

POLITICAL AND CLASS RELIABILITY SCREENING 1957–1958 IN SLOVAKIA: AN ELEMENT OF FORCED SOCIAL MOBILITY¹

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The 1958 political and class reliability screenings took place against the backdrop of the renewal of repressive policy pursued by the CPC leadership. Their course in Slovakia, so far not explored in detail, is studied mainly in the context of building new executive elites loyal to the post-1948 political regime. Based on the research into the CPC archival documents, we can surmise that, in addition to cases of espionage in state bodies revealed in 1957, the screenings were prompted by general distrust of members of the pre-1948 middle classes and executive elites or their descendants. This distrust grew following the suppression of attempts to liberalise the communist regime in Czechoslovakia and political unrest in Poland and Hungary in 1956, seen by the CP leadership as part of conspiracy by the regimes enemies. One of the reasons behind the purges was an effort of the so-called new intelligentsia, i.e. new executive elites recruited from the workers and peasants backgrounds after 1948 despite not meeting the relevant qualification criteria, to restore their power positions, which had been shaken by the liberalisation of cadre policy in the mid-1950s. Apart from the political and class reliability screenings in state offices, purges were also conducted in other departments. These were primarily concerned with the pre-1948 activities of those under scrutiny and their class origin. In Slovakia, added to the above issues was the employees' relationship to so-called Slovak bourgeois nationalism, the campaign against which was renewed in the autumn of 1956. The screenings were the last mass purge before the onset of 'normalisation' of 1969–1970; its impact on society was mitigated by the political liberalisation in Czechoslovakia after 1963. Keywords: 1958 political and class screenings. Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Communist Party of Slovakia. Elite formation. Conspiracy theories. 'Slovak bourgeois nationalism'.

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The period after the autumn of 1956 in Czechoslovakia has been associated with the resurrection of repressive course of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) leadership, which aimed to prevent not only the outbreak of similar unrest as in October–November 1956 in Hungary and Poland, but also the resumption of attempts of some intellectuals, including CPC members, to liberalise the regime in the spring of 1956. 1958 saw the culmination of a new wave of political oppression, which included purges, tightened censorship, restored control over the churches and political trials.² The post-1956 political course of the CP leadership can be described as a “*mixed strategy of repression and relaxation, Sovietization and the national road*”.³ Political and class loyalty screenings drawn up in 1957 and implemented in 1958 were the last major politically motivated purge in the ranks of civil servants. One can also see it as a project of forced social mobility before the onset of normalisation in 1969–1970. Publications by Czech historians have so far focused almost exclusively on the national, mostly Czech context of the purges, the most comprehensive being the work of Petr Cajthaml,⁴ but also the more recent publication by Tomáš Hemza.⁵ By contrast, the course of screenings in Slovakia, whether seen through the lens of supreme bodies of the Communist Party of Slovakia (CPS), or through that of society, has not yet caught researchers’ attention. Hence, the aim of the present study is to fill this gap, drawing on archival documents of the CPS and CPC supreme bodies, to capture the mood in which the screenings took place and to explore possible differences in their implementation in Slovakia and in the Czech lands. Concomitantly, the screening needs to be examined in the context of building new elites loyal to the post-1948 political regime.

In Soviet-style regimes, screenings played multiple roles. As M. Černá and J. Cuhra claim, “*one of them was to delineate a binding image of society, i.e. who ‘we’ or ‘they’, i.e. enemies, are, and codify fundamental social principles and normative interpretation of the situation of the time through categorization*”. Last but not least, in their words, the screenings also aimed to mobilize and test in practice the functionality of a large part of the Party and state apparatus.⁶

2 RYCHLÍK. *Československo v období socialismu 1945 – 1989*. Praha 2020, pp. 155–160.

3 KOLÁŘ. Post-Stalinist Reformism and the Prague Spring. In NAIMARK, PONS, and QUINN-JUDGE, eds. *The Cambridge History of Communism, vol. II. The Socialist Camp and World Power*. Cambridge 2017, p. 172.

4 CAJTHAML. Prověrky třídní a politické spolehlivosti v roce 1958. In ČERNÁ, and CUHRA, eds. *Prověrky a jejich místo v komunistickém vládnutí. Československo 1948–1989*. Praha 2012, p. 54–71.

5 HEMZA. *Rozhodující síla strany. Aparát ÚV KSČ v éře Antonína Novotného (1953–1967)*. Prague 2019, pp. 135–141.

6 ČERNÁ and CUHRA. Prověrky v komunistickém Československu. Několik obecních pozná-

Another objective was to create space for the replacement of elites at different management levels. Elites can be viewed as “a group of people who share power, exercise influence and shape decision-making on major issues, and, as a rule, are of above-average wealth”.⁷ Also, they enjoy symbolic capital by their dominant position in society.⁸ Hence, they represent the upper class, split into the ‘ruling elite’, participating directly or indirectly in the governance process, and ‘non-ruling elite’, representing the rest.⁹ For the purposes of this study, we define the elites functionally or positionally, as those working in Slovak central bodies and institutions.¹⁰ In such terms, the screenings applied to executive elites¹¹ as part of non-ruling elites not directly involved in political decision-making. Unlike political elites, they were marked by a higher degree of stability in the post-World War II period, as their work required formal qualifications.¹²

Communist regimes and the formation of executive elites

Soviet-style regimes based the formation of executive elites on Lenin’s conception of a strictly centralized Party as a vanguard whose role was not to represent but rather to lead the working class.¹³ Once in power, the Communist Party (CP) built its governance style on the management and control of all public life. Access to posts of responsibility and participation in central institutions were determined by one’s affiliation or loyalty to the ruling party.

Following the establishment of power monopoly in February 1948, the CPC combined the practice of replacing executive elites, especially members of non-communist parties, with that of co-opting members of the previous elites, e.g. through mass recruitment of new members.¹⁴ Shortage of experts made it

mek. In ČERNÁ and CUHRA, *Prověrky a jejich místo*, p. 6.

7 HUDEK, ŠOLTĚS and VÖRÖS. Úvod. In HUDEK, ŠOLTĚS et al. *Elity a kontraelity na Slovensku v 19. storočí. Kontinuity a diskontinuity*. Bratislava 2019, p. 9.

8 BOURDIEU. The Forms of Capital. In RICHARDSON, ed. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York 1986, pp. 46-58.

9 PARETO. Elites and Their Circulation. In HELLER. *Structured Social Inequality*. New York 1969, p. 35.

10 PAVKA. Kádrová politika KSČ: definiční a metodologická poznámka ke studiu elit v komunistické Československu. In *Politologický časopis*, 1999. vol. 5, n. 1, pp. 122-123.

11 VERZICHELLI. Executive Elites. In BEST, and HIGLEY, eds. *The Palgrave Handbook of Political Elites*. London 2018, pp. 573-591.

12 LIPTÁK. Politické elity na Slovensku roku 1945. In *Česko-slovenská historická ročenka 1996*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1996, p. 100.

13 LENIN. What Has to Be Done? In LENIN. *Essential Works of Lenin*. New York, n.d., pp. 56-167.

14 MAŇÁK. Orientace KSČ na vytvoření socialistické inteligence. In KOPEČEK, and KÁRNÍK, eds. *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu, sv. II*. Praha

necessary, especially at middle and lower levels, to mix old elites with new ones, generated from non-elite strata of society or from groups already established in other contexts.¹⁵ This approach changed after IX CPC Congress in May 1949, where President K. Gottwald voiced a demand for creating and educating its own intelligentsia, with ideological and class affinity for the CP, to be recruited primarily from the working-class milieu.¹⁶ Thus, especially in the first half of the 1950s, the ‘new intelligentsia’ was formed through direct promotion of workers to managerial and administrative positions, with some of the former elites being demoted to production.¹⁷ Gradually, the executive elites were completed with young graduates of secondary schools and universities.

After 1954, the CPC leadership came to be aware of the low quality of economic apparatus, which led to some softening of ‘cadre policy’, i.e. highlighting the importance of professional criteria at the expense of political ones in access to education and appointment to managerial posts. In 1955, a programme of ‘systemization’ was announced, under which managers were encouraged to improve their qualifications. Yet, as this demand met with strong resistance from members of the ‘new intelligentsia’, the policy of systemization as one of the key pillars of the ruling regime was abandoned. On 23 April 1956, the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee declared that the demands for additional training were exaggerated and that “*the introduction of systemization strayed from the principles of correct cadre policy*”.¹⁸ The events that followed the XX Congress of the CPSU, especially in the wake of II Congress of Czechoslovak Writers in April 1956 and student protests in Prague and Bratislava a month later, added to reinforcing the political or class principle in the recruitment of elites at the expense of the meritocratic rule.¹⁹

The context of decision-making on screening

While historian Karel Kaplan interprets the screenings as “*a belated response to the liberalization attempts of 1956*” or as groundwork for an official declaration of the victory of socialism in Czechoslovakia, P. Cajthaml is inclined to believe that the impetus was the discovery of a network of British secret service collaborators in central offices. In this regard, the most-oft cited names are those of Josef

2004, p. 132.

15 MICHELS. *Political Parties. A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*. New York, 1962, pp. 342-349; HUDEK, ŠOLTÉS and VÖRÖS, Úvod, p. 9.

16 MAŇÁK, Orientace KSČ, p. 110.

17 MAŇÁK, Orientace KSČ, pp. 138-140.

18 KALINOVÁ. *Společenské proměny v čase socialistického experimentu. K sociálním dějinám v letech 1945–1969*. Praha 2007, p. 211.

19 LIPTÁK, Politické elity, p. 101.

Potoček, director of the First Czech Reinsurance Company, and Václav Kvíčera, translator. While these two were executed in January 1957, the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau commissioned the drafting of guidelines for blanket screening of the ministries and central offices staff only after the arrest of another person accused of espionage – the Ministry of Heavy Engineering official Štěpán Palounek on 2 November 1957,²⁰ i.e. more than nine months later. Yet, Potoček himself, whose name is mentioned in the CC CPC documents most frequently, was far from meeting the criteria for a typical unreliable person either politically or class-wise. His father was a farmer and rural craftsman, while he himself became a CPC member on 1 January 1946, which casts doubt on his alleged fundamental disapproval of the situation in communist Czechoslovakia.²¹

The conviction of intrigues of hostile forces as the perpetrators of (not only) the regimes political problems was part of the cognitive framework and official interpretation of causal relations in the official propaganda and internal documents of the communist regimes elites.²² Thus, for example, with regard to the student protests in May 1956, unconfirmed reports of the transportation of their resolutions of the Prague university students to Bratislava via air shuttle²³ were also spread at the official level, while Antonín Novotný, First Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, described the protests at the CPC National Conference (June 11–15, 1956) as “*an attempt by reactionary elements ... to infiltrate among student groups*”; likewise, on 12 October 1956, i.e. even before the outbreak of the so-called Hungarian events, the CPS Central Committee Bureau called them “*the work of reactionary forces*”.²⁴

Perception of the “*world as structured by secret plots and malign manipulations*”,²⁵ which presumed the “*existence of a clandestine group with specific interest*”, thus constituted a standard part of the explanatory framework of the CPC leadership, but also a “*political technique to overcome rival social or political forces*”.²⁶ As ethnologist Zuzana Panczová notes, “*what is*

20 CAJTHAML, *Prověrky*, pp. 56-57.

21 TOMEK. *Tajný spolupracovník v britské rozvědné službě*. In *Securitas Imperii* 8. Praha 2001, p. 164; HEMZA, *Rozhodující síla*, p. 137.

