

**The Czech Republicans 1990-1998:  
A populist radical right outsider in a consolidating  
democracy**

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**Seán Hanley**

**School of Slavonic and East European Studies**

**University College London**

**[s.hanley@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:s.hanley@ucl.ac.uk)**

# **The Czech Republicans 1990-1998: A populist radical right outsider in a consolidating democracy**

## **1. Introduction**

The Association For the Republic - Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR-RSČ) was a small radical right populist party in the Czech Republic led by Miroslav Sládek, which was politically successful for much of the 1990s. It was represented in the Czech parliament between 1992 and 1998, but its support subsequently declined and the party lost parliamentary representation and the rapidly fragmented. Radical right forces in the Czech Republic have since failed to unite and, despite high profile and provocative bursts of activism and have remained electorally and political marginal. In this chapter, I examine the SPR-RSČ as a case study of party-based oppositional outsider populism in a consolidating democracy. Having first traced the origins and development of the party I then examine the populist nature of the radical right appeals it made in the Czech lands in 1990s and the implicit understanding of democracy these contained. I concluded by evaluating the Republicans' impact on the development Czech democracy and assessing the extent to which it has left a legacy in contemporary Czech politics.

## **2. The rise and fall of the SPR-RSČ**

The SPR-RSČ was formed in December 1989 as a 'radical right-wing party' by Miroslav Sládek and a group of associates, formally registering as a party in February 1990. The party seems to have originated as one of a plethora small, anti-communist groups founded in late 1989 during the course of Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution which styled themselves 'right-wing' and 'Republican' - an allusion to both US

Republicans and the conservative interwar Czechoslovak Agrarians, who officially styled themselves the Republican Party. Neither Sládek, who worked as a low-ranking official for the Czech censor's office, nor were other founders of the SPR-RSČ politically active before 1989. None seem to have been Communist Party members or to have had contacts with either dissidents or the less visible 'grey zone' of oppositionally minded technocrats that emerged in 1980s. The SPR-RSČ was quickly marked out by Sládek's egocentric, dominant personality and radical outspoken statements, which led to a rapid breakdown in attempts to co-operate with similar small groupings. Sládek's group thus contested the 1990 Czech and Czechoslovak elections outside the main alliance of small new anti-communist groupings, the Conservative Party - Free Bloc – (KS - SB).<sup>1</sup>

The SPR-RSČ, initially profiled itself as a respectable right-wing nationalist anti-communist party critical of Czechoslovakia's new president, the dissident playwright, Václav Havel and his Civic Forum movement for not becoming 'a platform for electoral struggle against the communists'.<sup>2</sup> However, chauvinistic and authoritarian elements – such as support for a strong presidency and hostility to African and Vietnamese guest workers - are detectable in the party's earliest programmatic documents and, even more so, in Sládek's statements and speeches. In the June 1990 Czech and Czechoslovak parliamentary elections both the Free Bloc and the SPR-RSČ's joint electoral list with the tiny All People's Democratic Party (VLDS)

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<sup>1</sup> Although the SPR-RSČ fielded candidates in both the Czech lands and Slovakia before the break-up of the Czechoslovak federation in 1993, it was in essence a purely Czech-based organization and its support in Slovakia was always negligible.

<sup>2</sup> 'Hlavní referát přednesený předsedou strany PhDr. Miroslavem Sládkem' in *Sdružení pro republiku - REPUBLIKANSKÁ STRANA Československa - Materialy z ustavujícího sjezdu*, undated booklet, Civic Forum Archive, Institute for Contemporary History, Prague Box 4 (Politická komise - interní informační materiály), sl. 5, p. 1.

received negligible support, each gaining just over one per cent in the Czech lands and winning no deputies in either the Czech or Czechoslovak federal parliaments.

In the course of 1990 Sládek's party developed a distinct brand of right-wing politics combining disruptive activism with ultra-radical conspiracy-minded anti-communism and a pallet of anti-elite, chauvinistic and racist anti-Roma themes. Using its newly founded weekly *Republika* started to promote conspiracy theories that the Velvet Revolution had staged as a result of secret agreements between Communist and dissident elites. The SPR-RSČ also received considerable publicity from protest demonstrations it organized against this 'conspiracy' during President George H. W. Bush's visit to Prague in November 1990. Banners in English held by party activists, visible in media coverage of the event, read 'President Bush - You Are Talking To Communists'. Independent reports spoke of estimated 2000 - 3000 Sládek supporters attending protest demonstrations organized to coincide with the visit.<sup>3</sup> In addition to anti-communism, the SPR-RSČ took up eclectic mix of issues designed to draw rapid support popular. It called for larger social benefits and increased public services; greater law and order; less bureaucracy and state intervention; the re-incorporation of Transcarpathia (ceded to the USSR in 1945) into Czechoslovakia;<sup>4</sup> the defence of Czech national interests against the West (and, in particular, supposed German and Sudeten German revanchism); and calls for tough measures against the Roma minority as a (supposed) source of crime and disorder, the racism for which the party became best known.<sup>5</sup> From spring 1991, the party's extreme and outrageous rhetoric,

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<sup>3</sup> See 'Národní třída po roce', *Republika*, no. 10, 26 November 1990 and 'Zazněl nám zvon svobody?', *Svobodné slovo*, 19 November 1990, pp. 1 and 4.

<sup>4</sup> The region is also known as Sub-Carpathian Ukraine and Ruthenia.

<sup>5</sup> Some analysts suggest that the Republicans toned down anti-Roma and anti-foreign rhetoric before the 1992 elections to focus on criticising government corruption and the failure to fight crime. See J. Pehe, 'The Emergence of Right-wing extremism', *Report on Eastern Europe*, 28 June 1991, pp.1-6.

provocative and well publicized demonstrations, and continual public campaigning in rallies and open air meetings addressed by Sládek had mobilized enough support to create a small national organization and growing electoral support.<sup>6</sup> In June 1992 benefiting from the fluid and uncertain political environment created by the break-up of Civic Forum into separate parties, the launching of economic reforms and the Czech-Slovak tensions over the redesign of the Czechoslovak federation, as illustrated in **tables 1 and 2** the SPR-RSČ made an electoral breakthrough, polling just over 6 per cent of the Czech vote in parliamentary elections and gaining representation in both the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly and the Czech parliament.

[TABLES 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE]

The Republicans' parliamentary faction quickly fragmented – nine of the SPR-RSČ's 14 federal deputies elected in 1992 rapidly broke with the party. However, this represented only a limited setback for the party, as the SPR-RSČ was largely inactive in the legislative process, preferring instead to continue its strategy of outrageous headline grabbing protest stunts.<sup>7</sup> Republican representative thus repeatedly came into conflict with the police and the courts, usually in connection with laws on inciting racial hatred and public order offences: Sládek, for example, was prosecuted for remarks in 1997 that the only thing Czechs should regret about their relationship with the Germans is that they did kill more of them during the Second World War.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> The party also received supportive publicity from newly established sensationalist tabloids such as *Špígl* and *Expres*.

