

# Far right-wing political parties in the Czech Republic: heterogeneity, cooperation, competition<sup>1</sup>

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**Far right-wing political parties in the Czech Republic: heterogeneity, cooperation, competition.** This article deals with far right-wing political parties in the Czech Republic, specifically the Association for the Republic-Czechoslovak Republican Party (SPR-RSČ), the National Party (NS), and the Workers' Party (DS); and it describes their electoral programs. The article analyzes the political impact of these parties and their supporters, as well as aspects of heterogeneity, cooperation, and competition between these political parties.

**Key words:** Far right political parties, Violence, Social pathology, National party, Workers' Party

**Krajne pravicové politické strany v Českej republike: heterogenita, spolupráca, konkurencia.** Tento článok sa venuje krajne pravicovým politickým stranám v Českej republike, menovite Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana Československa (SPR – RSČ), Národní strana (NS) a Dělnická strana (DS); a charakterizuje ich volebné programy. Štúdiá analyzuje politický dopad týchto strán na svojich stúpencoch ako aj aspekty heterogeneity, spolupráce, resp. konkurencie medzi týmito politickými stranami.

**Kľúčové slová:** krajne pravicové politické strany, násilie, sociálna patológia, Národná strana, Dělnická strana

## Introduction

In recent years we have observed marked growth in phenomena we call socio-pathological. This is a variable range of phenomena generally regarded as unwelcome, undesirable, even unacceptable. Each of these phenomena carries its own degree of social danger (Fischer, Škoda 2009, Kol. 1994). The issue of the youth comes to the fore mainly in the context of far right-wing political parties. Young people are often seen as the most at-risk group. Over the long-term it has been first-time voters, young men more often than women, who support and vote for these types of political parties (Kreidl, Vlachová 1999, pp. 335-354, Pink, Smolík 2007). Many authors explain this as a lack of responsibility on the part of the youth towards their family and their property; and therefore they tend towards radical and simplistic solutions to society's defects and shortcomings, and this may result in a tendency towards extremist ideologies (Kuchta, Válková 2005).

Other factors are openness to new ideas, rejection of established ways of thinking and behaving, insufficient life experience, egoism of the age group, or

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attempts to fit in among one's peers and get attention. Far right (or far left) organizations attract young people for their relative stability, cohesive membership, and apparent exceptionality, forthrightness, etc (Kuchta, Válková 2005).

Social danger is also seen as emanating from far right political parties, and the attitudes of these groups' supporters towards the use of violence. The terms political extremism or radicalism have come to be applied to this ardent – and often violent - pursuit of political ideals (in both, their right-wing and left-wing forms). It must be mentioned from the outset that in the foreign literature especially, the far right wing, and political orthodoxy and political authoritarianism are classified as social pathologies, the general term for all “abnormal or generally undesirable social phenomena” (Dubský, Urban 2008, p. 53, Kraus 2007, pp. 273-276, Mühlpachr 1999, p. 10).

The authors study the phenomenon of the far right wing from the perspectives of social pathology, political science, and sociology, but also from those of criminology or social psychology (Anastasakis 2001, pp. 15-26, Mareš 2003, Cottam et al. 2004).

The analysis briefly discusses the basic terminology used in relation to the far right (extremism, radicalism, and populism), then introduces the political parties that represent the far right in Czech politics. It is the far right, as most visibly represented by its political parties, that is seen by the public as an element of a kind of social pathology, something which is dangerous and abnormal.

Since the 1990s the far right in the Czech Republic has been the subject of intense interest in the media, social science (political science, psychology, sociological, pedagogical, historical), and politics as well.

Besides the political parties presented here, there are several ultra-right interest organizations active in the Czech Republic, either registered as civic associations or operating without registration (for example National Resistance's “free network” or the Autonomous Nationalists). Publishers<sup>2</sup> and editorial collectives (putting out printed books or periodicals, or running websites), militant organizations (based on the principle of “leaderless resistance”), unorganized groups coming out of various youth subcultures, as well as some important individuals representing the far right (“opinion leaders”), can all be didactically classified as far right.

