Uncovering enemies in the regional leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 1950–1951

MARIÁN LÓŽI

Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes,
Prague, The Czech Republic
e-mail: marian.lozi@ustrcr.cz
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Abstract
The study examines the phenomenon of searching for internal party "enemies" at the regional level of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) in 1950–1951. It describes and compares the course of the campaign in four regional party organizations (Ústí nad Labem, Plzeň /Pilsen/, Olomouc, Prešov), in which it observes the actions of central, regional and district level actors. It monitors general trends and local specifics. It analyses which factors determined the course of the search for "enemies" in the leadership of the regions of the KSČ and its results.[1]

Keywords
Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (ÚV KSČ), Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KV KSČ), District Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (OV KSČ) search for the "inner enemy", "purgative" campaign, criticism, self-criticism, caution and vigilance, dictator

1 This study was created as a result of institutional research at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes.

When the Chief Secretary of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KV KSČ) in Brno Otto Šling on the night of 6 October 1950 left a public assembly at which he had been the main speaker, he was arrested by members of the State Security (StB).[2] A model official for many years became at the directions of the highest official places a "traitor and enemy".[3] With his fall, the search for "enemies" within the KSČ turned into a massive campaign,[4] which gradually affected even the highest-ranking party officials – in February 1951 Marie Švermová, the deputy of the party's secretary general, was publicly condemned, in December 1951 then the secretary general himself Rudolf Slánský. The campaign culminated in a notorious trial "with the leadership of an anti-state conspiracy centre led by Rudolf Slánský", conducted on 20 through 27 November 1952 before the senate of the State Court in Prague.[5] However, in its course, the campaign did not limit itself only to central actors, during the months immediately following Šling's arrest it was also carried out at the regional level, where so-called dictators, elite regional officials, were deposed. This was a major upheaval for the party hierarchical structure, as they have so far been one of the main pillars of power for the establishment of the Communist Party's dictatorship.[6]

According to Czech historiography, the "cleansing" campaign in regional organizations was caused by a wide range of factors. As in the central party bodies, the escalating international and domestic political situation played a role here. Throughout the Eastern bloc, the threat of conflict with the Western powers, led by the United States, resonated and the rift with Yugoslavia deepened. Within the KSČ, nationwide vetting inspections took place in 1948 and 1950, which were to mobilise the regular members and officials to "watchfulness and vigilance" and provide a wide range of antagonisms. Finally, it is not possible to ignore the Machiavellian tendency of the highest Czechoslovak and Soviet officials to strengthen their own

2 ŠLINGOVÁ, Marian: *Truth Will Prevail*. Merlin, London, pp. 49–51.

3 The whole case was elaborated in detail by the historian Václav Kaška. KAŠKA, Václav: *Neukáznění a neangažování. Disciplinace členů Komunistické strany Československa v letech 1948–1952* (Disorderly and Unengaged. Disciplining members of the KSČ in 1948–1952). ÚSTR, Praha 2014, pp. 159–178. On Šling's career, see further SLABOTINSKÝ, Radek: Otto Šling – pokus o politický portrét komunistického funkcionáře (Otto Šling – An attempt at a political portrait of a communist functionary). In: KÁRNÍK, Zdeněk – KOPEČEK, Michal: *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu*, č. 4 (Bolshevism, Communism and Radical Socialism in Czechoslovakia, Vol. 4). ÚSD AV ČR – Dokořán, Praha 2005, pp. 177–198; PERNES, Jiří: Mládež vede Brno – Otto Šling a jeho brněnská kariéra (1945–1950) (The Youth Lead Brno – Otto Šling and his career in Brno /1945–1950/). *Soudobé dějiny*, 2004, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 45–60.

4 Communist Party officials had been arrested since the spring of 1949. The Brno case of Otto Šling was preceded by the Karlovy Vary case with the Regional Security Secretary of the Communist Party Alex Tannenbaum in April 1949 and the Olomouc case with the Chief Regional Secretary of the Communist Party Josef Stavinoha in January 1950. However, their impact was incomparably smaller.

5 KAPLAN, Karel: *Report on the Murder of General Secretary*. Ohio State University Press, Columbus 1990; BARTON, Paul: *Prague à l'heure de Moscou. Analyse d'une démocratie populaire*. P. Horay, Paris 1954.

6 LÓŽI, Marián: A Case Study of Power Practices. The Czechoslovak Stalinist Elite at the Regional Level (1948–1951). In: BLAIVE, Muriel (ed.): *Perceptions of Society in Communist Europe. Regime Archives and Popular Opinion*. Bloomsbury, London – New York 2019, pp. 49–64.

influence and reinforce the power monopoly of the KSČ, or its dependence on the Soviet protector.[7]

Relatively little attention has been paid so far to the regional organizations themselves, as the course of the campaign was influenced by the conditions that prevailed in them in the autumn of 1950. This omission was reflected in the regional research, and in recent years several component studies have been published on the topic of "searching for enemies" in the regional leadership of the Stalinist KSČ.[8] However, a generalizing narrative is still lacking. The ambition of this study is to offer it.[9]

In my search for inspiration, I was greatly influenced by the work of scientists Thomas H. Rigby and Gerald M. Easter, dedicated to the provincial elite in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s. Rigby studied how this elite had constituted. He concluded that although the senior officials of the Bolshevik Party's provincial and district committees were originally delegated by Moscow headquarters to the Soviet periphery, they had to establish themselves in the region with almost no outside help, through personal authority and creating client networks.[10] Easter then focused on the conflict that the provincial elite had in the second half of the 1930s with the central structures, and in particular with Joseph Stalin, a conflict in which its own political capital was insufficient and was liquidated politically and physical-

7 I refer to the extensive publishing activity of the historian Karel Kaplan. In English, see KAPLAN, Karel: *Report on the Murder of General Secretary*. Ohio State University Press, Columbus 1990, and Idem: *The Communist Party in Power. A Profile of Party Politics in Czechoslovakia*. Westview Press, London – Boulder 1987.

8 HRADECKÝ, Tomáš: Hodnocení činnosti krajského tajemníka KSČ Mikuláše Landy pohledem regionálních politických složek z doby před procesem (Evaluation of the activities of the Regional Secretary of the KSČ Mikuláš Landa from the point of view of regional political units from the period before the trial). In: HRADECKÝ, Tomáš – HORÁK, Pavel (eds.): *České, slovenské a československé dějiny 20. století*, č. 8 (Czech, Slovak, and Czechoslovak History of 20th century, Vol. 8). Univerzita Hradec Králové – Oftis, Hradec Králové – Ústí nad Orlicí 2013, pp. 347–354; HEMZA, Tomáš: Ve jménu boje proti „diktátorům", „spiklencům" a „zrádcům" (In the name of the battle against "dictators", "conspirators" and "traitors"). *Soudobé dějiny*, 2017, Vol. 24, No. 1–2, pp. 127–163; KABEŠOVÁ, Monika: „Zbaveni škůdců, pevně semknuti kolem ÚV a s. Gottwalda, s vědomím síly strany rychleji vpřed k socialismu." Čistky v KV KSČ Pardubice v letech 1949–1951 ("Removal of pests, firmly set around the ÚV and comrade Gottwald, with the awareness of the strength of the party gong faster forward to socialism". Cleansings in the KV KSČ in Pardubice in 1949–1951). In: KABEŠOVÁ, Monika – BEKERA, Tomáš – PARCHANSKÁ, Pavlína a kol.: *České, slovenské a československé dějiny 20. století*, č. 14. Univerzita Hradec Králové – Gaudeamus, Hradec Králové 2020, pp. 89–106 and KABEŠOVÁ, Monika: Andrej Kaboš a Ervín Polák. Odvolaní vedoucí tajemníci KV KSS Bratislava v kontextu hledání „vnitřních zrádců" počátkem 50. let 20. století (Andrej Kaboš and Ervín Polák. Dismissed chief secretaries of the KV KSS Bratislava in the context of the search for "internal traitors" in the early 1950s). *Historický časopis*, 2021, Vol. 62, No. 4, pp. 317–344.

9 I approached the topic before, but with different set of questions – see LÓŽI, Marián: Hledání nepřátel uvnitř KSČ. Fóra, aktéři a konfliktní témata vnitrostranické komunikace v regionální perspektivě (podzim 1950 – jaro 1951) (The Search for Enemies within the Communist Party. Forums, actors and conflict issues of intra-party communication in a regional perspective /Autumn 1950 – Spring 1951/). *Securitas Imperii*, 2018, No. 32, pp. 222–249.

10 RIGBY, Thomas H.: Early Provincial cliques and the rise of Stalin. In: RIGBY, Thomas H.: *Political Elites in the USSR. Central leaders and local cadres from Lenin to Gorbachev*. Elgar, London – Aldershot 1990, pp. 43–72.

ly.[11] Of course, the conclusions of both scientists cannot be rigidly transferred to the KSČ in the early 1950s; a typical Soviet guberniya was larger than Czechoslovakia itself in its size, much less the regional party organisations. The conditions were completely different in many respects. Moreover, in the studies of Rigby and especially Easter, I somewhat lack an emphasis on relationships within the provincial leadership and downwards, on functionary and party ranks. They focus exclusively on the vertical relationship between headquarters and the province. Nevertheless, I find them stimulating because they do not see the regional elite only as executors of the centre's order, but also as a group with their own identity and – albeit, of course, a limited one – a position of power.

To process the results of my research, I decided to apply a broader comparative point of view.[12] I examined in detail the cases of the removal of the so-called dictators in four regional organizations – Ústí nad Labem, Plzeň, Olomouc and Prešov. I chose them because they were characterised by different courses and therefore allowed me to capture both the basic general tendencies and the degree of variability present. It is necessary to note that the KSČ was divided into 19 regional organizations in this period (13 in the Czech lands and 6 in Slovakia). Therefore, I do not attach any claim to universal validity to the findings, although I consider the sample to be sufficiently representative, and in the analytical part I also mention examples of other regions and offer several generalizing theses. It is also important to note that each region has in its own way a unique milieu.

After a brief content analysis of the resolution, which the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (ÚV KSČ) devoted to Šling's case, and who was one of the important initiators of the "cleansing" campaign in the regions, I prepared case studies for four selected regions in the presented text. I was interested in the actions of the central, regional and local party actors, their mutual relations and how these conditioned the specific outcome of the campaign in the given region. The archival sources here were the information messages sent by the headquarters and especially the protocols of the actual meetings of the regional bodies – the operational regional presidiums (Předsednictvo krajského výboru, PKV) and representative regional committees (Krajský výbor, KV). In a mediated way also the meetings of the lower district bodies, the district presidiums (Předsednictvo okresního výboru, POV) and district committees (Okresní výbor, OV) as well as other district and local meetings. Finally, I focused on analysing the deeper reasons the course and results of the purges differed.

11 EASTER, Gerald M.: *Reconstructing the State. Personal Networks and Elite Identity in the Soviet Russia*. Cambridge University Press, London – New York 2000.

12 In this direction, I was inspired by the work on the project *Převzetí, upevnění a proměny panství KSČ v českých zemích 1945–1956, regionální komparace* (Takeover, consolidation and transformation of the KSČ domination in the Czech lands 1945–1956, a regional comparison) – see BÍLÝ, Matěj – LÓŽI, Marián – ŠLOUF, Jakub: *Nervová vlákna diktatury. Regionální elity a komunikace uvnitř KSČ v letech 1945–1956* (Nerve fibres of the dictatorship. The regional elites and communication within the KSČ in 1945–1956). ÚSTR, Praha 2019.

The resolution of the centre on Šling as the trigger of the campaign

After the discussion of the case of the arrested Otto Šling at a meeting of the expanded KV KSČ in Brno on 10 and 11 November 1950, a resolution was sent out a week later on 17 November to the regional presidiums of the KSČ. It was entitled *About the discovery of a hostile agent in Brno and the elimination of the political consequences of his activities*.[13] They were to discuss the document thoroughly and acquaint the wider party ranks with it. Its significance was utterly essential – it was precisely this document that initiated the large "cleansing" campaign in the regional party organisations. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to its content and implications. In this resolution, Otto Šling, the former Chief Secretary of the Communist Party, was officially described as a "dictator". He was to have appointed his personal supporters to important posts, suppressed the role of elected party bodies, ruled despotically and ignored any criticism of his person.[14] It is important to note that the description provided reflected the critical voices of Šling's opponents directly in the Brno region.[15] The headquarters completely identified with them and protected them with its authority. From the very beginning, the whole campaign was motivated not only by pressure from above, but also by local actors.

