

*Who Lost Czechoslovakia?:
Reconsidering the Communist Takeover 50 Years Later*

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The Cold War is over, and it is a very good time to be a historian of East Central Europe. The fall of the communist dictatorships of the region has opened hitherto inaccessible archives and libraries, allowing us both to gain a more complete understanding of events that have loomed large over the past fifty years and to seek answers to questions we have not even dared pose for lack of reliable information. Beyond these material benefits, however, there are also benefits to be reaped from the removal of the region's history from the sphere of ideological contest. During the Cold War, at least for most American scholars, there was a clear demarcation line between "us" and "them." We stood on the side of those fighting against Communism, and saw those dissenting from their regimes in Eastern Europe as our allies. As in contemporary affairs, so in history: with the exception of Marxist scholars, we saw those who had fought against the imposition of Communist dictatorships as our allies, and attributed their losses to the power of a group of local Stalinist loyalists supported by Moscow and directed unflinchingly toward the goal of gaining total power by whatever means necessary. It is largely this view that has been adopted since 1989 across East Central Europe, for obvious reasons being seen as telling the "true story" of Eastern Europe's slide into dictatorship. The willingness of many domestic accounts to mirror its interpretation has been succinctly noted by Norman Naimark:

The historical model is transparent; a few Soviet puppets in each of the countries — encouraged by the NKVD and backed by the power and influence of the Red Army — successfully employed "salami tactics" to capture free societies, halt the growth of democracy, and stunt the development of economic prosperity throughout eastern Europe. Western-style Cold War historiography, suppressed for so long in the countries of east central Europe, has come to dominate perceptions of the past.¹

This is not to say that there is not considerable truth in this understanding of communism's rise to total power in the region. Certainly the combination of the presence of the Red Army, the activities of the Soviet secret police and the abuses of the domestic secret police organizations, and the desires, plans and instructions of the Soviet Central Committee and other organs played a central role in the imposition of the communist monopoly of power. However, the reliance on Soviet puppets and the power of the Soviet Union renders the societies of the region mere objects, deprived of power, influence and even their own paths of historical development. We have to understand that, as a result of the massive shifts in the demographics, economics, and attitudes brought by the war, the Communist solution was at least acceptable and even preferable to significant elements within these societies. Even if -- as in Poland and Hungary -- the Communists were dissatisfied with their electoral results, the fact is that a large number of people did vote communist, and even more were amenable to communist aims and plans.

¹Naimark. "Rev and Counterrev in Eastern Europe." Christiane Lemke and Gary Marks, eds. *The Crisis of Socialism in Europe*. Durham: Duke University, 1992.

The Cold War model is particularly problematic for Czechoslovakia. The Red Army had withdrawn from Czechoslovak soil by the end of 1945, and Soviet pressure in the land was minimal in comparison with that exerted in neighboring states. Even if, as the leading historian of immediate postwar Czechoslovakia, Karel Kaplan, believes, the presence of Soviet troops in the region predetermined the fate of the country, he recognizes that domestic events played a commanding role:

the course of the conflict, the forms of opposition and the methods of the non-Communist forces in opposition to the power aims of the Communists were "an internal affair" dependent upon the powers, abilities and preparations to carry out such a struggle. If, from an international perspective, the anti-communist opposition had no hope for victory, the greater the importance of domestic political factors in the struggle for power. The opponents of [Communist] plans for power did not have to take a course such that by the second day of the decisive conflict they really ceased to exist as a political force.²

Following this view, Kaplan and other scholars have examined the power-political aspects of developments in the country from 1945 to 1948, and accorded tremendous weight to the events of February 1948, when twelve non-communist ministers resigned from the government causing a government crisis that the Communist party seized upon to gain a monopoly of power.

My research, however, raises wider and more troubling questions about the nature of postwar Czech democracy and about the aims, principles and potentials of the anti-communist resistance. Rather than focusing on the narrowly-construed political leadership and on the events of the dying days of the third Czechoslovak Republic, I ask what the broader range of opinion was, not only in February of 1948, but in the years that led up to the communist assumption of power. While the struggle for power was definitely on in February 1948, the Communist Party had already secured a leading role in Czechoslovak society and the support it had gained made the outcome of the struggle clear from the moment the battle left the back rooms of the National Front government and went to the streets. Among the questions I wanted answers to were: Why did the Communist Party gain forty percent of the Czech vote in free elections in 1946? Why did its membership grow from 28,000 at liberation to a million by March 1946? Why were there hundreds of thousands of people protesting in favor of the communist solution to the government crisis in February of 1948 and only a few thousand protesting against? Why could the democratic forces not attract and mobilize such mass support? And, finally, the title question of this talk, who lost Czechoslovakia?

In order to grapple with these questions, I examined the views expressed in a wide range of influential periodicals, including six daily newspapers and some thirty weeklies and monthlies. Within these, I focused on the ideas expressed by a broadly understood class of intellectuals. This group included creative intellectuals -- writers, poets and so on. -- but also academics, journalists, social critics and leading politicians. As I view them, these men and women and the journals in which they wrote were reflective of the ideas in the air at the time, filters of the public mood in an upward direction. At the same time, the political figures obviously manifested influence on both political developments and the public mood. The decision not to include archival material that has in some cases become available has not been taken lightly, and springs from a notion central to the project as a whole. Czech intellectuals historically, and particularly in the years immediately following World War Two, played a virtually unique and politically important public role. Their debates were carried out in extremely public venues, even mass-circulation newspapers, and often included responses from the broader public. Because of intellectuals' particular political and cultural influence on this wider public after the war, it is necessary to focus on their public debates.

My attempt to divine the postwar intellectual and cultural climate, an attempt to recreate the postwar Czech mind, takes the whole of the 1945-1948 period into account, and is conceived in terms of an intellectual struggle over discrete issues central to the national self-understanding. I characterize it in the way that the fiery anti-communist journalist Ferdinand Peroutka and the leader of the CP of CZ Klement Gottwald conceived of it in the epigrams at the top of my table of contents, as a struggle for the "soul" or "faith" of the Czech nation. The work is divided into three parts, with the first setting the intellectual contexts and the cast of characters for the other two.

