

3. THE BOLSHEVIZATION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

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The uncertain beginnings of the Communist Party had lasting effects on its development. The struggle for its Bolshevization was difficult and drawn out, and while the problems that arose were similar to or identical with those experienced in other, especially West European Communist parties, "reformist, social democratic" tendencies—as the Comintern called it—hung on more tenaciously in Czechoslovakia than elsewhere. The Party had to undergo complete metamorphosis before even its top leadership could be considered Bolshevik. As for the membership, the task of transforming it into a revolutionary striking force was not really accomplished before 1938.

The history of the Party, from its Unification Congress in 1921 until December 1938, when it was disbanded, can be divided into two distinct periods, with the Fifth Congress in February 1929 as the watershed. Before 1929, the policy of the Party was singularly un-Bolshevik. The Party was torn by factional struggles, numerous

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changes in leadership, and frequent interference by the Comintern. Party policy conformed to the program of the Third Internationale in words, if not always in fact.

The Problem of nationalities

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Of [#] then any problems that plagued the Czechoslovak Communist Party during the first years of its existence, the national minority issue was the most troublesome. Despite formal unification, the Communist party continued to reflect national antagonisms as they existed in the Czechoslovak state. As one Comintern official put it, "The Party was constantly menaced by dispersal into its national joints."

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Comintern policy tended to inflame conflicts. In Moscow's view, the proletariat of the oppressed minorities (especially the German proletariat), due to the objective conditions of its existence, displayed a far more consistent revolutionary attitude than did the Czechs. Stalin, speaking at the Czech Commission of the Fifth Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI in March, 1925, analyzed the situation in the following terms:

"The Czech workers are not badly off, the idea of the national state holds everything under its spell. . . . All this creates an illusion associated with national peace. . . . This accounts for the division between right and left [in the Communist Party] along national lines. . . . Slovaks and Germans [oppressed nations] have drifted to the left while the Czechs have gone in the opposite direction."

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Stalin's main point was that in Czechoslovakia the danger of rightist deviation was by far the greater. He supported this assertion with three arguments: First, in a period of revolutionary stagnation such as the mid-1920's, the rightist danger-

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discouragement and apathy in the performance of revolutionary tasks—is always greater; second, the Czechoslovak Party was under the spell of a strong social democratic tradition; and third, the national victory of the Czechs places the Czech working class in a privileged position and makes it complacent toward class struggle.

Stalin's judgment was supported by D. Z. Manuisky, who revealed that in the past the Politbureau of the Czechoslovak Party had included five Czechs and four Hungarians, Slovaks and Germans, with the other nationalities not represented at all. This in-
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 mans, whereas now it was composed of seven Czechs and 2 Ger-
 tolerable situation required immediate correction.² As a result, the
 Germans and other minorities [were given] that to the Czechs
 appeared to ^{have} be unduly large influence.

Social Democratic Survival

But the "incorrect" "social patriotic" idea of a "national community of interest," which of course entailed an insufficient appreciation of the class struggle, remained the hall mark of the Czechoslovak Party at least until 1929.³ For this it was severely and continuously criticized by the Comintern and by its own emerging "left wing." Under the influence of "social patriotism," the Party engaged in little if any revolutionary activity. It seldom appealed to the masses, for, as Antonin Zapotocky explained at the third Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI, in June, 1923, "the masses cannot be incited to a final struggle" under highly "nonrevolutionary" conditions.

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 The chief activities of Communists centered in Parliament, but even there they failed to carry out a "revolutionary policy," which would have consisted of using Parliament as a propaganda forum. They were content to merely play the part of an "opposition party."

The party continued to be excessively preoccupied with the quantity of its supporters and abstained from educating its

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The Communists' chief activities

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members in a revolutionary spirit for revolutionary battles. It also avoided open discussions — then a favored method of the Comintern to bring about the policies it desired — ~~purportedly~~ for fear of losing members. When, under Comintern prodding, such discussions were held, and membership concomitantly decreased, Zapotocky, reflecting the opinion of the leadership, remarked bitterly: "We paid for the discussion with 40,000 organized members."

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When united front tactics were called for, the Czech Communists tended to view them as a genuine coalition with the Social democrats. When the slogan of "Workers' and Peasants' Government" was put forth, they interpreted it as a means to a "peaceful transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat." When the Comintern ordered its sections to reorganize on the basis of factory units (nucleus) instead of the prevailing system of local units, the Czech Party balked, because of "resistance from the rank and file and the functionaries." Zapotocky, again acting as his Party's spokesman, explained that the workers objected to the organization of factory units for fear that it would increase "the persecution of Communists" and endanger their job security.

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