

1.01

UDC: 328(437)''1989/1992''

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Coming to (a Short) Life: The Czechoslovak Parliament 1989–1992

IZVLEČEK

(KRATKO) ŽIVLJENJE: ČEŠKOSLOVAŠKI PARLAMENT 1989–1992

Češkoslovaški zvezni parlament je bil vzpostavljen leta 1968, da bi nadomestil državni zbor unitaristične države in tako formalno izrazil enakopravnost Čehov in Slovkov v novoustanovljeni federaciji. Po zlomu reform praške pomladi je socialistični parlament izgubil večino suverenosti, obranil pa je zvezni značaj in formalne postopke, s čimer je predstavljal nekakšno »podporno« zakonodajno telo. Leta 1989 je žametna revolucija, ki se je opredelila za spoštovanje miru in zakonitosti, v središču nove politike seveda našla parlament starega režima. V revolucionarnem parlamentu 1989–1990 je koncept socialističnega parlamentarizma trčil ob nove motive, kot so nacionalna enotnost, prelom s komunistično preteklostjo, liberalna demokracija in subsidiarnost. Posledično se je oblikovalo več mešanih socialističnih, revolucionarnih in liberalno demokratičnih pogledov na parlament. Vse te koncepte in politične prakse pa so češka in slovaška javnost ter politični predstavniki dojemali in sprejemali na nasprotujoče si načine. Nekatere od teh razlik so se izkazale za nezdržljive in zvezni parlament je nazadnje odigral ključno vlogo pri vodenju razdružitve češkoslovaške federacije leta 1992.

Ključne besede: Češkoslovaška 1989–1992, parlamentarizem, zvezni sistemi oblasti, postkomunistična tranzicija, razdružitev Češkoslovaške

ABSTRACT

The Czechoslovak federal parliament was designed in 1968 to replace the National Assembly of a unitary state and thus formally express equality between Czechs and Slovaks in the newly established federation. After the crash of the Prague Spring reforms, the socialist parliament lost most of its sovereignty, while preserving its federal character and formal procedures, thus providing a sort of "backup" legislature. The Velvet Revolution of 1989, with its proclaimed respect to peace and legality, logically found the ancient régime's parliament in the centre of new politics. In the revolutionary parliament of 1989–1990, the concept of socialist parliamentarianism began to clash with new motives, such as the national unity, a break with the Communist past, liberal democracy, or subsidiarity. Various blends of socialist, revolutionary and liberal democratic views of the parliament consequently came to life, while each of these concepts as well as every practical policy was

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perceived and accepted in conflicting manners by the Czech and Slovak publics as well as political representations. Some of these differences turned out to be irreconcilable and the federal parliament eventually played a key role in administering the break-up of Czechoslovak federation in 1992.

Keywords: Czechoslovakia 1989–1992, Parliamentarism, Federal systems of government, Post-Communist transition, Break-up of Czechoslovakia

In his renowned report of the Central European *Year of Miracles*, Timothy Garton Ash offers a detailed and extensive description of the discussions inside the revolutionary Civic Forum headquarters as well as the atmosphere of Prague street demonstrations. The country's parliament, the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly was given only a brief comment: "The women with putty faces, cheap perms and schoolmistress voices. The men in cheap suits, with hair swept straight back from sweaty foreheads. The physiognomy of power for the last forty years. But at the end of the day they all vote 'yes' to the prime minister's proposal, as agreed yesterday with the Forum, to delete the leading role of the Party from the constitution, and remove Marxism-Leninism as the basis of education."¹ Parliament occupied a minor, rather obscure place in the Czechoslovak revolution and real power was to be found elsewhere, Ash concluded.

However, the material put together for the following analysis² offers a more complex picture. The parliamentary archives, legal documents, memoirs and interviews of former deputies suggest that the first post-Communist and the last federal parliament of Czechoslovakia, no matter how short-lived, was in fact a multifaceted body with surprising continuities with socialist times as well as striking discontinuities within the early post-socialist period. The legislature obviously lived an independent, yet influential life: Almost none of the important turning points in the parliament's history of 1989–1992 match the official landmarks of the democratic revolution and early post-socialist transformations of Czechoslovakia.

The two chambers of the Federal Assembly were designed in 1968³ to replace the existing National Assembly of a unitary state and to formally express the equality between Czechs and Slovaks in the thus established federation. After the crash of the Prague Spring reforms, the socialist parliament lost most of its sovereignty that it had briefly experienced in 1968. However, unlike almost all other reforms, the parliament preserved its federal character as well as its elaborate formal procedures.

