

# WORLD POLITICS

*A Quarterly Journal of International Relations*

THE STRATEGY OF COMMUNIST INFILTRATION: CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1944-48

THE FEBRUARY COUP IN  
CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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Reprinted from

WORLD POLITICS

Vol. II, No. 3, April 1950

Vol. II, No. 4, July 1950

## THE STRATEGY OF COMMUNIST INFILTRATION: CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1944-48

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**B**ETWEEN 1944 and 1948, six European countries experienced Communist seizures of power. Three were enemies and three friends and allies of Soviet Russia during the war; four were Slav countries; five were predominantly peasant with some remnants of feudalism; with the exception of industrial Czechoslovakia, their prewar record in democratic government was far from exemplary. In all of them, however, the Communists were successful.

What were the components of Communist success and democratic defeat? The case of Czechoslovakia shows clearly that the active interest and impressive display of Soviet power in contrast to the West's hesitant policy not only formed the background but were the chief bases for Communist successes in Eastern Europe. Careful, professional infiltration of democratic institutions and the wishful thinking of the democrats did the rest.

Until the coup in Czechoslovakia there was a tendency to ascribe Communist success in Eastern countries to lack of democratic traditions and to social backwardness. The presence of Soviet troops at the time of the Communist coups was said to explain the passivity of the democrats. The Czech coup of February 1948 seemed to be of a different variety. Czechoslovakia was widely known for her democratic traditions and minimum of social friction. Her highly developed industry was nationalized in 1945 and a new and thoroughgoing land reform introduced, all without a revolution. And there were no Soviet troops on Czechoslovak territory when the Communists seized power. But the basic factor, the immediate influence of Soviet power, was as present in Czechoslovakia as in the other five cases. The democrats felt and were internationally isolated, while the Czech Communists received direct and indirect support from the Communist super-power close at hand.

## I

This isolation of the democrats, or at least their feeling of it, was created in most European countries by three circumstances: a constant and genuine fear of Germany usually accompanied by an unceasing search for protection—shared by both eastern and western neighbors of Germany; the impressive advance of Soviet Communism to the Oder-Vienna-Trieste line; and the lack of an active Western concern for Central and Eastern Europe. The French withdrawal from Central Europe at the time of the Munich default to Hitler and the Western withdrawal from the same area after Yalta seemed to many Europeans two expressions of the same lack of interest and support. These three factors crystallized in the specific geographical and political context of the Czechoslovak Republic in a rather eloquent way.

Czech fear of Germany and her aggressions has been traditional since the tenth century. It is basic to Czech emotions, whatever regime rules in Berlin: Kaisers, Weimar Socialists, Nazis, Wilhelm Pieck, or Kurt Schumacher. When in 1945 the Sudeten German minority was transferred to the American and Soviet zones of Germany, Czech anxiety increased in spite of Germany's crushing defeat. The possibility of a Sudeten German revisionism, which might add new motives to the traditional "Drang nach Osten," created new fears and insecurity.<sup>1</sup> The fact that some Czechs had acquired former Sudeten German property in a rather unorthodox way added economic motivation to their national anxiety.

Red Army advances in 1944-45, and Soviet or local Communist propaganda which pictured the U.S.S.R. as the only geographically close protection against any renewal of German aggression created the desired impression that the security of Germany's neighbors was in direct proportion to Soviet strength and interest in Central Europe.

The weakening of French prestige, at Munich in 1938 and at Bordeaux in 1940, greatly contributed to the democratic forces' feeling of isolation in areas east of Germany. This feel-

<sup>1</sup> A similar fear of German revisionism developed in Poland in connection with their western boundaries, and may develop in France over the Saar question.

ing only increased in 1945 when it became apparent that France would not regain her former position as the most influential continental power. In Czechoslovakia the lesson of Munich was certain always to be remembered.

The Soviets' entry into World War II, their impressive victories and advances, and later their propaganda condemning the absence of a Second Front, shifted Czech hopes and admiration from Great Britain to Russia. Furthermore, the symbols of the West's fighting spirit, Churchill and De Gaulle, could hardly counterbalance the reality of the British insular position, British avoidance of all commitments in areas east of Germany, and the defeat and weakening of France. In any case, these two fighters were replaced soon after the war by other statesmen.

One may ask whether the strong American interest in Europe, as demonstrated by the U.S. Zone of Germany, did not more than replace the old French power and influence. Before 1948 this question could hardly be answered in the affirmative. Because of the United States' withdrawal from Europe after 1919, many Europeans did not consider the American presence in Europe after 1945 as permanent. Furthermore, since Europe was remote from the main sources of American strength, the United States was not considered a match for the Soviet Union, always close at hand. This of course applies to the period prior to the North Atlantic Pact.

In Czechoslovakia, these rather common European doubts about American intentions were sharpened by the Czech experience with the U.S. Army. American troops were ordered to stop their speedy and unopposed advance through western Bohemia at a point eighteen miles west of Prague (and two miles south of the Jachymov uranium mines), even though Prague, in revolt and despair, was begging for American help. Marshal Konev's Russian armies finally saved Prague, giving the Czechoslovak Communists an impressive anti-West and pro-East argument for years to come. Many Czechoslovak democrats took it for more than a hint that Russia, with American consent, was supposed to be predominant in Central Europe. When the U.S. Army in Bavaria was later replaced by a minimum constabulary force, U.S. stature in Europe compared even less favorably with visible Soviet strength.

The disparity between the democrats' feeling of isolation and the Communists' self-confidence was greatly increased in Europe by the Soviet sweep westward, far beyond the former boundaries of Czarist Russia. For the first time in Czech history Russia and Czechoslovakia were contiguous.

The Communists did not fail to exploit the difference between the Czech liberations in 1918 and 1945. Klement Gottwald expressed the importance and effects of the Soviet liberation in the following terms :

There is a basic difference between 1920 and 1948. In 1918 the liberation came seemingly from the West. . . . The Soviet Union was engaged in a war for its own survival . . . it had to fight foreign intervention . . . and *could not therefore be a visible support for us*. In 1945 it was just the opposite. Our freedom came clearly from the East. In spite of capitalist hopes, the U.S.S.R. did not come out of the war weakened. On the contrary, as Joseph Stalin foretold in 1939, at the end of the war the capitalists could not find the governments they formerly had on their side. *The international disposition of respective strength was totally different in February 1948 from that of 1920. . . .*<sup>2</sup>

The changed disposition of power in Europe made the Czech and Slovak attitudes toward their liberator and neighbor rather complex. There were the old sentimental ties to the only Slav empire, ties which had developed under the Germanizing rule of the nineteenth century. These sentimental pro-Russian tendencies were revived between 1917 and 1945. Both workers and intellectuals admired Soviet socialism during the 'twenties. The whole nation was grateful for their liberation by the Red Army in 1945; and there was a feeling of security because the Red Army would remain close at hand as a bulwark against any new German aggression.

But the proximity of the Red Army also became a source of insecurity and fear. Communists' efforts to identify themselves with the victorious Soviet armies, the display of red flags and other Soviet insignia used by the local Communist Party, and the obvious Soviet partiality for the Communists were all disturbing to Czechoslovak democrats.

<sup>2</sup> Speech of November 17, 1948, made at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in Hradcany Castle. It was distributed by the Czechoslovak Press Agency in New York, December 29.

Their anxiety did not develop into a clear-cut opposition for two reasons: the West insisted on continuing general cooperation with Russia; and when the West did oppose the Soviets on a specific issue, the results were discouraging. "The Soviet Union had established a reputation for meaning business, whereas the West was believed to be in much the same psychological state of ineffectiveness as it was at the time Hitler's troops went into the Ruhr."<sup>3</sup> Both factors had a strong influence on the practical and cautious Czech people, who tend to consider their own astonishing national survival more a result of clever compromising with aggressive neighbors than a victory achieved on the battlefields. Dr. Benes felt this strongly. His acceptance of the Munich dictate in 1938 was a compromise which was of course preceded by careful analysis of chances and odds, as was his second big compromise of February 1948. In the first, a serious threat of invasion, and in the second, danger of civil war and foreign intervention sufficed to deprive Czechoslovakia of its freedom without bloodshed. Although the Czechs saw in Benes their leader and the spiritual son of T. G. Masaryk, they perhaps realized too late that Benes was an outstanding diplomat but not a leader in the same sense as the elder Masaryk.

The presence of the Red Army in Poland and most Eastern European countries demonstrated eloquently the impressive shift of power in Europe. Western withdrawal and Soviet advance could not have been made more plain to the broad masses in Eastern Europe. The effect of this display of Soviet power is more responsible for Communist successes both in infiltration drives and final seizures of power, than the attractions of Marxist-Leninist doctrines. The nations of Eastern Europe were more frightened into Communism than seduced by it.

The violent conduct of the Soviet liberating armies might have turned a great many from Communism. Often, it achieved the opposite: many, exhausted by six years of Nazi oppression, preferred this time to be on the winning side, regardless of its extra-legal behavior, for siding with the democrats meant not peace and well-being, but more fighting and suffering.

<sup>3</sup> *Economist*, Feb. 12, 1949, p. 287.

## II

Soviet forces reached the boundaries of Czechoslovakia on April 9, 1944, but did not cross them at that time. A month later, the Soviet and Czechoslovak governments concluded a treaty concerning the administration of territory liberated by the Red Army. The treaty was put into practical application for the first time in November 1944, when the Red Army finally crossed the Carpathian mountains into Czechoslovakia and liberated the easternmost province of the country, Carpathian Ruthenia.

The treaty provided for the creation of two zones: the "Operational Zone," where the Soviet High Command would have the decisive power in all matters; and the "Rear Zone," where the Soviet High Command would transfer civil administration to an "Administrative Delegation," to be appointed by the Czechoslovak Government in London. The Delegation was to have representatives from all government departments. The treaty foresaw some limitations of Czechoslovakia's sovereign rights, even in the Rear Zone. These limitations were justified by military reasons, and by the necessity for Soviet military personnel to remain under Soviet jurisdiction, though on Czechoslovak territory. Militarily and politically the treaty seemed as reasonable as a government-in-exile could expect from a friendly army command engaged in military operations on its territory.

The application of this treaty by the political service of the High Command of the Ukrainian Front under General Mechlis is a classic example of how a legal text can be not only emptied of its contents, but changed into an instrument which defeats its intended purpose.