Nevertheless, the Secretariat of the ÚV KSČ was not limited to the role of recipient and mediator of the Brno critics. It enriched the interpretation with a fundamental "revelation" that made Šling a spy working for the enemy camp: *Such facts were discovered, unknown to the party until then from the past of Otto Šling, which clearly revealed Šling as an enemy agent and pest.*[16] This fantastic accusation, carried entirely in the spirit of Stalinist ideology, had its rationality: it provided the central leadership with a suitable tool for exculpation. According to him, Šling's dictatorship did not stem from the failure of the narrowest power group or perhaps even systemic defects of the party mechanism, but from the malice of foreign intelligence, willing to use even the dirtiest intrigues. At the same time, Šling's condemnation became a touchstone of membership loyalty to the party. Anyone who showed insufficient zeal or tried to stop the detection of the pests could suddenly be identified as another agent and enemy. The eradication of the "traitors" had to be complete, without any compromises. The path to purification was seen in a thorough examination of all the officials of the region, which would rid the apparatus of *unreliable, hostile foreign elements* and elevate those *who proved*

13 *Národní archiv (The National Archives, hereinafter only NA)*, f. Organizační oddělení Marie Švermová 1945–1951 (hereinafter only 1261/2/5), sv. (Vol.) 54, a. j. (Archival Unit) 315, Pardubice – Kádrová práce (Pardubice – Personnel work), Materiál pro schůzi mimořádného předsednictva KV KSČ dne 28. 11. 1950 (Material for the meeting of the extraordinary presidium of the KV KSČ on 28. 11. 1950), p. 4.

14 Ibid., pp. 139–140.

15 KAŠKA, Václav: *Neukáznění a neangažování*, pp. 175–177.

16 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 54, a. j. 315, Pardubice – Kádrová práce, Materiál pro schůzi mimořádného předsednictva KV KSČ on 28. 11. 1950, p. 4.

particularly worthy by their wariness and vigilance. The party organization was to be permeated by a *truly Bolshevik form of criticism and self-criticism*.[17]

The procedure approved for the Brno region was to become a guide for all other regional organizations as well. This is evidenced by the call of Central Secretary Rudolf Slánský, which was attached to the resolution: *It is necessary to examine whether criticism is being suppressed in your region as well, how it responds to voices from below, to examine working methods in the activity of the party in your region and to mobilize all citizenship and officials to increase wariness and vigilance so that the detection of a hostile agent in Brno leads to even greater strengthening of our party.*[18] This written appeal by the headquarters was completely identical for all regions. It is all the more interesting to see the different ways it could have been adopted and practiced in regional organisations.

The nerveless unseating of Mikuláš Landa (Ústí nad Labem region)[19]

Mikuláš Landa held the most administratively important position of Chief Secretary in the Ústí nad Labem regional organization of the KSČ. At the time of the issuance of the resolution on Šling, he had worked here only briefly (he was appointed in June 1950) to replace Květoslav Innemann, who was transferred to the position of director of the Central Political School. Unlike him, Landa had no direct previous connection to the region. He was born in 1911 into a middle-class Jewish family in Budapest, served as a central official of the Communist Youth Union during the 1930s, and spent the war in the Czechoslovak foreign army in Great Britain. After 1945, he worked in the central party apparatus, mainly in the post of an instructor in the organizational department of the ÚV KSČ. The Otto Šling affair was personally unpleasant for him from the very beginning, as he had often met with the former Brno Secretary as an instructor.[20]

The regional presidium in Ústí nad Labem first came to discuss Šling's case at its meeting on 31 October 1950, before the resolution of the Central Secretariat was sent. The Chief Secretary of the KV KSČ Landa informed the other members about *the report from Comrade Slánský about the Chief Secretary in Brno*. He was very brief and emphasised *the need in personnel policy to fight consistently and openly for one's views* and the need to *defend internal party democracy.* His concise approach was summed up in a laconic summary: *We are not critical enough.*[21] The ensuing discussion did not develop much either. The members of the presidium, Jan Budil and Antonín Šťastný, mentioned Landa's potentially problematic relationship

17 Ibid., pp. 7–8.
18 Ibid., p. 3.
19 For comparison, see HRADECKÝ, Tomáš: *Hodnocení činnosti krajského tajemníka KSČ Mikuláše Landy pohledem regionálních politických složek z doby před procesem*, pp. 347–354.
20 Ibid., pp. 344–345.
21 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 42, a. j. 260, Ústí nad Labem – Předsednictvo (Ústí nad Labem – presidium)

with his subordinates in disguised allusions, but another member Rovný sharply cut them off, noting *that comrades who hated constructive criticism spoke of fear.*[22] Landa's position in the region seemed to be solid. This was also confirmed by a meeting of the presidium on 19 November, when the headquarters representative Jiří Hendrych attacked Otto Šling very sharply, but he assessed the party leadership in Ústí nad Labem positively.[23]

The situation changed fundamentally a week later, at a presidium meeting on 27 November. The protocol of the meeting do not seem to have survived, but there is a report from Central Instructor Josef Koliáš on 4 December, which, despite subjective tone, provides invaluable information: *Comrade Landa read the resolution on the case of Šling and made a self-criticism in which he tended to blame and criticize others*.[24] As the Chief Regional Secretary, who moreover had met regularly with Šling in his former post of instructor of the Brno region,[25] Landa sensed the fickleness of his position and chose an attacking tone. However, it did not help him. Other members of the presidium formed a united front against him and attacked him fiercely, some even *speaking openly about Landa* […] *as an enemy of the party.*[26]

The Chief Secretary understood that his situation was extremely serious and began a cautious retreat. He admitted a particular mistakes and the fact that he thoroughly mastered Šling's working methods: *He didn't see people, but he wanted the tasks to be accomplished at all costs*. However, his confession was not enough for the rest of the presidium: *Following Comrade Landa's self-criticism, the members of the presidium re-entered and* […] *either directly or indirectly said that they did not trust Comrade Landa and that they could not cooperate with him. All members of the presidium unanimously expressed their disbelief of Comrade Landa and approached the Secretariat of the ÚV KSČ about his dismissal from the position of Chief Secretary of the KV KSČ.* The headquarters complied with their request and recommended the former instructor of the Ústí nad Labem Region, Josef Tesla, for Landa's position, which was accepted by all votes at the meeting of the regional presidium.[27]

The darkest perspectives opened up before Mikuláš Landa himself. In February of the following year, he was arrested by the StB on his way back to Prague from a fictional and unrealized meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ in Ústí nad Labem,[28]

1950/5, Zápis ze schůze předsednictva KV KSČ z 31. 10. 1950 v Ústí nad Labem (Minutes of the meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ from 31. 10. 1950 in Ústí nad Labem), p. 1.

22 Ibid.

23 HRADECKÝ, Tomáš: *Hodnocení činnosti krajského tajemníka KSČ Mikuláše Landy pohledem regionálních politických složek z doby před procesem*, pp. 347–348.

24 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 41, a. j. 254, Ústí nad Labem – Kádrová práce (Ústí nad Labem – Personnel work), Zpráva z kraje Ústí nad Labem, psána 4. 12. 1950 Josefem Koliašem (Report from the Ústí nad Labem region, written on 4. 12. 1950 by Josef Koliaš), p. 2.

25 Ibid., Dopis Mikuláše Landy Bruno Köhlerovi (Letter of Mikuláš Landa to Bruno Köhler), 7. 7. 1950.

26 Ibid., Zpráva z kraje Ústí nad Labem, psána 4. 12. 1950 Josefem Koliašem, p. 2.

27 Ibid.

28 *Archiv Národního muzea* (ANM), f. Bedřich Hájek (434), k. (Box) 1, Moje vzpomínka na padesátá léta

brutally investigated and sentenced three years later to a 20-year prison sentence in a closed trial.[29]

The absolute harmony shown by the members of the regional presidium in the meeting with the Chief Secretary evokes the appearance of sincerely experienced hostility and resentment, but such a judgement would be misleading at the very least, because it would ignore the fundamental role played by the central instructor Josef Koliáš, the author of the above-mentioned report, in provoking opposition to Landa. He had been active in the Ústí Region since the beginning of October 1950[30], during which time he saw no significant resistance to Landa's person.[31] He himself did the same and supported the Chief Secretary at the meetings of the presidium several times.[32] However, this did not prevent him from provoking hostile sentiments against Landa at an opportune moment, through instructively guided conversations with individual members of the presidium. He asked about their relationship with the Chief Secretary and spoke about the tense situation at the party Secretariat. The chairman of the KV KSČ in Ústí nad Labem Václav Pokorný was surprised by the questions asked and considered Landa's behaviour to be correct. Instructor Koliáš found more understanding listeners in other members of the presidium Jan Budil, Miloslav Špatenko and Antonín Šťastný, *"who, at my urging, confided in me and complained badly about Comrade Landa"*[33] Significantly, it was these officials who subsequently became Landa's most active critics, not avoiding even the most acute attacks. They diligently performed the task assigned to them. However, they did not receive any appreciation for their deed. Koliáš himself described their performance as tense: *A number of the statements made by Comrade Budil and Comrade Šťastný were exaggerated.*[34] All the credit for the "unveiling" of Mikuláš Landa should have belonged to a higher instance. Personally, this applies to instructor Koliáš, who could present himself as a vigorous fighter against the local dictatorship. Jiří Hendrych, the delegate of the headquarters, also played an important role, commuting regularly to Ústí nad Labem at the time and gradually becoming very critical of Landa – among other things, during that

a jejich dozvuky, rukopis (My memory of the 1950s and their resonances, manuscript), 9. 7. 1968, p. 82.

29 ČTK: Proces s pomahači protistátního spikleneckého centra (Trial with the assistants of the anti-state conspiracy centre). *Rudé právo*, 30. 1. 1954, p. 2.

30 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 42, a. j. 260, Ústí nad Labem – Předsednictvo 1950/5, Zápis ze schůze předsednictva KV KSČ v Ústí nad Labem konané dne 2. 10. 1950 (Minutes of the meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ in Ústí nad Labem taking place on 2. 10. 1950), p. 6.

31 Ibid., sv. 41, a. j. 254, Ústí nad Labem – Kádrová práce, Zpráva z kraje Ústí nad Labem, psána 4. 12. 1950 Josefem Koliašem, p. 1.

32 For instance still in the evaluation of the vetting of the village organisation in Líšťany. *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 42, a. j. 260, Ústí nad Labem – Předsednictvo 1950/5, Zápis ze schůze předsednictva KV KSČ, konané dne 20. 11. 1950 v Ústí nad Labem (Minutes of the meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ in Ústí nad Labem taking place on 20. 11. 1950), pp. 2–8.

33 Ibid., sv. 41, a. j. 254, Ústí nad Labem – Kádrová práce, Zpráva z kraje Ústí nad Labem, psána 4. 12. 1950 Josefem Koliašem, p. 1.

34 Ibid., p. 3.

heated session on 27 November, he gave a closing speech in the discussion of the resolution on Šling[35] and at the meeting of the KV KSČ on 16 December he added a sharply denunciating introductory speech on Landa and his work in the region.[36] Through Koliáš and Hendrych, the then plan of the central actors was completely implemented. The dexterous intervention relieved them of responsibility for the previous policies while maintaining status of the party centre as the primary mover and monopoly holder of power. The basic principles of the party hierarchy have been complied with.

However, the local context cannot be ignored entirely. The motivation for ousting Landa, although not decisive, also existed directly in the region. This is evidenced by the already mentioned member of the presidium and the regional head of the party's organizational and instructor department, Jan Budil, who with his prickly outbursts not only fulfilled the wishes of the highest places, but also gave passage to purely personal antipathies. He was in a hostile relationship with Landa, which dated back at least to the party vetting in August 1950, because the Chief Secretary then in addition to words of praise included also sharp criticism. Inter alia, he reprimanded him that *he did not rely on co-workers and could not use the help provided by the party.*[37] This unflattering assessment did not go unanswered. Budil in the Regional Secretariat deliberately created an atmosphere of fear around Landa,[38] in order to make his position harder. When the opportunity arose, he struck at him with full force.