I begin by tracing the historical importance of the intellectual class in Czech history. Since the beginnings of the national revival in the late 18th century Czech intellectuals have been the beneficiaries of a popular

² Karel Kaplan. *Nekrvavá revoluce*. 10.

legitimacy that has provided the foundation for their participation in their nation's political life. In the aftermath of the Second World War, their position in society had possibly never been higher. The Nazis had targeted their repression against the active intellectual classes, conceiving of them as the bearers of a national consciousness they wished to see extirpated such that the work of assimilation could begin. The population, while not driven to resist, relied on the intelligentsia to maintain the nation's language and culture until the threat had passed. Later in the war, as the ultimate victory of the Allied forces became apparent and the ranks of the resistance began to swell, intellectuals became the leaders of the underground. The service Czech intellectuals rendered their nation during the war was amply noted after its conclusion, and intellectuals were called to assume a leading role in public life.

But what kind of roles did they in fact play? The second chapter attempts a classification of postwar Czech intellectuals, dividing them into four groups: Communist, democratic socialist, Roman Catholic and Protestant. It seemed to me that some classification scheme was necessary, and I chose this one because these seemed the clearest breaks, but also because, with some modifications, it corresponds to the postwar political system, as you can see from the schematic at the bottom of the handout. Four Czech parties were permitted to re-enter political life after the war: the Communist, Social Democratic, the National Socialist and the People's parties. In my classification scheme, all those writing for explicitly communist organs fall in as communists (as well as any avowed communists writing elsewhere), and all those writing for National Socialist organs or those periodicals obviously sympathetic to that party fall into the democratic socialist camp. The Social Democratic party, deeply split internally between a fellow-traveling left and a moderate right, have been broken up, with the left appearing in the communist camp, and the right alongside National Socialist intellectuals in the democratic socialist camp. Roman Catholics wrote both in Church affiliated periodicals and in those controlled by the People's Party, an expressly Catholic political group. Finally, theologians and other intellectuals affiliated with either the million member Czechoslovak Church or the somewhat smaller Evangelical Church fall under the rubric of Protestant, although throughout I maintain a distinction between the two denominations. In the interests of brevity, my discussion today will focus on the communists and democratic socialists.

The first set of debates I examine concern the fierce discussions over the past, particularly the recent past of the interwar republic, Munich and the war. I argue that, in order to capitalize on the revolutionary wave washing over the nation after liberation, communist intellectuals offered already in May of 1945 a new conception of the nation. The lever for this new conception drew on the intrinsic historicism of Czech consciousness and the postwar resurgence of nationalism. The radical Czech left performed a two-sided transformation: the Communist Party became super-patriotic, and the whole of Czech history was reinterpreted in such a way as to make the communist movement the logical inheritor of the best values of the nation, with the Communist Party walking in the footsteps of the greatest figures of Czech history. Communist intellectuals strove to create what they called a "new Czechoslovakia," which would be explicitly Slavic and socialist, by carrying out what they termed a "revision of the national character." This revision entailed reinterpreting the interwar republic and its still-revered head, Tomas Masaryk, teaching the nation the "correct" interpretations of Munich and World War Two, and reorienting the national self-understanding eastwards, toward the great Soviet Union.

Communist views of Munich are easy to divine. On the one hand, they took the form of a moral criticism - the argument that the West was no friend of the Czechs and that Western-style democracy was in crisis. On the other hand the Czech radical left presented a socio-political argument that hinged on the willingness of Western capitalists and the Czech great bourgeoisie to sell out Czechoslovakia in an attempt to come to terms with Hitler and divert his imperial ambitions to the East, while the USSR had stood by its Czechoslovak ally. More interesting, however, are the views of the non-communists, who largely went along with these interpretations. The National Socialist Minister of Justice, the leading anti-communist Prokop Drtina, admitted that reactionary forces in the West hoped to divert Hitler to the East by sacrificing the Czechoslovak Republic. He went even further, however, when he claimed that had the USSR aided Czechoslovakia militarily in rejecting the Munich accords, "the military opposition of Czechoslovakia with Soviet aid would have called into being a coalition of the reactionary governments of Great Britain and especially France with Hitler and Mussolini against us." Such views furthered a subsidiary communist argument about the war. The Soviet Union was not only the only power to stand up to Nazi Germany, but that its victory in the war was a result of both its physical strength -- derived from its superior socialist organization -- and its moral strength -- derived from the socialist idea -- which led it to resist Nazism and imbued its soldiers with a strength and patriotism that non-communists such as Drtina perceived as underlying the Soviet victory. For even this staunch anti-communist, the war was "the victory of the Red Army and the USSR, but...also the victory of the November Revolution," which had created the moral preconditions for the defeat of Nazi Germany.

The point of these arguments is clear: the Soviet Union had proven itself the Czechs' ally in their darkest hour, and had been victorious in the war due to both its strength and its virtue. The West was perceived by communist, Protestant and democratic socialist intellectuals alike as morally degraded, weak before the threat of fascism, and explicitly both anti-Soviet and anti-socialist. Conversely, the Soviet Union was seen as resistant to fascism, willing to fight for Czechoslovak independence, and both physically and morally strong. Only Roman Catholics attempted to view Munich politically and to accord the Western Allies credit for their share in the Axis defeat. The postwar alliance with the USSR was the logical outgrowth of this reading of the recent past, and it was praised by all. The inference had further ramifications: if the Soviet Union was the guarantor of Czechoslovak sovereignty and international solidarity, who other than its local representative, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, could be the most reliable domestic guarantor of the same national interests?

