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THE DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL COMMUNIST ELITES IN THE CZECH LANDS 1945–1956

In certain important aspects, the establishment and consolidation of the state-socialist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia in 1945–1956 unrolled differently than in neighbouring people's democratic countries. What was strikingly different in Czechoslovakia was the population's strong sympathy for the Soviet Union and the Communist Party. The Czech national elites traditionally supported Pan Slavism, which helped neutralize the dominant influence of German culture in the 19th century. These tendencies then came alive after the traumatic fall of the interwar period of 1918–1938, Czechoslovak Republic in the autumn of 1938, which the majority of the Czech population considered to be a "betrayal of the West". This was why Czechoslovak democrats led by President Edvard Beneš during the Second World War already initiated the building of positive relationships with Joseph Stalin, which they believed would ensure security of the state in the future. This attitude resulted in the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty of Alliance in December 1943. In the spring of 1945, in contrast to other nascent Eastern Bloc countries, a relatively broad political consensus existed in Czechoslovakia regarding the preferred orientation of the state towards the Soviet Union.¹ This was one of the reasons why both Soviet and US troops left Czechoslovak territory in November 1945 without compromising the influence Moscow exerted on Czechoslovakia's foreign policy.

On the domestic political scene, this development caused a surge in the popularity of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC), which became a mass movement capable of integrating and mobilizing hundreds of thousands of new supporters originating from all segments of society. In this respect, the party relied to a great extent on its pre-war activities, in which time it regularly won about 10% of the votes in par-

¹ Cf., for example, Ch. Brenner, "Zwischen Ost und West": *tschechische politische Diskurse 1945–1948* (München, Oldenbourg, 2009); I. Lukeš, *Československo nad propastí: Selhání amerických diplomatů a tajných služeb v Praze 1945–1948* (Praha, 2014); V. Smetana, "Bod obratu? Americká a britská reflexe voleb a československé politiky v roce 1946" in *Květnové volby 1946 – volby osudové? Československo před bouří* (Praha, 2014), pp. 157–201.

liamentary elections. It also drew on its extensive resistance activity during the Nazi occupation. In May 1946, unrigged parliamentary elections took place, in which the CPC won over 40% of all votes cast in the elections in the Czech lands. Therefore, the Czechoslovak coup d'état in February 1948 took the form of a relatively calm takeover of power that was supported by a significant part of society. After overcoming the 1951–1953 crisis, which brought about the stagnation of living standards of the population as well as extensive personnel changes in the CPC apparatus, Czechoslovak society achieved relative stability during the subsequent period of 1953–1956, and maintained this stability during the later period, unlike in neighbouring countries of the Eastern Bloc. It was not significantly shaken even after the revelation of the “cult of personality” in 1956². The situation was very different in the Slovak part of the republic; therefore, this study will focus solely on the territory of the Czech lands.³

The sequence of aforementioned events and processes clearly implicate that the determining issues of Czechoslovak post-war history included the creation of a mass Communist movement, the construction of its organizational structure and the staffing of the lower and middle party positions that were necessary for its expansion. Unfortunately for a long time Czech historiography did not systematically study these issues and gave attention predominantly to the narrow group of top functionaries and their political tactics.⁴ Attempts were rarely made to not only analyze the development of the Communist Party at the level of the membership base but also to describe the situation in the leading positions in individual regions.⁵ The following study aims to provide an answer to the question of how the organizational backbone of the party at the regional and district levels was formed in 1945–1956 at a general level. In doing so, it will mainly focus on the typology of the origin of individual functionaries and the actual manner in which they performed their functions. The study was conducted within the framework of a broader project implemented at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes of the Czech Republic. In the research, the situation in four regions and eight districts that were selected to represent the social and economic structure of the Czech lands was studied in detail.⁶ The term elites (elite), has historically

² M. Blaive, *Promarněná příležitost: Československo a rok 1956* (Praha, 2001).

³ J. Rychlík, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. Století: spolupráce a konflikty 1914–1992* (Praha, 2015).

⁴ Cf., for example, J. Rupnik, *Dějiny Komunistické strany Československa. Od počátků do převzetí moci* (Praha, 2002); K. Kaplan, *Pět kapitol o únoru* (Brno, 1997); K. Kaplan, P. Kosatík, *Gottwaldovi muži* (Litomyšl, 2004); J. Pernes, “Komunistická strana Československa” in *Politické strany. Vývoj politických stran a hnutí v českých zemích a Československu*, díl 2. (1938–2004), (Brno, 2005), pp. 1131–1142.

⁵ Cf., for example, J. Maňák, “Vývoj početního stavu a sociálního složení KSČ v letech 1948–1968”, *Soudobé dějiny*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1999), pp. 460–478; *idem*, “Proměna dělnické strany v organizační moci. Problematika dělnického charakteru KSČ v letech 1945–1953 ve světle stranické statistiky” in *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu* (Praha, 2003), pp. 157–199; V. Kaška, *Neukáznění a neangažovaní: disciplinace členů Komunistické strany Československa v letech 1948–1952* (Praha, 2014); J. Slouf, *Podvedená strana: zrod masového komunistického hnutí na Plzeňsku, jeho disciplinace, centralizace a byrokratizace (1945–1948)*, (Plzeň, 2016); J. Mrňka, *Světlavá periferie: každodennost diktatury KSČ na příkladu Šumperska a Zábřezka v letech 1945–1960* (Praha, 2015).

⁶ Takeover, consolidation and transformation of the CPC rule in the Czech lands 1945–1956, a regional comparison (ÚSTR, no. 35). Regional organizations of the CPC in Plzeň, Prague, Olomouc and Ostrava and district

very complex and diversified definitions. In the study the main criterion of selection of the research sample is not moral, psychological or distributive, but strictly institutional. Its focus is on the individuals possessing means by nature of their administrative position within the Party, for implementing policies and the execution of domination in the regional context.⁷

THE DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL ELITES OF THE CPC 1945–1948

The CPC went through several dynamic transformation processes from 1945 to 1948. The first process concerned the programme. The formation of an international anti-Nazi coalition enabled the CPC leadership, then in exile to step out of the pre-war political isolation during the ongoing war and establish a collective government which was formed out of Socialist and Christian parties and referred to as the National Front. The party limited the use of radical social rhetoric and presented a moderate programme to the public, which was attractive not only for the industrial proletariat but also for members of the middle class.⁸ The CPC also ingratiated itself with many peasants and merchants by the distribution of land and firms confiscated from the expelled German population in borderlands. This enabled the CPC to aspire to a leading position within the National Front, which it had for all practical purposes, already achieved in 1946. In February 1948 it strengthened its hegemony by its final political defeat of the opposition. The formal unity of the Czech nation symbolized by the National Front became one of the most powerful instruments of incoming dictatorship. The CPC did not abandon the benevolent application of the class aspects until the turn of 1948–1949, following pressure from Moscow. It was only then that the CPC abandoned the primary effort to persuade the majority of the population to support the party's programme and resorted to predominantly administrative (often violent) methods of enforcing its policy.⁹

Changes in the programme established conditions for the CPC that enabled it to acquire a mass membership party status after the war. In 1945–1948, the party opened itself to an almost unregulated influx of new members, to whom it initially guaranteed a certain level of ideological plurality and from whom it did not demand strict party discipline. This approach was in stark contrast to the pre-war conditions. At the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, the CPC had gone through a wave of purges that significantly

organizations of the CPC in Tachov, Plzeň, Příbram, Kolín, Prostějov, Jeseník, Ostrava and Český Těšín were included in the study.

⁷ Cf., for example M. Pavka, *Kádry rozhodují vše!: kádrová politika KSČ z hlediska teorie elit: (prvních pět let komunistické vlády)*, (Brno, 2003), pp. 19–24; E. Pecka, "Sociologické teorie elity" in I. Koutská, F. Svátek, *Politické elity v Československu 1918–1948* (Praha, 1994), pp. 13–32.

