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Section 2: The Political Representation of Social Interests in Central and Eastern Europe

**Interest Framing Strategies of Centre-Right Parties
in East Central Europe
- A Czech-Hungarian Comparison**

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Interests, Parties and the East Central European Centre-Right

The literature on interests and interest representation in post-communist East and Central Europe has tackled a range of issues. These include the weak and fluid nature of social interests in the region (Ost 1993; Wiesenthal 1996; Ágh 1996); the mapping of interest groups within civil society (Cox and Vass 2000); the role of labour and the status of trade unions (Pollert 1997); the nature and authenticity of corporatist and tripartite structures (Iankova 1998; Ost 2000; Myant, Slocock and Smith 2000); civic participation, social movements and contentious politics (Howard 2000; Ekiert and Kubik 1998, 1999; Kopecký and Mudde 2002).

There is, however, a conspicuous absence of work on parties and interests. This is largely explained by the assumption that, with certain well defined exceptions such as Poland's trade-union inspired Solidarity Election Action (AWS) or small historic parties with small socially or geographically distinct constituencies, party-society links in the region are essentially be mediated through the electoral nexus. A number of sociological, institutional and historical factors underlie these judgements. Leaving aside the (initially) uncertain and underdeveloped nature of interests and interest groups themselves, East Central European parties' weak organisation, elite-dominated character and origins and easy access to state resources (Ágh 1998; Lewis 2000; van Biezen 2003), it suggested, disinclined them from seeking to represent or aggregate emergent social interests. Indeed there is evidence many regarded interest groups as unwelcome competitors for power, whose policy demands could derail or distort broader projects of post-communist transformation. This relationship was further underpinned by the fact that political parties and party competition developed more rapidly than interests and interest groups given the more rapid tempo of political democratisation compared to social and economic change (Ágh 1996, 1998; see also Dahrendorf 1990).

This has led many researchers towards quantitative methodologies, which seek to link individual voters' social-structural/market location (and related values with party choice through statistical analysis of voting patterns, public opinion and value surveys and socio-economic data (Evans and Whitefield 1998; P. Matějů and K. Vlachová 1998; Kitschelt et al 1999). However, as Enyedi (2003) notes in the parallel debate on cleavage formation, there has been little research on the way parties have interacted with society as agents. Instead, parties have tended to be viewed in rationalistic terms as relatively efficient suppliers of goods to the electoral market. In this perspective, parties' social and electoral strategies represent little more than a source of short term fluctuations within the broader equilibrium of the electoral market, which can be understood in terms a standard set of response to a standard set of trade-offs.¹ Social interests and interest groups, although they could theoretically be explicitly integrated into such rationalistic approaches, as party 'participants', whose support is exchanged for the party's political outputs (policies) in the same way as voters or members, are effectively written out of the picture (see Hopkin 1996, 1999; see also Zielonski 1998).

The paradox of de-synchronised party and interest development in East Central Europe is posed particularly acutely in the case of centre-right parties. Historically, the emergence of the political right in Western Europe and North and South America was associated the rise of distinct property-owning classes and a bourgeois civil society linked to the development of capitalism

¹ These typically centre on office-holding, vote maximisation and internal party stability.

(Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Middlebrook 2000). The same is true of the re-emergence of the Right in new or restored democracies such as West Germany, Italy and France after 1945 or Spain after 1975 (Wilson 1998). However, in East Central European countries the emergence of an organised political Right after 1989 largely *preceded* the laying of social bases and the ‘transition to capitalism’.² Moreover, unlike communist successor parties whose organisational inheritances and party traditions served as the basis their subsequent transformation (Gryzmala-Busse 2002), centre formations were typically ‘new’ parties, which lacked organisational resources, social constituencies and well defined identities.

In this paper, I seek to address these issues through a paired comparison of the interest representation of the principal centre-right formations in Hungary and the Czech Republic from approximately the mid-1990s: Viktor Orbán’s FIDESZ and the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) of Václav Klaus (and its liberal /Christian Democrat competitor, the Quad-Coalition (4K)). I focus on two areas where, evidence from the cases suggests, post-communist societies offer opportunities to go beyond the predominant individualised, electorally mediated pattern of interest representation: 1) the potential of episodes of mass civic mobilisation to re-connect parties with social interests; and 2) attempts by political parties, both discursively and substantively through public policy, politically to (re-)construct class interests and identities. As this research is still ongoing, this paper focuses primarily on the way that parties have framed social interests discursively and, to a lesser extent, how their organisational structures have reflected such concepts. Before addressing, these issues, however, I give a contextual overview of the two cases.

The Hungarian and Czech Contexts Compared

Hungary and the Czech Republic are of similar size and population and have comparable (and in a post-communist context, relatively high) levels of socio-economic development. Although in both states, communist rule was challenged by popular protest (in Hungary in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968-9), in neither case did it directly impose significant concessions from below or develop independent mass social organisations as was the case in Poland. In both Hungary and Poland, reform communism was the main potential avenue for social change, although in the Czechoslovak case reform the communist project were aborted in 1968-9 following Soviet-led military intervention. While late communist Hungary under Janos Kádár was characterised politically by relative liberalism and efforts to co-opt opposition and economically by limited market reform and the development of a (semi-)legal private sector (the ‘second economy’), Czechoslovakia developed a repressive bureaucratic-authoritarian regime, which maintained a highly centralised state-run economy. Nevertheless, the two cases retained certain similarities in the 1970s and 80s: both were de-mobilised societies characterised by a regime-inspired ethos of ‘socialist consumerism’ where opposition groups were restricted to small intelligentsia networks (Kusin 1978; Otáhal 1994; Hankiss 1990; Tökés 1996). The two countries modes of exit from communism in 1989-90 differed significantly – a ‘negotiated revolution’ based on a roundtable in Hungary, regime collapse under pressure of mass mobilisation and a ‘Velvet Revolution’ in Czechoslovakia. However, in the 1990s both developed stable, consolidated party systems, which included a strong centre-right party, which held office for a significant period in the 1990s,

However, in a number of important respects, the development of the two countries party systems has differed. There is significant empirical evidence suggesting that left-right competition in the Czech Republic has since the early 1990s revolved around a single axis of socio-economic

² Moreover, in one case, that of Poland, the right has a substantial working class base, having largely emerged through the Solidarity movement (Wenzel 1998).

conflict determined by post-communist marketisation, rather than historically-rooted value cleavages. Analyses of political space in the Czech Republic on both the elite and the mass level have repeatedly stressed the dominance of this issue dimension (Evans and Whitefield 1998). Left-right self-placement by the Czech electorate since 1990 has remained relatively stable, with most voters in the political centre and overall distribution skewed towards the right (Matějů and Vlachová 1998). Other studies have found that in the course of the 1990s, voting for parties of the right and self-placement on the 'right' by Czech voters became more closely linked with more meritocratic notion of social justice, an above average tolerance of inequality and commitment to market forces (Vlachová 1999). This has been underpinned by growing correlation between social class and party choice expressed in a tendency for better educated, more urban and more prosperous groups of 'transition winners' to back them (Matějů and Reháková 1997). In cleavage terms, Krause's (2002) analysis confirms that this prime socio-political division can be regarded as a fully formed cleavage taking in a range of objective (ascriptive) and subjective factors.

In the Hungary context, by contrast, left-right competition and understandings of left and right at both elite and mass have largely centred around socio-cultural issues relating to religion, morality and national identity (Simon 2001; Kitschelt et al 1999). These drew upon a number of pre-communist social and historical divisions, such as urban-rural, centre-periphery, religious-secular cleavages, which are peripheral in a Czech context. Left/right self-identification and party choice have therefore tended to be correlated with variables, such as age, religiosity, membership of the former ruling party, attitudes to the communist past, place of residence, with the exact pattern of linkage varying with the evolution of main actors in the party system across the decade. Socio-economic and class factors – understood in terms of 'winners' and 'losers' in the transformation process or measured in terms of income level or social mobility – have overall been relatively poor predictors of party choice (for a review of work in this field see Enyedi 2003: 11-13, 29-35). The emergence of an increasingly bi-polar party system dominated by two large groupings – FIDESZ and its allies on the right, and the left-liberal alliance of the Free Democrats (SZDSZ) and Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) – have built up a 'mosaic' of cleavages, which distinguish their support. Most, however, cut across the class and socio-economic variables which are the key determinants of left-right alignment and party choice in the Czech party system. Left and right thus each draw on different coalitions of high and low income groups (Enyedi 2003).

