
Nonviolent Conflict Resolution and Civic Culture: The Case of Czechoslovakia

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This chapter provides a description of the Czechoslovakian nonviolent Velvet Revolution in 1989. Specific features of the Czechoslovak democratic experience are discussed, such as civility, civic culture, and civic patriotism. Examples from Czechoslovak conflict resolution history, such as the aftermath of the Munich agreement, Nazi occupation, the Stalinist terror, the Prague Spring, the Velvet Revolution, and the Velvet Divorce, are analyzed within the conceptual framework of Black (1993). The authors find support for the Pax Democratica thesis, that is, there is a link between democracy and peace.

—The Editors

The creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 was a challenging experiment in transforming differing parts of the Habsburg monarchy into a modern democracy. The experiment lasted from 1918 until 1992 when Czechoslovakia split into two independent states, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. During these 74 years, Czechoslovakia went through political conflicts that could have been dealt with by use of force but were not. This chapter analyzes the Czechoslovak propensity toward peaceful conflict resolution, civic culture, and democracy (for a more detailed analysis see Klicperová, Feierabend, & Hofstetter, 1995).

A NONVIOLENT VELVET REVOLUTION

After World War II, Czechoslovakia became a Soviet satellite until the Velvet Revolution toppled the communist regime. The Velvet Revolution started on November 17, 1989, when a peaceful student demonstration was brutally suppressed. Against expectations, students did not surrender but instead united in a resistance movement. They went on strike and were joined by actors, playwrights, and dissidents, and the revolutionary Civic Forum was founded. Together they started to communicate with other citizens, triggering an avalanche of meetings and demonstrations that included hundreds of thousands of participants. Finally, a general strike convinced the communist government to share power: A multiparty government was appointed, the Federal Assembly elected Václav Havel as President, and democratic elections were scheduled for 1990.

During the November 17, 1989 approved demonstration, the prodemocratic speeches were on the brink of the impermissible (e.g., "better to die than to live without freedom"), but the march to the center of Prague that followed was unlawful. After the crowd reached the city center, it was blocked by armored vehicles that threatened to run over the demonstrators (just 6 months after the Tiananmen Square massacre, this was a frightening experience). An eyewitness reported: "A horrible pressure started, the crowd began to wave, we tried to stop that by shouting 'keep calm' [klid] and by holding hands. The students tried to form groups taking women and children to the middle so they could protect them by their own bodies although they themselves were getting many blows. It was admirable how people mutually tried to cope with the situation and keep calm" (Srnc & Netík, 1990, p. 11, translation by Klicperová).

The violent police action shocked the participants, injured some of the students, and dispersed them. However, the students soon congregated and declared an occupational strike. Students formulated their demands, organized an information network with other schools and centers outside Prague, verified rumors, obtained legal consultations, managed logistics, and contacted the media (focusing on foreign TV that was covering at least some Czechoslovak territory while domestic TV was still being censored). The movement spread further—the people were encouraged to initiate their own civic forums at workplaces and to take part in the general strike. During this time, remarkably, people behaved in a most civil manner.

It also must be noted that the general strike in support of the nontotalitarian opposition was meant as a 2-hour demonstration. As Havel stressed, "We do not want to ruin our economy. On the contrary, we want it to function better!" Many people even made up the lost working hours. The strike had a very orderly, dignified, even a merry character and was considered a valid referendum because approximately 70% of the citizens participated.

The Velvet Revolution was explicitly nonviolent from the very beginning. At the November 17th demonstration, students asked for a dialogue and carried banners with the inscription, "Nonviolence." Later, after being stopped by the police, they chanted "We do not want violence," "We don't want another China," "Gandhi," "We have empty hands" (with hands raised above heads), and even "We love you!"

There were no threats, physical attacks, throwing of objects or demolition of property on the part of demonstrators. Young women in the first rows handed flowers to the riot policemen. A song, "We Shall Overcome"—a hymn of nonviolent protest—was sung (in Czech) before the national anthems. When the tension rose and there was a threat of an attack, the crowd sat on the ground.

