

Myant, Martin Roy (1978) *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*. PhD thesis.

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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 IV

by Martin Roy Myant

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

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PART VI

FEBRUARY AND AFTER.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S ASSUMPTION OF
UNDIVIDED POWER AND THE SUBSEQUENT
CHANGES IN PARTY POLICIES.

The most dramatic event of immediate post-war Czechoslovak history was the Communist victory in February 1948. This was in a sense the climax of developments over the immediately preceding years and also of the whole of KSČ history. In another sense it was an anti-climax because it eliminated, or led to the elimination of, a number of possible roads for Czechoslovakia's development. Above all, the road of development based on broad national unity and a genuine plurality of parties was effectively ruled out.

Part VI therefore tries to set the February events within the wider context of the post-war development of Czechoslovakia and of the Czechoslovak road to socialism. This means looking at the immediate causes of the crisis, at the course of the crisis itself and finally at the wider consequences of the KSČ victory.

The Communists' activities in February can be conceptually separated into two aspects. The first was the public political defeat and hence paralysis of the National Socialists following the mobilisation of an enormous body of opinion. The second aspect was the intensification and exploitation of this paralysis by the KSČ so as to effectively eliminate the National Socialists, and their right-wing allies, from a share in power. This restructuring of power was carried through with the minimum of public involvement and meant that the KSČ leadership acquired a quite enormous concentration of power.

It was a very important factor in post-February development that many workers and many ordinary party members saw themselves as the victors, but the realities of power meant that they had no more direct influence over decision making than in the pre-February

system.

The events during the rest of 1948 revealed the deep conflicts and problems within post-February Czechoslovakia. There were important elements of continuity in the lasting social and economic problems, but a striking discontinuity in the implications for policy formation of the accession of the KSČ to undivided power and hence their implicit assumption of responsibility for the whole development and activity of society. It seemed, in fact, that the Communists were simply not up to the enormous task they had taken on. Their past had not led to the development of general or theoretical concepts from which they could formulate ideas for a model of socialism suitable to Czechoslovakia at that time. Instead, confronted with the new problems, they sought solutions from an old and familiar, but quite unsuitable, theoretical basis.

The comparison with pre-February society is revealing. Although the National Socialists had many faults and weaknesses which contributed to their defeat, and although they were themselves incapable of positively leading Czechoslovak society, they had deeply influenced KSČ policy. They had ensured that policy measures had to be argued for and publicly justified in pragmatic terms. After February that was no longer necessary.

CHAPTER 36: THE IMMEDIATE PRELUDE TO THE FEBRUARY CRISIS.

VI.36.1. The National Socialists become more confident as disagreements within the government are intensified.

Although 1948 did not begin with a complete deadlock in the government, there certainly were deepening differences. Particularly serious was the apparent standstill over the principal task set for parliament, the formulation and passing of a new constitution. Broadly speaking, there were two sides with the National Socialists advocating only a few modifications to the 1920 constitution, while the KSČ wanted to codify and incorporate many of the post-war changes without restricting the scope for further socialist change¹. In concrete terms, agreement seemed impossible over the questions of Czech-Slovak relations, National Committees and the nationalised industries. In this last case the National Socialists wanted a constitutional guarantee that no more could be nationalised while the KSČ wanted to leave that open and preferred to insist that nothing could be denationalised².

If a new constitution could not be approved, then the government could not complete its programme. The National Socialists were prepared to accept this³ and joined with the People's Party⁴ in advocating early elections. The date they pressed for, at the

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¹ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.44.

² Bouček: Praha, p.112-113.

³ SS 7/2/48, p.1.

⁴ For their Executive Committee's statement, advocating elections as soon as possible, see LD 27/1/48, p.1.

National Front meeting on 5/2/48, was 18/4/48 while the Slovak Democrats picked on 25/4/48. The Communists and Social Democrats, however, wanted to delay as long as possible and chose 23/5/48⁵. The timing of the elections could be very important in deciding their outcome as the Communists needed time to build up their campaign while the right-wing parties wanted to prevent this: the completion of the programme itself could also help raise the Communists' prestige as it was essentially their programme. The Social Democrats, as is argued below, found themselves pulled both ways but they definitely wanted the programme completed. Moreover, as Laušman sensibly pointed out, there was no reason to suppose that agreement could be reached more easily after the elections⁶.

Despite some nervousness the National Socialists seem to have been generally confident of markedly reducing the KSC vote. This belief was shared by Beneš and J. Masaryk⁷ and was said to be based on the results of a public opinion poll that had been suppressed by Kopecký but nevertheless leaked out⁸. The claim in numerous Western sources is that the KSC vote was expected to drop from 38% to 29%⁹. Similar claims can be found in National Socialist publications long before any reference was made to an opinion poll¹⁰.

⁵ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.44-45.

⁶ Speech, PL 15/1/48, p.1.

⁷ R.H.B. Lockhart: "The Czechoslovak Revolution", Foreign Affairs, XXVI, No.4, July 1948, p.632.

⁸ R.E. Black: "The last free poll in Czechoslovakia", Public Opinion Quarterly, XIV, No.2, Summer 1950, p.384.

⁹ e.g. Friedman: The Break-up, p.68.

¹⁰ Život strany, 31/5/47, p.1.

In fact, it seems that, although there was an opinion poll, its results were never even calculated¹¹. Anyway, it would have been of very limited value in so fluid a political situation with so much scope for vigorous campaigning or even events abroad to affect the final outcome. There is certainly no sign of the Communists regarding the outcome as easily predictable like they had in 1946. They apparently conducted their own survey, as they had in 1946, which suggested that they could win 55% of the votes in the Czech lands. This, however, was not a firm prediction, but an estimate dependent on the condition that their campaigning would prove effective¹².

Changes in the membership of parties do not give a definite indication for the elections either. All the parties were growing as political conflicts became sharper. The National Socialists made some losses in re-registration of members over the new year so that their total was 602,056 on 31/1/48 compared with 593,982 in September 1946¹³. The KSČ, with no re-registration to disrupt the impression of uninterrupted growth, drew near to the target of one and a half million: they were claiming more members than all the other parties put together. They may, however, have been recruiting mostly their former supporters: they still lacked a firm membership base among peasants, office workers and the urban petty

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¹¹Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.206-207.

¹²Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.204-205.

¹³Pavlíček: Politické, p.101-102.

bourgeoisie¹⁴.

Within this fluid situation the National Socialists seem to have become more confident. Gottwald's speech to the November KSČ Central Committee meeting was interpreted as "a defensive speech" and as expressing fear at the course of events¹⁵. The electoral defeat of the KSČ was confidently predicted after which it was assumed that genuine cooperation within the government could be renewed¹⁶, presumably on terms laid down by the National Socialists. Their confidence was such that Ripka could foresee a KSČ victory only if the Soviet Union actively intervened: he convinced himself, owing to their cautious attitude on the situation in Greece, that the Soviet leadership were scared to go too far in offending the West and would therefore hesitate to send troops into Czechoslovakia¹⁷.

Confidence was raised particularly when it seemed that the leaders of other parties were also nervous about the Communists' possible intentions. Scope was therefore created for an anti-KSČ bloc which, as it could unite a majority of MPs, could have the strength to block the development of the Communists' campaign and force an early election. Towards this end, discussions were held between Drtina and Lettrich in January 1948 on a possible common approach between their two parties. The KSČ were able to

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¹⁴ Kašpar: "Členská", p.11.

¹⁵ Svobodný zítřek, 4/12/47, p.1, editorial.

¹⁶ e.g. J. Beneš, Svobodný zítřek, 8/1/48, p.3.

¹⁷ Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.137 and p.141.

expose this to the public¹⁸ and the National Socialists, having previously expressed total opposition to any "blocs", were acutely embarrassed. The discussions were, it was claimed in defence, no more than "a natural affair between decent people"¹⁹. Nevertheless, they did indicate the two parties' desire to coordinate actions.

Even more encouraging for the National Socialists was Laušman's fear of KSČ victory in the elections which he thought would be "a jump into the dark". This led him to welcome secret contacts with Zenkl which, unfortunately for them, were publicised by the KSČ albeit with exaggerated claims about the extent of agreement²⁰.

The Social Democrats had particular cause for concern as, following the Communist Party's November Central Committee meeting, an organised left wing was taking shape within their own party. It has been claimed that this was entirely directed by the KSČ, as part of the policy evolved at the November 1947 Central Committee meeting²¹, and it was soon openly challenging the leadership and hence the unity of the party with its own journal and a firm base in Hradec Králové. It was, however, not afraid to criticise the KSČ and to argue for a strong Social Democracy as the backbone and unifier of the National Front. It did not support the demands for

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¹⁸ RP 28/1/48, p.1.

¹⁹ SS 30/1/48, p.1.

²⁰ RP 17/2/48, p.1, and Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.91-92. The Social Democrats, of course, denied that any agreement had been reached and described the newspaper stories as a fabrication in the tradition of Svobodné slovo; PL 18/2/48, p.1.

²¹ J. Švec: Únor, p.317-321.

further nationalisations and gave great prominence to allegiance to the heritage of T.G. Masaryk²². Nevertheless, its existence could certainly justify Laušman becoming more nervous of anything outside the scope of the National Front as it had previously been understood²³.

The National Socialists evidently hoped to exploit this nervousness to create a bloc against the KSČ. They seem to have consciously decided to minimise criticisms of the Social Democrats: instead, for example, they defended Majer against KSČ criticisms²⁴.

VI.36.2. The National Socialists succeed in forming a bloc against the KSČ in the government, but the Communists respond by preparing to mobilise working class support for a major confrontation.

The National Socialists finally succeeded in ensuring another defeat for the KSČ in the government on 10/2/48. The issue was the ÚRD proposal on civil servants' pay which the KSČ supported. Two other proposals were then presented. Drtina advocated a linear 25% rise in wages and also an increase in pensions. Majer advocated a smaller overall rise but with more for the highest paid and an increase in pensions too. During the meeting Drtina withdrew his suggestion so as to support Majer's thereby ensuring it a majority in the government²⁵. This could be a cause for pleasure and even

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²² Směr, 26/1/48, p.1, and 5/2/48, p.13.

²³ An important part of Laušman's discussions with Zenkl had been the insistence that only the existing parties, with the same titles, could take part in the elections; RP 17/2/48, p.1.

²⁴ See the National Socialists' Presidium statement, SS 5/12/47, p.1.

²⁵ RP 22/1/48, p.1.

surprise for the Social Democrats, as they had asserted, and won with their own independent line. The National Socialists too could be happy at having defeated both the KSČ and ÚRO. The trade unions, however, continued to reject Majer's proposal²⁶.

They claimed that it had been extremely difficult to present a united position on civil servants' pay. All the civil servants' unions had wanted an increase in pensions, but had accepted the Presidium's objections that there could be no case for the preferential treatment of one group of employees²⁷. The ÚRO proposal was not held up as an ideal solution but rather as a difficult compromise that left plenty of other unions in the embarrassing position of holding back their own members because of the serious economic situation. Zápotocký therefore argued that to accept the civil servants' wishes would open the way for a free for all with disastrous consequences for the economy²⁸.

So the government's vote could be presented as an attack on the power, competence and unity of the trade union movement and an insult after the responsible way the unions had restrained their members. This was not changed when leading Social Democrats, including many on the left of the party, insisted that the additional expense over the ÚRO proposal was so small as not to damage the economy²⁹. The issue was presented rather as a point of principle.

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²⁶ RP 22/1/48, p.1.

²⁷ Práce, 25/1/48, p.1.

²⁸ Práce, 23/1/48, p.1.

²⁹ PL 17/2/48, p.1.

This refusal, by the KSČ and ÚRO, to accept a compromise was undoubtedly a consequence of the preceding KSČ Central Committee meeting. It was believed there that a sharp struggle prior to the elections would take place: a rebuff to the trade unions was reckoned, at the KSČ Presidium meeting of 9/2/48, to give maximum scope for a broadly based offensive against the other parties around the general demand for further nationalisations³⁰. Prior to that Zápotocký had hinted at the need to find a means to finance wage rises without increasing production. References began appearing to "a road of struggle" and to a possible congress of Factory Councils³¹.

A second government rejection of the ÚRO proposal therefore did not lead to a retreat, but instead to a statement from Zápotocký that all the questions worrying the trade unions about the government would be put to an all-state congress of trade union groups and Factory Councils to be called as soon as possible³². To be fully representative there would have to be 30,000 delegates but no building in Prague could hold so many so the numbers had to be restricted.³³

The main^{new} issue to be included was the question of nationalisations which was posed in such a way that it could be certain of widespread support and particularly solid backing from the workers

³⁰ Růžicka: ROH, p.253.

³¹ Práce, 23/1/48, p.1.

³² Práce, 11/2/48, p.1 and p.2.

³³ Práce, 12/2/48, p.1.

in big nationalised factories. Disagreements had smouldered through 1947 but they were suddenly thrust into the forefront of attention in early 1948. The issue was the Orion chocolate factory which had been nationalised on 9/1/46 because it was judged to be part of a big concern. Its US shareholders appealed against this to the Supreme Court and their case was upheld. Naturally, the workers were bitterly opposed to the decision. It could be^a dangerous precedent too as there were 140 similar appeals awaiting consideration. The government therefore discussed the case on 3/2/48. Zenkl argued for accepting the court's decision but Majer, who was backed by the KSČ, argued for installing a national administrator until the case could be settled³⁴. This, together with delays in incorporating confiscates into nationalised industries, the failure of the private sector in the plan and accusations against black marketeers, could provide the Communists with a good basis for developing their offensive around a demand for further nationalisations.

The build up to the congress was coordinated between the trade union and KSČ leaderships. It was also reinforced by the Communist press which prominently publicised the extent of capitalists' profits and devoted great attention to the proposals for a comprehensive social insurance scheme that were raised by KSČ ministers in the 13/2/48 government meeting.

It is still unclear exactly what results the KSČ expected from

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³⁴ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.39-40. The KSČ had previously called for definitive nationalisation and had argued against excessive pedantry in interpreting nationalisation decrees; RP 3/2/48. Evidently, they too could line up behind Social Democrats' proposals against their real enemies.

the congress of Factory Councils, but Gottwald later implied that the aim was to repeat the experience of the campaign over the millionaires' tax when, by carefully choosing and presenting the issue, many people who had previously wavered were apparently convinced that the National Socialist leaders really were "reactionaries"³⁵. This fits with the articles appearing arguing that the leaders of some parties were defending enormous profits which were going to only a handful of capitalists³⁶. It still leaves open whether the congress was to be part of a longer campaign³⁷, or whether it was to coincide with an immediate attempt to create a "new" National Front or to change the composition of the government.

Irrespective of these ambiguities even the Social Democrats, who were likely to support demands for further nationalisations, were nervous enough to oppose the calling of the Congress of Factory Councils. They claimed that, owing to the restriction imposed on the number of delegates, it would under-represent office workers who tended to be employed in smaller enterprises³⁸. They were particularly concerned at the apparent creation of a situation

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³⁵ Gottwald, speaking to the Central Committee meeting of 9/4/48, Spisy, XIV, p.358.

³⁶ e.g. RP 15/2/48, p.1 contains an estimate of the size of these profits.

³⁷ Gottwald implied that this may have been the case when he reminded the KSČ Central Committee on 9/6/48 that they had only expected to implement the further nationalisations after the elections; Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.426.

³⁸ PL 15/2/48, p.1. Apparently office workers were well represented; Růžicka: ROH, p.310. For the full figures on representation of different unions, see L. Lehár: Sjezd velkého rozhodování, Praha, 1968, p.128-129.

of "dual power" with trade unions arrogating for themselves the right to watch over and judge the government³⁹.

They viewed with similar apprehension the apparent determination of the KSČ to force a confrontation over agricultural policy. The Agricultural Committee of parliament refused to accept in full the Hradec programme at its meeting on 11/2/48 and the KSČ Presidium then decided to call a peasant congress⁴⁰. This was done by the "Kladno Regional Action Committee of Peasant Commissions". It called for an all-state Congress of Peasant Commissions to discuss the fate of the Hradec programme and the question of the prices of agricultural products which was in turn related to the issue of profits in the distribution system⁴¹. The response from villages was extraordinarily rapid with 22% sending in resolutions of support by 22/2/48⁴². The Social Democrats, however, joined the National Socialists in condemning the congress as illegal⁴³. Their argument, backed by the majority of the JSCZ leadership, was that the JSCZ was the only legitimate representative body for peasants. Nevertheless, the congress was held at the end of February.

³⁹ Cfl, 20/2/48, p.81.

⁴⁰ Kaplan: "Úloha", p.

⁴¹ Jech: Probuzená, p.426-427.

⁴² Kaplan: "Úloha",

⁴³ PL 18/1/48, p.1, and SS 18/2/48, p.1.

VI.36.3. The National Socialists, nervous about the developing Communist offensive, believe that they can win an important tactical victory by creating an alliance against increasing Communist domination of the police force.

As preparations were being made for the Congress of Factory Councils, there seemed to be grounds for both nervousness and optimism on both sides. The KSČ could be satisfied that their demands seemed to be immediately welcomed by the mass of workers. Meetings showed great enthusiasm for calls for passing the new constitution and laws directly benefiting the working class, for further nationalisations - to include part of the distribution system and all enterprises with over fifty employees - and for supporting the ÚRO position on civil servant's pay. Resolutions were soon flooding in at a faster pace than during the dispute over the millionaires' tax⁴⁴. There were some signs of opposition to the Congress from some office workers⁴⁵, but it appeared to be only a small minority.

The National Socialists could feel reassured that precisely this situation was making even the Social Democrats nervous. They believed that they had the strength to deflate the impact of the Congress of Factory Councils, achieve the isolation of the KSČ in the government and thereby force early elections⁴⁶. The key to this was to be the issue of Communist domination of the police force which had reached such a stage as to lead even Social Democrats to suggest that the KSČ might have been preparing an "armed putch".⁴⁷

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⁴⁴ RP 19/2/48, p.1, and following days.

⁴⁵ e.g. LD 20/2/48, p.1-2.

⁴⁶ Ripka: Czechoslovakia, esp. p.208;

⁴⁷ PL 30/1/48, p.1.

The National Socialists had often appeared to be making exaggerated and sensationalised accusations against the police⁴⁸, and these were stepped up in the autumn of 1947 with warnings of an imminent police state⁴⁹. They, in fact, did not believe that the KSČ had the strength to stage a coup against the existing government on the basis of its position within the police force. Beneš even thought that half the police and effectively the whole army would follow him rather than the KSČ⁵⁰. There certainly was a significant anti-Communist presence within the union representing the police⁵¹, and the union's journal was full of concern about the conditions of work and the need for higher pay for policemen who were classified as civil servants⁵². Nevertheless, the police union did definitely follow the line of the ROH leadership in late 1947⁵³.

The army, with 140,000 men compared with 40,000 in all the different sections of the police force, was potentially far more powerful. Although there was a definite KSČ presence⁵⁴, Beneš

⁴⁸ See above Sections III.13.2 and IV.29.2.

⁴⁹ e.g. Hora, SS 18/12/47, p.1-2.

⁵⁰ J. Korbel: The Communist Subversion of Czechoslovakia 1938-1948; the Failure of Coexistence, London, 1959, p.199.

⁵¹ V. Kroupa: "Únor 1948 a Sbor národní bezpečnosti", Únor a československé, p.85-86. See also Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.220.

⁵² Národní bezpečnost, 10/12/46, and later issues.

⁵³ e.g. M. Bartoš, Národní bezpečnost, 15/11/47, p.173.

⁵⁴ Apparently there was a small but powerful group of KSČ officers partly balanced by "outright reactionaries". The typical army officer vacillated around the middle of the Czechoslovak political spectrum; J. Lipták, Špičák: "Únor", p.148-149.

could have based his optimism on an unmistakable tendency for even Svoboda to dissociate himself from the Communists' campaigning methods. Disagreements even became open when, evidently in the expectation of a major power struggle, the KSČ began calling for a purge of army officers on the grounds that many had been indisputably pro-German during the war⁵⁵. Svoboda sharply rejected such suggestions⁵⁶.

Even if this made a "police coup" an improbable eventuality, there were three new factors which made the National Socialists' case more serious. These were the personnel policy of the Ministry of the Interior, the course of investigations into the assassination attempt on three government ministers and the behaviour of the security forces in early 1948.

Nosek naturally continued to maintain in public that appointments were not made on party terms and he backed this with the insistence that changes he instituted were not opposed by non-Communists within his ministry⁵⁷. Nevertheless, the true situation was revealed in a speech to KSČ policemen in Prague on 19/1/48. He revealed there that half of Prague's policemen had joined the KSČ, but this did not mean complete domination. He left no doubt about his aim when he pronounced: "You certainly know that, in connection with the implementation of the law on the police, we have carried

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⁵⁵ RP 30/11/47, p.2.

⁵⁶ PL 21/1/48, p.1.

⁵⁷ See his speech to the Budget Committee of parliament on 26/11/47, Cesta k lidové, esp. p.131-132.

out an exchange of personnel and also a reorganisation in the Ministry. We want to continue in this way so as to have the leading posts and the commanding positions in our hands"⁵⁸. This was apparently justified because only Communists were "the best and most reliable patriots", while others were judged to be unreliable in their support for People's Democracy.

So, although Nosek was definitely trying to ensure Communist domination of the police, it was still not clear what role this would play in party-political struggles.

It seemed, however, that the National Socialists could demonstrate direct police partisanship in the investigations of the attempted assassinations. The police believed that the boxes containing the bombs had been made in Prague and seemed unwilling to consider any other possibility⁵⁹. They had, however, also investigated the possibility that they had been made in the Moravian village of Krčmář by a carpenter who boasted while drunk that he had been involved in the assassination attempt and apparently never altered his story afterwards⁶⁰. The National Socialists used their strength in the Ministry of Justice to continue investigations and give them full publicity. Drtina even presented the findings to parliament and Svobodné slovo did not hesitate to sensationalise, for party-political ends, claiming that five people held in Krčmář, all KSČ members,

⁵⁸ Cesta k lidové, p.147.

⁵⁹ RP 22/1/48, p.1.

⁶⁰ SS 21/11/47, p.1-2 and 25/11/47, p.1, and RP 22/11/47, p.1.

had actually committed the crime⁶¹. Ortina tried further to implicate the whole KSČ by linking up the assassination attempt with a discovery of arms apparently stored by the KSČ MP Jura-Sosnar.

Although the MP denied responsibility he resigned from all positions to allow investigations to proceed without becoming a focus for party-political disputes⁶². He also complained that Ortina had made charges against him in a parliamentary speech before he had even been questioned on the case⁶³.

Gottwald seems to have believed that the National Socialists were revealing more aggressive intentions with their "provocation" over the assassination attempts⁶⁴. The evidence presented by Ortina was, however, powerful: under normal conditions it would have to have been taken seriously. It has been suggested that the Communist leaders were unaware of what was happening within the police force and security organs and found themselves defending actions that they could not control and preventing investigations of what was really happening⁶⁵. Presumably the problems were being caused by party members, particularly within the organs of power, who doubted the party's ability to win in the elections and therefore

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⁶¹SS 22/1/48, p.1, and 28/1/48, p.1. Some emigré writers have elaborated even on this claiming, for example, that there was conclusive proof that the KSČ Presidium had known all about the assassination attempts; e.g. J. Josten: Oh My Country, London, 1949, p.78.

⁶²PL 22/1/48, p.1 and p.2, and PL 24/1/48, p.2.

⁶³LD 24/1/48, p.1.

⁶⁴KSS dok, p.616.

⁶⁵J. Švec: Únor, p.404.

wanted to use other means to change things⁶⁶.

This could have applied more clearly to the behaviour of security organs over the so-called Most spy affair. Ortina claimed that agents provocateurs had been used to show links between a spy group, allegedly working for the West, and leading National Socialists⁶⁷. Obviously, this could have had an enormous impact on the elections, but it could also give the National Socialists an opportunity to raise still more forcefully the issue of Communist domination of the police and security forces.

In fact, they chose to stage a confrontation over personnel changes in the Prague police. During the government meeting of 13/2/48 a report reached the National Socialist ministers of further changes which, they believed, transferred eight senior police officers out of Prague into provincial posts. It proved possible, even though Nosek was absent, to create a bloc against the KSČ and demand the reversal of these most recent changes. The National Socialists then refused to attend another government meeting until this resolution was carried out. When the decisive meeting was to take place, on 20/2/48, Svobodné slovo published a lengthy article under the title "We will not allow a police regime". The content was less sensationalist than usual: the essential message was that 80% of decisive positions in the police were held by the KSČ⁶⁸. Irrespective of

⁶⁶J. Švec: Únor, p.405.

⁶⁷See the Ministry of Justice statement, SS 22/2/48, p.3.

⁶⁸SS 20/2/48, p.1-2.

the truth of the article's claims, it can hardly be expected that a windy and controversial account in a highly partisan paper could have transformed the political situation so completely as to push into the background questions of completing the government programme, of ration shortages and of the international situation. Ripka, however, later even suggested that KSČ proposals for a social insurance scheme were intended purely to divert attention from the issue of the police⁶⁹, and he even implied that a virtue of the Svobodné slovo article was that it was the first time the public had been informed of the situation in the Ministry of the Interior⁷⁰.

Under these circumstances, the KSČ was more than willing to invite a confrontation. Nosek was even preparing a reply which would prove that the National Socialists had received so inaccurate an account of the changes in the police force as to make the government's resolution meaningless⁷¹.

Before attending the government meeting, the National Socialist ministers asked whether the preceding meeting's resolution had been implemented. On hearing only that Nosek was preparing a statement, they felt their own inside information to have been confirmed. They therefore handed in their resignations to the President and to the Prime Minister. The People's and Democratic Parties followed.

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⁶⁹ Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.193-194.

⁷⁰ Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.223.

⁷¹ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.120. See also Gottwald's speech to the Central Committee meeting of 9/4/48, Spisy, XIV, p.361.

After that they sat back and waited. It is not clear exactly what they expected to gain: although the action had been discussed beforehand there were strong doubts about it within the leaderships of the three parties and there had been no attempt to gain the prior approval of the Social Democrats or of the non-party Ministers⁷². There had previously been some suggestions of repeating the French or Italian experiences and expelling the KSČ from the government. There could then have been a new government headed by Zenkl or Masaryk or a government of officials⁷³. This would have been the ideal outcome for the National Socialists, but more likely the hope was that the KSČ would give way rather than face a government crisis: apparently Beneš generally encouraged this belief⁷⁴. They could then have hoped for the reversal of the most recent changes in the police and early elections⁷⁵ which would have taken place before completion of the government programme and without agreement on the new constitution, and also without any political involvement from the security forces.

IV.36.4.

VI.36.4. Summary and discussion.

1948 began in an atmosphere of increasing tension between parties. Deadlock was imminent on a number of important issues, so that the

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⁷²For summaries of the confused situation, see Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.230. and J. Švec: Únor, p.440.

⁷³Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.220.

⁷⁴Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.217 and p.219.

⁷⁵Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.232, and Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.203.

forthcoming elections looked increasingly like the decisive struggle for power. Nobody could confidently predict the result and this only accentuated nervousness as all sides could foresee possibilities of both triumph and disaster.

The National Socialists were pleased that the Communists' aggressiveness seemed to be increasing the chances of an anti-KSČ bloc. They were even able to isolate the KSČ in the government when the ÚRO proposal for adjustments in civil servants' pay was rejected by a majority vote.

Instead of meekly accepting defeat, the KSČ decided to step up their offensive. Almost immediately, mobilisation of the working class was started as ÚRO called a Congress of Factory Councils to discuss all their grievances with government policy.

This was potentially very dangerous for the National Socialists who had built a shaky unity around little more than fears of the Communists' intentions. That was not enough to achieve their immediate aim of defeating the KSČ and forcing early elections on favourable terms. For this they had to take the initiative away from the demands of the Factory Councils.

They chose the issue of increasing KSČ domination of the police. They were genuinely concerned, but believed that they could exploit the issue to their own advantage because even the Social Democrats seemed to share their fears. Urgency was added to the issue by, first, personnel changes, amounting to an establishment of firm KSČ dominance in Prague; secondly by evidence that police investigations of the earlier assassination attempts were ignoring evidence uncomfortable for the KSČ; and thirdly by evidence that an attempt

had been^{made} in the security forces to implicate government ministers in spying for the West.