⁸ K. Kaplan, *Znárodnění a socialismus* (Praha, 1968).

⁹ *Idem*, *Pět kapitol o únoru...*; V. Veber, *Osudové únorové dny 1948* (Praha, 2008); J. Křestan, "Zdeněk Nejedlý a problém českého národního komunismu" in J. Kalous, J. Kocian (eds.), *Český a slovenský komunismus (1921–2011)*, (Praha, 2012), pp. 299–305.

reduced its membership and transformed the party into an ideologically rigid sect.¹⁰ In this way, the post-war expansion of the membership base represented a major shift in strategy. The enormous spontaneous interest which in addition was aroused by systematic recruitment campaigns encouraged the population to join the CPC.¹¹ By the end of 1947, the party membership in the Czech lands grew by 1,275,000 members.¹² The recruitment continued also after the dictatorship had been established. At the end of 1948, the party had 2,268,000 members,¹³ representing 25.88% of the population.¹⁴ The situation changed at the turn of the year 1948–1949, when extensive checks were carried out, which started the process of gradual disciplining of the CPC membership base.¹⁵

In 1945–1948, the CPC's status as a mass membership party and its new governmental ambitions enforced a dramatic change in the existing internal organization of the movement. It was necessary to build a sufficiently broad and efficient apparatus that would be able to manage the activity of hundreds of thousands of new Communists. Registering members, issuing party membership card and collecting membership fees was a tremendously challenging technical problem in 1945. However, the number of staff at the secretariats had to be increased but not only for these reasons. The CPC stepped out of the opposition and its policy could no longer be based solely on mere criticism of government practices as the party now had to participate in the branch of executive power. Its supporters had taken key positions in a number of administrative offices at all levels, from ministries to local committees. For this reason, it was necessary to create a professional party apparatus capable of coordinating the activities of the party's supporters in many specialized fields. Thus, the years 1945–1948 saw a rapid process of bureaucratization of the CPC, during which the number of paid party employees grew dramatically.¹⁶ Moreover, from 1947 these professionals gained influence inside the party at the expense of elected bodies.¹⁷ After February 1948, this process accelerated as the party gained a dominant position in all institutions and authorities. Thus, the CPC professional apparatus no longer needed traditional political platforms (elected party bodies, public representative bodies) and it was often able to implement its plans in an informal way and with a greater level of autonomy.

¹⁰ J. Rákosník, "Bolševizace odborů v roce 1929 očima »poražených«" in *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu IV* (Praha, 2005), pp. 34–54.

¹¹ J. Maňák, "Vývoj početního stavu a sociálního složení KSČ v letech 1948–1968...", pp. 460–478; J. Šlouf, *Podvedená strana...*, pp. 153–210.

¹² NA, Organizační oddělení ÚV KSČ, M. Švermová (1261-2-5), sv. 5, a. j. 26, přehled rozložení členů KSČ v místních a závodních organizacích, věkového a sociálního rozvrstvení, zpracováno podle dodaných členských listů k 31.12.1947.

¹³ NA, Organizační oddělení ÚV KSČ, M. Švermová (1261-2-5), sv. 5, a. j. 26, přehled rozložení členů KSČ v místních a závodních organizacích, věkového a sociálního rozvrstvení, zpracováno podle dodaných členských listů k 31.12.1948.

¹⁴ "Soupisy obyvatelstva v Československu v letech 1946 a 1947" in *Československá statistika*, sv. 184 (Praha, 1951), p. 12.

¹⁵ M. Černá, J. Cuhra (eds.), *Prověrky a jejich místo v komunistickém vládnutí: Československo 1948–1989* (Praha, 2013), pp. 12–19.

¹⁶ K. Kaplan, *Aparát ÚV KSČ v letech 1948–1968: studie a dokumenty* (Praha, 1993).

¹⁷ J. Šlouf, *Podvedená strana...*, pp. 129–149.

In 1945–1948, the CPC apparatus had three organizational levels in the Czech lands: central, regional and district. The first stage of the reconstruction of the party structure took place spontaneously during the anti-Nazi national revolution in the spring of 1945. Later, the party's territorial organization was guided by the pre-war traditions and above all by the demands of the political struggle. For this reason, regional secretariats were established in the seats of the constituencies, while district secretariats were set up in the seats of the district committees.¹⁸ There were 19 constituencies and 154 districts (as well as 7 cities with the special status of a district) in the Czech lands in 1945.¹⁹ This administrative structure lasted until the beginning of 1949 when new territorial reform established 13 political regions and 180 districts (plus 7 cities with special status). The CPC apparatus applied the same changes.²⁰

The above description of the expansion of the Communist movement also had to be supported by adequate staffing. However, after 1945, the party's capabilities were substantially reduced as a result of the war. A relatively narrow group of top party functionaries emigrated to the Soviet Union as early as 1938 where they lived in exile during the war and formed the basis of the central secretariat after the liberation of Prague in May 1945. At the beginning, it only had two employees – the political secretary Rudolf Slánský and the organizational secretary Marie Švermová. However, the party's apparatus grew steadily. And it was Marie Švermová who was responsible for staffing in the regions.²¹ It is however worth mentioning that there was no Soviet influence on the selection of regional cadres.

Unlike the central part of the organization, the regions lacked political staff that would have experience from the interwar CPC as the majority of party regional elites had been arrested and interned in Nazi concentration camps in 1939.²² The persecution also gradually decimated the subsequent establishment of the home resistance. Therefore, in the final phase of the war, Communist resistance organizations operated in the regions that often had very little continuity of personnel from the pre-war times.²³ And it was these groups of Communist-sympathizer rebels who, at the turn of April and May 1945, engaged in anti-Nazi uprisings in various towns and took over public administration in them. In some cases, they also confiscated suitable buildings for the CPC and established its secretariats there.²⁴

¹⁸ Unfortunately, the dynamic development of the party organization in the years 1945–1948 resulted in an incomplete state of the preserved sources. For this reason, further analysis will focus predominantly on the development of the CPC functionaries at the level of regions.

¹⁹ "Volby do ústředního shromáždění dne 26. Května 1946" in *Zprávy státního úřadu statistického*, no. 27 (1946), series B-2, pp. 180–183; Dekret presidenta republiky o územní organizaci správy, vykonávané národními výbory ze dne 27.10.1945, č. 121/1945 Sb.

²⁰ Zákon o krajském zřízení ze dne 21.12.1948, č. 280/1948 Sb.; Vládní nařízení o územní organizaci okresů v českých zemích ze dne 18.1.1948, č. 3/1949 Sb.

²¹ M. Švermová, *Vzpomínky* (Praha, 2008), pp. 194–244.

²² J. Ullrich, *Šest let za ostnatým drátem* (Plzeň, 1945), p. 84; J. Žák, *Deset posledních dnů – Buchenwald* (Plzeň, 1945); B. Kozelka, *Vzpomínky* (Praha, 1968), pp. 101–158.

²³ A. Háčková, *Praha v komunistickém odboji* (Praha, 1984).

²⁴ SOA v Praze, f. SKV KSC Praha, kart. č. 1, složka Krajská konference v Praze 1. – 2.9.1945, zápis schůze tajemníků pražského kraje z 23.6.1945.

The staffing of these revolutionary secretariats was improvised, and in a number of places the positions were taken by persons who had no pre-war experience with party life and whose political rise was tied to their activity in the last phase of the resistance. However, their initiative was absolutely crucial for the post-war expansion of the CPC. It allowed the party to fill key positions in the revolutionary national committees across the country and gave them a head start in creating an organizational network before other political entities did so. These individuals then ensured the Communist Party's legitimacy by getting the credit for their activities in home resistance.