Party Development on the Hungarian Centre-Right

The principal formation of the Hungarian centre-right is FIDESZ – Hungarian Civic Alliance (FIDESZ-MPSZ), a party which, although continuously present in the Hungarian parliament since 1990, has undergone fundamental ideological and organisational transformation during that time. Its status within the party system has also changed radically in the course of the 1990s from that of a relatively minor opposition party to one of the two dominant actors and contenders for office. FIDESZ was founded in 1988 by students and graduates of a number of leading Hungarian universities as an independent youth movement intended to rival stagnating official organisations for young people, the party acronym standing for Federation of Young Democrats. Defining itself as both a social movement and 'generation party' – membership was initially restricted to those under 35 – that was radical, liberal and alternative, FIDESZ was represented both at the Opposition Roundtable and the roundtable talks proper. It subsequently contested the 1990 founding elections, polling 8.6 per cent and winning a small number of representatives (Tokes 1996; Kiss 2003).

In early 1990s, FIDESZ was considered part of Hungary's liberal camp, which at this time constituted a distinct bloc standing between the reformed former communists of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and the conservative-nationalist parties led by Hungarian Democratic

Forum (MDF), which drew on pre-communist Hungarian right. As such - like the larger liberal grouping the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) - it was, excluded from the first post-1989 coalition administration, which the MDF formed in alliance with the Christian Democratic People's Party (KNDP) and the Independent Smallholders' Party (FGKP). The victory of the traditionalist right led to a number of organisational and political debates among the liberal parties.

In organisational terms, a group in FIDESZ led by Viktor Orbán sought to abandon its prevailing informal social movement ethos and decentralised, participatory structures in favour of a more centralised, professionalised party organisation with a conventional hierarchy and territorial branch structure capable of winning elections (van Biezen 2003 126-9; Szabó 2003: 80-1; Kiss 2003. These changes were finally realised at the party's fifth congress in 1993, soon prompting the departure of both radical groups still committed to movement politics and social-liberals, whose politics were at odds with Orbán's stress on economic liberalism (van Biezen 2003 126-9; Hegedűs 2003). The resultant party had some 15,000 members and the most limited organisational network of any Hungarian Party (van Biezen 2003:111)

Although seeking to make liberal forces a dominant grouping, which opinion polls at this time suggested was possible, both FIDESZ and the Free Democrats considered possible political openings to other blocs. However, while the Free Democrats explored the possibility of working with the Socialists, who shared their distaste for the right's traditional nationalism, FIDESZ under Orbán's unchallenged leadership considered openings to the right. This was reflected in the party's decision in 1993 to re-define itself as 'national-liberal', rather than liberal.

However, FIDESZ's overtures to the by-now unpopular conservative-national and Christian right - led by a disintegrating Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) - proved electorally costly in the 1994 election, in which FIDESZ's already low vote declined. The election, which was one by the Socialists, who formed a coalition government with the Free Democrats, proved similarly unsuccessful for divided and fragmented parties of the defeated traditional right. FIDESZ's response was to move unambiguously to the right, re-naming itself FIDESZ-Hungarian Civic Party (FIDESZ-MPP) in 1995, and progressively embracing and taking up the nationalist, socially conservative, Christian agenda of the traditional right, leaving behind its earlier economical liberalism and anti-clericalism. Between 1994 and 1998, FIDESZ-MPP competed with the more radical Independent Smallholders to form the core of a right-wing alliance, which could integrate both the elites and the voters of the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the increasingly fractious Christian Democrats (Fowler 2004b). By 1998 FIDESZ-MPP had emerged as the clear winner of this contest. Although in the 1998 election, it co-operated both with the (now much diminished) Hungarian Democratic Forum and (less formally) with the Smallholders, FIDESZ-MPP proved increasingly capable of directly absorbing right-wing elements.

In Hungary, many key market reform policies and austerity measures were carried under the 1994-8 Socialist-Free Democrat administration, rather than the first post-1989 government formed of the Hungarian right, whose approach towards marketisation was cautious and whose priorities were largely non-economic (Bartlett 1994). The unpopularity of such measures contributed to the liberal-left's defeat by the FIDESZ-led bloc in 1998 election. The party then formed a coalition with the Independent Smallholders and its election ally the Hungarian Democratic Forum. The 1998-2002 Orbán government attracted much controversy both for its abrasive style, uncompromising attempts to control the media and public agencies, and unashamed use of office to gain party political advantage. However, against expectations, the party was narrowly defeated in the April 2002 general elections after a highly polarised and emotive campaign.

Party Development on the Czech Centre-Right

The principal and most successful party of the Czech right is the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) formed in early 1991 on the basis of the free market, anti-communist right wing of a disintegrating Civic Forum. Like FIDESZ, ODS is closely identified with its charismatic founder, the former Czechoslovak Finance Minister (1990-92) and former Czech Prime Minister (1992-7) Václav Klaus, who led the party from its foundation until December 2002, when he stood down to launch his campaign for the Czech Presidency. However, unlike FIDESZ, from its foundation Klaus's party has consistently identified itself as a Western style conservative party. The party was initially defined by its support for market-led economic reform, radical decommunisation and minimal compromise with Slovak demands for a looser, more confederal structure for Czechoslovakia. It was on this platform, that the party convincingly won the June 1992 parliamentary elections in the Czech lands.

Klaus's ODS thus became the dominant force in the centre-right coalition governments that negotiated the division of Czechoslovakia in late 1992 implemented many key policies of post-communist transformation in the independent Czech Republic. However, the party's policies in office were in practice considerable more statist and welfarist, than its free market rhetoric and ideology might have suggested (Dangerfield 1997; Orenstein 2001). Moreover, by mid-1990s it became increasingly evident that, rather than producing the post-communist economic miracle that some had detected, the policies of by the Klaus government had created an under-regulated, under-capitalised, inefficient private sector, dominated by politically well connected insiders. The resultant economic malaise both undermined the party's reputation as a party of radical reform and aggravated tensions with its junior coalition partners, the social-market oriented Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL) and the neo-liberal Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA).

After inconclusive election results in June 1996 deprived the coalition of its majority, early parliamentary elections in 1998 saw ODS for the first time out-pollled by the Social Democrats, who became the largest Czech party. Such were the tensions between ODS and its former coalition partners, that Klaus unexpectedly opted to allow a minority Social Democratic government under Miloš Zeman to take office, on the basis of a written pact, the 'Opposition Agreement'. In succeeding years, Klaus's party then realigned itself combining its established neo-liberal position with conservative and nationalist themes, such as defending national interests against the EU, restricting immigration and resisting German demands to revise the legal status of the 'Beneš Decrees' expelling Czechoslovakia's ethnic German population in 1945-6. Although certain parallel can be drawn with FIDESZ's transformation and colonisation of the national-popular right, ODS's realignment was neither as far-reaching, nor as electorally successful. In the June 2002 parliamentary elections, Klaus's party suffered a further electoral defeat and saw its share of the vote decline to 25 per cent, its lowest share in any parliamentary election since its foundation.

The Czech centre-right also includes a number of smaller Christian Democratic, liberal groupings, which sought in the late 1990s to provide a coherent right-wing alternative to Klaus's party. Key amongst these are the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA), the Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) and the Freedom Union. The Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) was the first notable party of the right founded in post-communist Czechoslovakia. It was created on 17 December 1989 by a group of neo-conservative dissidents and free market economists. The Alliance's lack of resources, overly theoretical preoccupations and rapid absorption into the broad Civic Forum movement limited its impact. In 1992, having refused to dissolve itself into Klaus's ODS, it thus emerged only as a minor

parliamentary party with just over 5 per cent support. Although ideologically close to Klaus's ODS in its identifying itself with the Anglo-American New Right, the Alliance sought to distinguish itself as more as a more principled and consistent advocate of free market economic policies with a greater commitment to decentralisation and civil society development

The Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) had existed as a 'satellite' party under communism, but its origins dated to the 19th century. Drawing on historic bastions of support in rural Catholic regions of South Moravia and East Bohemia, KDU-ČSL was the only non-communist historic party to gain representation in Czech and Czechoslovak parliaments after 1989. However, its broader appeal was weakened by its confessional character and perceived collaboration with the old regime, although its fortunes in office as a result of the politically astute leadership of Josef Lux, the party's Chair between 1990 and 1998. Given its historic origins, in re-inventing itself in a post-communist context, the party naturally gravitated towards Western Christian Democratic parties.

The Freedom Union (US) was founded in February 1998 by opponents of Václav Klaus within ODS, who had unsuccessfully challenged him for the party leadership in the wake of its traumatic and scandal-ridden departure from office in December 1997. The party rapidly developed a distinct right-wing liberal critique of the Klaus era, which embraced the need for social and public sector modernisation. However, despite attracting media interest and drawing support from outside the established right, the Freedom Union (US) failed to displace Klaus's ODS. Instead it took the place the Civic Democratic Alliance in the Czech party system, which effectively disintegrated in 1997-8 as result of a financing scandal parallel to that of ODS and the irruption of longstanding factional tensions.