22 PANCZOVÁ *Konšpiračné teórie: témy, historické kontexty a argumentačné stratégie*. Bratislava, 2017, p. 136.

23 FERKO. *Senzácia? Vrenie!* In *Kultúrny život*, 1956, vol. XI., č. 21, p. 1.

24 MARUŠIAK. *Príliš skoré predjanie. Slovenskí študenti v roku 1956*. Bratislava 2020, pp. 143, 155.

25 ÖNNERFORS and KROUWEL. *Between internal enemies and external threats: how conspiracy theories have shaped Europe – an introduction*. In ÖNNERFORS and KROUWEL, eds. *Europe: Continent of Conspiracies. Conspiracy Theories in and about Europe*. London 2021, p. 1.

26 ASTAPOVA et al. *Introduction: Eastern Europe in the global traffic of conspiracy theories*.

also important for the credibility of a conspiracy theory is that, in addition to unverified information, it also contains true data and revelations that serve to support key but less credible or completely unsubstantiated information”.²⁷ Even the latest research does not dispute that J. Potoček and the other officials mentioned did indeed engage in espionage activities against the Czechoslovak state. At the same time, however, reports of the involvement of the ‘reaction’ in the May protests at universities in Prague and Bratislava were spread by the security forces to conceal the fact that they were unable to read the students’ or the public’s moods, or to identify the reasons behind the discontent.²⁸ Eventually, conspiratorial beliefs about the ‘reactionary activities’ became part of the so-called Hungarian complex of the CPC leadership, i.e. of the fear that the bloody events in Hungary in the autumn of 1956²⁹ may be replicated; this was one of the reasons behind rejecting efforts to reform the regime.

A resolution of the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau of 2 May 1956 raised the question of reinforcing the class principle in admitting students to universities; it was reiterated at the CPC conference in June. The May 1956 events at universities brought about the screening of university teachers;³⁰ concurrently, screening also continued in other departments. In the summer of 1957, the screening of state and cooperative trade workers in Slovakia began. As the operation revealed, this sector employed a number of ‘politically unreliable’ citizens such as sales assistants, window dressers, accountants, clerks, operations staff, hotel receptionists and security technicians. At that time, the CPS leadership had not yet decided to resort to radical or rapid purges; ‘defective’ employees were to be gradually dismissed and reassigned to material production.³¹ Although staff screenings in state and cooperative trade were part of the politically motivated purges in the post-1956 period, their impact on society was much smaller compared to those of employees in central bodies. Early in 1958, the CPS Central Committee Bureau decided for “*a gradual demotion of capitalist and speculative elements from trade into material production*”. It also approved a ban on the employment of former business owners in their

In ASTAPOVA et al., eds. *Conspiracy Theories in Eastern Europe*. London; New York 2021, pp. 3, 6.

27 PANCZOVÁ, *Konšpiračné teórie*, p. 136.

28 MARUŠIAK, *Príliš skoré predjanie*, p. 147.

29 KAPLAN. *Kronika komunistického Československa. Kořeny reformy 1956–1968. Společnost a moc*. Brno, 2008, p. 17.

30 MARUŠIAK, *Príliš skoré predjanie*, pp. 87, 155.

31 Slovak National Archives Bratislava (SNA), Archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia (A ÚV KSS), fund (f.) Presidium of the CC CPS, box (b.) 964, session of the Bureau of the CC CPS (BÚV KSS) of 22 November 1957. *Správa o kádrovej situácii v štátnom a družstevnom obchode na Slovensku*.

former shops as managers.³² Another screening process, which ran in parallel with the screening on class and political reliability, was that under way in the Czechoslovak People's Army, approved by the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau in March 1958. It was aimed, among others, at those officers whose *“political, class, professional and personal qualities least meet the demanding requirements imposed on professional officers”*.³³

Work began on the preparation of lists of inconvenient persons even before the outbreak of the Hungarian uprising, as shown by a report on the displays of bourgeois nationalism and the activities of ‘fascist’ elements in central offices in Bratislava, dated 16 October 1956, and sent to the CPS Central Committee Secretary, Pavel David.³⁴ According to the report, 10 members of the fascist organisations – HG and HSLŠ³⁵ were working as clerks at the Commissioner's Office for Food Industry and Purchase of Agricultural Products. In the intended restructuring and slimming down of the state apparatus, a move discussed at the state-wide conference of the CPC in June 1956, there was a plan to dismiss approximately 20 persons ‘with dubious attitude to our establishment’. These mainly came from formerly wealthy families such as ex-attorneys. During the Slovak State (1939–1945), the Commissioner's Office for Trade employed 28 such persons, one third of whom now enjoyed ‘a sufficient level of political trust’. This, however, did not apply to the remaining two-thirds, *“who are either outwardly politically passive or are currently working for the CPS. This group of employees will be gradually dismissed”*. Of the Slovak Union of Consumer Cooperatives administration staff, 18 had worked in fascist organizations and, according to the report, their gradual dismissal was expected as well. The situation was similar at the Commissioner's Office for Consumer Industry and in the Slovak Union of Production Cooperatives.

The author of another undated report, probably from before the decision on political and class reliability screenings, received by P. David in 1957, was Rudolf Barák,³⁶ Czechoslovak Minister of the Interior. The report stated that *“the situation at some institutions in the state and society”* would *“require*

32 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. CC CPS Secretariat, b. 179, meeting of the CC CPS Secretariat of 25 October 1958. Kontrolná správa o plnení uznesení BÚV KSS zo dňa 17. 1. 1958 o kádrovej a politickej situácii v štátnom a družstevnom obchode na Slovensku.

33 National Archives Prague (NA), fund (f.) Communist Party of Czechoslovakia – Central Committee, CC CPC Presidency (02/02), vol 201, archive unit (a.u.) 274, item 13.

34 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, b. 2248, a.u. 317. Niektoré prejavy buržoázneho nacionalizmu v rezortoch dopravy, dated 16 October 1956.

35 HG (Hlinkova garda) – the Hlinka Guard, founded by Jozef Tiso in 1938, was the militia maintained by the Hlinka Slovak People's Party (Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana-HSLŠ), a far-right clerico-fascist party, in the period from 1938 to 1945.

36 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, b. 2249, a.u.419. Ľudáci.

certain cadre measures to replace personnel incapable of working in the new spirit". One can surmise that this process was originally intended to be gradual, as, in the Minister's words, this was not to "give an impression that someone is being removed on the grounds of their former party affiliation". With regard to the new wave of campaign against so-called Slovak bourgeois nationalism, he informed P. David that "Communists in the security forces are in all cases obliged to consult the party authorities and notify them of any displays of nationalism or of any concealment of their previous active Ludák³⁷ activity." As he explained, those with a faulty past were inactive during the Hungarian uprising because, despite their initial approval of the events in Hungary, while they still "believed that the Hungarian events would reverberate in Slovakia and that similar initiatives would be undertaken there as well", they eventually withdrew, discouraged by the Hungarian demand to rebuild St. Stephens Empire: "...the demand of the counter-revolutionaries went against the efforts of Ludáks and other nationalists to establish a so-called Slovak state". The former "had such an effect on the nationalist elements that no mass action on their part took place in our country". The report also aimed to escalate the sense of threat, which was to justify a new wave of oppression. As an example, the report stated that, according to 1953 data, among the

"State Security Headquarters staff identified so far, who have remained in the territory of the Czechoslovak Republic, there are 31 civil servants, 13 senior officials of the regional National Committees and District National Committees, 23 senior executives in trade and distribution, 15 technical personnel in industry, and 14 senior executives in the construction sector. Some even became candidates of the Communist Party of Slovakia."

Of 43 intelligence reporters, graduates of the Hlinka Youth Higher Leadership School, 3 worked at commissioner's offices, 4 in national committees, 11 in technical positions in enterprises, 7 in the health sector, and 4 in education. Baraks report expressly focused on their most recent employment. It also pointed out that the judiciary did not sufficiently prosecute the so-called bourgeois-nationalist elements, indicating that a new wave of judicial persecutions would follow.³⁸ That this was an overture to the ensuing personnel purges was clear from the note on the above lists, which said that "the data can only be used after a rigorous individual Party investigation".

37 I.e., members of The Hlinka Slovak People's Party.

38 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, b. 2244, a.u. 23. Soznam bývalých kapitalistov, exponentov rôznych buržoázných strán, bývalých gardistov a dôstojníkov československej a tzv. slovenskej armády 282/sekr. D/57

According to T. Hemza, while the CPC leadership was aware of “*the threat from the ranks of bourgeois experts*”, until the autumn of 1957, internal party documents did not include any mention of blanket screenings. To him, the change in attitude in early November 1957 showed in the above spy scandals; another indicator was that, in the spring of 1956, an extraordinary congress of the CPC was called for particularly by Party organisations in central offices and at universities.³⁹ In May 1956, the question of class composition of university students was raised as well. Yet, screenings on political and class reliability were not the only forms of vetting; while the case of Potoček and others may have contributed to accelerating the entire process, they were not its immediate trigger.

