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# The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia: A Post-Communist Socialist or a Neo-Communist Party?

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the evolution of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (CPBM) with special attention given to its identity and programmatic and policy positions in the 1990s. It argues that the CPBM represents a special type of a post-communist "radical socialist" party with neo-communist leanings. It is neither a "social-democracized" ex-communist party, nor an ultra-orthodox communist or genuine neo-communist party.*

The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (CPBM) is an interesting and, in some respects, unique subject of study in the context of post-communist successor parties in Central and Eastern Europe. Common wisdom has it that the CPBM embodies an unreformed, "fossilized" central European communist party operating under an unchanged name and, in the respective context of Czech political arrangements, a case of an anti-system or even "extremist" political force affected by an explicit "convention on exclusion" (*conventio ad excludendum*). However, this oversimplified and (potentially) misleading definition fails to reflect the CPBM's specific inner dynamism and context of development which also have to be addressed if we want to draw a well-founded and theoretically informed characteristic of the party. This article is a contribution to the study of the CPBM as a possible materialization of a neo-communist and/or post-communist "radical socialist" party. The main focus of the article is on the ideological and programmatic aspects of CPBM, and on its respective policy/programmatic positions.

## **The Genesis of the CPBM and its Approach Towards the Legacy of the CPC**

To avoid misunderstanding, we should start by clarifying the issue of the relationship between the CPBM and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC). The CPBM was formed first as a territorial organizational unit of the CPC in March 1990 to act as the Czech counterpart to the Communist Party of Slovakia (CPS) within the federalized CPC. The CPBM was instituted as an independent political party at its 1<sup>st</sup> congress in late September-early October 1990. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (operating since the Fall of 1990 under a slightly modified name the "Communist Party of Czecho-Slovakia" abbreviated to CPCS) was first transformed into a federation of two parties in November 1990 and proved to be unworkable due to discord between its Czech and Slovak components. The CPCS eventually terminated its activities in April 1992. The above facts show that the evaluation of the relationship between the CPBM and the CPC requires a more sophisticated approach than usual. The CPBM was not originally formed as a successor party to the CPC in the Czech Republic. It only became the successor to the CPC in 1992 as a consequence of the disintegration of the CPCS. In terms of organization, the CPBM formed part of the CPC (CPCS). The question therefore is whether the CPBM can be considered a genuinely new party in all respects. The only argument to support such an interpretation is the numbering of its congresses. On the other hand, its continuity to the CPC in terms of organization and personnel is quite apparent. The CPBM, as a natural successor to the CPC, took over the latter's legacy but applied a discriminating approach towards the different components of this legacy. This is an extremely important point in understanding the identity of the CPBM, and as such requires a deeper analysis. First, however, a brief outline of the history of the CPC is necessary.

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia—Section of the Communist International (CPC) was founded at a congress held May 14-16, 1921. In the context of then-party arrangement in Czechoslovakia, the CPC represented an anti-system multinational (multi-nationality) party without coalition potential, characterized by markedly anti-regime attitudes and behaviour (except for the early 1920s and the period from 1936 to 1938, including a number of exceptions in the sphere of local policy). Even though the CPC was officially dissolved in December 1938, in the period of the "Second Republic", its exile- and domestic- clandestine structures went on working. In a radically changed international and domestic political situation extremely favorable for the party immediately after the end of World War II, the CPC acted as a pragmatic party participating in the government. This was the period of an interim regime which gradually moved toward political conflict and culminated in the events of February 1948 and subsequent communist dictatorship. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was transformed into a state-carrying

party in a totalitarian system built after the Soviet Stalinist example. The most remarkable event, which was of critical importance for the evolution of CPC as a state-carrying party, was the attempt at a radical reform and democratization of the socialist totalitarian system in the period from 1968 to 1969, known as the "Prague Spring". After this attempt at reform was throttled by the military intervention of the USSR and its allies a period of "normalization" began. Apart from a massive purge within the party which affected almost half a million of its members (Měchýř, 2000: pp. 325), this meant a total suppression of reformist efforts and a triumph of fossilized dogmas. "Normalization" together with a radical negation of the party's reformist past deprived the CPC of the capacity to reform and to later absorb Perestroika. After 1987, the approach of CPC leaders towards Perestroika was rather formal and lukewarm. Every serious attempt to reform the party would have imposed the need to at least indirectly rehabilitate the Prague Spring and to delegitimize the CPC's leadership. The CPC thus gained an image of an extremely orthodox, inert and inadaptible communist party. Such was the condition of the CPC at the moment of the outburst of the Velvet Revolution in November 1989 which caused a rapid collapse of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. The CPC leadership abandoned attempts to resolve the crisis within the existing political framework of a communist system and limited itself to a defensive adaptation to the new situation of multiparty democracy.