Following the conclusion of the Opposition Agreement pact between ODS and the Social Democrats in July 1998, which included an agreement to collaborate on reform the electoral system to the disadvantage of smaller parties (Birch et al 2002: 79-86), these three smaller Czech centre-right parties began an increasingly close political collaboration. In September 1999, they created a four-party bloc, Quad-Coalition (4K).³ Although originally conceived in pragmatic terms, 4K's programmatic and policy documents show evidence of new right-wing synthesis. As this paper will suggest, in certain respects – and allowing for important differences of national context - this bloc more closely parallels Hungary's FIDESZ in both its origins, ideology and strategy of interest representation. Unlike, FIDESZ, however, 4K failed to become either a consolidated or a dominant actor in the party system. Indeed, in January 2002 the bloc disintegrated as a result of inter-party rivalries (Hanley 2000a).

Contrasting Constructions of the 'Civic' Right

Despite their contrasting records and political stances, some writers see an affinity between the two parties - and others in the region - based on their common use of the label 'civic' (Sitter 2001). This is, however, misleading. Crucially, it obscures both the extent to which political concepts are embedded in national cultural and historical contexts and the ways in which right-wing political in different states have *crafted* specific (and different) understandings of civil society and the civic since 1988-9.

³ The fourth member of the coalition the small anti-communist Democratic Union (DEU) founded in 1994, which, with the exception of one Senator elected in December 1996, never gained independent parliamentary representation. DEU merged with the Freedom Union in December 2001.

As many specialists on Hungarian politics have noted, the Hungarian term *polgár* is complex and potentially ambiguous because it refers both to the ‘citizen’ and the ‘bourgeois’, carrying both the socio-economic and the ideological connotations of this second meaning (Fowler 2003, fn). In the Czech context, by contrast, the notion of the citizen/citroyen (*občan*) and the burgher/bourgeois (*měšt’an, měšt’ák*) are linguistically separate.

However, in both contexts, the concept of the ‘civic’ as used by the right is more than a historically derived, culturally specific term, but the *product of intense ideological construction* rooted in the political struggle that produced the main party of the centre-right in each case. Fowler (2004a, 2004b) notes that in the context of the Hungarian transition from late communism, ‘civic’ (*polgári*) was a relatively flat and uncontroversial term. Similarly, even among academic sociologists and intellectuals the concept of embourgeoisement was fading as topic of debate (Csiste 1998). These terms acquired strong political meaning only in the course of the 1990s in connection with the realignment of right-wing forces and the emergence of FIDESZ in the late 1990s as the dominant broad, consolidated formation of the Hungarian right. Fowler traces how the meaning of the term was progressively re-defined by FIDESZ politicians across the 1990s. Initially a label denoting the party’s anti-communism and rejection of the ex-communist Socialists as coalition partners in 1992-3, after 1994 it was subsequently adapted to define a moderate ‘national-liberal’ position, excluding the governing socialist-liberal bloc *and* more the radical nationalist pole then coalescing around the Independent Smallholders. As the Hungarian right united in and around FIDESZ, the label ‘civic’ was used by the right as a synonym for itself and appears frequently in the title of right-wing political and social organisations allied with FIDESZ. The ambiguity and historical resonance of the Hungarian term has also enabled it serve as

Ideology, which has synthesised traditional Christian, nationalist and populist themes of the Hungarian right in a new ideology, which articulates on a critique of post-communist transformation as conceived and implemented by the liberal left (Fowler 2004b; Schöpflin 2002).

In the Czech context, although most only explicitly took up the concept of ‘civil society’ *after* the collapse of communism, the concept was the ‘civic’ was central to the thinking of a number of leading dissidents. It was thus natural that the Czech dissidents catapulted to political prominence by mass anti-regime protests in November 1989 should frame the movement formed from it, Civic Forum (*Občanské fórum*). The movement’s initial rationale was to allow the participation of Czechs in public life as citizens, rather than alienated subjects of the communist one party-state – ‘Civil Forum’ or ‘Citizens Forum’ would perhaps a better English rendition of the movement’s name at this time.⁴ However, as the Forum was drawn into fulfilling many of the functions of political party (government formation, contesting elections) by the Czechoslovak regime’s rapid implosion, the meaning of its ‘civicness’ changed accordingly. As discussion over the movement’s possible future transformation into a ‘civic party’ suggested, by mid-1990 the term was increasingly redefined to mean a broad, non-communist middle ground in Czech politics favouring democracy, marketisation and Europeanisation, not allied to any of the small historic parties. However, in late 1990 a ‘right-wing’ coalition of grassroots anti-communist activists and neo-liberal neo-liberal technocrats emerged within Civic Forum, which – in a larger scale version of internal disputes FIDESZ was later to undergo – sought to move from the model of inclusive non-ideological social movement to a conventional, hierarchically structured programmatic party. This further re-defined the ‘civic’ in Czech politics. The Civic Democratic Party (ODS) founded in April 1991 under the leadership Václav Klaus’s partly used the label ‘civic’ to indicate that it

⁴ I am indebted to my colleague at SSEES/UCL Prof. Robert Pynsent for this observation

was one of Civic Forum's 'successor parties' and aspired to take up its role as the main political vehicle for post-communist reform. However, as their Hungarian counterparts were to do ODS leaders crafted a deeper right-wing notion of the term.

For Klaus and his ODS colleagues, the 'civicness' of the party indicated not only its secular, non-confessional character, but also its breadth of appeal, commitment to individualism and rejection of sectional interests. ODS's first electoral programme thus pointedly stressed that it viewed politics and society began with 'the citizen, the individual as a source of initiative' (ODS 1992: 2). Speaking to ODS's first regular Congress, Klaus asserted that

...we do not restrict our membership, our sympathisers and supporters or our voters to certain specific politically, socially, economically, geographically or generationally-defined group....
(Klaus 1991)

ODS thus viewed civil society and the 'civic' as meaning the free interaction of individual citizens – 'a society of free citizens' as Klaus frequently re-defined it - rather than in terms structures of civic association, which it viewed as a veiled form of corporatism, or citizen participation in politics, which it viewed as a 'populist' threat parliamentary democracy.

The party's long-term *Political Programme*, a document drawn up more moderate Josef Zieleniec, rejected 'a corporatist or syndicalist state' of 'corporations and institutions which are under the control of particular groups of citizens' (ODS 1996: 11). This point reiterated many times in Klaus's voluminous writings and other ODS documents. However, as in Hungary, electoral competition and the evolution of the party system also 'civic' label in the hands of the centre-right. The electoral failure in 1992 of the other main successor party to emerge from Civic Forum, the centrist Civic Movement (OH), eliminated centrists notions of a 'civic party', indirectly triggering long-running intellectual controversy over whether it was necessary to build a strong civil society beyond party politics (Pehe 1994)

The emergence of a 'historic' party which had remained outside Civic Forum, the Czech Social Democrats, as the main force on the centre-left in 1996 further confirmed the identification of 'civicness' with centre-right liberalism.

Civic Mobilisation and the Right

As Kopecký (2002) suggests demobilised post-communist societies can retain a capacity for intense, usually short-lived episodes of mass protest and contentious politics, which punctuate the apparent normality of a civil society dominated by local non-political associations and bureaucratic, elite-centred interest organisations. Civic mobilisation may be defined as a form of such contentious politics, which is framed in terms of the broader interest of a national or local community and is undertaken by participants as citizens, rather than as producers or consumers, or single issue or policy advocates.⁵ In both Hungary and the Czech Republic, significant mass civic mobilisation aligned with forces on the centre-right has taken place, offering right-wing parties whose roots may lie in anti-communist protest traditions the opportunity to re-connect

⁵ As Dvořáková (2002: 152) puts it they are involved in 'multi-dimensional activities and their topic includes the whole realm of politics'.

with society.⁶ Szabó (2003: 76-77) distinguishes three ideal types of protest politics with which political parties may interact:

- 1) *mass mobilisation*, which does not exceed the bounds of spontaneous protest over specific issues;
- 2) *social movements*, whose mobilisation is not only more sustained and resource-intensive, but is characterised by a high degree of symbolic interaction, sophisticated framing of grievances and contestation of existing political structures; and
- 3) *'top down' mobilisation* organised and controlled by governments or political parties.

Hungary's 'Civic Circles' Movement

After abandoning the perspective of an inter-party 'Civic Alliance' (Fowler 2004b), In the late 1990s, FIDESZ had already taken steps towards becoming a 'mosaic cleavage party' by encouraging elites recruited from small, disintegrating right-wing parties with distinct social constituencies to establish distinct sub-groupings within the party. One such grouping, the Hungarian Christian Democratic Society (MKDSZ) was directly represented the party's national board (Enyedi 2003: 17).⁷ However, the 'civic circles' movement have their immediate origins in FIDESZ's efforts to mobilise right-wing voters for the second round of voting for the crucial single constituency seats in Hungary's April 2002 parliamentary election, after it had unexpectedly been out polled by the centre-left in the first round. Although first round votes ensured that FIDESZ was narrowly defeated (Fowler 2003), its success in mobilising second round support, both electorally and on the streets, led Viktor Orbán to call for the formation of 'friendly civic groups' in May 2002 (Budapest Sun 2002a).