The problem, however, was at the programme level. The home resistance environment was critical to the party political system in the pre-war era and it did not have clear party allegiances. In general, at the end of the war it was assumed in these circles that the old system of political parties would not be restored and that a united left-wing political movement would emerge that would include not only communists, but also all other socialists. At the same time, these communists expected immediate implementation of a socialist revolution. Their attitude therefore was not often compatible with the new moderate CPC programme.²⁵ Therefore, after returning from exile the party leadership had to impose the concept of the National Front onto the lower levels of the party organizational network “from above” with vigor.

In the course of May 1945, pre-war functionaries who survived concentration camps were eventually repatriated to their homes. They had experience with the party discipline in the 1930s and personal ties to people working at the party centre in the pre-war period unlike the majority of other resisters. Consequently, they were better informed and able to interpret the new political line in a more flexible way. In addition, the shared experience of the concentration camps created intense bonds of unity and solidarity between the functionaries that could be used in subsequent political life.²⁶ In this way, the pre-war social network of communist activists was greatly strengthened and expanded to include new fellow inmates from concentration camps.²⁷ After repatriation, political prisoners reclaimed the positions they held in the pre-war period in their regions. They based the legitimacy of their demands not only on their political experience but also on their persecution during the occupation.

The return of political prisoners allowed the party centre to appoint people to key positions in the regions whom they could trust on the basis of a shared past. On the other hand, the protagonists of the uprising in May 1945 were gradually pushed into the background. The organizational secretary Marie Švermová later described this phenomenon as “*discrimination*” and justified it by the Soviet aversion caused by the cooperation between the local Communists and the “collaborator” Russian Liberation Army

²⁵ SOA v Plzni, f. KV KSC Plzeň, kart. 297, zápisy mimořádné schůze sekretariátu 8.6.1945 a 25.6.1945; M. Švermová, *Vzpomínky...*, pp. 194–195.

²⁶ K. Kaplan, *Kronika komunistického Československa. Antonín Novotný – Vzestup a pád “lidového” aparátčika* (Brno, 2011), pp. 105, 111.

²⁷ O. Šik, *Jarní probuzení – iluze a skutečnost* (Praha, 1990), pp. 14–50.

during the Prague Uprising in May 1945.²⁸ However, the process was more general, and it took place not only at the centre but also in certain regions.

The transfer of power between revolutionary officials and pre-war functionaries who returned from exile or from concentration camps differed by region. The important criterion was the actual number of the surviving local pre-war comrades. In Plzeň, for example, the representatives of home resistance anticipated that it would be necessary to install pre-war functionaries in the leading positions within the party as well as in the national committees. Therefore, they reserved some positions for the former politicians in advance. Consequently, both groups were represented in the governing bodies of the revolutionary national committee and the party regional committee in the subsequent period. For several months, a fierce power struggle went on between the two groups, including, among other things, the misuse of security authorities. Members of the home resistance were eventually ousted from their positions. They first lost their positions within the party apparatus (Karel Benda), and later their public positions (Václav Hrbek). In 1945–1946, the CPC in West Bohemia was controlled by supporters of the former regional party leader in the 1930s and former political prisoner in Buchenwald, Josef Ullrich.²⁹

A similar course of events took place in the district of Kolín, which had the status of a party region in 1945–1946. In May 1945, the CPC leadership was taken over by a pre-war functionary and once a political prisoner in the concentration camp in Buchenwald, Rudolf Koštejn who enjoyed good relationships with the centre. Subsequently, his group fought for dominance in the region until 1948, with a faction of home resistance functionaries who controlled the municipal national committee and who were led by Ladislav Volenec.³⁰

The situation in Prague was however different, compared to that in other regions as there was a concentration of an unprecedented number of experienced pre-war functionaries there. In addition, these pre-war functionaries maintained contact with the top party leadership. Therefore, the transfer of power in Prague took place with very little resistance from representatives of the home resistance. This was true not only at the central level (former vice-chairman of the Czech National Council Josef Smrkovský), but also with respect to workers at the regional secretariat (Jiří Lutovský, Adolf Roštlapil). Josef Krosnář, a member of the leadership in exile in Moscow and pre-war leader of the movement of the unemployed, became the chairman of the new regional committee of the CPC in Prague.³¹

In some regions, in Olomouc for example, members of the pre-war party elites were fortunate enough to escape arrest and participated in resistance activities during the war. In such cases, they used the combination of the legitimacy of tradition and resistance after the war and their position was all the more powerful. A typical example was Jiří Sosnar, the secretary of the CPC regional committee in Olomouc.³²

²⁸ M. Švermová, *Vzpomínky...*, p. 205.

²⁹ J. Šlouf, *Podvedená strana...*, pp. 106–129.

³⁰ SOA v Praze, f. SKV KSČ Praha, Krajská revizní komise, kart. 176, spis Ladislav Volenec.

³¹ *Ibidem*, Zápis krajské konference v Praze 1. – 2.9.1945, k. 1.

³² J. Schulz, *Dějiny Olomouce*, sv. 2 (Olomouc, 2009), pp. 273–374.

In 1945, the CPC Central Secretariat gradually succeeded in installing such functionaries in all regions, with whom it was able to cooperate on the basis of personal ties.³³ They in turn used similar tactics to staff district secretariats in their respective regions. Thus, despite the spontaneous nature of the growth of the Communist movement, its organizational backbone was developed top-down. At first, it resulted in a relatively decentralized structure built on a plan of interconnected clientelistic networks of both regional and supra-regional nature.

This process took place before the first party conferences were convened and regular elections of the party bodies carried out. Consequently, the elections were relatively formal because they respected the exceptional position of strong individuals. When compiling the ballots, consideration was given to professional, gender and territorial balance. However, this balance was only symbolic rather than factual. The choice of specific representatives of individual interest groups was routinely altered and revised by senior bodies.³⁴ Right from the onset, the most important decisions were taken by an elite group of the most influential functionaries at informal meetings in the regions. As a rule, this group controlled the work of the presidium of the regional or district committee, which discussed their suggestions and in this way made them official. Finally, in defiance of the party's statutes, the committee's plenary session only formally adopted the presidium's decision.

In spite of the above-mentioned, party secretariats were not the dominant regional power centres in 1945–1948. Initially, executive positions in district national committees, which had extensive powers in security, legal and economic spheres, were significantly more powerful. Some Communist leaders, therefore, delegated organizational work in secretariats to their supporters, while they held representative positions of party organization chairs. They then used the privilege of being the official faces of the Communist Party in the elections to achieve leadership positions in national committees. This was also the case of Josef Ullrich in Plzeň, who became chairman of the District National Committee in Plzeň, or Josef Krosnář, who served as Deputy Mayor of Prague.³⁵ The outlined hierarchy of party and public offices also functioned at the central level. The CPC was intent on building the image of its chairman Klement Gottwald as the main representative of the party on the outside, and preferred his involvement in the government to the management of the Central Secretariat. However, after the coup d'état in February 1948, the CPC began to control public administration at all levels and therefore the power of party bodies in the regions gradually outweighed the powers of the national committees.

Intensified bureaucratization of the party apparatus was another process that significantly affected the composition of the CPC functionaries in 1945–1948. Younger people gradually began to strengthen their position within the outlined system of clientelistic networks. Before the war, these younger people were not prominent functionaries. They

³³ M. Švermová, *Vzpomínky...*, pp. 209–201.

³⁴ SOA v Plzni, f. KV KSČ Plzeň, Zápis schůze pléna KV KSČ 4.5.1945, k. 25.

³⁵ M. Vacková, V. Vacek, *Vzpomínky* (Praha, 1964).

did however work in youth or student organizations, however their organizational capabilities legitimized them for the execution of the given positions. The older generation of pre-war Communists was not well prepared for the new requirements of administrative and cadre management. That is why they delegated the organizational work in the secretariats to younger comrades, while they kept the status of symbols of continuity and leaders of the public debate with the political opposition. The incoming generation often had better education and a more international outlook (often with contacts in the West). However, what they often lacked was the working-class background. A typical example of such a functionary was the organizational secretary of the Prague region; A physician and member of the International Brigades, František Kriegel, who was practically in charge of the party secretariat by proxy of the political secretary Antonín Novotný and the chairman Josef Krosnář.³⁶ At the same time, this process also weakened the influence of elected party bodies (conference, plenary session, presidium) compared to the apparatus.

