



Sciences of Europe

VOL 2, No 55 (2020)

Sciences of Europe
(Praha, Czech Republic)

ISSN 3162-2364

The journal is registered and published in Czech Republic.
Articles in all spheres of sciences are published in the journal.

Journal is published in Czech, English, Polish, Russian, Chinese, German and French.

Articles are accepted each month.

Frequency: 12 issues per year.

Format - A4

All articles are reviewed

Free access to the electronic version of journal

All manuscripts are peer reviewed by experts in the respective field. Authors of the manuscripts bear responsibility for their content, credibility and reliability.

Editorial board doesn't expect the manuscripts' authors to always agree with its opinion.

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HISTORICAL SCIENCES

PARTY SYSTEM IN THE FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC (1918-1938)

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the study of the party system of the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938). It is established that the democratic political system has created conditions for the creation and functioning of a large number of political parties. Political parties were one of the structural parts of the political system of the Czechoslovak state. They played an important role in its formation. The structure of the Czechoslovak party-political system was not limited to the traditional division of political parties into right, left and centrist. In Czechoslovak politics, parties were distributed primarily on national grounds, and only then, within their own national community, ideologically. This factor, along with the proportional electoral system, contributed to the emergence of a large number of political parties and significantly complicated the formation of the party coalition necessary for the proper functioning of parliament.

Keywords: political parties, political system, democracy, interwar Czechoslovakia.

Political parties in the First Czechoslovak Republic have held a special place since its inception. No wonder contemporaries often called this state a republic of parties. The first Czechoslovak Republic was one of the most democratic countries in Europe at the time. It was in a democracy that opportunities arose for the development of a large number of political parties, which became the core of the political system of the newly created state. The study of the structure of the political system of Czechoslovakia has been and continues to be of interest to many scholars. In particular, K. Ivashchenko emphasizes the important role of political parties in the structure of the political system of Czechoslovakia [1]. Yu. Bisaga and N. Kushnir studied the legal aspects of the position of political parties [2, 3]. Interesting for the study of this problem are works on the activities of individual political parties, as well as scientific research, which examines the political situation in some regions of the state [4, 5, 6]. It is difficult to overestimate the role that its first president, Tomas Masaryk, played in the formation of Czechoslovakia's political system. M. Nagornyak reveals the significance of his influence on the activities of political parties [7].

In view of the above, the aim of the article is to analyze the peculiarities of the party system in the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938) and the contribution of political parties to the formation of the political system of the newly created state.

It should be noted that the role of political parties in the First Czechoslovak Socialist Republic differed somewhat from the generally accepted understanding of the place of political parties in society in modern times. If at the present stage a political party, as a rule, performs the functions of a voluntary association of citizens, supporters of a national program of social development, which should promote the formation and expression of political will of citizens, participates in elections and other political events [2, p.123], then in the Czechoslovak Republic parties had much broader functions.

Political parties influenced the daily lives of Czechoslovak citizens not only through their participation in government activities, but also through hundreds

of professional, cooperative, youth, women's, sports, cultural, educational, and other organizations. In addition, the parties had a network of publishing houses and periodicals [2, p.18]. As the Czech researcher D. Garn noted on this occasion: "Parties accompanied human life from cradle to coffin" [6, p.536].

In Czechoslovakia, as of 1938, there were 60 parties. Only a quarter of them succeeded in the elections. The interaction of political parties with the state, as well as other elements of the political system and citizens is characterized by the institution of the party system.

The party system is determined, firstly, by the number, nature and relationships of existing parties in the country, secondly, the special conditions of these parties, thirdly, their actual role in the management of public affairs, especially in government formation [7, p.82].

The party system of the First Czechoslovak Socialist Republic was characterized by polypartyism - the tendency to form a large number of parties [8, p.298]. Its causes are the influence of several factors, the first of which is the diverse ethnic composition of the population. The vast majority of the republic's nationalities formed their own party-political spectrum even before its independence, which was nationally isolated.

The exceptions were Marxist parties, which were built on an international basis. Within the national community, the parties were divided according to the interests of the social groups they represented (workers, peasants, entrepreneurs, intellectuals), which also contributed to the increase in the number of parties. At the same time, each of the national political camps had its own characteristics and was at different stages of development of the party-political structure at the time of joining the Czechoslovak Republic [9, p.102].

