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THE CLASS STRUCTURE OF A SOVIET-TYPE SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the movement for industrial democracy in Czechoslovakia during the 'Prague Spring' of 1968. The theoretical framework raises the question of whether or not state socialist societies are class societies characterised by class divisions and antagonisms. Evidence on the workers' movement for democratic control of the workplace, together with evidence concerning inequalities of reward and opportunity suggest that the events in Czechoslovakia during 1968-69 can be interpreted in terms of class theory and concepts. The course of events supports the basic argument that conflict between workers and Party officials over the management of both the unions and the workplace represent a form of class struggle over the means of production and distribution.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with class relations in a Soviet-type society, focusing specifically on the industrial working class in Czechoslovakia and its struggle for emancipation from a Soviet-type ruling class. I shall examine the concrete and evolving relationship between the Communist Party and the largest social force within that society: the industrial workers. I shall trace the fate and actions of the Czechoslovak working class from the Communist take-over in 1948 to the crisis of the entire system and the open conflict between the Party and the workers in the 1968-9 period, commonly known as the Prague Spring.

The purpose of Chapters I and II is to put the Party-worker relationship in Czechoslovakia into a wider theoretical context through which their latent and later open antagonism can be explained. This theoretical context poses and seeks to answer the question whether or not Czechoslovak society and societies similar to it have antagonistic class structures. The essential question is whether one can speak of dominant and dominated classes within such societies. If one can, the problem then becomes how to identify these classes, and differentiate between them and their respective class interests.

The first chapter will examine the class structure of industrial societies, and in particular the feasibility of

the distinction between a ruling and a ruled class in the Soviet-type context. Chapter II will review the available empirical evidence which supports the argument that there is a distinctive ruling class within the Soviet-type society. My argument is that there is sufficient evidence for arguing that the Communist parties of Eastern Europe and the USSR have created new ruling classes in their respective societies.

Chapters three, four and five deal with the concrete example of Czechoslovakia's working class and its relationship to the Communist Party. I shall seek to demonstrate that the working class in this country has many attributes of a 'dominated' class and has engaged, first in latent, and later, in 1968-9, in open forms of class struggle with the (Communist) Party-based ruling class. I shall examine the type of domination of the working class in the 1950's, the form the class struggle took in 1968-9, and assess to what extent the working class was successful in emancipating itself from ruling class control, given the specific socio-historical circumstances of the Prague Spring.

Of the alternatives, the term Soviet-type society, in view of the fact that the debate on the precise nature of the social system considered is not closed, appears to be the least misleading for two important reasons. First, most of the nations which became the "People's Democracies" after the Second World War have had their social systems imposed by Soviet military power or strong political and diplomatic

pressure. Secondly, the most important social institutions were and remain closely modelled on Soviet institutions. The Communist Parties, the most important political and economic institutions, and even the trade unions, are closely patterned on the Soviet model. Furthermore, the Soviet Union had twice intervened militarily to preserve this Soviet-type system: in 1956 in Hungary and in 1968 in Czechoslovakia. The fact remains that the social systems of these societies, with the exception of Yugoslavia were patterned after the Soviet example and to a great extent remain so today.

CHAPTER ONE

The Class Structure of Industrial Societies

In discussing the social structures of Western and Soviet-type societies, we are essentially looking for the presence of the main classes. The purpose of this chapter is not to explain the complexities of social stratification in either society but simply to ascertain on what basis the presence of main classes within the social structure can be stipulated.

A useful approach to this problematic of class is to combine Marx's and Weber's insight into the class structure. From Marx we derive the notion of an antagonistic mode of production which generates classes. The class distinction is between those who own and control the means of production and those who are excluded from exercising such control. From Weber we derive the notion of social classes as a particular strata within society. Classes arise from distributive inequality of both social and economic opportunities, arising from a 'common market situation'.

This combined approach entails both the analysis of the structure which generates classes (Marxism approach) and analysis of the agents within these classes (Weberian approach). A society can be said to have a class structure:

1) if there is an identifiable group in the control of the means of production which prevents other groups in society from gaining access to the control of these means of production

2) if there exists significant distributive inequality of economic, social and political opportunities within the social structure. If this inequality is due to some other factors than those arising directly out of the technical division of labour

3) if there is large scale social antagonism (violent or institutionalized) between large groups which could be considered as 'classes'.

On the basis of the three criteria both the advanced Western and the Soviet-type societies can be considered to have class structures.

There are both similarities and differences between the respective class structures. In relation to the first criterion, in both societies there exists an identifiable group in control of the means of production, and a large group (the working class) which is excluded from access to the control of these means of production. The apparent difference is that in the Western society the power base of the dominant class is still partly based on the legal control and ownership of private property. In the Soviet-type society the control over the means of production is mediated through the state and rests in the hands of a political bureaucracy. The individuals comprising this bureaucracy can claim no personal property rights in regards to the means of production. Another difference is that, whereas in the Western societies the political and economic spheres are relatively separate, in the Soviet-

type society the ruling class clearly controls both the economy and the state.

Significant distributive inequality exists in both societies based on criteria other than those arising from the technical division of labour (i.e. education and qualification). The difference lies in the fact that such distributive inequality in the Western society is largely generated from the ownership of private property and/or access to the control of the means of production. Distributive inequality in the Soviet-type society arises from the holding of a state or a Party administrative position and is contingent on the retention of such a position.

Finally in both societies there exists social conflict between large groups in the population which could be considered as 'classes'. The difference is in the fact that in Western societies this conflict is by and large institutionalised through legalized means such as collective bargaining. In the Soviet-type society such conflict is not institutionalised and periodically erupts in confrontations which often lead to the crisis of the entire system. The examples of working class revolt in Poland, Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Poland again in 1970 suffice.

Let us take a closer look at the various approaches to the class analysis of the Soviet-type society and seek in a more precise way to ascertain which theoretical approach most closely approximates the conflictual reality of these societies.

Denials of Antagonistic Class Structure

The Soviet and Wesolowski's Views

The establishment of the USSR heralded the emergence of the first state based on Marxist ideas. Unfortunately, as this state developed, Marx's language and terminology were retained but his methods of critical class analysis were relinquished when dealing with the social relations in the USSR, and later "People's Democracies", so-called, of Eastern Europe.

To recall Ossowski's verdict, whereas Marx's analysis was like as immense lens concentrating rays from different directions, Stalin's Marxism became an optical device which let through only the rays coming from one direction.[1]

Stalin's view of Soviet class relations, which formed the basis for the present day Soviet view, held that with the overthrow of capitalism and the gradual consolidation of socialist society, all exploitative aspects of class relations had ended. The establishment of a socialist state did not mean an immediate end to classes. These remain in a socialist society even after exploitation has been ended because the abolition of class divisions occurs only in the highest stage of development of the productive forces and production relations. Only when the old forms of social differentiation of labour, distinctions between town and country, and intellectual and physical labour disappear will there be no more classes.[2]

Unlike Marx' classes, those in the Soviet Union are considered non-antagonistic because the conditions within the social structure which give rise to class antagonism are said to be no longer present. Social classes are defined on the basis of the existence of two forms of socialist ownership: state and collective farm. These two types, reflecting the difference in the level of development of productive forces in industry and agriculture, give rise to two classes within the Soviet society: the working class which includes people working on state-owned farms, and the kolkhoz peasant class. Since social differences exist between people mainly engaged in physical labour and those engaged in mental work the latter constitutes a stratum called the intelligentsia.[3]

The largest and the 'leading' class in the Soviet society is the working class which in 1972 formed about three-fifths of the population.[4] This class plays the leading role in society because of two major factors. It has the leading position because it works in enterprises which represent the highest form of the socialist economy. Also, the Soviet working class is the toughest, best organized and possesses the richest revolutionary experience to make it the leading class in society.[5]

The explanation of social tensions in terms of Marxian class antagonisms had been useful to the Soviet and Eastern European regimes in the earlier stages of their respective development. It aided the speedy elimination of dissident

elements which were labelled as 'class enemies'. The thesis of sharpening class struggle gradually gave way to the affirmation that in the present stage of the construction of the socialist society, fundamental class antagonisms had been overcome.

Since neither Marx nor Engels could analyse class relations in a modern society where the major means of production had been nationalized, the Soviet view is made more plausible by the apparent absurdity of counterposing to it the Marxian notion of class in the analysis of such a society. As Rakovski points out the incongruity:

> In the generally accepted framework of historical materialism it is impossible to give a description of a modern non-transitional society where there is no capitalist private property but where the means of production are not at the collective disposal of the producers ... where economic priorities are not normally determined by the market, but neither are they chosen by means of rational discussion among the associated producers, and so on.[6]

The nationalization of the means of production appears to be incompatible with the presence of a ruling class.

On the other hand the term class was retained by the Soviets to describe their own social structure since fully acknowledging that Soviet society is classless would be to approximate Marx' vision of a classless Communist society where all productive forces are fully developed. This claim would put the Soviet officials into the awkward position of trying to explain the shortcomings of their society, if the

promised 'classless' society was already an accomplished fact. The Soviet approach has been rather to stress the stage by stage development of their society towards Marx's ideal one. The concept of transitional, non-antagonistic classes admirably suited this purpose.

The Soviet view of friendly class relations, as this chapter will attempt to show, does not explain the conflictual social reality in a Soviet-type society. Because it presents a society devoid of systemic social conflict, where no group has special access to the control of the means of production, and special privileges apart from those arising from the technical division of labour, it is highly problematic. This conception cannot suggest an explanation of the profound, periodical eruptions and crises within the East European systems which often spring from the working class. It does not even admit the possibility of the formation of a new ruling class which continues to oppress the working class. The Soviet view has forsaken critical Marxist insight and instead uses selected Marxist phrases to legitimize the status quo. It prevents a sociological inquiry into the nature of power, social inequality and the lack of individual and collective freedoms.

Within Eastern Europe, there is some discussion about whether or not the concept of class is still useful in describing socialist society. In Poland the term class has fallen into disuse. By the mid-1960's the Polish statistical

handbook Rocznik Statystyczny had ceased to publish a table on the class composition of the Polish population.[7] The Polish sociologist Wesolowski has argued that one can no longer speak of the existence of classes in the contemporary socialist societies, but only of strata and social differentiation. His argument proceeds in the following manner: Marx considered the relationship to the means of production as the decisive criterion in the formation and differentiation of classes, because this relationship determined a number of other social attributes. The capitalist mode of production creates two basic and antagonistic classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. One owns and controls the means of production and the other is deprived of both ownership and control. The notion of a class divided society cannot apply to socialist societies since the statisation of the major means of production eliminates one element of the antagonistic capital-labour equation. The bourgeois class which owned the means of production is no longer present. From this fact Wesolowski concludes that socialist society has abolished the class structure in all its attributes and manifestations, and that socialist stratification has to be treated in terms of strata and particular interest groups. Class conflicts and class domination simply do not exist. If conflicts arise they are between the state and particular interest groups within the population.[8]

This position, in a manner similar to the Soviet

view, fails to account for the existence of a large group in control of the means of production which also enjoys substantive privileges unavailable to the wider public. Furthermore, Wesolowski's argument does not explain the subordinate position of the working class as a class nor its periodical revolts.

Affirmations of Antagonistic Class Structure

On the other hand there has been a great deal of literature affirming the presence of antagonistic classes within the Soviet-type society. Perhaps the most influential have been the state capitalist and the managerial class theories. I shall briefly review these, then outline the limitations of both views.

The State Capitalist View

The state capitalist theorists stress the similarity between the two social systems and maintain that both are ruled by a 'collective' capitalist class. Especially Djilas and Bettelheim stress the structural identity of the ruling classes in the Soviet-type society and in the advanced capitalist nations of the West.

The Soviet-type system is considered capitalist; it represents the abolition of capital as private property within the boundaries of capitalist production itself. The most oppressive features of capitalism, such as wage labour, the

rigid division of labour and the subjugation of the working class have been maintained. In both systems the logic of capitalist accumulation prevails at the expense of distribution, which retains its class character.

The state-capitalist-bureaucratic class is considered a propertied class because it collectively 'owns' the state and through it centralizes all capital into one large national capital. In Russia and later in Eastern Europe private and individual ownership of the means of production had given way to a collective ownership formally vested in a state controlled by the bureaucracy.

The argument that the bureaucratic class 'owns' the means of production is stressed not only by Djilas, who equates the right of control with the right of ownership, but also by Polish Marxists Kuron and Modzelewski who stress that: "State ownership of the means of production is only a form of ownership. It is exercised by those social groups to which the state belongs."[9] More recently this argument had been upheld by Bettelheim who argues that the system of state enterprises constitutes the collective private property of a state bourgeoisie. This state bourgeoisie, which consists of managers, directors and members of the state planning apparatus dominates (instead of representing) the working class.[10]

The state capitalist argument then centers on the similarity between the essential features of the two systems,

specifically on the 'ownership' of the means of production by a bureaucratic state capitalist class which dominates the working class in a manner similar to the domination in the capitalist countries.

The Managerial Class View

This view of the Soviet-type class structure does not differ dramatically from the state capitalist view, except in the fact that it maintains that Soviet-type society is a class society of a different type existing alongside capitalism, and that its ruling class consists of 'managers' and not state capitalists.

In the words of Burnham, the original exponent of the managerial class theory, ownership is equated with control, since without control there is no ownership.[11] The Soviet-type state is controlled by a small group of people who carry out the essential and specialised tasks of directing and co-ordinating (i.e. managing) the large and complex Soviet society. That they are a ruling class is indicated by the fact that they control the instruments of production and in turn receive preferential treatment in the distribution of the fruits of these instruments of production. Soviet society is viewed as increasingly becoming class dichotomous, in which a mass of unskilled workers and highly specialised managers are the two opposing forces.

A more modern version of the managerial class theory

is argued by Krejci (1976), who stresses the importance of 'managers' as wielders of political power in the Soviet-type system. The central class division can be said to lie in the division between managers and producers of goods and services. The respective ruling Communist Parties create this 'managerial class' which dominates the 'mass' of producers.[12]

Once again the theme of a class dichotomy, this time based on a political distinction between managers and non-managers, is highlighted.

While both the state capitalist and the managerial class theories have provoked a great deal of discussion and do contain a lot of merit, I shall restrict my comments to a brief criticism of the shortcomings of these theories.

First, it appears that both theories stress far too much the 'dichotomons' aspect of the class structure in these societies, portraying it as a rigid division between the ruling and ruled classes. The significant social mobility from the lower classes into the ruling class which occurred in Eastern Europe in the 1950's is barely mentioned. For example Djilas only casually mentions, without going into detail, that the ruling class was born out of the exploited class.