Warning of the imminence of a "police regime", the National Socialists forced a confrontation in the government demanding the reversal of some personnel changes. They were supported by a majority of ministers, but Nosek refused to carry out their demands. In an attempt to force the KSČ to yield, the National Socialist, People's and Democratic Parties' ministers resigned from the government.

This was probably intended as a tactical manuevre in the hope that the KSČ would back away from a confrontation. If the Communists had still had no alternative to cooperation within the existing National Front, it could well have been successful. As the next two chapters show, it was based on an erroneous estimation of KSČ strength, of KSČ intentions and willingness to face a final confrontation and of how the mass of the population would respond to a major political crisis.

CHAPTER 37: THE CRISIS OF FEBRUARY 1948 AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S MOBILISATION.

VI.37.1. The Communists quickly mobilise massive support for the formation of a new government to be headed by Gottwald.

Far from yielding at once, so as to avert a major crisis, the KSČ saw the resignations as a phenomenal blunder. The vigorous and decisive action they took was unlike their earlier campaigns. The aim, it very quickly became clear, was not simply to "expose" their political opponents. Instead, they saw and seized upon the opportunity that had suddenly been created to stage the decisive power struggle before the elections.

They could see a possibility for the National Socialists' plan to succeed. Should the Social Democrats join the others in resigning the government could fall: Gottwald would be entrusted by Beneš to form another government but would be unable to persuade the other parties to join it. The only possibility then would be a government of officials. Alternatively, if the KSČ tried to maintain the government, then Beneš could refuse to accept the resignations and the resigning ministers would return with Presidential approval so that the government majority could block the activities of KSČ Ministers one after another¹.

Nevertheless, the resignations were a blunder because they left the KSČ holding positions of power while seeming to confirm precisely what the Communists had wanted to prove, i.e. that the three re-

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¹Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.362.

signing parties were opposed to the completion of the government programme and were scared of the Congresses of Factory Councils and Peasant Commissions. The police, the KSČ believed, was for most ordinary people not a central issue so that the KSČ were left with "more or less all the trumps" in their hand². They therefore took an absolutely firm stand from the start portraying the resignations in the most dramatic terms possible as an abandonment of the National Front and transition to the opposition. A call was issued for the mobilisation "of all the strength of the working people for the support of K. Gottwald's government", and for the creation of a "firm National Front which would create a safe support for K. Gottwald's government"³.

This meant maintaining that the resignations need not lead to immediate dissolution of the government. This was a constitutionally acceptable position as the chairman and a majority of the ministers were still in office. Moreover, the President had no constitutional right to demand its resignation unless parliament passed a vote of no confidence. Gottwald presented this view to the President adding that he could not accept back those who had resigned. This was the crucial point as it meant that he was seizing the opportunity to demand a complete change in the character of the government. Beneš, however, refused to accept the ministers' resignations⁴.

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² Gottwald, speaking at the KSČ Central Committee meeting of 9/4/48, Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.363.

³ Resolution of the KSČ Presidium meeting of 20/2/48, RP 21/2/48, p.1.

⁴ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.130-131.

Gottwald's firm stand won immediate widespread popular support: this was a pleasant surprise for Communist activists⁵ who had only just before been reporting signs of difficulties⁶. The day after the resignations, at a huge rally called in Prague's Old Town Square, Gottwald made the KSČ position even clearer. He argued that Nosek was doing everything legally and constitutionally and ridiculed the accusations of a "police regime", "terror" and "gestapism". He claimed that the real issue was much wider and that it involved the creation of a bloc preventing the government from proceeding with the normal conduct of its business. Although he accepted that the immediate aim behind the resignations was not to expel the KSČ from the government⁷, he still claimed that it was part of an attempt, stemming from "reaction", to destroy the National Front, to break the alliance with the USSR and "to gradually annul everything that has been brought to the people by the national revolution and liberation"⁸. Finally, he argued that a solution to the crisis had to be found "constitutionally, democratically and parliamentarily - on the basis of a broad National Front"⁹. A new government should be formed with the support of "progressive and democratic forces in all political parties and all-national organisations": its task would be simply to complete the existing government programme¹⁰.

⁵ e.g. Bouček: Praha, p.140-141.

⁶ Bouček: Praha, p.123-124.

⁷ Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.266-267.

⁸ Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.251.

⁹ Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.252.

¹⁰ Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.253.

So, essentially, Gottwald tried to portray the crisis as a threat to all the revolutionary gains while presenting KSČ policy as no more than continuity with the existing immediate programme. There was no difficulty in mobilising support for this position and huge demonstrations were held in all major towns on 21/2/48. Meetings were held in factories showing the strength of feeling in the working class. In ČKD-Libeň, for example, according to the most hostile account an early morning meeting of all employees was warned by the chairman that anyone voting against "excludes himself from the factory" and that "workers will not work with him". Only one voted against and he was escorted out¹¹.

Sometimes such meetings might support the position taken by the Social Democrats¹². In the ČKD central office in Karlín, for example, a resolution was passed for maintaining the unity of the National Front on the basis of democratic cooperation. The National Front was to discuss all disputed questions like the constitution and proposed laws and there were to be further nationalisations achieved "by the calm and democratic agreement of the parties of the National Front . . ."¹³. There was, however, no sign of mobilisation among the supporters of the other parties. Rather there were signs of disagreement or doubt from their members about

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¹¹SS 22/2/48, p.3.

¹²See below Section VI.38.6.

¹³PL 21/2/48, p.2.

the correctness of the resignations¹⁴. The causes of their paralysis are discussed in more detail in the next chapter, but were revealed to some extent at the Congress of Factory Councils on 22/2/48.

VI.37.2. Opposition to the Communists' position evaporates at the Congress of Factory Councils.

This congress, although attended by only 8,030 delegates, was referred to at the time as a great parliament of the working people. It was addressed by Gottwald, Zápotocký and E. Erban and there then followed a fairly wide-ranging discussion around a draft resolution prepared by the trade union leadership apparently on the basis of resolutions received from basic organisations over the preceding days. The government crisis was naturally at the centre of attention, and there were several very militant expressions of the Communists' view of its origins. Nevertheless, it was remarkable how many contributors evaded directly taking sides in the crisis, and concentrated on the social issues more typically associated with trade unions.

It was also remarkable that the expected opposition, which could conceivably have been supported by one third of the delegates, proved quite incapable of presenting a coherent position. A. Vandrovec's speech was largely ambiguous: he claimed to unconditionally support the proposed social insurance scheme and further nationalisations, but then referred to reservations on

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¹⁴ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.169-170.

some further unspecified points. He therefore wanted to be able to vote on the final resolution in parts rather than taking it as a whole¹⁵. Šplíchalová was even more vague¹⁶. This contrasted pathetically with Ripka's attempt only a few days before, on 19/2/48, to argue to the National Socialist delegates to the congress that all the ÚRO suggestions were either bad or somehow unreasonable. He had particularly opposed the idea of further nationalisations¹⁷. Presumably it would have been politically suicidal to say that in public.

In the end the resolution was taken as a whole and Zápotocký ridiculed those who wanted to split up the concrete demands from proposals for action. That, he said would be "cheap demagoguery"¹⁸. The resolution itself included a preamble analysing the general political situation and claiming that reaction was trying to reverse the development of People's Democracy. This was put in a fairly general way and did not contain direct references to the government crisis. The core of the resolution was a set of five demands: the passing of the social insurance law without delay, passing the new constitution, accepting the ÚRO proposal on civil servants' pay, further nationalisations and rejection of any attempts to denationalise nationalised firms. There was also a general expression of support for peasants' demands concerning land reform and finally a definite

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¹⁵Lehár: Sjezd, p.72-73, and SS 24/2/48, p.3.

¹⁶Lehár: Sjezd, p.81-83.

¹⁷Bouček: Praha, p.139-140.

¹⁸Lehár: Sjezd, p.103.

proposal for a one-hour stoppage of work on 24/2/48 in all factories and offices so that all employees could be informed of the results of the Congress¹⁹. According to the official account only ten votes were cast against the resolution.

Attention then turned to the one-hour general strike which proved to be extraordinarily successful. In Prague 200,300 took part there were only 98 strike breakers: 96% then voted for the Congress resolution²⁰. Similar figures were produced for other parts of the country although it is difficult to calculate with accuracy as it is not always clear what resolutions were passed. One estimate suggests that 4% voted against while 5% voted for resolutions not containing all the demands²¹. It is at least clear that, alongside the effective unanimity of the working class, many offices joined in too. Even the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Masaryk himself took part: only 32 out of 24,000 factories and offices refused to strike²².

The general strike appeared to confirm the disappearance of any organised force opposing the KSČ. Behind this apparent unanimity, however, was considerable differentiation: office workers were by no means as definite as manual workers and could be expected to view some of the Congress' demands with suspicion, particularly on the question of civil servants' pay. They often reached their

¹⁹Lehár: Sjezd, p.104-106.

²⁰Práce, 25/2/48, p.1.

²¹Bouček: Praha, p.231.

²²Růžicka: ROH, p.278.

decisions in the presence of delegations of workers from big factories who seem to have been pretty blunt in expressing their views on the situation²³. The response from many office workers, therefore probably stemmed from fear, confusion and disorientation rather than firm commitment.

Nevertheless, the KSČ felt themselves strong enough to demand that, if Beneš did not accept the proposals for a new government which Gottwald had by then prepared, there would be a full general strike²⁴. They firmly opposed a subtle compromise solution whereby different representatives of the same parties would be accepted into the government²⁵ and, claiming that the old National Front had been abandoned by the resigning ministers, they set about preparing a new National Front which was to be a solid support for the Gottwald government and its programme.

Action Committees, presented as the organs of this new National Front, began appearing on 23/2/48. That evening a Central Action Committee was established following an initiative from ÚRD²⁶ and the KSČ. It is not clear who was invited, but a number of mass organisations and the left within the People's Party were present. The Social Democrats sent observers, but no National Socialists were present. Perhaps most important of all, the

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²³ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.270.

²⁴ Even this was seen by the KSČ leaders as a further demonstration of public opinion rather than a final show-down as it was intended to last for only one day; Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.287-288.

²⁵ Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.270-271.

²⁶ This had been proposed and voted on at the Congress of Factory Councils; Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.191.

commanders of the army attended²⁷.

After this it appeared that the KSČ had enough support from groups within the National Socialist and People's Parties, and also from Šrobár's Freedom Party, to guarantee a parliamentary majority. There was therefore no opposition to delaying the meeting of parliament scheduled for 24/2/48²⁸.

VI.37.3. The Communist Party increasingly exploits positions of power to suppress opposition activities and to restrict the expression of alternative views.

While the mobilisation of mass support for Gottwald's demands was the main task of party organisations and the main means of preventing the development of any coherent opposition, the KSČ also had no compunctions about using the organs it dominated to ensure a fundamental change in political power. This was in no sense an alternative to the mobilisation of public opinion.

Particularly after the Congress of Factory Councils had confirmed paralysis of potential opposition, the involvement of the police became more direct thereby ensuring that the National Socialists, rather than suffering a single major setback, were completely defeated.

The KSČ seem to have been even less restrained in exploiting control of the radio. This was an extremely useful instrument for encouraging mass mobilisation as events such as the Congress of Factory Councils, Gottwald's pronouncements, workers' demonstra-

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²⁷ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.241-250.

²⁸ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.238-239.

tions and the allegations about preparations for a coup from within the National Socialist Party²⁹, could all be given maximum publicity. Laštovička also had no hesitation in preventing anyone likely to oppose the KSČ view of events from broadcasting³⁰. Majer apparently tried unsuccessfully to challenge this while a whole number of employees of the radio simply received dismissal notices through the post³¹.

The press was more difficult to control, but the KSČ Presidium on 21/2/48 discussed ways for the union of print workers to limit the amount of paper for some newspapers. In fact, the initiative had already been taken by workers in paper mills stopping the paper supplies so that National Socialist and People's Party publications would have been stopped within a week³².

A pretext for more direct measures was the discovery of what organs of the Ministries of Defence and of the Interior presented as a plot by National Socialists to seize power. Their evidence suggested that National Socialists in the army and police were preparing to distribute arms to reliable party members³³. There was no proof of direct contacts with the party's top leadership - although Hora was soon accused of keeping contacts with the plotters³⁴.

²⁹ See below.

³⁰ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.143.

³¹ PL 22/2/48, p.2.

³² Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.165.

³³ RP 24/2/48, p.1.

³⁴ RP 25/2/48, p.1.

- and it could all have been little more than an amateurish escapade.

Nevertheless, the police took it as a reason for searching offices of both the National Socialist and People's Parties on 23/2/48. They took away some written material³⁵, but made no arrests³⁶. The National Socialists, previously full of rhetoric, responded very meekly: the police were accused of illegal actions in searching premises and confiscating documents, but the charge that some sort of plot had existed was not denied. Instead, the party's Presidium expressed their inability to comment and gave an assurance that "they would defend noone who could be proven by a proper court to have committed an offence". Simultaneously, they rejected any attempt to link the party as a whole or the leadership with any anti-state activities³⁷.

Legal proceedings were later started against the National Socialist MPs Krajina, Hora and Čížek. Accusations included the establishment of an intelligence network in the police and army and a plan to make arms available to members of their party³⁸. These accusations are in no sense ridiculous: there obviously was some sort of intelligence network providing inside information on the police force, and Ripka seems to have been fully aware of plans

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³⁵ Svobodné noviny, 24/2/48, p.2.

³⁶ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.230.

³⁷ SS 24/2/48, p.1.

³⁸ RP 19/3/48, p.2.

to organise serious defensive actions should the KSČ attempt to stage a coup³⁹.

At the time, though, the KSČ willingly exaggerated the significance of the police discoveries so as to accuse the National Socialists of preparing a putch. While assessing "reaction's" chances "very realistically"⁴⁰, the KSČ took full advantage of the atmosphere created by these allegations. National Socialist organisations were, for example, forbidden in power stations on grounds of state security⁴¹. The Ministry of the Interior acted on 24/2/48 to ban public meetings of all the parties whose ministers had resigned because, it was claimed, such meetings were being used to attack the government⁴². On the same day the Ministry of the Interior ordered, "in the interests of law and order", that measures should be taken "to stop the further systematic spreading of lies and false reports" by the National Socialist's publishing house: this involved removing the senior editorial staff⁴³.

VI.37.4. The Communists are prepared for the eventuality of an armed conflict, but nobody even attempts to use armed force against them.

Although the Communists were able to achieve their aims with-

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³⁹ Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.262.

⁴⁰ J. Pavel: "Hlavní štáb Lidových milicí v Únoru", Pražské milice v Únoru, Praha, 1964, p.20.

⁴¹ RP 26/2/48, p.3.

⁴² Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.213.

⁴³ RP 25/2/48, p.1, and RP 26/2/48, p.3.

out any armed clashes, their position within the police force was certainly a great help. They were in a position to direct particularly reliable units into Prague where the decisive struggle was taking place. Already before the crisis had broken a special unit that had been formed out of frontier guards to fight the Banderovci was brought from Eastern Slovakia to locations near Prague⁴⁴. On 20/2/48 they were brought into Prague itself and on 23/2/48 they took up positions guarding communications, public places and members of the government⁴⁵. This must have further demoralised any potential opposition.

At the same time, the unquestioning loyalty of the ordinary police, who were armed with rifles and small machine guns, was assured by the way crisis developed. They were simply asked to stand by the country's legal government which seemed to be quite capable of maintaining the loyalty of the population. Moreover, many policemen could interpret the National Socialist accusations as an attack on all of them while workers' resolutions often expressed "solidarity with the police".

The possibility was always present that the army could intervene against the KSČ and there seems to have been some hope that Beneš, as its supreme commander, might order some sort of action⁴⁶. Had a situation arisen in which the KSČ had been

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⁴⁴ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.133, and Kroupa: "Únor", p.96.

⁴⁵ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.212 and p.213.

⁴⁶ Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.280.

politically isolated and then attempted a putch, the great majority of the army could well have been mobilised against them. This, however, was not how the political situation developed and it is very difficult to see how the army could have been used against the legal government.

The KSČ did fear the possibility of part of the army answering a call to move against them⁴⁷, but believed that they too could rely on some army units⁴⁸. Among these was a tank brigade located close to Prague⁴⁹. In this situation any direct intervention against the KSČ by a part of the army, even if ordered by Beneš, could only have led to a bloody clash with no certainty of success and no guarantee of a stable political future afterwards. This would have been a type of action very distant from Beneš's conception of politics and with extremely dangerous international implications. It is therefore not surprising that he made no actual approaches to the army⁵⁰ but instead insisted on a peaceful solution to the crisis.

So, instead of intervening decisively on either side, the army commanders gave, on 23/2/48, an emphatic order that the army should keep out of internal political disputes and remain loyal to its supreme commander - Beneš - and to the alliance with the USSR⁵¹.

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⁴⁷ Pavel: "Hlavní", p.24-25.

⁴⁸ Pavel: "Hlavní", p.21-22.

⁴⁹ J. Lipták, Špičák: "Únor", p.161-162.

⁵⁰ J. Lipták, Špičák: "Únor", p.167.

⁵¹ PL 25/2/48, p.1.

This did not prevent the same commanders from attending the founding meeting of the Central Action Committee⁵² and there is also evidence of army officers being involved at lower levels in the creation of Action Committees⁵³. This did not decisively alter the situation: rather it confirmed the inability of the army to play a role independent of the general political tide.

Alongside the police and army the KSČ created a further armed force on which they could rely completely. This was the People's Militia which appeared as a small force of reliable KSČ members with the task of policing and ensuring control in factories. Militia groups seem to have been very hastily organised⁵⁴ and generally made their first public appearances on 23/2/48. Their first task then was to ensure unanimity in the general strike and the mere sight of even a few armed men in factories was enough to ensure the disappearance of any opposition⁵⁵. They were also concerned in Prague with ensuring physical dominance in the centre of town and preventing "larger gatherings of reaction"⁵⁶.

They must have strengthened the tendency towards demoralisation and resignation among anti-KSČ forces, but as^a real military force they were insignificant. Over the whole country there were probably

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⁵² The exact reasons for this decision have never been explained as Svoboda soon buried his differences with the KSČ. Perhaps his reasoning was similar to that of the left-wing Social Democrats.

⁵³ J. Lipták, Špičák: "Únor", p.159-160.

⁵⁴ See Pavel: "Hlavní".

⁵⁵ Bradáč: Lidové, p.92.

⁵⁶ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.216.

15,000 - 18,000 with 6,550 in Prague⁵⁷. They often had difficulty in acquiring arms and, in Ostrava for example, started with a motley collection from the old Factory Militia, from weapons kept in people's homes and from the police⁵⁸. In some places they were assured that the army would provide arms if it proved necessary⁵⁹, but in Prague 10,000 rifles and 2,000 machine guns were brought under police escort from Zbrojovka-Brno⁶⁰.

On the night of 24-25/2/48 the KSČ leadership decided on this full arming of the new militia force and simultaneously presented Beneš with a full proposal for the composition of a new government⁶¹. The militia really became established in the factories as victory was announced⁶².

VI.37.5. Summary and discussion.

The course of the February crisis was dominated by the Communists' determined response to the resignations. Instead of yielding, they demanded of Beneš that he accept the resignations and allow the vacant posts to ^{be} filled by ministers of Gottwald's choosing. They thereby converted the government crisis into the

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⁵⁷ Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.251.

⁵⁸ Bradáč: Lidové, p.83-84.

⁵⁹ H. Konečný, Cesta k vítězství, p.25.

⁶¹ F. Sova: "Lidové milice - věrná stráž revolučních vymožeností pracujícího lidu", Únor a československé, p.30.

⁶⁰ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.217.

⁶² Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.307.

decisive struggle for power. They used all their strength, including positions in the media and police force, to ensure a favourable outcome, but their first consideration was a massive mobilisation of their supporters.

This led, as could have been predicted from the experience over the millionaires' tax, to the fragmentation and paralysis of the other parties. Their weaknesses were clearly exposed at the Congress of Factory Councils which almost unanimously backed the KSC demands for continuing with the existing government programme plus the further nationalisations. Although several speakers had doubts and reservations, nobody could express outright opposition. Neither did anybody try to raise further issues such as the Communist domination of the police force.

This congress marked the implicit public political defeat of the National Socialists' position. This was confirmed by the success of a one-hour general strike. It meant that, if there had ever been any doubts, the KSC could then move to the next stage of solving the crisis on their own terms. With the argument that the old National Front had failed, steps were taken to establish a new one under a Central Action Committee which was supported by the army commanders and which incorporated elements from other parties who could help fill the vacant posts in the government.

To ensure a speedy favourable outcome to the crisis, increasingly repressive measures were used against the right-wing parties. A pretext was found for this in allegations, based on a great exaggeration of evidence, that National Socialists had conspired to seize power by force. It meant that, only a few days after the

resignations, the National Socialists were being effectively silenced.

With victory looking imminent, the KSC even created a further armed force, the People's Militia, which was completely under their own control.

In assessing Communist tactics during the February crisis, the question invariably arises of whether their behaviour remained within the constitution. This issue was given prominence particularly by emigré writers who wanted to portray the KSC as a brutal usurper of power riding roughshod over all legal norms. They could hardly claim that the overall solution to the crisis was counter to the constitution, but they could point with more justification to aspects of KSC tactics which went beyond the mobilisation of opinion. Examples were the activities of Action Committees and the creation of the People's Militia which were only legalised retrospectively.

Nevertheless, the controversies around the constitutionality of February can lead to evasion of the central issues on both sides. They provide an apparent explanation for the defeat of the resigning ministers thereby diverting attention from their political weaknesses which are discussed in the next chapter. Alternatively, the general constitutionality of the solution to the crisis can be presented as a cover or even justification for the real essence of the change which was the complete transformation of the political power structure.

CHAPTER 38: THE PARALYSIS AND CAPITULATION OF POTENTIALLY
ANTI-COMMUNIST FORCES DURING THE FEBRUARY CRISIS.

VI.38.1. The need to explain the easy Communist victory.

On 25/2/48 Beneš, presented with a list of names for Gottwald's new government and faced with yet another huge demonstration of public support for KSČ policy, finally yielded. The crisis ended with the formation of an effectively new government in which the parties that had resigned lost posts to the KSČ, ÚRO and the Freedom Party. The Social Democrats and Slovak Communists retained exactly the same positions as before, but the Government Presidium was fundamentally altered. The precise situation is shown below.

This meant that the resignations, far from forcing the KSČ to make concessions, had given the Communists the opportunity to completely transform the situation within the government. With remarkable speed, a minimum of violence and without over-ruling the existing constitutional framework, the KSČ had excluded from power their main opponents.

This easy victory was partly a consequence of their own tactics and of their ability to mobilise massive support. It must also be seen as a consequence of the failure of any potential opposition to raise significant support and then of the conscious decisions by army commanders, Social Democrats, elements of the National Socialist and People's Parties and ultimately Beneš himself to accept the Communists' demands. The reasons for this, it is argued below, must be sought in the restrictions imposed on the various potentially anti-Communist forces by the international

Table 29: Czechoslovak Government from 25/2/48¹.

Prime Minister	K. Gottwald	(KSČ)
Deputy Prime Ministers	V. Široký	(KSS)
	A. Zápotocký	(ÚRO)
	B. Laušman	(SD)
Foreign Affairs	J. Masaryk	(non-party)
National Defence	L. Svoboda	(non-party)
Foreign Trade	A. Gregor	(KSČ)
Interior	V. Nosek	(KSČ)
Finance	J. Dolanský	(KSČ)
Education	Z. Nejedlý	(KSČ)
Justice	A. Čepička	(KSČ)
Information	V. Kopecký	(KSČ)
Industry	Z. Fierlinger	(SD)
Agriculture	J. Ďuriš	(KSS)
Internal Trade	F. Krajčír	(KSČ)
Transport	A. Petr	(LS)
Posts	A. Neuman	(NS)
Social Security	E. Erban	(ÚRO)
Health	J. Plojhar	(LS)
Food Supply	L. Jarkovcová	(SD)
Technology	E. Šlechta	(NS)
Unification of Laws	V. Šrobár	(Freedom Party)
State Secretary for Foreign Affairs	V. Clementis	(KSS)
State Secretary for National Defence	J. Ševčík	(Party of Slovak Revival)
(see below Section VI.38.7)		

¹Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.366.

situation, by the weaknesses in their own political philosophies and by the KSČ tactics which served to highlight all their inadequacies.

VI.38.2. The international situation is a major factor preventing the National Socialists from vigorously posing an alternative to the Communists' policies.

During the autumn of 1947 the National Socialists had possibly been seeking to win friends in the USA with their anti-Communist rhetoric. During the February crisis this was no longer an adequate basis for foreign policy. To mobilise any mass support, and even to hold their own party together, they had to be able to pose a real alternative to KSČ policy. The trouble, from their point of view, was that the US had little interest in helping them. There therefore seemed to be no practical alternative to the implicit KSČ line of incorporation into a Soviet bloc.

There were still lingering hopes of establishing closer relations with the USA and the US ambassador Steinhardt returned to Prague just as the crisis broke expressing the continuing hope that Czechoslovakia would reconsider its decision about the Marshall plan². Previously Steinhardt had made the limp offer that, if questions of compensation for US citizens for property that had been nationalised and other issues relating to trade between the two countries could be settled to the satisfaction of the US government, then it would "be possible to consider again the Czechoslovak request for a loan of 20 million dollars for the purchase

²SS 21/2/48, p.3.

of cotton . . ."³.

There was some US interest in influencing the political situation in Czechoslovakia and consideration was being given to a trade agreement, a gesture on cultural relations and publication of documents on the liberation of Prague⁴. Restraint was probably generated in important places in the US by doubts about the significance of events in Czechoslovakia: Marshall later argued that the February events merely confirmed the existing situation as Czechoslovakia had for three years been a close ally of the USSR in international affairs⁵. So suggestions of the usefulness of a political gesture were linked with exaggerated reports - quite unrepeatable inside Czechoslovakia - that, if the KSČ did not gain substantially in the elections, Beneš would replace Gottwald with a non-Communist Prime Minister⁶.

The US State Department was, however, seemingly unconvinced by such arguments and made no gesture that could have influenced the course of the February crisis. This contrasted with the Soviet position, represented by Deputy Foreign Minister Zorin who arrived

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³ SS 11/2/48, p.1.

⁴ Foreign Relations United States 1948, Vol IV, Washington, 1974, p.733. The last point was a reference to a fierce debate that had started in the Czechoslovak press between the KSČ, who claimed that the US army had failed to liberate Prague thereby showing a lack of interest in Czechoslovakia's fate, and Peroutka's papers in which it was claimed that the Soviet Union had prevented the US army from liberating Prague and therefore could not be regarded as a completely reliable ally.

⁵ Foreign Relations 1948, p.736.

⁶ Foreign Relations 1948, p.734.

in Prague at the same time as Steinhardt. He could offer more concrete economic assistance with the deal for supplying wheat. This followed negotiations through the autumn and was given enormous publicity by the KSČ because of its political potential. In fact there was no gift as the wheat had to be paid for with industrial goods⁷ and this meant that shortages were simply shifted elsewhere. Nevertheless, it could be presented as a very good omen for the future because firm long-term trade agreements with other Slavonic states were guaranteeing 40% of Czechoslovakia's exports and imports⁸.

Zorin also made clear that Soviet interest went beyond trade agreements as he expressed Soviet concern over the allegedly anti-Soviet articles appearing in part of the Czechoslovak press⁹. During the crisis itself the official Soviet position was presented in the Soviet press and then quoted back inside Czechoslovakia¹⁰. This could further paralyse the National Socialists particularly when the issue of relations with the USSR was thrust into the centre of political attention by the founding congress of the Union of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship on 22/2/48. All the papers reported on this fully and highly favourably.

It is also possible that Soviet concern over Czechoslovakia was so great that Stalin positively wanted the KSČ to ask for

⁷ Stručný, p.355.

⁸ Hospodář, 18/12/47, p.1.

⁹ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.107.

¹⁰ RP 23/2/48, p.1.

Soviet military assistance to establish a full monopoly of power. He was, it has been claimed, well informed of doubts within the KSČ leadership about the chances of winning an electoral victory¹¹. In practice Gottwald gave no hint of suggesting that he felt outside assistance would be necessary.

VI.38.3. Beneš tries to find a compromise solution to the crisis, but ultimately sees no alternative to accepting the Communists' demands.

