

Redeeming the Communist Past

THE REGENERATION OF
COMMUNIST PARTIES IN
EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

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The Roots of Regeneration: Communist Practices and Elite Resources

Communist parties seem a highly improbable source of democratic skills and effective political leadership. After all, during the four decades of their political and economic monopoly in East Central Europe, they had few incentives to devise responsive or responsible public policies and were far more adept at repression than at representation. They became the stereotype of unchanging behemoths, the progenitors of the stolid *homo sovieticus* and political organizations unable to change their bureaucratic and plodding ways.

Yet, as this chapter will show, elite resources held the key to the regeneration of ruling parties of the discredited regime. Since the successor party elites spent their careers in the communist parties and their auxiliaries, these resources were very likely to have their origin in the parties. Paradoxically, specific organizational practices of the communist parties – the privileging of young party activists, the constant tinkering with policy, and the “cat and mouse” game of negotiation with society and the opposition – could both sustain the parties’ rule prior to 1989 and foster their democratic success afterwards.

After the communist governments fell in 1989, the opportunities presented by this regime collapse prompted scholars to ask what it took to “get the parties right.”¹ The regime break was radical, and the communist

¹ Schmitter, Philippe C. “Intermediaries in the Consolidation of Neo-Democracies: The Role of Parties, Associations and Movements,” working paper No. 130, Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques y Socials, 1997. See also Evans, Geoffrey, and Whitefield, Stephen. “Identifying the Bases of Party Competition in Eastern Europe,” *British Journal of Political Science*, October 1993: 521–48. Jasiewicz, Krzysztof. “Structures of Representation,” in White, Stephen, Batt, Judy, and Lewis, Paul, eds. *Developments in East European Politics*. London: McMillan, 1993b: 124–46.

past was discredited as a source of political norms. Therefore, the dominant approach initially argued that institutional crafting and the immediate context of a democratic transition, “comprised of norms, institutions, and international pressures, matter[ed] most to the future of liberal capitalist democracy.”²

Yet certain structures and patterns of the communist era persisted to shape political and economic developments after 1989, biasing decision making in favor of the familiar and the extant. Thus, the collapse of the communist regime may have removed the obvious structures of communist life, such as the monopoly of the party or economic planning. However, less visible institutions of the past – such as popular norms, patterns of political behavior, and organizational networks – continued to influence politics and political strategies (Barany and Volgyes 1995, Crawford 1995, Hanson 1995, Pridham and Lewis 1996).

If the regeneration of the communist successor parties “clearly demonstrat[es] the continuing effect of the Leninist legacy on post-communist politics,”³ then it prompts an investigation of which legacies influence political development, how they are transmitted, and when they cease to be relevant. Such an examination can demonstrate the ways in which the legacies of the old regime often determined which institutional choices were made, and which economic and political imperatives become relevant to the political actors during a democratic transition. Moreover, it can generate generalizable propositions for further comparative research of the role of old regime practices in the regeneration of discredited political actors. Finally, the legacies of communism, as this chapter will show, were not merely the “tools of discourse and mobilization,”⁴ but determined the available resources and strategies of party regeneration.

² Crawford, Beverly, and Lijphart, Arend. “Explaining Political and Economic Post-Communist Eastern Europe,” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 28: July 1995: 171–99, p. 176. Geddes, Barbara. “A Comparative Perspective on the Leninist Legacy in Eastern Europe,” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2, July 1995, 239–74.

³ Hanson, Stephen. “The Leninist Legacy and Institutional Change,” *Comparative Political Studies*, July 1995, 306–14, p. 311. See also Pridham, Geoffrey, and Lewis, Paul G., eds. *Stabilising Fragile Democracies: Comparing New Party Systems in Southern and Eastern Europe*. London: Routledge, 1996.

⁴ Crawford and Lijphart 1995, p. 176.

Specifying the Legacies

Specifying the Legacies

If communist legacies are defined as the patterns of behavior, cognition, and organization with roots in the authoritarian regime that persist despite a change in the conditions that gave rise to them, three separate tests assess the impact of a given legacy on post-1989 party development. First, does the party consistently exhibit the given behavior or organizational pattern? If it does not, a “legacy” explanation becomes a tenuous and wishful description of what *might* have happened rather than a specification of an actual causal factor.⁵ The imprecision inherent in some of the existing accounts of the “Leninist legacy” has led to unwarranted assumptions – for example, many so-called sociological legacies of communism turned out on closer inspection to be short-term responses.⁶

Second, can we identify a transmission mechanism? Some structural, individual, or ideational means must be discernible for the legacy to affect the party directly. Many of the mechanisms of replication and transmission of the legacies of the socialist regimes have remained underspecified. Both critics and advocates of the legacy-centered approach seemed to assume that inertia or a nearly “automatic” replication will continue to make legacies relevant, but have not taken into consideration either a dynamic or a deliberate element. While legacies without an identifiable transmission mechanism may appear, they do not lend themselves easily to a systematic analysis.

Third, does a given pattern persist until the political disjuncture, such as the regime collapse of 1989? If it does not, such a legacy is less likely to affect subsequent political development directly. This concern with persistence further implies that it is necessary to trace when, if ever, the legacies stop being relevant, and what determines why some are more tenacious than others. Despite their concern with the past, many students of the historical influences on the political status quo have not taken into account the time horizons, or the political “half-lives,” of a given political legacy. Yet some inheritances from the old regime, such as a distorted price system, can disappear immediately, while others, such as patterns of labor relations, can continue for much longer periods of time.

