Public Support to the KSČM after 1989: Historical Grounds, Political and Social Context, Perspectives

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In the region of Central Europe, the KSČM (the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia) represents a certain unique phenomenon – in none of the post-communist countries does a communist (communist-party based) and only little reformed party play an analogous role within the party system, in none of them does it have such a high (and what is more: even growing) electorate support. In Poland, Hungary (but for example also in Slovenia) the local post-communist parties took over the politics of their reformist wings, deepened it and continued in it consistently. As early as the break of the 1990s, they managed to transform into catchall parties close in profile to western socialist or social democratic parties. After a short period of being in the defence, their programme and staff regenerated and their organisations became stabilised. Coherent and disciplined entities emerged and have gradually transformed into parties of social democratic character. As early as the mid-1990s, these parties were incorporated into the international social democratic movement.

The Czech Republic saw an entirely different development in this respect. The KSČ, the leadership of which became a Brezhnevian anti-reformist force after defeat of the Prague Spring, remained the outpost of orthodox communism until the end of the 1980s. No strong reformist wing developed within it like in Poland or Hungary. After 1989, all attempts of certain groups within the KSČ to reform the party to an entity of democratic left failed repeatedly. The transformation of the KSČ(M) was characterised by a number of "internal" factors and two major ones fully manifested themselves in the decisive period shortly after the regime changed. First, it was the lack of *readiness of the party elite to enact a reform within the party* and, second, *low willingness in the party membership to accept and support such a reform*.

The unsuccessful attempt at a radical (and plausible) transformation ("social-democratisation") in the 1st half of the 1990s resulted in KSČM remaining close to the original, traditional communist model, that is to say remaining an entity with a strong anti-system capacity and the single powerful successor organisation of communist parties in the region between France and the Ukraine. It represents a specific metamorphosis of the communist machinery; its modified ideology, however, caters for continuity of the communist heritage and uses class-coloured, authoritative, socially populist and ethno-nationalistic strategies to mobilise its electorate.

Unlike similar (i.e. only little transformed) parties in the region, for example the Hungarian Munkáspárt, the German PDS and the Slovak KSS, the KSČM records a much higher electorate support and also protest potential on the national scale. Despite all of this, it has not yet had the opportunity to influence the transformation process in a principal manner, in particular because the elites of the other parties – at least so far – have isolated it politically and the party has been perceived as an unacceptable and country democracy-threatening partner when government coalitions were negotiated (let us note at this point that the outlined modus is perceived ambivalently by the Czech public to say the least[1]). In an entirely principal way, this political excommunication undermines party competition in general and opportunities for alternations in the executive in particular. The significance of the KSČM as a determining factor in the functioning and the institutional character of the overall system is constantly on the rise, even if the KSČM is only a relevant force with growing influence but with zero or very weak coalition potential at the left margin of the party spectrum (Fiala at al. 1999; Novák 1999).

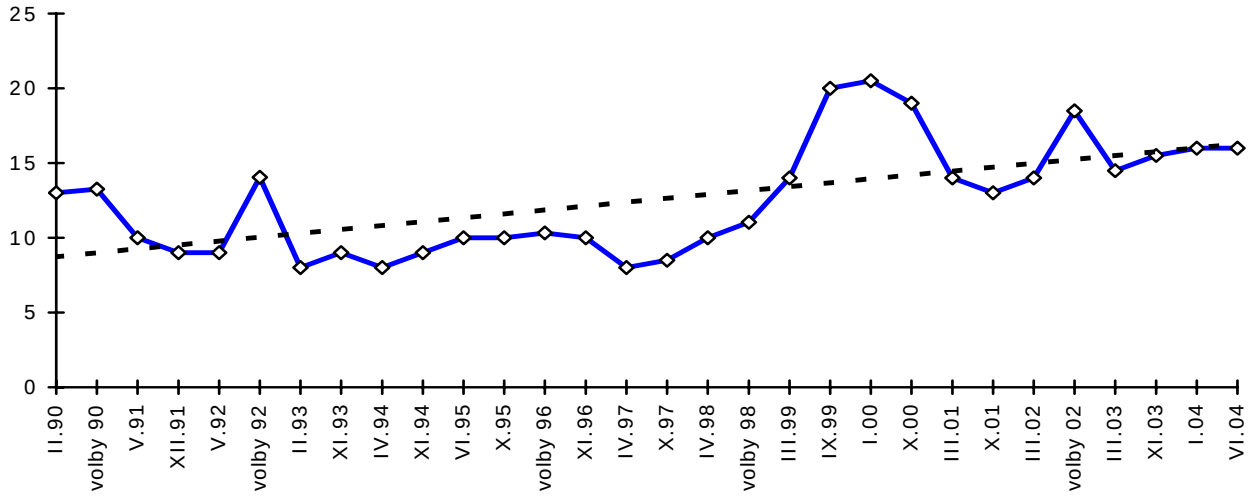
As a result of internal developments within the KSČM (symbolised by a referendum on omitting the expression "communist") that have denied approximation of the party to social