Approval of screenings in Slovakia

The decision on screenings was preceded by the approval of rules on the “*reassignment of staff from central bodies within forthcoming changes in the management and organisation of industry*”. In this regard, one’s attitude towards the 1953 monetary reform, their conduct after the XX CPSU Congress and attitude towards the so-called Hungarian events of 1956⁴⁰ played an important part in the employees’ evaluation. Similar initiatives were also observed in the CPS leadership. At a meeting on 1 November 1957, the CPS Central Committee Bureau turned down a proposal by the Commission on Restructuring and Systemization of Administration at the Board of Slovak Commissioners, headed by its Vice-Chairman, Štefan Šebesta, to extend the powers of Slovak national authorities, which resulted in his dismissal from political and state positions in January 1958. An important point, however, was the task of providing for the screening process in Slovak central offices, aimed at individuals suspected of so-called Slovak bourgeois nationalism.⁴¹ The proposal to conduct screenings, for the time being only in the Office of Presidency of the Board of Commissioners, at some commissioners’ offices⁴² and in the regional bodies of the State Bank of

39 HEMZA. Rozhodující síla, pp. 135-138.

40 NA, f. KSČ-ÚV, 02/02, vol. 161, a.u. 217, item 2.

41 For more detail see LONDÁK. *Otázky industrializácie Slovenska (1945 – 1960)*. Bratislava 1999. S SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 963, session BÚV KSS 1 November 1957. Preliminary Report of the Commission of the BCC CPS on the Work of the Commission on the Issues of Restructuring and Systemization of Administration under the Board of Commissioners. Subsequently, in December 1957, the commission labelled Š. Šebesta as “*the initiator and bearer of wrong, alien to our Party and the working class, hostile bourgeois-nationalist tendencies...*” SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 965, session BÚV KSS 16 December 1957. Správa komisie Byra ÚV KSS o činnosti komisie Zboru povereníkov.

42 Specifically, these were the Slovak Planning Office, the Commissioner’s Office for Transport, the Commissioner’s Office for Finance, the Commissioner’s Office for State Control, the Commissioner’s Office for Consumer Industry, the Commissioner’s Office for Food Industry,

Czechoslovakia, was put forward by Rudolf Strechaj,⁴³ Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, at a meeting of the Bureau of the CPS Central Committee on 22 November 1957.

It was aimed to “*examine and expose displays of bourgeois nationalism and their perpetrators and also, due to the changes in organisation and management of industry and reduction of administrative staff, submit proposals for a substantial improvement of the situation with cadres in central offices, provided that those who advocate and spread nationalism and members of the old bureaucratic apparatus from the period referred to as ‘the Slovak State’ would be removed from their offices*” and also to “*see how the principles of cadre work laid down in the Party’s cadre policy are being adhered to*”. The screenings were to be conducted along party lines, with the participation of members of the CPS Central Committee, CPS Central Committee departments, regional Party committees, municipal and district Party committees, and heads of relevant offices (commissioners). R. Strechaj also drew up a specific screening procedure with a list of officials of the CPS Central Committee, or commissioners, who were to participate in the process within the various departments. At each office, specific officials were to be identified “*to lean on responsibly, whose presence would permit the administration of screenings (cadre officer, chairman of the local party organisation, etc.) Where members of the CPS Central Committee head the department, the procedure is to be coordinated with them in particular*”.

Based on the cadre documents of those expressing “*bourgeois-nationalist views*”, their official conduct in the past, especially during the Slovak State, was to be assessed “*with special regard to former exponents of fascism, the Ludáks*”. Based on the screening results, a decision on personnel changes was to be made. The results were to be finally approved by the CPS Central Committee Bureau and then discussed at the CP meetings of regional, municipal and district committees in Bratislava and in party organisations of the respective central offices, in the presence of the officials of the CPS Central Committee, “*with the aim of drawing conclusions for substantial improvement of the quality of cadre and educational work*”. Although Strechaj’s proposal drew on the resolution of the CPS Central Committee Bureau of 1 November 1957, it was not adopted, the reasoning being that he was to conduct the screening himself, jointly with the commissioners at central offices.

While in the early months of 1957, the Hungary events were still being discussed in the context of pending purges, the adopted document clearly

the Commissioner’s Office for Construction and the Commissioner’s Office for Education and Culture.

43 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 964, session BÚV KSS 22 November 1957. Návrh politicko-organizačných opatrení na zabezpečenie 1. etapy previerky na niektorých centrálnych úradoch.

identified the main cause of the latter to be “*liberalist views in the selection, evaluation and deployment of cadres*” on the part of some executives of cadre offices. The CP leadership pointed to the “*slackening of class and political aspects*” with a preference for professional criteria (qualifications, diplomas, and college certificates) in the selection and deployment of cadres. The so-called systemization was unequivocally denounced, while some of its requirements, especially the educational ones for senior staff, were declared to be contrary to the Party principles of cadre policy.

The decision to conduct countrywide screenings, along with the implementation guidelines, were adopted at a meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee on 10 December 1957.⁴⁴ Ten days later, the Political Bureau approved the organisational directives. According to the resolution, the screening was not to be a one-off; instead, as the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau declared, ‘it would be expedient’ to replicate similar screenings after a certain period of time, also covering international organisations, officials of mass and other social organisations, editorial offices of weekly and monthly papers, radio, television, cinema, and other unspecified institutions, since, as the CPC leadership believed, this was where many unreliable elements were likely to be operating. At the same time, it adopted an amendment to the resolution authorising the CPS Central Committee to discuss the guidelines on screenings, adapting them to suit the specific Slovak setting.⁴⁵ The criteria for dismissal or work demotion were defined socially, i.e., they applied to former members of the ‘bourgeoisie’, large entrepreneurs, members of boards of directors, wealthy villagers, owners of fiscal and legal offices and their relatives. Another group were the so-called minions of the bourgeoisie, i.e. former senior civil servants, security forces and army officers, and also managers of capitalist enterprises. The screenings also applied to former Nazi collaborators in Czech lands – members of the Flag (Vlajka) and similar ‘activist’ organisations, representatives of bourgeois political parties, those expelled from the Communist Party and trade unions, but also those convicted of more serious crimes such as corruption. A special group was constituted by ‘politically bankrupt elements’, which included “*former officials of yellow, agrarian, fascist organisations, Trotskyists, other former disruptors of the workers movement and exponents of pre-February 1948 reactionary political parties*”.

The screenings also affected relatives of politically active exiles, those who held major political or economic posts in the ‘capitalist outland’, or those

44 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 968, session BÚV KSS 11 November 1957. Návrh na zabezpečenie uznesení Politického byra ÚV KSČ o prevedení previerky všetkých pracovníkov na ministerstvách a ústredných úradoch z hľadiska triednej a politickej spoľahlivosti na Slovensku.

45 NA, f. KSČ-ÚV, 02/02, vol. 161, a.u. 217, item 2.

convicted of political crimes. Those screened were not only assessed for their social status and past political activities but also for their existing political attitudes, particularly in the context of the 1953 currency reform and the Hungarian events of 1956. Exceptions were made for those who had made some significant contribution or for irreplaceable experts.⁴⁶

The meeting of CPS Central Committee Bureau decided that, due to Slovakia's different historical development, the screening would also apply to members of fascist organisations under the World War II Slovak Republic including the Hlinka Slovak People's Party, the Hlinka Guard, the Hlinka Youth, the German Party and the Volunteer Protective Corps (*Freiwillige Schutzstaffel*, FSS the paramilitary wing of the German Party founded in late 1938), and, in territories occupied by Hungary after 1938, also the Hungarian National Party, the Arrow Cross Party (*Nyilaspart*, a Hungarian pro-Nazi party), the Horthy Party of National Unity (*Nemzeti Egység Pártja*), as well as to individuals who at that time held important posts in the political, state and economic apparatus, along with their immediate family members and associates, as well as to those who "*actively fought against the USSR*", and members of Haščík's army (i.e. the reconstituted army of the Slovak state, built after the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising in September 1944 and led by Defence Minister Štefan Haščík – author's note).⁴⁷ Proponents of so-called bourgeois nationalism were not allowed to pass the screenings. The above categories allowed for a relatively loose interpretation of the guidelines, and the Bureau's resolution also pointed out that "*cadre defects from the 'Slovak State' period have to be examined case by case, taking into account active involvement in the Slovak National Uprising, as well as participation in the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps in the USSR.*"

Although officially, the screenings concerned ministries or commissioner's offices and other central offices, they also affected the editorial offices of daily and weekly papers, radio, television, publishing houses, public education headquarters, the Slovak Museum in Bratislava and the National Museum in Martin, the Čedok travel agency, banks, engineering project and departmental research institutes, the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Slovak Matica (Matica slovenská – the oldest Slovak national, scientific and cultural institution) and the head offices of cooperative unions.

The screenings were entrusted to special Party screening commissions. These were established at the level of ministries or central offices and consisted of 5–7

46 CAJTHAML. Prověrky, pp. 61-62.

47 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 968, session BÚV KSS 11 January 1958. Návrh na zabezpečenie uznesení Politického byra ÚV KSČ o prevedení previerky všetkých pracovníkov na ministerstvách a ústredných úradoch z hľadiska triednej a politickej spoľahlivosti na Slovensku.

members. They were appointed by the relevant department of the CPC Central Committee or CPS Central Committee jointly with the ministry or some other central office. As a rule, they were chaired by a deputy head of department of the CPC or CPS Central Committee or head of department of the CPC Central Committee (CPS Central Committee); their members were the deputy minister (deputy commissioner), head of the cadre department at the relevant office, chairman of the CPC General Company Committee and a staff member of the municipal or district CPC committee in Prague (Bratislava). Other members of the CPC apparatus could also be added to the commissions as necessary. The establishment of auxiliary commissions was also planned if needed, intended for the central examination of documents *“for further screenings, the use of staff and files from cadre departments and cadre records at the CPC Central Committee, for consultation on moot points with party and other bodies and organizations, and for other appropriate methods and forms of work”*.

The screening comprised the entire staff of ministries and central offices, with the exception of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of National Defence. First to be screened were those who were expected to remain in the service, followed by those who were considered for relocation to enterprises or associations of enterprises; the last to be screened were the remaining personnel. The head office was usually composed of one main screening committee and a number of subsidiary committees in charge of the screening process in the subordinate institutions. In the Ministry of Agriculture, for example, there were 8 subsidiary commissions, 4 of which handled the ministerial staff and 4 the staff of subordinate institutions.⁴⁸

According to the screening results, those screened were divided into several categories. The fate of those who had to leave the central office was diverse. As long as the employee's defects were judged as minor, they were demoted to a lower-ranking position or office; if the screening committee raised more serious objections, the employee was demoted to manual work in production or was pensioned off. Those who failed the screening were to be demoted immediately, without a three-month notice. Where this applied to a large part of the staff, the commissions concluded that ‘their professional and political development’ would be monitored for 1–2 years, and then decided upon. Others were to be dismissed gradually until replacements could be found. Each employee who was to leave his or her current position was to be interviewed individually; those who were to be retained could also be screened in smaller groups. The screening result was drawn up for each employee, along with an opinion on their further employment. Employees falling within the cadre regulations (‘nomenklatura’) of the CPC

48 NA, f. KSČ-ÚV, 02/02, vol. 177, a. u. 241, item 12.

(CPS) Central Committee were decided upon by the respective authority of the CPC (CPS) Central Committee following the approval by the respective minister or head of the central office. A report on the screening results in Slovakia was to be drawn up by 15 April 1958, and by the end of April of the same year, the screening was to be completed throughout the entire Czechoslovak Republic.

