THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT WITH REGARD TO THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESSES THROUGHOUT CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S HISTORY

Jan Dobeš

This contribution examines how important the role of Parliament was for the transformation phases in 1918-1920, 1938 and 1945-1948 respectively. It evaluates place and position of the legislative assembly in the process of political decision-making and its relations to the executive power. The author offers the theory that in Czechoslovakia, as indeed in many other nations, the relative importance of Parliament decreased, and it became subordinated to Government and political parties. The proof, with regard to interwar Czechoslovakia, is the so-called “pětka” (Committee of the Five). After World War II, in 1945-1948, this tendency continued to exist. During this later period, there was even a fundamental change in the composition of the National Assembly, with the number of delegates coming from a traditional elite background decreasing, and the number of those having ties to the new institutions (National Committees, trade unions) increasing. The National Assembly ceased to be a place where important political decisions were made, and became a kind of arena in which pointed, sometimes radical political positions were debated and defended, positions for which there was no room in the proceedings of Government, which had to arrive at some form of compromise.

NORMALIZATION

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In the present contribution, “normalization” is defined, using the example of the ČSSR of the early seventies, as a mechanism which stabilizes party rule and centrally-planned economy in soviet-type systems after the end of a reform phase. Once ideology has been discredited, within the newly consolidated casing of party rule social politics and consumer orientation gain crucial importance for the silencing of whatever grudges the population may bear. The appearance of repression is altered, with open terror being no longer the norm and “lower-key” and at the same time more efficient forms of control becoming more widespread instead. “Normalization” is one of several forms of final-stage socialist rule, a case in point among the “normalization” regimes being the “real socialism” of the GDR during Honecker’s tenure. Early on, normalization is quite successful as a rule, since the requirements of safeguarding power coincide with the material interests of large strata of the population. In the end, however, it fails because it simply cannot deliver all the promises that had been linked to it. This is especially true for the consumer aspect, since most of the desires raised are never satisfied.