<sup>7</sup> Such events included the blocking of the main Prague-Bratislava highway by SPR-RSČ members in 1993; regular SPR-RSČ rallies in Prague Wenceslas Square on 28 October, the anniversary of Czechoslovak independence; the disruption of a commemoration in 1994 at the site of the Terezín (Theresienstadt) concentration camp, where German representatives were present; and the nationwide distribution in 1995 of leaflets alleging a conspiracy between the Czech and German governments to return the Sudetenland to Germany. Sládek was also nominated by his party as a presidential candidate in 1992, 1993 and 1998, using the special parliamentary sessions that elected the Czechoslovak (and later Czech) President as a platform to make inflammatorily phrased attacks on establishment politicians.

<sup>8</sup> M. Mareš, *Pravicový extremismus a radikalismus v ČR*, Brno: Barrister & Principal, pp. 196-7.

greater access to the media it enjoyed as a parliamentary party and the platform afforded by parliament itself also enable the SPR-RSČ to amplify its message and build on its initial success. In the 1996 Czech parliamentary elections, the party gained over 8 per cent of the vote, its representation in the Czech parliament from 14 to 18 deputies.

However, in early parliamentary elections in June 1998, despite having performed strongly two years earlier and mounted a costly and apparently effective billboard campaign, the Republicans saw a dramatic decline in their vote unexpectedly failed to re-enter the Czech parliament. Exit polling suggested that, unlike in previous years, the party had failed to win over significant numbers of first time voters and that many younger, less educated male voters, who had previously supported the Republicans turned in 1998 to the Czech Social Democrats (ČSSD), who offered a more credible and professional solution to the economic issues of pressing concern to such groups.<sup>9</sup> The party was also undermined by revelations about Sládek's management of the party, the most damaging of which concerned his nepotistic placement of his partner (later his second wife) and relatives on the party's electoral list in 1996 and apparent misuse of party funds to finance his own lifestyle.<sup>10</sup> The latter accusation seems to have been especially damaging electorally given the party's regular attacks on established politicians as personally corrupt and self-seeking.

Faced with this sharp electoral reverse the SPR-RSČ was rapidly undermined by organizational instabilities stemming from its culture of activism; charismatic leadership; and lack of functional formal party structures. The SPR-RSČ was essentially a loose network of local groups linked to a national leadership dominated

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<sup>9</sup> M. Kreidl and K. Vlachová 'Rise and Decline of Right-Wing Extremism in the Czech Republic in the 1990s', *Czech Sociological Review*, 8 (1), 2000, pp. 69-91.

<sup>10</sup> D. Tácha 'Živili jsme Sládka', *Týden*, 37/98, pp. 37-9

by who ran it through a clique of trusted associates, friends and relatives.<sup>11</sup> Sládek's personal dominance of the party had already led to repeated factional conflicts and several waves of defections,<sup>12</sup> all of which accelerated after its debacle in the 1998 parliamentary elections and subsequent further electoral decline in regional authorities in 2000. After the party was declared bankrupt in 2001 because it was unable to pay employees, remaining members regrouped in a new, smaller successor organization: the Miroslav Sládek Republicans (RMS). However, the RMS's electoral impact was negligible and the organization declined into a political rump, which was a relatively minor player even on the Czech Republic's small radical right scene. In the succeeding years other radical right party have made a similarly significant electoral impact in the Czech Republic.

## **2. The SPR-RSČ as a populist radical right party**

Although Central and East European parties sit uncomfortably within some comparative typologies derived from the West European experience, the Republicans fit comfortably with the category of radical right populist party, understood as a combination of populism and with ideological characteristics of nativism, social authoritarianism and scepticism towards liberal democracy.<sup>13</sup> The SPR-RSČ's nativism was expressed in an ethnically exclusive xenophobic vision of the

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<sup>11</sup> Sládek reportedly personally decided the nomination (or removal) of conference delegates, candidates and members of the party executive, all aspects of party policy, organization and finance. A. Cerqueirová, *Republikáni: Šokující odhalení*, Place of publication not stated: Unholy Cathedral, 1999, pp. 59-78.

<sup>12</sup> After the initial departure of moderates alienated by Sládek's radicalism in early 1990, the Radical Republican Party (RRS) broke away after the 1990 elections and joined with other ex-SPR-RSČ members (including two Republican deputies) who had left Sládek's party in 1992 and 1995 to form the Party of Republican and National Democratic Unity (SRNDJ), later re-named the Patriotic Republican Party (VRS). VRS was joined by a further large group from SPR-RSČ in 1998. See M. Mareš, *Pravicový extremismus a radikalismus v ČR*, *op.cit.* pp. 190-99, 225-238.

<sup>13</sup> C. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right parties in Europe*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Czechoslovak (and later Czech) state defined by anti-Roma racism, anti-German nationalism and rejection of membership in international organizations, including both NATO and the EU. Its authoritarianism was expressed in demands for law and order, tougher punishments for criminals including the restoration of the death penalty. In almost all cases, issues of crime and disorder were either ethnicized and explained as part of the ‘Gypsy problem’, or put into a populist idiom and discussed in terms of the criminality and corruption of elites. However, unlike Czech neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groupuscules after 1989, the SPR-RSČ was not opposed on principle to representative democracy, which (like a number of mainstream parties) it wished to supplement with elements of direct citizen participation.

By the mid-1990s the Republicans had come to see themselves as part of a Europe wide family of ‘radical right’ parties which, they believed, were a response to the wider ‘moral crisis of the democratic system’ plagued by corruption, criminality, immigration, the ‘dictatorship of money’ and the inability of governing coalitions to resolve the problems of ordinary people.<sup>14</sup> The party enjoyed close relations with France’s Front National (FN) and participated in several events organized as part of the first incarnation of the EURONAT grouping sponsored by the FN. The SPR-RSČ ideology combined this radical right outlook with a populist discourse containing all three key core characteristics outlined by Rovira Kaltwasser and Mudde in the introduction to this volume: 1) a view of society as divided into two homogenous and hostile groups - a corrupt self-serving elite and a morally unsullied People; 2) an understanding of such divisions as predominantly *moral*, that is based on character and self-chosen conduct; and 3) a conception of the proper purpose of politics as the expression of social and national unity, and its defence against threatening external

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<sup>14</sup> M. Sládek, *To, co mám na mysli, je svoboda*, Brno: SPR-RSČ, pp. 73-4



forces or corrupt internal minorities. The Republicans' specific construction of these elements was essentially framed in terms of a radical anti-communist ideology of regime change.

