

**The Break-up of Czechoslovakia:
The Impact of Party Development
on the Separation of the State**

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Abstract

When Czechoslovakia separated into two independent republics on January 1, 1993, it was hailed as the "velvet divorce." Relief that a European "ethnic" conflict had been resolved without physical aggression was apparently so deep as to have blunted curiosity about the real issues underlying the conflict. This paper looks back into the file and, in particular, explores the impact of party political developments on efforts to mediate some form of constitutional compromise. The analysis is not intended as an account of the separation (which would necessarily delve deep into historical, cultural, and economic questions). The more specific aim is to consider the issues and institutional pressures that dominated party development between 1989 and 1993, and to evaluate their contribution to the split. The article concludes that the profoundly unpopular decision to separate the country emanated from irreconcilable views on the correct "transition" path rather than a deeply rooted nationalism on either side. Moreover, both Czech and Slovak electorates were, to a striking degree, "held hostage" to party choices of economic policy and a common state, presented as mutually exclusive possibilities.

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The Break-up of Czechoslovakia
The Impact of Party Development on the Separation of the State*

Abby Innes

Czechoslovakia separated on January 1, 1993 - just three years after the toppling of the country's Communist regime in November 1989. There were clearly multiple causes of the Czech and Slovak divorce, fostered not least by the Communist repression of attempts to articulate national grievances as such. The Communist inheritance undermined the state in other, more quantifiable ways. Economic and constitutional conditions proved particularly corrosive; Communist abuse of the constitution as a facade for centralised power had invalidated the term 'federation' for many Slovaks, who since the war had aspired to real federalisation. A minority power of veto also lay in ambush in the newly animated federal parliament; an institutional reinforcement of serious disagreements over terminology and conflicting expectations. On the economic front Czech's resented the long-term subsidy of Slovakia and the federal economic reform of 1990 to 1992 was unmistakably a Czech reform designed for the Czech economy. Reform authors, as the Communists before them, adhered to the belief that economic developments delivered converging national identities - even, it seems, when these developments amounted to a scissoring economic performance. In such a context the national burden was potentially a heavy one. In an exploration of the basic premise that politics after 1989 nevertheless 'mattered', this article focuses exclusively on the role played by the new institution of party politics. By colouring in the map of the Czechoslovak inter-election period I aim to demonstrate a party-systemic contribution to sundering the state, specifically, to show that imbalances in the fledgling party system prohibited the clear mediation of Czech Slovak relations.

As it turned out, the first free democratic election in June 1990 was a poor indicator of public preferences. The electorates were offered only the plebiscite issues of 'Are you for change?' and only afterwards did the victorious Czech and Slovak anti-regime movements splinter into factions which then instituted themselves as parties. Of their offspring the two parties attributing a transcendent value to the common state found themselves marginalised but not, so this article claims, straightforwardly because of their 'national' views. Neither, as Section 2 explores, did nationalism and questions of secession define party evolution and the party campaigns leading up to the second election in June 1992. Czech and Slovak rivalry, though divisive, had proved useable by party agents only in a highly constrained way, stuck as

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Interviews:

Vaclav Zak (former Civic Forum MP, Chair of the Czech National Council) 14.6.1995 10.30-12.00. Office of 'First', Prague)

Ivan Gabal (sociologist, former advisor to President Havel, Head of the President's social research unit and OH 1992 campaign manager). 15.6.1995 11.30-13.00. 'MENT', Prague)

Fedor Gal (sociologist, former Chairman of VPN) 4. 4. 1995 12-14.30 Cafe Tinska, Prague)

between Czechs and Slovaks. Personalities played a prominent role in the subdued campaign, unavoidably given the few salient differences between programmes and the resulting reluctance to enter a substantial debate. Even the Communist Party advocated political pluralism and a market economy, though it balked at the abolition of state property (RFE 15.6.1990 Peter Martin).

Election results: 8 - 9 June 1990 (percentage share of the vote)

	Federal Assembly		Czech/ Slovak National Councils
	House of the People	House of the Nations	
<i>Czech Republic</i>			
OF	53.1	50.0	49.5
KSCM (Communist Party)	13.5	13.8	13.3
CDU	8.7	8.7	8.4
HSD - SMS*	7.9	9.1	10.0
<i>Slovak Republic</i>			
VPN	32.5	37.3	29.3
KDH	19.0	16.7	19.2
SNP	13.8	13.4	13.3
KSCM	11.0	11.4	13.9
Egyutteles and MKDH	8.6	8.5	8.7
DS	4.4	3.7	4.4
SZ**	3.2	2.6	3.5

*Movement for Self-governing Democracy - Society for Moravia and Silesia

** Slovak Green Party

If anything OF's success, paralleled by that of the like-mindedly consensus-seeking VPN and the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) in Slovakia, seemed to bode well for the resolution of regional conflicts. The threat to stable relations lay in the inevitable disintegrative tendencies of the civic movements and the direction such fragmentation might take; particularly as foreshadowed by notions of economic autonomy.

The disintegration of the centre: June 1990 - Spring 1992

In the first year after the revolution the role of political parties was deeply contentious. As a debate this related not just to the sour experience of the Communist Party, but also the strong party dependency of deputies in the First Republic. This ambiguous status was reflected in the two distinctive characteristics of

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prior to the June 1992 election, but as allegiances settled the parliamentary caucuses (Federal and Czech) disintegrated⁴.

With the Forum destroyed its offspring faced the defining problem of open competition. Personal popularity was uncertain grounds for competition if indecisively attached to policy. A reputation for the delivery of policy was likewise a long term endeavour when basic design remained the immediate task. Clarity in priority setting offered some room for contest, but to divide the economic right and liberals a distinctive note was required. It was found in an aspect of those differences that had just divided them, namely social tolerance and the approach of society to its Communist past. OH's belief in the organic redevelopment of civic society as the bedrock of a new democracy, combined with its criticism of Klaus's radical emphasis on macro economic adjustment, was to sink it.

Setting the agenda: cleavages and party development - June 1990 to June 1992

It has been concluded that "regional, religious and ethnic" and only potentially economic cleavages "underpinned party diversification in 1990 and 1991" (Wightman 67:1991). Though this claim might relate to Czech Slovak differences, these were not the issues to dominate Czech party evolution. The only regional difference to spawn a party here was the issue of greater Moravian/Silesian autonomy. This one party, having split in Spring 1991 over whether to seek republican status or simply greater self-management, looked set to dissolve altogether in the event of minimal self-administration actually being granted. The Catholic church was not consistently divisive; Church heads fought with Klaus over the restitution of Church property but Klaus claimed to represent the "Christian traditions in Europe" (Mlada Fronta 7.1.1991). Finally, ethnic animosity toward Slovakia as such (as opposed to conflicts over a constitutional arrangement) was discouraged by the electorate. The Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA), the only party to play openly the ethnic card in June 1992 failed to enter the Federal Assembly altogether. That said, the positive value of the relationship with Slovakia was reduced to its most utilitarian components; the political right and left held different legal and economic conditions as mapping minimal prerequisites of a common state. So long as constitutional talks continued Czech parties only passively undertook a highly rational and pragmatic evaluation of partnership, assuming away all substantive difficulties as on the Slovak side - a more 'acceptable' formulation of nationalism.

Clear implications for federal power emanated rather from the significantly divisive issues of the period, notable precisely for their lack of pre-Communist roots. Economic reform and questions of

⁴ Other deputies opted between remaining independent or entering one of the various smaller groups which had left the Forum in January. On April 2, Czechoslovak Social Democracy, which had failed to win representation in June 1990, announced that six deputies had joined, or rather, created its ranks.

The national dispute impacted on republic-level developments but without evoking any parallel mechanism for its mediation. In Slovakia, the dominance of the national issue and the existence of the Czech/Slovak relationship as potential scapegoat for all ills inhibited the development of a realistic domestic discourse on internal developments in Slovakia, leaving many issues untreated until the country awoke to find itself independent on January 1, 1993. In the Czech lands the images of Slovakia as wishing to pursue a gradualist path, as unfazed by the prospect of authoritarianism, simply as backward, cross referenced into many domestic policy debates. Those Czech politicians seeking a more graduated reform, who opposed lustration, who opposed centralised and strong executive power found themselves viewed as recidivist; as having entered, in effect, the Slovak orbit.

The party environment seemed slow to develop systemic features precisely because it lacked the conditions for party competition. Such conditions were undoubtedly forestalled by the electoral strategies of the ODS and HZDS. The ODS's demolition of the dissident competition and subsequent reenactment of the 1990 election, this time as the uncontested 'democratic' party, together with Meciar's well-directed over-promising from the safety of opposition both succeeded in provoking defensive reactions and blocking debate. By June 1992 the two parties seemed elevated beyond reach, a remarkable similarity between them being their adoption of optimistic rhetoric. ODS's rhetoric was not only free market but essentially about the transition - the market as both 'natural' means and end, all other paths being the 'constructs' of ideologists. Implicitly, the process of liberalizing was not only democratic in itself but democratising. ODS's competitors in the meantime spoke of laying foundations and necessary conditions, and so, gratefully, echoed the unfulfilled promises of the old regime. Meciar used a similar technique, only employing the release of Slovak national potential as the long-suppressed natural path, most recently suppressed, he argued, by the policies of the Czech right.

Finally, if one compares the positive rhetoric of the election victors with that of the dissident liberals who faced political extinction after June 1992, a last, crude explanation for the choice of the electorate immediately presents itself. The Slovak liberal elite in particular came too close, too often, to insulting its electorate. One choice phrase amongst Slovak dissidents accounting for the public aversion to reform was 'post-Communist panic'. The 5% threshold had the effect of eliminating both Czech and Slovak liberals - the moderate centre parties in both republics - thus removing many of the post-November leaders, the core of the emotionally pro-federal elite, from both the Federal Assembly and the National Councils (Olson 112:1994). Their brief and economically painful experience of liberalism, nonetheless, was not one to encourage the Slovak electorate back on its choices.

when 72.8% of the population claimed feelings of anxiety and insecurity when looking into the near future (Tucek and Manek 28: 1993).

Klaus had indeed claimed, unusually, to be a conservative, thus wedding a natural supporting argument for gradualism to a programme of rapid economic transformation. The ideological allusion helped to distinguish the ODS from other parties of the right, but more importantly, blunted the much feared, sharp edge of reform. Self-avowedly 'Thatcherite Conservatism' proffered reassurance with the argument that all reform, however drastic or innovative, was fundamentally a return to the "most valuable social values, formed as the fruit of a thousand year evolution" (Klaus 17:1990a). Moving forward into reform (supplemented by de-bolshevisation) was sold as a device to regain the positive aspects of the past (Thatcher's so-called "vigorous virtues") and to return to the western path. Such claims, that the process of reform not only generated the information necessary for the present but re-invoked what had been known before communism, constituted a form of politico-economic mysticism that looked remarkably like an inversion of Marxist-Leninist historical dialectic.