The role of such groups, he explained, was to prevent the new socialist-liberal coalition government from reversing key policies implemented by the 1998-2002 centre-right government and to protect right-wing supporters from supposed threat of humiliation and persecution (Budapest Sun 2002a). The 2002 election result was framed by FIDESZ, like that of 1994, as an event comparable to the imposition of one-party rule in 1947 consistent with FIDESZ's view of post-1989 Hungarian politics as a continuation of the struggle between the mass of the nation and a *nomenklatura* elite and its clients, whose dominance could be likened to one of the many foreign occupation Hungary suffered in the past (Budapest Sun 2002a).

In more strategic, party political terms, the movement seems to represent a means of both pressurising the government, mobilising additional resources for election campaigning and creating an organised social bloc of right-wing identifying 'civic' voters (BBC Monitoring 2002a, 2003c), which has echoes of the cleavage-building strategies of encapsulation or pillarisation pursued by West European mass parties (Enyedi 2003). It also seems to echo on a much larger scale the 'sub-cultural' strategy of Hungary's small Christian Democratic Party (KNDP) in the mid-1990s (Enyedi 1996). Although civic circles are also engaged in a range of charitable, educational and cultural activities with a right-wing 'civic' slant, their most visible activities are political events, many of which are protest events and forms of contentious politics. Civic circles (indirectly) contested the results of the April 2002 election by staging protests in July 2002 –

⁶ In comparative terms, social mobilisation of this type by right-wing parties – which can normally rely on other resources and sources of power - is relatively rare and seems characteristic of contexts where party structures are weak and 'new'. French Gaullism and Argentinian Peronism may be possible example.

⁷ The Fidelitas youth organisation, whose upper age limit of 35 years, echoes that of the original FIDESZ, is also represented in this way.

most notoriously the blocking of the Elizabeth Bridge in central Budapest by a small illegal protest - demanding that ballots be retained for a possible recount, suggesting that electoral malpractice may have occurred (Budapest Sun 2002b, 2002b). Others have focused on broadcasting outlets, which have become politicised on strongly partisan lines in contemporary Hungary, and whose power (and supposed domination by left-liberal and ex-nomenklatura elites) is preoccupation of FIDESZ and the Hungarian right (Hegedűs 2002), and sites connected with historical memory and national identity, such as the House of Terror Museum (Budapest Sun 2003; Pittaway 2003) or Soviet war memorials (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, Part II, 5 April 2004). Civic circles have also been active a variety of petition campaigns and referendum initiatives supported or sponsored by FIDESZ challenging aspects of government policy RFE/RL NEWSLINE Part II, 29 March 2004; BBC Monitoring 2002c, 2004d). Civic circles have also sponsored or supported a range of smaller scale events with local or sectional demands that fit with the 'civic' right-wing perspective. These have included farmers protests' (2002d, demonstrations against hospital cutbacks and local campaigns against housing and supermarket developments. They have also protested against US-led intervention in Iraq (about which FIDESZ is sceptical).

By late 2003 there were 11, 000 civic circles registered by FIDESZ through its Democracy Centre with an estimated 150 000 – 160 000 participants in 1000 localities in Hungary⁸. Although the party has provided organisational and logistical support to the movement, it has not regulated or licenced local circles, or vetted those who set them up. FIDESZ leaders have, however, sometimes distanced themselves from the activities of more extreme elements within the movement such as the burning of the Israeli flag during protests against anti-clerical comments broadcast on alternative radio station (Ha'aretz 2004; BBC Monitoring 2004b). Although well co-ordinated through internet sites, email and text messaging (BBC Monitoring 2004a) as well as conventional paper-based publications, the civic circles remained highly decentralised and did not develop significant regional or national leadership structures. Instead in May 2003 they were partially incorporated into the FIDESZ following a major re-organisation and re-thinking of the party structure at its May 2003 congress at which it was re-named FIDESZ-Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz– MPSZ).⁹ The congress abandoned the concept of FIDESZ as a framework party of committed activists, political professionals and office-holders (a membership of some 15,000) for the goal of creating a more loosely structured mass movement, in which levels of commitment and participation would vary. Parallel to this loosening of party structures, FIDESZ established an number of self-governing internal 'platforms' intended to represent the interests of key social groups and communities within 'civic Hungary', such as women, smallholders, employers, the sphere of local government, pensioners, cultural workers, rural areas, and ecologists.¹⁰ Each platform would be represented in the party's wider leadership (FIDESZ 2003a).

In addition to inherent normative appeals of grassroots participation, this organisational change was justified by reference both anti-communism and West European models of party organisation. Viktor Orbán argued that the movement was both a substitute for an absent civil

⁸ Civic circles supportive of FIDESZ with have also been formed in ethnic Hungarian regions of Romania and (according to some reports) Slovakia and among expatriate a number of Western countries (BBC Monitoring 2003b, 2004c). Circles need not be territorially based but can include members in several localities linked by friendship or other common interests

⁹ FIDESZ sources also sometime use the translation Hungarian Civic Union. Máté Szabó notes that the Hungarian term also carries the sense of 'covenant'. Remarks in discussion following the presentation of Szabó (2003) as a conference paper at the ECPR General Conference, Marburg 18-21 September 2003 (author's notes).

¹⁰ As Fowler notes (2004b) these essentially functional divisions could pose problems for the absorption of expressedly party-political groupings such as the Hungarian Democratic Forum

society, which would constitute a temporary bulwark against nomenklatura dominance supposedly represented by the liberal-left (*EPP News* 2002), and a move toward the Christian Democratic ‘People’s Party’ model in keeping with FIDESZ’s international alignments (FIDESZ 2003).

In Szabó’s social movement theory perspective the ‘civic circles’ movement appears to combine aspects of a genuine social movement with ‘top-down’ party-led mobilisation clearly evident in the party’s initiation, co-ordination and incorporation of the movement (Szabó 2003: 76-7).¹¹ However, what is of greater interest is FIDESZ’s turn to mass civic mobilisation as a form of party-society linkage and its ability to achieve such mobilisation on a mass scale. On first examination, both seem surprising in the light of Hungary’s lack of social mobilisation after 1956 and comparatively low levels of transitional mobilisation in 1988-89 and of contentious politics after 1989 (Ekiert and Kubik 1998). It is doubly surprising given the struggle of the Orbán group in FIDESZ the early 1990s to its social movement ethos of ‘base democracy’ in favour of the model of professionalised party with limited organisation and membership purely oriented towards electoral competition. Finally, the emergence of civic circles movement and FIDESZ’s turn to mass organisation with functional representation of interest groups runs entirely counter to current trends in political participation and party organisation across the region (Howard 2002; Ágh 1998; Lewis 2000; van Biezen 2003)

The Czech Republic The Civic Democrats’ Electoral Mobilisation

The Civic Democratic Party’s founding vision conceived of itself programmatically-oriented, office-seeking party with an electorally mediated relationship to individuals and groups in society, which contrasted with Civic Forum’s ‘corporatist’ desire to substitute for an absent civil society. This has defined ODS’s approach to social representation from its foundation until the present day. Like other ‘civic’ parties in Czech politics – and other liberal and post-opposition parties elsewhere in the region - ODS viewed social, denominational or class interests as threatening the general (‘civic’) interest of society as a whole. It did, however, recognise the interests of certain ‘natural’ entities - individuals, families, associations freely formed by individuals, local communities, and, latterly nation states - as different, potentially conflicting (see Klaus 2002: 132). Where possible, ODS argued, such conflicting interests should be resolved and co-ordinated by parties indirectly through the creation of environment for free competition. However, in some circumstances, at a higher level such interest might need to be aggregated and represented by political parties. The party recognised the existence of more conventional interest groups in civil society such as trade unions, employers’ organisations or the Church. However, it feared that such groups had a strong tendency to institutionalise themselves within the political system, imposing corporatist type structures, that would lead the Czech Republic to repeat the ‘mistakes’ of some West European countries. It, therefore, argued that interest groups should only have a political input in policy areas of immediate concern and should not be represented by political parties (ODS 1996: 14-15; Klaus 1994/2002b).

Although aware that ODS itself was as much a coalition of interests as a community of shared beliefs (Klaus 1991: 204) both Klaus personally and ODS paid little attention to defining the party in relation to external or social interests, or modifying its organisational structure to accommodate them. Thus, although in its formative stage in 1991-2, the party ODS sanctioned the establishment of (spontaneously emerging) informal ‘professional clubs’ of ODS members

¹¹ Szabó’s speaks of FIDESZ as a ‘mobilising populist party’, noting that the circles’ nationwide organisation and dependence on FIDESZ resources, which derive from its status as a former governing party, distinguish them from FIDESZ’s earlier incarnation as social movement..

(e.g. railway employees, doctors, teachers, mayors), it saw them more as a means of channelling members' expertise into policymaking, than of gaining social presence. To reinforce this distance from social interests ODS was, moreover, insistent that a clear distinction be made between public events and those with an 'internal' character for members only.