The movement stressed its humanism by its symbols: Civic Forum logo (*Občanské Forum* in Czech) had a smiling face built into the letter O; the Slovak counterpart of civic forum bore name Public Against Violence; posters of Havel held his quotation "Love must win over lies and hate." Not even symbolic aggression was involved. At one point a person came to a demonstration holding a shovel (not the threatening symbol of gallows) with the inscription "For Štěpán" (the Prague Communist Party Secretary), suggesting that he should quit politics and work, for a change. In Olomouc, rather than destroying the huge statue of Lenin, people covered it with children's balloons and the inscription, "Fly away."

"A nonviolent revolution is a creative process," claimed journalist Michal Horáček (1990, p. 5). Literature (including drama and songs) provided a unique medium for disclosing suppressed feelings and for giving moral support. Humor was used as a creative coping mechanism. "There are people here!" shouted someone in the November 17th crowd facing the brutal police, quoting a famous sentence from Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Schweik*, the title character of which shouted these words on the battlefield of the World War I (Horáček, 1990, p. 7).

Later during the struggle, there were other satirical events. People brought big paper boxes and walled in governmental buildings so that the comrades could get the message of how isolated they were. On Saint Nicholas day (when mischievous Czech kids receive "presents" of coal and potatoes instead of candy and fruit) people brought coal and potatoes to the communist president. A similar nonviolent message was given later on when a student repainted a Soviet tank (symbol of the still-present Soviet occupying army) pink.

The objective of the Velvet Revolution was dialogue and the aim was democracy. The means of accomplishing democracy were no less democratic than the goal. First, it was necessary to develop a general national discussion, starting at schools and theaters, and after they became too crowded, the dialogues spilled over to the main square in Prague, the Václavské Square. When even that was not large enough, the meetings were called to the vast Letná area. Faithful to the name of the organizing body (the Civic Forum movement) the daily meetings indeed became a forum of direct democracy.

Cultural patterns together with the institutions of civil society may have a crucial significance for the choice of violent or nonviolent conflict-resolution strategy. A general statement could be drawn for Czechoslovakia that, when left alone, without interference from abroad, the country had a tendency to install a democratic political system. (That proved true in 1918, 1968, and again in 1989.) Its presidents, Masaryk and Havel, were inspired democratic leaders who enjoyed respect and popular admiration. Deference toward democratic political leaders (Feierabend, Hofstetter, Huie, Klicperová, & Lautenschlager, 1993) seem to dominate Czech political culture. The support given to democratically elected politicians is note-

worthy. According to the *Budování státu [nation building]* (1990–1995), since the Velvet Revolution, the top five or six governmental office holders have enjoyed continuous popularity and trust of the majority of the Czech nation.

PEACE, DEMOCRACY, AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

In general, the Czechoslovak democratic experience exhibits a peculiar blend of peaceful conflict resolution, civility, civic culture, and civic patriotism, and these traits were all present during the Velvet Revolution. Our current aim is to reflect on the Czechoslovak case in the light of democratic theory. The link that binds democracy and peace is widely explored in political science at the present time. The empirical findings seem less in dispute than the theoretical underpinnings that try to explain the relationship (Merritt & Zinnes, 1991; Poe & Tate, 1994). Among the many hypotheses of the Pax Democratica thesis, let us choose one that thus far, has not been applied in the literature on democracy. Nonetheless, it is capable of a parsimonious explanation that is compatible with other hypotheses and is broad enough to embrace the ambiguous case of Czechoslovakia. (After all, the country has spent most of its political life under dictatorships.) This is the theoretical construct of Black (1993).

Black (1993) classifies the forms of conflict management into several categories: *self-help* (which is a unilateral handling of grievance by aggression), *avoidance*, *negotiation*, *toleration* (needing little or no aggression), and *settlement*. Self-help is further subdivided into *vengeance*, *discipline*, and *rebellion*, whereas settlement is "the handling of a grievance by a nonpartisan third party" (Black 1993, p. 85). Third-party intervention is further categorized as: *friendly pacification* (carrying no aggression), *mediation*, *arbitration*, *adjudication*, and *repressive pacification* (in order of increasing authoritativeness). Another concept related to the aggressive form of conflict resolution is *moralism*, rather unusually defined as "a tendency to treat people as enemies" (Black 1993, p. 144). Moralism "features formalism and decisiveness . . . the tendency to create and apply explicit rules" of right and wrong by the aggressive means or coerciveness and punitiveness (Black 1993, p. 145).