Ultimately it was Beneš's concession to the KSČ, acceptance of the resignations and approval of a new government that ended the crisis. This has even led to some attempts among later emigré writers to place some blame on him for the outcome of the February crisis. This could be related to the concrete question of whether he knew of and approved the resignations beforehand in which case he could be accused of selling out. It is certainly difficult to believe that he was not consulted, but he may well have been ignorant of the risks and uncertainties involved and particularly of the likelihood of the Social Democrats also resigning from the government¹². There is no reason to doubt that he shared the hopes of the resigning ministers and he may well have ^{given} them some encouragement¹³. Nevertheless, a difference soon began to show between Beneš and the National Socialist leaders because of the former's sober and realistic assessment of the actual situation.

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¹¹ J. Švec: Únor, p.201-202.

¹² See Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.219-220. Peroutka claimed that Beneš indisputably and definitely promised not to accept the resignations; Peroutka: Byl, p.25.

¹³ Apart from emigré sources, this was suggested ^{by} Gottwald at the Central Committee meeting of 17/11/48, K. Gottwald: Spisy, Vol. XV, Praha, p.137.

The difference really showed as the KSČ steadily mobilised support. First of all Beneš surprised the resigning National Socialist ministers when he did not demand the resignation of the whole government¹⁴. It would anyway have been a pointless gesture as the constitution did not allow him such power and if he abandoned the constitution then the KSČ too would be free to do so. Nevertheless, it indicated Beneš's acceptance of the implications of the fact that a solution to the crisis had to be found by agreement with the KSČ.

His position was expressed concisely to a delegation of workers led by Kozelka, who was chairman of both the ČKD-Libeň Factory Council and the Prague Trade Union Council, who argued that he had to yield to the massive demonstrations of support for the KSČ position. Beneš was apparently visibly shaken and snapped back: "We have not reached the stage yet when the street decides whether I as President should or should not accept the resignations"¹⁵ He followed this with an insistence that a solution to the crisis must be reached by compromise. He said that he understood when the workers' representatives suggested that they were willing to confront civil war rather than retreat, but maintained that he would not allow anyone to be excluded from the government. "You can rely on me both now and in the future not to accept anything in any situation that would mean excluding one ^{or} other group from participation in the government . . ."¹⁶.

14 Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.236.

15 Kozelka: Vzpomínky, p.183.

16 Kozelka: Vzpomínky, p.184, and SS 22/2/48, p.1.

He seems to have hoped that a compromise would still be possible with Gottwald accepting the renewal of a similar sort of government at least as a temporary expedient¹⁷, but this was tantamount to leaving the initiative in Gottwald's hands. By 22/2/48 he was becoming increasingly aware of the seriousness of the situation and expressed to Laušman fears that there could be civil war: he was beginning to conclude that he had to accept the Communists' demands¹⁸.

The point, then, was not just the mobilisation of public opinion, but the way how the KSČ was heightening the crisis into a struggle for power. This left Beneš ultimately with the choice between conceding or using every means available to fight the KSČ. The latter course seemed hopeless: at the very best, given the realities of the international situation, it could only hope to force active Soviet intervention. To Beneš that would be a disaster as he could see no future for Czechoslovakia against the USSR. Ripka, however, seems to have been quite willing to base his hopes on yet another war in which he thought the USSR would be defeated. He suggested that he would have succeeded if it could be shown that a Communist regime could be instituted only by violence¹⁹, and that if there were Soviet intervention then it would be clear that external aggression had happened. He could

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¹⁷Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.156, quoting from Smutný's account.

¹⁸Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.206-207, quoting from Smutný's account.

¹⁹Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.203.

once more go into emigration and await a later victory. Beneš dismissed this as totally unrealistic²⁰. Instead, as the KSČ heightened their campaigning and even began to demonstrate their ability and willingness to utilise organs of power, he lost interest in talking to the National Socialist leaders, accepted the resignations and approved Gottwald's new government²¹.

VI.38.4. The National Socialists are paralysed by their inability to present a consistent and coherent policy.

Perhaps Beneš would have resisted the KSČ demands far more stubbornly if there had been any sign of active mass support for the National Socialists. They, however, seem to have assumed that the crisis would remain confined within the government and restricted to the single issue over which they had offered their resignations. They therefore made no attempt to mobilise support, although they apparently planned to hold public meetings on 24, 25 and 26/2/48, when they believed negotiations would be taking place for a new government²². By that time, however, they were split internally, divided from potential allies, subjected to police repression and generally in a state of total demoralisation.

This paralysis stemmed in the first instance from the weaknesses in the National Socialist Party which were brought into the open by the Congress of Factory Councils and by the vigorous activities

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²⁰ Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.257.

²¹ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.297.

²² Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.247.

of the KSČ. The crisis was then posed to the mass of the population as a far more general one. To mobilise any widespread support the National Socialists had to be able to formulate convincing and realistic aims. This, owing to the international situation and to the fact that they had to a great extent initiated the crisis precisely so as to avoid commenting on the issues raised at the Congress of Factory Councils, the National Socialists were unable to do. Instead, they soon found themselves playing down the breadth and scope of the crisis.

Behind this lay crippling contradictions in their position. On the one hand they had refused to come to a National Front meeting and had even resigned from the government: this seemed to suggest that they saw conflicts as becoming irreconcilable. On the other hand they could not seriously advocate a government without Communists - apart from any other considerations that would expose them without question as disrupters of the National Front - and that meant that they could only advocate a return to the previous National Front. If they called for immediate elections, and they had previously advocated this if the constitution could not be agreed on²³, that still left the same unanswered questions about their future intentions. Did it mean that they opposed completion of the government programme? Did it mean that they thought co-operation between parties would be ended after the elections? Why, if they did not oppose the workers' demands, could they not

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²³SS 7/2/48, p.1.

have continued in the government or, as a minimum gesture, expressed full support for them? Finally why, if they really feared a police state, had they chosen to resign from the government? If they really believed the Communists wanted to seize power it would be hard to think of any more naive act.

Instead of clarifying their position and answering the questions that were being raised by their own initiation of the crisis, they started off by trying to claim that it was completely untrue that the trouble in the government was caused by the unwillingness of some parties to allow the passing of the remaining laws. Unconvincingly they claimed ". . . we have it firmly assured that the only cause of the critical situation in the government is the question of the security and police services . . .", adding "We beg the public not to believe that we want to defend capitalists, land-owners and reactionaries . . ." ²⁴. As they could not prove this by actively propagating the measures advocated by the Factory Councils, their whole attitude must have appeared two-faced and hypocritical particularly to many workers.

In fact, in an attempt to minimise the importance of the crisis, National Socialists on the Factory Council at Walter-Jinonice even voted against calling a meeting of the whole factory ²⁵.

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²⁴ SS 21/2/48, p.2 and p.1. It was very noticeable that the powerful anti-Communist rhetoric of earlier months was suddenly toned down. Presumably, realising that they could not mobilise active support of their own, the National Socialists hoped thereby to discourage the mobilisation of support for the KSC demands.

²⁵ LD 22/2/48, p.2.

Leading National Socialist trade unionists then failed to present a coherent position at the Congress of Factory Councils and the National Socialist Presidium followed this with a completely ambivalent attitude towards the one-hour general strike. While not advocating anything they did not oppose participation "in the interests of calm in the factories and work places . . ." ²⁶. At the same time, they maintained that the old National Front was still in existence so that there was no need for Action Committees ²⁷.

There were some attempts to mobilise support in Prague but the biggest was a student demonstration which, according to the most optimistic account, had a total strength of only 9,000 ²⁸. It presented no positive proposals, did not emphasise the original National Socialist demands concerning the police force and instead just expressed its loyalty to President Beneš. Two days later a similar demonstration led to a confrontation with the police and during this a policeman's machine gun was accidentally fired lightly wounding a student. Apparently this was the only serious violence during the whole crisis ²⁹.

This suggests that the great majority of National Socialists could find no counter to the Communists' position. It is therefore

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²⁶ SS 24/2/48, p.1.

²⁷ Presidium resolution, SS 24/2/48, p.1.

²⁸ SS 24/2/48, p.2. According to other estimates, there were only 2000 participants; Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.250.

²⁹ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.311.

not surprising, although presumably the resigning ministers did not realise that this was going to happen, that many people who had been unconvinced a few days before when the Communists had been arguing that disagreements were not trivial but represented conflicts between two fundamentally different conceptions of development, should suddenly revise their opinions³⁰. Those Communists who had for months been fruitlessly seeking firm allies in other parties, but had been unable even to convince Social Democrats that Zenkl would betray socialism, suddenly found that their work had been done for them by the resignations³¹. Not surprisingly, some National Socialist leaders began to accept the inevitability of complying with the KSČ desires. One such group was represented by the trade union leaders Koltán and Mátl who followed through the logic of the whole party's compliance with the general strike to argue: "In the interests of peace and order in the factories we recommend that trade unionists of the National Socialist Party should join the Action Committees and cooperate with members of the other political parties . . ."³². They joined with A. Neumann and the economist Šlechta to form, on 24/2/48, an Action Committee inside the National Socialist Party³³: they thereby supported Gottwald's efforts to create a new government.

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³⁰ Bouček: Praha, p.134-135.

³¹ J. Nosek, Cesta k vítězství, p.16-17.

³² PL 25/2/48, p.2.

³³ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.277.

VI.38.5. The People's Party cannot present a clear and united position either.

Even though the resignations were coordinated, the two Czech right-wing parties seemed only to have reached agreement on a single tactical step. They could not present a united position throughout the crisis. The People's Party started off just as vague about their aims and contented themselves with denying that resignation from the government automatically meant resignation from the National Front. Their solution to the crisis was for the KSČ to accept certain conditions which they vaguely summarised as "respect for laws . . ."³⁴ There was absolutely no mention of the issues to be brought before the Congress of Factory Councils and Hála felt free to oppose the one-hour general strike on the grounds that everyone should be working³⁵.

Finally the party's Executive Committee expressed their aim in a letter to Beneš in which they could see ". . .no other way out of the present crisis apart from an early calling of elections for which the present government, in a state of resignation, would be trusted with conducting the normal course of government until after the elections. That is the road known to our constitution"³⁶. Presumably this meant that the government programme was not to be completed and that Beneš, even though he lacked the constitutional right to do so, should formally dissolve the government.

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³⁴LD 21/2/48, p.1.

³⁵LD 22/2/48, p.1.

³⁶LD 24/2/48, p.1.

Alongside the general confusion in the People's Party there seems also to have been wider differentiation in interpretations of the likely outcome of the resignations. A number of prominent figures simply disappeared and reports, which were not denied, began to appear suggesting that Tigríd had left for West Germany even before the crisis started. This made it very easy to portray him and his political associates as agents of Western imperialism³⁷. It must also have further strengthened feelings of resignation and defeatism in the People's Party and thereby helped the small left-wing group that approached Gottwald 20/2/48 to indicate disagreement with the resignations³⁸. By 25/2/48 they had been able to assume control of the party's publishing house and propagated the view that Gottwald's suggestion was the only way out of the crisis³⁹.

VI.38.6. The Social Democrats waver and vacillate while the Communists build up their campaign. Ultimately the majority of Social Democrat leaders see no alternative to accepting Gottwald's demands.

Had the Social Democrats resigned from the government, along with the other parties, then the course of the crisis might have been very different. They, however, were unable to accept the full implications of resigning. They rejected thoughts either of a government of officials or of a majority government⁴⁰ and in-

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³⁷ Mladá fronta 22/2/48, p.1, and RP 25/2/48, p.1.

³⁸ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.137.

³⁹ LD 25/2/48, p.1.

⁴⁰ The KSČ made this offer to them on 19/2/48 suggesting that two fifths of government posts could go to Social Democrats; Nedvěd: Cesta, p.61.

sisted instead on continuing with the existing government until the elections⁴¹.

The point was that, although even many on the left of the party viewed with apprehension the aims of the KSČ, the Social Democrats disagreed with the National Socialists on many other issues. So, instead of joining one side or the other, the Social Democrats condemned both - the resignations were described as over-hasty while the Communists' vigorous response was criticised for making further cooperation more difficult - and set themselves the task of bringing the two sides together "on the platform of the hitherto existing National Front . . ."⁴².

This was fully consistent with their approach over the preceding months and was the only basis for overcoming the potentially sharp differences within the party. Majer, on the extreme right wing, favoured joining the resignations. On the left were voices for negotiating with the KSČ on the basis of the proposal for a government without the parties that had resigned⁴³. At first, however, the centrist position retained dominance and was also able to keep the party from completely fragmenting: thus the Prague leadership could unanimously recommend the expulsion of V. Koušová-Petránková who spoke without the party's knowledge or agreement at the KSČ rally on 21/2/48⁴⁴.

⁴¹ Resolution of their Presidium meeting of 19/2/48, PL 20/2/48, p.1.

⁴² Resolution of the Presidium meeting of 20/2/48, PL 21/2/48, p.1.

⁴³ Nedvěd: Cesta, p.61.

⁴⁴ Svobodné noviny, 24/2/48, p.2.

For a time it seemed possible that fear of the KSČ might lead them towards the National Socialists' position. Laušman referred to the preparations for the Congresses of Factory Councils and of Peasant Commissions as causing "the shaken social and economic peace" and "bringing the republic hundreds of millions in losses"⁴⁵. Even later the joint condemnation of the resignations and of the KSČ response was combined with the suggestion that the only way out of the crisis would be elections⁴⁶. Such views must have been pushed into the background by the success of the Congress of Factory Councils and the mobilisation of opinion - undoubtedly including many of the Social Democrats' supporters - around the Communists' demands.

Gradually even the centrist position was made irrelevant by the initiatives the KSČ was taking which made the renewal of co-operation in the old National Front inconceivable. At the party's Executive Committee meeting on 23/2/48 it was decided not to actively participate in the Central Action Committee. Nevertheless, the voting indicated that the left was gaining ground. They effectively argued that a special agreement had to be reached with the KSČ in view of the dangers from the international situation and from internal forces which were felt to be threatening the general direction of Czechoslovakia's post-war development. The right was increasingly restricted by the failure of the National

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⁴⁵ PL 22/2/48, p.1.

⁴⁶ J. Wenig, Svět práce, 25/2/48, p.1.

Socialists to present convincing ideas for Czechoslovakia's future. They therefore ended up with little more than expressions of allegiance to the principle of parliamentary democracy⁴⁷. This could not provide an adequate guide to action particularly in view of the Communists' probable ability to command the support of a majority of MPs.

On 24/2/48 the party's Presidium discussed again Gottwald's proposals and other possible solutions to the crisis. Fierlinger proved able to win a decisive majority for negotiating with Gottwald, but the precise terms were still unclear. Then, as discussion continued, the Social Democrats' Central Secretariat in Prague was occupied by left wingers, following a decision reached at a meeting of factory organisations in Prague and apparently helped by KSČ students. Laušman called for the police, but they would not help him⁴⁸.

Late that evening Fierlinger led the majority of the Presidium out of the meeting and announced their willingness to accept Gottwald's terms, which included the removal from the government of Tymeš and Majer. The statement read over the radio indicated to some extent how it had been possible to win over the party's centre as it suggested that Social Democracy was to be an equal partner with the KSČ in creating a new government⁴⁹.

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⁴⁷ Nedvěd: Cesta, p.63.

⁴⁸ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.279-280, and Belda, et al: Na rozhraní, p.242.

⁴⁹ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.280-281.

Even if such a hope was highly optimistic, there no longer seemed to be any serious alternative. Gottwald seemed to have mobilised enough support to ensure that joining the resignations would only divide the party without altering the outcome of the crisis. To the party's centre it probably seemed wiser to follow the dominant tide of events and thereby try to retain some party unity and a significant mass base even after the defeat of the two Czech right-wing parties.

In fact even Laušman, after he had been left in a minority in the Presidium, outmaneuvered Fierlinger by going to Gottwald to discuss the composition of the new government in which he became Deputy Prime Minister.

VI.38.7. Opposition very quickly disintegrates in Slovakia.

The Communist victory in Slovakia proved to be particularly simple. Divisions within the Democratic Party had already been shown up before that and the rival groups proved incapable of organising any serious action when, on 21/2/48, Husák effectively dissolved the existing Board of Commissioners by informing all its Democratic Party members that their party had resigned from the National Front⁵⁰. Two days later replacements were appointed and the headquarters of the Democratic Party was occupied⁵¹. Husák was soon showing one of the consequences of the transfer of power by signing documents giving ownership rights to those peasants gaining

⁵⁰ Pravda, 24/2/48, p.2.

⁵¹ Bouček, Klimeš, Dramtické, p.240.

from the land reform⁵². On 27/2/48 the consolidation of power was made more complete as Ferjenčík resigned, apparently not for political reasons, and then Búza too was replaced⁵³.

The Democratic Party seemed to collapse more readily than the Czech parties. They were quickly removed from positions of influence and an Action Committee was formed on 25/2/48 bringing together the two distinct internal oppositions led by Kyselý and Polák. They called for a purge and then renewal of the party⁵⁴. By this time a new government had been created in Prague without the Democratic Party and Kyselý wanted the party to completely change their policies so as to win back ministerial posts⁵⁵. This "opposition group from the former Democratic Party" was given two posts in the new Board of Commissioners, but the key posts of the Interior, Agriculture and Supply all went to Communists⁵⁶.

It was soon announced that all Ukrainian representatives had transferred to the KSS⁵⁷ while there were reports of massive defections from the Democratic Party into the KSS⁵⁸. Outside Bratislava power

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⁵² Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.258.

⁵³ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.321.

⁵⁴ Bouček, Klimeš: Dramatické, p.299.

⁵⁵ Radio broadcast on 25/2/48, Pravda 27/2/48, p.1.

⁵⁶ Pravda 29/2/48, p.1. There were also representatives of the two other parties and of the trade unions.

⁵⁷ Pravda 2/3/48, p.1.

⁵⁸ Pravda 3/3/48, p.1.

was transferred remarkably easily with hardly ever any opposition. In some of the more isolated parts of the country, where the KSS was particularly weak, there was no scope at all for opposition, because news of the political crisis was not heard until after it was over!⁵⁹.

VI.38.8. The Communists quickly consolidate the position of of the new government as potential opposition leaders capitulate or emigrate.

Even after the new government had been formed it was still not clear that the KSČ had won undivided power. Beneš remained as President although he intended to resign at once and was only dissuaded from doing so by Gottwald. His actions in the remainder of his life suggest confusion and deep depression as he could neither approve of the KSČ actions nor could he see any point in seriously opposing them. So, despite various fluctuations in his position, he never openly opposed the new government's policies and finally resigned on 7/6/48. Gottwald was then quickly elected President and Beneš died shortly afterwards⁶⁰. Although the KSČ may have felt somewhat constrained during those months by Beneš's continued presence, they were generally very pleased to have so convincing an indication, for any others likely to oppose them, that they were working within the constitution during that uncertain period when power was being consolidated.

⁵⁹ Laluha: Február, p.222.

⁶⁰ Kaplan: Utváření, p.55-60.

Probably the same applied to J. Masaryk who remained as Foreign Minister in the new government. His death on 10/3/48 was officially described as suicide. This explanation was widely accepted by informed sources even if they were aware of the political capital to be gained from encouraging rumours that there might have been "some other" cause⁶¹. No credible evidence for such a view has ever come to light and it is hard to see any motive for anybody associated with the new government wanting to murder him. Had they wanted to remove him from the government he could have been sacked as were Majer and Tymeš. Neither did they need to fear voluntary emigration which for them was a harmless form of protest: suicide was a very powerful one in the period when they wanted the appearance of maximum continuity with the previous constitutional forms.

They were also eager to win approval for the new government and its programme from parliament which met on 10/3/48. Out of the 300 elected MPs 230 attended and none voted against. The KSČ seem at first to have expected an opposition group to emerge in parliament but, perhaps fearing that some pretext would be found for their arrest⁶², all its possible leaders either fled or capitulated⁶³. This made it very easy for the KSČ to discredit them.

⁶¹ See Ripka, Czechoslovakia, p.301-302, and Steinhardt's message to Washington, on 30/4/48, Foreign Relations 1948, p.751.

⁶² Such fears would have been justified. A warrant was in fact issued for Lettrich's arrest; RP 28/2/48, p.1.

⁶³ K. Kaplan: "Zakotvení výsledků únorového vítězství", Československý časopis historický, X, No.2, 1962, p.156.

It is not even obvious what emigrés hoped to achieve in the West: for some seem just to have always assumed that they would have to go⁶⁴. Apparently about 3,000 left by 21/5/48⁶⁵ and by mid-1950 there had been 20,450 attempts and successes. Surprisingly, the overwhelming majority were not members of any party and neither were there any leading figures from cultural, economic or scientific life⁶⁶. It is only the defeated political leaders that could influence the domestic situation as they set about starting political activities in emigration. They were hampered in this because the US government, while wanting to encourage their organisation⁶⁷, also believed that by emigrating they reduced to zero the chance of any anti-Communist opposition inside Czechoslovakia⁶⁸. This meant, particularly as Beneš refused to denounce the new government, that there was no point in supporting a full government in exile which would lead inevitably to a break in diplomatic relations. US concern, then, was not primarily or immediately with influencing events inside Czechoslovakia but rather with ensuring that the easy Communist victory there would not help Communists in Western Europe and, in particular, in the elections that were about to take place

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⁶⁴ e.g. Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.313.

⁶⁵ Veselý, speaking at a press conference, Věstník ministerstva vnitra československé republiky, XXX, No.11, 15/6/48, p.2.

⁶⁶ Maňák: "K problematice", p.689 and p.699.

⁶⁷ e.g. R.A. Lovett's comments on 25/10/48, Foreign Relations 1948, p.433.

⁶⁸ Steinhardt's message of 30/4/48, Foreign Relations 1948, p.752.

in Italy⁶⁹. For this purpose emigrés could obviously be a great help as they could appear as the most convincing support for propaganda against Communism.

They fitted into the developing cold war atmosphere in the West and this provided their main field of influence in ensuing years. They could add authenticity to the extremely strong condemnations of the new Czechoslovak government from the press and official circles in the West where the February events were later quoted even as a major justification for the establishment of NATO. The KSČ consistently pointed to the misinformation, exaggerations or contradictory claims in the Western press and even the absurdity of the same papers that had supported Chamberlain suddenly appearing to be deeply concerned at the fate of Czechoslovak democracy⁷⁰. Emigrés, by their actions, seemed to be associating themselves with such positions. This in turn left the way open for exaggerated attacks against them. Accusations of planning an armed putch and civil war became common place⁷¹, while the fact that they went first of all to Germany was played up to the full as proof of their anti-state intentions⁷².

All told then, by emigrating they made the Communists' task

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⁶⁹ e.g. Marshall's message to the US ambassador in Paris on 24/2/48, Foreign Relations 1948, p.736.

⁷⁰ e.g. M. Galuška, Světové rozhledy, II, No.3, March 1948, p.195, or K. Winter, Tvorba, 1948, No.10, p.187-188.

⁷¹ Bareš, Tvorba, 1948, No.9, p.161.

⁷² e.g. Gottwald, speech 28/3/48, Spisy, XIV, p.323.

of consolidating power a very comfortable one. That, of course, does not mean that the final outcome would have been different if a serious attempt had been made to create an opposition inside Czechoslovakia.

VI.38.9. Summary and discussion.

Communist victory was achieved on 25/2/48 when Beneš formally accepted the resignations and agreed to a new government firmly dominated by the KSČ. This outcome cannot be explained simply by the mobilisation of opinion. Neither was Communist use of organs of power in itself an adequate explanation. Rather, those two aspects of KSČ tactics proved successful because of fundamental weaknesses in the other parties which were crippled by their inability to pose alternatives to KSČ policy on foreign relations or on the general direction of domestic social and economic development.

Beneš ultimately gave in because he could see no possible solution without the agreement of the KSČ. He rejected wild, and probably hopeless, alternatives like trying to use the army against the Communists because he believed that the most it could have achieved would have been Soviet intervention.

The National Socialists were unable to mobilise real support, which might have raised Beneš's morale, initially because of contradictions in their own political position. They had precipitated the crisis, but suddenly found themselves unable to present a solution to it or to challenge the popularity of the Communists' proposals. Unable to mobilise support, they reversed from their

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aggressive face of the previous weeks to an extremely conciliatory attitude - presumably in the hope of discouraging the Communists' mobilisation of support. It was only a short step for some of their members to join the KSC in forming the new government.

The paralysis and general confusion among the National Socialists inevitably meant that unity with other parties could not go beyond agreement on the single act of resigning. In fact, the People's and Democratic Parties seemed even more demoralised and the transfer of power in Slovakia proved to be even simpler than in Prague.

There could also be little scope for unity between the National Socialists and Social Democrats: this was of great importance in easing the Communists' road to power. Gottwald feared that if the Social Democrats' ministers resigned, then his whole government could fall. Instead, the Social Democrats reacted essentially as they had during the crisis over the millionaires' tax: they dissociated themselves from both sides in the hope of bringing all the parties together again. This was the only way to ensure the continued unity of their party but, as the paralysis of the right and the aggressiveness of the KSC became clearer, the left won the majority of the party leadership for their policy of joining Gottwald's new government. The Social Democrats thereby retained their organisational unity.

One aftermath to the February crisis was the emigration of many of the defeated politicians. This seemed to confirm their complete resignation as they had no further real chance of influencing events inside Czechoslovakia. There was, in fact, no attempt to form an opposition group when parliament next met.

CHAPTER 39: THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S MONOPOLY OF POLITICAL POWER.

VI.39.1. Action Committees quickly confirm the extent of the Communists' victory in February.

Changes in power throughout society were brought about to a great extent by Action Committees which were presented as the organs of the new National Front. There was soon talk of making them permanent institutions to be incorporated into the new constitution¹, but the practical details of their size, exact composition and relationship to other institutions were all left vague. Only the essential principle was made clear and that left little doubt that their immediate role was to reflect and consolidate the Communist Party's newly won power regardless of any normal democratic procedures. A directive from the Ministry of the Interior read as follows:

"...The initiative for the creation of an Action Committee comes from a Revolutionary Trade Union group or from an organisation of the Communist Party. If necessary it is created at the start only by members of the Communist Party who carefully investigate what reliable people from other organisations or clubs, or if need be which individuals, they should draw in"².

¹ e.g. Čepička, answering questions from the Labour MPs Grossman (Crossman?), and Wiigg, RP 17/3/48, p.1.

² Lidová správa, 15/3/48, p.81. This makes KSČ dominance even clearer than the figures for different parties' representations which show 68,90% for the KSČ, 17,37% Social Democrats, 3,95% National Socialists, 4,53% from the People's Party, 5,25% non-party and 14% representing trade unions; Pavlíček: Politické, p.131.

They were not to be elected organs and control was to be exercised only from above - even the calling of public meetings was discouraged. Nevertheless, they were presented as the "authorised" spokesmen of the will of the Czechoslovak people³ and had enormous powers of discretion: they were assured that decisions, provided they had been "correct", would be retrospectively approved by law. In factories they were accepted as only temporary organs while in localities they were to "direct and control public life for all the future".

When their immediate tasks were precisely defined, first priority was given to the implementation of a purge. They were not to completely replace National Committees, which were to remain as organs of public administration, but were to become "organs of political leadership and popular control"⁴ to be concerned first of all with recommending changes in personnel⁵.

It seems that at some levels the purge was often carried out far more simply with the use of direct administrative measures. The Communist mayor of Prague simply requested the removal of all representatives of the other three parties from the National Committee and the Ministry of the Interior quickly approved the measure⁶. Changes then went down to lower levels. The official

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³ Circular from the Ministry of the Interior, 8/3/48, Věstník ministerstva vnitra Československé republiky, XXX, No.3-4, 15/3/48, p.60.

⁴ Lidová správa, 15/3/48, p.82.

⁵ Věstník ministerstva vnitra Československé republiky, 15/3/48, p.60.

⁶ Bertelmann: Vývoj, p.256-257.

figures suggest that of 9,419 employees in the political administration, only 526 were removed while out of 5,600 in Regional administration a mere 28 were sacked⁷. Overall, in all spheres of life, the immediate post-February purge probably affected only 20,000 - 30,000, including those demoted or prematurely pensioned off⁸. This first purge, then, was not as sweeping as later ones, but it was thorough enough at the highest levels to completely change the political power situation.