The bureaucratization of the party apparatus led to a high turnover rate of cadres in the years 1947–1948. Autochthonous regional party elites were promoted to central administrative positions where they lost their independent power position. The central secretariat installed people from other regions, often young functionaries without significant pre-war positions to replace them (Josef Pavel in Plzeň 1946, Karel Václavů in Plzeň 1947).³⁷ They often brought with them a whole new team of co-workers (Josef Stavinoha in Olomouc 1948, Hanuš Lomský in Plzeň 1948).³⁸ In the regions, they had to promote radical views to contend with local elites for exclusive positions. In addition, after February 1948, these proponents of radicalism were no longer contained by opposition of other political parties and thus sometimes they themselves developed modes of conduct that are typical for dictators. The acts of these new administrative elites often provoked opposition from local pre-war Communists and resisters, which often turned out to be fatal for them during the political trials of 1949–1952.

DISTRICT AND REGIONAL ELITES 1948–1953

According to the historian Karel Kaplan, the years 1948–1953, a period delimited by the events of February 1948: the death of Joseph Stalin, and of March 1953: the death of the President of Czechoslovakia and Chairman of the CPC, Klement Gottwald, can be defined as the *founding period of the Communist regime*.³⁹ Also the term the “*period*

³⁶ SOA v Praze, f. SKV KSČ Praha, Krajská revizní komise, Zápisy prověrky Františka Kriegela 21.10.1948, k. 82.

³⁷ J. Šlouf, *Podvedená strana...*, pp. 123–152.

³⁸ J. Bieberle, “K politickým procesům (Olomoucký případ 1949–1950)”, *Slezský sborník*, vol. 88, no. 3 (1990), pp. 167–182.

³⁹ K. Kaplan, *Československo v letech 1948–1953: Zakladatelské období komunistického režimu*, *Státní pedagogické nakladatelství* (Praha, 1991).

of *Stalinism*” can be used.⁴⁰ It was characterized by substantial political, economic and social changes, effected through brutal repression and mobilization of the populace, which in many ways determined the next period.⁴¹ An ongoing political transformation, which was not limited only to the power centre, but which also affected the regions and districts, was of crucial importance. The power of party secretariats grew rapidly and the tendency of bureaucratization continued. The hierarchical structure of the CPC penetrated the whole territory of the republic; after January 1949, the administrative division of the country was modelled on this structure.⁴² However, it was not a strictly centralized unit. It reflected the complex relationships between the centre and the periphery with regional particularities playing an important role in this complex relationship.

Under these conditions, the regional and district party elites played a particularly important role as they were in charge of the actual exercise of power and mediated the connection between the organization and the centre. By strengthening the administrative element, the most important post within the regional apparatus i.e. the post of the political, and later-to-be head secretary, grew in significance. Officially, they were solely responsible for the supervision of the day-to-day operation of the local secretariat and were subordinated to the presidium and the chairman of the given organization. But in all actuality, they acted as a decisive factor at the time, as the power role of the collective body was limited and the role of the chairman was primarily ceremonial, as evidenced by the fact that in 1953 it was abolished without causing any major upheaval. Still, performing the role of a head secretary was exceptionally demanding – they worked in chaotic conditions and had to deal with a multitude of difficulties. Their complicated position was symptomatic of the entire party structure at that time.

In the party organizations that were studied, a specific group emerged among the regional head secretaries who occupied this position during the period 1948–1953, that had unique characteristics that set them apart from the other relatively homogenous individuals. What distinguished them from the others was their middle-class background and the education that they had received. In addition, from the point of view of life trajectory, there were other similarities. In the 1930s, representatives of this group were actively working in the Communist Youth Union, and some of them had spent the war in exile in Great Britain; prior to their appointment as head secretaries, they worked in the central apparatus. And finally, several were of so-called “Jewish origin”. Their appointment and the subsequent exercise of the function, for which they apparently did not have the “right” social and ethnic background in the Czech environment demonstrates

⁴⁰ For the definition of the term “Stalinism”, see S.F. Cohen, “Bolshevism and Stalinism” in R.C. Tucker, *Stalinism: essays in historical interpretation* (New York, 1977), pp. 3–29. However, in case of Czechoslovakia, it began as late as autumn 1948, rather than after the events of February 1948.

⁴¹ Cf., for example, P. Barton, *Prague à l'heure de Moscou: Analyse d'une démocratie populaire* (Paris, 1954); L. Kalinová, *Společenské proměny v čase socialistického experimentu: k sociálním dějinám v letech 1945–1969* (Praha, 2007), pp. 113–217.

⁴² A territorial administrative reform came to force, by which the Land Code was abolished and 19 regions (13 in Bohemia, 6 in Slovakia) were established.

the true intention of the tendency to prefer practical competence over a “representative” social profile, which CPC had already manifested in previous periods, but which peaked in the years 1948–1951.

At the same time, however, it is evident that this tendency was not successful in the long run. After the spring of 1951, Czechs with working-class background, all of which were also pre-war members of the CPC, involved in illegal activities (namely Antonín Novotný, Václav Pašek, Květoslav Innemann, Václav Uhlíř), became heads of regional organizations. It would be a mistake to see this change as a major U-turn; it instead represented an advancement of a certain – long-standing – direction. Nonetheless, it demonstrates a definitive move towards the kind of regional party elites who based their legitimacy within the party, on the right origin and CV. This instrumental criterion gave way to the need for traditional authorities. Thus, even in the period of Stalinism, there was a tendency to recede from some purely revolutionary principles, and in this way the era was not as rigid as it might have seemed at first sight.

By definition, the study of the prosopography of the district head secretaries in the period 1948–1953 can only be indicative, since in case of a number of functionaries it was impossible to find even the most basic data; also the list of names is not totally reliable. Nevertheless, certain constants emerge that can be used for the interpretation of social policy – it is possible to use the term *class* – of the Stalinist CPC. The overwhelming majority of head secretaries for whom we were able to trace biographical data were of “working-class origin” and initially had “working-class professions”. Naturally, these categories are determined by both ideology and time; however, it is possible to use them with a certain degree of distance. They clearly show that in the past, regional party elites came from the classes that had been politically, economically and socially marginalized over time. This social status that was *period-appropriate* even trumped the *period-inappropriate* political decisions made in their youth (like membership of parties or movements that declared themselves to be anti-Communist organizations as well as undesirable behaviour during the occupation) unless it was sufficiently serious or abused by the opponents of the functionary. In this regard, party personnel policy showed a certain consistency, but in practice it was far from flawless. Even someone who was an undisputed Nazi collaborator in the past could become a district head secretary. However, similar mistakes were rare and disappeared over time. In no case should such mistakes be considered a rule or perhaps even intentional.

At that time, the trend to replace pre-war Communists with party members intensified amongst those who had entered the ranks of the CPC in 1945 – rarely also after 1945 – and who were usually not involved in the resistance. It was expected of them that in the past they had “acted like good Czechs”.⁴³ Unlike in the case of regional secretaries for whom the social origin and the credit they got for working for the CPC were decisive, in the selection of district secretaries the only important issue was that they

⁴³ ZAOPO, f. KV KSČ Olomouc, inv. č. 28, Předsednictvo KV: 6.3.1952, k. 36. Návrh na vedoucího tajemníka OV KSČ Prostějov.

“came from working-class families”.⁴⁴ This makes sense as these elites had a much lower status in the power hierarchy but at the same time there was a greater need for them. The necessity of pre-war membership would have substantially reduced the number of potential candidates. Whereas the traditional CPC elite dominated at the regional level, a completely new category of elites with no previous experience was emerging at the district level. The process undoubtedly started earlier and lasted longer than that of the traditional CPC elites, but there is no doubt that the period of Stalinism was crucial for its implementation.

