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Reform Efforts in the Czech and Slovak Communist Parties and Their Successors, 1988–1993

Anna Grzymala-Busse*

Reform efforts in the Slovak and Czech Communist parties in the late 1980s have largely gone unnoticed. The prevailing image of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (Komunistická Strana Československa, KSČ) was that of a stagnant, unreformable behemoth, the very image of party ossification after the Prague Spring of 1968 and the subsequent party purges. The expulsion of nearly a third of the party’s members (450,000 in total) during the 1969–70 normalization campaign that followed the Spring was to have eliminated any overt reform movements left in the party. Some scholars have argued that these purges prevented a more benign party rule, as exemplified by either the Hungarian “Kadarisation” or the uneasy “social contract” of Gierk’s Poland.1 Gustav Husák and his crew of normalizers were firmly in power, and, barring the occasional death, there were no personnel changes in the ruling politburo in the 20 years that followed the Spring. Czech and Slovak societies, for their part, had withdrawn into the private sphere, and the few dissidents who arose in the 1970s were repeatedly silenced through imprisonment and police harassment. In this situation of “ultrastability,”2 both the party and the society were demobilized, and an atmosphere of stagnation and demoralization set in.3

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Yet several reform efforts\(^4\) did arise, and their development is important for two related reasons. First, they belie this standard view of the complete stagnation of the party. The portrait of stability and conservatism generally held throughout the 1970s, but by the 1980s the party rank and file had begun to awaken. Second, the differences in the patterns of organization and strategy of these reform efforts help to explain the diverging paths of the post-1989 successors to the Communist Parties in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The Slovak and Czech successor parties gained roughly the same percentage of the vote in their respective republics in the 1990 and the 1992 elections (13.5 percent in 1990 and 14 percent in 1992), and they both stem from the same common party. However, the Slovak successor, the Strana Demokratickej Ľavici (SDL), has remade itself into a social-democratic party and joined the Socialist International, while its Czech counterpart, the Komunistická Strana Čech a Moravy (KSČM), continues to espouse communist ideology (albeit renouncing nondemocratic means of gaining power). The SDL has become a recognized and respected member of the opposition, and was part of the government in 1994. Meanwhile, the KSČM has not only been excluded from all post-1989 governing coalitions but has for the most part been both isolated in the parliament and excluded from the opposition’s common declarations. The SDL has pursued economic market reforms both in and out of the government since 1989, while the KSČM has denounced capitalism; finally, as the SDL agitates for Slovak participation in European economic and security structures, the KSČM condemns both NATO and European Union (EU) membership. Several scholars have already pointed to the significance of reformist leadership and reform-minded coalitions in explaining the differences in party trajectories,\(^5\) but

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4. By reform efforts, I mean those orientations that wished to democratize the delegate and leadership selection process, make the leadership more accountable to party members and society at large, and proposed that the party move away from orthodox stances such as democratic centralism, dictatorship of the proletariat, and the leading role of the party.

the organizational bases of these reformers, and the processes by which reformists attempted to change their parties, have largely been ignored.

Below, I first show that the Czech and Slovak Communist Parties were not nearly as uniformly minded or as stagnant as we assumed them to be at the time of the November 1989 Velvet Revolution. I then examine the various party reform efforts and platforms, and what came of them. I argue that the differences in the party leadership’s responses to these reform efforts explain why, despite their common origins, the reformist efforts took such different courses and the Slovak and Czech parties followed diverging trajectories after 1989.

**The Czech Splinters**

In the case of both the Slovaks and the Czechs, reformist efforts within the parties had two origins: the generation of party reformers expelled or struck from party lists during the normalization campaign, and the younger generation that joined the party after 1970. In the Czech Republic, the generation of 1968ers had been excluded from political life after their expulsion. Many were not only expelled from the party but actively persecuted by the state. Their children were not allowed to enter university, their families often suffered harassment at work and at school, and many were subjected to police surveillance. An estimated 70,000 to 100,000 were fired from their jobs and denied all but menial employment. The vast majority were not allowed to rejoin the party, and were barred from public life altogether, creating a “party of the expelled,” a shadow party of sorts, linked by personal and ideological ties.

The first stirrings of a Czech Communist Party reform movement, directed at the KSČ and the party-state system, arose from this very group. With so little to lose, and with many of the per-

8. Milán Otahal mentions two earlier groupings, the Svaz Komunistů Československa and the Socialistické Hnutí Československých Občanů (the Union of Communists of Czechoslovakia and the Socialist Movement of Czechoslovak Citizens, respectively), which arose in the 1969–70 period (Otahal, 22–23). Both were a continuation of earlier Prague Spring efforts and were quashed immediately.

*Reform Efforts in the Czech and Slovak Parties*
sonal networks intact, some of the ’68 generation began to meet in the early 1980s, and in late 1988 their efforts led to the formation of a movement called Obroda. According to one of the group’s leaders, Čestmír Cisář, Obroda began as a series of clandestine meetings of these discussion clubs. By 1988, the group was publishing Dialog ’88, a samizdat publication that called for a reevaluation of 1968 and issued repeated demands for a renewal of socialism in a more open, democratic framework. In January 1989, Obroda attempted to reenter public life by sending out a declaration of its existence and its goals to all press organizations, and attempted (unsuccessfully) to register officially a month later.

Obroda’s ideology was consistently that of reform socialism. In its initial document, Obroda denounced the Brezhnev interventions, called for an analysis of the Stalinist era, objected to the February 1948 takeover of power as a Stalinist obviatation of the possibility of democratic socialism, and included objections to certain (unnamed) Czechoslovak leaders. It set out its goals as the facilitation of dialogue among all groups, promised to work for socialist reform, and called for another look at “real history.” Later documents emphasize Obroda’s orientation toward the “humane, moral, and social values of socialist governing of society, with democratic autonomy of a free people, effective plurality of the economy, work free of exploitation, civic equality and justice, social welfare, rule of law, the development of education and culture, ecological values, and the development of spiritual and national values.”9 In this grab bag of ideas, the uniting theme is a democratization of socialism, and a renewal of the ideals of 1968. Obroda’s call was for a loosening and humanizing of the system, though not for a change of its structure or leadership. It was thus firmly embedded in the ideas of 1968, and limited by their scope.

