



The 2017 Czech Parliamentary Elections

A Bitter Result for the Left

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Preface

Jiří Málek

Every type of election in Czechia attracts special attention. There are several reasons for this. One of them is the size of the Czech population in comparison with similar countries in Central Europe (in Czechia, today there are 10.56 million inhabitants, while in Hungary there are 9.8 million and 5.4 million in Slovakia. There are 542,000 foreigners in Czechia – most of them are of Ukrainian and Slovakian origin, approximately 107,000 each, followed by the Vietnamese with a total of 57,000). It can be assumed that Czech society is relatively nationally homogeneous, while not being nationally closed at the same time. However, in relation to the so-called migration crisis, the attitude of the vast majority of the Czech population is very reserved at least. Additionally, in contrast to other countries in the region, the former Soviet Bloc Czech society and the political system did not experience any kind of major turbulence. For almost 30 years, it has been clearly dominated by the concept of a neoliberal global society, constituted by a party-structured, robust, right-wing block opposed by a stable left-wing block.

This block – which primarily originated from the former Communist Party – has never been part of the government so far (in contrast with several post-socialist countries in the '90s). Nevertheless, it has transformed itself – although, according to some of its critics, insufficiently – into the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), and several other small political entities, such as the Party of Democratic Socialism. Apart from this, a restored Czech Social Democracy, representing a centre-left political spectrum of society, became a significant force in parliament from the second half of the 1990s, including its participation in several governments. However, it has long been refusing cooperation with the KSČM at a national level. KSČM's candidate lists have been dominated by the representatives of the radical left in virtually all the elections over the last 25 years. Virtually no other (non-communist) radical left-wing entity has participated in the elections at parliamentary and regional levels. At municipal and district levels, the elected representatives of the KSČM have been and are part of the ruling coalitions. Although, the composition of the left-wing groupings in Czech society is relatively heterogeneous; the Communist Party with its permanent presence

in Czech Parliament since 1989 is dominant. Its candidates are also among those who have succeeded in all European Parliament elections (since 2004, when Czechia became a member of the EU). The latest parliamentary elections in Czechia saw poor results for both left-wing parties: KSČM (7.76%) and the Social Democratic Party (7.27%). The Czech radical left feels the need to analyse the situation and bring forward proposals for further activities. This will not be a simple and confrontation-free process.

Over recent years, transform! europe has been analysing the regional differences of the individual European regions, including left-wing political activities there, as well as the ways in which these countries and their left-wing movements contribute to the pan-European, left-wing currents. The aim is to then broadcast this knowledge to all leftist forces, e.g., in connection with the preparation of the 2019 European Parliament elections and the role of the radical left in European structures, especially in the European Parliament.

Furthermore, as a contribution to this discussion, transform! europe is publishing this policy paper which focuses on the last Czech parliamentary elections, where the radical left – like many similar parties in other European countries – experienced a serious defeat. The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation is going to open its presence in Prague this year. As part of this process, it organised an international colloquium on election results in various European countries, primarily in the Central European region, in December 2017. In agreement with this foundation, we have decided to publish the speeches delivered on the situation in Czechia in a policy paper which could be helpful for readers across Europe to comprehend at least some aspects of the Czech political development.

Europe After the Elections

Jiří Dolejš

The Czech left has been experiencing the biggest slump in its history since 1918. It will need time to revive itself and find a way to avoid a slide to the extreme-right rhetoric.

The recent election results have fully placed the Czech left into the European trend. The elections in the Netherlands, France, Germany and Austria, as well as in Czechia, have several common features despite local characteristics. The left is losing. There is a definite nationalist conservative wave sweeping across Europe coupled with the rise of populists. At the same time, an economic recovery has been an objective factor in weakening social tensions and restraining the partitioning of voters within the left-right scale.

In Czechia, the current economic growth of four percent of GDP is accompanied by a record low in unemployment. The German economy is growing by two percent with unemployment sitting at a 40-year low. The Czech government has raised pensions and minimum wages, while achieving budget surpluses at the same time. The situation is similar in Germany.

The European Central Bank provides national economies with a certain growth stimulus via its policy of so-called quantitative easing, albeit on a lesser scale compared with the U.S. Federal Reserve. An additional draw on European funds for the 2007-2014 budget periods has also benefitted the Czech economy. In Czechia, the share of public debt to national GDP has fallen to 35%, while in Germany it stands at 65%. All this made it practically impossible for the left to use the classic economic arguments in their election campaign. A drive organized by the Social Democrats (ČSSD) together with Czech trade unions – Let's Call an End to Cheap Labour (highlighting the fact that Czech manufacturing is cheaper than Western manufacturing, primarily due to wage dumping) – was not effective either.

On the contrary, public mistrust in traditional political parties, whose long and dubious track records catalysed protest emotions, had a strong impact. Under the influence of the topic of migration, protest voters shifted their values to greater tolerance of authoritarianism, demagogic leaders, and the acceptance of attacks on foreign culture and

socially unadaptable people, as well as on the concept of European integration.