If communist intellectuals intended to revise the national character and give shape to a new, expressly socialist Czechoslovakia, they had to come to terms with the interwar bourgeois republic and its commanding figure, Tomas G. Masaryk. In attempting this, they argued that the interwar state was at best a necessary failure, while striving to claim Masaryk as a heroic ally of the working class and a forerunner of their socialist ideas, despite his sometimes biting criticisms of Marx. By doing this, they attempted to deny the era, while at the same time assuming the mantle of the man universally regarded as its personification. What is surprising is that non-communists, too, joined in the criticisms of the interwar republic. With the notable exception of Roman Catholics, non-communist intellectuals felt no strong desire for a return to the prewar republic, and expended little intellectual energy in attempting to salvage its reputation. With the explicit or implicit agreement of non-communist intellectuals, the communists' arguments on the nature of the interwar republic therefore became the dominant interpretation of postwar Czechoslovakia. They portrayed the First Republic as a state dominated by an alliance of a foreign (i.e. German) and domestic bourgeoisie that exploited "the people" before betraying them to imperialist fascism. In the face of this onslaught, democratic socialist intellectuals — the majority of whom had been active in the interwar years — responded weakly. On the one hand, they urged the public to relinquish any hope of a return to the "bourgeois republic." As Ferdinand Peroutka put it: "here we must say that there is no return to that...the Third Republic in fundamental ways will differ from the First Republic." On the other hand, their primary defense of the First Republic lay in presenting the postwar Third Republic as the fulfillment of its less glorious predecessor's promise. By arguing the latter, they may have been acting to preserve the moral core of the interwar republic, but they thereby praised and legitimized a state in which the Communist Party played the leading role. Furthermore, here the Communists' argument that they were the logical inheritors of the nation's best traditions found increased plausibility: the First Republic had developed into the far superior Third Republic and flawed bourgeois leadership had developed into far superior Communist leadership. The only voices expressing shock at the blatant denigration of the interwar republic, at the reversal of judgment on a past well within living memory, were Roman Catholics.

The battle over Masaryk's legacy provided a somewhat different view of the interwar republic. All political and intellectual currents attempted to benefit from association with his name and heritage, and it was here that the communists met their stiffest resistance. Communists stressed Masaryk's opposition to the bourgeois establishment of the late Austro-Hungarian Empire, and claimed that Masaryk was, at least in relative terms, a "socialist." Although Masaryk was not a socialist in the 1940s sense of the word, as one communist commentator put it, his "thoughts and struggle were revolutionary for the discrete developmental stage" in which he lived, and was therefore, paradoxically, "a socialist even if he was never a socialist." With his socialist pedigree thus established, Masaryk was enlisted for the cause of present-day socialism and often deployed as an imputed supporter of policies proposed by the Communist Party. Many anti-communists adopted in large part the views of their opponents, and this was true even at the highest levels of the political and intellectual establishment. Masaryk's successor Beneš was one of the leaders in this respect. In harmony with the communists' placement of Masaryk at the service of the new People's Democracy, Beneš argued that "no one here should think that what we are doing today means any kind of departure from Masaryk. It is rather a continuation and completion of his program and his ideas to their logical conclusion."³ This argument too bears resemblance to the attempt to developmentally tie the postwar republic to its prewar antecedent.

The shift in views from the interwar period is striking. Nowhere is it moreso than in the question of the nation's cultural orientation. What was revealed in this debate over the nation's position between East and West

³ From an interview in *Masarykóv lid* reprinted in František ákarvan, ed. *EB nřroduZemskř osv tovř* rada I. Praha: Zemskř rada osv tovř, 1946. 35-6.

was a transformation of the Czech self-conception along one of its most fundamental axes. Spearheaded by communist intellectuals' drive to "revise the national character," many Czechs shifted their allegiances away from the capitalist and liberal West toward the Slavic and socialist East. In this debate communist intellectuals generalized the victory of the Soviet Union such that it was widely perceived as a victory for the Slavs as a whole. One of the sharpest blows Munich had delivered to the Czech psyche was the "smallness" Czechs felt by being left out of the discussions over Czechoslovakia's future. Many Czech intellectuals seem to have taken the USSR's victory as also a victory for their nation, using the notion of a greater Slavdom to compensate for the "smallness" perceived in the face of the West's agreement at Munich. Communist public figures exploited this, arguing that "the victory over fascism is also the victory of the Slavs" and casting Russia as the defender of the Slavs.⁴ This phenomenon represented more than a psycho-political ploy on the part of communist sympathizers, however, as even President Beneš recognized the ascription of such a role to the USSR, praising "the great role of the Soviet Union in this struggle, [and] the heroism of the Red Army, which fought not only for the Soviet Union but also for the rest of the Slavic nations."⁵

Claiming the victory over Nazi Germany for all the Slavic nations through the role of the USSR was the first link in the attempt to forge a chain binding Czechs to the East. Communist intellectuals and those allied with them trumpeted supposed "Slavic virtues" endlessly, stressing the power of the Soviet Union and the justice of its social system. Beyond this, communist intellectuals presented two arguments specifically designed to allay non-communists' suspicions of an Eastern turn: that the East represented the inheritor of the Western tradition, and that socialism as embodied by the USSR was the direction in which the future of the world -- both East and West -- was turning. Both of these arguments were accepted by non-communist intellectuals. For example, Marxism was accepted by the democratic socialist cultural and literary critic Vaclav Èerný as "the fruit and expression of Western thought." Similarly, the idea that the world was turning to socialism also found resonance. The Evangelical leader J. L. Hromádka believed that "All Europe, not only Czechoslovakia, is on the road to socialization. It is a historical fact," while the National Socialist government minister Jaroslav Stránský argued that the East was both "closer to the *sources* of beauty and the good" than the West, and was "itself the source of the future's moral, artistic, social and scientific values."

The optimism expressed in these lines regarding the future of socialism was expressed equally for its presumed bearers, the Slavs under the leadership of the USSR. Communist intellectuals propagated a distinctly messianic interpretation of Slavism, but interest in "renewing" and "deepening" contacts with Slavic nations was widespread. The notion served as the foundation for President Edvard Beneš's attempt to build a "new Slavic politics" based on the ideas he expressed in his Reflections on Slavism and his A New Slavic Politics. While the effect of the president's positions on the discourse of Slavism is difficult to measure precisely, at the bare minimum his words did much to discourage wider discussion of the question. With the imprimatur of the nation's most influential non-communist personality, it is apparent that communist intellectuals had succeeded in capitalizing on the USSR's share of victory in the Second World War and setting the terms of the debate over the nation's orientation. The resonance that so many of their ideas found even among strongly anti-communist sections of the intelligentsia placed them in a dominant position for defining the postwar conceptual field. Their popular linking of Slavism and socialism particularly placed their moderate democratic socialist opponents in a politically difficult position, for they also supported socialist reforms and increased contacts with their Slavic neighbors. The problem they confronted was one of measure: how to support a turn to the East to only a certain extent, without appearing to be merely weak copies of communist rhetoric?