Rather than appealing to structural-social interests, ODS thus sought to mobilise broad popular support on the base of a programme of social transformation and (latterly) the defence of 'national interests'. Addressing the first regular ODS congress, Klaus (1991b) defined the party in terms of market reform, a strong federal Czechoslovak government and firm decommunisation which would

'.....appeal to all the citizens of this country, who are not indifferent to its future.... our programme is broad enough to manage this, while at the same time remaining clear and unambiguous'

Speaking in 2001, at a conference marking its tenth anniversary, Klaus made a similar appeal centring on a somewhat different transformation, urging his party

'...to attempt to formulate a higher common interest, which can unite a significant part of the Czech public in expectations of the fateful steps ahead of the Czech Republic ... entering the European Union

... to offer a common language and common set of positions matters extending far beyond the time space of one set of elections. (...) ... it is we who wish want these elections not to divide and disunite our society, but to unite it on the basis of this higher common denominator (Klaus 2002: 129-30).

The party's underlying view thus implies the legitimate interests of individuals and groups of individuals in a national community could be co-ordinated and, to a considerable extent harmonised through a political party and its programme and ideology. In many cases, however, such a broad programmatic appeals were framed terms of anti-communism or a populist identification with the nation or ordinary people. In the absence of a communist successor party strong enough to be credible contender for power, ODS quickly identified the Czech centre-left, centrist intellectuals close to President Havel and other critics (such as ecologists and churchmen) as unconscious proponents of 'Third Ways', which echoed 1960s reform communism (Klaus 1994/2002a).

Civic Mobilisation and Centre-Right Alternative in the Czech Republic

The Hungarian concept of 'civic circles' seems loosely correspond to the Czech notion of the 'civic initiative' (*občanská iniciativa*). For much of the Czech Republic's existence such 'civic initiatives' were scattered and small in scale, typically reflecting the concerns of local groups, committed activists or intellectual elites. Although presented as non-political, some efforts at developing civil society in this grassroots manner were informed by a political perspective strongly held by President Havel and some other former dissident intellectuals, which was critical of the etatism and technocratic approach to politics of both the Czech centre-left and centre-right. In 1999 and again in 2001 such 'civic initiatives' rapidly mobilised tens of thousands on the streets of Prague – and, to a lesser extent, provincial centres – in protest against the cartel-like co-operation of the two principal parties of left and right and their perceived attempts to 'partify' the media. The 'Thank You, Now Leave' petition launched by six former leaders of the student

movement during the 1989 Velvet Revolution initially appeared destined to be as ineffective and limited in impact as earlier similar initiatives, such as the ‘Political Club’ project December 1997 or the ‘Impulse 99’ campaign founded in July 1999 (Dvořáková 2002)

The ‘Thank You, Now Leave’ petition’s authors expressed the widespread view that a decade of post-communist transformation had produced ‘instead of co-operation between the state and the entrepreneurial middle class ... a battle being waged, infiltrated by mistrust, thievery, incompetence and corruption among state officials’. They declared that they felt cheated by ‘arrogant political power, incapable of agreeing on a functioning form of leadership for the country, blaming us, the public, for the way we voted’. It then asserted that

‘the atmosphere which has taken hold of this land is not native to us, but emanates from the arrogance, cynicism and bloated self-interest of the majority of our present political leaders. A fair number of the politicians in our country have, by their behaviour, all but reached the standards of our former Communist rulers!’

before concluding with a demand that the countries leading politicians should step down and an appeal for ordinary Czechs including members of political parties to ‘come out of our shells of dubiousness and anxiety and join hands’ (‘Thank You, Now Leave’ 1999).

The petition’s articulation of an underlying sense of frustration and malaise as the symbolic tenth anniversary of the revolution - a period when support for the hardline Czech Communists was also unexpectedly growing – saw it rapidly gained signatories, which eventually totalled some 200,000. Demonstrations organised by ‘Thank You, Now Leave’ attracted 50,000 -70,000 in Prague and several thousand in provincial centres were the largest since the fall of communism in November 1989. However, despite organising a series of further events, mass support rapidly waned and a follow-up demonstration in February 2000 attracted dozens, rather than thousands. In organisational terms the protest left a small network of ‘Thank You, Now Leave’ associations, whose activities were restricted to discussion events and the formulation of public statements. Attempts to organise a new political party on the basis of the movement were equally stillborn. Splits within ‘Thank You, Now Leave’ produced two small centrist liberal ‘civic’ groupings, Path of Change (CZ) and Hope (*Nadeje*), whose political impact was minimal (Dvořáková 2002).

A second wave of civic mobilisation centring around Czech Television occurred in late 2000 and early 2001. On 12 December 2000, the governing body of Czech Television (ČT), the Czech state-owned public broadcaster, replaced its chief executive with a new appointee. Subsequent changes that the new management regime sought to introduce into ČT’s troubled news and current affairs section provoked a strike by journalists, who occupied their studios, taking normal programming off the air. Czech Television’s governing body was (by law) composed of representatives of political parties and, having been most recently appointed in February 2000, was dominated by nominees of the incumbent Social Democrats and Klaus’s Civic Democrats, their partners in the Opposition Agreement. The striking journalists and their supporters alleged that the two parties were attempting to partify and censor independent media. Spontaneous demonstrations in support of the strikers outside TV studios in Prague and Brno rapidly escalated into mass protest on a scale similar to that in November 1999. On 2001 a demonstration against the managerial changes in Czech Television in Prague, at which the two main parties’ perceived attack on journalistic freedom was compared to communist take over of independent media in 1948, attracted over 100, 000. However, despite achieving its main objective in forcing the resignation of the new Czech Television chief executive, this episode of mobilisation too quickly waned and left little more than a new civic association committed to promoting independent public service broadcasting.

Despite their anti-politic rhetoric and use of the Velvet Revolution as a point of reference, neither episode of civic mobilisation was ‘truly non-partisan, nor fully anti-partisan’ (Dvořáková 2002: 150). The ‘Thank You, Now Leave’ movement and its predecessor ‘Impulse ’99’ were partly driven by the political ambitions of some of their founders to win election to the Czech Senate as independents. The television protests in part reflected the sectional interests of Czech Television employees and internal disputes about how to reform the institution (Stroehlein 2001; Čulík 2001). The protests’ focus on the Opposition Agreement as a source of social and political stagnation fitted the Quad Coalition’s discourse that depicted its two larger rivals as nationalistic and clientelistic leftovers from the past with a ‘communist’ way of managing politics. Indeed, striking journalists were known to be sympathetic to the Quad-Coalition, whose support they successfully solicited. A number of 4K politicians and leading figures in earlier ‘civic initiatives’ visited occupied TV studios to support the protest.

However, despite aligning itself with powerful civic mobilisation, the Quad-Coalition was unable to steer or develop the movement in the way that FIDESZ directed and institutionalised the ‘civic circles’. Despite 4K’s studied moderation, as the emotive atmosphere of the television crisis showed (and ODS’s response to its critics showed) there was significant polarisation. Moreover, the notion of a broad and inclusive political party surrounded by a hinterland of local civic political groups and clubs, substituting for an absent civil society, was not unfamiliar in Czech politics. Such a structure had been envisaged for a reformed Civic Forum movement’s in 1990 before its right wing became the majority. It had also been championed by the Forum’s anti-Klaus wing, the Civic Movement (OH) in 1991-2, before lack of electoral and grassroots support revealed its unfeasibility.

Explaining Contrasting Approaches to Civic Mobilisation on the Centre-Right

Perhaps the most significant contrast is that between Orbán’s FIDESZ and Klaus’s ODS. Both parties were successful centre-right formations led by charismatic leaders, which suffered significant electoral defeats ejecting them from office. Both favoured a bi-polar model of left-right competition, which was depicted as a continuation of the process of regime change begun in 1989. However, whereas in 2002 Orbán responded to electoral defeat by making successful appeals for civic mobilisation to ‘re-root his party in society, in 1998, despite calling rhetorically in its election campaign for mobilisation against the left, Klaus’s party opted instead to conclude a political pact with the left, retaining its previous aversion to citizen mobilisation and mass participation.