In the Austrian elections, the Socialists ended up in second place with 26.9% of the vote, while the Greens and Communists remained outside parliament (a national characteristic was the fact that Communists campaigned together with part of the Greens, but to no substantial outcome). In Germany, the Socialists gained only 20.5% of the vote – the lowest result in the party's history. The dreams of the red-red-green coalition were dispersed by the modest result of both Die Linke and the Greens (who gained around 9% of the vote each).

Although the thunder of the Austrian National-Liberal Party was partly stolen by the shift of the victorious People's Party towards a more conservative policy, in Germany, the far-right AfD (which essentially promotes the program of the nationalist NPD) gained a representation in the Federal Parliament for the first time. Moreover, this xenophobic subject has strongly weakened the positions of Die Linke in Eastern Germany.

The most striking fall of the left in Europe has actually taken place in Czechia. The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) lost 47% of votes compared with 2013. The Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), who up until recently used to be a ruling party (the winner of the last elections), has actually ended up behind the Communists (a loss of 64% of voters). Czech left-wing voters have confirmed once again that they do not consider their leftism to be of importance. The KSČM has lost its voters, failing at the same time to gain some of the original ČSSD electorate. The sum of 15% of seats for the left in Czech Parliament is the worst result since 1918. Before the Second World War, the traditional share of the left (Communist Party and Social Democrats) was usually about 25%. After 1989, the combined left traditionally gained 40% of the vote, achieving a majority in 2002 that was not used, however, to form a government. And last year's result of 1.5% of the vote (which was a decline over the previous period) for the left-wing Greens was mainly due to the fleeing of their voters to the centre-liberal Pirates.

What are the causes behind the European trend? They also represent the specific situation in Czechia. The economic boom has recently allowed the government to find resources for rising pensions and salaries. This means that social tension has fallen and the struggle on the right-left axis was moved backstage. Voters began to decide based upon other factors. They were no longer interested in what the nationalist right offers compared with the left and vice versa. Above all, the accumulated mistrust in the political parties for their dubious pasts had a significant impact. It was true not just for KSČM and its deeds in the era of socialism, but rather for all parties, whose track records were linked to the development of capitalism, including the Greens created after 1989 (which once used to be a part of government).

The protest emotions that motivated voters to make their election decisions, although very strong and problem-related, were not linked to a desire for change in the quality of the existing system, but rather to demands for a practical, visible outcome like “go and lock up this thief, a politician”.

The illegal migration crisis was another factor. Alongside it, a significant shift has taken place in the cultural and value axes of a number of voters. A rise in tolerance (even amongst left-wing voters) to factors such as authoritarianism was evident; people began to listen to demagogic leaders offering simple solutions. They also started to accept attacks on foreign cultures, socially unadaptable citizens and the concept of common Europe. Our policy here has encountered a difficulty when being explained. The KSČM adopts a critical stance towards the EU, but it is not an anti-European party. We acknowledged the need to regulate migration, but we could not become an anti-immigration party that does not want to comprehend that migrants are largely victims of the system. This approach was rather difficult to advocate, while negativism has taken root not just among the voters, but also in some party members.

The “Babiš Phenomenon” (Andrej Babiš, Chairman of the victorious ANO movement in the 2017 parliamentary elections) played a certain role in this election. We all found ourselves in the shadow of the ANO movement and of its leader and owner, an elitist oligarch and a product of 1990s privatisation. He took a martyred stance against cronies-rooted parties (traditional bourgeois parties controlled

by business circles). Our criticism of ANO and its chairman – an oligarch and billionaire – was therefore perceived by many as being inspired by these “cronies” and thus became untrustworthy for a number of voters. In the post-election period, this has its consequences since ANO and Babiš have won the elections and formed a minority government thus far. The “Anti-Babiš” bloc refuses (for the moment) to enter into a governing coalition with ANO; the right is split: the “cronies” refuse to rule together with the oligarch. ANO is left with the choice of the left-wing KSČM, Tomio Okamura’s right-wing Movement of Freedom and Democracy (SPD), and possibly the liberal Pirates. Never before have we had a right-wing party as a political cooperation prospect, the party of a billionaire who is masking his business interests with populism. And that is a huge dilemma for us.

Another factor is a certain infection of traditional left voters and some KSČM members by the right-wing extremism. The voters are increasingly less interested in past wars and the conflicts that took place in the 1950s or the events of 1968. They seem to no longer care what the events of 1989 had been supposed to bring. They have already had the possibility to experience the results of change and find out that the reality is rather different from their expectations, thus losing their illusions. The change they are currently calling for is not so obvious. They have no one to associate it with, and while associating it with populists, they also absorb their way of expression where an enemy is depicted as a representative of a foreign nation, foreign culture and foreign beliefs, where an intellectual is regarded as a dangerous person. This leads to a certain anti-intellectual attitude. This is also shared by a part of KSČM’s support base (in contrast with Die Linke’s stance towards the AfD), which leads to the fact that some of our members and a large share of our voters have a strong sympathy for the SPD.