Obroda’s emphasis on limited reform, and particularly on Gorbachev’s reforms, was a source of concern for the KSČ mainstream. First, Obroda advocated political and economic change, which by this point was anathema to the aged leadership of the Party. Second, it appealed to the ideas of perestroika and glasnost, whose pedigree was impeccably Soviet. As such, they could not be eas-

ily dismissed as “rightist deviations” or “opportunism,” even if they came from a supposedly marginalized and irrelevant cohort. Finally, despite their numerical disadvantage, Obroda members were distributed around the country and had made explicit connections to dissent groups in many instances.

The KSČ’s reaction to Obroda’s activity was swift. A January 3, 1989, “Plan of neutralizing Obroda ’88 by the agency,” drawn up by the State Security Agency, viewed Obroda as yet another “set of rightist opportunists,” a “dangerous and real attempt” to reach the ’68 generation and other citizens “on the basis of a friendly program.”10 The agency then outlined its plan of infiltration: to first go into the regional organizations and intimidate the members through “interviews,” and then to try and create conflict between Obroda and other groups, control the press, and use the members’ history against them. In May 1989, Obroda representatives were called to a meeting with Central Committee representatives, where they were again denounced as enemies of socialism and as rightist opportunists.11 While Obroda tried to emphasize Gorbachev’s programs and their application to Czechoslovak conditions, the representatives of the Central Committee simply grouped them with Charter ’77 and warned Obroda members to lie low.

Nevertheless, by June 1989, Obroda had established contact with Charter ’77. Numerous Obroda members signed “A Few Words,” the Charter’s dissident appeal. The KSČ Central Committee responded by sending a letter to its members warning that independent groups, including Obroda, were “attempts to create program platforms against socialism that try to divide the party membership,” and that warning against political or economic crisis amounts to deepening it.12 In response, Obroda sent a letter to KSČ members, addressing itself to pro-reform communists. The letter argued that political and economic change and improvement are possible only with the participation of the communists, par-

11. As Mencel recalls, he replied that since they were no longer members of the party, Obroda participants could hardly be a deviant faction. Mencel interview, 23 October 1996, Prague.
12. Archives of the Ústav pro Soudobé Dějiny, Obroda file.

446 Reform Efforts in the Czech and Slovak Parties
ticularly the reform-minded contingent, and that international conditions were now favorable for such reform.

Much as the dissent opposition in Czechoslovakia had earlier called on its government to "obey its own laws," Obroda emphasized that it had been created in accordance "with all existing laws, especially the Helsinki Accords," signed by the Husák government. It made little effort to hide its membership: a February 1989 publication lists more than 118 members and their addresses. The movement was organized on a regional basis, with about 10 branches in the larger cities but little contact between branches until the Velvet Revolution. (One of the leaders of the movement, Vojtěch Mencel, for example, found out about the existence of some of the local organizations, such as the one in Jablonec, only a month after the Velvet Revolution.) Total membership was estimated at anywhere from 400 to 500 prior to November 1989, and more than 2,000 afterward.

The Velvet Revolution, which began on November 17, 1989, on the streets of Prague, initially caught all these political participants by surprise. The party relinquished control at the last minute, and its leadership rapidly descended into chaos. At the December 1989 Extraordinary Congress, many of the most discredited party leaders were expelled from their posts and, in some cases, from the party itself. This set the stage for a new generation of leaders. Nevertheless, the KSČ remained closed to the Obroda initiative. Obroda joined the Civic Forum on November 23, 1989, and ran on its candidate platform in the June 1990 elections. Eight of its representatives were elected to the parliament on the OF (Civic Forum) list. By October 1990, however, ideological tensions and personal conflicts within had resulted in Obroda's de facto exclusion from the Forum, and, given both this political isolation and its social-democratic leanings, many Obroda members went on to join the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party (Československá Strana Socialní Demokracie, ČSSD) in early 1992.\(^{13}\)

13. In 1991, Obroda founded the Club of Social Democratically Thinking Representatives in the Parliament, a precursor to its final absorption by the Czechoslovak Social Democratic party. Though Obroda tried to present itself as a social-democratic formation, the ČSSD had little truck with it; most of the 1989 leaders of the ČSSD were older members who remembered all too clearly the forced union of the Social Democrats and the communists in 1948. However, given the 4 percent that the ČSSD received
The younger KSČ members, though restive before 1989, were not as bold as their elders. Despite the assurances of many former KSČ activists that much of the mid-level apparat was both dissatisfied with the status quo and oriented toward reform prior to 1989, there were few organized manifestations of this discontent. Unlike the largely retired generation of 1968, the younger party members were afraid that their livelihoods would be at stake, and that nonconformity would mean expulsion and demotion. Prior to 1989, therefore, the only people who could voice calls for reform of the party system were either those who had been expelled from the party or those within the party who could rely on the discretion of their comrades—small, informal groupings within the mid-level apparat and activists. In both cases, these were the people who had been exposed to popular reactions to party policies and the isolation from society that resulted, unlike the insulated world in which the higher-level apparat and leadership lived.

As the Velvet Revolution unfolded, several reform groupings arose, and garnered some early support from the party. Immediately after the Velvet Revolution, the KSČ leadership encouraged the formation of party platforms, for two reasons. First, given the rapid pace of the regime’s breakdown, there was no time to develop alternative programmatic and ideological formulations at the center, so the party leaders had hoped that the party platforms would provide these new programs. Second, doing so was a way of “bringing back party democracy,” which had been sorely missing from the party for more than half a century. Since it was clear that the party would have to give back its assets and could no longer organize in the workplace, the party’s leaders saw the membership and its mobilization as the main chance for political survival. Therefore, to give the members an incentive to stay within the party, the party leadership initially placed an enormous emphasis on the opinions and contributions of the rank and file. In article after article, and declaration after declaration, the membership was

\[\text{in the 1990 elections, and the subsequent replacement of these older members in the leadership, a deal was struck between the two groups, and Obroda members joined the ČSSD in early 1992.}\]

\[\text{14. Vasil Mohorita recalled that this was his main justification for supporting the Democratic Forum of Communists while he was party leader.}\]

448 Reform Efforts in the Czech and Slovak Parties
held to be the ultimate arbiter of party program and organization. Words were followed by actions. In fact, the extremely controversial question of the Czech party name was left to a 1991 membership referendum\(^\text{15}\) (with the result that more than 75 percent of those who were polled voted against changing the name), and the party continued to rely on its members as the main source of votes and support.