The process of adaptation of the CPC to the new situation started at its extraordinary congress in Prague in 1990. The congress approved a declaration apologizing to all citizens for the "mistakes" made and injustices done by the party in the past. The party admitted that it had lost its leading position as the state-carrying party and expressed its determination to adapt to the rules and conditions of the incipient pluralist democracy in Czechoslovakia (Fiala and Holzer and Mareš and Pšejka, 1999: pp. 97–98). In the period following November 1989, the difficult position of the CPC went on deteriorating. The party recorded a dramatic drop in the number of members, and many of those who remained were demoralized and paralyzed. Even more significant was the progressive political isolation of the party. Efforts to deprive the communist party of its legitimacy only came after the revolution, and were inspired by the strategic calculations of new political actors and by the changing structure of political opportunities. Initially, the opinion that prevailed in the new anti-communist and/or non-communist establishment was that the CPC would be renewed and integrated in the formative pluralist political system as any other political party. This was also the standpoint of the greater part of the public. According to an opinion poll taken in April and May 1990, 72% of citizens shared this view (IVVM, 1990). This standpoint reflected the initial acceptance of the CPC as a partner in the "round table" dialogue during and after the revolution. In the course of time, however, the trend towards a permanent exclusion of the CPC from the circle of "democratic parties" and towards its labeling as

an extremist force which should not be collaborated or negotiated with prevailed. The "convention ad excludendum" thus came to materialize.

In the new situation, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (the Communist Party of Czecho–Slovakia) and The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia relied on purely defensive strategies. Sacrificing or at least dissociating itself from a substantial part of the party's history formed part of this strategy. However, the degree of sacrifice required provoked severe conflicts within the party and varied in the course of time, a development quite symptomatic of the party's later history. During the last phase of CPC's (CPCS) existence and in the first phase of the existence of CPBM, i.e. from 1990 to 1992/93, the officially declared relationship of the CPCM towards the legacy of the CPC was explicitly positive only in two brief phases of the party's history, the early phase of the formation of CPC associated with the name of the leftist social democrat Bohumír Šmeral, and the period of the Prague Spring (Documents of the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of CPBM). Later the overall attitude of the CPCM towards the legacy of the CPC began to change. A radical cut from the communist past was no longer considered suitable or possible. The appreciation of the Šmeral period remained, while the assessment of the Prague spring became somewhat ambivalent. In the second half of the 1990s, explicit or implicit positive elements of the party's past in almost all the periods of the history of CPC and the communist regime were "discovered", with the possible exception of the period of political lawsuits and witch–hunting of the 1950s. A specific expression of this process was the thesis of the 5<sup>th</sup> party congress held in 1999, according to which the "pre–November 1989" form of socialism exceeded, in many respects – as seen from the point of view of the everyday needs of common citizens – the restoration of capitalism in the Czech Republic (CPBM, 2000a).

However, the changing assessment of the CPC's past and the degree of absorption and legitimacy of communist traditions was just one of the many aspects of the evolution of the image and self–presentation/self–identification of the CPBM. Two of the most prominent examples of this evolution were the question of the political program – and hence party identity – of the CPBM and the question of the party name itself.

### **The Battle for the Party's name and Identity**

The battle for the party's name and identity between 1990 and 1992/1993 was a symbolic expression of a two– or three–sided conflict between the innovating, conservative, and pragmatic groups within the CPBM. In the first phase of the adaptation of the CPC to the new situation, especially in the pre–electoral period of spring 1990, the CPBM made an effort to convince the electorate of its definitive break with its pre–November past. However, it was not clear what this meant. The