The proportional electoral system was a factor contributing to the growth of the number of parties. According to the French political scientist M. Duverger, the proportional electoral system is the main guarantee of creating a multiparty system, because under its conditions the party's independent performance in the elec-

tions causes minimal damage, which does not contribute to the merger of ideologically similar parties. An example of such a phenomenon, the scientist calls the interwar Czechoslovakia [8, p.310].

The nature of the electoral system was not a determining factor in the formation of the party-political system of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. In addition, some political parties have shown a desire to unite, precisely in order to gain additional votes in the election. A striking example is the Polish and Hungarian political parties, whose unifying aspirations, however, were largely dictated from abroad. Nevertheless, the proportional electoral system became an additional factor that strengthened the formation of multi-party system in Czechoslovakia [10, p. 41].

The multi-party system of the First Czechoslovak Socialist Republic was often criticized by supporters of liberal democracy, who believed that the number of parties in the state should be much smaller. This view was shared by TG Masaryk and his successor E. Benes. They called for an end to conflicts between the parties, worrying about the unity of the people, with the aim of cooperation of all nationalities and groups. Politicians believed that the most optimal version of the party system is a two- or three-party [6, p.537].

In the first year of the Czechoslovak Republic there were about 20 parties, in the last - more than 60 [11, p.64]. The leading role in the initial stage of the republic's existence was, of course, played by the Czech political camp, which underwent some modification after the First World War. Thus, the youth camp in the new state was represented by the Czechoslovak National Democratic Party (CNDP). The National Socialist Party merged with some realists, progressives and anarcho-communists and emerged as the Czech Socialist Party, and from December 1919 as the Czechoslovak Socialist Party (CSP). The leading role in its activities was played by the National Socialist wing.

The unification process took place in a rather unconsolidated camp of political Catholicism, as a result of which the Czechoslovak People's Party (CPP) was formed. The Agrarian Party began its activities in the First Czechoslovak Republic as a strong and consolidated political party. In order to popularize the party among the population, it was renamed the Republican Party of the Czechoslovak Village (RPCV), after uniting with Slovak agrarians in 1922 [6, p.543].

The Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party (CSDP) gained the most popularity in the first parliamentary elections (1920), and after uniting with the Slovak Social Democrats in December 1918, it became a nationwide party. After some time, the contradictions between the socialist-reformist and the revolutionary wing intensified within the party. In 1921 there was a split in the middle of the party, supporters of the revolutionary wing founded the International Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) [11, p.24].

The KPC is not the only example of the opposition wing leaving the party, but it is the only successful one. Other attempts by the opposition to establish their own powerful political force after leaving the party failed. Over time, such parties either disintegrated or became part of more influential political forces.

After the declaration of independence of Czechoslovakia, the phase of differentiation and formation of

Slovak political parties began in the Slovak political camp. The Slovak National Party (SNP) was going through a difficult stage of separation from it of certain political directions that were formed during the First World War. In particular, the Catholic camp separated from the SNP, which formed the Slovak People's Party (SPP), as well as the agrarians who became part of the RPCV [11, p.82].

Attempts to integrate Czech political parties into the Slovak party structure began at this time. They had two forms. The first is the unification of ideologically similar Czech and Slovak parties. Examples of such integration are Czechoslovak agrarians and the Social Democrats.

It should be noted that in neither of these cases the integration was complete, in both political parties there was a Slovak wing, which often disagreed with the decisions of the party leadership [6, p.546].

An attempt to unite the Catholic parties was made by the pre-election alliance of the CNP and the SLP in 1920, but immediately after the election, each party followed its own political path. CHNP for a long time participated in government coalitions, while the SLP after a short participation in the lordly coalition finally moved to the opposition [6, p.546].

The second form of integration was the attempts of Czech political parties to build their own party structure in Slovakia. The Czech parties without the Slovak component gained support only among Czech officials, teachers and workers who were in the region to solve the staffing problem. The Slovak party structure was fragmentary and asymmetric, which significantly complicated the task of its full integration into the Czechoslovak state [11, p.90].

After the proclamation of the independence of Czechoslovakia, the situation of German political parties in the German territories that became part of it became much more complicated. If before 1918 in these territories there were large German parties organized throughout the state, then after the proclamation of new borders, the parties were forced to rebuild the party structure within the new state.

The most difficult test for German parties in Czechoslovakia was their new status in the state: from privileged parties that took an active part in public administration, they became a party of a national minority that categorically did not recognize the new state system [12, p.45].