Although Black does not say so, we suggest that most of the aggressive forms of conflict management fit the pattern of autocratic regimes, whereas the nonaggressive forms fit democracies. Empirical evidence in political science sustains this hunch, including an apparently incontestable general law of political science; perhaps the only one where thus far there is no exception to it, to wit: Modern democracies do not make war on each other. Instead, they prefer peaceful conflict resolution (Small & Singer, 1976; Rummel, 1983; Russett, 1993; Singer & Wildavsky, 1993).

Corollaries (perhaps less universal) follow from this nonviolent propensity of democracies. Democracies exemplify less violence—less killing in wars in which they participate—than do autocracies (Rummel, 1994b, p. 6). For democracies, their mutual hostilities short of war are much less frequent than those among autocracies (Rummel, 1983). In their internal politics democracies use an incom-

parably lower level of coercive or violent force (Feierabend, Nesvold, & Feierabend, 1970), relying instead on peaceful conflict resolution.

In the same vein, the less democratic and the more autocratic the government, the more violence and aggression is expended in all the directions of the political field. Consequently, totalitarian regimes are the most brutal offenders (Rummel, 1994a, p. 3). It also seems that the more stable the democracy, the less the manifestations of violence, coerciveness, and aggression (Russett, 1993, p. 35). For example, the very stable democratic regime of New Zealand during 1955 to 1961 did not experience any event at all that qualified as a case of internal political aggression (Feierabend & Feierabend, 1966, p. 138).

Black furthermore postulated that, "*Conflict management is isomorphic with its social field*," recapitulates and intensifies its larger environment (1993, p. 91, italics in original). Such a social field or environment is shaped by social distance–closeness among other variables. In a simplified version of his thesis, social distance is more likely to produce the aggressive kinds of conflict resolution: discipline, rebellion, repressive pacification, and moralism. Social closeness instigates the nonaggressive forms: negotiation, tolerance, and friendly pacification.

Social distance–closeness subsumes vertical distance–closeness, which corresponds to inequality–equality of status. Thus, given the hypothesis of social distance, it is less likely for a child to discipline an adult than vice versa and easier for equal partners to negotiate, because superiors command and inferiors obey. In addition to the vertical social distance–closeness, there is horizontal distance–closeness, which includes relational distance–closeness that distinguishes between strangers and intimates, and cultural distance–closeness, that is the heterogeneity–homogeneity of culture. Hence, it is assumed that it is more difficult to kill a friend and a compatriot than a stranger and an ethnic enemy.

Let us orient Czechoslovakia's conflict events in Black's typology: The aftermath of the Munich agreement is the case of repressive pacification. The expulsion of the Sudeten Germans after World War II was vengeance. The years of Nazi occupation and Stalinist terror together with the milder autocracy of the post-Stalinist era qualify under the label of discipline, relying on moralism with coerciveness and punitiveness of ideological totalitarianism. The years of the First Republic were the least involved in the aggressive nexus. Negotiation, toleration, and peaceful settlement prevailed in the democratic political system. The Prague Spring and reaction to the August Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968 qualify as mass nonviolent rebellions. The 10 days of the Velvet Revolution combined the astonishingly civil mass protest in the streets (which qualifies as a rebellion) and negotiation, symbolized by the picture in which the dissident Havel, now the president, shakes hands over the negotiating table with Communist Premier Adamec. "Negotiation is the handling of a grievance by joint decision" (Black, 1993, p. 83), and that negotiation happened. The dissidents, including the hundreds of thousands in the streets who equalized the status of the negotiators, got the revolution and the old elite structures got the "velvet" rather than the vengeance. The subsequent Velvet Divorce between the Czechs and the Slovaks, creating separate statehoods, is a case of avoidance.

Let us now orient the essentials of democracy in Black's scheme. What is it in the democratic political system that fosters social proximity in the vertical as well as in the horizontal sense, and with it the peaceful forms of conflict resolution? The enumerations of democratic traits always include popular sovereignty and almost always individual and civil rights, tolerance of opposition, and their corollaries (Dahl, 1971, 1989; Čermák, 1992; Sartori, 1987; Friedrich, 1950).

