In Pursuit of an Errant Act:
The Influence of the "Culture of Late Capitalism" on the Dissolution of Communism in Czechoslovak Socialist Republic

by

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for any award or any degree or diploma in any University or other institution. It is affirmed by the candidate that, to the best of his knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due references is made in the text of the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the influence of Western cultural products on the ideological defeat of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia. My argument is that the collapse of the communism in Czechoslovakia cannot be solely explained by the macroeconomic problems nor by the Gorbachev factor. Although structural problems and Gorbachev's *perestroika* put Communist party elites into difficult situations, as the successful suppression of the Tiananmen Square protests shows, these factors were not enough to overthrow the party. I believe the main factor for the collapse was the party elites' severe crises of legitimacy, which even paralyzed the security forces from intervening in the massive protests and student occupations. Using the accounts of Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek on the new global culture of late capitalism, I argue that the main reason for the legitimacy crises of the "real communism" was the spread and penetration of the new cultural and ideological predicament, which began to emerge in North America and Western Europe roughly in late 1950s, to the Eastern bloc countries. The thesis thus seeks to challenge the ascribed iron-ness of the curtain by discussing the interaction between the two blocs of the Cold War.

Keywords: Velvet Revolution, Czechoslovakia, History of Twentieth-Century Communism, Culture of Late Capitalism.

ÖZET

Bu tez Batı kültürel ürünlerinin Çekoslovak Komünist Partisinin ideolojik yenilgisine olan etkisini incelemektedir. Temel argümanım Çekoslovak Komünist Parti'nin çöküşünün yalnızca makroekonomik problemler ya da Gorbachev faktörüyle açıklanamayacağıdır. Yapısal problemler ve Gorbachev'in *perestroika* sı Komünist Parti seçkinlerini zor bir durum içine soksa da, Tiananmen Meydanı olaylarının başarılı bir şekilde bastırılmasının da gösterdiği gibi bu etkenler kendi başına partinin devrilmesi için yeterli değildi. Çöküşü getiren temel etkenin güvenlik güçlerini dahi kitlesel protesto ve öğrenci işgalleri karşısında hareketsiz bırakan, parti elitlerinin içinde bulunduğu derin meşruiyet krizi olduğuna inanıyorum. Fredric Jameson ve Slavoj Žižek'in geç kapitalizmin yeni küresel kültürü hakkındaki çalışmalarından hareketle, "reel komünizmin" meşruiyet krizinin ardındaki temel sebebin, Kuzey Amerika ve Batı Avrupa'da kabaca 1950'lerin sonlarında oluşmaya başlayan yeni kültürel ve ideolojik durumun Doğu Bloğu ülkelerine sıçraması olduğunu öne sürüyorum. Bu özelliğiyle tez, iki blok arasındaki etkileşimi tartışarak, "perde"ye atfedilen "demir" olma özelliğine karşı çıkmayı hedefliyor.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kadife Devrim, Çekoslovakya, Yirminci Yüzyıl Komünizm Tarihi, Geç Kapitalizmin Kültürü.

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> And then those young, intelligent, and radical people suddenly had the strange feeling of having sent out into the world an act that had begun to lead a life of its own, had ceased to resemble the idea it was based on, and did not care about those who had created it. Those young and intelligent people started to scold their act, they began to call to it, to rebuke it, to pursue it, to give chase to it. If I were to write a novel about that gifted and radical generation, I would call it In Pursuit of an Errant Act.[1]

PREFACE

Sitting in front of my computer in Ankara, I was having an online interview in order to get into a graduate program for a university located in one of the former socialist countries of Europe. After introductions and polite small talk, we began to discuss my proposed research topic; there was a brief but very important moment. The professor asked why I am interested in the causes of the collapse of the system; instead, he said, he would rather question how twentieth-century communism was able to maintain itself for such a long time. There seemed to occur an "insurmountable *parallax gap,* the confrontation of two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible."[2] Since 1989, there have been two different ideological ways of questioning the twentieth century's communist experiment. The first focuses on the reasons for the failure of the great egalitarian

[1] Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (Croydon: CPI Bookmarque, 2000), 12.

[2] Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: Mass.: Massachusets Institute of Technology Press, 2006), 7.

project, which came into political reality in 1917. On the other hand, the question for ex-dissidents of the Eastern bloc has long been how was it possible that these "authoritarian", "inefficient" and "irrational" regimes were in power for such a long time? How did those totalitarian regimes hold on to power for such a long time? I believe this parallax gap is not an "antinomy, which can never be dialectically mediated/sublated into a higher synthesis."[3] Analyzing the reasons for the "sudden" collapse of socialism and the analysis of its persistence "for a long time" are not entirely different from each other. Stalinist principles such as a centralized economy, planning and an immense bureaucratic machine, which arguably made the USSR a world power after the Second World War, became the main weakness of the entire bloc in the global information age. For this reason, one of the fundamental aims of my thesis is to show that the shift from 'persistence' to 'collapse' cannot be explained solely by the internal dynamics of socialist bloc countries. It was not an isolated phenomenon; on the contrary, it was very much related with the new predicament, which came into existence during the 1960s, outside of the bloc. The shift in Western capitalism was generated by the post-war welfare state policies, new capitalist relationships, which allowed overproduction in consumer goods, and more importantly novelties in information and media technologies, so that cultural capitalism gained an ability to diffuse its 'unconscious message' all over the world, including to socialist countries.

This text aims to portray the impact of this unconscious message on the collapse of the socialism in Czechoslovakia. In other words, my fundamental aim is to identify the impact of the consumption of cultural capitalist products, such as rock'n roll, punk, beatnic literature and Hollywood movies, on the ideological defeat of the

[3] Žižek, *The Parallax View,* 7.

twentieth-century communism. Although there are different collapse stories among the socialist republics of central Europe, I focused on the case of Czechoslovakia since, in my opinion, it provides nearly a Weberian "ideal type" for the cultural exchange between the blocs, not only because of its geographical proximity to the West but also the presence of a strong urban bourgeois culture together with the Western style democratic values, which the Czechoslovak Communist Party was never be able to crush completely.[4]

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The year 1989 signifies scenes of happy endings for many people around the world. It was the unexpected, carnivalesque year of revolutions, which marked the triumph of liberal democratic values over the communism of the Eastern bloc countries. Despite Gorbachev's well-known, top-down attempts to change the political and economic mechanisms of the USSR, the avalanche which brought one of the most radical political projects of twentieth-century to its catastrophic end was a complete surprise to the vast majority of social scientists. Since then, there have been two main positions for explaining the sudden collapse of the twentieth century communists. The first one highlights the structural hardships of the Eastern bloc regimes in 1989: the chronic problems of central planning in a command economy, the arms race with the US-led NATO, bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, the Gorbachev factor etc… The second position emphasizes the role of civil society, the call for freedom of the people and the devastating critique and activism of public intellectuals against the socialist states. This thesis takes neither side, nor does it try to find a middle ground. Although it is certain that the structural problems led to

[4] With the exception of Switzerland, Czechoslovakia was the only democratic country in the region in the 1930s until its annexation by Germany. Arguably, it was the only country with a democratic political tradition in the entire Eastern bloc.

serious politico-economic crises for the socialist states of central and Eastern Europe, these cannot explain the whole story. Most important, it was not the economic problems that made the communist party elites give up their power, but a crisis of their legitimacy, which paralyzed the entire system. The macro-economic problems were hard punches but the skillful boxer could handle them, as in the case of China, Cuba or North Korea; but the knock-out was declared only when thousands of people hit the central squares all over central and Eastern Europe and demanded free multi-party elections in their countries. On the other hand, the second "ideas matter[5]" approach tends to ignore the fact that the mass activism of the ordinary people in 1989 and the regime's inability to crush the protestors had very little to do with the so called philosopher kings of "civil society" such as Havel or Michnik. "Ordinary people (even the well-connected ones) often did not care to know, about 'the rise of civil society.'"[6] In addition, despite the fact that "civil society" activists sparked the fire of protests, it is important to recall that similar sparks had flashed numerous times in the history of the twentieth-century communism and none of them was turned into successful revolution. The question to ask is what made 1989 so peculiar that it brought such revolutionary upheaval, comparable only to the 1789 and 1848 in its geographical scope? Why could not European Communist Parties (and their elites) hold onto power, while Chinese, Cuban or Vietnamese communists did? Those are the questions that I will try to answer through in this text.

[5] Barbara J. Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2003), 7.

[6] Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010), 5.