Much to the consternation of historians and dissidents the avowed anti-Communism of parties to the right of OH led them to belittle the events of the Prague Spring. Denying its status as a popular insurrection, the events of 1968 were dismissed as an irresponsible contest between Communist factions. Nonetheless while leading this assault on the country's history and collective memory, ODS expropriated those central tenets of the '68 platform expressing the historical aspirations of Czech political culture, the most important being the aspiration to Europe. In 1968 Milan Kundera had fought for the re-emancipation; the re-Europeanisation, of Czech cultural life. Under Klaus, aided by his Czech role model stature as the 'skilled engineer', the Czechs would 'return' on solid modern ground as a thriving economy abounding with enviable industrial talents. Without such an economy he threatened, Europe would remain a mirage. The fact that many 1968 reformers had, at one time, been committed Stalinists⁷, permitted ODS to espouse the traditions that had underpinned the 'Spring' whilst damning the party radicals of the time (among them Jiri Dienstbier) as collaborators, unfit for office.⁸

From ODS's platform of economic credibility Klaus projected himself as a sympathetic realist but also satirised the rival, intellectual core of the old Civic Forum. According to Garton Ash, Klaus displayed an "almost comical desire to be taken seriously as a writer" (Garton-Ash 1995:36). In practice,

⁷ Kundera wrote of 1968 that "instead of the standard pattern of one group of people (a class, a nation) rising up against another, all the people (an entire generation) revolted against their own youth. Their goal was to recapture and tame the deed they had created, and they almost succeeded" (Kundera 13, 14: 1987).

⁸ A foreign correspondent, Dienstbier was expelled from the Party in 1969 and fired after participating in anti-occupation broadcasts. From 1970 he worked predominantly as a stoker and was among the first signatories and spokesmen of Charter 77, imprisoned between 1979-1982.

creation of a legitimating myth), the dire losses of federal income being made up in the short term by the released powers of patronage in an independent Slovakia.

The apparent duality arising from Meciar's pure populism - his championing of Slovak equality combined with his apparent rejection of all-out independence rhetoric is vital when assessing his popularity. The nationalist vote was a small minority - the Slovak National Party secured a mere 9%. Many of Meciar's Slovak supporters could vote for him believing themselves to have protested against 'Pragocentrism' whilst at the same time expressing their desire to maintain a common state (Vodicka 92:1993). According to one account, only 19% of would-be voters for the HZDS were adherents of an independent Slovakia (from a poll taken in April 1992 by the Bratislava Centre for Social Analysis, in Vodicka 99:1993). If this suggests a gulf in information available to Slovaks as to the real resolution of the ODS, opinion poll data rather attests to the electorate's perspicacity on this point. Feelings behind both Czech and Slovak voting patterns were marked by frustration. By May 1992, 73% of Czech respondents and 86% of Slovaks were either rather or very dissatisfied with the overall political situation (from 1320 surveyed by IVVM, Prague 2-9.1.1992 in Wolchik 171:1994).

Contrary to the claims of the ODS the 1992 election could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be taken as a fair referendum on the future of the state. The electorate saw no clear range of alternative state arrangements and the question as a whole was bound up hopelessly with supposedly dichotomous choices concerning the political economy of each republic. As if this were not manipulation enough, ODS and HZDS had both proclaimed themselves 'in spirit' for a common state. The point at which the spirit would be overcome by circumstances was ultimately something the electorate could only guess at since, for each republican electorate, 'circumstances' would be dictated by the votes of the other republic.

Those Czechs who valued current economic reforms had little choice but to vote for a party which held only pragmatic respect for the common state and even less for the principles of self-determination - as expressed through the ambition of the majority. Those Slovaks who had taken the step of voting for Meciar, a vote possible under a wide spectrum of motives, were conveniently interpreted by the ODS *a priori*, and the majority of its supporters, as having voted for the destruction of the state. This interpretation freed Klaus's hand to dissolve the state at his own speed; absolved from blame as ODS would now claim to be. With only 16% of the population supporting separation as the best solution in the first week of July 1992 (IVVM poll in Lidove Noviny 3:29.7.1992), the legitimacy of the separation was nevertheless unresolved beyond the borders of the ODS.

Klaus's consideration of economic welfare and the progress of privatisation, than by any overweening desire to restore in full that which had been expropriated (see Stein and Scarrow 1994). Victory over restitution only confirmed Klaus's evident grip on reform. 'Screening', in contrast, provided ODS with victory in an area often considered the preserve of the dissidents - that of public morality.

Various commissions, notably that investigating the violent events of 17 November 1989, had had access to state security files and had engaged in a process of vetting public officials for past collaborations. This initial process had been criticised by deputies for its arbitrary application under the People's Party Interior Minister, Richard Sacher. Even after Sacher's departure in June 1990 the vetting procedure remained controversial, becoming the focus of public concern over continuing Communist influence. Public disquiet was mobilised by anti-Communist groups of the right, notably the Confederation of Political Prisoners (KPVC) and the Club of Committed Non-Party Members (KAN). These very vocal groups were the heartfelt opposition to continuing Communist forces and stood, militantly, for their disqualification. They found allies both in the press and academic commentary¹¹ and, so it transpired, a champion in the parliamentary right.

Lustration was never out of the press in 1990 and 1991, the implication being always that a coherent Communist force remained, larger and more recidivist than the observable Communist Party. Newspaper stories in Spring 1991 centred on screening the administration, particularly on how parliament could acquire the right to dismiss deputies found to have collaborated. In February the Christian Democratic Union and smaller parties of the right had demonstrated for 'universal and legally reliable vettings' (Mlada Fronta 26.2.1991). That same month, the head of Prague's Charles University politics faculty and KAN member, R. Kucera, made a straight comparison between communism and fascism and called for communism to be criminalised and its government members condemned. Kucera warned that another 'victorious February' (as in 1948) was just waiting in the wings (Kucera 43:1992). It was possible to capitalise on the issue of screening without appearing driven by revenge, despite liberal appeals for tolerance and reconciliation. The right claimed that political prudence should outweigh 'civic' and human rights considerations in this case. The threat was animated by figures such as Vaclav Benda who insisted that "former collaborators of state security have relatively high representation in the Presidium of the parliament and its Constitutional-Legal Committees" (MF 10.1.1991). When Deputy Interior Minister

¹¹ Exposing Communist infiltration in the new system was the clearest way for the Czech press, un-purged and still under the old titles of Youth Front and Red Truth etc. to rehabilitate themselves in a new competition to appear editorially independent. Eager for conspiracy, new newspapers, notably *Respekt*, endeavoured to push de-bolshevisation to the fore. Having set out to 'vet' public life the press fastened onto personalities with greater rigour than onto policy.

	House of the People (150 seats)		House of the Nations (150 seats)	
	Votes (%)	seats	Votes (%)	Seats
<i>Czech Republic</i>				
ODS - KDS	33.9	48	33.4	37
LB	14.3	19	14.5	15
CSSD	7.7	10	6.8	6
SPR	6.5	8	6.4	6
CDU - CSL	6.0	7	6.1	6
LSU	5.8	7	6.1	5
Others	25.8	0	26.7	0
Total	100.0	99	100.0	75
<i>Slovak Republic</i>				
HZDS	33.5	24	33.9	33
SDL	14.4	10	14.0	13
SNP	9.4	6	9.4	9
KDH	9.0	6	8.8	8
MKDH + Egyutteles	7.5	5	7.4	7
SDSS	4.9	0	6.1	5
Other Parties	21.3	0	20.4	0
Total	100.0	51	100.0	75

Elections to the Czech and Slovak National Councils, 5 - 6 1992

Czech National Council	Votes (%)	Seats
ODS - KDS	29.7	76
LB	14.1	35
CSSD	6.5	16
LSU	6.5	16
CDU - CSL	6.3	15
SPR	6.0	14
ODA	6.0	14
HSD - SMS	5.9	14
Other Parties	19.0	0
Total	100.0	200

impulses of liberal ministers (Stein and Scarrow 24:1994), if effectively given his hegemony over economic policy-at-large. In the business of credibility, the image of ODS as a 'modern European political party' and its greater radicalism looked well set. ODS had nonetheless faced a persistent barrier; if Klaus had apparently won his claim to authorship of economic reform, he had yet to convince the electorate that reform depended on his continuation in office. In the first months of 1991 voters most supportive of economic reform had split almost evenly between OH and ODS (ibid.). Potentially this left OH in the lead since it was unclear, before lustration, quite how much value the electorate ascribed to OH's more evidently 'civic' priorities.

The issue of screening resolved; OH's civic values and their determination to institute liberal legal norms set them at odds with the prevailing public mood¹³. Thereafter the differences established by lustration were exploited fully by ODS, even though for Klaus the need for lustration was scarcely a deeply held belief. Indeed, his neutrality had earlier provoked consternation among the right. When the issue had originally been expropriated for the political right at a joint press conference¹⁴, KDS's Vaclav Benda had argued that they wished to change the situation whereby reform Communists still controlled various bodies not as a result of free elections but due to the undemocratic policy of the Civic Forum (Mlada Fronta 2: 19.2.1991). Escaping the censure of his own side had pushed Klaus to endorse wholeheartedly the militant supporters of vettings, even if ODS's 'sponsorship' of lustration, if one combines it with Klaus's writings on 1968, situated it plainly in Michnik's paradigm 'new Party of the clean and prudent' (Michnik 20:1993).

The pressure to manipulate lustration was considerable. It was only in April 1991 that ODS built a public lead over the OH in economic policy, moreover, public allegiance seemed to be waning for both groups by the summer. By mid-1991, polls revealed that fewer than half of Civic Forum supporters assigned themselves to either party. Grassroots political activity was minimal, and in lustration, best of all, was an issue where the press had already done the work of the missing party infrastructure (Stein and Scarrow 24:1994). Until now Klaus had wielded the past against the OH in terms of anti-intellectualism, indicting the unbridled intellectual as a dangerously utopistic force in politics. What he had lacked was the contemporary evidence to drive this message home. OH's attitude

¹³ It would be wrong to characterise those against the lustration law as the former dissidents *en bloc* (many of whom, notably Vaclav Benda were at the fore of the most impassioned called for legalised disqualifications of past collaborators). The important distinction was between those strict liberal dissidents that balked at the potentially abusive sweep of the law, and those, like Havel, who opted for an anti-Communist line, either out of conviction or from the perception that the government had yet to convince the public of its wholehearted rejection of past practices.

¹⁴ attended by the KAN, the Liberal Democratic party, the Civic Democratic alliance, the Club of the Democratic Right Wing, the Republic Union, and notably, the right-oriented Prague Civic Forum Council.

candidacy for re-election as President. He exploited the suspicions felt against Havel's clique in both republics and attributed this decision as much to Havel's choice of advisors as to his own mistakes in office (ibid.). On 14 May Meciar stated that after elections he would not assume any federal post (Czech Sociological Review p136:1993). In so doing he signalled an intention to maximise the leverage power of the Slovak National Council in any further talks; according to the HZDS campaign, talks dependent on the results of a referendum. In the Czech republic this was seen by many as the first concrete step in Slovakia's withdrawal from a common state.

The confident election style of HZDS rode on a wave of support. In 1991 the attitudinal profile of those supporting HZDS was still unclear. By April 1992 however, it was obvious that supporters more than usually rejected current development. More than three quarters stated that post-November development brought great disappointment (as against a high 64% in the whole Slovak population) and 71% judged the economic reform too radical or basically misconceived. 84% believed that other conceptions of economic reform would be better than those currently in place. As to the state-legal arrangement 79% of HZDS supporters judged that Czechs insufficiently understood Slovakia and that this was a crucial factor in 'coercing' Slovaks towards independence (68% in the whole population). Less than half, 48%, stated that for the population of Slovakia it was more important to slow the pace or at least change economic reform, than to maintain the common state (41% in the Slovak population as a whole)³⁹.