¹ Timothy Garton Ash, *We the People. The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin & Prague* (London: Granta Books, 1990), 111.

² This paper was written within a research project supported by the Czech Science Foundation (GAČR, GA15-14271S).

³ The Constitutional Act on the Czechoslovak Federation was adopted in October 1968. It amended the Constitution of Czechoslovakia from 1960, formally placing many of the former functions of the central government under the jurisdiction of the two national governments.

This “backup” legislature was first mobilized during the *perestroika* reforms of the late-socialist régime and then became one of the cornerstones of the post-socialist transformation.

The Czechoslovak revolution of 1989, with its proclaimed respect to peace and legality, logically found the *ancient régime’s* parliament in the centre of new politics. In what will further be called the “revolutionary parliament” of 1989-1990, the concept, values and practices of socialist parliamentarianism began to clash with new motives, such as the calls for national unity, for a break with the communist past, concepts of liberal democracy, the civic principle or subsidiarity. Various blends of socialist, revolutionary and liberal democratic practices and views of parliament consequently came to life, while each of these concepts as well as every policy was perceived, practiced and accepted in conflicting manners by the Czech and Slovak publics as well as political representations. As will be shown further, some of these differences turned out to be irreconcilable and the federal parliament eventually played a key role in administering and legitimizing the break-up of Czechoslovak federation in 1992.

This article follows the logic of neo-institutionalist approaches to explaining parliaments as organizations. Traditional historiographical works on institutions used to describe the most easily visible parts. In case of parliaments, they would refer to the most evident archival traces such as the foundation of the body, its composition, official actors and their speeches, the legislation passed etc. The so called new institutionalism can be understood as a reaction to the development in social sciences turning the researcher’s attention away from the central to less visible actors and processes. Descriptions of organizations began to focus on practices, habits, values and myths generally accepted and further transferred by institutions. Parliaments are thus often seen as relatively stable structures with established social norms, methods of bargaining and expertise. These seem to sooner or later overwhelm every newcomer and make him or her adapt to the norms and start practising them as well. We will be able to trace this process during the régime change and demonstrate some interesting continuities between the socialist, revolutionary and liberal democratic parliaments within the Federal Assembly.

The following interpretation also tries to cope with the usual premise that in case of context modification such as régime change, political institutions immediately adapt to external interventions such as new legal regulation etc.⁴ Our approach goes further past the neo-institutional search for underground myths carried on by institutions. We tend to see interactive relations between institutions and actors, producing rather fluid organizations. Parliaments can then be observed as somewhat “vulnerable” environments that constantly seek to find balance between the existing

⁴ Foundation texts of new institutionalism by Paul J. DiMaggio, Walter W. Powell, W. Richard Scott and John W. Meyer have been published together in Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, ed., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (London, Chicago: Chicago UP, 1991), 41–62, 63–82 and 108–42.

rules, institutional regulations and myths – and the current as well as former members, their expectations, beliefs and self-concepts.

Overlooking the Revolution

Physically speaking, the Federal Assembly was situated right in the heart of the Velvet Revolution. The steel and glass construction⁵ was designed in the reformist era of the late 1960s at the upper end of Wenceslas Square to institutionally counterweight the Prague Castle. And yet, for many days, the parliament was absent from the symbolic topography of the revolution.⁶ The reasons were manifold. First, demonstrations and protests traditionally centred round the statue of St Wenceslas, which had been separated from the parliament's building by a busy crossroad and an urban motorway constructed in the late 1970. Second, the demonstrators rather turned their attention to the organs of the Communist Party and the media headquarters, by which they assessed the parliament's significance in the political system quite appropriately, as it seemed. And third, the Federal Assembly itself did neither try to join in the revolution nor did it stand up openly to hold it back.

As a result, for almost two weeks following the police action against the student demonstration at Národní Street, and the consequent student strike and an establishment of the revolutionary movements it seemed that the life in the parliamentary building went on as if nothing was happening and no crowds of thousands were to be seen from the windows. The sessions of committees were held according to a yearly schedule adopted in late 1988, dealing with draft bills prepared by the government, most often without any notice to the events spreading through the country.⁷ In reality, there were fierce fights about what to do inside the Communist Party. The Civic Forum, on the other hand, feared that an activated parliament might quickly pass the reformist legislation prepared by the Communist government. Yet since no clear guideline came, the socialist parliament chose to exemplify stability, political decency, and expert knowledge and organization in what it perceived as potentially chaotic situation.