Indeed, even after Klaus stepped down as party leader, younger politicians with leadership ambitions, who argued that ODS needed broadening organisationally and to avoid the impression that it represented mainly the powerful, rich and successful, made only modest suggestions for involving sympathisers (party-sponsored discussion clubs, more social events) and greater social implanatation (party foundations to improve fundraising and research). True to its ethos of political professionalism, much ‘new’ thinking focussed instead on internal organisation reforms (empowering regional organisations, primaries) or elite-level projects (creation of think-tanks and leadership academies) (Langer 2002; Nečas 2002).¹²

On first examination, the reasons for such differences appear to lie in the character of the Civic Democratic Party itself or Czech political culture. Klaus’s party had been founded in 1991 as part of a right-wing reaction against ‘movement’ forms of organisation championed by Civic Forum’s

¹² Nečas 2002 even uses the term ‘People’s Party’ (*všelidová strana*)

ex-dissident leaders, which ODS had depicted as constituting a 'Third Way' with overtones of 1960s reform communism. The party's professional structures, clear lines of authority and firm distinction between members and non-members were central to its conception of itself as a 'standard' Western party. However, there is no reason to think that it would necessarily constitute ideological shibboleth as to prevent radical reorganisation of the type FIDESZ's founding leaders undertook in 2002-3. In many respects, Klaus and other ODS leaders had proved as ideologically and politically innovative as FIDESZ. After 1997 the party moved towards traditional Czech nationalist positions and simultaneously abandoned its refusal to work with left-wing parties, signing the Opposition Agreement with the Social Democrats in 1998 and seeking the support of Communist deputies to ensure Klaus's election as President by the Czech parliament in 2003. Moreover, as demonstrated during ODS's internal crisis and split of 1997-8, when Klaus supporters gathered spontaneously outside ODS party headquarters, the former ODS founder did possess the capacity to trigger protest during periods of political tension. Moreover, as noted above, episodes of mass civic mobilisation have, if anything, been more frequent in a Czech context, including on one occasion, an instance of 'top down' civic mobilisation prompted by President Havel's December 1991 call for public support for his proposals for agreeing a new Czechoslovak constitution.

Rather, FIDESZ's strategy of civic mobilisation and the subsequent development of a mass party with a 'hinterland' of civic groups and ODS's failure to develop such a strategy seems to reflect the contrasting dynamics and incentives of the party systems. ODS's potential for drawing on civic mobilisation reflecting public frustration course of socio-economic transformation was limited by the fact that, having institutionalised and gained office at a relatively early stage (Hanley 2004), it had been politically responsible the implementation of many key reforms. FIDESZ, by contrast, was a relatively new party, which stabilised in its current 'civic' right-wing form only in the mid-1990s. Arguably more decisive as an explanatory factor, however, are the different party system formats and the related issue of the 'regime divide' between the former ruling party and its former opponents (Gryzmala-Busse 2001: Ágh 1998). Hungarian party competition has evolved from a 'triangular' pattern to a bi-polar pattern opposing a liberal-left to 'civic' right centred on FIDESZ. In the Czech context, however, despite efforts to engineer bi-polar competition, the survival of hardline Communists, who remain 'uncoalitionable' for all other parties and of the Christian Democrats - facilitated by the more proportional Czech electoral system - in addition to divisions on the (neo-)liberal right - has made the model of two blocs unrealisable, as evidenced by a succession of minority governments (three between 1996 and 2002). Paradoxically, such instability opened up possible new crosscutting inter-party alliances. In the Hungarian party system, however, - which by 2002 was essentially two bloc system - other than deploying the existing strategy of including all right-wing groups in the FIDESZ bloc more extensively and more effectively, right-wing leaders had few potential alliance strategies open to them. This may explain the attractiveness of a 'turn to society' as means both of incorporating right-wing voters directly (Enyedi 2003) and as a strategy of for pressurising the socialist-liberal coalition administration.

It is also legitimate to ask why leaders of the Czech Quad-Coalition (4K) did not seek to capitalise on unexpected supportive civic mobilisation as FIDESZ did. To some extent, the different outcome of the Czech case reflected the fact that civic mobilisation was initiated from below by non-party actors as an anti-political movement (albeit one directed primarily at the two main political parties) and was not amenable to 'top down' co-ordination. In Szabó's (2003: 76-7) terms the Czech 'Thank You, Now Leave' and television protests combined mass mobilisation with elements of a social movement. Moreover, unlike the tightly organised, charismatically-led FIDESZ, the Quad-Coalition was a cumbersome inter-party alliance, in which the internal balance of power was uncertain and contested (Dimun 2002). It both lacked a leadership with the

authority and capacity to call for the creation of a wider movement and the stability to integrate new participants from civic groups in a wider structure. Despite their impressive scale, civic initiatives themselves lacked the resources or the political focus to co-ordinate diverse concerns and participants into longer term social movement (Dvořáková 2002: 150-1), that FIDESZ provided to the ‘civic circles’ 2002. The unexpected scale of the mobilisation also surprised the leaders of civic initiatives, who were unprepared for the possibility that such a mass movement might take on a quasi-party political role. In the Hungarian context, such possibilities were clearly not lost on FIDESZ’s experienced party politicians.

A number of authors (Kiss 2003; Szabó 2003) attribute FIDESZ’s inclination and ability to (re-)deploy a strategy of mass civic mobilisation to its origins as a dissident social movement in the late 1980s. The presence of a mobilised radical right subculture, which emerged in 1992-3 with the departure of the radical ‘populist nationalists’ from the fragmenting Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) (Szabó 2003; Fowler 2004b), and a well established subculture of Christian organisation (Enyedi 1995) may be further factors facilitating mass mobilisation. Enyedi (2003) argues that, paradoxically, the centralised, elite-dominated framework party model adopted after 1992-3 facilitated ideological realignment and turn to civic mobilisation. He further notes that, despite its efficiency as a vehicle for electoral competition, the framework parties’ lack of social implantation can leave them vulnerable to shifts in a volatile electorate - as demonstrated by FIDESZ’s loss of popularity before in the 1994 parliamentary elections – and lacking in influence when in opposition to a government with a clear parliamentary majority.

The ‘Thank You, Now Leave’ mobilisation in the Czech Republic and subsequent mass protests of 2000/1 confirms suggestions from the Hungarian regarding the importance of student leaders of the late 1980s as an elite group with the legitimacy and cognitive outlook to trigger civic mobilisation. In the Czech case, however, in contrast to Hungary, this group had been politically marginalised after 1989 and had no party political base to work from. As in Hungary, this group combined an alternative protest movement culture with a range of more conventional ideological views ranging from social liberal to Christian neo-conservative. As in Hungary, students, along with artists, actors and social scientists were among the first to become active in alternative networks (Otáhal 2003) and mobilise in anti-regime protest (1999). However, in the Czech case, the more repressive context of late communism provided weaker opportunities for student protest groups to organise in the way FIDESZ. Moreover, when in November-December 1989, student protest movement emerged, the speed and scale of subsequent broader social mobilisation saw it rapidly overshadowed by the broader Civic Forum movement, which was led by an older generation of dissidents and technocrats. Although some student activists, such as Marek Benda or Hana Marvanová, did enter party politics, the majority chose to pursue careers in fields such as journalism, academia, policy research or the voluntary sector (Otáhal 1999). Until late 1990s top level Czech centre-right (and centre-left) elites were dominated by a generation of technocrats and (to a more limited extent) former dissidents born in the 1940s.

Centre-Right Parties and the Missing Middle Class

Across East Central Europe, the coercive transformations that followed the onset of communist one-party rule in the late 1940s eliminated domestic middle classes socially and economically and stigmatised their values culturally and ideologically. The steady erosion of communist power in the 1970s and 1980s saw renewed intellectual interest and reassessment in the role of defunct historical middle classes. At the same time, sociological and historical research suggested that although not present ‘socially’, aspects of middle class identity had been transmitted to certain social groups in late communism both through traditions of educational achievement and personal

and family narratives (Večerník 2001; Mark 2003). Surprisingly, however, in the initial phases of post-communist politics, despite their strong anti-communism and desire to re-establish continuity with the pre-communist past, centre-right formations in the region did not perceive the recreation of a middle class base for themselves as a high priority. In the late 1990s, however, in both Hungary and the Czech Republic newer centre-right formations, which defined themselves in terms of critiques of the shortcomings of early transformation, used the concept of middle class development as an important framing device.

FIDESZ: The Charm of a Discrete National Bourgeoisie

The concept of embourgeoisement (*polgárosodás*) has strong historical resonances in Hungary. It is used to refer, for example, both to the partial modernisation of Hungarian society during the 19th century (Fowler 2004a) and to the emergence of ‘socialist entrepreneurs’ operating semi-legal rural and retail business within the second economy that emerged in the 1970s and 80s (Szelenyi et al 1988). It has also served as a framing device for making sense of Hungary’s modern political history. In this perspective, embourgeoisement is seen as normal, underlying, ongoing process of development in Hungarian society, present across all regimes, which has been periodically slowed or blocked by social groups with an anti-bourgeois, interests or culture. In this perspective, the rule of the communist nomenklatura with its non-meritocratic outlook centring on ideological and political criteria appears analogous to the earlier dominance of the aristocracy. This historical parallel was reinforced by the limited development under both regimes of a market economy under political structures supposedly reflecting other values and the complex interweaving of elements of a middle class market society with a predominantly non-market regime (Gerő 1995: 1-18; see also Townsley, Eyal and Szelenyi 1999). After 1989

The high levels of social inequality in pre-communist Hungary and growth of inequalities in late communist Hungary - in part, a consequence of the development of the ‘second economy’ – raised marked concerns about the potential social costs of the transition to a full blooded market economy. For some, even among those who did not identify with Hungary’s populist right-wing traditions, the development of a national bourgeoisie of small and medium property owners based on the domestic embourgeoisement trends that had emerged under late socialism was an attractive potential ‘Third Way’ (Szelenyi 1990). In practice, however, in the early 1990s such a strategy did not prove economically or politically feasible (Bartlett 1994; Greskovits 1998).