Even more markedly, opposition to Chief Secretary Landa was felt in the Communist Party's district organizations. For example, Bohumil Lipert, the Secretary in the Děčín district, described the results of his work in the darkest colours: […] *Landa's policy was introduced into the districts. The form of criticism was such that people did not want to work, they were afraid.*[39] The report on Landa's overthrow was therefore received very positively. Enthusiasm was even such that Tesla, the new regional Chief Secretary, feared the disintegration of the discipline: *There was a general relief in the region, but there was a second danger that many might go to the other extreme. There is no need to meet the deadlines, we must not insist*

35 Ibid., p. 2.

36 The historian Tomáš Hradecký attributes a fundamental share in Landa's appeal to Hendrych (and the former Chief Secretary of the KV KSČ Ústí nad Labem Květoslav Innemann). HRADECKÝ, Tomáš: *Hodnocení činnosti krajského tajemníka KSČ Mikuláše Landy pohledem regionálních politických složek z doby před procesem*, pp. 349–350.

37 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 41, a. j. 254, Ústí nad Labem – Kádrová práce, Zápis z mimořádné schůze předsednictva KV KSČ, konané dne 10. 8. 1950 (Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ, taking place on 10. 8. 1950), p. 1.

38 Ibid., Opis dopisu, který byl předán Marii Švermové Miroslavem Kárným (Copy of a letter which was handed to Marie Švermová by Miroslav Kárný), 16. 11. 1950, p. 1.

39 Ibid., Zpráva ze schůze krajských instruktorů a vedoucích tajemníků OV z 12. 12. 1950 (Report from the meeting of the regional instructors and chief secretaries of the OV from 12 December 1950), p. 2.

on compliance, because that would be a dictatorship.[40] Landa's fall thus satisfied not only the top management, but also local, more directly oriented actors.

Nevertheless, the interest of the headquarters was the key factor. Regional and district officials remained passive for a long time and only began to act when they were called upon to do so. The question arises as to why this was the case. The most inspiring clue provides an indication of how long Landa served as Chief Secretary of the region. He held the post for five months, from June to November 1950, which was a mere fraction of Šling's five-year leadership in the Brno Region. Previously, he had not held any post in the Ústí's party apparatus, he came from headquarters. It is therefore possible to express a hypothesis that in such a short period of time, his so-called dictatorial practices could not have manifested themselves sufficiently and could not have created too many enemies for him. At the same time, he did not manage to build his own position, which therefore stood on very unstable foundations. This is also confirmed by the fact that Landa did not have time to appoint any deputies, which he justified by the fact that *there were not so capable comrades in the regional apparatus who could be nominated for such important positions.*[41] The chairman of the KV KSČ in Ústí nad Labem Pokorný saw in the absence of a deputy a major problem for Landa's leadership and expected a remedy from one's establishment.[42] However, that did not happen. A group of loyal collaborators, which is an important support for every member of the regional Stalinist elite, was very poorly developed by Landa. Mikuláš Landa thus lacked more fundamental opponents and allies in the local framework. Therefore, the decisive role in the cleansing campaign could fall to the headquarters, which removed him from office in relative calm, only with a temporary and not very significant activation of local officials and organisations.

The irreconcilable fight against the "Lomský group" (Pilsen region) [43]

The Chief Secretary of the regional organisation of the KSČ in Pilsen was Hanuš Lomský. He became one in December 1948 after a series of reorganizations caused by an internal party conflict. At that time, the local leadership came under fire due to poor management of the region, and Lomský was sent by the headquarters to restore order in July. Prior to that, he had not held any position in the Pilsen regional apparatus. He was born in 1917 in Mariánské Lázně, just like Mikuláš Landa

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., Opis dopisu, který byl předán Marii Švermové Miroslavem Kárným, 16. 11. 1950, p. 2.
42 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 42, a. j. 260, Ústí nad Labem – Předsednictvo 1950/5, Zápis ze schůze předsednictva KV KSČ ze dne 31. 10. 1950 in Ústí nad Labem (Minutes of the meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ in Ústí nad Labem from 31. 10. 1950), p. 1.
43 For comparison, see ŠLOUF, Jakub: *Podvedená strana. Zrod masového komunistického hnutí na Plzeňsku, jeho disciplinace, centralizace a byrokratizace (1945–1948)* (Deceived party. The birth of the mass communist movement in the Pilsen region, its discipline, centralization and bureaucratization /1945–1948/). Západočeská univerzita v Plzni, Plzeň 2016, pp. 149–152.

into a Jewish family. He had been a member of the KSČ since 1937, during the occupation he lived in England, after the war he worked as a Secretary in the Secretariat of the ÚV KSČ.[44] He also had a close acquaintance with the arrested Brno Secretary Šling.

The Regional presidium in Pilsen received the resolution on Šling's case for discussion on 1 December 1950. The Chief Secretary of the KV KSČ Lomský opened the meeting with partial self-criticism, in which he pointed out a number of shortcomings in party work. He confirmed the occurrence of dictatorial methods, which were especially reflected in the suppression of any criticism of the Secretariat and the leading officials of the region. He asked the plenary a suggestive question, which he immediately answered himself: *Are we heloing criticism or killing it? We kill it by formally admitting mistakes, as well as our impatience with criticism or brushing it off*. He strongly condemned the personnel policy, for which he took personal responsibility. However, it is not without significance that he did not expect any "enemy" cadres in his own party apparatus. He consciously distinguished the situation in the Pilsen Region from the Brno conditions, where the alleged "enemies" within the Communist Party Secretariat were to pose the greatest danger. At the end of the appearance, Lomský moved to a personal level when he admitted a close working relationship with Šling and wanted to know whether this fact did not affect him in the performance of his duties.[45]

The other speakers also more or less continued in the direction set by the Chief Secretary Lomský. Although they did not avoid sharp criticism of the party bodies, mostly the regional secretariat, they primarily attacked their insufficient interest in institutions outside the communist party. For example, Josef Hora, a trade union official, explained the poor work of the unions by saying that the staff of the party secretariat did not take trade union officials seriously and never had time for them.[46] The outputs did not lack urgency, but they were within clearly defined boundaries. The degree of Lomský's guilt was assessed very benevolently. The authoritarian practices were not explained by his personal inclinations, but were to stem from the inadequacy of other senior officials. The overall wording of the plenary was moderate: some inappropriate procedures were called out, but the perpetrators were not identified and punished. The group of personalities standing at the head of the regional organization was to remain unchanged.

There was no change in this direction at the meeting of the KV KSČ on 16 and 17 December, but the downward pressure intensified. Hanuš Lomský found the culprits among district and local officials. Specifically, he attacked a member of the presidium of the OV KSČ Rokycany, *who had abused his post for 3 years* […]

44 Ibid., p. 145.

45 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 32, a. j. 217, Plzeň – Kádrová práce (Plzeň – Personnel work), Projednání brněnského případu v předsednictvu KV Plzeň (Discussion of the Brno case in the presidium of the KV KSČ Plzeň), 1. 12. 1950, pp. 1–2.

46 Ibid., p. 7.

interfered with the vetting of his wife, who had not attended meetings for a year […]. *He pursued a personal family policy.* According to Lomský, the share of the regional leadership was limited to passivity: *We were informed of all these things, but it was our fault that we did not manage to intervene.* He continued to present himself as a "fighter for the purity of the party" in the ongoing, "sharpening struggle!": *The class enemy will continue to try to send agents to our party or acquire its agents directly from party members. The more we grow, the harder* […] *the enemy's method will be.* […] *We must educate the whole party to greater revolutionary wariness and vigilance.*[47]

Lomský's interpretation was not in any way questioned during the meeting. In several articles, criticism was levelled at individual regional officials, but not at the regional party elite. At the end, the chairman of the KV KSČ Plzeň Karel Poláček could thus put the search for the enemy in the proper limits: *We have to make sure that, where work gets stuck, individuals who hinder work are exposed like Šling in Brno*.[48] The detection of "traitors" should not become more massive; in no case should the regional party leaders be endangered.

However, this assumption was refuted in the following weeks, as the party headquarters began an investigation with Hanuš Lomský due to his personal acquaintance with Šling and Švermová, working in the central organizational department and, of course, activity in Pilsen itself. Lomský was repeatedly summoned to Prague, and at the end of January 1951 he was investigated for two days by the head of the personnel department, Bruno Köhler, who *alerted him to serious mistakes in party work*.[49] It was undoubtable that the endangered Chief Secretary of the KV KSČ Plzeň was in a difficult position. He largely confessed the offense, even publicly. At the meeting of the Pilsen KV KSČ on 3 February, he embarked on a wide-ranging self-criticism, in which he reproached himself for many mistakes: *I have insufficiently understood the question of the class struggle, I have underestimated for us the Marx-Leninist teachings on the sharpening of the class struggle during the period of socialist building, and I have been deceived by great successes. I did not learn enough from the Soviet Union to fight the class enemy*. For these reasons, albeit unknowingly, he should have been involved in "traitorous" activities: *These mistakes have led me to play, albeit unknowingly, a role aimed at* […,] *allowing Šling or people under his influence to take power in the party, which would mean nothing less than re-establishing capitalism.* Finally, Lomský told the KV KSČ that he had asked the presidium of the ÚV KSČ to remove him from the position of Chief Secretary.[50]

47 *Státní oblastní archiv* (hereinafter only SOA) *v Plzni*, f. KV KSČ Plzeň, k. 27, Zápis ze zasedání krajského výboru strany v Plzni dne 16. 12. 1950 (Minutes from the meeting of the regional committee of the party in Pilsen on 16. 12. 1950), pp. 18, 20.

48 Ibid., p. 98.

49 *NA*, f. ÚV KSČ – Komise I. (Commission I), sv. 18, a. j. 346, Dopisy Hanuše a Marty Lomských (Letters of Hanuš and Marta Lomský), 26. 12. 1955, p. 1.

50 *SOA v Plzni*, f. KV KSČ Plzeň, k. 27, Zápis ze schůze KV KSČ (Minutes from the meeting of the KV KSČ), 3. 2. 1951, pp. 4–5.

The initial reaction of the participants in the meeting was very moderate towards Lomský. The remark was made by Hana Sojková, a member of the KV KSČ, who told the plenary *that many of the mistakes which* [comrade Lomský] *has spoken of here were made by every one of us*.[51] The discussants were so conciliatory towards Lomský that they upset the present representative of the headquarters, Jiří Hendrych. He said irritably: *Only a small debate developed here on the announcement of comrade Lomský*.[52] In Hendrych's judgement, the meeting of the KV KSČ in Pilsen was simply insufficient in assessing the alleged mistakes of the Chief Secretary.