In reality, however, the Federal Assembly had been experiencing a considerable change of atmosphere, attitudes and roles throughout the late 1980s. It is certainly true that the Czechoslovak Communist Party was extremely reluctant as it came to transferring Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* from the Soviet Union. For Czechoslovak leaders, these policies fatefully resembled the Prague Spring re-

⁵ For recent photos of the internationally acclaimed project by Karel Prager, Jiří Kadeřábek and Jiří Albrecht see "Federal Assembly Building at Wenceslas Square, Prague," accessed October 30, 2015, <http://www.parliamentsintransition.cz/dokumenty/federalassemblybuildingatwenceslassquareprague>.

⁶ Petr Roubal, *Starý pes, nové kousky: kooptace do Federálního shromáždění a vytváření polistopadové politické kultury* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2013), 15–16.

⁷ APCR, FA-5, Minutes of Committee on Industry, Transport and Trade, 22nd meeting, November 20–23, 1989.

forms, the suppression of which brought them to power. But reforms in general were perceived as necessary, and the federal parliament became one of the few official political arenas where the principles of *perestroika* were to be tested and presented. The committees and chambers found themselves under pressure exerted by the government: the parliamentary bodies were expected to pass the drafts of economic reform regulations quickly and smoothly, while at the same time showing “a spirit of openness”. Pressure also came from the public: members of parliament were bound to participate at numerous meetings in their constituencies, and in these years, they met immediate critique wherever they showed up.⁸ The Communist Party Central Committee also pressed on resignation on nine deputies who were either abroad at diplomatic postings or had been ill for a long time. For the first time in forty years, the experimental by-elections of Spring 1989 allowed voters to choose new MPs from a list of two or three candidates.⁹

There were also important internal shifts. The parliament itself used the new setting of *perestroika* to emancipate from the government’s automatic expectations of loyalty if not obedience. Respective ministers, presenting the government drafts in the committees, were confronted with parliamentary criticism of not respecting the MPs’ standpoints as well as with pointing to specific shortages of consumer goods or poor quality of public services.¹⁰ The parliament grew more active in quantitative sense as well. More legislation was passed. In 1988, for the first time since 1971, a plenary session took as long as three days. Nonetheless, the principle of the parliament being subjected to the Communist Party Central Committee and to “the needs of the government” had never been seriously conceptually challenged.

Socialist Parliamentarism

It is difficult to evaluate the power effect of these changes since parliaments occupied a highly ambiguous position in state-socialist systems. By 1948, as the Czechoslovak socialist dictatorship came to being, the original radical scepticism of Marx’s, tending to propose a complete break-down of parliamentary system, had been abandoned. The Communist movement adopted a more pragmatic Leninist interpretation that stressed the Marxist requirement of “conversion of the representative institutions from talking shops into ‘working’ bodies” that would be “executive and legislative at the same time”.¹¹

⁸ See e.g. “Interview of Josef Bartončík, Brno, Dec. 3, 2012,” in *Sbírka rozhovorů s bývalými poslanci Federálního shromáždění*, ed. Adéla Gjuríčová et. al, (Collection of Interviews of MPs, Institute of Contemporary History, Oral History Centre).

⁹ František Cigánek, “Předlistopadový parlament ve světle archivní dokumentace,” in *Dvě desetiletí před listopadem 89*, ed. Emanuel Mander (Praha: ÚSD AV ČR – Maxdorf, 1993), 57–72.

¹⁰ See e.g. Minutes of Constitutional and Legal Affairs Committee, 18th meeting, May 29–June 6, 1989 (APCR, FA-5) which demonstrates both the growing length of sessions as well as the endless scope of criticism.

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Civil War in France*, Chapter 5 [The Paris Commune], accessed October 30, 2015, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/index.htm>. Cf. Vladimir Ilyich

Along the post-war Stalinist guideline, the Communist parties infiltrated the existing parliaments and after taking over converted them into representative bodies of the Soviet type under direct Party control.¹² Parliaments stopped calling themselves parliaments and were referred to as “representative assemblies”. Their composition was no longer derived purely from party electoral support: the bodies needed to mirror the society in a more literal sense. This system of the so called descriptive representation produced parliaments consisting of deputies who reflected the society’s occupation, gender, ethnic and age structure to a considerable extent – as opposed to mere political preference expressed by bourgeois parliaments. However, finding such matrix of candidates, some of whom had to combine several categories, was a challenging task as well as in fact a substitute for the electoral process. The actual election only approved the candidates included in a single list of the National Front.

