

Pirating into the Czech Elections

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***The Pirate Party** are buccaneering their way into European politics, having found a foothold in the testy soil of Central Europe after colonising, in small measure, various hamlets in Sweden, Germany and Iceland. **The Czech Pirates** (PPCZ), a term certainly exotic by current political pedigrees, managed to obtain over 10 percent of the vote, a result that gave them a rich harvest of 22 members in the parliamentary elections.*

It took nine efforts, but the Czech Pirates had been edging their way onto conspicuous terrain in various local elections, including netting 5.3 percent of the total vote in Prague in 2015. The city of Mariánské Lázně also found itself having a Pirate Mayor after garnering 21 percent of the vote.

Retaining their oppositional colours, the Czech Pirates are insisting on avoiding the muddying nature of coalition talks with the overall winners. (The dangers of compromising collaboration!) Their agenda is one that has become fairly known across its other incarnations: the abolition of internet censorship, the favouring of institutional transparency, and the revision of, amongst other things, punitive copyright laws. But other agenda items form their twenty point program, including improving the lot of teacher salaries and tax reform.[1]

The latter point is particularly appropriate, given the party's experimentation with testing EU laws on the subject of pirate sites through its "Linking is not a Crime" stance. This was sparked, in large part, by attempts by the Czech Anti-Piracy Union to target a 16-year-old for that great terror of the regulator: linking to content designated as infringing of copyright law.

Launching several of their own contrarian sites, including Tipnafilm.cz and Piratskefilmy.cz, the latter carrying some 20,000 links to 5,800 movies, the Czech Pirate Party was overjoyed by the prospect of prosecution.

"Our goal is to change the copyright monopoly law so that people are not fined millions for sharing culture with their friends."[2]

As Czech Pirate Party chairman **Lukáš Černožský** said at the time, belligerent and defiant,

"Instead of teenagers, copyright industry lobbyists are now dealing with a political party which didn't run the website for money but because of our conviction that linking is not and should not be a crime."

The gains of the party showed a certain mood at work and, as has been the case in much of

Europe, proved boisterously, and at stages angrily, anti-establishment. Across the political spectrum, the Czechs were again showing that they can add fuel to any political fire, setting matters to rights on the continent while tearing down assumptions. As with any fire, however, the consequences can be searing.

While the Pirates did well, the Freedom and Direct Democracy party (SPD), a strident right wing outfit, nabbed similar numbers from the other side of the spectrum, sporting its own anti-EU, anti-immigrant brand. As its leader, **Tomio Okamura**, insists,

“We want to leave just like Britain and we want a referendum on EU membership.”[3]

Billionaire fertilizer tycoon **Andrej Babiš**, the sort of oligarchic figure who should always trouble democratic sensibilities, weighed in the elections with some 30 percent of the vote with his ANO party. His version of politics, another confection of anti-politics dressed for disgruntled consumption, reprises that of the businessman turned party leader. The claim made here is common: that the machinery of governance is somehow analogous to running a business.

Traditional parties, foremost amongst them the long performing Social Democrats, with whom Babiš had been in coalition with after gains made in 2013, found themselves pegged back to sixth position in the tally.

The swill stick of politics did not tar Babiš all that much, a figure who has managed to develop a certain Teflon coating in a manner similar to other billionaire leaders (think **Silvio Berlusconi** and a certain **Donald Trump** in the White House). He had become the focus of suspected tax crimes, and lost his job as finance minister. European subsidies, it was claimed, had found their mysterious way into his pocket.

Such suggestions merely touched the tip of a considerable iceberg, one which also consists of allegations of previous employment with the Czechoslovak secret state security service Stb. According to Slovakia’s Institute of National Memory, his code name for collaboration during his espionage stint was Bureš.[4]

The billionaire seemed distinctly unperturbed, and his party’s showing suggested that some water will slide off a duck’s back.

“I am happy that Czech citizens did not believe the disinformation campaign against us and expressed their trust in us.”

He roundly insisted that his was “a democratic movement” positively pro-European and pro-NATO “and I do not understand why somebody labels us as a threat to democracy.”[5]

These elections, however, will be savoured by a party that promises a fresh airing of a stale political scene, and one not nursing those prejudices that provide all too attractive gristle. Legislation, should it be implemented, may well remove the cobwebbed fears long associated with the Internet. But facing these newly elected figures will be ANO and an invigorated, indignant right-wing of politics, a far from easy proposition.

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Notes

[1] <https://www.pirati.cz/program/psp2017/20-nejdulezitejsich-bodu-programu/>

[2] <https://torrentfreak.com/pirate-party-prosecuted-for-operating-a-pirate-site-160125/>

[3] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/19/far-right-czech-election-kingmaker-calls-referendum-eu-membership/>

[4] <https://intelnews.org/2013/12/02/01-1379/#more-10656>

[5] <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/21/world/europe/andrej-babis-ano-czech-election.html>

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