However, given the semantic overlapping in Hungarian of the bourgeois and the civil context, unsurprisingly, such thinking has been extended and developed by FIDESZ party/movement in its vision of a ‘civic Hungary’. FIDESZ-aligned ‘civic’ discourse combines a critique the policies of socio-economic transformation implemented by the liberal-socialist coalition government of 1994-8 with broader critique of the Hungarian communist experience and the exit from one-party rule in the late 1980s using the frame of embourgeoisement.

The essentially anti-communist perspective downplays the significance of the negotiated political transition in 1988-9 and stresses instead the continuity between the ruling party of the late communist period and its successor the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) not only institutionally, but also in terms of its political culture and values. These are viewed as deeply undemocratic, monopolistically seeking for economic and political power and serving the same nomenklatura groups and client groups. In socio-economic terms, the switch from a form of Soviet-aligned socialism to Western oriented market policies is seen as ultimately inconsequential as both universalistic, technocratic ideologies, which privilege foreign over domestic interests (Tellér 2000) and, if unresisted, would proletarianise and impoverish the mass of the Hungarian population. The former communists’ enduring political culture is seen as rendering them deeply

anti-bourgeois, leading them to represent a coalition of interests connected with the structures of the former communist regime

In the words of Lázsló Gyula Tóth, former head of cultural secretariat of the cabinet in the Orbán government

They [the ex- Socialists] cannot be depositaries of the future because they are against the middle classes. A few loud slogans cannot hide their deeply rooted antagonism which they inherited from the communist movement, antagonism which pushes large groups – which could otherwise produce culture and values – to the standards of the proletariat. MSZP is known to be representing employers and employees, the winners and losers of the system change... (Tóth 2000: 491)

Such a view see party political competition between left and right (and the coalition of interests they represent) is as a continuation of the anti-communist struggle, in which one side (the left) is seeking to impose a political monopoly supported by monopolistic economic structures Tóth warns of a

... uni-polar political structure where the MSZP will be capable of controlling a substantial proportion of socio-economic processes even under the circumstances of multi-party parliamentary democracy, recreating thereby the monopoly of access to information, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the existence of informal relation systems inherited from the Kádár regime. (...) The sustained existence of the economic and cultural monopolies renders the operation of the institutions of bourgeois democracy an mere formality' (Tóth 2000: 490)

As its construction of the 'civic' and civil society, the FIDESZ movement itself is seen as a substitute for absent or underdeveloped middle class and as a temporary political bulwark guaranteeing desirable social development. As Laszlo Kover, president of the FIDESZ board out it, the party's goal is

'... to defeat them [the liberal-left] at many more elections until the middle class, the trunk of Hungarian society, strengthens to such an extent that the country's future can be determined by a civic Hungary able to stand on its feet unassisted' (MTI: 22 January 2004)

In Search of the Lost Czech Middle Class

Almost uniquely in East and Central Europe, the Czech lands developed a relatively modern social structure before the onset of communism. However, as foreign visitors to interwar Czechoslovakia invariably noted, historically class divisions in the Czech lands were relatively muted. The recent modernisation of a largely peasant society, the absence of a native aristocracy and dominance in Czech politics of the struggle national autonomy is conventionally viewed as having produced a 'middle class' society with strong egalitarian ethos.

From the 1960s onwards, as disillusionment with socialism (and its reformability) set in, an increasingly idealised view of the interwar Czech middle class emerged as part of a growing generalised nostalgia for First Czechoslovak Republic as a lost Golden Age. Dissident intellectuals thus frequently evoked images of prosperous self-sufficient family businesses and respected, cultured, financially independent professionals. These images implicitly or explicitly contrasted with unreformed monolithic bureaucratic structures of the 'normalisation' regime of late communist Czechoslovakia, in which poorly paid intellectual workers were state employees

with low autonomy and diminished social status. Such attitudes also appear to some extent to have been carried through at mass level. Recent polling suggests that Czechs regard small businesses with greater trust, than big businesses, which are seen as more likely to evade regulation, engage in unfair competition and serve as a vehicle for the ex-nomenklatura (Červenka 2003).

As in the Hungarian case, intellectual discussion of middle class in the Czech Republic focused on its weakness. As in Hungary, such discussion has been historicised and situated within a wider narrative of national development, which takes in both the communist and the pre-communist period. However, in contrast to the Hungarian case, Czech debates over middle class formation after 1989 tend to frame the ‘problem’ in terms of the historic plebianism of Czech society and the weakness of social hierarchies, of which communism was the final and most extreme expression (Pehe 2004). This pattern is seen as being reinforced the discontinuities of Czech history, and frequent and sudden changes of regime. These, it is argued, generated a changing succession of rapacious, oppressive philistine *nouveaux riches* groups, one of which establish themselves for a sufficiently long period to evolve the culture and social responsibility of a genuine upper class (Pithart 1998).

In the immediate aftermath of the Velvet Revolution the theme of the middle class was only taken up by small historic parties of the left, such as the Social Democrats and the Czechoslovak Socialist Party. For such parties historic class divisions in pre-war Czechoslovakia were a natural point of reference and claims to represent the middle class a convenient strategy to project a centrist image. However, in a context where even small scale market reform had not yet been undertaken and large scale economic transformation began in earnest only in 1991, such appeals appeared irrelevant and anachronistic. The only political actor concerned at this time with Czech middle class development was President Havel, whose concern in mid-1990 that he had not seen newly renovated private pubs and shops appear, as he had expected, led directly to Czechoslovakia’s programme of ‘small privatisation’ (direct sales of small retail businesses) (Ježek 1997:131-4).

However, as in Hungary, the theme of the middle class only emerged in Czech party politics in the mid-late 1990s in the context of realignment on the centre-right. As in Hungary, it was part of an intellectual and political response to the perceived failures of the policies of post-communist transformation. However, in the Czech Republic these policies were implemented by centre-right governments headed by Václav Klaus that held office between 1992 and 1997. The rise of right-wing discourses of middle class development coincided with the fragmentation, rather than the consolidation and concentration of the centre-right.

However, middle class first emerged publicly in the academic publications (Večerník 1999; Matejů 1999b) and contributions to the press (Večerník 1995, 1997a, 1997c, 1998; Matejů 1998a, 1999a) of the Czech sociologists, Jiří Večerník and Petr Matejů. Research on post-communist social trends had highlighted the fact that, whilst low income groups were maintaining their share of national income as a result of redistribution through the tax and benefit system, and high income groups were increasing their share despite such redistribution, middle income groups’ share was declining. Večerník and Matejů argued that the failure to develop a financially independent, self-reliant middle class was damaging both to Czech democracy and to the Czech Republic’s long-term prospects for economic development.

Both the centre-right Klaus government (1992-7) and the minority Social Democratic administration that took office in 1998, they argued, had been too preoccupied with large, formerly state-owned enterprises and the sizeable electoral constituency of ‘transition losers’.

The importance of small businesses – which lacked access to cheap credit state-owned financial institutions lavished on former state companies in which owned large stakes in them – was overlooked, dissipating the wave of small scale entrepreneurialism that had emerged after 1989. Neglect of ‘new middle class’ professionals employed in the public sector would damage both the stock of human capital and quality of public administration needed for sustained economic growth. The consequent failure to develop a ‘middle class ethic’. Such policy failures, it was argued, reflected an underlying inability to understand that the market economy was neither self-sustaining nor easily shaped by public policy, but embedded in a social-structural and cultural content. In short-term party political terms, it was suggested, the electoral decline of the centre-right – or, more accurately, the rise of the centre-left – was partly attributable to frustrated members of the potential Czech middle class feeling themselves more and more to be transition ‘losers’ and turning to the Social Democrats.

Among Czech parties of the right, the theme of the middle class was first been taken up, the Christian Democrats as part of a realignment stressing its commitment to the ‘social market’ and attempted to broaden its electorate beyond core support among relatively poor rural voters in traditionally Catholic regions. Party leader Josef Lux argued that the self-declared right-wing voters’ extensive social policy expectations of the state stemmed not from inconsistency, but from the relative poverty of the middle classes (*střední vrstvy*). Lack of a properly targeted social policy, he suggested, was making this ‘strongest group within the nation ... its creative potential and “showcase” of [general] living standards’ passive and risk averse (Lux 1995). In an interview in August (1996) Josef Zieleniec, the Czech Foreign Minister and one of ODS’s co-founders, argued that, having failed to substantially increase its vote in the June 1996 election, the party needed to undergo social and electoral broadening (*rozširování*) to gain the support of at least 40 per cent of voters. A key target group that Zieleniec identified whose support the party should and could draw on were small entrepreneurs, whose values and work ethic he valued (Zieleniec 1996).