While rejecting the whole concept of separation of – executive, legislative, and judicial – powers and offering one, unified power representing the working people, the Communist doctrine also abolished the exclusiveness of the parliament in the political system to a considerable extent. Even the federal parliament of the late-socialist Czechoslovakia was “merely” the supreme level of the united system of representative organs. The system, stretching from the Federal Assembly and the two sub-federal National Councils to the National Committees at local, municipal and district levels, both adopted the norms and put them into practice.¹³ The joint legislative and executive role was also expressed through a specific concept of the mandate. Members of parliament were understood as “elected political and state functionaries” obliged to work in the constituency as well as in the representative body and other state institutions. They would bring the working people’s inputs in the parliament, inform the people about legislative work as well as observe how the laws work in the constituency. They were under the voters’ direct control: Those who did not work appropriately could be dismissed by voters any time.¹⁴ This extreme focus on direct accountability obviously created a very weak mandate which served the purpose of Party control over the parliament. The system also tended to include the legislature in the system of state administration,¹⁵ forgetting about its originally self-governing principle.

This notion of parliament, established in the Stalinist era of Czechoslovak socialism and fundamentally different from the liberal democratic parliamentarism, did not substantially change through adoption of the new constitution of 1960. The

Lenin, *The State and Revolution: Experience of the Paris Commune of 1871. Marx’s Analysis*, Chapter 3, accessed October 30, 2015, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch03.htm>.

¹² For Czechoslovakia, see e.g. Karel Kaplan, *Národní fronta 1948–1960* (Praha: Academia, 2012), 100–01.

¹³ Jan Bartuška, *Státní právo Československé republiky* (Praha: Státní nakladatelství učebnic, 1952), 39, 74–75. Cf. František Koranda et al., *Slovník socialistického poslance* (Praha: Svoboda, 1985), 152–56, 436–37.

¹⁴ Koranda et al., *Slovník*, 225–26.

¹⁵ Jan Bartuška et al., *Státní právo Československé republiky* (Praha: Orbis, 1953), 244–45.

federalization of 1968 only formally replaced the national tier by the federal one and added one more at the level of the Czech and Slovak Republics. The collapse of the Prague Spring reforms, however, diminished the federal aspect of the structure to something similar as “compulsory figures” that political actors had to practice on formally given occasions. The general concept of the representative structure, through which the sovereign people execute state power, remained the core of representative legitimacy until 1989.

As a result, the Velvet Revolution encountered an established system of federal and sub-federal parliaments which had strong formal powers, as they occupied the status of supreme state bodies, but in practice were not expected to seek any stronger power position at the expense of the Communist Party. Neither did the two levels share much real power: the federal tier possessed most of it, a fact producing much reluctance on the Slovak side. However, the parliament’s formal strength represented a major obstacle to what was nicknamed the “articled revolution”¹⁶, i.e. a quick and negotiated régime change which sought to respect the country’s legislation at the same time. Petr Roubal’s article in this issue of *Contributions to Contemporary History* also explains the federal parliament’s reconstruction by co-optation as a response to the same problem.¹⁷ Another aspect of the clash of the Velvet Revolution and the socialist parliament, namely the parliament’s amalgamation with the National Front, the permanent coalition of the Communist Party and its satellites, and the specific parliamentary mathematics directing the revolution, is analysed by Tomáš Zahradníček further in the issue.¹⁸ In other words, the revolutionary movement found itself next to a highly unpopular socialist parliament which it did not control, but which it desperately needed in order to pass any legislative amendment. As a way out of the gridlock, the revolutionary parliament was set up as an interim form between the socialist and liberal democratic parliaments.

New MPs for a New Era¹⁹

In late January 1990, a special law was passed which allowed that about half of all members of the federal parliament, if they were not willing to resign by themselves, could be deprived of their mandate, “following their previous activity” or “in the interest of a balanced distribution of political powers”. New MPs, who supposedly provided “better guarantees of developing political democracy”, were co-opted.²⁰

¹⁶ Roubal, *Starý pes*, 27–32. On the origin of the nickname, Valtr Komárek, “Děkujeme, přijďte,” in *Pocta Zdeňkovi Jičínskému k 80. narozeninám*, ed. Vladimír Mikule et al. (Praha: ASPI, 2009), 294.

¹⁷ Petr Roubal, “Revolution by the Law: Transformation of the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly” in this issue.

¹⁸ Tomáš Zahradníček, “Debates Were to Be Held in the Parliament, but it Proved Impossible” in this issue.

¹⁹ “Nová doba – noví poslanci,” *Svobodné slovo*, January 31, 1990, 1.