The case made by democratic socialist intellectuals in this great debate reflected on one hand their tolerance and open-mindedness, and on the other hand their recognition that in the aftermath of the war the balance of power -- military, political, economic and cultural -- had shifted markedly to the East. While demanding that Czechs should choose the best from both East and West, their strategy also led them, and most notably Vaclav Èerný, to espouse a messianic view that mirrored the view of the new Slavism taken by communist intellectuals and their supporters and acknowledged by many non-communist public figures. Instead of investing the larger Slavic world with a redemptive function, however, Èerný ascribed it to the Czechs alone, on whose ability to synthesize East and West the future of the world depended. The task would not be easy to accomplish, for it required Czechs "to harmonize two types of human life....in no way to establish a temporary compromise of both, but to digest, fuse and unite

⁴ Josef Rybůk. "Naše kulturní úkoly." [Our Cultural Tasks.] *Rudá práva*. 25 December, 1945. 5.

⁵ Edvard Beneš. òvahy. 260.

them in a new, once again internally consistent higher organism....we are charged [to accomplish this] first, possibly as an example for all Europe." According to Ěerný, "future peace is possible only at the price of [a Czech synthesis of cultural forces] success."⁶ The messianism this widely-held view revealed bears evident political risks.

As should be evident from all that I have so far said, the communists dominated the conceptual limits of discourse with their "revision of the national character." On issues vital for the national self-understanding, communist intellectuals largely determined the field of debate and the issues over which debates would take place. These debates revealed a deep shift in the Czech national self-conception. In place of the prewar pride in the First Republic and in belonging to the Western family of nations, and new Slavic and socialist Czech identity was being forged. This found its institutional embodiment in the "People's Democracy," and in that system's evolving domestic social configuration and its international political orientation. Communist intellectuals could not have achieved this without the considerable assistance of groups of intellectuals who saw themselves as supporters of the communists' strivings. Here the support of Protestant intellectuals was significant. Little noted and rarely discussed in examinations of postwar Czech political, cultural and intellectual history, their influence has been unjustly overlooked. The intellectual leadership of the Czechoslovak Church, which represented nearly 1/8 of the Czech public, not only stood behind the communist reinterpretation, but actively drove it forward, occasionally outdistancing even communist intellectuals themselves. The support of more moderate Evangelical Protestants also played a significant role in solidifying a consensus close to communist views.

However, the communists also gained much support from their supposed opponents in the democratic socialist camp. Above all, democratic socialist intellectuals were often quick to place themselves close to individual communist interpretations, whether in criticizing the interwar republic or in trumpeting the heroic values and rosy future of socialism and Slavism. This had the effect of lending credence to at least parts of the communists' much larger attempt to reorient the nation's self-understanding -- a goal with which they could not agree. For this reorientation, the communists had a coherent and comprehensive interpretive structure, composed of Marxism and Slavic nationalism, that provided forceful and believable explanations for the traumas the nation had undergone. The elements were all linked in an easily recognizable whole, such that democratic socialist support for individual elements redounded to the plausibility and conceptual power of the whole. Democratic socialists appeared largely incognizant of this, and of the political and cultural implications their support bore. Even when democratic socialist intellectuals disagreed with their communist opponents, they were careful not to do so too sharply, phrasing their responses as a set of careful and reasoned compromises. These genuinely reflected their considered opinions of the matters at hand, but bore the weaknesses I have just pointed out. Simultaneously, democratic socialists' reasoned compromises left them appearing divided, since they often stressed different elements in arriving at somewhat different conclusions. This often happens when truth is the goal sought, but it indirectly contributed to the appealing cogency, clarity and explanatory power of the communist reinvention of the nation. Moreover, democratic socialists' compromises contributed to a decided fuzziness about exactly what the essential differences were between the intellectual positions of the Communist Party on the one hand, and National Socialists on the other. I would argue that this had immeasurable but decided political ramifications.

Perhaps most disturbing, however, was the messianic zeal with which many democratic socialists viewed their and their nation's calling. This aspect pervaded, tacitly or explicitly, much of their argumentation. Whether in the striving toward perfection from the imperfect interwar republic or in the calling of Czechs to synergistically synthesize East and West into a higher unity that would save humankind, these intellectuals believed they were playing a historical role. They seem to have truly believed that that the nation they led would internally perfect itself and thereby heal the contradictions of the larger world. The notion encouraged the public to think that all things were achievable, and that the Communist Party's dominance in Czechoslovakia would necessarily have different effects than it had in neighboring countries, about which the Czech public was notably ill-informed. It contributed to the notion that all circles could be squared simply because of the fact that it was the Czech nation performing the action. This had grave, even self-delusional consequences when the form and nature of the Czech socialism then being created were on the intellectual agenda.

The communist cultural offensive and the Communist Party's widely successful attempt to reformulate the national identity prepared the public for the more explicitly political debate over socialism that intensified after the 1946 elections. The party refrained from discussing their vision of socialism during the first year after liberation, and it and its intellectual allies benefited from this. Above all, their silence allowed time for their

⁶ Vřclav Ěerný. "O naš' modern' socialistick tradici a co s n' souvis'. (K problematice socialistick kultury u nřs, 5.)" *Kritickù m s'c n'k* 7 (1946) 179.

reinvention of the nation to develop, and for their own reinvention as Czech patriots to gain hold. Even after their victory at the ballot box, the Communist Party's intellectual and political leaders stated their goals moderately. Perhaps knowingly, they played on the Czech belief that "Czech Communists are not like other Communists"⁷ by formulating their aims as a "specific Czechoslovak road to socialism." The battle over the meaning of socialism was a crucial one for the Communist Party and its fellow-traveling allies on the left wing of the Social Democratic Party, constituting the political and social twin of the battle over the revision of the nation's self-understanding and orientation. In this, as in the debate over the "revision of the national character," communist intellectuals again set many of the terms and boundaries of the field of debate. The "Czechoslovak road" was a key ingredient in making this possible, and went far in placing their democratic socialist and Roman Catholic opponents on the defensive. In this, they did not specify the final form Czechoslovak socialism would take, but moved to reassure the public that it would not be the institutionalization of a Soviet-style regime. The heart of the "Czechoslovak road" was composed of already-existing elements for which there was widespread support in the land: free elections and parliamentary government, the People's Democratic system, the National Front government, and the Two-Year Plan for the Czechoslovak economy. The plausibility of this "calm, parliamentary road" was undergirded by the reinvention of the nation and of the party itself, and further by party's announcement of its goal to win a majority of the vote in the 1948 elections.