However, it was only with the foundation of the Freedom Union (US) by anti-Klaus politicians who had broken away from ODS in 1998 that the sociologists’ more extensive and worked through arguments middle class development to entered Czech party politics. The sociologists’ writings offered a ready-made agenda and a potential constituency for the Freedom Union, which distinguished it from both Klaus’s ODS and the Social Democrats and perfectly fitted with its emerging identity as an open party pragmatic modernisers (‘new right’) with a new political style. The party’s first political programme, which was co-authored by Večerník, thus stressed that

‘It is important for social stability that a strong middle class (*štední stav*) exist between upper and lower social strata. Small businesspeople and the self-employed have productive capital. Teachers, doctors and engineers have human capital ... This is also true of skilled workers, who identify with the middle class during times of prosperity. These middle strata bear the burden of risk and innovation as well as cementing society and giving it a kindly appearance (*vlidnou tvář*) (Unie svobody 1998)‘

Czech concepts of the ‘middle class’, although they do not overlap with notions of citizenship, are complex and ambiguous. The most common reference in current Czech political discourse is to a middle stratum (*štední vrstva*). However, two other terms are frequently and interchangeably used: 1) the historically derived term *štední stav* which corresponds semantically and sociologically to the Austro-German notion of the *Mittelstand*; ¹³ and 2) the term *štední třída*,

¹³ A popular Czechoslovak encyclopaedia from the interwar period defined the *štední stav* as ‘all “little people” with the will and opportunity for social advancement ... public officials, private clerks, most industrialists and tradespeople,

which appears to have entered Czech through journalism and the social sciences as a translation of the English term ‘middle class’.

In conflating these terms, Czech party politicians and intellectuals updated a historical and essentially anachronistic term with more contemporary meaning derived from the social sciences about the middle class as agent of democratic stability and generator of human capital. At the same time, centre-right concerns for middle class development undoubtedly echoes of the ‘*Mittelstand* policy’ (*středostavovská politika*) pursued in pre-war Czechoslovakia and Austria-Hungary to protect these groups from competitive pressures. The one key difference, as in the Hungarian case, is that Czech political parties were seeking to (re-)define the class identities of those they seek to represent through discourses on transformation, rather than merely articulating and aggregating pre-existing, readily identifiable interests. However, in the Czech case middle class development had relatively short life as a framing device on the centre-right. Despite both supporting a range of policies which addressed the weakness of the Czech middle class, when the Christian Democrats and Freedom Union came together in the Quad-Coalition alliance, the theme was relegated to a relatively minor theme, meriting only one line in 4K’s 2001 prospectus for government (Čtyřkoalice (2001)).

The Civic Democrats: Middle Class Not Wanted

Although in 1997-8 some ODS leaders’ speeches and party documents paid lip service to the importance of the middle class (e.g. Macek 1997; ODS 1998), by mid-1999 the party had begun an ideological realignment, which stressed the importance of the nation, the homeland (*vlast*) and other ‘natural communities’, but specifically *excluded* any mention of the middle class. Thus, speaking to a newspaper interviewer in June 1999 Václav Klaus listed the natural entities of human society with which a person identifies as the individual, the family, the local community (*obec*) and the nation (or national state) (Klaus 1999; see also Klaus 1998/2002). ODS’s rejection of class based interests in general and of a putative middle class in particular was made explicit by ODS deputy and defence spokesman, Petr Nečas in speech to the party’s first ideological conference (1999a), later reprinted in revised form in the Brno-based journal *Proglas* (Nečas 1999b). As part of a broader polemic against arguments for an opening to the centre, Nečas made a stinging rejection of the ‘ideology of the middle class’ as a

‘rehashed Marxism (*zástydělý marxismus*), in which the vanguard role of the working class is replaced by the stabilising role of the middle class. This is a subtle and concealed class vision of an organic society, which continues the search for a privileged social group or class that is supposedly of fundamental importance for the development of the whole of society (Nečas 1999b).’

The ‘mythologisation of the middle classes’, he argued, gave a satisfying sense of self-importance of some voters and reflected the self-interests of political and media elites, which identified themselves as middle class. In Western European states such as Germany, where the self-defined middle class constituted a large majority. Here, support for the middle class was simply a ‘utilitarian attempt to create a majority (*snahu po většině*) (Nečas 1999b), which justified state

especially those in the retail trade, most craftsmen and the self-employed. (...) ...the liberal professions (doctors, lawyers, civil engineers), many people living on private incomes and pensions, the peasantry and the upper strata of the workers’ (*Masarykův slovník naučný*, 1933, vol 6, 1007-8)

welfare policies redistributing resources from the very rich and very poor to middle income groups.

Noting the middle class origins of Hitler, Lenin and Pol Pot, Nečas dismissed as unfounded arguments that a strong middle class contributed to political stability. He also rejected claims that the structural development of a Czech middle class would promote values of self-reliance and responsible citizenship. Whilst this link might have been present historically when the Czech middle class included many small property owners, in contemporary society, he noted much of the putative middle class was composed of salaried professionals, many employed in the public sector. Citing the example of the Czech Medical Chamber (ČLK) and its smaller, more militant offshoot LOK, he argued that such groups, had a vested interest in high levels of state redistribution and higher public spending, which would result in a higher tax burden on small businesses.

Demands for policies to facilitate middle class development were in sum

‘... a hypocritical attempt to appeal to the majority of society, to maintain a welfare state with the highest possible levels of redistribution and to search out privileged and exceptional [social] strata. Calls to “build” or “create” a middle class can today be equated with social engineering (Nečas 1999b)’.

Nečas’s rejection of the ‘ideology of the middle classes’ is highly significant. Far from being a neo-liberal Nečas is one of the leading thinkers on ODS’s neo-conservative wing, whose thinking contained pronounced anti-liberal elements and who in other contexts had praised FIDESZ as an example of the potential electoral benefits of moving from liberalism to social conservatism. Indeed, the remainder of his speech, extremely atypically for an ODS politician, highlighted the social costs and divisions between generations, social groups and regions opened up by marketisation. However, his proposed solutions rejected approaches based in welfare system or social policy (the ‘primitive buying off of social groups’) in favour of the renewal of ‘family values’ and ‘national cohesion’ through education. Here ODS’s neo-liberalism – or perhaps rather, the resolutely free market and anti-welfarist stance of its Anglo-American reference points – trumps any notion of class representation.

Conclusions

This paper has explored the way in which key centre-right formations in Hungary and the Czech Republic have developed interest representation strategies going beyond competition for individual votes in the electoral market. Preliminary analysis of the two case studies suggests that episodes of civic mobilisation and strategies for (and debates surrounding) the (re-)formation of a national middle class may provide (limited) opportunities for doing so. However, there appear to be factors, which predispose certain types of centre-right party to pursue these strategies. One such predisposing factor is ideology. Conservative-national parties, such as FIDESZ, and moderate conservative/Christian democratic groupings, such as the Quad-Coalition, which see the market as culturally and socially embedded in a national community, are more amenable to conceptions of class identity and class representation, than parties with a strong neo-liberal influence such as ODS. The timing of party formation also seems relevant. Both FIDESZ in its conservative ‘civic’ incarnation and the Quad-Coalition emerged through processes of centre-right realignment and were able to position themselves as critics of initial, neo-liberal inspired transformation policies.

Similarly, there seem to a specific combination of factors, which makes civic mobilisation of a kind that can be co-opted by centre-right parties likely. Amongst these are the ability of a right-wing political entrepreneurs to frame left-right party competition in anti-communist terms as a

continuation of the process of regime change, thus raising the political stakes for participants; the presence (and location) of elites with the cognitive ability and legitimacy to trigger mobilisation – in both cases analysed those who had acted as student leaders in 1989 played this role; and, finally, the format and dynamics of party system competition – where alliance strategies appear to have been exhausted, either because of intense and extreme bi-polarisation (as in Hungary), or because of cartel-like arrangements stemming from failed bi-polarisation (as in the Czech Republic), it may be rational for politicians to seek to develop civic mobilisation and links with civic movements as an adjunct to ‘normal’ electoral competition.

A final, on first examination, finding is the greater importance of the development of a national middle class and middle class identity for the Hungarian right, given that in ‘objective’ sociological terms Hungarian party competition shows very weak patterns of class voting. Similarly, in the Czech Republic, where such class voting patterns are well established, even the most conservative elements of the Civic Democratic Party are adamant in their rejection of the ‘false ideology of the middle classes’. This paradox is, however, easily resolved by examining the extent to which class and interest identities are politically and culturally constructed. In both cases examined, middle class discourse in the centre-right – even when supported by sociological research as in the Czech Republic – were strongly influenced not only by competing discourses concerning post-communist transformation, but also by narratives of national development rooted in the pre-communist period.

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