⁵ Elster, Jan. *Political Psychology*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 161.

⁶ Kolarska-Bobińska, Lena. “Social Interests, Egalitarian Attitudes, and the Change of Economic Order,” *Social Research*, Vol. 55, No. 1–2, Spring/Summer 1988: 111–38.

If they satisfy these conditions, legacies can influence political action in three different ways. First, they delineate the set of feasible actions: The lack of certain skills or networks makes some political decisions impossible. Second, they also provide the patterns and templates for evaluating both strategies and other actors: The historical record confers both cognitive biases and reputations that make some declarations credible. Finally, by providing a cognitive shortcut (as a ready source of information), they lower the transaction costs of decision making, relative to the other bases for evaluation.⁷

All three are especially relevant in the fluid and confusing political environment that follows a regime collapse. Regime transitions are periods of intense elite learning, but also of the use and reification of prior information and skills. Political actors, whether voters, party leaders, or policy-makers, would seek credible sources of information that require the least investment of time and effort. If a persistent, stable, and transmitted legacy could provide information or a template regarding a political decision with less time and effort invested than other options (such as seeking international templates, delving into party programs, etc.), then it would be likely to influence decision making.

For example, a party leader could choose to advance his or her own cohort, whose familiar skills and abilities the leader trust, rather than attempt to recruit a whole new set of leaders from the outside. Similarly, a plethora of political parties with vague programs could make policy-based voting decisions difficult. Thus, a voter would rely on the historical divide between “the communist party state” and the “opposition” and label parties according to their roots rather than laboriously sift through the parties’ numerous, and vague, programmatic declarations. As the political situation stabilized, however, the profiles of political actors become clearer and more settled, and the consequences of political choices more predictable. Legacies are then less likely to influence decision making directly. Instead, the patterns they initially set into motion, now translated into organizational and institutional choices, would begin to structure politics.

Certain legacies are more likely to persist than others – the more they are an irretrievably sunk cost, and the more “expensive” they are to change, the more they will be sustained. For example, individual education, skills,

⁷ Rationality itself, after all, involves the realization that obtaining all pertinent information may not be cost-effective or rational. Dennett, Daniel. *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993.

Specifying the Legacies

and expertise would be more likely to persist than reputations. It is difficult to “discard” one’s prior experiences, and acquiring additional skills or expertise requires relatively high effort. The regime transition could in fact fortify portable skills, since existing skills will define the set of feasible options for a given individual – and once a strategic choice is made, its implementation will often require the same skills and experiences that led the individual to adopt this strategy in the first place. Reputations, on the other hand, are continually updated, and new information is relatively cheaper to acquire (especially in the case of political parties, where all the competitors are constantly “pushing” information at the electorate, through campaigns, press conferences and releases, and public statements). The relevance of the usable past for voters and for other parties is thus more likely to wane as the communist successors develop new, consistent behaviors that eventually alter their past image.

These criteria allow us to reexamine several prior analyses of the legacies of communism. Disaggregating these patterns is the first step in ascertaining which actually mattered, and which lacked the consistency, transmission mechanisms, and persistence to make a difference. First, the parties’ antidemocratic history and their authoritarian style of ruling and governing have been said to preclude success in democratic competition. Yet, paradoxically, the same party organizations responsible for the stagnation of state socialist regimes created a set of dynamic and skilled party elites. Those parties that regenerated after 1989 were surprisingly catholic in their recruitment of elites and increasingly tolerant of internal dissent. What mattered, then, was not only the opponent public governance, but also the persistent patterns of elite recruitment that underlied it.

Second, the longstanding resistance to communism in countries such as Poland was said to have eliminated the successor parties as political competitors in a freely elected party system.⁸ After all, the party was widely repudiated by the populace, and the imposition of the communist regime in Poland was likened to “placing a saddle on a cow,” in Josef Stalin’s rustic phrasing. However, this public antagonism had a very different effect on the party itself. The more the party had to respond to an antagonistic society, the more it could develop experience with policy innovation, negotiation, and justification. Tracing the transmission of a given legacy and its effects on specific actors thus holds surprising conclusions.

⁸ See Lech Wałęsa, quoted in *Życie Warszawy*, 2 February 1990, or Zubek, Voytek. “Poland’s Party Self-Destructs,” *Orbis*, Vol. 34, Spring 1990: 179–94.

Third, the Czech party's domestic roots, its postwar popular support, and the secularism of the populace favored the Czechoslovak communist party immediately after World War II. Some scholars thus predicted that this initial popular support meant that the party would succeed in the post-1989 polity. However, the initial support in Czechoslovakia for the communists rapidly subsided after the party's brutal coup in 1948 and even more so after the 1968–70 crackdown, so that very little remained by 1989. Without taking into account the ebbing strength of this legacy over time, we may be led to the wrong conclusion.