Theoretical Framework

Instead of negotiating between the structuralists and idealists in a "chicken and egg" fashion, my emphasis goes to the rooster; a different, foreign and charming factor, if you will, contributing as much as the chicken to the genes of the egg. My basic conviction is that the rooster was, in Fredric Jameson's term, "the cultural logic of late capitalism."[7] In other words, the 1989 *Carnival of Revolutions*[8] cannot be explained by focusing a magnifying glass on the inner dynamics of Eastern European politics and society, while ignoring the changes in the culture of global capitalism. The 1960s was a time when "the cultural logic of late capitalism" with its global ideology began to spread all over the world, including to central and Eastern bloc countries because of the new media technologies; and it greatly contributed to the shaping of anti-Communist youth culture in Czechoslovakia after the crushing of the Prague Spring. The West, not only with its humanism and democratic values, but also with its life-style-- blue jeans, the Beatles, hippies, clean streets and fashionable cars-- appeared to younger generations as the only way to have a 'decent life.'

During the post-war era, capitalism developed a potential for overproducing a vast variety of consumer products and its marketing strategies led individuals to create and follow different paths to reach their own or market-ascribed 'meaningful' or 'good' life. As Žižek (inspired by Lacan) argues, overproduction and welfare state policies led to the emergence of *jouissance*, a Lacanian concept that can loosely be translated into English as "enjoyment," which appeared as a categorical imperative in

[7] Fredric Jameson, *Post Modernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham N.C: Duke University Press, 1991).

[8] Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

Western capitalism.[9] Lacanian *jouissance* signifies an enjoyment itself, which "is in its innermost status something imposed, ordered."[10] It never appears spontaneously on the subject, it is rather an injunction. "Lacan had posited an equation between *jouissance* and superego: to enjoy is not a matter of following one's spontaneous tendencies; it is rather something we do as a kind of weird and twisted ethical duty."[11]

For Žižek in contemporary western societies (and arguably in the elites of the rest of the world), this notion of "enjoyment" serves a post-modern superego and the era of cultural capitalism is marked by the replacement of patriarchal symbolic authority with "enjoyment" as the categorical imperative.[12] The wide range of cultural capitalist products-- such as rock'n roll, Coca Cola, and Viagra-- served this change in one way or another. Consequently, as Jameson argues, because of the introduction of mass media technologies, the new cultural logic of capitalism gained a "tremendously powerful force which, in sheer gravitational attraction and capability of diffusion, is known, or used to be known, as cultural imperialism. Nothing like a global socialist culture exists as a distinct oppositional force and style to this."[13] The prescription for *jouissance* and its ideology were transmitted through the mass media technologies, and the socialist elites gradually lost their "cultural capital" and hence the ability to generate legitimacy; thus they were unable to maintain the status quo.

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[9] Slavoj Žižek, "You May." *London Review of Books* 21, no. 6 (1999). http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n06/slavoj-zizek/you-may

[10] Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 2008), 9.

[11] Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (New York: W.W. Norton& Company), 79.

[12] Žižek, "You May," *London Review of Books.*

[13] Anders Stephanson and Frederic Jameson, "Regarding Postmodernism: A Conversation with Frederic Jameson*" Social Text* 21 (1989) p.16 http://www.jstor.org/stable/827806

As I explain in the second chapter, after the crushing of Prague Spring in 1968, the party made efforts to form an alternative to capitalist mode of *jouissance* through the concept of "quiet life," but their efforts met with no long-term success.

Whether this post-war cultural transformation was part of some entirely new politico-economic change or "a shift in surface appearance" is disputed.[14] I take the latter position, which argues that, though there have been certain cultural and ideological changes starting from the late 1950s and they were in relation to alterations in the post-war international political economy, the basic rules of capitalist accumulation remain intact. Contrary to post-modernist thinkers, such as Baudrillard or Lyotard, I think that these changes, by no means, signify that we are now in a post-capitalist, or postindustrial world nor do they require us to change our mode of thinking. This approach uses the term "post-modern" in its very precise, limited meaning, which is the new predicament in the sphere of culture and arts. Andreas Huyssen cautiously discusses the extent of the 'postmodern' changes:

> "The nature and depth of transformation is debatable, but transformation it is. I don't want to be misunderstood as claiming that there is wholesale paradigm shift of the cultural, social, and economic orders; any such claim would clearly be overblown. But in an important sector of our culture there is a noticeable shift in sensibility, practices and discourse formations which distinguishes a post-modern set of assumptions, experiences and propositions from that of a proceeding period."[15]

Fredric Jameson relates this spectrum of changes forming the "culture of late-capitalism" to a need for American cultural domination during the heyday of the Cold War. For him, when modernism broke down, the new system of culture was

[14] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change.* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publications, 1989), *vi.*

[15] Andreas Huyssens, "Mapping the post-modern," *New German Critique,* no.33 (1984): 8.

first produced in the United States as the traditional forms of culture were weaker there and "at the moment American power was questioned, a new cultural apparatus becomes necessary to reinforce it." These cultural forms greatly helped American ideological hegemony in the world and this new global culture was an effective "vehicle for depoliticization as religion" once had been.[16] While Harvey locates the beginning of post-modernism somewhere between 1968 and 1972, for Jameson its beginning was the 1950s. During the early 1950s, American industry effectively solved its post-war hardships by producing more and more consumer goods and spare parts, while the pioneers of new products and new technologies, including media, began to appear. In the 1960s, when these economic and technological developments met the baby boomers and created a big intergenerational rupture, a new, American, global culture was established.[17] The Eastern bloc countries were not immune to this global culture. The new cultural forms began to appear almost spontaneously on both sides of the curtain, became very popular among younger generations and quickly replaced the older cultural forms.

Otakar Krívanek's *Deň Náš Každodenný* (Our Daily Day) (1969) testifies to this generational rupture in a small Slovak town close to the city of Nitra. Initially, Krívanek intended to shoot a documentary about the life of an ordinary Czechoslovak family; however, he changed his mind in the middle of the shooting and turned the film into a rather experimental, Vertovian style, movie without a preset screenplay, professional actors or actresses. It depicts the life of the Ravinger family; father Michal is a teacher of chemistry while the mother, Gerta, teaches music. The main story in the film, if there is any, is the concerns of the parents about

[16] Anders Stephanson and Frederic Jameson, "Regarding Postmodernism: A Conversation with Frederic Jameson," *Social Text* 21 (1989) p.16 http://www.jstor.org/stable/827806

[17] Jameson, *Postmodernism.*

their older daughter, Miška. One night, the father discusses the traditional dances of his time and the modern dances that Miška, apparently, prefers. He is surprised that they do not dance the traditional *polka* in her school but dances like "šejk," the Czechoslovak derivation of "shake," referring to "swing" during 1960s, which father Ravinger misunderstands as "Svejk," and tango. The father, still in his cheerful mood, says the *polka* will survive three generations, since it held (his) entire generation throughout the war, and he decides to teach *polka* to Miška. He asks her mother to play the melody on the piano; however, after a few steps Miška asks mother to change the rhythm to tango and tries to teach tango moves to the father. Later in the late night, when the parents are alone, the father expresses his surprise with the daughter:

> Do you remember how we practiced *polka* with Miška? I didn't like her then. Then she wanted that tango. Goodness, she was encouraging me to get so close, so amorous, body to body. Seriously! Some shake-up dance like the tango suits her better than a *polka*.[18]

The movie was shot in twenty days in June 1968, only two months before the Warsaw Pact intervention in the Prague Spring in August 1968. The closing scene depicts Miška boarding on a train, which would eventually take her to Salzburg for a language course. Neither she, nor the film makers could possibly know that the government would ban travelling to the west in six months, and travelling outside of the bloc became only a dream for the vast majority of the citizens. However, such bans did not shake the dominance of tango and šejk over *polka* in their now closed country.

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[18] *Deň Náš Každodenný,* directed by Otakar Krívanek (1969; Slovenská Požičovna Filmov, Bratislava: Slovenský Filmový Ustav, 2008), DVD.

In short, the global counter-culture of the 1960s signified the beginning of a "sea change (which) is bound up with the emergence of new dominant ways in which we experience space and time." [19] Arguably the sea-change had similar effects on individuals in Western and Eastern bloc countries; however, its results were different. In the West, economic elites benefited from such changes because the consumer society boosted their profits, while the political elites of the Eastern bloc became terrified as these changes brought new aspirations to younger people, which Stalin had never faced, and undermined the legitimacy of their politics. As I discuss further in the second chapter, in the Czechoslovak context, the regime's response to such cultural changes can vaguely be divided in to two periods. In the pre-Prague Spring period, the Czechoslovak leadership under the First Secretary Antonín Novotný, tried to stop such influence through public campaigning against the "foreign bourgeois influence" in society. The party saw this as a "culture war" and tried to fight against this "capitalist way of life" penetrating into the society. They responded to the threat of "bourgeois ideology" with heavy agitation for the wisdom of socialism with a Leninist spirit, dictating comradely cooperation within the classless society in the fight against imperialism. For a brief period of time, the party even imposed restrictions on growing long-hair. On the other hand, in the post-Prague Spring era, the party accepted defeat against the new global culture; agitations for the socialist way of life and public campaigns against the western influence were replaced by the rhetoric of the "quiet life." The production of consumer goods was intensified, while the regime ceased its endeavors to control the private lives of individuals. In fact, while imposing strict bans against traveling to the West, the regime granted almost absolute freedom in the private lives of individuals, as long as they were obedient to