These class theories posit, sociologically speaking, a much too rigid distinction between the ruling class and the masses while not having elaborated the principle which underlies the ruling class and the working class formation as classes. It fails to account for the fluidity of class

arrangements; the movement of agents both inter- and intra-generationally between the ruling class and the mass of producers. An analysis of how the ruling class reproduces itself is crucial given the fact that most of the top leaders of the ruling class in Eastern Europe are themselves former workers, or of proletarian or peasant origin. Finally, the inextricable linking of class to property ownership, though it is evident that such a linking is not the most useful or important when dealing with the Soviet-type society leaves gaps in the state capitalist theory.

Class formation, barriers to entry into classes, class differentiation and peculiarities of the organization of the ruling class need to be examined before class analysis can be made truly plausible. In this regard, a relatively recent, and in my opinion, the most useful approach to class analysis in both systems is provided by Parkin. Parkin utilizes a flexible approach to the study of social class. Using Weber's concept of social closure as the principle underlying class formation, he argues that any social collectivity practices closure by excluding outsiders from access to social and economic opportunities (rewards) and thus creates a stratum of ineligibles beneath it. According to Weber, the practice of social closure is used for 'monopolisation of specific, usually economic opportunities'. Whether these exclusionary practices are justified by reference to faith, pigmentation, or language, they are generally similar

to those sanctified by property rights or credentials because they represent exploitative forms of social action.[13]

What emerges from Parkin's development of the Weberian notion of social closure is that elite groups in both Western and Soviet-type societies carry out such practices of social closure, and thereby create <u>classes of nomination</u>. These classes, like Weber's group or social collectivity, restrict the access to rewards and nominate its successors rather than simply transferring its positions to lineal descendants. The class of nomination, as opposed to a class of reproduction, singles out specific attributes of individuals rather than the generalized attributes of social collectivities in choosing its successors. As for the Soviet case, Parkin cites Orwell in support of his view. Orwell had written:

> The essence of oligarchical rule is not father-to-son inheritance but the persistence of a certain way of life imposed by the dead upon living. A ruling group is a ruling group so long as it can nominate its successors. The Party is not concerned with perpetuating its blood but with perpetuating itself.[14]

Parkin argues that the <u>raison d'etre</u> of a hegemonic party is to preserve political and economic control in the hands of a social group which could not legitimate its power and privileges by reference to the same criteria which govern the distribution of rewards among the population at large:

> The skills and attributes of the political bureaucracy are useful mainly for the

> maintenance of the apparatus which is its own creation; they are not the skills which are intrinsically necessary to an industrial society. And where the political class is not also the ascendant class, its survival can only be guaranteed by a hegemonic party exercising total dominion over men and ideas.[15]

The notion of social closure as a processual feature underlying class formation highlights the essential fluidity of class arrangements in industrial societies, and avoids the pitfalls of the 'class-based-on-property' problematic. State property can and does legitimize the party's right to nominate successors and its role as the guardian of the society's interests. Classes, according to Parkin, when defined through the principle of social closure, adopt the necessary idiom of conflict without resorting to the rigidities of a formal dichotomy.

In comparing Western and Soviet-type societies he argues that propertied elites in the former and Party elites in the latter are in a roughly similar structural position insofar as the principle underlying their privileged position differs from the one which guarantees the position of most other groups in society, i.e. rewards arising from the technical division of labour. Both elites enjoy a materially privileged position because they expropriate surplus value or surplus product created by the subordinate class.[16]

Complementary to the principle of social closure Parkin uses the concept of '<u>solidarism</u>' to describe the collective action mounted by the excluded, negatively

privileged groups against those who exclude them. Solidarism as the principle underlying the 'underdog' class formation is useful in examining the class formation of the working class in the Soviet-type societies. I shall argue that it is with the help of this principle that one can understand the various, periodical working class actions against the East European regimes, as a form of reaffirmation of class solidarity on the part of the working class in the face of exploitative decisions and actions by the Communist Party. Such solidaristic actions represent an attempt to reaffirm working class control over the means of production and working class organizations. Industrial forms of solidarism, because of the highly politicised nature of the Soviet-type system, are immediately translated into a political solidarism as situations of class conflict develop where the most class conscious elements of the working class confront the Party-based ruling class.

Parkin's argument that the major stratification and class cleavage, as between the two contrasting modes of social closure, exclusion and solidarism, provides a sufficiently clear theoretical framework for the understanding of the conflict between the workers and the Communist Party within the Soviet-type system as a 'class conflict', and helps to explain the context of the struggles of the Czechoslovak working class against the Communist Party under a Soviet-type regime.

A detailed empirical study which illustrates how the class of nomination is created by the Party within the system of state enterprises in the Soviet Union is by Andrle in his excellent study entitled "Managerial Power in the Soviet Union". Here he shows that the Soviet enterprise director and the leading managers are at the centre of not only economic but political and ideological sets of problems. Party supervision of industrial managers dates back to the 1920's when Party officials had to keep an eye on the bourgeois specialists without whom Soviet industrial development was difficult. Today, with no bourgeois specialists to keep an eye on, the Party still closely controls enterprise activities. Perhaps the most fundamental means through which direct Party control today is established and the class of nomination created is through the Party managerial personnel policy.[17]

The repeatedly stressed official goal of the Party's personnel policy is that 'in every situation the manager demonstrates the qualities of a political leader and a state executive for whom the general interest counts first of all, above local or sectional interests'.[18] The aspiring managers must be politically mature before they are appointed to important positions. The Party's power over the selection of persons to managerial and other important positions assures that this goal is generally met. There exists in the USSR

what is called the 'nomenklatura system'.* So pervasive is this system in the USSR that Andrle writes:

> In the Soviet Union, each position of authority or influence is listed in the hierarchically differentiated nomenklatura of appointments which are under the jurisdiction of a party office. Thus the hiring to and firing from the few thousand highest political, administrative, managerial, ministry and police jobs is subject to veto powers of the secretariat of the Central Committee of the CPSU, that is they are listed in the nomenklatura of the republican party central committees, and so it goes on, down to the raikoms**. In a curious sense, the population of the whole country is split into two classes of persons, those who occupy 'nomenklatured' positions and those who do not; and those who do are differentiated by the status of the party organ at whose nomenklatura their job is listed. Thus the directorships of the largest enterprises in the high priority sectors of industry are listed at the CC CPSU, while the directorships of the smallest factories producing consumer goods are listed in their local raikoms, together with the foremen of the neighbouring larger factories.[19]

Every Party organization in the USSR is responsible for creating a 'managerial reserve', which is a list of people who are potentially suitable for managerial careers. Similarly, the Party organs have a right of veto over all appointments made to posts listed in their nomenklaturas. What Andrle is describing is the composition of the Soviet Union's ruling class. The mechanism through which this class

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* nomenklaturas are lists of appointments controlled by the party

** raikom = raion committee of the CPSU; raion is a district; an administrative subdivision of an oblast

reproduces itself is revealed by the operation of the nomenklatura system. This being a system of social closure, Parkin, in his concept of the 'class nomination' theoretically analysed this mechanism of class formation and reproduction on the part of the ruling class.

In subsequent chapters on Czechoslovakia I shall document how this class of nomination subjugated the working class in the 1950's, and also analyse how the Czechoslovak working class responded in the 1968-9 period by forming a "class-for-itself", (in Marxist terminology) engaging the ruling class in a struggle over the control of the unions and the worker councils.

CHAPTER TWO

The Class of Nomination as the Ruling Class in the Soviet-type System

The major theoreticians of oligarchy, Mosca, Pareto and Michels, have argued that no social order can exist without a ruling class. All were keenly interested in the socialist idea and in its organizational embodiment in the socialist parties. They have attacked the socialist claim that a future socialist system would be a classless society. It is useful to consider briefly some of their predictions about the nature of an anticipated socialist society and about the nature of the governing socialist parties, and then compare the extent to which these predictions have been validated in the subsequent experience of the Soviet-type society.

Mosca believed that no social order is possible without a ruling class. In every social order men at the head of a state need a ruling class which carries out their orders in order to govern effectively. He warns against a society where the state gains unprecedented powers and where the political class is organized along a single principle. In such a society it becomes difficult for all other social forces to act in public life. The collectivist societies

would, according to Mosca, be managed beyond any doubt by officials.[20]

Pareto held that the victory of a socialist party would lead to the creation of a new working class elite which would become a ruthless ruler of the working class:

> After the victory the new aristocracy will perhaps allow some concessions of form and language to the new proletarians; that is, to the weak, the 'improvident', or the incapable, but actually these latter will probably have to bear an even heavier yoke than the one they are bearing now. The new masters will not, at least for a little while, have the senile weaknesses of our bourgeoisie.[21]

Michels undertook an extensive study of the oligarchical tendency within the German socialist party to show that even within a force dedicated to its suppression, this tendency persists. He found that the socialist party was bureaucratized and oligarchical even before taking state power. The oligarchical tendency results from organization, and is in fact its inevitable outcome. A socialist organization, generated to overthrow the centralized power of the state, was started from the idea that the working class needs merely to secure a sufficiently vast and solid organization in order to triumph over the forces of the state. Towards this purpose the party of the workers acquired a vigorous centralisation of its own, based upon the same type of authority and discipline which characterizes the state.[22]

He devotes attention to the process of the

de-radicalization of socialist leaders of proletarian origin. He seeks to explain how and why the men who lead the movement become detached from the working class and come to represent their own interests instead of that of the workers'. The detachment of proletarian leaders from the class they lead is a natural process, and two reasons account for it. First, it is impossible for a modern labour leader to remain a manual worker. Shortage of time and that of physical capacity are important limiting factors. The well paid leader becomes economically 'declasse', an ideologue, since the cause he advocates does not correspond to his position in society.[23] To underline the elevation of a worker above the class he comes from, Michels uses the German sociological term 'gehobene Arbeiter Existenz' (working class life on a higher scale.[24]

The second reason which accounts for the distance between the leader and the worker is the barrier of rules and regulations which, while guiding his actions as well as controlling the rank and file, separate the leader from the mass.

The labour organization, in the final analysis, is the creator of a new (petty bourgeois) stratum which had risen above the proletarian class. The socialist party, with its salaried posts of honour, serves as a potent stimulus for those individual workers, willing and able to elevate themselves above the working class condition, particularly in terms of social and economic status. Once they attain such positions

they perform different functions and consequently come within the orbit of the new political class. The party detaches itself from the class it is said to represent and instead serves the interests of the bureaucrats.[25]

Though one may well argue with the notion that the tendency to oligarchy represents an "iron law" of history, and that all socialist societies and the governing socialist parties must necessarily be oligarchical, it appears that in the specific case of the Soviet-type society the predictions of Mosca, Michels and Pareto had proven remarkably accurate. The available evidence which suggests that the Communist Parties of the USSR and of Eastern Europe are oligarchical in nature, and do indeed form the cores of the ruling classes of these nations, will now be examined.

On the Empirical Differentiation of the Ruling and Working Classes - the Soviet-type Context

Following the elite theorists' argument how does one, in a Soviet-type society, make the distinction between the Party-based ruling class on the one hand and the working class on the other? The ideologues of the Eastern European regimes deny any separation between the working class and the Party which controls the state. The state, they argue, is simply a tool of working class power, managed in the interest of that class by the vanguard of the working class, the Communist Party. The Czechoslovak Constitution, for example, affirms

that:

> The guiding force in society is the vanguard of the working class, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, a voluntary military alliance of the most active and most politically conscious citizens from the ranks of workers, farmers and intelligentsia. (Official English Translation 1964)

On the basis of available evidence it seems possible to make the empirical separation between the ruling and working classes, and portray the conflict between their respective interests, because of the Communist Party's exclusive control of the state and economy, the process of de-proletarianisation of the ruling communist parties, the monopolisation of political and economic power by fulltime functionaries (i.e. oligarchical control), periodical working class actions against specific party policies together with the formation of a worker counter-ideology and, finally, because of the privileges which separate the way of life of the ruling class from that of the working class.

There is a close connection between top party and state positions. Though such positions are formally and institutionally separate, top Party leaders usually occupy leading positions in the state. As Gyorgi points out, where collective leadership has been the norm, the top Party leader had assumed the position of the First Secretary of the party (formerly the Secretary General), while the number two man in the Party became the prime minister on the government side. Around these two clustered a small group of about

five to eight colleagues who were identified as collective leaders of both party and government. In some nations the top party leader combines the top Party and state position in his own person, and again high ranking Party members hold high state offices.[26] In view of these facts, the separation between the party and the state has to be regarded as only formal. In reality, Party position gives access to a state position, and the Party apparatus is the real locus of decision-making power.

There is a very high ratio of Party members among individuals in high state positions. This fact was noted for the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia by Giddens.[27] In 1968, in Czechoslovakia, 70-80% of leading economic officials, 80-90% of officials of social organisations, and 85-90% of officials of central organisations were also ranking members of the Communist Party.[28] Among ministers in government and members of parliament the respective figures were 90% and 75%.[29]

Not only do the various constitutions proclaim the Communist Party (or its nominal equivalent) to be the leading force in the state, but statistical analysis of the leading position holders in state and state controlled organisations reveals the dominant influence of the Communist Party.

The oligarchical nature of the Communist Party vis à vis the working class is demonstrated by the fact that by the mid-1960's most of the Communist Parties had undergone a

process of de-proletarianisation. Manual workers, from forming or nearly forming a majority within the Party, had become a minority by the late 1960's. Within the Soviet system only East Germany and the USSR show a minor resurgence of manual workers in Party membership, but nowhere have the workers regained a majority with the Party.* For Yugoslavia, a Party newspaper 'Komunist' reported in 1966 that in the twelve month period previously 51 percent of those expelled from the Party and 53.6 percent of those who resigned voluntarily were manual workers.[30] While in 1948 workers and peasants formed four fifths of the Yugoslav Party membership by 1957 the figure had dropped to one half.[31]

Giddens quite correctly argues that such a rapid de-proletarianisation far outstrips that which might have been predicted on a purely statistical basis as a result of the growth of the white collar sector of the labour force.[32] A wealth of evidence suggests that manual workers are vastly underrepresented in the Party's leading bodies. Baylis' study of the East German party elite shows that out of the

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* The drop in the percentage of manual workers within the party is as follows: Czechoslovakia from 57 to 33.4 percent; GDR 48.1 to 45.6 percent; Hungary 56 to 34.6 percent; Poland 62.2 (1945) to 39.7 percent. The percentages compared are from the years 1947-8 and 1966-9. In Bulgaria the workers formed 36.1 percent of party membership in 1956-8 period. In the USSR the workers formed 41 percent of the party membership and dropped to 38 percent in the 1966-9 period (data compared by Therborn 1978, p. 82).