Fourth, the historical absence of social democratic parties has been used to explain why the Polish and Hungarian communist parties were able to regenerate, if the trade-off between communist and social democratic support on the Left holds.⁹ Social democrats were active in the prewar Czech Republic, and once rebuilt after 1989, the party constituted the traditional Left alternative to the Czech communists. As a result, the Czech communist party was unable to become a more moderate competitor, it is argued, because the social democrats already occupied the centrist Left space. The Polish and Hungarian parties faced no such historical competition, and so could remake themselves into social democratic parties. However, this analysis ignores the weakness of the social democrats in the Czech Republic from 1989 to 1993, precisely the time when the other parties regenerated. Having barely reconstituted themselves (they were obliterated after World War II), and with many of their potential leaders in the Civic Forum opposition mass movement (including Valtr Komárek, Jan Kavan, and others), the Czech social democrats were simply not a real threat to the communists until they gained strength in 1993. Legacies thus cannot readily influence postcommunist development without mechanisms of transmission.

More generally, while some legacies of the interwar era persisted through to the post-1989 period, the configurations of parties and electorates prior to World War II had less influence on the communist parties' structures and practices.¹⁰ After 1945, the politics differed from their prewar predecessors in crucial respects. First, the political leadership and

⁹ Przeworski, Adam, and Sprague, John. *Paper Stones: A History of Electoral Socialism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

¹⁰ For an argument that the configuration of bourgeois-socialist cleavages and representation had a decisive influence on postwar communist systems and post-1989 democratic politics, see Kitschelt, Herbert, Mansfeldová, Zdenka, Markowski, Radosław, and Tóka, Gábor. *Post-Communist Party Systems*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Specifying the Legacies

the intelligentsia had been weakened and even physically liquidated during the immense devastation of World War II, as in Poland.¹¹ Even if their experiences and skills diffused to other politicians, these patterns do not provide clear causal chains. The mechanisms of transmission from one period to the next are rather tenuous (the Czech Republic being a partial exception to this rule).

Second, even where the political elites and parties were not devastated, as in the Czech Republic, the communist parties repeatedly changed form and substance in the interwar period. For example, if we are to extrapolate Czech party strategies from the interwar to the postwar period, should the relevant reference point be the democratic, mass, moderate Czech communist party of 1918–25, or the authoritarian, radical, and Leninist Czech communist party of 1926–38¹²?

Third, the Polish and Hungarian communist parties were extremely weak in the interwar period, and this weakness may have led them to greater caution after World War II.¹³ However, prewar strength was not necessarily a reliable predictor of postwar strategy. On the one hand, the Czech party's pre-1926 domestic support should have led the party to accept greater pluralism and reform efforts in the communist period, since the party felt assured of greater support. On the other, its weakness after 1926 should have led the party to reject free elections in 1946. That neither happened suggests that past patterns of bourgeois-socialist cleavages and representation were neither sustained, nor did they inform postwar strategy. In short, the continuities between the pre- and postwar regimes were neither as consistent nor as systematically persistent as the postwar patterns.

Which legacies *do* matter, then? For the communist parties, the key legacies were the elite political resources, established by the communist practices of elite recruitment, policy reform, and negotiation with the opposition. As a result, the parties entered the transition to democracy

¹¹ Gross, Jan. "The Social Consequences of War: Preliminaries to the Study of Imposition of Communist Regimes in East Central Europe," *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Spring 1989, 198–214.

¹² Prior to World War II, the Czech party functioned for several years as a mass party in the democratic Czech Republic, rather than as a traditional communist organization, focused on secretive cells and a strict discipline. Under its congenial leader Bohumil Šměral, the KSČ resembled a social democratic party à la the Austrian or German Social Democrats. Ultimately, Comintern felt compelled to purge the party and return it to the fold by instituting a new leader, Klement Gottwald, in 1926.

¹³ I am indebted to Herbert Kitschelt for this point.

with distinct configurations of elite “portable skills” (elite perceptions, experiences, and expertise) and “usable pasts” (the sets of shared historical references that resonated with the populace), which arose in the communist era. While there were changes over time – most notably, with the post-Stalinist “thaw,” which relaxed ideological demands and gave the parties greater leeway – these general patterns persisted throughout the postwar period.

To examine the effects of organizational practices, this chapter compares both how different parties responded to similar exogenous shocks and how similar parties can differ in outcomes. First, the Polish and Hungarian parties followed distinct policies of societal engagement and elite advancement: The Hungarian party entered into a “social contract” after 1956 that minimized public conflict, promoted extensive economic and political reforms, and coopted the intelligentsia into the party. Meanwhile, the Polish party faced greater and more continual public conflict, was more cautious in liberalizing the economy and the polity, and fostered competition and pluralism within its own ranks instead of coopting the intelligentsia. Yet both parties had to respond to lengthy negotiations that eventually forced them to exit from power.

Second, ostensibly similar parties differed in their responses. Thus, the Slovak party shared a common history with the Czech, under the umbrella of the Czechoslovak communist party. Nevertheless, its trajectory after 1989 differed considerably. Such comparisons, therefore, are very well suited to determining which legacies matter, how, and when, both in the regeneration of the communist successor parties and in other instances of organizational transformation.

Communist Takeovers and Regime Crises

If communist organizational practices were the key to the formation of elite resources, the communist capture of power after World War II initially determined these practices. In addition to establishing the monopoly control of politics, authority over political and economic decision making, administration, and adjudication, these takeovers first delineated the relationship between the party and the society. Specifically, if the party came to power through popular mobilization, it saw its organization as a means of establishing and retaining its power. It would subsequently try to ensure the purity and loyalty of this important asset, which brought the party to power and subsequently would ensure its rule. If, instead, the party

Communist Takeovers and Regime Crises

was “imported” from the outside by the Soviet Union, it tended to view organization as less relevant to its maintenance of power. Without the legitimation of an initial electoral victory, such a communist party would be more likely to rely on elite cooptation and societal engagement to maintain its rule.