main inner cleavage was the issue of the party's identity and name. The innovating and most of the pragmatic groups within the party considered changing the name to be both necessary and/or practical. Initially, the most active reforming group was the Democratic Communist Forum (in 1990), and later, from 1990 to 1991, the Democratic Left faction (Grzymala–Busse, 1998). The above factions, and later also other groups, called for a deeper reform of the party including a change of the name (the most often proposed variants being "The Party of Democratic Socialism", "The Party of the Democratic Left", "The Party of the Radical Left"). On the other hand, the conservative factions maintained that the transformation of the CPC was not a question of its name and that the name itself did not hinder the process of further changes. They drew upon conservative tendencies of the greater part of the party members whose defensive attitude was summed up in the oft-heard phrase that "we have nothing to be ashamed of". In a foreshadowing of later developments, however, reformist arguments about the definitive end of communism as a political project and thus the corresponding need to redeem the CPC through its transformation into a social democratic party were rejected (Fiala and Mareš, 1999: pp. 187–188).

The conflict between the conservative wing and the Democratic Left faction and its allies culminated in September 1991 in the decision to take a referendum within the party on changing the party's name (of 354,545 registered members, 291,783 members voted, of which 221,575, i.e. 75.94%, voted for the preservation of the name). The result was announced at the extraordinary congress of the party held on 1 February 1992 (Fiala and Holzer and Mareš and Pšeja, 1999: p. 113). Prior to the congress, the partisans of the Democratic Left faction along with other reformist leftist groups left the party and established a new tiny party called the Democratic Party of Labour. However, this did not put an end to internal conflicts over the party's name. The CPBM was looking for a way to present itself as a revived, new political force. An opportunity for this was the electoral (and post-electoral) alliance of the Left Bloc with the Democratic Left movement (not to be confused with the Democratic Left faction). The remaining groups with a reformist profile within the CPBM (including the Chairman of the Party, J. Svoboda) were of the opinion that the creation of an alliance could be a feasible way to transform the party, to "overcome the past" and to effectively "overshadow" its communist name (Fiala and Holzer and Mareš and Pšeja, 1999: 119, pp. 122–123; Fiala and Mareš, 1999). A new escalation of the conflict over the party's name in the first half of 1993 culminated in a total defeat of the reformist groups and in the disintegration of the Left Bloc alliance. Subsequently, the defeated reformist groups left the CPBM. In the same year (1993), an ultra-orthodox grouping - the faction "For Socialism" - operating within the CPBM was defeated, too, and its most prominent representatives were expelled from the party (this group became the core of the "Party of Czechoslovak Communists" transformed in 1999 into the "renewed" orthodox "Communist Party of Czechoslovakia"). These actions basically solved

the issue of a radical change of the name and, consequently, of the CPBM's identity.

The conflict concerning the name of the party was just the tip of the iceberg. There was a parallel, less conspicuous conflict going on, concerning the definition of the CPBM's programmatic identity.

## **Ideological and Programmatic Positions of the CPBM**

In the early period of the adaptation of the CPC to post-revolutionary conditions, the party's programmatic and ideological positions were rather confusing. At the extraordinary congress of the party in December 1989, an "Action program" was approved which proclaimed the transformation of the CPC into a modern leftist party whose goal was the creation of a society based on social justice, democracy and humanity (Fiala and Mareš, 1999: p. 184). The propositions contained in the electoral program of CPC in spring 1990 were of a similar nature. Of greater importance, though, was the 1<sup>st</sup> congress of CPBM in October 1990 in Olomouc. Apart from other issues, the congress approved the CPBM Program defining democratic socialism as the party's principal goal (Documents of the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of CPBM). This basic program of the party was valid until 1992. In hindsight, the above program represented the farthest the party has ever gone in the effort to transform itself into a democratic socialist party. It was no wonder then that the program was heavily criticised by orthodox communists. With this program, the Czech communists declared their identification with the methodological heritage of Marxist dialectics, rejecting the conception of Marxism as a closed system, and also declared their acceptance of ideological pluralism as well as their open attitude towards non-Marxist leftist movements. The party rejected dictatorship in any form, as well as the monopoly of power, rejecting the notion of a "proletarian dictatorship" as an ideological relic of the last century and inapplicable to an advanced civic society. The ideal of democratic socialism and the effort to create a society and a state based on the principles of social justice were declared the bases of the party's identity (Documents of the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of CPBM). The Programmatic Declaration of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (the federation of CPBM and the Communist Party of Slovakia-Party of Democratic Left) approved by the 18<sup>th</sup> congress of CPCS was conceived of in a similar way but proved ineffective due to the gradual decline of the activities and the eventual disintegration of the federation (Fiala and Holzer and Mareš and Pšeja, 1999: pp.153-154).