One intra-party group to gain prominence as a result of this emphasis was the Democratic Forum of Communists (Demokratické Forum Komunistů, DFK), which arose in an earlier form in the summer of 1989. Its origins lay in the Prague party organization’s political school, the Kabinet Politické Výchovy, and its mid-level party activists. As the head of the school in the Prague I party organization, which was itself a district known for a high percentage of intellectual and professional party members, one of the leaders, Miroslav Grossman, had ready access to numerous basic organizations of the party, and became the mobilizer of a discussion group. The group, which was at first called the Bohumil Smeral Society (Společnost Bohumila Směrála, SBS), after the interwar Czech communist leader, was more of a discussion group than a political movement—there is no evidence that the SBS ever issued a declaration or in any other way formally declared its supposed reformist stance prior to November 1989. According to Grossman, however, there were some ties to Obroda through personal contacts and discussions.

Immediately after November 1989, the SBS rapidly mobilized, and at a November 25, 1989, meeting, a week after the first events in Prague, the assembled members adopted the DFK name as a counterpart to the Občanské Forum. According to both current Communist Party officials and the founders of the DFK, the immediate interest within the party was enormous: thousands of party members signed letters of support and asked to join the DFK.\(^\text{16}\) Estimates range from 10,000 to 60,000 supporters, spread out all over the country. The breadth of this mobilization in support of

\(^{15}\) The Slovak party leadership took precisely the opposite approach, and ignored calls for a party referendum (which the Czech party leader, Jiří Svoboda, had encouraged in the Slovak party as well).

\(^{16}\) Interview with Joseph Heller and Vera Žežulková of the KSČM, and with Miroslav Grossman, Jaromír Šedlák, and Jiří Kofranek, formerly of the DFK, Fall 1996, Prague.

East European Politics and Societies 449
the DFK suggests that there was a considerable constituency of reform supporters within the party.

The initial goals of the group were to revise the significance and meaning of 1968, to get rid of the much-hated normalization document that still determined party policy (the Poučení z Krizového Vývoje), and to do away with the leading role of the party. The organization’s aim was to remake the KSČ along the more moderate lines of reform and societal engagement practiced by the Polish and Hungarian Communist parties at the time. The DFK hoped to achieve this aim through constant agitation and infiltration of party activities, active debates at party meetings, and its presence at party congresses.

With the coming of the revolution, the demands grew more radical. By mid-December of 1989, the DFK was calling for a direct election of the president, and nearly 40 of its members had attended the KSČ Extraordinary Congress on December 20, 1989. At the congress, the DFK demanded the status of a party within a party, and wanted DFK organizations to get the status of KSČ cells, Communist party dues to pay for DFK activities, a small apparatus fully subordinate to the DFK, a journal, part of KSČ assets, and official faction status.

According to the account of one participant,17 the DFK’s presence at the KSČ Extraordinary Congress was respected, because the DFK had met with massive public support in the party ranks. In fact, the new KSČ leadership had given it formal recognition, material support, and even access to Central and Executive Committee meetings to party platforms, which it saw as a sign of democratizing party life, and a means of distancing the new leadership from the old authoritarian practices within the party.

At the same time, however, the DFK was simply not ready strategically, and did not have the personnel, organization, or assets to push for more change within the party. Even though it was granted ready access to the discussion, its efforts at the creation of a larger reform wing failed, due in part to the composition of the congress. The DFK’s presence was a tiny minority in comparison with the overall body of 1,530 delegates with a decisive


Reform Efforts in the Czech and Slovak Parties
vote. These delegates, in turn, differed little from their rubber-stamping predecessors. They were selected much the same way their predecessor had been: from the ranks of “respectable” party stalwarts, chosen and approved by mid-level party apparat rather than elected by the more reform-minded members. As such, they had little interest in supporting a group that threatened their favored position in the party. Nor was the DFK able to ally itself with the party leadership; its only ally was Vasil Mohorita, the new party chair, who nevertheless did not promote the DFK programs or attempt to give the organization more of a say.

Though the DFK expressed “considerable dissatisfaction with the results of the congress . . . and the results of the elections of the leading representatives,”18 it had failed to develop “radical reformist elements of the new course as a basis for the reconstruction of the left,”19 its stated goal for the congress. For one thing, the DFK was ill prepared to translate its rank-and-file support into effective demands for party reform. It had no tools with which to organize: no phones, secretaries, or financial resources.20 The grand total of its active members at the Prague center was around 12, a fact the founders tried to conceal from the Civic Forum and from the party itself.21 It was rapidly infiltrated by the state security forces, which only diminished its credibility in the eyes of other leftist forces that were already suspicious of the forum’s intra-party orgins.22 Finally, it was unclear what role it wanted to assume.23 As one of its founders said, “it both wanted to be a [party] faction and yet not be called one.”23

By January 1990, according to one of the forum’s founders, the DFK could no longer exert significant influence within the party.24 The organization began to split. One group, led by Miloslav Ransdorff, a current KSČM party leader, favored remaining within the

20. Interview with Jaromír Sedlák, 5 November 1996.
21. In a letter to the students of the medical faculty written in December 1989, Kofránek said that he regretted lying to Ivan Havel, who asked him how many members the DFK had. Kofránek made up an answer on the spot. The DFK archive, Jiří Kofránek, Prague.
22. Private Leva Alternativa Archive, Petr Kužvárt, Prague.
party and working to democratize it from within. Another faction, led by Jiri Kofranek and others, wanted to offer a “constructive opposition to the developments in the party” that would force the KSČ to change. Meetings were held continuously, but as different members had been present at each, no real decision was arrived at until February 20, 1990, when the formation of the Czechoslovak Democratic Forum (Československé Demokratické Forum, ČSDF) from the ranks of the Kofranek group was announced.

At first, it appeared that the DFK within the party and the ČSDF shared similar goals: cadre changes and revitalization of the party organization, the creation of a broad left movement, and support for a pluralist democracy. By March 1990, however, the founding Congress of the Communist Party of the Czech Lands and Moravia (Kommunistická Strana Čech a Moravy, KSČM), as the KSČ was now called, representatives from the ČSDF demanded a divorce from the Leninist principles of party organization, and its spokesman, Josef Kašuba, was quoted as saying, “reformist forces have never won in the party. Today they must.” ČSDF representatives emphasized opening up the party, and changing its focus from its own members to a civic-movement orientation. A May 1990 letter in Lidové Noviny addressed the expelled members of the KSČ and asked for their support.