Former *regional head secretaries* who later recalled the circumstances of their appointment for the given party position made it ostentatiously clear that they did not feel sufficiently qualified for the position and did not agree with their appointment. Naturally, this could be a mere power denial ritual by which they demonstrated their alleged modesty. In addition, they often acknowledged this in retrospect when they found themselves in a situation (like party screening, communication with party rehabilitation committees, criminal prosecution) when it seemed appropriate to act with humility. Therefore, their claims must be taken with a pinch of salt. However, they undeniably had a high level of credibility, since in fact the exercise of the function of a regional secretary at that time involved the overcoming of obstacles, which made it less attractive to say the least. Already at the time of the appointment, serious complications could occur. In any given region, the appointed secretary, for example, could have met with resistance from local functionaries who perceived him as an *outsider* and therefore he only managed to establish his position after he had been able to gain support of at least some part of the workers of the local apparatus. It was by no means a simple, automatic process.

In the given period, it was central institutions that formally took decisions on each appointment and of the deposition of regional head secretaries – the proposal was submitted by the Cadre (later 1st) Department and approved by the presidium. In practice, this was a much more personalized process, in which initially the chief secretary, Rudolf Slánský and his deputy, Marie Švermová, played a vital role. After their political fall, it was taken over by the head of the 1st Department, Bruno Köhler, and the increasingly more active secretary of the Central Committee of the CPC, Antonín Novotný. The selection was only confirmed at the regional level; this practice continued also after 1953. It would therefore be possible to place the responsibility for any complication or crisis situation arising from the replacement of the regional head secretary on the centre and say it was the centre’s fault or intent. That was the case of the designated political secretary of Olomouc Josef Stavinoha, who was dispatched to his new administrative domain at the end of 1947 without the knowledge of regional functionaries and had to establish his authority in person.⁴⁵ This however also proves, that regional elites were not only passive recipients of orders from the leadership, but they often tried to act autonomously. Therefore, the relationships between the centre and the periphe-

⁴⁴ ZAO, f. KV KSČ Ostrava, inv. č. 55, Předsednictvo 25.2.1952, k. 131, Bohumil Bělovský.

⁴⁵ SOKA Olomouc, Osobní fond Josef Bieberle, Svědeckví pamětníků, Josefa Stavinoha.

ry were more ambivalent than it might appear at first sight. Moreover, the central and regional levels were not always necessarily at odds with each other. On the contrary, party organizations in the regions often expected the centre to help them solve their own problems and crises.

After the tense months of the winter and spring of 1951, when top functionaries were arrested and emotional debates held at party forums, the appointments and removals of regional secretaries became relatively rare, and when they happened, they did not take the form of an emergency condition. After that, changes were planned in advance, which in turn maintained some continuity.

It is evident that at the regional level the situation somewhat calmed down after 1951. However, the argument can be developed at the speculative level: The existing regional elites did exert influence not only over the periphery but also over the centre itself. Antonín Novotný is a telling example – he became one of the secretaries of the Central Committee of the CPC in 1951 and thus began his steep rise to power. But also other top regional secretaries were involved in important central decisions, which culminated in their appointment for important positions in the central apparatus, whether at the level of department heads or secretaries. In this sense, it is possible to support the thesis raised by the Czech exile journalist and politician Pavel Tigrid in 1962 that it was “a new team of existing regional functionaries led by Novotný”⁴⁶ that benefited most from the purges and upheavals associated with the fall of the General Secretary Rudolf Slánský and that gradually formed a new party leadership. This can also be linked to another, albeit temporary, phenomenon. Stabilization tendencies did not come *a priori* from above; on the contrary, they spread also in the opposite direction – from regions to the centre.

Also, the manner in which the *district head secretaries* were replaced was conditioned by hierarchical relationships, in this case between the district and the regional party levels. But the way it happened was a little different. In the course of replacement of district head secretaries its initiators in regions tried to avoid the emergence of potential crises, which at the time was at odds with the personnel policy of the centre towards the regions. However, this does not mean that the appointment of a new secretary would be a painless process, on the contrary, it was. However, the difficulties here did not arise from unpredictable actions of the centre, but from the dysfunctions of the district party organizations, which were not able to perform even the most basic tasks and moreover were divided by personal tensions. Consequently, the incoming secretaries found themselves in a highly precarious position which they had to overcome on their own – without any much needed help from above. It can be said that the regional level undermined their efforts, particularly by its resolutions that were often incomprehensible and yet received for implementation by the districts in large quantities.

Obstacles could also arise along the horizontal line, between individual district organizations. District head secretaries often worked successively in two or even three diffe-

⁴⁶ P. Tigrid, “Jak tomu bylo opravdu se Slánským a druhy”, *Svědectví*, vol. 4, no. 16 (1962), p. 304.

rent districts within one region and their transfer was not always smooth. For example in spring of 1950 the district party organization in Kolín had to wait more than a month for the arrival of the new head secretary Ivo Elsner who was facing accusations of drunkenness in his previous job location in Příbram.⁴⁷ And finally, the poor state of district organizations was also indirectly affected by the party centre itself, which summoned secretaries who were considered particularly effective at their work to the central secretariat without providing adequate replacements to the districts.

Sources of potential complications in the process of replacement of head secretaries at the district level were numerous. However, as in the case of the regions, the situation improved gradually. The replacement became smoother; after 1953, major complications almost disappeared. It would certainly be an exaggeration to draw far-reaching conclusions here, but it is evident that a more sophisticated division of labour prevailed. Regional authorities stopped using blatant invasive personnel interventions; district secretariats improved their work, albeit not in general, but only in this particular area.

Power practice was characterized by considerable chaos. Head secretaries at the regional and district level gave up on planned management as well as regular contact with subordinate organizations, the reason being a huge number of immediate urgent tasks at hand and a lack of personnel to fulfil them. This created a certain sense of loneliness among functionaries in the face of demanding responsibilities; a feeling that was widespread in both regions and districts.

Head secretaries often dealt with this situation by bringing with them or searching for loyal collaborators among local functionaries, whom they subsequently appointed in leading positions in the party apparatus. They primarily shared their demanding agenda with them. This practice was particularly evident at the regional level. At the district level, this was less common or at least rarely traceable. District head secretaries often acted as lone wolves who refused to share the administration of the party organization. Yet examples show that also here certain more personal relationships existed.

Regional party elites also often committed corruption; and it would not be much of an exaggeration to say that corruption was ubiquitous. It stemmed from the material conditions of a period which was characterized by a general shortage. Its main cause was the legacy of World War II; however, the rigidly managed economy operating on the basis of extensive requisitions and allocation was becoming an increasingly important reason too. This structural element also fundamentally affected the forms that corruption took. The elites had access to scarce or valuable goods without being subjected to rigorous control. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that head secretaries together with other top regional functionaries faced accusations of skulduggery and even downright corrupt practices, including machinations with confiscated valu-

⁴⁷ SOKA Příbram, f. Okresní výbor KSČ Příbram, inv. č. 16, Zápis o schůzi okresního výboru KSČ, konané dne 13.5.1950 o 15,00 hod v zased. síni sekretariátu, p. 3.

ables⁴⁸, fixed purchases of automobiles⁴⁹ or black-marketeering in textile fabrics.⁵⁰ These allegations have never been adequately investigated and therefore must not be taken too seriously. However, the recurring scheme gives these accusations at least some plausibility.

The material benefit obtained in this manner may seem negligible compared to later periods. However, we mustn't forget that during the period of Stalinism, the integrity of the functionaries officially professed by the CPC was not yet an empty phrase and the individual cases often made strong impressions at national forums. In addition, it should not be forgotten that the bad economic situation affected not just the elites but, above all, the entire population. Under such conditions, any undeserved advantage for "party bosses" resonated all the more. However, corruption can also be perceived functionally, as a means by which previous personal ties were strengthened – or, conversely, severed – in the environment of party elites. Further, it illustrates how important the personal element was during Stalinism.