### *2.1 'Ordinary people' versus corrupt (crypto)-communist elites*

The Republicans saw themselves as representing hardworking, previously unpoliticized 'ordinary people' who had been neglected and overlooked by privileged elite groups, from the communist nomenklatura and the dissident intelligentsia alike. Early in 1990 Miroslav Sládek summed up this view speaking of his party defending

'...ordinary people, who are the salt of the earth, they work, they look after families, they were here through the most difficult of times and had to rely only on their miserable wages. They didn't emigrate; neither did anyone support them in a professional career. It is they who make up this country. They should therefore have the opportunity to influence this country's future (...) And not merely to watch passively as power is taken over ..'.<sup>15</sup>

As this described elite-mass relations both during communism and in the transition from communism, the Republicans thus unsurprisingly viewed Czechoslovakia post-1989 political institutions as essentially a continuation of the old regime: a 'new totalitarianism', outwardly reformed, but also basically continuous with former communist nomenklatura in their use of a media monopoly to maintain an ideological façade of pluralism as means of exercising social control for self-seeking reasons.<sup>16</sup>

As Sládek explained, the new political parties had

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<sup>15</sup> 'Hlavní referát přednesený předsedou strany PhDr Miroslavem Sládkem', *op.cit.*, p.1.

<sup>16</sup> 'Hlavní referát přednesený předsedou strany PhDr Miroslavem Sládkem', *op.cit.*, pp, 1-2.

‘very small to tiny memberships, but their leaderships have an excess of financial resources and unlimited access to the media ... now fully in the hands of this new totalitarianism. (.....). These parties identify with different political currents, not for programmatic reasons, but for reasons of personal advancement (*z prospěchářských důvodů*), because they think that this or that current will enable them to continue their sweet inactivity at the expense of the majority of citizens’.<sup>17</sup>

The party partly explained such elite collusion through conspiracy theories, actively promoting the work of Miroslav Dolejší, a political prisoner in 1950s later re-imprisoned on politically motivated charges in 1970s and 80s, who claimed that dissidents had been a secret reserve of loyal Communist Party members created in 1969-70 whom the regime had only pretended to persecute and that, consequently, the 1989 Velvet Revolution had been the product of a secret agreement between Reagan and Gorbachev in 1987 and staged jointly by the KGB and the CIA. However, the party also used the more widely accepted argument – influential on both the radical anti-communist right and among mainstream right-wing elements in Civic Forum – that the reform communist politics of many dissidents in 1960s gave them an unacceptable ideological and political affinity with current communist nomenklatura elites. Such arguments, although they could be formulated subtly, quickly became reduced to a straightforward equation of dissidents and communists and were generally used by the Republicans in this form.<sup>18</sup>

Not only the Velvet Revolution, but all subsequent developments were explained within this framework of elite manipulation as staged and manipulated by a powerful,

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<sup>17</sup> M. Sládek, *....tak to vidím já.*, Brno: SPR-RSČ, 1992, p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> See S. Hanley, *The New Right in the New Europe: Czech transformation and right-wing politics, 1989-2006*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 164-6.

sinister establishment, operating behind a facade of democracy. The creation of a party system; the division of Czechoslovakia; coupon privatization; increasing social inequality thus were all viewed as products of the conspiracies against the people by an alliance of communist elites and crypto-communist dissidents. As an unsigned article in *Republika* in 1992 discussing the imminent division of Czechoslovakia put it 'I have the impression that everything was planned beforehand (similarly to the Velvet Revolution) and that the Czech and Slovak nations have been deceived, abused and violated by a foreign power working with its domestic lackeys (*přísluhovačů*)'.<sup>19</sup> The Republicans' most original contribution to this radical anti-communist discourse of elite collusion and manipulation was, as in the above citation, to link domestic elites with external threats from foreign interests. For the Republicans such threats stemmed mainly from the danger of economic and geo-political domination by Germany and, to a lesser extent, Austria and, in particular, from Sudeten German claims for recompense for the mass 'transfer' of ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia in 1945-6.

## 2.2 *Moral politics*

However, the SPR-RSČ construction of collusive communist and crypto-communist elites was not framed purely in terms their (supposed) shared origins or ideological affinities. Drawing on the common understanding— implicit in much dissident discourse - of communism as primarily *moral* phenomenon (a form of evil) rather than a social or historical one, the Republicans framed the distinction between people and elite as a *moral* one between the decent and hardworking majority and a corrupt and indolent minority, which was using its monopoly on political power dishonestly

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<sup>19</sup> 'Vždy o nás rozhodl někdo jiný', *Republika*, 16-22 November 1992, p. 7.

to enrich itself in the privatization process, both directly and by serving foreign interests.<sup>20</sup>

The Republicans had highly personalized, moralistic view of politics which explained the failings of political institutions in terms of establishment politicians' personal corruption and turpitude. By contrast, unlike both dissident and communist elites - who, the Republicans argued, were interlinked and co-responsible for the inequities of both past and present) - <sup>21</sup> the Republicans stressed that they were 'new faces' with a 'clean record'. Unsurprisingly, the party's discourses about the type of political change it wished to bring about were replete with references to moral renewal, purging and purification. The party's internal culture of continual activist mobilization, intended to build a distinct ethos of unity and self-sacrifice,<sup>22</sup> also highlights the party's 'moralization' of politics.

In contrast with the 'decency' and popular base of the SPR-RSČ, Civic Forum and its various successor parties were depicted as vehicles for corruption, personal enrichment and elite manipulation by ex-communist functionaries, dissidents and, former black marketeers, which required 'purging',<sup>23</sup> because although they had money and power, but no roots among the people. In the Republican view Czechoslovakia's new liberal-democratic and liberal-market institutions were not simply phoney and inauthentic, but the product of *deliberate* deceit by ruling elites, further evidencing their moral turpitude. This was, in the Republican view, true not

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<sup>20</sup> This view often shaded into a more deeply anti-political view: politics was, as Sládek once put it, a dark tunnel in which the only light by which people could orient themselves as they like fumbled their way along was the Republican Party and its goals. Sládek, ....*tak to vidím já*, *op.cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>21</sup> See 'Hlavní referát přednesený předsedou strany PhDr. Miroslavem Sládkem', *op.cit.*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>22</sup> Sládek, ....*tak to vidím já*, *op.cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, R. Havlík, 'ODS = komunistická nebo fašistická strana', *Republika*, no. 3, 20 - 26 January 1992, p. 3 or J. Bulba, 'Proved'te očistu svých politických stran', *Republika*, no. 37, 14 - 20 September 1992, p. 5.