No less interesting are the individual campaigns waged against ideological opponents on the Internet, in the form of graffiti (“Good Night Left Side” or “Good Night White Pride”), or in violent clashes during demonstrations.

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<sup>2</sup> In the Czech Republic especially Kontingent press publishers ([www.kontingent.cz](http://www.kontingent.cz))

The far right comprises a broad spectrum of various kinds of groups with various organizational forms<sup>3</sup> (Mareš 2003).

### **Definition of basic terms**

The following passages will be present and conceptualize individual terms commonly used in describing the far right. The main terms are social pathology, extremism, radicalism, and populism.

Social pathology can be seen as a catch-all term for unhealthy, deviant, abnormal, generally undesirable social phenomena (Col. 1994). These undesirable phenomena can also include politically motivated violent acts, which are associated with extremism and radicalism.

In democratic countries extremism is a general label for a specific social phenomenon, but also for its ideological foundations and the activities stemming from them. The ideological foundations of extremism are various ideologies (primarily political or secondarily political) that question the foundations of democratic society or its fundamental human rights and freedoms (Smolík, Vejvodová 2010, pp. 43-67, Mareš 2003, Kraus 2007, pp. 273-276, Charvát 2007).

From the standpoint of political science the general term “political extremism” is very problematic: the term is too empty, and indiscriminately applied; its descriptive and semantic value is practically zero (Fiala 1998, pp. 7-16).

Another problem is overuse of the terms extreme and extremist in (not only) Czech public discourse, often for the deliberate purpose of discrediting the thus-labeled group in the eyes of the mainstream public (Mareš 2003). Likewise disputable is use of the term extremism in a legal context, because extremism is a political science concept not a legal term; not everyone labeled as an extremist can be prosecuted under the law (Černý 2008). Charvát also points out that the term is used in police jargon, where it is defined as any activity aimed against the constitution and democracy (Charvát 2007).

At the levels of sociology and criminology, extremism can be defined as the sum of certain pathological social phenomena, forming more or less organized groups of persons and supporters of these groups characterized by a rejection of the basic values, norms, and behavior prevalent in current society. These are behaviors that are morally and socially harmful, but are not criminal in and of themselves, and which appear on a mass scale over an extended period of time with stable characteristic elements (Kuchta, Válková 2005).

Another term often used in discussion of the far left and far right is radicalism, which was first associated with leftist groups, and was given to

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<sup>3</sup> from registered political parties to individual gangs or parties

supporters of the French Revolution, the Paris Commune, and Marxism. At present the term radicalism is used to describe political positions that do not advocate the overthrow of the democratic system, but remain within the constitutional order, albeit at its fringes. It must be remembered that the boundary between radicalism and extremism is fuzzy. Also for this reason it is better to use an over-arching all-inclusive term for both radicalism and extremism; which is, far right, far left (Mareš 2003).

Yet another term is populism, which is not associated with any particular political ideology or current, but represents rather a style of political propaganda aimed at “regular people” which tries to protect them against defined enemies on one hand, while on the other hand offering quick and simple solutions to current social problems (comp. Charvát 2007).

Based on the above, the acceptable term seems to be far left/far right. By using the term far right we can avoid complicated categories such as extreme right, populist right, neo-fascist, neo-Nazi, ultra-right, anti-immigrant, racist, xenophobic, etc., which are often quite promiscuously used but which cannot be regarded as synonyms (Kupka, Laryš, Smolík 2009).

At practical level the difference between extremism and radicalism in the Czech Republic is defined by courts (in the case of political parties it is the Supreme Administrative Court). It is also possible to say that the term “extremism” is used by journalists relatively casually and inaccurately.

### **Far right parties in the CR**

As in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Czechoslovakia, and after 1993 the Czech Republic, went through a complicated process of political and economic transformation accompanied by the consolidation of democracy. This process was often problematic for many citizens of the CR, and far right political parties attempted to use this by presenting themselves as a non-communist alternative to the political parties of other party families. The far right political landscape began to form during the 1990s. The most important representative of the far right in the CR was the Association for the Republic-Czechoslovak Republican Party (Anastasakis 2001, pp. 15-26, Danics 2003, Milza 2005).