In Ruthenia, the treaty was nullified by a direct annexation of the whole province by the Soviet Union. In Slovakia, Moravia, and Bohemia, the application of the treaty amounted to a transfer of the local administration to the Communist Party instead of to the Administrative Delegation of the Czechoslovak Government. A new and popular administrative reform made it possible for the Red Army to strengthen the Communists. It provided for a more equal division of power between the

central government in Prague and the National Committees (that is, the local governments). The National Committees were supposed to be executive bodies of local administration, freely elected on the village, town, district, and province levels. These nuclei of future local governments were to be formed by agreement among the active resistance leaders during the occupation period. Together with partisan units, they were to be the main centers of national resistance. Before the liberation took place, the National Committees formed underground were to assist the advance of the liberating armies by partisan and espionage activities in the German rear. The Soviet High Command therefore quite naturally established early contacts with these Committees through parachutists and other agents. While President Benes and his intelligence staff in London directed the work of their parachutists and resistance network in such a way as to help the Allied war effort, the Soviet High Command and Czechoslovak Communist leaders in Moscow concentrated on preparing for their victories in time of peace. The Soviet spy network in the German rear was formed so that it represented the basic framework of the future Communist Party organization. Local Communist agents were to be spies for the Soviet High Command; and Soviet spies were to become local Communist leaders. Thus, before liberation, the underground National Committees were already infiltrated by the Communists.

When the Red Army liberated the territory, the National Committees were able to come out in the open. The Red Army assisted them publicly in re-establishing order, that is, in arresting those whom the Communist resistance leaders considered to be collaborators. The link between local Communists and the NKVD became very evident, and produced the desired effect on the population. Furthermore, the plunder and rape committed by the Soviet troops increased the general feeling of helplessness. Fear and opportunism were in many cases sufficient reasons for the democratic majority to yield direction of National Committees to the Communists, even in cases where the Communists were not successful in their pre-liberation infiltration.

Some direct help was offered by the Red Army to the Com-



munist Party itself. German property confiscated as war booty was handed over to the local Communists if the Russians had no use for it. Reichsmark deposits in Czech or German banks were practically valueless for immediate use by Soviet troops; the Communists could convert them into Czech crowns. Linotype machines, office furniture, newsprint, and typewriters (with Latin alphabets) were also worthless to the Red Army, but priceless for the Communists, on the eve of a great propaganda campaign.

The above was the usual pattern in the Operational Zone, where the Soviet High Command had the decisive power—the Administrative Delegation of the Czechoslovak Government was temporarily barred. When the Administrative Delegation and the democratic leaders were finally allowed to enter areas which had been declared part of the Rear Zone, they were unable to counterbalance the weight of the Soviet presence—even though the bulk of the people had been looking forward hopefully to the coming of Dr. Benes' government.

The delegation usually found the basic organization of the Communist Party well established in the center of the city, in the best building, well supplied with money, newsprint, and typewriters. All this gave an appearance of strength which at that time was certainly not to be found behind this impressive but still Potemkinist façade.

A secret dispatch of January 21, 1945, sent from the liberated territory to the Czechoslovak Government in London, gives a good picture of the sort of situation the Delegation faced:<sup>4</sup>

In Michalovce, Slovakia, the Communist Party has just published the first issues of their newspaper, *Pravda*, under the auspices of General Mechlis, chief of the Red Army's political service. The Communists have instructions to concentrate on gaining complete control of the National Committees.

Another dispatch from the same source a month later describes the situation in liberated Slovakia:

<sup>4</sup>The Soviet High Command never allowed the Czechoslovak Administrative Delegation to send direct radio-messages to London. Dr. F. Krucky volunteered to use a secret transmitter and send ciphered messages from behind the Soviet lines, risking his life daily. Most of the dispatches quoted in this and the following chapters are from that source. They were filed at the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London. Dr. Krucky, Czech Minister Plenipotentiary in Cairo since 1946, resigned recently.

From parts of Slovakia which are still under the complete jurisdiction of the Red Army, there is a daily arrival of several members of the Communist Party, mostly educated persons and students. When they reach the Rear Zone, Communist Headquarters immediately send them all over the area. Thus, the Communists do not lack agitators. They organize National Committees wherever they had not already been formed, or change their composition if it does not correspond to the Communist pattern. *The presence of the NKVD increases the self-confidence of these agitators and backs up their threats*, which are plentiful. *The people are confused*. The Slovak Democratic Party has no such aid coming in from the Operational Zone. They have so far been unable to issue a newspaper of their own. Communist activity plus the great number of Communist agitators concentrated on one area creates an impression of strength *which does not exist*.

The right of Red Army commanders to decide which Czechoslovak citizens could enter or leave the Operational Zone gave the Red Army another opportunity to help the Communist Party directly. While the Communists were free to move forward almost without restrictions, the usual Soviet bureaucratic methods were used to prevent democratic leaders from traveling and organizing their activities.

The incorporation of the easternmost Czechoslovak province into the Soviet Union in January 1945 demonstrated more than anything else the effectiveness of Soviet power and the helplessness of the democratic forces, which had the law on their side but insufficient strength to uphold it. The sharp contrast between the ruthless display of Soviet power in favor of an illegal issue and the democrats' hopeless defense of lawful government led to a general fear that the Ruthenian coup might be repeated in other parts of Czechoslovakia. The first democratic retreat took place in the face of extreme pressure exercised from within by local Communists and from outside by Stalin and Molotov themselves. The Czechoslovak leaders abandoned Ruthenia hoping to save Slovakia and Bohemia from the Soviets and Teschen from the Polish Communists, who were great favorites in Moscow at that time. The retreat from Ruthenia was the beginning of a chain of withdrawals made for the sake of issues which seemed more vital than the ones immediately at stake—a chain which ended in the loss of the whole country. There is a direct line from the January 1945 coup in Ruthenia to the Prague putsch of February 1948. Even

at the time of the Ruthenian annexation there was certainly some justification for anxiety over the safety of other Czechoslovak areas. For example, Minister-Delegate Frantisek Nemeč, a representative of the government-in-exile in the area liberated by the Red Army, sent President Benes a long dispatch on December 30, 1944, after his conversation with Stalin and Molotov. He dared to show some concern about the future of the whole country, even though his dispatch was to be transmitted by Ambassador Fierlinger:

Although the movement in Ruthenia came into being step by step, it is now recognized as a spontaneous popular expression. This recognition determines the Soviet attitude toward the Ruthenian issue. If we tried to break the movement now, it would mean ruling with the aid of bayonets and would create unfriendly relations with the U.S.S.R. Had I expressed doubts about the spontaneity of the movement during my decisive discussion with Molotov and Vishinsky, the "spontaneous movement," in my opinion *would have been repeated in Slovakia*. . . . I also believe that postponement of an otherwise foregone conclusion could have led to an *isolation* of our Government from its country. I believe that there was danger that the Soviets would use the same methods on the Czechoslovak Government in London, which had earlier isolated the Polish Government-in-exile. . . . I was afraid that volunteers for the Red Army would be recruited *in Slovakia* too, that the Delegation would be stripped of all influence in the liberated territory, and finally, that the Slovak National Council [a Central National Committee and the directing resistance body in Slovakia, composed of Communists and democrats alike] might be persuaded to espouse a "spontaneous movement." . . . I know that I did not follow your instructions. I take the entire personal and political responsibility . . . but I acted so only for the sake of the *territorial integrity of Slovakia and Bohemia*.

### III

A justified popular demand for a reform, administrative, social, or economic, is usually a welcome tool for Communist methods of infiltration.<sup>5</sup> After careful preparation, the Communist propaganda apparatus tries to focus the whole issue on a short, appealing slogan which seems acceptable to everyone, and at the same time cleverly conceals the Communist drive

<sup>5</sup> In *Foundations of Leninism*, Stalin says: "in revolutionary tactics under a bourgeois regime, reform naturally becomes an instrument for disintegrating this regime, an instrument for strengthening revolution." Translated by Historicus, "Stalin on Revolution," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (January 1949), p. 197.

for power. The administrative reform in Czechoslovakia was especially useful to the Communists. With the slogan "Government of the People, by the People, and for the People," it became a most effective instrument of infiltration.

Before the war Czechoslovakia had a mixed form of local government, partly elected and partly nominated by the central government. It bore some marks of the bureaucratic and centralistic Austrian past. The idea of limiting the power of the central government had long been popular. As early as 1943 President Benes and his government were considering the democratization and decentralization of the government, especially with regard to Slovakia, whose ambition was to govern herself independently of Prague, though within the framework of Czechoslovakia. The new units of local government, called "National Committees," were to be entirely elected.

The democratic leaders thought in terms of democracy and decentralization, and assumed that the National Committees would be formed *after* liberation. The Communists, on the other hand, had in mind a Westernized form of the 1917 "soviets," composed of revolutionary workers, soldiers, and sailors. They wanted these new "soviets" to be composed mainly of Communist resistance leaders, and made every effort during the resistance period to influence the composition of National Committees beforehand.

The "administrative decentralization" fitted almost perfectly the plans for Communist infiltration in a country which military operations had split into a number of temporarily isolated districts, difficult to control. With direct and indirect help from the Red Army, both before and during the establishment of the National Committees, the Czechoslovak Communists obtained many more positions than they were entitled to according to the five-party agreement.<sup>6</sup>

In the autumn of 1945, a month before the withdrawal of the Red Army, nearly all chairmanships of National Committees were in Communist or pro-Communist hands. So was the lead-

<sup>6</sup>This agreement was reached in Moscow on March 27, and proclaimed in Kosice on April 5, 1945. It gave equal representation on National Committees to all parties, wherever they were active. The Communists could thus claim 25 per cent in Bohemia, and 50 per cent in Slovakia.

ership of most police and agriculture departments in local or district National Committees. The police and agriculture departments were of the utmost importance in a country where it was the duty of the local police to arrest collaborators and fascists according to the judgment of the local government, and where the Ministry of Agriculture and its local agencies were authorized to confiscate and *distribute* property which had formerly belonged either to fascists or to Sudeten Germans.

Even before the war, local governments in Czechoslovakia exerted great influence at the polls. During the war their authority over food-rationing and the system of delivery duties imposed on the peasants increased their power to interfere in the life of the community. And because of Communist infiltration, their influence was even greater in the immediate postwar period. The infiltration, accomplished in the special atmosphere created by the presence of Soviet troops and with their direct or indirect aid to the Communists, was the chief reason that in the general elections of May 26, 1946 so many non-Communists voted for the Communist Party, which obtained almost thirty-eight per cent of the vote.

It is interesting to note that since the February coup the Communist Ministry of Interior has never allowed free elections for National Committees. At first, excuses were given for not holding local elections. Postwar disorganization and large-scale population shifts made them impossible to administrate. Then, the general elections interfered. Finally, in March 1949 a new administrative change was proclaimed in Prague: "district secretaries" would be *nominated* by the central government to supervise local and district National and Action committees.

The "democratization and decentralization" was a useful weapon for infiltration and disorganization of the government. But once the Communists seized power, the party dictatorship required strict centralization and party control. Hence the new institution of "district secretaries." The same pattern is seen in the Communists' exploiting of difficulties between Czechs and Slovaks. As long as faction could contribute to the scheme of weakening its adversary by limiting the coalition government's power, the Communist Party was a great defender of

Slovak autonomy. The Communists even had an independent *Slovak* Communist Party, with its own executive committee. But as soon as control was safely in Communist hands, the Party became an enthusiastic advocate of Czechoslovak unity and centralization and the Czech and Slovak Communist parties quickly merged.