Of the same, if not even more critical, opinion were also the functionaries of the party's district organizations, who until then had rather been on the defensive. At the convened committees, they bitterly complained about the situation in the region and demanded an extensive personnel cleansing. They pointed out *that there was a bad personnel policy, that there was a police regime.* […] *The criticism of the comrades at the OV KSČ calls for all Lomský's collaborators to be removed.*[53] The exasperation of the party members in the districts was also supported by the fact that Hanuš Lomský was arrested on 7 February at the behest of the headquarters. The StB arrested him when he left an interview with Köhler, right *in the door of the building of the ÚV KSČ*.[54] At the end of the month, at a meeting of the ÚV KSČ, Minister of Information Václav Kopecký spoke about him, along with Šling and Švermová, as one of the *insidious conspirators who had been detected and caught*[55] Lomský spent the next three years in pre-trial detention before being sentenced on 28 January 1954 at the same trial as Mikuláš Landa to fifteen years in prison.[56]

Another regional committee met on 1 March 1951 in Pilsen in an atmosphere aggravated by Lomský's arrest and an influx of criticism from district officials. General Secretary of the ÚV KSČ Rudolf Slánský himself delivered the introductory speech this time. He spoke minimally about the local context of the ongoing "detection of enemies in the party" and Lomský was mentioned only twice, but Slánský included him in the narrative of the so-called big conspiracy, which formed the axis of his interpretation. He told the plenary that *alliance was based on the kinship of political views, anti-party, anti-Soviet, anti-communist, and this also brought the whole faction closer.* Its alleged members were to abuse their positions in the party apparatus and manipulate other regional secretaries. In the end, they thought of

51 Ibid., p. 6.
52 Ibid., p. 10.
53 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 32, a. j. 217, Plzeň – Kádrová práce, Záznam z předsednictva KV KSČ Plzeň ze dne 9. 3. 1951 (Record from the presidium of the KV KSČ Plzeň from 9. 3. 1951), p. 1.
54 *NA*, f. ÚV KSČ – Komise I., sv. 18, a. j. 354, Záznamy o pohovoru s H. Lomským (Records from the conversation with H. Lomský), 22. 2. 1963, p. 2.
55 KOPECKÝ, Václav: Zpráva vyšetřující komise předsednictva Ústředního výboru k případu Otty Šlinga, Marie Švermové a druhých zločinných škůdců a spiklenců (Report of the investigating commission of the presidium of the Central Committee on the case of Otto Šling, Marie Švermová and other criminal saboteurs and conspirators). *Rudé právo*, 27. 2. 1951, p. 7.
56 ČTK: *Proces s pomahači protistátního spikleneckého centra*, p. 2.

convening a nationwide conference, at which, according to their plan, it would be possible to make a change in the party's leadership, and with it changes in government and the removal of the president of the republic. The KSČ had been saved only by the presence of mind of its highest representatives: *Today, the whole party owes the ÚV KSČ and, above all,* [president] *comrade* [Klement] *Gottwald for the fact that the conspiracy of treacherous pests had been defeated*.[57] It is obvious that Slánský conceived the whole affair as a matter of the highest importance, a true turning point in the history of the KSČ.

The local participants of the meeting on the other hand focused strictly on the regional context of the affair. In their contributions, they drew attention to various shortcomings on a regional, district and local scale, and looked for culprits. The functionaries of the OV KSČ also resorted to self-criticism, but it very often slipped into more or less veiled accusations upwards. The contribution of František Monhart, the Chief Secretary in the Pilsen 3 party organization, was symptomatic in this regard. He admitted that *the district had made mistakes*. He saw the main cause, however, in the disinterest and dictatorial practices of Hanuš Lomský: "*Despite the fact that Lomský lived almost next to the* [District] *Secretariat, he almost never came to take a look at the Secretariat.* […] *It was a hunt for results* […]. *It was Lomský, who forced us to make the results ever larger, since we are a border region"*. [58] The Chief Secretary of the OV KSČ Přeštice Jan Škácha spoke in a similar vein, according to whom erroneous instructions were enforced against the will of the district presidium, because *Lomský said so*.[59] The district party elite had thus relinquished the responsibility it had delegated to a higher authority.

As at previous district committee meetings, the criticism expressed was not limited to Lomský, but also indirectly included other regional officials. Roman Bek, a member of the KV KSČ, formulated their interconnection mildly: Many of Lomský's collaborators took over his working methods and separated from the party base. This isolation must be overcome. *We must remove the Great Wall of China in the KV* [KSČ]..[60] The instructor of the OV KSČ Stanislav Bálek spoke much more sharply: *When we look at the collaborators Lomský chose, we see that he relied on people to whom the working class was foreign who could not benefit the party. The content of his work and the content of the work of our agitation reflected this.*[61] The relationship between the regional and district elites has changed dramatically since December of the previous year.

The leading regional party leaders were completely taken aback by the rapid development of events. The confused speech of the chairman of the KV KSČ Plzeň,

57 *SOA v Plzni*, f. KV KSČ Plzeň, k. 27, Zápis krajského výboru konaného dne 1. 3. 1951 v Plzni (Minutes of the regional committee held on 1. 3. 1951 in Pilsen), p. 8.
58 Ibid., p. 62.
59 Ibid., p. 67.
60 Ibid., p. 19.
61 Ibid., p. 32.

Karel Poláček, at the meeting of the presidium on 9 March is illustrative in this respect: *We have caused chaos in our heads. There was a spy in our ranks, and we followed him. We did our policy so badly that we did not expose him. If there were no other circumstances, he would still be sitting here. Lomský was recalled not only because there were mistakes, but mainly because he did not tell the party what he knew about Šling. It is not yet clear why he was recalled. It has not yet been made clear in what way he hurt the party the most.*[62]

However, helplessness did not affect everyone. Miroslav Finek, Deputy Chief Secretary, temporarily entrusted with being in charge of the Regional Secretariat, took a very proactive approach at the meeting.[63] Although he was referred to in the region "as Lomský's striking fist",[64] he fully identified with the criticism of the regional leadership coming from the districts: […] *comrades on district committees are right to ask… We must admit that comrades are right*. And he immediately announced the dismissal of the first two most criticized employees of the party apparatus, Ivan Lewinger and Jarmila Krýslová: *Lewinger is removed from the party apparatus and goes into production, Krýslová is put on leave*. At the end of his speech, he recommended *that commissions be set up to investigate the work of the KV KSČ apparatus and all members of the presidium*.[65] Finek showed the same zeal the next day at a meeting of the KV KSČ, at which he advocated the consistent use of *criticism and self-criticism to eliminate the shortcomings and methods used by the people of Šling and Lomský. To introduce constant monitoring in the daily scrutiny of the work of each official and party member*.[66] The whole speech lasted almost three hours, and the Deputy Chief Secretary clearly presented himself as the main fighter against dictatorship and for the purge of the regional organization. A project initiated by him was submitted to the KV KSČ for the election of a four-member commission of inquiry to investigate the entire case.[67] The proposal was approved unanimously. Everything seemed to be going according to Finek's intentions.

However, the situation got out of hand very quickly. The established commission of inquiry showed surprising independence from its originator and came into direct contact with headquarters. On 4 April 1951, its members went to see General Secretary Slánský to inform him on the course of the investigation. The findings they reached were devastating for the highest officials of the Pilsen region. For

62 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 32, a. j. 217, Plzeň – Kádrová práce, Záznam z předsednictva KV KSČ Plzeň ze dne 9. 3. 1951 (Record from the presidium of the KV KSČ from 9. 3. 1951], p. 8.

63 *SOA v Plzni*, f. KV KSČ Plzeň, k. 27, Zápis ze schůze KV KSČ (Minutes from the meeting of the KV KSČ), 3. 2. 1951, pp. 11–12.

64 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 32, a. j. 217, Plzeň – Kádrová práce, Záznam pro členy sekretariátu ÚV (Minutes for the members of the Secretariat of the ÚV), 4. 4. 1951, p. 1.

65 Ibid., Záznam z předsednictva KV KSČ Plzeň ze dne 9. 3. 1951 (Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ in Plzeň form 9. 3. 1951), p. 1.

66 Ibid., Zpráva ze zasedání KV KSČ v Plzni dne 11. 3. 1951 (Minutes from the meeting of the KV KSČ in Plzeň form 11. 3. 1951), p. 2.

67 Ibid., p. 1.

example, the second Deputy Chief Secretary, Ladislav Čada, was accused of a collaborative past and incorrect activities: *During the occupation, he was commissioned to run a German photo company, married a German woman who claimed German nationality and had the whole family deported to West Germany as active fascists.*[68] […] *He had suspicious contacts with Lomský*. Above all, however, the commission included the serious accusations against Finek himself: *There is a mood against him in the region, he is strongly criticized at the district conferences that have taken place so far, they say that he was Lomský's striking fist*. In this way, the commission discredited four members of the presidium and one member of the KV KSČ.[69] The conclusions of the commission were clear – to recall them all immediately. Headquarters reacted most favourably: *Comrade Slánský recommended the members of the commission to continue in their work, examine all the members of the KV KSČ,* [and] *prepare proposals for new members of the presidium*.[70]

The position of the attacked against such an onslaught was unsustainable. At the meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ Plzeň 10 April 1951 they resorted to a desperate defence. Ladislav Čada protested and stressed that he remained *the son of the Pilsen working class* despite his mistakes.[71] Miroslav Finek was humbler. He explained his close relationship with Lomský by the fact that deposed Secretary once possessed a great amount of prestige: […] *he did not come here just like that. After all, as a member of the Central Secretariat, as a Regional Secretary, it was a personality and he was trusted. And how could some Finek have afforded to distrust a man who is far ahead of him politically…* However, he understood that because of this bond, and given past transgressions, his position was unsustainable, that *such a person could not stand in the party apparatus*. [72] The next day he was fired by the KV KSČ. And with him the rest of the once powerful "Lomský group".[73] A member of the investigative labour commission, the pre-war communist Marie Hergetová could legitimately take on a sovereign tone in her contribution: *The commission relied on what it received from the members below. I do not think it can be said that something in the Commission's report is not based on the truth and that something is not substantiated.* […] *It is clear from the questionnaires that many should not be*

68 Understandably, the level of actual guilt cannot be proved retroactively. Marriages between Czechs and Germans were common before 1938; the "families of active fascists" were not by far the only ones removed after the war. For me, it is proof of the period language and moods.

69 Besides Čada and Finek, they were also the planning referent of the Regional National Committee (Krajský národní výbor, KNV) Plzeň Josef Vostradovský, the chairman of the KNV Karel Frous and MP Jaroslava Krafková.

70 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 32, a. j. 217, Plzeň – Kádrová práce, Záznam pro členy sekretariátu ÚV (Record for the members of the Secretariat of the ÚV), 4. 4. 1951, pp. 1–3.

71 Ibid., Zpráva ze zasedání PKV a KV v Plzni konané ve dnech 20.–21. 4. 1951 (Report from the meeting of the presidium of the KV and KV in Pilsen held on 20.–21. 4. 1951), p. 1.

72 Ibid., Zápis z mimořádné schůze předsednictva KV KSČ v Plzni, konané dne 20. 4. 1951 (Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ, taking place on 10. 8. 1950), p. 7.

73 Ibid., Zpráva ze zasedání PKV a KV v Plzni konané ve dnech 20.–21. 4. 1951, p. 3. Other than the persons mentioned by the investigative commission on 4. 4. 1951, the deputy head of the cultural promotion section Břetislav Poncar was also recalled.

in their places.[74] This is how she spoke about the once most powerful representatives of the Communist Party in the Pilsen region.

The gradually formed "coalition" of the headquarters with dissatisfied lower officials in the region celebrated a full victory. It is obvious that the variable compared to the situation in Ústí nad Labem was the activity at the regional and district level. The lower ranks of officials used Šling's case to depose the unpopular regional Stalinist elite. At first glance, Hanuš Lomský's position seemed to be more stable than that of Mikuláš Landa – Lomský had been in Pilsen for a relatively long time and surrounded himself with a group of close collaborators, especially representatives Miroslav Finek and Ladislav Čada. However, over time, this group managed to antagonize more people at the same time. That is why the course of the campaign was so dynamic and as a result not only Lomský fell, which was certainly the intention of the headquarters, but with him the whole suite of his former supporters.

A defensive match for František Řezníček (Olomouc region)

The Chief Secretary of the KV KSČ in Olomouc was František Řezníček. He was appointed to the post on 11 January 1950 under the extraordinary circumstances of the so-called Olomouc case. His predecessor, a former foundry worker from Vítkovice and a long-time KSČ official Josef Stavinoha, was then recalled and arrested by members of the StB by a decision of the presidium of the ÚV KSČ.[75] As the new Chief Secretary, Řezníček consistently dealt with the consequences of the so-called Stavinoha-ism. He dismissed Stavinoha's collaborators from the Regional Secretariat on a large scale – for instance, on 10 February, 29 of them, including purely administrative workers, were "released" by a resolution of the presidium of the KV KSČ in Olomouc.[76] Řezníček thus introduced himself as a strong member of the regional Stalinist elite. Like Landa and Lomský, he had not worked in his new domain before. He was born on 11 May 1915 in Prague to Czech working-class parents, and for a long time he made a living as a modeler in the metal industry. In the 1930s, he was active in the Communist Youth Union and worked illegally during the war. After 1945, he rose rapidly in the party hierarchy, from district to highest regional office.[77] He did not know Otto Šling personally, but he was in contact with Mikuláš Landa, who came to visit him in Olomouc several times as an instructor and also attended meetings of the regional presidium.