Our burden is our pre-November (i.e., the events of November 1989) history. Although KSČM officially distances itself from the deeds of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), in a period of real socialism, this position is not always regarded as trustworthy by ordinary voters. This is also due to the fact that we have a number of older members in our ranks, some of whom have not embraced this distancing wholeheartedly, but rather as a tactical attitude – and this is evident from their way of communicating with their surroundings.

Regarding the activities of our party (KSČM), i.e., subjective causes that have led to our election result, we can say that our programme is quite sophisticated and fulfils an integrating role. The problem is related to communicating it to people and being able to respond to situations and events that are not covered by the programme. And there are some contradictions, both in relation to the past and in the attitude to the extreme right-wing scene. This is evident in relation to topics like migration or attitudes towards the EU. For example, there was a stance for tough measures against migration, while at the same time, the number of migrants from the Middle East and Africa is absolutely minimal in our country. The majority of migrants, including illegal ones, is made up mainly of Ukrainians, but this interests almost no one and creates no topic for debate.

Our party has a somewhat outdated outlook in terms of its attitude towards its own past. Simultaneously, it acts in a rather contradictory, perhaps conservative, manner with regard to the abovementioned topics. Hence, by doing so, we are losing on the one hand a certain group of voters and, on the other hand, we are discouraging another group. How to deal with these themes is an open issue.

The party's problem is not its programme, but rather its image. The average age of our membership base is nearing 80. This elderliness, quite often highlighted by the mass media, confirms the public's belief that we are a party of the past, especially when we sometimes use the language of the past. This cannot impress the public. We have always been strong because we were able to balance multiple opinion streams within the party. We were a party open to different ways of thinking and this has weakened us over the past two or three years. When we embraced the use of new communicational resources, i.e., social networks in the pre-election period, but instead of promoting our programme goals and discussing them with the public, we often used them to quarrel with one another, we did not impress the voters at all.

Debates within the left-wing intellectual environment have not impacted the opinions of mass voters. However, if the new must emerge against the old, then we cannot avoid these kinds of debates and put aside leftist intellectuals. When these intellectuals slide into the marginal agenda, they do not have enough energy left to elaborate priorities that are of interest to the public. They should not continue

to communicate this in ways that would be more appropriate to fascist-type forms, but on the contrary, they must grasp and explain them from left-wing positions and using left-wing language. Here we have a major handicap and a gap because we have not been successful in these matters yet.

The Czech left will certainly need some time in order to revive itself, to master the generational change and give the public a signal that it is catching a second breath.

We consider it important to exchange experiences with our (German) partners, in order to be in a position to help and understand one another. Nowadays, this will become really important.

This also applies to European issues, particularly with regard to Eastern Europe. It is necessary to build a counterforce to both neoliberals and national conservative forces: from the change in European decision-making to a different eurozone architecture. Otherwise, we risk facing the scenario of the Polish left with a complete departure from the political scene. All this not forgetting the spur of European integration, one of the most important projects of the New Age. There will be no immediate miracle after these elections. Hence, the planning of further steps in this strategic context is essential.

What Is Next After the Czech Parliamentary Elections?

Jiří Málek

Although the results of the Czech parliamentary elections could not leave anyone who considers themselves to be a leftist calm, we have no choice but to look ahead to the future. In order to do that, however, we need to realise the real cause of the last election results¹.

Taking into consideration the limited scope of this paper, it will be rather impossible to dig into the deeper layers of problems. Hence, we will try to highlight and (perhaps) remind of the most essential aspects. I will deliberately not review the position of the so-called moderate left: Czech Social Democracy (ČSSD). This is an extremely complex issue whose analysis requires a deep internal knowledge of processes and relationships within the party.

A separate analysis would require a proper definition of the left. The “stream” of modern wisdom, Wikipedia, states: “the term ‘left’ has been used to describe groups supporting the change of traditional social order with the aim of reaching the equality in redistribution of wealth and privileges.” But is this really a correct definition? “While classical left was vulgarly Marxist by limiting its perception of the word to the set of social relations and productive factors, the new left is rather vulgarly Hegelian while it focuses its attention on what is happening in the heads of individuals ...”, Czech philosopher Martin Vrba writes². Today, it is perhaps necessary to approach the concept of leftism in the “traditional” sense of the term without ignoring, however, the “new” perception that reflects the gradual evolution of social realities.

It has been said many times that the left’s so-called “Czech problem” is not primarily a Czech-specific course of action. It is rather a Czech reflection of a European trend, slightly modified by local characteristics and relationships. We cannot claim, however, that all its local root causes are coherent with European ones (including the problems of

the European left), although their consequences (election results) are rather similar. This problem shall be regarded both in its historical and material dynamics (we, Marxists, can use the term in a dialectical way). The facts show that the electorate of both Czech Communists and Social Democrats consists primarily of two types of voters. The first group is made up of so-called voters of conviction. The other is formed by voters who use their vote to express their disagreement with various aspects of social or economic life, and protest against the shortcomings, mistakes or injustices of the current order of matters (subjectively perceived as such by these voters). These are so-called protest voters. We also ought to be careful in terms of using the notion of an “anti-establishment party”. Although, across the media, we often read that the ANO movement (the winner of the Czech elections with leader Andrej Babiš) is an anti-establishment party, we shall realise that this really is not the case! As politically anti-systemic parties, we can only consider the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM or CPBM), and, to a certain extent, Tomio Okamura’s Movement for Freedom and Direct Democracy of (SPD) – a right-wing movement with strong nationalist and sometimes xenophobic ideology. These are the parties that are characterised by real fundamental objections to the existing political order (neoliberal capitalism) and have its substantial change as their strategic goals.

