

**Crisis Committee: Czechoslovakia 1990**

**Peter Colotka: Position Paper**

**Mateo Huegel**

**University of Toronto Schools**

Czechoslovakia today stands at a crossroads. As we separate from the Soviet Union, and create our own path, we are set upon by crucial questions, of identity, and of how we wish to create our future. There are many: Should Czechoslovakia remain unified? Should we embrace western capitalism fully, setting aside communism in its entirety? What is to be done about the ex-communist leaders? These questions are of the utmost importance, and I, Peter Colotka, will try to steer my home country down the path I find to be most prosperous.

The divide between the Slovak and Czech elements of Czechoslovakia has been growing for a long time, and I believe that it is imperative that the country remains unified. It is only together that we can prosper in this new world. Although there are historical grievances between these two lands -- the Nazi occupation of the Czech Republic in 1939, for example -- they can be overcome. Recall the United States, which fought its own civil war and still remains unified, and stronger as a result. There are numerous problems with the two country proposal as well. Cooperation between the Czech Republic and Slovakia would undoubtedly break down quickly, for one of many possible reasons. Even if a single currency is shared between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, such a system is bound to break down as either country seeks to alter its exchange rate for one reason or another. Additionally, such a separation would damage the shared culture and identity shared by these two peoples irreparably, and thus cannot be tolerated. Rather, I believe that in order to effectively mitigate the current issues with government, Czechoslovakia needs a stronger central government, which could be useful in facilitating mutually beneficial economic relations.

Czechoslovakia faces another defining issue for its future. It has followed communism since 1948, and now, following the Velvet revolution, it has become apparent that the people of Czechoslovakia desire democratization and reform in government. I believe that there needs to be a gradual shift from communism to more liberal forms of government, as reforms are put into place. A dramatic shift from communism, without respect for the damage it could cause to existing government institutions and structures, could be incredibly destructive to the existing economy and government services. Regardless of what you think of it, the fact of the matter is that communism has provided at least basic services to our population, and switching suddenly could leave huge groups of people without any services at all. Moreover, it is a mistake to assume that democracy and communism are fundamentally incompatible. The Communist Party holds the support of 35% of the population, which is far from insignificant. Consequently, it is natural that current communist leaders should have a role in shaping the future of Czechoslovakia, and be an active and important part of the new government. Being a part of the Communist Party, I concur with Mikhail Gorbachev’s calls for ‘perestroika’ or restructuring in the government, and I believe that ultimately, gradual reforms are necessary for Czechoslovakia’s economy and government to thrive. As Gorbachev has said, our country also needs to open gradually to the west to become more competitive and grow our economic potential.

I also want to discuss the legal responsibility of communist officials for actions taken during their tenure in office. Being - for all intents and purposes - a satellite government of the Soviet Union, I believe that said government officials cannot be held responsible for actions that they were obliged, either by circumstance or by orders, to perform, and which they would not ordinarily take. With corruption being rampant in parts of government, an official might have to, regardless of their personal beliefs participate in this broken system. As a result, they simply cannot be held legally accountable.

To conclude, I believe that Czechoslovakia should remain unified as a country, because their separation would be mutually damaging to both parties, I believe that Communism must be very gradually phased out, and support Gorbachev’s calls for ‘Glasnost’ and ‘Perestroika’, openness and restructuring in government, and emphasize the fact that communism has had some successes and has strong support among the Czechoslovak population, and that it cannot be removed suddenly, or there will be incredibly damaging effects on our people. Lastly, I would like to contend that some communist officials may not be held legally responsible for their actions while in office, on the grounds that they did not have very much choice in what they could do, as they had to participate sometimes in a broken and corrupt system. This is what I, Peter Colotka, conclude is best for Czechoslovakia, for those reasons.