189 members and candidate members elected to the 1971 eighth congress of the SED only three were then workers.[33] Among the 115 full members of the Polish Central Committee elected at the sixth congress of the PZPR in 1971, two were farmers, 27 were manual workers, 75 party, government and other officials, and 11 other non-manuals. Among the 93 candidate members 2 were farmers, 17 were manual workers, 52 were officials, 21 non-manual and one with occupation unknown.[34] Meissner found that at the 1966 Soviet Party Congress the top level bureaucrats, while constituting only 2.1 percent of the total party membership, held 81.1 percent of the full memberships within the Central Committee.[35] The evidence shows that the majority of individuals who are elected to top party bodies are already fulltime functionaries and far removed from the occupational status of a manual worker. Michels had predicted that this would happen a long time ago. The data also bear out Mosca's prediction that in a collectivist society such as the Soviet-type society, would be managed by officials.

A further demonstration that the separation between the Party and the working class is very real becomes evident if one considers the often violent conflicts of interest. Consider the periodical worker actions against party-state decisions: Eastern Europe since the 1950's has witnessed numerous worker revolts against specific Party policies and decisions, and has even experienced the formulation of what

may be called a worker counter-ideology. On June 17, 1953 large scale worker demonstrations and riots occurred in East Germany following a June 16 government decision to increase average work norms by 10 percent. Also in June 1953 a worker revolt erupted in several Czechoslovak mining and industrial centres following a government monetary reform and became known as the 'Pilsen Revolt'. In the 1956 Hungarian Revolution there was a widespread participation of workers and even the creation of a Central Workers Council in Budapest. The Polish worker councils were spontaneously created in 1956 following a crisis in the communist leadership as a reaction against Party control over the enterprises. Czechoslovakia in 1968 and 1969 experienced a mushrooming of semi-legal worker councils which strenuously opposed Party and state control. Poland in 1970 experienced violent worker demonstrations in the Baltic ports of Gdansk, Gdynia and Szcecin following a government decision to sharply increase fuel, food and clothing prices. In the 1976-78 period the Polish situation again became unsettled. These examples are only the major instances of worker confrontations with the regime. These conflicts show that large sections of the industrial working class have not been able to use legal channels to influence the policies of the party and, therefore cannot be said to control the Party and state machinery, despite what the official propaganda maintains. The workers have revolted to protect interests which were threatened by Party-sponsored

state decrees.

As for a worker counter-ideology, during the most serious crises of the East European regimes (Poland and Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, Poland 1970), the elected representatives of the industrial workers formulated relatively clear demands to put forward to the Party. Included in these were such ideas as demands for the autonomy of the worker councils and of the trade union organisations from Party and state control. This may be termed a worker counter-ideology opposing the Party's 'umbrella' ideology which claimed the absolute unity of interest between the workers and the Party.

A final way to differentiate between the interests of the ruling and working class members is to consider the privileges members of the former class enjoy at the expense of the latter class. The nature and extent of these privileges is difficult to document since even the existence of such privileges is, as much as possible, hidden from view by a Party which is formally committed to the long term eradication of most social differences. Salaries of high state and Party officials have been kept a state secret. Many privileges exist apart from salaries and are in the form of material possessions and various funds at the disposal of Party and state officials. For direct evidence I rely on the personal testimonies of Party and state leaders who had enjoyed such privileges during their tenure. Two former Czechoslovak leaders confirm the existence of privileges.

E. Loebl, in 1949 the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade, writes about the benefits his position had brought him:

> The relatively low salaries of people in high government positions were aimed at giving the impression of equality of income. If one considered the salaries alone, such an assumption appeared correct. But there were remarkable 'fringe benefits' that made the power elite also an economic elite. We, for instance, had our beautiful apartment virtually rent free, and I had a car and a driver at my disposal. All the parties I gave were catered by a special firm and charged to the ministry. I had special medical privileges and could at any time make use of spas or recreation centers of my choice; I could travel freely and enjoyed hundreds of small privileges that were not available to ordinary citizens ..."[36]

Loebl's testimony suggests an explanation of the role and scope of these privileges in the de-radicalisation and de classement of former workers who were elevated above the working class and "seduced" with previously unheard of privileges. To use Michel's term, such people have become 'ideologues' because their standard of living and occupational status did not at all correspond to their former position in the working class.

Another account comes from Z. Mlynar who held a high position in the Attorney General's Office and subsequently, during the Prague Spring, became one of the secretaries of the Central Committee. Mlynar discusses his salary as a secretary of the Central Committee. His monthly salary amounted to 14,000 crowns of which 8,000 he received as official salary and another 6,000 in the form of a fund put

at his disposal which could be disposed of at his will and for which he had to account only in formal terms. His total income was approximately ten times the average Czechoslovak wage. Still the salaries of the members of the party's presidium, those of the first secretary of the party, the prime minister and the president of the national assembly were much higher than his.[37]

The practical separation between the ruling class and the working class then can be made on the basis of the de-proletarianisation of the ruling Communist Party's, monopolisation of political and economic power by fulltime officials (i.e. oligarchical control), periodical working class action against party policy together with the formation of a worker counter-ideology, and finally, the various privileges which separate the way of life of the ruling class from that of the working class.

CHAPTER THREE

Class Relations in one Soviet-type society

The Communist Subjugation of the Czechoslovak Working Class

To supplement a theoretical analysis of class structure and class relations by a historical one, I have selected to examine the evolution of Czechoslovakia from its inception as a society reorganised on the Soviet model. Czechoslovakia's evolution after the Second World War is important to examine for three main reasons.

First, Czechoslovakia, prior to the Communist take-over, did possess a broad industrial base and a large and highly organised and class conscious industrial working class. In 1936, twelve years before Czechoslovakia officially became a Soviet-type society, there were 191 worker and 508 non-manual employee unions with a combined membership of 2,219,000, or 70 percent of the non-agricultural labour force.[38] Czechoslovakia is therefore one of the few countries where a study can be made of the impact of a Soviet-type development on the working class, the system of social stratification and on the economy of an already industrialised and developed nation which possessed an institutional frame-work very similar to the Western democracies.

The second reason for choosing Czechoslovakia is that during the events known as the 'Prague Spring' the dynamic of the social structure and social relations within a Soviet-type society were revealed to a great extent. The mechanisms of political, economic and social power were bluntly exposed as a social conflict of immense proportions developed while the Communist Party struggled to preserve its hegemonic role in society.

Finally, out of the Czechoslovak Reform came the concepts of 'participatory socialism' which, especially when applied to industrial relations, suggest a possible direction for change within this Soviet-type society towards a more democratic form of social organisation.

The study of Czechoslovakia, within the general tradition of classical political economy, as a case study of a society which adopted or was forced to adopt the Soviet example, can advance our understanding of such a society and the relationship between classes within such a society. In examining Czechoslovakia I shall focus on the complex and evolving relationships between the party, the state, the unions and the industrial workers. As I am dealing with classes and class relations, and have found the distinction between the ruling and working classes useful in describing the fundamental conflict within a Soviet-type society, I shall seek to describe the relationship between these two basic classes from the early 50's, leading up to the open

conflict between them which occurred during the Prague Spring and aftermath of the Soviet-led invasion.

The Collective Measures for the Subjugation of the Czechoslovak Working Class

A) The Regimentation of the Trade Unions

Following the communist take-over in 1948 Czechoslovakia became one of the "People's Democracies" and underwent a statisation of its major means of production. The ruling Communist Party proclaimed itself the embodiment of the working class will, and declared officially that the new system had abolished capitalist exploitation of the workers. Nominally, the working class was declared the master of the state, and through state mediation the owner of the nation's productive forces.

Officially the working class had come to power. But was that really the case? The reality underlying this official pronouncement was quite different. The working class manifested but few of the features of a new ruling class. Its conditions of existence did not really change. Wage labour and the authoritarian social relations within the industrial enterprises remained the same. The trade unions, once the working class' representative in an antagonistic capitalistic mode of production, simply became an appendage of the Communist Party. From the vehicle of working

class interest in an antagonistic class relationship, they became an instrument of Communist domination over the working class.

For its organisation of labour, Czechoslovakia adopted the example of the Soviet Union, as did most other East European countries. Foremost this model exemplified a wholly different conception of the structure and role of the trade unions. All formerly independent unions were forced, through a series of government decrees, to become a part of one giant trade union federation called the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement (ROH)*. By 1951 the number of unions had been reduced from 21 to 12.[39]

All union organisations became directly subordinated to the central committee of the new union federation and the latter was given the power to dissolve any branch, or to dismiss any union official not carrying out its directives. A government directive dating back to 1946 made it illegal to establish unions unaffiliated with the ROH and banned all other ad hoc worker organisations.[40] As with the unions, so other institutions which formerly represented worker interests were dissolved or came under the power of the central trade union organisation. State-financed work tribunals, which had previously served as a major legal avenue of worker defence

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* The Revolutionary Trade Union Movement was not an exclusively working class organisation. Some 95 percent of all wage and salary earners were organised on the 'one industry - one union' principle, where industry is to be understood as a 'branch of human activity'.

against employers' unjust actions, were abolished in December 1948.[41]

Perhaps one of the major obstacles to the regimentation of the unions were the enterprise union organisations known as enterprise councils. The independence of these councils was curtailed in the following manner. According to a law formulated in 1945 all members of this council were to be elected by the enterprise workers from a list of candidates presented to the voters by the higher organs of the trade union organisation. A majority of eighty percent was stipulated as necessary for council members to be elected. A further government decree in November 1946 specified that if the list of candidates did not obtain the necessary majority, a new, again officially-sponsored list, would be presented and a new election called. If, for the second time, the necessary majority was not obtained, the regional union council was to appoint a substitute organ to fulfil the function of the enterprise council. The first elections of this kind were held in the spring of 1947 from which 88 percent of the larger factories (with 3,000 or more employees) emerged not with elected councils but with appointed substitute organs.[42]

This unusual election system blocked the workers from electing the union representatives of their choice, even on the lower levels. The choice was simple: either the workers voted for the list of candidates composed by the Communist dominated higher union organs, or the regional union council

named the worker representatives without an election. In either case the workers did not choose their representatives, but an apparently democratic procedure was retained. In this manner the major remaining independent union channel was turned into a tool of the ROH, and through it into a tool of the Communist Party. The enterprise councils were later replaced by the formally subservient basic organisations of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, thereby ceasing to play the role of an opposition to the state's economic policies.[43]

The role of the trade union movement underwent a drastic change. The primary goals of trade union activity became the unconditional support of government-set production goals, and the encouragement and stimulation of worker productivity. Union organisations at all levels received clear directives specifying the new orientation for union activity. Two notions can help us to clarify how this was implemented.

The Party-propagated notion of 'the general interest of the working class', and the complementary notion of 'protectionism' came to guide all union activity. The regime justified most of its policies and the actions of its unions because they were 'in the interest of the working class', even though such decisions and policies were frequently implemented to the detriment of specific interests of 'particular' groups of workers. The concept of 'protectionism' was used by the regime's representatives to label any action

which was contrary to the Party policy of the moment. If an action was labelled 'protectionist' it was obviously not in 'the general interest of the working class'. Both notions were used to invalidate demands by particular groups of workers. The work of the union organisations and of the individual union officials was judged in the context of these two notions. If an organisation defended specific worker interests against party-state policies, its work was termed 'protectionist'. If it faithfully carried out these directives its actions were commended as being 'in the general interest of the working class'. On the one hand these two notions were used to ensure union organisations' conformity to Party-state directives, and as a sort of a scale by which to measure the 'correctness' of activity of particular organisations and individuals, and on the other hand as a means to discourage and dissipate specific worker demands.[44] With the help of these two slogans the Czechoslovak ruling class was able ideologically to dominate the industrial workers, just as the concrete measures which transformed the unions into an obedient tool of the Party represented the organisational side of this domination.

Being termed 'protectionist' usually involved censure or dismissal of the union official from his post. Precisely in order to avoid this 'protectionist' label union officials came to represent more and more the Party ('in the general interest of the working class') and paid less and less

attention to the demands of particular groups of workers.

It is important to stress again the close relationship between the trade unions and the Communist Party. In terms of the leading personnel there was a close overlap. Higher ranking union officials were usually members of the Communist Party. Top union officials were often included in the Party's highest organs. Lower union levels duplicated this trend. In the enterprises, alongside the basic union organisation and the management apparatus, were cells of the Communist Party, and individual Communists exerted a dominating influence in all three organisations. As a result only a small fraction of the workforce, the Party faithful, directed all organised activity within the enterprise.

The structure of the Czechoslovak industrial enterprise, as in other Soviet-type societies, became characterized by a deliberate duplication of controls: the management and trade union control over the workforce was watched over and reinforced by Party control. Organisationally separate from both, the Party cells [together with the unions] were presented ideologically as the embodiment of the will and interests of the working class, and as a popular check on management. In reality both the Party cells and the basic union branches served as the direct and indirect instruments of Party control over managers, union officials and ordinary workers. The Party hierarchy superordinated within the enterprise every rank order which arose from the technical division of labour.

The regime's policy of appointing and rewarding only those unionists who followed the Party line created a union movement whose most important task consisted of carrying out the will of the Party. As mere 'transmission belts' of Party policy, the unions became simply the Party's watchdog on the working class, an agent of social, political, and economic control.

Party membership became a means of upward mobility for ambitious workers. It served to help elevate the worker into management positions, or into well rewarded layers of the Party or union bureaucracies. Thus the ruling party created a large and reliable political class of which the trade unions formed a significant part. What was created was a class of people whose personal and collective interests lay in the reproduction and safeguarding of the existing relations of production. What is evident from the Czechoslovak case is that from a formerly exploited class was born a new exploiting class. The higher officials in the unions and various other higher state positions, who were generally of a lower class background, were appointed on the basis of their loyalty to the Party. Their incumbency of these positions depended primarily on their willingness and ability to carry out the will of the Party. Thereby they joined the <u>class of nomination</u> which was created by the Czechoslovak Communist Party, and helped to perpetuate the relations of domination over the working class.[45] This transformation of the character and

mission of the trade unions was one of the major steps in a chain of measures aimed at subjugating the industrial working class.