democratic platform, to the constructive, reformist non-communist left, a part of membership departed, the party became illegible for a major part of left-wing electorate and vacated the space at the left centre for another left-wing pro-system political entity that would fill in the resulting gap on the political market. In the Czech context, therefore, the role of the democratic left played by post-communist parties in Poland and Hungary has been taken up by the authentic social democrats. It is not a coincidence that the beginning of the growth of ČSSD's popularity with the electorate falls into the year 1993 when the then exchange of the KSČM's pro-reformist leadership (J. Svoboda) and the victory of neo-conservative wing led by M. Grebeníček suggested that the process of "social-democratisation" would be blocked (the issue remains whether this was a conscious conceptual move of the party elite or a conformist adaptation to the requirements of the membership and rigid core electorate).

Political and Social "Growth Factors"

The most important cleavages within the Czech left wing[2] may be found as including the social-economic dimension, the support to regime (and relationship to the past) and foreign policy orientation. Between 1992 and 1996, in the Levý blok /Left Block/ era, the KSČM, although with a mark of a party of "old regimers" and despite a continuing internal differentiation (and ongoing sedition of the reformists), maintained its faithful voters without, however, acquiring new ones. The period was, at the same time, an era marked by internal consolidation and firm settlement at the political scene.

Chart: Development of support to the KSČM since 1990.



Source: CVVM (IVVM), Our Society /*Naše společnost*/ 2001/2004 survey. Note: Between the 1992 elections and the 1996 elections, the preferences indicate a sum of preferences of parties associated in the Levý blok /Left Block/ coalition (LB, KSČM + Demokratická levice /the Democratic Left/). Data on the election results from 1990 and 1992 represent shares in the elections into the Czech National Council.

If the years 1996 to 2002 could be called a period of balancing of forces (in 1996, the left recorded an overall increase in votes cast for it and levelled the share of the right wing), the 2002 elections already represent a clear inclination of voters to the left.[3] The crisis of liberal politics related to economic turbulences in 1996 and 1997 climaxing in the autumn of 1997 in

the breakdown of the right-wing coalition has become a significant factor in the restructuring of party landscape foreshadowing a certain (general) loss of trust in political institutions.

1. In the general public's eyes, the legitimacy of the regime based on free elections has ceased to compensate for the onerous social impacts; a contrast between the (parallel) processes of political and economic transitions, between the fast democratisation and the slow introduction of prosperous and efficient market economy started to be felt. The widespread trust in better future eroded fast, the "transformational enthusiasm" ascribed to radical reforms and political elites that had built up their profile on introducing the reforms was undermined.
2. The economic transformation agenda started to threaten not only the basic vital interests of certain groups but also their very existence (employees of state enterprises, members of co-operatives etc.). The economic transformation created an authentic threat for the living standard of many households, including these parts of society who had not identified (at least not in a distinct manner) with the communist regime.

Actually, it is apparently the social-economic dimension which is key to interpreting the success of the KSČM. At least since the mid-1990s, the Czech society, like other transitional countries, has seen a clear shift in perceiving and assessing the system transformation from the point of view of values (i.e. that something is assessed as "correct") to perception and assessment of the transformation from the point of view of interests (i.e. something is assessed as "more beneficial for me and for people like me").

