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Stephen Deets^a; Karel Kouba^b

^a Division of History and Society, Babson College, Babson Park, MA, USA ^b Department of Politics and European Studies, Palacky University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

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PROFILE

The Czech Greens revived

Stephen Deets^{a*} and Karel Kouba^b

^aDivision of History and Society, Babson College, Babson Park, MA, USA; ^bDepartment of Politics and European Studies, Palacky University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

After the June 2006 elections, the Czech Greens (SZ) were the surprise kingmaker, finally opting for a centre-right coalition with the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and the Christian Democratic Union (KDU). Like other East European Greens, SZ emerged in the first post-communist elections only to quickly disappear. Its recent success is attributable to the Green 'brand name', its new party leadership and political orientation, and the major liberal party's collapse. However, this does not mean the internal and systemic challenges facing SZ are over.

Given the environmental degradation under communism, most notably the tremendous air pollution in northern Bohemia and Moravia, ecological issues were salient enough for SZ to win 4.1% in the 1990 elections, obtaining its highest support in the ecologically devastated regions. The elections were won by Civic Forum (OF), a broad anti-communist coalition which soon began to disintegrate. In the inchoate party system, the Green Party also began to fade. For the 1992 elections, it formed a coalition with the Agrarians and Socialists, placing it well on the left. The coalition won over 6% of the vote, but two-thirds of the Green members left the party over the coalition agreement. By 1996 SZ was in such disarray that it did not even contest the parliamentary elections, and in 2001 it was down to 239 members, most of whom were older, had little formal education, and did not hold the post-materialist values often associated with the Greens (Jehlicka and Kostecky 2003). The 1996 elections also marked the comparative consolidation of the Czech party system. The centre-right Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and centre-left Czech Party of Social Democracy (CSSD) each average about 30% of the vote, the unreformed Communists (KSCM) slightly over 10%, and the Christian Democrats (KDU) slightly under 10%, with only the liberals floating among various parties since the revolution.

*Corresponding author. Email: sdeets@babson.edu

Several factors in the late 1990s led people to believe there was an opening for a new, centrist party. First, there were a series of corruption scandals involving ODS. Second, as Vaclav Klaus, the ODS Prime Minister from 1992 to 1997, was openly dismissive of civil society, especially environmental groups, NGOs had had little access to government. With the failed protests over the Temelin Nuclear Power Plant and other issues, NGO leaders increasingly viewed parliamentary politics as the only route for real change. Finally, when the CSSD formed a minority government with the ODS' tacit support, many believed there was too much collusion between the biggest parties (Jehlicka and Kosteletzky 2003). While SZ was small, dysfunctional, and heavily indebted, it did have an existing organisational structure, a well-known name, and ties to a European party.

Two outsiders began thinking strategically about the Czech Greens. One, Jan Beranek, had been active in environmental issues since his youth in the 1980s. Co-founder and later Executive Director of Hnutí DUHA (recognised as Czech Friends of the Earth), he took a prominent role in the fight against Temelin. In 2001 he co-organised the Brandys Initiative, a broad coalition of NGOs that sought to increase the power of civil society, especially easier access to the government and better funding. In the run-up to the 2002 election, Miroslav Rokos, the Greens' newly elected chairman, approached Beranek for suggestions of Brandys activists who might be interested in running on the SZ electoral list (Beranek 2006a). The other outsider was Petr Stepanek. Stepanek (2006) had been involved in environmental issues since joining an unofficial, Prague-based environmental organisation in the late 1980s. Previously a member of the Prague City Council and spokesperson for the Ministry of Environment in 1998, Stepanek was Vice-Chair of the Party for Civil Society (SOS), intending to build up the party and then merge it with the Greens.

The 2002 election, though not a breakthrough, confirmed SZ's potential. Its 2% did not win any parliamentary seats, but it was enough to secure government funding, and its significant increase in Prague, Brno, and other towns showed its growing appeal among younger, well-educated urban voters. Many activists and intellectuals allied with Beranek joined the party, and in spring 2003 he easily became the new SZ leader. One of his closest allies was Jakub Patočka, who with Beranek had co-founded Hnutí DUHA. At this time, Patočka was editor-in-chief of the weekly *Literani Noviny*, a former literary and cultural outlet that increasingly focused on progressive political and social critiques. While not taking an official position in SZ, Patočka became an influential voice as the new leadership set about remaking the party by rewriting both the programme and the constitution. The programme changes were not very controversial. Although many referred to the new platform as 'dark green', Beranek (2006a) stressed its similarity to the German Greens. Organisational changes were far more controversial. Power shifted from the local level to the centre, which Beranek defended as the party had lost control over some regional branches. Greater centralisation was also necessary because

he wanted to fundamentally transform the party into one that supported and practiced more direct democratic activism.

