
The Slovak Party of the Democratic Left: A Successful Post-Communist Party?

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolution of the Slovak Party of the Democratic Left (PDL). It analyzes the PDL from its evolution from the Communist Party of Slovakia to its recent internal crisis. It deals also with the PDL's identity conflict between two party wings in the second half of the 90's – the "radical socialists" and the "modernists" - which ended with the victory of the "radical socialists." In conclusion, the paper argues that the PDL today represents an interesting case of a communist successor party whose ideology lies somewhere between its communist origins and modern social democracy. In short, the PDL can be termed a post-communist "radical socialist" party.

The Party of the Democratic Left (Strana demokratickej ľavice) experienced extensive transformation from its original communist structure in the 90's and eventually came to be considered – in contrast to the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (CPBM) – a "social-democratised" ex-communist party. Thus, it bears similarities to post-communist parties in Poland (Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland) and Hungary (the Hungarian Socialist Party). At the same time, and in contrast to these parties, the PDL has never enjoyed broad popular support (its maximum share of the vote, 14.7%, was reached in 1992 and 1998) and has suffered as well from serious inner conflicts which have resulted in a moving away from social democratic positions. This article focuses on the reasons for the PDL's particular evolution, tracing the internal development of the PDL in the 1990's as well as the party's ideological development, organizational structures, and concrete policies.

The Genesis of the CPS and its Relationship to the CPC

It is not possible to understand the different development of the Czech and Slovak post-communist parties without first outlining their origin within the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPS). By 1989, the predecessor of the PDL – the Communist Party of Slovakia (CPS) - was a branch of the CPS. In the days of the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918 – 1938) the Slovak communists represented only one of the CPS's regional organizations. During the Slovak war-state the Slovak regional organization was transformed (under underground conditions) into a separate party – The Communist Party of Slovakia (CPS). During a short semi-democratic period immediately after the end of the war (1945 – 1948) the CPS became formally independent, although its political line was coincident with the politics of the CPS. This organizational independence was lost in 1948 when CPS leaders came to the conclusion, after the establishment of the communist regime, that a continuation of the CPS's independent existence was pointless. Thus, the party was again transformed into the CPS regional organization, with the name CPS staying. This produced more or less hidden frustration among the Slovak communists. Nevertheless this situation lasted until 1989. The CPS still worked without legal status during the first months after 1989 and in 1990. During the first parliamentary election, it stood in the election as a part of the CPC. Yet the CPS's pursuit of independence was manifested not only in its political programme (whose title, the "Election programme of the CPS as an independent part of the CPC", emphasized the CPS's organizational independence) but also by its next election document "Who we are and where are we going". In this document the party argued that the CPC should undergo structural change so as to allow the Czech and Slovak communists to behave as separate political forces. During the CPC congress in November 1990, it was decided to create a new federal party consisting of a Slovak organization (CPS) and a Czech organization (CPMB). After the congress, relations between the CPS and CPMB became even less close, since the two parties were moving in very different ideological directions. Consequently, the CPS, now renamed the PDL, decided to secede from the federation on its first congress in December 1991.

The situation in the CPS was slightly different from that of its Czech counterpart even during the communist era, primarily after the events known as the Prague Spring. Though in the 70's and 80's the CPS leadership was of the same orthodox-communist orientation as the CPC, the

membership was quite different. The mass purge of reform communists from the CPS after 1968 was much less pronounced than within the CPC: whereas the "Czech" membership was reduced by about 31%, the Slovak membership was reduced only about 16%. (Maňák 1997: 58 and 117). Moreover, a number of eliminated Slovak communists were allowed to come back after some time. In the Czech lands this was impossible. In addition, because many CPS members were intellectuals, it was much more difficult to replace them in their jobs, which they would lose after their expulsion. As a result, the CPS had much more reform-oriented, non orthodox-minded members than the Czech CPBM after November 1989.

