

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK SOCIALIST PARTY IN 1948

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The Czechoslovak National Socialist Party, which changed its name several times over the years and whose legacy is currently claimed by the Czech National Social Party as a successor organization, is one of the oldest traditional Czech political parties. It was established in 1897 in the period of political differentiation of Czech society with the ambition of becoming an association of Czech workers, the organization of which until then had been the focus of the international Social Democratic Party. Eventually, it profiled itself as the party of the lower middle classes, with a nationalistically formulated programme of defending the ideas of democracy, social equality and justice that was aligned with the vision of creating a reformist Czech national socialism. By tradition, it was opposed to Marxism, communism and any kind of totalitarianism, and, after 1918, participated in the building of a democratic Czechoslovak Republic. It defended these policy postulates even after the end of the Second World War, when, in a heavily reduced, centre-left party-political system identified with the concept of the National Front, it profiled itself as the most consistent opponent of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC). While the Communist policy aimed at a complete takeover of power with the objective of the revolutionary transformation of Czech and Slovak society and the building of socialism and communism, the National Socialists unequivocally rejected this concept and aimed at a vision of a national, democratic and socially just state. The clash of these contradictory ideas about the future, which was not specific only to Czechoslovakia, but was related to the formation of the bipolar order of the world and Europe after the Second World War, and the fact that Czechoslovakia found itself in the Soviet sphere of influence, was reflected in the emergence and resolution of the government crisis of Gottwald's cabinet in February 1948. The KSC used this case for a coup d'état. It established the dictatorship of the proletariat in Czechoslovakia, liquidated the democratic political system and replaced it with a totalitarian one, and in line with Moscow's intentions, it began a revolutionary transformation of society with the aim of building socialism. The February Communist coup also had a major impact on political parties, particularly the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party. The Communists, with the help of turncoats and careerists covered by Communist State Security, dismantled that party and began to actually build a new political party from its ruins under the name of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party. In terms of its policy statement, the party identified itself with the visions of the Communists, who made it a shadow organization collaborating with the regime until 1989. This study reflects the circumstances behind the formation of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party in 1948, with a focus on the formation of the party leadership and party elite. People who mostly cooperated with the Communists before February 1948, along with individuals secretly authorized by the KSC and the security structures to work among the National Socialists for the purpose of intelligence and decomposition activities, established themselves as the leaders of the organization at central level.

Keywords: political parties, Czechoslovak Socialist Party, Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, political crisis, action committees.

Formulation of the issue. The political party of the Czech National Socialists, whose name changed several times during the less than a century of its existence (Czech National Social Party, Czech/Czechoslovak Socialist Party, Czechoslovak National Socialist Party), was a product of the political differentiation of Czech society in the 1890s and was among the oldest organizational structures of this type in the Czech Lands. After several unsuccessful attempts to found it, it was established in 1897 as a counterweight to the international Social Democratic Party. It distinguished itself from that party from a national point of view, and also formulated a vision of creating Czech socialism that rejected Marxism with its class perception of society and emphasizing the idea of solidarity and cooperation of people built on the principles of human freedom and democracy. Initially, it declared itself as a workers' party, but in fact its social profile was formed by the lower middle classes; in addition to workers, there were tradesmen, small farmers, crofters, landless people, day labourers and, to a lesser extent, members of

the intelligentsia. It aptly supported the profile of the 'little Czech man' party and the Masaryk principle of small work, presentation and protection of the interests of 'ordinary people'. While it built up the image of a rhetorically very radical and nationalist political party critically opposed to conditions in the Habsburg monarchy in the years running up to the First World War, it was among the state-forming parties, defenders and builders of a democratic state after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic (1918). With the exception of 1926 – 1929, it formed a relatively significant part of all government coalitions, it was constantly represented in the National Assembly (NA), both in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate, and had ministers in the various cabinets. This era ended with the Munich Agreement (1938), which resulted, *inter alia*, in the disintegration of the party-political system. The party was forced to cease its activities and, in the years of the Second Czechoslovak Republic, its membership base was dissolved into the newly formed Party of National Unity and the National Labour Party. This episode ended with the

establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (1939) as a result of the occupation of the country by the German Nazis. The Czechoslovak National Socialist Party (ČSNS) could not be renewed until 1945, after the defeat of Nazism and fascism and the restitution of the Czechoslovak Republic. In the newly conceived post-war political system, based on the Communist-controlled National Front (NF), it took up the position of an opponent of the policy of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC), which, at the behest of Moscow, was systematically preparing to take over absolute power in the country, to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and to transition to the building of socialism and communism. The National Socialists initially became part of the Socialist Bloc. Their vision was aimed at creating a socialist society that, in quality, was diametrically opposed to the concept that the KSC had at its disposal. Their aspirations were aimed at the creation of a national and democratic welfare state guaranteeing a high standard of living for people and the equal status of every person in the spirit of the intellectual legacy of its founding figures, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Edvard Beneš. They rejected the implementation of the Soviet socialism model into Czech and Slovak society both in its Stalinist and nationally modified forms. Very quickly, they found themselves in the position of the greatest opponent within the party-political system and critics of the behaviour and policy of the KSC in 1945 – 1947. The natural consequence of such behaviour was the emergence of political tensions and conflicts between the two political parties and the efforts of the KSC to weaken and eliminate the influence of the National Socialists, and to decompose and even liquidate their party.

