

Koren Gilbai  
Petr Miller

Petr Miller was an electrician at the C.K.D. who usually wore corduroy slacks and a black leather jacket to work. He studied at Prague's School of Economics in the late 1960s before being expelled for criticizing the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. After an apprenticeship at the big Tatra automobile works, Miller joined the C.K.D, a company that manufactures industrial equipment. Beginning in 1962, Miller worked his way up to a foreman position. Following brutal, unjustifiable violence by the Communist police in November of 1989, Miller addressed thousands of workers in a big hall where electrical motors and transformers were made. There, he rallied the workers to march to Prague in protest of the Stalinist leadership. In the face of the detrimental communist rule, Miller led 10,000 workers in a protest at the center of Prague (Czechoslovakia's capital). The demonstration was held at Wenceslas Square. On December 11, 1989, Miller became the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs in the new government. His abnormally fast acquisition of political power illustrated the state of urgency of Czechoslovak politics at the time. Petr Miller was, fundamentally, a worker. He was appointed to the ministry due to his extensive knowledge, experience, and familiarity with the grave social and wage problems in Czechoslovakia. The fact that he was a worker stimulated political trust among the common-working people. Upon organizing the protest, Miller asserted: "Czech workers realize that a time is coming when restructuring will become necessary." Following that rebellious act, 750,000 Czechoslovaks followed the 'trend' initiated by Petr Miller. In addition, 75% of the population engaged in a two-hour strike with the demand of free elections and the end of Communist rule. Indeed, Miller's leadership inspired Czechoslovak workers and provided a profound effect on the independence movement.

In restructuring their economy after the fall of communism, a significant fear was rising unemployment. However, Miller planned to solve this through retraining and improving labour conditions. He planned on shortening working hours and adding one extra week of leave. Miller drew his aspirations from Switzerland and Sweden, where unemployment was very low. Who, if not Miller, would relentlessly fight for the lower-working class? Another grave concern at the time was the transition of industry away from steel and coal mining. This would engender high unemployment rates, but Miller planned to retrain those workers into alternative fields of work.

Petr Miller's primary source of motivation for overthrowing the communist rule was the Communist-led trade unions, that were detrimental to Czechoslovak workers. He pursued this goal through the Civic Forum (OF in Czech) Party, along with Vaclav Havel. Miller held a strong belief that for forty years, trade unions were merely an extension of Communist Party and never acted independently. Due to this, after being unchained from the shackles of communism, Miller sought assistance from developed countries where union activities were performed at a high level. In addition to trade unions, Miller wanted to pursue aid from the West in learning how to establish democratic structures.

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