In June 1991, the ČSDF held its first congress, and determined that it had about 2,500 members. Its declarations now spoke of a turn to the center rather than the left, and the necessity of political partnerships, probably with the Civic Movement (Občanské Hnutí, OH, an offshoot of the Civic Forum) or the ČSSD as the desired partners. The ČSDF and another reform splinter joined before the 1992 elections, and were duly absorbed by the ČSSD after 1992. For its part, the DFK platform within the KSČM had retained a far more orthodox orientation, and had little interest in such basic issues as changing the party’s name or its orientation. Rather, it emphasized a “full accounting with the past” as a means of regaining popular faith, without pressing for significant organizational or programmatic changes, and eventually dissolved in the KSČM structures, as the KSČM turned away from supporting internal platforms in 1993.
The pattern of reformist Czech communists turning to social democracy can also be seen in the case of the Democratic Party of Labor (Demokratická Strana Práce, DSP). Its origins lie in the Democratic Platform, founded by Miroslav Jansta, a young party lawyer, in late 1989. With a membership of anywhere from 10 to 28 people, the platform was as radical as it was small. Calling for significant reforms within the party, it demanded the ouster or removal from power of the elderly conservatives, an end to the democratic centralism that they argued still existed within the party, and the remaking of the KSČM into a “modern left party.” It joined forces with the Democratic Left (Demokratická Levice, DL), a group formed in December 1990 by seven KSČM parliamentarians, whose reform efforts were also defeated at the December 1989 and October 1990 congresses. This faction had pressed for changes similar to those proposed by the DFK, but, having formed among the congress delegates, it had little time to build mass support. In any case, it, too, proved unable to alter the party’s path.

In May of 1991, the DL was officially founded as an independent opinion current within the party. Its founders proclaimed that the goals of the DL were a change of the KSČM’s name and drastic party reform. Above all, the faction called for an end to what it saw as the party’s preoccupation with internal rather than programmatic changes. DL leader Michal Kraus argued that unless the KSČM abandoned its preoccupation with its own members, the party was “well on its way to becoming unreformable.” He further maintained that such a party would be needed and wanted only by its members, and that rapid reform within the party was required immediately. In so doing, Kraus had echoed the calls made by the DFK, and pointed to a crucial characteristic of the party—its constant reference to its members as its sole programmatic and organizational rationale.

The party immediately lashed back, its leadership (including the erstwhile reformer Ransdorf) proclaiming itself “amazed” at the DL’s “shallowness” and “thoughtlessness.” Party head Jiří Svo-boda said that what mattered more than programmatic or name changes was “what the people who make up or sympathize with the party want.” While the DL called for “Socialist International membership, rapid and drastic economic reform under parlia-
mentary control, and a noncommunist program,” Svoboda responded that “people don’t expect grand theory from us, people expect concrete instructions for conduct.”

Despite this resistance, DL members expected the group to effect change within the party. They pointed to the DL’s local organizations in nearly all of the electoral regions (okresy), and declared more than 13,000 members. The DL further claimed that a fourth of the representatives of the Federal Assembly and Czech National Council sympathized with its program. Despite assurances by both sides that each had the best interests of the KSCM in mind, the conflict with the KSCM leadership continued, and the showdown was not long in coming.

In late August of 1991, the leadership of the Demokratická Levic demanded that Svoboda and the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the party be replaced, that former state security members be expelled from the party, and that the party’s financial activities be made transparent. The DL further demanded that an immediate Extraordinary Congress be called to finally and drastically reform the party, its organization, its methods, and its program. The reaction was an immediate closing of the ranks of the KSCM. Despite incipient inner conflicts within the party, the KSCM stonewalled the requests, and the Central Committee Plenum gave Svoboda leadership a vote of confidence at its September 7, 1991, meeting. The DL’s demands were never answered.

Frustrated, the members of the DL platform left the KSCM and founded their own party. The Demokraticka Strana Prace was officially formed a week later, taking with it 20 parliamentary representatives of the KSCM and creating a new parliamentary club. In the official KSCM historiography, the consequence for the rump KSCM parliamentary grouping “was an increased internal stability of the club, its effectiveness, and the efficiency of its parliamentary work.”

The DSP united in its ranks sundry leftists, including some Obroda, ČSDF, ČSSD, and former members of the KSCM. Arising as a social-democratic-type party, its program emphasized the creation of a free market with parliamentary oversight (thus continuing one of the most controversial


454 Reform Efforts in the Czech and Slovak Parties
points of the DL’s program) and the creation of a noncommu-
nist left party.

The DSP ran in a silent coalition with a regional Moravian party
in the 1992 elections, with Kraus winning a parliamentary seat and
the Moravian partner taking two others. With only one seat, and
an incipient conflict with its electoral partner, the party could
hardly claim an enthusiastic following. DSP membership had
decreased with time. As many as 10,000 to 15,000 members had
left the KSČM when the DSP was formed, but only 7,000 had gone
into the DSP. The aftermath of the 1992 elections reduced this num-
ber to 3,000, a figure that continued to decrease. Party records
reveal increasing apathy on the part of membership and local or-
ganizations alike. By early 1993, Kraus had been joined by more
than 700 members in dissolving the party and joining the ČSSD.

Ironically, however, the DSP saw itself vindicated. The party
was founded because Svoboda and the party leadership refused
their demand for a full party transformation, name change, rereg-
istration of members to weed out those who could not reconcile
themselves to the party’s defeat of November 1989, and a turn-
ing outward of the party’s orientation. Two years later, an embat-
tled Svoboda first proposed exactly what he had earlier denounced,
and was then summarily replaced as party leader at the 1993 party
congress.

In addition to the DFK and the DSP, other, smaller currents
immediately arose after November 1989. One was the Party of
Independent Left (Strana Nezávislé Levice), yet another current
that was disappointed by the results of the December 1989 Extra-
ordinary Congress of the KSČ, with an orientation toward demo-
ocratic socialism and the Socialist International. Wanting the best
of both worlds, it sought to retain contact with the KSČ, given
“common policy interests,” while demanding a purge of KSČ
ranks. It, too, faded into obscurity, receiving 4,343 votes in the 1990
communal elections. Its membership was never publicized, and
some of its activists then joined the DSP.

Local-level reform groups emerged briefly when the party

27. Výkonny Výbor meeting records, DSP private archive at the Strana Demokratické Lev-
ice, Prague.

East European Politics and Societies 455
changed from a workplace to a territorial- and interest-based organization. These included the Club of Autonomous Communists (Klub Samospravných Komunistů), which began as a group to promote autonomous economic and political solutions but grew increasingly orthodox in character; the Radical Socialist-Communists Group (Aktiv Pražských Komunistů); and the short-lived Greens’ Platform. Each group consisted of about 20 to 40 members, who made no attempt to influence KSČ or KSČM policy at the higher congress or Central Committee levels.