Thus, the takeovers encouraged the parties to reach distinct conclusions regarding the kind of party organization that would best establish the parties’ authority. As a result, the parties adopted different organizational practices: policies of recruitment, willingness to negotiate with society, and willingness to respond with policy reform. Other factors, such as the differences in the relationship with the Soviet Union¹⁴ or the distinct political cultures involved,¹⁵ certainly affected postwar political developments. However, as the critical formative moments, the initial takeovers had the greatest influence on the choice of these organizational practices and hence on subsequent elite political resources.

Regime crises, in turn, reinforced these patterns and ensured that the parties’ organizational practices would be sustained until, and through, 1989. Where the party elites saw the party organization as the guarantee of the party’s authority and control over society, they naturally saw it as responsible for the failings of the communist regime, and thus set out to “improve” its reliability after regime crises. Where the parties discounted the party members, on the other hand, the crisis response consisted of removing the elite “culprits” – the discredited party leaders – and of engaging society through further reforms and negotiation, however meager in effect. The responses to regime crises thus not only reflected party cleavages, patterns of popular mobilization, and international pressures,¹⁶ but the parties’ organization and control over society.

If the takeovers established these practices and the crises reinforced them, their cumulative effects were greatest during the era of late state socialism, the 1970s and 1980s, for two reasons. First, the more recent the historical memories, the more likely they were to influence popular perceptions of the party. For example, the Polish party elites, whose most

¹⁴ Bunce, Valerie. *Subversive Institutions*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999a.

¹⁵ Holmes, Leslie. *Politics in the Communist World*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1986. White, Stephen, Gardener, John, and Schöpflin, George. *Communist Political Systems*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982.

¹⁶ See Ekiert, Grzegorz. *The State Against Society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

recent regime crisis was in 1980–1, were held far more accountable for the crisis than the elites of the Hungarian party, whose major crisis occurred in 1956. Second, the cohorts of elites currently leading the communist successor parties advanced through the communist organizations during those two decades, gaining the experiences and skills that proved crucial after 1989. Nonetheless, since the 1970s and 1980s both resulted from and reinforced the outcomes of earlier organizational practices, they cannot be viewed separately from the rest of the postwar era.

Thus, the postwar communist period shaped both the elites' portable skills and their usable past. Postwar takeovers of power set the stage for subsequent organizational strategies and practices pursued by the communist parties. Subsequently, the levels of reform and societal negotiation ebbed and flowed, as such efforts were pursued, only for the parties to back-track. However, even as these reforms and negotiation efforts themselves were not cumulative, the skills and experiences gained by the elites were.

Organizational Practices

First, earlier policies of elite recruitment shaped the composition and skills of the elite cohorts of 1989. These policies consisted of elite advancement, leadership turnover, and, to a lesser extent, internal party pluralism, which have proven important in other contexts.¹⁷ They fall into two ideal types. In “closed” or “intramural” recruitment, elites are recruited from the lower echelons within the organization itself. Leadership turnover is minimized, as is the existence of various ideological divisions or debates. This type of recruitment prizes stability and predictability, since it replicates the same set of values and practices from one level of the hierarchy to the next. Closed patterns of elite advancement have led to orthodox, cautious, and largely conservative elites in other political systems.

In contrast, in “open” or “extramural” recruitment, elites can be brought into the party “horizontally,” from correspondingly high positions in other organizations, and they frequently change places within the organization. Such recruitment tolerates differences in opinion and favors diversity in individual experience and skill, promoting pragmatism and innovation.¹⁸ Higher rates of leadership turnover also promote innovative

¹⁷ Dogan, Mattei. *Pathways to Power*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989, p. 3.

¹⁸ Waltz, Kenneth. *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967, p. 46ff.

Organizational Practices

and flexible policy making,¹⁹ and top leadership requires these attributes.²⁰ Open recruitment also keeps the elites from entrenching themselves in any position for too long and creates competition for prized positions. In turn, competition itself trains potential leaders in the skills required in the political system to which they belong²¹ – and, as these cases show, in political systems that are radically different.

Given the differences in their recruitment policies, the parties had fostered different degrees of innovation and flexibility in their mid-level and top cadres. To summarize the patterns of party recruitment, the Polish and Hungarian parties recruited from the outside, using skill, style, and pragmatism as criteria, while the Czechoslovak party²² advanced its elites from within, using ideological loyalty as the chief criterion. While they ironically allowed the rise of reformist Slovak elites through their strict control over the party, the Czech party leaders stifled their potential to put forth elites with practical, portable skills, who could lead a nonideological, competitive democratic party. Since the successor party leaders were all in these ranks in the 1980s, these party policies directly affected the leaders' capabilities.

Second, although no party radically transformed the economy or the polity, the Polish and Hungarian parties made several attempts to alleviate the more egregious shortcomings of the system, both by policy reform and negotiation with the opposition. The content of these policy experiments, however inadequate their results, was perhaps not as important as the willingness of the party actors to respond to a captive audience – the societies under communist regimes. The more a party promoted policy innovation prior to 1989, the more it fostered pragmatism and flexibility in policy making. The more it had subsequently implemented these innovations, the more experience the party elites received in overcoming administrative reluctance, organizational entrenchment, and other institutional and political barriers to party regeneration. Implementing reforms

¹⁹ Putnam, Robert. *The Comparative Study of Political Beliefs*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1976, p. 6, and Putnam, Robert. *The Beliefs of Politicians*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973, p. 147.