The **SDL**'s shift to west European social democracy and its social orientation had allowed for a resurrection of the party's fortunes since 1990. Remarkably by 1992 the **KDH** was held in greater suspicion as a potential threat to democracy (35%), compared to 20% for the **SDL** (Butorova 63 - 65:1993). **SDL** argued that the election would decide both the form of the common life of Czechs, Slovaks and other nationalities, and that it would set the future priorities for the economy and society. For the former, **SDL** proposed a "loose federation with elements of confederation" thus managing to escape suspicions either of Slovak nationalism or Czechoslovakism.

When **KDH**'s Carnogursky could get beyond defending his views on liberalism he explained that his vision was for a strong, stable and ultimately independent Slovakia and that national consciousness could grow slowly into a stable identity (Lidove Noviny 21.5.1992). The **KDH** was

³⁹ Sociologically, there were parallels in **ODS/HZDS** support. **HZDS** support was strongest among both those threatened by reform - the lowest qualified and high-school educated population, but also among high qualified specialists where support reached beyond 50% (data from **AISA** survey conducted by Marek Buguszak 1 - 9 April from sample of 1363: MF 22.5.1992). Again it seems reasonable to argue that the 'technocratic elite' - or 'grey zone' constituted an important body of support. A fact which points to their expectation of professional benefits arising from a party that championed the Slovak economy without, so it could yet seem, rejecting links to the Czech republic.

the vettings procedure for human rights reasons and because these damaged the prestige of the Assembly. His popularity, it was not too subtly implied, originated in Slovak preferences for the old regime. In July 1991 Klaus leapt the hurdle of being too apparently anti-Slovak by claiming that the Slovak Public Against Violence also opposed Dubcek, (Dubcek had left VPN that month objecting that it had departed the centre ground); Klaus's implication being that 'good Slovaks' would follow such a line. Polls found that Czechs, far more than Slovaks, felt the legislation to be necessary (Stein and Scarrow 26: 1994). The vote on lustration thus not only set OH (Civic Movement) apart from the old right of the Civic Forum but aligned it with the forces of Slovak nationalism and the left, who abstained with OH or voted against the bill. According to Vaclav Zak, OH's opposition to the bill, particularly to the principle of collective guilt, lost it two thirds of its membership (Zak 29.3.1995). Despite this most dire warning, the Movement insisted on running the 1992 election campaign on a platform 'for the rule of law' - electorally falling on their own sword in a manner readily imitated by their liberal Slovak colleagues.

Slovak party development 1990 - 1992: liberalism versus 'the nation'

"There is a direct conflict between the needs of the Czechoslovak economy and the national interests of most Slovaks" (Rude Pravo. 8.12.1990). Petr Pithart (OH), Czech Premier

The new Slovak ruling elite to emerge from November 1989 was in fact a combination of dissidents and 'laundered' Communists, the latter split between 1968 veterans and those who resigned in the wake of the '89 revolution (Szomolanyi 63:1994). It was moreover, evident that Slovak preoccupations (at both elite and mass level) centred on matters other than purging the past. This relative absence of retributive impulses has prompted some to suggest that Slovaks were unrealistic about democracy (Mihalikova 54,55:1994). An alternative interpretation, borne out by electoral choices, is that a more favourable experience under communism had aroused less resentment against its personnel. Czechs and Slovaks held in common the impulse to defend, if not improve, the socio-economic developments achieved in the last twenty years.

It was to the detriment of their agenda that Slovak dissidents¹⁷ possessed an even greater distaste for politics than did their Czech colleagues. Led by the sociologist, Fedor Gal, VPN had been the first

¹⁷ The repressive conditions of post-invasion 'normalisation' (1968 - 1989), particularly Communist Party purges, had been more moderate in Slovakia than in the Czech lands. Artistic and intellectual circles were less violently harrassed and consequently dissident groups were small and isolated, not only from the public but from one another, amounting only to what have been termed "islands of positive deviation" (Szomolanyi 66: 1994).

acknowledging support for the idea of, a common state. It stated frankly that “jeopardizing Czechoslovakia is not only nationalistic, but also the dangerous dream of a unitarian state. We support a referendum as the single legitimate condition of the division of the state or its reshaping with more members” (Respect 21.5.1992). Federal Foreign Minister, Jiri Dienstbier accused Kalvoda of irresponsibly playing the Czech national card. He in turn appealed not only to emotional and socio-economic reasons for the common state, but, for the first time in two years of wrangling, raised seriously the issue of international security (Interview with Jana Smidova Lidove Noviny 9:30.4.1992). Such a late appearance scarcely convinced that Slovakia was indeed the touchstone of Czech geopolitical stability (even if the left feared Bohemia's incorporation as a sixth new German *länder* (Wehrle 32:1994). More convincing, given its greater currency in the Czech media and immediate resonance, was the rightist innuendo that (as in the 1980s) a gradualist Slovakia would arrest Czech development and continue to bar it from its European destiny.

The coalition between the Christian Democratic Union and the People's Party KDU-CSL carried a broad manifesto essentially endorsing current progress including, with little elaboration, its preference for a federal constitution. The remaining election successes regarding the Federal Assembly were for the far right Republican Party of Czechoslovakia, led by Miroslav Sladek (53% of Republican support stemmed from the under 34s (Lidove Noviny 29.5.1992)) - and on the left. The KSCM - LB (coalition of the Communists and Democratic Left) rejected apologetics and hoped that the “expectations of our citizens from November 1989 are fulfilled”. They supported a ‘federation’, but given their lack of internal evolution, with all the potentially Marxist-Leninist connotations that had ever been attached to their use of the term. The social democratic (CSSD) programme varied little from that in 1990 and honest, if lame on the issue, the party stated: “we consider a federal constitution the ideal, but at present difficult to implement” (Mlada Fronta 4.6.1992). A coalition since 1991, the LSU represented an uncomfortable alignment of Greens, (urban) Socialists and cooperative farm interests, as represented by the Agricultural Party³⁶. There was little common policy ground between leftist Agriculturalists and the centrist Socialists (Kostecky 81:1995) and other issues dominated their muted claim to support a ‘federal state’.

OH firmly right of centre (campaign manager Ivan Galal moved swiftly to eject Zeman from the party - the main personality dragging OH to the left) - the only space for it according to opinion support, OH nevertheless failed to compete with ODS and ODA. Under a barrage of criticism from Klaus, OH called in vain for classic modern mixed economy aids. OH reduced its own chances by standing for “radical economic reform which must lead to the resolution of all social and ecological problems” (Co cheme).

³⁶ The Electoral Commission recognised the group as constituting a political movement as opposed to a ‘coalition’, to which a higher parliamentary threshold would have applied.

Slovaks failed to reject the old regime (Wightman 61:1995). Turn-out was an impressive 95.4%²². Havel persuaded Carnogursky to put KDH's 26 deputies behind the federal VPN/OF governing coalition, believing the Christian Democrats likely to outstrip VPN if Slovakia reverted to its pre-Communist clericalism. Carnogursky himself returned to the Slovak parliament. With only 48 seats out of the 150 in the Slovak National Council, VPN premier elect Vladimir Meciar was obliged to seek a Slovak government coalition with the KDH (with 31 seats) and the Democratic Party (with 7), in order to secure a governing majority. Carnogursky became vice premier. Coalition rules were established with difficulty though as we shall see, a majority system would have also run into trouble.

Party diversification 1991 - 1992: Caliban at the gate²³

VPN had responded to the break-up of the Forum by promising cooperation with all former associates. By 1991 however, the Slovak organisation was itself no longer intact. Even the anti-hierarchical Gal assumed VPN's right to approve their Prime Minister's decisions and to hold him accountable; yet in this it was frequently frustrated by Meciar. By March, the Slovak Premier had formed a faction; the 'Public Against Violence - for a Democratic Slovakia', publicly splitting the VPN in half. Fatally for VPN the real causes of friction were unclear to the broader public until this open conflict. Assisted by a nervous media, Meciar had in many ways appeared a diligent advocate of the VPN programme, provoking VPN internally (for example, by moving against their own coalition Interior Minister - Anton Andras), but giving them little room to complain. More obvious to the public was that, in contrast to the rest of VPN's leadership, Meciar believed that of the 'five pillars' of the VPN's agreed programme (September 1990) Slovak national issues should receive particular priority. Many in the VPN feared that since August (see later), Meciar had adopted too confrontational a style in negotiations with the Czechs, which, combined with his known reservations over economic policy would lead to an un-looked for clash. These 'pillars' were supposed to enjoy parity of esteem. Meciar, however, believed that the VPN had little choice but to respond to the rising tide of Slovak national, (if not nationalist) sentiment, a tide he perceived as behind the growing popularity of the rival KDH.

At VPN's Congress on February 23, 1991, Meciar attempted to take over the leadership only to be defeated by the incumbent, Fedor Gal. Gal not only rejected the possibility of turning VPN into a party but pointed to the danger of populism which "misuses people's national thinking for the narrow power

²² Only the DS, and Slovak Nationalists projected unequivocal positions on preferred state-arrangements. Radio Free Europe was unusually off the mark when it claimed the issue of autonomy became an electoral rallying point (RFE 16:15.6.1990).

²³ Quoted by Bill Lomax (187:1995) 'Caliban at the Gate' was used by Gyorgy Csepeli and Peter Gyorgy to represent by the 'confused masses' rising up against liberal democracy in favour of some other position, e.g. ethical socialism - deemed by them the dire alternative.

system and their attitudes to the sets of competing politicians (Lipset and Rokkan, in Mair 92:1990). The ODS claimed that it was the one party of the democratic state³², and portrayed OH as a retreat of crypto-Communist utopians. "In a functioning parliamentary democracy", Klaus argued, "non-political politics doesn't have a chance" (Klaus 3.4.1992 in 9:1993). In early April 1992, Klaus stated that together with the ODA, the ODS had "apprehensions of a distinct upsurge of anti-reformist forces, striving to thwart the post-November development. We are determined not to allow it and strive jointly for a victory of the right-wing (MF 2:3.4.1992)". Bizarrely implicit in those anti-November forces were the dissidents of the Civic Movement, who had, of course, formed the very nucleus of pro-November forces for over twenty years³³.

Regarding the state arrangement, the ODS stuck to its advocacy of a functioning federation. It called for an end to and reversal of the republican erosion of federal powers begun in 1990, and opposed 'experiments', including confederation (Mlada Fronta 4.6.1992). The right, by 1992, were united in Klaus's view that a federal state was not to be bought at the cost of jeopardising economic reform in any way. Klaus distanced his party from the debacle of the talks and was outspoken only when explicitly questioned about a Slovak 'third way'. The question was thus played down, often not appearing at all in party campaign literature. Klaus preferred a strategy of shifting responsibility for the conflict entirely onto the Slovak side and claimed that it was now "evident, that votes for HZDS are votes for the division of the state....Slovak voters, self evidently, have the right to decide this, but not for all days on end (Lidove Noviny 6:14.5.1992)". Igor Nemec confirmed that if the party faced "a choice between a common socialist Czechoslovak state and two independent states, it would choose the latter" (Telegraf 2.6.1992).