How did the Communist Party's democratic opponents respond to the communists' distinctly moderate course? Throughout the 1945-1948 period, democratic socialist intellectuals were driven by a firm belief in the moral rectitude of socialism. Their socialism, however, had none of the theoretical support that Marxism could offer Communists and left-wing Social Democrats. Instead, it was based on three related conceptual premises. First, it was founded on the certainty that capitalism was dead, and deserving of only post-mortem scorn. Second, their socialism regarded Marxism, as the intellectual foundation of the modern socialist movement, as a valuable tool in the struggle for social justice, but also as problematic because of its association with communism. On the one hand, democratic socialist intellectuals attempted to secure the theoretical legitimacy of their socialism by associating themselves with portions of the Marxist canon, its leading lights and its terminology. On the other hand, they rejected Marxist theory as a complete whole. Finally, and most importantly, it is clear that their socialism sprung from an essentially cultural and ethical understanding, which expressed itself in terms such as "socialist culture," "socialist humanism," and the struggle for the "new man."

All political currents in the nation, with the exception of the People's Party, strove to portray themselves as both nationalist and socialist. As communist intellectuals were well established on the latter of these issues, they devoted their energies to successfully reinventing the Communist Party as patriotic and resting on national traditions. Democratic socialists had the opposite problem. The national and patriotic pedigree of the National Socialist Party was in no doubt, so its intellectual vanguard strove to reinforce its socialist credentials. Democratic socialist intellectuals, like so many of their countrymen, believed deeply in the socialist future of Czechoslovakia and went on the offensive to win support for a broadly construed and vaguely defined socialism immediately after the war's end. In very important ways, they contributed to the public fervor for the task of "building" socialism that they later were confronted with dampening.

In any discussion of democratic socialist intellectuals' conceptions of socialism, the material state of Czechoslovak society must be borne in mind. The Košice Program of April 1945 proclaimed extensive confiscations and nationalizations. In addition to the state's confiscation and partial redistribution of the property of ethnic Germans, Hungarians and collaborators, it called for the nationalization of the entire financial and credit system, all insurance companies, and the entirety of the state's natural and energy resources, among others. Then, by his decrees of October 1945, President Beneš nationalized industries employing over 60% of the economically active population. These actions meant that by the end of 1945 "the share of combined government and nationalized sectors in national output was almost twice as large as, for instance, that in France or Austria or Britain at that time."⁸ These moves in industry were matched by a wide-ranging land reform, involving roughly 8.8% of the area of Czechoslovakia, that accompanied the property confiscation.

The sweeping socialist transformation Czechoslovak society experienced almost overnight in 1945 has two major implications for my analysis of democratic socialist intellectuals' relationship to socialism. First, one can only wonder where in precise terms these intellectuals wished to guide their society, when they urged it toward

⁷ See Robert Bruce Lockhart, *My Europe*. London: Putnam, 1952. 120.

⁸ Jan M. Michal. "Postwar Economic Development." In: Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luňák,

socialism. Second, with property, industrial, labor and institutional relations in the given state, democratic socialist intellectuals' lack of a concise theoretical or practical framework may have led them to the abstract cultural, moral and ethical view of socialism they adopted. In the words of Eva Hartmannová, they called for "character [and] ideals" to bring about an "unclearly defined and in its concrete form unanalyzed 'socialism'" revealing a dichotomy between "a seemingly inexorable material reality and a psychic dimension on which hopes were placed."⁹

Their enthusiasm for socialism narrowed the rhetorical distance between themselves and their Communist Party opponents. This had the effect of obscuring for the wider public the essential nature of the differences between the National Socialist and Communist parties, but also about the precise nature of the National Socialists' socialism. For example, Ferdinand Peroutka's leading anti-communist weekly, *Dnešek*, received a letter from one National Socialist party member that demanded clarification of the party's understanding of socialism, and closed by asking "whether we would not breathe much more easily and live much more easily if we universally learned to say clearly and understandably: Marx's socialism = Masaryk's humanism!"

It seems that democratic socialist intellectuals strove to grasp the ideals of socialism and separate them from their incarnation in the Communist Party. In this they stressed a difference in methods but not necessarily in aims between democratic socialists and Communists. For example, one leading National Socialist argued:

The methods of our Communists are not, in our judgment, the best path. If someone were to ask us whether the Communist program is too much for us, we would answer: In no way. In some areas it is too little for us. A Communist government in our country would, by its methods, separate us from its own goal of socialism rather than bring us closer.¹⁰

This comment reveals a recurring theme of democratic socialist criticism, brought by their commitment to socialism. They were forced to admit, as did Peroutka, that while democratic socialists may wish that the communists would base their "constructing" work on a non-Marxist basis, there was no doubt that their labor was "in the interests of socialism."¹¹ In essence, their pre-election argument that communism was somehow foreign and that a socialism based on Czech traditions was necessary — gravely damaged by the communist "revision of the national character" in the cultural sphere and later by the "Czechoslovak road" in directly political discourse — was refitted for further duty. Now that they could no longer believably claim to hold a patent on Czech socialism or even Czech traditions, democratic socialists maintained that they could introduce socialism into Czech society in a better way. This allowed them to escape precisely analyzing the content of their socialism, and to characterize it as one predicated on the defense of freedom and democracy, the very content of which was a source of contestation with the communists. The affirmation of socialism, coupled with this defensive definitional posture characterized democratic socialist intellectuals' stance until their ultimate exclusion from the political scene.