The last elections also reflected the dynamics of voters’ political attitudes. In the long run, the self-identification of people on the left or right spectrum of a political scale tends to decline – as sociological research shows.³ The radical left share stands at 7.5%; the next 11.2% identify themselves as moderate left; and a further 8.2% as centre-left.

The right-wing parties and movements of different intensities are supported by 35.4% of the population, with 20.0% claiming to belong to the centre-right. 27.4% rate them-

1 For the results see Jiří Málek, “A Black Autumn for the Czech Left”, 13 Nov 2017

2 Martin Vrba: *Jsou piráti novou levicí?*, web version of A2 (journal) – A2larm, <https://a2larm.cz/2017/10/jsou-pirati-novou-levici/>, 27.10.2017

3 Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění – Public opinion research centre: Self-Classification on the Left-Right Scale of Political Orientation, June 2017, report Nr. po170811, published 11.8.2017

selves as “centrist”, while 10.3% feel that they have no affiliation whatsoever.

In terms of time analysis, one can see a long-term and continuous decline in left-wing preferences (from about 40% in the years 2012-2013 to the current level of about 27%). The latest electoral results of the left-wing parties essentially correspond to this stratification, taking into consideration the fact that several traditional leftist voters, for various reasons, gave their votes to populist political subjects – the ANO movement or SPD – this time around.

Long-term monitoring also indicates that the share of left-wing support has fallen since the beginning of the decade. Although the support of the right-wing side of the political spectrum has not changed for the last three years, the growth of the “centre” is evident. Therefore, the traditional right-wing parties did not see any significant increase in their electoral scores, while a significant change took place in the so-called “centre”. Here, on the basis of the long-term trend analysis, it was clear that part of the population was turning away from the left-wing concept, inching towards a “better offer”. Many voters were attracted by new political subjects who reported to the “centre” with different levels of intensity (it is quite probable that these subjects were aware of this trend and hence took advantage of it by presenting themselves as centre). The detailed analysis (approaches, views on key issues and the priority orientation of some social groups), however, shows that this is, in reality, a rather “right centre”.

Let us try to look at the following areas in the last elections as a step to fight further:

- Lists of candidates;
- Electoral programmes;
- Events that took place during the final week – a decision-making period for an estimated 42% of voters (almost twice as many as during previous elections).

The candidate lists are of very significant importance, far more so than programming documents. In the time of the media-saturated world, this is even truer. The underestimation of how the electoral party will present its electoral intentions and who will be its “faces” was often a reason for many subsequent, unpleasant surprises, especially for left-wing parties.

Here the previously reliable approach of the left let it down. While creating the lists of candidates (both for KSČM and ČSSD candidates), these parties primarily relied on their own membership base. KSČM candidate lists contained on average just 20% of party non-members (in one electoral region the candidate list contained exclusively party members. Members of an allied left-wing party – the Party of Democratic Socialism (SDS) – were present only on the Prague candidate list). However, it is also necessary to ask left-wing groups operating in civic society, and leftist non-partisan parties and movements why many of them selected a “splendid isolation” (including some SDS members), and did not even try to negotiate the creation of wider left-wing candidate lists and blocks. Instead, these individuals and groups mainly focused on criticising the traditional left-wing parties, acting like unengaged observers.

If I want to light a fire I need to have a box of matches. Someone who wants to succeed in politics needs to participate in elections. The non-communist left (based on the division of the Czech left into the Communist, non-communist and a third “new” group that does not belong to the previous two) made no significant attempt to join the election drive either in terms of the programmes or in terms of participation on the electoral lists. No one from their ranks has complained, for example, about not being consulted and not being asked for their endorsements or nomination for the Communist election candidate lists. Today it turns out that the “passing over” of these various leftist clusters and opinion streams has not benefitted the Czech left.

The same is true for a “hyper” radical left wing (revolutionary zealots or orthodox interpreters of Marx, Engels, Lenin and sometimes Stalin). Although often very active in their declarations, publications and discourses at internal assemblies, they were rather lacklustre in terms of influencing voters in their places of residence, as can be seen from a detailed analysis of district election results. The activities of writing letters and leadership memoranda can be managed pretty much by any literate person, while delivering a substantial outcome is something rather different. To summarise, it can be said that in creating the electoral lists of radical left-wing candidates (which were actually only KSČM candidates), the aspect of nominating personalities with a wider civic outreach was underestimated. It does not really matter who reached the candidates’ list. What matters is that no serious discussions about forming them

took place, nor were there any attempts to gain personalities with wider civic appeal.

