

# Czechoslovakia

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## Introduction

Czechoslovakia was formed in the aftermath of World War I and the defeat of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. It was mainly conducted by later President Tomáš Masaryk the state including Czechs in Bohemia and Moravia and Slovaks was planned. After the Declaration of independence on the 28th of October 1918. The constitution was passed on the 29th of February 1920 by the Revolutionary National Assembly. Czechoslovakia enters the ABEL Database with the formation of the first cabinet resulting from national assembly elections on the 25th of May 1920. The country developed into a successful and stable democracy even though different ethnic groups were unsatisfied with their role in the multi-ethnic state. In our database, democracy in Czechoslovakia ends with the Munich Agreement on the 30th of September 1938 transferring parts of the country to Nazi Germany and beginning a process of decay of the country.

## Elections

Czechoslovakia voted in three elections between the inauguration of the first elected parliament and the end of democracy. The House of Deputies was one of the chambers of the bicameral parliament and had 300 seats over the whole time. Elections were held in 23 districts which distributed seats by proportional representation using the Hare quota. The often very huge number of not distributed seats was then assigned proportionally using the Hagenbach-Bischoff method for the whole country as one constituency. Every person aged 21 or older had suffrage. Citizens under 70 in reasonable health conditions were obligated to vote. Candidates for the House of Deputies must have been at least 30 years old. The rules for elections did not change in important ways during the interwar years (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 462-463).

### 15 November 1925

Those first elections after the formation of democratically elected governments led to various parties obtaining seats in parliament. The biggest group was formed by the

**Agrarian Party**, which received 13.6 % of the votes and 45 of 300 seats in parliament. The other parties which had coordinated the country by being part of the Petka an informal committee formed of the five most important parties' leaders were also part of the new parliament with the catholic **Czechoslovak People's Party** receiving 31 seats the [Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party] obtaining 29 seats and the **Socialist Party** receiving 28 seats. The smallest of the five was the right-wing **Czechoslovak National Democracy Party** obtaining only 13 mandates. The second strongest group in the chamber was the communist party which received 41 seats with 13.1 % of the vote. Nearly all other seats were won by parties of ethnic groups like the German **Farmers' League** (24 seats) and **Social Democratic Workers' Party** (17 seats) or the far-right nationalist **Hlinka's Slovak People's Party** (23 seats). After that, again a cabinet led by Antonín Švehla the leader of the Agrarian Party was formed. Members of the cabinet came from the four successful of the Petka parties and one of the **Czechoslovak Traders Party** which had split from the National Democracy Party in 1920 (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 478-479,489). In the following years governing parties changed multiple times also including German and Slovak parties for the first time in government. The cabinet was led by the **Agrarian Party**.

## **27 October 1929**

Early elections were called by Prime Minister František Udržal after the Nationalist **Hlinka's Slovak People's Party** had left the government. The result showed increasing support for the governing coalition' left-wing parties like the **Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party** who increased their parliament members by 10 to 39 of 300 and the **Czechoslovak National Socialist Party** reaching 32 mandates (+4). The most successful party was again the **Agrarian Party** winning 46 seats. The **Czechoslovak People's Party** suffered significant losses to hold 25 mandates in the new parliament as well as the **Communist Party of Czechoslovakia** which won only 30 seats. **Hlinka's Slovak People's Party** lost 4 mandates to keep 19 after being part of the government for the first time in the two years preceding the election. After the

election, the next government led by the **Agrian Party** politician František Udržal came into power. It included aside from Petka parties German minority parties.

## 19 Mai 1935

1935 elections led to a clear shift towards radical, separatist movements within Czechoslovakia. While the known Petka parties and the Communist party could repeat their 1929 results or only lose a few seats, many of the votes from national minorities went to newly formed parties or blocks. The **Sudeten German Party** became the second strongest party winning 44 seats in the chamber in its first election. An autonomous bloc including multiple minority parties around **Hlinkas's Slovak People's Party** reached 22 seats. A bloc including the National Unification Party which was formed through a merger of multiple parties including the National Democracy party reached 17 seats. The party was close to the fascist movements in Czech-dominated regions. The National Fascist Community also reached 6 mandates. In total a clear shift towards the far-right wing and autonomous party was visible in this election. Still, the established parties including the older German minority parties formed the next governments until the end of the Republic due to the Munich Agreement.

## Parties

The Czechoslovakian interwar party system was very fragmented due to the various cleavages in society. The most prominent was the ethnic/language cleavage which led to the creation of minority parties for Germans or Hungarians. While most of the parties focused on both Czechia and Slovakia, Slovakian nationalist parties gained further support over time fighting for more autonomy within the state or even independence. Within those regional groups parties were separated along the lines of class and religion. For example, this led to the creation of multiple left-wing parties like German and Czechoslovak Social Democrats, the system-supporting Czechoslovak Socialists, and the anti-system Communists. Multiple small fascist parties never reached major success except the German

Nazi-Near Sudeten German Party in the last year of the Republic (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 455-456) (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 136).

## Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party

The **Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party** was a moderate socialist but state-supporting party, which was mainly supported by Czech and Slovakian Workers. Aside from supporting the newborn state, the party demanded better conditions for workers and the development of workers to be future leaders. Socialization and confiscations of industry and great landowners were aims that were pushed back to let the economy evolve first. The **Communist Party of Czechoslovakia** split from the Social Democrats in 1921 to pursue more radical concepts. This led to the fall of the only Social Democratic prime minister in interwar times Vlastimil Tusar. As one of five parties of the informal Petka group, they took part and supported all governments (Wende, 1981: 707,709) (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 146-147).

Original		Československá sociálně demokratická strana dělnická
Other Names		Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party
Abbreviation		
Factions		

## Sudeten German Party

The Party was formed in 1933 and included German-nationalist groups and members of the in that year banned **German National Socialist Party**. Its Leader Konrad Henlein gave the party an outer appearance fighting for full German autonomy within the democratic Czechoslovak state. Still in the background, both party factions especially the former Nazi party members demanded a more radical anti-system course. After not enough evidence for being banned, the party reached major success in the 1935 elections and developed to become more radical. This led to stroger financial and political bounds with Adolf Hitler in Germany. The party supported the developments leading to the Munich Agreement (Wende, 1981: 700) (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 153).

Original	Sudetendeutsche Partei
Other Names	Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront
Abbreviation	SdP
Factions	Kameradschaftsbund / former DNSAP members

## Agrarian Party

The **Agrarian Party** led the government coalitions of the Republic from 1922 until the end of democratic Czechoslovakia. The party pursued policies that supported farmers and agrarians as a whole. Therefore it was the leading group demanding land reform which included both former large landowners and small farmers. While agreeing with secularization, it was in general a conservative party. The party looked for contact with the German Agrarian Party and was a leading force in including them in the government. In the 1930s following the financial crisis, the party groups around Secretary Rudolf Beran got in contact with Czech fascist groups and with the **Sudeten German Party**. This was a turnaround from the state near policies in the 1920s demanding equilibrium between different state-supporting parties in the Petka group and the President.

Original	Republikánská strana zemědělského a maloroľnického ľudu
Other Names	Republican Party of Farmers and Peasants, Republikánska strana zemedelského a maloroľnickeho ľudu
Abbreviation	RSZML
Factions	

## Communist Party of Czechoslovakia

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was formed in 1921 after left-wing members and parliamentarians of the **Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party** had separated. The party also merged with Slovakian, German, and Jewish groups of communists to form one party. While first skeptical about too much influence from Moscow, the party got in control of the left Soviet near wing in 1924. After that, the party followed a Bolshevism policy course excluding members opposing the party. Until 1935 the party was not interested in parliamentary policy work and the preservation of the state. During the last year of the republic, the changing united-front policy coming out of Moscow led

to the support of the Czechoslovak state against the upcoming Munich (Wende, 1981: 686-689) (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 139-140).

Original	Komunistická strana Československa	
Other Names		
Abbreviation		KSČ
Factions		

## **Hlinka's Slovak People's Party**

The **Hlinka's Slovak People's Party** was a right-wing, catholic, and Slovak nationalist party. The name of the party leader Andrej Hlinka was added in 1925 to the party name. Over most of the interwar period, the party mainly pursued increasing Slovak autonomy within the Czechoslovak state. It attracted mostly people in small towns and rural areas and some Christian workers who hoped that the party could help to overcome the economic gap that Slovak regions were behind Czech regions in the state. A radical wing that increased its power over the 1930s openly demanded an independent national state for Slovakia. Also, the fascist tendencies within the parties grew and the party began orientating towards the German fascist (Wende, 1981: 697-699) (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 151-152).

Original	Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana	
Other Names		Slovenská ľudová strana, Ľudáks
Abbreviation		HSLŠ
Factions		

## **Czechoslovak People's Party**

The Czechoslovak People's Party was one of the five Petka parties and pursued a close connection between the catholic church and the new Czechoslovak state and worked against secularism tendencies. The Slovak People's Party divided from it in 1921 to follow Slovak autonomy tendencies. The party was part of all party governments in the interwar period and supported the democratic state until its end (Wende, 1981: 710-712) (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 145-146).

Original	Československá strana lidová	
Other Names		
Abbreviation		ČSL
Factions		

## Czechoslovak National Socialist Party

The Czechoslovak (National) Socialist Party was a socialist party that was the closest representation of the ideas of the long-term state president Masaryk. It supported the Czechoslovak State but demanded socialist reforms leading to a more equal distribution of earnings and assets. This Socialism should be established in an "economy democracy" but without too much state control over the economy. Except for 1926-1929, the party as one of the Petka parties, was always part of the government. In the last years of the republic the party focused on the defense of the state against radical groups on the right and the left, supporting President Benes who had been a former member of the party (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 145) (Wende, 1981: 705-707)

Original	Czechoslovak National Socialist Party	
Other Names		Czechoslovak Socialist Party
Abbreviation		ČSNS
Factions		

## Czechoslovak National Democratic Party

Rasin / Petka / CSND to follow?

## DSAP

to follow?



## References

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