Study objectives. Objectively, over a relatively long time horizon, political developments in Czechoslovakia in the post-war years necessarily led to a nodal point, the cutting of which would determine the future of the country. It found itself in the zone of the power influence wielded by the USSR, which ordered and helped to establish Communist-dominated political regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. In the second half of the 1940s, Czechoslovakia was the last and only country in this region in which this plan had not yet been implemented. Therefore, the KSC found itself under pressure from Moscow, which was demanding that developments be accelerated. The Communists had an opportunity to resolve this situation in February 1948. They exploited the government crisis to stage a coup, establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. This was a major milestone in the modern history of Czechoslovakia with profound repercussions for all of society. Naturally, it also had serious consequences for the ČSNS. The aim of this study is to outline internal developments in the party in 1948, taking into account the fact that the February Communist coup caused its organizational breakdown and *de facto* its demise. Its former left-wing faction founded a new political party called the Czechoslovak Socialist Party (ČSS) from its ruins at the instigation of the KSC to represent its successor organization. Given the scope of this study, we do not aim to exhaust the entire issue of the genesis of the new party or the transformation of the ČSNS. Instead, we limit ourselves to the circumstances under which the new power elite that founded and led the party was formed.

Analysis of sources and literature. While the history of National Socialism and its political parties until 1948, thanks to the fact that the party's archive was preserved and relatively systematically built up, has been explored on a relatively solid level, albeit with layers of influence from Marxist historiography, the history of the ČSS in 1948–1989, i.e. in the years of Communist totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia, currently suffers from serious historiographic residue in the sphere of the history of the Czech political party system, which has not been fully erased even more than 30 years after the 'Velvet Revolution'. There are two reasons for this. The topic is not attractive to contemporary historiography in terms of the history of the party itself, which is actually a story of close collaboration especially between its leadership – and the activity of officials at all levels – and the totalitarian Communist regime, with the exception of only short episodes of efforts to achieve greater independence while maintaining the same political goals. The second reason is the problem of access to archives. The party archive was maintained even in this period and it even 'survived' the further turbulent history of the party and its successor organizations since the 1990s. Fortunately, the documents passed into the state archival care and ended up in the National Archives in Prague, but their archival processing, or inventorying, has been slow due to their sheer size (several hundred packages) and they are theoretically inaccessible to researchers in the public arena. As such, new works on the history of the party are rare.

As to the insufficient state of exploration of our topic and the opportunities to access archival fonds, our study draws on facts contained in printed sources, both in the periodicals *Svobodné slovo* and *Socialistický směr* and in editions prepared by the party for the education of its membership base in the *Stranická knihovnička* series. In terms of archival documents, we researched the funds of the Central Action Committee of the National Front and the Archive of Security Forces documenting the contact between the party's elite with State Security. We obtained particulars of a personal nature from the Archives of the National Social Party from the period up to 1948 that had been deposited in the National Archives in Prague. The second most important source of information is secondary literature. Some partial information related to our topic, which we critically evaluated and summarized, is scattered in publications from the provenance of the ČSS itself and subsequently in titles elaborating on the topics of modern Czechoslovak history after 1945. Individual items are quantified in the footnotes and in the final list of resources. We also paid special attention to memoirs. Although these are subjective views of events, the evaluation of which is not always objective, they sometimes contain details and data necessary to understand people's actions. In this context, in addition to the memories of the leading figures and elite individuals of the ČSNS, it is necessary to mention the extensive three-part memoirs of Karel Löbl (1925 – 2021) [Tomeš], published at the turn of the millennium, who played an important role in the history of the ČSS from its establishment until 1990 as its leader and a representative in the role of deputy and minister.

Research results. The establishment of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party is closely related to the events accompanying the resolution of the government

crisis in February 1948 and the consequences thereof. Political developments from 1945 to 1948 resulted in deep social crisis which saw the resignation of 12 ministers of three political parties – the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party, the Czechoslovak People's Party and the Slovak Democratic Party – on 20 February [Demise ministrů tří politických stran, 1948, p. 1]. Through this act, the ministers of Gottwald's cabinet directly protested against the personnel policy pursued within the police force by the Communist interior minister Václav Nosek (1892 – 1955), and in a broader context also against the activities of the KSC in the entire post-war period [Kocian]. Despite general expectations, President Edvard Beneš (1884 – 1948) accepted the resignation of the ministers under strong pressure from the Communists [Pejskar, 1993a, p. 14] on 25 February, and thus gave the prime minister the opportunity to reconstruct his cabinet and replace the departing ministers with new ones. Two ministers from the Czechoslovak Social Democracy (Václav Majer and František Tymeš) resigned afterwards, which meant that the number of ministers who had resigned from the cabinet represented an absolute majority and required replacement by a new cabinet, but it was too late because of how the crisis had been resolved. The chairman of the KSC and prime minister Klement Gottwald (1896 – 1953) fully exploited¹ the mistakes made by the leaders of the democratic political parties in the resignation and added politicians from the same parties to the cabinet, but those who joined the government of the 'revived National Front' did so without the consent of the leaders of their parent political organizations. In addition, these were individuals closely cooperating with the KSC against the interests of their own parties (left-wing intra-party opposition) over a relatively long period, as well as ambitious men corrupted by the offer of ministerial seats and career growth in a political regime fully controlled by the KSC. In the case of the National Socialist Party [Kapitola, 1984, p. 19], Emanuel Šlechta (1895 – 1960)² was made minister of technology and Alois Neuman (1901 – 1977)³ was appointed minister of post offices, replacing the existing ministers Prokop Drtina (1900 – 1980) [Koutek], Hubert Ripka (1895 – 1958), Jaroslav Stránský (1884 – 1973) and Petr Zenkl (1884 – 1975) [Pejskar, 1993b; Doležel, Ivanov (eds.)]. The fact that the government crisis was resolved by reconstructing the cabinet resulted in a change in the political regime in which the KSC took a leading role. It constituted a dictatorship of the proletariat, with Czechoslovakia setting out on a path of building socialism and communism. From the point of view of the history of political party system, a *de facto*