Subjugation of the Individual Worker

A set of measures imposed upon the worker mainly through state and union decrees can be categorised under the heading of forced participation in the labour process. The trade unions served as a lever through which the Communist government put into operation a set of measures aimed at disciplining and restricting the freedoms of the individual worker. Strike action became a penal infraction in article 85 of the Penal Code of July 12, 1950 and carried a prison sentence of 5-10 year maximum and even 10-25 year maximum if the striker acted as a member of a professional organisation (i.e. as a union official for example). In this article strike action was not mentioned by name but fell under the general category of a 'disturbance in the functioning of an office, a public service, or an industrial enterprise'. To leave no doubt about the inclusion of strike action, a commentary put out by the Procurator General explicitly declared that strike action would be legally prosecuted in accordance with article 85.[46]

Work discipline gained a notorious connotation. In 1949 at the 9th Party Congress the Secretary General of the Czechoslovak Communist Party declared:

> The party and the trade union organisations must support the authority of the foremen to the effect that the latter will not fear to make the workers work at full pace.[47]

The Congress resolution stipulated:

> If it is necessary for the fulfilment of the economic plan guidelines, then overtime work, even nightwork, can be ordered.[48]

Repeated absenteeism merited three months to one year of labour camp internment and/or one year imprisonment.[49]

The geographical mobility of the labourer was restricted by the need for each worker to seek permission to change jobs from a Party controlled district work office. If the permission was refused, he could not change jobs because each enterprise was under a strict regulation not to hire anyone without such permission. The worker was held to his job in this indirect manner. Each time he wanted to accept a new job his district work office could refuse him permission to do so. Sooner or later, when he tired of running around looking for a job, the worker returned to one of the 'favoured' jobs in a 'favoured' enterprise and the district work office graciously permitted him this job.[50]

The Communist regime created other institutions which reinforced the individual's participation in the labour process, whether he was willing or not. In the early 1950's there existed what may be termed 'a reserve army of labour'. It was not, however, composed of the unemployed since unemployment in the capitalist sense did not exist in a Soviet-type society. Instead, one part of the labour force 'in

reserve' was made up of people in the labour camps who were considered as former, present or potential enemies of the regime. Another section of the reserve army of labour consisted of work brigades which were not composed of volunteers despite what official propaganda maintained. Yet another consisted of army units which were periodically assigned to industrial or agricultural work as part of their training.[51]

The worker was forced to participate in industrial production by another legally binding arrangement: the collective bargaining agreements. Essentially these agreements bound the employee to work conscientiously and to obey work regulations, but very little was said about the employer's responsibilities.

The base wage was not specified but depended on the gross amount assigned to an enterprise which in turn depended on the enterprise's record in fulfilling the plan.[52] The gross amount was lowered if the enterprise failed to meet its plan. Thus, the worker's performance was judged on a double level: his own and that of the enterprise for which he worked. In fact he was given a personal and a collective responsibility for economic results without being in a position to influence the decision-making bodies which charted the economic course.

This draconian approach towards the workers, both collectively and individually, by the regime during the

1950's has been compared to the Nazi labour measures in occupied Czechoslovakia a decade earlier. Barton has argued that in both cases the trade union movement was regimented into one monopolizing organisation, the number of unions drastically reduced, and adherence to union dictates greatly enhanced by highly discriminating measures against recalcitrant individuals. Both regimes supressed the right to strike and made a parody of the collective bargaining agreements by binding the worker but not the employer. Under Communism each factory had social directors with analogous functions to those of the social commissioners under the Nazis. In both cases the trade unions collected penalty money for labour law infractions and put them towards a common social fund. Finally during the Nazi occupation, as under the Communist government, workers were unionized according to their workplace and not according to their trade making on-the-spot control easier.[53]

Though such a comparison omits some major differences between the two different systems, such as the different amount returned to the worker in services, and does not distinguish between the violence accompanying the labour measures, there is a similarity as far as the lack of collective and individual worker freedoms are concerned.

In considering both the collective measures aimed at subjugating the working class and the measures aimed at the individual worker, the question inevitably arises as to why

this subjugation did take place at all, and secondly why it did assume such a severe form. The answer is to be found in consideration of the larger economic and political context of Eastern Europe in the 1950's. The fact is that the interests of the Czechoslovak economy were by the early 1950's fully subordinated to the geopolitical interests of the Soviet Union which was, at that time, engaged in an intense effort aimed at strengthening the industrial and military base of the Warsaw bloc countries in case the Cold War should turn into a hot one. The emphasis on heavy industry, militarisation and rapid capital accumulation, coupled with intense ideological campaigns stressing the danger from the capitalist West, all appear to have led to the regime's perceiving a need to obtain the maximum productivity from industrial workers. This, in turn, necessitated the establishment of a large apparatus of social control and the institution of various coercive measures designed to keep worker resistance to a minimum, so that the effort at increasing productivity could go on unhindered. The Party-based ruling class, hiding behind the veil of an egalitarian Marxian ideology, in fact followed the logic of capitalist accumulation, accompanied by the social control of the labour force in a manner comparable to the early period of capitalist development. The reasons for the subjugation of the working class can be explained in the following terms.

The Response on the Part of the Working Class

In part, the response to the question of why the workers did not resort to open rebellion can be attributed to the highly coercive nature of labour control measures, and the various powerful agencies which enforced the Party policies, such as the police, the army and the unions. In part the answer also lies in the fact that despite the severity of the new regime not all workers became immediately discontented with it. Part of the explanation lies in the changing nature of the industrial workforce.

After the Communist take-over, with extensive industrial production, as measured in the number of factories, and production indices and jobs, many new blue and white collar positions were created. Many thousands of rural and small town inhabitants became industrial workers. A great number viewed their job change and induction into industrial work as social and economic mobility, and credited the regime for providing such an avenue of upward mobility. They could hardly lament the loss of traditional working class rights since they had never enjoyed them.

Though Czechoslovakia did possess a large working class before the Communist regime was established, in 1967 still, as Connor points out, 37.5 percent of the workers were of peasant origin.[54]

Similarly in 1967, 76.3 percent of those in non-manual occupations were children of workers and peasants.[55]

These later figures attest to the fact that the regime did provide a significant mobility channel for individuals within both the peasantry and the working class.

A part of the answer for the lack of violent opposition to the regime on the part of the industrial workers may lie in the influx of peasants into the working class and also the elevation of many capable workers into management, and the union and Party bureaucracies. These two factors probably did weaken the class consciousness and combative spirit of the 'core' workers. Unfortunately a study examining the adaptation of the peasant to industrial work in the Czechoslovak case remains to be written.

The other issues which mitigated worker discontent with the regime were the nominal elimination of unemployment and job security. Provided he was loyal to the new regime and did not disrupt the workplace discipline, even if he worked badly a worker was assured of a job.

The state media and Party media channels created and sustained an exalted image of the manual industrial worker. This was done at the expense of other social groups in the society, notably at the expense of the professionals and the intellectuals. The latter also lost in monetary terms. In Czechoslovakia nationalisation of the means of production was closely linked with a general policy of narrowing the gap between wages and salaries, between manual and mental, unskilled and skilled work. The ratio difference between the

average salary and the average wage was 2.5 in 1937-39; by 1946 it had dropped to 1.33.[56] The industrial worker, if disturbed by the decline in his standard of living, and the labour practices of the Communist regime, could take some satisfaction in seeing others in society lose their status and socio-economic position. As Krejci points out that about 400,000 former non-manual employees, professionals and entrepreneurs were forced to become manual workers.[57]

Overt resistance on the part of workers to the conditions created by the Party's industrial policies assumed a passive character after the initial flare-ups such as the Pilsen Revolt (1953). This consisted of a revolt in several industrial centres in Czechoslovakia on the part of mainly manual workers over the regime's currency reform which devalued the population's savings. The resistance assumed the form of a widespread apathy towards the regime's initiatives. The lack of mass and violent working class protest during the 1950's differentiates Czechoslovakia from some other Soviet-type societies which had experienced violent confrontations between the workers and the Party-dominated state apparatuses. Czechoslovakia did not experience the type of strife between the working and ruling classes such as occurred in Hungary and Poland in 1956.

The preceding section on the apparent acquiescence of the Czechoslovak working class does not mean to obscure the fact that deep seated contradictions within the class structure

have not been eliminated. However, all evidence points to the fact that the contradiction was muted and that the working class resistance assumed a passive character.

If one may use Marxist terminology the Czechoslovak working class in the 1950's and right up to the Prague Spring represented a "class in itself" rather than a "class-for-itself". As a militant "class-for-itself" it emerged only in 1968 in a difficult process I shall analyse later on in the thesis. The coercive measures effected by the Party created a deep seated hostility on the part of the manual workers to the Party. The intensity of this hatred only came to public attention in 1968-9 when the workers did have a chance to make their feelings known.

The Party's economic and social policies in the 1950's, in which a one-sided stress on capital accumulation in heavy industry became the goal, and not a pre-condition of socialist society, laid the ground for a generalized crisis of the whole system which culminated in 1968 in a political crisis. The Communist regime attempted to build socialism with highly coercive labour measures which parallelled those of the early capitalists. Wage labour, severe labour discipline and incarceration of recalcitrant workers were all carried out in the name of socialism. Indices of industrial growth were equated with socialist development and the means became all important while the 'end' vanished into the distant future. The Communist rulers instituted similar social

relations in the newly-built factories as those which prevailed under capitalism which was 'officially' overthrown. The experience of Czechoslovakia in the 1950's points out the difficulties associated with the building of socialism while retaining and even exacerbating the most oppressive features of the capitalist labour organisation.

The Continuing Domination of the Working Class and Signs of the Approaching Crisis: The Early 1960's

The 1960's dawned on a passive and apathetic workforce and a failing economy approaching the crisis point. The macro-economic facts pertaining to the extent of this crisis are staggering. Czechoslovakia became the only industrialised state after the Second World War where real, not simply nominal, wages declined. In 1962 a new large investment in the metallurgical and chemical industries led to a sudden 2.3 percent drop in real national income. The third five-year plan had to be abandoned after a mere 18 months in August 1962.[58] The Czechoslovak economy simply presented no more possibility for the Soviet-type economic development which had been dutifully followed for over a decade. The consequences of this policy were found to have been highly unfavourable for the worker so far as his wages were concerned.

In 1964 the economic section of the Czechoslovak Academy Of Science estimated that the Czechoslovak worker

earned about 62-67 percent of his West German counterpart and in the case of a technician only 57 percent.[59]

In Czechoslovak currency the wage and salary situation did not appear any more favourable when compared to other Western countries, as we can see from Table One.

Table One: Average Income by Country, Early 1960's

	Industrial Worker	Engineer	
Czechoslovakia	1,448	2,000	Czech. Crowns per month
Britain	4,170	-	
France	2,250	12,000	
U.S.A.	10,400	21,000	

Source: Study of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1964.[60]

From the perspective of growth in nominal wages over a period of fifteen years since 1950, Czechoslovakia once again lagged behind other countries. In West Germany nominal wages increased threefold, in Great Britain almost three times, in Sweden twofold, but in Czechoslovakia wages rose by a mere 0.9%.[61] While the total volume of wages increased substantially due to the increasing number of workers, individual wages stagnated.

Statistics of this kind can be misleading because the worker in Czechoslovakia has most social services free of charge (personally, not collectively). However it was

acknowledged by some leading Communists during 1968 that the Czechoslovak worker lagged behind his Western counterpart in his standard of living. This was publicly admitted by a leading economist on Prague television in 1968 (Sik in his television talks).[62] Moreover, the fact that many of the regime's policies in the 1950's were distinctly unfavourable to the workers was also admitted by the president of the National Assembly, Smrkovsky.

Several specific party policies contributed to the crisis and were 'inherited' so to speak from the 1950's. The policy of political and class-based appointments to management posts created a docile but unqualified management which had difficulty running the complex enterprises. In 1963 Czechoslovak economists and sociologists estimated that in industry 41 percent of the technical and managerial personnel were without any professional education and that 53.6 percent of the same lacked the prescribed qualification standard.[63]

To the preceding problems another one was added: the aging and obsolescence of industrial installations. According to the state statistical office at the beginning of 1960 among the two million machines and installations the average age was:

52	percent older than ten years
27.3	percent older than twenty years
13.4	percent older than thirty years
6.1	percent older than forty years

This meant that many workers had to work with more or less obsolete equipment. Also, as Machonin had shown, Czechoslovak industry employed a disproportionately high number of workers in manipulations of material and inter-plant transport - i.e. in physically strenuous labour.[65] All of these factors contributed to further making the 'condition' of the industrial working class during the 1960's worse than in the more technologically advanced western capitalist nations.

Along with the bad economic situation there remained a rigidity in regulations governing labour. The strict subordination of lower to higher union organs remained unchanged and union activity continued to be oriented towards encouraging higher production and worker productivity. Resolutions passed at the sixth all union congress held between January 31 and February 4, 1967 dwelt as during the fifties on worker obligations toward the socialist society, specifically instructing the worker to defend the regime's policies so that particular and individual interests (protectionism?) do not prevail over social interests, and to observe all rules of socialist life. (In the general interest of the working class?) No mention was made of any new rights on the part of the unionized workers in case of conflict with the Party, state or management.[66]

In April 1966 the trade union's central council published a brochure outlining legal aid to union members who came into conflict with management. This brochure

suggested that the worker should turn to the regional union organisation after obtaining a recommendation for his case from the enterprises' trade union council. The regional organ decided whether or not to aid the worker after examining his 'personal profile' which mentioned the worker's general attitude towards the socialist regime and its goals, his productivity level and general behaviour on the job. Only if his personal profile was satisfactory did the regional union organ aid the worker. This example of trade union directive from the mid-60's amply demonstrates the essential continuity in the structure and orientation of the trade union movement. It remained an obedient tool of Party and state policies and only marginally represented worker's interests.

As far as measures affecting the individual worker go the early 60's brought essentially no change in the class relationship between the Party and the working class. The 1965 Work Code, hailed by official spokesman as a progressive breakthrough in socialist labour relations contained in reality only a few concrete steps towards giving the worker more opportunity to participate in the Czechoslovak economy on any other terms than the ones the party decreed. The main advantage of the new code was that it systematised 83 labour laws and regulations into one comprehensive volume. The positive steps consisted of a better security of employment, longer holidays, the right to know the content of one's own

work dossier hitherto kept confidential by the employer, and the abolition of direct control by the district work offices over job changes. The crudest administrative controls were thus eliminated.

However the positive impact of these changes was lessened by other laws and regulations. Disciplinary measures remained. Minor infractions on work discipline entailed up to a three month loss of one tenth of one month's paycheck, or transfer to a lower paying job. Absenteeism was punished by taking away one or two days of holidays for each day of absence. Overtime work, even during recognized holidays, remained at the discretion of the employer who could order it if the interests of the national economy warranted it. The very vagueness of the phrase 'in the interests of the national economy' meant that it could be applied almost anywhere, anytime. No one could hold a second job without the explicit permission of his principal employer. An enterprise could transfer any of its workers to a place or type of work other than stipulated in the collective contract for a period of up to ninety days.

While the district offices lost their arbitrary power over job allocation there existed other, more subtle ways of keeping workers in desired posts. National Committees* advised workers as to which jobs to take and exerted pressure

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* A type of local government

on them to do so through various means.

For example a worker was forced to give a six month notice to his employer. However, few workers knew of a prospective job six months in advance and obviously few prospective employers could afford to hold a job open for such a lengthy period of time. This measure was instrumental in preventing many workers from leaving key industrial areas.

The state economic organs continued to regulate the amount of manpower in each enterprise and thus could restrict by this means unwanted geographical mobility.

