



Marian Calfa to Form New Government

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After the sweeping election victory of the Civic Forum and the Public against Violence, the incumbent Prime Minister, Marian Calfa, was chosen by President Vaclav Havel to form a new government. A former Communist and a long-time member of the government during the Jakes and Husak regimes, Calfa played an important role in forming the government of "national understanding" in December 1989. The skill he showed in leading that government for more than six months, as well as the decisive break he made with his communist past, earned him the respect of Czechoslovak citizens and the confidence of the President.

On June 12 President Vaclav Havel announced that he would like Prime Minister Marian Calfa to head the new government. Havel made his announcement after meeting with leaders of the Civic Forum and the Public against Violence, the two political movements that scored a resounding victory in the elections on June 8 and 9.¹ Although the choice of Calfa was widely expected, in view of Havel's strong support for the Prime Minister, some leaders of the Civic Forum and the Public against Violence had privately expressed reservations about his selection.²

Their misgivings relate to Calfa's past. Not only had Calfa been a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCS) until January 1990, when

he turned in his communist party card, but from 1972 to November 1989 he served in the governments of former communist party leaders Gustav Husak and Milos Jakes. The degree of opposition to Calfa within the Civic Forum and the Public against Violence seems to have been quite significant. On June 11 Havel was reported as saying he would not seek a second term for himself unless the new government was to his liking.³ This statement was interpreted as an attempt to put pressure on those who opposed his choice of Prime Minister and, possibly, of other members of the government as well.

Both Havel's support for Calfa and the great popularity that the Prime Minister enjoys among

the public result from the role played by Calfa in forming the coalition government of "national understanding" in December 1989, as well as the political skills he showed in leading that government through the postrevolutionary period. During that period the government introduced a number of important political and economic changes and steered the country toward the first free elections in more than 44 years. Although all major political forces, including the Communists, were represented in the government, and although conflicts between various ministers were reported, the Calfa-led government succeeded in avoiding a crisis.

Calfa's Biography

Calfa was born in Trebisov, eastern Slovakia, in 1946. At the age of 18 he became a member of the CPCS. After graduating from the School of Law at Charles University in Prague Calfa worked as a lawyer in the Czechoslovak news agency CTK for two years and then moved to the legislative department of the Office of the Government Presidium. In 1986 he was appointed head of that department and Secretary of the Legislative Council of the Government. From April 21, 1988, to December 3, 1989, he was a Minister without Portfolio responsible for the drafting of legislation. (In a communist system, the government is virtually the only body that drafts legislation; the largely rubber-stamping parliament then formally enacts the new laws.) On January 10, 1989, Calfa was appointed the head of a working group that was to draft a new Czechoslovak Constitution.⁴

On December 3, 1989, two weeks after the revolution had begun in Czechoslovakia, Calfa was named First Deputy Prime Minister in the "coalition" government formed by Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec. Despite Adamec's earlier promises, the government was still dominated by Communists. Under considerable public pressure, Adamec resigned on December 7, and Calfa was asked by President Husak to form a new government. The government of "national understanding" formed by Calfa on December 10 was composed of eight Communists, nine unaffiliated ministers supported by the Civic Forum and the Public against Violence, and two each from the Czechoslovak Socialist Party and the Czechoslovak People's Party. Calfa said that the "full agreement" on the composition of the new government had been the result of "very difficult talks" between major political forces in Czechoslo-

vakia.⁵ At a press conference on December 11, Calfa outlined his government's policy aims and said that the main emphasis had been on the need to prepare "free and democratic elections" and implement "radical economic reforms." Asked why he, unlike Adamec, had succeeded in forming a coalition government, Calfa replied that all parties had gradually reached a "stage at which they had the constructive will to solve the situation."⁶

On December 19 Calfa helped to break the impasse over the nomination of Havel for President. Havel had been nominated by the Civic Forum and other organizations, but the still powerful Communists had tried to block his candidacy by proposing that the President be elected by direct popular vote instead of by parliament, as had traditionally been the case. Calfa supported the Civic Forum, asking parliament to elect the new President on December 29 and proposing Havel for that position. In response to the CPCS's attempts to prevent Havel's election, Calfa said that "nothing can deter Czechoslovakia from its path toward a democratic political regime."⁷

This and other statements by Calfa at the end of last year revealed a growing rift between him and the CPCS. On December 20 and 21 Calfa failed to attend the party's extraordinary congress, although he was then the highest-ranking Communist (President Husak had resigned from his post on December 10). On January 18, 1990, it was announced that following the example of two of his key economic ministers, Vladimir Dlouhy and Valtr Komarek, Calfa had ended his membership in the communist party.⁸ The party leadership severely criticized Calfa's decision, saying that his departure from the party had upset the balance of major political forces in the government agreed upon during the round-table talks. In its issue of January 20, the communist daily *Rude Pravo* wrote that Calfa had failed to inform the party's Central Committee of his decision, which was likely to "have a negative influence on many members of the party." The Slovak Communist Party also criticized Calfa, and the Democratic Forum of Communists asked that a new communist Prime Minister be named. Asked why he had left the party, Calfa replied that he had had personal reasons and added that the government should be impartial.

In interviews given at the beginning of 1990, Calfa repeatedly emphasized the need for radical economic reform but also stressed that such reform should be gradual, should not adversely affect

social groups that were economically weak, and should not lead to large-scale unemployment. On February 27 Calfa presented to parliament a government report on, among other things, the state of the Czechoslovak economy. Several groups, including the Civic Forum, had accused the government of following a populist line that recognized the need for radical reforms but refused to acknowledge the inevitable high cost of such reforms. In response to these accusations, Calfa painted a gloomy picture of the state of the Czechoslovak economy and sought to emphasize that great sacrifices would be inevitable on the road toward improvement.¹⁰ However, he also said that the transition from central planning to a market economy would have to take place gradually and that his government would prevent "a cheap sell-off of the national wealth."