After these early reformers appeared, made their demands on the party, and left in discouragement to form new parties or to dissolve during 1989–92, a second wave of splinter groups arose in the period immediately surrounding the June 1993 Prostějov Congress. The congress was a watershed for the KSČM. It was the final gathering at which clear opinion currents could be discerned, or were legally allowed by the party statutes. Faced with the conflicts between the reformist factions and the more orthodox members, the KSČM decided to eliminate official party platforms. It was a time for party dissenters to either “put up or shut up.” At this point, the name of the party and the repercussions of its change, the dominant topic of party discussion since 1989, had become the main point of division among three groups. Former Central Committee member Josef Mecl and then-party chair Jiří Svooboda represented the “reformists” who wanted the name Party of Democratic Socialism (Strana Demokratického Socialismu). The former mid-level apparatchik Jaroslav Ortman and the “centrists” wanted the Party of the New Left (Strana Nové Levice), while post-1989 party leader Miroslav Grebniček and the conservatives wanted to retain the old name.

The two groups, the Party of the Democratic Left (Strana Demokratické Levice, SDL; not to be confused with the Demokratická Levice29) and the Left Block party (Strana Levý Blok, SLB; not to be confused with the 1992–94 KSČM electoral coalition and also called Levý Blok) arose in June–July 1993, after the third KSČM congress, in Prostějov. They differed less in program than

29. Or, for that matter, with the Hnutí Demokratické Levice, a small regional movement. The SDL had its beginnings in the Hnutí Demokratické Levice, a 150-member, group based in Brno under the leadership of Lotar Indruch. Though officially noncommu-

Reform Efforts in the Czech and Slovak Parties
in political biography. The SDL group consisted of former Federal Assembly members, whereas the SLB was dominated by the representatives of the Czech National Council, two groups that had a history of political resentment. During the late 1992 parliamentary debates over the division of Czechoslovakia and the fate of the federal institutions, the representatives of the KSČM National Council had voted against the formation of a temporary Senate as a holding pen of sorts for the representatives of the Federal Assembly. The latter were thus left without a political or institutional home after the split of the Czechoslovak Federation in January 1993, and considered the action of its National Council colleagues a betrayal.

After clandestine pre-congress negotiations failed to produce the outcome desired by Mecl and Svoboda, more than 70 delegates, led by Mecl, at first left the congress hall and upon their return announced that they had founded SDL but would continue to vote at the congress. The SDL welcomed reform communists and current members of the DL and the KSČM, allowing for joint membership. In its programmatic declarations, the party declared itself to be a center-left formation, falling between the communist and the social-democratic parties. It later announced that it would follow the Socialist International program, and maintained contact with the KSČM for a few months. However, with the advent of a new law on parties that forbade dual membership the two parties largely lost contact after 1994. Currently, the party has organizations in 74 okresy, but no data on the number of basic organizations. The membership is estimated to be around 3,000. The SDL’s performance in the communal elections of 1994, and in the parliamentary and senatorial elections30 of 1996, did not clear either for the 5 percent barrier for parliamentary representation or the 3 percent barrier for state funds. It has also lost the funds gained by its only parliamentary representative in 1993, since the 1994 law also

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30. The beleaguered former leader of the KSČM, Jiří Svoboda, ran on the SDL platform in the Prague 2 district in the 1996 Senate elections. He failed to win the seat.
based state funding of parties on votes rather than on seats gained.

The Strana Levý Blok, for its part, arose immediately after the 1993 congress, on July 1, 1993. It also allowed double membership, and had signed a toleration agreement between the SLB, the SDL, and the KSČM on July 22, 1993. It is led by Jaroslav Ortman, who argued that his group was the “great integrator,” and that its raison d’être was uniting the left. He noted that both KSČM and SDL leaders were former Federal Assembly members, but he “did not know whether this is a coincidence.” Though it took 23 of the 35 parliamentary representatives of the KSČM, it faced the same key problem the SDL did although the SLB garnered both funds and publicity by dint of its continued parliamentary representation after July 1993, it was unable to generate an electoral constituency or a local organization. Its parliamentary origin meant that it had few local organizational resources to rely upon. There were reports that it used its funds to “buy off” regional leaders of the KSČM, but to no avail: in the first electoral contest after the 1993 congress, the SLB lost its entire parliamentary representation and has not regained any seats in either the 1996 parliamentary or the senatorial elections. The party claims about 50 local organizations and about 3,000 members.

According to representatives of both the SDL and the SLB, there are no great programmatic differences between the two parties. At various times, both have proposed coalitions only to back out. Representatives of both parties characterize the differences as a question of personalities, rather than of ideology or program, and some point to the lingering bitterness from the Temporary Senate debacle as the real reason for the lack of coordination or cooperation between the two parties.

Meanwhile, the KSČM continues to defend what it sees as the rights of its members and the working class. It has instituted no programmatic or organizational changes since the 1993 congress,

31. Given the provenance of SLB leadership, this is not that surprising; most were party workers prior to 1989, stationed in the research institutes of the UV KSČ. (Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party) Concomitant with these appointments was “a tendency not to stick out, and the pragmatic policies of integration of groups and different parties into the Levý Blok,” according to a KSČM representative. Interview with Josef Heller, 24 September 1996.

although it will now set up mid-level coordinating committees in anticipation of the proposed administrative reorganization of the Czech Republic. Decision making has been recentralized again, with the higher party organs now having veto power over the decisions of the local organizations. The party’s membership continues to age, with more than 70 percent of its members older than 65, and little influx of younger members. It has steadfastly voted against NATO membership, the Czech-German agreement, and what it sees as the undermining of Czech autonomy through international economic and security initiatives.\footnote{Even the moderate changes within the KSČM had become too much for some groups. The first group to emerge was the Marxistický-Leninský Klub KSČ, founded in early 1990. It saw the name change as an attempt at liquidation and the existence of opinion currents as nothing but a path to party collapse. It equated change with “division and destruction,” and, as long as its elderly leadership was able to do so, denounced the leadership’s differing opinions about the party name as a show of irresponsibility toward the members. A bigger contender for power were the series of initiatives around Miroslav Stepan, the former party head of Prague, who was both convicted for leading the police brutality during the November 1989 events and expelled from the party in December 1989. Stepan was readmitted to the party by a local cell on October 2, 1992, and by January 1993 he had formed the For Socialism hard-liner platform within the KSČM along with other former party notables. The platform’s status was discontinued by the party two months later, and the founders of For Socialism were again expelled from the party, only to found the People’s Union for National and Social Salvation (LÚNSZ), which was then transformed into the Strana Československých Komunistů (SČK) by early March 1995. The SČK has not gained any parliamentary or senatorial representation, and its membership is estimated to be anywhere from 750 to 20,000 (the latter being a party estimate). All have failed to reveal their membership or organizational numbers, and their greatest asset was the publicity they could generate.}