However, a new program of CPBM was proposed and approved at the 2<sup>nd</sup> congress of the party in December 1992 in Kladno (Documents of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of CPBM). The program continues valid till today as the party's basic program (known as the "Kladno Program"). This program is indicative of the party's char-

acter in that it clearly identifies with the ideals of socialism and thus has been accepted – albeit with diverse interpretations - by the different streams within the party. The program was subject to internal discussion before the party's 3<sup>rd</sup> congress in Prostějov and was approved at the end of the congress (Documents of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of CPBM). The anti-capitalist orientation of the program was quite apparent. The ideological propositions of the program referred to the legacy of Marx and Engels, leaving out, of course that of Lenin. Significant stress was given to the party's "deep national roots resulting from a centuries-long strife against social and national oppression and threats". The concept of "democratic socialism" was rejected in favor of a "modern socialist society" (democratic, self-governing, politically and economically pluralist, prosperous, based on social justice). The following basic principles were declared: living by one's own work, equality, human solidarity, social justice (Documents of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of CPBM).

The 4<sup>th</sup> congress of CPBM in December 1995 in Liberec gave stimulus to another shift in the party's program and in the interpretation of its ideological propositions. The congress approved the Political Declaration of the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress following up the Kladno program. The declaration laid stress on the proposition that the programmatic objectives of the party were *clearly anti-capitalist* and the party's methodology *was consistently Marxist* (The 4<sup>th</sup> Congress of CPBM). Apart from Marx and Engels, Lenin's contribution to Marxist theory was mentioned explicitly. A radical change of the social system towards socialism was confirmed as the basic objective of the party (a socialism which would learn from past experiences). Moreover, and unlike all the previous documents of a similar nature, the party's political declaration was quite explicit in speaking about communism as a natural outcome of socialism. According to the declaration, communist society was the CPBM's long-term objective because communism was said to embody the eternal desire of man for progress and social justice, and to guarantee a sustainable development of a civilization governed by humane ideals. In the same context, communism was interpreted as a social movement striving for the actual liberation of man, and as a set of values and a way of life corresponding to this objective (The 4<sup>th</sup> Congress of CPBM).

These ideas signaled a clear shift in the interpretation of the Kladno program. As a matter of fact, such an interpretation cannot be called but neo-communist. It was both a product of the previous victory of the conservative wing over the reforming communists within the party (and in this sense, a response to the previous conflicts over the party's identity), and an expression of the intense effort being made by the CPBM to clearly define itself against other political formations operating on the left side of the political spectrum.

The second half of the 1990s failed to bring a similarly dynamic and/or dramatic development of the CPBM's programmatic principles. The only relatively new development was the greater stress the party gave to the role of self-governing structures as a characteristic element of modern socialism. This became apparent at the programmatic conference of the CPBM in January 1999 which refused socialist nationalization strategies and the privileged role of the bureaucratic establishment. In contrast, great importance was given to workers, employees and unprivileged classes to self-organize. The proposition to reinforce democracy "from the grass-roots", as well as self-government and "self-liberation" of the unprivileged classes, was included in the principal programmatic documents approved at the 5<sup>th</sup> congress of CPBM in December 1999, i.e. "The CPBM at the Turn of the Millenium" and the "Program of Renewal". The former document represents a middle and long-term program, the latter, a short-term program. In terms of ideology, at the CPBM 5<sup>th</sup> congress the communists declared their intention to follow up the 1992 Kladno program, as well as the Political Declaration of the 4<sup>th</sup> congress of 1995. The overall self-presentation of the party was that of a "modern leftist", anti-capitalist party looking for a solution of the general social crisis. There was no major programmatic change here despite the changed atmosphere in the late 1990s as well as the formation of a minority social democratic government after the parliamentary elections in 1998, something reflected in party documents (CPBM, 2000a; CPBM, 2000b; CPBM, 2000c). The CPBM was now trying to present itself as a constructive political force capable of sharing responsibility for governing the country. This resulted in a growing moderation in the presentation of its own program, or at least of its potentially most controversial points. However, this trend towards a more moderate image has not been accompanied with any serious change in the ideological pillars of party identity.