simply of pretended differences between communists and dissidents, or between mainstream parties of left and right, but also of seemingly more impersonal economic processes. Sládek thus argued that growing social inequalities resulting from economic reform were a *deliberate* action intended by elites to depoliticize and control discontent through poverty, rather than an indirect consequence of marketization.<sup>24</sup>

### 2. 3 *Defending the national community*

Although notionally in favour of liberal rights and political pluralism and certainly in favour of private property, the Republicans viewed Czechoslovak (and later Czech) society in terms of as organic community united by strong ethnic and historical bonds, whose cohesion, distinctness, freedom and – over the longer term - very survival were threatened by a range of external and internal threats, consciously and unconsciously unleashed by elites.<sup>25</sup> These included such diverse phenomena as growing economic inequality, family breakdown, declining birth-rates, rising crime, consumer culture and European integration. The task of the Republican movement, Sládek explained, was to counteract such centrifugal and disintegrative forces and to channel the expression of the ‘will of the nation’ (*vůle národa*).<sup>26</sup> Consequently, the proper relationship between state and society could be understood in collectivist and paternalist terms: the role of the state was to care for the people and guarantee popular well-being as means of preserving the nation. In Sládek’s view ensuring such security

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<sup>24</sup> M.Sládek, *To, co mám na mysli, je svoboda*, *op.cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>25</sup> The Republicans subscribed to a conservative form of Czechoslovakism which assumed that Czech and Slovaks were brother nations, whose cultures and interests were closely aligned, but rejected the notion of distinct progressive ‘Czechoslovak Idea’ associated with T. G. Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia.

<sup>26</sup> Sládek, *....tak to vidím já*, *op.cit.*, pp. 27-9.

for the people ‘... is not the right but the duty of the state, if it is to have any reason for its existence’.<sup>27</sup>

#### *2. 4 The Republicans’ understanding of democracy*

In the 1990s the Czech Republic saw an extensive public and political debate about the most appropriate model of democracy. In outline, it opposed those who favoured a liberal, majoritarian model based on bi-polar competition between professionalized, ideologically well defined parties of left and right, such as the then Prime Minister (and current President) Václav Klaus, to those favouring a more consensus-based model with greater scope for organized interests, direct citizen participation and a civil society to play a role in decision making. This best known representative of such a view was the Czechoslovak (1989-92) and later Czech (1993-2003) President Václav Havel. However, it was a vision broadly shared across the political centre and centre-left of Czech politics, albeit with a greater emphasis on traditional corporatist arrangements by the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats.<sup>28</sup>

Situating the Republicans in such debates – and identifying the party’s broader understanding of democracy – is, however, problematic. Firstly, the Republicans showed limited interest in policy or programme development and, in contrast to radical right parties in some other European states, the party was not supported by a distinct right-wing nationalist intelligentsia milieu, which might have formulated a

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<sup>27</sup> Sládek, *To, co mám na mysli, je svoboda, op.cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> See P. Machonin., *Strategie sociální transformace české společnosti*, Brno: Doplněk, 1996, pp. 31-43; P. Pithart and V. Klaus, ‘Rival Visions’, *Journal of Democracy*, 7 (1) January 1996, pp. 12-23; and M. Potůček ‘Havel vs. Klaus: Public Policy in the Czech Republic’, *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis and Practice*, 1 (2), 1999, 163-96.

more worked out and coherent ideal of democracy. SPR-RSČ ‘programmes’ are thus typically short one-page lists of demands intended to highlight themes to voters, while Sládek’s own speeches and writing, which are the most extensive source for understanding the party’s ideology, are often repetitive, rambling and loaded with invective and hyperbole. Neither source engaged explicitly or coherently with contemporary Czech debates about models of democracy. Secondly, the Republicans were regarded by mainstream politicians and journalists and intellectuals as an extremist pariah party and its views were not taken seriously and were therefore largely ignored. Sládek, who bore a close physical resemblance to the British comedian Rowan Atkinson, was thus widely dismissed by opponents as a disruptive ‘Mr Bean’ figure. Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, however, the Republicans’ discourses on democracy were confused because – unlike most Czech political parties with the exception of the hardline Communists– they did not consider post-1989 Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic to be a democracy, but saw outward pluralism simply as a facade for a new form of authoritarianism. The Republicans thus rejected the idea that there was a meaningful democratic competition, considering other parties mere vehicles for corrupt elites.<sup>29</sup> Sládek spoke of ‘pretend new parties and ... a fictitious political spectrum in Czechoslovakia. (...) Its goal is to confuse voters in Czechoslovakia and create the impression that there is a multi-party system in Czechoslovakia’<sup>30</sup> The Republicans’ pronouncements on democracy are thus often simultaneously concerned with *democratization* – how to bring about genuinely democratic system – and as well as what form such genuine democracy might take.

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<sup>29</sup> Sládek, *Jak to vidím já*, *op.cit.*, p.90.

<sup>30</sup> Sládek ....*tak to vidím já*, *op.cit.*, p. 71.

The Republicans' positions do nevertheless have an underlying coherence and logic, which amount to an implicit strategy of transformation to an illiberal form of democracy and market society.<sup>31</sup> The Republicans' primary role, as they saw it, was to 'do battle with the current establishment'<sup>32</sup> to 'intervene to save the nation from destruction'<sup>33</sup> by bringing about genuine revolutionary regime change of the kind that Civic Forum had pretended to carry out in November 1989. The Republicans saw their party as a dynamic campaigning vehicle, whose main task was to mobilize members and supporters through continuous demonstrations, public meetings and rallies very much in the way that Havel's Civic Forum had done during the Velvet in November-December 1989.

The Republicans' proposals for the type of democracy they would introduce in a reformed political system offer somewhat sketchy and incoherent. Proposed institutional reforms mentioned in Sládek's writing include voters' right of recall legislators; proportional representation with no formal threshold; decentralization of power to the level of the commune; the restoration of the four-fold provincial structure of interwar Czechoslovakia; and a reduction of central government to a mere seven ministries.<sup>34</sup> All were, however, claimed by the party to empower ordinary people against corrupt professional politicians or enable popular control over elites. Insofar as it is possible to identify any more general underlying model in Republican pronouncements, it thus appears that the party saw democracy very largely as a simple

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<sup>31</sup> Machonin, *Strategie sociální transformace, op.cit.* pp. 31-43.

<sup>32</sup> A. Kukulová, 'K volbám', *Republika*, no. 26, 26 June - 9 July 1992, p.3.