The Czech pattern, then, is of reformist groups arising from within the party, with the initial encouragement and support of the party, only to leave and found new parties in frustration, leaving the KSČM increasingly orthodox. Ironically, by fostering programmatic platforms in the name of greater party pluralism, the KSČM all but guaranteed uniformity. In the name of internal diversity and membership democracy, the party leadership initially promoted programmatic platforms after 1989 through financial subsidies, access to meetings, and favorable rhetoric. Given these incentives, the reformist groups clearly profiled themselves as platforms, only to be easily marked and isolated as “separatist forces.” At the same time, the party leaders barred the reformist groups from decision making, allowing the members’ conservatism to set party policies instead, thereby rendering the platforms’ efforts inef-
fectual. Given the resulting combination of powerlessness and member hostility, the platforms had little incentive to remain within the party and continue their efforts.

Nor did the platforms have much chance of widespread support outside the party, the Czech reformers, in their DSP, SLB, and SDL incarnations, all arose from the parliamentary representation of the KSČM. None of these groups, with the possible exception of the DFK, had widespread backing. They hoped to translate their parliamentary presence into subsequent electoral support, but they had little or no local support and organization, and no material assets with which to compensate for a lack of local structures. They had also failed to consider that instead of offering a political alternative on the left to the communists and to the Social Democrats, they had painted themselves into a corner: too visibly tainted by their communist past for the noncommunist voters and too “treasonous” for the KSČM members, they were largely appealing to a nonexistent electorate. The reform alternatives thus could not mobilize the member support necessary for party reform in the KSČM, or the electoral support necessary for success as autonomous parties.

**The Slovak Splinters**

Though it was ostensibly part of the same ossified federation after 1968, the Slovak Communist party (KSS) took a very different path after 1989. Ironically, much of the KSS leadership exhibited a notable lack of enthusiasm for reform during the Prague Spring—there was little factionalism or pro-liberalization sentiment in the KSS either before or after 1968. By the same token, the Slovak party was hardly more flexible in its decisions or leadership choices. Nevertheless, it was the Slovak party that managed to

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34. Officially, the KSČ was organized along federal lines after 1968 to reflect the new federal state arrangements. In practice, however, the two separate organizations that emerged were the Slovak Communist party and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia; it was decided that there was no need for a communist party of the Czech Lands and Moravia until 1991. The KSS was fully subordinate to the KSČ, so that all decisions for the Slovak regional organizations, for example, flowed directly from Prague, bypassing Bratislava entirely. Similarly, agendas for Slovak party congresses (and even their timing) reflected Czech domination.
transform itself in ways that the Czech party did not even attempt after 1989.

For one thing, the KSS almost immediately began to disassociate itself from the KSČ and the Prague-centered Czech domination of the Slovak party organization.37 One of the first demands the KSS leadership made after November 1989 was for greater autonomy and a devolution of decision-making power to the Slovak organization, rapidly followed by a separate party congress in 1990 and negotiations that eventually led to the end of the federation of the two parties in 1991. The KSS congress decided to allow the new leadership to change the party name by October 1990, and became the Party of the Democratic Left (Strana Demokratickej Lávici, SDL) in January 1991. Simultaneously, the party “re-registered” its members (former KSS members had to rejoin the SDL organization, signing a statement of agreement with the new party program and organization) and, instead of remaining on the orthodox communist course, remade itself into a social-democratic party with membership in the Socialist International.

As was true of the Czech Republic, no major overt reform movements or platforms existed within the KSS prior to November 1989. Whereas the Czech party organization gave rise to discussion clubs among mid-level members and activists, the Slovak reformers were concentrated in the KSS’s main theoretical and programmatic organ, the Marxist Leninist Institute of the Central Committee of the KSS. Several younger party pragmatists quietly worked at the institute, where they had enjoyed the relative freedom to travel abroad and access to a library fully stocked with Western journals and books at a time when opportunities to travel and the availability of foreign media had been severely curtailed. They were led by Professor Viliam Plevza, whose ambitions had by several accounts extended well beyond the institute.38 Under Plevza’s direction, the institute’s research teams had come up with several reform documents, notably the Stance Regarding the Sit-

35. The one exception was the push for federalization and greater Slovak autonomy. See Barbara Wolfe Jancar, Czechoslovakia and the Absolute Monopoly of Power (New York: Praeger, 1977), 177–78.
36. See Skalník Leff, Conflict in Czechoslovakia, 259.
37. Leff, 246 ff.
nation, The Platform for the Revolutionary Defense of the Party and Society (Stanovisko k Situacii, Plaforma Pre Revolučnou Obrodu Strany a Spoločnosti), and other documents advocating extensive reforms. These circulated widely among both the institute’s research staff and some of the younger apparat members. None of these, however, made it to the Central Committee agenda prior to November 1989. Nevertheless, Plevza continued to groom his young (in their mid-30s) charges, including Peter Weiss and Pavol Kanis.

It was this cohort that was to prove crucial in the reformist takeover of the KSS. These young scholars were ready to assume power at a time (immediately after November 1989) when most older, established party officials were either too disoriented or too frightened to take charge. Unlike their Czech counterparts, the old Slovak party leaders had both a pool of young talent at high levels and a reliable older party comrade who could act as their promoter and as a guarantee of acceptability to the party elders. They thus allowed these “Young Turks” access to power, especially since they had proven their loyalty. Both Kanis and Weiss entered the public arena through a spirited defense of their party’s right to exist in television debates and press articles during and after the Velvet Revolution, gaining both publicity and popular approval in the process. As young, well-educated, and personable party members, they were the ideal candidates to represent the KSS in late 1989, and were duly elected to the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the KSS in December 1989, assuming the leadership on January 20, 1990. It was under their direction that the KSS then adopted its decisions to disassociate itself from the KSČ, change its name, reregister the membership, and reform its image in 1990–91.