## IV

Control of the National Committee in an area is not enough to assure the success of a coup. One of the physical prerequisites of a Communist revolution is that Communist workers and agents be well armed. A war usually gives everyone easy access to weapons. War therefore serves the Communists well from the technical point of view, as well as for economic and psychological reasons. During the Second World War, partisan fighting offered an exceptional opportunity to distribute weapons among Communists, with the almost enthusiastic consent of the non-Communist world. Few realized then that Communist partisans might use these weapons not only to win the war but to win the peace as well.

Czechoslovak partisan warfare cannot bear comparison with Yugoslav or Russian activities. Flat and densely populated Czechoslovakia was hardly suited for an imitation of Tito's warfare and President Benes felt the futility of attempting to develop any such resistance. The Communists attacked his point of view violently all through 1944. This conflict between Benes' rational and cautious standpoint and Communist and Russian disdain for human losses was more important than any simple clash between two concepts of warfare. The Czechoslovak Communists were most interested in the opportunities which Benes' appeal to the Czech and Slovak peoples to form partisan units would create for the postwar period.

In May 1945, after the war in Europe ended, "revolutionary guards" made their appearance in towns and villages. Most claimed to be partisans who were at last able to come from the mountains and forests out into the open. In most cases, they came as a complete surprise to the people, who had never before heard of partisan activities in their neighborhood. The appearance of the revolutionary guards added to a general atmosphere

of lawlessness. Their activities attracted many young people who had long dreamt of handling German weapons and were tempted by the chance to rob, plunder, and bully. They fitted in well with the Communist scheme of terror.

In the factories, workers' militia were formed. Their official function was to protect the factories against possible Sudeten-German sabotage. Their real function was to supply the Communist Party with armed units until the police and the army could be sufficiently infiltrated. Under the pressure of democratic groups, the workers' militia were later mostly abolished, in 1946 and 1947. Their reappearance during the February putsch demonstrates that they had only gone underground, and were ready when needed by the Communists.

In autumn 1945, Czechoslovakia was almost completely in Communist hands, through the work of the National Committees, the guards, and the militia. The strength of the Red Army was everywhere present. The democrats felt that real freedom was but half-awakened after six years of Nazi oppression. The Communists were the only organized force certain of foreign help in a disorganized and confused country.

Complete seizure of power seemed to present a minor task. The assumption therefore is that only the international situation and the requirements of Soviet foreign policy made the Kremlin *postpone* the seizure of power in Czechoslovakia to a later date.

## V

The feeling of national unity which usually occurs in times of war or foreign oppression is another fertile ground on which Communism can develop its attack against democratic institutions. Patriotic fervor facilitates the formation of nonpolitical, national mass organizations and even creates a demand for them, which the Communists are eager to fill. For the spirit of unity provides a new weapon against parliamentary democracy and its factious political parties.

In Czechoslovakia, before the war, there were eight to fifteen political parties, based on class, ideology, and nationality. Under the indiscriminate German terror, party differences vanished to a great extent. And because of disbandment of the

Comintern in 1943, the remaining differences between Communists and non-Communists became blurred. The slogan of National Unity was on the lips of all the resistance leaders, whatever their politics. The feeling of unity was strengthened daily as Communists and non-Communists faced the Nazi firing squads side by side. For the Czechs the only distinction was between a patriot and a quisling.

During the resistance period, the Communists were already making every attempt to transform the positive attitude toward National Unity into a negative one toward political parties as such. Later, they directed their criticism against representative government as typified by the pre-Munich "bourgeois" republic of Masaryk and Benes. Denigration of parliamentary democracy went hand in hand with glorification of the new form of a unified People's Democracy.

The chief argument against parliamentary democracy was repeated and repeated: "The people in a parliamentary democracy have only the right to vote and then to keep silent for six years. The elected representatives have no reason to follow the opinion of the people. For six years, they are independent of the people. The Communists cannot agree to that."

Infiltration of nonpolitical mass organizations is one activity on which the Communist Party is willing to expend an almost endless supply of "infiltrators," funds, and energy. Communist concentration on labor unions is well known. The Czechoslovak example shows that the party was applying the same effort to other nonpolitical organizations—peasant unions, youth clubs, student associations, intellectual groups, and purely professional associations.

The Communists made good use of the old trade-unionist tradition of unifying all labor unions and keeping them free from any connection with political parties. The watchwords of labor unity and national unity were identified as closely as possible. The Nazi occupation had prepared the ground for this unification. Under the Germans, political differences between

<sup>7</sup> This quotation is taken from President Benes' record of his conversation with Klement Gottwald on May 4, 1948 at Sezimivo Usti. The conversation concerned the new Constitution of Communist Czechoslovakia, Benes' refusal to sign it, and his decision to resign. The record of this dramatic conversation was smuggled abroad in the summer of 1948.



unions (Socialist, Communist, Christian, and Agrarian) were obliterated, and replaced by the Nazi form of unified labor front. Under Nazi orders, this procedure was followed with other mass organizations too. After the war the Nazi Labor Front was taken over almost without change by the Communist labor leaders, and in 1945 became the only unified Central Labor Union (URO). Not only the organization but in some cases even the personnel of the Nazi labor front were taken over by the Communist-sponsored Central Labor Union. These labor quislings were promised immunity by the Communist Ministry of Interior if they would stand ready—whatever their past—to cooperate with the party. They complied.

The Communists' unification and centralization of mass organizations, which attempted to divide the country into *professional* categories on a supposedly nonpolitical basis, reminded many an observer more of the fascist corporative pattern than of a democratic structure.<sup>8</sup> The only differentiation between groups was to be according to profession. The common, "national" (Communist) ideology was always in the background. The Communists made several attempts to place these mass organizations on a level with the political parties, or even above them, if possible. The democratic parties did not give in on this issue until February 1948, since they rightly felt that the existence of the political parties themselves was at stake.

Why did the democrats fail to make a similar effort, or at least to check the sweeping Communist infiltration of the important mass organizations? The answer to this justified question lies partly in the professionalism of Communist agents and agitators. While non-Communists could participate in the activities of their clubs and unions only in their spare time, certain selected Communists were able to give all their time to such activities *because they were paid for it*. Thus, these Communists could acquire first a detailed knowledge of the machinery of these organizations and later the determining power in them. From the very beginning, competition between democratic amateurs and Communist professionals was on unequal terms. For instance, according to the figures of the National

<sup>8</sup> Some new mass organizations were founded, such as The Union of Czech and Slovak Women, the National Congress of Partisans, a union of former inmates of concentration camps, and a unified youth and sport movement.

Socialist Party Headquarters in Brno, the Communist Party was maintaining twelve full-time agents and secretaries to one for the National Socialists. And this evaluation was limited to professional agents concentrating on political activities in the narrow sense of the word.<sup>9</sup>

Financial support for Communist activities came from various sources. The Red Army was of course an important one. And the Communist hold on the Ministry of Interior proved invaluable, for a good income was derived from the well-paid managers of nationalized industry, who were appointed on the basis of their political records. Also, the owners of private industries were sometimes ready to contribute to the party fund if they could thereby avoid either nationalization or persecution because of dubious war records. Control over the Ministry of Agriculture gave the Communists another source of funds. That department had the power to confiscate and distribute property which had belonged to collaborators or Germans. Finally, very tight party discipline and constant control assured the Communists a continuous flow of regular contributions from members. While the democratic parties were always in financial difficulties, with contributions coming in slowly, enforced taxation of every Communist according to his monthly or weekly income yielded regular and important sums to the party funds.

## VI

In a modern democratic and industrial country, the most important prerequisites for a Communist coup seem to be infiltration of the Ministry of Interior and its police, and direction of the primary labor organizations. Without the Ministry of Interior (if it is this ministry which directs the police and investigation services) and without the labor unions, the success of a Communist coup would be more than doubtful. The importance of other key positions may vary from country to

<sup>9</sup> In *What Is to Be Done?* Lenin stated: "In order to be fully prepared, the working class revolutionist must become a professional revolutionist . . . our duty [is] to assist every capable worker to become a *professional* agitator, organizer, propagandist, literature distributor." A workingman who is at all talented and "promising must not be left to work eleven hours a day in a factory. We must arrange that he be maintained by the Party." Lenin, *Collected Works*, New York, International Publishers, 1929, Vol. IV, pp. 205, 206. Although Lenin's pattern corresponds to specific needs as they existed in Russia around 1900, his lesson was not lost to Czech and other European Communists.

country. In Bulgaria, the Communists' second goal in the government was the Ministry of Justice, which might give them influence over the war trials. Other Eastern European Communists put more stress on the Ministry of Information. In Czechoslovakia, the Communists were anxious for the Ministry of Agriculture. They were ready to compromise on everything except the ministries of Interior and Agriculture. In all countries the Ministry of Interior, with its police, was the Communists' first objective in the government.

The second immediate objective was domination of the labor unions. The industrial concentration of population on small areas offers great opportunities for Communist strategy. A successful general strike is a powerful means of intimidation and at the same time an efficient weapon in the fight itself. The countermeasures of the adversary may be frustrated by a strike which affects transportation, telephones, and electricity. And those who control these facilities can distribute arms quickly and easily.

In Czechoslovakia, the most industrialized state of Eastern Europe, the importance of labor was increased by the nationalization of all heavy industry and most other industry. The Central Labor Union thus became one of the most important economic organizations in the country, for it combined the support of a tremendous number of wage earners with the power formerly held by private industrialists and managers. In the hands of the Communists, the Central Labor Union became almost a state within a state, an administration with the support of the workers, both white-collar and manual, which did not hesitate to compete with the legal government, "supported by a few deputies." The head of the Central Labor Union was a former inmate of Buchenwald, Antonin Zapotocky, who became Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia after the coup.

The Ministry of Interior was by far the most important instrument of Communist domination in Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1948. Without it, the Communist vote in the general elections of May 1946 would not have been thirty-eight per cent; the number of opportunists and cowards would have been smaller; the February putsch would have been much more difficult, if not impossible.

Some reorganization of the police was necessary, since there

was collaboration between Czech and German police from 1939 to 1945. The Communist Ministry of Interior took full advantage of the opportunity to make sweeping changes which put both police and investigation services into the hands of the Communist Party. Like the administrative reform of government, the need for changes in the police service provided an excellent pretext for gaining control.

Postwar hostility toward collaborators and Germans was fully exploited by the Communists, with their tactics of threats, blackmail, and conditional pardons. Authority to open or close collaboration cases belonged to the Ministry of Interior and to the police departments of the National Committees. They could forget about the offenses of those in custody, or about the tortures and other crimes of those who were conducting the investigation. Their arbitrary decisions created an atmosphere of insecurity. People almost felt guilty for having survived the Nazi occupation without spending time in concentration camps or in exile. In 1945 a special Retribution Act created a separate system of People's Courts, which were entirely devoted to war-guilt cases prepared by the Ministry of Interior's investigation service. Confiscation of offenders' property was the mildest form of punishment. Opportunities to exert pressure by threats of confiscation and for corruption in the distribution of confiscated property were limitless for a party engaged in a ruthless drive for power.