<sup>33</sup> Sládek, *To, co mám na mysli, je svoboda, op.cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Sládek, ....*tak to vidím já, op.cit.*, pp. 30, 65, 70 and *To, co mám na mysli, je svoboda, op.cit.*, 43-48.



mechanism for creating accountability between rulers and ruled, which could operate to bring about the revolutionary displacement of discredited rulers. As Sládek put it ‘[i]n a functional democracy elections represent a mechanism not dissimilar to a revolution’.<sup>35</sup> The role of parties was simply one of continual mobilization and campaigning. In Sládek’s words ‘[f]or a political party the election campaign starts the same day that the previous elections end. Otherwise it isn’t a political party, but a group of layabouts (*spolek lenochů*).<sup>36</sup> However, other more contentious forms of mobilization could also be justified. Sládek even went so far as to claim, on one occasion that ‘[i]t would be easy and understandable and fully in accordance with the Bill of Rights and Freedoms [in the Czech Constitution] to bring about the removal of illegitimate authorities using any means, including violence’.<sup>37</sup>

### **3. The Republicans and Czech democracy**

The Czech Republic rapidly and successfully consolidated democracy after the collapse of communism in November-December 1989 and, unlike Slovakia, suffered few serious repercussions on its democratic development following the negotiated break-up of the Czechoslovak federation at the end of 1992. However, the quality of Czech democracy - and in particular the quality of elites-masses linkage - has been persistently called into question. The broad Civic Forum (OF) movement which came to power during the November-December 1989 ‘Velvet Revolution’ soon faced criticism over the representativeness of its leadership structures and the real mandate of its ex-dissident leaders. However, the Forum’s break-up in 1990-1 and rapid

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<sup>35</sup> Sládek, *To, co mám na mysli, je svoboda, op.cit.*, 1995, p. 104.

<sup>36</sup> Sládek, *....tak to vidím já, op.ci.*, p. 236.

<sup>37</sup> Sládek, *To, co mám na mysli, je svoboda, op.cit.*, p. 72.

replacement with conventionally organized parties, which then became dominant actors in the political process, raised further questions. Although stable, formally democratic in their internal organization and capable of articulating clear programmatic positions to voters, Czech parties' generally low memberships made them closed organizations, vulnerable to the informal influence of vested interests. Moreover, the rapid consolidation of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) which formed from the right wing of Civic Forum in 1991 and the fragmented state of the Czech centre-left enabled incumbent centre-right parties to politicize public administration and turn a blind eye to corruption for much of the 1990s. While the emergence of the Social Democrats (ČSSD) as the dominant party of the centre-left towards the end decade brought more equal competition between left and right, it also led to a series of close electoral contests, which failed to produce clear majority governments. The resulting pragmatic co-operation between major parties of centre-left and centre-right was then seen by critics as generating a collusive, clientelistic pattern of party politics, which denied voter choice and further blocked citizen participation and civil society development.<sup>38</sup>

### *3.1 Positive effects on democracy?*

How did the Czech Republicans fit into this pattern of democratic development? As Rovira Kaltwasser and Mudde suggest elsewhere in this volume, populists can, in

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<sup>38</sup> See A. Green and C. Leff Skalník 'The quality of democracy: Mass-elite linkages in the Czech Republic', *Democratization*, 4 (4), 1997, pp. 63-87; H. Kitschelt, Z. Mansfeldová, R. Markowski and G. Tóka, *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation and Inter-Party Cooperation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; A. Roberts, 'Demythologizing the Czech Opposition Agreement', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 55 (8), 2003, pp. 1273-1303; Hanley, *The New Right in the New Europe*, *op.cit.*; M. A. Vachudova 'Centre—Right Parties and Political Outcomes in East Central Europe', *Party Politics*, 14 (4), 2008, pp. 387-405; and J. Pehe, *Demokracie bez demokratů: Úvahy o společnosti a politice*. Prague: Prostor, 2010.

some circumstances, play the role of a democratic corrective by acting as a channel for previously unexpressed interests and issues. This, however, presupposes either that they have a degree of electoral support sufficient to make an effective claim on power or, failing this, that they enjoy sufficient acceptance and co-operation from established parties to enter the coalition-making game. The SPR-RSČ lacked both significant electoral support and minimal levels of acceptance by other political actors.

Although willing to share a television studio with SPR-RSČ representatives, from the outset other parties (including the hard line Communists) treated the SPR-RSČ as an extremist pariah party. All other parties considered the SPR-RSČ unacceptable as a potential coalition partner at either national or local level and the Republicans, for their part, seem to have had little interest in gaining office. However, although the Republicans' rhetorical suggestions of direct action and persistent racism, led some to wonder whether there were grounds for banning the party as an anti-democratic grouping,<sup>39</sup> there was little discussion about formalizing the effective *cordon sanitaire*.

This reflected the fact that much debate about the Republicans – and extremist parties more generally in the Czech Republic - was subsumed into the more politically salient and controversial question of the status of the Communist Party. The main successor to the former ruling party in the Czech lands, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), was an organizationally well entrenched and well supported

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<sup>39</sup> J. Fabrý, 'Lze rozpustit republikány?', *Nová Přítomnost*, 5/97, pp. 26-7. A 1991 law (amended in 2001) forbids the propagation of movements which 'demonstrably tend towards the suppression of human rights and freedoms or espouse ethnic, racial, religious or class hatred'. On the legal background see 'Zákaz propagace komunismu', *Revue Politika* no. 2/2005. Online at <http://www.cdk.cz/rp/clanky/243/zakaz-propagace-komunismu/> (accessed 25 November 2010).

organization,<sup>40</sup> but was regarded by mainstream parties as extreme and undemocratic force, which posed a significant challenge for Czech democracy. In evidence, critics highlighted KSČM's anti-capitalist commitment a new type of socialist regime distinct from capitalist democracy and its failure fully to repudiate Communist one party-rule between 1948 and 1989. The legality of KSČM was subject to a series of legal and political challenges by right-wing and liberal politicians during 1990s, while no serious attempts were mounted against to ban the smaller and more ideologically incoherent SPR-RSČ.<sup>41</sup> However, despite such attempts the existence of lustration legislation barring individual high-ranking former Communists from many forms of public office,<sup>42</sup> in the political arena mainstream parties were content to maintain an informal but openly stated *cordon* against the KSČM, which were ideologically so distant from them as to be wholly unattractive as potential partner. The one exception were the Czech Social Democrats (ČSSD), who passed a formal congress resolution in 1995 forbidding co-operation with the Communists of other 'extremist parties'. The resolution named a series 'extremist parties' alongside the KSČM, including the SPR-RSČ. However, characteristically for such debates the Republicans' inclusion served principally to blur the contentious issue of co-operation with the KSČM, which sharply divided the ČSSD.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Between 1990 and 1998 KSČM's electoral support ranged from 10 to 14 per cent. In 1998 its membership was an estimated 120,000. SPR-RSČ membership records were chaotic and its claimed membership of 50, 000 clearly inflated. A realistic estimate based on candidates fielded in the 1994 local elections would suggest a membership of perhaps 5000 – 10,000.

