

Michal Pehr: Czech Political Parties 1945–1946
Resumé

Ph.D. thesis *Czech Political Parties 1945–1946* by Michal Pehr is focused on Czech political parties between 1945–1946. In eight chapters the author describes their renewal after World War II and their activities upto the May elections in 1946. In this period a new system of political parties was introduced, known as either National Front, Popular Democracy, or Afterwar Democracy. Its main aim was to reduce shortcomings of pre-war democracy, to secure peace and to improve conditions of society. Broad economic, political, and social reforms were to be the main means to these desired aims. In the period the changes took place as broad as nationalization, transfer of Germans, punishment of colaboraters with the German occupants as well as some limits had been imposed on the number of political parties and political freedoms. This concept of politics was to better the life for all and for that reason it was called popular-democracy. It was supposed to imply more freedom, rights and social advantages for all.

A new system, however, soon showed serious shortcomings, such as the rapid growth of bureaucracy and corruption. In this period also the struggle of the Communists to take over all political power was growing. In other words this period was the time of conflicts between the democrats and the Communists on the issue of political principles of a new state.

It is conceivable, that under this situation the political parties played a decisive role. In this respect it is not a coincidence, that the after-war political system is usually described as the system of the National Front. The existing political parties had formed the National Front from parties, which were generally viewed as participating in the anti-Nazi resistance movement and in the renewal of Czechoslovakia. Four parties formed the group - Communists, Social Democrats, Democrats, The Party of Work and Freedom. No existence of other party was allowed. The opposition formally did not exist. The National Front was in the position to make decisions on all political issues. Theoretically, decisions were to be made as a result of agreements between participating political partis, which were supposed to have equal position. The practise was, however, different, since the influence of the Communists was growing.

In his disertation the author comes to several interesting observations, which can be summarized as the following points: The insight into political parties showed the classical inconsistency between the theory and practice. The ideals were rooted in good intentions, the practice, however, was completely different. The behaviour of parties and their relationships remained rooted above all in traditional struggles for power. At the same time they did not

change anything in relation to their declared aims. Only from their development over the time the shifts in their political orientation became apparent, since they ceased to represent specific social or class interests and became to be parties of the type *catch-all-parties*. In addition, there are two reasons why the period is interesting for the history of political parties. For the first time in modern Czech history political parties were rebuilt from their very foundations. Secondly, the parties of the National Front were in a position to decide, which political organization would be licensed and which would be banned. The thesis by Michal Pehr discusses these and many other matters.