Apart from public administration, the purge was also concerned with political parties and mass organisations. This, naturally, did not affect the KSC, and the trade unions too were felt to be capable of carrying out necessary internal changes themselves. Thus Zápotocký and E. Erban, who had both taken government places, were replaced while Šplíchalová, A. Vandrovec and F. Dlouhý, who had voted against the resolution at the Congress of Factory Councils, were suspended from their posts⁹.

Actions taken against the political parties that had resigned from the government prevented them from redeveloping any independent life. The Presidium of the Central Action Committee called for the establishment of Action Committees inside these parties to ensure that they were purged¹⁰. As it was made clear that new organs could

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⁷ Lidová správa, 1/5/48, p.138.

⁸ L. Kalinová: "K poúnorovým změnám ve složení řídicího aparátu", Revue dějin socialismu, 1969, No.4, p.486.

⁹ ÚRO, 11/3/48, p.2.

¹⁰ RP 29/2/48, p.2.

only be formed after the completion of the purge and Action Committees inside these parties had to be constituted in a way approved by the relevant local Action Committee¹¹, this effectively gave the KSČ the power to decide on the fate of the three parties that resigned from the government.

There were, however, unanswered questions concerning the fate of these other political parties and also of the Social Democrats. It was not at once clear how the elections would be fought and, above all, it was not yet clear what difference February made to social and economic policy.

VI.39.2. The consolidation of Communist power is greatly eased as the party presents economic and social policies as just a continuation of the existing government programme.

In economic life the purge was probably considerably milder than in the political and public administration spheres. It also seems to have been carried out more quickly, particularly in factories where it was often implemented at public meetings during the one-hour general strike¹². This meant that Action Committees were generally not necessary in factories where Factory Councils were firmly Communist dominated. In offices this was often not the case and directives were given for establishing Action Committees without approval "from below"¹³. Even there their existence was to

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¹¹ Čepička, RP 3/3/48, p.3.

¹² Bouček: Praha, p.230.

¹³ Šmídmajer, speech, ÚRO, 4/3/48, p.1-2.

be temporary and the ÚRO Presidium on 4/3/48 announced that they would be progressively dissolved¹⁴.

Generally in Factories the KSČ leaders found themselves holding back their followers who wanted to use political doubts about the new government as grounds for discrimination against qualified personnel. This was resisted on the grounds that the KSČ still believed that there was no need to create a "new intelligentsia" as had been done in the Soviet Union. Kopecký shortly beforehand had been pointing to this distinction arguing that part of the intelligentsia was actively supporting the government's policies while even that part which opposed them could be won at least for "a loyal attitude to our new regime"¹⁵. This sort of argument was taken up at the height of the February crisis by Fejka who insisted that specialists should not be sacked for their political views because commitment to their work could still be enough to ensure that they served nationalised industries¹⁶. This was accompanied with other warnings against allowing the purge to be dictated by personal feelings of enmity or dislike and thereby to unnecessarily damage production¹⁷.

Nevertheless, there was no constraint on the speediest possible

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¹⁴ RP 5/3/48, p.3.

¹⁵ Kopecký: Zápas, p.48.

¹⁶ Speaking on 23/2/48, reproduced in Fejka: 25 únor, p.53. He also balanced this with a warning on 8/3/48 that there could be centres for sabotage left in the nationalised industries, so that caution was necessary; Fejka: 25 únor, p.72-73.

¹⁷ RP 10/3/48, p.2.

takeover of those firms set by previous KSČ policy for nationalisation. The trade unions argued for the immediate installation of national administrators wherever it could be said that the "smooth course of production" was threatened¹⁸. There were similar warnings over the following weeks¹⁹ so that when, on 6/4/48, the government approved the further nationalisations, it probably did little more than confirm the existing situation. By the beginning of May it could be announced that there were 68½% of industrial enterprises and 95% of employees in the public sector²⁰.

Although this obviously was a blow to capitalists, it was not clear whether or to what extent it was aimed against the rest of the private sector. Frejka had earlier stated that:-

"the question in the further road to socialism will be the gradual limitation and finally complete elimination of the private-capitalist sector"²¹,

while in the same speech it was promised that businesses employing up to 50 and landholdings of up to 50ha would be constitutionally guaranteed. This, it was claimed, meant that the Hradec programme provided "a final solution to the land question"²². This was made equally explicit at the Congress of Peasant Commissions which was

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¹⁸ RP 25/2/48, p.1.

¹⁹ e.g. K. Švec, ÚRO 4/3/48, p.2.

²⁰ Statistický zpravodaj, XI, No.7-8, July-August 1948, p.282.

²¹ Frejka: 25 únor, p.46.

²² Fakta a cifry, III, No.1-2, 1948, p.34.

held in Prague on 28/2/48, i.e. after the formation of the new government. It was stated there that the new constitution would "refute for once and for all" the stories "about somebody wanting to establish some sort of kolkhozes"²³.

This indication of KSČ intentions was not as unambiguous as they claimed. Gottwald, following Stalin, made clear that a constitution was not a programme for the future but rather ". . . a codification of results so far achieved"²⁴. It was therefore perfectly possible for the KSČ to constitutionally guarantee private property while still believing that it would ultimately disappear. Nevertheless, there certainly was no rush by the KSČ after February to alter their general conception of social and economic policies for the immediate future. Alongside vague references to "faster" progress towards socialism²⁵ there were also expressions of restraint. Slánský firmly insisted that party education courses should include "our road to socialism" because "Many people think that we will now go quickly to socialism, following the Soviet example to the Soviet system. We must present our party as a patriotic force"²⁶. The laws that were rushed through parliament in those months seemed to confirm that view. Particularly important was the passing of the constitution as the KSČ had wanted it.

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²³ Zemědělské noviny, 29/2/48.

²⁴ Speaking on 4/2/46, Gottwald: Spisy, XII, p.258.

²⁵ See Gottwald's speeches of 28/3/48 and 9/4/48, Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.339 and p.364.

²⁶ Speaking on 6/3/48, quoted in Kaplan: Utváření, p.138.

Undoubtedly the rapid formulation and acceptance of the new social insurance scheme, including a free health service and adequate pensions, also had a great political impact, and there were further new laws affecting many spheres of life. The necessary apparatus for the revision of the pre-war land reform was created and Peasant Commissions were established, as the KSČ had wanted, from those demanding land²⁷. There was even a new law extending security of employment to more in the civil service thereby making nonsense of previous claims that the KSČ wanted to abolish their security²⁸.

Continuity with previous KSČ policy on social and economic questions could even lead to a generally favourable assessment of February from those who had vacillated or doubted the KSČ before. This was a further reason for the absence of any active opposition to the KSČ in the immediate aftermath of February. There could still be doubts about the future development of the political structure and many could not believe that Zenkl, Drtina and Stránský were outright traitors. It nevertheless could be accepted that "they were not especially progressive people"²⁹, and that sort of view fitted with the following persuasive argument:

"Everyone can convince themselves . . . that parliament and government is much more efficient after the February days

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²⁷ Věstník ministerstva vnitra Československé republiky, XXX, Nos. 3-4 and 10, 15/3/48, p.79 and 31/5/48, p.217.

²⁸ Lidová správa, 1/4/48, p.102.

²⁹ This widespread attitude was commented on in Tvorba, 1948, No.11, p.201.

than at any time before when disruptive elements were undermining the efficiency of government and parliament.

'Before it needed months or even years to pass important laws which had great meaning for the working people. Today the work of government and parliament, which is conducted in accordance with the resolutions of the all-state Congress of Factory Councils and of the Congress of Peasant Commissions and with the programme of the Gottwald government, is proceeding as quickly as the interests of the working people require. . . ."³⁰.

It is only a short step from such an argument to the view that far from being a guarantee of democracy the previous system with vigorously competing parties had been a purely negative encumbrance. There was no immediate limitation to discussion in non-party specialist journals and it could be hoped that February would lead not to a limitation of discussion in general, but only to the elimination of negative and destructive criticism that had previously been damaging to the economy³¹. There were plenty of references to the need for still more "constructive" criticisms³²; this was clearly expressed in an editorial in the non-party economic journal

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³⁰ Fakta a cifry, III, No.4, 15/4/48, p.6-7.

³¹ e.g. "The elimination of petty party politicking from factories, offices and workshops and the tightening of the unity of employees in workplaces is a useful precondition for the fulfillment of all plans and counter-plans and for raising the quality of products", V. Slach, ÚRO, 13/5/48, p.1.

³² e.g. the editorial in Budovatel národního podniku, 1948, No.4, p.2.

Hospodář. It was argued that the government was getting on with the job that had previously been obstructed by the "superfusion of party politics". Approval for this naturally led to rejection of Western claims of "totalitarianism" as the new National Front was implementing measures "which were necessary and which the people had longed for". After this followed the optimistic claim: "Today party interests and political affiliations are no longer the decisive agent in our economy. The revived National Front is more than a political formation, it is a working community which knows what it should do and wants to do it". Within this there was need for still more criticism than before, although it had to be intelligent and based on knowledge: "Masaryk's 'democracy is discussion' applies at all times"³³.

VI.39.3. The Communists immobilise possible opposition by recruiting high officials and members of other parties into their own ranks.

While such hopes as those suggested above may have further disoriented potential opposition, similar views seem neither to have been held nor discussed in the KSČ leadership. All attention there was devoted to confirming the party's grip on political power. The first step towards this, although one which still left plenty of ambiguities about the future political structure, was the encouragement of a massive influx of new members into the party. Having previously set a target of one and a half million members by 1/5/48, Gottwald announced that, with membership already over 1400,000 the

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³³ Hospodář, 11/3/48, p.1.

target could be raised to two million³⁴.

This could appear as a continuation of the previous policy of winning the maximum number of new members as a basis for the biggest possible vote. It also acquired new features in the post-February situation. Analysis of the 856,657 new members gained by August shows that the biggest influx came in March and April³⁵. A quarter of them were members of other parties, including a total of over 116,000 former National Socialists. The party grew to contain almost 26% of the total Czech population³⁶. Simultaneously there was a change in its social base: the percentage of workers among members sank from 57% in March 1946 to 49% in late 1947 and then below 40% in August 1948³⁷. By contrast, post-February mass recruitment led to an increase in the representation of office workers from 5,6 to 20,6%³⁸.

There is no reason to doubt that many of the new recruits had previously been supporters of the KSČ. This, however, was improbable for most former National Socialists, for many office workers and for the technical intelligentsia. It was the recruitment of these people that was particularly important in confirming the new position of the KSČ within the power structure.

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³⁴ RP 29/2/48, p.1.

³⁵ Kaplan: Utváření, p.99.

³⁶ Kaplan, Utváření, p.100.

³⁷ J. Fulka: "Růst členské základny KSČ a únor 1948", Nová mysl, 1970, No.3, p.355.

³⁸ Kaplan: Utváření, p.99.

There was, in fact, considerable resistance within the KSČ to recruiting former National Socialists. Apparently many of them had supported the resigning ministers, but then suddenly rushed to join the KSČ so as to save their jobs. The leadership argued in reply that even those who were not convinced Communists should be allowed to join as they could be won over and re-educated in time³⁹. Slánský dismissed fears that this process threatened a dilution of the KSČ by pointing to the immense "ideological and organisational strength" of the party⁴⁰. There were proposals to start educating new members as quickly as possible with lectures on the purpose of the Communist Party and on the meaning of the February events in the context of Czechoslovakia's road to socialism⁴¹.

Even though party leaders did talk of winning genuine conviction from former National Socialists once they were inside the KSČ, the first and immediate aim was expressed as the destruction of the influence of the People's Party, of the National Socialists and of right-wing Social Democracy⁴². While avoiding direct administrative measures to dissolve National Socialist organisations, every encouragement was given to their members to join the KSČ. There was even implicit approval for their local leaderships to dissolve

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³⁹ Funkcionář, 6/4/48, p.32-33.

⁴⁰ Funkcionář, 10/3/48, p.24.

⁴¹ Funkcionář, 6/4/48, p.1.

⁴² Slánský, Funkcionář, 10/3/48, p.24.

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organisations and transfer en masse to the KSČ⁴³. In practical terms, this was a very simple way of immobilising potential opposition.

The second important group of new recruits, which probably contains many of the same people as the first, was made up of those holding positions of power and influence in the state and economy. For the KSČ subordination of such people to party discipline was a logical corollary to the great power the party was acquiring. It could either completely purge all power structures - and in the process lose valuable specialist abilities - or, as was done, ensure compliance with some help from the visible threat of a purge by the Action Committees. Criticisms were, in fact, soon being made by the KSČ leaders of the practice whereby office workers were given application forms for the party and limited periods in which to fill them in⁴⁴. Even if such warnings were heeded, every encouragement was still given to many of those who wanted to retain high positions to hastily join the KSČ. Warnings against allowing "careerists" into the party were revealingly balanced by reassurances that they were no more of a threat than former National Socialists⁴⁵.

The KSČ leadership had equally little hesitation in encouraging the recruitment of specialists in the economy. Irrespective of the

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⁴³ This was done in Beroun; RP 5/3/48, p.3. In Ústí nad Labem the Action Committees within the National Socialist Party completely dissolved all organisations; RP 11/3/48, p.5.

⁴⁴ Slánský, RP 7/3/48, p.2.

⁴⁵ e.g. Funkcionář, 6/4/48, p.33.

depth of their convictions, they were apparently needed in factory organisations alongside workers⁴⁶. In some cases this was evidently extremely successful: in Vítkovice, for example, not one qualified engineer was left outside the party⁴⁷.

VI.39.4. The three other Czech parties are prevented from challenging Communist dominance.

The National Socialist Party⁴⁸ emerged from the February events with their credibility shattered, many of their former leaders in emigration and no clear conception for the future among those left. The most visible basis for a continuation of their existence was the two ministers in the new government. The surviving leadership consisted of Šlechta and Neumann who had had reservations about the party's policy before, J. David who had never actively opposed the previous party leadership and a number of trade unionists who could see no point in the continued existence of an independent party. At lower levels the idea was still very much alive of a definitely anti-Communist party⁴⁹, but this was rejected by the leadership as unrealistic. It would obviously have been unacceptable to the KSČ. In late February or early March Slánský indicated to

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⁴⁶ Slánský, Funkcionář, 10/3/48, p.9.

⁴⁷ Frejka, Tvorba, 1948, No.21, p.404.

⁴⁸ By then it had been renamed the Czechoslovak Socialist Party but, to avoid unnecessary confusion, they will still be referred to as the National Socialists.

⁴⁹ Kaplan: Utváření, p.76-77.

Neumann that the party should be very small and be purged of reactionary elements⁵⁰. Evidently there was a lasting fear that it could rebuild its public credibility and cause real trouble for the KSČ if left as a genuinely independent party.

The People's Party seemed to hold together much better than the National Socialists and only a few members transferred to the KSČ⁵¹. There was also a more clearly defined left which could implement some sort of purge while retaining the majority of former members⁵². This did not prevent later moves to set the People's Party up as a counterbalance to the KSČ⁵³. The party's development was further complicated by the attitude of the Catholic church which refused to express loyalty to the state after the February events. In fact the church even opposed the united candidature⁵⁴ and tried to forbid Plojhar, the party's minister in the government, from standing for parliament⁵⁵.

With both the National Socialist and People's Parties largely immobilised, the most important potential opposition to the KSČ were the Social Democrats. Their future was not immediately clear as they had vacillated through the February events and their final

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⁵⁰ Pavlíček: Politické, esp. p.185-186.

⁵¹ Funkcionář, 10/3/48, p.25.

⁵² Pavlíček: Politické, p.191-192.

⁵³ Pavlíček: Politické, esp. p.217-219.

⁵⁴ See below Section VI.39.5. for an explanation of the united candidature.

⁵⁵ Kaplan: Utváření, p.47-52, and Pavlíček: Politické, p.217.

commitment to the Gottwald government did not necessarily represent full subordination to the KSČ. The decision had been reached by a hastily formed coalition between the "centre" of "left-opportunist" trend and Fierlinger's left wing, and this still left open the old question of how far the Social Democrats should differentiate themselves from the KSČ. This remained even after considerable personnel changes including the expulsion of a whole number of prominent right-wingers⁵⁶ and even after the replacement of Laušman by Fierlinger as chairman⁵⁷. A new twist was even added to the old problem by an influx into the party of former National Socialists.

At first the leadership seem to have felt that February gave the party tremendous prospects. There were references to being "an equal partner with the Communist Party" and even to becoming "the leading and decisive agent in our political life". It was claimed that this would be done on the basis of programmatic clarity and genuinely socialist policies and there were references to the need to maintain the "purity" of the party⁵⁸. Later a three month probationary period was introduced for new members⁵⁹.

Hopes for a strong and independent party for those who understand Marxism "in their own way" were expressed even by Fierlinger⁶⁰

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⁵⁶ At the Presidium meeting of 4/3/48, PL 5/3/48, p.2.

⁵⁷ At the Presidium meeting of 18/3/48, PL 19/3/48, p.1.

⁵⁸ PL 29/2/48, p.1.

⁵⁹ PL 25/3/48, p.1.

⁶⁰ PL 4/3/48, p.1, quoting an interview with the Daily Herald.

who later said that the response at meetings was quite sufficient to justify hopes of building a real mass party⁶¹. There were, however, a number of real obstacles if the Social Democrats were to avoid basing their expansion on former National Socialists who were simply seeking a more respectable base to pursue their former policies.

The first problem was that there was even less hope of finding a credible international orientation. The division of Europe into two opposing blocs effectively forced them to choose one side or the other. Other Socialist or Social Democrat parties in Eastern Europe were merging with Communist Parties on terms that left the new party as a member of the Informbureau. In Rumania this happened on 21/2/48, Gomulka was predicting it for Poland on 20/3/48 and, according to Rákosi, the decision was taken in Hungary in early March⁶². At the same time, the Czech Social Democrats were forcibly divided from their potential allies in the West when the British Labour Party issued a statement on the February events without even consulting them. Laušman and J. Lindauer, the party's new general secretary, sent a bitter letter protesting at this and indicating that the Labour Party's criticism was based on a distortion of the facts and was far sharper "than towards the fascist dictatorships in Spain, Portugal or Greece"⁶³. An analogy was soon being found with the failure of the Socialists International after Munich⁶⁴.

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⁶¹ Speaking on 17/4/48, quoted in Nedvěd: Cesta, p.66.

⁶² Nedvěd: Cesta, p.71-72.

⁶³ PL 7/3/48, p.1.

⁶⁴ PL 23/3/48, p.1.

It was also being accepted that the Social Democrats had been found wanting during the February crisis. This encouraged, particularly among the left, an inferiority complex towards the KSČ. Even Laušman admitted that the party had been confused⁶⁵ and attempts to suggest that this did not indicate any deeper weakness damaging the party's right to continued existence were not fully convincing⁶⁶. A more comprehensive self-criticism by V. Erban pointed to the whole attempt to present an image distinct from the KSČ as having led to the creation of blocs against the KSČ at local level and a general shift towards the National Socialists. The remedy he saw in the party purging itself of its right wing and of reactionaries and in working closely with the KSČ⁶⁷. It is difficult to see how this could have led to a mass party with an outward appearance of full independence.

The natural alternative was a merger with the KSČ and many on the left of Social Democracy saw this as inevitable either at once after February or in the near future⁶⁸. During March there may well have been a shift in the opposite direction. It was certainly unclear where the Social Democrats were heading as they remained outside the scope of the Action Committees and only participated in them in areas where they were weakest⁶⁹. Laušman even claimed to have

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⁶⁵ Svět práce, 3/3/48, p.1.

⁶⁶ e.g. R. Foustka, Svět práce, 10/3/48, p.1.

⁶⁷ PL 16/3/48, p.1 and p.3.

⁶⁸ Kaplan: Utváření, p.70.

⁶⁹ In Plzeň only 2% of Action Committee members were Social Democrats; Nedvěd: Cesta, p.65.

been starting genuine opposition activity in March⁷⁰.

Very probably it was the uncertainties about the future course of Social Democracy and the continued scope for the other parties to develop into real opposition forces, particularly as the great mass of the peasants and urban petty bourgeoisie remained outside the KSC⁷¹, that led to a change in KSC policy on the conduct of the elections and on the overall future party structure.

VI.39.5. The Communists shy away from contested elections.
The results confirm the consolidation of the new
power structure.

Immediately after the February events, the KSC still seem to have assumed that the elections would be contested between all the legal parties. The aim was for the most convincing possible victory as a confirmation of February. An overall target of 75% was set and this was broken down into targets for individual areas⁷². Lower levels in the party responded enthusiastically to this with reassurances that there would be little difficulty in winning a quite enormous vote⁷³. There were, however, sobering voices at the meeting of KSC regional secretaries suggesting that only 55-60% of the vote would go to the KSC. February, as was pointed out at the Central Committee meeting on 9/4/48, had been so easy because the

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⁷⁰ Laušman: Kdo, p.228.

⁷¹ See below Section VI.39.5.

⁷² Belda: "Mocensko-politické", p.236.

⁷³ Kaplan: Utváření, p.41.

opposition had been disoriented and immobilised. Its social base still remained intact. Above all, the middle peasants seemed unconvinced by February. The Peasant Congress, it was pointed out, had by no means expressed the feelings of the whole peasantry⁷⁴.

This led to the fear in the KSČ leadership that, despite the organisational weaknesses of the other parties, the KSČ still might not win enough votes to justify a monopoly of power⁷⁵. Moreover, looking further into the future, "reaction" could re-emerge within the same parties as before. It could find support among those with reservations about government policy as it had before February. This fear was expressed in warnings against complacency. Although at times it was suggested that no significant opposition could develop⁷⁶ it was also emphasised that "reactionaries", despite all appearances, had not completely vanished but were just going underground and would in time become even more perfidious⁷⁷. Prominent themes were the need to root out reaction completely so that another February would never be needed⁷⁸ and the need not to be lulled into over-confidence, plus the belief that events would not "follow a

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⁷⁴ M. Reiman: "Únor a československá cesta k socialismu", K politickým, p.14.

⁷⁵ Belda: "Mocensko-politické", p.236.

⁷⁶ e.g. Gottwald, in an interview with A.I. Goldberg of A.P. said: "A strong opposition cannot develop, because opposition elements have no hope of gaining the sympathy of the people. . .", RP 23/3/48, p.1.

⁷⁷ Slánský, For a Lasting Peace, For a People's Democracy (henceforth FLPFPD), 15/3/48, p.2.

⁷⁸ Gottwald, speaking to a KSČ conference in Prague, Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.343-344.

smooth asphalt road through beautiful sunny weather directly to socialism . . ."⁷⁹.

So, with the expectation that "reaction" would find a social base and show itself again within the other parties, it was natural to try to find a way to bind those parties more closely to the KSČ. An essential part of this was the decision that the elections would not be contested between parties, but would be fought by a single united list of candidates. This was later justified for precisely the reason that it prevented the penetration of "reaction" into the other parties⁸⁰.

The change came at the party's Presidium meeting on 5/4/48 when it was decided that all legal parties would stand on the same platform⁸¹. The idea was first publicly mentioned by Zápotocký at the ÚRO plenum on 7/4/48 and was then, formally speaking, left open for discussion⁸². Several mass organisations and many factories had expressed their agreement by the time the KSČ Central Committee met on 9/4/48⁸³.

This was not a decision to ban all opposition outright and in fact Gottwald even suggested that there should be a party which "reaction" could join so that it would not need to penetrate the KSČ.

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⁷⁹Slánský, Funkcionář, 6/4/48, p.9.

⁸⁰Gottwald, speaking at the Central Committee meeting of 9/6/48, Gottwald: Spisy, XIV, p.427.

⁸¹Nedvěd: Cesta, p.67.

⁸²RP 8/4/48, p.1.

⁸³RP 9/4/48, p.1.

The trouble was that nobody was interested in openly oppositionist activities⁸⁴. This is hardly surprising as to do so would automatically encourage the epithet "reaction" and mean definitive exclusion from the developing power structure. This, of course, was precisely what Gottwald wanted.

There were arguments from both at home and abroad that the united candidature was undemocratic⁸⁵. One reply to this was that the only restriction on opposition candidates was that they would need 1,000 signatures before their nominations would be accepted⁸⁶. The most serious attempt to achieve this was made by V. Beneš, the President's brother, but he failed to rally enough support⁸⁷. Otherwise any opposition preferred not to show itself as, lacking an organisational basis, it could hardly hope to do well in the elections.

The elections themselves were held on 30/5/48 and 93,5% of those eligible voted with 89,3% expressing approval for the single list of National Front candidates. It is always difficult to know how seriously to take the results of uncontested elections because there is no opposition to confirm whether they are conducted fairly. In this case too there were claims that the published figures were invented and that the true results should show 33% blank votes in

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⁸⁴ Gottwald, speaking at the Central Committee meeting of 9/4/48, quoted in Nedvěd: Cesta, p.69.

⁸⁵ See Švermová's comments on such arguments, RP 11/4/48, p.1.

⁸⁶ RP 11/4/48, p.1.

⁸⁷ Kaplan: Utváření, p.44.

Moravia and 20% - or even as much as 40% - in Slovakia⁸⁸. No subsequent Czechoslovak source has supported such claims and, in fact, all seem to have accepted the results as genuine. Such a convincing victory is not impossible when there was no credible alternative and therefore little point in voting against. This was particularly true as it became the general practice to cast one's vote openly in favour. Anybody voting against could thereby easily be identified and could fear later discrimination. This obviously contravened the principle of the secret ballot.

VI.39.6. Following the elections, the Communist Party confirms the impotence of the other parties and completes a merger with Social Democracy. Communist domination of political power is complete.

There could be no question that the elections were a great success for the KSČ. They had prevented any big arguments dividing the nation, there was not the slightest hint of any disorders - unlike the elections in Italy at the same time - and there was no decline in production⁸⁹. Soon afterwards Beneš - depressed, demoralised and soon to die - resigned and was replaced by Gottwald who could soon proclaim: "...we have concentrated all the decisive levers in this state into reliable hands. . ." ⁹⁰. The question of the continued existence of other parties alongside the KSČ was then

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⁸⁸ Steinhardt's message to Washington on 31/5/48, Foreign Relations 1948, p.756.

⁸⁹ Slánský, For a Lasting Peace, For a People's Democracy, 15/6/48, p.4.

⁹⁰ Speaking at the Central Committee meeting of 17/11/48; Gottwald: Spisy, XV, p.144.

a purely tactical one.

It had already been decided in early April that Social Democracy would merge with the KSČ. This appeared as a fulfilment of the belief that the splitting of the workers' movement after World War I would one day be reversed. It thereby acquired automatic popularity within both parties. More immediately, it was an important tactical expedient to prevent the re-emergence of a strong Social Democracy that could challenge KSČ supremacy.

The decision was taken by the KSČ leadership at just the time when Fierlinger was talking of the need to ensure the existence of an independent party⁹¹, but others on the left willingly seized on the opportunity. A meeting of the party's representatives on 17/4/48 was meant to discuss how to rebuild the party, but instead it simply discussed and accepted the proposal for a merger⁹². This was then announced in the press on the following day⁹³.

The terms of the merger were laid down by the KSČ. It was made quite clear that the two parties could not approach each other as equals⁹⁴ and Gottwald warned against the danger of former Social Democrats establishing factions within the united party⁹⁵. It was even made clear that, despite the mass recruitment of office workers

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⁹¹ Speaking on 5/4/48, quoted in Směr, 15/4/48, p.15.

⁹² Nedvěd: Cesta, p.68.

⁹³ RP 18/4/48, p.1.

⁹⁴ Kaplan: Utváření, p.70-71.

⁹⁵ Gottwald, speaking at the Central Committee meeting of 9/6/48, quoted in Nedvěd: Cesta, p.77.

and National Socialists, by no means all Social Democrats could be accepted into the KSČ⁹⁶.

The process of merging took place from the end of June and the leading left Social Democrats were given good representation in the KSČ leading organs. At lower levels individual KSČ branches were able to choose who they would accept. It is pretty clear that they excluded any who had spoken against them before. The merger thereby effectively eliminated the legal political platform for about half the Social Democrats⁹⁷.

The attitude towards the other two parties was different partly because a merger would not have succeeded in easily absorbing the majority of their former members into the KSČ and partly because their continued independent existence was advantageous both domestically, as had been shown in the elections, and internationally as the appearance of a multi-party system was still maintained⁹⁸.