²⁰ Ralf Dahrendorf. *Society and Democracy in Germany*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1967, p. 225.

²¹ Easton, David. *Systems Analysis of Political Life*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965.

²² Much as there was a Soviet Communist Party and various parties in the republics but no Russian Communist Party, similarly there existed a Czechoslovak Communist Party and a Slovak Communist Party but no Czech counterpart on the republican level.

also gave future elites considerable experience in responding to public concerns, and in convincing skeptics within both society and the party.

Finally, negotiation with the opposition and answering societal demands allowed the party mid-level elites to identify societal priorities, formulate responsive appeals, and convincingly address opponents within the party and within society. Such negotiation could even result in a tacit consensus between the more moderate elements within both the party and the opposition, as we will see in the Hungarian case and the aftermath of the revolution of 1956. The more consistently conflictual this relationship, on the other hand, the deeper and more persistent the post-1989 divide between the postcommunist and the postopposition camps.

To summarize the differences in public policy, the Czechoslovak party clamped down on any reform or liberalization (with the notable exception of the Slovak reform proposals) as a threat to its rule, and refused to negotiate. In contrast, the Polish and Hungarian parties continually dabbled in policy reform and negotiation, to gain societal acquiescence. The following sections turn to the individual cases to examine the origin of the parties' organizational practices, their persistence, and the differences among the parties.

Czechoslovakia

The Czechoslovak Communist Party (Komunistická Strana Československa, KSČ) captured power as a mass political party, with extensive organizational networks and a large party membership. Using these to mobilize voters, it won over 40% of the vote in the free elections in 1946²³ and wrested a leading role in the government coalition that followed. Dissatisfied with the pace of political change, the party fomented a crisis among its coalition partners in February 1948 (several noncommunist ministers resigned, without naming replacements) and took over power completely in a coup d'état. Since it relied on its twenty thousand organizations and almost 2.5 million party members (or over 25% of the adult population) for electoral support, to eliminate political competitors and to mobilize

²³ The KSČ received a considerably smaller percentage of the vote in Slovakia. The party's high Czech support has been explained as a function of the banning of the Agrarian Party, the pro-Russian sentiment following liberation, and the gains in areas where Germans had been expelled following the war. Suda, Zdenek. *Zealots and Rebels: A History of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1980, p. 196ff.

Czechoslovakia

forces during the coup, the KSČ continued to emphasize its mass party character, even as it did away with elections.

Having successfully emerged from domestic competition, the party's leaders considered the party's structures and members the mainstay of their power. As Central Committee members argued, "the strength of our party rests in organization, whereas the strength of other parties rests on tradition."²⁴ A large, loyal membership was both an enormous political resource and the only proof that the party needed of its legitimacy. It was also a way of "crowding out" other political forces – other political parties had also sought mass party membership, and the KSČ saw its gains as their losses.

As a result, the KSČ leadership subsequently counted on the "saturation" of society by party members and structures to help establish party authority as legitimate and to maintain its control of Czechoslovakia. A large, committed, ideologically pure membership would guarantee the party's sustained control over society and retain the same structures that brought the party into power in the free elections of 1946. Table 1.1 details Czech party membership data.

Therefore, as befitted the vanguard of the workers, the party pursued the "proper" blue-collar members. The percentage of Czechoslovak party members in the white collar/intellectual sectors peaked at less than a third – the KSČ was the one party to insist on its "working-class" character until the very end. As a result, the Czech intelligentsia and white-collar workers were the group most eager to join the party, but faced the highest ideological barriers to doing so.²⁵ Even in the late 1980s, when well-educated technocrats dominated the party apparatus and nomenklatura in Poland and in Hungary, the KSČ proudly noted that nearly 90% of its apparatus came from communist, worker families.²⁶

²⁴ SÚA Fond 01, sv 2 aj 12 2. Diskuse k referatu S. Gottwalda. 30.5.1946. Souček and Švermová.

²⁵ Wightman, Gordon, and Brown, Archie. "Changes in the Level of Membership and Social Composition of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 1945–73," *Soviet Studies*, July 1975: 396–417, pp. 409–10. Czech white-collar workers had considerable incentives to join the party – employment in the state sector was made exclusively the provenance of the party, as was advancement within its ranks. The KSČ had wanted to recruit blue-collar workers but had fewer incentives for blue-collar workers to join, and far fewer sanctions to keep them from leaving. For example, while white-collar workers were demoted to menial jobs if they were expelled from the party, blue-collar workers faced no such punishments.

²⁶ *Život Strany*, No. 11, 1988.

Table 1.1. *Czech communist party membership.*

KSČ (Czech component)	1945	1950	1955	1965	1970	1980	1985
Membership:	17,500	2,200,000	1,370,000	1,400,000	900,000	1,152,000	1,240,400
Percentage of population	.2%	25.3%	16.5%	14.3%	10.1%	11.1%	12%
Organizations	14,000	26,400	35,100	38,881	33,579	34,300	35,000
Composition ^a (%)							
Blue collar	68.0%	38.4%	40.7%	32.9%	26.1%	30.0%	
Professional	4.5%		31.0%	23.0%	33.1%		
Agricultural	27.5%		6.7%				
Apparat			6,500	8,700	4,500	4,000	14,000
Nomenklatura			250,000		100,000	260,000	

Note: ^a The Czechoslovak party was unusually secretive about its composition – many of the files in the archives are marked “top secret,” and much of the information was never released. In contrast, the Polish party published the data both in its statistical yearbooks and in the party press.