The new leadership faced its first crisis over the June 2004 European Parliamentary elections list, headed by Patočka. Leading the criticism of both the list and the process creating it was Petr Uhl, a prominent dissident from the communist era and former Commissioner for Human Rights. Uhl wanted the list headed by former Minister of Environment Martin Bursík, who at that time was not even a SZ member (having joined KDU several years earlier). While Uhl held no leadership position, he had close ties to Daniel Cohn-Bendit, then co-President of the European Green Party and self-proclaimed 'realo'. Cohn-Bendit demanded that Beránek redo the list and rewrite the party constitution, which he refused to do (Beránek 2006a). The Greens still won 3.2%, better than any result since 1990, but inside the party the results were viewed as a disaster in light of expectations, setting in motion the autumn 2004 leadership battle. By summer 2004, there was a growing faction wanting to replace Beránek with the more media savvy and pragmatic Bursík. The faction was led by Štěpánek, who had since joined the party and had long-standing ties to both Uhl and Bursík. The group also complained of the leadership's undemocratic behaviour, calling for restoring power to the regional organisations. Finally, the party became a cauldron of intense personal rivalries, which were magnified by gossip-driven resentments involving the personal lives of some in the leadership. While Beránek barely survived the party congress, several opponents, including Štěpánek, also won leadership positions. Weakened, Beránek and his allies were easily ousted in autumn 2005, and Bursík became SZ chairman.

The 2006 elections

With their new, telegenic leader, the party received extensive favourable media coverage. Instead of calling for deep societal change, SZ campaigned on quality of life, good governance, and greater rights for women and minorities. It highlighted such issues as reducing weekend truck traffic on highways, increasing the use of renewable resources, and preserving green space (Štěpánek 2007). At local level, it targeted such issues as preserving community control over schools and corruption in land use planning. In this way, it tried to build a national campaign by aggregating local concerns. The Greens also significantly benefited from the collapse of the liberal US-DEU, who had previously garnered support from the urban middle class. By spring 2006 the party was up to 15% in some polls.

While SZ won 6.3% in the June 2006 election, enough to enter parliament, it again polled below expectations. Not surprisingly, the previous and new party leadership had different explanations for the declining poll numbers in the campaign's closing weeks. Bursík refused to state any preferences for coalition partners except for refusing any coalition supported by the KSCM. Seeing Czechs as strategic voters, Patočka (2006) argued that if you

hated ODS and disliked Paroubek, the CSSD leader, you would vote Green to keep the CSSD in check; but this worked only for those who knew the Greens wanted a centre-left coalition. Otherwise voters had to vote CSSD to ensure a centre-left government. While Bursik's calibrated centrism gained liberals, Patocka thought there were more potential voters on the left, so he interpreted the mid-May decline as SZ supporters switching to CSSD. Over the long run, Patocka predicted the green core will desert the party, leaving it with the undependable liberals.

The new leadership sought to portray SZ as a flexible, pragmatic party, referring repeatedly to the old Green party mantra 'neither left nor right, but ahead'. Acknowledging their voters as urban and higher income, Stepanek (2006) saw a typical post-materialist Green base, denying that they had picked up a disproportionate share of liberals. He blamed the mid-May decline on media reports using two episodes to trumpet the reappearance of factionalism. In what became known as the 'Left Manifesto', as many as 35 Greens in Ostrava, including some on the party list, published a statement decrying the Greens' move to the right and denouncing its refusal to endorse a CSSD-led coalition. Calling the individuals part of a CSSD-orchestrated dirty trick, Bursik replaced two individuals on the region's list. Some noted the irony of Bursik's faction, having criticised Beranek's tightening controls over local party organisations and undemocratically putting together candidate lists, removing local candidates who won their spots through a series of local primaries. Shortly after this, Uhl publicly complained about aspects of the new leadership. While many of his concerns were administrative (the website kept crashing and there were problems with minutes of meetings), it brought back memories of Uhl's fights with Beranek and reinforced perceptions that the Greens were deeply factionalised and might not be able to maintain party discipline in Parliament.

In many ways the electoral results were a nightmare. In the 200 seat parliament, ODS won 81 seats, followed by CSSD at 74. Three small parties split the rest, with the KSCM winning 26, KDU 13, and the Greens 6. Even if Bursik had wanted a coalition with KDU and CSSD, the three parties together only had 93 of 200 seats; in other words, no CSSD-led coalition was possible without at least the tacit support of the Communists, to which Bursik categorically refused to agree. Without the extremely unlikely grand coalition between ODS and CSSD, ODS had to have both KDU and the Greens to form a coalition, but it still left them with only 100 seats.

