>47</sup> See below Vol. IV, p.113.

<sup>48</sup> Zápotocký, Práce, 8/1/48, p.1.

<sup>49</sup> Weberová, speech, RP 19/12/47, p.3.

<sup>50</sup> Čepička, speaking to newsmen, SS 31/12/47, p.2.

<sup>51</sup> RP 25/10/47, p.1.

<sup>52</sup> SS 14/11/47, p.1.

support from Jankovcová. It was then pushed through the government by the Communists and Social Democrats against the other parties' opposition<sup>53</sup>. The new system began operating within a few days<sup>54</sup>.

So there was no major crisis. The National Socialists became less realistic in their propaganda suggesting that textile shortages were caused by "the Communist, non-specialist, politicised and protectionist policy"<sup>55</sup>. In turn the Communists could provide further circumstantial evidence that the National Socialists were sabotaging the economy when some leading businessmen members of that party were caught black marketeering<sup>56</sup>.

V.35.6. The Communists try to avoid loss of popularity in the villages by forcing a confrontation over the Hradec programme.

A solution to the supply shortages also depended on the peasants and the Communists were aware of the difficulties this presented. They needed peasant votes but their firmest supporters desperately needed food from the peasants. This obviously made any relaxation of the strict quota system impossible, but that amounted to asking peasants to surrender even essential reserves that they needed for their own consumption and for the next sowing<sup>57</sup>. At first calls

<sup>53</sup> SS 10/1/48, p.1.

<sup>54</sup> RP 8/1/48, p.1.

<sup>55</sup> SS 4/1/48, p.1.

<sup>56</sup> e.g. RP 6/1/48, p.1. There were lots of cases of the National Socialists and People's Party favouring mild punishments but far fewer cases of actual members of those parties being caught.

<sup>57</sup> Stručný, p.354.

for ignoring quota obligations were listened to only by richer peasants but, particularly in early 1948, the situation was changing. Poorer peasants, more dependent on livestock products, had not been so badly hit by the drought at first, but their willingness to respond to government appeals finally seemed to be fading<sup>58</sup>. The Communists were therefore effectively forced to do everything to win their sympathy and to split the village. The crucial weapon was the proposed new land reform.

Already on 12/9/47 the KSČ had been thinking of stepping up the campaign for the Hradec programme aiming for a peasant congress<sup>59</sup>. By 5/10/47 the Peasant Commissions had been developed in the Kladno region to such an extent that they were even present in villages where there was no land to divide up. A congress was then held in the area with 986 delegates of which 546 were Communists. It fully supported Communist policy<sup>60</sup>.

Even then, there was still scope for agreements. The four National Front parties called on all peasants to fulfill their quota obligations<sup>61</sup> and the National Front, meeting again on 11 and 12/12/47, agreed to a very rapid parliamentary timetable for the discussion of the remaining proposals<sup>62</sup>. There was soon surprisingly

<sup>58</sup>Jech, Václav: "Některé", p.244-245.

<sup>59</sup>K. Kaplan: "Úloha hnutí rolnických mas v procesu přerůstání národní a demokratické revoluce v socialistickou", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1962, No.4, p.493.

<sup>60</sup>Jech: Probuzená, p.369.

<sup>61</sup>SS 1/11/47, p.1.

<sup>62</sup>Jech: Probuzená, p.411-412.



quick progress, after the earlier delays, with the revision of the first land reform taking place during January and February<sup>63</sup>. Only the People's Party and Slovak Democrats had voted against this in the government<sup>64</sup> so that, again, both total deadlock and a solid bloc against the KSČ had been averted.

#### V.35.7. Summary and discussion.

The KSČ clarified the immediate aims of their political offensive at a Central Committee meeting in November 1947. Gottwald's analysis was that rising political tension stemmed from an offensive by "reaction" which had been encouraged by the policies of the United States.

Gottwald was probably exaggerating the likely dangers partly in the interests of political propaganda and partly out of fear that there might just be a major upset in Czechoslovakia. In view of the changes in other parties, the international situation and the domestic economic difficulties that could serve to lower the popularity of the KSČ, the Communists might soon be forced out of the government.

Information from the party's basic organisations certainly indicated very deep discontent, not least among the working class, at the extreme food shortages. Gottwald therefore formulated a strategy based on three elements.

<sup>63</sup>Jech: Probuzeň, p.415-417.

<sup>64</sup>Kaplan: "Úloha", p.494.

The first was to prepare as thoroughly as possible for the elections.. This, however, was not felt to be enough and there were even voices within the KSČ for completely abandoning the electoral road.

The second was to place the blame for economic difficulties onto the other parties. The KSČ pressed for strong measures against the black market and for major restrictions on private traders. Perhaps they expected a major confrontation over this, starting off like the crisis over the millionaires' tax, but in fact the Social Democrats supported them.

The third element was to work for a broader political platform with which to fight the elections. The hope was that left elements from all the other parties would join, thereby maintaining the appearance of continuity with the old National Front. Preliminary efforts to achieve this naturally caused consternation within the other parties and especially within Social Democracy. It indicated very clearly that, even if they did not intend an extra-parliamentary seizure of power, the Communists were prepared to destroy the basis of the agreements underlying the existing National Front in their quest for an effective majority in the coming elections.

Although they implicitly denied it at the time, this represented a major change from their earlier conception of the Czechoslovak road to socialism. They were in fact indicating cooperation and compromise within the existing National Front. That does not mean that they could definitely be accused of proposing an immediate "totalitarian" regime. They were still prepared to face contested elections and said nothing that could rule<sup>out</sup> the existence of a legal opposition afterwards.

Nevertheless, they definitely wanted for themselves an absolutely firm grip on power: any opposition would have been excluded from decision making. In that sense, even if they did not change their conception of a road to socialism involving a gradual process of social and economic transformation, the Czechoslovak road was reduced to just a new means of achieving the aim of a monopoly of power.