The history of the SPR-RSČ can be divided into five stages. The first stage begins at the end of 1989 and ends with parliamentary elections in 1992. During that time outside of parliament the republicans came together around the figure of Miroslav Sládek. In February 1990 the party adopted the name SPR-RSČ; the first SPR-RSČ congress was held on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1990. Its political activity made it the one publicly well-known political representative of “republicanism” (or something claiming to be that), and gradually became the

dominant formation on the right of the Czech political spectrum<sup>4</sup> (Mareš 2003, Milza 2005). The second stage, from 1992 to 1998, saw the SPR-RSČ seated first in the Czech National Council, then after the 1993 breakup of Czechoslovakia in the Parliament of the Czech Republic, where the SPR-RSČ became known for the extremist excesses of its officials and parliamentary representatives.

The party's third phase after the 1998 election until 1999 saw the breakup of the party (accompanied by the departure of many of its major identifiable figures). Nevertheless, the SPR-RSČ managed to somewhat re-consolidate itself by the beginning of 1999 (Mareš 2003). The fourth chapter involved the appearance of the political formation known as the Miroslav Sládek Republicans (RMS).

The fifth stage saw the renewal of the SPR-RSČ at a congress of the "republican movement" on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2008. The following political groups united under the tried-and-true name Association for the Republic-Czechoslovak Republican Party: the Republican Party of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia; the Republican Union; the Radical Republican Party; the Republicans; and the Miroslav Sládek Republicans (RMS). Miroslav Sládek became the SPR-RSČ's chairman (Kyloušek, Smolík 2008, pp. 370-388). Since the renewal of the SPR-RSČ, however, the activity of the party has been negligible compared to the 1992 – 1998 era.

Among the most important points of the republican program are social populism, an emphasis on the "tough" approach in the area of domestic security, emphasis on the ethnic roots of social and criminal problems (said to be caused by Gypsies and immigrants), denunciation of the "Americanization" of society and some post-modern values (for example homosexual rights or multiculturalism, but not environmental protection), anti-communism and anti-leftism in general, emphasis on national aspects in economics, education, and culture, and an isolationist foreign policy. The party has always presented itself as the one true opposition, which for its principled stands must suffer from media bias and persecution of its officials.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years the most frequently-discussed far right group has been the Dělnická strana [Workers' Party] (DS), founded by former SPR – RSČ members. The Workers' Party was registered on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2002 under the name Nová síla [New Power]. The party name was changed as of 22<sup>nd</sup> January

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<sup>4</sup> giving the label "republican" an "ultra-right-populist" hue

<sup>5</sup> The political program of the SPR-RSČ for this year's parliamentary election can be found on the party's website at <http://www.republikani.com/program.htm>. Mareš, M. (2003): *Pravicový extremismus a radikalismus v ČR*. [Right-Wing Extremism and Radicalism in the CR]. Brno: Barrister&Principal, Centrum strategických studií.

2003. Its founder was Tomáš Vandas, now DS chairman, former secretary of the Miroslav Sládek Republicans (RMS) (Vejvodová 2005).

Political violence by the DS drew attention especially after the so-called Workers' Party Defense Corps was founded on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2008. The main communications outlet for this political party is its paper *Dělnické listy*. The Workers' Party can be classified as a small, far-right political party with strong populist elements, and is allied at present with the non-registered organization National Resistance. Part of the membership base is formed of former members of National Corporatism. The DS may be an alternative for voters from the ranks of the Autonomous Nationalists or National Resistance (Kyloušek, Smolík 2008, pp. 370-388). The media reported on the DS in relation to DS Defense Corps activities in Janov (18<sup>th</sup> October 2008, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2008, 24<sup>th</sup> January 2009) and Přerov (4<sup>th</sup> April 2009). On the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2008 the government of the CR submitted a proposal to dissolve the DS, but unsuccessfully: on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2009 the Supreme Administrative Court refused to ban the DS.<sup>6</sup> On the 11<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> April 2010 the second proposal to ban the DS was filed (Kyloušek, Smolík 2008, pp. 370-388). This time the Supreme Administrative Court dissolved the DS.