<sup>41</sup> 'Zákaz propagace komunismu', *op.cit.*

<sup>42</sup> See K. Williams, 'Lustration as the Securitization of Democracy in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 19 (4), 2003, 1-24. Lustration bans did not extend to elected office.

<sup>43</sup> L. Kopeček, 'Czech Social Democracy and its "cohabitation" with the Communist Party: The story of a neglected affair', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 41 (3), 2008, pp. 317-38. Social Democrats interpreted the resolution as barring *national* co-operation with the Communists.

The *cordon sanitaire* around the SPR-RSČ – and the party’s own lack of interest in programmatic issues or gaining office through the coalition-making politics– meant that it had no policy influence or indirect leverage on other parties. Even the Republicans’ existence as a parliamentary pariah party had limited relevance: until 1996 liberal and centre-right governments enjoyed clear parliamentary majorities in the Czech lands. Only with the inconclusive parliamentary elections of 1996 did the parliamentary presence of the Republicans (and the Communists) as an uncoalitionable party have an influence on political outcomes, contributing to an agreement for the formation of a minority centre-right government negotiated with the Social Democrats. However, the continuation of this pattern of deadlock in several subsequent elections following the political demise of the Republicans in 1998 suggests that the SPR-RSČ was one among many contributing factors.

Nor, viewed from the perspective of political mobilization, can it be argued, that the Republicans helped facilitate cross-class politics: politics in the Czech Republic in the early 1990s as in other post-communist Central and Eastern Europe was not based on rigid historically based class blocs, that a populist movement might bridge – communist societies lacked a conventional class structure; the concept of class was discredited and overshadowed by the focus on democratization and social transformation; and the post-1989 social structure was in flux, resulting in a transition politics that was already highly dynamic and ‘cross-class’. Nor arguably did the Republicans help expand the political realm as in post-communist transition politics most, if not all, aspects of economy, state and society were already politicized and subject to political debate and political decision-making about how they should be transformed into autonomous, non-political systems.

The Republican phenomenon did give voice to topics and groups that did not find a voice in the mainstream post-transition discourse of elites associated with Civic Forum: radical anti-communism, anti-German nationalism and anti-Roma racism (the ‘Gypsy problem’). They also politically mobilized and politically engaged a certain segment of Czech society – young, poorly educated, predominantly male – which might otherwise have been politically disengaged. In a more underlying sense, the party’s nationalism, authoritarianism and commitment to economic statism and a large communist-era welfare state also provided a means for many of voters to express their support for the values and policies of outgoing communist regime, while in their own minds radically disavowing it. To some extent, especially in 1990-1, the Republicans could also be credited with introducing – or, at least, alerting the Czech public of – that democratic politics entailed conflict and competition, not (just) consensus.

Many of the statements in the preceding paragraph must, however, be markedly qualified. The SPR-RSČ was, in many cases, far from the only outsider vehicle for expressing such public sentiments ‘silent majority’ issues that elites did not wish to acknowledge. Radical anti-communist views emerged into the public arena very quickly through more establishment-oriented groupings such as the Confederation of Political Prisoners (KPV), Club of Committed Independents (KAN) and, most notably, in the splits in Civic Forum itself, which propelled Václav Klaus to the chairmanship of the Forum in October 1990 and led to the foundation of the centre-right Civic Democratic Party (ODS) the following year. With the waning of ODS anti-communism, always more rhetorical than real, new parties such as the Democratic Union (DEU) and Right Bloc (PB) parties –founded respectively in 1994 and 1996 - offered additional vehicles for right-wing radical anti-communism devoid

of the SPR-RSČ's racism and statist economic remedies. Anti-German nationalism very similar in tone and focus to that of the Republicans was strongly expressed by the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM). The only 'silent majority' issue that SPR-RSČ was unique in voicing was that the 'Gypsy Problem': a belief that Roma were an undeserving, criminal minority generating a range of social problems against whom punitive and repressive policies should be targeted – a sentiment prevalent across large parts of Czech society.<sup>44</sup> However, the Republicans' obvious extremism and lack of intellectual and programmatic sophistication made it a highly ineffective champion of such issues. The SPR-RSČ's culture of extremism and paranoia, which served to mobilize members, also cut the party off from broader Czech society, making it, in the words of former leading Republicans, a 'microcosm'<sup>45</sup> and 'a sect, which abhorred everything and everyone around it'.<sup>46</sup> The net impact of its activities was to arguably produce a closing of ranks among other parties and confirm the taboo status of its illiberal nationalist and racist views.

### *3.2 Negative effects?*

The negative effects of the SPR-RSČ on Czech democracy are somewhat easier to enumerate, although here too the Republicans' relative weakness and isolation limited their scope and it would almost certainly be an exaggeration to speak of them as ever being in any sense a threat to Czech democracy or democratization. The Republican vision was certainly one which overwhelmingly stressed popular sovereignty and devoid of any liberal concern for checks and balances, minority rights or the rule of law. However, the party's

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<sup>44</sup> See R. Fawn 'Czech Attitudes Towards Roma: "Expecting More of Havel's Country"', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53 (8), 2001, 1193-1219.

<sup>45</sup> An anonymous former leading Republican cited in 'Sládkovo krédo: Věrnost, blbost a pracovitost', *Lidové noviny*, 18 June 1998.

<sup>46</sup> Petr Vrzáň, a former Republican parliamentary deputy quoted in Tácha, 'Živili jsme Sládka', *op.cit.*

lack of power and influence left it in no position to circumvent such rights in practice. Indeed, as various court cases involving the party and its leaders show, legal provisions protecting the rights of others were often enforced *against* them. The Republicans' moralistic and radical discourse demonizing and abusing political opponents and rejecting the legitimacy of the political system did little to foster a culture of dialogue or consensus in Czech public life. However, as suggested above, the Republicans did arguably help cement a form of establishment consensus among mainstream parties to affirm liberal norms regarding the (non-)ethnic character of the Czech state and the civic character of Czech nationalism and national identity. Liberal understandings of Czech nationalism were, however, sufficiently strong and embedded<sup>47</sup> that it is unlikely that the Republican challenge, even if it had been less self-defeatingly crude and extreme, would have opened up political space for conservative ethno-nationalist themes. Overall, the role played by the SPR-RSČ broadly conforms to the expectations of Rovira Kaltwasser and Mudde that weak populist forces in an unconsolidated, new democracy will play the role more of corrective than threat to democracy. However, the SPR-RSČ's political isolation and lack of political and intellectual credibility left it poorly equipped to make any meaningful critique of the socio-economic exclusion, alienation and disempowerment of some groups in post-communist Czech society or the corruption that increasingly marred post-communist transformation.<sup>48</sup>

### *3.3 The Republicans' outsider populism: Causes and context*

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<sup>47</sup> For an in-depth discussion comparing Czech and Polish nationalism and their relationship with liberalism see S. Auer, *Liberal Nationalism in Central Europe*. London and New York. RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

<sup>48</sup> See Q. Reed 'Political Corruption, Privatisation and Control in the Czech Republic: A Case Study of Problems in Multiple Transition', Unpublished DPhil thesis, Oriel College, Oxford, 1996.



