

Land reform was attempted during the interwar period, but was only partially successful. By 1938, the share of land in farms of more than 100 hectares had decreased from 16 percent to 10 percent, while that in farms of 2-20 hectares had increased from 58.4 percent to 65.3 percent (Lazarcik 5). Insufficient capital remained a major problem for most farmers.

Postwar and the Communist Takeover

Damages sustained during World War II severely hurt the agricultural system in Czechoslovakia. Indeed, Joseph Hajda claims that "no meaningful comparison between prewar and postwar production trends can be made without accounting for the substantial reduction in productive capacity" (Hajda 131). In 1945, agricultural production was 56 percent of what it was before the war (Hajda 131).

Anti-German sentiment and gratitude to the Soviet Union for its role in defeating Hitler's army helped boost the membership of the the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia from its prewar number of 80,000 to over one million by 1945 (Ulc 101). In the first post-war government, the Communists were part of a ruling coalition that included the Social Democrats, the Socialists, and the Catholics in Bohemia and Moravia, and the Democrats in Slovakia. The popularity of the coalition was enhanced in the rural areas by a massive land transfer, headed by a Communist party member, in which the property of German and Hungarian nationals and other "enemies and traitors" was confiscated and transferred to small Czechoslovak farmers.

In May 1946, the Communists won 38 percent of the vote in freely held parliamentary elections and gained control of key ministries within the government: interior, information, agriculture, education, and social