In a survey taken in April 1992, ODS supporters more than any others, expressed satisfaction with the course of social and political development (86%) and the economy (78%). They were the least afflicted with feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness and surrender (33% as opposed to the notably high 55% national average). Another prominent characteristic in an ODS voter's profile was support

³² When Klaus was asked if he was trying to repeat the election of 1990 by threatening the electorate with renewed authoritarianism he replied that the obvious rejection of secret police, tinkered margins and leading tasks of the party in 1989 was only "a superficial rejection of one type of common system", and that it was necessary now for the electorate to decide "in which direction to begin" (LN 6:14.5.1992).

³³ The main weapon of the campaign against the real left was the invocation of the ghosts of totalitarianism but also its economic other-worldliness; Klaus spoke scathingly of the left "fretting and blaming this government that the former Soviet Union no longer buys textiles (4.6.1992:23:1993)". ODS militantly opposed what it called any "third way between communism and democracy" (as opposed to between communism and capitalism). Klaus nevertheless avoided the word capitalism employing 'market economy' in preference (LN 8.29.5.1992). ODS's strongest resource was clearly the absolute association of economic reform with the figure of Vaclav Klaus. In a series of articles entitled: *A short guide to the 'election gulash'*, Klaus was sufficiently confident to conclude with the following advice - "when deciding for whom to vote, it is enough with economic arguments to use your common sense" (5.5.1992, 17:1992).

claiming to be separatist). Finally, if elections were to be held in March, 42% said they would vote for the HZDS and 1% for VPN (Pravda, Lidove Noviny 20.4.1991). At this point VPN committed what could only be described as political suicide, and recalled Meciar as Premier on April 23, 1991, releasing him into unfettered opposition at a time of VPN's lowest ever political legitimacy. From here Meciar could pursue freely the politics of 'overbidding' (Sartori 334:1990), introducing massively inflationary demands into the policy arena - from the state arrangement to the economy and foreclosing, in Sartori's terms, any nascent system of fair party competition. It has been concluded that, "when [Meciar] was forced into opposition, only one path was left for him to fight successfully for a return to power, the national one" (Jicinsky 75:1993). Judging by his subsequent strategy, not of playing the independence card but of simply bundling constitutional alternatives as the public mood dictated, it seems more accurate to argue that Meciar, having exited on the tide of VPN support took the nationalist card into his eclectic, populist pack.

Meciar's ouster inaugurated an unambiguously non-Communist Slovak government, a coalition between KDH and the VPN rump, now under Kucerak's leadership. It has been claimed, with hindsight, that the VPN had only ever won because the names of '1968' politicians "evoked the belief of a continuity of reform socialism among the majority of those 29% of voters" (Szomolanyi 72:1994). There were nevertheless, significant supplementary reasons as to why the remainder of VPN (to be renamed Civic Democratic Union, ODU) failed to revive. The first, following Szomolanyi, was the result of the electorate's aspirations to continuity and stability. Opinion poll data stressed repeatedly that the public's overriding concern was over declining social welfare and living standards, above all other issues (Butorova 60:1993). Having reconciled themselves to a transitional 'valley of tears' - as an article of liberal economic faith - the metropolitan liberals of ODU rejected as naive any soothing adjustment of economic reform to worsening conditions. This rejection might not have been so inflammatory had it not been wedded to public knowledge that the reform's Czech authors governed over markedly different conditions. As it was, most Slovaks did not react to growing national inequality with an equally zealous faith in the free market.

The second reason concerned 'the nation'. The main issue to arise spontaneously onto the political scene, Slovak political equality with the Czech lands had long been, and remained, an issue of change. Here the liberals took on the role of conservatives, again apparently more sensitive to Prague than to Bratislava. VPN/ODU overshot its constituency having struck, goaded by Meciar's 'nationalism', upon a more ultra-secular, a-national image than was actually strictly true to its politics. As with the economy, its arguments about the state were read as pretentious to a liberal monopoly on realism and rationality. By

the election loomed, stormed into the Czech and Slovak media. The most damaging allegations were that security files, kept in State Security safe houses in Bratislava and Meciar's home town of Trencin, had disappeared. Several pages of registration documents concerning Meciar and his appointees had also vanished after Meciar became Interior Minister. The report concluded that Meciar had gathered documents on government members, the Catholic Church as well as influential journalists in order to harrass them. His successor, KDH's Anton Andras, had apparently made the mistake of trying to dismiss some of Meciar's recruits and had suffered accordingly (Jan Obrman RFE 10.4.1992).

Meciar dismissed the report as a smear campaign orchestrated from Prague and the Federal Interior Ministry. A few days later Meciar alleged the Ministry had a master plan to not only discredit him, but even, if necessary "to liquidate him physically" (Narodna Obroda 1.4.1992). Both the SNP and SDL supported Meciar and HZDS while Dubcek remained silent. Federal and Czech parliaments, wisely, kept a low profile. Unless stripped of his parliamentary immunity, requiring a simple majority in the House of the Nations, Meciar could not be prosecuted and even had this been secured, the trial would not have taken place before the election (ibid.). The chosen timing of the accusation could not have been worse; it came too late to dissuade those already persuaded by Meciar's national and economic promises, and, however unfairly, it destroyed the civic credibility of the ODU as a party above the manipulation of information deemed too characteristic of political life. Meciar brushed off the affair as being only the first in a series of pre-election slanders (Lidove Noviny 31.3.1992), portraying a swaggering indifference to the inevitable Czech censure that contrasted sharply with the historical self-image of the Slovak and immediately with the ultra-Czechophile stance of the ODU.

The failure of these revelations to dislodge Meciar led ODU to take a step that condemned their election chances. The last remaining strategy for 'decapitating' HZDS remained lustration. Believing that a strict implementation of the lustration law sometime in the near future might finally purge Slovakia of the demagoguery ODU so feared, it opted for a coalition with the Czech party they felt to be both intellectually sympathetic and which most represented this aspiration, the ODA. Having selected as their electoral partner the one mainstream champion of Czech nationalism, ODU sealed their electoral fate before the official campaign had even begun.

Section 2. 1992 elections - Hobson's choice

It was only when negotiations collapsed that the full weight of party attitudes came to bear on the republican conflict, yet they did so decisively through the fact of the June election. Victory for the ODS-KDS coalition in the Czech Republic and the HZDS in Slovakia amounted to the presentation of

Councils and the Federal Government were the formal locus of the constitutional debate. In party political terms the failing process of the talks allows us both to map Vladimir Meciar's switch to nationalist rhetoric and to account further for the failing credibility of the VPN/ODU-KDH coalition. Four series of meetings on constitutional reform took place between 1990 and the June election in 1992. The first in Trencianske Teplice in August 1990, discussed provisional power-sharing arrangements and finally concluded in December. The second took place in Lany on 10 May 1991 (after preparatory meetings with Havel in February and March). The third occurred in Budmerice on May 31, 1991, and the last in Kromeriz on June 17, 1991. There were also numerous and never resolved meetings over the question of a treaty between the two republics.

The talks at Trencianske Teplice set the tone of Premier Meciar's approach to Czech federal partners. To their surprise he had preempted negotiation by arriving with a preset agenda, and though little of the talks was publicised Meciar's style made the headlines in both republics, as did his demands that a re-division of competences between the federal centre and the republican parliaments be made as quickly as possible. The Czech response; that Meciar practiced the politics of the *fait accompli*, and that such serious intervention in the state arrangement would disrupt economic reform, seemed suspiciously evasive of the issue. The Czechs badly misjudged the depth of Slovak expectations, but also Slovak political reality. So far as Meciar was pulling the national issue into his sphere of influence via VPN it would gravitate toward the anti-secessionist political centre. Having presented himself as at the head of institutional change whilst at the same time damning the impulse toward separatism, Meciar had warned to the very echo of his Czech liberal detractors that: "A split in the country must not occur, we see how nationalism develops in the USSR or Yugoslavia" (Svobodne Slovo 1,3:20.8.1990). In August 1990 he had made every show of aiming at a new, more equal relationship with the Czechs, even adopting a style that conceded the frequent Czech illusion to Slovakia as the 'younger brother' (a phrase harped on notoriously by the prominent Czech writer, Ludvik Vaculik). "I want to emphasise" said Meciar "that nobody in Europe wants a poor relative he would have to maintain. That would be the case of Slovakia if it broke away from the federation" (Svobodne Slovo 1,2, 7.8.1990).

By October 1990, when the detailed discussion of a new division of competences began to run aground, Meciar's stance was backed by demonstrations of over 10,000 in Bratislava. When agreement was finally achieved the Slovak National Council unanimously approved the resulting draft constitutional amendment. To the public eye (and there were complaints at the secretiveness of the talks), the more nationalist force to emerge at the this time was the KDH, whose second congress had insisted on the right of the Slovak republic to exit the federation; 'full sovereignty' and its own system of taxes and a separate

The issue of statehood had been most dramatically played out in the Slovak National Council and its praesidium. Sovereignty was proposed and voted down four times between 1990 and 1992, proposed on three occasions by the nationalist faction of the KDH. Szomolanyi has argued that Carnogursky “unleashed nationalist forces assuming that it was possible to keep them under his control (Szomolanyi 75:1994)” and certainly he primed the issue which Meciar deployed more skillfully through the 1992 election and beyond²⁸. At the beginning of March 1992 the two factions of the KDH finally came apart, with the nationalist wing led by Jan Klepac, deputy chairman of the SNC, splitting off to form the Slovak Christian Democratic Movement²⁹. KDH welcomed the split, arguing that it freed the party to present itself as a true right-of-centre Christian Democratic party. Unfortunately by this stage Carnogursky’s claims to want to stand once again behind a negotiated settlement, including a referendum on the state’s future, had few partners in the Czech republic.

A week after the separation of the KDH Alexander Dubcek, whose popularity rating according to an IVVM survey stood at 75 % approval, compared to 73% for Meciar, turned his allegiance to the Slovak Social Democrats³⁰. His move confirmed his pro-federal position, and this, because of the national esteem in which he was held, seemed to represent a blow to HZDS. As a condition of his entry however, Dubcek had secured a Social Democrat promise not to enter into pre-election coalition with the Party of the Democratic Left - thus splitting the potentially strongest opposition to the HZDS (Jan Obrman: Dubcek Joins the Social Democrats in Slovakia RFE 3.4.1992).

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increasingly unpopular new KDH / VPN governing coalition and distinguishing himself from the already established separatism of the Slovak National Party. Meciar immediately embarked on the latter by reassuring Havel of his pro-federalism, stating to the Czech Press Agency that those in Slovakia against the federation “are no greater than a year ago... a small minority” (*Zemedelske Noviny* 1,2, 11.3.1991). To do so in the long term, his new HZDS adopted “appealing emancipation rhetorics which aptly blurred the constitutional issue” (*Butorova* 66:1993). Constitutional talks were now entering their most tortuous phase. By the spring of 1991 they were stalemated on the issue of whether a state treaty could be a legal document and not just a political declaration. Both Czech and Slovak, core liberal/rightist governments had managed to regress the talks to impasse over a treaty of undecided status to introduce constitutions the actual content of which had not yet been decided or drafted. ‘Emancipation rhetorics’ it is important to note, could not be dismissed as less clear than the statements of the Slovak government, attempting to explain the repeated deadlock in negotiation.

