

# CLEAVAGES IN INTERWAR CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC

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## Abstract

This paper deals with the theory of cleavages and its application on the interwar Czechoslovak Republic, especially from the perspectives of Slovak interwar political parties. Therefore it points out the needed theories, which are important in definition of cleavages in the given country. The paper focuses on all relevant cleavages, which are characteristic for the interwar Czechoslovak Republic, and tries to present a more transparent picture of the situation in the country in terms of the party system and political parties.

**Keywords:** cleavages, Czechoslovak Republic, Stein Rokkan, political parties

## 1 Introduction

The political elites of the successor states of interwar Czechoslovakia confronted a central paradox. On the one hand, since they viewed their state as a vehicle of national expression and survival, they sought to build a unitary nation-state. On the other hand, this unitary ideal had to confront a deeply multicultural reality: over one third of the inhabitants of Czechoslovakia were ethnically foreign. This was a result of the imperial recognition of the limits of state power to affect cultural engineering. The result was a mix of minorities policies, pursued with different intensity and combination at different times, that oscillated between assimilation, accommodation, and discrimination. If we add the wrangling of two state-founder nations, the different ideas and development are much more obvious.

It is the same regarding the cleavages in interwar Czechoslovak Republic. If we want to understand them or apply them, we will need to use Rokkan's theory of cleavages, as a basis, to focus on the relevant cleavages in interwar Czechoslovakia. Besides it, it is also important to devote the threshold of democratization as well. Thanks to these theories, it is possible to present a more transparent picture of the situation in the country in terms of the party system and political parties, what is one the aims of this paper.

## 2 The Threshold of Democratization and Theory of Cleavages

Stein Rokkan's theory of cleavages is considered as an instrument, which explains relatively accurately the origin and development of mass political parties in Western Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The reason, why the author paid no attention to the Central and Eastern European countries at the primary application of this theory (60s' of 20<sup>th</sup> century), was the absence of competitive environment in politics. The use of Rokkan's theory is impossible without this basic requirement and any attempts lost the relevance (Kopeček, 2000, p.41).

After the formation of plural party systems in 1989, the above mentioned theory also started to use for countries of Central and Eastern Europe and appeared some attempts to apply or more precisely to analyze the creation and development of Czech and Slovak political parties according to this theory in political science literature (2 Kopeček, 2000). However, if we want to understand the basis of Rokkan's theory of cleavages, it will be necessary to become familiar with the problematic of formation of modern mass democratic politics as well, which created the conditions and place for political parties according to this theory.

### The Threshold of Democratization:

The modern mass politics was created according to Rokkan as a combination of gradual disruption of traditional monopoly over political power already established elites and gaining access of underprivileged social groups to an active participation in the political process. In this connection used Rokkan a metaphor of "thresholds", what has to be got over in the way towards modern mass politics. There are four thresholds of democratization:

1. **Threshold of Authorization**, which was got over in the moment, when the right of protest was given to classes politically not enjoying full rights (introduction of freedom of speech, freedom of gathering, bargaining etc.);
2. **Threshold of Incorporation**, which was got over in the moment, when the underprivileged social groups were, at least formally, awarded by right to participate in the elections of political representatives;
3. **Threshold of Representation**, which overcoming meant a gradual decreasing of barriers defending the entry of new political powers into the parliamentary;

4. **Threshold of Executive Power**, which overcoming is connected with achieving of government's responsibility towards the parliament, but also the fact that the results of parliamentary elections started to be accepted (Rokkan, 1999, p. 246-247).

Stein Rokkan tried to create a model, in which he would compare individual countries, based on the introduction of right to vote and gradual changes of electoral system, and the adequate development of party alternatives according to the cleavages. The space for mass politics, which also brought the formation of mass political parties along, is created after the overcoming of first two thresholds, which are mutually linked, because the overcoming of threshold of authorization logically leads to the strengthening of pressure on the overcoming of threshold of incorporation. The pressure on the overcoming of third threshold – threshold of representation – began to intensify by introduction of right to vote allowing the political participation of the most of adult men population. Mass political parties representing groups of new participants in the political process tried to overcome barriers, which should prevent these political subjects achieving of representation in legislative bodies. The rules, which would ensure this representation, were presented by proportional electoral system, which unlike till then used majority electoral system would ensure an adequate representation of new political streams (their formation was also connected with ongoing urbanization and industrialization in the most of the countries). By overcoming the last threshold were created conditions for overcoming the last one, which differed from the previous thresholds by the fact that the task of political party came to fore in the given political system. The last threshold – threshold of executive power – was overcome after the fulfillment of two conditions, specifically that “the parliament must have real control over the executive and the political party must have real possibility to become the part of parliamentary majority” (Hloušek, Kopeček, 2004, p. 31).