The approval of the screening guidelines in Slovakia was followed up by a meeting of the leading CPS officials with the commissioners, cadre workers and members of the screening commissions at Slovak central state offices.⁴⁹ R. Strechaj, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, justified the screening by the need to “*address the problem of the transition period*”, the result of which, in his words, was to be “*extension, or further development of people’s democracy.*” Again, he insisted on the implementation of screening arguing by the events in Hungary in the autumn of 1956:

“The screenings will reveal exactly what people have not talked about so far, [and that is] that they will show that the former members or supporters of the Hlinka Guard are not suitable for many important offices. Often, we have found, as during the Hungarian events, for example, or during events of lesser importance, that exactly people like these were indifferent, or disapproving of our regime. We often saw with these people that, on similar occasions, they made remarks in the canteens and everywhere in their work teams.”

He concluded his speech by declaring that “*we need to ... get rid of those who were burdened with their past.*”

As E. Kuchta from the Commissioner’s Office for Finance pointed out, pre-emptive policy measures were to be taken “*even if the person concerned has behaved properly so far*”. Cadre officer Kopřiva of the Commissioner’s Office for Agriculture asked what measures had been taken to ensure that unreliable cadres’ were not dismissed from production. He reasoned that such was the experience with the screenings of the first half of the 1950s, e.g. in 1951, and with the later operation entitled ‘77,500 workers to production’. As he alleged, not only were they paid 35,000 CZK, but, after a period of time, many of the dismissed even returned to central offices and to managerial posts: “*I am of the opinion that this operation should be performed in such a way so as not to render it fruitless again, so that we will not have to revert to these issues in two- or three- years time.*” A. Janetka from the Commissioner’s Office for Transportation insisted that, within the screening procedure, all those who had been on the Eastern Front and had not

49 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, b. 2219, a.u. 240, Zápis z porady o kádrovej previerke v zmysle uznesenia SÚV KSC z 13. 1. 1958.

defected to the Soviet side should be dismissed. Jozef Valo, a member of the CPS Central Committee Bureau, was against:

“On the other hand, however, those who made every effort to support war against the Soviet Union and suppressed the revolutionary movement and class consciousness in our country must be set apart, and this requires more work ... Hence, it is necessary to be very prudent and judge individually who is who. One has to take into account, especially with young people, their attitude to our social order, and this should be a guide, rather than the mere fact of their having fought on the Eastern Front.”

In her speech, Jolana Hercková, executive secretary of the CPS Municipal Committee in Bratislava, criticized the existing practice of giving preference to professional criteria over political ones. She pointed out that many officials in commissioners' offices showed their interest in becoming CPS candidates solely out of fear of being punished for their political past. She spoke of the experience with screening university teachers. While a number of them had to leave universities in the post-1956 period, they often managed to find employment in the Slovak Academy of Sciences, research and engineering project institutes.

“Now we will have to deal with these comrades again because they have regained posts in central offices. Meanwhile, as we see, the situation is worst in the very research and engineering project institutes. These comrades have also gained by being better remunerated than they were at universities,” said J. Hercková.

Karol Bacílek, First Secretary of the CPS Central Committee, warned against radical solutions: *“I strongly advise comrades against following the Party's directives in this regard bureaucratically... No bureaucratic procedure should be allowed, just as no rigid understanding of these matters should be permitted.”* He pointed to the existing possibility of appealing against the decision of the screening committee, urging to proceed on a case-by-case basis:

“...e.g. a rank-and-file member of the Hlinka Guard could have shot a Jew fleeing to Hungary at the border and rob him, meanwhile a teacher and leader of the Hlinka Youth would be automatically and illegally doing his job. We are not free to proceed by simply saying that we should dismiss one just because he was an official or leader at such and such school”.

He noted that railway workers and civil servants, for instance, were also members of the Hlinka Guard, but had not individually applied for membership. *“So, if one was a member of the Hlinka Guard in 1938 and shortly thereafter ceased to be such a member, that should be taken into account, too.”* A number

of CPS members covered up their illegal work with membership in the Hlinka Guard, Hlinka People's Party or Hlinka Youth. "This is a serious point that was not, and could not have been considered in the directives," Bacílek pointed out. On these grounds, he asked

"to treat the issues politically and to look at the issues on a case-by-case basis as well ... If, since 1945, one has worked honestly and with integrity, has a good track record, his offence is not that of an active or prominent fascist, then what he has done since the liberation must be considered".

He warned against petty entrepreneurs or their relatives becoming victims of screenings, calling for a consistent „discernment between petty entrepreneurs and capitalists. We should not take any petty entrepreneur for a capitalist. An Aryanizer, that's another story. "He argued, among other things, that many entrepreneurs were CPC members: So, we should prevent declaring a petty entrepreneur to be a capitalist element." The minutes of the meeting, which took place in the presence of a number of party apparatus and cadre workers, conveyed an air of retaliation for the post-1953 period, when the regime had been forced to make certain concessions in cadre policy'. As an example, a Mr Zangl, an employee of the Slovak Planning Office, said the following regarding cadre workers:

"In 1953–1954, we somewhat diminished the role of these people. Nowadays, cadre workers are counted among personnel department employees. This is particularly the fault of cadre work. I remember, and there is a lot of discussion in this respect, that Roháč and Dikobraz⁵⁰ have actually turned into cadre offices instead. This state of affairs can be blamed on the Party's central committee – the respective department that is supposed to supervise the magazines and should not have allowed this. At the time when we are launching the screening, the role of cadre workers should increase, it should be underscored by the Party as one of the most important tasks."

He pointed out that in 1952–1953, many members of the so-called new intelligentsia left the Slovak Planning Office:

"It happened because the emphasis was on higher education. These comrades from the planning office were not leaving satisfied. It would be right for the supreme party body to take measures for the individual offices to keep an eye on those comrades who have left and those who were good

50 The two most popular magazines of humour and satire in Czechoslovakia, published from the late 1940s until the early 1990s.

party members, fought for the party line and are now perhaps underutilised, it would be good to make proper interventions in personnel policy also in this regard at all departments – rather than requiring tertiary-level education.”

Vojtech Daubner, chairman of the Slovak Trade Union (TU) Council, pledged the unions support for screening:

“We know that the union is inclined towards protectionism, legal protection on labour matters. But it also has the right to refuse. We will take further measures at the Slovak TU Council and the Slovak committees [of trade unions – authors note] so that the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, rather than being a hindrance, would turn into help, so that a well-conducted screening would cleanse our state apparatus of those who do not belong there. Our people, especially communists, will be duly informed in order to support this screening.”

During the debate, members of the Board of Commissioners spoke only rarely. Those present pointed out that many ‘politically unreliable’ individuals had found shelter in research and engineering project institutes, which should have been the focus of attention of the screening commissions. In the closing part of the meeting, R. Strechaj decided that the labour trade unions of regional national committees and district national committees would be reminded to “*mainly attend to the political criteria as set by the CPC Central Committee Politburo*”. Despite V. Daubner’s promise, he stressed that “*it wouldn’t be a bad thing if our trade union bodies and unions ... gave such instructions to their constituents so as not to act as defenders of workers rights, but instead would take part in the very responsible task of improving the state apparatus, of preventing admission to the state apparatus for all people who do not belong there.*”

Although the CPC leading officials ostensibly warned against ‘blunders’, thereby ridding themselves of responsibility for these in advance, the reality was different. Both CPC and CPS officials regularly received reports on the progress of screening or lists of ‘defective persons’. In reality, therefore, they knew that the adopted guidelines were not being actually followed, that the screening was affecting many more people than just the central offices’ employees or the institutions directly subordinate to them. The reasons for being included in the list of ‘defective persons’ were not only those exhaustively named in the screening guidelines. Such lists also comprised cultural, judicial and national committee staff. In addition to the parents’ employment or religious beliefs, membership of Zionist organisations or being described as a ‘Zionist’, or claiming German

nationality, the Social Democratic Party membership, words uttered in private conversations, etc., all these were among the criteria for inclusion.⁵¹

Early in 1958, lists of defective persons were also drawn up at some enterprises. Thus, for example, in the Bratislava Asana (pest control company), the screenings applied to one person; 4 ‘defective persons’ were in the Regional Union of Consumer Cooperatives, 4 in the Peat Processing Plants, 8 in the Georgi Dimitrov Factory, 14 in the Czechoslovak Automotive Transport Enterprise, while in the Bratislava City Transport Company, the screenings, conducted in line with the prepared lists, applied to 10 employees such as ticket inspectors, clerks, or technical staff. The Czechoslovak Car Repair Shop employed 16 ‘defective’ persons, while according to the State security report of 8 January 1958, 38 such individuals worked in the customs office in Bratislava. According to the regulation issued by K. Bacílek, First Secretary of the CPS Central Committee, *“this document should be regarded as informative and may be used as a guide in screenings at central offices. Drawing conclusions based on it alone is inadmissible”*. However, the very existence of such document makes it clear that the actual scope of screening was much greater than stated there.⁵² Yet, as the reports on the screening results show, the data obtained via the State Security served as background records for screening commissions:

“Through the commission’s chairman, documents submitted by the Regional Administration of the Ministry of the Interior via comrade David and the II and VII departments of the CPS Central Committee were also taken into account in the employees’ screenings,”

says the report on findings at the Commissioner’s Office for Agriculture; the situation was similar in other departments.⁵³

The screening was extended to regional and district authorities, the management, technical, planning and administrative staff of some enterprises and factories, as well as to universities, where it became a criterion for assessing teachers.⁵⁴ In the České Budějovice region, similar screenings even took place as

51 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, b. 2250, a.u. 448. Závadné osoby (1958).

52 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, b. 2250, a. u. 449. Závadné osoby (1958) 27/sekr.D/58 (returned 18 January 1958); SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, b. 2250, a.u. 450; Závadné osoby (1958). SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, b. 2244, a.u. 28. Zoznam bývalých dôstojníkov s reakčným postojom k nášmu zriadeniu zamestnaných v štátnych úradoch v Bratislave (1958).

53 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 978, session BÚV KSS 25 April 1958. Závěrečná správa o výsledkoch previerky politickej a triednej spoľahlivosti pracovníkov Povereníctva poľného a lesného hospodárstva.