In its program statements the DS calls for the restoration of the CR's sovereignty, withdrawal from NATO military structures, determination of the nationality of residents of the CR, deportation of illegal immigrants, direct election of the president of the republic, reinstatement of the death penalty, etc. The DS program for this year's election can be found on the party's website.<sup>7</sup> Another political party that has drawn attention from the media as well as the security forces is the Národní strana [National Party] (NS). The National Party was founded as the initiative of Vlast.cz, the civic association, started by former members of the Patriotic Front in 2000. The party was officially established on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2002, and its founding congress was held on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2003 in Prague.

The NS defines itself as a political party with a sense of conservative values and national tradition. These are based on so-called integral (defensive) traditionalism. The NS would adapt Czech defensive nationalism for today's generation, based on order, authority, discipline, loyalty, duty, and responsibility. The NS was publicly visible in the past; it is often portrayed as a possible partner in the radical community for contacts with parliamentary political parties (Smolík 2008, pp. 27-29). The NS drew much media attention by founding a National Guard (NG), and also with a controversial campaign clip before the 2009 election to the European Parliament. The spot presented

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<sup>6</sup> Decision of the Supreme Administrative Court of 4. 3. 2009. ref. no. Pst. 1/2008 – 86. Available at [www.nssoud.cz](http://www.nssoud.cz), last reference as of 14. 10. 2010.

<sup>7</sup> For more see <http://volby.delnickelisty.cz/program>.

what it called a “final solution to the Gypsy question”, which resulted in Czech Television’s refusal to show it.<sup>8</sup> A member of the NS also produced a study entitled “The Final Solution of the Gypsy Problem in the Czech Lands”, for which he was criminally charged.<sup>9</sup> Another topic characteristic for the NS, and relatively new within the framework of the far right, is its attitude towards radical Islam in Europe; in recent years the NS has presented itself on this issue by protesting against the mosque in Brno, and through articles warning of the dangers of Islam.

At the end of 2009 the activities of the National Front were influenced by the resignation of long-time chairwoman Petra Edelmannová on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2009; followed as of the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2009 by the entire council of the NS: Michal Kubík, Jan Skácel, and Jiří Gaudin.<sup>10</sup> At present some NS members (for example Jan Skácel and Michal Kubík) are active in the political party [Czech National Unity Movement] (ČHNJ).

### **Heterogeneity, cooperation, competition**

The strategies of individual far-right political parties and civic associations (of which some later became political parties) have differed. Most of these strategies moved along the lines “getting into politics” – “educational activities” (Sedláček 2003, Smolík 2008, pp. 27-29).

Political parties on the far right do not make up a completely homogeneous group, but differ from one another; nevertheless there are themes (protection of national interests, criticism of political opponents, criticism of multinational economics and military organizations, opposition to immigration and postmodern values, etc.), which allow for ideological cooperation and led to practical cooperation between these political parties (and civic associations) in the past as a part of broader electoral groupings.

In the Czech party system it became possible in the 1990s to identify a number of political groups that could be classified on the far right. Radical right-wing parties (especially the NS and DS), which moved in to occupy the political space vacated by the SPR-RSČ after its electoral failure in 1998, took a fairly strong stance against the party of Miroslav Sládek, but even here there were several attempts at cooperation between these political parties and civic associations.

After 2000 there were several attempts at cooperation among these far-right political parties and civic associations.

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<sup>8</sup> The campaign spot is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zq-iDgZtfQw>.

<sup>9</sup> For more see [http://www.narodni-strana.cz/propag\\_mat/KO\\_RE\\_OT\\_CI.pdf](http://www.narodni-strana.cz/propag_mat/KO_RE_OT_CI.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> For more see [http://www.narodni-strana.cz/clanek.php?id\\_clanku=4093](http://www.narodni-strana.cz/clanek.php?id_clanku=4093).