The Fight for the Party Name and Identity

The process of the adaptation of the CPS to its new situation after the fall of communism in the end of 1989 started with the dismissal of the old leadership on December 6 1989. It was replaced by a newly-created authority, the so-called "Action Committee" (Akčný výbor). A reform-oriented group from the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Bratislava obtained the leading positions on this committee. The most important people there were Peter Weiss and Pavol Kanis. However, the reformist orientation of the Action Committee's members was ultimately limited. In its special congress in December 1989 the Action Committee introduced a programme, which, while advocating a number of reform steps, also mentioned the need for a return to the "experiences from 1945 - 1948" in shaping the party, i.e. a return to a semi-democratic era, when the communist desire for exclusive power was at its strongest. In spite of this, this document, approved by the CPS congress, was much more reform-oriented than the one approved a few days later. From the beginning of 1990 the leadership of the Slovak communists intensified its contact to western social democrats (mainly in form of leading representatives' foreign trips). Then the leadership expelled the most discredited members who had held high offices before November 1989. During 1990 two platforms with different views on the future of the CPS were formed. The "*Platform of socialistic orientation*", which was linked with reformatory leadership of the party led by its leader P. Weiss, viewed the 17th of November (the beginning of the revolution against state socialism in Czechoslovakia) as "the epitome of ineffectiveness and futureless tendency of the communistic party and the proof of its organizational and ideological failure". This platform rejected revolutionary terror and the proletarian dictatorship and argued that a communist

restoration of the CPS was both impossible and undesirable. In contrast, the *"Platform of Communist restoration of the CPS"* rejected changing the name of the party, argued against the expulsion of its most discredited members, claimed that the former regime had achieved "positive results" and lined up against what it saw as the "repression of the Marxist-Leninist movement inside the party." (Journal Pravda 4.9. 1990). Ultimately however, the reform-oriented wing got the upper hand and at the CPS congress in Prešov in October 1990 it enforced the symbolic change of the party name to "The Communist Party of Slovakia - the Party of the Democratic Left" (CPS – PDL), reelected P. Weiss as a leader, and pushed through a new, non-Marxist program. In spite of this, the months following the congress saw an escalation of the dispute between reformists and conservatives within the leadership. Weiss' reformists made use of their numerical superiority in the highest party authority – the Central Committee – during the time between congresses. On 26 January 1991 this committee decided to change the party name once again, this time to "The Party of the Democratic Left" (PDL). Party leader Weiss's argument here was very interesting. He declared that other parties had to accept the PDL as a constructive opposition power, yet in order to do so the PDL would have to transform itself into a modern left-wing party and to free itself of the communist party ideological heritage (Journal Pravda 28. 1. 1991). And indeed, this party congress put an end to any ideological-historical continuity with the old CPS.

In December 1991 the first congress of a new PDL was called. Only around 10% of the members of the former CPS (before November 1989) joined the new party. Immediately, the PDL proclaimed joining the Socialist International to be one of its goals. The members of the orthodox wing left the party during 1991 and later re-established the CPC – without, of course, the material possessions and organizational structures of the original party, all of which was inherited by the PDL, a fact which contributed to the politically marginal nature of the "new" CPC during the 90's. Initial high hopes for the PDL were not fulfilled, however. The reasons for this were both subsequent political developments in Slovakia and the PDL's own inner development.

The Evolution of the PDL from 1991 till 1996: the PDL as a Social-Democratic party?

1991 brought one more phenomenon to Slovak party politics – the formation of a new party, The Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (MDS). This party, although not defined as primarily a leftist grouping, became a distinct rival of the PDL's on the left side of the political spectrum. Public opinion polls demonstrated some interesting public attitudes in the Spring and Summer of 1991. The PDL's leader Weiss, one of the most popular of Slovak politicians overall, nevertheless enjoyed less support within his own party than the MDS's leader Vladimír Mečiar (*Aktuálne problémy slovenskej spoločnosti máj 1991: 29, Slovensko – júl 1991: 22*). This situation lasted quite a long time, and signaled the fact that both parties were speaking to similar groups of voters. In spite of this the relations between the MDS and the PDL were quite good – at least until a new government headed by the MDS came to power after the parliamentary election of 1992. The reason for this growing friction lay in some controversial steps of Mečiar's government.