(hidden) one-party party-political system was created that did not allow political competition. Non-communist political parties integrated into the "National Front" system became mere satellites of the KSC, entities fully controlled by the Communists and performing their tasks. Šlechta, the first chairman of the ČSS, characterized the position and role of the party in these words: '*In February, we accepted the leadership of the KSC and pledged to cooperate in the building of socialism. We proclaimed friendship with the Soviet Union as the basis of our patriotism.*' [Šlechta, 1959, p. 9]

As far as can be ascertained, it was to Šlechta that Gottwald first submitted an offer to become a member of the government. Šlechta consulted the offer with Neuman, and the three men met in Prague at Gottwald's on 23 February, with the National Socialists confirming in writing that they accepted the offer [Pejskar, 1993a, p. 18; Neuman, p. 123; Tigrid, p. 85; Pavlíček, p. 191]. Gottwald allegedly also considered other candidates from the National Socialist Party, such as deputies Gustav Burian, Josef Nedoma and Štěpán Kobylka. Gottwald's son-in-law Alexej Čepička (1900 – 1990), the then minister and general secretary of the National Front, with whom both National Socialists were acquainted from the time of their imprisonment in the Nazi concentration camp in Buchenwald, also intervened in the meeting. Neuman had been the only non-Communist there to work in the illegal 18-member committee of prisoners and Čepička allegedly viewed him as a future chairman of the ČSNS Central Action Committee. However, he eventually became the vice-chairman of the Central Committee of the 'revived' NF.

While Šlechta and Neuman lived in fear and uncertainty that they would be expelled from the ČSNS for taking this step, in the meantime Czech and Slovak society was affected by the terror of the action committees (AC),⁴ which began to be formed on the basis of a call by Gottwald's on 21 February [Bušek, p. 311]. Public and political life in the country was quickly dominated by self-proclaimed 'revolutionary' factions of members and supporters of the KSC, starting purges and persecutions of people who publicly expressed their disagreement with the KSC's policy and were labelled enemies of Communist ideas and visions. Many National Socialists, especially their organizing elite, were detained in actions by the Communist security authorities, hundreds of them lost their jobs and thousands more faced (and/or succumbed to) a pressure campaign forcing them to join the ranks of the KSC. Members of State Security (StB) infiltrated the central secretariat of the ČSNS in Prague on 23 February

¹ We do not deal here with the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948, the oft-explored Communist historiography, historians living in exile, and historiography after 1989.

² Prof. Ing. RTDr. Emanuel Šlechta – as a mechanical engineer, he dealt with the organization of production and worked in the USA in 1923–1926. He lectured at the Czech Technical University in Prague from 1935, and was active in publishing. He was imprisoned in the concentration camp in Buchenwald for resistance activities against the Nazis in 1939–1945. After the war, he was a member of the ČSNS presidium; a minister, deputy, founder after February 1948 and the chairman of the party until 1960. An exponent of the KSC and a StB collaborator. He clashed with official KSC policy in the second half of the 1950s and the several years of this conflict led to his removal from political life and suicide.

³ Doc. JUDr. Alois Neuman – he worked as an auxiliary teacher after finishing secondary school (1919), he studied at the Faculty of Law of

Charles University in Prague in 1920 – 1925. He profiled himself as a social insurance expert, earned a doctorate in the field, and lectured at the College of Special Sciences at the University of Technology. A member of the ČSNS from 1918, a member of the NA in 1935 – 1939, mayor of České Budějovice in 1937 – 1939. Imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camp in Buchenwald; chairman of the Municipal National Committee in České Budějovice after the war and a member of the NA again from 1945 for an uninterrupted 31 years. Minister in 1948 – 1968, chairman of the ČSS in 1960 – 1968.

⁴ The formation of these organized groups was not supported by law, people were not elected to them and their actions must be described as illegal. This characteristic must also be applied to the People's Militias, founded on the basis of a decision of the KSC Central Committee on 21 February, they were armed with firearms and helped members of the National Security Corps.

and confiscated some of the party's documents [Bušek, p. 312; Netík, p. 134]. The disintegration of ČSNS structures took place at the level of regional, district and local authorities in the following days. An action committee prevented the ČSNS's Melantrich publishing house from publishing the party's central press mouthpiece, *Svobodné slovo* ('Free Word'), on 24 February; only the first edition intended for the provinces could be published, but even this did not reach readers because Communist-minded carriers threw packages of newspapers from trains onto the tracks [Netík, p. 140].