54 Návrh uznesenia 68. schôdze predsedníctva ÚV KSČ k návrhu stanoviska predsedníctva ÚV KSČ k triednej a politickej previerke z roku 1958, dokument nr. 51. 8. April 1968, Praha. In VONDROVÁ; NAVRÁTIL and MORAVEC. *KSČ. Pokus o reformu I. (říjen 1967 – květen*

early as mid-1957. The screening guidelines were discussed at meetings of the bureaus and at plenary sessions of the CPC regional committees in the latter half of January 1958. By March 1958, the screenings had gathered momentum, being discussed by the bureaus of CPS district committees. The secretariats of the CPC regional committees discussed the conclusions of the screening commissions twice a week. Late in May 1958, the screenings were still under way in research and engineering project institutes and in solicitors' offices, which had passed from the ministries' jurisdiction to that of the regions. At regional CPC committees, 'records for the relocation of teachers' were also being prepared. In the Olomouc region, screening committees even dealt with all teachers. As Vasil Biľak, then-Chief Secretary of the CPS Regional Committee in the Prešov region, later stated at a meeting of the CPC Central Committee Presidium on April 16, 1968, "8,600 of them [i.e., teachers – authors note] were ready to move".⁵⁵

Such extension of screening was haphazard, without following any formal regulations, being part of the very nature of the political practice of communist elites.

CPC and CPS leaderships knew that screenings did not occur in central offices alone, but did little or nothing to counteract that. Although, by and large, a conclusion was made that there were cases of "mechanical application of screening guidelines", even in this case, what was viewed favourably was that "the principles of cadre policy have been made known to a wide range of party officials and a decisive move has been made against the liberalist conception of the principles of cadre policy."⁵⁶

The erratic fashion of screenings in districts and regions was confirmed by the inspection report on their course, discussed at the meeting of the CPS Central Committee Secretariat of 21 February 1958: "the experience shows that ... in practice, the screening was also launched in districts and regions ... while sufficient preparation has been made for screenings in central bodies, it has not been adequate in the former". The screening procedure was rather harsh, especially in rural areas. Some Party officials described it as a second February⁵⁷ and treated its implementation accordingly. Even though, in keeping with the approved guidelines, each dismissed worker was to be interviewed individually,

1968). Brno; Praha 1999, pp. 361-362.

55 Stenografický záznam diskusie na 68. schôdzi predsedníctva ÚV KSČ k návrhu stanoviska k triednej a politickej previerke z roku 1958, dokument č. 52. 16. April 1968, Praha. In VON-DROVÁ; NAVRÁTIL and MORAVEC, *Pokus o reformu I.*, pp. 361-362.

56 NA, f. KSČ-ÚV, 02/02, b. 177, a.u. 241, item 12.

57 What is referred to as the February of 1948 in former Czechoslovakia was the communist coup that established a totalitarian regime in the country, which lasted until the Velvet Revolution in November 1989.

this rule was not observed, especially in the countryside. As an example, there were 9 persons working at the Šamorín District National Committee, who were labelled ‘cadre defective’. “*According to the notification, the screening committee came to such a conclusion so as to tell them not to start work on Monday, without any dismissal decree or instructions on what to do,*” the report states. On 13 February 1958 in the Čalovo district (now Veľký Meder), the screening commission summoned 20 teachers to announce their dismissal from the education department under Article 20 of Act No. 66/1950 Coll. as politically and nationally unreliable, with retroactive effect from 1 February 1958. The reason for sanctioning included the fact that their parents or in-laws owned 17–20 hectares of land or worked as gendarmes or artisans. According to the report, one of the dismissed teachers had even been awarded twice for his teaching efforts by the District National Committee. As noted in the report, in some districts and regions, the comrades misunderstood the wording of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee’s resolution on the screening, which was supposed to apply mainly to ministries, commissions and central offices. As a result, the authorities and school principals required teachers to write a church resignation letter, even though such practice had already been banned in 1954.⁵⁸ On the other hand, however, neither the Secretariat, nor the CPS Central Committee Bureau took any measures to stop such practices. Nonetheless, there were also cases to the contrary; e.g., in the Dunajská Streda district, although 5 workers – operations managers in the local cannery, labelled as former exponents of the so-called Slovak State and the Horthy regime by the inspection commission, were to be dismissed from their jobs, the CPS Local Organization Committee and the plant director opposed the decision, justifying their move by their professional qualities. At a meeting of the CPS Central Committee Secretariat, František Dvorský, Head Secretary of the CPS Regional Committee, recommended that pupils who had attended religious education should not be admitted to teachers’ colleges.⁵⁹ The screenings were wantonly extended to university students, although documents approved by the CPC Political Bureau or the CPS Bureau did not mention anything of the kind, meanwhile reasons cited for sanctions included students’ attitudes during the 1956 university protests.⁶⁰

Although the CPS leaders did not see the label ‘Second February’ as politically appropriate for tactical reasons, party machinery workers claimed

58 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 976, session BÚV KSS 5. April 1958. Listy – ohlasy na prejav povereníka A. Horáka.

59 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. Sekr. ÚV KSS, b. 167, session CC CPS Secretariat 21. February 1958. Kontrolná správa o plnení uznesení Politického byra ÚV KSČ a BÚV KSS o previerke pracovníkov povereníctiev a centrálnych úradov. Doterajšie poznatky z previerky.

60 MARUŠIAK, *Príliš skoré predjarie*, pp. 168 – 170.

continuity with previous purges and screenings, i.e., with the screenings run by the National Front Action Committees in the post-February 1948 period, party screenings of those who joined the Communist Party after 1948, the so-called ‘cleansing purge’ of 1951 (which preceded the above operation ‘77,500 staff to production’), the ‘1953 purge’, and others that followed.

At the interview, members of the screening committee usually first read to the employee an extract from their personnel file and their political and work assessment. The person screened was asked to comment on the assessment. If the document contained minor errors, corrections were made immediately; if major changes were necessary, a new round was in order where the new findings were checked against the personnel file, followed by an investigation, a new interview, and a new verdict by the board. The screenings did not only run in workplaces but also in birthplaces; the employees being screened demanded that, in addition to the CPS apparatus staff, their fate should also be decided by the TU organisations.⁶¹ Personal assessments were also demanded from national committees, mass organisations and in some cases from party organisations. During the screening, special heed was paid to the employees’ conduct during the 1953 currency reform, their attitude to the events after the XX CPSU Congress and to the Hungary uprising. Individuals’ religious beliefs were also established, as well as their potential secret participation in religious life.⁶²

According to an undated document compiled by Department I of the CPS Central Committee and commissioned by the First Secretary of the CPS Central Committee K. Bacílek, as an addendum to the final report on screening results (i.e., probably from the latter half of May or the early days of June 1958), a total of 45 main and 61 auxiliary screening commissions were established in Slovakia after the screening had been launched, with 547 serving communists, and several hundred more in charge of preparing cadre files. In some departments, namely, in those falling under the jurisdiction of Departments II, VII and X of the CPS Central Committee, the screening commission panels also included presidents or presidency members of the Slovak TU Slovak Committees.⁶³ In many institutes, such as the SAS, the screenings did not meet with approval or active support of senior executives, who rather sought to protect their employees.⁶⁴

61 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 978, session BÚV KSS 25 April 1958. Závěrečná správa o výsledkoch previerky politickej a triednej spoľahlivosti pracovníkov Povereníctva poľného a lesného hospodárstva.

62 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 978, session BÚV KSS 25 April 1958. Správa o stránickej previerke na Povereníctve školstva a kultúry, ako aj na jeho podriadených zložkách.

63 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, b 2250, a.u. 485. Prípád Lednár (1958).

64 For more detail on political and class reliability at SAS, see HUDEK. Protirečivý vývoj SAV. Vedecký výskum a budovanie pracovísk na pozadí tlakov politickej moci. In HUDEK and KOVÁČ. *Dejiny Slovenskej akadémie vied*. Bratislava 2023, pp. 177-199.

Public's response to screening

Officially, both public discourse and broader CP leadership meetings were silent on the screening; what was discussed was future industrial management organisation. A. Novotný only hinted that it would go beyond simple restructuring.

“There will be considerable transfers of people working in various bodies and institutions, with the reduction of workforce as a result of the new organisation. The reassignment of these people to production, to other places, must be made judiciously and wisely so that they could all find employment in an organised manner.... it is necessary to select capable and responsible managers for new organisational units, for control positions, reliable enough to ensure high quality of work performance and fulfilment of the tasks set before them. ... Care must be taken to ensure that, in transfers, class considerations are applied to the selection and deployment of cadres, along with an assessment of their political and class level as well as practical experience of each employee.”⁶⁵

The screenings went hand in hand with a propaganda campaign in the press, justified by the popular demand for decentralisation and reduction in the administration staff. However, being aware that the screening was not viewed favourably by the population, the CPS leadership saw the first major article on screenings in central offices as not very tactical. The article, published in Pravda, the central CPS organ without prior consultation with the Bureau or with the CPS Central Committee Secretariat, dealt with the state of affairs at the Healthcare Commissioner's Office, whose then head was non-communist Vojtech Török, a member of the satellite Party of Slovak Revival. The CPS Central Committee Bureau criticised the article for 'imprudent' formulations, such as *“all communists at the Healthcare Commissioner's Office must create an atmosphere of bold and principled criticism, from the ground floor up, from the porters lodge to the top floor...”*, a statement that could be interpreted as a straightforward allusion to the commissioner's work, *“which is not right now, when the importance of the National Front is being highlighted”*. For the same reason, the CPS leadership did not consider it right to state that *“the Party organisation scheduled a joint committee meeting with the commissioner on a semi-annual basis”*. The CPS leadership warned that this might create an impression that *“the commissioner is supervised and directed by the Party organisation. And eventually, it may be misused by the foreign enemy”*. The propaganda was supposed to keep emphasizing even more strongly that the

65 NOVOTNÝ. Referát súdruha A. Novotného na zasadaní ÚV KSCĎ dňa 30. septembra 1957. Bratislava 1957, pp. 10-11.

screening aimed to reduce and improve the administrative apparatus. The CPS Central Committee Bureau also found fault with using the word “persecution” in the closing part of the article: “*Whoever has a clear conscience has nothing to fear... it is not that we are now persecuting everyone who was a formal member of a fascist organization and who has admitted it*” and also with the phrasing that “*there are serious flaws even on the part of some Party members.*”⁶⁶

However, despite the official interpretation, the public generally saw the screening as yet another manifestation of political persecution. According to the reports of the Ministry of the Interior authorities on the population’s reaction in January and March 1958, there were “*various skewed views, mostly tending towards spreading bourgeois nationalism, undermining work morale, and underestimating our Party’s measures regarding the new organization of industrial management*”. Rather frequent were fears that the screenings were ethnically motivated and that the dismissed workers would be replaced with Czechs. The Finance Commissioner’s Office staff, for instance, claimed that “*more Czech is spoken at the Office than Slovak*”, and elsewhere, that the ministries were relocating non-professionals to Slovakia. There was a widespread opinion that the screening procedure in Slovakia was more stringent because they could thus dismiss as many people as possible and hire Czechs instead. Other interpretations claimed that the screenings were directed against the intelligentsia and that the reason behind them was the events in Hungary and Poland, or the overabundance of intelligentsia in the Czech lands. Czech employees, conversely, were concerned that the screenings would mostly affect Czechs. During the restructuring of companies and the formation of business associations, it was often said that personal and group interests took precedence over professional qualities. Long-standing members of the CPC expressed their dissatisfaction with the preference for members who joined the Communist Party after 1948. The screenings were accompanied by a decline in work ethic, especially at commissioner’s offices and central offices, a phenomenon that was given a sobriquet of ‘cadre disease.’ Emo Bohúň, the editor of *Kultúrny život* (Cultural Life), claimed that resistance to the screenings was also palpable in the CPS organisations. He described the screening process as “*a purge of Slovaks to make room for Czech youth, as was the case during the first Czechoslovak Republic*”. In his words, likely uttered in a private conversation, a critical article about the screening was to appear in *Kultúrny život*. Rumours and stories circulating among the population point to the pronounced atomization of society.