The Ministry of Interior's control over the details of the transfer of Sudeten Germans gave the Communists another fertile field for their activities.<sup>10</sup> The Communist Party, which before the war was the only party in Czechoslovakia containing both Czechs and Germans, became in 1945 a most enthusiastic supporter of the transfer scheme, regardless or perhaps because of its Czech-German past. The Communists profited well by this period of patriotic fervor and postwar excitement, often expressed by a thirst for revenge and for easy acquisition of other people's property. The atmosphere of violence and lawlessness terrorized not only the Sudeten Germans but the majority of Czechs as well.

A hold on the Ministry of Agriculture served the Communists

<sup>10</sup> The deserted Sudeten German factories supplied another argument for nationalization.

nearly as well as their control of the Ministry of Interior, despite the peasants' anti-collectivist persuasion. But though the non-Communist parties systematically warned Czech peasants of the ultimate aims of Communist-sponsored land reforms and Communist agricultural policy in general, the Communist Party scored a substantial electoral success with the Czech peasantry in May 1946. This success would have been impossible without control of the Ministry of Agriculture. Before World War II, the Czech peasants were dominated largely by the Agrarian Party. Its aims were materialistic. Price control of wheat and pork to protect the farmers, and distribution of tractors and fertilizers to aid their production seemed to be its chief "ideological" tenets. After several decades of political education by the Agrarian Party, the Czech peasants were rather easy prey for the new incumbents of the Ministry of Agriculture. Peasants who did not vote for the Communists out of fear of the Ministry of Interior, voted for them because of the Ministry of Agriculture's promises. The Communists scored their biggest successes in former Agrarian Party strongholds. Mr. J. Firt, National Socialist M.P., commented on the democratic defeat: "We have asked our peasants to vote for the philosophical heritage of Thomas Masaryk. They have voted for fertilizers instead."

The postwar situation in Czechoslovakia added other opportunities for Communist penetration of the peasantry. The Ministry of Agriculture had the very important function of distributing a great amount of land left at its disposal by the transfer of Sudeten Germans. It is easy to imagine how the Communist Party could use this power to bribe the hesitant and reward the faithful. The actual distribution of parcels of land and promises of new reforms made the farmers forget that splitting up land in many small non-self-supporting units would pave the way for collectivization. It should be remembered that before the war Czechoslovakia had had its first land reform, which satisfied the most compelling claims and abolished the large feudal estates. Many rich peasants whose consciences were not altogether clear concerning black market activities during the war (activities which could hardly be called acts of resistance), became members of the Communist Party, hoping to save their property or prevent a reopening of

their war-guilt cases. Finally, UNRRA and the Czech Ministry of Industry allowed the Ministry of Agriculture to fulfill some of its promises to deliver new tractors, machinery, and fertilizers. The Communist Ministry of Information took care to publicize these deliveries as a Communist contribution to the farmers.

## VII

As in other cases, postwar insecurity facilitated Communist infiltration of the Civil Service and the Army.<sup>11</sup> The purge of higher officials who had held their positions during the Nazi occupation was very thorough. There was, however, a chance to be forgiven for those who entered the Communist Party quickly enough. Officials who joined with the hope that their membership would be purely a formality found later to their astonishment what tight control the Communists had over new members. Special envoys of the Communist Control Commission<sup>12</sup> made sure that new Communists not only paid their regular dues to the party funds, but suited their behavior to party needs as well.

The unification of the labor unions brought the white-collar workers (including state and city employees) into the Central Labor Union. Government workers were thus put on the same level with manual workers. In practice, the former were under a *de facto* rule by the politically and numerically superior Communist workers.

The "democratization" of the civil service, and especially of the army, opened the door for further Communist infiltration. Before the war, the Czechoslovak Army was "apolitical"; soldiers could not vote while on active duty. When they were given the vote in 1945, the Communists took the occasion to demand

<sup>11</sup> Gottwald, in his speech of November 17, 1948, said: ". . . February has shown the importance of the state apparatus. . . . Before the February events . . . the state apparatus ceased to serve the former ruling class. In February the state apparatus in a sense played a very important role, and thus offered an illuminating example to the working class, that it should—as the new ruling class—take good care of its state apparatus."

<sup>12</sup> Every Communist Party has a Control Commission which operates at every level of the party organization. It supervises not only the political activity of the leaders and the rank and file, but also their private lives. It settles ideological and other disagreements. There seems to be an international link between the Control Commissions which may constitute the basis for the international Communist intelligence. The Head of the Central Control Commission in Czechoslovakia was Jindrich Vesely, former inmate of Buchenwald and head of the investigation service of the Ministry of Interior. Thus, the party and the state police were directed from one center.

political education for the soldiers, presumably so that they could understand politics and vote intelligently. With the help of the pro-Soviet though non-Communist Minister of National Defense, General L. Svoboda, the army was to be remodeled on the pattern of the glorified Red Army. "Commissars" were included, but were called "educational officers." Thus began the infiltration of the army, along with an extensive purge of the officers' corps.<sup>18</sup>

Justifications for the many promotions of Communists to high positions in the police, the army, and the civil service were of two kinds. First, a "moral" qualification for office was to replace the old bourgeois demands for schooling or training. A fighting or resistance record, as vouched for by the Communist-sponsored Union of Partisans, was considered a higher qualification than a university degree or military academy training. And fighting experience with the Red Army was the highest qualification of all. Secondly, the Communists claimed that twenty years of bourgeois and agrarian government had excluded them completely from government positions and that they were therefore entitled to a generous share of the postwar administration. The above arguments were usually stressed for penetration of government departments which were headed by non-Communists. In those directed by Communist ministers, very little trouble was taken to justify the "blitz promotions" of Communist officials.

## VIII

For a short period after the war, the "soft" element in the Czech Communist Party was ascendant. This group was led by Communists who had faith in the new nationalistic line which followed disbandment of the Comintern and led to the "coalition" line on both national and international levels. In Czechoslovakia, enthusiasm for the new policy took on an almost missionary character. Czech Communists hoped that communization of their modern industrial country by democratic methods might prove an example worthy to be followed for France and Italy. But as democratic opposition to Communism mounted, in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere, these "soft"

<sup>18</sup> Unlike the police, the army was not completely in Communist hands by February 1948. It is therefore impossible to say what the majority of officers and their corps would have done if Benes, as commander-in-chief, had asked them to restore order.

Communists had to return to the old dogmas of international class warfare, soon reinstated by the rebirth of the Comintern, with its strict international discipline, in the Cominform of 1947.

The return to the international line brought the "radical" Communists to the fore. Most of the leaders of this group had spent the war in German concentration camps where there was no reason for deviations from the original Communist doctrine. On the contrary, in Buchenwald or Oranienburg could be found thriving models of ideological cooperation which ignored national boundaries. Czech and other European Communists brought into German concentration camps were often saved from the "death commandos" by fellow German party members. These, with six years' service behind them, often had responsibilities as block leaders and clerks in the somewhat autonomous prison administration. They were in a position to help a foreign comrade by keeping him off the lists for the "death commandos" or getting him the job of "blockleiter" for his national group. The German Communists preferred to send German liberals, socialists, or Catholics on the commandos, rather than their European brothers. Besides preserving the Communist leaders, this international cooperation was a constant danger to non-Communist prisoners.

Returning from the concentration camps where the Comintern spirit had survived, the Czech Communist group could not understand the disbandment of the Comintern in 1943 and the adoption of the nationalistic line which led to the coalition governments in France, Italy, and Czechoslovakia. These "radical" Communists, isolated from the war evolution of Soviet policy, had remained faithful to the tenets of the Communist Manifesto, and were much surprised to find their chiefs returning from Moscow in a racial or nationalistic ecstasy which was partly sincere and partly for tactical reasons. And they could not share the enthusiasm with which their comrade, Vaclav Nosek, Minister of Interior in a coalition with bourgeois ministers, was carrying out the transfer of Sudeten Germans, with the visible help of Soviet authorities and in obvious contradiction of the class-conscious and international past of Communism.

The international needs of Moscow policy in 1945 had re-



duced these faithful Cominternists to temporary silence. It is, however, interesting to note that the members of the Czech radical group began to come into grace again after 1947, when the Cominform was established. Their criticism of the new line seemed to be confirmed on both national and international levels. The difficult relations between East and West, especially concerning the German question, were exposing the limitations of tactics which admitted that coexistence of the capitalist and Communist worlds was possible. And the more and more courageous opposition of the democratic forces in Czechoslovakia to the communization drive were revealing the limitations of the coalition tactics in the National Front Government.

It can be safely assumed that it was mainly to this group that Gottwald addressed his curious defense of the decision to postpone the putsch from 1945 to 1948. The radicals and some of the rank and file obviously failed to understand why they had been assured by their leaders between 1945 and 1948 that Czechoslovakia would become Communist through democratic methods, when in February 1948 a coup which the radicals had favored in 1945 finally proved necessary. Gottwald's admission of two conflicting ways of thinking within the Communist Party is worth consideration:

From May 1945 until February 1948 our way was very complicated. There were not always and everywhere clear and definite results. There were shortcomings and drawbacks. It is therefore not astonishing that here and there in our ranks some impatience was shown—and not only impatience, but *doubt that we had chosen the right way in May 1945*. This impatience appeared mainly in months preceding February, when reaction was beginning to raise its head with insolence.

When February was a success, some comrades voiced the opinion that we had unnecessarily lost all the time between 1945 and 1948. Some expressed it in the following terms: "What we did in February 1948 we could have done in May 1945, and everything would be fine by now." There would be no greater mistake than to leave even a shadow of such thinking in our ranks. Our party and our people inevitably had to go through this school of three years in order to make what happened in February possible. . . . In 1945, we would not have been up to those tasks. The period from May 1945 to February 1948 was of absolute necessity.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Speech of Nov. 17, 1948. It is interesting to note that Gottwald often speaks of "February" without daring to say what it was. He just calls it "February," or "February events."

## IX

Fellow travelers, whether consciously or unconsciously, are of great importance to the Communist strategy of infiltration. Their first task—often assigned to them without their knowledge—is to help spread Communist ideas to quarters otherwise inaccessible to Communist penetration, such as intellectual circles, and university groups. More specific tasks, of which the fellow travelers were usually aware, were to neutralize, corrupt, or even bring into the Communist camp the organizations or parties in which they held key positions.

There are several categories of fellow travelers, and in Europe the largest of these by far is *opportunists*. It is mainly fear of the display of Soviet power and the absence of a balancing Western strength which transforms Europeans into fellow travelers. Usually, their motive for cooperation with the Communists is to get on the winning side. Among the opportunists are many persons with professional or managerial skills, who believe that their services will be of use whatever regime may come. In postwar Europe, there was a special class of opportunists who hoped to whitewash their collaboration with the Nazis by cooperation with the Communists, or at least by large contributions to the party funds.