In this situation and in a tense atmosphere, the ČSNS presidium met on the evening of 23 February [Všem národním socialistům, 1948, p. 1; Bušek, p. 313], as did the ČSNS Central Committee, together with the party's parliamentary group, the following day [Kocian, p. 158; Pejskar, 1993a, pp. 12–14, 18; Ripka, pp. 254–255]. The party's presidium, headed by Petr Zenkl and Jaroslav Stránský, listened to a lengthy interpretation by Hubert Ripka (supplemented with Drtina's comments) of the political situation and the negotiations with President Beneš, which confirmed their belief that the non-Communist ministers had taken the right step by resigning. It identified the KSČ as the main culprit of the crisis, rejected the call to create action committees, and decided to exclude anyone who participated in their activities [Pavliček, pp. 130–131]. The proceedings of the Central Committee took a tumultuous course. Information from secretary general Vladimír Krajina (1905–1993) justifying the party's approach to the government crisis was approved. Controversies were associated with the issue of imposing a party punishment on those members who did not respect the ban on involvement in action committees. F. Richter, A. Neuman, E. Šlechta, F. Koktán, B. Pátková, Š. Kobylka, B. Urbánek, G. Burian, J. Nedoma, A. Hřebík (1902–1984) from the ČSNS [NA, f. ČSNS, osobnosti, k. 501] and J. Nestával were invited to a meeting on the establishment of the Central Action Committee of the National Front (CAC NF) held on 23 February. The situation was aggravated by a question asked by Milada Horáková (1901–1950) to Neuman whether he had received Gottwald's offer to join the cabinet of the 'revived NF' [Hora, p. 158; Löbl, 2012, pp. 159–160; Nekola, pp. 230–231; Koutek, pp. 340–341]. He replied in the affirmative, pleaded for the withdrawal of the resignation of the ČSNS ministers and demanded a party policy that would support the establishment of a new Gottwald-led cabinet. However, his project was not supported [Neuman, pp. 123–126; Pejskar, 1993a, p. 18; Drtina, pp. 552–558]. Neuman eventually left the negotiations after a phone call with Šlechta (who did not come to the meeting) and went to the government presidium where, as already mentioned, he and Gottwald agreed on the acceptance of an offer to join the cabinet. The following day, Krajina and Antonín Šolc (1879–1951), a representative of the Central Committee of ČSNS, drew President Beneš' attention to the fact that Šlechta and Neuman had been expelled from the party and did not have its consent to accept ministerial positions. However, the president did not act on this information [Pejskar, 1993a, p. 13; Ripka, p. 255].

The way in which the government crisis was resolved by adding new ministers to Gottwald's cabinet can be considered a fundamental turning point from the point of

view of the constitution of the ČSS. Ministers Šlechta and Neuman were surrounded by a group of politicians who carried out a coup in the ČSNS leadership, helped to dismantle it, and began to build a new political party from its ruins. Of the paralysed 24-member ČSNS presidium, 11 politicians soon emigrated, eight found themselves in prison thanks after raids by Communist security, one died of natural causes, three collaborated with the new regime for a short time, and one (Šlechta) switched to the Communist side and became the nominal leader of the party.

Everything indicates that Šlechta's group, on the initiative of both ministers, who also enlisted Jan Mátl (1902–1968) and František Koktán (1901–1975), met for a first meeting in Prague in the evening of 26 February 1948 [Löbl, 2012, p. 189; Bušek, p. 322]. Those involved are essentially reliably documented today. The meeting's attendees were mostly deputies of the Constituent National Assembly, former ČSNS officials, trade union officials, press editors, etc., i.e. mostly people who allegedly had a positive personal relationship with Šlechta and, understandably, accepted the policies of the KSČ and the ideas of socialism. Most of them then held important positions in the ČSS. To mention a few names at random: Josef David, Alois Hatina, Štěpán Kobylka, Božena Pátková, Gustav Burian, Antonín Vandrovec, Miroslav Klinger, Karel Jiše, Václav Hulínský, Karel Löbl, and Vladimír Hnilica.

According to a direct participant in the meeting, although it was hectic, chaotic and marked by unpreparedness, most of those present reportedly remained silent and the floor was mainly given to Neuman, deputy Štěpán Kobylka (1909–1980) [Konečný, 2004] and Prague ČSNS official Václav Hulínský (1910–1972). On the other hand, the organizers approved the text of a proclamation entitled 'Věrným stoupencům ČSNS' ('To the Faithful Supporters of the ČSNS'), which was published the next day in *Svobodné slovo* [Provolání, 1948, p. 1; 30 let ČSS v dokumentech, p. 35; Fejlek, p. 9; Kapitola, 1984, p. 20; Pejskar, 1993a, pp. 22–23; Paroubek, Duchoslav, p. 87; Löbl, 2012, pp. 192–193]. The meeting can be considered an unofficial constituent assembly of the Central AC of the ČSS, which took over the leadership of the party on 27 February. The authors of the proclamation stated that the current ČSNS leadership had lost the right to lead the party and stood outside it with their pre-February 1948 policy. '*We therefore take on the heavy responsibility of reorganizing the leadership at this fateful moment in the life of the party until the proper congress and democratic establishment of its bodies. It is our aspiration to return the party to its original path to socialism and democracy.*' The document also expressed loyalty to the idea of friendship and alliance with the USSR. The newspaper published the names of those who had signed the proclamation. In addition to the aforementioned attendees of the meeting, the document was also signed by the historian Prof. PhDr. František Bauer (1897–1976), prof. JUDr. Vratislav Bušek (1897–1978) [NA, f. ČSNS, osobnosti, k. 500], prof. MUDr. Dr. tech. Ing. Karel Kácl, DrSc., journalist dr. Miloslav Kohák (1903–1996), diplomat JUDr. Jaromír Kopecký (1899–1977) [NA, f. ČSNS, osobnosti, k. 502; Dejmek, p. 116], theologian prof. PhDr. Jan B. Kozák

(1888 – 1974) [NA, f. ČSNS, osobnosti, k. 502], Václav Mikuláš, prof. PhDr. ThDr. František Maria Hník (1905–1962), JUDr. Ferdinand Richter, Milena Šmejcová (1894 – ?) [NA, f. ČSNS, osobnosti, k. 504], and others.

