

Abstract

The rigorous thesis „Hammer and sickle against the Republic. The history of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in the years 1921–1929 (From radical socialism to Bolshevik communism)“ maps the eight-year life of the subject, which formed its distinct anti-system component in the political system until 1935. The study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the internal events and crises in the Communist Party, its causes, and also to describe the causes of the gradual transformation from a radical socialist party towards a party that would be closer to the ideal of professional revolutionaries, i.e. Bolshevik communism. Since its inception in 1921, the Communist Party represented an entity that was internally afflicted and weakened by periodically recurring crises. It could not have been otherwise as the Communist Party was created as a mass entity with around 350,000 members („It was thus possible to create a mass party, but its internal quality was relatively low“.).

It was therefore clear that, with exaggeration, each member had a different idea of the means by which the basic and at the same time the ultimate goal, the socialist revolution, would be reached. The number of members naturally changed over time, and after the Fifth Congress in 1929, when Gottwald's faction took over the party, the Communist Party had around 20,000–25,000 members. The party membership began to grow again during the Great Depression. But before the party became truly communist (Bolshevik), it had to go through a series of internal crises and leadership changes, as the Canadian historian and lecturer in Czech studies Harold Gordon Skilling aptly reminds.

Bohumír Šmeral, Václav Šturm, Václav Houser and Alois Muna were prominent figures in the early days of the Communist Party. The first-named has great merit in the fact that two thirds of the original members of the Social Democratic Party were transferred to the Communist Party in a disciplined manner. This fact alone, however, meant that these members were still learning to be communists and were still subject to the habits of their original parties, which became the subject of regular criticism by the Communist International (Comintern). Henceforth, the members of the Communist Party had to change basically everything – mostly ideological thinking, as well as everyday political activity, which should ideally have been a faithful copy of its model, i.e. the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This is naturally related to relatively fundamental organizational differences from the Social Democratic Party, where in the case of the Communist Party, its activities were primarily focused at factories as part of the later Bolshevization process.

The year 1924 represents a significant turning point, when it was decided at the Fifth Congress of the Comintern to bolshevize the communist parties. The Comintern was well aware of the fact that, especially in mass communist parties, there was disagreement with the official line in quite a few cases, which could, as a result, dangerously deviate a particular communist party from the canonical model established by the Comintern. In the case of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, the Comintern bet on a group of young communists around the then editor Klement Gottwald, who no longer had a „pernicious“ social-democratic past behind them, but were fully prepared to submit to the directives of the Comintern in all respects. At the 5th Congress of the Communist Party in February 1929, the „leftists“ around Gottwald indeed took over the party with all the negative consequences resulting from this.

In particular, we are referring to a noticeable decrease in the membership when seven well-known writers also left the Communist Party (though some of them later returned), or a tendency to an obvious sectarian conception of politics. Given that the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, unlike other communist parties, operated on a legal political platform, Bolshevization meant considerable complication in daily work and an inevitable regular conflict with the state apparatus, which naturally had unfavorable practical consequences for the party. However, if we ignore these negative consequences, the time in which Gottwald and his faction seized the helm of the Communist Party, actually favored the party. In 1929, the Great Depression broke out, which, according to many communists, was supposed to mean the final overthrow of the hated capitalism and the „inevitable“ establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Communist party is at the head of the Unemployed Movement, holds mass demonstrations for the abolition of the Ghent system and demands basic necessities for the unemployed – bread and work. And this strategy was successful for several years until the Czechoslovak economy began to show recovery. Thus, with Gottwald and his allies taking over the reins of power, the Communist Party is no longer a radically socialist entity from the early 1920s, which would be agreeable to at least certain compromises, but on the contrary, a strictly uniform entity that unconditionally stands behind the Comintern’s decisions.

Keywords: Klement Gottwald, Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Social Fighting, Comintern