²⁰ Act No. 4/1990 Coll., on dismissing deputies of representative bodies and on electing new deputies of the National Committees, Art. I.

The result was the establishment of a provisional revolutionary parliament with specific characteristics.

Until that point, all important decisions were made at round tables where the revolutionary forces as well as the up-to-date Communist negotiators were represented. Almost none of them held parliamentary mandates. Now that they gained the seats, the decision-making could be transferred to the legislature. The Parliament had been integrated into politics. But while the political actors as well as the media talked about “urgent tasks for epoch-making times”, in reality, the parliament was given only a limited mandate to meet them. The term was shortened to last only until June 1990 and explicit limits were put on the contents of the legislative work as well. For example, preparing a new democratic constitution was saved for the next, freely elected parliament. The present body was only expected to personify the new “national unity” rejecting and correcting the Communist past.

Since part of the legislative body came from the undemocratic election of 1986 and part was co-opted by revolutionary political parties or movements, it obviously did not match the previous system of representation in the sense of replicating the social structure. However, it was expected to represent society in a different sense. By its voting, the revolutionary parliament was supposed to legalize the changes required by the revolutionary public, be it the ratification of new executive figures, constitutional amendments or laws establishing elementary civic freedoms and principles of political competition. The parliament was to pass over its own autonomy and serve the public. Even President Václav Havel did not approach the MPs as people carrying a mandate or representing certain political organizations or programmes, but as citizens fulfilling their respective duties, “who care for the future of their country rather than their own personal comfort”.²¹ The irony was that Václav Havel, whose presidential mandate stemmed from the wholly Communist parliament of December 1989, considered himself a much more convincing incarnation of the awakened popular will. The parliament, on the other hand, was only supposed to mediate and legalize that will.²²

In spite of this restricting expectation, there were autonomous processes in the parliament that were out of control by external actors, including those with stronger legitimacy. President Havel provided a perfect example. By delivering his first speech to the parliament on 23 January,²³ he wanted to use his authority and dramatic talent to make it quickly pass his proposal of a constitutional amendment which would change the country’s name from Czechoslovak Socialist Republic to Czechoslovak Republic. But he was not aware of the current struggle the chambers were engaged in and neither did he have the “expert” knowledge of procedure, expecting that he

²¹ “President’s Speech in the Federal Assembly, May 9, 1990,” in *Projevy z let 1990–1992. Letní přemítání (Spisy sv. 6)*, ed. Václav Havel (Praha: Torst, 1999), 133.

²² “President’s Speech in the Federal Assembly, Jan. 23, 1990,” in Havel, *Projevy*, 26.

²³ “President’s Speech in the Federal Assembly, Jan. 23, 1990,” in Havel, *Projevy*, 25–43. P. Roubal provides a detailed analysis of the speech in his article in this issue, see ref. 17.

would “storm in and before they wake up, they will have passed my proposal”²⁴. In fact, he had staged his performance much better than that. While young pretty hostesses brought an oversize model of the new state symbols, he gave a speech of high literary quality. Yet no success followed. Not only was the President referred to the committees and the legal procedure, but in effect, he set off the so called “hyphen war” between the Czech and Slovak political élites that lasted for months. The Slovaks expected a deeper change of the federal system than just letting out a word from the state’s name. But as of this moment, they explicitly demanded a hyphen and a capital S in the word Czecho-Slovak.

This is only one example of the emancipation of the federal parliament which was, under the provisional and limited-mandate appearance, in fact negotiating and establishing a new democratic parliamentary procedure that would better express the parliament’s changing position within the political system. Until June 1990, the Federal Assembly was seeking a new relation to the President, the Government, the Czech and Slovak National Councils, the Czech and Slovak publics and the media. And it also experienced a first tough election campaign on parliamentary soil. The revolutionary parliament as defined above inhabited this difficult environment together with remnants of the socialist parliament as well as images and first attributes of the liberal democratic one. The three parliaments co-existed.

Laboratory of Professionalization

Czechoslovak politics in 1990 had immense tasks to complete – pass enormous amounts of legislation, build up political parties, find a balance between political institutions without the Communist Party dominance, set up a non-destructive relationship with the media etc. – and it did not have an established professional political class. Most of the political professionals from the socialist era have been discredited and replaced by new people. Parliaments became the main arena in which professionalization of the new political élites took place. This important social process can generally be defined as assimilation of the standards and values prevalent in a given profession. Every profession, including politics, tends to have some set or sets of values which determine what it means to be a professional in that field.²⁵ When successful, it also involves certain power, prestige, income, social status and privileges. Within parliaments, we will therefore operationalize it through observing the legal regulation of the mandate execution as a job, the special skills that deputies have to acquire, and their group identity.