66 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 972, session BÚV KSS 28 April 1958. Comments on the article *Veľká zodpovednosť ZO KSS na centrálnych úradoch*, published in *Pravda* on 27 February 1958.

As indicators of general helplessness, there were widespread statements such as “*they have promised us the world, meanwhile all we’ll get is the mountains in the Czech borderland and the Ostrava coal mines*” or that “*it does not pay to talk about anything, as whoever takes a stand against the Czechs is branded a bourgeois nationalist*”. On the other hand, there were also voices which read the screenings as a sign of the regimes weakness. According to some speculations, opposition to the screening was very strong; e.g., there was a rumour among the population that, in protest against the screenings, a factory had been blown up in Most. Also, based on the previous experience with repression over the recent years, the public was concerned about the future fate of those affected by the screening. One such rumour claimed that 14,000 families would be evicted from Bratislava and that, as part of restructuring, their members would go to work in peasant cooperatives, in construction or in the Czech borderlands. To replace them, 20,000 young Czechs were allegedly expected to move to Bratislava. According to other rumours, as many as 90,000 or 140,000 people were to go into production, while still other rumours suggested that “only” 7–8 thousand people were expected to leave Bratislava. The measures were mostly to apply to former members of the Hlinka Guard, the Protection Squadron Volunteers (Schutzstaffel – SS – paramilitary organization of the NSDAP), the German Party (*Deutsche Partei* – national socialist party, representation of German minority in Slovakia in 1939–1945), the Hlinka People’s Party, former army officers, gendarmes, capitalists, rebels and those whose relatives lived abroad.⁶⁷

A sense of fear and frustration spread among the population. According to a State Security report citing some censored private correspondence, the general public were “*mentally exhausted, living in uncertainty, not knowing what fate would befall them*”. They were convinced that the persecution was mainly due to religious beliefs, as many teachers – practising believers – were threatened with dismissal by communist Party leaders and officials. The screening was given the slang description of ‘new-snouts-in-the trough’. In the context of screenings, despite an intense propaganda campaign about the rising standard of living accompanied by lowering prices, in private conversations and letters, the public complained about declining living standards, falling incomes, and tightening standards. In the context of formal announcement of the price cuts, it is interesting to note that many criticised the fact that the prices actually went up.⁶⁸ Even official documents of the CPS Central Committee stated that, once

67 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, b. 2250, a. u. 453. Správa o ohlase obyvateľstva na prevádzanú reorganizáciu (KS MV Bratislava – 17 March 1958)

68 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, b. 2250, a. u. 464. Správa o závadných častiach listových zásielok vo vnútornom a zahraničnom styku (1958), KS MV Bratislava 1. 2. 1958 (dated 31 January 1958).

the central offices staff learned about the screening guidelines, tension and uneasiness grew in their ranks, resulting in poor work morale.⁶⁹

The screenings were also censured by intellectuals. Such was the case of the writer Katarína Lazarová,⁷⁰ who was outraged to learn that the screenings often penalised participants in the anti-fascist resistance. In her article *Silence is tantamount to betrayal* in the *Práca* daily newspaper, she wrote:

“We have every right to demand that, in our struggle for socialism, no position be occupied by a person who would act against us in the most crucial moments. One cannot remain silent on the fact that in some cases ‘reformed sinners’ are to be regarded as more reliable than those who fought during the Uprising, who have been branded with the stigma of unreliability, or persecuted for having been a national administrator of fascist property. And who was supposed to do this? Or was it to remain in the hands of the fascists? We cannot be silent on being screened by those who had nothing to do with our struggle, on having our reliability decided by those who have not even known, or have not been willing to, understand that the Slovak National Uprising laid the foundations of our present-day republic.”

Understandably, these words of hers could not be published. Ladislav Kalina, in his turn, attempted to ridicule the screenings in his show *A Rendez-vous in Bratislava*, but this play, too, was confiscated by the Main Press Supervision Administration.⁷¹ A number of writers, including Alexander Matuška and Ladislav Mňačko, refused to write about the screenings that were then under way.⁷²

Likewise, the final report on the outcome of screenings submitted to the CPC Political Bureau declared that the screenings were seen as crackdown on the intelligentsia per se and that they not only targeted those who had overtly opposed the Communist Party, but also those who had not been willing to actively support its policies or comment on current political developments. According to the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau, they *“lumped in political and class reliability with insufficient political maturity and a passive attitude*

69 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 977, session BÚV KSS 11 April 1958. Závěrečná správa o výsledkoch stránickej previerky triednej a politickej spoľahlivosti.

70 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 978, session BÚV KSS 2 May 1958. Správy Ministerstva vnútra.

71 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 975, session BÚV KSS 28 March 1958. Estrádna revue „Rendez-vous v Bratislave.“

72 SNA, f. Commissioner’s Office of the Interior – Secretary (PV – sekr.), Reports of the Press Supervision (STD), b. 55, 1958.

or work deficiencies". The screenings also affected those who, while being described as 'reliable' were dismissed just because their dismissal overlapped with the restructuring. Those who were to be reassigned as part of administrative restructuring were thus often branded with a stigma of the screening committees decision as they were leaving their original positions. Although, at a meeting of the chairmen of the screening commissions held at the initiative of the First Department of the CPC Central Committee late in January 1958, such methods were denounced, we have not found any instructions from the central bodies of the CPCS or CPS that would invalidate or rectify such 'blunder' or order the chief executives or the screening commissions to exonerate those thus affected. Exceptions to the rule were e.g. cases when negative decisions of the screening committee affected former rank-and-file members of the Social Democracy who joined the Communist Party after 1948.⁷³

Results of the screenings

According to the documents of the CPC Political Bureau, a total of 28,686 workers in ministries, central offices and institutions, i.e. bodies subordinate to the CPC Central Committee, were to be screened. In January and March, 905 workers (3.1% of the total number of those screened) were to go into production on the grounds of their 'class and political unreliability', while 1,089 workers had to retire for the same reasons (3,7% of the total number of those screened; as a rule, these were people over 60 years of age who had worked in the state apparatus during the First Czechoslovak Republic). According to the report, in many places, the screenings went far beyond what had originally been envisaged and the wrong conclusions were drawn: "*In some places, political and class reliability was mixed with lack of maturity or little political activity.*" Their results were particularly harsh in the education department, where teachers' contracts could be terminated because of their formal affiliation with the Catholic Church or even membership in the satellite Czechoslovak People's Party. What the CPS leadership saw as the screenings main shortcoming was that these were only a one-off event.⁷⁴

As the data used by the Political Bureau of the CPC's Central Committee at its session on 27 May 1958 during the discussion of the screening results showed, out of a total of approx. 30,000 employees, 4,302 (15%) were demoted to lower tiers of the political and state apparatus, 844 (2.9%) had to leave due to their 'political unreliability', while 1,089 (3.8%) were pensioned off. Exceptions

73 NA, f. KSČ-ÚV, 02/02, b. 177, a.u. 241, item 12.

74 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 978, session BÚV KSS 25 April 1958. Copy of the telex from the CPC Central Committee to all regional committees, municipal committees and the CPS Central Committee on class and political reliability screenings.

to the screening rules were made in 57 cases. These individuals “*demonstrate by their entire conduct their positive attitude to the people’s democratic system; on singular occasions, also because there has been no replacement for them yet.*” Among those affected were a significant number of Communist Party members. This included 40 pre-1948 Communist Party members and as many as 136 CPS members who joined after 1948.⁷⁵ Hence, in central offices, not counting the institutions subordinate to the Board of Commissioners, a total of 21.7% of the workforce were affected by the screenings; of these, 6.7% lost their jobs for political reasons.

The final conclusion on the course and results of the screenings in Slovakia was made at the meeting of the CPS Central Committee Bureau on 6 June 1958. At commissioner’s offices, central offices and in research institutes, 12,817 workers passed the screening successfully, 1,292 were demoted, 572 ‘alienated politically and class-wise’ individuals went ‘into production’, and 159 were pensioned off. Thus, like at the republic level, approximately 21 per cent of employees in Slovakia were variously affected by the screenings. On the whole, a total of 16,221 employees were screened, of whom 4,704 were at commissioner’s offices, 3,840 at central offices and 7,677 at research and engineering project institutes and other national economic bodies.⁷⁶ While unofficial documents, such as an undated report of the First Department of the CPS Central Committee, probably from late May 1958, cite different figures, which are slightly higher – 16,383 persons screened, of whom 749 workers were to ‘go into production’ or to be pensioned off for political reasons⁷⁷, the CPS leadership worked with the data from the report of 6 June 1958. These figures have also been used by other authors who have dealt with the issue. In absolute terms, 12,817 workers passed the screening successfully, while 3,404, i.e. 21%, were affected in one way or another.⁷⁸

The results of screening in Slovakia are shown in Table 1. As for the dismissals, i.e. staff reassigned to production or pensioned off for political reasons, the largest number was in research and engineering project institutes (4.8% of the total number of staff screened). At commissioner’s offices, 4% of those screened had to leave for political reasons, while 4.5% were dismissed from central offices. A relatively large group, up to 8.5% of the total number of those screened, was made up of the employees who lost their jobs for other than

75 NA, f. KSČ-ÚV, 02/02, vol. 177, a. u. 241, b. 12.

76 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 982, session BÚV KSS 6 June 1958. Final report on the course and results of the political and class reliability screenings of the commissioner’s offices and central offices staff in Slovakia.