Democracy and freedom were the cornerstones of democratic socialist intellectuals' hopes to create a successful, if undefined, socialism in Czechoslovakia. For them, democracy was a "character trait" of the Czech nation, but not something static, for "the democratic strivings that manifested themselves in the nineteenth century as bourgeois democracy continue on today as proletarian democracy."¹² The democracy and freedom they advocated were new and qualitatively different. Whether trumpeted as "socializing democracy" (President Edvard Beneš), "humanist democracy" (Robert Konečný), or a "political democracy...completed by economic democracy" (Ferdinand Peroutka), they all drew upon the ideas expressed by Beneš in his *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, lacked a precise content and defined themselves by their opposition to liberal democracy.¹³

What then did they intend to put in place of liberal democracy and freedom, if not their wholesale replacement by precisely the kinds of democracy and freedoms on offer from the communist movement? The answer to this question is extremely unclear, and the proliferation of terms denoting the new democracy that

⁹ Eva Hartmannová. "My' a 'oni.'" 99.

¹⁰ Jan B. Kozák. "Proã tedy nejste komunistou." 2.

¹¹ Ferdinand Peroutka. "Hlavní úkol na%oí politiky." 49.

¹² Antonín Klatovsk_. "Svoboda a socialismus." 167 and Robert Koneãn_. *Demokracie*. 11.

¹³ Edvard Bene%. *EB národu*. 38, Robert Koneãn_. *Demokracie*. 17 and Ferdinand Peroutka. "V p_edveãer." *Svobodné noviny*. 23 September 1945. 1.

democratic socialists wished to create did little to improve conceptual clarity.¹⁴ The system for which they strove would be a "correction" of earlier conceptions of democracy that would result in "a state realizing spiritual democracy and economic and social democracy."¹⁵ The two elements of democracy and freedom were certain to be components of it, but its formal character was the vague form of socialism predicted on the moral concerns for a new, socialist culture and socialist humanism already mentioned. To paraphrase a Czech proverb, it seems the wish became the father of the thought, and democratic socialists' profound faith in the power of their abstract conception of socialist society led them away from a careful consideration of the legal, institutional and conceptual foundations of freedom and democracy. For example, the future of freedom was discussed in airy terms that both glorified the new democracy and ignored democratic socialists' own lack of content for it:

[F]reedom is not in conflict with, but will be made easier by the new order. The former system led to the isolation of the individual...brought chaos into the inner person and sometimes even made a beast of him. The new order will lead the individual from pernicious isolation and by this save him. It will liberate us from an entire set of slaveries (above all the slavery to money), liberate the personality (osobnost)...It is about freeing the road so that the person can be truly good.¹⁶

Here, it should be noted, is another example of the messianism that pervaded democratic socialist arguments. Czech democratic socialist intellectuals believed that the future of their nation, and perhaps even the world hung on their ability to carry out the synthesis they desired. As Vratislav Bušek argued, 1948 would decide the fate of "a specific Czech synthesis, guaranteeing full and real democracy on the political, social and economic sides...a synthesis whose success is the fate of our nation."¹⁷ This view was shared by Antonín Klatovský, who expanded upon it after arguing for both the West's view of freedom and the East's measure of socialism by commenting that "The ideological opposition between East and West seems insurmountable. If it were to be so...the situation of humanity would be despair and hopelessness."¹⁸ Czech democratic socialist intellectuals set themselves the task of overcoming its opposition, and by creating a new and higher system, saving both their country and humanity from rising Cold War tensions and the apparently unbridgeable gap between East and West.

By maintaining and trumpeting the abstract moral and ethical qualities of their socialism, democratic socialist intellectuals committed three unforgivable errors. First, such rhetoric obscured the lack of clarity contained in their conception of their venture, leaving them unable to directly confront many of the dangers they faced. Second, their belief in the moral rectitude of socialism and their cherished socialist culture made them willing to actively condone measures they might — at another time — have rejected. Democratic socialist intellectuals not only applauded the "Czechoslovak road" and largely accepted the patriotism and democratic instincts of the Communist Party, but glorified the People's Democracy and urged further experiments in social engineering. Third, and perhaps most important, their commitment to socialism brought with it the adoption of what can only be termed communist rhetorical standards. Democratic socialist intellectuals talked of the struggle for "the new man," and the battles for and glories of an unanalyzed "new democracy," "socializing democracy," "socialist lifestyle," "socialist humanism," and "socialist culture." On the other hand, they condemned "liberal freedom," "liberal democracy," and any term containing the adjective "bourgeois." In a historical context in which there was a massive, well-organized and active Communist Party and a border with the Soviet Union, such language was politically and electorally dangerous, if not intellectually irresponsible. In any case, such language contributed to a weakening of the political and cultural defenses against a communist takeover. Vilém Hejl neatly summed up this weakness in reference to President Beneš, but it is equally valid for many, many democratic socialist intellectuals: "To what percent of the vote did Beneš' politics help the Communists, when both he and the Communists spoke the *newspeak* of the 'People's Democracy?'"¹⁹

¹⁴ As Eva Hartmannová has pointed out, democracy was not taken in a "normal sense." Normally understood democracies such as the United States, or even Switzerland, were seen as "somehow backward." Eva Hartmannová. "My' a 'oni.'" 98.

¹⁵ Vladimír Hellmuth-Brauner. "Idea minulé a dnešní demokracie." 1 and Robert Konečný. "Do druhého roku svobody." 79.

¹⁶ Jaroslav Nebesá. "Ďijeme zase v demokracickém státu." *Panorama* 21 (1945/6) 11.

¹⁷ Vratislav Bušek. "Národ se bránil: 1348-1648-1848-1948." *Svobodn. zít. ek* 3 (1947) 52:3.

¹⁸ Antonín Klatovský. "Svoboda a socialismus." 166.

¹⁹ Vilém Hejl. *Rozvrat*. 158.

Finally, democratic socialist intellectuals often allowed their sense of shared "socializing" mission with their communist opponents overwhelm their concerns over incipient communist totalitarianism. This was aided by both the value they placed on synthesis — East and West, or democracy and socialism — and their notion of a special Czech calling. This messianism is especially disturbing, for it allowed Czech intellectuals — who occupied a special place inside the special Czech society — to escape from political and practical reality. Instead of a careful consideration of the developments in their country and in its neighbors, the perceived "national individuality" of the Czech nation allowed Czech democratic socialist intellectuals to continue their bold experiment in squaring the circle blinkered from the disturbing light of either critical self-analysis or an honest assessment of regional developments. Democratic socialist intellectuals' messianism was guided by the notion that the Czech nation was specially culturally and morally qualified to accomplish a task at which others had failed. That they, too, failed is no detraction from the nobility of their intentions, but neither do these intentions exculpate them from the charge that they ill-served their nation. In an hour in which the Czech nation needed clarity and conviction, it received ambiguity and compromise; in an hour in which it needed democracy, communist and democratic socialist intellectuals alike were there with the "People's Democracy."