Professionalism in the sense of special skills and expert knowledge was a factor present even in the socialist parliament. Although as was shown previously, the

²⁴ For versions of the quote and further analysis of Havel’s entry into parliament see Jiří Suk, *Konstituční, nebo existenciální revoluce? Václav Havel a Federální shromáždění 1989–1990* (Praha: ÚSD AV ČR, 2014), 36.

²⁵ Gordon S. Black, “A Theory of Professionalization in Politics,” *The American Political Science Review* 3 (1970): 865–78.

actual power was difficult to measure, making a professional impression became a crucial imperative in the late state-socialism. The Communist Party evaluators used to express it through the requirements of “thorough preparation”, “successful coordination” of speeches and “high quality” of the sessions.²⁶ The interviews of MPs of the time show what a key element of their collective identity it was. For them, the main disillusionment associated with the 1989 revolution was exactly the disruption of this professionalism producing chaos and a lack of awareness of procedure and of good manners.²⁷

For the revolutionary parliament, continuity seemed out of reach. Approximately half of the deputies were replaced by new ones through co-opting in January 1990. The first free elections in June changed the parliament painstakingly once again: three quarters of the elected deputies were newcomers. The continuity of parliamentary work – which involved immense legislative tasks of re-introducing democratic procedures in state administration as well as numerous elements of retribution – was more or less provided by the parliament’s administration, the Federal Assembly Office. Historical legitimacies made things even more complicated: first, employees expelled from the administration after 1968 were accepted back, and then, if things were not going well, conspiracy by the Communist Secret Service was declared to be the reason and alleged collaborators of the Secret Service found among the employees. The revolutionary professionalism was therefore a remarkable mix of old and new, skilled and inexperienced, and of victims of retribution and new, supposedly democracy-protecting purges.

The question of formal professionalization of the highly time-consuming parliamentary occupation had been discussed since the beginning of 1990, but was seriously solved only after the summer general election. Being a deputy became a regular paid job. The salary that the parliamentarians approved for themselves was about three times the usual wage. This became one of the first income inequalities that the post-Communist public was exposed to²⁸ and caused a storm of criticism in the media. On the other hand, interrupting one’s previous job at this point for a two-year mandate basically meant leaving it for good, since returning into professional context dramatically changed by the social and economic transformation turned out to be practically impossible.

There was yet another paradox. While the public and the media expressed their expectation from the parliament to do a professional job for a professional salary, on the other hand, specific anti-professional ethic was widely shared. In this period, it

²⁶ See e.g. speech by Richard Nejezchleb, Minutes of the Defence and Security Committee, 4th meeting, Feb. 4, 1987 (APCR, FA-5). Cf. speech by Dalibor Hanes, Minutes of the Presidium, 2nd meeting, June 24, 1986 (APCR, FA-5).

²⁷ See e.g. “Interview of Štefánia Michalková, Bratislava, Nov. 15, 2011,” in Gjuričová, *Sbírka rozhovorů*.

²⁸ Act No. 304/1990 Col., on salary and reimbursement of expenses of deputies of the Federal Assembly. For figures concerning the income see e.g. “Czech Statistical Office,” accessed October 30, 2015, http://csugeo.i-server.cz/csu/dyngrafy.nsf/graf/mzdy_1960_.

seemed that in order to cut the link with the Communist era, the political sphere needed people with no political experience, leadership or legal education, people who do not wish to become politicians, but are willing to temporarily sacrifice themselves for the good of others. This approach was very close to the prevailing dissident rhetoric embodied by Václav Havel. But it became one of the decisive factors in the process of disintegration of the revolutionary catch-all movements. In the new parliamentary term, there was a completely new set of skills to acquire. Clubs organized along the immature electoral lists of wide anti-Communist movements began to fall apart in real time at the Federal Assembly meetings as of 1990 and re-organize into a number of political fractions. The segment of post-socialist parliamentary élite that was building up political parties worshipped new professionalism by which it openly protested against the dissident political and historical legitimacy-based amateurism.²⁹

Similarly as in case of other issues mentioned above, even in case of political professionalization, the Czech and Slovak élites employed quite different and sometimes incompatible strategies. While the Czech post-socialist activists relied upon the federal level to bring them a long-term political perspective, the Slovak leaders opted for sub-federal institutions of the Slovak Republic in Bratislava. Being kicked-up to the federal parliament in Prague was perceived as risky by Slovak politicians. Because of long sessions in Prague, they grew isolated from Slovak politics which were going through a dramatic transformation.³⁰ In the Slovak society, there was also widespread distrust to the so called “federal” Slovaks based in Prague. And no wonder the Czech MPs felt distant from their Slovak counterparts who showed constant dissatisfaction with the functioning of the federal system and who used parliamentary procedure pragmatically to push through their partial Slovak interests. The Czech MPs said they were identified with the federal state, but, as will be further explained, even in this respect, reality proved to be more complicated.