### **The Character and Purpose of Communist Policy Propositions**

In evaluating the policy propositions of the CPBM, we should note two things at the outset. First, there exists a relatively elaborate set of policies proposed by the CPBM. Second, however, the impact of communist policy propositions on governmental policies and on the Czech political agenda as such has been thus far minimal. The coexistence of these two aspects may seem paradoxical, but it is a product of the specific anti-system orientation of the CPBM. With the partial exception of the local/communal sphere, the CPBM has not had a chance to implement its policy propositions. Whether and to what extent the CPBM takes this fact into account may be reflected in the nature and in the purpose of its proposed sets of policies. Or to put it another way, what is the link between the anti-system orientation of CPBM and its policy positions and propositions?

A strong link between the CPBM's anti-system orientation and its policies can be seen in its foreign policy positions. A favourite issue used by the CPBM in its role as an anti-system party is the membership of the Czech Republic in NATO. The CPBM is the only relevant Czech party today to reject – for principal, ideological reasons, and in accordance with its declared rejection of militarism and "aggressive power blocs" - NATO membership, and to have steadily called for the suspension and eventual cancellation of the Czech Republic's membership in this organization (CPBM, 2000a; Mareš, 2000). On another issue of foreign policy – the Czech Republic's relationship with the European Union – the CPBM's attitude is somewhat more muted. In this case, it is not the EU or the idea of European integration as such that the party rejects, but the so-called "economic annexation" to and "unilateral dependence" of the Czech Republic on the EU. The CPBM tries to act here as a consistent defender of national interests and calls for a European cooperation and integration based on equal rights ("a Europe built up from the grassroots"), and in the case of the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union, for negotiating "bilaterally advantageous and balanced conditions" (Mareš, 2000; CPBM, 2000a; For a Democratic Europe: Manifesto of CPBM). Most of its members and partisans are against the country's integration into the EU. According to the "Leftist Sociologists and Psychologists Club" opinion poll of late 2000, 79% of CPBM voters are against the country's integration into the EU, 9% are undecided, while 1% did not express any opinion (Mareš, 2000: p. 39). To sum up: the position of the CPBM concerning different issues of foreign policy reflects its permanent radical opposition condition.

Interpreting communist policy positions in the domestic social and economic environment is somewhat more difficult. It can be said that the central motive of such positions and propositions and the CPBM programmatic sphere closely related with them is the defense of the unprivileged, vulnerable social classes which have been cast in the role of "losers" in the process of transformation. This motive dominates all the relevant economic and social position documents of CPBM. Of course in the early 1990s, the declared defense of those "who want to work" and those "who worked honestly in the past" had still quite a preventative character, when one bears in mind that the process of the transformation of economy and of privatization was still in its infant stages (Documents of the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of CPBM). The Czech communists attributed special importance to a right to work, the principle of fair remuneration of work and the development of a fair pension, health and social insurance scheme (CPBM, 1996). Not surprisingly, however, the guarantor of social security and of social and economic policy was/is to be the state (Fiala and Holzer and Mareš and Pšejja, 1999). As for privatization, CPBM called for a "deliberate privatization" which would result in an effective plurality of ownership forms (a mixed economy), with a special role for self-governing/self-owned employee collectives as an expression of "economic democracy". In this context, the communists were especially vehement about defending

the rights of agricultural cooperatives. All of this was presented in the party's Kladno program of December 1992, a program which also introduced the concept of a "socialist market economy" capable of creating equal opportunities for each citizen based on social justice as a key concept and objective (Documents of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of CPBM).

The mid-1990s brought a shift in the formulation of the economic and social policy positions of CPBM connected with two mutually related factors. First, modified policy positions reflected a more developed stage of economic transformation in the Czech Republic. Communist appeals to the "losers" of the transition to a capitalist economy could now be much more specific and concrete. Accordingly, these appeals could be seen as part of a persistent effort to delegitimize the process of the transformation of the economy and society (CPBM, 1996; CPBM, 1998). The CPBM called for massive revisions of privatization efforts, property restitution schemes, and even called for revising significantly the process of transformation as such. The party made great efforts to put forward legislation on the compulsory declaration of property, control over the way property was obtained and an effective solution of conflicts of interests. Moreover, the decision of the congress in Liberec put forward the notion that the CPBM would actively engage the public in deciding on its external activities/policies as well as in its internal organization (The 4<sup>th</sup> Congress of CPBM). The CPBM was to do politics not only "for" people but "with" people, which was eventually expressed in the slogan "Others decide about people, we decide with people". This slogan was the principal electoral slogan in the 1998 elections (CPBM, 1998).