When the representatives of the National Socialist, People's, and Slovak Democratic Party handed in their resignations on 20 February 1948, over the matter of Communist Party abuse of the police force, they were not aware that they had signed their political death warrant. They believed that their resignations would not be accepted by President Beneš, and that either the Communists would have to retreat on the chosen issue or that new elections would be called. They felt they had an issue whose importance would be clear to the public, whose support they would have, and that the government crisis would be solved in a parliamentary-democratic way, in negotiations between the party leaderships, parliament and the president. This was not the case.

The response the Communist Party was able to muster was impressive. Within days, hundreds of thousands of protesters were flooding the streets of Czech cities and towns, filling their squares to hear Gottwald's speeches to the nation. Huge daily marches were held in support of the party, and a one hour general strike was held on 24 February, in which two and one-half million workers participated.²⁰ On 25 February a crowd of 250,000 pro-Communist demonstrators in Prague, and hundreds of thousands elsewhere across the nation, waited for President Beneš to declare whether he would accept the Communists' solution for the crisis. In the opposing camp, a few thousand students marched past the Prague Castle, demonstrating no more than their support for the president. In the face of all this, Beneš conceded defeat and the communist victory was complete.

I would argue that, beyond the occasionally noted tactical failings of the democrats' chosen course, a fundamental weakness lay in the less visible sphere of political culture. With the exception of Roman Catholics who lay largely outside of the course of the February events, the public discourse carried on by the democratic socialist intellectuals weakened the national political self-understanding to a degree that large-scale resistance would have been highly unlikely in any case. The non-communist Czech public either largely could not see the implications of the events transpiring around them, or saw them as nothing radically new. The subject of this larger conceptual crisis in Czech democracy has only rarely been brought to light. Vladimir Kusin has noted that already in 1947 "The rallying cry of 'defense of democracy' and 'resistance to a police State' did not have the expected effect on the population."²¹ Further, as already mentioned, Otto Friedman has argued that organizing resistance

was particularly difficult for Czech democrats, who had persisted in minimizing the difference between Western democracy and Soviet 'democracy' and had thereby failed to prepare their followers for the danger of a Communist *putsch*. No wonder that at this hour of peril the democratic leaders did not know how loyal their closest democratic collaborators were and whether they were willing to risk their lives to defend one kind of 'democracy' against another.²²

In this, democratic socialist writers, political thinkers, journalists and social critics -- the broadly-construed leading Czech anti-communist intellectual cadre -- discussed in this study bear a heavy share of blame. They served as conceptual shepherds, guiding their nation to an end whose features were unclear, but which they promised would

²⁰ In Prague 200,300 workers took part, while there were only 98 strike breakers. M. R. Myant, anti-communist leaders handed in their resignations two days before Congress of Factory Councils met in Prague, assembling 8030 mostly communist delegates in the capital.

²¹ Vladimir V. Kusin. "Czechoslovakia." In: Martin McCauley, ed. Communist Power in Europe 1944-1949. London: MacMillan, 1977. 83.

²² Otto Friedman. The Break-Up of Czech Democracy. London: Victor Gollancz, 1950. 91, 98.

be a socialist (even if necessarily not communist) paradise. Socialist culture would be ethically advanced, socialist organization would bring material benefits, and the socialist individual would be a higher being, once the society was refashioned and the socialist citizen educated. In this way, by "forecasting the victory of socialism over capitalism in Czechoslovakia they were in the enviable position of prophets who assist in the fulfillment of their own prophecies."²³

They were indeed in such a position. The broadly construed intellectual caste in Czech society had the historically embedded legitimacy to speak for the nation. It also had authority among the lower classes, a tendency toward Slavic thought and a history of political activism that suited admirably a postwar environment in which the achievement of some form of social reform was on the public agenda. Czech democratic socialist intellectuals sought to "spiritualize" socialism and "organize and unify" the society for a socialism that even to its democratic leaders remained no more than a self-reflexive conceptual matrix. Their responsibility was not only self-assumed, however. They had been called by their nation to fulfill a role of moral and political leadership, and they had welcomed the task.

The experiences of Munich and the Second World War had made the rethinking of the meaning of the nation, its organization and orientation possible. The exact qualities that this would adopt were fought out in the battles examined in Part Two of my study. As we have seen, communist intellectuals strove to recreate the idea of the Czech nation. In their "revision of the national character," they reinterpreted the entire national history to accent both its socialist and Slavic features. In this task they had support from both of the prominent Protestant churches active in the period. While democratic socialist intellectuals tended either to adopt compromise positions on the issues discussed, or to argue in favor of a synthesis that would purportedly lead to a higher form of social and cultural organization. Roman Catholics alone consistently and coherently resisted this wholesale rethinking of the meaning of the Czech nation.

By their participation in this, non-communist intellectuals contributed to an atmosphere that weakened the Czechs' democratic defenses. In this, the experiences of Munich and World War Two provided the springboard. The West was denigrated for its participation in the Munich tragedy, while the USSR was praised for its physical and, more importantly, moral strength in defeating the Axis forces. This strength was then translated expanded into proof that the Soviet Union's social order was more just and efficient. In some sense, its also cultural order was also seen as superior, for the qualities it imbued in the Soviet citizens were seen as making the wartime victory possible. The First Republic, revered by the Czech public today, was denigrated, and the new postwar republic placed either on a pedestal or seen as the "fulfilling" of its interwar antecedent. The break with the prewar era can also be witnessed in the scorn placed on "liberal democracy" and "liberal freedom," and the necessary, concomitant raising of Tomáš G. Masaryk's socialist pedigree. *The symbolically most indicative example of the scope of the shift in ideas comes in the comparison of the differing meanings attached to, and the claimants of, the holidays of 28 October and 5 May. The former of these, the day Czechoslovakia became an independent state in 1918 was largely supplanted by the latter, the day of the outbreak of the Prague uprising against the Nazis in 1945. Not only was May fifth seen by democratic socialists as overcoming or completing the former, but the identification of a young, radical and politically active generation with it reveals the allure of radicalism in postwar Czech society.*

These politically loaded reinterpretations of the recent national past culminated in the large-scale swing in Czech cultural self-consciousness away from its historic ties to the West and towards the Slavic and socialist East. This broadly-understood Czech intellectual caste presided over perhaps the most fundamental shift in self-consciousness the nation has ever undergone. The glories of an ill-defined "Slavic solidarity" were trumpeted from all non-Catholic camps. The only attempts made to salvage a part of the Czech nation's Western self-understanding came in a messianic search to save all of humanity by uniting the socialist East with Western cultural values.