The solution for the future of the National Socialists was revealed in notes written over the summer by J. Tausigová. A merger similar to that with the Social Democrats was ruled out. Liquidation was also rejected as it implied excessive administrative measures. Leaving the party to develop on its own was felt to be dangerous as it would give reaction a chance to find a legal base. The chosen

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⁹⁶ Gottwald, speaking at the Central Committee meeting of 9/4/48, quoted in Nedvěd: Cesta, p.74.

⁹⁷ Nedvěd: Cesta, p.76.

⁹⁸ See Gottwald's comments to the Central Committee on 9/6/48, quoted in Kaplan: Utváření, p.67, and Belda: "Mocensko-politické", p.234.

course of action was to maintain a nominally independent National Socialist Party within the National Front under KSČ supervision⁹⁹.

Policy towards the People's Party was probably based on similar considerations. There were additional complications as it was feared that 30-40% of Moravian peasants might be completely beyond the influence of the KSČ. There were therefore doubts about allowing the People's Party to rebuild an apparatus and elected structure, as was Plojhar's aim¹⁰⁰.

This stabilisation of the new party structure and the completion of the post-February purge meant that there was no further work for the Action Committees. They could have existed as coordinating committees between the various parties and mass organisations of the National Front, but such a role was made irrelevant by enormous growth of the KSČ, its direct influence over the activities of the trade unions and the complete irrelevance to serious decision making of the remnants of the other parties. So, rather than a political structure in which the KSČ could exercise its influence through a system of "transmission belts", the KSČ felt itself to be big enough and influential enough to exercise its authority, to an increasing extent, directly. A logical consequence of this was the degeneration of Action Committees into what have been described as "administrative bureaucratic offices"¹⁰¹. They continued to exist, but made no important political impact.

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⁹⁹ Pavlíček: Politické, p.203.

¹⁰⁰ Pavlíček: Politické, esp. p.228.

¹⁰¹ Pavlíček: Politické, p.200.

VI.39.7. Summary and discussion.

During the first weeks after the February crisis the KSC consolidated an effective monopoly of power while maintaining the appearance of a plurality of parties.

Facilitating this was continuity with the old government programme, popular aspects of which could very quickly be accepted by parliament. It therefore seemed to much of the population that the outcome of February was in their best interests. It could even appear that meaningful criticism and discussion would not be restricted.

Meanwhile, the KSC established firm dominance through the activities of Action Committees. With a minimum of broad public involvement, they purged positions of authority and directed the development of the formerly right-wing parties in such a way as to prevent them from becoming real opposition forces.

Complementing the purge was a mass recruitment into the KSC which brought in, among others, large numbers of office workers and former National Socialists. In effect, this incorporated and thereby silenced those who could have challenged at any level the KSC grip on power.

There^{was} a potential base for an anti-Communist party in the large sections of the population that had remained silent during February. Although the KSC could expect to win an absolute majority in the elections, they would probably have been unable to completely crush the other parties. They therefore decided against contested elections and insisted on a single united candidature. The result, not surprisingly, was an overwhelming victory for the single list of candidates.

The Social Democrats presented a special problem because they had not capitulated or split during February and they were not subjected to interventions from Action Committees. This made them uniquely important as the only party free from direct Communist control. There were advocates of an immediate merger with the KSČ, but there were also serious hopes of building up a mass party that could become a genuine partner in the government.

Evidently, the KSČ were frightened by this possibility and insisted on merging the two parties. This was accomplished in a careful and selective way so as to incorporate the left Social Democrats while eliminating any legal platform for those who had ever spoken against the KSČ.

This consolidation of Communist power raises an important unanswered question. Although Gottwald never totally renounced the notion of a dictatorship of the proletariat as meaning a monopoly of power for the KSČ, he was still referring to the pre-February National Front as the best solution as late as December 1947. He even still thought after February that the elections could be genuinely contested. Against the background of this, of KSČ thinking over the preceding months and years, and even of the surprise from the other parties at how events unfolded, it does seem surprising that the KSČ leadership were so absolutely determined to convert their political victory into an effectively complete monopoly of power so quickly.

Perhaps ^{Gottwald} received instructions to that effect from Zorin. Then, aware of the existence of doubts about his policies within the KSČ leadership and of Stalin's likely concern should he appear too

liberal, he took the seemingly safe course. This is all speculation, but can be supported by circumstantial evidence¹⁰².

In a very real sense, then, the KSČ behaved as a "totalitarian" party, but that term must still be used with caution. The theories of totalitarianism are incapable of encompassing the reality of the development of Czechoslovak society. Despite the Communists' grip on power, they still had to decide how to use their position and this involved responding to the complex, flexible and changing realities of Czechoslovak society.

This is to some extent clarified in the next two chapters.

¹⁰² See J. Švec: Únor, 201-202.

CHAPTER 40: THE FIRST PROBLEMS CONFRONTING AND INFLUENCING
THE COMMUNIST PARTY AFTER THE CONSOLIDATION OF
POWER.

VI.40.1. The fact of the Communists' consolidation of power
confronts them with the need to reassess much of
their strategy.

On the basis of continuity with the previous social and economic policies, the KSČ had succeeded in winning and consolidating a position of immense political power. This could at first appear as "just" a change in power, but it was naturally interpreted by many within the KSČ as having much wider and deeper social implications. Pleasure at the election results naturally led to growing self-confidence and to the suggestion that there was little scope left for any opposition apart from outright reactionaries and traitors. The conclusion could be: "We are now going . . . unanimously and non-stop by the shortest route to socialism"¹.

These direct and optimistic words concealed a number of unanswered questions. Previously it had been possible to refer in very general terms to a road to socialism or to ultimately attaining socialism. The exact form of socialism in Czechoslovakia was not defined, but that was not a fundamental obstacle to the formulation of immediate policies. Instead, they were pragmatically restricted within a narrow time horizon so as to be broadly acceptable to the other parties. This set the framework both for the development of Czechoslovak society and for the development of KSČ policy.

February fundamentally altered that framework by rupturing the

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¹Nosek, radio broadcast, RP 1/6/48, p.5.

multi-party structure. Referring back especially to Chapter 17, it can be seen how many aspects of society evolved, at least to some extent, under the influence of the existence of a genuine plurality of parties. After February, the KSČ had won a position of such power as to be able to decide alone, and in full consciousness, over these questions.

This apparent freedom points to perhaps the most important of all the problems they faced. They had to implicitly redefine the role and position in society of the party. The restrictions that had existed before had been manifested largely through the plurality of parties which had, for example, secured the existence of a private sector and maintained a degree of independence for mass organisations. Such issues as the means of representing the diversity of interests within Czechoslovak society, the role of mass organisations or the relationship between politics and specialist abilities were all, in appearance at least, up for complete reassessment by the KSČ.

Evidently, the problems confronting a party with a monopoly of power are more demanding and complex than those confronting a party with a predominant share of power. There is still more scope for direct political intervention to consciously shape social development. It would seem that, to be able to find solutions to these new problems, there ought to be an extension of discussion and democracy at least within the party.

In some respects the effective elimination of other parties could make this easier. The need to present a united appearance against opponents and to incessantly blow one's own trumpet had

hopefully disappeared. Politics, instead of being concerned to a large extent with rivalries and manoeuvres, could centre on serious discussion of the development of Czechoslovak society in all its complexity.

There in fact were signs that many in the KSČ felt that, as there was no longer any need to restrain themselves in the interests of competition with other parties, they could express more publicly critical and controversial views. Particularly interesting were the large number of recommendations on the reorganisation of the National Committees. Generally they agreed with the KSČ pre-February proposals but many seemed to want more genuine decentralisation of powers. Amid a whole range of criticisms of the centralisation of power, one KSČ Area Committee included the interesting comment:

"the competence of National Committees in security is not properly clarified. While the National Committee members responsible for the police cooperate very well with the uniformed branch, there is practically no cooperation with the other sections i.e. criminal and state security"².

Hopes for such a democratisation of life were a very partial and short-lived consequence of February. The destruction of opposition could also be seen by party leaders as an end to the need to tolerate significant diversity and criticism within the KSČ³. Such an attitude could be seen as following logically from the February

²Lidová správa, 15/8/48, p.253.

³See above Vol. II, p.140.

events, with the role of the Action Committees and the greatly enhanced power of some Communist activists, but it would also imply acceptance by the party leadership of a notion of social development. In short, they would have to believe that the new tasks for a ruling party remained essentially simple, or largely the same as before: under such circumstances a full discussion of how to proceed would not have been an absolute necessity.

During the latter half of 1948 this attitude gradually won dominance. This chapter is concerned with the influences that strengthened it. It will become clear that there was always a degree of flexibility in KSC policy. At times there even seemed to be two lines. One, although never thoroughly worked out or elaborated, was based on the implicit acceptance of the complexity of society and hence of the existence of major objective constraints preventing the KSC from rapidly and totally transforming society. This appeared as a continuation of the pre-February notion of a slower road to socialism which was to avoid rushing or dictatorially imposing major social changes. By 1948, and particularly after the Informbureau's resolution on Yugoslavia discussed in the next section, there was no possibility of developing positively on the ideas of the Czechoslovak road to socialism and extending them into a new conception or model of socialism.

The alternative, although it too was never presented in a completely unambiguous way, was based essentially on the belief that, with a secure hold on political power, the KSC could quickly and totally transform social relationships. The policies of the preceding three years could then appear essentially as an unpleasant

but necessary compromise: that meant that there would be no advantage in trying to maintain continuity.

VI.40.2. The Informbureau's condemnation of the Yugoslav Communists and its insistence on Stalin's theories of the development of socialist society have little immediate impact on KSC policy.

Just as the February events changed internal political relationships, so too they fundamentally affected Czechoslovakia's international standing. In effect, they confirmed the completion of the first stage of the consolidation of the "Soviet bloc". The first sign that this would have far reaching implications for Czechoslovakia's internal life was the Informbureau's condemnation of Yugoslavia at its meeting in June 1948.

The resolution itself centred on the assertion that the Yugoslav leaders had been pursuing an anti-Soviet policy which was said to emanate from bourgeois nationalist elements who were said to have crept into the leadership of the Yugoslav Communist Party. This was backed up by some far-fetched accusations including the claim that the Yugoslav leaders were trying to curry favour with the imperialists and were arguing that "capitalist states are a lesser danger to the independence of Yugoslavia than the Soviet Union"⁴.

Although there were a number of criticisms of aspects of Yugoslavia's internal policies, these can hardly have been the root of the conflict as Stalin would have had more grounds for attacking

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⁴ FLPFPD 1/7/48, p.1 and p.2.

other states - particularly Czechoslovakia. Most likely the issue at stake was not primarily ideological but rather Stalin's desire to ensure the maximum consolidation of his bloc with the various East European states expressing unquestioning loyalty to the USSR. He must have expected that the Yugoslav leaders would demonstrate their subservience by accepting the exaggerated criticisms against them, but instead they refused and relations between the two states rapidly worsened.

The relevance of the Informbureau's resolution for Czechoslovakia was not at first clear. Above all there was no doubting Czechoslovakia's close relationship with the USSR so that criticisms of "anti-Sovietism" were felt to be irrelevant. Even on internal policy questions, where the aim of collectivising agriculture had been mentioned, the resolution seemed to be fairly flexible. It was pointed out that the Yugoslav party was criticised not for being too soft in the villages but rather for the opposite error. It definitely did not advocate sharp measures against the peasants or immediate collectivisation. So, in summarising the lessons for Czechoslovakia, it was possible to avoid any mention of collectivisation and simply give a vague warning against any sort of overconfidence with the reminder "that the transition from capitalism to socialism is not a road of slackening but of sharpening class struggle"⁵. This did not necessarily indicate the need for any change in KSČ policy.

Nervousness within the KSČ, was, however, gradually increased

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⁵ Funkcionář, 7/7/48, p.11-12.

by changes in other East European parties. The central question was always the policy towards the private sector, particularly in agriculture, and the most important case from Czechoslovakia's point of view was Poland. Changes occurred there with H. Minc warning that there could be no socialism as long as petty production remained dominant in agriculture⁶. This was followed by W. Gomulka's resignation from the post of First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party. He was accused of a right deviation in peasant policy⁷ and admitted to a number of charges including a nationalist position characterised as "an underestimation of the real ideological content in the relations between the new democracies and the Soviet Union, the failure to understand the leading role of the CPSU(8) in the international front of struggle against imperialism"⁸.

Earlier in Bulgaria and later in Hungary there were similar policy changes. The Yugoslav resolution and the Informbureau in general were concentrating on condemning an alleged "right deviation". There were sometimes even references to the dangers from "traitors" who followed Bukharin's ideas and there was a mounting insistence that the ideas in Stalin's basic work⁹ were of supreme importance for the formulation of policy in the People's Democracies. Above

⁶FLPFPD 1/8/48, p.2.

⁷Minc, FLPFPD 1/10/48, p.5.

⁸FLPFPD 15/9/48, p.4.

⁹This was produced in English as J.V. Stalin: Problems of Leninism, Moscow, 1953. Similarly important was felt to be History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Moscow, 1939.

all, prominence was given to the conception of socialist transformation enunciated by Stalin in his struggle with the "right" in the late 1920's. This included the theory that during socialist construction the class struggle would intensify. This was not a theory that had been verified by any empirical method nor had it been validly deduced from other theoretical notions. Essentially it was a bland assertion that proved capable of giving practical meaning to the condemnation of the "right deviation" in the late 1920's and of the notion of "nationally specific" roads to socialism.

Ultimately it led to a conception of social development reduced entirely to terms of class struggle. All conflicts with the holders of supreme power were ascribed to the conscious activity of class enemies. This simplistic view gradually dominated in official Czechoslovak thinking but, particularly at first, it was balanced by a more pragmatic view which took greater account of social realities.

Stalin's theories inevitably had a powerful influence on the KSČ. There had been an apparent theoretical vacuum over the preceding years, and suddenly party journals were full of ideological articles which could appear to provide a sounder basis for policies than had the earlier pragmatism. Nevertheless, their exact implications for policy measures only became clear against a background of disappointments and discontent at home combined with the fear of direct interventions from Stalin himself.

VI.40.3. The Communist Party is over-optimistic in hoping for a sudden transformation in the economic situation as a consequence of February.

The most important disappointment for the KSČ in their social and economic policies was the failure of industrial production to rise dramatically enough to promise earlier increases in workers' living standards. They had initially been very optimistic as they took full responsibility for directing the economy. The ÚPK was made irrelevant by the transformation of the party structure and instead enormous power went to a newly formed organ, the 15-member Economic Council attached to the KSČ Presidium, which made far-reaching decisions on the post-February reorganisation of the supreme economic organs¹⁰. At the same time the general framework for economic activity was thought to have been consolidated with the assurance of secure agreements with other planned economies. Trade balance figures were expected to improve because of this although there was still the same persistent deficit with the £ and \$ areas¹¹. General optimism was expressed by Frejka who was soon claiming that the pre-war production level had been passed even with a smaller population, so that real wages should already have been 40% above the pre-war level. He foresaw the prospect of making Czechoslovakia into a "shop window for socialism" claiming: "we have better means of production than England. We also have an army of technical intellectuals and a highly qualified work force"¹².

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¹⁰ See Frejka's report on its first activities, RP 30/4/48, p.2.

¹¹ R. Šimaček, Hospodář, 6/5/48, p.5.

¹² RP 6/4/48, p.1. By England he presumably meant the United Kingdom.

It seems that the February events were expected to remove restrictions on the economy and above all to unleash initiative from the ordinary workers. This seemed to be given some confirmation when the plan in industry was fulfilled by 102,3% in February and 106,4% in March¹³. Soon a movement was under way involving the announcement of "counter-plans" in factories. These were described as collective commitments worked out and discussed in factories by workers, engineers and managers with the aim of stepping up production to reach the Two Year Plan targets by 28/10/48. Frejka saw in this the start of a fundamental change in "the relationship of members of society to the means of production". The February events, further nationalisations and the thorough purge of public life were, it was claimed, generating a new feeling that people were really working for themselves¹⁴.

A number of indications do suggest that there was a certain willingness to work and to find ways of increasing production. The counter-plan movement seems to have started in a few factories in response to the KSČ Central Committee meeting of November 1947. It then spread rapidly following active encouragement from the trade unions¹⁵.

Other indicators that could be quoted were the doubling in the number of "innovating ideas" from workers and the doubling in the

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¹³RP 13"4/48, p.1.

¹⁴RP 1/5/48, p.1.

¹⁵J. Provazník, F. Vlasák: Socialistické soutěžení v ČSR, Praha, 1960, p.43-46.

number of Production Committees: there was also a steady increase in the number of factories where internal competition was organised¹⁶.

These, however, were not the only changes in workers' attitudes. It seems that this new enthusiasm gripped only a part of the workers who were willing to put in a great effort, including working extra shifts, to reach the ambitious new targets. It appears though that comparatively small voluntary brigades were not enough and the counter-plans could only have been reached by a far more widespread voluntary movement¹⁷. Instead, imbalances began to appear in May with particularly serious failures in coal mining. To a great extent this was blamed on the attitudes of the management but there were also references to the continuing indiscipline of some workers as shown in the high figures for absenteeism¹⁸.

It soon became clear that workers' attitudes were more diversified and complex than the KSČ expected¹⁹. This, however, was not subjected to a detailed investigation or analysis by the KSČ: instead, the failure to achieve a further upsurge in plan over-fulfillment was "blamed" on the failure of counter-plans to go beyond the work of a few specialists. This implicit exoneration of the working class completely contradicted the earlier claims that the counter-

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¹⁶E. Jukl: "Rozvoj tvořivé iniciativy pracujících na našich průmyslových závodech v období počátků socialistické výstavby", Vznik a vývoj, p.330-331.

¹⁷Jukl: "Rozvoj", p.334 and p.335.

¹⁸J. Neuls, Ivorba, 1948, No.25, p.495.

¹⁹See below, e.g. p.112, or Section VI.40.4.

plan movement had been genuinely broad and came spontaneously from the workers²⁰. It was, however, backed up with warnings that in future trade unions and Factory Councils would have to be involved in formulating counter-plans before workers could be convinced of their importance²¹. Gradually the blame was placed ever more clearly on the weakness in party organisations as a reason for the disappointing May results²². Initiative from the party was seen as the way to overcome shortcomings and to improve and increase production²³, and the need was emphasised for better organisational and political preparation for competition²⁴.

Evidently, there was no thorough and consistent analysis of economic problems and possibilities. Nevertheless, objective difficulties were being pushed into the background and the success of the economy was seen increasingly as dependent on the ability of the KSČ to raise workers' morale. The task of party organisations was therefore to convince workers that benefits would flow from raising production and productivity and thereby to unleash and direct their latent initiative which, it was believed, had been stunted under capitalism when experience had taught that effort to increase production led only to unemployment for workers or higher profits

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²⁰ e.g. Tvorba, 1948, No.14, p.261.

²¹ Z. Valouch, Funkcionář, 14/6/48, p.23.

²² Valouch, Funkcionář, 7/7/48, p.34.

²³ G. Kliment, Tvorba, 1948, No.27, p.521-522.

²⁴ J. Těhle, Funkcionář, 7/8/48, p.14.

for capitalists.

This was an important element in KSČ economic thinking before February but suddenly it became the dominant element with the role and usefulness of institutions redefined to accord with it. The plan was to be a means to encourage initiative, party organisations were to play a bigger role in this in factories and there was a determined effort to shift members from local into factory organisations²⁵. Factory Councils were also to help and there seems to have been little further mention of any other role they could play. So, although they were extremely powerful during the February days in deciding global questions of political power, they were given no specific expanded direct economic role. There were still the same ambiguities about their powers although demands for representation at any management talks, even if the law did not give them that right, were supported from above²⁶. In the following months, however, this was not clarified in any way to give them a role distinct or independent from the KSČ organisation. Neither were Factory Councils or KSČ basic organisations given any greater direct say over economic decisions: the trend was rather for a further centralisation of such powers among a small group of KSČ leaders.

A division of labour was being clarified whereby the supreme organs formulated a plan with ambitious targets and organisations at lower levels had only the limited task of persuading the work-

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²⁵ In March 1946 under 25% of party members were in factory organisations. This figure rose to 40% in early 1949; Kaplan: Utváření, p.152.

²⁶ Věstník ministerstva vnitra československé republiky, XXX, No.10, 31/5/48, p.206.

force to try to reach or pass those targets. February may well have created scope for some success in this but it may simultaneously have strengthened attitudes that made it harder. It was even suggested at the time that it encouraged false hopes that all problems would be solved at once and that there was no need for any special work effort²⁷. Alternatively, in so far as there was an upsurge in work elan it could not be fully exploited and was only frustrated because of bottlenecks caused by raw material shortages. This meant that some important factories were not even expecting to reach their plan targets by the end of the year²⁸.

VI.40.4. Workers become more militant and demand improvements in living standards. There are signs of distrust towards aspects of Communist Party policy.

Very probably a major discouragement to increased voluntary labour was its failure to yield the expected results in a higher standard of living. Optimistic talk of reaching and passing the pre-war level were great exaggerations. It was being claimed that real wages of manual and white collar workers in August 1947 were 45% and 6% above the March 1939 level²⁹. The calculation was done in such a way as to ignore the shortages in basic necessities and the need to pay high black market prices as became even more necessary after late 1947. A more recent estimate suggested that consumption for those who had been socially the weakest in the pre-Munich

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²⁷ Tatra, 1948, No.9, p.1.

²⁸ Tatra, 1948, No.10, p.1.

²⁹ Fakta a cifry, III, No.4, 15/4/48, p.4.

republic was somewhat higher than ever before in 1948 while for the better off there was a marked decline³⁰. Even if the average consumption per head could even have been higher in 1948 than in 1937, there was still no cause for any sort of complacency but rather deep discontent from workers who were given little more than promises that bread rations, which had been reduced in November 1947, could soon be raised again thanks to the supplies from the USSR³¹. The sort of news they received later was rather that a government meeting had decided not to reduce rations in basic foods although late spring was often the period when stocks had become depleted³². Even later it was decided that, despite the signs of a good harvest, rations would not be raised as the government preferred to build up stocks again first³³. There was also a growth in the black market and an acute shortage of textiles reflecting both the general difficulties in industry and the earlier need to export as much as possible to pay for the high price of wheat on the world market³⁴.

The true situation remains unclear but it does seem that after February, which workers' interpreted as their own victory, shortages and black market prices increased³⁵. Irrespective of the conclusions

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³⁰ Stručný, p.383.

³¹ Jankovcová, RP 4/3/48, p.1.

³² Hospodář, 27/5/48, p.3.

³³ Hospodář, 23/9/48, p.3.

³⁴ J. Nebesář, Hospodář, 9/9/48, p.1.

³⁵ For the level of black market prices see above Vol.III, p.67.

that can be drawn from statistics, at least one KSČ leader believed that living standards were dropping to "the lowest possible level"³⁶. So, instead of responding with an immediate voluntary commitment to work harder, they began to translate their increased self-confidence into insistent demands for immediate improvement in their social conditions. There were some strikes in the late summer of 1948 backing economic demands³⁷ and attacks on the softness or "liberalism" of the party leadership³⁸. The leadership could hardly ignore this. As Zápotocký pointed out:

"We have for whole decades been teaching workers to put their demands: you have a right to it and you must press for your rights, you must raise your living standard. When these problems are coming up today it is not possible to simply say - wait"³⁹.

Alongside the workers' desire for a social standing commensurate with their self-assurance was a sceptical attitude towards other social groups that were less firm in their commitment to the new government. Above all there was suspicion from Communist workers towards the "intelligentsia". This term was as vaguely defined as ever sometimes referring to leaders in the cultural field but very often to those technically qualified people that workers encountered

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³⁶ J. Frank, at the KSČ Presidium meeting of 9/9/48, quoted in V. Brabec: "Vztah KSČ a veřejnosti k politickým procesům na počátku padesátých let", Revue dějin socialismu, 1969, No.3, p.376.

³⁷ Brabec: "Vztah", p.377.

³⁸ M. Reiman, Nová mysl, 1968, No.8, p.1081.

³⁹ Brabec: "Vztah", p.375-376.

in their work. The depth of the problem was revealed in a lengthy discussion in the party's cultural journal Tvorba initiated by a letter expressing blanket hostility to intellectuals who had allegedly all been collaborators⁴⁰. Similar antipathy was expressed in a number of further letters although some indicated a milder, but just as real, distrust. One letter pointed out how workers' cynicism was encouraged as they watched such people suddenly changing to become KSC members: "We notice how hard it is for them to get used to the word comrade, how they dislike greeting in public with our 'honour to labour', how in trains or in public places they keep quiet when the party or its representatives are attacked, how they do not wear our badge etc. . . Here is the key to the elimination of distrust. . ." ⁴¹. This seems to summarise the common theme of practically all the workers who participated in the discussion as they suggested not that the intelligentsia was acting against or really damaging the new regime. Instead, they indicated distaste for those who could enjoy higher incomes or better working conditions and positions of power and influence while remaining lukewarm or even, as many workers saw it, hypocritical in their commitment.

It appears from this that, far from leading to a soothing of tension between social groups, February and the subsequent mass recruitment further accentuated certain previous divisions. The

⁴⁰ J.Vašut, Tvorba, 1948, No.16, p.319-320.

⁴¹ Tvorba, 1948, No.18, p.360. There was also the converse argument that those non-worker new members who ostentatiously displayed their commitment to the new regime should not be trusted; B. Sylla, Tvorba, 1948, No.35, p.699.

logic of KSC post-war policy pointed to the belief that such social tensions could be gradually eliminated as they had ultimately been caused by capitalism⁴². Nevertheless, the case put by intellectuals in their own defence did not attempt to deny the reality and even possible permanence of the social division between the two groups. Instead there were arguments that the social division of labour made both essential and also necessitated cooperation between the two. Against this it was suggested that some ordinary workers should be put in high positions so as to learn the necessary skills to replace those already there⁴³.

The leadership was at first perfectly willing to resist such ideas, just as they had resisted calls for a more thorough purge in factories during February, but late in 1948 the leadership suddenly became extremely compliant towards working class attitudes towards intellectuals and towards the private sector of the economy. This could appear both as a "class" line that could be hoped to raise the morale of the working class and as a re-interpretation of the implications of the Informbureau's resolution on Yugoslavia⁴⁴. An important further factor indirectly encouraging this change was the reappearance of an active opposition.

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⁴² This was argued by V. Pelíšek, Tvorba, 1948, No.19, p.378-379.

⁴³ e.g. A. Uher, Tvorba, 1948, No.19, p.379.

⁴⁴ See below Section VI.41.5.

VI.40.5. The Communists try to ensure continuing working class loyalty by overdramatising the danger of an organised opposition.

Real opposition first showed itself in public at the Sokol festival in July, but this was not felt to be a cause for deep concern. Much more serious was an attempt to use Beneš's funeral on 7/9/48 as an opportunity for an anti-government demonstration. This could have been an expression of concern at post-February development from the petty bourgeoisie and also an expression of opposition to the purge from Sokol officials⁴⁵. Irrespective of the source of opposition or of its strength, which is difficult to estimate, a warning was given by the Central Action Committee that an attempt was about to be made to hold a major demonstration against the regime and to reverse the results of February. Meetings in factories were quickly held and resolutions passed warning against allowing such a provocation and calling for tough measures⁴⁶. It was claimed that an attempt was being made "to break our unity" and to threaten successful economic and political development⁴⁷.

Soon there was evidence of "reaction's" plots in the form of leaflets. One in Tábor called for the occupation of KSČ offices, National Committees and police stations wherever strength permitted⁴⁸.

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⁴⁵ Kaplan. "Zamyšlení", First Part, p.781. Following the Sokol festival the KSČ began paying more attention to that organisation. This involved both a purge and the establishment of Sokol units in factories; Funkcionář, 7/9/48, p.21-22. Evidently, fears about potential opposition were leading the KSČ to narrow the scope for comparatively non-political organisations.

⁴⁶ RP 9/9/48, p.1.

⁴⁷ RP 11/9/48, p.1.

⁴⁸ RP 12/9/48, p.1.

Trials soon followed of the distributors of leaflets showing that all material had common features. There were, it was claimed, attacks on the People's Democratic system and on leading representatives of the state and calls for economic sabotage and terrorist acts⁴⁹. Sentences of up to seven years were given⁵⁰.

The crucial question here is not the measures used against the opposition but the way how the workers in factories had previously been presented with a dramatised account of the dangers⁵¹, so that strong police measures could be used with their apparent approval thereby simultaneously overcoming their ambivalence on other issues. This appears to have been the principal purpose of the factory meetings as otherwise the police force proved perfectly capable of handling the situation.