The meeting also gave impetus to the formulation of a directive for the establishment of an AC across the party, at all organizational levels, which was to ‘purge’ the party of ‘reactionary and anti-people elements’. Their members could not be individuals who ‘betrayed the party’s socialist programme’ [Utvoríte akční výbory strany, 1948, p. 1]. In reality, the action committees deprived the anti-communist-minded officials of their positions, took care of their dismissal from their jobs and subjected many to such pressure that they later chose emigration. The ‘faithful’ had provisionally agreed on steps towards the official establishment of a new political party that would be called the ČSS [Löbl, 2012, p. 191]. Their actions were made possible by the fact that the current ČSNS leaders, headed by party chairman Petr Zenkl, Prokop Drtina and Hubert Ripka, resigned on 26 February. Before mid-March 1948, the presidium of the AC ČSS announced, through *Svobodné slovo*, that they, together with Jaroslav Stránský (1884 – 1973), Vladimír Krajina and Julius Firt (1897 – 1979), had been expelled from the party by a statement of the AC ČSNS published on 26 February [NA, f. ČSNS, osobnosti, k. 500]. The security authorities interned a number of leading party officials or isolated and controlled both the central secretariat of the party and the editorial office of *Svobodné slovo* [Klátil, p. 327]. According to the memories of Karel Löbl, the management of the central secretariat of the party was taken over on 27 February by Alois Hatina (1886 – 1950), a former anarchist and member of parliament for the ČSNS in 1929 – 1939 [NA, f. ČSNS, c. 567]. His past caused a scandal, so he was quickly replaced by Ing. František Xaver Novák. Miroslav Klinger (1893 – 1979) then held this office definitively from 1948 to 1960. An excellent sports gymnast in his youth (he took part in the Olympic Games in Antwerp in 1920 and in Paris in 1924, and in the World Championships in Ljubljana in 1922), he was subsequently deputy chief and then chief of the Czechoslovak Sokol Community (1927 – 1939), and was imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camps at Dachau and Buchenwald in 1939 – 1945 [NA, f. ČSNS, osobnosti, k. 502].

The process of establishing the ČSS leadership was completed on 29 February. This date can be considered the date of the party’s formal constitution. At this time, the AC ČSNS convened a new meeting and formed its 18-member presidium, which was soon to be expanded to include representatives from Moravia. Its chairman was Emanuel Šlechta, and the positions of vice-chairmen were taken by Alois Neuman (vice-chairman of the CAC NF and chairman of the party’s parliamentary group), Josef David (1884 – 1968, chairman of the Constituent National

Assembly),¹ Ferdinand Richter (1885 – 1950, deputy of the ČSNS in the interwar period, president of the Regional Court in Brno) and Božena Pátková (1907 – 1973, member of the CAC NF).² The members of the presidium were František Koktán (a member of the CAC NF), Josef Černý, Václav Hulínský, Miroslav Klinger, Jan Mátl (a member of the CAC NF), Václav Mikuláš, Ervín Tichý (1898 – ?, previously a ČSNS deputy from 1935), Bohuslav Šantrůček (1890 – ?), Štěpán Kobylka, Bohumil Urbánek, Alois Hatina, Ivan Petr and František Xaver Novák.

The presidium issued a statement addressed to the party public in which it approved the text of the proclamation published on 27 February and announced that it was taking over the leadership of the party, returning to a name expressing the organization’s socialist programme, i.e. the former name Czechoslovak Socialist Party, and also to this party’s programme from 1918. It declared that its goal was to build a socialist, selective and systematically disciplined party that would be a valid component of the revived NF and would participate in the policy of building socialism as pursued by Gottwald’s cabinet [Očistou k socialismu, 1948, p. 1; 30 let ČSS v dokumentech, pp. 37–40; Kapitola, 1984, p. 21].

Immediately afterwards, the presidium of the AC ČSS issued a summary of guidelines for the party’s current activities. The overriding priority was to purge the membership base [NA, f. NF, k. 87 - zápis ze schůze 10. 3. 1948].

In the February 1948 crisis, the attitudes of the National Socialist Party’s deputies in the Constituent National Assembly (CNA) were also very important for the formation of the new leadership of this party, as the parliamentary group traditionally represented a second centre of power within the party. The ČSNS had gained 55 deputies in the May 1946 elections [Soukup, 1947, p. 66]. The attitudes of representatives in the years of the Third Republic are generally characterized as anti-communist [Kaplan, 1995, p. 20; Löbl, 2017, p. 203]. During the government crisis in February 1948, they expressed their dissatisfaction that the party leadership had allegedly not informed them sufficiently about the circumstances and the aim behind the resignation of the National Socialist ministers, but they took a negative stance on the proposals submitted by the secretary of their parliamentary group, Josef Čupera (1908 – 1973), on 25 February, after the creation of the Action Committee of CNA deputies. They refused to create an action committee of the group to ‘purge’ it, considering this unnecessary [Pavlíček, p. 144]. They did not want to send their representatives to the AC CNA either. Most of them even considered a protest against the constitution of a new government of the revived NF. Some contemplated resigning from their parliamentary mandate. At the parliamentary group’s meeting, the deputies discussed these matters heatedly for five hours, but the final result can be described as surprising. In the

¹ Josef (Joža) David belonged to the left wing of the ČSNS and supported the ČSS’ first steps. He did not run for the National Assembly in the May 1948 elections and left public life in June 1948.