[19] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity,* vi.

the party's political decisions, at least in the public sphere. Individuals were encouraged to seek shelter in the safety of their private lives with their family and stay away from the politics. Through this strategy they were successful in repressing the political opposition for the better part twenty years, yet never did they win the hearts and minds of their citizens. When the wave of anti-party revolutions started in the region, the Czechoslovak Communist Party had already lost its legitimacy in society. The entire network of political power depended on the Czechoslovak security forces and Soviet military presence in the country. It was for this reason in 1989 that the whole reign of the party crumbled in one week even though the country had a stable economy with still-working institutions. I argue that the main reason behind this sudden collapse of the Czechoslovak Communist Party was its legitimacy crises. Here by "legitimacy crises," I do not refer to "idealist" political conceptualization, which –I believe-- overemphasizes the influence of civil society and public intellectuals on individuals to accept or not to accept an "authority." On the contrary, I use the term in rather more limited sense, signifying the state's inability to deter the citizens from not participating in the political demonstrations and, more importantly, its incapacity to mobilize security forces to defend its political authority. As I explain further in the fourth chapter, the crucial moment for the fate of the revolution occurred when the party realized that they could no longer depend on security forces, including the People's Militia, to suppress the anti-party protests. So many people sympathized with the protests that the regime feared the possibility of a civil war outbreak, if an armed suppression was ordered to suppress the civil unrest in the country. Moreover, the people working for the security forces had begun to show their discontent with the party's policies, especially after the false killing reports of the fictional university student during the police intervention in the

November 17 protests. The public reaction to this alleged killing, together with the iconic images of the fall of Berlin Wall appearing on the televisions, undermined the determination of the security forces to suppress the daily manifestations. Consequently, police took a passive stance with regard to the demonstrations, while the People's militia organizations in various cities began to declare themselves out of existence.[20] In short, the mass antipathy towards the party overwhelmed the members of the security forces and their paralyses made the revolution possible.

I argue that one of the most important reasons for these crises was the unstoppable penetration of the above-mentioned cultural logic of late capitalism into the socialist bloc. I believe although the countries in socialist bloc showed different traits than their western counterparts in terms of social classes, Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and "habitus" can still be applicable in this context with some modifications. In his theory, the particular habitus establishes a "group-specific way of seeing or making sense of the social world" through the "distinctive mode of cultural consumption."[21] However, in the context of the socialist republics of the twentieth century, the *nomenclatura* habitus; within which the high, socialist realist aesthetic dispositions are constantly reproduced, did not serve to maintain the social order. Starting from the mid-1960s the Czechoslovak Communist Party's leaders, facing the cultural sea-changes of the late-capitalism, began to realize that they were increasingly losing their "cultural capital," their ability to generate the "valuable" and "legitimate". After the tragedy of the 1968 Prague Spring, when the hopes for reforming the system were totally crushed, this resentment was expressed in the consumption of cultural products from the West, until the year of 1989. Listening to

[20] Bernard Wheaton and Zdenek Kavan, *The Velvet Revolution: Czechoslovakia, 1988-1991* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 79.

[21] Martyn J Lee, *Consumer Culture Reborn: The Cultural Politics of Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 34.

rock'n roll, wearing blue jeans or having long hair became parts of the transcripts of resistance for Czechoslovak dissidents. "Pursuing the errant act" became an "act for itself", creating a political struggle through seemingly apolitical cultural consumption. Here, I do not solely refer to "underground culture", the identity formation through Western music such as rock'n roll or punk. In fact, despite the apparent overemphasis in the literature on the underground Czechoslovak culture during Communism, I believe that their activities and activism remained somewhat marginal in Czechoslovak society until the very end. What made the party elites completely lose its legitimacy in society was the mass political apathy that they created in the post-Prague Spring normalization process combined with the total burst of cultural capitalism through all sorts of media products; radio, cinema, music and televisions…

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Some writers[22] use the word "autopsy" to define their endeavors to understand or explain the failure of twentieth-century communist systems. However, if I have to say it in a metaphor, I would like to think of this short work as an "airplane-crash investigation," a contribution to understanding what went terribly wrong in one of the greatest egalitarian projects of the human history. In addition to examining the written literature on the subject, I looked at the movies (old and contemporary), newsreels of the era, and made in-depth interviews with fourteen people in the city of Bratislava. My interviewees are from various class, educational and age groups: the youngest was born in 1973 and the oldest 1932. I asked questions about their experiences during communism and their feelings towards the party. During my

[22] Jack Matlock, *Autopsy of an Empire: The American Ambassador's Account oft he Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1995), Dmitri Volkagonov, Harold Shukman. *Autopsy for an Empire: The Seven Leaders Who Built the Soviet Regime* (New York: Free Press, 1998).

interviews, the discussion revolved around three main questions: i) Who were they? / What was their family background? ii) Which Western songs/movies did they like when they were young? iii) How were they able to obtain these cultural products? iv) How did their following of the western cultural forms affect their opinion on the party? Unfortunately, one setback of my research was that I did not have an opportunity to interview any member of the party during communism. Although some of my interviewees made remarks about the good sides of the communist era, such as having more personal security, less unemployment and a lower level of inequality, none of them supported the policies of the party in pre-1989 period.

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The first chapter summarizes the course of events from the end of the Second World War until the Prague Spring with the aim of describing the historical conditions that led to communists' taking power in 1948, as well as their internal struggles to rule the party. In the second chapter, I focus on the era of "normalization" and assess the party's extraordinary strategy for maintaining its power. In doing so, I attempt to demonstrate how their methods for achieving short-term security in holding power made them lose credibility and legitimacy among society in the long run. In the third chapter, I look at the dissident movements and opposition groups of 1980s, trying to track the road that made the Velvet Revolution possible. I attempt to establish an interconnection between the chapters, so that I can build steadily into a coherent argument that transcends into entire work. It is up to the reader to decide to what extent I have succeeded.

PART I: THE WINDS THAT SHOOK THE PRAGUE CASTLE: THE MAKING AND REMAKING OF CZECHOSLOVAK COMMUNISM (1945-1968)

The history of Czechoslovak Communist Party until the Second World War was typical of other communist parties of Europe. The Czech lands, in particular, had undergone rapid industrialization and urbanization process under Austro-Hungarian Empire and because of the large size of the Czech working class, the Czechoslovak Communist Party became one of the strongest Communist parties in Europe before it was banned in 1938. It was founded by the branch that left the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party in 1921 and won 13.2 percent of the votes in their first election in 1925. It became the second largest party in the Communist International outside of the Soviet Union with 138,000 members.[23] On the other hand, though the founding father of Czechoslovak Republic, Tomáš Masaryk, was a firm believer in pursuing ethical wisdom in politics, his wisdom never included Leninism. He had described Bolshevism as "an orgy of ignorance, violence and corruption" and held on to his suspicion of the Soviet Union until his death.[24] However, increasing tensions with the

[23] *Kommunisticheskii International pered shestim vsemirnim kongressom* (The Communist International before the Sixth World Congress), (Moscow: State Publishing Company, 1928) ; quoted in William Henry Chembarlain, "The General Staff of the World Revolution," http://www.marxists.org/archive/chamberlin-william/1929/soviet-russia/ch11.htm#foot-2 (last accessed in May, 2012)

[24] Igor Lukes, *Czechoslovakia Between Stalin and Hitler: The Diplomacy of Edvard Beneš in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.

Nazi Germany over the Sudeten region, a predominantly German speaking region, made strong relationships with the Soviet Union crucial for establishing a balance of power in order to deter Nazi Germany from attacking Czechoslovakia. In 1935, President Edvard Beneš managed to sign treaties of alliances with France and the Soviet Union, surrounding Germany from two sides in case of an attack on Czechoslovakia.[25] On the other hand, one must note that it was not until this agreement in 1935 that the Czechoslovak government *de jure* recognized the Soviet Union. The political elites of the first Czechoslovak Republic had been the ardent supporters of Western democratic tradition; for Masaryk, (Western) democracy was simply "a synonym for a good state."[26] In addition, though there was sympathy for Imperial Russia for being ruled by fellow Slavs, the Czech and Slovak bourgeoisie always had closer cultural ties with the West, and in their eyes the October Revolution meant the destruction of Russia's link with the European democratic heritage.

However, by the end of the Second World War, this ideological predicament had changed dramatically. There had emerged a wide consensus, especially among the Czechs, that the country's future lays with socialism. After the liberation of Czechoslovakia from German occupation in May, 1945 the main difference between the Communist Party and Social Democrat Party was the method to achieve this end; whether by the democratic evolution or proletariat revolution, they agreed that the goal was the same blurred political concept of 'socialism'. In addition, "even the political parties that considered themselves non-socialist (the People's and

[25] The Soviet Union agreed to help Czechoslovakia militarily only on the condition that France did the same.