Slánský indicated how important the sudden reappearance of "reaction" was for overcoming workers' ambivalence with the following thoughts:

"In the months of July and August over the holiday period hardly anything apart from the supply difficulties was talked about. By our course of action we have succeeded in changing the mood at once. We have experience that as soon as the question of the regime is posed so everything else recedes.

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⁴⁹ RP 17/9/48, p.1.

⁵⁰ RP 22/9/48, p.1.

⁵¹ Looked at objectively, the signs of opposition could have been disquieting for the future, but hardly amounted to a real threat; c.f. M. Reiman: "Únor", p.32.

Also from the telegrams coming from factories it can be seen that the workers want a vigorous course against reaction"⁵².

This can be corroborated by several more quotes e.g. "We see in our organisations the fact that when we call them into readiness, as it was in February or on the occasion of Dr. Beneš's funeral, then discontent was forgotten at once . . . and the mood changed in three hours"⁵³. It was this that gave meaning to the Informbureau's resolution on Yugoslavia which provided the theory that class struggle would intensify during socialist construction. Suddenly this was being repeated in Czechoslovakia on every possible occasion while before its general correctness had simply been accepted without any reference to immediate practical implications.

Suddenly there was a willingness to draw sweeping conclusions. In effect all difficulties were attributed to a class struggle in the sense of a conscious effort by "reaction" to destroy the regime. This was accompanied by the beginnings of a self-critical approach from the KSČ leadership amounting to the suggestion that difficulties had been caused by a complacent view that "reaction" was completely defeated⁵⁴. This view had, in fact, never been held: the real change was not in the evaluation of "reaction's" continued existence

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⁵² Speaking at the KSČ Presidium meeting of 9/9/48, quoted in Brabec: "Vztah", p.377.

⁵³ Report from Ostrava to the meeting of KSČ Area Secretaries in September 1948, quoted in Kaplan: Utváření, p.130

⁵⁴ Gottwald, speaking at the Central Committee meeting of November 1948, quoted in K. Kaplan: "Třídní boje po únoru 1948", Příspěvky k dějinám KSČ, 1963, No.3, p.326.

but rather in the attribution of economic difficulties to conscious sabotage by "reaction". Attempts to prove this empirically were unconvincing⁵⁵. Instead, Stalin's theory of the inevitable intensification of the class struggle was repeated on every possible occasion so as to substantiate the point. KSC leaders found a new and easy explanation for difficulties from the assertion ". . .the more we weaken the positions of the bourgeoisie, the more they will resist and use all possible means, even criminal ones, to reverse our development to socialism"⁵⁶.

Stalin's theory was extremely important in the formulation of the whole new direction of KSC policy. The first and most direct point was that vague and diverse discontent or apathy could suddenly be redirected against a single identifiable enemy. Related to this, a very simple answer was given to the question of what the general direction of KSC activity was to be. New theoretical concepts did not need to be formulated despite the immense changes in society: instead the central concept was still the old, familiar class

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⁵⁵ An extraordinary attempt was made to show a relationship between the number of votes against the National Front in the elections and the number of litres of milk delivered per cow. There was a vague correlation which was used as the basis for the sweeping claim that nonfulfillment of delivery obligations was "primarily a component of reaction's political struggle against our people's regime"; Lidová správa, 1/10/48, p.295. This unconvincing argument seems to have been unique as an attempt to provide some empirical evidence for the assertion that economic difficulties could be blamed on political enemies.

⁵⁶ G. Kliment, speech, RP 12/9/48, p.1. This was, of course, a complete reversal of the argument, which had been presented so often before and given such prominence within KSC thinking, that the bourgeoisie was crippingly weakened by the revolutionary changes of 1945.

struggle.

This filled a gap in KSČ life too as there had been, over the summer, a general decline in party activity after the peaks of February and the election campaign. This decline of activity could be related to a lack of conception about what party work should involve and was causing particular concern as signs grew of widespread discontent or apathy towards the regime⁵⁷. It was feared that some resolutions sent in by workers had been inspired by reactionaries⁵⁸ and that workers discontent could be exploited in several directions⁵⁹. This seemed to be confirmed when even some workers were found among those being arrested and sentenced for anti-state activities⁶⁰.

Now the solution was found to the linked problems of reactivating the party and raising the morale of workers by pointing an accusing finger at reaction.

VI.40.6. Summary and discussion.

With their monopoly of political power confirmed, the KSČ had to confront new problems and possibilities. Previously, when constrained by the other parties, they had worked out a policy involving a degree of cautious pragmatism, compromise and restricted

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⁵⁷ There were references to "nervousness and panic" in the party at the Organisational Secretariat meeting of 20/8/48, quoted in Kaplan: Utváření, p.127.

⁵⁸ Kaplan: "Třídění", p.333.

⁵⁹ Snítil, K politickým, p.47.

⁶⁰ Funkcionář, 7/10/48, p.4.

within a short time horizon. They could conceivably have developed from this basis even after February. Perhaps the logical next step in that general direction would have been freer inner-party discussion of the complex tasks confronting the party.

There were signs of more open discussion developing, and the leadership at all times showed some caution in face of objective difficulties. Nevertheless, the course adopted quickly led to great restrictions on internal discussion and to a sharp change in social and economic policy.

An important influence was the Informbureau's condemnation of Yugoslavia and hence of ideas of specificity in roads to socialism. Fears developed in the KSC leadership that they too would be condemned. At the same time, the Informbureau supplied them with a theoretical basis for policies at just the time when they were confronting new problems. The basis was Stalin's conception of class struggle which amounted to a reduction of all social development to a struggle between classes such that all difficulties in achieving socialism could be attributed to the conscious work of class enemies.

The importance of these ideas was that they could justify policies adopted by the KSC in the economy and methods being developed for the exercising and consolidation of political power.

Economic thinking was increasingly divorced from a serious analysis of possibilities and of the causes of disappointments. Instead, it was assumed that political commitment from workers would lead to increased productivity. In fact, alongside some willingness to work voluntarily, workers were becoming more vocal in expressing

distrust towards the intelligentsia and in demanding an improvement in living standards.

The method used by the KSČ to ensure working class commitment was bound up with their reaction towards signs of a right-wing opposition. This was an important precedent for later years⁶¹.

It appeared that a demonstration was planned to coincide with Beneš's funeral, but the KSČ leadership presented this as a real threat to the regime. Meetings were held in factories and workers demanded tough police measures. The crucial point then was that the KSČ leadership realised that they could ensure working class loyalty by claiming that the regime itself was threatened: complaints about living standards were then quickly forgotten.

This manipulative political manœuvre rapidly became a central part both of the method of governing and of economic and social policies. This is further elaborated in the next chapter.

Stalin's theories suddenly gained a new relevance within the KSČ. Where empirical evidence was lacking, they could be quoted to support the assertion that difficulties were due to class enemies.

It is a remarkable thing that, even though their objective situation was so different, the theoretical basis and even to a great extent the methods of political work of the KSČ were very similar to when they had been in opposition.

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⁶¹ A direct analogy can be found with the later atmosphere leading to the arrest and imprisonment of Communist leaders; Brabec: "Vztah", p.377. Also, see below p.154.

CHAPTER 41: THE PROCESS OF PENETRATION OF STALIN'S "CLASS"
LINE INTO COMMUNIST PARTY POLICY AND THE PRO-
GRESSIVE ABANDONMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF A
CZECHOSLOVAK ROAD TO SOCIALISM.

VI.41.1. Gottwald, following consultations with Stalin, takes
a position midway between the two lines emerging
within the Communist Party.

On 11/9/48, as concern and doubts about the correctness of party policy were growing, Gottwald left Czechoslovakia for consultations with the Soviet leadership. There was little doubt that questions of internal policy would be discussed and it seemed likely that the KSČ would be criticised. The possible line of such a criticism appeared in an article written by the philosopher Kolman who was himself a Soviet citizen. His criticisms, presented at party meetings and in an article that was never published were pretty sweeping pointing to the mild line on religion, describing the "specific road" as a retreat from Leninism and arguing that an "all-national" as opposed to a "class" spirit had been allowed to dominate. All this he interpreted as a consequence of the swamping of proletarian by petty bourgeois elements as could be seen in the numerical preponderance of local over factory organisations. He blamed what he described as the effective leadership of the party - Slánský, Švermová and Bareš - for preventing development towards a fully "Marxist - Leninist" party and for restricting the most mature workers' organisations¹.

Although publication of this article was prevented, there was

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¹M. Reiman, Nová mysl, 1968, No.8, p.1082.

evidently a fear that Kolman might have been speaking with the authority of the Soviet leadership. Slánský, at a meeting of area secretaries on 22-23/9/48, spoke of the need to sharpen the course against reaction "ideologically, politically and administratively", and emphasised that a "period of sharpening class struggle" was beginning. He added the self-critical remark that "...the party underestimated the danger from reactionary elements after February..."², and even extended it as follows:

"After the return of comrade Gottwald from the Soviet Union our Central Committee and the Presidium of the party will be confronted with a whole range of new tactical problems. It will elaborate anew the policy of the party in a whole range of sectors so as to correspond to the new conditions of sharpening class struggle. . ."³.

There was also an opposing position that reacted strongly against the suggestion that party screening should aim to "bolshevise" the party⁴. Instead it was argued that nobody should lose his head at the continuing presence of "reaction" as the Czechoslovak road, it was repeated, was "...more complicated, in a certain sense more difficult"⁵. On his return Gottwald stood somewhere between these two positions. Perhaps Stalin had been persuaded that a full self-

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²RP 24/9/48, p.1.

³Kaplan: Utváření, p.111-112.

⁴This term was used and explained by Č. Císař, Ivorba, 1948, No.35, p.683-684.

⁵"O.H.", Funkcionář, 23/9/48, p.1 and p.2.

criticism by the KSČ leadership was not necessary as there were no influential "anti-Soviet" tendencies in Czechoslovakia. Revealingly, Gottwald presented the strengthening of bonds with the USSR as the centre of all policy⁶.

Even though policy changes were to be made quietly, they were still very significant. A Central Committee meeting was therefore called for November⁷. In the interim the view that there could be a road to socialism without a dictatorship of the proletariat was being vigorously condemned as an attempt at a revision of Marxism - Leninism. Effectively it was argued that seeking major differences from the Soviet road was a "dangerous nationalist deviation" aiming to separate Czechoslovakia from the Soviet Union⁸. Instead, specificity was reduced only to the fact that the Red Army had liberated Czechoslovakia. The bourgeoisie was still expected to resist just as stubbornly and this was used as a justification for employing "all administrative means. In a fight with ^{this} sort of enemy strong words will not help, only energetic actions"⁹.

Gottwald did not present so hard a position. He seemed to want to retain an element of specificity in the sense of a slower and more cautious approach albeit within Stalin's general conception of

⁶FLPFPD, 1/11/48, p.3. This was, of course different from the previous emphasis on a Slavonic orientation which had included great admiration for Tito.

⁷Kaplan: Utváření, p.228.

⁸Bareš, Tvorba, 1948, No.38, p.741-742.

⁹V. Kún, Funkcionář, 23/10/48, p.2-3.

socialist construction. He warned against excessive haste - particularly in the collectivisation of agriculture - saying that there should still be no mention of Kolkhozes but just preparations for their later organisation. Stalin had approved of this¹⁰.

Nevertheless, the KSČ leadership increasingly returned to a "pure class" line, in some respects similar to the attitudes of the 1928-1934 period, and this reinforced a number of tendencies that were making themselves felt after the post-February consolidation of power.

VI.41.2. Open recruitment to the party gives way to a screening of members. This is not yet a total capitulation to the "class" line.

As the KSČ held an effective monopoly of power, changes in the party's internal structure and composition were of immense importance for Czechoslovak society as a whole. As was argued above, in Section III.17.8, those issues had been strongly influenced by the need to compete with other legal parties. After February that was changed. First there was the mass recruitment, leading to still greater diversity among members, and then there were reactions against that from the political core of the party. It seems to be a perfectly natural corollary of February itself, and of the great power party officials and activists had acquired, that they should see no need to make apparent compromises in favour of these new recruits when power had been consolidated. Their attitudes could have much in common with those of manual workers towards intellectuals.

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¹⁰ Kaplan: Utváření, p.247.

So, following persistent signs of distaste towards the whole practice, mass recruitment was officially stopped in early August when the KSČ Presidium admitted that serious mistakes had been made¹¹. Simultaneously, new recruitment principles were announced with an emphasis on the need to be more selective when recruiting peasants, small businessmen and intellectuals and to see recruiting workers as the primary aim¹². This was a significant change as previously the need to broaden the party's social base had been a principal aim of the recruitment: middle peasants, workers and office workers in industry and particularly students, among whom the KSČ was still weak, were seen as the most useful recruits¹³. There was also a reappearance of old terminology with references to the "Bolshevik principle in accepting new members"¹⁴.

The official line, however, was that the change was not intended to be particularly dramatic. The proposals for a screening of all party members, announced shortly afterwards, appeared to be essentially in harmony with the stated justification for the post-February recruitment. For some months there had been references to the need for ideological consolidation of the party by means of education for the new members¹⁵, and the fullest possible

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¹¹ Funkcionář, 7/8/48, p.1.

¹² Funkcionář, 7/8/48, p.1.

¹³ H. Lomský, Funkcionář, 14/6/48, p.19-20.

¹⁴ Kún, Funkcionář, 7/8/48, p.6.

¹⁵ Funkcionář, 11/5/48, p.30 and p.31.

internal discussion. Although it was felt that some "alien elements" would have to be removed¹⁶, the principal aim of the screening process was to be the education of new members plus some reorganisation and subdivision of local and factory organisations into units of manageable size¹⁷. Shortly before the start, which was to be on 1/10/48, there were strong warnings against the assumptions of "many comrades" who "wanted to get rid of the so-called 'February and post-February members' which they see as nothing more than ballast"¹⁸.

It was at this point that mounting nervousness among party activists and the effects of the Informbureau's resolution on Yugoslavia began to seriously influence inner-party questions. At the Presidium meeting of 9/9/48 it was argued, albeit improbably in view of the realities of the party's organisational structure plus the nature of opposition the regime was facing, that feelings of uncertainty and even panic had been able to penetrate more easily because of the party's social breadth¹⁹. It was even suggested that bourgeois attitudes and petty bourgeois elements were causing the trouble, so that many members would have to be expelled²⁰.

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¹⁶ Funkcionář, 14/6/48, p.12-13.

¹⁷ Funkcionář, 21/8/48, p.1-9.

¹⁸ Funkcionář, 7/9/48, p.5.

¹⁹ Kaplan: Utváření, p.131.

²⁰ Kaplan: "Třídění", p.339.

VI.41.3. With a further tightening of the inner-party regime it seems that Stalin's theories serve to justify gross limitations on internal democracy.

In early November there were changes announced within the KSČ in line with the "class" approach and responding to demands for more positive commitment from members. A differentiated approach was announced with probationary membership, which had been introduced shortly beforehand, to be of different lengths for manual workers and others. Conversion of full membership back to probationary membership, which was allowed for during the screening, was to be applied only in exceptional cases for workers. For others there was to be a very close examination of what motivated them to join the KSČ²¹. There were general warnings of how many new members from the intelligentsia, who had previously held no strong political views, were remarkably reluctant to study socialist theory insisting that their work was "non-political, non-party"²².

Although it was claimed that the party screening involved a bigger discussion of party strategy and tactics than ever before²³, there is no sign of the direct involvement of the membership in formulating that strategy. The discussion took place against a background of fear that KSČ policy was being condemned by Stalin and fear from part of the membership that they might be expelled by the

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²¹ Resolution of the KSČ Presidium meeting of 3/11/48, Funkcionář, 9/11/48, p.6,10 and p.11.

²² RP 6/11/48, p.1.

²³ Slánský, speaking at the KSČ Central Committee meeting of 17/11/48, reproduced in Slánský: Za vítězství, II, p.234.

other part. Under these conditions, initiatives and contributions from lower levels rapidly diminished while the power and field of competence of the party apparatus increased²⁴. Channels of communication from the ordinary members up to the leadership, which had been very important for the formulation of policy before February, seem to have disappeared.

Perhaps more important than anything else in this deterioration of inner-party life was the growth of a new phenomenon described as "dictatorialism". In a sense it was no more than an extension into inner-party affairs of the methods that were being used against other parties and against active opponents of the regime. It was referred to during the autumn of 1948 when a number of party officials were accused of shunning cooperation with party organizations: instead they exercised power alone²⁵. The problem came into the open over the so-called Karlovy Vary case where party members were expelled or even imprisoned for voicing criticisms²⁶. There were plenty of similar cases in other areas with officials consciously restricting internal discussions that could lead to criticisms of themselves. Perhaps most revealing of the immense and largely uncontrolled power they had gained after February, they sometimes used the security organs to silence criticisms from within the party²⁷.

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²⁴ Kaplan: Utváření, p.170-171.

²⁵ Čísař, Ivorba, 1948, No.35, p.684.

²⁶ Kaplan: Utváření, p.177-178, and Tausigová, Ivorba, 1949, p.458-459.

²⁷ Kaplan: Utváření, p.183 and p.184.

The leadership naturally condemned such practices, but did not see in them a consequence of the new power structure. Instead, in line with Marxist theory as they understood it, power was seen as no more than the expression of ^{the} will of a class. Problems of its control and regulation and of the role and activities of the ruling party had not been seriously considered before and were raised only in a very uncertain, pragmatic and unsystematic way. Gottwald did at least once indicate that there could be advantages in the legal existence of another party, but he never pressed the point²⁸.

Zápotocký felt that trade unions could act as a control, pointing out that external criticisms had served a purpose in making party members aware of the need to defend their policies before the public²⁹.

In practice, the trade unions were given a different role within society so that they could not possibly perform this function.

Zápotocký later pointed to the growth of disagreements and strife within the party which he attributed to the absence of a visible enemy³⁰.

Systematisation of this pragmatic observation into a recognition of the need for a continuing mechanism of control over power was impossible in the prevailing atmosphere. Advantages of the pre-February political system were never mentioned and there was never any suggestion that anything could be learnt from the pre-Munich

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²⁸ See above p. 90.

²⁹ Speaking on 9/4/48, quoted in Kaplan: Utváření, p. 182.

³⁰ Speaking on 20/4/49, quoted in Kaplan: Utváření, p. 186.

republic. Instead, alongside the condemnation of "specificity" went condemnation of "the remnants of bourgeois liberalism and pseudo-democracy"³¹. There was no longer any suggestion that there had been anything positive in previous democratic forms and instead only their negative features were emphasised - such as the undemocratic way of formulating the first constitution and restrictions on freedom of expression particularly for Communists³² - as if that were sufficient to justify the post-February system.

So the leadership's condemnations of "dictatorialism" could only imply that the phenomenon was no deeper than the mistakes and transgressions of a few specific individuals. They, in fact, had no compunctions about using similar methods. In investigating the Karlovy Vary case, security organs were used and the leading party official in the area was condemned as a "class enemy who had wormed his way into our party to do deliberate harm"³³.

Still more serious was the treatment of Kolman. Evidently, he was felt to be a real danger and he was expelled from the party, apparently without his own knowledge, and transported to imprisonment in the USSR³⁴. So, paradoxically, it was the man who wanted the most consistent application of the "class" line who was the most harshly suppressed. Nevertheless, the scope for more general

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³¹ E. Bolgár, a Hungarian referring to Czechoslovak developments, quoted in Světové rozhledy, II, No.10, October 1948, p.773.

³² Fakta a cifry, III, No.8, 10/8/48, p.2-11.

³³ Tausigová, quoted in Kaplan: Utváření, p.190.

³⁴ See the letter from Kolman in Nová mysl, 1968, No.8, p.1079-1080.

abuses of power was undoubtedly greatly increased by the spread of attitudes and ideas that were broadly in line with Kolman's critique.

The leadership went at least half way towards accepting those attitudes. They too increasingly saw the problem not as the need for a democratisation of political life, but as the need to take a strong line against alleged enemies within the party. This could be supported by Stalin's theories and could even appear as a means to win back solid working class commitment. Moreover, within such a conception "dictatorialism" appeared just as another reason for distrusting party members at lower levels.

It was suggested that the introduction of secret ballots in inner-party elections could be a useful restraint on party officials thereby restricting these abuses of power. This was strongly favoured as a principle within the leadership, but it was rejected as premature owing to the alleged immaturity of members and to the prevalence of internal conflicts between groups³⁵. Control over the abuses of power was therefore left in the hands of the leadership who, of course, had more scope than anyone else to abuse power.

The importance and practical meaning of the "class" approach was quickly becoming clear. It was important in justifying an increasingly dictatorial regime within the party. It backed this up with answers to the questions of the conception of social development and the content of the work of a party holding a monopoly of power.

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³⁵ Kaplan: Utváření, p.185.

Instead of seeing the complexity of the problem, everything was reduced to a continuing and fierce political struggle. The party therefore had all the more reason for rigid and disciplined unity and for paranoia about maintaining the purity of its ranks.

VI.41.4. In an attempt to win firm loyalty from the working class, an increasingly tough line is taken against opponents of the regime and against those held responsible for economic difficulties.

The social and economic policies developed by the KSČ in late 1948 were justified in terms of a "class" approach and centred on the conception of a "sharp course" against reaction. This was partly a response to immediate economic difficulties which meant that some section of the population had to suffer. It was also an application of Stalin's theory about the intensifying class struggle and could appear as an attempt to win back working class loyalty so as to ensure a firm support for the new regime and to encourage voluntary efforts to raise production.

This seems to have been all that the working class was expected to do. There was no recognition of any advantage in that degree of independence and differentiation of function that workers' organs had been given before February. Instead, even at the very lowest level, trade unions were given exactly the same tasks as party organisations³⁶ and that did not even include checking the management.

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³⁶Slánský: Za vítězství, II, p.207. For the tasks assigned to party organisations, see below p.141.

The most obvious and immediate practical expression of the sharp course was a strengthening of the powers of the police³⁷.

There were strong administrative measures against black marketeers - including, for example, the conversion of two terms of life imprisonment into death sentences by the supreme court in Brno³⁸ - and it did appear that this had some influence in reducing the black market. Reports, however, were often contradictory suggesting that it was suppressed in some localities but reappearing in others. It seemed probable that at least the elaborately organised chains were disappearing³⁹: even this would not significantly raise workers' living standards as it did not solve the fundamental problem of acute shortages.

A second element of the "sharp course" was the establishment of labour camps. This was apparently demanded by resolutions sent in from factory meetings which wanted "loafers and disrupters" sent there. Slánský approved of this attitude⁴⁰ and suggested that there was no need to fear any unpopularity abroad because "it is already being said that we have concentration camps"⁴¹. He linked it with the sharper measures against small businessmen who were expressing opposition to the regime and against "Kulaks". The expectation was that it would raise workers' morale and this seemed to be confirmed by the large number of resolutions expressing approval⁴². It seemed to be in

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³⁷ Eelda: "Some Problems", p.142.

³⁸ RP 10/10/48, p.1.

³⁹ Statistický zpravodaj, XI, no.12, December 1948, p.430.

⁴⁰ RP 14/9/48, p.2.

⁴¹ Kaplan: "Zamyšlení", Part One, p.781-782.

⁴² Kaplan: "Zamyšlení", Part One, p.784.

line with the desire "to finish for ever with the attempts of reaction"⁴³.

A novelty in the measure was the provision that no court sentence was needed. Instead, it was felt that adequate objectivity could be achieved by the Ministry of the Interior while National Committees might be biased for or against a particular individual. At times it was implied that the aim was to use repressive measures against those whose transgressions were so mild that even new repressive laws could not touch them: this included the mere spreading of rumours which were claimed to be a conscious part of reaction's activities⁴⁴. Others, however, made clear that the targets were those avoiding work and that the aim was to re-educate them⁴⁵. This meant that, despite the initial justification, it was not so obviously linked to the "class" approach and could seem to be directed largely against indiscipline among workers. A report in 1950 showed that 86,6% of those in labour camps were workers or small businessmen⁴⁶.

A third element was the introduction of "class rationing". This involved the establishment from 1/1/49 of a dual market whereby about one fifth of the population (capitalists, small businessmen and those peasants owning over 15ha or not fulfilling their obligations

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⁴³RP 19/9/48, p.2.

⁴⁴e.g. Široký, speaking to the KSS Central Committee on 27/9/48, KSS dok, p.709.

⁴⁵F. Machula, Lidová správa, 15/10/48, p.313.

⁴⁶Belda: "Some Problems", p.142.

to the state) were excluded from the ration system for some goods. In one sense this was just a practical solution to a real economic problem as the imbalance between supply and demand on the market could only be corrected at the expense of some or all of the population. It was felt to be quite impossible to lower workers' living standards so that the chosen alternative hit very hard only at much of the private sector. It was hoped that in time market equilibrium could be re-established and rationing abolished completely⁴⁷.

The wider changes in the thinking of the KSČ pushed this pragmatic conception into the background. Instead, class rationing was increasingly interpreted as a permanent blow against the private sector and hence as a firm renunciation of the previous "all-national" policy. It could be justified by the belief that the private sector was essentially hostile to the government and that only among the working class was there solid support. It could therefore appear as the start to rapid administrative measures aiming to eliminate quickly the private sector⁴⁸.

VI.41.5. Following Stalin's advice on the need to create a "new intelligentsia", a policy is adopted responding directly to workers' prejudices.

The most dramatic change was in the attitude towards the intelligentsia which amounted to a capitulation to the attitudes

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⁴⁷ Kaplan: Utváření, p.212-213, and Stručný, p.372-373.

⁴⁸ Kaplan: Utváření, p.213.

of at least the politically vocal workers. This in turn was linked up with the notion that economic success depended on initiative from the workers and that the purpose of planning was to unleash that initiative. Gottwald indicated the new attitude on his return from the USSR when he presented the idea of creating a "new intelligentsia". This was to provide the new cadre force for the army and police. There is nothing remarkable in this as it seems quite natural that any regime would want maximum loyalty from its armed forces. More surprising was the great emphasis Gottwald gave to the technical intelligentsia. He argued for a reform of technical schools to allow for rapid advancement of young workers so that they could quickly acquire the necessary qualifications to take the highest positions. His argument was as follows:

"It is true that a considerable part of the older technical intelligentsia is faithfully serving the nation, but that is not enough. The old are dying out . . . We need a new type of intelligentsia which comes out of the working class which does not have to overcome earlier prejudices and also has no cause to renounce the working class because it is part of it. That applies above all to the technical intelligentsia"⁴⁹.

The case for a new intelligentsia was argued slightly differently by Kliment, although he too placed all the emphasis on those working in industry who had previously been regarded as the most loyal to the regime. He was full of praise for workers and claimed that

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⁴⁹ Speaking on 2/10/48, RP 3/10/48, p.1.

their enthusiasm had encountered "a lack of sympathy, bordering sometimes even on sabotage, from part of the technical intelligentsia". No new evidence was presented to support this claim, but Kliment asserted that Factory Councils and Production Committees often seemed to be more enthusiastic than the management and concluded from this that the way to utilise workers' initiative was to give the maximum opportunity for the promotion of talented workers even into the most responsible positions⁵⁰.

Although there were voices advocating continued caution⁵¹, these were outweighed by mounting criticisms of the technical intelligentsia and even arguments that their lukewarm political attitudes were an obstacle to economic success. This was most clearly expressed by Slánský at the Central Committee on 17/11/48:

"Take the director of a factory. He is a good organiser or a technical specialist but politically he is absolutely illiterate. Can he today run the factory well? He cannot! Technical knowledge or simple organisational ability is not enough for that. If a director today is to fulfill and surpass production plans he can only do it successfully when he does not suppress socialist competition but when he supports the development of the initiative and labour elan of the personnel, when he does not reject the innovating suggestions

⁵⁰ RP 9/10/48, p.1.

⁵¹ Bareš, at the KSČ Presidium meeting of 8/11/48, argued against any emergency measures. He saw no need to go beyond making educational advance easier for the children of workers; J. Maňák: "Sociální aspekty politiky KSČ vůči inteligenci v letech 1947-1953", Revue dějin socialismu, 1969, No.5, p.691-692.

of the workers but rather attentively listens to the workers' voices, consults them and gathers valuable experience from them. Therefore only he who is a politically educated Marxist-Leninist can be a good director"⁵².