Source: SÚA, Fondy 02 and 04 (ÚV KSČ and Předsednictvo KSČ), Prague. *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1966–91. Staar Richard. *Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1988, interview with Vasil Mohorita, 14 November 1996.

Concerned with the purity of party ranks,²⁷ Czech communist leaders purged their membership regularly, and at higher rates than any other party. For example, in 1948–51, two purges cast out 750,000 members, or 32% of party members.²⁸ In the most radical purge, the “normalization” drive of 1969–70 eliminated a third of the party’s members and decimated the party intellectuals. The Czech party still railed against “non-Leninist thinking” within the party as late as 1988, and insisted that it was “wholly natural and logical that the party demands . . . Bolshevization.”²⁹

Finally, Czech party membership rates were twice as high as those in the neighboring countries.³⁰ By 1949, the Czech party had succeeded in

²⁷ SA Fond ÚV KSS Předsednictvo. 1981/1541/81-3.2 Karton č. 1596. As late as 1981, the Czechoslovak Communist Party still spoke of “characteristic care for the upholding of party rules, ensuring the discipline of the communist and purity of party ranks.”

²⁸ Kaplan, Karel. *Political Persecution in Czechoslovakia*. Research project “Crises in Soviet-Type Systems,” No. 3. Köln: Index, 1983.

²⁹ Gustav Husák, 11 December 1971, *Život Strany*, and *Život Strany*, No. 5, 1976.

³⁰ At the time of its takeover in Czechoslovakia in February 1948, the KSČ numbered 2.5 million members, or over 25.3% of the Czech population and 9.1% of the Slovak. Afterwards, anywhere from 13 to 16% of Czechs were in the party (prior to the debilitating Prague Spring purge), as were 6–7% of the Slovaks.

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infusing society with party organizations – only 3.4% of Czech communities were without party organizations a year after the communist takeover.³¹ Similarly, only 3.3% of the communities were without a party organization in Slovakia by 1954.³² By 1989, a party organization existed for every 286 Czechs and for every 400 Slovaks. As a party journal explained as late as in the mid-1970s, “an effort must be made to ensure that there is no factory, no important workplace, and no community where there is not a primary organization of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.”³³

The Czechoslovak party was also perhaps the most persistent and successful in making society dependent on the party, in areas as basic as education and employment.³⁴ Membership in the orthodox Communist Youth Union was a prerequisite for higher education throughout the period, and “political criteria [were] always applied” in selection for both high school and university.³⁵ Five hundred and fifty thousand jobs were directly vetted by Czechoslovak party organs in the mid-1980s,³⁶ in contrast with 270,000 in Poland (with over twice the working population of Czechoslovakia) or the even smaller number in Hungary during the same time period.³⁷ Czechs and Slovaks were not allowed to travel as freely as Poles or Hungarians, and were subject to humiliating interviews, courtesy of the State Security Agency, after their return.³⁸ Censorship was also far more severe, as subscriptions to many Western journals were forbidden and domestic publications were under stricter control than in either Poland or Hungary.

³¹ Kaplan, Karel. *Útvaření generalní linie výstavby socialismu v Československu; od února do IX sjezdu KSČ*. Praha: Academia, 1966, p. 166. Thus, four hundred Czech villages had no party organizations in 1949. At the time, there were 11,695 such communities in the Czech Lands and 3,361 in Slovakia.

³² SA ÚV KSS Sekretariat. 1954/Inf a./54-7.9 Karton č. 91.

³³ *Život Strany*, No. 15, 1976, p. 12.

³⁴ Ulč, Otto. *Politics in Czechoslovakia*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Co, 1974, p. 105.

³⁵ Kaplan 1983, p. 6.

³⁶ Renner, Hans. *A History of Czechoslovakia Since 1945*. London: Routledge, 1989, p. 111. For Polish figures, see *Polityka*, 2 September 1989. More conservative figures (Kaplan, Karel. *Aparat ÚV KSČ v letech 1948–68*. Prague: Sešity Ústavu Pro Soudobé Dějiny, Sv. 10, 1993) place the number of Czechoslovak nomenklatura posts at 180,000–250,000.

³⁷ The Hungarian system differed in that while the direct nomenklatura ranged from ten thousand (in the mid-1980s) to ninety thousand, the party held discretionary “advisory” rights to an additional 350,000 posts.

³⁸ For example, over 1 million Hungarians had traveled abroad in 1970, and over 5 million did so in 1980. Over 870,000 Poles traveled abroad in 1970, and nearly 7 million did in 1980. In contrast, the figures for Czechoslovakia are 400,000 and 870,000, respectively.

The party's response to regime crisis also reflected its understanding of the party organization as the mainstay of its rule. The major reform movement, the Prague Spring of 1968, began within the party, partly because the party had so penetrated society that by that point few centers of independent thought existed outside of the party, unlike the relatively free academic departments and scientific institutes in Poland and Hungary. The Spring began with the formulation of reform alternatives by three committees attached to the central party leadership in the 1960s. Reformists, such as Ota Šik, came to influence policy. The suggestions for improving the economy eventually led to calls for political reform, the ascension of the reformist Alexander Dubček into the party leadership, and eventually an unprecedented renewal of both the party and its relationship to the society.³⁹ For the first time since 1946, the party began to regain legitimacy and to allow pluralism within the party and within society.