The *idealists* among fellow travelers include university professors, artists, and writers whose cultivation gives them a keen awareness of existing social injustices. They are looking for a remedy and hope to find it in a benevolent form of communism. The idealists are usually despised by professional Communists. Idealists tend to add unnecessary utopian encumbrances to the highly professional, cool, and ruthless Communist drive for power. Students formerly were looked on as good material for the Communists. But in a reasonably stable democracy which the Communist Party is trying to undermine with slogans stressing social and economic issues more than freedom, the student body seems much less reliable. In spite of all Communist efforts, threats and bribery, Czechoslovakian students constituted the most trustworthy anti-Communist corps in the nation.

*Comrades-in-arms* are a special product of the European resistance and concentration camp period. The fact that Communist and non-Communist leaders found themselves side by

side between 1941 and 1945 in a common fight against a common enemy created a network of friendly personal relations.<sup>15</sup> Although postwar politics separated these comrades-in-arms into different political groups, their "Association of Partisans" or "Union of Former Inmates of Buchenwald" were still their meeting grounds, both nationally and internationally.<sup>16</sup>

A classic example of the important role a fellow traveler occupying a key position can play is provided by Zdenek Fierlinger, the ambitious, opportunist leader of the Social Democratic Party. In 1945 his leadership changed his party into a docile tool of Communism, and in 1948 his work was crowned by the merging of the Social Democratic Party with the Communists.

The Communists knew their man. Klement Gottwald himself proposed Fierlinger for the Premiership of the first Czechoslovak Government in the liberated territory. Jan Masaryk made a record of his conversation with Gottwald on this subject on March 21, 1945:

Gottwald reproached me with the campaign launched by the Czechoslovak Government in London against Fierlinger, and especially with their decision to call Fierlinger back to London. I said that Fierlinger might be a subject for discussion but that I was not prepared to start it . . . all negotiations between Moscow and the Czech Government in London, between the Government and Fierlinger, have gone through Beneš hands; Beneš has always tried to help maintain Fierlinger in his post. I make one complaint about Fierlinger—since the day he became Czechoslovak Ambassador in Moscow he has never uttered a critical word about Soviet Russia. The impression was thus created that he was more papist than the Pope. . . . For me, Fierlinger's chapter is closed. To this, Gottwald replied that Fierlinger was *their candidate* for the Premiership. He stressed once more that they wanted him and that they hoped I would have no objection. I repeated once more that I would not discuss Fierlinger, that this was a domestic policy issue on which I would not like to express my opinion, since I have never been a member of any political party.

<sup>15</sup> Concentration camp friendships often began with a non-Communist's fear of tight Communist cooperation in the camp.

<sup>16</sup> During the coup in Czechoslovakia Communist leaders relied most heavily on these "comrades-in-arms," who were not only loyal, but had the further advantage that Communist propaganda could present them as "martyrs of Nazism" in comparison to the non-Communist leaders who had just resigned from the government, the ones who had "spent the war against Nazism in the lobbies of the Savoy in London." The two most important quislings of February 1948 were Father Plojhar from the Christian Democratic People's Party and Mr. Najman from the National Socialist Party, both former inmates of Buchenwald.

Communist support of this fellow-traveler socialist proved to be a very shrewd maneuver indeed. The Communist Party was able to claim other key positions in the government—Interior, Agriculture, and Information—because they left the Premiership to another party. As the strongest party, the Communists were entitled to claim it for themselves, according to Czechoslovak parliamentary tradition. Actually, they lost nothing by this move, since the new Premier was completely dependent and, as was later revealed, subservient to them. Along with Fierlinger, the Communists gained the whole Social Democratic Party, which could hardly avoid electing him their chairman when he had already obtained the highest position in the state. Even then, the Communists found it possible to explain their support of Fierlinger as a self-restraining gesture. Several Communist leaders explained that “we did not want to present the West with a Communist Premier. Fierlinger will not have the effect of a red flag on Western capitalists as Gottwald would.”

In Czechoslovakia the Communists destroyed the independent influence of the Social Democratic Party by corrupting the leaders rather than by persuading the rank and file. For example, they offered the Premiership to Fierlinger and the Ministry of Industry to another Social Democrat, Bohumil Lausman. The Social Democratic Party of Czechoslovakia became completely subservient to the Communist Party. When the May 1946 elections made the Communist Party the strongest and the Social Democratic Party the weakest, Socialist subservience to the Communists was even more pronounced. The Communists (114) and Socialists (39) together had 153 seats in parliament while the democratic parties held 147. The two Marxist parties were therefore capable of forming a purely Marxist government, having a composite majority in the parliament.

The Communists were as aware of this advantage as the democrats were of their weakness. Thus, it happened that the weakest Czechoslovak party, the Social Democrats, became the focal point of Czech politics from May 1946 until February 1948. Even the Western Socialist parties concentrated on the Social Democrats. So did the Czechoslovak democratic parties. And so did the Communists. Thus after its defeat at the polls the weakest party of Czechoslovakia was not only able to retain

two important ministries, Industry and Food, but was being bribed and seduced from all sides. While the Communists tried to help the left wing, the non-Marxist parties hoped either to split the party or assure victory for its right wing. The democrats nearly succeeded in their efforts. At the Socialist Congress in Brno in November 1947, Fierlinger was replaced by a middle-of-the-road man, Minister of Industry Lausman. It was not a complete victory for the right wing, as this would have split the party in two, but a compromise with a very clear indication of a shift toward the right. The Communists were no longer sure of Social Democratic support, except in purely economic socialist measures. The possibility of a Communist isolation in *political issues* became a real threat.

The above described shift among the Social Democrats, who were until November 1947 considered as reliable fellow travelers generally, was one of the reasons for the Communist decision to carry out a coup. In his speech of November 17, 1948, Klement Gottwald rather frankly admitted this:

. . . the reaction attempted to prepare a shift in the existing balance of respective power before the elections in 1948 took place . . . they attempted to *isolate* the Communists. There was mainly the well-known campaign against the *left wing of the Social Democratic Party*, against *Comrade Fierlinger*. The reaction thought that they would succeed in this way . . . by *isolating* the Communists and confronting them with a unified phalanx of all other parties, and that the Communists would capitulate.

The time was past when Czechoslovak democracy could have been saved simply by clever parliamentary maneuvering by the anti-Communist parties. The events of February 1948 were to prove that the infiltration had gone too far.<sup>17</sup> The foes of Communist rule were unable to save the Czechoslovak republic by any other means; besides they did not seem quite aware that the internal balance of forces was bound to reflect the dominant power position of the Soviet Union in Central Europe. The Soviet overlords by the end of 1947 had come to feel that the international situation had worsened to such an extent that no possibility of an unfavorable shift in the internal position of their followers in Czechoslovakia could be tolerated.

<sup>17</sup> The July 1950 issue of *World Politics* will contain a second article by Dr. Duchacek, "The February Coup in Czechoslovakia."

# THE FEBRUARY COUP IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA\*

By IVO DUCHACEK

## I

**T**HE Stalinists consider parliaments to be only schools for extra-parliamentary means of struggle. Were the Czechoslovak democratic leaders aware of this attitude while cooperating with the Communists both in the Parliament and Government of Czechoslovakia after 1945? If they were, what countermeasures did they devise? Even if the daily political fight over party or local issues necessarily narrowed their horizon, responsible democratic leaders had a fairly accurate picture of the situation even in 1945, when the Communists, thanks to the presence of the Red Army, could have seized power. The democrats' awareness of danger and their decision as to countermeasures were, however, influenced by many hopes and illusions, some justifiable in view of the international situation at the end of the war.

First, their chief hope was based on Communist abstinence in 1945. The Communists did *not* take the country completely in their hands, though they could have. The survival of Czechoslovak democracy seemed much more dependent on the international situation than on internal issues. That this analysis led in some cases to a rather passive expectation that outside forces would save Czechoslovak democracy once again is beyond any doubt.

Second, the Red Army, the reason for the people's lack of courage, was not supposed to stay forever. With its withdrawal, the feeling of helplessness was supposed to go, too. When the Red Army finally withdrew in November and December of 1945, this supposition proved only partly right, for the Com-

\* This is the second of two articles by Mr. Duchacek describing the Communist seizure of power in Czechoslovakia; the first appeared in the April 1950 issue of *World Politics* and was entitled "The Strategy of Communist Infiltration: Czechoslovakia, 1944-48."

munists did not vacate the positions they had occupied during the presence of the Red Army.

Third, the system of People's Courts which dealt with war-guilt trials was supposed to end in May 1947, when the two-year Retribution Act expired. This was another source of terror which was supposed to go. Again, a supposition only partly right, since the two years of Communist-sponsored and Communist-influenced People's Courts were sufficient to demoralize many who preferred to become Communists rather than face their war-guilt trials.

Fourth, in a favorable international situation, with the withdrawal of the Red Army and expiration of the Retribution Act, there was hope that democratic traditions might overcome a somewhat fatalistic submission complex which the Czech people had developed during the six years of Nazi oppression.

Fifth, the Democrats were asking a hopeful question: Why would Soviet Russia prefer to have only the Communist minority on her side when she can gain the whole nation by friendly handling and understanding?<sup>1</sup>

Sixth, Communist participation in the government was considered a safeguard against Communist transfer of the issues in dispute from the coalition government to the streets. Within the framework of the Constitution the democrats considered themselves strong enough, but they knew how weak they would prove if the Communists chose extra-legal ways of settling the issues. Fear of this caused many democratic compromises and retreats.

Finally, great hope was put in free, unfettered elections in which the majority could assert itself, a majority which was obviously not only democratic but non-Marxist. It was symptomatic that some democratic analysts did not even wish for a crushing defeat of the Communists—"just a little" was their phrase to express the fear that the Communists (not yet educated in democratic fair play) would not gracefully accept

<sup>1</sup> Prior to the Liberation, Soviet friendship seemed also *technically* essential if President Benes and his government were to operate. Since Czechoslovak territory had been liberated from the East and by the East, the way home from London to Prague had to be via Moscow. It was the Soviet's decision whether or not the Czech Government was to have a chance to start its activities on home territory and not only in the exile which had been the Polish Government's fate.

spectacular defeat. They considered the revolutionary organization of Czech and Slovak Communists as a political party similar to their own, though much more radical in methods and aims and consequently more difficult to deal with.<sup>2</sup> This mistaken estimate led to another error. Instead of combining their efforts, the democratic parties competed among themselves just as they hoped to compete with the Communist Party. Their wranglings enabled the Communist Party to combine with the People's Party against the National Socialists and vice versa or with the Czech parties against the Slovak and vice versa. The democrats' disunity of aims and methods was in sharp contrast to the strict discipline and carefully planned strategy on the Communist side.

Some democratic leaders considered temporary close cooperation with the Communist Party as essential for achieving their aims, that is to secure some key positions in the administrative or industrial sphere and thus improve their positions for the political fight with communism. There was some point in their reasoning that superiority of democratic forces on a purely mathematical parliamentary basis was not of great value so long as the Communist Party held the majority of economic and other key positions. But tactics which aimed at the weakening of the Communist Party by close cooperation with them were very confusing to the democratic rank and file, which was supposed to fight the Communists bravely on the local level,

<sup>2</sup> The three important Czechoslovak non-Marxist parties were the following:

(1) The National-Socialist Party, whose leader was Petr Zenkl. It is a non-Marxist party which by its advocacy of social reformism combined with some anti-Catholic and very nationalistic trends would correspond to the French radicals. At the elections of 1946 it obtained 18.29 per cent of the votes.

