



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

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THE STRATEGY OF COMMUNIST INFILTRATION: CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1944-48

By IVO DUCHACEK

BETWEEN 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.¹ 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-

¹ 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. . . .*²

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.

² 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."² 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.

² *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. Lino-type 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:⁴

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:

⁴The 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.⁵ 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

⁵ 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.*

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-

* 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

⁷ This quotation is taken from President Benes' record of his conversation with Klement Gottwald on May 4, 1948 at Sezimovo 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.⁸ 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

⁸ 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.⁹

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

⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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

¹⁰ 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.²¹ 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 Commission²² 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

²¹ 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."

²² 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.¹²

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"

¹² 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.¹⁴

¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

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.

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

¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.

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