Another subtle but effective means to prevent this unwanted mobility was to increase illness and maternity benefits to those employed in the same enterprise for a longer period of time. Illness benefits rose from 60 percent for those employed one year to 90 percent for those employed longer than ten years. Maternity allocations rose from 75 percent for a period of two year employment to 90 percent for more than five years of employment.

The Party leadership, though faced with a critical economic situation, was not prepared to implement radical changes, either in the system of management, labour organisation, or labour legislation. As it correctly foresaw, any such changes would pose a threat to its dominant position in society. It was up to the more daring reformers within the Communist Party in 1968 to try to implement some of their ideas, with the results which we shall presently examine.

Throughout the early and mid-60's renewed efforts were made by the Party to get workers more involved in the production process, and to get them to produce more efficiently. Apart from the ameliorations within the Work Code the most notable step was the creation in 1965 of factory production committees made up of mainly skilled workers who were to advise on ways to stimulate productivity and better production techniques. These committees did not significantly alter the state of affairs in industry. According to a testimony of a chairman of one of these production committees, its members never found out if their suggestions were carried out or even taken into account by the management.

The Party leadership attempted to gain worker support for yet another reason. The severe economic crisis inevitably created a split within the ruling class over the leadership's handling of the economy. The most outspoken critic, the economist Ota Sik, pointed out the inefficiency of the economic system, its bad effect on the population's standard of living, and the technical and economic lag that Czechoslovakia was experiencing in comparison to the nations of Western Europe.

The conservative Novotny leadership increased its interest in the workers because it sought to secure worker support in the case of an eventual confrontation with its critics within the ranks of the party.

In general, the regime's effort to induce worker

participation in the economy in the early 1960's did not alter the subjugated condition of the working class as none of the proposed measures put into question the status quo of the Party's monopoly on the exercise of political and economic power at all levels of the economy.

What needs to be stressed here is the essential continuity of the class relations from the 1950's into the early 1960's. The repressive measures aimed at the working class did lessen but had not ceased to be implemented altogether. What changed and precipitated the crisis was the deteriorating condition of the Czechoslovak economy. As the first signs of a severe economic stagnation appeared this, in turn, made explicit the criticism within the Communist Party of Novotny's handling of the economy along orthodox Stalinist lines. Later the struggle within the ruling class 'spilled over' into the wider society, as Chapter IV will examine.

There is no evidence that the Czechoslovak industrial working class played an active role in precipitating this crisis. It contributed indirectly, with its generalized apathy, lack of enthusiasm, and carelessness in the handling of the means of production and its products, all of which resulted in intended or unintended sabotage and poor workmanship. The active role was assumed by the working class only during the later stages of the Prague Spring when Party control over industry was relaxed, only to be later swept away by the working class.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Reform Movement and the Prague Spring: The Workers Against the Party

Twelve years have passed since the events in Czechoslovakia claimed the world's attention. This attention was mainly focused on one nation's struggle to free itself from the Soviet sphere of influence. This chapter will focus on the social and economic reform which was arrested in mid-course by the Soviet-led invasion.

Luigi Longo, a leading spokesman for the Italian Communist Party, argued that the Czechoslovak reform was to become the number one electoral argument of the Italian Communist Party in search of ways to convince the electorate that a humane socialism was possible. He was only partly referring to the Czechoslovak struggle for political independence from the Soviet Union. His reference really was to the Czechoslovak attempt at instituting participatory socialism, as a viable alternative (in the manner of Yugoslavia) both to neo-Stalinism and to the Social Democratic programs in Western Europe.

The Czechoslovak blueprints for reform appeared to offer hope to many Marxists and other critics of both the Western capitalist societies and those based on the Soviet-type

model, in search of a humane system applicable to a highly developed modern society which could fulfil the dreams awakened by the French Revolution and the socialist ideals of 19th and 20th centuries. In 1968 Czechoslovakia became the focus of hope and interest for many.

The Czechoslovak reformers eagerly fomented this optimistic view of the reform by pointing to the fact that the proposed fusion of Marxist-Leninist thought, one-party rule with constitutional guarantees of political, religious and economic dissent, and a state-owned but decentralised economy whose major aspects were to be co-determined by the workers, had never been attempted before.

After the experiment was put to an end many reform leaders were unsparing in their praise of the reform attempt. J. Pelikan, the head of the Czech Radio and Television during the Prague Spring and a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party described the Czechoslovak experiment in participatory socialism in these terms:

> The experiment had proven during the eight months that a socialism with liberty and the support of the majority of citizens is possible without censure and without police repression; that a socialism is possible with a common ownership of the means of production but also with enterprises' and workers' initiative without a state monopoly. It had proven the possibility of a socialist state where the worker participates in the management, the student in his faculty, and all the citizens in the running of their country. It was a socialism from the bottom up: its democracy was direct due to the workers councils, and representative

through its respect for universal suffrage and political pluralism.[67]

(My translation)

Ota Sik, the outspoken economist whose name is often associated with the economic aspects of the reform, dubbed the Czechoslovak experiment 'the third way' between the rigid, centralised Soviet system and the chaotic capitalist market system in the West.[68] R. Selucky, another leading Czechoslovak economist, published a book in English called Czechoslovakia, The Plan That Failed, arguing that the Czechoslovak version of socialism had enormous possibilities because of its combination of a market economy with socialist principles which gave the direct producers an equal voice in the running of the economy.[69] P. Pitthart defended the reform in Les Temps Modernes in similar terms, explaining how the Czechoslovak working class, after some hesitation and despite the unfavourable economic situation, adopted the reform as its own.[70]

Following the Soviet-led invasion, prominent Czechoslovak reformers closed all discussion about the problems and shortcomings of the Czechoslovak reform, and with almost an ideological fervour defended the reform in its entirety, as if to admit any doubt about any of its aspects was to cede to neo-Stalinist or anti-Communist critics. This unfortunately biases the view of the Western reader because he, for the lack of other sources, tends to rely on the reformers'

statements while forgetting that these views are conditioned by their personal involvement and a sense of frustration at the turn of events following the Soviet invasion. Herein lie the dangers to an accurate assessment of the Czechoslovak events. We must penetrate this ideological veil to examine what essentially was the reality of the struggle between the Party-based ruling class and the more class-conscious elements of the working class.

The purpose of this chapter is to re-open the discussion on the Czechoslovak experiment and examine one aspect of the Prague Spring: the confrontation between the industrial workers and the Party in the enterprises and in the unions. I shall seek to examine the contradiction between the official (Party) framework for worker participation and participation as it actually occurred, in the trade unions, the enterprises, and individual plants.

It is the contention of this chapter that the conflict over the issue of worker participation in the trade unions and in the worker councils can be viewed from the broader context of an intra- and later an inter-class struggle. This conflict occurred on a dual level. First, as a conflict between the conservative and reformist wing of the Communist Party, i.e. as a conflict within the ruling class, and later as an open struggle between the ruling class and the industrial workers over control of the means of production and the unions.

I shall attempt to document how the Party's plan for worker participation developed unexpectedly into a nation-wide struggle over the control of both the unions and the worker councils, between the Party-based ruling class and the more class-conscious elements of the industrial working class. The latter set out to break the Party's domination over the enterprises and lower union branches. This chapter will examine the extent to which they succeeded.

The Reform Blueprint for the Economy. New Overtures of an Old Ruling Class

The critical economic situation in the early and mid-60's gave rise to a persistent criticism of the Party leadership's conduct of the economy. Some reform-minded economists within the Communist Party traced the origin of the ills to some highly arbitrary economic decisions made in the 1950's, i.e. to the Soviet model of a highly centralised economy. Working with the general notions about combining the mechanism of the market with socialist principles, a whole set of measures was proposed to remedy the situation.

Economic decision-making was to be de-centralised and market criteria to be re-activated in guiding production. Extensive economic development was to give way to intensive economic development. This meant that instead of building new factories and other industrial installations, the existing

production facilities were to be modernized and made more efficient. The key word to production was to become quality and not quantity.

The previously imperative ideological and political considerations were, ostensibly, to be replaced by technical-economic ones with regard to the appointment of management personnel, and decision-making power was to be taken from political cadres, chosen on the basis of loyalty to the Party, and turned over to qualified specialists. On the lower levels of the economy the plan foresaw a new role for the enterprises as semi-independent units in a federative socialist economy. While the long range plan elaborated by the central organisms was to be retained, each enterprise was to be allowed considerable flexibility. Enterprise quotas were to be abolished and each enterprise was to compete with other enterprises for a share of the market. The criterion of success was to be profit, and inability to generate profit meant eventual phasing out. Each enterprise was to decide how and where to invest with the help of bank and state loans. This, it was argued, was a much better way to increase the productivity of labour and solve the problem of motivating workers to fulfil the Party's economic goals.

The above is just a bare outline of some of the major points of the proposed reform. Many of these ideas were discussed in detail in the writings of Ota Sik, the main spokesman for the economic reformers, notably in his Economic

Planning and Management (1966) and Plan and Market Under Socialism (1967). A closer examination of the merits and weaknesses of the proposed economic reform are beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather I shall seek to examine some anticipated consequences of the proposed reform for the industrial workers, and on their relationship to the Party, the unions and the management.

The reformist viewpoint was quickly adopted by the more progressive wing of the Communist Party, by the more progressive fraction of the ruling class, which used this platform to attack the Novotny Stalinist leadership which was adamantly opposed to any economic changes which may have threatened its monopoly of power.

The reformers' plan, expressed in the language of the economist, had underlying social implications. One of the important questions was how these reforms would affect the workers. Were they going to be detrimental or beneficial for the worker? How would they affect his level of participation in decision-making?

The issue of involving the workers in the decision-making process was a key though implicit concern in the reformers' platform. Ideas were raised about the necessity of setting up an enterprise organ to establish some real measure of worker participation. The plan, discussed until the Prague Spring in vague and general terms, was to set up some sort of a new enterprise management organ where labour,

management, the government and outside economic experts were to be represented. This institution would then serve as a counterweight to the actual management and higher economic administration bodies. At no time was it a question of instituting worker control over the enterprises, but more modestly, to ensure that the workers would have some say about the decisions affecting their enterprises' future. The relations between the trade unions and the worker councils* remained undefined except for the understanding that the two would represent the workers in two different areas: the council was to look after their long range economic interest, and the unions after their immediate concerns.

Though the reform plan appeared to offer the working class greater opportunity for participation in decision making, it offered little prospect for change in the basic relationship of the classes and in certain fields the implementation of the reform was to prove detrimental to the workers' living standard and job security.

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* I have chosen to call the new enterprise management organ a 'worker council' though in the government plan it was referred to as an 'enterprise management organ'. I have preferred to call it a worker council in view of the fact, and despite the official directives, that this organ came to represent the interests of the enterprise collectives , (two thirds of which were manual workers), and not the interests of the state or the party.

The reform envisaged a long range re-orientation of investments and manpower from heavy industry to the service, light and consumer industries and towards scientific research. This was a radically new direction in a country where Stalinist ideology had decreed for the past two decades that the development of heavy industry and its continual expansion was to be an article of faith. This new orientation meant, in the long run, a relocation of numerically significant sections of the working class employed in heavy industry. Without doubt this relocation was to cause severe problems for many industrial workers employed in this field. For a specific example let us turn to the coal industry.

During the 1950's the government made jobs in the coal industry more attractive by offering higher wages. However, since the reform envisaged that eventually coal was to be replaced by other, more economical energy sources, the majority of coal workers were to be transferred to other posts and thus be moved to lower paying jobs, consistent with the market determination of their wages. Due to such anticipated problems any talk of 'relocation' gained an ominous ring in the workers' ears. Their fears remained unallayed by Rude Pravo's announcement that such 'relocation' would affect 'only' 95,000 workers over a period of six years.[71]

Furthermore the conservative Novotny government, beginning to lean towards, and finally accept, a modified

version of the reform, omitted any social security provisions to counter the effect of such relocations. At the beginning of 1967, those workers temporarily unemployed directly due to the effects of the reform received no unemployment benefits for a period of six months. Belatedly, the government introduced in August 1967 an unemployment benefit which consisted of 60 percent of their previous net monthly wage up to the sum of 1,800 crowns.[72]

Under such conditions security of employment became an issue of cardinal importance to the worker because the reform threatened, in an uncertain manner for some and in a definite manner for others, the character and existence of every worker's job as he knew it and was accustomed.

The reform proposed a gradual increase of financial rewards to those with education and skills. In terms of salaries and wages, since 1966, even before the reform officially began, engineers and technicians received on the average a raise of 5.2 percent, other employees 6.2 percent, while the manual workers had only a 1.4 percent increase.[73] This fact again served to increase the worker distrust of the reform. The rather difficult language used by the reformers and their long term promises about the improved standard of living were less than convincing. The fact that these reformers were high ranking members of the Communist Party did not add to worker confidence. The fear of unemployment and growing wage differences were the major issues which

made the industrial worker distrustful of the reform.

In 1967 evidence of the workers' distrust of the plan surfaced. Many enterprises, which acquired a relative independence from the state due to the reform, raised their product prices and distributed windfall profits to enterprise members in direct contravention to the reformers' advice to reinvest these funds.[74] Such a move appears to reflect a distrust of long range economic planning and a lack of faith in the sincerity of the government's desire to reform the economy.

The sum of these anticipated and actual problems associated with the implementation of the reform made the industrial workers hesitant and in some cases outrightly hostile to the reform, as they were apathetic or hostile to the previous policies of the conservative regime. From the workers' point of view both essentially represented two different approaches by the same ruling class. Generally they adopted a wait-and-see attitude to both the pro-reform and anti-reform forces within the Party.

Their lack of involvement in the debate about the future of the socialist economy in Czechoslovakia can be attributed to two main factors; first, until the Prague Spring neither course of action promised an immediate improvement in their political and socio-economic (i.e. class) position; second, no one really asked them what they thought or wanted.

Ironically, both the reformers' plan and the ideas of the conservatives stressed the need for more worker participation as a necessary ingredient to a better functioning economy. However, neither view created any concrete opportunities for such a participation. It was up to the workers to 'create' their own pre-conditions for participation in a situation which can be viewed as one of class conflict.

In one sense there was a rupture between the passivity of the working class in the period preceding 1968-69 and its sudden awakening during the Prague Spring when it engaged in struggle over control of the unions and the worker councils. This rupture was indeed a sudden one and there is some difficulty about how to account for it. It is possible to argue that the strong combative traditions of the Czechoslovak working class were not destroyed by the crude Stalinist measures initiated during the 1950's but simply lay dormant until the political liberalization brought them out again in full force during the Prague Spring.

Another possible explanation is that the working class became combative as a 'class-for-itself' because it was seeking to realize the old socialist dream of '<u>factories to the workers</u>', which, though instilled by the Communist Party in the working class, remained until 1968 only an ideology devoid of substance. Both explanations have some claim to validity. The fact remains that there is a decisive break

between the level of class activity of the Czechoslovak working class before 1968 and during the later stages of the Prague Spring.