[26]R Szporluk, "Masaryk's Idea of Democracy," *The Slavonic and East European Review.* 41, no. 96 (Dec., 1962), 31.

Democratic parties) were for social reforms that were not contrary to socialism or that even resembled it."[27] In the perception of an ordinary Czechoslovak, the signification of the word "socialism" was transformed from 'Asian barbarism' into the prerequisite for the sovereign existence of Czechoslovakia in the future.

We can identify four main reasons for the post-war popularity of socialist ideals in Czechoslovakia. First, the agreement at Munich between Hitler and the western democracies, who sacrificed Czechoslovakia in the hope of evading another world war, destroyed the trust of the Czechoslovak intelligentsia and political elites in the concept of bourgeois democracy, because the signing of the Munich agreement by western powers in 1938, eventually led to the occupation of the entire country by the Germans, who created labor and concentration camps, the tragedies of Lidice, Terezin and the Slovak National uprising. These tragedies generated a collective trauma for an entire generation and shaped their political activism in the post-war period. Zdenék Stribrný, who later became the head of the English language department at Prague's Charles University during the Prague Spring, explained how they perceived the German occupation and, more important, the appeasement policy of Western powers:

> "... (prior to Nazi occupation) there was a strong tendency among intelligentsia to look to German culture, French culture, English culture, and then American culture, too, for inspiration without refusing Russian. But in '38 and '39 many people changed. I don't think they changed their views; they simply felt betrayed by the West and they realized that the Russians at least didn't agree with the pact. Stalin very soon made his own pact with Hitler, but at that time he didn't yet. He didn't accept the Munich Pact. He supported us. And that was very important. That caused a considerable change in the feelings and political orientation of many people."[28]

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[27] Karel Kaplan, *The Short March: The Communist Takeover in Czechoslovakia 1945-1948* (London: C.Hurst&Company, 1981), 34.

[28] David Leviatin, *Prague Sprung: Notes and Voices from the New World* (Westport: Praeger, 1993), 44.

Second, because it fought for every inch of the country side by side with the local resistance groups, the Soviet army's liberation of the country from the Germans, gave another boost to Communist ideals in the country. Surprisingly, Czech nationalism, anti-German and anti- Hungarian sentiments greatly increased the popularity of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia.[29] The predominantly Slavic Red Army was considered the ultimate brother-liberator of the country from the German and Hungarian occupiers and there was a common belief in Czechoslovak public opinion that the Soviet Union was the only country that Czechoslovakia could rely on.

Third, the Great Depression and the war had made the working class conditions unbearable especially in the Czech lands. During the inter-war period the new wave of urbanization increased the number of proletariat in the country, while wages went lower especially after the Great Depression.[30] On the other hand, those who were working in the low-paid jobs were considered lucky as unemployment struck the entire country. On the other hand, in the less economically developed Slovak part, the level of unemployment reached the critical stage in the 1930s. Krajčovičová explains the unbearable situation during the post-1929 era:

> The iron foundries at Krompachy were closed, as were the metal working facilities at Zvolen, while engineering, chemical, shoe and paper industrial production shrank; some textile enterprises moved to Hungary after the war. The result was high unemployment, emigration and social discontent…In 1931-1932, there were almost 200,000 unemployed persons in Slovakia, more than 50 per cent of the number of employed persons;

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[29] Kaplan, *The Short March,* 55.

[30] Jaroslav Krejci and Pavel Machonin, *Czechoslovakia, 1918-92 A Laboratory for Social Change* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), 66.

almost three quarters of these were agricultural workers.[31]

In addition to the already worsening economic conditions in pre-Munich Czechoslovakia, during the occupation, the German policy of closing down of the Czech universities and forcing Czech students to work as forced laborers in the factories both in Germany and Czechoslovakia raised working class 'consciousness' among the intelligentsia. In 1939, all universities were closed and Czech university students, along with the entire young male population of the country, were forced to work in the factories, which were controlled by German officers and the collaborationist part of the Czech bourgeoisie This generation of intellectuals became the idealistic supporters of the Communist Party and the revolution in the post-war period.

Fifth, the emergence of the Soviet Union as a super-power after the war and the *de facto* division of Europe into spheres of influences between the capitalist and communist blocs gave the upper hand to Czechoslovak communists. The western Allies had already found themselves in a fierce civil war with the local communists in Greece in 1946, and arguably, Stalin's non-interference in the Greek civil war, freed local communist parties of central Europe for overthrowing democratic liberal governments in somewhat similar logic to the secret Percentages Agreement, worked out between Stalin and Churchill in Moscow in 1944.

In short, by the end of Second World War, Czechoslovak communists had psychological, social, economic and political advantages over other parties for seizing power in the country. As a member himself of the Czech social democratic party and a critical witness of the Communist takeover in 1948, Peter Hruby depicts

[31] Natália Krajčovičová, "Slovakia in Czechoslovakia," in *Slovakia in History* ed.Mikulaš Teich, Dušan Kovač, Martin D. Brown (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 149-150.

scenes from the minds of the communist intellectuals during 1940s:

> Between 1943 and 1948, I was a lucky (and unhappy) witness to this process, especially watching as a friend, the best Czech recitor of poetry, was strenuously fighting all her humanist education and orientation as mere class prejudices and was trying to achieve complete victory over her "bourgeois" past, till she became a steeled representative of the Bolshevik cause…Too many of them accepted the Stalinist thesis that fascism was the last stage of capitalism. They expected all bourgeois democracies to develop into fascist systems and at the same time they imagined that the Soviet Union was a paradise of political as well as economic democracy.[32]

In the given conditions, it is not surprising that the Czechoslovak Communist Party won the 1946 parliamentary elections obtaining 31.95 percent of the total votes in the country, becoming Europe's third largest communist party with 1.35 million members by 1948.[33] In February 1948, Klement Gottwald, head of the Communist Party and prime minister in a multi-party government, persuaded President Edvard Beneš to appoint a communist-dominated government, following the resignation of non-communist elements from the cabinet to protest the purges of non-communist police officers by the Communist minister of interior. Meanwhile, thanks to the large number of their militants, communists were able to rally thousands of people for mass demonstrations in Prague. Fearing a civil war and Soviet intervention, Beneš accepted the communists' demands, giving way to the proclamation of a new socialist constitution in the parliament. Beneš refused to sign it and resigned from the presidency. When Gottwald replaced him, this simply meant the conclusion of the communist take-over in the country.

Although whether the "February takeover" was a revolution or coup d'etat is still

[32]Peter Hruby, *Fools and Heroes: The Changing Role of Communist Intellectuals in Czechoslovakia* (New York: Pergamon, 1980), 3.

[33] Karel Kaplan, The Short March,58.

disputed among Czech and Slovak intelligentsia, as I argued above, there were good reasons to be Communist in the 1940s in Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak Communist Party was successful in taking advantage of the historical traumas and economic hardships of common people as well as the international conjuncture. In addition to strong working class support, the takeover was made possible thanks to the mobilization of a large number of young communists from all social levels, who played a crucial role in pressuring Beneš to accept their demands. Believing the official party propaganda, they blindly supported the Stalinist persecutions in the country in the first years of Communist rule. However, many of these idealist militants of the communist takeover in 1948 soon regretted their support for Stalinism in the early years of the "revolution."

The First Disappointment: The Years of the Stalinist Terror and Installation of Totalitarianism (1948-1956)

Many top members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party had spent the war years in Moscow. They developed political ties with Stalinist leadership, observed Stalin's system and were eager to apply his policies in their country. Unsurprisingly, once they took the control of government, they used Stalinism as a political methodology. Immediately after the February takeover, the remaining non-communists were removed from all higher positions, and the possibility of having a non-communist opposition was effectively eliminated through strict censorship laws and the terror against the so-called bourgeois elements in society. Most famously, Jan Masaryk, the son of Tomaš Masaryk and minister of foreign affairs in pre-1948 Czechoslovakia, was found dead, dressed in his pijamas in the courtyard of the ministry. In the following months after "Victorious February," thousands of upper and upper-middle class families emigrated to the West, while their properties were

confiscated, as the Party quickly formed a monopolistic power stratum in the name of proletarian dictatorship. Although some working class members of the Communist Party were recruited to managerial positions after the February takeover, the leading Party elite soon formed a highly bureaucratic power stratum, alienated from the rest of society. On the other hand, the Communist Party succeeded in reducing poverty and material inequality in the society. However, it did not destroy the social classes, rather it transformed them for the benefit of the nomenklatura. This reduced the importance of party membership to a part of one's career plan, irrelevant to socialist ideals. However, even at the highpoint of totalitarian terror, the Communist Party elite never abandoned their campaign for the egalitarian distribution of wealth and relative privileges to the unqualified manual workers.[34] This created a practical but not necessarily Marxist alliance between the political elites (who could be considered as the highest strata of the society in the absence of large bourgeoisie) and the working class of the society. The main securities for the blue-collar workers were gradually granted in exchange for their contributing to the status quo, (or in other words the privileges of the highest Party officials and the totalitarian rule) through their labor and political pacifism.