(2) The People's Party led by Msgr. Jan Sramek. It is a Christian Democratic Party based on the Catholic social doctrine as inspired by the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. It obtained 15.69 per cent of the votes.

(3) The Slovak Democratic Party, led by Josef Lettrich.

While the National Socialist and People's parties were born under the Hapsburgs fifty years ago, the Slovak Democratic Party was a child of the resistance and liberation period. The leading positions were occupied mostly by former Slovak Agrarian leaders, all of them Protestants, and the rank and file were Catholic, mostly former voters for the Catholic Slovak Party. This religiously heterogeneous group was held together by the common fight against Marxism. At the elections in 1946 it succeeded in obtaining 62 per cent of the votes in Slovakia against the Communists. Thus this Slovak Party became the fourth Party of Czechoslovakia (14.08 per cent) and therefore stronger than the Social Democratic Party which had obtained only 12.05 per cent.



while democratic leaders almost seemed to be "honeymooning" with them on the national level. The particular position of the Social Democratic Party made such plans even more fragile. Furthermore, democratic leaders were prisoners of their own experience with the revolutionary Marxist movement in Czechoslovakia in 1919-20 when the powerful but most cooperative and constructive Marxist Social Democratic Party had emerged from an apparently similar revolutionary atmosphere following the first World War. The disbandment of the Comintern in 1943 and the subsequent adoption of the nationalistic line according to which "every country may follow its own path to socialism" made many a democrat draw the automatic conclusion that the Communists might very well turn out to be what the Social Democrats had been after 1920.

## II

Although the exact moment of the Communist decision to seize power in Czechoslovakia cannot be reliably established, the reasons given for it and the order of events seem to place the decision somewhere in the period following the establishment of the Cominform (September 1947).

In January 1947, the Czechoslovak Communist Party still seemed persuaded that Czechoslovakia could be communized by democratic methods. Prime Minister Klement Gottwald in January 1947, and Secretary-General of the Party Rudolf Slansky six months later, declared that the Communist Party must and would obtain a 51 per cent majority in the coming election, scheduled for spring of 1948. For some Communists this was a goal; for others, only a part of a psychological warfare. Even if some Communists sincerely hoped to win, they could not exclude the possibility of defeat.

A foretaste of the results of really free and democratic elections was given to Communists and democrats alike, in autumn, 1947, by the elections in students' associations in the universities and colleges at Prague and Brno. At these elections, which in Czechoslovakia had always been fought on political and not purely students' issues, the Communists and Social Democrats were reduced to 25 per cent of the total vote while the Chris-

tian Democrats and National Socialists gained a crushing majority of 75 per cent. In December 1947, another confirmation of this evolution of the people's mood was given by the results of a Communist "Gallup poll," organized and executed by the Communist Ministry of Information. According to this poll the losses of the Communist Party in the coming elections were estimated at 10 to 15 per cent of their strength.

The outcome of Czechoslovak elections was of utmost importance in an international situation worsening with each successive conference. The subsequent developments seem to indicate that Moscow in the winter of 1947-48 must have viewed with grave concern the internal situation in the two most western bastions of the Russian security line, Stettin-Trieste. The coming elections and other internal developments seemed to threaten the Soviet position in Czechoslovakia. In the Adriatic, the "Wilsonian" Leninism of Tito represented another potential danger. At the time of the coup in Prague, the tension between Belgrade and Moscow was near its culminating point. The correspondence between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia shows that on March 18, three weeks after the February coup, the Soviet General Barskov informed Tito about Marshal Bulganin's order to withdraw all military advisers from Yugoslavia. A day later the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires Armaninov notified Marshal Tito that the civilian experts had also been recalled to Moscow. In both cases the reason given was: "They are surrounded by hostility in Yugoslavia."<sup>3</sup>

With the coming crisis in Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union and the Communists, who have never believed in the wisdom or value of a majority verdict were in 1947-48 less ready than ever to look passively on any change of power relationship in the heart of Europe through a simple mathematical procedure of counting the votes after free elections. Besides coming elections, however, other factors made the Czechoslovak People's Democracy appear highly unreliable in the eyes of Moscow. These factors, in the particular international atmosphere of 1947, made it imperative for the Czechoslovak Com-

<sup>3</sup> J. B. Tito to V. M. Molotov, letter dated March 20, 1948, *The Soviet-Yugoslav Dispute*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1948.

munists to abandon the soft "coalition" line and adopt the radical remedy.

First, the *international situation* had its immediate effects on the situation in Czechoslovakia. The democrats tried to avoid taking sides, while the Communists gave the Soviet Union their unconditional support.<sup>4</sup> Tension increased, especially when Czechoslovakia, who had hoped she would never be driven to make the fatal choice between East and West, was obliged to take sides with respect to the Marshall Plan. On July 4, 1947 the Czechoslovak Government, including its Moscow-trained Communists, accepted unanimously the joint British-French invitation to join the Preparatory Conference in Paris. Five days later a delegation of the Czechoslovak Government (composed of the Communist Prime Minister Klement Gottwald and two non-Communists, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Masaryk and Minister of Justice Prokop Drtina<sup>5</sup>) heard from Stalin and Molotov in the Kremlin that: (1) The Marshall Plan was an anti-Russian scheme which could, under certain circumstances, involve the danger of an economic or shooting war against Russia with the help of revived German industry. Consequently: (2) adherence to the Marshall Plan was incompatible with the Soviet-Czechoslovak Alliance of 1943. Faced with this dilemma—the Marshall Plan (then still rather nebulous) or the Soviet Alliance (not nebulous at all in the geographical position of Czechoslovakia)—Prague reversed its decision of July 4 and refused to come to the Preparatory Conference in Paris. Though docile under duress, Czechoslovakia remained the only People's Democracy which failed to consult Russia before making a decision on such an important issue and which had to be

<sup>4</sup> The Communist Speaker of the Czech Parliament, Oldrich John, on February 22, 1949, at a session commemorating the February putsch, declared: ". . . [in summer, 1947] there was a series of attacks against the Ministry of Interior and the Security Corps. The reaction was most systematic and aggressive in agricultural questions. At this moment the National Socialists, Slovak Democrats, and People's Party have already formed a unified and concentrated phalanx. When Vice-Premier Zenkl calls, 'Not the East, but both East and West,' this slogan does not even try to hide a campaign against our foreign policy, against the U.S.S.R."

<sup>5</sup> After the February coup of 1948, Jan Masaryk and Prokop Drtina were found under the windows of their respective apartments—Masaryk, on March 10, dead; Drtina, on February 27, alive but crippled for life.

brought back to "reason" by open pressure. It was not only a sign of the general unreliability of Czechoslovakia but a manifestation of somewhat nationalist deviation.

Second, President Benes' *Memoirs*, published in 1947, contained several critical remarks on the subject of Soviet foreign policy and its reflection on the Czechoslovak Communists during the Ribbentrop-Molotov period. Dr. Benes considered it necessary to insert some last minute reservations about Russian sincerity in general. For the Kremlin, even Benes—who had often been criticized for defending Russia to the West instead of the contrary—became a symptom of the general unreliability of Czechoslovakia.

Third, the Social-Democratic Party, which had shaken off Fierlinger and his fellow-traveling policy at the November Congress in Brno, caused Communist apprehension that the general awakening in Czechoslovakia might isolate the Czech Communists. A possible defeat at the polls could be followed by a coalition of non-Communist forces in the French pattern. Such a course of events would represent a dramatic shift in favor of the West.

### III

The preparation of a Communist coup in a democratic country seems to take place on two levels. First, Communist machinery develops an attack against the democratic forces. This would usually include a campaign against one of the democratic groups, devised in such a way as to isolate it from the others. Furthermore, there would be an attempt to deprive democratic groups of their leaders or of their strength. Attempts on the lives of democratic leaders or attempts to corrupt or frighten them would fall into this category, just as would attempts to support or bribe ambitious second-fiddlers in the democratic parties. An attempt to link up the democratic parties with some *distant* foreign forces would be made, while the Communists presented themselves as national champions, certain of the support of a powerful friend close at hand.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Lenin wrote to Commissar of Justice D. I. Kursky on May 15, 1922: ". . . a formula must be found that would relate these activities [of the Mensheviks] to the international bourgeoisie and its struggle against us."

Accusation of high treason would be made against democratic leaders.

Second, in the thus heated atmosphere, Communist Headquarters would try to revolutionize the labor unions, either by new far-reaching demands or by slogans defending their position against an imaginary enemy. Cells would be mobilized and Action Committees and workers' militia formed. Basic weapons would be distributed and a general order of readiness for action issued. The threat of street-fighting and barricades may have the same effect as the street-fighting itself on comfortably living democrats; such threats would be especially effective if the democrats felt internationally isolated, prisoners of their own democratic methods. Fair-play for instance, is hardly an adequate weapon against a scientific palace-revolution.

In Czechoslovakia the pre-putsch targets were well chosen. The first was the Slovak Democratic Party, which in May of 1946 succeeded in obtaining a 62 per cent majority against the Communists in the province of Slovakia. The Communist Party made a series of public accusations of high treason, especially of subversive activities in connection with those Slovaks abroad who favored the Hitler-created independent Slovak State and opposed therefore in 1945 the re-establishment of Czechoslovakia. The Communists hoped to isolate the Slovak Democratic Party from the other non-Communist Czech parties, which had never had great sympathy for the rather loose Slovak conception of state unity. Czech non-Communist leaders, however, saw through the Communist tactics and the sudden enthusiasm for unity of the Czechoslovak Republic.

The second target was the most popular non-Communist leadership: Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk, Vice-Premier and Chairman of the National Socialist Party Petr Zenkl, and Minister of Justice Prokop Drtina. Petr Zenkl's personal courage and record of six years imprisonment in Buchenwald and his outspoken criticism of communism made him one of the most popular and important anti-Communist leaders in the government. Under Drtina's direction the Ministry of Justice proved a most valuable counterbalance to the Communist Ministry of

Interior. Their struggle often resulted in curious occurrences. People released by the Ministry of Interior were immediately arrested by the Ministry of Justice, and vice versa. Although less romantic, it reminded some observers of the fights between the King's musketeers and Richelieu's guards in Dumas' novels.