On April 7 Calfa announced that "the first stage" of his government's work had been completed. The first stage, he said, had consisted of "charting all Czechoslovakia's major problems," while the second stage would consist of taking concrete steps to remedy the problems.¹¹ Among these steps was a large number of draft laws proposing significant changes in areas such as the economy, education, and human rights. The government submitted these draft laws to the Federal Assembly in the spring.

Meanwhile, two groups had begun to form within the government, one advocating shock therapy to boost the Czechoslovak economy and the other advocating gradual reform. Calfa originally appeared to side with the latter group, led by Deputy Prime Minister Valtr Komarek. However, in May and early June the group of radical reformers led by Minister of Finance Vaclav Klaus appeared to gain the upper hand. It is unlikely that it could have done so without Calfa's blessing.

While Prime Minister of the Interim government, Calfa visited a number of foreign countries, including the USSR (where he started negotiations on the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia), the United States, Canada, Iceland, Finland, Austria, Italy, the Vatican, France, and Ireland. In January, during a meeting in Sofia of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, Calfa reiterated Czechoslovakia's demands for a significant reform of that organization. Later Calfa met with high-ranking officials from the Council of Europe, the European Community, and the International Monetary Fund to discuss Czechoslovakia's possible membership in these organizations.

In the June 8 and 9 elections Calfa ran on the ticket of the Public against Violence and was elected to the Federal Assembly. As Prime Minister, however, he may not be elected to the Federal Assembly Presidium. According to opinion polls published in April and May, Calfa was among the most popular political figures in Slovakia. Both his candidacy and active campaigning clearly helped the Public against Violence, which according to the opinion polls was losing to the Christian Democratic Movement in April.¹² During the election campaign Calfa made several trips to Slovakia and was enthusiastically welcomed, especially in eastern Slovakia, where he was born. A significant turnabout in the Public against Violence's popularity occurred after Havel, accompanying Calfa on his trip to eastern Slovakia on May 17, had announced that he wanted Calfa to head the postelection government.¹³ While it is difficult to say whether Havel's comments were prompted by his admiration for Calfa or the tactical need to boost the Public against Violence's popularity, his public support for Calfa clearly helped the movement to score an impressive electoral victory.

Assessment

President Havel has suggested that there is a need for a degree of continuity between the government of "national understanding" and the new, postelection government; and he no doubt feels that Calfa is the man who can provide this continuity. Together with Vaclav Klaus, Jiri Dientsbier, Vladimir Dlouhy, Valtr Komarek, and Petr Miller, Calfa was one of the most popular and most capable figures in the transitional government. But unlike the other popular members of the government, Calfa has little charisma. Moreover, the Czechoslovak political scene has until now been dominated by Havel, not simply because of Havel's own personal appeal but also because of the absence of a strong and colorful personality in the top governmental post. Thus, even though Czechoslovakia would like to have a parliamentary rather than a presidential executive, it seems likely that the political landscape will continue to be dominated by Havel.

The complicated relationship between Czechs and Slovaks is another reason for naming Calfa Prime Minister. Should Havel, a Czech, be elected for another presidential term, either the Prime Minister or the Chairman of the Federal Assembly should be a Slovak. (Although the constitution does

not stipulate that this be the case, the division of power between the Czechs and the Slovaks has traditionally been based on an unwritten rule ensuring that a degree of balance be maintained in the top posts.) With the exception of Alexander Dubcek and, possibly, Havel's adviser Milan Knazko, no other Slovak who ran on the Public against Violence's ticket seems to enjoy the nationwide popularity that would make him a suitable candidate for either post. Jan Carnogursky, the leader of the Christian Democratic Movement in Slovakia and a Deputy Prime Minister in the interim government, could hardly have been appointed to such an important position after his party had finished third in the federal elections.

Yet another reason for naming Calfa could be the emphasis that Havel has placed on reconciliation. Although a former Communist, Calfa has proved that he is committed to democracy and willing to work hard to achieve it. At a time when in

many enterprises experienced people in managerial positions are being frequently demoted because of their past association with the communist party, Havel may have wanted to indicate that vengeance does not necessarily benefit the country. Calfa's critics are likely to object to the Prime Minister's communist past and maintain that, since democratic forces have been elected to power, now is the time to make a clean break with the past. Havel, on the other hand, seems to think that a chance should be given to those who have dissociated themselves from the communist party and have proved they are willing to work for a new democratic order in Czechoslovakia.

Finally, Havel has obviously been impressed by Calfa's political skills, economic and legal expertise, and ability to reach compromises in complicated situations. During the difficult times that lie ahead for the new government, such credentials may be needed more than a colorful personality.

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Notes:

1. Radio Czechoslovakia, June 12, 1990, 1:00 P.M.; and CTK, June 12, 1990.
2. AP, June 12, 1990.
3. Reuter, June 11, 1990.
4. See Peter Martin, "Biographies of Members of the Federal Government," *Report on Eastern Europe*, no. 2, January 12, 1990.
5. See Peter Martin, "The New Czechoslovak Government of National Understanding," *ibid.*
6. *Rude Pravo*, December 12, 1990.
7. Czechoslovak Television, December 19, 1990, 7:30 P.M.
8. AP, Reuter, and dpa, January 18, 1990.
9. CTK, January 22, 1990.
10. Radio Czechoslovakia, February 27, 1990, 1:00 P.M.
11. *Ibid.*, April 7, 1990, 6:00 P.M.
12. Radio Prague, May 9, 1990, 6:30 P.M.
13. Radio Czechoslovakia, May 17, 1990, 6:00 P.M.