I wonder how the radical left-wing programme is shaping up, or who is or was trying to influence it by bringing their ideas. The KSČM's programme base was the party's long-term programme. Its current election programme can be rated as reasonable, realistic and achievable (at least in many of its points). Still, programmes do not win elections by themselves. But, there was also an unused opportunity to address a broader (leftist) spectrum of voters. From the moment when it was clear that only KSČM had brought a candidate list, there were no major critical discussions about a broad left-wing programme. By this, I mean a discussion between left-wing parties, either within the party or between it and other non-parliamentary left-wing structures and movements, perhaps with left-wing intellectuals. Many of these groups who, on the basis of their knowledge and opinions, needed at least to try to "sell" their ideas within the framework of a common left-wing concept preferred to embrace a posture of "proud silence". (This can be described as an attitude resembling: "I do not like it, so I will definitely not vote for it or contribute to a possible improvement".)

I'm not saying that those from the party structure who formulated the programming of documents together just stood for some external inputs, but both sides have been comfortable with the absence of confrontation. It is probably good to add one more note. The KSČM electoral programme is not the same as KSČM's party programme, which contains a strategic objective to achieve socialism. Going with this long-term objective to elections will currently mean committing political suicide. On the contrary, the aim is to get a broader left-wing support with very diverse ideas about the future. Why? Let us make a hypothetical calculation: The KSČM's election result was 7.76%. If we were to theoretically deduct all the potential votes of members of the KSČM (approximately 40,000 members), then the result would be at least 6.97%. Thus, the voices of those who are not closely connected with KSČM have a decisive weight. An awareness of what the electoral majority's attitude is and what its preferences and dislikes are is crucial. Sociological discovery of the comparison between "realism" and the present is also interesting. Less than 20% of citizens said that the pre-1989 quality of life was better than it is now; 38% preferred the current situation; and a

third of citizens said it was "50:50". But watch out! The appreciation of pre-1989 quality of life does not automatically mean the acceptance of socialist concept and, on the contrary, the assessment of a better present does not automatically mean this concept's rejection. Furthermore, we are not talking about repeating the socialism of the mid-20th century, but rather about creating the socialism of the future in terms of its perception in the 21st century framework.

Czech elections have resulted in an interesting and unusual situation. The final week before the election was a decisive one for their outcome. Why did so many voters make their choice so close to the election? I wish I knew. But naming PR technologies as one of the major root causes is probably not fundamentally right. There are many reasons why the actual reality is not that simple. Let us compare the PR expenses of the KSČM and ČSSD. The difference is in tens of millions of crowns. The first handled its promotional campaign through its own modest resources, while the latter outsourced it to a reputable top PR company. Their election results were, however, almost identical. I tried to study how some activities of KSČM officials, which were very negatively "presented" by the media, had an impact on changes of electoral preferences, since this anti-campaign is commonly regarded as an argument for many people on both sides. It looks as though they did not manifest themselves too significantly, staying within the rate of statistical error. Perhaps, in that final pre-election week, a certain last drop overturned the bucket. But what kind of a drop it was, we can only guess. And this is true for all sides.

Let me make a few comments regarding the post-election situation and some new players on the political scene. Who can be considered as the current "left"? I would like to cite St. Matthew: "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them". The Pirate Party is the one that is most talked about. I personally think that the track record of their German name-sake would be useful for our predictions. I do not have any substantial leftist optimism towards this party. It is amusing to hear the words of consent from the "Marseille Forum" (Nov 2017), portraying the gain of parliamentary representation by Czech Pirates as a success for the left. For me, so far, this is an unclear "transparent" party. I am aware that at least some of its members are signing up for DiEM25. It is also true that neither the Pirates' programme nor that of DiEM25 contained a single mention of solidar-

ity. Furthermore, Czech Pirates are not evidently eager to fight against exploitation, while this fight was mentioned just once in the DiEM25 Manifesto. I would say that, at best, the Pirates stand for certain improvements on capitalism, but they show no sign of demanding fundamental changes in the current social order or in the liberal capitalism model. Various characteristics of this group are available: “They hide their right (left) faces and are neo-Marxists” or “petty bourgeois”; “They offer a universally requested commodity – an anti-system strive”. The aura of the anti-system party (although not a pure one – they are certainly not anti-capitalist) is definitely present and has attracted mainly young voters (an absolute number of younger voters has grown when compared with the previous elections).

It is still unclear to me how the Pirates are perceived by the electorate and whether this perception is common for both Prague and other regions. Surely there was a snowball effect. Finally, the Pirates defined themselves as a liberal party at their subsequent congress in January 2018 (not a single word about leftism). It will be interesting to see how they will behave in the campaign for the European Parliament elections. There is some discussion within the party. They are aware of some controversy and therefore deliberately avoided public debates before the elections, including the issue of closer ties with DiEM25 and a common European candidate list. Some of their representatives believe that this is a dangerous factor that could lead to the collapse of their entire political platform. There was also a declared opinion of a desire to consult the entire process with the German Pirates.