Those in favour of the Reform course achieved a key political victory in January 1968, as Dubcek toppled Novotny from the post of the First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. 1968 also became a year of unprecedented liberalization in this Soviet-type society. It was a year of the full implementation of the economic reform bringing what the reformers claimed was a 'new deal' for the workers within a human-faced, participatory socialism. It was also a year of bitter struggle between the most class-conscious elements of the working class and the Party over the control of the unions and the worker councils.

The Prague Spring - The Workers' Class Struggle for Control of Industry

If the complex events of 1968 and 1969 can at all be summarized they should be called 'the era of participation'. Especially in the latter stages of the Czechoslovak liberalisation, the focus of the struggle of ideas and social forces shifted from an intra-Party (intra-class) squabble between the reformers and the conservatives, towards a struggle between those seeking to enforce the government sponsored reform, and thus to 'contain' the situation, and those who

went beyond the official limits, seeking to break the Party's hold over the major areas of national life. The struggle over control took place between the new men in power seeking to establish authority and various previously powerless social groups such as intellectuals and industrial workers.

In industry a gap emerged between the government plans for worker participation in management and the worker's own ideas and plans. During 1968 and 1969 the official limits of the democratisation process were continually overstepped by most constituent units of Czechoslovak industry. The federated unions, individual enterprises and factories, the trade unions' basic organisations, the factory Party cells, the newly established worker councils and unofficial ad hoc worker organisations created during the Prague Spring (such as the Worker Committees for the Defence of the Press), all had their own ideas as to what to do and how to democratise social relations within industry.

The image of Czechoslovakia harmoniously embarking on a course of participatory socialism which was presented by the spokesmen for the Dubcek regime both during and after the Prague Spring is misleading and incomplete. The social situation, especially from the point of view of industrial relations, was brimming with conflict and revolt. In many places the direct producers took control of the management, Party and union organisations and consciously contravened the orders of higher union and party bodies.

The two focal points of this struggle for autonomy on the part of the working class were the unions and the worker councils.

Two Contexts of the Working Class Struggle

a) The New Unionism

The liberalisation of the political situation in 1968 gave rise to a strong revival of independent trade unionism aimed at restoring and extending the privileges which had once belonged to the unions before the Communist take-over. Resolutions passed at the National Conference of the basic organisations of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement held on June 18-20, 1968 left no doubt that the Soviet-type unionism was on the way out. The national conference affirmed that the duty of the unions was to defend and represent the worker and not Party and state interests. The strike was re-affirmed as an inalienable worker right. The collective bargaining agreements were to be reworked to give them legally binding value for both parties and make them independent of national economic plans and goals. They were to be altered only with consent of both the employer and the employee.[75]

Though the conference did not issue a clearly formulated statement about the role it foresaw for the Communist Party within the unions, in documents of individual unions a

silence was maintained, perhaps as a purposeful omission, about the role of the Party. The customary exhortations about 'the leading role of the Party' in industrial life were absent. Some documents went as far as to espouse independence for the unions of all political parties and wanted the union organisations to act as a political force within the Czechoslovak parliament.[76]

New ideas about the mission and activity of the trade unions were also expressed apart from the traditional institutional channels. By November 1968 the Central Trade Union Council (CTUC) received from worker collectives and its affiliated union branches 4,441 resolutions containing over 21,000 suggestions.[77] From these resolutions it is possible to piece together what kind of a trade union organisation was being demanded by the rank-and-file workers. First of all, the majority of resolutions wanted the union to take immediate steps to remedy the bad, work-related social conditions which had prevailed since the 1950's.

Many resolutions specified also the kind of trade union structure they would like to see emerging from the liberalisation process. Among the most common were the demands for truly democratic union elections and a functional independence of the basic branches from the higher union organs and the Communist Party. Many resolutions demanded a large scale reduction in top union personnel in order to save money and cut down on bureaucracy. Many wanted to

retain more of the union funds at the grass root levels. Most resolutions were in favour of abandoning the production orientation and favoured an end to the unions' role in arbitrating work disputes. Many wanted the unions to cease distributing state social security which bound it to state policies. A broad consensus of the resolutions was that the unions were once again to represent workers' interests in effective opposition to Party and management policies.

Apart from the resolutions to the CTUC, workers within the Czech section of the federated unions prepared their own resolutions. The similarity in demands and uniform tone of the resolutions was evident.

Workers in metallurgy decided that their union was to represent exclusively and legally the economic and social interests of the workers, resorting to a strike to back their demands if necessary. Workers in mining wanted a trade union organisation independent of the government, and of the CTUC, which would act as a political force in the society. This organisation was to represent all workers within the industry regardless of political, national, or religious differences. Obviously this was a reference to the past union practice of looking only after workers who were loyal to the Communist regime.

Workers in the consumer industries demanded an independent organisation. They wanted their union to have a say in the organisation and management of production. To

enforce these demands the consumer industry unions were to resort to all forms of democratic protest including the strike. Furthermore, they demanded a right to decide on what type of a union organisation there would be in the enterprise, the control of its finances and the power to create and administer strike and aid-to-member funds. Lastly they demanded that legal protection be extended to union officials for the duration of their function and for two years afterwards.[78]

It is evident that many worker collectives had very clear ideas about the nature of the changes they wanted in their union structure and goals. The central cleavage point of the class struggle arose from the lack of understanding and cooperation between higher union organs which represented the ruling class' interests and the lower union organs which directly voiced the opinions of their enterprise collectives, i.e. the interests of the working class. The top union organs and especially the CTUC remained committed to Party and state policies while seeking to limit the scope of the changes pressed from below.

While it is true that the incumbent president of the CTUC was replaced in March 1968, the new president, who was appointed but not elected, was also a conservative who had previously held a ministerial post (Heavy Industry) and various high union positions under the old regime. Relatively few top level union officials were replaced or forced to

retire during the course of the Prague Spring in the period prior to the Soviet-led invasion. The upper echelon trade union apparatus dutifully followed the Party's proposals as to how the reform should proceed. There are several examples to show how the CTUC proved unresponsive to the rank and file demands.

While the resolutions overwhelmingly advocated union independence from the Communist Party and political pluralism, the CTUC pronounced itself against political democracy and in favour of retaining the leading role of the Party in the unions. Conflict also revolved around the question of union unity. The CTUC fought with all the means at its disposal what it called the 'fragmentation' of union unity; it vigorously resisted the emergence of new unions and the splitting up of the existing ones. Grudgingly, it accepted the emergence of some but refused to accept others. The famous case concerned the railway engines' crews' demand for a separate union. The organisation, called the Federation of Engine Crews, was not recognised by the CTUC. The organisation responded that it would continue to exist as an 'interest organisation'.[79]

A mushrooming of more or less independent union organisations meant that the CTUC (and through it the Party) could no longer exercise a close control over union activity.

Many resolutions demanded an end to the union disbursement of social security. However at the fifth plenary

session the CTUC decided that it would keep distributing state social security to its members.[80] This action appears to convey an attempt on the part of the council to retain some of its waning leverage over the workers.

On the question of a right to strike the CTUC agreed to its legality, but in June the council president Polacek launched a well publicised campaign against any wildcat work stoppages. Strike figured in the CTUC's thinking as a highly damaging tool of worker self expression.[81]

Finally the CTUC immediately echoed government plans for the creation of workers' councils. This plan, as I shall later show, was unfavourable to any notion of worker control or even co-determination as it gave the enterprise workers only a minority representation in the proposed council. The CTUC did not protest the government plan to separate the worker council from the trade union sphere of influence. Under this proposal the union organisations would have no power over the decisions of the councils which, even though economically sound may prove detrimental to the workers' social and wage concerns.

It is far from clear that the rank and file saw the situation through the government's and CTUC's eyes and agreed to such a neat separation of functions (trade unions - wage and social concerns; the worker council - economic interest of the enterprise). What is known from the various resolutions about worker thinking, it appears that they regarded

both institutions as representing a unified worker interest. Workers often directed their immediate demands to the attention of the councils, and their union representatives spoke to economic issues. The basic union organisations were often very much involved in the setting up of the worker councils or of the preparatory committees for the councils, and served as a very useful tool for the working class' struggle against the Party.

It should not be thought that the worker-Party/state dialogue remained on the level of an exchange of conflicting resolutions. It was certainly not just a revolution of resolutions. The bitter dispute between the higher and lower levels of the giant union federation, as one manifestation of a society-wide conflict, achieved a very active level during the later stages of the Prague Spring, and especially following the Soviet-led invasion.

In the Fall of 1968 a host of basic union branches were dissolved and new union officers democratically elected outside the usual election period. By the end of 1968 Kusin estimates that between seventy and eighty percent of the trade union functionaries were replaced, presumably for not going along with the enterprise collectives policies.[82] Much of the trade union apparatus put into place by the ruling class, and which faithfully served ruling class interests, was dismantled through popular action carried out by the enterprise collectives.

Examples as to how and why this was done abound in the syndicalist by-monthly 'Odborar' (The Unionist). For example, in a large electronic equipment producing factory in Prague (Tesla) the election took place on May 1, 1968 of 21 members of the basic union organisation. Only two former members were re-elected. The reason for this sudden election was that some time earlier a number of workers had asked the union officials to call a factory meeting so that all workers could express their opinion on the current political events in Czechoslovakia. The officials refused, commenting that such a mass meeting was unnecessary at this time. The workers' collective responded on March 26 by dissolving the current basic branch and organised democratic elections for the positions so swiftly vacated.[83]

Another well publicised case occurred in the Trnava automobile factory where the steering committee of the basic organisation was dismissed by the workers because it refused to censure the unusually high financial rewards the top managers appropriated for themselves - a five percent raise for every one percent improvement over the production plan. Most workers received next to nothing in bonus payments and sometimes not even their base wages even though the plan was fulfilled. The situation became so irregular that the deputy director was receiving 13 times the reward a shop foreman received. The Trnava workers considered this unfair since it did not reflect the difference between these two

men, either in the ability or in the amount of work performed. The newly elected officials quickly applied themselves to correcting such ills within the enterprise.[84]

These two examples demonstrate the kinds of actions performed by the most active elements of the working class at the lower levels of industry once direct control by the Party and state agencies was removed. The ruling class had in fact lost control over many enterprises.

At the trade union federation level, the CTUC could not prevent the expansion of the federated unions from 12 to 31, thus abolishing the forced contraction carried out during the 1950's.[85] Both the old and the new union organisations united in calling for further independence from any external (i.e. Party) intervention in their internal affairs. Voices were heard advocating the abolition of all intermediate levels between the CTUC and the basic organisations.

The glass makers, the locomotive crews, the transportation workers, and the hop growers all demanded new organisations to represent them. At the June 1968 plenary session of the CTUC president Polacek reported that the executive body had received thirty seven proposals demanding their organisation's separation from the existing union structure.[86] Some the CTUC managed to delay or put off, others it could not. On the whole the council appeared to be lagging far behind the spontaneous developments in the unions at the regional and enterprise levels, rather than

performing a leadership role.

After the Soviet-led invasion the reorganisation of the unions' officialdom was carried to the extreme as the basic organisations, using democratic procedures, simply threw out the remaining conservatives at the pinnacles of the federated unions (mainly the Czech ones). Between October 1968 and March 1969 sixty individual trade union congresses met to adopt by-laws and elect new leaders. The electoral changes swept away all who were not fully committed to the new course and continued to support Party policies. The purge even extended to the CTUC as it lost 85 percent of its membership in the executive committee. The ultimate purge was, however, in the Czech Metal Worker Congress which elected, on December 19, 1968, a new executive board of which no members had previously held a leading position.[87]

This revolution in the trade unions was so complete that few government officials openly cared to admit it. One of the few, L. Strougal, one of the leading Moscow-favoured hardliners, pronounced on January 24, 1969, in reference to the happenings in the unions: "But the most important battle, which cannot be lost awaits us in the unions".[88] As late as April 1, 1970 the worker daily '<u>Práce</u>', back under censorship, complained about the dangerous game of the Metal Workers Federation which represented more than 900,000 members. The metallurgists' congress held in December of the previous year had refused to recognize the leading role

of the Communist Party, and had proclaimed its independence. Previously, at the end of 1969, the same daily complained that not all basic union organisations hastened to admit to 'errors' and revise their approach to union activity. This complaint was published more than a year after the consolidation process was initiated under the pressure of the Soviet occupation authorities.[89]

The official evaluation of the trends in the unions was provided two and a half years after the invasion in the anti-reform pamphlet 'Sli Proti Nam' (They Went Against Us), published in the Party daily 'Rude Pravo' (Feb. 4, 1971). It was admitted that the non-election of Communists to trade union offices had taken place mainly after the invasion and that 10 percent of the newly elected trade union committees, often in large factories, were without a single Communist member.[90] Eventually, however, Party-state power proved stronger and the union renaissance was reversed. More than 50,000 Czech and 13,000 Slovak trade union functionaries were purged.[91]

The events occurring in the trade unions during the Prague Spring are significant for one important reason. The contentious struggle for the control of the unions showed that the working class had achieved a significant though unfortunately temporary victory over the ruling class. The working class was able to re-affirm the role of the unions as a vehicle of working class interests in antagonistic class

relations. The newly elected union functionaries represented the workers and not the Party.

Furthermore, the struggle over the unions reaffirmed the inherently antagonistic nature of industrial relations within this Soviet-type society. The Czechoslovak experience demonstrated that the unions are not a 'friendly link' between the Party and the workers, but rather an instrument of domination which can become, given the proper circumstances, the focus of a struggle for control between the two main classes. In short, the revived unions became a successful weapon of working class struggle against the Party.

The Second Context of Class Struggle

b) The Worker Councils

The second focus point of the Party-worker conflict became the worker councils. The idea of a worker council originated under the conservative regime but the concrete proposal was formulated only in the Spring of 1968 by the Dubcek government. It sought to elicit worker participation in the production process and especially in management decisions. The aim appeared to be to make workers co-responsible for the enterprise's success by giving them a voice in reviewing and censuring the decisions and activities of management experts.