Vertical proximity is fostered in the equality of political citizenship, in which popular sovereignty calls for "one person, one vote," in which freely contested elections may replace one set of officeholders with another, and in which the opposition can become the governing party. Distance between the governors and the governed is diminished by the democratic authority pattern through which political elites are not sovereign but depend on the electorate. Autocracies deny these aspects of popular sovereignty, thereby maximizing the distance between the power status of the political elites and nonelites. Vertical distance is also diminished by civil, individual and minority rights, provided there is equal protection before the law.

The granting of popular sovereignty and civil rights alone, however, is not enough to guarantee a stable democratic polity. It is the national political culture that may do so by providing for cultural and relational closeness among the citizens. The potentially unruly and excitable master of democracy, the *demos*, must conduct itself responsibly. A robust civic culture provides for the homogeneity of democratic political culture, and civic patriotism promotes the homogeneity of the national culture, thus fostering horizontal closeness.

These two cultures, together with popular sovereignty and civil rights are the most likely to create civility, which includes tolerance rather than bigotry, respect for law and the rights of others, and most fundamentally, peace rather than aggression among the citizenry, that is to say, Black's nonviolent forms of conflict management. If conflict management is isomorphic with its social field, as Black held, then it can also be said that civility and civic culture are isomorphic with democracy.

These qualities in all likelihood recreate and reinforce each other, just as one weakened may diminish the other. Just as, for example, the exercise of the democratic system may reinforce civic culture and civility, so civic culture or civic patriotism may resuscitate democracy. It could also be argued that, in small nations such as Czechoslovakia, when democracy is taken away because of external pressure, civic culture and civility may survive, and, given a chance, it will reappear as it did in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and 1989. Such an expectation corresponds to the notion of culture as an enduring rather than an ephemeral set of attitudes.

Whereas civic culture and civility are postulated as the guarantors of the stability of the democratic political system, exclusive ethnic nationalism is highly disruptive. The explosion of nationalism in the former multinational states—especially in Yugoslavia—is a tragic example of such dynamics. On the other hand, liberal nationalism or civic patriotism (also called civicism) appears to be a powerful cement of the stable (civil) democratic polity (Brass, 1991; Tamir, 1993). This is because the civic culture and civility constitute an essential portion of the national

identity above and beyond purely cultural elements of ethnic nationalism. In Black's terms, the *homogeneity* of political and national culture combined narrows the cultural and relational distance, thereby fostering peace and nonviolent conflict resolution.

The nationals of the civic culture tend to symbolize their nationality in terms of freedom or democracy, rather than just language, religion, or the arts, literature or music. In other words, the political legitimacy of the democratic regime is reinforced by the sense of national identity of its citizens. Such civic patriotism is likely to act as an energizer of political democracy. The democrat and the patriot are one and the same. In the Czechoslovak case some extraordinary personalities of civic patriotism became national heroes and martyrs such as Jan Palach and Jan Zajíc.

The Velvet Revolution is a good example of civic patriotism. It was a protest against the old regime, but, even more, it was the call for democracy combined in a poignant, even sacred moment in the life of the nation when this "*imagined community*" (Anderson, 1992) came fully alive in a mass encounter and peak experience, for example, with the brotherly caring behavior of the crowd, the exemplar of civility, and the aesthetic and moral attributes of a national cultural event of the first magnitude.

The very name *Czechoslovakia* connoted the aspiration toward civic patriotism on the part of Czechoslovaks. Czechoslovak political identity embraced both the Czech and the Slovak nation, certainly during the First Republic (1918–1938). There were indications that such ambition was succeeding. One could suppose success was prevented by the abrupt interruption of the democratic enterprise by Nazi and Communist rule. That the Slovaks parted company with the Czechs in 1992 is witness to the ethnic nationalism that prevailed in the end but certainly against a considerable resistance of Czechoslovak sentiment in both nations. That the establishment of two independent states turned out to be the Velvet Divorce rather than the murderous struggle of the Balkans, may be, in part, the legacy of the Czechoslovak civicism.