During 1919-1920, several large German parties were constituted in the Czechoslovak Republic: the Union of Farmers (Bund), the German Social Democratic Workers' Party (GSDWP), the German Christian Socialist People's Party (GCSPP), the German Democratic Party (GDP). Craft Party (NRP), German National Party (NNP), German National Socialist Workers' Party (GNSWP). The most numerous of the German parties was the KPC, in which, as in the KPC, there was a split and some of its members moved in 1921 to the KPC [6, p.548].

In addition to these parties, there were about ten other small German parties, which were not very popular and quickly withdrew from the Czechoslovak political scene.

Hungarian political parties, like German ones, did not agree with their new position in the state. Former

privileged parties were forced to rebuild the party structure in Czechoslovakia. The most influential Hungarian party in Czechoslovakia was the Zemsky Christian Socialist Party (ZCSP), which gained popularity not only among the Hungarian population of the republic, but also among Germans living in Slovakia.

The second most popular was the Hungarian Zemsky Party of Farmers and Landowners, which in 1925. was renamed the Hungarian National Party (UNP). The party was most popular among the peasantry, but over time it managed to gain popularity among artisans and merchants [6, p.549].

The socialist camp was represented by the Hungarian-German Social Democratic Party, which worked closely with the CSDRP. Despite lengthy negotiations between the two political forces, their merger never took place.

Unification efforts in the Hungarian nationalist camp were successful only in 1936, when the Christian Socialists and the Nationalists formed the United Hungarian Party (UHP). Given the relatively low percentage of the Hungarian population in the republic (5.6%) in the proportional system, it could claim only a small representation in public authorities [4, p.31].

Polish political parties operating in the territory of Teszyn Silesia had little influence on the party-political structure of the republic. Due to the small size of the Polish minority, Polish parties did not have a high degree of differentiation. After resolving the dispute over the border between Czechoslovakia and Poland, the Polish Socialist Workers' Party (PSWP) began its political activity. The Union of Silesian Catholics (USC) and the Polish People's Party (PPP) were also quite popular among the Polish minority [6, p.550].

One of the evidences of the democratic political system of the Czechoslovak Republic was the development of Jewish parties. The situation of the Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia was much better than in other Central European countries, and the government officially recognized Jews as a separate nationality. Among the Jewish parties, complex processes of division of spheres of influence took place, connected with the differentiation of the Jewish parties not only by ideological direction, but also by religious, national and cultural affiliation. The largest influence among the Jewish population of the republic was the Jewish Party (JP), which adhered to the Zionist orientation and actively cooperated with the Jewish international organization Poale Zion [12, p.78].

The development of Ruthenian parties was complicated by the activities of a large number of parties of other nationalities on the territory of Subcarpathian Russia. In fact, Ruthenian parties were differentiated not only ideologically but also nationally and culturally.

The most influential were two areas: Ukrainophile and Russophile. Among the most popular Russophile parties were: the Autonomous Agricultural Union (AAU), the Carpatho-Russian Labor Party (CLP), and the Russian People's Party (RPP). Ukrainophile positions are not enough for the Russian Agricultural Party (RAP) and the Ukrainian Peasants' Party (USP). It is worth noting that the vast majority of Ruthenian political parties based their political program on the slogan of the autonomy of Subcarpathian Russia. The demands

of Ruthenian political parties, as well as parties of other minorities, became more radical after the aggravation of the economic crisis [6, p.552].

The exception in the party-political structure of the first Czechoslovakia was the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC), which was the only international party of the Czechoslovak Republic, which included representatives of all nationalities of the republic. It should be noted that the leading role in the leadership of the party was played by the Communist International [11, p.325].

There was a constant struggle between political parties, which eventually led to the establishment of new parties, which led to a significant increase in their number. It is difficult to establish the exact number of political parties of the First Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, because a significant part of political formations that called themselves political parties, in essence, did not correspond to this concept, but were formations of another type (political movement, political club).

This question often criticizes the political system of the First Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and casts doubt on the political maturity of Czechoslovak society, but a deeper analysis of the problem indicates that the political camp in Czechoslovakia was not as deep as it might seem at first glance. Among the political parties, there were five or six parties that were influential enough to claim to form the political system.

The degree of influence of a political party on the political system of the state is determined by two main indicators: the number of party members and those who sympathize with it and the role in governing the state [9, p.158].

The most objective indicator of the number of supporters of a political party is the election results, because the parties themselves, seeking to give the impression of an influential political entity, often overestimated the data on their number.