A Constituent Assembly that Never Adopted a Constitution

From the very moment Czechoslovakia was established in 1918, the two nations' respective shares in governing the country had been problematic. The Czechs tended to dominate in the country they created for both themselves and the Slovaks who, on the other hand, showed reluctance and took any strategy to oppose the Czech domination. The federalization was a surprisingly radical constitutional transformation of the country that was passed by parliament in October 1968, but was not preceded

²⁹ Magdalena Hadjiisky, “Vznik občanské demokratické strany: Pokus o sociologickou analýzu,” in *Kapitoly z dějin české demokracie po roce 1989*, ed. Adéla Gjuríčová et. al. (Praha, Litomyšl: Paseka, 2008), 68–90. Srov. Michal Kopeček, “Disent jako minulost, liberalismus jako projekt. Občanské hnutí – Svobodní demokraté v české polistopadové politice,” in *Rozdělení minulosti. Vytváření politických identit v České republice po roce 1989*, ed. Adéla Gjuríčová et. al. (Praha: Knihovna Václava Havla, 2011), 61–106.

³⁰ See e.g. Gabriela Rothmayerová, *Zo zápisníka poslankyne* (Bratislava: Perex, 1992), 36.

by any substantial debate among both experts and the public. The surprisingly easy Czech consent might have been caused by the shock of the military invasion.³¹ But it soon became clear that in the post-1968 Czechoslovakia very little would change in the day-to-day business of governance. As a result, when the Czechs claimed they were identified with federal Czechoslovakia in the 1990s, what they had in mind was the usual Czech centralism.

The tension between Slovak and Czech political representations of revolutionary publics could be felt from the very outset of the 1989 revolution. Soon the former manifested that redistribution of powers between the federal and republics' institutions was a primary issue of a democratic transformation, while the latter saw this as an obstacle to more urgent tasks of democratization and de-communization and showed surprise. For several weeks the problem seemed to lie in the different position of the Civic Forum vs. the Slovak Public Against Violence within their respective publics and a much easier incorporation of former socialist elites in Slovakia.³² At least since the hyphen war, however, it was obvious that a serious reform of the federal system, including a substantial redistribution of powers would be necessary.

Although this was never said explicitly, the federalization of 1968 in fact involved the demise of the original Czechoslovakia and two new republics, a Czech and a Slovak one, each with its own citizenship, parliament and government, came into being on the territory of the previously united country. As the unicameral National Assembly was replaced with a bicameral Federal Assembly, its two chambers were given equal authority, and one of them, the Chamber of the Nations, contained an equal number of Czechs and Slovaks. Moreover, certain decisions required the majority consent of each half (Czech and Slovak) of the Chamber of the Nations. Now that the Communist Party domination was over, this resulted in that half of the Slovak part of the Chamber was able to block any important decision.

The revolutionary parliament experienced this during the hyphen war, when it seemed impossible to agree on any version of the state's new name. Other federalization issues, all of them highly controversial, were left up to the next, freely elected parliament. Only this legislature was supposed to have the legitimacy to draft a new constitution for both nations and a federation for the new era. However, the existing federal system, originally created only to formally express equality between the Czechs and Slovaks, could not stand the democratic practice. No matter how sophisticated processes of constitution making and its negotiating the federal parliament created,³³ for the reasons described above – the simultaneous emancipation of

³¹ Tomáš Zahradníček, "Federalization – The Path to Demise," *Aspen Review. Central Europe* 1 (2013): 25–30.

³² See e.g. Jiří Suk, *Labyrintem revoluce. Aktéři, zápletky a křížovatky jedné politické krize (od listopadu 1989 do června 1990)* (Praha: Prostor, 2003), 170–80.

³³ See the files of the Commission of Members of the Federal Assembly, the Czech and Slovak National Councils for Preparation of the Constitution and the Expert Commission for Drafting the Constitution, 1990–1991, Federal Assembly 6th term Collection, Archives of the Parliament of the Czech Republic.

parliament(s) from other institutions, re-building the party-political spectrum and creating new political élites involving different strategies of the Czech and Slovak political élites – they were never shared by both national political communities. The Federal Assembly remained isolated from Slovak politics – and allergic reactions to the ongoing bargaining developed on both sides.