Before the Lany talks in May 1991 Carnogursky had reiterated that while separatism was quite unacceptable he would insist on the state treaty (Prace 2. 8.5.1991). At Lany it was agreed that an accord on the principles of the new constitutional arrangement would be signed by the National Councils - the treaty would be inner-state but with state law characteristics. Unfortunately, at Budmerice, cross party representatives contemplated postponing the June 1992 election and rejected the results of Lany. The continuing ambiguity of constitutional arrangements positively invited the opposition HZDS into the fray to suggest that Slovakia be a subject of international law and that the state treaty should be concluded on an international state level. This appeal was typical of several installments of the policy overbidding to come, installments that inflated debate to the point of fiasco.

HZDS ‘intended’ that the delegation of competences to a higher centre should be such as in negotiations over a confederal Europe (Prace 3.13.6.1991) - thus pushing the state treaty utterly beyond the pale for the Czechs. Within a few days of HZDS having raised the state treaty stakes Klaus had accused Carnogursky’s position on the treaty as being hysterical, even populist (*Mlada Fronta* 15.6.1991) and he determined to show his impatience with trial marriages at the forthcoming talks at Kromeriz. That Meciar could so easily drag Carnogursky down with this sniping from the sidelines (for Klaus managed to cloak Carnogursky in Meciar’s colours) is testimony, Klaus’s tactics apart, to the willingness of Czechs to believe that all Slovak politicians essentially shared a vision of independence. This tendency, certainly exhibited by the Czech press, led one Slovak commentator in *Slovensky narod* to object that: “When a Czech identifies with his nation, he is considered to be a great patriot - But if a Slovak so much as

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³⁰ An independent since resigning from the VPN in July 1991, many had expected him to follow his frequent and controversial endorsement of Meciar into the ranks of the HZDS. Had he joined HZDS Dubcek would have been used as a figurehead, moreover, he opposed Meciar manipulation of the national question. After lustration it was clear that no Czech party of the centre/right would nominate him, thus ruling him out of a federal position.

Councils and the Federal Government were the formal locus of the constitutional debate. In party political terms the failing process of the talks allows us both to map Vladimir Meciar's switch to nationalist rhetoric and to account further for the failing credibility of the VPN/ODU-KDH coalition. Four series of meetings on constitutional reform took place between 1990 and the June election in 1992. The first in Trencianske Teplice in August 1990, discussed provisional power-sharing arrangements and finally concluded in December. The second took place in Lany on 10 May 1991 (after preparatory meetings with Havel in February and March). The third occurred in Budmerice on May 31, 1991, and the last in Kromeriz on June 17, 1991. There were also numerous and never resolved meetings over the question of a treaty between the two republics.

The talks at Trencianske Teplice set the tone of Premier Meciar's approach to Czech federal partners. To their surprise he had preempted negotiation by arriving with a preset agenda, and though little of the talks was publicised Meciar's style made the headlines in both republics, as did his demands that a re-division of competences between the federal centre and the republican parliaments be made as quickly as possible. The Czech response; that Meciar practiced the politics of the *fait accompli*, and that such serious intervention in the state arrangement would disrupt economic reform, seemed suspiciously evasive of the issue. The Czechs badly misjudged the depth of Slovak expectations, but also Slovak political reality. So far as Meciar was pulling the national issue into his sphere of influence via VPN it would gravitate toward the anti-secessionist political centre. Having presented himself as at the head of institutional change whilst at the same time damning the impulse toward separatism, Meciar had warned to the very echo of his Czech liberal detractors that: "A split in the country must not occur, we see how nationalism develops in the USSR or Yugoslavia" (Svobodne Slovo 1,3:20.8.1990). In August 1990 he had made every show of aiming at a new, more equal relationship with the Czechs, even adopting a style that conceded the frequent Czech illusion to Slovakia as the 'younger brother' (a phrase harped on notoriously by the prominent Czech writer, Ludvik Vaculik). "I want to emphasise" said Meciar "that nobody in Europe wants a poor relative he would have to maintain. That would be the case of Slovakia if it broke away from the federation" (Svobodne Slovo 1,2, 7.8.1990).

By October 1990, when the detailed discussion of a new division of competences began to run aground, Meciar's stance was backed by demonstrations of over 10,000 in Bratislava. When agreement was finally achieved the Slovak National Council unanimously approved the resulting draft constitutional amendment. To the public eye (and there were complaints at the secretiveness of the talks), the more nationalist force to emerge at the this time was the KDH, whose second congress had insisted on the right of the Slovak republic to exit the federation; 'full sovereignty' and its own system of taxes and a separate

the election loomed, stormed into the Czech and Slovak media. The most damaging allegations were that security files, kept in State Security safe houses in Bratislava and Meciar's home town of Trencin, had disappeared. Several pages of registration documents concerning Meciar and his appointees had also vanished after Meciar became Interior Minister. The report concluded that Meciar had gathered documents on government members, the Catholic Church as well as influential journalists in order to harrass them. His successor, KDH's Anton Andras, had apparently made the mistake of trying to dismiss some of Meciar's recruits and had suffered accordingly (Jan Obrman RFE 10.4.1992).

Meciar dismissed the report as a smear campaign orchestrated from Prague and the Federal Interior Ministry. A few days later Meciar alleged the Ministry had a master plan to not only discredit him, but even, if necessary "to liquidate him physically" (Narodna Obroda 1.4.1992). Both the SNP and SDL supported Meciar and HZDS while Dubcek remained silent. Federal and Czech parliaments, wisely, kept a low profile. Unless stripped of his parliamentary immunity, requiring a simple majority in the House of the Nations, Meciar could not be prosecuted and even had this been secured, the trial would not have taken place before the election (ibid.). The chosen timing of the accusation could not have been worse; it came too late to dissuade those already persuaded by Meciar's national and economic promises, and, however unfairly, it destroyed the civic credibility of the ODU as a party above the manipulation of information deemed too characteristic of political life. Meciar brushed off the affair as being only the first in a series of pre-election slanders (Lidove Noviny 31.3.1992), portraying a swaggering indifference to the inevitable Czech censure that contrasted sharply with the historical self-image of the Slovak and immediately with the ultra-Czechophile stance of the ODU.

The failure of these revelations to dislodge Meciar led ODU to take a step that condemned their election chances. The last remaining strategy for 'decapitating' HZDS remained lustration. Believing that a strict implementation of the lustration law sometime in the near future might finally purge Slovakia of the demagoguery ODU so feared, it opted for a coalition with the Czech party they felt to be both intellectually sympathetic and which most represented this aspiration, the ODA. Having selected as their electoral partner the one mainstream champion of Czech nationalism, ODU sealed their electoral fate before the official campaign had even begun.

Section 2. 1992 elections - Hobson's choice

It was only when negotiations collapsed that the full weight of party attitudes came to bear on the republican conflict, yet they did so decisively through the fact of the June election. Victory for the ODS-KDS coalition in the Czech Republic and the HZDS in Slovakia amounted to the presentation of

claiming to be separatist). Finally, if elections were to be held in March, 42% said they would vote for the HZDS and 1% for VPN (*Pravda, Lidove Noviny* 20.4.1991). At this point VPN committed what could only be described as political suicide, and recalled Meciar as Premier on April 23, 1991, releasing him into unfettered opposition at a time of VPN's lowest ever political legitimacy. From here Meciar could pursue freely the politics of 'overbidding' (Sartori 334:1990), introducing massively inflationary demands into the policy arena - from the state arrangement to the economy and foreclosing, in Sartori's terms, any nascent system of fair party competition. It has been concluded that, "when [Meciar] was forced into opposition, only one path was left for him to fight successfully for a return to power, the national one" (Jicinsky 75:1993). Judging by his subsequent strategy, not of playing the independence card but of simply bundling constitutional alternatives as the public mood dictated, it seems more accurate to argue that Meciar, having exited on the tide of VPN support took the nationalist card into his eclectic, populist pack.

Meciar's ouster inaugurated an unambiguously non-Communist Slovak government, a coalition between KDH and the VPN rump, now under Kucerak's leadership. It has been claimed, with hindsight, that the VPN had only ever won because the names of '1968' politicians "evoked the belief of a continuity of reform socialism among the majority of those 29% of voters" (Szomolanyi 72:1994). There were nevertheless, significant supplementary reasons as to why the remainder of VPN (to be renamed Civic Democratic Union, ODU) failed to revive. The first, following Szomolanyi, was the result of the electorate's aspirations to continuity and stability. Opinion poll data stressed repeatedly that the public's overriding concern was over declining social welfare and living standards, above all other issues (Butorova 60:1993). Having reconciled themselves to a transitional 'valley of tears' - as an article of liberal economic faith - the metropolitan liberals of ODU rejected as naive any soothing adjustment of economic reform to worsening conditions. This rejection might not have been so inflammatory had it not been wedded to public knowledge that the reform's Czech authors governed over markedly different conditions. As it was, most Slovaks did not react to growing national inequality with an equally zealous faith in the free market.

The second reason concerned 'the nation'. The main issue to arise spontaneously onto the political scene, Slovak political equality with the Czech lands had long been, and remained, an issue of change. Here the liberals took on the role of conservatives, again apparently more sensitive to Prague than to Bratislava. VPN/ODU overshot its constituency having struck, goaded by Meciar's 'nationalism', upon a more ultra-secular, a-national image than was actually strictly true to its politics. As with the economy, its arguments about the state were read as pretentious to a liberal monopoly on realism and rationality. By

system and their attitudes to the sets of competing politicians (Lipset and Rokkan, in Mair 92:1990). The ODS claimed that it was the one party of the democratic state³², and portrayed OH as a retreat of crypto-Communist utopians. "In a functioning parliamentary democracy", Klaus argued, "non-political politics doesn't have a chance" (Klaus 3.4.1992 in 9:1993). In early April 1992, Klaus stated that together with the ODA, the ODS had "apprehensions of a distinct upsurge of anti-reformist forces, striving to thwart the post-November development. We are determined not to allow it and strive jointly for a victory of the right-wing (MF 2:3.4.1992)". Bizarrely implicit in those anti-November forces were the dissidents of the Civic Movement, who had, of course, formed the very nucleus of pro-November forces for over twenty years³³.

Regarding the state arrangement, the ODS stuck to its advocacy of a functioning federation. It called for an end to and reversal of the republican erosion of federal powers begun in 1990, and opposed 'experiments', including confederation (Mlada Fronta 4.6.1992). The right, by 1992, were united in Klaus's view that a federal state was not to be bought at the cost of jeopardising economic reform in any way. Klaus distanced his party from the debacle of the talks and was outspoken only when explicitly questioned about a Slovak 'third way'. The question was thus played down, often not appearing at all in party campaign literature. Klaus preferred a strategy of shifting responsibility for the conflict entirely onto the Slovak side and claimed that it was now "evident, that votes for HZDS are votes for the division of the state....Slovak voters, self evidently, have the right to decide this, but not for all days on end (Lidove Noviny 6:14.5.1992)". Igor Nemeč confirmed that if the party faced "a choice between a common socialist Czechoslovak state and two independent states, it would choose the latter" (Telegraf 2.6.1992).