77 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, b. 2250, a. u. 485. Případ Lednár (1958).

78 BARNOVSKÝ. *Prvá vlna destalinizácie a Slovensko (1953–1957)*. Brno 2002, p. 118.

political reasons, the most frequently cited argument being lack of qualifications. More than 22% of them worked at commissioner's offices.

Thus, the most common form of sanction was downgrading to a more inferior position due to lower level of political credibility. This affected 9.8% of the total number of persons screened at commissioner's offices, 10.4% at central offices and 5.6% at research and engineering project institutes. Thus, in Slovakia, a total of 79% of those screened passed without penalty, 7,9% were demoted to lower positions, 3,5% of those screened were reassigned to manual work ('production') and 1% of those screened were pensioned off – all for political reasons. In sum, a total of 4,5% of those screened were dismissed on political grounds.⁷⁹

In the Office of the Slovak National Council, the Presidency of the Board of Commissioners and commissioner's offices, a total of 4,704 people were screened, of which 1,038 were forced to leave their positions; in central offices and institutions, a total of 3,840 employees were screened, of which 171 were dismissed. At research institutes and nationwide organisations, the screenings applied to 7,677 workers, of which 172 lost their jobs. Overall, a total of 1,381 people were laid off due to the screenings at nationwide organisations. In the CPS Central Committee nomenklatura, a total of 598 workers were screened, of which 45 were reassigned to less prominent positions, 7 had to leave for production and two employees were forced to retire.⁸⁰

The screenings also affected some senior officials of the regime, and three deputy commissioners were forced to resign. The first to leave was Ján Kotoč, Deputy Commissioner for Education and Culture, who, according to the findings of the screening commission, had been member of the Hlinka Guard and Hlinka Youth, had received award from Minister for his activities in the education field and maintained contacts with Democratic Party exponents in the post-1945 period. Anton Hromkovič, Deputy Commissioner of the Interior, was also removed from office for having been a member of the Hlinka Youth and for having allegedly applied for membership of the Hlinka Guard Emergency Divisions in his younger years, even though he was discharged a week later for being under-age. Also dismissed was Deputy Commissioner for local fuels and oil industry, Jozef Šimčisko, who served as the Government Commissioner for coal mines during the Slovak State. Eight directors of the main administrations at commissioner's offices were forced to leave as well.⁸¹

79 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 982, session BÚV KSS 6 June 1958. Záverečná správa o priebehu a výsledkoch previerky politickej a triednej spoľahlivosti pracovníkov povereníctiev a centrálnych úradov na Slovensku.

80 Ibid.

81 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, b. 2250, a.u. 485. Prípád Lednár (1958).

Table 1

Results of class and political reliability screenings in Slovakia – breakdown by type of office

	Commissioner's offices	Central offices	Research institutes, engineering project institutes, national branches of central authorities	Total
Screened	4,704	3,840	7,677	16,221
Remaining (%)	64.1	80.7	87.3	79.00
Demoted due to lower political credibility (%)	9.8	10.4	5.6	7.9
Manual work – production due to political unreliability (%)	3.1	3.3	3.9	3.5
Pensioned off due to political unreliability	0.9	1.2	0.9	1.00
Laid off for other than political reasons (%)	22.1	4.4	2.3	8.5

Source: Slovak National Archives and CPS Central Committee, fund of the Presidency of the CPS Central Committee, box 982, session of the Bureau of the CPS of 6 June 1958. Final report on the course and results of the screening of political and class reliability of commissioner's offices and central offices staff in Slovakia.

According to the report approved by the CPS Central Committee Bureau, of the 598 CPS Central Committee nomenklatura cadres who underwent screening, 45 were reassigned to lower-level divisions, 7 went into production, and 2 went into forced retirement for political reasons. 211 CPS members were reassigned to lower-level positions (49 pre-1948 members and 162 who joined the CPS after 1948), of the 572 workers sent to production 55 were CPS members (13 pre-1948 members, 42 post-1948 members), while 32 CPS members were pensioned off on political grounds. At some offices, employees made mass 'solidarity' appeals

against the decisions of screening commissions. Such was the case in the food industry, consumer industry and trade sections, but especially in engineering project institutes and research institutes, where a total of 337 appeals were lodged. Also, as part of staff cuts, there was a trend to automatically transfer fresh school leavers to lower-level departments, which was explained by their need to gain experience in production. As a rule, these individuals did not accept the jobs offered and rather looked for employment on their own.

As the report approved by the CPS Central Committee Bureau stated, many leaders knew about their subordinates' 'shortcomings', but were unwilling to discipline them. On the other hand, what came forth was the strength of social relations and the old boy network' system in society along with nepotism, which continued to thrive even under the totalitarian regime and despite industrialization. To illustrate this, the Research Institute of Mechanisation and Automation in Nové Mesto nad Váhom was used as an exemplary case, with as many as 76 workers being close relatives to each other, and many others having familial ties with the managers. The situation was similar at the Dionýz Štúr Geological Institute, or at Kovotechna Piešťany, and elsewhere.⁸²

During the dismissals, the CPS leadership cited employees' poor performance, with the exception of the sectors falling under the Light Industries Department, and also the Communications and Health Departments. In other departments, according to the report, the situation was dissatisfying, with dismissal dates being rescheduled or lay-offs not even having started. One of the major tasks was to fight cases when "*managers perform cadre work wantonly and recruit people without cadre officers' knowledge or even against their opinion. Some leaders do not even respect Party organisations*". Such managers were also forced to leave their posts.

On the other hand, the CPS Central Committee Bureau appreciated the work of cadre trade unions, which, except in isolated cases, were made up of 'workers committed to the party'. It reiterated a statement made at the 1956 statewide CPS conference that "*class and political screening was neglected, whitewashed, with even important circumstances withheld*", describing this phenomenon as 'pernicious liberalism'. It stressed the role of cadre workers in enterprises and institutions, denouncing plans for the so-called systemization of workers: "*Over the recent years, their work has been grossly underestimated, their confidence often shaken when they became targeted by our satire ... their work ... was disrupted by all kinds of systemization.*" It also emphasised their special role in the CPC nomenklatura, describing the screening as "*invaluable experience for*

82 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 982, session BÚV KSS 6 June 1958. Záverečná správa o priebehu a výsledkoch previerky politickej a triednej spoľahlivosti pracovníkov povereníctiev a centrálnych úradov na Slovensku.

them for future work". The main thrust of the work of the CPS organizations in workplaces was to be *"educational work, which is the weakest link in the Party work"*. Hence, they were not supposed to make formal decisions, which were in charge of the chief executives. Yet, as members of the CPS and also of its nomenklatura, they were naturally bound by the decisions of its superior authorities. On the other hand, the CPS Central Committee Bureau observed adverse social structure of organisations and committees, especially in research and engineering project organisations; the situation was similar in education and culture departments. In reality, one of the reasons behind launching the screening process was the fact that power elites could not fully rely on their lower links.

One of the major problems in this regard was education of professional cadres, as *"those with rich experience in production and politically mature, but whose professional education languishes, have been cheated on salary during restructuring or systemization, or have been dismissed from office or institute due to lack of education"*, as was the case at the Transport Commissioner's Office. On the other hand, however, the CPS leadership observed the need to help the Commissioner's Office for Local Fuel and Oil Industry by providing politically mature technical and professional staff from the coalfields in the Czech Republic. On the whole, the CPS Central Committee Bureau gave the screening a favourable rating, as it affected

"those who, by their political profile, do not belong in the state or economic apparatus or have lost confidence of the working people... The screening has precluded politically unreliable individuals from wielding influence over our new and, above all, young intelligentsia.... It has helped those who, due to a slight blunder in the past, have been pushed to the sideline just because they have been lumped in with those who have seriously compromised themselves in the past, so their initiative can rightly be expected to grow considerably now".

Based on the decision of the CPS leadership, a list of those who had been demoted to manual work because of their cadre defects was to be sent to the CPS Regional Committees and to the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior to prevent the formers' reassignment to positions of responsibility in the lower branches of state and economic apparatus. Proposals by the 6th and 7th Departments of the CPS Central Committee that the CPS local-level organization committee should express an opinion on each hired employee and assess whether the appointee could be hired, and that whenever a new employee was hired, a representative of the CPS low-level organisation and the low-level TU committee be present, were rejected by the CPS Central Committee Bureau as wrong:

“The focus of party work is not to replace the responsibility of the leaders, but to do educational work in party or mass organizations when assessing the results of political and work activity... based on such knowledge, the party organization can then take a correct stance on further employees’ assignment to a more responsible position.”

According to the CPS Central Committee Bureau, the largest number of dismissed workers was at the Health Commissioner’s Office, where out of 243 employees, 200 retained their positions, 33 were demoted to lower positions, 6 were reassigned to production, and 4 were pensioned off.⁸³ A high proportion of those affected was also at the Education and Culture Commissioner’s Office, where out of 647 workers, 9 were demoted to manual work, 13 were sent to retirement, while as many as 161 were reassigned to lower branches of the state or economic apparatus, i.e. as a result of the screenings, a total of 28.2% of the workforce were affected.⁸⁴

According to the final report on the screening results, *“the most favourable state of affairs”* was at the State Audit Office, where no one was dismissed for political reasons; the situation was also good at the Slovak Planning Office and the Commissioner’s Office of the Interior. By contrast, extensive purges were taking place in the departments managed by the Agriculture and Food Industry Commissioner’s Offices. Shortcomings were also reported in the water management department, e.g. in the Water Development and Investment Centre in Bratislava, where out of 264 workers, a full fifth were ‘defective’ (34 workers had been active in the Hlinka People’s party, 12 in the Hlinka Guard Emergency Divisions, The Hlinka Guard and the Hlinka Youth; 6 in the Democratic Party; 1 in the German Party, i.e. 1/5 were ‘defective’).⁸⁵

The CPS leadership issued instructions on how to work with cadre documents in the individual departments of the CPS Central Committee.⁸⁶ According to the instructions, the cadre division in the Party Organs Department of the CPS Central Committee was charged with keeping central records of cadres from all sections of Party and public life. In line with the CPS Central Committee nomenklatura, all employees of the CPS Central Committee were obliged to register cadre files delivered to the CPS Central Committee at the Party Organs Department. Depending on the nature and importance of the position of the person in question, the document was either to remain at the department or was to be forwarded

83 Ibid.

84 BARNOVSKÝ, *Prvá vlna destalinizácie*, p. 118.

85 Ibid.

86 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, b. 2262, a.u. 469. Pokyny BÚV KSS o práci s kádrovým materiálom v jednotlivých oddeleniach ÚV KSS, undated.

to the individual divisions. If borrowed for inspection, the document did not need to be registered. The records of persons serving in offices falling within the cadre nomenklatura of the CPS Central Committee remained in the active file. Cadre files of those dismissed and transferred to other departments were to be archived in the technical department; documents in the active files were to be updated, supplemented with new information and performance evaluation. In any event, complete documentation on ‘cadres’ working in the CPS Central Committee nomenklatura, the CPS Central Committee Bureau and the CPS Central Committee Secretariat had to be permanently available and could not be loaned out to the organs of state or economic apparatus, nor to the lower-level CPS bodies.