² JUDr. Božena Pátková worked as an attorney. She was a member of the National Assembly in 1948 – 1952. She belonged to the left-wing ČSNS faction and she was very active in February 1948. She publicly supported the verdict in the political trial of Milada Horáková and other National Socialists in 1950. As sister-in-law of the foreign minister Vladimír

Clementis (1902 – 1952), sentenced to death in a political trial with the KSČ secretary general Rudolf Slánský and subsequently executed, she had to resign from her roles within the party and from her public positions in 1952. She was able to return to politics in the mid-1960s (from 1964, she was a member of the National Assembly, as well as the Prague City National Committee and the District National Committee), holder of the Order of 25 February. From 1969, she was briefly a member of the Czech National Council (she resigned in 1970).

end, they revised the original position and perhaps about half of them signed the declaration of the AC CNA expressing loyalty to Gottwald's cabinet; they¹ set up their action committee and made a recommendation to the AC CNA to admit five of their deputies to this body in the first phase and another six in the second phase [Kaplan, 1995, pp. 21–22]. We do not yet know the reasons prompting a reversal in the stances of the party deputies, but it is a fact that most of them did not support the coup in the party. Karel Kaplan views Čupera as a pro-Communist politician at whose instigation deputies signed a declaration of loyalty to Gottwald's cabinet. The court files from the trial of Milada Horáková and from the subsequent political show trial against Čupera's group modify this view.

If we consider what happened after February 1948 to the 55 deputies who had been elected in 1946, the parliamentary group of party deputies shrank to 33 (in addition, the validity of two mandates had not been decided at the time the review was issued) [Soukup, 1948, p. 106]. In the end, the purge within the parliamentary group was carried out by the AC CNA itself; 30 deputies were not checked [Pavliček, p. 144]. All the prominent figures of the post-war ČSNS left the assembly of representatives [e.g. Zenkl, Drtina, Jaroslav Stránský, Jan Stránský, Zemínová, Firth, Ripka, Přeučil, Hora, Horáková, Uhlířová, Krajina, Uhlíř (1900–1980), Ješ, Lesák, and Klátil]. Deputy Milada Horáková was sentenced to death in a trumped-up political trial by the Communists and executed in 1950. In all, 19 deputies were sent to prison and 18 went into exile [Pejskar, 1993a, p. 16; Löbl, 2017, p. 203]. Alois Jaroš (1893–1951), formerly included among the executed [Löbl, 2017, p. 203], died of tuberculosis in prison [https://www.ustrcr.cz/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/PD_04_2017_73-81.pdf - cit. 30. 8. 2023]. We do not yet have information about the fate of six deputies.² Therefore, 10 CNA deputies were actively involved in building the new party: Alois Neuman, Václav Mikuláš (1886–1964), Karel Kácl (1900–1986) [NA, f. ČSNS, osobnosti, k. 502], Václav Jirásek (1899–?), Gustav Burian (1900–1960), Antonín Vandrovec (1907–1999), Ladislav Hobza (1901–1990), Štěpán Kobylka, Gustav Loubal (1905–?) [NA, f. ČSNS, osobnosti, k. 502] and Bohumil Urbánek (1901–1956). For these deputies, records of their contact with the StB can generally be found in the Security Services Archive in Prague. This line-up was expanded in the May 1948 elections by another 13 deputies [Löbl, 2017, p. 203],³ mostly politicians who were among the most influential in the ČSS leadership: [Naši noví poslanci, 1948, p. 1] Emanuel Šlechta, Božena Pátková, Jan Mátl, František Koptán, Miroslav Klinger, Václav Hulínský, Antonín Fiala (1902–1972), Ferdinand Richter, František Xaver Novák, Josef Růzha (1911–?) [NA, f. ČSNS, osobnosti, k. 569],⁴ Antonín Vlasák (1899–?), Josef Černý (1897–1982) [NA, f. ČSNS, osobnosti, k. 500], and Josef Maria Šafařík (1890–1979). Karel Löbl characterizes some of them as individuals unappreciated by Zenkl's leadership of the

party before February 1948, or he describes them as direct opponents of the ruling party and discusses 'ideologically pliable *parvenus* following the instructions of their new masters without argument'. He is critical of the editor Šafařík, who later welcomed the execution of Milada Horáková in his newspaper [Löbl, 2017, p. 203]. After the 1948 elections, Neuman became the chairman of the parliamentary group; its presidium consisted of Pátková (vice-chairwoman), Urbánek (vice-chairman), Vandrovec (vice-chairman), agents Mátl and Hulínský, and treasurer Hobza. Čupera continued to be the group's secretary. During the parliamentary term, some of the existing deputies were replaced by new ones, e.g. the deceased Richter was replaced by František Kopecký (1923–1997) in the period from December 1950 to March 1951, who was then replaced by Jiří Fleyberk (1920–?). Václav Říha (1901–?) replaced Kobylka in 1950, when Růžena Skřivanová (1902–?), a substitute for Kobylka, refused to take the oath. Marie Sedláčková (1902–1983) replaced Václav Mikuláš in July 1950. Antonín Žák (1909–?) took over the mandate from Václav Jirásek in May 1949. František Beneš (1907–?) took over Pátková's mandate in March 1952.

A global view of events within the ČSNS in February 1948 and in the following months of that year leads us to conclude that the intra-party coup orchestrated by the left wing of the party in collaboration with the KSČ was not only successful, but also relatively quick. By the end of the calendar year, these people had managed to demolish the party to its foundations and began to build what was essentially a new organizational entity from its ruins. They began the actual rebuilding roughly in the spring months of 1949. However, it did not seem to bother them that the party paid a heavy price for this 'success': a once relatively prosperous political organization had become a disenfranchised and powerless Communist satellite which would hard to be viewed as a classic and traditional political party in the future. The party's personnel base had disintegrated. A large proportion of party members reacted to the Communist coup and the new situation within the party by staging a more or less covert protest, voluntarily surrendering their membership of an organization that had fundamentally revised the direction of its manifesto and its policies. Less radical members of the party were more passive and stopped taking an interest in the life of the party. National Socialists known for their anti-Communist attitudes were persecuted and expelled from the party. Šlechta is said to have boasted to Čepička in September 1948 that he had expelled over 240,000 members [Pejskar, 1993a, p. 22]. Approximately half a year after February, about 115,000 members changed their party affiliation, either defecting from the ČSNS or joining the KSČ under pressure. From a membership base of approximately half a million (623,386 members in 9,217 organizations as at 31 January 1948) at the end of 1948, it is estimated that only 1,751 members remained in this group, among them 1,751 officials at the level of the Prague head office and the

¹ Kaplan stated that the declaration was signed by 45 National Socialist deputies; Pavliček mentioned 33, and Pejskar only about 15.