#### Theory of Cleavages:

The basic idea of theory of cleavages comes out from the fact that the current form of political systems of Western European countries is the result of long-term historical processes within the given societies, where their completion was finished only in the phase of existence of mass politics, when the Western European countries overcame every thresholds of democratization.

During these historical processes and thanks to the long-term and deep disputes or political competition were created four cleavages, around which the political parties were shaped. When these disputes were or competitions intensive and long-term, it came about the disintegration of given society into several social groups – segments of voters, which were created permanent electoral relations to political parties, representing their interests. The cleavages in the society is according to Stein Rokkan a product of cleavages of Western European societies, in which Rokkan identified two significant long-term and historical processes, when came about a gradual formation of modern nations and modern states. These historical processes were the national and industrial revolutions, which influence on to the society and politics is possible to observe in two dimensions – territorial and functional, where each revolution was the cause of formation of cleavages in both dimensions.

*Table 1 National and Industrial Revolutions and Cleavages*

	<b>Territorial Dimension</b>	<b>Functional Dimension</b>
<b>National Revolution</b>	Cleavages center - periphery	Cleavages church – state
<b>Industrial Revolution</b>	Cleavages city - countryside	Cleavages owners – workers

Source: Strmiska, M. et al.: *Political Parties of Modern Europe*, Praha: Portál, 2005, p.21

By national revolution was started up the process of building of modern nation and formation of national identity, which was necessarily connected with implementation of national unification with an attempt to build military-administrative, economical and cultural centers. The formation of centers of modern states and the stress on the role of nation in modern states naturally brought about reactions in the form of creation regional or national formations, which defended the interests of some territories or some nations or language minority, which determined their different identity, based on historical, ethnic or language reasons against the national center. The national revolutions stood at the beginning of birth of **cleavages of center – periphery**, based on it were formed several regional formations or parties of territorial defense. The processes of national revolutions also coincided with the competition among Catholicism and Protestantism, or more precisely the effort of mainly absolutistic states to limit the independence of church and also to assert themselves in this area of social life (Hloušek, Kopeček, 2004, p. 36). This effort, of course, caused the defense of church and its

supporters and born new **cleavages of church – state**, where its potential was strongly strengthened by ongoing secularization in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and based on it came about the creation of Christian Democratic and Christian Socialist formations.

The industrial revolution meant on one side an industrialization of Western, particularly also Central and Eastern Europe, but on the other side it was connected by important encroachment on demographic, social and political structures of European society. The caused urbanization of Europe meant an increase of importance cities as from the view of number of population as their economic and political importance. The defense reaction of countryside's population against of these trends meant a birth of **cleavages of city – countryside**, around which were created agrarian parties defending the interests of countryside population.

The change of economy was closely connected with industrial revolution as well, which began to be in bigger and decisive rate based on private capitalistic enterprise and wage work. The development of capitalism, which made a stand against the interests of capitalist enterprise and workers, determined the birth of **cleavages of owners – workers**, based on which Social Democratic and Socialist, and finally the Communist parties were created. All of these political parties defended the interests of working-class (Hloušek, Kopeček, 2004, p. 38).

The establishment of all of these political parties created on the base of cleavages was at the same time an expression of stand up against of till then dominant local Conservative and Liberal elites, where the process of their creation did not exclude the mutual competition between these new political parties. Stein Rokkan considered the last cleavages of owners – workers as the most important from all of the cleavages, which should have a homogeneous influence in a contrast with the three historically older cleavages (describing the differences in the development of European party system), because on its base were shaped the most important political parties of modern European right-wing and left-wing (Strmiska, 2005, p. 21).