The new government

While most active SZ members supported a deal with ODS, SZ's left wing wanted a CSSD-led minority government tolerated by the Communists, with or without the Greens formally in the government. For them, ODS was a threat to democracy; it did not help that former ODS leader, and now President, Klaus consistently refers to global warming as a hoax and

environmentalists as dangerous radicals. In contrast, the SZ's left wing viewed the Communists as comparatively weak and far more environmentally conscious. Furthermore, they deemed Paroubek desperate enough to agree to the Greens' priorities on civil society, media reform, and energy. But civil society and media were not Bursik's highest priorities, and since the CSSD had considered expanding Temelin, an energy agreement was not guaranteed either. Bursik's faction believed an agreement with ODS had several benefits, including confirming SZ as the centrist swing party. The CSSD's behaviour during the campaign also left a bad taste in their mouths; it was not just the Left Manifesto incident, but also the treatment of the Greens in the CSSD-leaning press. In contrast, the Green platform received good coverage in the ODS-leaning media. Furthermore, as a coalition agreement at the national level could lead to cooperation in ODS-dominated cities, most importantly Prague, it would allow the Greens greater ability to force government openness and accountability. In this way, Bursik's faction believed they could push to ODS into becoming more green and less corrupt.

Bargaining between ODS and the Greens lasted from June until December. The Greens were given four of 18 Cabinet seats in the new government. Bursik became Deputy Prime Minister as well as Minister of Environment, SZ members took the positions of Minister of Education and Minister of Equal Opportunity, and the Greens nominated the well-respected Karel Schwarzenberg as Minister of Foreign Affairs. SZ also secured agreement that there would be no expansion of nuclear power, more emphasis on renewable energy and energy efficiency, and a future CO₂ tax for major polluters, as well as concessions in transportation, anti-corruption, and minority protection policies. By the end of the year Bursik's personal popularity was rising, the public rated SZ the most effective party, and it was again over 10% in polls.

Bursik's leadership has not been trouble-free, though, and within months criticism was growing inside the party over both his style and support for certain policies. The biggest policy dispute has been over the US proposal to build a missile shield to defend against attacks by 'rogue states'. While the actual missile battery would be in Poland, the radar site would be in the Czech Republic. The proposal is deeply unpopular in the Czech Republic (68% oppose it), particularly among Czech Greens (85% disapprove) (Červenka 2007). Even the European Federation of Green Parties (EFGP) announced its strong opposition. ODS is fully behind it, and as a member of the coalition, Bursik has tried to finesse the issue. The official SZ position is that the party will support it if it is approved by the EU and NATO and is controlled by either of these bodies, not just the US. Petr Stepanek, Vice-Chair for International Affairs, argued they could not take a fuzzy position on an issue the EFGP strongly opposed. At the February 2007 party convention, Stepanek lost a very tight re-election race to Ondrej Liska, a young MP. Given that Stepanek was the only member of the leadership to lose his position and Bursik appeared in firm control of the meeting, it seems the remaining left faction, still

bitter over Stepanek's role in Beranek's ouster, came together with those who wanted someone even closer to Bursik.

The fall of Stepanek foreshadowed the ongoing factional battles for party control. In May 2007 one of Bursik's most vocal critics, Matej Stropnický, was elected Deputy Chair of the SZ's national council, and soon after the vote he helped lead a large demonstration against the antimissile shield. The 23-year-old Stropnický has criticised not just the party's position on that issue, but complains that Bursik has moved the party too far to the right, ignored the activism that made it distinct from the other parties, and concentrated too much power at the top (O'Shea 2007). In October, Bursik once again flexed his muscles with the forced resignation of the Minister of Education. Dana Kuchtová, a veteran of the fight against Temelín, was blamed for botching applications for EU education funds. Inside the party not only was there unhappiness about losing someone with activist credentials and about Bursik's failure to even try to defend her, but many were appalled when Bursik indicated he did not need the approval of any SZ committee or group in naming her replacement. After several weeks of internal party debate, Bursik announced the new Minister of Education would be Ondřej Liska.

Beyond the controversies surrounding Bursik himself, of greater long-term concern is the identity of the party. Beranek (2006b) suggested that the 'Czech Green Party, turning blue, is discrediting green politics'. Bursik's personal approval rating remains comparatively high in public polls and party support remains stable. However, analysing polling trends, one Czech sociologist has asserted this stability is because ODS supporters are switching to the Greens, replacing the environmental activists who are abandoning the party (ČTK 2007). Echoing the feelings of his dwindling faction, Stropnický said, 'We are losing our topics and losing our color' (O'Shea 2007).

Conclusion

Because of their existing structure, name recognition, and ties to a European party, the Czech Greens could reinvent themselves to take advantage of the opening created by the liberal party's collapse and draw in voters who are young, educated, urban, and middle class. However, the comparatively weak institutionalisation of the party has made it an attractive takeover target for political entrepreneurs, which can be seen in the rise and fall of Beranek, Bursik's ascent, and the subsequent dissension within the party. In addition, the SZ remains embattled over questions about the degree of centralisation and pragmatism. These tensions result in personal infighting, suspicion of the leadership, and cycling of membership which in turn causes rapid shifts in factional power. Finally, though scholars typically classify Greens as *realos* or *fundis*, their emphasis on localism and their libertarianism opens the ideological variation much wider. In the Czech case, saying the Greens have turned blue is clearly going too far, but with the influx of 'yellow' liberals and past ODS supporters, its hue is certainly changing.

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