Three decades later, Vaclav Havel assessed the nature of this relationship between lower class citizens and high party officials by narrating about his famous greengrocer. Havel told the story of a greengrocer, displaying the Marxist banner "Workers of the world, unite!" (apparently at the request of the Party) alongside the fruits and vegetables. The greengrocer, Havel described, did not display the banner because of his political ideals, nor did he even give too much thought to it. For Havel, though the greengrocer did not share the Communist ideals, his very act of

[34] Krejci and Machonin, *Czechoslovakia, 1918-92 A Laboratory for Social Change,* 155-160.

compliance signified that he "enters the game, he becomes of its players, he makes it possible for the game to continue being played, for it basically to continue, simply to exist."[35] On the other hand, one must remember that the game was set by the implicit agreement between the Czechoslovak Party élites and the working class in the very early days of the Communist regime. As in the case of Poland, once the lower classes pulled their silent approval of the system away, the whole system crumbled as the severe legitimization crises shook the Party technocracy.

When the Party successfully overcame any pockets (or rather possibility) of political resistance from the non-communists, or class enemies, there began an internal crusade against those so called, with bourgeois origins, Zionist ideology, or Slovak nationalism. As in other central European socialist states, the non-obedient Czechoslovak intelligentsia and political rivals within the Party were exposed to brutal Stalinist show trials. Totalitarianism was installed by sheer political police force directed not only against the non-communists but also any different position than the ruling clique within the Party. In the most famous trial of all, fourteen leading top members of the Communist Party, including the Party Secretary Rudolf Slánský and the former minister of Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Clementis were sentenced to death for a Trotskyite-Titoite-Zionist conspiracy against the people of Czechoslovakia in 1952. Eventually, these purges, show trials, executions, Khrushchev's secret speech revealing the terror of 1930s, the brutal suppression of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, and even more important, the establishment of bureaucratic machinery under the absolute oligarchy of the *nomenklatura* in the name of proletariat dictatorship, shook the confidence of many members of the 1948 generation in the premises of Stalinism. Later, during the Prague Spring, when they

[35] Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against The State in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane (New York: M.E Sharp Inc.), 31.

were criticized by the younger generation of reformists, many of them were self-critical about their naivety in their understanding of proletarian dictatorship. In one such confrontations in the *Národopisné Společnosti Československé,* (Writer's Union Weekly) the Czech writer Pavel Kahout reminded readers of the conditions leading to their support for Stalinism and confessed the mistakes of his generation:

> I was born in 1928… For my generation the arrival of Russian tanks was a real miracle…The perspective of a socialist revolution seemed to be the only starting point… Our enemies wanted to restore capitalism. Most of all, I liked to be the poet of revolution. It was an era of great faith that around the corner was the time when the best ideals of humanity will be realized. I am not ashamed of that faith, whatever I called it, Stalin or else. The poet- unlike judges- has the right to believe. Also a citizen has the right to believe. Trust is an indispensable part of democracy. So much greater is the historical responsibility of everybody who disappointed it. Whoever he is, Stalin or else… Anyway, I am not apologizing… Rather it will never stop grieving me that the years which I then considered to be "the best years of our life" were for so many others the cruelest ones –and for a good many, the last. I can never forgive those who willfully brought it about. But also for myself I will not have a full feeling of my own dignity till I come to terms with the tragedy of the nation and revolution at least partly by a creative act.[36]

This disappointment and the feeling of guilt made them ardent supporters of the reform Communists in 1968, when the motto "socialism with a human face" came as the prescription for their grief. In fact, the political efforts to bring reform to the Communist system were made by the politicians who were in their twenties in 1948. Arguably, the Prague Spring started as a top-down effort of reform-minded members of the 1948 generation, including Dubček, until it was embraced by the youth in the streets after the Soviet intervention. The crushing of attempts to create "socialism with a human face" by the armies of the Warsaw Pact deepened the grief of the revolutionaries of 1948. However, unlike the later generations most of them kept their belief in the premises of Marxism even after the Prague Spring and saw

[36] Hruby, *Fools and Heroes,* 13.

totalitarianism as the deviation from the theory. In a discussion with a Czech Communist friend, Kahout had a few remarks on the young communist intellectuals of early 1950s: "I want to say that we were no Marxists and if one day we should be punished, then more than anything else, for our crimes against Marxism. We are charlatans who passed ourselves off as surgeons."[37]

The Great Expectations (1956- 1968)

The year 1956 was critical moment for Communism in Central Europe. Khrushchev's "secret" speech, revealing the crimes of Stalin, had a large impact on the socialist countries and parties all over Europe. For the victims of Stalinist terror in the Eastern bloc countries, it was not anything new but a confession, while for young Communist idealists, it was a massive blow to their trust in the party's leadership. In Czechoslovakia, the situation was particularly grave, because mass trials and purges were recent and the main political actors, responsible for similar Stalinist crimes, were still in power. For instance, the General Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Antonín Novotný was known as the chief Stalinist and the ardent supporter of trials at the climax of Stalinist terror in the country. During his leadership, the world's biggest statue of Stalin was erected in Prague and as the image of Stalin declined, so did his. "Even so, Prague's statue remained defiantly untouched, in large part because there were still too many Stalinist skeletons lurking in the closets of the Czechoslovak Communist Party leadership."[38]

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[37] Hruby, *Fools and Heroes*, 16.

[38] Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV, 9.* The stautue was toppled on Moscow's orders in 1962. "To give but gruesome example: following the execution in 1952 of top party officials (most of them Jews), falsely accused of treason in Czechoslovakia's notorious Stalinist show trial, their confiscated property was sold off at bargain prices to their former colleagues and friends among Party elite. The avarice was such that the wife of the country's future leader, Antonín Novotný, bought up the china service and bedding belonging to the family of the executed foreign minister, Vladimír Clementis. She was familiar with the china, if not the bedding, from her many social visits to the

Despite the persistence of this ruling elite in power for nearly a decade after Khrushchev's speech, there emerged a new generation of Communist Party members, climbing up the ranks of the newly formed nomenklatura, waiting for their turn. The Stalinist domination within the Party was first cracked in Slovakia. Alexander Dubček became the first secretary of the Slovak branch of the party in 1962 and he first began to loosen the Stalinist ties there and subsequently, gained the support of young reform Communists all over the country. Thanks to Dubček's liberal rule, the Slovak weekly newspaper, *Kultúrny život*, became the national center of discussion on the ways to reform Communism, as the new generation of intellectuals was increasingly becoming dissatisfied with the totalitarian rule of the top party elites. This, along with the economic recession and "continuing thaw in international relations and changes in neighboring nations, contributed to a national crisis of power that steadily spread through Czechoslovak society during the mid-1960s."[39] Finally, in 1967, during the fourth Congress of Czechoslovak Writer's Union, the pandora's box was opened and the party was openly criticized for the first time since the 1948 revolution by later famous writers such as Milan Kundera and Václav Havel. Later that year, during the CPCz's Central Committee Plenum, Dubček demanded intra-Party democracy, the reduction of the excessive power of Novotný and the Central Committee, which exercised authority in every aspects of Czechoslovak society, and more autonomy for Slovak national institutions. In return he was accused of advocating bourgeois nationalism and "of falling under the influence of

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Clementises' home." Heda Margolius Kovaly, *Under a Cruel Star: A Life in Prague 1941-1968*, trans. Franci Epstein and Helen Epstein with the author (New York, 1997), 167. quoted in Paulina Bren, The Greengrocer and His TV, 2.

[39] Jaromír Navrátil, ed., *The Prague Spring 1968: National Security Archives Reader* (Budapest: Central European University Press), 5.

incorrect local interests."[40] The struggle to determine the future of Czechoslovakia was unofficially started. In order to avoid losing the power, Novotný invited Leonid Brezhnev to the country. However, during his short visit to Prague, having talked to almost all members of the Presidium and probably sensed the unpopularity of the Czechoslovak Party Secretary, Brezhnev simply refused to take any side in the inner party disputes. Thanks to Brezhnev's clear remark on Soviet neutrality, on 5 January, 1968 reform Communists were able to pass the regulation that separated the posts of first secretary and of President and elected Dubček as the first secretary of the party, while Novotný remained as President, but with mostly symbolic authority.