Power conflicts also formed an important part of the execution of power. They were often associated with the immediate replacement of head secretaries; however, this was not an exclusive correlation. Another important area of conflict were those between secretaries and actors within the CPC who possessed a certain degree of local legitimacy stemming from resistance or from the credit they got for working for the CPC or the region in the pre-war period. These conflicts culminated in the party debate in the years 1950–1951 – which did not turn out very well for the "counter-elites" from among the pre-war party members. In the context of the making of elites, this was a trend typical of the hierarchical descent of power. The centre and the regional authorities preferred the unequivocal dominance of administratively appointed head secretaries; more independent, unauthorized and overly ambitious actors had no place there.

STABILIZATION OF CPC REGIONAL ELITES 1953–1956

According to many, the year 1953 brought the end to the "founding period" of the state-socialist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia.⁵¹ After the death of Joseph Stalin, the leadership of the CPSU modified its political course, which also affected the Soviet satellites, including Czechoslovakia. Domestic factors played a role here too, particularly the death of Klement Gottwald. In addition, people in many places rebelled against the currency reform in June. This was hitherto the most significant manifestation of the dissatisfaction of the Czechoslovak population, which pointed out the weaknesses of the current policy and the potential threat to the stability of the power system.⁵²

⁴⁸ NA, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 21, a. j. 152, *Praha – Kádrová práce*, p. 162.

⁴⁹ J. Bieberle, "K politickým procesům...", p. 174.

⁵⁰ SOKA Prostějov, f. OV KSČ Prostějov, inv. č. 181, k. 287, Frank Eduard, p. 66.

⁵¹ Cf. K. Kaplan, *Československo v letech 1948–1953. Zakladatelské období komunistického režimu...*; J. Pernes, *Krise komunistického režimu v Československu v 50. letech 20. století* (Brno, 2008).

⁵² Cf. J. Šlouf, *Spříznění měnou. Genealogie plzeňské revolvy 1. června 1953* (Praha, 2016), p. 352.

Once again, changes took place not only at the top political levels; they permeated the entire Czechoslovak society and they also affected the regional and district elites of the Communist Party, who ensured the day-to-day exercise of power.⁵³

After 1953, the appointment of head secretaries at CPC district committees was still decided by the top party bodies, in particular by the leadership of regional organizations⁵⁴. As a rule, the candidate they nominated was unanimously approved at the first plenary session after the annual district party conference, even when the district functionaries did not approve of the selection. Any possible objections were discussed with representatives of the region exclusively in closed sessions. The party centre interfered in the appointment of district head secretaries only in exceptional cases.⁵⁵ The power hierarchy was not the only reason – even after 1953, district authorities were in some cases incapable of finding their own competent functionaries and they simply had to ask a superior authority to appoint a head secretary.⁵⁶ The problem was further complicated by the fact that the best district cadres were often transferred to a higher party level. On the other hand, regional leaderships were able to push a candidate through to lead the district or municipal committee despite strong opposition from the local leadership.⁵⁷ This authoritative approach of the party regional committees often meant that despite the officially proclaimed consensus, disputes prevailed that were often reflected in the practical operation of party district and municipal committees and complicated the status of the secretaries appointed by regional authorities.

While the appointment of district head secretaries was usually decided at the region level, the selection of regional head secretaries in the observed period was strictly the responsibility of the party centre. Changes often took place regardless of the regional CPC conferences; head secretaries were appointed to the regions in accordance with the current political need, which was only exceptional in case of districts after 1952. After 1953, however, there were efforts to stabilize the personnel situation and establish a more continuous development in the regions. In the observed regions, in the 1953–1956 period, only one head secretary was replaced. This replacement was caused by an emergency situation, in particular by health problems.⁵⁸

⁵³ For more details, cf. M. Bílý, “»Jestli jsi to myslel upřímně, tak půjdeš dělat to, co strana potřebuje«. Stabilizace regionálních elit KSČ v letech 1953–1956 ve vybraných krajích a okresech”, *Paměť a dějiny*, no. 4 (2017), pp. 39–54.

⁵⁴ J. Maňák, *Proměny strany moci II. Početnost a složení voleb funkcionářských sborů KSČ 1948–1968* (Praha, 1998), pp. 62–63.

⁵⁵ AMP, f. MěV KSČ v Plzni, Zápis ze schůze MV KSČ ze dne 29. 9. 1953 v 17 hodin, k. 189; SOKA Prostějov, f. OV KSČ Prostějov, Zápis z ustavujícího zasedání OV KSČ dne 14. března 1954, k. 20; SOKA Příbram, f. KSČ – OV Příbram, Okresní konference KSČ Příbram 12 a 13 března 1955, k. 2; SOKA Tachov, f. KSČ – OV 1945–1988, Zápis Okresního výboru po konferenci dne 6. března 1955 v Lid. domě Tachov, k. 9; SOKA Prostějov, f. OV KSČ Prostějov, Zápis z ustavující schůze okresního výboru KSČ č. 1, 18.3.1956, k. 21; NA, f. 1261/0/12, sv. 45, a. j. 239/0, Zápis ze 111. schůze organizačního sekretariátu ÚV KSČ, konané dne 24. září 1953 v 16 hodin v budově ÚV KSČ.

⁵⁶ SOKA Prostějov, f. OV KSČ Prostějov, Zápis čís. 14 z BOV ze dne 18.3.1953, k. 69.

⁵⁷ NA, f. 1261/0/12, sv. 38, a. j. 221/1, Potvrzení vedoucích tajemníků okresních výborů KSČ a vedoucích tajemníka městského výboru KSČ v kraji Plzeň, 21.5.1953; AMP, f. MěV KSČ v Plzni, Zápis ze schůze byra MV KSČ ze dne 2. dubna 1953 konané v zasedací síni 40, k. 41.

⁵⁸ Václav Uhlíř, who held the highest party office in Olomouc from June 1951, was replaced by Pavel Hron in April 1954 due to health issues. From September 1952, Plzeň regional committee was permanently led by Jan

From 1953, the position of regional secretary was often occupied by middle-aged men. In the observed regions, the youngest head secretary took office at the age of 37, while the oldest was 51. The national average age of regional head secretaries was declining slightly at that time. Whereas in 1953 three of them were over 45⁵⁹, in 1957 as much as half of top regional officials were under 40 and none of them were 45 or older. The unwritten lower age limit of 30 was preserved.⁶⁰ Head secretaries at the CPC regional committees in Prague, Plzeň, Olomouc and Ostrava came from the working-class environment and before joining the party apparatus they worked predominantly as manual workers. The 1953 nationwide statistics confirmed that manual workers prevailed among top regional secretaries.⁶¹ All observed regional functionaries had only basic education and subsequent apprenticeship training. After 1948, however, they attended the Central Political School (ÚPŠ). It can be assumed that this party education was becoming a necessary qualification for regional head secretaries in the course of the 1950s.⁶²

Four of the five studied regional head secretaries were pre-war party members. However, they embarked on a career within the CPC apparatus only after 1945 and in the majority of cases only after the February coup.⁶³ Therefore, they could not derive their legitimacy from the credit of working for the party. Yet all of them were proud of their resistance activities; Kozelka, Uhlíř and Kolář were imprisoned for their activities during the occupation. Any connection to the region played a minor role in the selection of regional head secretaries. Three of the five head secretaries in the survey did not have any significant contacts with their respective regions prior to their appointment. More important was their experience and expected prospects.⁶⁴ In the mid-1950s, the number of pre-war Communists among regional head secretaries declined sharply. Whereas in 1953 they accounted for over a half of their total number, four years later only two of them were holders of party membership cards issued before 1945; the two happened to be Pavel Hron and Václav Kolář.⁶⁵ This trend was likely related to the above-mentioned

Hlína. The CPC regional committee in Prague was led by Bedřich Kozelka, who formally took office after the regional conference in May 1953, but who had worked as deputy head secretary under Antonín Novotný from 1952. As he was also member of the central bodies, he was the actual head of the regional organization and thus represented clear continuity. From February 1953, the regional party organization in Ostrava was permanently led by Václav Kolář.

