

'The new Czechoslovak Government' from the Luxemburger Wort (26 February 1948)

Caption: On 26 February 1948, the Luxembourg daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort recounts the events of the 'Prague Coup', which gave Czechoslovak Communists the majority in Klement Gottwald's Government at the expense of the Democrats led by Jan Masaryk.

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 26.02.1948, n° 57; 101e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Neue tschechoslowakische Regierung", p. 1.

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Last updated: 06/07/2016

New Czechoslovak Government

Under pressure from Communist demonstrations and strike threats, President Beneš accepts Gottwald's proposals

Prague, 26 Feb. The government crisis in Czechoslovakia came to an end last night through the formation of a Communist-majority Cabinet headed by the current Prime Minister Klement Gottwald. President Edvard Beneš finally agreed to accept the resignations of the 12 Ministers who had provoked the crisis last Friday. After receiving the resignations of two more Ministers, who were not acceptable to Gottwald, Beneš approved Gottwald's proposed list of Ministers. The President's repeatedly announced radio address, however, has not yet been given. Parliament is still in authority and will probably not be formally dissolved until the new elections, for which no date has yet been set. It seems that Gottwald has achieved everything he wanted by means which, in his opinion, are strictly constitutional. According to the letter of the law, his actions were indeed legal, but the rifle barrels of the security police, who are subordinate to the Communist Ministry of the Interior, have been acting as an obvious warning since Monday morning, giving an indication of the methods that Gottwald was prepared to use, if necessary, in order to enforce his claims.

Communist and trade union demonstrations, succeeding each other incessantly since Friday evening, reached their peak yesterday, when more than 50 000 people assembled on Wenceslas Square in the centre of Prague. At 4 p.m., the square was packed with demonstrators. Half an hour later, Prime Minister Gottwald, accompanied by the Communist trade union leader, Antonin Zapotocky, and Minister of the Interior, Vaclav Nosek, entered the presidential palace. At the same time, a special edition was distributed of the Communist newspaper *Rude Pravo* with the headline: 'If Gottwald's demands are not endorsed by Beneš, there will be a general strike.'

The day ended on Wenceslas Square with a parade of 8 000 armed workers, supposedly factory guards who were staging a previously planned demonstration.

The new Ministers are: Deputy Prime Ministers: Antonin Zapotocky (Communist), Bohumil Lausman (Social Democrat) and Viliam Siroky (Slovak Communist); Minister for Foreign Trade: Antonin Gregor (party membership not yet known); Minister for Industry: Zdenek Fierlinger (Social Democrat); Minister for Transport: Alois Petr (Catholic People's Party); Postmaster General: Alois Neumann (People's Socialist); Minister for Social Affairs: Evzen Erban (Social Democrat and Secretary-General of the Trade Union Federation); Minister for Health: Jozef Plojhar (Catholic People's Party); Minister for Public Works: Amanuel Slechta (People's Socialist); Minister for Coordination: Vavro Srobar (supporter of the Slovak Unity Party); Minister for Justice: Alexej Cepicka (Communist, previously Minister for Internal Trade); Minister for Internal Trade: Frantisek Krajcir (Communist); State Secretary for National Defence: Jan Sevcik (Slovak Democrat).

Remaining in office are the two Independents, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Jan Masaryk, and Minister for Defence, General Ludvik Svoboda, as well as the previous Communist members of government, Minister of the Interior, Vaclav Nosek, Minister for Finance, Jaromir Dolansky, Minister for Information, Vaclav Kopecky, and Minister for Agriculture, Julius Duris, Minister for Education, Zdenek Nejedly (previously Minister for Social Affairs), and Minister for Food, Ludmila Jankovcova (previously Minister for Industry).

The new Cabinet thus includes twelve Communists, four Social Democrats, two People's Socialists, two members of the Catholic People's Party, one Slovak Democrat and two Independents. Of the twelve Communists, nine belong to the Czech and three to the Slovak Communist party. The former Cabinet consisted of six Czech and three Slovak Communists, four People's Socialists, three Social Democrats, four members of the Catholic People's Party, four Slovak Democrats and two Independents. Reports claimed this morning that the new Cabinet members of the People's Socialists and the Catholic People's Party had been expelled from their parties.

Of particular significance for the future course of events is the fact that the new Communist government has gained control of the Ministry of Justice, which had previously been governed by the anti-Communist

People's Socialist, Dr Prokop Drtina. Unconfirmed reports claim that some high-ranking court officials have been arrested. With the Ministries of Justice and the Interior under their jurisdiction, the Communists have, at all events, gained full control over the political opposition. Foreign observers in London are convinced that, while President Beneš has retained the outward form of democracy, in practice the resolution of the crisis constitutes a victory for the Communists.

The fact that Jan Masaryk has been confirmed as Minister for Foreign Affairs is, however, interpreted as a sign that not everything has been handed over to the Communists. Masaryk, an independent politician, maintains good relations with the Western democracies and has frequently embarrassed the Communists by taking an honourable stance.

As a counterdemonstration to the Communist parades, the Prague student body attempted yesterday to march to the Hradcany to pay homage to President Beneš. The police, however, thwarted the rally and arrested 50 of the students. More than 10 000 students had gathered on the square outside the old Charles University building to take part in the march and demonstration.

Later in the evening, an outward easing of the tension could be felt in the streets of Prague. In the factories and government offices, however, what are known as 'action committees' seem to be continuing their 'purges' without interruption.

According to police reports, at the border between Czechoslovakia and Germany, near Waldhaus, close to Passau, the German police yesterday arrested three men who claimed to be anti-Communist politicians from the Czechoslovak Catholic People's Party trying to flee the country. They were handed over to the American army's counter-intelligence service. Their names have not been revealed.