This contrasts strikingly with previous calls to "deepen the camradely and friendly cooperation of managers, technicians and workers, of all honest workers irrespective of political affiliation"⁵³. It is also highly revealing in its presentation of politics as being the ability to win the confidence and raise the morale of workers who were naturally distrustful of managers. It linked up closely with the presentation of the tasks of the party's factory organisations which were as follows: first was the mobilisation of the whole labour force to fulfill production plans. Second was the development of socialist competition and "shock work". Third was the fight for the full utilisation of machinery and conservation of raw materials. Fourth was the fight for better labour discipline. Fifth was the encouragement of piece work and bonus systems so that each individual could be rewarded for his own work. Sixth and last was concern for the social conditions of the labour force⁵⁴.

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⁵²Slánský: Za vítězství, II, p.220-221.

⁵³Slánský, speech, RP 23/11/47, p.2.

⁵⁴Slánský: Za vítězství, II, p.207.

VI.41.6. The new "class" line leads to a policy of gradually suppressing the private sector and hence to a conception of economic planning with a maximum of effective centralisation.

A major element in the Communist Party's pre-February campaign had been the argument that the Two Year Plan was failing only where capitalist enterprise predominated. This seemed to be borne out by the plan's final figures which suggested that national income per head was 13% higher than in 1937⁵⁵. Heavy industry had done particularly well and the only real failures were agriculture and construction "where petty production predominate and where there were capitalist elements"⁵⁶. There was a considerable oversimplification of the causes of failure in these two sectors both of which were crucial for the standard of living. F.J. Kolár could see only two obstacles in agriculture - the drought and "sabotage by remnants of capitalist elements"⁵⁷. There were also other obstacles such as the failure of industrial productivity to rise as planned thereby accentuating the agricultural labour shortage which could not be counter-balanced by technical progress. The land reform and settling of frontier areas may also have adversely effected production so that even the Two Year Plan's targets were probably unrealistic⁵⁸. Kolár, however, deduced from his oversimplified position that the precondition for economic

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⁵⁵ Stručný, p.367.

⁵⁶ RP 24/9/48.

⁵⁷ Ivorba, 1948, No.39, p.767-768.

⁵⁸ Stručný, p.373-374.

success was "unceasing, untiring and ever intensifying struggle against the remnants of capitalist elements in our economy and a striving to replace backward small-scale production with socially higher forms"⁵⁹.

This meant a reformulation of the place of the private sector within the Five Year Plan and even of ^{the} aims of the plan itself. Previously it had been given the very general aim of raising living standards and a similar relationship to the idea of national unity as that of the Two Year Plan. It was worked out on the basis of the original proposal from the KSČ in late 1947 and there is scope for doubting whether all its aims were achievable⁶⁰. In the period when Gottwald was in the USSR there was a quite sudden change from discussions about it in purely economic terms⁶¹ to emphasis on the need to look at it from the viewpoint of socialist construction, understood in purely socio-economic terms⁶². Limiting and suppressing the remaining capitalist elements became the "consequence"⁶³ and increasingly the aim itself of the plan. This was a logical

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⁵⁹ Tvorba, 1948, No.40, p.781. Perhaps an encouragement to such propagandist over-simplification was a feeling expressed by Gottwald on 20/9/48 (quoted in Kaplan: Utváření, p.202) that, as the Two Year Plan had failed to raise living standards, planning in general was discredited among part of the population. The presentation of the plan as a political struggle and this explanation for its shortcomings could make it easier to mobilise support and even enthusiasm.

⁶⁰ See Kaplan: Utváření, esp. p.202-204 and p.224.

⁶¹ Zápotocký, FLPFPD, 1/8/48, p.4.

⁶² Kaplan: Utváření, p.210.

⁶³ e.g. Zápotocký, Základy první pětiletky, Praha, 1948, p.13.

corollary of the view that, because of the intensification of the class struggle and active resistance from capitalist elements in the form of economic sabotage, complete victory could only be achieved when a socialist economic structure had been created⁶⁴.

At the Central Committee meeting on 17/11/48 Gottwald was more cautious than to advocate an immediate attempt to eliminate the private sector. Stalin's writings on the subject had warned against excessive haste pointing to the need for an adequate industrial base for a higher technical level before collectivisation of agriculture could be undertaken⁶⁵. Gottwald's caution appeared both as a response to such warnings and as an element of continuity with the previous slower road. Nevertheless, there was noticeably less interest in the private sector than before and, although it was still given some tasks that it could fulfill within the plan, there was no suggestion that it was better equipped than the public sector for even these limited tasks. Moreover, they all involved the need for the closest integration into the plan and cooperation with nationalised enterprises⁶⁶. The implication could be that the private sector was to be absorbed without the use of direct administrative measures and this process was encouraged by the policy of class rationing⁶⁷.

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⁶⁴ F.J. Kolár, FLPFPD, 15/2/49, p.3.

⁶⁵ In the USSR there had been no really large urban petty bourgeoisie: problems relating to the private sector had naturally centred on agriculture.

⁶⁶ e.g. Živnostenské noviny, 4/12/48, p.1-2.

⁶⁷ Kaplan: Utváření, p.267.

Towards peasants the immediate aim was to ensure the fulfillment of quota obligations. A similar method was used to the encouragement of counter-plans thereby trying to use the peasants' degree of approval for the outcome of February to incorporate them into the administratively planned economy⁶⁸. A new element was introduced with the need for "restricting and suppressing" capitalist elements: this led to a differentiated approach in setting obligations. Bigger peasants with 30-50ha, who were claimed to be subtly sabotaging, were to be given harder tasks. For smaller peasants there was to be greater emphasis on solving their social problems⁶⁹. There was a problem here in defining the boundary between friendly and hostile peasants. The Russian word kulak, for which there was no exact Czech equivalent suggesting that it did not refer to an exact social phenomenon either, was the term applied to the allegedly hostile peasants but there were differences within the KSČ on what it referred to in terms of size of landholding⁷⁰. Problems in identifying and defining class relations in the villages did not prevent Ďuriš from presenting the struggle against capitalist elements as the most important aspect of the party's agricultural policy⁷¹. This was the start to an approach which ignored Gottwald's earlier calls for caution and placed the trans-

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⁶⁸ Provazník, Vlasák: Socialistické, p.51-54.

⁶⁹ Funkcionář, 29/11/48, p.30.

⁷⁰ Kaplan: Utváření, p.246.

⁷¹ Kaplan: Utváření, p.249.

formation of social relations before the technical development of agriculture. In other words, collectivisation could be justified even without the necessary technical preconditions.

Not surprisingly, there was growing suspicion towards the regime's policies from peasants, who were worried by the reappearance of talk of collectivisation: even the land they were to have received after February was generally allocated to newly established cooperatives⁷². Small businessmen naturally felt discriminated against particularly by class rationing and there were expressions of sympathy for their case within the KSČ⁷³. The intelligentsia was also worried: their concern stemmed from the purge, the restriction of opposition and discussion, the changes in the party demanding more positive commitment and the "sharp course"⁷⁴. Talk of the new intelligentsia must have compounded this into real fear.

All these feelings could find no legal means of expression. Instead, owing to the nature of the new power structure plus the atmosphere within the KSČ their existence could encourage more repressive measures. Slánský effectively argued that there was no

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⁷² K. Jech: "Sociální pohyb a postavení čs. zemědělského obyvatelstva v letech 1948-1955", Revue dějin socialismu, 1968, zvláštní číslo, p.1113-1114. In early 1949 there was even an attempt to establish cooperatives that would be a step towards the full collectivisation of agriculture. In practice, the attempt failed and investigations of peasant opinion indicated how deep their suspicions were; Kaplan: Utváření, p.259-260.

⁷³ Kaplan: Utváření, p.267.

⁷⁴ Maňák: "K problematice", p.1017-1018.

longer any point in trying to broaden the party's support: "What has remained outside our ranks we will probably never win for the policy of People's Democracy, they are outright enemy elements"⁷⁵.

This again reveals how far the KSČ had moved from the pre-February implicit conception of social development. At that time broad national unity had been a conscious aim whereby as much as possible of the population could be involved in economic construction. By late 1948, direct planning, political commitment and the working class alone were felt to be all that was necessary for Czechoslovakia's social and economic development.

VI.41.7. The problem of Slovak nationalism is explained away within a conception of development reduced entirely to class struggle.

Events in Slovakia during and after February do not appear as a major influence on all-Czechoslovak political questions. Instead, Slovak development became even more firmly subordinated within a general perspective worked out in Prague.

This, however, led to sharper conflicts among Czechoslovak Communists than before. This did not directly reflect a wider active opposition in Slovakia than in the Czech lands, neither did it stem from disagreements on the policies adopted to consolidate power. On that issue there seems to have been implicit unanimity.

The Slovak Communists were happy to carry out the purge of public administration with the minimum of popular participation.

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⁷⁵ Speaking on 11/10/48, quoted in Kaplan: "Třídění", p.343.

A particular problem arose because it was usually felt necessary to remove over half the elected representatives in National Committees. Generally this was done by dissolving the old body and appointing an Administrative Commission from above with only very occasionally elections at public assemblies⁷⁶. Often these new bodies were formed directly out of the local Action Committees on the suggestion of the local KSS organisation⁷⁷.

There were several specially Slovak factors helping this transfer of power. One was the view that the Democratic Party had been the opposition while the KSS represented support for the government and even for President Beneš. This view could be reinforced by the trials of the conspirators⁷⁸ and was particularly influential in those areas where the government programme had had an effect. Another important point was the reassurance given by Ďuriš that land under 50ha was guaranteed for private ownership: this was apparently seen by many former supporters of the Democratic Party as evidence that they had been deceived by talk of "kolkhozes"⁷⁹.

The election results did suggest slightly more willingness to vote against the official candidates than in the Czech lands. There

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⁷⁶ Laluha: Február, p.254-255.

⁷⁷ Laluha: Február, p.241.

⁷⁸ Obuch, against whom the evidence was particularly strong, pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 30 years imprisonment. Kempný received six years and Bugár one. Ursíny refused to admit anything and received a seven year sentence; RP 20/4/48, p.1, RP 21/4/48, p.2, RP 30/4/48, p.1 and RP 16/5/48, p.1. In 1964 the evidence against Ursíny was admitted to have been fabricated; J.Jablonický, M.Kropilák: Slovník Slovenského národného povstania, Bratislava, 1970, p.302.

⁷⁹ Laluha: Február, p.267.

was, however, no real evidence of an organised opposition. The impression rather was of a successful consolidation of Communist power and it was this that led to disagreements between Czech and Slovak Communists. The point was that, just as the consolidation of power allowed some Czech Communists to expect a looser inner-party regime, so too Slovak Communists could no longer see the need for the degree of centralisation of authority in Prague. In discussion of the new constitution they therefore advocated giving greater powers to the SNR. This point of view was simply not understood in Prague where Kopecký and to a certain extent also Gottwald seemed to be losing patience with the KSS. They seemed to see the question only in pragmatic terms from their point of view as the holders of power. They could still see possible threats to their positions from the other parties and from Beneš. Their general distrust towards the political situation in Slovakia only added to their worries and they could not see any possible gains from devolving more power⁸⁰.

This was the background to a decision to merge the two Communist Parties. It was not preceded by genuine broad discussion, but was reached effectively by the KSČ Presidium alone meeting on 26/7/48⁸¹. There was no sign of opposition from Slovak Communist leaders who in fact seemed to gain from the merger. They were given, by co-option, full representation in KSČ supreme organs thereby apparently

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⁸⁰ Kaplan: Utváření, p.34-40.

⁸¹ S. Faltán: Slovenská, p.260 and p.261.

overcoming the strange subordination they had endured before.

Nevertheless, the merger also ensured the elimination of a potentially independent Slovak Communist Party and coincided with further changes in nationalities policy. The most important of these was the abandonment of the aim of expelling the Hungarian minority⁸². Instead, it was decided at a KSČ Presidium meeting on 8/7/48 that Hungarians would be allowed certain rights and would be able to join the KSČ (not the KSS)⁸³. Husák pointed explicitly to the merger of Communist Parties as laying the basis for future Czechoslovak-Hungarian relations and he emphasised the urgency of overcoming nationality prejudices in Southern Slovakia⁸⁴.

Apparently there were voices within the KSS doubting the need for so big a change in policy towards Hungarians⁸⁵. There were even some who, when confronted with anti-Jewish demonstrations, were prepared to play along with existing prejudices by, for example, publicising the notion that all the leaders of the Democratic Party had been Jews⁸⁶.

So in three respects - in the powers of the SNR, in the Hungarian question and in the attitude towards anti-semitism - the problem of Slovak nationalism was being raised in a new way after February. This led to a particular interpretation of the

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⁸² Široký, speaking to the KSS Central Committee on 27/9/48, KSS dok, p.719.

⁸³ KSS dok, p.701.

⁸⁴ RP 29/9/48, p.1-2.

⁸⁵ Široký referred to such views at the KSS Central Committee on 28/9/48, KSS dok, p.744.

⁸⁶ Široký ridiculed this on 28/9/48, KSS dok, p.746.

Informbureau's resolution on Yugoslavia in such a way as to implicitly justify the firm subordination of Slovak Communists to Prague's guidance. Široky even claimed that "petty bourgeois nationalism" could be found within certain parts of Slovak society, within the KSS and within its leading organs⁸⁷. He qualified this by pointing out that, contrary to the suggestions of some other KSS leaders, the situation was by no means as serious as in Yugoslavia or in Poland where the party leaders had apparently taken a position of "anti-Russian nationalism"⁸⁸.

It is noteworthy that this condemnation of Slovak nationalism was partly an expression and consequence of the reversal of policies that had been largely enforced from Prague and that had never been suitable to Slovak conditions. This reversal, however, did not lead to a new appreciation of the peculiarities of Slovak development. Above all, it did not involve a recognition, in political and constitutional forms, of Slovak nationhood.

The Communists had never argued that Slovakia should retain complete separation from Czech development. Particularly the Slovak economy, they believed, could benefit greatly from full integration into an all-Czechoslovak economy. By the autumn of 1948, however, this was being taken much further. According to Široky, any attempt to maintain the distinctness of Slovakia was essentially no more than an attempt to prevent "the acceptance of progressive ideas

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⁸⁷ Speaking on 27/9/48, KSS dok, p.710.

⁸⁸ KSS dok, p.740.

from more advanced nations"⁸⁹.

VI.41.8. Summary and discussion.

Stalin's "class" line penetrated quickly into all aspects of KSC policy during the autumn 1948. There were advocates of a still sharper change who called for a full self-criticism from the leadership. Gottwald however, following consultations with Stalin, retained an element of caution. Even if earlier ideas of the Czechoslovak road to socialism were being quietly dropped, there was still some continuity in the sense that the Soviet model of socialist construction was to be adopted with some degree of respect for Czechoslovak conditions.

Nevertheless, the changes were important enough. Ideas for a mild screening of the party gave way to demands for more sweeping changes which stemmed from fears that alien elements had penetrated the party. This created an atmosphere in which it was practically impossible to control over party officials who in some cases even used the security forces to silence their critics. Even the party leadership started using similar methods.

Stalin's theories gave no framework for understanding the need for a control on power. They also helped justify increasingly strong police measures against opponents of the regime. This was described as a "sharp course" against "reaction" and apparently won approval from workers, but it involved a dangerous departure from the existing legal norms.

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⁸⁹Speaking to the KSS Central Committee on 27/9/48, KSS dok, p.710.

Social and economic policy generally appeared as the consequence of an application of Stalin's conception of socialist construction in a situation of increasing economic difficulties. Inevitably, at least some section of the population had to suffer but, so as to ensure their political loyalty, workers were given preferential treatment in the distribution of rations. This became linked with the view that the petty bourgeoisie were politically hostile so that the private sector should be tolerated no longer. A conception of economic planning evolved from this in which private enterprise had no role to play at all. In fact, the aims of the plan were increasingly set as the creation of socialist socio-economic relations. There were even attempts at the voluntary collectivisation of agriculture although there was no technological justification.

Stalin's advice was probably more direct on the need to create a "new intelligentsia" but, by placing the principal emphasis on the technical intelligentsia, this idea took a form that fitted with workers' prejudices and dovetailed with a conception of economic activity based on loyalty to the KSČ.

All this could only narrow the regime's social base. Under the prevailing circumstances, this did not lead to a return towards pre-February social policies. Instead, the KSČ leadership relied ever more on manipulative methods of gaining working class support.

This makes clear the inadequacy of two simplistic ways of defining power in post-February Czechoslovakia. It is incomplete to describe it either as "totalitarian" or, to use the term that came back into official use in 1949, as a "dictatorship of the proletariat". Dictatorship was exercised, but neither by nor

against the proletariat.

The development of society depended greatly on the means whereby the party leadership won consent from their supporters and handled manifestations of discontent and potential opposition from them. This was crucially important in the development to the show trials of the 1950's. They were not simply individual abuses of power, or reflections of the disruption of earlier legal norms. Although both those set the scene, the point was the conversion of the use of the security forces into a systematic aspect of the party leadership's method of governing society.

In February 1951 Šling, Švermová and Clementis were arrested and accused by the Central Committee of treason. Bareš commented as follows: "We are not exaggerating when we say that to a certain extent the spirit inside the party and the response to the resolution of the Central Committee resembles the atmosphere of February 1948. And this is not accidental . . . because as in February 1948, at a different stage of development, we have crushed the enemy which tried to turn back the wheel of history"⁹⁰. So, again, the identification of an alleged enemy diffused developing discontent and converted it into enthusiastic support.

The question of how all this could have been avoided is taken up again in the next, concluding chapter.

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⁹⁰ Brabec: "Vztah", p.379.

CHAPTER 42: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS.

There is no attempt in this concluding chapter to summarise the preceding work. The aim is just to bring out and put together some of the important elements in the argument so as to be able to confront the wider problems raised by Czechoslovakia's development in the 1945-1948 period. The basic question can be expressed as the need to explain why, in the practically unique case of development in a definitely socialist direction in an advanced country with democratic traditions, socialism became associated with the same dictatorial methods as had developed in the Soviet Union.

This must be linked to a number of further questions. Why did the Communist Party enjoy such enormous prestige in 1945 and what role did that party play in transforming society? Why, following a period of evolution apparently towards a specifically Czechoslovak model of socialism, did Czechoslovakia increasingly adopt the "Soviet model" of socialism? To ask why something happened raises the question of whether events followed an inevitable course or whether there were genuine alternatives. There is therefore an attempt in this chapter to indicate how the KSČ could have developed towards, and successfully applied, a different conception of socialist development more suited to the needs of an advanced society.

42.1. Explaining the socialist direction of Czechoslovakia's post-World War II development.

Understanding the general popularity of the Communist Party and the strength of the general trend of revolutionary changes in

1945 is not the same as understanding in detail the form that socialism took in Czechoslovakia. The former is best interpreted against a wider background of Czechoslovak history. This shows how, and experience elsewhere seems to fully confirm this, socialist revolution could only take place in an advanced industrialised society under quite exceptional historical conditions.

Important points are the newness of the Czechoslovak state, the consequent weakness of a conservative tradition and the relative strength of political forces advocating radical social change. The real obstacles to socialist revolution after World War I seemed to be not solid conservatism or political repression, but the ability of reformist politicians to satisfy part of the workers' and others' social aspirations and to find solutions to the specific problems of Czechoslovakia as a new, small, landlocked state located between powerful neighbours and containing large national minorities.

A comparison between 1918 and 1945 shows that socialist ideas were popular on both occasions, but that in 1945 that popularity was greater and was expressed in a large body of support for the Communist Party. The experiences from the close of World War I, from the inter-war period, from the collapse of the Czechoslovak state, from the occupation of the Czechlands and from liberation in 1945 all served to broaden the Communist Party's prestige and to encourage the view that other political philosophies could not cope with the problems confronting Czechoslovakia.

Perhaps just as important as this "objective" background was the subjective ability of the Communist Party to evolve policies

broadly in line with the needs of the situation. This added up to a unique configuration of circumstances that enabled Czechoslovakia to set out in a clearly socialist direction after May 1945.

42.2. The general problems of evolving a model of socialism suitable to an advanced, industrialised society.

A description of the general trend of Czechoslovakia's development cannot be fully separated from a more detailed analysis of Czechoslovak society in the 1945-1948 period. Considerable detail is necessary in this, because the basic argument is that the Communist Party lacked the theoretical equipment to cope with the complex tasks of governing and leading an advanced society: this can only be shown by revealing at least some of society's complexity.

The likely difference between revolution in an advanced and backward country was pointed out by Gramsci. In the former case the process seemed to be more complex because "when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed"¹. In one sense this seemed to be borne out by Czechoslovakia's experience. It has been pointed out that, looking at post-World War II Eastern European experience, socialist revolution in the sense of consolidation of Communist power took place latest in the most advanced and mature country. Evidently, socialist revolution had to be viewed as a slower and more complex process and not as

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¹ A. Gramsci: Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, London, 1971, p.238.

a single revolutionary act².

Despite attempts to use some of Gramsci's ideas as a basis for throwing further light on Czechoslovak development³, He is little help beyond indicating the need for a more concrete analysis of the relationship between political power and other aspects of the structure of society. References to a "war of position" or a "war of manoeuvre"⁴, obscure the crucial point. The national revolution involved the destruction of big capital in industry and finance plus a whole number of further changes. Politics thereby became far less a question of "war" and increasingly a question of conscious and constructive involvement in the shaping and creation of new institutions and relationships.

A description and analysis of the Czechoslovak Party's role in society therefore sheds new light on the meaning of a revolutionary change and of political power in an advanced society. Not only was society complex, but it was also fairly tightly bound together into one single entity. Particularly during and as a consequence of the revolutionary changes politics, in the sense of the activities of government or of political parties, had a deep, lasting and direct impact on the lives of most people.

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² O. Janeček: "Kdy u nás začala socialistická revoluce", Československá revoluce, esp. p.98.

³ See also O. Janeček: "K otázce našeho přístupu k socialismu a k typu naší revoluce v letech 1944-1945", Slovenské národné povstanie roku 1944, Bratislava, 1965.

⁴ See Gramsci: Selections, esp. p.237-239.

There was a discernible gradation and differentiation of involvement, depending on the effects of revolutionary changes and the degree of incorporation into the developing model of economic planning, and this corresponded roughly to the propensity among different social groups to join political parties. As an example, peasants in the Czech interior, and this was even more true in less advanced Slovak villages, were less closely integrated and less likely to be actively concerned about politics. This cannot be expressed rigidly as they clearly were affected by government decisions and by some of the revolutionary changes. Nevertheless, there is a definite contrast between their position and that of many office workers, policemen and employees of the media who could find their jobs and livelihoods directly dependent on political allegiances. This, stemming from the generally higher level of development and hence greater degree of integration of society, gave the political, social and economic changes in Czechoslovakia in and after 1945 a somewhat different character from those associated with the Russian revolution of 1917.

This is the logical starting point for analysing the Communist Party's role, and for seeing whether the party was subjectively capable of handling the objective situation. The Communists could not, of course, have prepared in advance detailed ideas with which to confront every eventuality. Ideas were naturally always evolving, changing and responding to new realities. Nevertheless, as was argued in Chapter 21, the Communist Party was not fully prepared for the task it was taking on. The party's past history

had been, in many respects, an inadequate preparation for confronting the situation of 1945. It left a heritage of serious weaknesses in the fundamental theoretical basis from which they worked out their policies.

42.3. The development of Communist Party policy up to 1945.

For almost all the existence of the Communist Party until the formation of the Košice government, its policies were either strongly influenced or directly determined by the Comintern. Particularly from 1924 onwards the Comintern leadership in Moscow was able to issue directives changing the policies and leadership of the KSČ. Although these directives did not always point policy consistently in one direction, the net effect was to restrict the ability of the KSČ to work out and develop ideas on the specific Czechoslovak situation.

A promising start was made in the party's early years when Šmeral began working out a strategy based on the recognition of Czechoslovakia's concrete international standing and advanced society. He still did not explore the full implications of national statehood and neither was there consideration of whether the political structure, involving mass parties and parliamentary democracy, could or should be maintained under socialism. Although Šmeral advocated working for a coalition government of socialist parties, he did not develop from this any ideas on the possible political structure under socialism.

Nevertheless, ideas were flexible and changeable and there was

plenty of discussion of political strategy. Had the Comintern continued to allow scope for this, then it seems reasonable to postulate that, even if Šmeral's aims might not have been achieved at once, the Communist Party would have been much better placed to lead Czechoslovak society at a later period.

Instead, the Comintern encouraged and ensured the victory of a negative, sectarian trend which led to increasingly sharp condemnations of Šmeral and a rejection of the need for genuine internal discussion. Particularly in the 1928-1934 period, ideas were evolved that were of use only to a party of pure opposition. Nothing was considered beyond blanket condemnations of capitalism and consequently, despite some flexibility in ideas, nothing serious was worked out on how to further advance Czechoslovak society as a whole. It was in this period that the notion that all social phenomena could be reduced to class terms really took root.

The conception of the Popular Front was clearly restricted by this heritage, but could still provide a basis for ideas for the new republic developed particularly in Moscow from 1943 onwards. The conceptual advances made then should not be underestimated as the KSČ proved more capable than any other party of formulating a programme close to the immediate needs of Czechoslovak society. It showed that the party leaders implicitly understood that politics in that period were not purely concerned with a struggle for power, nor with regulating strife between parties or governing within a stable and largely unchanging political and

social structure. Instead, politics after liberation involved cooperation between political parties in laying the basis for a new republic.

42.4. Contradictions and changes in post-war Communist Party policy.

The development of new ideas could not be complete within the short space of time from the dissolution of the Comintern until February 1948. There seemed in fact to be a serious contradiction between the party's ability to recognise and respond to the immediate needs of the situation, and the party's overall way of looking at social development. Although practice suggested to the contrary, the party leadership still at first presented the revolution as primarily a political power struggle, albeit not between precisely defined socio-economic classes but between vaguer notions of "reaction" and the "nation".

Even if the leading Communists did not recognise the need to change some of their basic ideas, it was a fact that the party was deeply changed in its nature and internal structure by becoming the leading force in the revolutionary changes and in society generally. It was no longer just a party of dedicated political activists, although such people still dominated in its leading core. It had broadened to include many more sorts of people. Especially significant were those bringing specialist abilities for the multifarious tasks of governing an advanced society.

The guiding theoretical conceptions evolved when in opposition were inadequate for this wider task the party was taking on, but

that did not of itself force immediate modifications. None of the Communist leaders were great theoreticians and, given the previous history of the Communist movement, they were understandably reluctant to experiment with new ideas: instead, they waited for the initiative to come from Stalin. The same sort of attitude prevailed throughout the KSČ as, despite diversity within the party's ranks, the prestige of the leadership was high: there was no serious possibility of discussion extending beyond the limits set from above.

Gradually, however, prominent Communists did develop towards a firmer theoretical base for a Czechoslovak road to socialism. Their ideas were always cautious enough to evade explicit criticisms of the party's past actions and policies. Nevertheless, it is possible to conceive of the KSČ undertaking major programmatic revisions on the issues discussed in the following sections. In each case an important start was made in the party's practice and often also in explicitly stated ideas.

This avoids the mistake of writing history as if events could only have followed one possible course, thereby implying that the only possible model of socialism was and is the one that emerged. It also avoids the opposite error of indulging in idle speculation about a totally abstract model of socialism divorced from the realities of the situation at the time. The aim is rather to see how Czechoslovak society and the Communist Party could have developed from the basis laid in and after 1945.

The points below could be referred to as issues of socialist

democracy, or of a democratic model of socialism. Such terms, and even use of the word democracy, have been avoided wherever possible throughout this work as democracy can have so many different meanings to different people. In the following sections no attempt is made to define or construct a precise model of socialist democracy. The approach used does not try to portray a conception of democracy as a distinct issue, but rather as a number of related issues within a broader conception of society as a whole.

As the Communist Party was trying to actively lead and shape society, the crucial general introductory points on its conception of democracy, and on how that could affect Czechoslovakia's development, are the party's methodology for interpreting and understanding society - this centres on the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat - and the related issue of its view of its role within society, which relates to the concept of the vanguard party.