As early as the break of the 1990s, many sociologists noticed the conflict between the "socialist mentality" and the free spirit of liberal democracy and market economy. More freedom (in particular in economy) caused less equality in the results, brought about higher personal risk and responsibility for one's own fate and more complex selection patterns. All this invoked nostalgic reminiscences of the "good old times". The socialist mentality is deeply rooted in the primary groups, in particular in homes facing economic hardships and not able to accept the new strategy compatible with the market environment. In addition, the "Gründer" transformation stage gave rise to a category of people who coped with the changes and the new rules in a way which not only did not make them a convincing evidence of life success but through which they stigmatised wealth (and consequently market economy) with a criminal etiquette of a kind. Breaching or circumventing of (imperfect) laws led to frustration from de-legitimisation of differences in property and could not be accepted as an archetype of success and a just redistribution of economic goods.

That is why certain group interests – derived from attitudes in relation to standard of living, group social security, position in status hierarchy etc. – continued to be defined within the old system pattern, its institutions and a symptomatic statism-based social structure; And, in the context of a radical system change, they created a natural social basis for political formations defending the preservation of the old system or parts thereof (in particular state-managed economy). For a number of relatively large social groups, in particular people with lower education and subsequently having fewer opportunities to assert themselves at the labour market, the consequences of reforms meant existence (and, after all, existential) anxiety and "unbearable burden creating desire to give up freedom in order to re-gain the feeling of safety and to reduce the uncertainties of tomorrow imminent to freedom" (Wnuk-Lipiński: 418).

The KSČM saw an important rise in its popularity after the 1998 elections; back then a conflict has begun to dominate the left which may be simplified in the following terms: doing politics of the elite vs. representing group interests. After assuming government responsibility, the non-communist left (ČSSD) was forced to face the following dilemma: acquire support from the population or continue in the transformation of the society. The social democrats – so far profiting from KSČM's isolation – decided to follow a reformist course, invariably painful for a large part of the natural left-wing clientele. The alienation of the left-wing elite from its own electorate has brought along weakening of political support

and a subsequent search for an election alternative in the bosom of (neo)-communist social demagogy (the Communists "know how to use simplified models and how to set future good against the present evil", Lipset: 146). A hypothesis may be developed that, right at that moment, the KSČM became (despite the lack of a charismatic leader) a field of attraction for the former voters of various left-wing (the SŽJ and other smaller groups) as well as radical right-wing formations (the SPR-RSČ), which had gradually lost their relevant electorate base. Also, the KSČM begun to be the recipient of votes from ČSSD.

Recent success of the KSČM in the elections is supported by clear advantages. The party disposes of strong, disciplined and stable core electorate with apparent high "world view" identification and a relatively balanced support from settlements of various sizes and individual regions (in particular, the results reach above-average values in Northern Bohemia and Moravia regions). Strong institutional and organisational background facilities, frequently unjustly neglected, also offer comparative advantages:

1. Very strong, stabilised and extensive regional infrastructure (an unprecedented network of 4,691 basic units) as an immensely important and efficient logistic background for local as well as national political activities.[4]
2. Economic security, i.e. ability to function without debt for a long period of time and to fund campaigns and activities from the party's own resources to a great degree (unlike in other parties, members' contributions form a major part of income).
3. Within the Czech context, a wide and massive membership base. Based on information from KSČM, the party claims almost 101,000 members currently (as of 1 January 2004).[5]

Class-related Appeal of Extremism

Undoubtedly, KSČM managed to position itself authentically within the structure of *social cleavages* of Czech post-November society (Kitschelt 1992, 1995).[6] The firm rootedness of the electorate within the social cleavages structure may be one of possible explanations behind KSČM's high election support.

Approximately since the mid-1990s, the impact of social stratification on election-related behaviour has pronounced itself more visibly in Czech lands. The left-wing radicalism (in Lipset's terminology, the "left-wing fascism") manages to represent actual interests of relatively large segments of Czech society or – at least – to politically instrumentalise patterns of class loyalty for lower social classes and groups permanently experiencing economic uncertainty the life chances of whom (subjectively as well as objectively) fatally depend on the degree to which public resources are re-distributed and on the degree of paternalism and involvement of the state in social policy (pensioners, unskilled workers and farmers, unemployed people, people with lower education etc.).