² The party's parliamentary group was in constant flux; some representatives resigned from their mandate within the parliamentary term and new members came in, which is why detailed observation is difficult and the figures are not always absolutely accurate.

³ Löbl mentions 15 deputies; the party was said to have been assigned 25 seats by the KSČ.

⁴ Růzha is sometimes referred to as Hřůza in literature. No deputy of this name was present in the National Assembly in the 1950s.

regional and district AC ČSS [Pejskar, 1993a, pp. 16, 29], who then built up the new party [Kapitola, p. 23]. The basic organizations of the former party practically ceased to exist; they either disintegrated or the Communists engaged in various practices to render them inactive.

The transition of power into the hands of a new crop of politicians was relatively calm and free of overt conflict. Most officials and activists resigned from their positions without much resistance and left their agenda to the self-proclaimed putschists not only at central level, but also in the regions. Where to look for the causes of this fact? In our opinion, there are essentially two reasons. 1) People's existential fear for themselves and their own families because the coup was accompanied by violence and pressure from security forces and the newly established 'revolutionary' units, the aforementioned action committees and people's militias. The party's management units were not prepared for such a situation. They were caught off guard, having expected procedures, behaviour and resolution of the conflict in the spirit of democratic principles and mechanisms. They were unable to sufficiently navigate the resulting situation full of uncertainties. In many cases, their expectations for the future can also be described as unrealistic. They were counting on the storm to sweep over and everything to return to the old ways after the election. They failed to recognize fully the determination of the KSČ to take over power permanently in the country and to achieve that objective at almost any cost. 2) The party was infiltrated by people executing the KSČ's orders. The CC KSČ, its registration department [Kaplan, 2015, pp. 255–272; Pejskar, 1993a, pp. 21–23] and the department for work in non-Communist parties, State Security and the National Front had their own agencies within the ČSNS. These were mostly individuals collaborating with Communists, informers and subversives for a long period of time, or they were secret members of the KSČ. They worked not only within the party leadership, but also at all organizational levels. As a result, the leadership of the KSČ had sound information about the situation within the ČSNS and, when the time was ripe, they could use these people to carry out their intentions and remove those National Socialists they considered their enemies. A faction that belonged to the leading elite of the ČSS and remoulded it in the image of the Communists was formed from these National Socialist quislings and their ideological allies who had sensed an opportunity for career growth [Tigrid, pp. 84–85]. Karel Kaplan (1928 – 2023), a well-informed historian of the founding period of the building of socialism in Czechoslovakia, identified this left faction managed directly by the CC KSČ with names such as Božena Pátková, František Koptán, Josef Linek (1901 – 1979), Alois Neuman, Jan Mátl, Ladislav Technik (1910 – ?), Luděk Kapitola (1922 – 2002), Václav Hulínský, Antonín Vandrovec, Karel Jiše (1891 – 1959) [Jiše], and Bohuslav Kučera (1923 – 2006) [Kaplan, 1995, pp. 28, 40–43; Kaplan, 2015, p. 267], but mentions others as well – including Josef Černý, František X. Novák, František Slavík, Jindřich Schermer, and Karel Löbl. [Kaplan, 1995, p. 44]. We could find numerous others by carefully examining the registers of the Security Services Archive.

Research conclusions. The aim of our study was to consider the circumstances underlying the formation of the

Czechoslovak Socialist Party in 1948 and the establishment of a new leadership within the National Socialist political party, and in doing so identify the elite who, inspired by the external environment, had taken this step. We have shown that the main impulse for this step was the way in which the government crisis precipitated by the resignation of deputies of three non-Communist political parties in protest against the aims and policies of the KSČ was handled. Prime minister Gottwald and the people around him managed to get several second-class politicians to replace the resigning ministers without the consent of their parent parties and, instead of new elections, in which the Communists would have been at risk of defeat, the cabinet was reconstructed so that, in reality, a Communist dictatorship was installed. Gottwald offered cabinet posts to the National Socialists Emanuel Šlechta and Alois Neuman, who headed the self-proclaimed AC ČSNS that removed the duly elected leadership of the party and took over the reins. The existing ČSNS was renamed ČSS, which radically changed its programme, lifting the programme visions and intentions of the KSČ. After personnel purges in the membership base in 1949, it proceeded to build the party's organization so that it lost its independence and became an obedient satellite of the KSČ, collaborating with the Communists until 1989. We have also shown that the behaviour of party deputies, some working in the CNA in the first phase, those who were already on the single electoral list of the NF in the May 1948 elections in the second phase, played a fundamental role in the formation of the ČSS.

However, in our opinion, the question of whether the ČSNS was transformed or whether a new political party was created in February 1948 remains open. Historiography has not dealt with this problem so far and we can find both interpretations in literature. The truth is that even the spokespersons of the National Socialists themselves are not clear on this issue. Although the party adopted a new name in February 1948, almost completely changed its leadership, radically changed its programme direction, policy and organizational order, and saw its membership undergo a process of fundamental differentiation and reduction, its elite figures referred to it as a 'revived National Socialist organization' in the first phase of its existence, probably under the influence of the existing contemporary trend of concealing the actual coup and rupture by deploying the phraseology of the 'revival' of existing structures. Perhaps only the takeover of the ČSNS's property and a small portion of its former members can be acknowledged as a continuous element in its existence.