After the Soviet-led invasion crushed the Prague Spring, however, all these gains were reversed. Since the impetus for the Czech liberalization had come from within the party, the party's "treachery" was punished. The leadership reasoned that without a reliable membership, it could not count on an effective public loyalty. Therefore, the Czechoslovak response focused on cleansing the membership ranks and clamping down on any "dangerous" initiatives. The result was both a renewed ideologization of party life and an increased fear of pluralism in the party leadership. Entire academic institutes and departments were summarily eliminated during the "normalization" campaign of 1968–70, the press and media were enervated completely, and constant "loyalty checks" made party members acutely aware of the party leadership's desire for ideological reliability.⁴⁰ In the most dramatic purge in the history of state socialism, following the Prague Spring, over 28% of KSC members were expelled from the party within a year.⁴¹ Moreover, expulsion meant not only loss of party membership, but of employment and schooling opportunities as well, not

³⁹ See Skilling, H. Gordon. *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976. Renner, Hans. *Dějiny Československa po roku 1945*. Bratislava: SAP, 1993. Kusín, Vladimír V. *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement, 1968*. Santa Barbara, CA, ABC-Clio, 1973. Kusín, Vladimír V. *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring: The Development of Reformist Ideas in Czechoslovakia, 1956–1967*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1971.

⁴⁰ Jancar, Barbara Wolfe. *Czechoslovakia and the Absolute Monopoly of Power*. New York: Praeger, 1971, p. 125.

⁴¹ Wightman and Brown 1975: p. 408.

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only for the expelled but their entire families.⁴² The purge was designed to prevent any future reformist deviations in the party, but it also left a lasting trauma for much of society, whose bargaining power vis-à-vis the party was curtailed, and whose faith in the party's legitimacy was irrevocably gone.

The subsequent policies of societal oppression and policy stagnation were to demonstrate that the party was once again fully in control. Since 1968 itself was a party reform, the party did not consider any further political or economic reforms, for fear of a similarly disastrous loss of control over society. The party document after 1969, "The Lessons of the Crisis Development in the party and society after the thirteenth congress of the KSČ" (*Poučení z krizového vývoje ve straně a společnosti po XIII. sjezdu KSČ*) denounced any attempt at political or economic reform, either then or in the future. As late as 1989, the KSČ leader Miloš Jakeš argued that any revision or attempt to come to terms with the events of 1968 would mean that the party would fall apart.⁴³

The one achievement of the Prague Spring was the federalization of Czechoslovakia, which partly addressed the earlier Czech domination of Slovakia under the auspices of "the Czechoslovak People's Socialist Republic." The communist party did relatively poorly in the 1946 elections in Slovakia, and never organized as thoroughly as the Czech party: The membership rate at the time of the 1948 takeover was 9.1% of adult Slovaks, about a third of the rates in the Czech lands (see Table 1.2). Nor were the Slovak party members or leaders seen as particularly committed to establishing communist rule. Therefore, the Slovak communist party was rapidly forced to join the Czech party, and the Czechs centralized control over the Slovak party.⁴⁴ In having to cede almost all its authority to the

⁴² As Timothy Garton Ash put it lyrically, "that window cleaner over there: his thesis was on Wittengstein. Ask your waiter about Kafka: before his trial, he lecture on *The Trial*. Yes, the nightwatchman is reading Aristotle. Your coal will be delivered by an ordained priest of the Czech brethren. Kiss the milkman's ring: he is your bishop." (*The Uses of Adversity*: New York: Vintage, 1990, p. 63.)

⁴³ Interview in *Pártelet*, February 1989, quoted in Tökés, Rudolf. *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 316.

⁴⁴ The Slovak communists played a considerable role in the Slovak National Uprising, directed against the Hitlerite puppet government of wartime Slovakia, led by Monsignor Jozef Tiso. The considerable gains they made were lost, however, when they actively participated in the "Prague agreements," which ceded Slovak autonomy to Prague and then made the Slovak communist party a part of the Prague-centered Czechoslovak Communist Party.

Table 1.2. *Slovak communist party membership.*

KSS	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1980	1985
Membership:	16,500	230,000	200,000	250,000	300,000	300,000	388,000	436,000
Percentage of population	.5%	6.8%	5.4%	6%	6.8%	6%	7.9%	8.5%
Organizations		8,600	9,400	9,700	10,000	10,600	11,700	12,500
Composition (%)								
Blue collar	72.5%	51.3%	39.4%	37.5%	34.4%	29.9%		
Professional		17.3%	11.6%	15.9%	20.9%	22.9%		
Agricultural		17.3%	11.6%	11.6%	8.3%	8.3%		
Apparat			2,300		2,100	1,300	1,600	3,000
Nomenklatura						18,400		21,000

Source: SNA, Sekretariat and Predsednictvo ÚV KSS files, Bratislava. *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs*. 1966–91. Staar. 1988.

Prague center, the Slovak communists became an instrument of the Czech leadership. As a result, the Slovak branch was a subservient and stagnant party backwater until 1968 and the federalization of the country.