In his classical work called *Political Man*, Seymour Lipset has stressed the important influence the social-class positioning of voters (defined by education, income, status, power, occupation and wealth) and ideologies, political preferences and values related to such positioning play in relation to the behaviour in the elections.[7] Lipset's basic assumption is that, in modern societies, extremist and intolerant movements (not exclusively left-wing) find support with the popular classes much more frequently than with higher, rich classes. Research studies based on Adorn's investigation of "authoritarian personality" have shown that authoritarian tendencies decrease with growing education, social class and income.[8] Authoritarian personalities (opposing – instinctively rather than rationally – political pluralism and civil freedoms) thus occur more frequently among lower social classes. Inclination to authoritarianism and extremism, apparent with lower classes, is related to low education, lack of interest in politics (which is typical under standard conditions; in the times of crisis, it may lead from apathy to extremist activism), lack of social contact beyond their primary groups etc.

In our context, another observation is also extremely topical: according to Lipset, inclination to authoritarianism of lower classes need not necessarily mean that they would support forces pertaining to authoritarianism. From among several solutions, they would select the one they consider easier. If extremism should seem a complex political solution, the lower classes would prefer other alternatives, i.e. they would stand up against extremist parties. This would be the case whenever a strong moderate left-wing party stands side by side with a weak communist party. A weak party may have radical social changes on its agenda but cannot promise that it would be able to implement them in the near future and improve the situation of the poorest strata.[9]

There is no doubt that the decision-making in the elections is not shaped exclusively by affiliation to certain social groups.[10] Not always do people vote primarily on the basis of their natural social interests but also based on ideas that appeal to them rationally or emotionally. Interpretation of natural relations behind actual election behaviour is therefore an immensely complex and multi-faceted issue. A number of identifications (factors) reciprocally strengthening one another enter the play; in addition to social determination, they include for example party agitation and propaganda, influence of family background, variables in the party and election systems, national, religious, regional or other motivations, situational factors, cultural conditions, boom-related impacts etc.[11]

After all, are class determinants decisive for voting in favour of the radical left? However possible to demonstrate scientifically the relation between party programmatic and aspirations of the parties' social bases, the class conflict within the social structure cannot be the single explanatory prism or social basis for KSČM's position. By the way, subjective derivation of party differentiation from class context is very problematic in general terms, let alone for parties of communist type.[12]

A number of authors (among others, Kitchelt 1995; Brokl in our context) note the establishment of a two-dimensional space for political orientation with continuous relevant value scales existing in it: in addition to a "social-economic" axis presented by the left and right, there is a "cultural" axis of liberalism-authoritarianism. And it is the liberalism-authoritarianism dimension and not the social-economic ("class-related") dimension that structures both poles of the Czech party scene and that is key, in particular, for parties representing alternatives to large parties (at the right side of the spectrum, it was the ODA and later the US-DEU in relation to the ODS; at the other end, the KSČM in relation to the ČSSD).

A further distortion of the explicit association between class and choice, i.e. the concept of rational instantaneous behaviour of voters, is presented by identification with parties based on deep mental stereotypes. Such identification prejudges political (ideological) continuity in time regardless of changing states of affairs, even in periods of dramatic regime changes. Starting with the behavioural research by P. Lazarsfeld in the 1940s, the impact of "referential groups", i.e. immediate social environment, has been accentuated in social sciences. Some researches (Inglehart, Rose) even think that the most reliable predicator of political (party) orientation (more important than social class, education or occupation) is the family environment, i.e. certain generational continuity in values ("law of heredity in politics").

Is the KSČM an ideological party, class party (in the sense of representing certain social groups) or something "in between"? According to the aims and character it undoubtedly represents (within the intentions of Weber's classification) a worldview party whose policy derives from firmly set values, closely linked with a closed ideological system in which the performance of a universalistic ideological project is key. Based on social aspects of the organisational structure, it is a mass integration party, *a party of social integration* (Neumann).

It is incontestable that parties represent the most important organisational manifestation of class politics, not only as an actual difference within the social structure but also as manifestation of divergence based in special collective consciousness, i.e. in value and opinion-based orientation. The notion of conflict in relation to political parties contains three inter-related components: 1) actual difference in social structure, 2) manifestation of divergence in collective conscience and 3) organisational completion of conscious difference (interest) in the form of a political party. At the level of existence within the social structure, the difference by itself does not automatically represent – at least without the realization of collective identity – any significant social political conflict, around which the political fight is burning (Gallagher, Laver, Mair: 63).