In 1992-1993 other political performers accepted the PDL as a pro-system political power. This was proven by the attendance of representatives of "historical" social democratic parties and Slovak president Michal Kováč, at the PDL's 2nd Party Congress in Žilina in May 1993. To further underscore this point, the PDL did not invite representatives from the CPBM to attend the congress. Even the right-wing anti-communists were willing to cooperate with PDL, specifically the Christian Democratic Movement (CDM). This was borne out in March 1994, when a vote of no confidence was given to Mečiar's government. Subsequently, the CDM created together with the PDL (and other smaller parties) a new government led by Jozef Moravčík. This signalled in effect that the "expulsion agreement" – whereby the CPS and PDS were perceived to be not a suitable coalition partner for other parties – had run out. Moravčík's government coalition was in some way unique, because a similar union of anticommunists and post-communists' union did not occur elsewhere in Central and East Europe in the first half of the 90's. However, the PDL's leader P. Weiss made a cardinal political mistake in spring 1994, when he miscalculated the PDL's electoral prospects by supporting early parliamentary elections in autumn 1994. Weiss expected his party to win the elections and that he would become the prime minister (the PDL's support ranged between 15 -

20% in early opinion polls). For this reason Weiss created the left-wing coalition "Common Choice" whose members included the PDL and the small left-wing parties - "historical" Social Democrats, Greens and Agrarians. Another small party did not become a member of Common Choice - the Slovak Worker's Front (SWF), which was founded by a former PDL deputy, Ján Ľupták. Ľupták blamed the PDL for betraying left-wing voters through its coalition with right-wing parties. Surprisingly, Common Choice was received only 10.4% of the vote in the 1994 election, with the SWF receiving almost as much with 7.3% of the vote. The election results proved that the SWF had attracted a considerable amount of former PDL's voters. The MDS gained 35% of votes and created a new government with the SWF and the Slovak National Party. The election failure was the beginning of a crisis within the PDL. A number of members left the party and the leadership was criticized for its negative attitude towards the MDS. Weiss managed once again to defend his position at the 3rd Party Congress in February 1995 but he did not stand for reelection at the next congress in Nitra in April 1996. Jozef Migaš became the new leader of the PDL. He emphasized a more left-wing orientation to the PDL. Among other things he declared that it was necessary to *"dust off Marx and to study his words concerning the conflict between work and capital, ownership and theft"* (Mešežnikov 1997: 31). In the Spring of 1996, during the Mečiar government's own crisis, the new PDL leadership lent informal support to the government. Thanks to this Mečiar's government survived. Given the new political direction of the PDL – occurring ironically enough just at the time when the PDL had gained entrance into the Socialist International and its "social-democratic" identity was being accepted by western social democrats – it seemed to some observers that the party's previous "social-democratic" phase had been just a short aberration.

A New Dispute over Party Identity after 1996

The change in leadership in 1996 played an important role in later party development. Gradually two wings formed within the leadership – a "radical-socialist" wing (leader J. Migaš, Ľ. Fogaš, Ľ. Andrassy, P. Koncoš and others) and a "modernist" wing (former leader P. Weiss, B. Schmögnerová, M. Ftáčnik, P. Kanis and others). Before 1998 this conflict had remained hidden (the PDL had been in opposition), but it soon surfaced after the parliamentary election in 1998. Although the MDS won the election, it was not able to create a government coalition with majority support