It was only after some time that the belief that a new party had been set up began to prevail in the press and in the statements of leaders. This was after it had established itself and begun to permanently define itself in a way that ran counter to the ČSNS, and especially counter to the leadership of this ruling party in the period immediately before February 1948. This is less evident in the example of the change in the numbering of party congresses, as they had to be presented as party conferences, but it is clearly evident in the comments and celebrations of the anniversaries of the party's existence, which was counted down to and associated with the year of 'Triumphal February'. The idea of establishing the ČSS as a new

organization is also claimed, for example, by the official 'history' of the party written by one of the protagonists, Luděk Kapitola [Kapitola, p. 16].

Discussions related to the holding of the first 'post-November' ČSS congress in 1990 seemed to interpret the ČSS as a new party. They showed that the then membership base no longer felt a connection to the ČSNS and wanted to be members of the ČSS, the organization it joined. Therefore, the participants of the next congress held in January 1991 refused to return to the name of the party valid from 1926 and voted to keep the current name of the party. On the other hand, the congress officially took place in 1990 as the 24th congress and the 25th ČSS congress in 1991. In taking this step, the party followed the numbering of ČSNS congresses and demonstrated the idea of continuity with the organization founded in 1897. It is

beyond doubt that this contradiction had its roots in the existence of the Czechoslovak National Social Party in exile [Fic], which considered itself the legal, ideological and political successor of the pre-February ČSNS. The ČSS merged with the exile party on 16 March 1990, which broke up the day before at its 6th congress and transferred its legal continuity with the ČSNS to the ČSS [Návrh programu ČSS, 1991, p. 8; Pravdu má ČSS!, 1991, p. 1]. It is interesting that, at the beginning of 1991, the former chairman of the exile party, Vladimír Krajina, viewed the ČSS as the bearer of the domestic legal continuity of the ČSNS in the years of totalitarianism [Krajina]. But a recapitulation of historical facts leads us to the conclusion that the closest to reality is the interpretation of the ČSS as a new, successor organization of the defunct or continued-in-exile ČSNS.

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ДО ЗАСНУВАННЯ ЧЕХОСЛОВАЦЬКОЇ СОЦІАЛІСТИЧНОЇ ПАРТІЇ В 1948 РОЦІ

Чехословацька націонал-соціалістична партія, яка протягом часу кілька разів змінювала свою назву і на спадщину якої нині претендує Чеська націонал-соціалістична партія як її правонаступниця, є однією з найстаріших і традиційних чеських політичних партій. Вона була заснована у 1897 р. в період політичної диференціації чеського суспільства з амбіціями стати спілкою чеських робітників, організацією яких до цього часу займалася інтернаціональна соціал-демократична партія. Згодом вона позиціонувала себе як партія нижчих верств середнього класу з націоналістично сформульованою програмою захисту ідей демократії, соціальної рівності та справедливості, що ототожнювалася з концепцією створення реформістського чеського націонал-соціалізму. Вона традиційно виступала проти марксизму, комунізму та будь-якого тоталітаризму що Чехословацьчина опинилася в радянській зоні впливу, знайшло своє відображення у виникненні та розв'язанні урядової кризи кабінету Готвальда в лютому 1948 р. Комуністична партія Чехословацької Республіки (КПЧ) використала цю справу для здійснення державного перевороту. Вона встановила в Чехословацькій т. зв. диктатуру пролетаріату, ліквідувала демократичну політичну систему та замінила її тоталітарною і відповідно до намірів Москви розпочала революційну трансформацію суспільства з метою побудови соціалізму. Лютневий переворот, здійснений комуністами, мав також серйозні наслідки для політичних партій, передусім для Чехословацької націонал-соціалістичної партії. Комуністи за допомогою перебіжчиків і кар'єристів під прикриттям комуністичної служби безпеки ліквідували її та почали будувати на її руїнах нову політичну партію під назвою Чехословацька соціалістична партія. Партія програмно ототожнювала себе з поглядами комуністів, які перетворили її на тіньову організацію, що співпрацювала з режимом до 1989 р. В дослідженні розглядаються обставини заснування Чехословацької соціалістичної партії у 1948 р., і в центрі його уваги – проблематика формування керівництва партії та партійних еліт. На чолі організації, на рівні центрального апарату, опинилися люди, які здебільшого співпрацювали з комуністами ще до лютого 1948 р., або особи, яких КПЧ та органи безпеки таємно уповноважили працювати серед націонал-соціалістів з метою розвідувальної та підривної діяльності., а після 1918 р. брала участь у розбудові демократичної Чехословацької Республіки. Ці програмні постулати вона відстоювала і після закінчення Другої світової війни, зарекомендувавши себе як найпопулярніший опонент Комуністичної партії Чехословацької Республіки у значно редукованій лівоцентристській

партійно-політичній системі, що ототожнювалася з поняттям Національного фронту. Якщо політика комуністів була спрямована на повне захоплення влади з метою революційної трансформації чеського і словацького суспільства та побудови соціалізму і комунізму, то націонал-соціалісти однозначно відкидали цю концепцію та обстоювали бачення національної, демократичної і соціально справедливої держави. Зіткнення цих суперечливих уявлень про майбутнє, яке було не чехословацькою особливістю, а пов'язувалося з формуванням біполярного устрою світу та Європи після Другої світової війни і з тим.

Ключові слова: політичні партії, Чехословацька соціалістична партія, Комуністична партія Чехословащини, політична криза, комітети дії.