President Havel tried to intervene and mediated many of the negotiations between the Czech and Slovak representations. He felt personally responsible for the success of the deals. He supported the process by inviting experts from abroad and hosting their informal meetings, and partly undermined it by having his own version of constitution drafted and trying to get it through the parliament which by then had been blocked up against him.³⁴ The new constitution was never adopted, and the Czecho-Slovak bargaining led to no conclusion.

The next election took place in 1992. It witnessed a professional campaign and produced stable political fractions and a parliament of self-confident and experienced professionals. The Slovak election winner Vladimír Mečiar had ignored the federal parliament for long, however, this assembly did neither include some of the more foresighted Czech leaders such as Václav Klaus, whose party won in the Czech lands, but who himself ran for a seat in the Czech National Council. The federal parliament found itself to be the only remaining federal institution in an ever more fractioned Czechoslovakia. And it also turned out to be the only institution that could once again legalize what had been decided elsewhere, namely at meetings of election winners behind closed doors. The last thing that the federal parliament was asked to do was to validate the dissolution of the Czechoslovak federation, including a “hara-kiri” dissolution of the parliament itself.

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³⁴ Adéla Gjuríčová, “Anti-politics and anti-parliamentarism: Václav Havel and the Czechoslovak parliament in the 1990s” (paper presented at the conference *Parlamentarismuskritik und Antiparlamentarismus in Europa*, Berlin, May 7–8, 2015).

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(KRATKO) ŽIVLJENJE: ČEŠKOSLOVAŠKI PARLAMENT 1989–1992

P O V Z E T E K

Češkoslovaški zvezni parlament je bil vzpostavljen leta 1968, da bi nadomestil državni zbor unitaristične države in tako formalno izrazil enakopravnost Čehov in Slovakov v novoustanovljeni federaciji. Po zlomu reform praške pomladi je socialistični parlament izgubil večino suverenosti, ohranil pa je zvezni značaj in formalne postopke, ter tako predstavljal nekakšno »podporno« zakonodajno telo. Leta 1989 je žametna revolucija, ki se je opredelila za spoštovanje miru in zakonitosti, v središču nove politike, ki je nazadnje pripeljala do razdružitve Češkoslovaške, seveda našla parlament starega režima.

V članku je uporabljen neoinstitucionalni pristop, ki dojema odnose med institucijami in njihovimi akterji kot interaktivne. Parlament se tako opazuje kot »ranljivo« okolje, ki nenehno išče ravnovesje med veljavnimi pravili, institucionalnimi predpisi in miti ter sedanjimi in nekdanjimi poslanci, njihovimi pričakovanji, prepričanji in samopodobami. S tega stališča lahko v razvoju zveznega parlamenta ob koncu osemdesetih in na začetku devetdesetih let 20. stoletja razločimo tri faze, ki so opisane v članku: prva faza – socialistični parlament, ki je izhajal iz stalinistične doktrine in so ga omajale reforme perestrojke; druga faza – revolucionarni parlament, ki ga je vzpostavilo revolucionarno gibanje in se je znašel ob strani zelo nepriljubljenega socialističnega parlamenta, ki ga je potreboval, ni pa ga nadzoroval; tretja faza – liberalno-demokratski parlament, ki je bil skupni teoretični ideal, vendar ni dobil dolgotrajne možnosti za razvoj. Te trije parlamenti naj bi soobstajali in delovali vzajemno.

Češkoslovaška politika je morala leta 1990 opraviti izjemno veliko nalog – sprejeti je morala ogromne količine zakonodaje, vzpostaviti politične stranke, najti ravnovesje med političnimi institucijami brez nadvlade komunistične partije, vzpostaviti neškodljive odnose z mediji itd. – ni pa imela izoblikovanega profesionalnega političnega razreda. Parlamenti so postali glavno prizorišče profesionalizacije novih političnih elit. Vendar pa so češke in slovaške elite v tem procesu uporabljale precej različne in včasih nezdružljive strategije. To je veljalo tudi za številne druge vidike postsocialistične preobrazbe: češka in slovaška javnost ter politični predstavniki so dojemali in sprejemali politične koncepte in prakse na nasprotujoče si načine. Nekatere od teh razlik so se izkazale za nezdružljive in zvezni parlament je nazadnje odigral ključno vlogo pri vodenju razdružitve češkoslovaške federacije leta 1992.