74 *SOA v Plzni*, f. KV KSČ Plzeň, k. 27, Zápis krajského výboru, který se konal dne 21. 4. 1951 v Plzni (Record of the regional committee, which took place on 21. 4. 1951 in Pilsen), p. 42.

75 This was the first case of the "search for enemies in the party" after Karlovy Vary, initiated by the Central Commission of Party Control, using disputes in the regional leadership. BIEBERLE, Josef: K politickým procesům (Olomoucký případ 1949–1950) (On political trials /The Olomouc case, 1949–1950/). In: *Slezský sborník*, 1990, Vol. 88, No. 3, pp. 167–182.

76 Ibid., pp. 176–177.

77 *NA*, f. Oddělení stranických orgánů – krajské, městské a okresní konference KSČ, zasedání a plány práce KV KSČ a MV KSČ 1945–1960 (Department of Party Bodies – Regional, Municipal and District

It is not surprising that Řezníček first took a very proactive approach in the campaign against so-called Šling-ism. At the meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ in Olomouc on 27 November 1950 he spoke extensively about the lessons learned from the Brno case, which he divided into nine points for clarity, ranging from the need not to create too close staff ties in the regional presidium to the threat of so-called bad people in positions of responsibility.[78] At no point, according to Řezníček, was the situation in Olomouc comparable to the situation in Brno, however, there were many partial shortcomings that he said needed to be rectified. He considered it essential to be open to criticism: *We must listen carefully to every comment, investigate every important message*.[79] He assessed the current situation as insufficient in this respect. Řezníček's approach was rather modest; he lacked a tendency to expressive statements and a leader's self-presentation. He saw the solution in a gradual correction rather than vigorous interventions. However, he did not fail to appeal to the need for criticism, especially from below.

If Řezníček did not place his person in the spotlight, other participants of the meeting did so for him. Deputy Chief Secretary Vlastimil Bělohlávek considered it necessary to point out in particular that Řezníček, unlike Otto Šling, could not be accused of dictatorial conduct: *There is also talk here of dictatorship. I do not think it is possible to say that a single official in the Regional Secretariat had manifested such a behaviour, let alone in the slightest case Comrade Řezníček*.[80] The delegate of the headquarters Vladimír Štička then directly appreciated the way in which the Chief Secretary managed the regional organisation: *I would like to tell you that you have one advantage in the Olomouc region namely that Comrade Řezníček has always had things handled from the party's point of view, as the party should react to these things*.[81] The entire discussion took place in a similar vein; the Brno case did not seem to endanger Řezníček in any way. This was also reflected in the adopted resolution, which summarized the consequences of the case for the Olomouc region: it paid the main attention to the district organizations of the Communist Party, touched briefly on the work of the Regional Secretariat, and completely kept silent about any mistakes made by the Chief Secretary.[82]

Řezníček's reputation in Olomouc remained spotless for a surprisingly long time, even though more and more potentially dangerous signals came from the headquarters and some regions. Already on 4 December, Řezníček informed the presid-

Conference of the KSČ, meetings and work plans of the KV KSČ and MV KSČ 1945–1960) (hereinafter only 1261/2/33), a. j. 840, VI. krajská konference v Olomouci ve dnech 22. a 23. 4. 1950 (VI. regional conference in Olomouc on 22. and 23. 4. 1950), p. 294.

78 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 67, a. j. 376, Olomouc – Předsednictvo (Olomouc – Presidium) 1950/5), Zápis ze schůze předsednictva KV KSČ, která se konala dne 27. 11. 1950 v Olomouci (Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ, which took place on 27. 11. 1950 in Olomouc), pp. 13–16.

79 Ibid., p. 17.

80 Ibid., pp. 18–19.

81 Ibid., p. 20.

82 Ibid., p. 21.

ium of the recall of the Chief Secretary of the KV KSČ in Ústí nad Labem Mikuláš Landa.[83] The two were not only united by holding the same position, but Landa, as a central instructor, helped Řezníček to establish himself in Olomouc.[84] From the amount of partial information and indications, it can be concluded that there was a confidential relationship between them.[85] An instructor from the headquarters, Václav Sova, then spoke very sinisterly at the meeting of the KV KSČ on 22 December. Řezníček evaluated his contribution as follows: […] *I do not, however, know why comrade Sova, instructor of the KV KSČ* (correctly ÚV KSČ – author's note)*, appeared and said in the discussion that it went to little depth in the Brno case, and his discussion showed that he would like to uncover a new case in the party at all costs*.[86] Finally, the most fundamental omen of future changes was the meeting of the regional presidium on 1 February 1951, during which members were informed by statements from the ÚV KSČ about the allegations against the party's deputy General Secretary Maria Švermová and the removal of Řezníček's Deputy Bělohlávek. Švermová had so far been criticized relatively moderately, and Bělohlávek was apparently recalled only because of his alleged collaborative activity during the war, however, Řezníček thus lost two of his supports.[87] Without the patronage of Švermová, he would hardly have achieved the post of secretary, while Bělohávek was his right-hand man in the Regional Secretariat. All three were bound by close staff ties, which must have been extremely uncomfortable for Řezníček. Personally, however, he has not yet faced any attacks from headquarters.

That changed in the second half of February. František Řezníček was summoned to Prague for an interview with the head of the central personnel department Bruno Köhler. The meeting gradually took on the form of an interrogation, especially when two members of the ÚV KSČ, Minister of Information Václav Kopecký and Deputy Secretary General Gustav Bareš joined it. Řezníček described the event at the meeting of the KV KSČ in Olomouc on 1 March as follows: *They talked to me for a full 6 hours and I think I explained some things to them and that helped. One moment Comrade Bareš and Comrade Kopecký came into the room and they treated*

83 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 67, a. j. 376, Olomouc – Předsednictvo (Olomouc – presidium) 1950/5, Zápis o schůzi předsednictva KV KSČ, která se konala dne 4. 12. 1950 v Olomouci (Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ, which took place on 4. 12. 1950 in Olomouc), p. 22.

84 Landa attended the meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ Olomouc in January 1950, when Řezníček was appointed to the post of Chief Secretary.

85 For instance, they lived together for a week in a hotel in Olomouc. *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 67, a. j. 377, Olomouc – Předsednictvo 1951/1, Zápis ze schůze předsednictva KV KSČ, která se konala 26. 2. 1951 v Olomouci (Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ, which took place on 26. 2. 1951 in Olomouc), p. 11.

86 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 67, a. j. 376, Olomouc – Předsednictvo 1950/5, Zápis o mimořádné schůzi předsednictva KV KSČ, která se konala dne pátek, 29. 12. 1950 v Olomouci (Minutes from the extraordinary meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ, which took place on Friday, 29. 12. 1950 in Olomouc), p. 20.

87 Ibid., a. j. 377, Olomouc – Předsednictvo 1951/1, Zápis o mimořádné schůzi předsednictva KV KSČ, která se konala ve čtvrtek dne 1. 2. 1951 v Olomouci (Minutes from the extraordinary meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ, which took place on Thursday, 1. 2. 1951 in Olomouc), pp. 2–4.

me differently, as in the disciplinary proceedings.[88] Řezníček had avoided the fate of Lomský, who was arrested immediately after leaving Köhler, but was still in a very bad position. The course of the interview did not bode well for him.

It was under these circumstance on 1 March 1951 in Olomouc that the meeting of the KV KSČ took place, which was attended by the minister of national defence and son-in-law of the president of the republic Klement Gottwald himself, Alexej Čepička, famous for his confrontational approach. It is possible to adopt only with assuagement Řezníček's assessment that the minister "came there to dispatch" him.[89] Čepička attacked immediately in the initial speech, if in a veiled way. He seemingly only described Šling's activity: *Šling placed great emphasis on gradually dominating all of the regions. Šling managed to put his people in the leading positions in most of the regions.* […] *For five years, something has been created that cannot be cured by one meeting of the party's bodies. Here, it is necessary to look carefully and responsibly at the activities of those who are responsible for the activities of the party, and if it is found to be a bad thing, to relentlessly go against it. This must be underlined in time in the Olomouc region as well. I do not think that things have been resolved to date*.[90] The implications for Řezníček were clear. The next step seems all too obvious – to state his guilt directly. Řezníček understood the delicacy of his position well and did not hesitate to address it himself: *I think the ÚV KSČ, the KV KSČ and the whole* [communist] *party and mainly the regional organisation of the party in Olomouc can rightly ask me – well and what about you? Which group of regional officials did you belong to? How guilty do you feel?* However, he refused to admit a fundamental mistake and presented himself as a staunch communist without fear and shame: *From the age of sixteen, I have not betrayed the party and the working class, the Soviet Union and Comrade Stalin, proletarian internationalism, the party leadership and Comrade Gottwald for a moment not even in thought*.[91] An open conflict ensued between the minister and the Chief Secretary. Čepička accused Řezníčka of *not saying everything honestly and that he had left a back door for himself*.[92] He now openly pointed out his affiliation with the alleged traitors: *Comrade Řezníček was in touch with Švermová, he also visited her in a flat in Prague*.[93] And the victim defended himself strongly: *However, I cannot feel anything that I would have done against the party and the republic. Švermová was*

88 *Zemský archiv v Opavě, pobočka Olomouc* (Provincial Archive in Opava, Olomouc branch), f. KV KSČ Olomouc, inv. č. (Inventory Number) 16, Zasedání pléna 1. 3. 1951 (Meeting of the Plenary on 1. 3. 1951), p. 52.

89 The evaluation comes from František Řezníček himself. *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 68, a. j. 378, Olomouc – Předsednictvo 1951/2, Zápis ze schůze předsednictva KV KSČ, která se konala 5. 3. 1951 v Olomouci (Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ which took place on 5. 3. 1951 in Olomouc), p. 23.

90 *Zemský archiv v Opavě, pobočka Olomouc*, f. KV KSČ Olomouc, k. 9, inv. č. 16, Zasedání pléna 1. 3. 1951, p. 12.

91 Ibid., p. 31.

92 Ibid., p. 61.

93 Ibid., p. 66.

the deputy of Comrade Slánský. I obeyed her orders; she did not give me any personal orders.[94] The tense personal skirmish defined the course of the entire meeting.

Behind Čepička stood the headquarter's power authority and the thickening atmosphere of the "hunt for hidden enemies"; Řezníček was covered with allegations and was on the defensive. Members of the KV KSČ and other participants would have been able to join the attack with impunity, thus proving loyalty to the headquarters. Instead, most of those involved in the clash stood in support of Řezníček. The pre-war communist Herma Barfusová saw in him the best human qualities: *I have known Comrade Řezníček from the time when I was in the central political school. I can say that he seemed to me there as one of the few people who were very thorough and honest and tried to acquire as much knowledge as possible and then pass on their experience to the rest. Then I greatly appreciated his honesty*.[95] The chairman of the company organisation in the factory for machinists' tools Mikeška testified to Řezníček's popularity with ordinary labourers: *As far as Comrade Řezníček is concerned, he gives me the impression of an honest fighter for a better tomorrow for labourers. It is the opinion of all comrades who meet him. Our comrades also asked me, on their behalf, to tell Comrade Řezníček to come to us, that they would like to see him again*.[96] Babica, a former member of the workers' scrutiny commission, summed up the prevailing sentiment about the Chief Secretary: *We believed him and still do*.[97] Čepička's escalating attacks on Řezníček and his supporters only strengthened this defensive reaction, and in the end it was not Řezníček, but the headquarters, who came under the criticism. Antonín Plíska, a member of the KV KSČ, went the furthest to ask a suggestive rhetorical question: *All the blame here is falling on Comrade Řezníček. However, the question is whether there were no more competent people in the Central Office who were supposed to look at what Švermová was doing*.[98] Due to the prevailing atmosphere, Čepička decided to temporarily postpone the whole matter: *I recommend that you wait until the ÚV KSČ deals with this*.[99] Řezníček maintained his position in Olomouc for the time being and seemingly even went on the offensive. At a meeting of the presidium on 5 March 1951 he criticised Čepička for his indiscriminate behavior towards members of the KV KSČ: *I think that Comrade Čepička did not have the right to interrogate in this way*.[100] In retrospect, he appreciated the help he had received at the meeting, and at the same time acted as an advocate of internal party democracy. Undoubtedly, he did not miss how important the support from the region was

94 Ibid., p. 65.
95 Ibid., p. 40.
96 Ibid., p. 49.
97 Ibid., p. 57.
98 Ibid., p. 67.
99 Ibid., p. 71.
100 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 68, a. j. 378, Olomouc – Předsednictvo 1951/2, Zápis ze schůze předsednictva KV KSČ, která se konala 5. 3. 1951 v Olomouci (Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ which took place on 5. 3. 1951 in Olomouc), p. 23.

for him to survive the fight with the Minister of National Defence and Gottwald's son-in-law.