⁵⁹ NA, f. 1261/0/12, sv. 38, a. j. 334/4, Schválení vedoucích tajemníků krajských výborů KSČ, zvolených krajskými výbory, 9.6.1953.

⁶⁰ J. Maňák, *Proměny strany moci III. Početnost a složení pracovníků stranického aparátu KSČ 1948–1968* (Praha, 1999), p. 39.

⁶¹ NA, f. 1261/0/3, sv. 36, a. j. 334/4, Schválení vedoucích tajemníků krajských výborů KSČ, zvolených krajskými výbory, 9.6.1953.

⁶² *Ibidem*; J. Maňák, *Proměny strany moci III...*, p. 39.

⁶³ A certain exception was Bedřich Kozelka, who did a short stint as head of the district leadership of the CPC in Prague–Karlín. However, after the war he did not join the party apparatus until after February 1948. Archiv Poslanecké sněmovny, f. Poslanci a senátoři Národního a Federálního shromáždění, inv. č. 1319, sv. Kozelka Bedřich.

⁶⁴ NA, f. 1261/2/33, a. j. 2509, Zpráva pro delegáty na IX. Krajskou konferenci Komunistické strany Československa v Olomouci, nedatováno, 1953; NA, f. 1261/0/3, sv. 35, a. j. 323/4, Změny vedoucích tajemníků KV KSČ v Ostravě a v Gottwaldově, 5.2.1953.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

tendency to appoint younger regional head secretaries – many of the new appointees were still adolescents before 1938. However, an attempt at personnel consolidation of the leadership at the CPC regional committees followed. In 1957, for example, only three new regional head secretaries were appointed.⁶⁶

The stabilization of cadres at the regional level after 1953 is also documented by the absence of major power and personal conflicts, which is in contrast with the previous period. In the studied regions, only one major conflict occurred in the years 1953–1956, which was moreover, largely caused by the centre which initiated a search for scapegoats among the regional party functionaries in Plzeň after the uprising against the currency reform.⁶⁷ The success of this personnel policy of the CPC centre towards the regional committees was reflected in the fact that the position of regional head secretaries was not substantially threatened by the heated internal debates after the 20th Congress of the CPSU.⁶⁸

A similar personnel strategy was also enforced by the CPC regional committees towards subordinate district organizations. Compared to the regional level, however, a higher rate of turnover of district head secretaries also continued after 1953. The duration of their tenure in particular districts oscillated significantly, from a single term to many years.⁶⁹ It was not only important whether the person in question proved useful to the superior party authorities; some district head secretaries were still installed in their positions as a provisional solution.⁷⁰

In 1953–1956, the position of district head secretaries was held by middle-aged men, a little younger than in the case of regional head secretaries. In the mid-1950s, the office of the district head secretary was on average, held by a 35-year-old. As a rule, he came from the working-class environment. In a minority of cases the functionaries came from agricultural families and even fewer of them had parents who did not work manually. More than two-thirds of district head secretaries worked in various manual professions before starting a political career. As in the case of regional head secretaries, most of their counterparts in districts had only basic education and subsequently trained in various crafts; only three of them had high school education. Most of the officials in the survey attended the ÚPŠ. On the other hand, in the mid-1950s, district head secretaries were not obliged to study at the ÚPŠ; virtually all functionaries in the survey attended at least a district or regional political school.⁷¹

After 1953, none of the observed CPC district committees was led by a pre-war Communist. The vast majority of district head secretaries joined the CPC in 1945, or

⁶⁶ J. Maňák, *Proměny strany moci III...*, p. 40.

⁶⁷ J. Šlouf, *Spříznění měnou...*, pp. 322–323.

⁶⁸ M. Bílý, “Reakce již bourá pomníky a my... teprve projednáváme! Některé aspekty debaty o XX. sjezdu KSSS ve vybraných nižších organizacích KSČ”, *Securitas Imperii*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2017), pp. 83–85.

⁶⁹ NA, f. 1261/0/3, sv. 36, a. j. 334/4, Schválení vedoucích tajemníků krajských výborů KSČ, zvolených krajskými výbory, 9.6.1953.

⁷⁰ A typical example was František Nedbal, who led the district committee in Prostějov between the years 1953 and 1954. Cf. J. Lžičářová, *Vývoj regionálních struktur komunistického režimu v 50. letech 20. století na Prostějovsku* (Olomouc, 2010), p. 37.

⁷¹ For more, see M. Bílý, “»Jestli jsi to myslel upřímně, tak půjdeš dělat to, co strana potřebuje...», pp. 45–49.

a year later. This means all of them received party membership cards before February 1948. Except for one functionary, none of the others began their professional political career before the Communist Party seized power. A slight majority of them began to work in the party apparatus before 1950, and so they already had some political experience when they assumed the posts at the helm of district organizations. However, this experience was not always sufficient and appointed head secretaries often lacked the necessary skills and authority to manage a district.⁷² The authority of a head secretary however, did not necessarily have to stem from resolute behaviour or a connection to superior authorities; it could also reflect the functionary's abilities and respect for him as a person. Since district had the vast majority of cases they were not even active in the resistance. Also, they often lacked any specific connection to the local environment. Therefore, when compared to the regional elites, their district counterparts had significantly lower initial authority in 1953–1956. Thus, it was usually more difficult for district head secretaries to legitimize their position. Among other things, this resulted in a larger number of conflicts at the district level. There, the head secretary was often perceived as a strange element appointed by the region. On the other hand, the connection to the CPC regional committees often made it easier for district head secretaries to fulfil their job. In practice, it was precisely the regional committees that took decisions about the dismissal and appointment of head functionaries at their subordinate organizations.

From the end of 1953 onwards, the party centre appealed to regional organizations to carry out as few changes in the management of district committees as possible. The annual evaluation of district head secretaries was therefore rather lenient.⁷³ Nonetheless, the centre was often aware of the low level of the district head secretaries. In February 1954, the Central Committee of the CPC observed that the regions were often careless in the selection of district head secretaries. Therefore, regional head secretaries were entrusted to supervise the “so-called” political growth of district head secretaries and concurrently, the control and advisory functions of regional organizations towards districts was strengthened.⁷⁴ These measures were in line with the efforts of the party centre to stabilize the day-to-day execution of power at the local level. Instead of constant dismissal of functionaries, they were to undergo a more elaborate education and their political growth was to be stimulated. This trend was linked to the move from the chaotic and revolutionary phase of the construction of the state-socialist dictatorship to its systematization and further bureaucratization. Unlike in the previous period when it was believed that behind each failure there were hostile intentions, district head secretaries were not demoted within the party hierarchy due to partial deficiencies of competent replacements. On the contrary, the top

⁷² SOKA Prostějov, f. OV KSČ Prostějov, Zápis čís. 20 ze zasedání okresního výboru KSČ dne 13. února 1954, k. 19; *ibidem*, Zápis z ustavujícího zasedání OV KSČ dne 14. března 1954, k. 20; ZAOPO, f. KV KSČ Olomouc, Zápis č. 53 ze schůze byra KV KSČ v Olomouci, konané dne 12. března 1956, k. 67.

⁷³ ZAO, f. KSČ – SKV Ostrava, Usnesení byra krajského výboru KSČ konané dne 28. ledna 1954, k. 150.

⁷⁴ ZAOPO, f. KV KSČ Olomouc, Péče o vedoucí tajemníky OV a MV KSČ – rozpracování úkolů z dopisu ÚV, 11.2.1954, k. 50.

CPC authorities showed a tendency to transfer problematic functionaries to positions where they could potentially gain the desired political experience.⁷⁵ This was a result of the fact that the Communist Party, which had blended with the state structures, needed to systematically educate its own elites.