in the parliament. The new government was formed by the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDC), which consisted of five, mostly right-wing parties (of which the most important was the CDM). The PDL's success in the elections was almost the same as in 1992 (14.6%) and it joined the government coalition. It seemed that the crisis of the middle of the 90's was over. The wide new coalition of prime minister Dzurinda (SDC) resembled the government of which the PDL was a member in 1994. It was the wide right wing and left-wing government again. The problems emerging from this new government were similar in many ways to those of the government of 1994. At the end of 1999 Robert Fico, the PDL's former very popular vice chairman, founded a new political party, "Smer." Fico criticized Dzurinda's government activities and its "anti-social and non-professional policy". Almost immediately some voter support was transferred from the PDL to Smer (Bútorová and Gyarfášová and Velšic 2000: 295. Compare table #5 below). That was the beginning of the new party's crisis. Migaš's leadership of PDL tried to define against itself towards the SDC. Indeed, it tried to make use of the SDC's disintegration to take over the prime minister post. Yet the conflict between the two wings of the PDL came to a head at the same time. In April 2000, during the vote of confidence for Prime Minister Dzurinda, the "radical-socialist" wing voted against the prime minister, while the "modernist" wing lent him crucial support (a few of the PDL's MPs abstained from voting). The prime minister was confirmed, but tension persisted between the PDL and the Dzurinda.

At the 6th PDL's Congress in Košice in July 2000 the conflict between the two wings reached a critical point. The "modernist" wing demanded the revitalization of the PDL's identity so that the party would be consistent with modern (western European) social democracy. In contrast, the "radical-socialist" wing of the PDL attacked the "modernists" for the latter's purported abandonment of leftist principles. The "radical-socialist" wing won over the party base with this argument and gained control over other crucial party positions. Indeed, although Migaš resigned the post of party leader (because of corruption charges as well as poor electoral results for the PDL) the other "radical-socialist" representative, P. Koncoš, was elected as the PDL's new leader, having gained twice as many votes as the "modernist" representatives Weiss and Ftáčnik. Meanwhile the "modernist" wing's attempt to stamp its identity onto the PDL by pushing its own version of a party platform for the PDL entitled "*The PDL – A Modern European Socialist Party*" was unsuccessful. In January 2002 the "radical-

socialist” wing successfully forced the dismissal of government minister B. Schmögnerová, one of the most prominent of the PDL’s ”modernist” wing (earlier another “modernist”, P. Kanis, was dismissed from his ministerial post on charges of corruption). Consequently, key ”modernists”, such as P. Weiss, B. Schmögnerová, and M. Ftáčnik, decided to leave the PDL and create a new party – the *Social Democratic Alternative (SDA)*. The first congress of this new party took place in April 2002. However, the SDA’s chances for electoral success (i.e. clearing the 5% hurdle necessary for parliamentary representations) in the next elections in September 2002 do not look very good, according to early public opinion polls (see table #5).

Ideological and Programmatic/Policy Positions of the PDL

The PDL’s programmatic and ideological positions were rather confusing in the early period of post-communist Slovakia. For example, in late February 1990, then-leader Weiss proclaimed that the party *”is not giving up our Marxist inspiration”*. Besides this the party would strive to *”assimilate the social democratic and revolutionary working-class movement tradition (...) and the whole western european socialist movement.”* (Journal Pravda 26. 2. 1990). Weiss signaled certain doubts as to the future programmatic position of the party. Yet already in the 1990 election document called *”Who we are and where are we going”* there was only one reference to Marx, while a discussion of a so-called civil society, the building up of a legal and democratic state, and the construction of a social market economy were given a lot of attention. These terms became then the main terms (together with other programmatic points as social equality, solidarity, justice, human rights protection, etc.) in the basic programmatic document adopted at the 1st Congress of the PDL in December 1991. The commemorating of communist classics (Marx, Engels, Lenin) disappeared from the program and the PDL orientated itself to western social democrats instead (Documents of the 1st Congress of PDL). In the 1992 election program territorial autonomy, decentralization, and elements of direct democracy were added as basic goals of the PDL. In contrast, the economic policies of the PDL were very careful and at the same time ambiguous. Thus for example the PDL chose the formulation *”the implementation of whatever form of ownership is appropriate in the particular case”* to describe its stance towards private vs. public ownership. A similarly careful approach was used to address questions on the access of foreign capital to the Slovak economy (Election programme PDL 1992). Meanwhile, the goal of achieving an eco-