The communist social and economic policy propositions in late 1990s were again characterized by their extensiveness. This can be seen in the party's demand for full employment, a radical increase in pensions, the re-evaluation of newly-created rules for retirement (especially the reduction of the retirement age), the abolition of market principles in the health care sector, the preservation of free education at all types of schools, the renovation of state subsidized housing development, and many, many other areas. The effort to prevent the "further deterioration of the principles of the welfare state" was now associated with a more active approach towards the formulation of anti-crisis economic and social measures. The CPBM considered this of special importance, and even more so given the party's analysis that the Czech Republic was experiencing a "deep economic, social, moral and political crisis" resulting from a "failure to control" the transformation of the economy (CPBM, 2000a). This approach culminated in the "Program of Renewal" approved by the 5<sup>th</sup> congress of CPBM in December 1999. The propositions contained in this program were dominated by the demand to dramatically reinforce the role of the state as an irreplaceable tool for the strategic management and enforcement of recommended growth measures within the framework of the market econ-

omy, as well as in the implementation of an active and effective social policy (CPBM, 2000c).

If we now focus on the issue of the link between the anti-system orientation of CPBM and its policy positions, we will arrive at the question of whether the party's policies can be seen as reflecting the typical "outbidding" policy pronouncements of an anti-system party, i.e. the articulation by a party of extremely ambitious and mostly unrealistic economic and social policy propositions vis-à-vis its competitors. The answer is partly positive. In this case, it is necessary to distinguish the different aspects and purposes of the economic and social policy positions of the CPBM. To be sure, the CPBM's defense of the social welfare of the non-privileged social strata is one of the elements of an anti-system populism (Fiala and Holzer and Mareš and Pšejka, 1999). These elements are, in turn, connected with a persistent effort to delegitimize the existing political, economic and social arrangements and to justify the basic goal of the Czech communists, i.e. the transformation of capitalism into a new kind of socialism. This however does not mean that virtually all the economic and social policy propositions of the CPBM can be simply dismissed as anti-system populism tout court. It is necessary to reflect upon the fact that since the beginning of the 1990s, the formulation – which was extremely detailed in a number of cases – of social and economic policy propositions served also to point out the competency of the CPBM to promote the correct policies. This has been especially important given that the CPBM has been constantly obliged to defend its right to exist. In the late 1990s, the CPBM had to defend its competence again but this time in a different situation in which the party started to put forward its readiness to eventually share the responsibility for governing the country (CPBM 2000a; CPBM 2000c).

### **The Membership and Electoral potential of the CPBM**

In order to understand the character of the CPBM one must of course look at its members and electorate. After all, the party is considered a mass party with the largest number of members in the post-communist Central Eastern Europe (Lewis, 2000). Scholars differ on what this fact means. For instance, according to the Czech scholar M. Klíma, the CPBM has kept a large part of its original membership base in spite of not having changed its name or reformed itself (Klíma, 1998). This gets in backwards. It was not in spite of its unchanged name and unreformed character that the CPBM has managed to keep a considerable part of its party membership, but exactly because of it. This was the case even in spite of the fact that after November 1989, the CPC suffered a great reduction in the number of members. As of 1<sup>st</sup> January 1989, the number of CPC members and candidates amounted to 1 701 085, while as of 30 June 1990, the number was only 756 120 (Fiala and Holzer and Mareš and Pšejka, 1999: p. 102). However, the above figures

are related to federal Czechoslovakia. The reduction in the number of members was a by-product of a drastic change of the CPC's position, i.e. the loss of its position of a privileged state-carrying party. The Czech historian Jan Měchýř commented on the situation with typical hyperbole: "There remained only the faithful who can be said to have understood nothing, learned nothing and forgotten nothing" (Měchýř, 2000: p. 326).

The trends in the number of CPBM members in the Czech Republic and their social characteristics since 1992 are shown in the following tables.