The case of the SPR-RSČ is broadly in step with the hypotheses advanced in the introduction of this volume about wider contexts, which determine the impact of populism on democracy, although it also raises some questions: the Republicans' nationalist, anti-communist and welfarist ideology led the party to radical positions rejecting the legitimacy of Czech democracy and advocating the possible use of violence which – although never acted upon and containing strong elements of hyperbole and farce – were potentially threatening to democracy had the party won greater mass support. Such discourses were clearly more exclusionary rather than inclusionary centring particularly on the Roma minority. This fits the expectation that in a country with low levels of socio-economic inequality, such as the Czech Republic,<sup>49</sup> populists will tend to adopt discourses of (usually ethnic exclusion). However, it should be noted that, apart from the Roma minority (estimated at up to 5 per cent of the population) the Czech Republic also had low socio-cultural diversity and was (and is) ethnically homogeneous. In line with arguments advanced in the introduction to the volume, that the generally high levels of legitimacy enjoyed by the political establishment of ex-dissidents and technocrats swept to power by the November 1989 Velvet Revolution and elected in a landslide victory in free elections in 1990 may explain the Republicans' limited electoral and political impact. The Republican case also confirms the suggested association of party system fragmentation and populist success: the rise of the SPR-RSČ in 1991-2 coincided with a period of flux in Czech party politics following the disintegration of Civic Forum and its containment and subsequent demise with the consolidation of the party system

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<sup>49</sup> Levels of income inequality in the Czech Republic in the 1990s were among the lowest in Central and Eastern Europe. See T. I. Garner 'and K. Terrell 'A Gini decomposition analysis of inequality in the Czech Republic and Slovakia during the transition', *Economics of Transition*, 6 (1), 1998, 23-46.

in mid-late 1990s. It should be noted, however, that openness' of Czech party-electoral politics may also have been a braking factor on the SPR-RSČ as - although it established a hegemonic position on the extreme right – it faced a range of other parties and groups articulating an anti-establishment and/or anti-communist message.

#### **4. Legacies of the SPR-RSČ**

The SPR-RSČ has left few strong discernable legacies in Czech politics. Despite a brief personal comeback in local politics in 2003-4 during which he became mayor of a small borough on the outskirts of Brno, Miroslav Sládek appears to be a marginal, semi-retired figure,<sup>50</sup> now widely derided even on the Czech radical right for his political failures.<sup>51</sup> Most other leading members of the SPR-RSČ of the 1990s seem to have left politics, although former rank-and-file Republicans have reportedly been active at grassroots level in a variety of parties and movements, the most notable being the former editor of *Republika*, Andrea Cerqueirová, who is now a prominent campaigning journalist writing on lesbian and feminist issues. Some younger activists in the Republicans of Miroslav Sládek (RMS) have, however, remained active on the Czech far-right: Tomáš Vandas the former RMS secretary was the leader of the Workers Party (DS) which he formed in 2003; currently the most well supported radical right organization in the Czech Republic. However, the DS seemed largely to have moved away Sládek's recipe of a 'Republicanism' (*republikánství*) blending radical right and populist appeals in favour of a more overtly neo-fascist style,

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<sup>50</sup> I. Svobodová, 'Sládek: Politiku jsem ještě nevzdal'. *Mladá fronta Dnes*, 19 March 2006. Online edition. Available [http://zpravy.idnes.cz/domaci.asp?t=domaci&c=A060319\\_081941\\_domaci\\_jan](http://zpravy.idnes.cz/domaci.asp?t=domaci&c=A060319_081941_domaci_jan) (accessed 23 November 2010).

<sup>51</sup> For example, right-wing Czech blogger D-Fens commented that '...for a short time the party functioned more or less normally, but then its chairman [Sládek] started to go a bit loopy [*začal magořit*] and in 1996-8 the only people hanging on were those on good terms with the chairman or who didn't oppose him..'. 'Republikán(ka) Andrea', dated 8 March 2007. Online. Available at <http://www.dfens-cz.com/view.php?cisloclanku=2007030803> (accessed 1 July 2010).

stressing street and sub-cultural politics, rather than election campaigning reaching out to a mass of discontented voters. The Workers' Party's aggressive protests in areas with high concentrations of Roma and paramilitary style parades, which have gained it considerable publicity, appear closer to the strategy of Hungary's Jobbik than the Republican model of the 1990s developed by Sládek.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, in 2010 the radicalism of the Workers Party led to its formal banning for unconstitutional anti-democratic extremism in February 2010, a fate the Republicans easily escaped.

The Republicans also appear to have left little real ideological legacy. Shortly after the political collapse of the Republicans in 1998-1999, the mainstream, the centre-right Civic Democratic Party (ODS) of Václav Klaus start to explore anti-German nationalism – albeit in different and usually more measured terms than the SPR-RSČ – as part of a realignment towards ‘national interests’ and a more explicit defence of Czech statehood against the supposed encroachment of Germany and the EU. However, although the demise of the SPR-RSČ arguably diminished the taboo status of overtly expressed Czech nationalism, closer examination of the Civic Democrats’ trajectory reveals that its ‘nationalist turn’ owed more to internal development and debates, than any external influences.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, even the few fringe elements linked to ODS which have sought to develop a embrace more ethnically-based conservative-nationalist form of right-wing politics , such as the Young Right group, have drawn on foreign models or the historical ‘integral nationalist’ National Democratic tradition of the interwar period, rather than the legacy of Sládek and his party.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> The Workers' Party (DS) has a limited electoral base: it polled 1.07 per cent in the 2009 European elections and, under a slightly different label, won 1.14 per cent in the 2010 parliamentary elections.