Not long after Dubček's election as the first secretary, the discussions among reform Communists for the future of the country were made public and this was immediately reflected in society, causing mass euphoria especially among the university students. From the very beginning, reform Communists made it very clear that Dubček's appointment was not only a rotation of leaders, but a mentality. One of the radical reform Communists, Josef Smrkovský wrote in the the journal of the Communist Party *(Rudé Pravo)*:

> ... referring to a series of tasks that should have been performed a long time ago, as well as to topical and pressing matters in the economic and social system. It is also essential to eliminate everything that has been distorting socialism, hurting people's souls, causing pain, and depriving people of their faith and enthusiasm.[41]

In March 1968 the political and socio-cultural mobilization that was later going to be described as the "Prague Spring", effectively began. On 4, March, the Party Central Committee Presidium officially declared that it had begun the process of abolishing censorship. In two weeks time, two mass meetings between young people

[40] Navrátil, ed., *The Prague Spring 1968: National Security Archives Reader*, 7.

[41] Josef Smrkovský, "Jak nyní dál:Nad závéry lednového pléno UV KSC," *Rudé Pravo*, February 9, 1968, p.2. in Jaromír Navrátil, ed., *The Prague Spring 1968: National Security Archives Reader, 47.*

and political and cultural officials were organized for discussing the matters that had long been forbidden by the party in Prague. It is estimated that around 20,000 people attended each of these meetings. The more important and the crucial step was that the new Czechoslovak Communist Party leadership formed the "Action Group for the Restoration of the Social Democratic Party" and this triggered the end of Warsaw Pact's "wait and see" policy.

The leaders of the pact met in Dresden, where Dubček was expected to explain the notion of their reforms to other socialist leaders. Ulbricht and Gomulka were especially very critical on the direction that Czechoslovakia was heading and even accused reform Communists of being "counter revolutionary." Brezhnev, on the other hand, tried to assure Dubček that they did not intend to dictate the internal matters of his country. However, Brezhnev's speech at the Dresden conference gave a clue about the suspicions among the top-members of the international *nomenklatura* towards Czechoslovakia as well as the level of reality, at which they were dwelling.

> But let us clarify what you mean by "liberalization of society"? For 25 years you have been building socialism. Have you not had democracy until now? Or how else could this be understood? Perhaps the phrasing is not quiete exact in this regard. But what do we want? This is not the worst thing. We see a danger, and we want to talk about it.[42]

The danger that Brezhnev and other Warsaw Pact leaders felt was indeed quite understandable. As O. Výborný, a Czechoslovak television reporter in Moscow, had reported in February 1968, the Soviet intelligentsia along with the rest of bloc was

[42] "Stenogprahic Account of the Dresden Meeting, March 23, 1968." Foundation for the Archive of Parties and Mass Organizations of the GDR under the Federal Archival Service (Berlin), Central Party Archive oft he SED (Berlin) IV 2/201/778 in Jaromír Navrátil, ed., *The Prague Spring 1968 National Security Archives Reader* , 65.

closely observing the developments in Czechoslovakia with great enthusiasm.[43] Its success would have signified a great danger for the totalitarian hegemony of the international communist party elites. Consequently, the diplomatic pressure on the new Czechoslovak leadership to slow down the momentum of the Prague Spring, if not stopping it, gradually intensified. Yet, reform Communists refused to accept Moscow's "friendly" advices. In April, they announced a new "Action Program." Although this program clearly assured that the main orientation of Czechoslovak foreign policy would remain untouched, it also contained plans for changing the party's monopolistic exercise of power in society and "democraticizing the economy," which gave another 'justificiation' to the fears of the International *nomenklatura* elites. In addition, reform Communism's abolishing of censorship and the appearance of open and "radical" discussions on the "new socialist path" in the Czechoslovak media terrified Moscow. During the Soviet-Czechoslovak meeting in Moscow on 4-5 May, 1968, the attack of Nikolai Podgorny, the Chairman of Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, demonstrates the nomenklatura's frustration with the idea of freedom of speech in any socialist state.

> Excuse me, Cde. Dubček, but we wish to know what is happening with regard to radio, television, and the press. One gets the impression nowadays that anyone who wants to can be heard speaking about anything he pleases. Is it possible that the means of mass information and propaganda, including, *Rudé Pravo,* have fully slipped out of your control?[44]

During the endless talks between Dubček and the international *nomenklatura*

[43] See "Report by Czechoslovak Television Reporter on Soviet Reactions to the Events in the CSSR, February 28, 1968" Institute for Contemperory History, Archive of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Prague in Jaromír Navrátil, ed., *The Prague Spring 1968 National Security Archives Reader* , 55-57.

[44] "Stenographic Account of the Soviet-Czechoslovak Summit Meeting in Moscow, May 4-5, 1968" Institute for Contemperory History, Sbírka (Collection)Komise vlády CSFR pro analyze událostí let 1967-1970, Materials Provided to the Czechoslovak Commission by Boris Yeltsin (4/92, 7/92) in Jaromír Navrátil, ed., *The Prague Spring 1968 National Security Archives Reader* , 117.

elites, the main issue was not the actual policies of the Czechoslovak government but the intented plans, programs and discussions, appearing in the mass media. Despite his continuous efforts to assure other Warsaw Pact leaders of his country's "communist" future, Dubček was questioned for the articles, written by radical reform Communists and non-Communists. However, to the shock of other leaders, he refused to persecute them or bring censorship back to the country. Ludvík Vaculík's manifesto "Two-Thousand Words," strongly defended the reforms and urged society to defend the gains of the Prague Spring against the internal or external "retrograde" elements. It was immediately made public and signed by seventy leading intellectuals and well-known public figures. Despite its socialist tone, "Two-Thousand Words" and its wide appearance in the Czechoslovak media appearing in four main newspapers and was rightfully perceived as a frontal attack on the legitimacy of the entire hegemony of all communist regimes in the region. The leaders of five other communist parties sent letters to Prague and proposed a joint meeting in Warsaw. However, "the content of the individual letters greatly distorted the situation inside Czechoslovakia" so that the Czechoslovak Central Committee refused to attend the meeting but instead proposed bilateral meetings with each communist party in Europe, including the Yugoslav and Romanian communist parties. Their resistance angered Warsaw Pact leaders, and on 17 July 1968 in their so-called Warsaw letter they accused Dubček of losing control of the party and the country and losing grounds to reactionary forces and made it clear that they would intervene unless the Czechoslovak government took the initiative against (in their terms) right-wing forces. As a reply to the frightening "Two Thousand Words," all five parties published the letter in their official journals and condemned the anti-communist tendencies in Czechoslovakia. Having sensed the immediate threat of

foreign intervention, Dubček requested a bilateral meeting in Čierna nad Tisou located on the Slovak-Ukranian border with Brezhnev, while twenty army divisions from neighboring "fraternal" states were being deployed to the Czechoslovak borders for Operation Danube. Brezhnev decided to attend the meeting and repeated the same demands to eliminate so-called anti-socialist, reactionary elements, such as the famous Presidium member, radical reformist and veteran of Spanish civil war František Kriegel, and emphasized the danger of an "anti-socialist coup" in the country. Dubček rejected the accusation of counter-revolutionary developments and defended the essentially positive steps that the party had taken, though he admitted some minor negative consequences, which, he claimed could easily be solved by the Czechoslovak Communist Party itself. The Soviet delegation insisted that the situation was very dangerous in the country and justified their heavy involvement in the Czechoslovak case as it constituted an essential part of socialist common borders. The three and a half day conference in Čierna nad Tisou was turned into such deaf monologues, centered around these two irreconcilable view points. The conference ended with only agreement on the need for a joint meeting of six Communist parties in Bratislava. However, according to Dubček even though the Czechoslovak side gave no fundamental promises, the Soviet leadership conducted its "normal *modus operandi*: automatically to consider its own proposals and demands to be accepted and binding, then to impose their implementation with the argument that, after all, 'it was agreed to, and accepted.'"[45] It was probably for this reason that Brezhnev said good-bye to the Czechoslovak delegation with the following words: "You gave us a promise and we are confident that you are going to fight...if our plan is foiled, it will

[45] "Alexander Dubček vypomíná: Puvodní rozhovor pro Občanský deník o pozadí srpnových událostí roku 1968," *Občanský deník* (Prague), Part 1, August 3,1990, p.3 and Part 2, August 10, 1990,p.3 in Jaromír Navrátil, ed., *The Prague Spring 1968 National Security Archives Reader* , pages 190 and 300-105.

be very difficult to call a further meeting… That is when we shall come to your assistance."[46] However, the obvious problem was that the enemy was not clear, there was not any plan agreed on by both sides, and the extreme majority of the Czechoslovak community was not asking for his help.

When the meetings in Bratislava resulted in the same monologues and no agreements, five Warsaw Pact countries (USSR, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and East Germany) decided to take an action similar to the one in Hungary in 1956. Meanwhile, some hard-line, anti-reform Czechoslovak Communists sent a letter to Brezhnev and asked for "assistance with all the means" at their disposal.[47] This gave further justification to the leadership of the international *nomenklatura* to invade the country. Finally, on August 20 1968, Warsaw Pact armies began to enter Czechoslovakia. The top members of party's plenum were brought to Moscow and forced to sign the document accepting the presence of Warsaw Pact soldiers in the country. Soon after, President Ludvík Svoboda ordered the Czechoslovak army to stay in their barracks and not to confront the foreign armies. In the absence of military opposition, the only resistance to the "intervention" came from student groups, who had been actively participating in the debates on the ways to reform Communism and had been strong supporters of the change attempted by Dubček's administration. Despite the widespread street clashes between the Warsaw Pact armies and students in the major cities and the apparent discontent among the population for the invasion, shortly afterwards, the Soviet-backed new regime was established under the leadership of Gustav Husák.