Political parties, which are one of the most important parts of the electoral process, were not regulated by any law in the Czechoslovak legal system. This phenomenon was not unique to interwar Czechoslovakia. Here are reflected two political traditions that dominated the European party-political systems during the nineteenth century. The first was the secondary role of the political party - the envoy was accountable first to his constituents and only then to the party to which he belonged. The second reason for the lack of legislative regulation of political parties was the unwillingness of political parties themselves to be regulated by law. The ruling parties did not need legislative support, opposition parties did not want to adopt such a law for fear of possible harassment by the authorities [6, p.555].

The interaction of political parties with the state was to some extent determined by the constitution of 1920, which dealt with the proportional electoral system. However, the concept of "political party" was not mentioned in the basic law of the Czechoslovak Republic. The activities of parties were indirectly regulated by election legislation and election councils, which operated with the concept of "election party". At the same time, the peculiarities of the party's functioning were not subject to control by law, so the parties had complete freedom in choosing candidates to participate in the election process. The concept of "electoral party"

was defined as a temporary entity formed to participate in elections, which did not correspond to the real essence of political parties of the republic, the vast majority of which were permanent political entities [6, p.556].

According to the constitutional law "On Elections", which was adopted on February 29, 1920, parties were obliged not later than 21 days before the election to submit to the chairmen of district election commissions candidate lists to be signed by hundreds of voters included in the permanent electoral lists. A thousand signatures were required for Slovak constituencies. If the list of candidates did not meet the requirements or the names of the parties were not clearly different from each other, the chairman of the district election commission obliged the party to make changes. If this did not happen, the election commission recognized the party's candidate letters as invalid, as reported in government magazines [5, p.136].

From this law follows the understanding of the party as a pre-election association, which was supported by at least a hundred, and in Slovakia by at least a thousand voters, and which is submitted by a joint candidate letter. Electoral legislation did not contain a provision prohibiting voters from signing various candidate lists.

In essence, voters did not choose between candidates, but between candidate lists. An interesting feature of the election law was the granting of the right to parties to create new candidate lists. This right was granted to parties that received at least 2,000 votes in one constituency, or if the "electoral number" reached 20,000 votes. Only persons who were at the beginning of the party's candidate lists and were not elected could be entered in these new candidate lists. The commentary to the law noted that the purpose of this provision is to ensure the passage to parliament of leading members of the party, who for one reason or another were not elected on the old candidate lists [7, p.137].

In the event of controversial issues related to political parties, attempts were made to regulate them by the 1867 Law on Unions. According to him, the union had to be announced and, if the public authorities did not ban it within four weeks after the announcement of the union, it could freely carry out its activities [6, p.556].

Thus arose the greatest paradox of the existence of political parties in the state: being one of the main subjects of law in the state (through parliamentary activities), they themselves were not legal entities.

Czechoslovak legislation began to regulate the activities of parties only in 1933. with the adoption of the law banning the activities of political parties, which was directed primarily against extremist parties that threatened the integrity of the state and its democratic system [6, p.201].

The position of political parties in interwar Czechoslovakia is vividly illustrated by the results of the parliamentary elections held in the First Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in 1920, 1925, 1929, and 1935. None of the political parties gained a significant advantage. The exception was the Czechoslovak Social Democrats, who in 1920 won 27% of the vote. However, due to the split between the reformist and revolutionary wing within the party and the formation of the CPC, the

electorate was divided between the two political forces, and, accordingly, the popularity of the CSDWP decreased [4, p.88].

The parties played a crucial role in the creation of law. Any law in parliament was passed by a majority vote. Therefore, the parties raised the question of the need to reach a compromise. This task was complicated by the absence of a classical majority and opposition in parliament. In the Czechoslovak parliament there was a strong opposition in the face of German parties, which was set not against the ruling majority, but against the existence of the state in general. In addition, beginning in 1921, a strong Communist Party joined the opposition.

This forced the so-called "state-building" parties to constantly negotiate in order to reach a compromise. Given that the majority political parties had different political orientations and different political demands, reaching a compromise was an extremely difficult task for them. Party coalitions were rather fragile, and if one of the parties in the coalition wished to join the opposition, political instability ensued. It was especially difficult to reach an understanding within the coalition during the periods of membership of national minority parties (mostly German) [4, p.92].

The proportional electoral system made it possible for a considerable number of parties to enter parliament. There were 15-16 parliamentary party clubs in the Czechoslovak parliament at the same time. Under these conditions, none of the political parties could win more than 50% of the seats, and therefore could not form a parliamentary majority without uniting with other parties. An invariable precondition for the establishment of a ruling majority was the formation of a party coalition.