However, he overestimated his prospects. He went to Prague to the secretariat of the ÚV KSČ for an interview with the General Secretary of the ÚV KSČ Rudolf Slánský. He described his motivation briefly: *I wanted to go there and complain about Comrade Čepička*. Instead, he came under criticism himself. He was reprimanded by top party officials and Řezníček succumbed to this concentrated onslaught, accepting all the accusations made: *I then spoke to Comrade Slánský, Köhler and Comrade Bareš.* […] *I recognised* […,] *that I had made some serious errors, that I had led the entire KV of the party astray*.[101] In the following days, he embarked on more and more self-criticism. At a meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ in Olomouc on 19 March 1951, he assessed himself in this way: *It is clear to me that I am that comrade from the province who was short-sighted, politically blind, that I was a sober instrument, forgiving, that I saw a god in Švermová, that I was a hypocrite*.[102] He condemned himself even more sharply at a meeting of the KV KSČ on 23 March: *Now I see that I was no workers' leader, that I was not even a proper communist*.[103] It was not just about playing a learned role, Řezníček was probably going through a painful personal crisis.

The whole session, with regard to Řezníček's self-blame, took place fundamentally differently from the KV KSČ meeting on 1 March. This time, almost all participants unequivocally stood up for envoy of the ÚV KSČ Gustav Bareš, attacked Řezníček indiscriminately in their speeches and assessed his self-criticism as insincere and insufficient. They probably felt what was expected of them in Prague with a delay; also important to them was the fact that Řezníček himself accepted the role of the culprit, thereby making the accusations against him ring true and losing any credibility in the eyes of many of his previous supporters. Bareš could be satisfied in his closing speech: *As for Comrade Řezníček's statement, I think most of the comrades reacted correctly*.[104] The headquarters could celebrate another important success, albeit belatedly.

However, isolated voices of resistance rose against the approved interpretation. The alternate member of the KV KSČ Marie Skřičilová spoke very strongly: *One thing amazes me in the criticism of Comrade Řezníček* [by the others]*: we sat her three weeks ago and the comrades who today spoke of and knew of these shortcomings did not draw attention to them earlier. I cannot understand it.* […] *It is necessary to knock on everyone's hearts, how responsibly did we help Comrade Řezníček*

101 Ibid., Zápis ze schůze předsednictva KV KSČ, která se konala 19. 3. 1951 v Olomouci (Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the KV KSČ which took place on 19. 3. 1951 in Olomouc), p. 2.
102 Ibid., p. 3.
103 *Zemský archiv v Opavě, pobočka Olomouc*, f. KV KSČ Olomouc, k. 9, inv. č. 16, Zasedání pléna (Meeting of the Plenary), 23. 3. 1951, p. 13.
104 Ibid., p. 62.

by criticism? We suffered from the very shortcoming he suffered from.[105] And another member Václav Hanečka directly appreciated the person of Řezníček: *When I have to judge Comrade Řezníček as I know him and how comrades look at him at our plant in Lutín in Sigma, I cannot understand that it can be said here that he did not have a good relationship with the people, I think that the officials did it themselves. He has been to our company many times and there he never showed himself in such a way that he did not want to be criticized, he rejected criticism, etc. On the contrary, he explained and convinced*.[106] Neither the direct criticism from above nor the general atmosphere of the meeting forced all participants to stop defending "their" Chief Secretary.

However, the next step was obvious. Řezníček was recalled from his post as Chief Secretary and member of the KV KSČ right at the meeting "unanimously"; Václav Uhlíř chosen by the Secretariat of the ÚV KSČ, took his place for the time being until the holding of the regional conference.[107] Finally, new KV KSČ elected by a conference decided during its first meeting on 8 June 1951 that it would expel Řezníček from the KSČ *as a traitor to the party and people's democratic establishment*.[108] At first glance, this is a typical outcome. However, it is important to mention that Řezníček, unlike Landa in Ústí nad Labem and Lomský in Pilsen, was never prosecuted. And his two representatives, Ladislav Bernát and František Řeháček, were able to hold office without penalty until the June conference.[109] Thus, no so-called Řezníček group was constructed, which stands out especially in contrast to the brutal punishments of the alleged associates of Hanuš Lomský. It can be stated that the reason for the relatively mild course of the campaign was the reluctance of regional party actors to participate more significantly in the disparagement of the Chief Secretary, and on the contrary the willingness to stand up in his defence against the intentions of the headquarters. How can this behaviour be explained?

After taking office, František Řezníček got rid of the real and alleged supporters of his predecessor Josef Stavinoha and replaced them with people who then owed him their functions. This is especially true for the group of Řezníček's closest collaborators, who may have felt a degree of personal loyalty to him. Such a form of loyalty, of course, had its limits, as evidenced by Miroslav Finek's behaviour in Pilsen, and in the time of the "search for the internal enemy" could often be an aggravating circumstance, which shows the fall of a whole group of officials around Hanuš Lomský. It is clear that Řezníček's support was set on a wider base. This was also stated retroactively by the chairman of the KV KSČ Olomouc Augustin Šlezar, although he of course perceived the mentioned support as a result of

105 Ibid., p. 30.
106 Ibid., p. 44.
107 Ibid., p. 61.
108 *Zemský archiv v Opavě, pobočka Olomouc*, f. KV KSČ Olomouc, k. 10, inv. č. 17, Zasedání pléna (Meeting of the Plenary), 9. 6. 1951, pp. 29–30.
109 Ibid., p. 30.

Řezníček's manipulation: *He deceived the entire KV KSČ and tried to make it a wall for his plans, a wall that would stand behind him and that would protect him, that would stand against the ÚV KSČ, against his Gottwaldian leadership.*[110] Řezníček could "deceive" the KV KSČ because he enjoyed a certain popularity among its members for his friendly demeanour and constructive approach to problems. Mentions of Řezníček's popularity in the companies cannot be ignored, for the very reason when and in what context they were made. At the regional level, there had long been no nominal criticism of him. After Řezníček's fall, three local organisations of the KSČ in Náměšť na Hané on 27 March 1951 requested the punishment of him and his closest collaborators, but this was caused by a long-term personal dispute and it was a singular phenomenon.[111] It makes no sense to embark on counterfactual considerations about the extremes that the KV KSČ in Olomouc could reach under Řezníček's leadership. After all, Řezníček stepped back as soon as he found out that Čepička's attack was not an accidental manifestation, but the result of the headquarters' deliberations. However, his "affair" shows how a complicated web of relations could have existed both amongst regional officials and in their relationship to central actors.

The timed overthrow of Arnošt Pšenička (Prešov region)

The Chief Secretary of the KV of the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) in Prešov was Ján Šiška, however, the chairman of the regional organisation Arnošt Pšenička claimed a decisive position for a long time. He authoritatively chaired the presidium's meetings and took the floor at them. Unlike Landa, Lomský and Řezníček, Pšenička was bound by a lifelong connection to his region. He was born on 8 June 1916 in a Slovak family in Bardejov, he worked in construction – his original profession was a construction assistant. In 1945 he became the chief functionary of the District National Committee (Okresní národní výbor, ONV) in Prešov, a year later he was elected territorial chairman of the KSS. After the establishment of the regions in 1949, he took the position of regional chairman.[112] Pšenička did not maintain any confidential contacts with the Brno Secretary Šling, they knew each other at most by sight.

The presidium of the Prešov Region first discussed the resolution on the affair of Otto Šling on 22 November 1950. The preserved protocol of the meeting is laconic.

110 Ibid., p. 28.

111 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 64, a. j. 358, Olomouc – Kádrová práce (Olomouc – Personnel work), Dopis místních organisací KSČ I, II, III Náměšť Rudolfu Slánskému (Letter from local KSČ organisations I, II, and III in Náměšť to Rudolf Slánský), 29. 3. 1951. On the dispute at the square Náměstí na Hané briefly see BÍLÝ, Matěj – LÓŽI, Marián – ŠLOUF, Jakub: *Nervová vlákna diktatury*, pp. 163–164.

112 *Archiv bezpečnostních složek* (hereinafter only ABS), f. Inspekce ministra vnitra ČSSR, I. díl (Inspection of the Minister of the Interior, Part I) (hereinafter only A 8/1), inv. j. (Inventory Unit) 412 Arnošt Pšenička, Protokol o výpovědi odsouzeného, v Jáchymově dne 27. 11. 1956 (Arnošt Pšenička, Protocol on the answers of the sentenced, in Jáchymov on 27. 11. 1956), pp. 1, 6.

It only records that the resolution was read and that *all the members of the presidium discussed* it. However, this was not the only debate. The Chief Secretary of the KV KSS Prešov, Ján Šiška, proposed to convene another extraordinary meeting due to the case, at which the participants would *discuss* all the important issues *in detail*.[113] The extraordinary meeting took place on 11 December and was thoroughly recorded.

The members of the presidium immediately related the case of the Brno region to the local context. The mutual similarity was most accented by the chairman of the KNV in Prešov Ludovít Medveď: *According to the resolution, it seems that this did not happen in Brno, but in Prešov*.[114] This relationship was reflected in some points of criticism. For example, MP Ivan Prokipčák bitterly complained about dictatorial practices: *When we came to the meeting, we got really scolded, we were beaten on our backs and so we went home. We felt a kind of dictatorship here*.[115] Other allegations were specific to the Prešov Region or Slovakia. The member of the presidium Štefan Štenko pointed out that party members were too often swayed by nationalism and did not behave like real communists.[116] The most comprehensive list of shortcomings was provided by Chief Secretary Šiška in the call for their correction: *I think that it will be necessary to take a clear position on the methods of work, the violation of personnel policy, personal popularity and other things that have been done in the KV KSČ in our region. They have almost complete identity with the case of O. Šling, so it is necessary to go critically to things from the past and in the current work.*[117]

It is obvious that someone had to be held responsible for these mistakes. The member of the presidium Blaža Lančaričová conceived broadly, *that the work of the presidium of the KV KSČ was insufficient, it is shown on our districts ...* [...]. *I have the opportunity to look at the basic organisations and we see that distrust of individual OV KSS officials in the region is large.* […] *I was also in some villages. If you heard those voices from below, one's heart hurts that those cases had not yet been resolved*.[118] The others, however, saw the culprit primarily in one person: chairman of the KV KSS in Prešov Arnošt Pšenička. Literally, an outpouring of reproaches and accusations fell on his head. The head of the regional agricultural department, Michal Špak, portrayed him as a dictator: *I myself was sometimes afraid to come to*

113 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 88, a. j. 478, Prešov – Předsednictvo (Prešov – presidium) 1950/5, Zápisnica napísaná na 28. zasadnutí predsedníctva krajského výboru KSS, ktorá sa konala dňa 22. 11. 1950 v Prešove (Minutes written down at the 28th meeting of the presidium of the regional committee of the KSS, which took place on 22. 11. 1950 in Prešov), p. 15.

114 Ibid., Zápisnica napísaná na mimoriadnom zasadnutí predsedníctva krajského výboru KSS v Prešove, ktorá sa konala dňa 11. 12. 1950 (Minutes written down at the extraordinary meeting of the presidium of the regional committee of the KSS in Prešov, which took place on 11. 12. 1950), p. 4.