conomic transformation with a minimum of social impact – a part of the PDL’s program since 1990 – was preserved in the 1992 program. A certain shift in this direction was made a year later in the new party program, when stronger support for foreign capital access and the privatisation process was given. Nevertheless, the PDL maintained that some industry branches should be run by the state (mining industry, power engineering, armaments industry etc.). The party also supported some necessary social-economic measures which it had criticized earlier, such as restrictive wage policies (Documents of 2nd Congress of PDL). The party’s policy positions did not change significantly in the program for parliamentary elections of 1994. Classical elements of left-wing politics (solidarity, social justice, human rights etc.) were supplemented with new themes only slightly mentioned in previous PDL’s programs, such as ecological farming, environmental protection, and food safety. The reason for this was the new party coalition - Common Choice together with smaller left-wing parties - which moved the PDL in a slightly different political direction. These “new left” policy elements remain a part of the PDL’s programmatic platform.

In 1990/1991 the CPS/PDL had already supported the democratic political system established after November 1989. Yet the new successor party, the PDL, has gradually become ideologically distant from the CPS. As mentioned earlier, for example, between 1992 and 1994 the PDL changed its originally negative approach to economic transformation. Since 1994 basic party programmatic positions and policies have not experienced any big changes: The emphasis given to the social market economy, the creation of a legal state, the favoring of mixed ownership, environmental issues – all of these remain. However, in 1998 some new elements were emphasized, such as education and the creation of an information society. To be sure, a number of declarations by certain party leaders were against the official programmatic documents (see above Migaš at the congress 1996). Such contradictory outbursts reflect not merely some leaders’ personal political opinions but also the larger structural problem of achieving party goals while in power.

The Character and Purpose of PDL Policy Propositions

The PDL’s policy propositions have been influenced by the problematic character of the party situation in the 90’s. During the PDL’s opposition period it promised voters to moderate the social consequences of eco-

conomic transformation while dramatically improving the standard of living. Yet once it became a member of the government, it was forced to carry out unpopular social measures. A typical example occurred during the Moravčík government in 1994. At a time when state finances were in a critical situation the PDL agreed to increase the Value Added Tax (VAT). This step and others strongly influenced the PDL's popularity and consequently the party election results in 1994. Technically speaking, a similar situation happened again (with similar consequences) after the PDL took a seat in Dzurinda's government in 1998. A typical example was unemployment policy, an issue extremely sensitive in Slovakia. During the election campaign the PDL promised a reduction in unemployment of about 13% and proclaimed as its goal the gradual achievement of full employment. (Election program of PDL 1998: 5-6). By 2002, as a consequence of necessary structural economic reforms, unemployment exceeded 20% limit, despite – or perhaps because of – the fact that the Minister for Labor and Social Affairs came from the PDL!

The absurdly contradictory nature of the PDL's policy pronouncements can be seen in an important area of foreign policy - the membership of Slovakia in NATO. Although the PDL has voiced clear support for membership for many years now its true position is much more complicated. To be sure, the party established the objective of Slovakian membership in NATO as early as 1993 (on the condition that a referendum would be held), a position that the party still officially subscribes to. However, even in 1993 there were absolutely opposite opinions in this matter within the party. Before the referendum about Slovakian membership in NATO was held on May 1997, the PDL recommended a yes vote to their voters. Yet during the NATO military action against Yugoslavia in March 1999, party leader Migaš expressed his deep regret about the course of events and raised doubts about the intended results of this operation. Moreover, during his time in the Dzurinda government coalition now-party leader Koncoš voted against making Slovakia's airspace available for NATO planes, stating that "in the PDL we have many different ideas on how foreign policy should be oriented" (Mesežnikov 1999: 88; Marušiak 1999: 277 - 278). A similar conflict in basic policy orientations exists for the PDL's voters. As can be seen in table #1, for quite a long time the PDL's voters have been separated into two evenly-balanced groups (contrast this with the positions of other significant political parties indicated in table #1). The divergence of opinion connected with the question of NATO membership question does

not exist for the next very important foreign issue – Slovakian membership in the EU. Here the party supports membership, as do their voters, around 80 – 90%.