All of these resulted in the un-anchoring of traditional Czech understandings of themselves, their past and their future. In such a condition two dangers become increasingly evident. First, this disorientation also affected traditional notions of freedom, democracy, and socialism, and the understandings of political behavior as a whole. Second, the reinterpretations favored the predominant left-wing of an already truncated political spectrum. This wing was dominated by the Communist Party, whose Marxism provided a coherent and interlocking cultural and historico-political philosophy that contained consistent answers to the questions raised by the war. Its great explanatory power was furthered by the support of Protestant religious leaders and represented a sharp divergence from democratic socialists' synthetic compromise positions that lacked such a solid ideological foundation. The People's Party's

²³ A. French. *Czech Writers and Politics 1945-1969*. East European Monographs 94. Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs, 1982. 47.

Roman Catholicism proved far more immune, resting on a centuries-old conceptual framework, and the faith of its followers made them less likely to experience a vacuum in world view for communist ideas to fill.

The political rewards from controlling the interpretive field of discourse came for the communists in the discussions over the meaning of socialism, which only hit full stride after the various positions in the debates over the recent past had been firmly staked out. Here the Communist Party's moderation played distinctly to its advantage, and in many ways the Communist cultural offensive was the more radical component of the two. The party's leading politicians and intellectuals were able to capitalize on the popularity of the postwar reorganization of the state to claim many of features of postwar Czechoslovak government as their own. Further, it was able to claim the title of socialist party *par excellence* and thus avoid discussing precisely where it was leading the state. This strategy of maintaining a commitment to the major elements of the "people's democratic" system -- particularly the National Front, the Two-Year Plan, and parliamentary democracy (through the politics of gaining a majority of the vote) -- brought them considerably closer to their democratic socialist opponents.

The effects of this on the events of February cannot be precisely measured, but the intellectual complicity of not only Protestant but also democratic socialist political and intellectual leaders must be recognized. The latter's enthusiasm for socialism encouraged both led, and to some extent was led by, the nation into a venture whose outcome was never clearly formulated. President Beneš' admission that he had no "clear and precise" notion of the end state of his "socializing democracy" was mirrored by the National Socialist leader Hubert Ripka's later admission that it was a "political experiment."²⁴ This sense of experimentation with the future of their nation neither dampened democratic socialists' enthusiasm by nourishing caution, nor encouraged an intellectually rigorous debate over the implications socialism was having for their land or those it had had for lands to the east, either in the Soviet Union or the fraternal "People's Democracies."

The Communists could rely on both the solid theoretical foundation of Marxism and the practical elements - the fulfilling of the Two-Year Plan and the winning of a majority -- contained in the "Czechoslovak road." In opposition to this, democratic socialists could muster only airy notions of a "new democracy," a "socializing democracy," a "socialist humanism," and a once again messianic vision of uniting Eastern socialism with Western freedom. As in the debates covered in Part Two, democratic socialist intellectuals found themselves internally disunited, theoretically bereft and, after the elections of 1946, increasingly on the defensive. The costs of this became evident in February, when the issues must have seemed unclear to the Czech public. Were true democrats to stand up for liberal democracy, socialist democracy, the people's democracy, or socializing democracy? Were they to counter the communists on the streets for liberal freedom, socialist freedom, or a higher freedom to be achieved by synergetic synthesis? Was to counter the Communist party an act inimical to the ideals of the "new Slavism?" Even granting that democratic socialists were both democratic (as they understood democracy), and socialist (as they understood socialism), one has to ask if they presented their ideas and ideals clearly, coherently and consistently enough for the public to be able to clearly distinguish between what "we," the true democrats, stood for, and what "they," the incipient totalitarians, stood for. In the event, the road to the communist domination of Czechoslovakia was paved with democratic socialists' good intentions, but also by their failure to clearly delineate and differentiate their vision of the Czechoslovak future from that of a Communist Party that was enormous in size, well organized, and internally coherent in its views not only of the recent past, but also of the steps to be taken in the present. In this sense the democratic socialists' loss was tragic in the truest sense of the word.

In some ways, the democratic socialists were shackled by the times in which they acted. The experiences of Munich, occupation and war had not made moderation a virtue, and the allure of Marxism and the Soviet Union reached a crest across Europe as a whole after the defeat of Nazi Germany. Nonetheless, Czech democratic socialists had been co-creators already during the war of the institutional, political and cultural contexts in which they would be operating thereafter. In this sense, the flaws of the democratic political culture can be found already then, in Czech intellectuals' plans for the future in the underground resistance, and in their political plans in exile in London. As Vilém Hejl has argued:

The February tragedy was prepared already in London...The majority of the exile government blindly trusted Beneš and without objection accepted and peddled the vague terms 'revolutionary politics,' and 'new democracy,' 'Slavism' and

²⁴ Edvard Beneš, cited in ct. "Boj o nového cloveka trvá." *Svobodné noviny*. 15 Dec 1946 and Ripka. Czechoslovakia Enslaved. London: Gollancz, 1950. 312.

'socialization,' without even thinking about who would carry out this 'revolution,' against whom and by what means, how much democracy would survive in the 'new democracy,' how 'socialization' would appear in practice and what the meaning of 'Slavism' in the international position of the republic would be.²⁵

²⁵ Vilém Hejl. Rozvrat. Mnichov a náš osud. Toronto: 68 Publishers, 1989. 115.