The SPD (Freedom and Direct Democracy) movement became one of the key election players that absorbed a large section of the former left-wing (KSČM) and social democrat voters. This influx of “protest voices” reflects opinion shifts in the broad civic strata. This movement is often referred to as xenophobic, anti-immigration, nationalistic, etc., while its other programme points, such as an emphasis on direct democracy and a relatively significant social programme, are usually ignored. It is a genuinely anti-systemic cluster that states a request to change the current “regime”. All this (a kind of political mix that responds to current critical moods) has become attractive to many left-wing citizens, including those with a relatively strong focus on social issues. This movement is able to sell a “new and well-packaged political commodity”. Besides ANO, it was a qualita-

tively new phenomenon in the election market (although the movement had succeeded in past elections with a much lower result). But, unfortunately, this time it gained votes mainly at the expense of the left.

By no means shall we skip on our review of the election winner: the movement named ANO. It has been perceived as one man’s project, carried out by Andrej Babiš, a typical oligarch whose fortune finds its roots in the privatisation of the “socialism” that took place in the 1990s, and who decided to directly influence politics. Although this characteristic is correct in principle, it is rather far from being complete and does not capture all of its aspects. In general, this is not a completely new phenomenon; previously there have been other “new” political players (backed by relatively wealthy entrepreneurs) who have succeeded in at least one election period. ANO, nevertheless, has not disappeared from the political scene in its second term but has struck a convincing win (30% of votes), thus confirming that it is not a “single-use party”. It should also be mentioned that ANO’s popularity has been growing steadily on a regional level, where this movement took first or second place in all regions during the 2016 regional elections.

Ever since 1989, powerful business circles and the associated political entities have been shaping the Czech political climate, including election results and the composition of elected bodies. However, they have always tried to keep this process hidden from the public by using political parties and their representatives as a veil – with the staunch support of mainstream media. Now a new player has joined the game – one who does not seem willing to succumb to the existing rules. He has associated himself with his own political movement and strives for maximum personal involvement in Czech politics (in the past, he was Finance Minister for a long time). He clearly declares his personal desire to play a significant political role. He also strives to bring a patriotic touch to the political sphere (throughout his entrepreneurship, A. Babiš never hid his wealth in one of the so-called tax havens but always paid taxes in the Czech Republic). He has declared his intention to defend national interests (including those of the Czech national bourgeoisie) against “Brussels”, perhaps even to the detriment of the interests of multinational economic corporations.

The ANO movement is, on the other hand, clearly pro-Western, and certainly strives to avoid a substantial correction

of capitalism and a change in the country's international orientation. It keeps insisting primarily on the need to curb tax evasion and outflows of profits abroad, as well as to force those who, for decades, have not been doing much for the country but consuming its benefits to bear a larger share of public expenses. This sounds rather attractive for many people, including those whose economic interest is concentrated on their daily survival. Some of these people used to be among voters of the Social Democratic Party and KSČM. A notable role was played by the personalities at the head of the ANO, and SPD, movements. As I have already said, the Czech left has generally underestimated the role of personalities in the electoral struggle.

Our time does not tolerate the analogy and it is pointless to prepare for past battles. Czech society is facing the municipal elections in autumn 2018. We have a situation where (as in Germany) there are some areas or electoral districts in which we have neither radical left-wing candidates nor a single vote for the left in the last elections. We must not ignore such phenomena as a large scattering of votes cast within the same region. For example, in the randomly selected town of Břeclav, the election results of KSČM candidates in several electoral districts of a relatively homogeneous city ranged from 4% to 20%. The dispersion range of 6-14% observed in the city of Chomutov is similar. We need to know why this happened; what role the activities of the party and the radical left played there; what influence the social structure had on the local societies; how effective a "personal agitation" and communication with citizens was, etc. This year, there will be elections for a third of Senate chairs. These elections are based on the pure majority system. This gives us the unique opportunity of finding a way to build a broad left-wing coalition. There is nothing to lose here because the representation of the radical left in the Senate has been scarce throughout its existence (on average one, exceptionally two senators). However, all left-wing partners must agree and embrace this policy, taking into consideration the fact that isolated attempts in the past (nomination of SDS leaders on the KSČM candidate list) brought no spectacular results.

One of the key factors is a need for cooperation between politically close entities, such as the Czech and German left. From our side, we are striving to overcome an existing language barrier by providing Czech readers with translated analyses and concepts – e.g., those published by the Rosa

Luxemburg Foundation and by transform! europe. This is a rather important factor throughout Central and Eastern Europe. This will also have importance in terms of the forthcoming European elections, because common activities require much better mutual understanding and mutual discussion. We shall by no means overlook the European dimension of the situation of the Czech left. This is primarily our internal task, which nevertheless shall be handled in cooperation with our foreign partners. Today, there are a number of European leftist initiatives, but these are rather Western European initiatives. However, the "eastern" part of Europe (Central, Eastern and Southern Europe within the EU) has 104.7 million inhabitants out of a total of 507.4 million EU citizens, and the real influence of the left here is weak, sometimes even scarce. It is also necessary to bear in mind the role of Central Europe, with all its complexities and historical consequences, as well as with the opportunities that it can bring to the entire continent. The way the European Left can participate there must be considered. It is also a matter of contemporary idols and left-wing visions across Europe that should link its individual regions, rather than leading them – on the contrary – to isolationism and alienation. All this is reflected in the tactics and strategy for the forthcoming 2019 European elections. They shall be our top priority.