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[46] Navrátil, ed., *The Prague Spring 1968 National Security Archives Reader,* 190.

[47]"The Letter of Invitation from the Anti-Reformist Faction of CPCz Leadership, August 1968" Institute for Contemperory History (Prague), Sbírka (Collection) Komise vlády CSFR pro analyze událostí let 1967-1970, Materials Provided to the Czechoslovak Commission by Boris Yeltsin (4/92, 7/92) 21 in Jaromír Navrátil, ed., *The Prague Spring 1968 National Security Archives Reader ,* 324.

Then followed the reintroduction of strict censorship and persecution of those who supported the Prague Spring. The new regime faced a similar dilemma to that West Germany had faced right after WW2. Too many people had supported the now-disliked *ancien regime*. Their numbers were so high that a total purge would mean the liquidation of so many educated people from their positions at an extent that it would threaten the functioning of the new government. The new leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party designed a genuine solution to this problem. They quickly formed interrogation committees for establishing ideological rigidity especially among Czechoslovak intellectuals. The committees divided their targets basically into two categories based on their public recognition. Those who were known by the public and known for their support of reform communism, such as by signing the "Two Thousand Words" or making positive comments about the political developments during the Prague Spring, were asked to write a public apology and to denounce their former political beliefs and activism. However, the real job of the committees was much more radical than this text-book neo-Stalinist method for intimidating a few hundred public intellectuals. Their job was to eliminate any risk of reformists taking power again in the future, even if this required the screening of millions of people. For such an ambitious aim, a total of 70,217 central committees including 235,270 members were formed and they interviewed 1.5 million party members in seven months.[48] The committee was to decide "whether to renew the person's party membership card or to expel him from the party, or else cancel his party membership."[49] Those interviews were vital for the screened individuals,

[48] Hans Renner, *A History of Czechoslovakia since 1945* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 98.

[49] *Závéry předsednictva ÚV KSČ ze dne 14. Dubna 1970 k dalšimu postupu ve výméné stranických legitimací*; "Přilohy: Postup při výméné členských legitimicí v základních organizacích silné zasažených pravicavým oportunismem," 14 April 1970, NAČR, ÚV KSČ, f. předsednictvo, a.j. 199 quoted in Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968*

because losing one's party membership was synonym with losing one's job or any white collar career path in the future. On the other hand, probably to the shock the interviewees, the decision process was brutally simple. They were asked whether they agreed or disagreed "that the invasion was an act of necessary international military assistance," and agreeing was the only correct answer for keeping their party membership. [50] Later, this wave of interviews included non- party members, especially in cultural and academic fields, because they were the active supporters of the leaders of reform communism until the very end. Those who refused to capitulate by announcing their disagreement with the invasion were sacked from their positions and forced to work in low-paying blue-collar jobs. Not only did they have to suffer the consequences personally, but also their close relatives faced restrictions from public services, higher education and job opportunities. Facing such threats, many of them capitulated to the new regime. Newspapers were filled with such forced denunciations explaining potential harm of their "former" beliefs toward socialism. Although there were cases of disobedience, the regime managed to degrade the vast majority of reform socialists in virtually every work place in every district of the country by forcing them to give up their idealism. In this way, the reform communists not only lost their political campaign but also their prestige and, credibility at every level of society. On the social level, since too many people were screened and forced to make loyalty statements to the Party in order to enter into any type of middle and upper level jobs, the humiliation was felt by very large stratum of society. Suddenly, the absolute minority in the society that had agreed with the Soviet intervention began to exercise its hegemony and the rest of the society simply had to lie about their actual political beliefs if they wanted to have a comfortable life not

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Prague Spring, 44.

[50] Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV,* 44.

only for themselves but also for their children.

This created, as nearly all of my interviewees recounted, "a state of mass schizophrenia," in which the vast majority of the people were forced to express different political opinions in public than inside their flats. This radical non-pluralism generated apathy for party politics among the people as the new Czechoslovak news agencies were all turned into crude propaganda machines. During the post-Prague Spring era, fearing public disobedience, the party indeed encouraged people to withdraw into their apolitical, quiet, conformist lives. On the eve of Soviet invasion, then the chairman of the Slovak Communist Party Gustáv Husák asserted what normalization was to be about: "a normal person wants to live quietly… this party wants to safeguard the quiet life."[51] During his long presidency, the investment in the production of consumer goods was intensified, the living standards steadily rose, the socialist TV was filled with soap-opera like television serials, and the country experienced a big baby boom. While political power was held by small group of *nomenklatura* elites, the rest of the society was deliberately encouraged to take shelter in their family lives, to live without thinking much about the ongoing events in the country. As Havel's frustration with the greengrocer's callousness demonstrates, the regime was successful in creating what the Marxist tradition would call- "petit-bourgeois conformism." Despite the activism of a few individuals, such as the self-immolation of 19 years old university student Jan Palach in 1969 or signing of Charter 77 by some intellectuals, there appeared no sign of public disobedience in the country until Bratislava Candle Manifestation protests in March 1988. Yet this success came with the price. During the era of normalization, people became more radical in their attitude to the party and the ideals of communism. The

[51] Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and Ist Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics, 1968-1970* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 175.

1968 attempts to reform Communism in Czechoslovakia were largely an effort of the discontented young Communist intellectuals of the 1948 generation to bring democratic values to the communist regime. However, the intervention of Warsaw Pact troops in August, 1968 eradicated all the hopes for creating a genuine socialism and the later opposition groups no longer sought to reform socialism but to overthrow it. In this regard, the end of the Prague Spring had an international effect, because it brought such desperation for reform-minded individuals in all socialist bloc countries. The famous Soviet writer and dissident, Vassily Aksyanov, explained how the reform-minded socialist intellectuals in USSR perceived the suppression of the Prague Spring:

> It completely changed my outlook on everything around me. Everyone was shocked by this, by the extent of the crackdown on an entire generation of writers. It was as if we all had a collective breakdown. After that, a lot of people started talking about emigration. You didn't hear a whole lot about emigration before—most people were involved in the struggle against these idiots and we still had some hopes for winning the battle. Before the crackdown people said, "Look at Czechoslovakia, they started a new type of socialism." Socialism With a Human Face as it was called. But after '68 we started talking about "Socialism With an Inhuman Asshole." The Thaw was over, and the deep frost of a long Soviet winter was upon us. I realized after the crackdown that it was the end—all of our hopes had been murdered.[52]

Although some members of the 1948 generation, including Dubček, believed in the possibility of staying within the ideological coordinates of socialism even during the heyday of the Velvet Revolution, their time was gone. The later generations turned their focus to the premises of Western democracies rather than to saving socialism. The main actors of the epic photographs depicting the students confronting the Soviet tanks on 21 August 1968 lost their hopes of saving Marxist

[52] Vassily Aksyanov, Interview by John Pohlmann, Conversations with Vassily Aksyonov, http://www.sovlit.com/conversationswithaksyonov last accessed in November, 2011.

ideals, and instead the word “truth” emerged as the new political aim, while the new party officials described the intervention of the Warsaw Pact as “friendly aid” and justified the mass purges of the country's most respected intellectuals as a necessary means to save socialism within the country. In the late 1970s, play-wright and big rock'n roll fan, Václav Havel emerged as the champion of the new dissident movement and began expressing a new ethico-political motto, which later became the title of his collection of essays: “Living in Truth.” [53] Understanding the ideological transition between these two main ethico-political *ethe* constitutes the main ambition of this text.

[53] Václav Havel, *Living in Truth: 22 Essays Published on the Occasion of the Award of the Erasmus Prize to Vaclav Havel* (Amsterdam : Meulenhoff, 1986).