It was the coalition that formed the government, which was accountable to parliament and had the right of legislative initiative. For the first Czechoslovak republic there were coalitions of four types: national (1918-1919, 1922-1926), red-green (1919-1920), lordly (1924-1929) and broad (1929-1938) [13, p.106].

The first, national coalition (October 14, 1919 - July 8, 1919) was formed by the Agrarian Party, the Social Democrats, the National Socialists, the National Democrats, and the People's Party. After the elections of 1925. it was joined by the craft party [13, p.107]. The government was headed by the leader of the National Democrats K. Kramarz.

It is worth noting that the ministerial portfolios in the government were distributed in such a way that the most influential of them were farmers. These were the posts of ministers of the interior, agriculture, labor, and railways. In addition to being prime minister, the National Democrats have become finance ministers. The Czechoslovak National Socialists were represented by the ministers of defense, post and telegraph, the social democrats by the ministers of justice, education and social policy, and the Catholic People's Party was represented by the minister of health. The Slovak club has won a government post without a portfolio.

Kramarz's government was called "national" because the coalition on which it was formed united the Czech and Slovak parties. The main task facing the government was to ensure internal and external stabil-

ity in the country. It should be noted that until early December 1919, the government did not have a defined program of its work. The only clear ideological position was the idea of unity of Czechs and Slovaks [7, p.423].

On July 10, 1919, the coalition announced its program. The main goal was proclaimed the preservation of "peace and order in the country" [10, p.97]. The government planned to carry out reforms, but stressed that the government's actions would not be radical.

The split in the ranks of the Social Democrats, the protests of the left against the government coalition with the bourgeois parties, led to the crisis of the party, then to the resignation of Tusar and the replacement of the red-green coalition in early September 1920 by a new cabinet (technical government) J. Cherny. The economic situation remained difficult, and the government had to deal with the provision of civil servants, whose situation was catastrophic. Once again, Czech-German relations worsened. The situation was complicated by a long serious illness of the president [7, p.425].

Under these conditions, the so-called "Five" gradually emerged - an unconstitutional but influential political body of the leaders of the leading parties, which officially acted as the Joint Executive Committee of their parliamentary clubs. From the Social Democrats in the "Five" included R. Bekhine, then A. Meissner, from the agrarians - Antonin Shvegl, from the National Socialists - J. Strzybrny., The People's Party was represented by J. Shramek, the National Democrats - A. Rashin, and after his death K. Kramarzh. The most influential figure of the "five" was A. Schwegla [7, p.101].

According to Yu. Bisaga the existence of such an institution as the "five" was an indicator that the parliament is not fulfilling its functional responsibilities as an element of the political system of the Czechoslovak Republic [3, p.58].

The Five was an unofficial association of party leaders who formed the Czechoslovak majority. The power of the "five" lasted with minor changes until March 1926. Its power was real during the government of J. Cherny and E. Benes. However, when Benes came to power, it was agreed that the "five" would belong only to parliamentary decisions, and the government - a legislative initiative. As there were party leaders in the G-5 and, as a rule, minor party representatives in the government, this agreement did not become a reality. The parliament was often guided by the instructions of the "five" in its decisions and was only a means for official decision-making [9, p.22].

Despite the fact that the existence of the "Five" was a departure from democratic norms, its activities should not be evaluated unequivocally negatively. O. Serapionava noted that in the conditions of sharp aggravation of social and national contradictions in the summer-winter of 1920. the creation of the "five" allowed to preserve the democratic regime itself [4, p.119].

It should be noted that although the "Five" is a specific body for the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, but the existence of such an entity was characteristic of other states, for which it was a manifestation of the tendency to oligarchy [4, p.59].

In the case of the Czechoslovak Republic, the existence of the "five" was a manifestation of the leading

role of the parties in the political system of the state, which did not correspond to classical parliamentarism. In the conditions of the state, the parliamentary parties were given a secondary role.

It was not only the Five that defined political life in the country. Of great importance was the influential group that formed around E. Benes and T. Masaryk, which was called "Hail". The very concept of "Hail" included not only certain personalities, but also ideas and political practices. "Hail" was essentially a conglomeration of politicians, influential people, journalists, lawyers and writers who supported the political ideas of T. Masaryk and E. Benes and embodied them in Czechoslovak society. Its existence was based on the high authority of the president in society. The closest to the Grad were the socialist parties, although their supporters were found in various political associations, public organizations and movements. The traditional opponents of the "Hail" were the National Democrats [8, p.490].