An element of civic patriotism seemed present in Czech political tradition, or at least was clear during the Czech National Awakening. This tradition relied on Czech intellectuals, including students, but above all, it was T. G. Masaryk, the revered founder of Czechoslovakia who (by the end of the 19th century) clearly enunciated the tenets of democracy and linked them with the legacy of Czech history, the idea of Czech nationalism, and later with the idea of the Czechoslovak nation (Masaryk, 1971; Opat, 1990; Čapek, 1990). Philosophically, he made democracy part of his notion of humanism and the pursuit of truth. Both concepts stem from tradition that span the time from the Protestant reformer Jan Hus (1369–1415) and J. A. Comenius (1592–1670) to T. G. Masaryk (1850–1937) and still is reiterated by Václav Havel in his admonition "to live in truth" (Havel, 1991). The official presidential flag carries the inscription "The Truth Prevails." In the Czech lexicon truth and humanism are powerful symbols of the democratic creed.

In Czechoslovak history, we witness a series of manifestations of the obedient civic culture: the civility of the crowds during the Prague Spring and the Velvet Revolution, the observed discipline of the nation at the time of Munich (people

determined to fight for their freedom yielded to president Beneš's decision to surrender), the behavior during the Second Republic in 1938–1939 (L. K. Feierabend, 1994) and waiting in vain for a president's appeal for resistance against the Communist putsch of 1948. All are of the same cloth. Altogether, the Czechs seemed to adore their leaders and rely on them more than they did on themselves, provided these leaders had impeccable democratic credentials.

Such a deferential culture, together with a postulated degree of civic patriotism should be assumed to be highly supportive of a stable democracy and especially appropriate for times of crisis. And equally so it should foster peaceful conflict resolution. A recent study of Czech students at Charles University in Prague by the authors (Klicperová, Feierabend, & Hofstetter, 1995) is highly suggestive of the remarkable continuation of such a political culture. The study focuses on cognitive structures of organized views or schemata that facilitate processing of new information in the context of what is known, provide meaning to current experiences and aid in evaluating experiences (Conover & Feldman, 1984; Taylor & Crocker, 1981). To summarize the findings, no schema (with the exception of one minor schema of alienation) expresses either anticivic or antidemocratic culture, whereas the robust civic culture (Almond & Verba, 1989) predominates in nearly half of the 95 students in the sample.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We may conclude that the nonviolent conflict resolution in Czechoslovakia's internal and international affairs confirms the nexus that links peace to structural and cultural traits generally referred to as political democracy. The *Pax Democratica* thesis is confirmed in modern Czechoslovak history and so is its opposite: Whenever democracy was extinguished in the country, however involuntarily, discipline or vengeance followed, to use Black's terms. Furthermore, the Velvet Revolution as well as the empirical finding about the Czech students is witness of the resilience of the civic culture and civility.

The demise of the Soviet system left behind no doubt about the pernicious character of autocracies, especially their totalitarian and Soviet offshoots. Horowitz (Rummel, 1994a, p. xiii) spoke of the "need to revise our sense of the depth of the horrors committed by communist regimes on ordinary humanity," whereas the Nazi horrors have been apprehended for close to half a century. Singer and Wildavsky (1993) refer to "Zones of Peace" governed by democracies and "Zones of Turmoil" ruled by nondemocratic systems.

The Czechoslovaks in their modern history lived in both of these zones, in democracy and totalitarianism, and with them experienced both the virtues and glory as well as the pain and shame of the 20th century. Yet, in retrospect it would seem obvious that the democratic culture of peaceful conflict resolution is not always glorious. In 1938, the Munich appeasement did not serve the Czechs well, nor the Europeans, nor anybody else. The tragedy of World War II soon followed. Munich was just the most dramatic and the least honorable of the democratic

peaceful resolutions in the chain of conciliatory events. Later at Yalta and Potsdam again the acquiescence of Western democracies to a dictator's demands, as well as the conciliatory complicity of the Czechoslovak democratic leadership with the Czechoslovak communists, led Czechoslovakia into the vengeance against the Sudeten Germans (Rummel, 1994a, pp. 304–310) and immediately after that into the full blown Soviet-type totalitarianism.

Again today (so far without the benefit of hindsight but with the experience of the past) one may well wonder about the wisdom of the belated intervention of the NATO forces in the Balkans and the tardy invasion of Haiti by American troops to shelter democracy; the tolerance of "ethnic cleansing" on the part of democratic powers whether it takes place in Europe, Africa, or elsewhere. Some measure of democratic "moralism," a term of opprobrium as used by Black, instead of blind democratic tolerance and civility, perhaps should be put on the democratic wish list for the next century.

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