Issue of Anti-System Identity

Frequently, the KSČM is coined an extreme anti-system or refusal-to-protest party, not seldom also essentially non-democratic and the like. This justifies (or has justified) the requirement to isolate the party politically and deprive it of government legitimacy. Within the current system, the presence of an anti-system party is linked to the de-legitimising effect, i.e., based on the relation to state power, not sharing the values of political order (regime), in which it operates. In political community, it represents a heterogeneous, external ideology, an essentially unaccountable opposition polarising party competition and excluded from the possibility of participation on power. The ability to exercise its blackmail potential undermining possible government configurations is key here (Sartori, 1976; Barša, Strmiska, 1997).

The KSČM, which has not undergone any radical "social-democratisation therapy", undoubtedly represents a subversive element in the political party system; at the same time, however, it is not possible to consider it insignificant as far as the arithmetic of its functioning is concerned.[13] It is extremely difficult to expose with credit and grasp in complexity all parameters of the existence of a strong anti-system or protest party and it goes beyond the scope of this article. Will the virtual or actual anti-system character of the KSČM stand up to a serious analysis of the acceptance or rejection of democratic rules? And what is, in this respect, the relation from this point of view among clearly heterogeneous entities being (a) the leadership of a party and the parliamentary club (party elite), (b) the membership base and (c) the electorate and associates of the KSČM?

An a priori acceptance of the KSČM's anti-system identity as a constant value is, however, disputable throughout – in principle, it eliminates any consideration of creation and reproduction of such "identity" as well as integration of evolution elements of the entire political party system (and development of interactions among party actors) and the dynamics of motivations involved in the election behaviour. Probably, it is not feasible to take an increase in the electorate potential of a party – in view of the historical and political context – for manifestation of and evidence to a continuing polarisation within the entire system, or, more precisely, within the entire political community. The KSČM's anti-system identity – marked out by (dynamic) framework of the KSČM's party system – is still under development and it is impossible to ignore signs of certain weakening of its anti-regime orientation and diminishing ideological distance from the ČSSD (a major part of fluctuating electorate moves around precisely on the ground plan demarcated by the mentioned parties).[14]

It is worth asking whether the existing expansion of the KSČM's electorate is facilitated and conditioned primarily by surviving "traditional" features of the KSČM as an anti-system force or, to the contrary, by new or revived elements of a moderate (i.e. non-revolutionary) reformist orientation, taking hold despite (or under the ballast of) the legacy revolutionary potential. It is probably only possible to explain the growth in support to the KSČM by encompassing both of the above factors; and, in this context, also the fact that the KSČM's

electorate entails various sectors of the Czech electorate, whose motivations and priorities are also likely to differ considerably, needs to be taken notice of.
The fundamental issue remains to be answered whether the KSČM strives for – despite fierce ideological rhetoric – a reformist change (direction) of governmental policy or a radical overthrow of the entire system (as the main component of anti-system character). The notion of an "isolationist party" (Daalder: 85) could be a possible basis for capturing the existing position of KSČM in theory. The notion traces divergence from an anti-system party to a participation party, critical in relation to the regime, but not rigorously refusing, in principal opposition. Within the given context, it needs to be noted that the general public clearly fails to reflect the KSČM as an extremist party and, at the same time, does not reject based on consensus potential future involvement in government.[15]
The KSČM does not (has not had?) any chance to participate in power, but it succeeds in organising and mobilising, through protest, some alienated sub-cultural groups with specific political patterns, wishing that their voice – radical, clearly protest, negativistic and frequently indeed anti-system – be heard in the public arena in spite of being aware that its participation in the creation of state will is more or less unrealistic. The party thus represents hard-shell opposition accumulating protest voices – clearly or "only" potentially anti-system, anti-regime, "alienated".
The party plays the role of a tribune (French political scientist Georges Lavau), which belongs to parties defending groups that have the impression of being excluded from participation in the given system (moreover, the absence of "right-wing" populism in fact allowed the KSČM to monopolise on this role). According to Lavau, political parties that are clearly ("in a manifest manner") adversary to the political system and its values (i.e. anti-system parties) perform the role of a tribune in a "latent" (covert) manner and indirectly contribute to preserving certain system elements. In fact, having once acquired sufficient strength and representative power to efficiently block or obstruct the functioning of the system, they cease to be revolutionary. In addition, they have sufficient authority over groups whose spokesmen they play in order to prevent them from organising wild (anti-regime) activities. On the one hand, such parties distort harmonic functioning of the system and have an inclination to irresponsible acts and behaviour, on the other hand, they discourage from revolutionary activities going from "below" and, in certain explosive situations, they represent an instrument by means of which the stability of the system, yet with certain existing cleavages, may be retained. For parties playing the role of a tribune, this presents an advantage of moving around in environment favourable for their own growth and systematic use of dissatisfaction. On the other hand, however, they run the risk of losing their revolutionary character (in the event of the KSČM rather certain "revolutionary esprit"), of getting in tow of oftentimes fickle electorate and, finally, of their radical tribune profile excluding them, permanently or for a long period of time, from holding government responsibilities, thus also power-related benefits (Novák 1997: 41 to 42).
Naturally, the "ghettoization" of the KSČM distorts the logic of the functioning of the party system. From the point of view of possible government constellations, the KSČM, having zero coalition potential, is in fact a mere appendix to the party complex but it is becoming more and more clearly its (un)acknowledged part. The actual power of the KSČM objectively cancels its anti-system character at least in one aspect: in relation to the political party system and interactions among individual actors, it is becoming a clearly legitimate ("system") partner.