42.5. The temporary abandonment of references to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, propounded by the Comintern in such a way as to mean an effective monopoly of power for the Communist Party, did not just represent a theory of political power. It was also a consequence and expression of an over-simplified and reductionist method of understanding social reality. It implied the reduction of everything, especially power, to terms of class. This, of course, was not the view of Marx and

Engels⁵, but change did not begin from a critique or reassessment of ideas developed in the inter-war period.

The term the dictatorship of the proletariat was dropped in 1941 presumably as a tactical expedient in the interests of good relations between the Soviet Union and the West. It was not propagated again by the Czechoslovak Communists until they had safely consolidated a monopoly^{of} power. Nevertheless, despite the most superficial appearances, this developed into much more than just a tactic or trick with which the Communists hoped to dupe their coalition partners. The realities of Czechoslovakia's post-war development pointed beyond that and encouraged the Communists to reassess some of their ideas. This led to the view that the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat was unnecessary and that socialism might be achieved by a more gradual, evolutionary process.

This was only a start, but it could conceivably have allowed for the party to develop towards a new theoretical basis, more capable of encompassing the full complexity of society. The Communist Party's leaders were too cautious while theoreticians were generally too rigid in their ideas to attempt this.

An analogous and related issue was the recognition of a socialist content to the national revolution. Had this point been followed through vigorously, it could have had important political implications. It implied the need for a more flexible conception of socialism which could not be reduced purely to socio-economic terms. That interpretation meant that socialism was an

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⁵ See Weselowski's work referred to in Vol. I, p.12,

essentially simple and easily defined social formation which has to be achieved, or built, after which problems and difficulties would cease. Such an interpretation was perhaps natural for a party of opposition, unable to directly influence immediate policies and therefore relying to a great extent on a vague vision for the future. It could hardly be adequate for a party confronting the realities and contradictions of a socialist development of society.

42.6. The failure to evolve a flexible conception of the leading role of the Communist Party.

Although there was some discussion within the KSČ of the relevance of the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat, there was no clarification of ideas on the role of the Communist Party itself. Lenin's theory of the vanguard party could be interpreted as meaning that the party alone can know everything and can decide the direction of social development purely on the basis of its own theoretical conceptions.

Such an interpretation fits with the system of political power that developed after February and also with the Communists' attitude when in opposition, particularly in the 1928-1934 period, when all other political movements were completely condemned and rejected. It could be justified historiographically by an account of KSČ history presented as a succession of successes, or at least as a steady development towards the ultimate victory.

Propaganda for any party tends to portray its history in as creditable a way as possible. Slánský's account to the KSČ Eighth

Congress⁶ was an example of this. He argued that the party had been proved right in the past, that its basic philosophy had been proved capable of finding solutions to Czechoslovakia's problems and that it therefore deserved trust for the future. The only existing attempt to write a full account of KSČ history⁷ points to a basically similar conclusion.

The evidence assembled in this work points to a different conclusion. Although sometimes able to contribute decisively to the general direction of Czechoslovakia's development, the KSČ never had the theoretical equipment, or the means for forming policies, with which to understand and hence direct society entirely on its own. At all times, society was too complex to be directed from one centre or on the basis of one all-embracing conception, such as class struggle.

It seems that there are broadly two possible conceptions of the role of a Communist Party, both roughly compatible with the idea of a vanguard party or of a party exercising a leading role in changing society. One sees the vanguard as capable of knowing everything and therefore justified in taking a monopoly of power. The alternative, more flexible view involves rejecting the claim that any party can hold a monopoly of truth.

This is still compatible with the view that a vanguard party has to play a decisive role if a socialist transformation of

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⁶See above Vol.II, p.198-199.

⁷Dějiny KSČ.

society is to take place. It can certainly be argued that the great strength of the Communist Party was a precondition for Czechoslovakia developing in a socialist direction, but its leading role had to be continually reaffirmed in each individual sphere of social activity on the basis of its ability to develop and apply its general ideas to specific concrete problems raised by social development. This naturally involved compromises and modifications in some of the party's proposals, but the general trend of development after May 1945 was close enough to the Communists' immediate aims and dependent enough on their strength for it to be valid to talk of a leading role for the Communist Party.

Although this was how the party's role was developing in practice, and although it was pragmatically recognised that the party should not try to do everything, it was not justified in theoretical terms as related to the needs of Czechoslovak society at the time. This was a very important weakness greatly restricting the party's ability to develop answers to more specific issues of democracy.

42.7. The failure of the Communists to appreciate the benefits of a genuine plurality of parties.

The Communists did not openly discuss the issue of a one-party versus a multi-party political system, but the ideas of a vanguard party as inherited from the days of the Comintern and as applied in the Soviet Union, plus a very few allusions to that effect, suggest that they saw a one-party state as the ultimate

ideal.

A comparison between the pre-February and post-February political structures does suggest that there were real benefits in the National Front system. While socialist change was by no means prevented, there was a powerful control on the Communist Party leadership's power. Other bodies and organs could not be transformed into simple transmission belts, criticisms could not be totally silenced, the diversity of interests and opinions could not be ignored and policy measures could not be decided on without some discussion in public. To become and remain a leading force in society, or a vanguard party, the Communist Party had to be able to present its idea sensibly and convincingly enough to win in open political debate.

There was, then, an important and very welcome mechanism of control over the supreme positions of power. Even inside the KSC, and despite the absence of any discussion about inner-party democracy, relations were affected by the existence of a plurality of parties in society. It was largely prodding and criticisms from some of their partners in the National Front that particularly encouraged Communists to begin publicly modifying their ideas.

The National Front, however, was not primarily a mechanism for preventing the abuses stemming from a monopoly of power. Initially it was a coalition between political forces holding different conceptions of social development. There was always the possibility that the balance of strength might change leading to a reversal of some of the important revolutionary changes, or to give the Communists sufficient strength to govern alone. This

meant that there was always tension and nervousness between parties. Moreover, the fact of competition between them encouraged demagoguery, the distortion of truth for propaganda aims, and the restriction of discussions inside parties. Clearly, it was a most imperfect method of ensuring a degree of control over power.

The further development of Czechoslovak society might have led to a better system. Even after February 1948 some Communist activists, and possibly some individuals outside the party too, did not expect a completely monolithic power structure. It might be possible to develop a model of socialism within which diversity is represented within one party and through various representative organs and mass organisations. That would require toleration by the leadership of greater flexibility, discussion and diversity within the party.

The Communist Party leadership's behaviour in and immediately after February 1948 suggests that they did not recognise the need for the expression of diverse views and interests up to the highest point of power in the state. Far from seeking a better way of doing this from the pre-February coalition, they took measures going way beyond the method of political debate so as to eliminate from a share in power the other political parties. The way this was done points to a conception of social development was such that they believed everything could be directed by one centralised party.

Had they known in advance of the economic and social difficulties of the next few years and, above all, had they foreseen the

tragedies about to befall so many of them personally, then leading figures in the party might have seen the error of this conception. There was, however, no sign until after 1956 of anybody in the Communist movement realising the need for a more complete theory of democracy.

42.8. The failure of the Communists to recognise the need for public control over potential organs of repression.

Alongside the general issue of a control over power so as to ensure representation for diverse views and interests is the narrower question of public control over the organs that can be used for direct repression. This became a live political issue around the situation in the police force. The Communist Party saw the basic question as the political allegiance of the police. With considerable justification, they felt that the police in the pre-Munich republic had been clearly biased towards the right. Their response from 1945 onwards was to aim for an even firmer Communist dominance: this was achieved by, and itself involved, a great restriction on the degree of genuine public control over the police.

There certainly had to be armed forces capable of dealing with possible concerted opposition especially from some Germans and from fascist elements in Slovakia. Major changes from the pre-Munich and Protectorate forces were perfectly justified, as too was insistence on the need for an anti-fascist political awareness within the police. This, however, could have been achieved with an extension rather than a restriction of public control. The

police and security forces would then have been given the role of protecting the environment within which the parties of the National Front could cooperate and compete for popularity. Attempts to eliminate other political forces from a presence in potentially repressive organs indicated contempt, or at least distrust, for coalition partners. It could follow naturally from the erroneous conception of a vanguard party discussed above in Section 42.6. Had they appreciated the need for a general control over power, the Communist leadership might have moved closer to the Social Democrats ideas on the police.

Communist domination of the police was certainly a source of tension between parties. It is, however, difficult to assess the direct political role of the police, or of the more specialised security and intelligence services, in the 1945-1948 period. They certainly were not powerful on their own, but they may have been indirectly influencing major political decisions. Apart from the known cases where their activities were at the centre of political controversies, they could conceivably have been reporting to the KSČ leadership on the activities of the other parties in such a way as to generate and encourage fears. Beneš apparently felt that Gottwald genuinely believed that there were plans for creating a government of officials⁸.

There is a real lack of empirical evidence on the activities of the police and security forces and on the Communist leaders' views

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⁸ Ripka: Czechoslovakia, p.213.

on how they were to be used. Bareš hinted that they may have been playing a larger role than published sources suggest:

"He who takes a stand against the people and against the republic must be aware that sooner or later he will feel the weight of the law. It is a definite shortcoming that many Communists have not yet fully understood the meaning of state, legal and administrative power"⁹.

Even without speculation on the role of the police and security forces, later experience leaves little doubt that potential organs of repression need to be publicly accountable. In the 1945-1948 period this issue was raised, particularly by the Social Democrats, but Communists showed no awareness of its importance. Nevertheless, mechanisms of control did exist owing to the independence from the Communist Party of the courts and owing to the need for the Communists to show at least some degree of respect for their coalition partners who could publicise abuses through their press. These controls were removed after February 1948.

42.9. Vagueness and ambiguities in the Communist Party's ideas on the democratisation of local government.

The Communists were the advocates of giving maximum power to the National Committees in May 1945. This followed partly from a pragmatic realisation of the difficulties and problems that would be faced in consolidating the new state and partly from a belief that grass roots organs of power were necessary to guarantee

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⁹ Bareš: Naše, p.28-29.

revolutionary changes. This last point could be deduced from an interpretation of the Russian revolution and from interpretations of the failure of the revolutionary movement in Czechoslovakia in 1918 and 1938.

This, however, is quite insufficient to define the role of National Committees after the consolidation of the state. The Communists evidently hoped that they would develop a lasting role bringing local administration closer to the people it directly affected, but to make this a reality they had to have realistic ideas on what powers and activities could be taken by local organs. There obviously had to be some limitations to the degree of decentralisation of power and the main debate between Czech parties centred on whether to give the National Committees considerable autonomy in a narrow range of issues, or whether to restrict their role to that of executive organs of the Ministry of the Interior with a much wider sphere of competence.

The Communists favoured this latter conception and its weakness can be seen in the issue of the police force. The issue there, however, was not simply the ministry's powers over appointments. Probably of greater importance was the Communist Party's grip on National Committee posts concerned with the police. That in itself need not have ruled out a considerable degree of autonomous decision making power for National Committees, and hence a genuine decentralisation of power. That would have depended on the situation within the party and on whether individual party members were likely to try to act as a control on the activities of a ministry headed by

a member of their own party. The pressures against doing so - such as the competition between parties encouraging chauvinism within each one and the actual power structures within parties as reflected in their methods of selecting representatives for elective posts - were considerable.

Although parties could make a major contribution in developing ideas on the role and powers of National Committees, their domination over those bodies also in itself hampered the genuine decentralisation of power. An analogous situation could have applied in a number of economic organs, as discussed in the next section, and in much of the press which was directly subordinated to political parties. Such party domination could be justified by the Communists' view that they could lead society alone and also by the National Socialists' view that diversity could be fully expressed through competing parties.

After February the Communist Party took responsibility on its own for the development of society. Despite some hints that a laxer regime could develop within the party, the trend was for a far greater restriction on the autonomy of National Committees. The purge implemented by Action Committees, giving effective power to party bodies, exemplified this.

42.10. The possibilities for developing a new model of management for a socialist economy.

Nationalisations, state regulation of the economy and the Two Year Plan created the basis for the development of a socialist economy. As was suggested in the introduction to Part V, there need have been no rush to eliminate all private enterprise although

there could well have been benefits from a gradual extension of public ownership and a gradual improvement in methods of planning.

This means that the general ownership pattern is only one side to the question of the structure of a socialist economy. It is possible to develop different degrees of centralised control and different methods of detailed management particularly within the nationalised sector. The situation in Czechoslovakia ruled out great reliance on market forces or on the price mechanism as a regulator and organiser of the economy. It would therefore be quite unrealistic to look for an embryonic model of market socialism. Czechoslovak experience is, however, of relevance to questions of centralised planning under a plurality of parties and with attempts to develop industrial democracy.

Experience in the brief period of economic planning up to February 1948 does not support the view that political plurality and centralised economic planning are incompatible. Despite Ripka's fears¹⁰ the accession of the Communist Party to undivided power did not follow logically from the nationalisation of, and hence centralised control over, most of Czechoslovakia's industry. Neither did the destruction of big capital mean restrictions on workers' freedoms. On the contrary, it gave enormous scope for an expansion of industrial democracy particularly through the power of elected Factory Councils.

There^{is} insufficient information to allow for definite conclusions on the role they could have played within a model of centralised

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¹⁰ See above, Vol.II, p.160.

planning. It remains impossible to generalise safely on how far they could behave as completely independent bodies or how far they were genuinely representing the feelings of workers. The role played by Communists in their creation and in their later activities also raises the issue of their autonomy from direct party directives. Nevertheless, it is possible to conceive of them, and other trade union bodies, developing from their economic role as a "social conscience" of the enterprise into a powerful instrument of economic policy. They could have been permanently involved in winning workers' commitment for government policies and, as a precondition for being able to do that, in acting as a partner with or at least as a control on economic policy makers at all levels thereby preventing arbitrary acts and voluntaristic decisions.

Only part of this was the Communist Party's conception of their role, but there clearly was a place for independent representatives bodies for workers at all levels in the economy.

Widespread working class doubts about, and disagreements with party policy ^{- as outlined especially in Chapter 27 -} are evidence enough of that. Together with scope for independent, professional economic discussion plus some sort of plurality in the supreme body of plan formulation, strong Factory Councils and trade unions could have prevented the subjectivist planning errors of the years after 1948.

The greatly expanded role of the Communist Party after February 1948 meant that representative organs were given no specific, independent role.¹¹ That does not mean that the party should have

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¹¹ See above p.

simply kept out of economic questions. The development of the pre-February model of economic management suggests that the party had an important contribution to make on a number of issues that could not be seen as purely economics. These included the roles of and relationships between the various economic and representative organs, the relationships between and relative pay of manual and technical workers and the general level of labour morale. The party, however, implicitly accepted that it alone could not directly manage the economy and that those with different political affiliations could also make a valid contribution.

It seems, then, that nationalisations and the beginnings of economic planning greatly expanded the role of politics in the economy. Politics in this context does not mean strife between parties or concentration on a fight for power: it refers rather to participation and involvement in decision making, representation of interests, and conscious attempts to go beyond the effects and operation of purely economic mechanisms. Ripka's point about the relationship between socialism and democracy in the economy should therefore be put differently. There need not be any inevitable tendency, but socialism, with the greatly expanded centralised governmental power to decide over economic issues, implies a far greater need for democratic forms. Otherwise, real alternatives cannot be presented and discussed and the best solution to problems cannot be found¹².

After February 1948, when the controlling influence of the

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¹²Brus: Socialist, esp. p.193-194 and p.197.

other political parties had been removed, the role of the Communist Party in the economy increased, but it also underwent a fundamental change. It seemed set to over-rule the importance of representative bodies, of specifically economic mechanisms and to some extent even of specialist abilities¹³. At the same time, politics was understood not as involving participation and control but primarily as a question of hectoring and campaigning to encourage workers to reach ambitious production targets.

This change can be related to the Communists' oversimplified interpretation of society as outlined above in Section 42.5 and 42.6.

42.11. The possible irrelevance of speculation on what could have happened.

The preceding sections have aimed to show that, prior to February 1948, a Czechoslovak model of socialism was gradually taking shape. It was still at an early and formative stage and the leading force in Czechoslovak politics, the Communist Party, had only begun to recognise the need for major changes in its thinking. It is, however, possible to conceive of a further gradual development of society, governed by a genuine coalition, such that the Communists would have modified their own theoretical conceptions in such a way as to be able to give still more definite leadership.

A serious possible objection to this is that the division of

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¹³ See above p.140-141.

Europe and the realities of the cold war may really have confronted the Communists with a choice between total defeat or total victory. Czechoslovak politics, it could be argued, was bound to divide in the same way and to the same extent as European politics as a whole, even if the Czechoslovak Communists did nothing to encourage the process.

Two points can be made in reply to that suggestion. The first is that the February events were an important encouragement to, as well as a consequence of, the division of Europe. They gave legitimacy to US strategy in Europe and to the setting up of NATO. The US had seen Czechoslovakia primarily as an ally of the Soviet Union and had not been seriously concerned about the fate of Czechoslovak democracy¹⁴. The February events then increased the credibility of the claim that the United States aimed to defend democracy in Europe as it appeared by then that socialism might be incompatible with expending civil liberties and a genuine plurality of parties. Czechoslovak experience prior to 1948 pointed rather to the opposite conclusion.

The second point is that, even if there were disadvantages as well as advantages to the pre-February political structure, Chapters 40 and 41 show some of the first unpleasant social consequences of the post-February power structure. Even if the coalition might have become unworkable without the Communist Party's offensive of autumn 1947, that cannot mean that there was no alternative to

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¹⁴See above, esp. p.

the elimination from a share in power, and then the effective silencing of all other political opinions. This affected not only clearly anti-socialist forces, but also those that were ambivalent or even firmly pro-socialist.

42.12. Unanswered questions on the role of the Soviet Union in deciding the direction of Czechoslovak politics.

No serious Czechoslovak policy could ever have been based on total independence in the sense of ignoring the international situation. From the foundation of the state in 1918 it was recognised that Czechoslovakia had to be part of some international arrangement or bloc. After 1945 there were good grounds for a close alliance between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union: this, rather than reliance on the West, seemed to be the basis for Czechoslovakia's security.

The relationship that developed was, however, much tighter than just a common approach on world questions. A new element was introduced into Czechoslovak politics as Stalin actively intervened in Czechoslovak foreign policy in mid-1947. From 1948 onwards this was extended into insistence on such firm incorporation into a Soviet bloc that Stalin's conception of socialist construction was adopted by the KSČ. This could be seen as a continuation of the same relationship between the Soviet and Czechoslovak Communist Parties as had operated within the Comintern. The difference was that earlier when Czechoslovak Communists had been unable to work out ideas suitable to their own conditions, they had been condemned to impotence, but in 1948 they held a monopoly of power. Their

ideas therefore had a very direct impact on the development of society. Czechoslovakia can be said to have adopted the Soviet model of socialism. That does not mean that every aspect of Soviet society was copied and reproduced: that would have been impossible. The point for Czechoslovakia's internal policy was threefold. In the first place, Stalin's theories were adopted as a general guide for policies. Secondly, as a consequence of that, no attempts were made to evolve new ideas suitable for the new situation. This meant that differences from Soviet institutions and methods of organising society appeared as residuals from the past rather than the consequence of creative attempts to grapple with the concrete needs of Czechoslovakia's development. Thirdly, there definitely were times when direct pressures were applied by Stalin to change KSC policy. It may eventually be revealed that this, and perhaps some Soviet influence on the Czechoslovak security forces, was important even before February. Lack of information on the extent and influence of these undisclosed contacts between the USSR and Czechoslovak Communists is an important gap, but need not radically alter any of the conclusions reached in this work.

Evidently, the Soviet Union had a great influence on Czechoslovakia's internal policy and this could lend support to Fejtö's argument that: "the fundamental contradiction of the socialist system is between the particular kind of hegemonism (both imperialist and ideological) of the USSR, and the tendency of the Communist parties and states to try to win or recover their internal and

external autonomy"¹⁵. It is certainly true that a major change in policy by the Czechoslovak Communist leadership would require Soviet approval, but Fejtö seems to over-generalise the phenomenon. Apart from implicitly ignoring the extent to which the two states could have common interests, he obscures the complexity of changes and tendencies within Czechoslovak society. Some of these encouraged some of the moves towards adopting the Soviet model while some could point towards different directions of development. The next section therefore suggests the possible principal internal tendencies in post-February Czechoslovak society and relates them to the special relationship between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union.

42.13. The contradictions and tendencies of the socialist society in Czechoslovakia.

The preceding work has shown the steps towards the evolution of a Czechoslovak model of socialism and how that process was interrupted by the events of February 1948. This raises a difficult question for some modern Marxist theoreticians. R. Medvedev, for example, has argued that in the Soviet Union today, owing to the advanced nature of the society, democratisation is "an objective necessity"¹⁶. Brus similarly concludes that social advance has led in Eastern Europe to a "growing complexity of the object and

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¹⁵ F. Fejtö: Histoire des démocraties populaires, Vol. II, Après Staline 1953-1971, Paris, 1969, p.335.

¹⁶ R. Medvedev: On Socialist Democracy, London, 1977, p.311.

methods of decision-making"¹⁷, such that there is an "indisputable need for democratism..."¹⁸. He even concludes that economic needs will ultimately determine "the democratic evolution of the political system under socialism"¹⁹.

Czechoslovak experience in the immediate post-war period gives some support to the view that democratisation was a "need" of society, but seems to contradict the argument that evolution will inevitably lead in that direction. This raises the question of what conflicts and hence of what tendencies could be expected to operate in post-February society.

There certainly were a number of sources of conflict in pre-February Czechoslovakia, but they only really manifested themselves when expressed in the strife between parties. February eliminated this strife, but it could not mean a damping of all conflicts: in fact, some seem to have been intensified as they took on a completely new importance. Although this work only looks at the first months after February, later experience would probably support the view that there were three issues - or spheres of conflict - around which the future development of Czechoslovak society was largely decided. These were the issues of inner-party democracy, of relations between the party and the working class and of the handling of outright opposition to the government.

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¹⁷Brus: Socialist, p.188.

¹⁸Brus: Socialist, p.197.

¹⁹Brus: Socialist, p.207.

February brought conflicts within the Communist Party to the forefront of political attention by encouraging two opposing general tendencies. One, amounting to an application inside the party of methods that were used against other political movements, was for a tightening of discipline and concentration of power. The most extreme expressions of this in 1948 were the general phenomenon of "dictatorialism" and the treatment of Kolman. Dictatorialism in itself could create its own opposition, but there was further encouragement for an ill-defined opposing trend from the belief that, as opposition from other parties had been eliminated in February, there was no longer such need for a tight inner-party regime. Perhaps there was some tendency for Communist Party activists to try to incorporate and represent the diverse interests within society, thereby strengthening the second trend, but that did not appear as a conscious aim. Instead, there was a general feeling that social and economic policies should be based on continuity from the pre-February period plus an embryonic, but clear, tendency for party activists to criticise excessive centralisation of power.

The conflict between these two tendencies cannot be easily expressed as a conflict between identifiable sociological categories. Notions of a clearly defined new class, or even of a bureaucracy, obscure two important points; first, "dictatorialism" came to affect all levels of the party and therefore cannot be seen as a rational expression of a definite interest within society; secondly, the crucial point was the mechanism of decision making and of exercising political power which was such as to prevent the formulation of policies rationally responding to the needs of Czecho-

slovak society at the time.

Of these two tendencies, victory in 1948 went generally to the first one. It was greatly, if not decisively, helped by Stalin's theories and perhaps also by his direct influence. Nevertheless, the changes inside the Communist Party were to a considerable extent dependent on the party leadership's response to signs of working class discontent.

There had been indications before February that workers often did not accept economic policies advocated by the Communist Party. These had never come to the centre of attention because they were never directly expressed in disagreements between parties. Nevertheless, they probably encouraged the Communists to adopt a more militant policy and to exaggerate the extent to which private enterprise caused economic problems.

After February the relationship between the party and the working class became more important. Workers widely regarded February as their victory. They were more self-confident than ever, and less willing to be fobbed off with promises for the future. Their hopes and aspirations clashed with the party leadership's demands for still more effort which, owing to the realities of the economic situation, could not be accompanied with real improvements in living standards.

At the same time, February meant a narrowing of the Communist Party's social base so that loyalty from the working class was all the more urgently required for the new power structure. Moreover, bodies able to represent the interests of other social groups at governmental level, i.e. the other political parties had been

silenced. There was therefore no mechanism opposing, and plenty of pressures encouraging, the partial satisfaction of workers' social demands at the expense of other social groups. This was very important for the whole direction of social and economic policy and was encouraged by Stalin's conception of class struggle.

In fact, consolidation of a monopoly of power was legitimated by social benefits in the very first weeks after February. Workers certainly gained over the following years compared with the pre-Munich republic and the model of socialism that developed in Czechoslovakia could claim credit for overcoming the more extreme social inequalities and injustices of capitalism. This justifies reference to a "social" conception of socialism²⁰, which could consolidate a political power structure by its ability to give benefits to at least a part of the working class, but which could not satisfy all the other needs of an advanced society.

So, although working class discontent led to a crisis within the party leadership, it did not thereby encourage any liberalisation of the regime. Instead, the party leaders believed they could overcome the crisis by establishing still more rigid discipline within the party and by effectively rejecting the view that the interests of other social groups should still be respected.

This creates a link between the method used to secure working class loyalty and the methods adopted against signs of discontent with government policy. Outright hostility was a new problem as

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²⁰See Kaplan: "Historické".

the coalition had served to incorporate and thereby to some extent silence social forces with doubts or reservations about the revolutionary changes. After February there were some signs of more open opposition to the government. The leadership did not see this as a legitimate expression of concern at government policies which could be incorporated by a degree of liberalisation. Instead, and this related to the desire to secure working class loyalty, it was exaggerated into a threat to the regime itself and hence to post-war social gains. This was justified by Stalin's theories of socialist construction and led to the speediest possible elimination of all private enterprise, even when it could not be justified in economic terms.

42.14. The international implications and significance of events in Czechoslovakia after World War II.

February 1948 is even today quoted as a crucial element in the chain of events dividing Eastern from Western Europe and simultaneously dividing Socialists from Communists in Western Europe. This was the most striking and immediate international significance of the February events, but this section is concerned with another issue that ^{may} even prove to be of more lasting international importance: that is, the implications of the whole 1945-1948 period for the ideas of socialism in advanced societies such as exist in Western Europe.

Czechoslovakia has been quoted as an example of the feasibility of a road to socialism based on the winning of a firm majority

in parliament²¹. Such suggestions, obviously following from Khrushchev's remarks at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, indicate at least a willingness to see what was new in Czechoslovak experience, and that was a definite advance from the early 1950's.²² Nevertheless, February was still seen as the decisive change, so the Czechoslovak specificity was reduced to a question of the road to Communist power. The revolutionary changes of 1945 therefore appeared as having no potential beyond being a step along that road.

There are some similarities, but also some important differences between the strategies of Western European Communist Parties and the strategy of the KSČ. This can partly be explained by different circumstances, as no Communist or Socialist party in any advanced country is likely to find itself in so favourable a situation as to be able to incorporate all legal parties into a coalition within which it holds such a definite initiative. Neither are the repressive organs of the state likely to be so free from right-wing influence or domination. This means that, if a "historic compromise" can be said to have been made in Czechoslovakia, then the Communist Party entered into it from a position of great strength. A position of such strength that developments after May 1945 cannot be quoted as direct support for "gradualist" ideas

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²¹For a Czech example see J. Kozák: How Parliament can play a revolutionary part in the transition to socialism and the role of the popular masses, London, 1961. The Czech edition was first published in 1957.

²²See above Section 1.4.

on the transition from capitalism to socialism.

Nevertheless, there are many specific points and three general issues that can be presented as important lessons from Czechoslovakia's experience. The first is the great importance of conscious political leadership if socialism is to become a reality: many of the tasks and problems involved in the creation of a new social order needed conscious and systematic solutions: the Communist Party's role within that process was enormous. The second lesson is that this need not involve an exclusive position of leadership for one party. The third lesson, which comes particularly from a comparison between pre-February and post-February society, is that socialism, perhaps to an even greater extent than preceding social formations, requires mechanisms for representing, at the effective levels of power, the diversity and differences within society. This does not necessarily mean legal, competing parties: although that does ensure some sort of control on power, it is by no means a perfect mechanism. Nevertheless, recognition of the necessity for some mechanism is perhaps the most important lesson for Communists, while other Socialists might be more surprised by the first two points.

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