In the summer of 1947, three wooden cases containing infernal machines were sent to these three leaders. The cases were intercepted, and judicial investigations established the following facts: the wooden cases had been ordered by Communist Headquarters at the town of Olomouc, Moravia; they were fabricated by a Communist cabinetmaker at Krcman, near Olomouc; Communist deputy Jura Sosnar placed the explosives in the boxes with his own hands. It was proved furthermore that the same deputy organized deposits of weapons and munitions in the Olomouc area. This exposé was a great triumph for the Ministry of Justice and for Secretary-General of the National Socialist Party Vladimir Krajina, who first traced the origin of the infernal machines to Communist Headquarters in Olomouc. It was a triumph full of political consequences. A Communist deputy lost his parliamentary immunity. Several Communists, including the cabinetmaker, were arrested. The public, accustomed to unlawful arrests by the Ministry of Interior, felt encouraged by this just application of the law. At the same time, the people realized what methods the Communist Party might use to achieve their aims. The tension and fear of the future were increased by this incident.

In retaliation, the Ministry of Interior later accused the National Socialists of having organized an espionage service for foreign powers, and made some spectacular and widely publicized arrests on that basis in the Duchcov area. But when the Ministry of Justice cross-examined the witnesses, they admitted that they had been forced or paid to act as *agents provocateurs* for the needs and purposes of the Ministry of Interior. Although the Ministry of Justice, and with it the democratic majority, seemed to be winning these duels, the Communists achieved their aims too. The atmosphere of the country became less and less breathable.

The Communists' third target was the middle classes, backbone of the democratic majority. They were by then almost annihilated by the collectivist economy. What was left of them was supposed to receive the finishing blow by a new, severe taxation of property—the "millionaires' tax"—and further limitation of commerce.

These and other issues were debated in an atmosphere of rising temperature. Some dreaded a putsch, some ascribed the fever to pre-electoral turmoil. Some were convinced that the rhythm of Communist demands had quickened because the Communists feared defeat at the polls and therefore desired to settle the election issues beforehand and at the same time wanted to impress the voter with the continued success of Communist activities in the government and parliament, so that he would vote for the winners and not the "permanent losers," the democratic parties.

In the meantime, the second level of Communist pre-putsch operations became apparent. At the end of December, news about the distribution of weapons was becoming more and more public. In January, the Central Labor Union and the Peasants Union came out with extensive demands, going far beyond the agreed program of the government.<sup>7</sup> If these demands were granted, the non-Communist leaders felt that the election would be fought on dead issues. The Czechoslovak democracy, and its liberties, would already be communized from top to bottom. When the Ministry of Interior began a communization of the police under the banner of "police reform," the Czechoslovak democrats were at the point of using any issue possible to force the elections. The non-Communists' pathetic belief that "only free elections could be the passport to a brighter future" was based on the following reasoning: If

<sup>7</sup> In his speech of November 17, 1948, Gottwald discussed the countermeasures against the non-Communist groups: ". . . [we had to] make new claims for further nationalization and agricultural demands going beyond the framework of the governmental program. On this basis the Labor and Peasants Union called their convention. These demands became a signal for the reaction. They realized that it was really five of midnight. They reacted nervously; this speeded their coming into the open and thus they committed their mistake."

The speech was made at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in Hradcany Castle. Copies were distributed by the Czechoslovak Press Agency in New York, December 29.

Russia came to consider the Czech elections as internationally significant, everything would be lost anyway; if Russia is ready to consider the elections as a domestic affair, then everything can be gained by forcing free elections at the earliest possible moment.

#### IV

The Central Labor Union and the Peasant Union announced their mass conventions in Prague for February 22 and February 29 respectively. These conventions would bring a great number of Communist workers and peasants into Prague—overcrowding of the city was another prerequisite for the putsch.

The decision in January to convoke the labor and agricultural conventions on February 22 and 29 set the climax of the crisis in the last week of February 1948. One week before the labor convention, Communist leaders concentrated on revolutionizing the mind of the labor rank and file. Slogans defending the rights of labor against an imaginary foe—domestic and international reaction—were combined with a war cry denouncing parliamentary democracy as such. On Sunday, February 15, Antonin Zapotocky, the leader of the Central Labor Union, declared bluntly: "Away with the Parliament if it does not fulfill the program of the Labor Unions." The same day, another labor leader, Jungmann, said "If they [the democrats] do not like the slow road to socialism, we can take the quick one . . . the meeting next Sunday will decide which road to socialism we shall take." The tone of the Communist press left no doubt that the road to a complete collectivization of Czechoslovak economic life would be the quickest possible.

Meanwhile, the Communist Minister of Interior continued to carry out his police reform. On February 20, he refused outright to comply with the Government's decision which ordered him to suspend the nomination of eight new police inspectors, all Communists, in the district of Prague. The governmental decision was reached by a combination of the votes of all parties except the Communist Party. This time, the Social Democratic Party joined forces with the democratic parties. The Communist Party found itself isolated. In the opinion of Benes



and other democratic leaders, police reform was the only issue on which the Social Democrats would surely side with the non-Marxist parties. There was little assurance that they would support the non-Communists in opposing the Marxist claims to be put forward at the approaching labor convention. The police reform thus seemed the only issue on which free elections could be forced.

With President Benes' approval, a governmental crisis which should have been followed by elections developed on Friday, February 20, two days before the labor convention. Twelve ministers belonging to the National Socialist, People's, and Slovak Democratic parties handed their resignations to President Benes. The three Social Democratic ministers put their portfolios at the disposal of their party executive without resigning from the Government. They left the decision to the party leaders. Even at that dramatic moment they remained middle-of-the-roaders. What were the hopes of these twelve unsuccessful apostles of democracy? They knew that they would be desperately helpless if the Soviet Union—rightly or wrongly—decided that the international situation made it imperative to take Czechoslovakia completely into Communist hands. Then no matter what path was chosen, they argued, Czechoslovak democracy would die. If, on the other hand, the Soviet Union did not consider it necessary to interfere, early free elections were the only chance to save the Government from Communist control. For such elections a governmental crisis because of a dispute concerning civil rights in connection with the police reform seemed a better issue to base elections on than further nationalization and other labor issues which were to be raised by the conventions two days later.

This democratic faith in constitutional methods—the formal resignation of the government, free elections, and a new government—were in sharp contrast to the organized, extra-parliamentary, and anti-constitutional display of Communist strength.

Communist infiltration of labor, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Information proved to be of decisive value for the execution of the coup. As soon as the machinery of the

coup was set in motion, it was the duty of the labor unions, which had already played an important part in preparing the revolutionary atmosphere, to create the impression that former ruling groups were absolutely helpless. This was achieved by three methods. First, workers' militia were rapidly formed; weapons, taken from the secret "depots d'armes" or from the reserves of the nationalized armament industry, were distributed. The appearance of men and women in plain clothes with rifles or submachine guns on their shoulders in Prague and other cities created an impression of lawlessness and made the population feel helpless. Second, workers were rapidly mobilized for various different public meetings and parades through the streets of Prague. These were supposed to add to the impression that an armed and organized mass cannot be defeated by a handful of democratic leaders, arguing over constitutional issues with an old, sick and hard-pressed president at their head. Finally, a one-hour general strike was called on the fourth day of the crisis, chiefly as a means of intimidation. It was to show that the courage and organization of labor could frustrate any retaliation from the democrats, should they decide to hit back. Although imposed on the workers with threats and actual force by Communist agitators, the strike was a success—especially since the democratic leaders did not dare to appeal to the workers themselves or to other mass organizations. The streets of Prague were thus well-nigh abandoned to the Communists, who were able to persuade the people that Prague had turned Communist overnight. Only the students dared to contest Communist mastery of the streets. Several thousand brave students tried to give courage to others by parading through the streets of Prague. Their readiness to fight for democracy by other than constitutional means proved them to be realists, keen political analysts, and heroes of Czech democracy.

The Ministry of Interior, which had already proved its value in the pre-putsch period, became with labor and Communist Party Headquarters one of the chief directing centers of the coup. The Minister of Interior ordered several police regiments to Prague. Before they reached the city, they had to take a new oath of allegiance to Prime Minister Gottwald.

Their concentration in Prague increased the tension and made it obvious that the police, the most important arm of civil power, had become an illegal force on the side of the Communists. On Sunday, February 22, the labor meetings were broadcast and filled the air with revolutionary slogans, threats, and announcement of the general strike for Tuesday. A few hours later the police started the first wave of illegal arrests. No ministers or members of Parliament were arrested. Like the general strike, this first wave of arrests was to serve mainly as intimidation and proof of the Communists' limitless power.

In a country with a modern, democratic administration the actual engineers of a Communist coup are chiefly the "Action Committees." To a certain extent these correspond to the workers' and soldiers' councils of the Soviet revolution. They are formed secretly and have their tasks assigned long before the putsch. They are made up of trained Communists whose main duty in the preparatory period is to acquaint themselves with the machinery of the office, organization, or ministry which they are supposed to take over at a given signal. They must work there in whatever position they can obtain, as doorman, cleaner, typist, clerk, or something higher.

Their unmasking would usually take the following form: at a given moment a group of ten or fifteen men and women, armed with weapons or accompanied by workers' militia, would make their way to the office of a director, minister, or head of a department, order him out, take over the command and start an immediate purge of lower positions, pending further instructions from the Central Action Committee.

The Action Committees quickly replaced the duly elected or nominated direction of every administrative organization in Czechoslovakia. There were Action Committees in the National Opera House which started the purge among the singers, actors, and orchestra; there were Action Committees in every ministry, in the Central Office of the Fire Brigades, in the Conservatory of Music, in the Association of Writers and Journalists, and in Parliament, in hospitals, in the National Committees, in the cooperatives, in the publishing houses—everywhere. To the original members of the Action Commit-

tees were added later many fellow travelers who hoped for a quick revolutionary career.

The Central Action Committee replaced the National Front, which had been the coalition of the five important political parties in Czechoslovakia. On the surface, the new "regenerated" National Front resembled its predecessor. Besides the Communists, there were a few Social Democrats, National Socialists, and Christian Democrats. The difference was that these non-Communist representatives were no longer chosen by the executive bodies of their parties, but by the Secretary-General of the Communist Party. He assumed the power of designating who, according to Communist standards, was a good National Socialist or Christian Democrat. The Communist choice, of course, fell on some who had formerly been excluded from their parties because of their too obvious "fellow travelership."

Action Committees were also formed within the non-Communist parties. They began a thorough purge by excluding from membership all former leaders, most members of Parliament, and above all, ministers who had resigned from the Government. For instance, the People's Party central organ, *Lidova Demokracie*, purged on February 25, announced on March 23: "The presidium of the Action Committee of the People's Party announces that it has excluded from the party the *chairman* of the party, Msgr. Dr. Jan Sramek, because of his attempt to leave the country secretly. For their former activities the following members of Parliament are excluded. . . ."

On the second day of the crisis the Action Committees of the nationalized paper mills announced that they would not deliver newsprint to newspapers which had not been approved by the Central Action Committee. The Action Committee of the railroads issued an order to stop delivery of papers which did not adhere to the program of the regenerated National Front. And three days later the Action Committees within the non-Communist parties took over all non-Communist newspapers with the help of the police and workers' militia. On the following days those papers appeared again without any noticeable change on the surface. But their contents were *ganz gleichgeschaltet*.