### 3 Cleavages of Interwar Czechoslovak Republic

From the cleavages, which are characteristic for interwar Czechoslovak Republic, is at the first place the cleavages of center – periphery. It can be said that basically each political party must take a stand on the question of status of Slovakia within the Czechoslovak Republic. Not only that the center was moved from Budapest to Prague, but mainly the dividing line was in motion inside the political scene. The Slovak political streams, which stood till then against of the center in Budapest, were divided in the new republic into the parties enforcing the Slovak autonomy (people's party, nationalists and Hungarian political parties) and political parties advancing centralism and the idea of unitary Czechoslovak state (agrarians, social democrats). Exactly, by the cleavages of center – periphery can be explained the willingness of agrarians and social democrats to share the governmental power and the permanent opposition policy of autonomist political parties (especially, the People's party sharply criticized the policy of governmental parties, except of the period at the end of 20's, when they made a government). From the cultural point of view, the interwar Czechoslovakia was distinguished by achieving a gradual independence of Slovakia from the center and gradual refusing of idea of so called "czechoslovakism". The Slovak centrists were parts of national political parties. However, it did not mean that these parties were subordinate to the center in Prague. Some of the members of Slovak agrarians, led by M. Hodža, were so strong that they could manage their own policy, independent from the leaders in Prague. The Czechoslovak and centralist stream was represented by only one political party during the interwar Czechoslovak Republic – the party of social democrats. The cleavages of center – periphery led to the cooperation between opposition autonomist political parties: Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSĽS) – Catholics and Slovak National Party (SNS) - Protestants. Later, they made a common electoral coalition in 1935. On the other side, the autonomist political parties were also divided in the area of Slovakia, although they tried to achieve more independence from the center in Prague. In terms of the Hungarian autonomist political parties, they tried to weaken the influence of Prague and later to rejoin Slovakia to Hungary. Both streams of autonomist parties followed different aims and there was no chance for mutual cooperation.

The **cleavages of city - countryside** have a significant importance for birth and activities of Agrarian Party. When the Czechoslovak Republic was established, in practice there were no any larger cities in Slovakia. Bratislava and Košice had strong superiority of German and Hungarian population. This was one of the reasons of huge differences between the Conservative countryside and the cities. The ideology of agrarianism had in Slovak environment a firm background already before the unification of Czech and Slovak agrarians. Their main opponent, in the struggle for countryside voters, was Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, which relied on its religious and autonomist program (Rivera, 1996, p. 187). The Social Democrats (ČSSD) and Communists (KSČ) found supporters in cities. The low industrialization of Slovakia also gave a chance to other political parties, besides the socialist parties. It resulted in the more serious influence of countryside political parties and countryside policy.

**Table 2** *Cleavages and more important Slovak political parties in Interwar Czechoslovak Republic<sup>1</sup>*

<b>Political Parties<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>center - periphery</b>	<b>state church</b>	<b>city - countryside</b>	<b>owners - workers</b>
HSES	<b>Autonomist</b>	<b>Catholic</b>	Countryside	-
Agrarian Party	Centralist	Protestant	<b>Countryside</b>	-
ČSSD	<b>Centralist</b>	<b>Secular</b>	city	<b>Social Democratic</b>
KSČ	„flexible“	<b>Secular</b>	Countryside	<b>Communist</b>
SNS	<b>Autonomist</b>	Protestant	-	-
MNS	<b>Autonomist</b>	Protestant	Countryside	-
KKSS	<b>Autonomist</b>	Protestant	Countryside	-

Source: Hloušek, V. and Kopeček, L.: *Conflict Democracy: Modern Mass Politics in Central Europe*, Brno: MU MPU, 2004, p. 137.

Regarding the **cleavages of state – civil society**, the most of political parties existing in interwar Czechoslovakia can be added to the side of civil society. The Communist Party definitely belonged to the side of state, especially with its attempt to eliminate the civil society. It was a permanent opposition political party, although the opposition parties refused to cooperate with it. The People's Party belonged to the side of civil society until 1938, although since the mid-30s had emerged some features of Italian fascism in the party. In terms of the HSES, we can talk about the gradual transition towards the state in within the cleavages of state – civil society. It was obvious after 1938 that the HSES tried to achieve the power monopoly. Each Slovak political party was integrated into Hlinka's Slovak People's Party and the others, except of the Social Democrats and Communists, were banned. Thanks to the small divergence of cleavages, the political parties kept stable electoral favor until the end of interwar Czechoslovak Republic. Basically, it was unable to do it due to the official definition of nation – Czechoslovakism, and the Slovak political parties did not try to change it. There was a lack of an adequate theory, because only the idea of statehood left, which, on the other side, was not accepted by the whole nation. It could be one of the most important reasons, why the interwar Czechoslovak Republic disintegrated.