The program of the Czechoslovak Communist Party

drafted in April 1968 stated in regards to the idea of worker participation in management:

> The economic reform will increasingly place the working collective of the socialist enterprises in a situation where they will directly bear the consequences of good or bad management of their enterprises. The party considers it necessary that the whole working collective which will bear the consequences has an influence on the management of the enterprise.[92]

P. Pitthart, a leading spokesman for the reform put the reformers' conception of the role of the worker councils' this way:

> They (the worker representatives in the worker council) can make demands of the leadership and put awkward questions to it ... but they would not work out the strategy of the enterprise because the state's economic center has that sufficiently in hand.[93]

Already in 1967 Ota Sik gave an outline of the view which was later to become the official policy of the Dubcek government:

> The producers themselves cannot take part in management work with the necessary level of knowledge and their participation in management is restricted by the relatively long working hours and their narrow field of knowledge. If the management bodies were, under the circumstances, to be producers too, they would of course get no work done. Therefore for the time being, it is necessary to have special bodies for management alone.[94]

and again:

> For the time being, there must be a division of labour between people who are economically active and people who

> are supervisors, although it will be possible and necessary to have a sort of a sporadic participation of producers (during the work day) in the activity of management bodies. This transitory participation will not do away with the necessity for having people who deal only with management, for the existence of a certain special governing apparatus.[95]

At the same time he underlined that the workers must be involved in decision-making about how the production process is organised:

> At the same time, it is necessary to make use as much as possible of the experience of the direct producers themselves, the workers, technicians and other employees, and to assure their direct, though necessarily only occasional, participation in the active work of management.[96]

This rather ambiguous stance was further clarified by him during the course of the Prague Spring. Speaking before the Czechoslovak Economic Society on May 5, 1968, Sik argued in favour of a strong worker voice in the worker councils as a means towards stimulating worker initiative, and the elimination of 'subjective' decisions on the part of the management, as well as to keep an eye out for the interests of the society and the working collectives.[97]

Some more pessimistic appraisals appeared about the possibility of immediate producers influencing democratically management decisions. What sounded like a warning to workers about expecting too much from the worker councils was given on March 7, 1968 in the party daily 'Rudé Právo' by V. Komarek, the General Secretary of the Economic Council:

> I think it would be a great error to think that the economic sphere can be democratised by the same methods as the public life, without taking account of its specific character.[98]

He went on to stress the discipline that technology imposes on the industrial work force arguing that rational and successful management is the result of a hierarchical structure. What in effect he was doing was that he was warning the workers that the government participation scheme would not significantly alter the predominant position of the Party-sponsored management within the enterprises.

The atmosphere of uncertainty about the role and composition of the council was ended when the government approved on June 8, 1968 the framework principles for the establishment of worker councils on an experimental basis in a small number of selected enterprises.

The principles started by reflecting that it was necessary to avoid 'spontaneity' and proceed in a reflective and organised manner. These principles consisted of several points about how to proceed in the setting up of the councils and what powers the council will have once in operation. These points will be briefly summarised below. It will become evident that the government proposed council was to be more a means of keeping worker participation at a token level.

The council was to have, after a consultation with an as yet unnamed superior organ, the power to appoint and

recall the enterprise director and his immediate subordinates. The council was to approve the remuneration of the director and other management personnel, and their share in benefits accruing from the enterprise's economic activity. The council was to decide on statutory questions about fusion with other enterprises, and about the division of the enterprise into smaller units. The enterprise director, on the other hand, became responsible for his actions to the council. Over important investment actions the council was to be given the power of veto which had to be supported by a two-third council member majority.[99]

On a closer examination of the whole set of framework principles it becomes obvious that many of the council's powers were restricted by one or more limiting conditions, making the council on many issues a consultative rather than a co-deciding body. For example, the council's power over the appointment, and especially the revocation of the enterprise director was limited by a certain stipulation. Though the council had the formal power to revoke the director's appointment, such a decision could be made only if it could be shown that his activity had led to poor economic results. He could not be dismissed for acting contrary to the will of the council, or for his neglect of other areas of concern to the council or the unions. On the contrary, the director, in case of a disagreement with the council could, after two rounds of consultation, implement his policies despite the

council's opposition.[100]

From the point of view of the worker, the council's power of veto over important investment decisions was once again more illusory than real owing to the composition of the council. For important enterprises, designated as such by the superior economic body of the State, the principles stipulated that the state representatives were to have 20 percent of the council's seats and up to 30 percent of these seats was to be filled by economic experts from outside the enterprise. Also added to the council were the representatives of the state bank or of other institutions, if they had a financial interest in the specific council.[101]

In the case of important enterprises, as probably foreseen by the government and its economic experts, such an arrangement would put the enterprise representatives in a minority in their own council. The state representatives, the outside experts and the bank representative would normally side with the management's economically motivated views in the case of a dispute, and the two-third majority would never materialize to stop the management from acting contrary to the wishes of the enterprise collective (two-thirds of which were the manual workers).

The government framework principles sought to limit also the scope of the council experiment and thus restrict its impact as a possible means towards the democratization of the entire economic life. The council was not to be set

up in individual factories, in enterprises of a directly public nature such as railways, communications and lands and forests. Furthermore, the councils were forbidden in those enterprises which had proven deficit-prone, and in those earmarked for liquidation by the reform.[102]

From the framework principles it is evident that the government sought to limit the scope of this experiment and did not wish to allow worker co-decision on an equal basis, which would be consistent with the image projected at home and abroad about the new participatory socialism. The real balance of power between the Party-state-management and the immediate producers basically remained unchanged in the Party-government proposal, though the worker was to some extent permitted a greater say than before. The conservative nature of the proposed changes clashed with the promises about the nature of the new Czechoslovak socialism.

The Czechoslovak government's provisions about worker participation in the councils resemble the system of worker participation in the West German supervisory boards in non parity co-determination industries (those outside of coal, steel and iron industries) set up by the Works Constitution Act (1952). In both cases the enterprise employees were limited to a minority representation (in the Czechoslovak case less than one-half in important enterprises, in the West German case one-third) and therefore one cannot speak in a real sense of a co-determination of issues between the

state and management on the one hand and the labour force on the other.* The Czechoslovak government proposal did not go beyond a form of participation already granted to the workers twenty-five years ago by the 'capitalist' West German system. This proposal, as did the rest of the economic reform, represented in fact new overtures of an old ruling class.

The Yugoslav example was not followed either. Under the official provisions Czechoslovak workers were not to obtain the level of control over enterprise activities that their Yugoslav counterparts appear to enjoy.**

The Transformation of the Worker Councils Into a Tool of Worker Control

As in the case of the lower level trade union organisations the worker councils became, in the hands of the enterprise collectives, quite a different institution from the one proposed by the government. The idea of spontaneously forming worker councils caught on, especially among the industrial workers. For example, despite the

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* For an analysis of the West German experience with co-determination see J.R. Adams and E.H. Rummel: Workers Participation in Management in West Germany: Impact on the Worker, the Enterprise and the Trade Union, Faculty of Business, McMaster University, 1977.

** For some of the more optimistic accounts of the Yugoslav situation see A. Meister Ou va l'autogestion yugoslave? (1970) and P. Blumberg Industrial Democracy: The Sociology of Participation (1968).

government's initial intention to have this idea 'tested out' only in a few selected enterprises, by mid-August, one half of all the enterprises under the jurisdiction of the Ministry for Heavy Industry, and one half of the enterprises in Mining planned to establish councils or preparatory committees for councils by the beginning of the next year (1969) at the latest. In the Building Industry the union organisations pushed strongly for the setting up of worker councils.

In all of the cases mentioned by the unionist bi-monthly 'Odborar' the worker-elected representatives apportioned themselves a clear majority of the council seats in direct contravention of the government principles about the composition of the council. Most councils, of which we have some knowledge, declared their independence both of higher level union and Party organs and of government economic bodies.

Symptomatic of the mood of independence prevailing in the worker councils, especially following the Soviet-led invasion and during the 'normalization' period, is the fact that in the fall of 1968 worker council representatives of twelve steel producing enterprises met with the representatives of the Central Trade Union Council and government representatives and categorically refused to heed the authority of any organ appointed by higher authorities.[103]

Many councils became the controlling bodies within their enterprises, and therefore not only vehicles of worker participation but of worker control (at the enterprise level). After the Soviet-led invasion, along with the unions, the worker councils became the centres of resistance to the re-introduction of Soviet-type industrial practices and Party control over life in industry.

At the height of the worker council experiment the councils represented some 800,000 workers, or approximately one sixth of the labour force.[104] This is a rather impressive figure given the hostile attitude towards the councils by the Soviet and Warsaw Pact occupation authorities which actively sought to discontinue the experiment.

As the decisive gap between the post-invasion government's 'model' for the councils and the actual operation of those spontaneously created, evidence, cited by V.V. Kusin, comes from a Party Central Committee's inquiry into sixteen selected councils. It was discovered that they had a total of 317 members, not counting those from outside the enterprise, with an average of twenty members of whom some 60 percent were Party members. The government inquiry found that not a single one of the sixteen councils worked according to a statute which was in keeping with the 'model' and therefore subsequently decided on their disbandment.[105]

The issue which remains to be resolved is whether the relative independence of these councils can be directly

attributed to the effect of the Soviet invasion and the 'normalisation' process (return to the pre-1968 status quo). It appears that while the plans for many of these councils were prepared previous to the invasion, the real impetus for the quick setting up of most of these councils came only after the invasion. It was mainly after the Soviet-led invasion that the councils (as well as the unions) became a real oppositional force to the Party and state policies, and developed into an effective vehicle of working class interest.

I shall examine two specific plans for the establishment of worker councils in two key enterprises, one of which served as an example to a great many other councils. The contradiction between the 'council' of the government framework principles and the actual council is soon apparent. Whereas the first institution represented the class interest of the ruling class, the second represented the class interest of the working class.

The machinery and car producing Skoda enterprise in Plzeň is very important to the national economy, and its worker collective numbered around 40,000. In mid-1968 this enterprise took the first step towards establishing a worker council. It published a program called the '<u>Collective Enterpreneurial Organs in the Skoda Enterprise</u>' in an edition of 50,000 which was immediately sold out. According to the unionist bi-monthly '<u>Odborar</u>' this document soon attracted a larger audience than the government framework principles and

many councils throughout the republic were modelled after it.[106]

The Skoda council members were to be democratically elected with the enterprise representatives holding three quarters of the seats. The council was to direct the management concerning the policies it should follow, having the power to revoke the director if he failed to carry out its wishes. The director and management were not to participate in the councils' deliberations. The council appointed itself the supreme enterpreneurial organ of the Skoda enterprise, refusing to have its activity controlled by any higher state economic body.

On September 26, 1968, the Skoda council commenced its activities. The actual election, described as 'truly democratic', elected twenty-nine members out of 107 candidates, two thirds of whom happened to be Communists. Six of the council members were workers, seventeen technicians and four 'candidates of science' (higher degree).[107]

The council advertised for the post of enterprise director and chose the most suitable applicant for a period of six years. With both the basic union organisation and the director the council concluded a new collective bargaining agreement which gave substantive advantages to the enterprise employees. Women employees received one extra day off a month. All retired employees received an additional 100-150 crown monthly supplement, in addition to what they were

receiving from the state. Employees were also to receive financial aid when buying a dwelling. All employees, economic circumstances permitting, were to receive a yearly salary increase of 4.2 percent - the government and the CTUC had suggested a ceiling of 2.5 - 3 percent.[108] The Skoda council guaranteed full social security to those who lost their position or were laid off due to changes within the enterprise. These socio-economic measures in favour of the Skoda employees decided upon by the worker council were substantial given the severe economic crisis which had prevailed in Czechoslovakia since the early 1960's.

The significance of the Skoda council is that it set the example to many other councils by involving itself in both the immediate and long range social and economic interests of the enterprise's employees. Thus it far exceeded the specific role assigned to it by the government framework principles - a consultative role strictly on economic matters. Instead the council became a spokesman for all worker concerns, whether social, economic or political.

Most councils in fact closely co-operated with the union organisations and did present a unified front against Party and state interference in the enterprises. The close co-operation between the reformed unions and the worker councils is illustrated in a study which found that in 65.5 percent of the cases the union organisation served as the main promoter of the preparatory committees for the worker councils.[109]

The worker participation statutes of the Wilhelm Pieck factory in Prague provide another case of a revolutionary approach to worker control - this time at the factory level. The program of the Pieck workers clearly aimed at worker control. The highest legislative body within this factory became the popular assembly of all workers over 18 years of age and those who had worked longer than three months in this factory excluding the director. This assembly was to elect a management organ (i.e. a worker council) from its own ranks and this organ was to consist of 15-20 members.

To prevent careerism among council members, the following year a third of the council members was to be replaced. The council members could serve two consecutive terms. Through the medium of the worker council the workers gained control of the following areas:

a) elaboration and ratification of worker self-management statutes

b) ratification of the enterprise statutes

c) ratification of the long term economic plans for the enterprise

d) election and revocation of worker self-management organs

e) nomination and revocation of the director and control over his remuneration

f) determination of a fusion with other economic units in order to form a new economic unit; decision on joining or withdrawing from a larger economic unit; the self-managed factory also had a right to elect and revoke the nomination of its representatives in the self-management organs of the larger economic unit

g) determination of the division of benefits arising from enterprise activity into individual salaries and into contributions to the enterprise in view of the long term development of the enterprise

h) determination of common investments with other economic organisations; the right to decide on the enterprise's own investments, and the acceptance or provision of credits above the level originally agreed upon

i) ratification of the enterprise Work Code

j) the worker self-management organs have a right to present demands and suggestions to the director and all such have to be taken up and discussed by him

k) periodical discussions and reports on the enterprise's activity and the ratification of the periodical reports which deal with the enterprises activity.[110]

The revocation of the director and his staff became possible under three conditions:

a) if he abuses his power and breaks the existing regulations

b) if he does not respect the decisions of the worker council

c) if, due to the director's activity, the enterprise suffers economic losses, or if he subverts the collective agreements.[111]

For revocation measures to be initiated the documents stipulated a three-fifth majority of the council members. The document also mentioned a veto by the council of management decisions if these ran counter to the will of the working collective.

The project for worker self-management in the Wilhelm Pieck factory turned the worker council, in utter disregard of the government framework principles, into a self-management organ - into an organ of worker control, responsible to its factory collective only.

The proposal contravened government principles in several key aspects. First of all, the enterprise employees occupied an absolute majority of the council's seats. Secondly, the director and management became directly subordinated to the council's will. Finally, the council (implicitly) refused to heed the authority of any higher Party or state organ.

There are two peculiarities about the Czechoslovak worker councils. The first is that although average participation in council elections was estimated at 83 percent by a research team from Prague's Institute of Technology, and two-thirds of the electorate were manual workers, throughout Czechoslovakia a majority of the freely elected council members turned out to be technicians, professionals and highly skilled workers.[112] One study of 95 worker councils found that 70.3 percent of the council members were technicians, 24.3 percent were manual workers and 5.4 percent consisted of administrative staff. The same study found that the figures for skill and education followed the same pattern; the workers tended to elect those who were skilled, educated and highly qualified.[113]

The other peculiarity is that there did not develop a generalized tendency on the part of the workers to discriminate against Communist Party members in council elections. The number of Communists elected to worker council positions varied from council to council but only occasionally were

eligible candidates excluded simply on the basis of their Party membership. In 83 councils where the political structure had been recorded, 44 had a majority of Communists, in 33 non-Communists pre-dominated, and in 6 the balance was even.[114]

What is the reason for these peculiarities? It appears in the first case that in the elections to the worker councils industrial workers demonstrated the desire to get away from the 'amateurism' management exercised previously by Party-appointed and, more often than not, incompetent Party bureaucrats. The disproportionate election of technicians, professionals and skilled workers to represent them lies chiefly in the development of the labour force since the early 1950's. Party policy and practice since the early 1950's stressed narrow wage differentials between workers, technicians and professionals. The skills arising from the division of labour (education, skill, mental work, and other qualification) ceased to be greatly rewarded, and differences between these groups lessened and receded into the background as the political division between those exercising Party-delegated authority and those who had to submit to it gained prominence.