The uprising against the currency reform in Plzeň in June 1953 and the subsequent screenings of CPC functionaries did not – with the exception of Plzeň – have a more significant impact on the personnel structure of the leadership of district and regional party organizations. In general, the behaviour of district head secretaries was assessed positively. Thus, the position of some district head secretaries in the observed period was much more seriously threatened by the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956. As a result, some behaviour of the recent past began to be criticized, while local party elites were subjects to complaints that came from below, although the accusations of practicing the “cult of personality” often stemmed from personal antipathies and disputes. On the other hand, the “fight against the cult of personality” and the promotion of collective leadership at the district – and often also at the regional – level often turned into empty rhetoric, by means of which the local establishment sought to strengthen its own position.⁷⁶ Following the 20th Congress of the CPSU, by removing a problematic district head secretary, the regional committees of the CPC could demonstrate on the outside that they took the “fight against the cult of personality” seriously. In reality this was more about resolving practical problems at the district, such as personal animosities among the local functionaries.⁷⁷ In the aftermath of the 20th Congress of the CPSU, the regional leadership could approach such cases in an exemplary manner, and according to current needs, use them to demonstrate the absence of “collective leadership” in the district.⁷⁸ The situation was made easier by the fact that while debating the problematic past, some of the party members referred to “dictator-like” conduct of district head secretaries.⁷⁹ This is more proof that there was mutual interaction between the power and the population and that in certain cases the CPC authorities were able to take into consideration the public moods. The typical pragmatism of such conduct is well demonstrated by the fact that the aforementioned functionaries were not punished later – instead they went to work at regional party secretariats or study at political schools.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ SOA v Plzni, f. KSČ – ZKV Plzeň, Návrh usnesení KV KSČ v Plzni k resoluci politického sekretariátu ÚV KSČ k událostem 1. června 1953, k. 29; SOA v Praze, f. SKV KSČ Praha, Návrh na vedoucí tajemníky obvodních a okresních výborů KSČ, 27.1.1955, k. 182; SOA v Plzni, f. KSČ – ZKV Plzeň, Příprava okresních konferencí, 14.2.1955, k. 119.

⁷⁶ For more, see M. Bílý, “»Reakce již bourá pomníky a my...», pp. 60–66.

⁷⁷ ZAOPO, f. KV KSČ Olomouc, Zápis č. 45 ze schůze byra KV KSČ v Olomouci, konané dne 16. ledna 1956, k. 66.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, Zpráva ze šetření na okrese Jeseník, provedeném na základě usnesení byra KV KSČ ze dne 16. ledna 1956, březen 1956, k. 67.

⁷⁹ SOKA Jeseník, f. KSČ – OV Jeseník, Zápis ze schůze Okresního výboru KSČ v Jeseníku, konané 7. 4. 1956; *ibidem*, Zápis ze schůze Okresního výboru KSČ v Jeseníku, dne 4. května 1956, k. 19.

⁸⁰ ZAOPO, f. KV KSČ Olomouc, Zápis č. 53 ze schůze byra KV KSČ v Olomouci, konané dne 12. března 1956, k. 67; SOKA Kolín, f. KSČ – OV Kolín, inv. č. 34, Zápis ze zasedání OV KSČ v Kolíně dne 18. května 1956.

CONCLUSION

In the 1945–1948 period, the CPC went through a dynamic transformation process. It became a mass membership party with ambitions to form a government and built a network of regional and district secretariats to fulfil these tasks. In doing so, it initially relied on the members of the last group of domestic resistance in the regions. But these people often joined the party only at the end of the war, and thus lacked both the political experience and the party discipline. Therefore as early as 1945, these protagonists of anti-Nazi resistance were gradually replaced by pre-war CPC functionaries who returned from exile and concentration camps. The party centre appointed individuals to important positions on the basis of personal trust and bonds. Thanks to this, the CPC's organizational backbone turned into interconnected clientelistic networks that linked the centre and the regions.

At the same time, the increasing administrative demands in 1945–1948 led to the gradual suppression of the importance of the elected bodies of the CPC that gave way to a professional apparatus. Within the existing structure of personal ties, younger individuals began to get ahead. They did not base their legitimacy on their past merits, but rather on their abilities. They came at the forefront regardless of their class origin. The party was gradually bureaucratized. The centre began to appoint functionaries in the regions regardless of their relationship to the given region. New administrators often assumed their positions only at the cost of suppressing resistance from the local Communist movement. The February 1948 coup d'état did not represent a major milestone in the internal functioning of the CPC; however, it led to a significant limitation of the public control of the current party actors. More profound transformations in the execution of the CPC rule were only brought about by a change in the political line at the turn of 1948–1949, when the party gave up on its hitherto primary goal to persuade the majority of the nation to support its policy.

The following period of Stalinism in the CPC was accompanied by a tremendous amount of chaos. To a large extent the head secretaries in regions and districts fell victims to this chaos; to a lesser extent, they were behind creating the chaos. It was the result of the dysfunctional party structure which, due to cadre and organizational deficits, was unable to perform most of its formally binding obligations. Thus, the execution of power was characterized by considerable unpredictability and brutality, which was also intensified by the period ethos of “acute class struggle”. Personal relations and even corruption gained major importance. Ever since the spring months of 1951, the situation in the regions settled down a little. Regional head secretaries even played an important role in the reconstruction of the central apparatus which was decimated by the removal and prosecution of General Secretary Rudolf Slánský and his associates.

It was at the district level where the most fundamental changes were then made. Within the CPC, a new elite of head secretaries arose that lacked previous experience with the execution of power. They relied on professed good class origin and expressed fundamental loyalty to the structure of the party apparatus. And it was this elite that, despite its considerable transformations, crises and losses suffered in the Stalinist period, became a more permanent factor. It was this elite that practiced the CPC domination at the level of regions in the years to come and was its primary support line.

After 1953, the main aim was to overcome the crisis, in which the state-socialist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia found itself at the end of its revolutionary phase. Efforts were made to create a calmer, more stable environment; attention was no longer given primarily to radical, turbulent socio-economic transformations and mass repression – even though they did not fully disappear, predominantly forced collectivisation of the countryside continued – but rather to meeting the daily needs of the population. This was a reaction to the extreme phenomena that occurred during the Stalinist period, such as the political trials with prominent representatives of the CPC, which also had a brutal impact on the regional party elite. The new regional stabilization elite derived its legitimacy from their status as pre-war Communists, resisters and their working-class origin, which once again became an important factor in career growth within the party. On the other hand, the new district party elites lacked political experience and in performing their jobs they often relied on the authority of superior bodies. As a rule, they did not take much initiative. This did not stem only from their inexperience; it was rather what the top power circles expected from them. The state-socialist dictatorship lost its initial dynamics; its bureaucratic mechanisms were being completed and their smooth operation was a priority.

This situation reflected the overall transformation of the Communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia, which in a new manner started to emphasize a smooth exercise of power. This was in line with the tendency to ensure greater personnel stability and continuity at the CPC regional and district committees that could greatly help the implementation of this new approach and which was *de facto* necessary for a long-run, more conceptual construction of a functional power system.

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The Development of Regional Communist Elites in the Czech Lands 1945–1956

The focus of the study is the analysis of the elite at the regional and departmental levels of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) in the period 1945–1956. Specifically, it deals with the holders of the administratively, most important function, that of political or later head secretary. However, it also respects an actual state of affairs within studied regions and departments and designates elite accordingly. Through methods of prosopography it examines social background of the selected elite and how these performed dominance in their respective domains. It comes to the conclusion that within the concerned period the social origins and power practices of the elite shifted dramatically in accordance with the transformations of the Czechoslovak state-socialist dictatorship itself. These changes did not happen continuously, but in conditions of strained hardships and major turnarounds. In the process, new or semi-new elite was created and revolutionary ethos gave way to stabilization and smooth performance of power.

KEYWORDS

Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC), region, department, elite, head secretary, dominance, state-socialist dictatorship

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