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Source:
http://www.kscm.cz (visited on 20. 7. 2004 for the last time).

[1] The survey conducted by IVVM in December 1999 shows that every other respondent (53 %) did not agree with the negative attitude of certain politicians to discuss society-wide issues with representatives of the KSČM. To the contrary, 38% of respondents considered a similar attitude as justified (text of the question: "Certain personalities and institutions refuse to discuss serious social issues with the KSČM. Do you agree with this?"). Most frequently, opponents of the dialogue with the KSČM have reproached this party its past (42%); 15% of them coined the party extremist and the same share expressed mistrust in the party. 14% of respondents noted that this party has not changed in any way and continues to be the same. Almost every tenth respondent was of the opinion that a dialogue with communists lacks any meaning. Proponents of the dialogue pointed out the democratic postulate stating that discussions should be led with everyone most frequently (30%), the same number of respondents mentioned that the KSČM is a parliamentary party, 23 % stressed their preferences and election success and 12% of respondents commented that they are a party like any other. In the specific context, the results of investigation organised at the end of April and beginning of May 1990 are worth mentioning. Majority of population (72%) supposed that the KSČ should have the same rights and obligations as other political parties, 26% disagreed with this opinion. An absolute majority of respondents (59%) was of the opinion that the KSČ should not be abolished, 37% were of an opposite opinion. As far as the efforts of the KSČ to transform into a modern political party are concerned, more than a half of respondents (54%) held a sceptical view of such efforts at that time, 36% thought that communists made such efforts.

[2] Arend Lijphart defined seven ideological dimensions, in which party conflicts occur: 1) social-economic dimension, 2) religious dimension, 3) cultural-ethnical dimension, 4) village-town dimension, 5) regime support dimension, 6) foreign policy dimension, 7) materialists vs. post-materialists dimension (Lijphart, A. Political Parties: Ideologies and Programs, in: Butler, D., Penniman H. R., Ranney, A., *Democracy at the Polls*, AEI, Washington 1981, pp 26 to 51).

[3] According to an investigation conducted by IVVM in December 1999, the public saw the increase in the KSČM's preferences primarily as a result of response to the situation in the country at that time. To an open question: "Currently, the growing popularity of the KSČ is being discussed. Where do you personally see the reason behind the growing popularity of this party?" 52% respondents answered that it is a response to the current social problems (corruption, unemployment, difficult law enforceability, failures of the government, behaviour of parties and politicians, loss of social certainties, dearth, misery, chaos, decrease of moral values etc.). Only 15% mentioned the qualities of the KSČM's programme and 14% valued the past regime positively.

[4] Source: http://www.kscm.cz, information as of 1.1.2004. Regions with the most numerous membership base include the Central Bohemia, Southern Moravia and Moravia Silesia. Also, the age structure of the membership base is worth mentioning: 71% of members are older than 60 years of age. A number of associated organisations are linked to the party (Komunistický svaz mládeže /The Communist Youth Union/, Levicový klub mladých /The Left-Wing Youth Club/, Socialistická solidarita /The Socialist Solidarity/, Socialistická alternativa Budoucnost /The Socialist Alternative – Future/, Socialistická organizace pracujících /The Socialist Workers' Organization/).

