

welfare. Their popularity was slipping, however, as postwar euphoria faded. Faced with the prospect of losing at the polls in the May 1948 elections, the Communists staged a political crisis in February of that year. The Communist Minister of Interior refused to comply with a cabinet decision regarding the reinstitution of noncommunist police commissioners. The twelve noncommunist ministers resigned, hoping to force immediate elections. Instead, after a visit from the Soviet ambassador, President Eduard Benes issued a mandate for one-party rule. Several noncommunist leaders fled the country or were arrested. A new constitution was adopted in May, and Klement Gottwald, long-time leader of the party, became president after Benes refused to sign the constitution.

Collectivization

In imitation of its Stalinist model in the Soviet Union, the Czechoslovak government's first five-year plan called for the nationalization of all economic endeavors, rapid expansion of heavy industry, and the socialization of agriculture. The methods employed to collectivize the land were ruthless. Joseph Hajda writes, "The guiding principle in liquidating the private-farm sector and replacing it by agricultural cooperatives and state farms was 'the end justifies the means'" (Hajda 133). By the end of 1952, almost one-third of all agricultural land had been collectivized (Lazarcik 12). The continued emphasis placed on heavy industry, however, resulted in the neglect of the agricultural sector, especially in terms of state investment in the state farms and collectives.

Collectivization was discontinued in 1953 following the deaths of Stalin and Gottwald in March, and the area held by collectives actually declined by almost one-fifth by 1955 (Lazarcik 12). In 1956, however,