As in the Czech Republic, several groups arose from the ranks of current and former party members. The roles of the programmatic platforms and the 1968ers differed, however. By the middle of 1990, two unofficial platforms had emerged within the party: the Platform of Communist Defense (Platforma Komunistickej


462 Reform Efforts in the Czech and Slovak Parties
Obrody, PKO) and the Platform of Socialist Orientation (Platforma Socjalistycznej Orientacji, PSO). The former was a more orthodox formation, largely grouping older people who felt strongly that changing the name or orientation of the KSS would be the group’s downfall. The PSO, on the other hand, was the platform of the younger reformers from various research institutes. Both groups published their positions in the September 1990 issues of Pravda, then still the party’s newspaper, and participated in the October 1990 KSS congress. However, since the KSS had never given formal support to programmatic platforms, the two groups were more sources of public discussion than institutionalized reflections of party divisions. After the congress, the PSO dissolved in KSS structures, while some of the people associated with the PKO eventually founded an orthodox communist splinter party, the KSS ’91.39

Unlike the Czech platforms, the Slovak intra-party groups were never given a chance to become springboards for new organizations. Offended would-be platform leaders accused the party of stifling discussion and of engaging in nondemocratic methods at the first party congresses, while the Weiss leadership castigated them for diverting attention from the matter at hand—the party program and identity. Nor did the stifling of the platforms stop there; opinion currents were not given a chance to organize officially, gain party recognition or resources, and their efforts at debate at the party congresses were immediately silenced by the congress chairs.40 Ironically, however, this “nondemocratic” Slovak policy allowed the KSS to pursue its path to becoming a publicly acceptable democratic competitor.

The federal structure of the country was reflected in the formation of reformist factions after 1989. From the very beginning, much as Civic Forum and Public Against Violence had formed

39. Two orthodox groups arose simultaneously and independently: KSS’ 91, with about 1,200 to 1,400 members, and the ZKS, with about 600, joined on August 28, 1992. The membership of the new orthodox KSS was variously estimated at between 6,000 and 20,000, though the lower figure seems more likely. Largely made up of elderly former KSS members, the party has been unable to clear the 5 percent electoral barrier and is currently attempting to revive its organizational structures (only about 100 or so are politically active).

separately, so had the generation of 1968 and reform communists formed republic-level organizations, with broadly common goals and names but different strategies and subgoals. Little organizational glue held the republic-level organizations together; most organizers refer to “consultation” and “sharing experiences,” but no real coordination or subordination took place between the Czech and Slovak branches of ostensibly federal organizations. Most political organizations (the Communist party included) wanted to distance themselves from the “false federation” of 1968: More importantly, the electoral law stipulated that representation in all three chambers was based on republic-level electoral performance. There was neither the desire nor the need to organize across the republic borders, since an organization needed to cross the electoral thresholds in only one republic in order to gain both representation and state funds. Not surprisingly, no party had expended much effort to organize countrywide electoral lists in either 1990 or 1992.

Obroda had been founded in Slovakia in January 1990. Groups of 1968ers throughout Slovakia began to organize in November, and at two meetings, on November 30, 1989, and December 5, 1989, some of them went on to found the Strana Demokratickeho Socialismu (SDS), while others decided to found the civic association Obroda. Obroda’s initial manifesto, which dates from December 11, 1989, declared that the organization wanted to aid the country in the transformation process, and demanded a real federation, democratic freedoms, a regulated market, a real or dissolved National Front, and Public Against Violence (Věrejnost proti Nasiliu, VPN) as the basis for dialogue with the government. Within a few months, however, the real aim of the Slovak Obroda’s leaders came to the fore: compensations for and the rehabilitation of the 50,000 people in Slovakia, who had been persecuted in 1968–70. Specifically, their chief interest was the “extra-legal rehabilitation” (mimosoudná rehabilitace) of those who had to change or give up jobs as a result of party prosecution after 1968. Demanding readmission to jobs, pension supplements, and other compensations, the organization pitched itself at an increasingly narrow constituency. At its peak, Obroda counted between 1,000 and 1,500 members in 31 existing groups.
Although it was registered as a civic organization, Obroda wanted to remain active in the elections. Realistically evaluating its electoral chances, the association decided to cooperate with the VPN, as “the club would have no chances if it were to go to elections alone.” Four 1968ers associated with Obroda successfully ran on the VPN platform. The group’s popularity grew, only to gradually decrease in 1991, when the organization came under attack as a crypto-communist center; several Slovak newspapers published charges that the Federal Assembly, and especially the Slovak Obroda, had been filled by security agents. Obroda publications struggled both to refute the charges and to distance the organization from the KSS. Moreover, it was unable to push through its compensation program; Ivan Laluha, Obroda’s chair, proposed extra-legal rehabilitation legislature in the Federal Assembly House of Peoples, and was subsequently the only deputy to vote for it.

In an intra-party analysis, the Obroda leadership concluded that the organization had little chance of future success, given the members’ apathy and particularly their lack of interest in rehabilitation. In addition, there was only minimal financial support for the group, and its low membership was unlikely to grow, since the program did not address the younger generation. Of the 24 active and registered cells, 17 had decided to dissolve. Obroda asked its members to support the newly formed Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (now the ruling party in Slovakia) and stopped functioning as a Slovak-wide organization by May 1991.

Meanwhile, a largely younger cohort founded the Party of Democratic Socialism (Strana Demokratického Socializmu, SDS) after the November 30, 1989, meeting of the Slovak 1968ers. At first, its membership consisted largely of members of the Leninist Spark (Leninská Iskra), a small organization founded in early 1987 to propagate the ideas of perestroika in Slovakia. Leninská Iskra was founded by Igor Cibula and Jozef Moravčík, later the foreign minister of Slovakia, and consisted of about 60 people, most of whom belonged to the 1968 generation. Much like the Czech Obroda, it was limited to discussions of regime alternatives, although, unlike its Czech counterpart, it had within its ranks current KSS members, such as Moravčík. While it tried to provide information about the developments in the Soviet Union, show
the need for similar developments in Slovakia, and recruit more people, its influence was limited by the intervention of the communist security forces. Iskra decreased its activities, and was renamed the Forum of Social-Scientific Dialogue (Spoločensko V ědecké Forum Dialog), which met in the fall of 1989.

Like the other reformist Slovak groups, the SDS argued for democratic freedoms, equal individual rights—and the rights to work, education, free health care, larger pensions, and a plurality of forms of ownership. The SDS manifesto also argued for “democratic socialism and social democracy,”41 stating that the party wanted more “than the bourgeois democracy can provide.” Explicit connections were made to Prague Spring leader Alexander Dubček, and his vision of a “socialism with a human face,” although Dubček himself never joined the party. The SDS also claimed adherence to Socialist International principles (as almost every self-identified left party had done in the former Czechoslovakia in 1990–91).