In a survey taken in April 1992, ODS supporters more than any others, expressed satisfaction with the course of social and political development (86%) and the economy (78%). They were the least afflicted with feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness and surrender (33% as opposed to the notably high 55% national average). Another prominent characteristic in an ODS voter's profile was support

³² When Klaus was asked if he was trying to repeat the election of 1990 by threatening the electorate with renewed authoritarianism he replied that the obvious rejection of secret police, tinkered margins and leading tasks of the party in 1989 was only "a superficial rejection of one type of common system", and that it was necessary now for the electorate to decide "in which direction to begin" (LN 6:14.5.1992).

³³ The main weapon of the campaign against the real left was the invocation of the ghosts of totalitarianism but also its economic other-worldliness; Klaus spoke scathingly of the left "fretting and blaming this government that the former Soviet Union no longer buys textiles (4.6.1992:23:1993)". ODS militantly opposed what it called any "third way between communism and democracy" (as opposed to between communism and capitalism). Klaus nevertheless avoided the word capitalism employing 'market economy' in preference (LN 8.29.5.1992). ODS's strongest resource was clearly the absolute association of economic reform with the figure of Vaclav Klaus. In a series of articles entitled: *A short guide to the 'election gulash'*, Klaus was sufficiently confident to conclude with the following advice - "when deciding for whom to vote, it is enough with economic arguments to use your common sense" (5.5.1992, 17:1992).

Slovaks failed to reject the old regime (Wightman 61:1995)). Turn-out was an impressive 95.4%²². Havel persuaded Carnogursky to put KDH's 26 deputies behind the federal VPN/OF governing coalition, believing the Christian Democrats likely to outstrip VPN if Slovakia reverted to its pre-Communist clericalism. Carnogursky himself returned to the Slovak parliament. With only 48 seats out of the 150 in the Slovak National Council, VPN premier elect Vladimir Meciar was obliged to seek a Slovak government coalition with the KDH (with 31 seats) and the Democratic Party (with 7), in order to secure a governing majority. Carnogursky became vice premier. Coalition rules were established with difficulty though as we shall see, a majority system would have also run into trouble.

Party diversification 1991 - 1992: Caliban at the gate²³

VPN had responded to the break-up of the Forum by promising cooperation with all former associates. By 1991 however, the Slovak organisation was itself no longer intact. Even the anti-hierarchical Gal assumed VPN's right to approve their Prime Minister's decisions and to hold him accountable; yet in this it was frequently frustrated by Meciar. By March, the Slovak Premier had formed a faction; the 'Public Against Violence - for a Democratic Slovakia', publicly splitting the VPN in half. Fatally for VPN the real causes of friction were unclear to the broader public until this open conflict. Assisted by a nervous media, Meciar had in many ways appeared a diligent advocate of the VPN programme, provoking VPN internally (for example, by moving against their own coalition Interior Minister - Anton Andras), but giving them little room to complain. More obvious to the public was that, in contrast to the rest of VPN's leadership, Meciar believed that of the 'five pillars' of the VPN's agreed programme (September 1990) Slovak national issues should receive particular priority. Many in the VPN feared that since August (see later), Meciar had adopted too confrontational a style in negotiations with the Czechs, which, combined with his known reservations over economic policy would lead to an un-looked for clash. These 'pillars' were supposed to enjoy parity of esteem. Meciar, however, believed that the VPN had little choice but to respond to the rising tide of Slovak national, (if not nationalist) sentiment, a tide he perceived as behind the growing popularity of the rival KDH.

At VPN's Congress on February 23, 1991, Meciar attempted to take over the leadership only to be defeated by the incumbent, Fedor Gal. Gal not only rejected the possibility of turning VPN into a party but pointed to the danger of populism which "misuses people's national thinking for the narrow power

²² Only the DS, and Slovak Nationalists projected unequivocal positions on preferred state-arrangements. Radio Free Europe was unusually off the mark when it claimed the issue of autonomy became an electoral rallying point (RFE 16:15.6.1990).

²³ Quoted by Bill Lomax (187:1995) 'Caliban at the Gate' was used by Gyorgy Csepeli and Peter Gyorgy to represent by the 'confused masses' rising up against liberal democracy in favour of some other position, e.g. ethical socialism - deemed by them the dire alternative.

acknowledging support for the idea of, a common state. It stated frankly that “jeopardizing Czechoslovakia is not only nationalistic, but also the dangerous dream of a unitarian state. We support a referendum as the single legitimate condition of the division of the state or its reshaping with more members” (Respect 21.5.1992). Federal Foreign Minister, Jiri Dienstbier accused Kalvoda of irresponsibly playing the Czech national card. He in turn appealed not only to emotional and socio-economic reasons for the common state, but, for the first time in two years of wrangling, raised seriously the issue of international security (Interview with Jana Smidova Lidove Noviny 9:30.4.1992). Such a late appearance scarcely convinced that Slovakia was indeed the touchstone of Czech geopolitical stability (even if the left feared Bohemia's incorporation as a sixth new German *länder* (Wehrle 32:1994). More convincing, given its greater currency in the Czech media and immediate resonance, was the rightist innuendo that (as in the 1980s) a gradualist Slovakia would arrest Czech development and continue to bar it from its European destiny.

The coalition between the Christian Democratic Union and the People's Party **KDU-CSL** carried a broad manifesto essentially endorsing current progress including, with little elaboration, its preference for a federal constitution. The remaining election successes regarding the Federal Assembly were for the far right Republican Party of Czechoslovakia, led by Miroslav Sladek (53% of Republican support stemmed from the under 34s (Lidove Noviny 29.5.1992)) - and on the left. The **KSCM - LB** (coalition of the Communists and Democratic Left) rejected apologetics and hoped that the “expectations of our citizens from November 1989 are fulfilled”. They supported a ‘federation’, but given their lack of internal evolution, with all the potentially Marxist-Leninist connotations that had ever been attached to their use of the term. The social democratic (**CSSD**) programme varied little from that in 1990 and honest, if lame on the issue, the party stated: “we consider a federal constitution the ideal, but at present difficult to implement” (Mlada Fronta 4.6.1992). A coalition since 1991, the **LSU** represented an uncomfortable alignment of Greens, (urban) Socialists and cooperative farm interests, as represented by the Agricultural Party³⁶. There was little common policy ground between leftist Agriculturalists and the centrist Socialists (Kostecky 81:1995) and other issues dominated their muted claim to support a ‘federal state’.

OH firmly right of centre (campaign manager Ivan Gabal moved swiftly to eject Zeman from the party - the main personality dragging OH to the left) - the only space for it according to opinion support, OH nevertheless failed to compete with ODS and ODA. Under a barrage of criticism from Klaus, OH called in vain for classic modern mixed economy aids. OH reduced its own chances by standing for “radical economic reform which must lead to the resolution of all social and ecological problems” (Co chceme).

³⁶ The Electoral Commission recognised the group as constituting a political movement as opposed to a ‘coalition’, to which a higher parliamentary threshold would have applied.

the vettings procedure for human rights reasons and because these damaged the prestige of the Assembly. His popularity, it was not too subtly implied, originated in Slovak preferences for the old regime. In July 1991 Klaus leapt the hurdle of being too apparently anti-Slovak by claiming that the Slovak Public Against Violence also opposed Dubcek, (Dubcek had left VPN that month objecting that it had departed the centre ground); Klaus's implication being that 'good Slovaks' would follow such a line. Polls found that Czechs, far more than Slovaks, felt the legislation to be necessary (Stein and Scarrow 26: 1994). The vote on lustration thus not only set OH (Civic Movement) apart from the old right of the Civic Forum but aligned it with the forces of Slovak nationalism and the left, who abstained with OH or voted against the bill. According to Vaclav Zak, OH's opposition to the bill, particularly to the principle of collective guilt, lost it two thirds of its membership (Zak 29.3.1995). Despite this most dire warning, the Movement insisted on running the 1992 election campaign on a platform 'for the rule of law' - electorally falling on their own sword in a manner readily imitated by their liberal Slovak colleagues.

Slovak party development 1990 - 1992: liberalism versus 'the nation'

"There is a direct conflict between the needs of the Czechoslovak economy and the national interests of most Slovaks" (Rude Pravo. 8.12.1990). Petr Pithart (OH), Czech Premier

The new Slovak ruling elite to emerge from November 1989 was in fact a combination of dissidents and 'laundered' Communists, the latter split between 1968 veterans and those who resigned in the wake of the '89 revolution (Szomolanyi 63:1994). It was moreover, evident that Slovak preoccupations (at both elite and mass level) centred on matters other than purging the past. This relative absence of retributive impulses has prompted some to suggest that Slovaks were unrealistic about democracy (Mihalikova 54,55:1994). An alternative interpretation, borne out by electoral choices, is that a more favourable experience under communism had aroused less resentment against its personnel. Czechs and Slovaks held in common the impulse to defend, if not improve, the socio-economic developments achieved in the last twenty years.

It was to the detriment of their agenda that Slovak dissidents¹⁷ possessed an even greater distaste for politics than did their Czech colleagues. Led by the sociologist, Fedor Gal, VPN had been the first

¹⁷ The repressive conditions of post-invasion 'normalisation' (1968 - 1989), particularly Communist Party purges, had been more moderate in Slovakia than in the Czech lands. Artistic and intellectual circles were less violently harrassed and consequently dissident groups were small and isolated, not only from the public but from one another, amounting only to what have been termed "islands of positive deviation" (Szomolanyi 66: 1994).

candidacy for re-election as President. He exploited the suspicions felt against Havel's clique in both republics and attributed this decision as much to Havel's choice of advisors as to his own mistakes in office (*ibid.*). On 14 May Meciar stated that after elections he would not assume any federal post (*Czech Sociological Review* p136:1993). In so doing he signalled an intention to maximise the leverage power of the Slovak National Council in any further talks; according to the HZDS campaign, talks dependent on the results of a referendum. In the Czech republic this was seen by many as the first concrete step in Slovakia's withdrawal from a common state.

The confident election style of HZDS rode on a wave of support. In 1991 the attitudinal profile of those supporting HZDS was still unclear. By April 1992 however, it was obvious that supporters more than usually rejected current development. More than three quarters stated that post-November development brought great disappointment (as against a high 64% in the whole Slovak population) and 71% judged the economic reform too radical or basically misconceived. 84% believed that other conceptions of economic reform would be better than those currently in place. As to the state-legal arrangement 79% of HZDS supporters judged that Czechs insufficiently understood Slovakia and that this was a crucial factor in 'coercing' Slovaks towards independence (68% in the whole population). Less than half, 48%, stated that for the population of Slovakia it was more important to slow the pace or at least change economic reform, than to maintain the common state (41% in the Slovak population as a whole)³⁹.

The **SDL**'s shift to west European social democracy and its social orientation had allowed for a resurrection of the party's fortunes since 1990. Remarkably by 1992 the **KDH** was held in greater suspicion as a potential threat to democracy (35%), compared to 20% for the **SDL** (*Butorova* 63 - 65:1993). **SDL** argued that the election would decide both the form of the common life of Czechs, Slovaks and other nationalities, and that it would set the future priorities for the economy and society. For the former, **SDL** proposed a "loose federation with elements of confederation" thus managing to escape suspicions either of Slovak nationalism or Czechoslovakism.