**Table 1**  
**Membership of the CPBM, 1992-1999 (as of 1<sup>st</sup> January of each year)**

	1992	1993	1995	1997	1998	1999
Number of members	354 549	317 104	196 224	154 923	142 490	136 516
% Decrease from Preceding Year		10.6	38.1	21.0	8.0	4.2

Source: CPBM, 2000a

**Table 2**  
**Age structure of the Membership of the CPBM (January 1999), in %**

Up to 30	0.51
31-40	3.20
41-50	13.38
51-60	18.33
61-70	28.11
over 70	36.42

Source: CPBM, 2000a

**Table 3**  
**Membership of the CPBM according to Length of Membership (January 1999), in %**

More than 55 Years	0.8
40–54 years	57.6
25–39 years	22.5
10–24 years	16.4
Less than 10 years	2.7

Source: CPBM, 2000a

**Table 4**  
**Social Structure of the Membership of the CPBM (January 1999), in %**

Blue Collar Workers	14.2
Farmers	1.9
White Collar Workers	6.9
Self-Employed	1.9
Others	7.8
Retired	67.3

Source: CPBM, 2000a

**Table 5**  
**Structure of the Membership of the CPBM according to Level of Education (January 1999), in %**

Primary School	64.0
Secondary School	27.3
University	8.7

Source: CPBM, 2000a

The above data speak for themselves. The CPBM is a mass party, but a special sort of mass party. Its typical member is a retired person with primary education who has been a member of the party for the 40 years or more. The average age of a CPBM member in 1997 was 62.5 years, and 63.6 years in 1999 (Fiala and Holzer and Mareš and Pšeja, 1999: p. 181). The core, long-term members of the party form an extremely disciplined but also extremely conservative group which is not inclined to any (especially ideological) change (CPBM, 2000a). If we take

this fact into account, we can understand the results of the 1992 referendum on changing the party's name and why the later radical socialist or neo-communist leadership of the party has had to respect the opinion of this core group, to the detriment of its ability to maneuver politically.

Sociological research carried out in the 1990s also shows the great importance of the party's members as voters (Machonin et al., 1996; Tuček, 1998; Matějů and Vlachová, 1999; Matějů and Vlachová et al., 2000). This mainly applied at the beginning of the 1990s (Tóka, 1996: p. 115). However, we must also take into consideration the fact that the proportion between the number of party members and voters has been changing: while in 1992 the number of CPBM voters was 2.6 times higher than the number of its members, in 1998 it was 4.6 higher.

**Table 6**  
**Electoral results of the CPBM (CPC in 1990, Left Bloc in 1992) 1990-1998 (in %)**

	1990: Czech National Council	1992: Czech National Council	1996: Chamber of Deputies	1998: Chamber of Deputies
Votes obtained (%)	13.24	14.04	10.33	11.03
Seats obtained	32	35	22	24

Source: ČSÚ, 2001; CPBM, 2000a

Having said all that, however, two important things should be noted in looking at the relationship between the CPBM's voters and electorate. First, CPBM membership is a relatively reliable indicator of affiliation to the CPBM electorate. Second, the members of the party form a steady long-term core of the party's electorate (Vlachová, 2000). However, the CPBM's electorate has also recorded a certain amount of fluctuation. From 1990 to 1992, for example, the portion of the "faithful" voters of the CPBM (or the Left Bloc in 1992) was 80%, while it was only 67.1% from 1992 to 1996, and then returned to the previous 80% in the period from 1996 to 1998 (Fiala and Holzer and Mareš and Pšeja, 1999).

The data on when CPBM voters decide to vote for the party tells a lot about the stability of the CPBM's electorate as well.

**Table 7**  
**Timing of CPBM voters' Decision to Vote for the CPBM/Left Bloc (%)**

	1992	1996	1998
Immediately Before the Elections or in the Course of the Election	7	3	3
A Few Days Before the Election	11	3	3
Roughly one Month before the Election	4	10	10
Earlier	78	84	84

Source: Fiala and Holzer and Mareš and Pšeja, 1999

Apparently, except for the election in 1992, the electoral campaign or the pre-electoral activities of the party had a very limited impact on CPBM voters' decision-making. This is in conformity with the thesis of a steady core of CPBM's electorate (Vlachová, 2000). According to a representative wide electorate poll in 1996, the CPBM electorate occupied – quite typically – first place in key categories showing the degree of engagement or identification of the voters with the parties: 60% of CPBM voters voted for the party because "such attitudes were in conformity with their belief, conviction", 25% voted this way because "they were members, or worked in the party" and 13% voted this way because "a relative also wants to vote CP" (Fiala and Holzer and Mareš and Pšeja, 1999: p. 190). Identification with the party based on ideological affinity and/or personal ties is typical for CPBM voters.

