
Interview: Dr. Oldrich Tuma

Changes since 1989 in the Czech Republic

Dr. Tuma is an historian at the Institute for Contemporary History in Prague, Czech Republic founded after the collapse of communism. He spoke with Angelika Beyreuther-Raimondi at the conference on "The Heritage of Dictatorship and Domestic Peace."

EIR: Can you explain the change of the political elite in your country since 1989?

Dr. Tuma: Yes, the political elite, the politically active people, are mostly new people. Even, as I stressed, within the Communist Party itself. Those leading figures of the present Communist Party are people who are quite different compared to the Communist Party before 1989. So, even in the party, which still is Communist, it was necessary to make this change of personnel. As far as political elites are concerned, the change is very extensive.

EIR: And what about the industrial and economic management-level people? Despite the fact that you had Vaclav Klaus as the Prime Minister for a long time, and he is well known as the so-called "star pupil" of the free-market economy, there are still the old networks alive in the economic field.

Dr. Tuma: What I would like to say, is that there are people with a Communist past in the economic elite. But they are not in the same positions, and the structures are different. But those were the people, who, when the privatization began in 1991, had money, had connections with the information—those people who either belong to the old Communist managerial elite, or were even just political functionaries of the Communist Party apparatus. And they started quite new careers in private business or as managers in the partly state-owned companies, but mostly in the private companies; and, also, very often, in the companies owned by foreign capital, because the foreign capital considered them experts, with the experience and the knowledge, and the know-how.

It doesn't mean that the old networks exist as they used to be; of course, the structures changed, but many people with a Communist past, members of the Central Committee of the party, are now in positions which you can describe as the economic elite.

EIR: What is the structure in the banking sector?

Dr. Tuma: These are also those people. For instance, the present Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Josef Tosov-

sky, is a person with a Communist past. He was member of the Communist Party during the Communist period; he was even chief of the only Czech bank in the 1980s to have a branch abroad, in London, the Zivnostenska Banca. He was director of this Zivnostenska Banca in London. This was quite an important function, and, obviously, not just anyone could be sent there, and probably only a real expert on banking. He was a governor of the Czech national bank, and now he is Prime Minister. Maybe he is an exception in the political elite, a man with a Communist past. But as far as public opinion is concerned, he is a transitional figure—he will serve as Prime Minister for a few months, and the public accepts him mostly as an expert on economy, not as a real politician.

EIR: The political change in the Czech Republic is the most complete, compared to the other countries we talked about.

Dr. Tuma: Compared to other countries. Well, Germany is a different case, the former East Germany; but yes, in Poland or in Hungary, you have very deep political changes, but still people in the Hungarian government, or the President of Poland, are people with a Communist past, and this is something, which probably wouldn't be tolerated in the Czech Republic. . . . Those people basically disappeared from political life. This doesn't mean from public life—they have influence—but they use their influence for themselves, not to promote the old ideas.

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