Both Grad and Pyatirka worked closely together, but fought for power. The "hail" had a strong influence in the parties of the "Five" by providing financial subsidies to some of them. [5, c.120]

In November 1925, parliamentary elections were held in the country, as a result of which the national coalition led by A. Schwegla resumed its activities. Apart from A. Schwegla, only E. Beneš (Minister of Foreign Affairs) and J. Kallaj (Minister Plenipotentiary for the Administration of Slovakia) retained their positions. The government, which was established on December 9, 1925. lasted a short time due to contradictions within the coalition. During this period, the Five ceased to exist, but was replaced by a committee of ministers and representatives of coalition parties. The number of its members changed, but the goal - to coordinate major government decisions - remained unchanged [5, p.124].

On March 18, 1926, the national coalition was replaced by a technical cabinet headed by J. Cherny. Its aim was to consolidate political forces and pave the way for a new coalition of Czech, German and Hungarian parties.

The political situation remained volatile. Gradually, a new governmental group of united agrarian parties and several clerical associations began to form, including the German and Hungarian Christian Social Parties, which advocated strengthening ties between church and state [8, p.301].

Under such conditions, a new coalition was formed under the leadership of A. Schwegla, which was called "lordly", "civil" or "Czech-German" (1926-1929). It included the Czechoslovak parties (agrarians, people's party, artisan party), two German parties (agrarians and Christian Socialists), and the Glinka SNP. Socialist parties that did not win ministerial portfolios joined the opposition [9, p.547].

In early March 1928. Prime Minister A. Schwegla became seriously ill. He left the government and left politics. From February 1929, the "gentlemen's" coalition was headed by F. Udrzhal. Conflicts between the People's Democrats and the agrarians contributed to the growing instability within the coalition.

The parliamentary elections of October 27, 1929, formed a new "broad" coalition (1929-1938) consisting

of Czechoslovak and German parties (the Republican Party, the People's Party, the Craft Party, the National Socialist Party, the German Social Democrats, and German agrarians).) [9, p.547].

The period of the "broad" coalition was marked by a gradual increase in political instability in Czechoslovak society, which was significantly exacerbated by the economic crisis of 1930-1933.

The process of forming a coalition for the Czechoslovak parliament was extremely difficult. The unification took place in an atmosphere of conflict, disputes over the division of powers, and when a compromise was finally reached, it was short-lived. The large number of parties in parliament significantly complicated the process of forming a coalition.

In conditions when it was impossible to quickly form a new coalition, the president of the republic used the institution of governmental power, that is, he appointed the government independently. This need arose in 1920-1921, 1926 and 1938 [13, p.547]. In Czechoslovakia, the government ceased to exist due to controversy within the coalition, the only exception being the third government of M. Goji, who resigned (September 22, 1938) under public pressure protesting his agreement with the Anglo-French note on the transfer of the Czech border to the Nazis. Germany.

Analyzing the problem of the party coalition as an element of the democratic system of Czechoslovakia, it should be noted that the existence of a "national" coalition in the current conditions was virtually impossible, as it was opposed by a large number of disloyal opposition (left and right) [2, p.50].

From the point of view of the development of the political system of the state, an important step was the creation of a "gentleman's" coalition with the participation of two German political parties. O. Serapionova called the entry of German parties into the coalition the beginning of the process of liquidation of national party blocs and the creation of new political structures, which were built not on national but on political affiliation [2, p.125].

However, the participation of German parties in the coalition did not mean their renunciation of their national demands and full reconciliation with the status of a national minority in the Czechoslovak Republic. The policy of Sudeten German activism, one of the manifestations of which was German participation in the government coalition, was defined by contemporaries as "marriage of convenience", as its purpose was to gain power primarily to improve the position of the German population in the state [9, p.37].

As the socialist parties were not part of the "gentleman's" coalition, they formed the opposition. This became an important element in the development of parliamentarism in the Czechoslovak Republic, as the opposition of the socialist parties, in contrast to the German opposition, was loyal to the state. The existence of such opposition is a necessary element of the functioning of parliamentary democracy [6, p.245].

Thus, political parties were one of the structural parts of the political system of the Czechoslovak state. They played an important role in its formation. The structure of the Czechoslovak party-political system was not limited to the traditional division of political parties into right, left and centrist. In Czechoslovak politics, parties were distributed primarily on national grounds, and only then, within their own national community, ideologically. This factor, along with the proportional electoral system, contributed to the emergence of a large number of political parties and significantly complicated the formation of the party coalition necessary for the proper functioning of parliament.

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