After 1968, however, the Czech party allowed the Slovaks some administrative autonomy, largely as a result of Slovak lobbying. Since the Slovak party was not as active in the Prague Spring,⁴⁵ Slovak party members were not purged as heavily. While districts where 20% of members were expelled were put forth as examples, others, such as the intellectual center in Bratislava, only had a tiny percentage of expellees.⁴⁶ Those who were expelled could also count on support from many of their old comrades. Moreover, since the intelligentsia was so small and well-connected in Slovakia, the party hesitated to punish intellectuals. As a result, Slovaks grew in relative importance in the party (for example, both the new KSČ leader after 1968 and the new mayor of Prague were Slovaks), and the Slovak republic became the main beneficiary of post-1968 policies. Thus, the Slovak party could gain some public support, given its fulfillment of national aspirations, and preserve a more ideologically diverse membership. After 1989, many of these Slovak communists dispersed into the new

⁴⁵ *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1966, p. 50.

⁴⁶ Politologický Kabinet SAV. *Slovenská Spoločnosť v krízových rokoch 1967–1970*. Zborník štúdií III. Bratislava: SAV 1992, p. 186.

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political parties, blurring the divide between the communist party and the rest of society.

Elite Advancement Policies

The conservative Czech party leaders deliberately replicated a pattern of “closed” elite advancement – elites could rise only within and through the party ranks. The purges and recruitment policies of the Czech communist party rewarded neither education nor extramural experience, but ideological loyalty. Anxious to reassert control, and suspicious of any innovations that smacked of the 1968 reform movement, the party promoted only “safe” comrades, tested by years, if not decades, of party work. Prospective members had to apply directly to the party and could be rejected on ideological grounds. Advancement occurred mostly through progression upward in the party, into increasingly ideologically stagnant elite layers, so that conformist and orthodox members were the primary ones to advance in the party. The overwhelming majority of Czech and Slovak leaders were long-time party activists.⁴⁷ Although education levels increased over time, party leaders had no international experience, and their schooling was at either the Prague or the Moscow party schools.⁴⁸ The youth organization, completely under party control after 1968, provided no reformist elites. As a result, the Czech party elites in the 1980s were ideologically hidebound, and eventually unable to keep up with the transition of 1989.

Ironically, in their desire to control the Czechoslovak party, the Czech leadership created the space for Slovak reform potential. The strict centralization of power in the Czechoslovak communist party meant that as orders flowed from Prague to the Slovak regional party heads, Bratislava (the capital of Slovakia) was largely neglected by party supervision and control commissions. The Slovak elites who led the party after 1989 arose through an oversight – they spent most of the 1970s and 1980s in the Marxist-Leninist Institute of the Central Committee of the KSS, the Slovak party’s main theoretical and programmatic organ, far away from both party supervision and access to party decision making.

⁴⁷ Wolchik, Sharon. “Economic Performance and Political Change in Czechoslovakia,” in Bukowski, Charles, and Cichock, Mark, eds. *Prospects for Change in Socialist Systems*. New York: Praeger, 1987, p. 48.

⁴⁸ Kaplan 1993, p. 13.

Several younger party pragmatists quietly worked at the Institute and enjoyed relative freedom to travel abroad and a library fully stocked with Western journals and books, at a time when access to travel and foreign media was severely curtailed. They were led by Professor Viliam Plevza, whose ambitions had by several accounts extended well beyond the Institute.⁵⁰ Under Plevza's direction, the Institute research teams had come up with several reform documents, which circulated widely among both the Institute research staff and some of the younger apparat members. These young scholars were unable to advance into the party's leadership prior to 1989, and thus gained far more theoretical than practical experience in policy making and implementation. Nevertheless, they were ready to assume power, immediately after November 1989, at a time when most older, established party officials were either too disoriented or frightened to take charge.

While the Czech party and its institutes stagnated,⁴⁹ pockets of Slovak reformists could thus survive. However, these clusters of Slovak reformism remained an exception to the general rule of ideological stagnation and lack of policy innovation. In its effort to prevent the resurrection of "right-wing opportunism," the KSČ Politburo did not turn over its mid-level cadres and did not bring in any new members (unless an incumbent died) until 1987, when Jakeš's dogmatic wing of the party took over from the conservative pragmatic Gustav Husák.⁵¹ As a result, an average of only 13% of the Politburo leadership changed every year (16% if we include the changes made in 1968) in the last two decades of communist rule (see Table 1.3), less than half the rates in Poland. Moreover, elites who left did so as a result of retirement or death – there was minimal horizontal movement to other positions.

Nor did the party allow internal pluralism. Any reform-minded party member bold enough to attempt to disseminate his or her views would be rewarded with both expulsion and loss of employment. Instead of capital-

⁴⁹ An exception is the Institute of Economic Planning, where the likes of Václav Klaus and Vladimír Dlouhý first became prominent. This same institute also employed Miloslav Ransdorf, currently the Czech successor's party main apologist. Unlike the Slovak Institute of Marxism-Leninism, however, the Institute of Economic Planning had no direct elite ties that would allow its members to ascend to the top of the successor party immediately.

⁵⁰ Žiak, Miloš. *Slovensko: Od komunizmu kam?* Bratislava: Archa, 1996, p. 28–9, and interviews with Peter Weiss.

⁵¹ Josef Blahož in Lawson, Kay, ed. *How Political Parties Work: Perspectives from Within*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994, p. 230.