Where the candidates who fell within the nomenklatura of the CPS lower-level bodies or mass organizations management were concerned, the commissioner, chairman or head of a central office asked for the subdivisions’ opinion. When candidates in the CPS regional committees nomenklatura were concerned, the CPS Central Committee department in charge merely requested and studied the document; the department in question only kept in its records a digest of the document. Candidates for lower-level positions in state bodies and mass organisations could only be screened by the authorized department of the CPS Central Committee; no other central party body could make decisions on their future career. The complete document remained in the CPS Central Committee records. Questionnaires and CVs on persons under scrutiny were supplied by cadre departments at commissioner’s offices and central offices; cadre reports were requested directly by the CPS Central Committee departments from the party organisations where the person in question had previously lived and worked. With non-party personnel, cadre documents were sent from state and economic bodies, from mass organisations management, as well as from the relevant CPS bodies in places of work or residence. Cadre documents of religious dignitaries were to be obtained by the CPS Central Committee through commissioner’s offices, national committees and National Front organs. The cadre material consisted of a questionnaire certified by the CPS low-level organisation in question and a photograph. It was composed of a biography, including information on the immediate family and spouse and their family, class origin, current employment, as well as previous and current political affiliation. Cadre documents were to be renewed once every three to five years.

The CPS leadership revisited the screening process in July 1958. It stated that the course of screening proved the rightfulness of decision of the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau of December 1957. It defined the main pillars of the regime – the so-called working-class cadres and intelligentsia coming from the working class and the working peasantry, i.e. people existentially dependent on

the communist regime. It denounced instances of 'liberalist attitude', declaring them to be 'a violation of Leninist principles of cadre work'.⁸⁷ Those affected, naturally, strove to mitigate the consequences of decisions of the screening commissions. As pointed out in the State Security report of mid-August 1958, they sought employment in communal enterprises, construction or agriculture, but not directly in manual jobs.⁸⁸

In discussing the screening results, the CPC leadership also attended to the institutional provision of cadre work.⁸⁹ It decided to reconsider the 1951 decision of the CPC Central Committee to decentralise cadre work by transferring it to the auxiliary apparatus of a minister or head of a bureau or enterprise. Until then, cadre departments had been fully responsible for the selection, deployment and training of cadres, after which they were also entrusted with personnel matters. Their role became more administrative than political. At the same time, however, they were authorised with cadre work. On 6 January 1959, the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau decided to enhance the responsibility of chief executives for the selection of personnel for important posts using political criteria. Accordingly, cadre registration departments were to be set up in ministries, central offices, enterprises and institutions, reporting directly to chief executives. Their task was to keep records of personnel files and to handle those to be loaned in keeping with the established guidelines. They were also tasked with keeping records of personnel files, which were to consist of an employee's detailed political biography, their personal questionnaire and Party testimonials. In addition, they were in charge of verifying the most relevant data on the employee, or clarifying ambiguities and other important facts based on the CV or other relevant findings (including, presumably, information from the Ministry of the Interior). The third main task of these units was to deal with cadre proposals and characteristics. In line with the decision of the CPC leadership, some of the duties of the former cadre departments to be dissolved were entrusted to personnel departments. Such were employee recruitment and dismissal or wage issues. Care for employees' professional growth was to be in the charge of factory committees of the Revolutionary TU Movement. Moreover, authorised chief executives were to bear responsibility for drawing up a plan, preparation and record-keeping of cadre reserves.

In such spirit, a corresponding resolution of the Czechoslovak Government No. 82 was drafted and approved on 23 January 1959. Cadre registers were

87 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 983, session BÚV KSS 2 July 1958. Resolution of the CPS CC Bureau on some issues of cadre policy in connection with the class and political reliability screenings of state and economic apparatus staff in Slovakia.

88 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 1014, session BÚV KSS 14 August 1959. Informative report on state security in Slovakia.

89 NA, f. KSČ-ÚV, 02/2, vol. 201, a.u. 201, item 8.

formed as departments and auxiliary units, accountable directly to the minister, or commissioner, head of office, head of association, enterprise or factory. They operated in every institution and organisational unit. However, in some offices, personnel, occupational safety, workers welfare, education, awards and bonuses also remained within their remit. Their work assignments included handling secret files and protecting the enterprise as well as labour and wage administration. The dissolution of cadre departments and divisions (with the exception of the defence, security, foreign affairs and foreign trade ministries and their subordinate units) was explained as follows: allegedly, senior executives *“did not pay enough attention to cadre issues, while especially in central bodies, the influence of Communist Party organisations was not salient enough; on the contrary, more emphasis was put on expertise”*.⁹⁰

‘Class and political reliability’ screenings were declared closed by Alexander Dubček, Head Secretary of the CPS Central Committee for the Bratislava region, at a meeting of party officials from central offices in early 1959. As his address showed, the CPS leadership was well aware that the screenings had met with a rather negative response. He repeatedly denounced the so-called systemization of state apparatus employees, thus reinforcing the sense of security of the so-called new intelligentsia: *“Spurious professional and systemization tendencies diverted attention from class and political aspects.”* At the same time, however, he urged CPSU officials not to enforce blanket purges or sweeping measures: *“It is ... wrong for criticism to mean that the comrade being criticized should be dismissed or reassigned to another position. On the contrary, timely criticism should prevent such a solution if the criticized derives the right lesson for his work.”* Nevertheless, the officials were to ensure that *“those dismissed in the course of political and class screenings do not re-enter the apparatus and that people like them are by no means recruited.”*⁹¹

Conclusion

In Slovakia, as in the Czech Republic, approximately 21 per cent of the central government offices staff and their subordinate organisations were affected by screening. The overwhelming forms of punishment were softer, such as reassignment to lower-level branches of state and economic apparatus. In ministries and central offices answerable to the CPS Central Committee, 6.7% of employees

90 SNA, f. Office of the Presidium of the Board of Commissioners – Board sessions, session of the Board of Commissioners 5 February 1959. Draft proposal for the implementation of Government Resolution No. 82 of 23 January 1959 on the dissolution of cadre departments and divisions in the State and economic administration and the creation of cadre registers.

91 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, b. 999, session BÚV KSS 23 January 1959. Report on the meeting of party officials from central offices, read by A. Dubček, Chief Secretary of the CPS Regional Committee in Bratislava.

lost their jobs for political reasons (through reassignment to manual work or forced retirement), while 4.5 per cent did so at institutions subordinate to the CPS Central Committee bodies. However, data from the documents of supreme CPC and CPS bodies are not reliable, as the screenings were conducted outside the institutions that had originally been targeted, and were also carried out in the regions without the adoption of relevant regulations. The actual number of victims is thus considerably higher, although impossible to pinpoint. Although the CPS leaders asserted that such course of action was wrong, they did not intervene or seek to regulate it at lower levels.

Although the sense of threat, amplified following the 1956 events in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, largely shaped the policy of the CPC leadership, conspiracy theories pertaining to the espionage scandals uncovered in 1956-56 played a relatively minor role in the implementation of the screening process. In Slovakia, however, the campaign against so-called Slovak bourgeois nationalism, which, especially with regard to the attacks on prominent state officials, was also conspiratorial in nature, played an important part in their very preparation. Reports on the so-called bourgeois nationalists drawn up by the State Security bodies from the autumn of 1956 onwards, with quantitative data for individual departments, indicate that similar measures had been prepared in Slovakia long before the final decision to conduct blanket screenings was made. Thus, the screenings in Slovakia also had an ethnic aspect. This constituted the most significant difference between their course in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic.

The screening initiators regarded the brief period of liberalisation of cadre policy in 1954-56 as a political error. In this context, the espionage scandals of 1956-1957 were hardly mentioned in the CPC and CPS internal documents. On the contrary, the latter frequently cite overly liberal approaches in the post-1954 period. Meanwhile, the review of this policy had already begun in the spring of 1956, while in the autumn of the same year, in the wake of the so-called Hungarian events, the preparation of personnel purges was gaining momentum, at least in Slovakia. We can thus surmise that one of the reasons behind the screenings was dissatisfaction of members of the 'new intelligentsia', formed after 1948 as a result of straight promotion of workers to managerial positions along with the policy of 'systemization', revoked in 1956. Their aim was to regain the positions in society they had won before 1954. Parochial distrust of former members of the broadly understood 'bourgeoisie', i.e. the pre-1948 middle classes and executive elites, or their descendants, which had persisted in the CPC since 1948, was combined with fears of a threat to its position of power in 1956, along with the real uneasiness on the part of a large proportion of the so-called new intelligentsia about the prospects of losing their former position

of power. Even before 1956, the CPC leaders were aware that the practice of forming elites before the introduction of ‘systemisation’ had exhausted its potential. Hence, during the screening procedure, qualification deficiencies were cited among the reasons behind dismissals from state institutions; alongside the political and class principle, whose key role in the formation of executive elites was confirmed during the 1958 screenings, the meritocratic principle was also taken into account. In contrast to the screening conducted immediately after 1948, the 1958 screening did not involve the mobilisation of members, activists or sympathisers of the CPC or the Czechoslovak Youth Union as an official youth organisation. The screenings focused on the activation of security forces, the party apparatus and cadre union workers. At the same time, they served as a means of pressurising managers in state institutions, as well as in the economic sphere, to toe the CPC party line in its cadre policy.

Yet, compared to the post-1948 or 1969–1970 screenings, their consequences were considerably milder. This was due to the general slackening of the grip of political repression after 1959, making managers less willing to pay heed of the screening findings, but also due to the power of social networks at lower levels, which allowed those affected to find employment at least partly matching their qualifications. Ultimately, the effects of screening findings were mitigated by political liberalisation in the post-1963 period.

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