

Czechoslovakia from Liberation to Communist State, 1945-63



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Czechoslovakia from Liberation to Communist State, 1945-63: Records of the U.S. State Department Classified Files



This collection traces the development of the Third Republic, which was established after World War II, and differed markedly from the First Republic of 1918. The Third Republic was created as a result of a compromise between pre-war Czechoslovak Republic leaders and the Czech Communist Party (KSC). The Republic's hopes were subverted by the KSC, which at the time had considerable popular support and the backing of the Soviet Union.

Date Range: 1945-1963

Content: 52,359 images

Source Library: U.S. National Archives

Description

This collection documents the creation of the Third Republic, which was established after World War II and includes: dispatches, instructions, and miscellaneous correspondence dealing with topics such as political affairs and government; public order and safety; military affairs; social matters (including history and culture); economic conditions (including immigration and emigration); industry and agriculture; communications and transportation; and navigation. These records are of great interest to diplomatic historians and historians studying the region. The material is in English, making the information contained in these files particularly accessible.

From Liberation to Communism

The Third Republic was created as a result of a compromise between pre-war Czechoslovak Republic leaders and the Czech Communist Party (KSC). The KSC steadily expanded its influence over key ministries and in 1948 delivered the final blow to Czechoslovak democracy by seizing all power. After 1948 Czechoslovakia moved completely into the Soviet sphere of influence and was transformed into a Stalinist state.

The Third Republic came into being in April 1945. Its government was a National Front coalition in which three socialist parties—Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC), Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party, and Czechoslovak National Socialist Party—predominated.

The popular enthusiasm evoked by the Soviet armies of liberation benefited the KSC. Czechoslovaks, bitterly disappointed by the West at Munich, responded favorably to both the KSC and the Soviet alliance. Between May 1945 and May 1946, KSC membership grew from 27,000 to over 1.1 million.

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In the May 1946 election, the KSC won a plurality of 38 percent of the vote. Communists were able to gain control over key ministries such as information, internal trade, finance, and interior (including the police apparatus). Through these ministries, the communists were able to suppress non-Communist opposition, place party members in positions of power, and create a solid basis for a takeover attempt. In January 1948, the communist-controlled Ministry of Interior proceeded to purge the Czechoslovak security forces, substituting communists for non-communists.

In February 1948, when the Communists took power, Czechoslovakia was declared a “people’s democracy” (until 1960) - a preliminary step toward socialism and, ultimately, communism. Bureaucratic centralism under the direction of KSC leadership was introduced. Dissident elements were purged from all levels of society, including the Roman Catholic Church. The ideological principles of Marxism-Leninism and socialist realism pervaded cultural and intellectual life. The economy was committed to comprehensive central planning and abolition of private ownership of capital. Czechoslovakia became a satellite state of the Soviet Union; it was a founding member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) in 1949 and of the Warsaw Pact in 1955. Following the Soviet example, Czechoslovakia began emphasizing the rapid development of heavy industry.

In the 1950s, the Stalinists accused their opponents of “conspiracy against the people’s democratic order” and “high treason” in order to oust them from positions of power. Large-scale arrests of Communists with an “international” background, i.e., those with a wartime connection with the West, veterans of the Spanish Civil War, Jews, and Slovak “bourgeois nationalists,” were followed by show trials. The outcome of these trials, serving the communist propaganda, was often known in advance and the penalties were extremely heavy.

Destalinization had a late start in Czechoslovakia. In the early 1960s, the Czechoslovak economy became severely stagnant. The industrial growth rate was the lowest in Eastern Europe. As a result the party approved the New Economic Model, introducing free market elements into the economy.

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