A Generation Not Spoiled by Communism?

Apolena Rychlíková

I would like to focus on the generation of the so-called “millennials” (18-34 years of age) and to reflect on which parties these young people vote for, what the reason for their choice may be and what their perceptions of the left are. For almost 30 years, I – born in 1989 – kept hearing that Czech society has been waiting for a generation that has not been spoiled by communism. I tend to think that these elections have rather brutally shown that instead of a generation not burdened by the “spoils” of communism, we have received a generation burdened with individualism and managerialism.

This statement can be supported by the results of the last elections and the voting preferences of young people. While ČSSD (Social Democrats) and KSČM (Communists) received just 4% and 1% of the “millennial” votes respectively, the Czech Pirates gained 22% of them on their anti-establishment rhetoric – a really great result. A result of 18% of the vote for the Civic Democratic Party (ODS, a traditional right-wing party) was surprisingly high; the ANO movement (the winner of the elections with leader Andrej Babiš) gained 14% in this group. Overall, the right-wing parties fared much better than the left with this age strata. Nowadays, this young generation of “millennials” is beginning to participate in shaping politics and public space. That is why it is important to address this issue from the left-wing point of view and look for the society-wide reasons of left-wing unattractiveness.

In the post-1989 era, the society-wide general perception was characterised by an emphasis on economic freedom. Hence, the antagonistic concept of the left embodied a regress, while the right represented progress. This was also probably partly due to the fact that we lacked a sort of liberal leftist party, one that would accentuate some type of liberalism while preserving some kind of left-wing values, such as certain reciprocity, at the same time. The issue of economic transformation was never discussed in terms of a class structure of the society. A previously homogenous socialist society very quickly turned into a class one, where property ownership began to be regarded as a value that defined an owner as being more valuable compared with a non-owner. At the same time, strong individualism started to take

root. This very emphasis on economic freedom, which fully neglected the legacy of the pre-1989 period, led to the forgoing of principles such as solidarity or equality (the latter, being one of the cornerstones of a democratic society, is not present either in our politics or in our public space).

The rooting of these principles was also fuelled by the privatised media, which staunchly promoted and represented the right-wing ethos (just look at the PR successes of Václav Klaus in the 1990s or the promotion of voucher privatisation for former socialist state property). The generation burdened by managerialism, a term understood as the ability of a man to lead a company and make money, is reflected in a perception that it is precisely this ability that defines the value of a person and thus qualifies him/her to be able to function everywhere, state sphere included. This way of thinking from the '90s has returned today, embodied in the character of Andrej Babiš – a man regarded by the younger generation as a capable manager, the head of a successful company able to provide the impression of an ability to perform successfully in politics (as a prime minister). This person also embodies the second myth of “non-political politics” which has emerged from Václav Havel’s activities.

This myth is, however, presented by Andrej Babiš and his ANO movement in a rather different way. They indoctrinate the point that politics is no longer a concept of a right/left duel of ideas and ideologies, but rather a modern tool for applying specific actions by specific people. Hence, it arrives at the technocratisation of society. Babiš has succeeded in removing ideology from the public space and he is trying to create an atmosphere in which everything is individualised. Therefore, the blame for problems that will occur will be supposed to be laid on specific people rather than on relevant policies. This is also evident in Babiš’ attitude to the policy of building political coalitions. He openly states that the concept of coalition and cooperation with other parties is just an ideological brake that hinders the effectiveness and performance of politics as an effective corporate governance tool of public space.

The ODS received the second largest number of youth voices (18%). I personally know two young men working in the

media sphere who have enthusiastically broadcast the fact that they “dropped it” for the ODS, since it is a party that has already cleansed itself from its past (when it was associated with a large number of corruption affairs and cases of lobbying in favour of the economic interests of various groups). To some extent, this perception is linked to the activities of the party’s new chairman Petr Fiala, who has, in a certain way, covered over the party’s past when it carried out much more aggressive right-wing politics (during the tenure of Prime Minister Topolánek) coupled with an aggressive rightist rhetoric. These young people do not regard a new, emerging generation of this party of orthodox activists (such as Václav Klaus Jr.) as a threat to society, considering them incapable thus far of building an ODS majority. A certain party’s attractiveness also comes from an appeal to individualism and the persistent anti-communist drive (for example, the first deputy chairman of ODS keeps mixing the notions of socialism and communism, and tries to resurrect the rhetoric of anti-communism widely used in the recent past).