115 Ibid., p. 2.

116 Ibid., pp. 1–2.

117 Ibid., p. 1.

118 Ibid., p. 7.

Comrade Pšenička's office. The reports were not adopted at the presidium, we did not know what to do next. There was no principle of criticism and self-criticism. The criticism was only on the part of Comrade Pšenička.[119] The member of the presidium Július Haluška explained it using an example how authoritarily Pšenička organized signing events: *Comrade Pšenička came to us, mobilized everything and said: You will not come from the villages until you bring so many and so many signatures. The signatures were made so that one was signed by the left and the other by the right hand. It only depended on the quantity, not the content*.[120] Josef Rychvalský, chairman of the ONV in Bardejov, attacked Pšenička for promoting family members: *He has put his family in a high position, but they are as far away from the party as "heaven is from the earth"*.[121] Štenko went even further, throwing the support of the so-called class enemies to him, that he was dragging *all the former capitalists with him*.[122] The recently dismissed dairy manager in Prešov, Štefan Tomko, mentioned Pšenička's partner and former Chief Secretary Pavel Fleischer, who was to commit an intrigue on his behalf, come intoxicated to Tomek and trade with him for a nomination for a parliamentary seat.[123] Finally, a member of the presidium Pavol Zubkovič spoke of Pšenička and Fleischer clearly as internal enemies: *These gentlemen will not deceive the party, even if they take their senses from higher lords. The party cannot be deceived and therefore our case and the Brno case cannot be separated*.[124] The agreement was almost universal. The members of the presidium of the KV KSS Prešov gave the impression that the headquarters resolution on Otto Šling launched a cleansing process in the regional leadership. The designated culprit Arnošt Pšenička was not present at the meeting. Although he remained chairman of the regional party organization, he last attended a meeting of the presidium on 10 October 1950, before the public announcement of Šling's arrest.[125]

Pšenička's long-term absence was caused by a conflict that dated from 1949 and set against one another the Chairman of the KV KSS Prešov and the chief officials of the district committees of the KSS – primarily former Chairman of the OV KSS Prešov Štefan Tomek, chairman of the OV KSS Giraltovce Tomáš Girmal and chairman of the OV KSS Bardejov Andrej Nicák. The allegations included poor personnel policy, greedy interests, and dubious acquaintances. Arnošt Pšenička especially resented the cooperation of said district chairmans with the owner of the company for mineral springs Sultan Alexander Weis and the director of the timber cooper-

119 Ibid., p. 10.
120 Ibid., p. 8.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid., pp. 11–12.
123 Ibid., p. 3.
124 Ibid., p. 9.
125 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 88, a. j. 477, Prešov – Předsednictvo 1950/4, Zápisnica z 21. zasadnutia predsedníctva krajského výboru KSS, ktorá sa konala dňa 10. 10. 1950 v Prešove (Meetings from the 21st meeting of the presidium of the regional committee of the KSS, which took place on 10. 10. 1950 in Prešov), p. 1.

ative Echaus. For profit, the officials were to have falsified reports so that neither the company nor the cooperative would be nationalised. In his later testimony, Pšenička stated that in the confirmations *the data on the state of the company were manipulated.* […] *In the recommendation, they stated a lower number of employees and capacity of the company than was the case in reality.*[126] The other side focused on the type of people, who Pšenička was to have put in leading positions. For instance, Štefan Tomko claimed that he had sabotaged him as a labourer in the election as chairman of the OV KSS in Prešov and replaced him with a teacher as Agricultural Secretary.[127] Dissatisfied district officials wrote complaints, which they sent to the KSS Party Control Commission in Bratislava. Pšenička said what followed: *On the basis of these complaints, party control headed by Rybanský came to Prešov in the middle of the year 1950. This commission was in Prešov for about a month, and when it was over, it called me to the party control room at the Regional Secretariat, where they handed me some records to comment on.*[128] Pšenička denied the allegations, but found himself in a difficult position. It is very likely that it was precisely after meeting the commission that he stopped attending the meetings of the regional presidium. On a recommendation or at his own discretion, he decided to seclude himself until his case was finally decided.

The resolution on Šling, which was extremely unfortunate for Pšenička, provided an opportunity for a final showdown. At the described meeting of the regional presidium on 11 December 1950, the members assigned him the role of "dictator" and "enemy". Two days later, the plenary of the KV KSS Prešov expelled him from the party along with Pavel Fleischer.[129] The fall of Arnošt Pšenička received the approval of the party headquarters and national publicity. At a meeting of the ÚV KSČ on 21 February 1951, KSS Secretary General Štefan Bašťovanský explained his exclusion as follows: *This happened for a serious violation of intra-party democracy, for the suppression of criticism, for dictatorial methods of work and for the promotion of hostile elements in party, public functions, all of which helped to expose Pšenička himself to the party as a foreign and hostile element*.[130] Not quite a month later, on

126 *ABS*, f. A 8/1, inv. j. 412, Arnošt Pšenička, Protokol o výpovědi odsouzeného, v Jáchymově dne 27. 11. 1956, pp. 1–2.

127 Ibid., pp. 2–3; *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 88, a. j. 478, Prešov – Předsednictvo 1950/5, Zápisnica napísaná na mimoriadnom zasadnutí predsedníctva krajského výboru KSS v Prešove, ktorá sa konala dňa 11. 12. 1950 (Minutes written down at the extraordinary meeting of the presidium of the regional committee of the KSS in Prešov, which took place on 11. 12. 1950), p. 3.

128 *ABS*, f. A 8/1, inv. j. 412, Arnošt Pšenička, Informace pro s. ministra vnitra (Arnošt Pšenička, Information for comrade minister of interior), 29. 11. 1956, p. 3.

129 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 88, a. j. 478, Prešov – Předsednictvo 1950/5, Zápisnica napísaná na 31. zasadnutí predsedníctva krajského výboru KSS v Prešove, ktorá sa konala dňa 20. 12. 1950 (Minutes written down at the 31st meeting of the presidium of the Regional Committee of the KSS in Prešov, which took place on 20. 12. 1950), p. 2.

130 BAŠŤOVANSKÝ, Štefan: O odhaleniu špionážnej záškodnickej činnosti V. Clementia a o frakčnej protistranníckej skupine buržoázných nacionalistov v KSS (On the revelation of V. Clementis's espionage activities and on the factional anti-party group of bourgeois nationalists in the KSČ). *Rudé právo*, 27. 2. 1951, p. 9.

8 March 1951, Pšenička was arrested and sentenced to seven years in prison for the crime of sabotage by the Supreme Court in Prague after three and a half years in detention.[131] On the same days, he and his colleague Fleischer were arrested and sentenced – Fleischer to nine years in prison.[132]

Although Pšenička's case became part of a great story about a "conspiracy of enemies within the Communist Party", it cannot be overlooked that it originally was a strictly local affair. The accusations made against the chairman of the KV KSS Prešov by dissatisfied district officials and later by almost all members of the regional presidium were certainly exaggerated. After all, Pšenička strongly rejected them even in a later statement. However, with an available source base, it is quite impossible to definitively verify or disprove their credibility. It is indisputable that the position of Pšenička in the regional organization was exceptional and that it showed authoritative elements. This deserves a deeper reasoning. As well as the position of his opponents, who primarily pursued their particular interests and tried to cover their own shortcomings. It was not just Pšenička who noticed that. The chairman of the OV KSS in Giraltovce Tomáš Girmal was openly blamed in the regional presidium *that he made policies for his family*.[133] Štefan Tomko was recalled from the post of the administrator of the Prešov dairy supposedly because *he did not allow any revision into the dairy*[134] and the overall loss of the company under his management was 2.5 million Czechoslovak crowns.[135] At the meeting of the presidium on 11 December 1950, the chairman of the KNV Medveď, otherwise very critical of Pšenička, mentioned the share of district officials in the poor functioning of the regional organization: *Mistakes were also made from below, instead of the OV KSS taking a critical stance, it bypasses the KV KSS and proposes the exchange of personnel at the committees or ministries according to its own proposals*.[136] It was part of a wider phenomenon. The personal form of government has developed particularly strongly in the Prešov Region. Ján Šiška, the Chief Secretary of the KV KSS Prešov, described its gradual establishment: *When we examine the development of the party in the Prešov region since 1945, it can be said that the party was not built from the ground up, but individuals appeared like Pšenička.* […] *I think there are*

131 *ABS*, f. A 8/1, inv. j. 412, Arnošt Pšenička, Informace pro s. ministra vnitra, 29. 11. 1956, p. 1.
132 Ibid., inv. j. 1171, Pavel Fleischer, Zápis o výpovědi, Dolní Smokovec (Pavel Fleischer, record of the testimony, Dolní Smokovec), 12. 8. 1964, p. 1.
133 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 88, a. j. 477, Prešov – Předsednictvo 1950/4, Zápisnica napísaná dňa 6. 9. 1950 z 16. zasadnutia predsedníctva krajského výboru KSS (Minutes written down on 6. 9. 1950 from the 16th meeting of the presidium of the Regional Committee of the KSS), p. 9.
134 Ibid., Zápisnica spísaná na 20. zasadnutí predsedníctva krajského výboru KSS Prešov konanom dňa 5. 10. 1950 (Minutes written down at the 20th meeting of the presidium of the Regional Committee of the KSS Prešov taking place on 5. 10. 1950), p. 1.
135 *NA*, f. 1261/2/33, a. j. 5510, Zápisnica napísaná na pokračovacom zasadnutí pléna KV KSS dňa 4. 1. 1951 v dome ČSA v Prešove (Minutes written down at the continuing meeting of the plenary of the KV KSS on 4. 1. 1951 in the House of the ČSA in Prešov), p. 4.
136 *NA*, f. 1261/2/5, sv. 88, a. j. 478, Prešov – Předsednictvo 1950/5, Zápisnica napísaná na mimoriadnom zasadnutí predsedníctva krajského výboru KSS v Prešove, ktorá sa konala dňa 11. 12. 1950, p. 5.

reasons why the comrades did not solve problems for the benefit of the party, but for the benefit of individuals.[137] That is why Pšenička was able to authoritatively administer the region for so long, and that is why his overthrow, despite the use of official terms and interpretations, had the character of personal settlement of accounts.

Investigating the possible causes of the differences

The case studies demonstrate how differently the "cleansing" campaign could take place in the regions. In Ústí nad Labem, the headquarters prevailed with the relative passivity of regional and district officials. On the contrary, in Pilsen, an alliance of headquarters and localities was set up against the regional elite, which achieved absolute success. In Olomouc, the centre's intention met with resistance from regional and district officials and ended at least halfway. Finally, in Prešov, part of the regional elite took the initiative and shut down its rival. I would like to reiterate that the cases of the four regions cannot be generalized to the nineteen regions into which the Communist Party was territorially divided. And in several regional organizations at that time there was no "searching for the enemy".[138] However, each of the four cases has more widely shared features and specifics. For instance, the removal of the Chief Secretary of the KV KSČ in Ostrava Vítězslav Fuchs and his colleagues[139] as well as the deputy of the Chief Secretary of the KV KSČ in Pardubice Jiří Kotrch and the so-called collective[140] in many ways was reminiscent of the course of events in the Pilsen region. There are also strong parallels between the nature of the campaign in the Ústí nad Labem and Bratislava regions, as well as in the Olomouc and Karlovy Vary regions.[141] It is all the more necessary to ask the reasons for the differences. Why in some regions the development was dynamic, a number of actors spoke and the whole "group" was brought down in the end, while in other regions it was a formal event with minimal response and the culprit an "individual".

The role of the central authority comes first. The resolution on Šling's case, which largely initiated a cleansing campaign in the regions, has already been discussed above. It is interesting to follow the ways of acting of the individual highest officials of the Communist Party, directly interfering in the regional processes of the campaign. The procedure of the Minister of Defence Alexej Čepička, who spoke

137 *NA*, f. 1261/2/33, a. j. 5510, Zápisnica napísaná na pokračovacom zasadnutí pléna KV KSS dňa 4. 1. 1951 v dome ČSA v Prešove, p. 20.

138 I have not examined thoroughly every regional organisation. I emphasise that it can be only the result of my ommission.