Table 1
”Do you support Slovakian membership in NATO?” (%)

Political parties	April 1998		June 1999		August 2000	
	Support and somewhat support	Don't support and don't fully support	Support and somewhat support	Don't support and don't fully support	Support and somewhat support	Don't support and don't fully support
PDL	41	51	45	48	47	44
SDC	86	7	70	24	87	11
MDS	46	47	8	85	27	63
Total of inhabitants of Slovakia	58	31	35	53	50	39

Source: Surveys of Public Questions Institute (IVO): Bútorová 1998: 215 – 216; Bútorová, Gyarfášová, Velšic 2000: 315.

Note: Data are in percentage, the remainder up to 100% answered “I do not know”.

Paradoxically, the PDL's present crisis is partly caused by the conflict between its program, (which makes „classic” social-democratic demands) and the conditions of post-communist Slovakia, i.e. the country's social and economic problems, problems which complicate the realization of any such demands. As a consequence, policy disputes reflect a broader dispute within the party over the very identity of the PDL.

The Membership and the PDL's Electoral Potential

Characterizing the PDL is not possible without looking at the demographics of its members and voters. The PDL was founded at the end of

1991 with 47,000 members. An overwhelming majority of these formerly belonged to the CPS (only about 2,000 PDL party members at this time were not members of the communist party before). The PDL was the biggest Slovak political party at that time, although it had lost many former CPS members at the time of its founding. The post-communist parties the “Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland” and the “Hungarian Socialist Party” underwent a similar radical reduction in their memberships. Yet while the Polish and Hungarian post-communists managed to stabilize their membership, the number of PDL members continued to decrease throughout the 90’s. According to data from the PDL’s secretariat, the number of party members fell to a scant 20,000 by the end of 2001, about a half the number of members compared to 1991 and the PDL’s lowest membership total since 1991. Ironically, the PDL had fewer members than the orthodox “new” Communist Party of Slovakia, which had about 23,000 members in 2001. The decrease in the membership is undoubtedly connected to the departure of the “modernists” and the subsequent founding of the SDA. A downward trend in the PDL membership throughout the 90’s is captured in table #2.

By virtue of its social structure the PDL has earned the reputation of being an “intellectuals” party. Data on the social structure of the membership if unfortunately not available, but a rough guess can be made on available data on the social structure of delegates to party congress. At the party congress in 1996 the most numerous groups were social groups of economic representatives (48%), teachers (14%) and businessmen (8,5%). Workers made up only 4% of the delegates. Over 70% of delegates had a university education, a figure which exceeded many times the average of the Slovak population at large (Journal *Ľavicové noviny* 1. 5. 1996).

In addition, the education level of PDL voters was dramatically above that of the average Slovak. During the 90’s people with a secondary and higher education voted for the PDL. It is interesting to compare here the PDL with the biggest Slovak political party, the MDS, which attracts voters with rather low levels of education (see table #3). In terms of rural versus urban voters, it can be said that in general the bigger the city, the better the for the PDL. This was vividly demonstrated by the PDL’s election result in 1998, when the party won on average 17.1% of votes in municipalities over 5000 inhabitants but only 11.6% (see table #4) in the municipalities under

5000 inhabitants. This manifested the noticeable “urban” character of the party, in contrast to, for example, the MDS.

Table 2
PDL membership development

Year	Nov. 1989*	July 1990*	Dec. 1991**	1992	1994	1995	1996	1998	1999	2000	2001
The membership (in thousands)	440	194	47	48	27, 6	24	27, 6	22,4	21, 2	20	20

Source: PDL secretariat

Note: all data (unless otherwise stated) are according to the end of the calendar year and are rounded.

* CPS

** after completion of the re-registration from CPS

Table 3
PDL and MDS voters according to education level – correlation coefficient

Party/Year	Representation according to Level of Education			
	Low/ Basic	Medium/Sec. without A levels	Medium High/Sec. With A levels	High/High Technical or University Education
MDS 1992	0,309	0,435	-0,345	-0,419
MDS 1994	0,459	0,469	-0,484	-0,554
MDS 1998	0,600	0,444	-0,623	-0,628
PDL 1992	0,201	-0,259	0,303	0,178
Common Choice 1994	0,443	-0,384	0,495	0,477
PDL 1998	0,349	-0,196	0,452	0,322

Source: Krivý 1999: 260

Note, Table 3:

The correlation coefficient expresses the direct variation relation: the education representation in the SR's municipalities and party results in the same municipalities. Coefficient higher positive values signal that the political party reached above-average results. The coefficient higher negative values signal that the party reached bad results.