<sup>53</sup> Despite an initially outwardly Thatcherite, neo-liberal ideology, ODS discourse always contained many classical Czech nationalist tropes See Hanley, *The New Right in the New Europe*, *op.cit.* 180-5/

<sup>54</sup> See S. Hanley, ‘Klaus thinktank warns of Islamicisation’. Blog posting dated 21 August 2007. Online. Available

Similarly, no party, with the exception of the far-right groups discussed above, has ever taken up the Republicans' harsh approach to the Roma minority, although Czech public opinion continues to be largely hostile to Roma<sup>55</sup> and some local politicians from mainstream parties running for the Czech Senate or in municipal elections have campaigned against Roma in thinly disguised form, often winning landslide victories. Some politicians from the Public Affairs (VV) party, which unexpectedly entered the Czech parliament in May 2010 after an unexpected meteoric rise, have similarly advocated tough measures against anti-social behaviour in housing estates where large numbers of Roma live, even going so far as to advocate the use of citizen patrols. However, no such tendencies are detectable within the position of VV as a whole, whose highly successful political strategy combined anti-establishment populist rhetoric denouncing established parties as corrupt 'political dinosaurs' with calls for market-oriented reforms and greater use of direct democracy.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps the closest equivalent to Sládek's Republicanism found in contemporary Czech politics can be detected in the left-wing eurosceptic Sovereignty bloc, led by former newsreader and former independent MEP Jana Bobošíková. Although its rhetoric is not anti-communist, Bobošíková's party - an amalgamation of independents' grouping and fringe parties, which was formed in 2009- has an economically interventionist, nationalist and eurosceptic programme framed in populist terms as a critique of an indolent and corrupt elite with surprising echoes of Sládek

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<http://drseansdiary.blogspot.com/2007/07/klaus-thinktank-newsletter-warns-of.html> (accessed 1 December 2010).

<sup>55</sup> 'Poll shows poor relations between public and Roma', *Czech Daily Monitor*, 13 May 2010, p.1.

<sup>56</sup> 'Veci veřejné politický program'. Online. Available <http://www.veciverejne.cz/politicky-program.html> (accessed 5 May 2010).

and the SPR-RSČ of 1990s.<sup>57</sup> Like the SPR-RSČ, Sovereignty is also heavily dependent on high profile, charismatic leader, although Bobošíková projects an image combining professionalism, toughness and femininity very different from that of Sládek.<sup>58</sup> However, once again no direct linkages with the old SPR-RSČ are traceable, suggesting, at most, that the same structural conditions that helped shape the Republicans may have endured and influenced the development of other populist parties.

## 5. Conclusions

The SPR-RSČ was a radical right populist outsider, whose populism was strongly shaped by the transitional context of early democratization in which it emerged. Key to the party's populism was a blurred distinction between a socially unifying, politics of revolutionary regime change and conventional democratic competition between parties. The Republican' populist discourse and understandings of democracy were thus strongly shaped by a radical anti-communist view of transition from communism in 1989 as incomplete, unjust and manipulated. The impacts of the party on Czech democracy are broadly those anticipated of a non-incumbent outsider populist party in the introduction to this volume. However, such impacts – both positive and negative – were limited by the party's relatively low electoral base, short life span; isolation from the liberal-democratic mainstream of Czech party political and political discourse; and

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<sup>57</sup> See Bobošíková's speech launching her party's election programme on 3 May 2010 in which she denounced the EU for '...pseudo-humanist and so-called politically correct waffle about human rights and minorities...'. 'Volby 2010 - naděje pro Českou republiku, projev lídra Suverenity Jany Bobošíkové na programové konferenci'. Online. Available <http://www.suverenita.cz/aktuality/zobraz=volby-2010---nadeje-pro-ceskou-republiku,-projev-lidra-suverenity-jany-bobosikove-na-programove-konferenci> (accessed 15 November 2010).

<sup>58</sup> The party, whose full name is Sovereignty – the Jana Bobošíková Bloc., polled 4.26 per cent in the 2009 European elections and 3.67 per cent in the Czech 2010 parliamentary elections.

inability to formulate a more programmatically coherent and intellectually sophisticated radical right populist discourse.

As Vladimíra Dvořáková has suggested,<sup>59</sup> the Republicans are therefore perhaps best understood as a product, albeit it an unusual product, of a broader Czech anti-political tradition with cultural and political roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century, which views professionalized political elites and state institutions as inherently inauthentic and corrupt, and instead stresses the need for a ‘moral politics’ backed and brought about by citizen mobilization and self-organization.<sup>60</sup> Such anti-political traditions can be seen as shaping the political outlooks of numerous other actors in post-1989 Czech politics including: President Václav Havel and other ex-dissident politicians; the many local independents’ groupings still active in Czech electoral politics; the civic protest movements such the ‘Thank You, Time to Go’ initiative that erupted in November 1999 to protest against established parties’ perceived clientelism;<sup>61</sup> as well as newer, anti-establishment parties such as Public Affairs.

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<sup>59</sup> V. Dvořáková, ‘The Politics of anti-politics? The Radical Right in the Czech Republic: Past and Present in L.B. Sørensen and L. Eliason (eds.), *Fascism, Liberalism and Social Democracy in Central Europe*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, pp. 166-79.

<sup>60</sup> For a succinct discussion see Belohradský’s essay ‘O politice politické a antipolitické’. V. Belohradský, *Kapitalismus a občanské ctnosti*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1992, pp. 31-4.

<sup>61</sup> V. Dvořáková, ‘Civil Society in the Czech Republic: “Impulse 99” and “Thank You, Time To Go” in P. Kopecký and C. Mudde (eds.) *Uncivil Society? Contentious Politics in Post-Communist Europe*. London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 134-56.

## Tables

Table 1: Electoral support for SPR-RSČ in the Czech Republic in elections to the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly 1990-2\*

Chamber of the People (lower house)

Year	Number of votes	Percentage	Deputies (of 99 from Czech Republic)**
1990	67 781	0.94	0
1992	420 848	6.48	8

Chamber of Nations (upper house)

Year	Number of votes	Percentage	Deputies (of 75 from Czech Republic)
1990	72 155	1.00	0
1992	413 459	6.37	6

\* Representation in the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly was based upon separate polls in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In total (with the inclusion of deputies from Slovakia) 150 deputies sat in each Chamber.

\*\* 101 deputies were elected to the Chamber of the People for the Czech Republic in 1990. This was reduced to 99 in 1992.

Source: Czech Electoral Commission website [www.volby.cz](http://www.volby.cz)

Table 2: Electoral support for SPR-RSČ and successor organizations in elections to the Czech parliament 1990-2010\*

Year	Number of votes	Percentage	Deputies (of 200)
1990	72 048	1.00	0
1992	387 026	5.98	14
1996	485 072	8.01	18
1998	232 965	3.90	0
2002**	46 325	0.97	0
2006	Not contested	Not contested	-
2010***	1 193	0.03	0

Source: Czech Electoral Commission website [www.volby.cz](http://www.volby.cz)

\*Elections in 1990 and 1992 were for Czech National Council, subsequent elections to Chamber of Deputies

\*\* Miroslav Sládek Republicans (RMS)

\*\*\* Re-founded SPR-RSČ. Electoral lists in 3 of 14 districts.