One of the several efforts at integration was the founding of the so-called National Social Bloc, or Right Alternative 2001. The CR Ministry of the Interior rejected a proposed name change to the National Social Bloc because the acronym matches that of the Dutch Nazi party during World War II. Therefore the NSB decided to take the name Right Alternative, which it continued to use (Smolík 2002).

That political party grew out of the Vlastenecká republikánská strana [Patriotic Republican Party] (VRS), members of the banned<sup>11</sup> civic association National Alliance (NA) and the unregistered National Resistance network (Smolík 2008, pp. 27-29). Internal conflicts within the Right Alternative in the spring of 2002 resulted in its not taking part in the 2002 parliamentary election (Sedláček 2003). From broad cooperation, the RA found itself in a situation of heavy competition and general disintegration<sup>12</sup> (Mareš 2003, p 242).

Sedláček in his analysis of far-right political parties (Czech Right, National Democratic Party, Republicans, VPB, ČSNS and RMS) before the 2002 election, arrived at the conclusion that given a successful integration, a new party might have a chance at achieving the 5% threshold for getting into parliament (Sedláček 2003, p. 80). A simple count of votes won by the parties added up to 2.42 % (116,069 votes).

Before election to the European Parliament in 2004 cooperation took place between the NS and ČSNS, on the basis of which the so-called National Coalition was founded. Until the elections the coalition was led by NS chairwoman Petra Edelmannová. Skopal points out, however, that not all members of the ČSNS supported cooperation with the NS (Skopal 2007). During the spring of 2004 tensions arose in the National Coalition over the role of the so-called spokesman, who was supposed to be the only one authorized to communicate with the public. In the election to the EP on 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> June 2004 the National Coalition received only 2,944 votes (0.12 %) (Skopal 2007).

Another example of cooperation on the far right can be seen in the project called the National Five prior to the 2006 election, when the National Party,

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<sup>11</sup> The NA was dissolved by decision of outgoing Minister of the Interior Václav Grulich as of 31. 3. 2000. Václav Grulich explained his decision by saying that the association had repeatedly violated the law. The NA began its public events with a demonstration against the totalitarian laws being used against the movement tending to violate citizens' rights and freedoms. At the NA demonstrations regional leader Vladimír Skoupý repeatedly denied the Holocaust. Even so its activists including Skoupý ran unsuccessfully for the regional council in the fall of 2000 on the ballot of the Patriotic Republican Party (VRS).

<sup>12</sup> a number of members, including J. Kopal, went from the PA to the National Democratic Party.

Czech National Unity Movement<sup>13</sup>, National Unification<sup>14</sup>, Workers' Party, and the Miroslav Sládek Republicans (successors to the SPR-RSČ) joined forces. The National Five project was launched on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2005, when officials of those parties decided at a joint meeting to run in the 2006 election on a joint ballot under the flag of the National Party and under the shared name National Forces. However, due to disagreements among the individual political parties the project collapsed in the summer of 2005 (Vejvodová 2005).

In this case, too, personal interests and factionalism made any stable long-term cooperation impossible on the far right. The heterogeneity of the individual political parties led to intensified competition among them, and to a sharp conflict between the National Party and the Workers' Party.

Even so, the parties of the far right tend to rely on a few fundamental themes, which appear in the programs of the individual right-wing political parties. These main themes also may be instrumental in any possible cooperation or integration on the far right.

All of the three political parties often refer to the following mobilizing themes:

- uncritical nationalism (national chauvinism, hyper-nationalism),
- clear awareness of identity; i.e. the difference between “us” (“down here”) and “them” (“up there”); or, attitudes towards political elites, angry criticism of the political regime,
- emphasis on law and order,
- elements of social populism,
- ethnicization of social and criminal issues (especially in relation to Gypsies),
- criticism of postmodern values,
- criticism of supra-national political and security structures (mainly the demand to withdraw from NATO)
- improved work with the youth,
- criticism of immigration etc (Kupka, Laryš, Smolík 2009, Mareš 2003).