Pirates who, like Tomio Okamura’s Movement of Freedom and Democracy (SPD), bet on the very aggressive anti-establishment campaign, cleverly “drove” into the post-ideological concept of politics (just as ANO did). But it is the only party that has emerged from the grassroots strategy of a movement built the bottom-up way, with this concept ongoing. They do radiate an air of a certain inner vitality that is quite pleasant to observers. They have taken on a role of permanent opposition: some sort of society watchdog. At the same time, the party is democratic to the degree that it brings together various ideological streams (DiEM25 members, libertarians), which is not so evident to an outsider. This fact is not particularly accentuated in their outcomes, in what they say or what they offer. There is some kind of transparency. It has no system solution; it looks as though they are leaving it to the people outside to decide by themselves what is good and what is not on the basis of transparency. But that will certainly hit a number of obstacles. It is very important that Pirates are bringing and accentuating society’s digital technology dimension. This is one party (apart from the Greens) that is trying to cope with the future anticipated by technological revolution (Industry 4.0).

This is something that the Czech left does not do at all. The former left was a social force that was able to create visions

in the past that a person could identify with and think “we share this planet, we share the society and we are fighting for a better world”. Today’s left cannot reach out to young voters; it does not offer an anti-systemic policy or an anti-establishment drive that might contextualise young people’s life situations in terms of their socio-economic realities. Topics such as affordable housing, employment, health or education are permanently neglected. At the same time, the left does not represent any ecological movement. It does not evaluate the possible consequences of climate change from a class perspective. Considered from the point of view of social justice, climate change is going to primarily affect people who are far less involved in the pollution of the planet than corporations, but are estimated to bear the heaviest consequences of it, for example, by having no place to live or move to. So far, the left is not capable of offering a class perspective of climate change.

At the same time there is no clear emphasis on the need to reduce inequalities, as if the leftist debate on equality, with an economic equality being an integral part of it (as the principle basis of leftism as such), has disappeared. We are talking about the circumstances in which young people are entering the real world. Research shows that more and more inequalities are beginning to accumulate in Czech society for certain groups of people who do not have access to decent work, affordable housing and adequate education. It finds a base in the class origin of people who have been born into families that are already somehow discriminated against. There is up to a 90% assumption that their children will not get out of this situation and will remain stuck in their original group. On the other hand, these people are the most common victims of disinformation and hoaxes, and as a result, many of them tend to give their support and their votes to parties such as the SPD. These do not offer them any improvement in the hands they have been dealt, but at least they promise to worsen the situation of others blamed for the troubles. This is a negative perception of the future, against which it is necessary to create an alternative based on a positive but sharply determined policy. And these are not even the declassed people, in whom the left has lost interest and does not stand for any longer. Let us just consider the laws made against so-called “socially unadaptable” people (for example, mandatory public work for the chronically unemployed), where the left has not played any positive role in forming them. We have abandoned these people and they

have abandoned us. They neither go to the polls nor participate in politics. They are aware of being treated as non-citizens and they do not even claim their citizens' rights.

The Czech left is very conservative, whether we are talking about KSČM or ČSSD. The refugee crisis has displayed this quite clearly. Solidarity as such is no longer a cornerstone of our left's ideology; there is no system solution to issues like unemployment. We no longer care about what conditions and what wages people will work for, nor about the length of working hours in relation to economic growth. While somewhat-privileged classes of corporate employees enjoy the reduced working hours and improved possibilities for rest and recovery, the declassed groups of manual labourers continue to toil long hours in poor working conditions with their non-existent rights' protection. We need to start a debate about, for example, a radical shortening of working hours to, say, six hours per day, as well as about wage increases.

This has to be tied up with a debate about redistribution of wealth throughout society. Leftists have often adopted a negative rhetoric to ostracise certain groups of people, blaming them for poor integration into society or for remaining unemployed. They do not deal, however, with the related circumstances of the availability and decency of employment in the area. There is no appeal to the future, no vision or consistent opposition to the current economic order. However, there is an evident leaning (especially within the KSČM) towards a nationalist and conservative policy, which cannot be attractive to young people in this case. In the end, they tend to prefer to vote for the SPD which is more straightforward, has a leader with whom they can identify and offers a feeling of an effective destruction. We are in a situation where left-wing issues are being overwhelmed by the far right, and the left is losing because it seeks to cope with the extreme right instead of creating a fundamental opposition policy.

The idea of cooperation with the non-parliamentary left, which is creating a completely different kind of leftist politics in public space, has no backing from the parliamentary left-wing parties. It is quite different compared with the fascist parties and groupings (e.g., anti-Islamist), who have achieved a possibility to be heard by society. Although failing to gain an electoral support, they have managed to shape current public debate in a very anti-emancipatory

manner. This brownish public is currently present in parliamentary politics as well. Today, these groups are winning with their anti-emancipatory politics and rhetoric. The Czech left, instead of cooperating with non-parliamentary, radical left-wing subjects, seems rather more inclined to listen to the extreme right-wing subjects and accept their language.