The research did not include districts where the Hungarian population is over 20%. The reason is ethnic electoral behaviour, where voters vote largely for the "Party of the Hungarian Coalition" (by 1998 simply the "Hungarian Coalition").

Table 4
PDL and MDS electoral Success in Municipalities under and over 5000 inhabitants in National Elections, 1992 – 1998 (%)

Party	Municipalities with population		Election result (%)
	under 5000	over 5 000	
MDS 1992	38,9	35,9	37,3
MDS 1994	38,8	31,5	35,0
MDS 1998	32,3	22,8	27,0
PDL 1992	12,2	16,8	14,7
Common Choice 1994	8,0	12,6	10,4
PDL 1998	11,6	17,1	14,7

Source: Krivý 1999: 247 a 255.

Table 5
Electoral Preferences of Voters for the PDL, Smer, SDA, the “new”
CPS, and the MDS from 1998 to the spring of 2002 (%)

Party	Elections 1998	Sept. 1999*	Jan. 2000*	June 2000	Dec. 2000	May 2001	Oct. 2001	Jan. 2002	April 2002	May 2002
PDL	14,7	13,3	8,5	6,4	4,5	6,1	5,2	3,8	2,5	2,1
Smer	-	-	10,8	17,4	19,7	19,1	18,3	13	17,1	16
SDA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,6	4,4
”new” CPS	2,8	-	4,6	2,6	3,2	2,1	3,1	4,2	1,6	2,1
MDS	27	33	30,2	28,8	21,7	28	26,7	32,9	29,5	29,9

Source: *FOCUS: Bútorová, Gyarfášová, Velšic 2000: 295
 ÚVVVM – The SR’s Statistical Office (ÚVVVM - Štatistický úrad
 SR) - <http://www.statistics.sk>

Conclusion

The reform-oriented leadership of the CPS under Weiss resulted in both a change in the name of the party to the PDL as well as a change in its identity. For a while, the new PDL was accepted as the only post-communist social democratic party in both Slovakia and on the international level. Yet after electoral defeat in 1994 a large part of the PDL’s membership lost faith in the original reform-oriented leadership of the party, leading to its replacement by a new leadership which questioned the basic political identity of the party as reflected in its party program. Thus although the PDL continues to claim for itself a social democratic identity (close to the British Labour Party or the German Social Democrats), this does not really correspond to its basic ideological direction. Instead the PDL could be labelled a *post-communist “radical socialist” party*.

What accounts for this peculiar identity of the PDL? And what is the reason for the PDL’s failure in the new Slovak party system? Why hasn’t the PDL been as successful as its Polish and Hungarian post-communist counterparts? It has been argued here that political developments after 1992 forced the PDL to make repeated alliances with right-wing opponents in order to counter the MDS. The consequence of this schizophrenic state for the PDL was relative failure at the polls in both 1994 and again in 1999.

After 1991 (at least in terms of its party program) the MDS managed to claim for itself the center-left space in the political spectrum that would have otherwise fallen to the PDL. Similar rivals to the Polish and Hungarian post-communists did not materialize. As a result of this development, the 15% of the vote garnered by the PDL in 1992 has proven to be the party's maximum electoral result in national elections. The PDL's future is thus very uncertain. Considering the present party crisis and the very low electoral support, there is a danger that after the 2002 elections the party will be only further marginalized. Moreover, there is a strong probability that the PDL will be replaced by Fico's Smer, which will gradually become the major party of the radical (but non-extremist) left. However, Smer will ultimately come to experience the same question that has proven to be so fateful for the PDL – whether to cooperate with parties of the center-right or with the Mečiar's MDS.

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