All of these elements, which often support one another or are interrelated, can be considered as the mobilization cluster of the Czech far right. Nonetheless there are also topics that split the far right, for example the issue of the international character of the far right, attitudes towards Germany, or the so-called Beneš Decrees.

Above all, for adolescents these parties may offer a certain alternative to the other political parties. Over the long term it is clear that the activists of these parties are often young people. This fact is shown for example by a detailed analysis of the electoral ballots, which reveals the number of young people (18

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<sup>13</sup> A brief description of the ČHNJ is available at <http://www.chnj.cz>.

<sup>14</sup> The manifesto of National Unification is available at <http://www.nsj.cz/manifest.htm>

– 30 years), or the numbers of students running for office (Edelmannová 2006, pp. 435-466).

Looking beyond the phenomenon of the far-right political parties, it must be said that since the 1990s the far right has changed not only in quantitative, but also qualitative aspects. The entire far-right scene has experienced these changes:

- 1) Due to demographic changes the number of supporters of the far right has declined.
- 2) Compared to the 1990s the number of racially-motivated murders has dropped.
- 3) There has been a greater radicalization among some far-right groups, which are committing more sophisticated acts of violence, for example against the police (for example on the 4<sup>th</sup> April 2009 in Přerov or on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 2008 in Janov).
- 4) The activities not only of far right political parties but of civic associations or non-registered organizations are becoming more visible in the media.
- 5) Within the Czech far right, there is more discussion on foreign strategy, models, topics, and styles.

After the last parliamentary election in 2010 we can say that right-wing political parties in the Czech Republic are totally marginalized. SPR-RSČ and NS are inactive, DS was dissolved by the Supreme Administrative Court and transformed into DSSS. DSSS is an absolutely marginal political party.

## **Conclusion**

This article focuses on describing the individual far-right parties and their relationships. After laying out the basic political science terminology (extremism, radicalism, populism, far right) the far right political parties, SPR-RSČ, DS, and NS in particular, were described. Subsequent passages described the individual integration projects among these political parties, and the common mobilizing themes shared by the far right.

In a democratic political system there will continue to exist far right political parties which, although heterogeneous, may exhibit signs of cooperation or competition. The electoral gains of right-wing political parties are influenced by the overall situation in society – economic, demographic, international situation, security, and other factors that can influence the voters' electoral behavior. Even so the far right political parties cannot be seen as totally homogeneous organizations, because within parties like these there are often disagreements that lead to major fluctuations among the individual representatives of the far right, making it difficult for these parties to work together closely. The concluding passage presents some of the characteristic features of the current scene on the Czech far right compared to the 1990s.

In conclusion it might be added that far right political parties often project themes (especially in their speeches at meetings) that can be seen as expressions of broader social pathologies (violence against immigrants, racism, anti-Semitism, etc.). Political orthodoxy and radical political demands appeal to certain groups of young people, who may decide to take part in the activities of the individual far-right political parties.

#### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ČHNJ – České hnutí za národní jednotu [Czech National Unity Movement]  
DS – Dělnická strana [Workers' Party]  
DSSS – Dělnická strana sociální spravedlnosti [Workers' Party of Social Justice]  
EP – European Parliament  
NA – Národní aliance [National Alliance]  
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
NG NS – Národní garda Národní strany [National Guard of the National Party]  
NS – Národní strana [National Party]  
OS DS – Ochranné sbory Dělnické strany [Workers' Party Defense Corps]  
PA – Pravá alternativa [Right Alternative]  
PS PČR – Poslanecká sněmovna Parlamentu České republiky [Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic]  
RMS – Republikáni Miroslava Sládka [Miroslav Sládek Republicans]  
SPR-RSČ – Sdružení pro Republiku – Republikánská strana Československa [Association for the Republic – Czechoslovak Republican Party]  
VPB – Volba pro budoucnost [Choice for the Future]  
VRS – Vlastenecká republikánská strana [Patriotic Republican Party]

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