139 HEMZA, Tomáš*: Ve jménu boje proti „diktátorům", „spiklencům" a „zrádcům"*, pp. 138–150.

140 KABEŠOVÁ, Monika: *„Zbaveni škůdců, pevně semknuti kolem ÚV a s. Gottwalda, s vědomím síly strany rychleji vpřed k socialismu." Čistky v KV KSČ Pardubice v letech 1949–1951*, pp. 95–103.

141 See LÓŽI, Marián: *Dynamika teroru na lokální úrovni v období pozdního stalinismu* (diplomová práce) (Dynamics of terror at the local level in the period of Late Stalinism /Diploma thesis/). Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, Praha 2014.

openly against Řezníček in Olomouc at a meeting of the KV KSČ, opposes the behind-the-scenes and suspicious practices of the head of the KSČ Central Personnel Department, Bruno Köhler, who apparently cooperated with the StB. However, this is a difference in method, not intended purpose. Both worked in the direction of sharpening the campaign and finding the "culprits". In terms of differences, the fact that central officials in regional organizations intervened at different times and with varying degrees of intensity is more important. This happened in Ústí nad Labem already in November 1950 and very vigorously, while in Olomouc it was not until February 1951 and initially without sufficient determination. The assumption that the headquarters did not attach equal importance to each region seems logical. Five regions were profiled, which were considered essential, either for their economic potential or political importance – namely Ústí nad Labem, Pilsen, Brno, Ostrava and Bratislava.[142] For example, in the Slánský trial's protocol, they are directly described as "the most important industrial regions" when the defendant Otto Šling testifies.[143] Therefore, an interpretation is offered that the dynamics of the cleansing campaign in the region was conditioned by whether the headquarters was particularly interested in it or not. Where its stronger interest was absent, the campaign took place only formally. However, this is partly contradicted by the fact that the central actors also paid constant attention to the so-called less important industrial regions and, above all, that even between the five "most important" regions, the course of the campaign differed fundamentally. In the previous text, this is evident when comparing the case studies of the Ústí nad Labem and Pilsen regions, in which the situation was different despite the alleged affiliation to the same category. In any case, the importance of the headquarters is unquestionable, but it was not the only factor.

Personal relationships are another important factor. It is clear from the case studies that previous cooperation or acquaintances with the arrested Otto Šling and later Maria Švermová were a major aggravating circumstance for the challenged chief secretaries. It did not matter if they downplayed it or honestly confessed it; it has always been an integral part of their indictment. At the same time, personnel ties could create a domino effect – the relationship with the already revealed so-called dictator questioned the role of his closest collaborators and led to their removal and punishment. The case of the Pilsen Region is relevant here, where the entire "Lomský Group" was formed. It was impossible to get rid of the inclusion in it even by active and deft actions, which the deputy of the Chief Secretary of the KV KSČ in Pilsen Miroslav Finek convinced us of. This dynamic was characterized by a certain

142 I intentionally leave Prague aside in the study. As the capital of the republic and the seat of the central party bodies, it was characterised by specific conditions and different dynamics. The KV KSČ in Prague had its own case with Deputy Chief Secretary František Vais, but this was overshadowed by the arrest of Deputy Secretary General Švermová.

143 *Proces s vedením protistátního spikleneckého centra v čele s Rudolfem Slánským* (The process led by an anti-state conspiracy center led by Rudolf Slánský). Orbis, Praha 1953, p. 417.

fatalism – different defence strategies led to the same ends, to *guilt by association*. However, even this factor did not always matter. Pšenička was persecuted in Prešov without knowing Šling or Švermová more intimately; Řezníček's collaborators in Olomouc avoided his fate, even though they were willing to defend him against Čepička's attacks.

The personality element can be considered more broadly. The previous popularity or, on the contrary, the unpopularity of the leading regional officials of the Communist Party among their colleagues and in the party's ranks could have become crucial in the given conditions. Řezníček's popularity in the Olomouc region likely played a role in the fact that the cleansing campaign did not reach more people and he himself was not prosecuted; on the contrary, the strong antagonism of regional actors towards the "Lomský Group" in the Pilsen region accelerated the intensity of the campaign; Landa's bad reputation and at the same time the lack of anchorage in the Ústí nad Labem region certainly contributed to his lonely fall. The significance of these rebukes for individual phenomena is difficult to assess and quantify in any way. They show how complex the Stalinist Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was, in which we will not be able to get by with generalizations and we must take into account local specifics.

This brings us to the question of what role the regional specifics of a more permanent, structural type played here: How did the social conditions in the regions affect the degree of involvement of party actors and the outcome of the "cleansing" campaign? This element was almost absent in the previous text, because it did not appear directly in the consulted party documents. Nevertheless, it cannot be completely ignored. It will stand out especially if we focus on the Prešov region, which had a unique character within the republic. The economic and political structures were not very developed and stable due to the historical development, which was reflected in the level of the most basic material facts – in some districts there was no railway connection, electrification of municipalities had taken place only on 27.5% of the territory as of 1949, practically absent industry and barter prevailed.[144] The political organization of the population was low. It is understandable that the programme of radical social transformation, which the Communist Party joined after the war and escalated in the late 1940s, had a special course here. Efforts to mobilize the population clearly reached their limits. In 1950, the regional organization in Prešov was the smallest in the Czech Republic.[145] In addition, al-

144 SKRIP, Vasil: Zvláštnosti kolektivizácie na východnom Slovensku (The characteristics of collectivisation in East Slovakia). In: KRATOCHVILOVA, Želmira (ed.): Československé *zemědělství očima historiků. Sympózium pořádané komisí pro agrární a rolnickou otázku v Československu dne 23. a 24. května 1968 v Praze* (Czechoslovak agriculture through the eyes of historians. Symposium organized by the Commission for Agrarian and Peasant Affairs in Czechoslovakia on May 23 and 24, 1968 in Prague). Ústav dějin socialismu, Praha 1969, p. 137.

145 It had only 27,670 members. See Přehled o stavu krajských organizací ku dni 28. 2. 1950, tabulka č. 1. (Overview of the state of the regional organisationa as of 28. 2. 1950, Table 1). See MAŇÁK, Jiří: *Proměny strany moci. Studie a dokumenty k vývoji Komunistické strany Československa 1948–1968*,

most half of its members were peasants, [146] who could not be very active in the KSS due to their territorial dispersion, and most of them probably did not even care. There was a minimum of factory workers in the region, the main social support of communist politics, which was reflected in the composition of the Regional Committee - there were fewer of them in numbers and percentages than in any other KV KSS (or KSČ).[147] It therefore seems logical that becuase of a membership that was low in number and passive, the close personal ties of several local officials dating from the resistance or, conversely, membership in Hlinka's clerical fascist Slovak People's Party were decisive.[148] At the same time the central Czechoslovak or Slovak instance did not show much interest in the region due to its distance and backwardness.

Such an interpretation, despite its undoubted validity, is perhaps too orientalizing, conceiving of Prešov as a kind of backward exception. At the same time, the historical experience of the local population was shaped by the experiences of compatriots from working in the USA and partisan activity during the war,[149] which was several orders more extensive than in the Czech lands. Above all, however, the personnel networks of influence were a common phenomenon at the regional and district level of the Communist Party, as was the widespread instrumental approach to the cleansing campaign after the arrest of Otto Šling. On the other hand, it should be added that each of the four selected regions was in a way specific: the North Bohemian region of Ústí nad Labem was a border region with developed heavy industry,[150] very hard affected by the post-war expulsion of the German minority;[151] the West Bohemian region of Pilsen was characterized by mechanical production and the Social Democrats were historically prominent in it; the Moravian region of Olomouc had a strong agricultural and Catholic character, and social democracy in the interwar period occupied the second place behind the Christian People's Party. At the same time, an advanced food industry with malt houses, sugar factories and distilleries has developed here in connection with agriculture;

1. část (Transformations of the party of power. Studies and documents on the development of the KSČ 1948–1968, Vol. 1). ÚSD AV ČR, Praha 1995, p. 100.

146 Precisely 11,215 and 40.5 percent. See Přehled o stavu krajských organizací ku dni 28. 2. 1950, tabulka č. 6 (Table 6). Ibid., p. 105.

147 Only 9, thus 30 percent. See MAŇÁK, Jiří: *Proměny strany moci. Početnost a složení volených funkcionářských sborů KSČ 1948–1968*, 2. část (Transformations of the party of power. Number and composition of elected function corps of the KSČ 1948–1968, Vol. 2). ÚSD AV ČR, Praha 1998, p. 267.

148 ZAVACKÁ, Marína: Vidiecki komunisti ako aktéri a obete nútenej kolektivizácie (Village communists as actors and victims of forced collectivisation). *Forum Historiae*, 2016, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 58–59.

149 Ibid., p. 59.

150 On Ústí nad Labem at that time, see HRADECKÝ, Tomáš: *Nejpokrokovější kraj v Československu. Krajský národní výbor Ústeckého kraje v letech 1949–1960* (The most progressive region in Czechoslovakia. The Regional National Committee of the Ústí nad Labem Region in 1949–1960). Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, Praha 2017.

151 The number of Sudeten Germans is a sensitive topic. Myself, I have relied on the results of the census of the population in Czechoslovakia from 1930. It is not about the absolute numbers for me but only the level of representation of Germans in the population.

there was a modern light industry in Prostějov. All these specifics are very difficult to evaluate. However, it is interesting that the campaigns in the Prešov and Ústí nad Labem regions were comparable in terms of the passivity of the wider party ranks. The overall difference in the dynamics of the search for enemies in the regional leadership of the Communist Party could be interpreted by different historical developments – in the Prešov region long-term trends of the East Slovak periphery, in the Ústí nad Labem region the post-war expulsion of the German element is offered as a possible explanation, which was especially extensive, the new settlers had not yet become accustomed to the environment and specific conditions dominated there. Such a generalisation is, however, potentially deceitful. The previous outline of conditions in the Prešov region shows that they were ambivalent rather than clearly backward; in Ústí nad Labem there was a large Czech population at least since the last third of the 19th century, which maintained continuity with the previous period. Finally, the regions, or regional organisations of the Communist Party, were administratively created units. Homogeneity cannot be expected for them, the composition of the population and the character of the individual parts of the regions often differed from one other. Nevertheless, historical difference can be seen as another, albeit latent, factor present. It demonstrates the complexity of the relationship that existed between the dictatorship of the Communist Party of the 1950s and the previous historical periods.

Conclusion

In the text, case studies described the course of the "cleansing campaign" after the arrest of Otto Šling in four regions: In Ústí nad Labem the Chief Secretary of the KV KSČ Mikuláš Landa was removed by the active involvement of the central actors under the relative passivity of regional officials. In Pilsen, the coalition of the centre and the region revealed Hanuš Lomský, the Chief Secretary of the KV KSČ, and a group of his closest colleagues to be enemies. In Olomouc, regional officials initially opposed the plans of the headquarters and only the Chief Secretary of the KV KSČ, František Řezníček, was expelled, without further sanctions. In Prešov, due to the relative inactivity of the headquarters and regions, a small group of officials prevailed and removed the chairman of the KV KSS, Arnošt Pšenička. The intensity and outcome of the campaign varied across the four regions; in some it lasted a long time and involved a number of actors, in others their approach was instrumental and passive.

Several causal factors were subsequently postulated in the analytical section. Undoubtedly, one was the headquarters, which attached different degrees of importance to the individual regions during the campaign – it paid more attention to industrial and political centres than the others, from its perspective peripheral areas. Another factor was the personal relations of the leading regional officials, ei-

ther towards the accused Šling and Švermová or directly in the given regional party organization. The popularity or, conversely, the notorious reputation of the Chief Secretary could have played a significant role. The course of the campaign was also defined by specific regional conditions of a structural and historical nature, unique to the region or of a more general nature.

The case studies and the causal factors described together prove that we will not be able to make do with the perspective of the Prague headquarters when researching the Stalinist dictatorship of the Communist Party. The regional perspective does not bring a deeper knowledge only about the regions themselves, it also allows a more balanced view of the overall functioning of the dictatorship. Above all, the actors themselves are more in the spotlight. The Stalinist period in Czechoslovakia was not only a time of ideologies and regime mechanisms, people also lived and acted at that time, in this case higher or lower-ranking regional officials of the Communist Party. We should not forget that.

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