[5] As of 1.1.2004, KSČM's official records claim 100,781 members. However, it is not uninteresting to note that the overall number of members as of 1.1.2001 amounted to more than 120,000, meaning that, as opposed to 2001, there was an approximate 16% reduction in the numbers of organised party members. Let us note that more than 6,000 new members were accepted between 1990 and 2002. In this context, it is good to mention that as of 1.1.2002, 4,932 basic organisations were registered; the number of basic organisations decreased by 241 over two years.

[6] Also, historically conditioned cultural and social-economic causes of the establishment and traditionally strong positions of the communist party in the political-cultural architecture of Czech lands play a not negligible role. Since its very establishment, the KSČ has always enjoyed high voter support and has had firm roots in political interactions (cleavages) in the times of the first republic as well as between 1945 and 1948.

[7] For Lipset, elections represent *democratic manifestation of class fight*: "Although many parties reject class fight or class loyalty, analyses of their programmes and proponents show, after all, that also these parties represent interests of various classes" and adds that the overall European development of transition from industrial to post-industrial society did lead to the weakening of ideological potential of class cleavages and to a reduction in the importance of the communist parties and that in a modern society "democratic class fight shall continue but it will be a fight without ideologies, without red flags, without May Day processions" (Lipset, c.d., p. 220 and p. 408).

[8] Adorno has developed a hypothesis that political convictions are manifestations of deep layers of personalities. Among authoritarianism components Adorno includes the following 1) clinging to conventions, 2) subordination to the principle of higher authority, 3) authoritarian aggressiveness (condemning people not following conventions), 4) rejection of exaggerated subjectivity and imagination (anti-intraception), 5) inclination to superstitions and stereotypes, 6) destructive spirit, 7) pessimism (belief that the world is threatened by catastrophes), 8) exaggerated interest in sex (Adorno, 1969).

[9] Fiala, Holzer, Mareš, Pšeja (1999: 303) state that Czech communists may achieve the highest election gains whenever the social democrats are a government party and the KSČM can thus play the role of a penetrative "left-wing" opposition.

[10] See for example Sartori "The Sociology of Parties: a Critical Review, in: P. Mair (ed.), *The West European Party System*, Oxford University Press, New York 1990, pp. 150 to 182. In addition to Sartori, also Richard Rose and Derek Urwin, see Rose, R., Urwin, D., Social Cohesion, Political Parties and Strains in Regime, in: M. Dogan, R. Rose (eds.), *European*

Politics, Macmillan, London 1971, have relativised – based on rich empirical material – the importance of class cleavages for political parties.

[11] The most complex interpretation behind the causes of election decision-making offered in current social sciences is based on the work of scientists from the University of Michigan – books and articles of A. Campbell and his colleagues from the 1960s. R. Dalton (1988) summarised this notion into a *model of causal funnel*.

[12] Frequently, communist parties use the class appeal to mask the fact that they represent and, *in principle,* serve inter-class (or non-class) interests. According to Lenin's understanding, the party collects the most conscious part of the working class, it is its vanguard, revolutionary avant-garde; it is not, actually, the party of the class as a whole but the party of the elite (Novák 1997: 32).

[13] P.H. Merkl assumes that the subversive role of certain anti-system parties may, under certain circumstances, have a certain positive effect: these parties are "dysfunctional" in relation to the existing political system but they may paradoxically contribute to its development precisely by helping liquidate the outdated political system; in this respect, they are functional and positive for the global social system which political system is a part of (see P. H. Merkl, *Modern Comparative Politics*, Holt Rinehart & Winston, New York 1970, p. 109).

[14] In this context, a parallel with the development of the Italian communist party in the 1970s suggests itself. In their cited work on theory of political parties (pp. 162 to 170), M. Stramiska and P. Fiala point out the issue of a somewhat "essential" notion of anti-system character – within the context of Sartori's criticism of the "rigid" classification of party systems.

[15] In a research conducted by IVVM in February 1997, the most frequently mentioned extreme political party was the SPR-RSČ (65%); "only" 23% of respondents characterised the KSČM in this manner. In December 1999, respondents were asked the following question: "Would you mind if the KSČM participated in one of the future governments?" Proponents and opponents have polarised at that time into two blocks of the same sizes: 47% rejected the participation of communists on a government and 46% of respondents would not mind such participation.