Sociological research has shown that the mid-1990s were the years of crystallization of typical electoral decisions of different socio-economic classes in the Czech Republic (Matějů and Vlachová, 1999; Matějů and Řeháková, 2000). This crystallization was especially marked in the period preceding the parliamentary elections of 1992 and 1996, while in the period between 1996 and 1998 the process of solidifying the affinity between social classes and their respective political parties slowed down (Řeháková and Matějů, 2000). The social structure of the CPBM electorate is shown in the following table.

**Table 8**  
**Differentiation of the CPBM Electorate according to Social Class, in %**

	Professionals	White-Collar	Self-employed	Blue-Collar	Retired	Others	Total
1992	8.2	22.8	2.6	28.3	26.5	11.6	100
1996	5.5	20.6	5.4	21.2	37.3	10.0	100
1998	4.7	19.4	5.3	22.9	38.4	9.3	100

Source: Matějů and Vlachová et al., 2000 (Note: Data for the 1992 parliamentary elections are those for the electorate of the Left Bloc alliance; in the case of 1996 parliamentary elections the electorates of CPBM and of the two tiny parties, the Left Bloc and the Party of Democratic Left, were examined as one, despite the fact the parties performed independently. The Results of Elections to the Chamber of Deputies were considered).

Voting for the CPBM (as an alternative to the Czech Social Democratic Party and, over the course of time, to some tiny leftist parties as well) can be considered one of the clearest expressions of a clearly leftist value orientation. This voting and orientation were in the Czech context of the first half of the 1990s influenced by a “winners vs. losers” split in the electorate, defined as a perceived change in socio-economic status as a result of the economic transformation process. Apart from the effect of past or present membership in the communist party, a key role was played by the effect of downward class mobility. Subjective socio-economic mobility appeared as an extremely strong predictor of left-voting in the Czech Republic (Matějů and Vlachová, 1999). At the same time, however, the differentiation of the left-voting electorate should be taken into account. Despite its efforts, the CPBM has failed to achieve a monopoly position within the left-voting electorate and has been obliged to share this space with social democrats and some other minor parties. However, the distinguishing the left-voting groups of the electorate most likely to vote for the CPBM is rather difficult. As for the ideological programmatic orientation of such groups, we can say that two programmatic orientations prevailed in the mid 1990s within the communist electorate: a socialist orientation which stresses the state’s role in securing the citizen’s welfare and which accounts for 50.8% of the CPBM total, and a more strictly communist orientation which accounts for 31.6% of the total. In contrast, the social-democratic orientation (combining democracy with the social-market economy) has been represented by only 7%, still larger than that of other left-wing orientations (Tuček, 1998: pp. 34–35). As for social characteristics, further research has shown several interesting facts. For example, the attractiveness of the CPBM for voters as compared with the CSDP increases almost linearly according to age (the higher age, the higher the probability of a preference for the CPBM), and decreases according

to the degree of education. The size of the place of residence also plays a role: the larger the population/urban area, the lower the affinity for the CPBM. The typical CPBM voter in 1998 according to the above sociological data was thus a retired man with primary education, living in a village or a small town (Řeháková and Matějů, 2000).

## Conclusion

The CPBM represents one of the possible materializations of a post-communist “radical socialist” party. By no means is the CPBM a socialdemocratized ex-communist party. Indeed, the party’s identity as it has developed in the first half of the 1990s was based on an explicit rejection of socialdemocratization. However, the CPBM can also not be classified as a purely ultra-orthodox communist or genuine neo-communist party, even though some neo-communist traits are clearly also present. In the context of the Czech party arrangement, the CPBM occupies the permanent position of an opposition and anti-system party. It presents itself as a clearly anti-capitalist Marxist party defending the interests of the unprivileged social classes which became losers in the course of the transformation from the communist system to a capitalist economy and democratic political system. The ideological and programmatic profile of the CPBM and the policy propositions the party espouses correspond to this positioning. Due to its continued electoral viability the CPBM also has a certain “blackmail” potential within the context of Czech coalition politics but its direct influence on the political agenda has so been quite minimal so far. In short, the party occupies a pivotal ideological role in the Czech political system but its political influence thus far, as least until the parliamentary elections in June 2002 (depending, of course, upon the ultimate outcome of coalition negotiations) has been minimal.

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