The purge in the factories, directed by the Action Committees against the "enemies of the people," began so thoroughly that the leader of the Central Labor Union, Zapotocky, had to broadcast a warning against wholesale expulsion of skilled labor and engineers, usually non-Communists, as it was becoming a serious threat to production.

The effectiveness of the Action Committees again raises the question: What defense can a democratic government devise against such a thorough and secret undermining of its administration?

The Ministry of Information, and especially its broadcasting system, was another means of spreading the feeling of democratic helplessness and Communist power. Although the Ministry of Information ranked second or third as a key post during the infiltration period, for the putsch itself it was a first-rate strategic position. Thus, in a country where the Communists had not succeeded in getting control of the broadcasting system and other means of information, they would have to seize those means by force in the first hours of the upheaval. Immediately after the resignation of the twelve ministers, the broadcasting system became a channel for the Communist interpretation of events only. It was used to call public meetings, to issue orders, and especially to appeal for formation of Action Committees wherever they had not been formed in secret beforehand. The combined efforts of the Central Labor Union, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Information resulted in what might be called a *mobilization of the streets*.

The failure of the democrats to react strongly to the Communists' impressive display of power was certainly very important in Benes' decision to cede to the terror of the streets. His age, ill health, and pathetic faith in democratic methods of compromise were also instrumental in his acceptance of the new Communist regime.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> A segment of the conversation between Benes and Gottwald on May 4, 1948 follows: GOTTWALD: The President believes that the will of the people as expressed in the draft of the new Constitution could be transformed into a rule of the mob in the streets. I cannot find that in the Constitution . . . the people of course have the right to have their meetings and gatherings. This cannot be forbidden.

BENES: I have already faced the mob in the streets once. This is an argument for me. I do not want to be faced with street-rule for the second time. . . . I felt it as a humiliation for the President of the Republic and therefore I cannot forget it.

There were also reports that Gottwald and the Minister of Interior presented Benes with a list of his political and personal friends whose safety could not be guaranteed if the President made the impatient people of Prague wait any longer. These reports are not confirmed, nor is there reliable proof that Gottwald assured Benes that Parliament could be so well purged or terrorized by the time the Communists allowed it to meet as to ensure a vote of confidence for the new Government.<sup>9</sup>

Whatever extra pressure was brought upon Dr. Benes, even the official communiqué issued by the Communist Ministry of Information did not try to hide Benes' statement about his reluctant attitude to the new government: "It was not an easy decision for me to make; indeed it was very difficult for me. I have given long and earnest thought to the crisis and have come to the conclusion that your [that is, the Communist] proposal should be accepted."

This happened on February 25. The end of Czechoslovak democracy was certainly a depressing shock for the Western world. For the Eastern world and Communism in general, it had an encouraging effect. Since February 1948, not only Czech Communists but others too have never failed to underline the international significance of the "Czechoslovak February." At the parliamentary session commemorating the first anniversary of the coup, on February 22, 1949, Speaker of the House Oldrich John stressed this point:

. . . a year ago the February events had just culminated . . . it was not a decision for a limited period of time, but forever; it was not a decision concerning only our country, but the *whole world*. At a decisive moment and at a decisive key-position in Europe we achieved a *critical shift* of the forces of the world. . . . The significance of February must be estimated against the background of the courageous fight of the Greek patriots and the liberating movements of the working class in *France and Italy*, in all of Europe, in the whole world. Our February has had an importance for other countries, too. It belongs therefore to the *working class of the whole world* which is expecting its February. *It will have it.*

<sup>9</sup> On March 10—the day of Jan Masaryk's mysterious death—the Parliament met for the first time after the coup and gave the new Communist Government a vote of confidence by 230 votes out of 300.

## V

One of the most important means of making the democrats feel helpless and the Communists powerful was the sudden arrival of a high Soviet official, in Czechoslovakia or in other Eastern countries.

The Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, former Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, V. A. Zorin arrived in Prague on February 19, a day before the democratic leaders made their decision to resign from the Government. The official reason for his unexpected visit was the Soviet Government's desire to supervise deliveries of Russian wheat to Czechoslovakia—a rather unusual job for a deputy foreign minister. Zorin remained in Prague exactly one week. The coup also lasted exactly one week. On the day that Minister of Justice Drtina tried to commit suicide by leaping out of a window, Zorin took a plane to Moscow.

The presence of a high Soviet official was of utmost importance for the Communists' execution of the coup: it gave them self-confidence; it helped create the impression that behind every illegal action of Communist Headquarters stood the powerful Soviet neighbor, her armies, her MVD, and her concentration camps; and it helped increase the democratic majority's feeling of international isolation. Zorin's presence gave visible confirmation to the Radio-Moscow, *Pravda*, and *Izvestia* line that "200 million Russians support the Communist fight against domestic and international reaction." It caused anxiety that Soviet armed intervention might occur either through an invasion by the Red Army or dispatch of International Partisan Brigades from Russia. This fear had a strong effect on Benes and his advisers, no matter what the Soviet's real intentions were. Although it might be difficult to trace Zorin's direct intervention in the *technicalities* of the coup, his sudden arrival represented a very important, psychological intervention in the domestic affairs of Czechoslovakia. As Gottwald puts it in his analysis of the coup, "In 1918 the Soviet Union could not have given us *visible* support."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Speech of November 17.

In contradiction to the publicity for domestic consumption about Zorin's presence, the Soviet and Czechoslovak propaganda abroad made feverish attempts to present the February coup as a mere change of government and not of the regime. When, for instance, immediately after the coup the new Communist Minister of Foreign Trade Antonin Gregor stated in Prague, "We must thank our Slav Allies and mainly the Soviet Union for the fact that we succeeded in defeating reaction," the official Czechoslovak Press Agency was ordered to issue a corrected version from which this passage was deleted.

This insistence on the *domestic* character of the Czech coup of 1948 sounds rather deviationist today when Tito and his followers are assured from Moscow that "no country can build socialism without the Soviet Union" and that it is a Titoist deviation to "overrate one's own strength in developing socialism."

According to a report which for security reasons cannot yet be revealed, the Soviet decision to push Czechoslovakia vigorously into line seems to have coincided with the Soviet fear that a showdown with the West was in 1948 more imminent than it really was. The insistence of the Soviets on the domestic character of the Czech coup would then appear as consistent with their apparent wish not to increase Western suspicion and irritation any further. Also the Politburo probably did not wish to suffer a diplomatic defeat at the Security Council where, in April-June 1948, Chile had accused the U.S.S.R. of interference in the internal affairs of a member of the United Nations.

## VI

When Democracy confronts Communism on both national and international levels, four misjudgments usually give the advantage to the latter.

First, the sheer weight of the continental presence of Soviet power is often underestimated. The European mind was corrupted or frightened by the presence of the Red Army in areas east of Berlin in 1945—and the sweep of Soviet communism to the Oder, Bavaria, Vienna, and Trieste between 1944-1948—rather than seduced by the slogans of Marxism-Leni-



nism. It is often overlooked that in no European country was the Communist Party able to gain a majority in free elections. Despite the prestige which Russia gained by her impressive victories over the German oppressor and despite the threatening presence of Soviet power, communism was still the religion of a minority. Even after the coup in Czechoslovakia the Communist Party did not dare face free elections but introduced the usual *Ja-oder-Nein* single ticket ballot. Before February 1948, the Communist rank and file were forbidden to attend other political meetings than their own, so great was the fear of contamination by democracy and nationalism.

It was therefore Soviet power on the one hand and the lack of an active Western policy and of cohesion among Western European nations on the other that were mainly responsible for the self-assurance of the Communist minority and for the feeling of helpless isolation on the democratic side. The sharp contrast between the active influence of the East and the hesitant policy of the West in Europe was not only the background but the chief cause of Communist success in Czechoslovakia, of the number of opportunist fellow travelers, and of the democratic defeats. The checkmating of Soviet power thus seems the first condition of an awakening of democratic courage and resistance in Europe.

Second, the democrats usually make the mistake of considering the Communist Party as just another political party, though more turbulent, disagreeable, and ambitious than others. But the Communist Party is not just another party; it is a political structure *sui generis*—a revolutionary, para-military, espionage organization. It developed its revolutionary and conspiratory methods in an underground fight against the Czarist police and uses them now in a fight which is not being waged within democracy but against it. It operates on the basis of Marxist-Leninist doctrine, which is interpreted and applied to concrete situations by the Soviet Government only. When confronted with the Communist organization the democrats, prisoners of their own misconceptions and ideals, think in terms of the usual democratic means of political competition, such as free speech, open diplomacy, free elections, fair play, and tolerance. But the Communists think and plan their strat-

egy in military terms or in terms of illegal methods, such as corruption, spying, storm troopers, Action Committees, and other weapons of modern revolution. On the democratic side there always seems to be great hesitation in viewing the fight between democracy and communism as the Communists do—realistically. The Communists rightly see it as a life-or-death struggle.

Third, it is just as dangerous to underestimate the political *theory* of the totalitarian adversaries of democracy. Although Leninism-Stalinism is limited in its appeal, the fact remains that the revolutionary theory has always been the guiding principle of any practical activity of communism. It would be as wrong to overlook Lenin's and Stalin's political theory<sup>11</sup> in 1948 as it was to forget the Nazi pattern for world domination in 1938. The democrats in Czechoslovakia had to learn the hard way about the difference between the Communist's never-changing final aims and their temporary, tactical line of nationalism, as expressed in the short-lived slogan of "a different path to socialism in each country." Almost everywhere in Europe the failure to distinguish between the tactics of the day and the Communist theory which remains the basis of long-run policy produced in 1945 cooperation with the Communists or coalition governments in which the Communist parties took part. The example of Czechoslovakia demonstrates especially the dangers of such a path. A coalition is one of the Communists' best springboards to seizure of power. With Soviet power in the background, the hope for democratic and nationalistic contamination of local Communist parties is unrealistic.

Finally, it is true that opportunism and fear creates great numbers of fellow travelers on whom the Communist minority must partially rely for persuasion or confusion of large portions of the population. But it is precisely the neutral, passive, or undecided millions, along with the confused socialists and

<sup>11</sup> *In Foundations of Leninism*, Stalin himself bids us not to forget Lenin's theory: "We cannot forget the saying of Lenin's to the effect that a great deal in the matter of our construction depends on whether we succeed in delaying war with the capitalist countries *which is inevitable* but which may be delayed until proletarian revolution ripens in Europe" and that in the meantime "the basis of our relations with capitalist countries consists in *admitting* the coexistence of two opposed systems." —Translated by Historicus, "Stalin on Revolution," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (January 1949), p. 207.

true idealists, which are susceptible to a democratic counter-offense. Not without an effective display of power but *not with power only* can a counteroffensive be successfully waged. It is up to the Western world to develop a courageous political and economic program, a daring program of social reform. This should not be confused with the often advocated use of Socialist parties in the fight against communism. To support daring and modern social reforms does not necessarily mean to support the aging Socialist parties and leaders in Europe. But it must be borne in mind that Communist seduction operates at its best when the obvious social injustice or lack of respect for basic human rights is met by a negative or faltering attitude.