The SDS, too, came under charges of crypto-communism. Partly to deflect these allegations, it voted to change its name at its founding congress on March 26, 1990, to the Party of Democratic Socialists (Strana Demokratických Socialistov.) (The original name was identical to that of the resurrected East German Communist party.) In this new reincarnation, the party moved from appeals to “really put Marxism into practice” to declarations of its social-democratic character. It presented itself as a party of the working class, with an isolationist economic program. Nevertheless, it never moved beyond 30 or so party organizations and an estimated 200 to 600 members.

Among the party’s founding members were Vladimír Mečiar and Igor Cibula, the prime minister and the head of the security service after 1989, respectively. Though Mečiar rapidly left for greener pastures at the Federal Ministry of Interior, Cibula remained until March 31, 1990. Five days after being elected party chair, he resigned, ostensibly to lead Narodna Obroda, an independent newspaper. As it turned out, however, Cibula left the party in order to reenter the security services, which he had left after 1970. His leadership of the party was not without controversy:

41. SDS program, January 1990.
the new leader charged that Cibula had sabotaged alliance negotiations with Obroda and with the Social Democrats; neglected the collection of petitions necessary to run in the 1990 elections; and lied about party support and membership, costing the party valuable government subsidies. Whatever the shortcomings of the Cibula leadership, the party was dissolved by September 1990 and united with the Social Democratic party to form the Slovak Social Democrats.

The Czech DFK, for its part, had its counterpart in the Slovak Demokratické Forum Komunistov. Whereas the Czech DFK has been characterized as a “sharp knife to the KSČ’s throat to transform the party,” the Slovak DFK was a far less formidable reformist faction. With about 250 to 300 people, it was represented at the KSS Extraordinary Congress in December 1989 but never given the full-fledged participant and faction status that the KSČ initially gave to the Czech DFK. At the time, Weiss and other party leaders wanted to push through the reformist agenda and deliberately cut short what they considered to be “theoretical discussions” at both the Extraordinary Congress in December 1989 and the First Congress in October 1990. The Slovak DFK’s representatives at the congresses were more interested in discussing Lenin than in changing the party’s name or organization, issues the new KSS leadership considered to be irrelevant.

Moreover, by the time the Slovak DFK had tried to establish contact with its Czech counterpart, the Czech DFK had already split into the ČSDF and an intra-party faction. With no partner in the federal structure, and no audience in the Slovak party, the DFK remained isolated. It had no contact with the SDS or other reformist groups in Slovakia. The Slovak DFK leadership, moreover, grew more sympathetic to the orthodox communist line than did the leadership of the party, deepening its distance from the KSS leadership. After the KSS had undergone reregistration, the DFK

42. Jan Sekaj, the new chair, argued that Cibula told the NF that the party had 3,500 members, when in fact it had only 200. The NF subsequently lowered the party’s subsidy by 70,000 korany.
43. See Ziačik, 47.
45. Interview with Juraj Janošovský, 3 February 1997, Bratislava
fell apart. It was not a formal platform within the KSS, its mem-
bers were not registered in the new successor party, and it had no
material assets. Some of its members returned to the newly
renamed and reformed KSS-SDL, while others went into the
orthodox KSS’ 91 formation, which emerged in March 1991. In
fact, Juraj Janošovský, the erstwhile leader of the DFK, joined the
leadership of the orthodox faction.

The Slovak Communist party thus provided its reformist mem-
bers with an incentive to stay within the party but not to come
forth and profile themselves as they had done in the Czech party.
There was no official recognition or support of programmatic plat-
forms, nor did the leadership support party platforms with either
rhetoric or material resources. The reformist Slovak “professional
theoreticians” were well versed in internal party politics, and had
the benefit of a mentor with considerable party authority. Mov-
ing quickly to consolidate their power, the newly risen reformist
leadership concentrated reformist efforts, preempted any com-
peting centers of power, and thus discouraged or co-opted any
other reformist formations. In doing so, the leadership also pre-
vented conservative forces from attacking reformist targets.

After making its reformist intentions known, the newly arrived
KSS leaders then offered the membership a clear choice: either
agree to the transformed party character or leave. The vast major-
ity of the membership chose the second option, and the party went
from 250,000 to 40,000 members in a matter of months. The Slo-
vak leadership presented party members with a fait accompli: the
choice was not which group within the party the members might
support but whether they should stay in the reformed party or
leave. Thus the nominal role of the membership and a lack of for-
mal organization of the reformers within the party allowed the
new leadership to consolidate its power push through a reformist
course with little fear of backlash from the now-enervated mem-
bership.

Conclusion

By 1989, neither the Czech nor the Slovak Communist party was
as moribund as many observers had supposed. In both parties,
pools of potential reformers appeared by 1989 who could and did attempt to transform their parties’ organization and ideology. Why, then, do the fates of these reformist efforts differ so much? In retrospect, platform formation was both a time- and an effort-consuming enterprise that diverted and diffused reform interests if it was not given access to decision making within the party. In the Czech party, the leadership, through its formal encouragement but de facto denial of any real political power, gave the platforms the prominence that made them easy targets for the conservative party membership without giving the platforms any organizational means with which to defend themselves.

Problems of economies of scale also set in. The reform efforts faced larger party organizations that had the funds, local organization, membership numbers, and a far stronger identity than that of the splinters. Moreover, the more profiled the splinter, the more of a threat the party membership perceived it to be. Ill-defined groups of Slovak reformers could readily “sneak” into the leadership during the initial time of chaos, while clearly defined reformist groups antagonized the suspicious and orthodox Czech party membership after the initial shock of 1989 wore off and the parties began to consolidate again. Since all Czech party decisions were eventually submitted to the test of “party members’ wishes,” even if the reformers could convince some of the party leaders of the necessity for change, their conservative opponents could easily refer to the unreconstructed party membership and reject any proposed changes.

The reformist efforts within and around both parties point to both the potential and the limitation of Communist party reform. In the end, the KSČ and the KSČM effectively gave their reformists every incentive to leave, and thus to cement the party’s orthodox course. The KSS and its successor, the SDL, by eliminating the forums for discussion and organization that may have acted as alternative centers of mobilization for individual reformists, further ensured the reformist leadership’s hold on power in the center. While the Czech Communist party organization encouraged the rise of reform splinters, the post–1989 leaders of the Slovak Communist party organization and its successor encouraged the consolidation of organizational, ideological, and programmatic reform.
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470 Reform Efforts in the Czech and Slovak Parties