When **KDH**'s Carnogursky could get beyond defending his views on liberalism he explained that his vision was for a strong, stable and ultimately independent Slovakia and that national consciousness could grow slowly into a stable identity (*Lidove Noviny* 21.5.1992). The **KDH** was

³⁹ Sociologically, there were parallels in **ODS/HZDS** support. **HZDS** support was strongest among both those threatened by reform - the lowest qualified and high-school educated population, but also among high qualified specialists where support reached beyond 50% (data from **AISA** survey conducted by Marek Buguszak 1 - 9 April from sample of 1363: MF 22.5.1992). Again it seems reasonable to argue that the 'technocratic elite' - or 'grey zone' constituted an important body of support. A fact which points to their expectation of professional benefits arising from a party that championed the Slovak economy without, so it could yet seem, rejecting links to the Czech republic.

impulses of liberal ministers (Stein and Scarrow 24:1994), if effectively given his hegemony over economic policy-at-large. In the business of credibility, the image of ODS as a 'modern European political party' and its greater radicalism looked well set. ODS had nonetheless faced a persistent barrier; if Klaus had apparently won his claim to authorship of economic reform, he had yet to convince the electorate that reform depended on his continuation in office. In the first months of 1991 voters most supportive of economic reform had split almost evenly between OH and ODS (ibid.). Potentially this left OH in the lead since it was unclear, before lustration, quite how much value the electorate ascribed to OH's more evidently 'civic' priorities.

The issue of screening resolved; OH's civic values and their determination to institute liberal legal norms set them at odds with the prevailing public mood¹³. Thereafter the differences established by lustration were exploited fully by ODS, even though for Klaus the need for lustration was scarcely a deeply held belief. Indeed, his neutrality had earlier provoked consternation among the right. When the issue had originally been expropriated for the political right at a joint press conference¹⁴, KDS's Vaclav Benda had argued that they wished to change the situation whereby reform Communists still controlled various bodies not as a result of free elections but due to the undemocratic policy of the Civic Forum (Mlada Fronta 2: 19.2.1991). Escaping the censure of his own side had pushed Klaus to endorse wholeheartedly the militant supporters of vettings, even if ODS's 'sponsorship' of lustration, if one combines it with Klaus's writings on 1968, situated it plainly in Michnik's paradigm 'new Party of the clean and prudent' (Michnik 20:1993).

The pressure to manipulate lustration was considerable. It was only in April 1991 that ODS built a public lead over the OH in economic policy, moreover, public allegiance seemed to be waning for both groups by the summer. By mid-1991, polls revealed that fewer than half of Civic Forum supporters assigned themselves to either party. Grassroots political activity was minimal, and in lustration, best of all, was an issue where the press had already done the work of the missing party infrastructure (Stein and Scarrow 24:1994). Until now Klaus had wielded the past against the OH in terms of anti-intellectualism, indicting the unbridled intellectual as a dangerously utopistic force in politics. What he had lacked was the contemporary evidence to drive this message home. OH's attitude

¹³ It would be wrong to characterise those against the lustration law as the former dissidents *en bloc* (many of whom, notably Vaclav Benda were at the fore of the most impassioned called for legalised disqualifications of past collaborators). The important distinction was between those strict liberal dissidents that balked at the potentially abusive sweep of the law, and those, like Havel, who opted for an anti-Communist line, either out of conviction or from the perception that the government had yet to convince the public of its wholehearted rejection of past practices.

¹⁴ attended by the KAN, the Liberal Democratic party, the Civic Democratic alliance, the Club of the Democratic Right Wing, the Republic Union, and notably, the right-oriented Prague Civic Forum Council.

	House of the People (150 seats)		House of the Nations (150 seats)	
	Votes (%)	seats	Votes (%)	Seats
<i>Czech Republic</i>				
ODS - KDS	33.9	48	33.4	37
LB	14.3	19	14.5	15
CSSD	7.7	10	6.8	6
SPR	6.5	8	6.4	6
CDU - CSL	6.0	7	6.1	6
LSU	5.8	7	6.1	5
Others	25.8	0	26.7	0
Total	100.0	99	100.0	75
<i>Slovak Republic</i>				
HZDS	33.5	24	33.9	33
SDL	14.4	10	14.0	13
SNP	9.4	6	9.4	9
KDH	9.0	6	8.8	8
MKDH + Egyutteles	7.5	5	7.4	7
SDSS	4.9	0	6.1	5
Other Parties	21.3	0	20.4	0
Total	100.0	51	100.0	75

Elections to the Czech and Slovak National Councils, 5 - 6 1992

Czech National Council	Votes (%)	Seats
ODS - KDS	29.7	76
LB	14.1	35
CSSD	6.5	16
LSU	6.5	16
CDU - CSL	6.3	15
SPR	6.0	14
ODA	6.0	14
HSD - SMS	5.9	14
Other Parties	19.0	0
Total	100.0	200

Klaus's consideration of economic welfare and the progress of privatisation, than by any overweening desire to restore in full that which had been expropriated (see Stein and Scarrow 1994). Victory over restitution only confirmed Klaus's evident grip on reform. 'Screening', in contrast, provided ODS with victory in an area often considered the preserve of the dissidents - that of public morality.

Various commissions, notably that investigating the violent events of 17 November 1989, had had access to state security files and had engaged in a process of vetting public officials for past collaborations. This initial process had been criticised by deputies for its arbitrary application under the People's Party Interior Minister, Richard Sacher. Even after Sacher's departure in June 1990 the vetting procedure remained controversial, becoming the focus of public concern over continuing Communist influence. Public disquiet was mobilised by anti-Communist groups of the right, notably the Confederation of Political Prisoners (KPVC) and the Club of Committed Non-Party Members (KAN). These very vocal groups were the heartfelt opposition to continuing Communist forces and stood, militantly, for their disqualification. They found allies both in the press and academic commentary¹¹ and, so it transpired, a champion in the parliamentary right.

Lustration was never out of the press in 1990 and 1991, the implication being always that a coherent Communist force remained, larger and more recidivist than the observable Communist Party. Newspaper stories in Spring 1991 centred on screening the administration, particularly on how parliament could acquire the right to dismiss deputies found to have collaborated. In February the Christian Democratic Union and smaller parties of the right had demonstrated for 'universal and legally reliable vettings' (Mlada Fronta 26.2.1991). That same month, the head of Prague's Charles University politics faculty and KAN member, R. Kucera, made a straight comparison between communism and fascism and called for communism to be criminalised and its government members condemned. Kucera warned that another 'victorious February' (as in 1948) was just waiting in the wings (Kucera 43:1992). It was possible to capitalise on the issue of screening without appearing driven by revenge, despite liberal appeals for tolerance and reconciliation. The right claimed that political prudence should outweigh 'civic' and human rights considerations in this case. The threat was animated by figures such as Vaclav Benda who insisted that "former collaborators of state security have relatively high representation in the Presidium of the parliament and its Constitutional-Legal Committees" (MF 10.1.1991). When Deputy Interior Minister

¹¹ Exposing Communist infiltration in the new system was the clearest way for the Czech press, un-purged and still under the old titles of Youth Front and Red Truth etc. to rehabilitate themselves in a new competition to appear editorially independent. Eager for conspiracy, new newspapers, notably *Respekt*, endeavoured to push de-bolshevisation to the fore. Having set out to 'vet' public life the press fastened onto personalities with greater rigour than onto policy.

creation of a legitimating myth), the dire losses of federal income being made up in the short term by the released powers of patronage in an independent Slovakia.

The apparent duality arising from Meciar's pure populism - his championing of Slovak equality combined with his apparent rejection of all-out independence rhetoric is vital when assessing his popularity. The nationalist vote was a small minority - the Slovak National Party secured a mere 9%. Many of Meciar's Slovak supporters could vote for him believing themselves to have protested against 'Pragocentrism' whilst at the same time expressing their desire to maintain a common state (Vodicka 92:1993). According to one account, only 19% of would-be voters for the HZDS were adherents of an independent Slovakia (from a poll taken in April 1992 by the Bratislava Centre for Social Analysis, in Vodicka 99:1993). If this suggests a gulf in information available to Slovaks as to the real resolution of the ODS, opinion poll data rather attests to the electorate's perspicacity on this point. Feelings behind both Czech and Slovak voting patterns were marked by frustration. By May 1992, 73% of Czech respondents and 86% of Slovaks were either rather or very dissatisfied with the overall political situation (from 1320 surveyed by IVVM, Prague 2-9.1.1992 in Wolchik 171:1994).

Contrary to the claims of the ODS the 1992 election could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be taken as a fair referendum on the future of the state. The electorate saw no clear range of alternative state arrangements and the question as a whole was bound up hopelessly with supposedly dichotomous choices concerning the political economy of each republic. As if this were not manipulation enough, ODS and HZDS had both proclaimed themselves 'in spirit' for a common state. The point at which the spirit would be overcome by circumstances was ultimately something the electorate could only guess at since, for each republican electorate, 'circumstances' would be dictated by the votes of the other republic.

Those Czechs who valued current economic reforms had little choice but to vote for a party which held only pragmatic respect for the common state and even less for the principles of self-determination - as expressed through the ambition of the majority. Those Slovaks who had taken the step of voting for Meciar, a vote possible under a wide spectrum of motives, were conveniently interpreted by the ODS *a priori*, and the majority of its supporters, as having voted for the destruction of the state. This interpretation freed Klaus's hand to dissolve the state at his own speed; absolved from blame as ODS would now claim to be. With only 16% of the population supporting separation as the best solution in the first week of July 1992 (IVVM poll in Lidove Noviny 3:29.7.1992), the legitimacy of the separation was nevertheless unresolved beyond the borders of the ODS.

when 72.8% of the population claimed feelings of anxiety and insecurity when looking into the near future (Tucek and Manek 28: 1993).

Klaus had indeed claimed, unusually, to be a conservative, thus wedding a natural supporting argument for gradualism to a programme of rapid economic transformation. The ideological allusion helped to distinguish the ODS from other parties of the right, but more importantly, blunted the much feared, sharp edge of reform. Self-avowedly 'Thatcherite Conservatism' proffered reassurance with the argument that all reform, however drastic or innovative, was fundamentally a return to the "most valuable social values, formed as the fruit of a thousand year evolution" (Klaus 17:1990a). Moving forward into reform (supplemented by de-bolshevisation) was sold as a device to regain the positive aspects of the past (Thatcher's so-called "vigorous virtues") and to return to the western path. Such claims, that the process of reform not only generated the information necessary for the present but re-invoked what had been known before communism, constituted a form of politico-economic mysticism that looked remarkably like an inversion of Marxist-Leninist historical dialectic.