The **cleavages of owners versus workers** are hard to be determined in Slovakia during the existence of the interwar Czechoslovakia, because the workers formed only a very small social group. Slovakia remained in interwar period mainly an agrarian society with agricultural owners. Although the industrialization was part of the political programs of most of political parties, it was not realized largely. The reason of bigger influence of Communist Party on the population in Slovakia, in contrast to the Social Democrats, was especially the bad social conditions of lower social classes.

In terms of the **cleavages of state – church**, the relation of population in Slovakia to religion was very strong and the church had a very firm position in the society – especially the Catholic Church. An appreciable Protestant minority existed in the interwar Czechoslovak Republic, which position was strengthened by the fact that the most of national intellectuals came from this minority before 1918. The Protestants had a strong position, which was reflected in the party system as well. The most of the leading representatives of Slovak National Party (SNS) had been Protestants since the time of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and this remained in existence the interwar Czechoslovakia.<sup>3</sup> The evangelical religion also belonged to the common signs of agrarian elites in Slovakia. However, the religious influence was eclipsed in favor of agrarian class and, in contrast to the People's Party (HSES), it enabled to attract non-evangelical voters, too. The affiliation with the evangelical religion (the using of Czech language as liturgical language) played an important role at agrarians, because they did not refuse openly the “czechoslovakism”, what was declared by the state.

<sup>1</sup> The highlighted cleavages are key cleavages for the given political party.

<sup>2</sup> Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSES); Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party (ČSSD); Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ); Slovak National Party (SNS); Hungarian National Party (MNS); State Christian Socialist Party (KKSS).

<sup>3</sup> SNS – Slovak National Party was an evangelical party for a long time, as well as some national revivalists – L. Štúr, or bearers of statehood – M. R. Štefánik.

The Slovak People's Party was created as a protector of traditional Catholic values against of the "danger from outside", at first against of "Liberal" Hungarians and later against of "Atheistic" Czechs. A strong conservatism existed thanks to the small number of people living in cities and a weak middle class, what meant the lack of conditions to form an important liberal party. Therefore, the main opponents of Christian political parties in Slovakia became the Social Democrats, instead of Liberals. These cleavages led to the birth of political Catholic party – Slovak People's Party. It also influenced the conflict of city versus countryside. As the Agrarian Party was evangelistic based, it also affected the cleavages of owners – workers (Hloušek, Kopeček, 2004, p. 63-64).

#### 4 Conclusion

The aim of this paper was not to deal with the entire party system of interwar Czechoslovak Republic, but to focus on the relevant cleavages, which affected the development of country and coexistence of its nations, including its founder-nations. An interesting fact is that the most of Rokkan's cleavages were relevant for interwar Czechoslovakia and had influences on the political and party system of the country.

It can be said that basically each political party had to take a stand on the question of status of Slovakia within the Czechoslovak Republic. The Slovak political streams were divided in the new republic into the parties enforcing the Slovak autonomy (people's party, nationalists and Hungarian political parties) and political parties advancing centralism and the idea of unitary Czechoslovak state (agrarians, social democrats). By the cleavages of center – periphery can be explained the willingness of agrarians and social democrats to share the governmental power and the permanent opposition policy of autonomist political parties. The cleavages of city - countryside have a significant importance for birth and activities of Agrarian Party. A strong superiority of German and Hungarian population in Slovakia's biggest cities was one of the reasons of huge differences between the conservative countryside (agrarians, HSLS) and the cities (Social Democrats, Communists). The cleavages of owners versus workers are hard to be determined in Slovakia during the existence of the interwar Czechoslovakia, because the workers formed only a very small social group. Slovakia remained in interwar period mainly an agrarian society with agricultural owners. In terms of the cleavages of state – church, the relation of population in Slovakia to religion was very strong and the church had a very firm position in the society – especially the Catholic Church. However, an appreciable Protestant minority existed in the interwar Czechoslovak Republic, which position was strengthened by the fact that the most of national intellectuals came from this minority before 1918 (Slovak National Party). The evangelical religion also belonged to the common signs of agrarian elites in Slovakia. However, the religious influence was eclipsed in favor of agrarian class and, in contrast to the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSLS), it enabled to attract non-evangelical voters, too. The affiliation with the evangelical religion (the using of Czech language as liturgical language) played an important role at agrarians, because they did not refuse openly the ideology of "czechoslovakism".

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