The trade union renaissance, and especially the spontaneous worker council movement once again reaffirm where the real class cleavage in this society lies. The crucial conflict was not between the qualified/non-qualified, the

skilled/unskilled workers but between Party-appointed bureaucrats on the one hand and the rest of the working collective on the other. Once the Party bureaucrats, the key source of antagonism, were removed the enterprises appeared to function with less friction and through a democratic consensus.

The second peculiarity of the council elections, the fact that many Communists were elected as council members, appears to underline the fact (already discussed in Chapter One) that the directing class within a Soviet-type society should not be simply equated with the membership of the Communist Party per se but rather, more dynamically, with those who formulate and carry out the will of the Party, and form a class of nomination. In fact, during the Czechoslovak events, many members of the Communist Party (such as those in the worker councils) and the newly-elected union officials turned against those holding higher Party positions responsible for defining and implementing 'its' policy. The purge in the trade unions and the elections to the worker councils excluded those who remained loyal to the old regime and did not, or could not, adapt to the new situation.

Significantly, the councils continued to hold out and represent the workers long after the Soviet-backed regime decided to stop the council experiment. On March 4, 1969, almost seven months after the Soviet-led invasion and the beginning of the 'normalisation' period, the seventh

Czechoslovak All Union Congress resolved that the worker councils should retain the power to name the enterprise director, conclude collective contracts with the enterprise's employees, and vigorously oppose any interference on the part of 'external bureaucratic elements' in enterprise activity.[115] The council experiment ended only when the new Soviet backed government eventually forced the enterprises to dissolve their councils.

The Limitations of the Worker Council Experiment

There were several serious limitations in the worker council experiment which made the working class struggle for control over the factories only partly successful. First the geographical scope: the realization of worker control and self-management, manifested in the trade union and worker council activities, was restricted mainly to the Czech lands and occurred only marginally in Slovakia (for reasons not yet properly understood and too extensive for the present research).

Secondly, the worker councils were created and remained on the enterprise level in industrial enterprises; no unifying institution (such as a Central Worker Council) was formed to represent the councils politically within the Party-dominated state. The leading economic and political institutions remained in the hands of the Party and the

institutional arrangement of Soviet-type organisation was dismantled only at the enterprise level and in the federated unions. What had developed, in fact, was a situation of dual power in which the Party controlled the higher political and economic organs but was powerless to enforce its will in the enterprises.

The third limitation consisted in the failure to extend the reality of worker control to the factory and workshop levels where worker participation in decision-making could have had a real influence in involving the worker in the production process. The councils generally remained on the level of huge, often forcefully united industrial conglomerations which were the major industrial enterprises. Possibly the failure to implement worker control or participation at the lower levels was due to the rapid course of events which followed the setting-up of the first worker councils - as Czechoslovakia became occupied by forces of the Warsaw Pact countries which were very hostile to the continuation of this experiment.

The fact that the realisation of the idea of self-management remained confined to the basic levels of industry, and did not engulf all areas of national life, means that the Czechoslovak system was not re-structured along the lines of 'participatory socialism'. In many other areas the struggle remained at the level of ideas and resolutions; there it was indeed a 'revolution of resolutions'. In this sense the

Czechoslovak events can be termed an 'unfinished revolution'.

Yet the Czechoslovak worker councils held a potential which unfortunately was not realizable in the given circumstances. The existence of autonomous worker councils gave a new meaning, put some life back into the phrase 'factories to the workers' which in the previous twenty years had become pure rhetoric. The potential of the councils consisted in the fact that in the long run they could have provided the one vehicle for worker participation in the production process that industry, in both the advanced Western nations and in the Soviet-type societies, needs in order to attenuate the alienation of the industrial worker. Here, above all, lies the significance of the Czechoslovak experiment.

The worker councils could have served as the vehicle for a real socialisation of the means of production, extending far beyond the merely formal statisation which has retarded rather than advanced the cause of industrial democracy.

By dealing with these two contexts of the Czechoslovak working class' struggle against the Party I have sought to illustrate the type of class conflict which occurred in this society in the 1968-69 period. Both the revived unions and the worker councils served as the most important foci for the formation of the working class as a "class-for-itself". The working class awakened itself from the twenty year period of slumber under Stalinism and, following the principles of solidarism, challenged the exclusion and practices of the

ruling class at the level of the industrial enterprises and the trade unions.

To a great extent, as I have tried to show in this Chapter, they succeeded - however briefly- in eliminating these exclusionary practices. The ultimate failure of their efforts came from external forces - the Soviet-led invasion - and not from internal weaknesses.

CHAPTER FIVE

Class Relations Within a Soviet-type Society

I have sought to analyze theoretically, and document empirically the class structure and class relations within a Soviet-type society - Czechoslovakia - during a period of deep crisis.

To be sure, the analysis of social stratification of a society is not the only way to ascertain the major determinants in the struggle for power. Although the ideas and actions of men are conditioned by their social and economic position in society, the relations between social stratification on the one hand, and political and economic power on the other are very complex. The analysis of social stratification within a Soviet-type society provided the theoretical framework because of its value in helping to map out and understand the struggle for emancipation on the part of the Czechoslovak working class against a ruling Communist Party which came to dominate it in a very severe and oppressive manner.

The central argument of this thesis, from the evidence presented in the preceding pages, is that Soviet-type society can be treated as a class society for three reasons.

First, there is a definite group in effective control of the means of production. Secondly, there exists significant distributive inequality apart from that arising simply from the technical division of labour. Thirdly, and finally, there is considerable periodical conflict of an overt character between large groups in the population which can genuinely be considered class conflict.

There is extensive debate, touched on above, about the existence, character and relations between classes in Soviet-type society. Not all explanations, however are equally valid.

The orthodox Soviet view of "non-antagonistic classes", derived from Stalin, obscures the reality of social conflict in these societies and overlooks the subjugated condition of the working class and the manifest inequality of political and economic power. In a similar manner, Wesolowski's view that these societies are classless explains neither the dominant role of the Communist Party within this society, the subjugated 'condition' of the working class, nor the periodical conflict between these two forces.

The state capitalist and managerial class analyses are correct insofar as they discern the existence of a ruling class in Soviet-type society, and the fact that this system shares many oppressive features with the Western capitalist system. The major criticism of these theories is that they do not deal with the fact that the boundaries between these

two classes are not as rigid and dichotomous as they assume. Many capable and willing individuals of 'humble' origins are 'nominated' to positions of responsibility within the ruling class. Correspondingly, some former ruling class members are forced to become workers as a form of punishment for deviating from the Party line. Thus, inter-class mobility is perpetuated and even reinforced by the leading class.

Parkin's approach, employing Weber's concept of social closure as the underlying principle of class formation, offers the most useful way to understand how the ruling elite, its power derived from the hegemony of the Party, and the industrial workers form themselves into classes in a Soviet-type system. From this perspective it can be seen how exclusion is practiced by the Communist Party as it appoints to important political and economic posts only those who are, and remain, loyal to the Party, and who are willing to carry out its policies uncritically. In this way the ruling class takes on the form of a class of nomination. Through the process of nomination the ruling class in Eastern Europe and the U.S.S.R. not only forms itself as a class, but also ensures its own reproduction.

Empirically this dual process is illustrated by Andrle in his study of Soviet managers. Through the nomenklatura system the Party controls appointment to all higher administrative positions. This serves as a form of social control over those in positions of political and

economic decision-making, and ensures that each generation of leaders can choose its successors. Class formation and reproduction are jointly created in the same process.

Complementing the concept of exclusion is the idea of solidarism. This is useful in explaining class formation on the part of industrial workers, as a class seeking to penetrate the exclusionary practices established and maintained by the Party, and establish some form of more direct control of the means of production and the unions.

Chapter Two documented the existence of an oligarchical, Party-based ruling class in the Soviet-type system on the basis of the Communist Party's exclusive control of the state and the economy, the deproletarianisation of Party membership, and the emergence of rule by fulltime officials.

Working class action against the Party, and what may be termed the growth of a worker counter-ideology, also expose the fact that the Communist Party is not representative of the working class. Finally the existence of significant privileges also points to the fact that the Party officialdom's style of life is very much removed from that of the average worker.

In Chapters Three and Four attention is shifted to the specific case of the working class in Czechoslovakia since the establishment of Stalinist rule. I have sought to reveal and analyse the nature of the main collective and individual measures initiated by the Communist Party which

were aimed at the subjugation of the working class.

The unions, once a vehicle for the articulation of working class interests in their antagonism with private capital, were transformed by the Communist Party into an instrument of domination, into a 'transmission belt' of control over the working class. The subjugation of the individual worker was carried out by forcing him to participate in the labour process through collective agreements, the threat of labour camps and various other means if he proved recalcitrant.

The subjugation of the Czechoslovak working class, initiated in the 1950's and continuing into the 1960's, originally assumed such a severe form because of the subordination of the Czechoslovak economy to the geopolitical interests of the Soviet Union. The latter sought to strengthen the industrial-military complex of the Soviet-bloc countries during a period of Cold War. To achieve this purpose quickly an almost superhuman effort had to be obtained from the working class, and, understandably, such an effort was not forthcoming willingly. The coercive measures to which the working class was subjected were designed to implement the goal of industrialisation and, more generally, the rapid expansion of the country's means of production in as short a time as possible.

The initial response of the Czechoslovak working class to this subjugation was largely passive and apathetic.

In part the reason for this lies in the fact that the Communist Party, through its industrialisation policies, had provided a mobility channel for peasants into working class jobs and for peasants and workers into Party and state bureaucracies. This produced some commitment to the Party, and mobility from the ranks of the working class probably helped weaken any widespread resistance on the part of the working class to the Communist measures.

These Stalinist policies resulted in the early 1960's in a severe economic crisis which gave rise in turn to an economic reform movement within the Communist Party and to a persistent criticism of the hardliners. As I have sought to show, the government reform, whether hampered by conservative elements, or by external considerations, granted the industrial workers only negligible rights of participation in the economy. This reform, as publicised and promoted by Sik, did not greatly differ from what the Soviet liberal economists Liberman and Trapeznikov were proposing for the Soviet economy. The key ideas of decentralisation, rational planning, re-introduction of profit criteria, the role of the market and even some worker involvement in the running of the economy were not dissimilar.

The problem was that the reformers could not achieve the re-organisation of the economy along market lines without arousing other concerns and demands. To awaken the industrial workers from their attitude of passivity and mold them into an

enthusiastic and productive force, the reformers had to offer some type of worker participation scheme. What the government did in fact offer, many workers regarded simply as a sharing of responsibility for the enterprises' performance without the corresponding power to direct its economic course. In this respect, the reformist viewpoint can be seen to represent only a new overture by an old ruling class which was split on the issue of how to run the economy.

Analysis of the Prague Spring events reveals a complex conflict on two different levels. The first consisted of a struggle within the ruling Party between the conservatives and the reformers over the direction and scope of the reform and can be viewed as an intra-class conflict.

The second, a nation-wide inter-class struggle, took place between those who continued to serve the Party and those workers who sought to do away with Party interference in their affairs and establish a form of self-administration. It is the significance of this conflict - as a form of class conflict - that this thesis has sought to analyse and emphasize.

While the government gave the worker an opportunity to be consulted on important enterprise decisions, so that he or she could be a better producer, the workers took the situation into their own hands at the enterprise level, and instituted a form of self-management. They took the opportunity of being suddenly free from Party, state and union

domination, gained control over their enterprises, and pushed for improvements in their socio-economic position.

The discussion has focussed on the two most important contexts in which this struggle took place and became a struggle for worker control. First, in the unions the struggle occurred between the lower union organs which represented the working class' interests and the Central Trade Union Council which represented the ruling class' interests. During the later stages of the Prague Spring, the working class gained control over the unions by throwing out officials discredited through association with the old regime and set up many entirely new union organisations to more adequately represent the workers.

The second major point of class struggle was over the role of the newly established government-sponsored worker councils. The government proposals for the setting up of this body gave the workers only meagre, unequal rights of participation, and thus did not alter the balance of power between the two classes. However, once the idea was taken up by the workers themselves, in many cases, the councils became instruments of worker control.

The two plans for councils I have examined, that of the Wilhelm Pieck factory and the Skoda enterprise (the latter served as an example for other councils throughout Czechoslovakia) make it clear that the power within these councils was to be given to the worker collectives and not to the

Party, the management or to the outside experts. At their height, the councils represented some 800,000 workers or one sixth of the labour force.

Without undue idealisation of the Prague Spring events, it can be said that the renaissance of the trade union movement and especially the institution of the worker councils did represent a step towards a real socialisation of the means of production, far beyond formal, Soviet-type statisation. The worker councils sought to remove and do away with oppressive Party practices within the enterprises and give the worker some form of political control over the work process while improving his socio-economic position.

By focusing on the experience of the Czechoslovak working class, and especially on its struggle to emancipate itself during the Prague Spring, I have sought to demonstrate empirically the antagonistic nature of class relations in Soviet-type society and stress the possibilities for a successful working class revolt in effecting a new form of industrial relations (i.e. worker control) in such a society.

I would go as far as to suggest that the worker council experiment can serve as an example to the industrial relations systems of all advanced nations. The possibilities for a real socialisation of the means of production were very real, though it is difficult to predict whether or not the highly democratic and participatory worker councils would have degenerated into some type of oligarchy. However,

with the precautions introduced by the worker collectives about the organisation and operation of the councils, this possibility must be qualified.

By focusing on the happenings in the trade unions and in the worker councils this thesis is an attempt to explore a relatively uncharted territory in the literature about the Prague Spring. Though there are numerous works dealing with this period in Czechoslovak history, these accounts are mainly journalistic and personal accounts about well known political events, and rarely go behind the scenes to arrive at what is fundamentally the reality of a class struggle.

Ironically, the Czechoslovak working class had revolted against a Communist Party which acceded to power precisely because of backing by the same working class. Twenty years later, in Czechoslovakia, the working class was temporarily successful in wresting from the Party control over the enterprises and over the unions. The Czechoslovak experiment was stopped only as the result of a foreign military intervention. Both its achievements and its limitations can serve as a useful lesson for further attempts of this kind.

FOOTNOTES

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