Much to the consternation of historians and dissidents the avowed anti-Communism of parties to the right of OH led them to belittle the events of the Prague Spring. Denying its status as a popular insurrection, the events of 1968 were dismissed as an irresponsible contest between Communist factions. Nonetheless while leading this assault on the country's history and collective memory, ODS expropriated those central tenets of the '68 platform expressing the historical aspirations of Czech political culture, the most important being the aspiration to Europe. In 1968 Milan Kundera had fought for the re-emancipation; the re-Europeanisation, of Czech cultural life. Under Klaus, aided by his Czech role model stature as the 'skilled engineer', the Czechs would 'return' on solid modern ground as a thriving economy abounding with enviable industrial talents. Without such an economy he threatened, Europe would remain a mirage. The fact that many 1968 reformers had, at one time, been committed Stalinists⁷, permitted ODS to espouse the traditions that had underpinned the 'Spring' whilst damning the party radicals of the time (among them Jiri Dienstbier) as collaborators, unfit for office.⁸

From ODS's platform of economic credibility Klaus projected himself as a sympathetic realist but also satirised the rival, intellectual core of the old Civic Forum. According to Garton Ash, Klaus displayed an "almost comical desire to be taken seriously as a writer" (Garton-Ash 1995:36). In practice,

⁷ Kundera wrote of 1968 that "instead of the standard pattern of one group of people (a class, a nation) rising up against another, all the people (an entire generation) revolted against their own youth. Their goal was to recapture and tame the deed they had created, and they almost succeeded" (Kundera 13, 14: 1987).

⁸ A foreign correspondent, Dienstbier was expelled from the Party in 1969 and fired after participating in anti-occupation broadcasts. From 1970 he worked predominantly as a stoker and was among the first signatories and spokesmen of Charter 77, imprisoned between 1979-1982.

The national dispute impacted on republic-level developments but without evoking any parallel mechanism for its mediation. In Slovakia, the dominance of the national issue and the existence of the Czech/Slovak relationship as potential scapegoat for all ills inhibited the development of a realistic domestic discourse on internal developments in Slovakia, leaving many issues untreated until the country awoke to find itself independent on January 1, 1993. In the Czech lands the images of Slovakia as wishing to pursue a gradualist path, as unfazed by the prospect of authoritarianism, simply as backward, cross referenced into many domestic policy debates. Those Czech politicians seeking a more graduated reform, who opposed lustration, who opposed centralised and strong executive power found themselves viewed as recidivist; as having entered, in effect, the Slovak orbit.

The party environment seemed slow to develop systemic features precisely because it lacked the conditions for party competition. Such conditions were undoubtedly forestalled by the electoral strategies of the ODS and HZDS. The ODS's demolition of the dissident competition and subsequent reenactment of the 1990 election, this time as the uncontested 'democratic' party, together with Meciar's well-directed over-promising from the safety of opposition both succeeded in provoking defensive reactions and blocking debate. By June 1992 the two parties seemed elevated beyond reach, a remarkable similarity between them being their adoption of optimistic rhetoric. ODS's rhetoric was not only free market but essentially about the transition - the market as both 'natural' means and end, all other paths being the 'constructs' of ideologists. Implicitly, the process of liberalizing was not only democratic in itself but democratising. ODS's competitors in the meantime spoke of laying foundations and necessary conditions, and so, gratefully, echoed the unfulfilled promises of the old regime. Meciar used a similar technique, only employing the release of Slovak national potential as the long-suppressed natural path, most recently suppressed, he argued, by the policies of the Czech right.

Finally, if one compares the positive rhetoric of the election victors with that of the dissident liberals who faced political extinction after June 1992, a last, crude explanation for the choice of the electorate immediately presents itself. The Slovak liberal elite in particular came too close, too often, to insulting its electorate. One choice phrase amongst Slovak dissidents accounting for the public aversion to reform was 'post-Communist panic'. The 5% threshold had the effect of eliminating both Czech and Slovak liberals - the moderate centre parties in both republics - thus removing many of the post-November leaders, the core of the emotionally pro-federal elite, from both the Federal Assembly and the National Councils (Olson 112:1994). Their brief and economically painful experience of liberalism, nonetheless, was not one to encourage the Slovak electorate back on its choices.

prior to the June 1992 election, but as allegiances settled the parliamentary caucuses (Federal and Czech) disintegrated⁴.

With the Forum destroyed its offspring faced the defining problem of open competition. Personal popularity was uncertain grounds for competition if indecisively attached to policy. A reputation for the delivery of policy was likewise a long term endeavour when basic design remained the immediate task. Clarity in priority setting offered some room for contest, but to divide the economic right and liberals a distinctive note was required. It was found in an aspect of those differences that had just divided them, namely social tolerance and the approach of society to its Communist past. OH's belief in the organic redevelopment of civic society as the bedrock of a new democracy, combined with its criticism of Klaus's radical emphasis on macro economic adjustment, was to sink it.

Setting the agenda: cleavages and party development - June 1990 to June 1992

It has been concluded that "regional, religious and ethnic" and only potentially economic cleavages "underpinned party diversification in 1990 and 1991" (Wightman 67:1991). Though this claim might relate to Czech Slovak differences, these were not the issues to dominate Czech party evolution. The only regional difference to spawn a party here was the issue of greater Moravian/Silesian autonomy. This one party, having split in Spring 1991 over whether to seek republican status or simply greater self-management, looked set to dissolve altogether in the event of minimal self-administration actually being granted. The Catholic church was not consistently divisive; Church heads fought with Klaus over the restitution of Church property but Klaus claimed to represent the "Christian traditions in Europe" (Mlada Fronta 7.1.1991). Finally, ethnic animosity toward Slovakia as such (as opposed to conflicts over a constitutional arrangement) was discouraged by the electorate. The Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA), the only party to play openly the ethnic card in June 1992 failed to enter the Federal Assembly altogether. That said, the positive value of the relationship with Slovakia was reduced to its most utilitarian components; the political right and left held different legal and economic conditions as mapping minimal prerequisites of a common state. So long as constitutional talks continued Czech parties only passively undertook a highly rational and pragmatic evaluation of partnership, assuming away all substantive difficulties as on the Slovak side - a more 'acceptable' formulation of nationalism.

Clear implications for federal power emanated rather from the significantly divisive issues of the period, notable precisely for their lack of pre-Communist roots. Economic reform and questions of

⁴ Other deputies opted between remaining independent or entering one of the various smaller groups which had left the Forum in January. On April 2, Czechoslovak Social Democracy, which had failed to win representation in June 1990, announced that six deputies had joined, or rather, created its ranks.

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between Czechs and Slovaks. Personalities played a prominent role in the subdued campaign, unavoidably given the few salient differences between programmes and the resulting reluctance to enter a substantial debate. Even the Communist Party advocated political pluralism and a market economy, though it balked at the abolition of state property (RFE 15.6.1990 Peter Martin).

Election results: 8 - 9 June 1990 (percentage share of the vote)

	Federal Assembly		Czech/ Slovak National Councils
	House of the People	House of the Nations	
<i>Czech Republic</i>			
OF	53.1	50.0	49.5
KSCM (Communist Party)	13.5	13.8	13.3
CDU	8.7	8.7	8.4
HSD - SMS*	7.9	9.1	10.0
<i>Slovak Republic</i>			
VPN	32.5	37.3	29.3
KDH	19.0	16.7	19.2
SNP	13.8	13.4	13.3
KSCM	11.0	11.4	13.9
Egyutteles and MKDH	8.6	8.5	8.7
DS	4.4	3.7	4.4
SZ**	3.2	2.6	3.5

*Movement for Self-governing Democracy - Society for Moravia and Silesia

** Slovak Green Party

If anything OF's success, paralleled by that of the like-mindedly consensus-seeking VPN and the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) in Slovakia, seemed to bode well for the resolution of regional conflicts. The threat to stable relations lay in the inevitable disintegrative tendencies of the civic movements and the direction such fragmentation might take; particularly as foreshadowed by notions of economic autonomy.

The disintegration of the centre: June 1990 - Spring 1992

In the first year after the revolution the role of political parties was deeply contentious. As a debate this related not just to the sour experience of the Communist Party, but also the strong party dependency of deputies in the First Republic. This ambiguous status was reflected in the two distinctive characteristics of

Interviews:

Vaclav Zak (former Civic Forum MP, Chair of the Czech National Council) 14.6.1995 10.30-12.00. Office of 'First', Prague)

Ivan Gabal (sociologist, former advisor to President Havel, Head of the President's social research unit and OH 1992 campaign manager). 15.6.1995 11.30-13.00. 'MENT', Prague)

Fedor Gal (sociologist, former Chairman of VPN) 4. 4. 1995 12-14.30 Cafe Tinska, Prague)

The Break-up of Czechoslovakia
The Impact of Party Development on the Separation of the State*

Abby Innes

Czechoslovakia separated on January 1, 1993 - just three years after the toppling of the country's Communist regime in November 1989. There were clearly multiple causes of the Czech and Slovak divorce, fostered not least by the Communist repression of attempts to articulate national grievances as such. The Communist inheritance undermined the state in other, more quantifiable ways. Economic and constitutional conditions proved particularly corrosive; Communist abuse of the constitution as a facade for centralised power had invalidated the term 'federation' for many Slovaks, who since the war had aspired to real federalisation. A minority power of veto also lay in ambush in the newly animated federal parliament; an institutional reinforcement of serious disagreements over terminology and conflicting expectations. On the economic front Czech's resented the long-term subsidy of Slovakia and the federal economic reform of 1990 to 1992 was unmistakably a Czech reform designed for the Czech economy. Reform authors, as the Communists before them, adhered to the belief that economic developments delivered converging national identities - even, it seems, when these developments amounted to a scissoring economic performance. In such a context the national burden was potentially a heavy one. In an exploration of the basic premise that politics after 1989 nevertheless 'mattered', this article focuses exclusively on the role played by the new institution of party politics. By colouring in the map of the Czechoslovak inter-election period I aim to demonstrate a party-systemic contribution to sundering the state, specifically, to show that imbalances in the fledgling party system prohibited the clear mediation of Czech Slovak relations.

As it turned out, the first free democratic election in June 1990 was a poor indicator of public preferences. The electorates were offered only the plebiscite issues of 'Are you for change?' and only afterwards did the victorious Czech and Slovak anti-regime movements splinter into factions which then instituted themselves as parties. Of their offspring the two parties attributing a transcendent value to the common state found themselves marginalised but not, so this article claims, straightforwardly because of their 'national' views. Neither, as Section 2 explores, did nationalism and questions of secession define party evolution and the party campaigns leading up to the second election in June 1992. Czech and Slovak rivalry, though divisive, had proved useable by party agents only in a highly constrained way, stuck as

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**The Break-up of Czechoslovakia:
The Impact of Party Development
on the Separation of the State**

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Abstract

When Czechoslovakia separated into two independent republics on January 1, 1993, it was hailed as the "velvet divorce." Relief that a European "ethnic" conflict had been resolved without physical aggression was apparently so deep as to have blunted curiosity about the real issues underlying the conflict. This paper looks back into the file and, in particular, explores the impact of party political developments on efforts to mediate some form of constitutional compromise. The analysis is not intended as an account of the separation (which would necessarily delve deep into historical, cultural, and economic questions). The more specific aim is to consider the issues and institutional pressures that dominated party development between 1989 and 1993, and to evaluate their contribution to the split. The article concludes that the profoundly unpopular decision to separate the country emanated from irreconcilable views on the correct "transition" path rather than a deeply rooted nationalism on either side. Moreover, both Czech and Slovak electorates were, to a striking degree, "held hostage" to party choices of economic policy and a common state, presented as mutually exclusive possibilities.