PART II

THE CULTURE WARS IN THE AUTUMN OF 'REAL SOCIALISM'

Deconstructing Brezhnev

In the months prior to the August intervention, the five leaders of the Warsaw Pact met in Moscow and, then in Warsaw, to discuss how to deal with the Czechoslovak problem. The minutes of their secret meetings, later given by Boris Yeltsin to Havel's government, show the discomfort of the international *nomenclatura* with the wide usage of mass media technologies, particularly television, by the reform socialists. With the exception of Hungarian President János Kádár, who was famous for designing relatively liberal "goulash socialism" in his country, all other participants[54] repeatedly expressed their shock and anger with the appearance of open discussions about the ways to reform socialism in the mass media, because for them this was nothing but counter-revolutionary propaganda. What is striking here is that the Communist leaders seemed terrified predominantly by the appearing of open discussions, such as on the economic reforms or the

[54] Participants in the talks: From the Soviet Union: L.I Brezhnev (General Secretary of the Central Committee of Communist Party), N.V. Podgorny (Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet) A.N. Kosygin (Premier), K.F Katushev. From Bulgaria: T. Zhivkov (The First Secretary of Bulgarian Communist Party), From the GDR: Walter Ulbricht (First Secretary of SED Central Committee), G.Axen. From Poland: W. Gomulka (First Secratary of the Polish United Workers Party). Minutes of the Secret Meeting of the "Five" in Moscow, May 8, 1968 (Excerpts) Institute for Contemperory History (Prague), Sbírka (Collection) Komise vlády CSFR pro analyze událostí let 1967-1970, Materials Provided to the Czechoslovak Commission by Boris Yeltsin (4/92, 7/92) 21 in Jaromír Navrátil, ed., *The Prague Spring 1968 National Security Archives Reader* , 132.

possibility of recreating a social democratic party, without any censorship in the mass media; rather than the actual policies of the Central Committee under Dubček. For this reason, Dubček, himself, was never blamed for being counter-revolutionary but rather for being naive or incompetent in the war against such saboteurs. In addition to the central organ of the party, the newspaper *Rudé Pravo*, Warsaw leaders were concerned with the use of televisions and radios by reform communists without any censorship. For them, the emergence of such discussions and the sometimes critical tone signified the Czechoslovak Communist Party's losing control of the media, if not the entire society. Brezhnev, in particular, was very precise in his analysis of the situation in the country. On May, 8 1968 he explained to other participants in Moscow how he had advised Dubček:

> "We advised the Czechoslovak leaders in a comradely way: Put a member of the Presidium in the editorial office of *Rudé právo*, if only for a few months, and another Presidium member in the radio and television stations so that those people can take the work of these institutions under their control… Talks are under way about the best way for the Central Committee to regain control of the daily *Rudé Pravo* and of the radio and television.[55]

The international *nomenklatura* was fearful of the Prague Spring because they feared any development that might bring similar demands in their own countries. For this reason, in some perverse way, Brezhnev was right in telling his colleagues that in defending Czechoslovakia they were "defending the cause of the socialist camp and the entire international communist movement."[56] The real issue behind this rhetoric on "defending socialism" was his fear of the emergence of a new generation

[55] Minutes of the Secret Meeting of the "Five" in Moscow, May 8, 1968 (Excerpts)… Jaromír Navrátil, ed., *The Prague Spring 1968 National Security Archives Reader* , 135.

[56] Minutes of the Secret Meeting of the "Five" in Moscow, May 8, 1968 (Excerpts)… Jaromír Navrátil, ed., *The Prague Spring 1968 National Security Archives Reader* , 143.

of socialist citizens with new aspirations. His speech in Warsaw revealed this psychology of the international *nomenklatura* elites to a great degree.

> Right-wing forces are quite openly trying to undermine the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in order to transform it from a monolithic combat unit into an amorphous organization that includes mass of fellow travelers who do not subscribe to Marxist- Leninist views. It is not coincidence that they are encouraged by Cde. Císar, who claims there is no need to worry if the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia now admits 200,000 or 300,000 young people into its ranks to give an aging party a healthy injection…*What sort of "injection" do they have in mind, what are these 200,000 to 300,000 young people like who are to be admitted to the CPCz, and why admit young people and not true representatives of the working class?*[57]

Brezhnev's remark on the recruitment of young people to Party during the Prague Spring is particularly important. Although he uses the rhetoric of defending the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the party, the real battle was fought for the (re)interpretation of socialism within the party. All of the reform communists were firm believers in Marxist ideals as they saw those, and most of them kept their beliefs even after the Velvet Revolution. Even the infamous "Two Thousand Words" manifesto had a clear Marxist tone, and many of its signatories had been members of the party before February 1948. The actual fight was rather between the older generation of (domestic and international) party elites, who had been in the upper ranks of the party already in the thirties, and the above mentioned 1948 generation, many of whom had a middle-class family origin and became members thanks to the hard experiences of the Second World War.[58] The international *nomenklatura* feared that losing numerical superiority to reform communists within the Czechoslovak

[57]Transcript of the Warsaw Meeting, July 14-15, 1968 (Excerpts) Protokol ze spotkania przywodcow partii i rzadow krajow socjalistycznych: Bulgarii, NRD, Polski, Wegier, i ZSRR, Archiwum Akt Nowych, Arch. KC PZRR, P.193, T.24, Dok.4; Vondrová & Navrátil, vol.1,pp.269-297 in Jaromír Navrátil, ed., *The Prague Spring 1968 National Security Archives Reader* , 224-225. Ithalics are mine.

[58] There were surely exceptional cases to this generalization, such as "young" hardliner Vasil Bil'ak and old reformist František Kriegel; however, I believe overall, the idea is valid especially in the central European countries.

communist party would have triggered the collapse of the international socialist bloc as they knew it. For this reason, Brezhnev refused to see the recruitment of a few hundred thousand young members to the party as a "healthy injection," but rather as a step toward a counter-revolutionary takeover. In addition, I believe Brezhnev's suspicion of what reform communists saw "as a healthy injection" was closely related to the meaning of being young in the 1960s in central Europe.

Ironing the Curtain While the Guitar Gently Weeps

The award-wining Czech movie, *Pelišky* (Cosy Dens:1999) contained probably one of the most powerful scenes for describing such generational conflict on the eve of the Prague Spring. On Christmas night of 1967, a rebellious teenager, son of an army officer with sincere socialist beliefs, Michal Sebek, puts a colourful drawing of Mick Jagger on the bulletin board of the household, where his parents put the worldwide technological advances of the socialist bloc countries. The scene starts with the close shot of the tired father's face, who had a hangover from the previous night; and then his awe, shock and anger after realizing there is something wrong on the board. He shouts, "Who's this ugly hippie here?" Michal, who was brushing his teeth comes down the hallway slowly and answers in a half-sarcastic, half callous way, "You mean, Gagarin's brother?" The father angrily grabs the poster, comes close to his son, establishes eye contact and rips the poster off, while Michal keeps playing with the tooth brush in his mouth. Then the father turns his back, moves towards the kitchen but suddenly rushes back to the son and says in disappointed and angry voice "I wanted to pass the bulletin board on to you. You bastard." That was probably how Brezhnev felt about Dubček, the reform communists and the few hundred thousand new members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in the

summer of 1968. When the father leaves the hallway for the kitchen, Michal retains his callousness and makes a gesture that is something in between an army salute and *bras d'honneur* and continues his rebellious attitude towards his father. Neither the father, nor Brezhnev could do anything about it. The father could rip Jagger's poster and humiliate the son; Brezhnev could send hundreds of tanks to end the 'deviation'; however, the resentment towards the authority figure only became stronger.[59]

The 1960s have been generally characterized as the time of rock'n roll, the Beatles, the sexual revolution and student activism. The curtain was not iron when it came to preventing the penetration of such traits into Eastern bloc. Starting from the late 50s, rock'n roll music, both Czech and English, began to fill the cafés in the major cities, more and more young people were listening western songs on foreign radios, following western movies and deciding on their favorite actors, actresses or directors. New stages were opened for live performances of the mushrooming Czechoslovak *bigbít* groups, the term coined instead of rock'n roll, in order not to attract the attention of the party officials. "Even in small villages people gathered in the local hall. The most capable dancers demonstrated motions that they had learned by observation, to the accompaniment of recorded music, and all the others imitated them."[60] From the very beginning, government officials were suspicious of the popularity of non-socialist cultural forms among the younger generations. Yet they were simply overwhelmed by the massive cultural wave from the West. Jiri Donné's account of the fashion of the 1960s in Czechoslovakia tells much of the western influence in the country:

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[59] *Pelišky*, directed by Jan Hrebejk, (1999; Česká televize: Total HelpArt, Prague), VHS.

[60] Peter Balog, entry to *Publication on the Occasion of the Exhibition 'Beatlemania!'* by Czech Museum of Music, (Klatovy: Dragon Press, 2010), 20.

> "In the early sixties young people, following the model of cigarette advertisements in foreign magazines, had jeans (then called texasky) made for themselves from black denim sewn with white thread. From the black-and-white pictures they couldn't tell that jeans are blue with yellowish-orange thread."[61]

When the Beatles began to shake the world, the Czechoslovak youth was more than ready for their music. In nearly all of my interviews people remembered listening to the Beatles with great pleasure regardless of their level of English comprehension. As elsewhere in the world, the Beatles brought their own fashion, particularly the hair style. Looking at old pictures, many young people in contemporary Czech and Slovak Republics were surprised by the length of hair and skirts of their parents. In addition to being fashionable, having long hair itself became almost a global symbol for resistance against any type of authority. The peculiarity of Czechoslovakia, along with the rest of the Eastern bloc, was that the government and party perceived their appearance as something foreign and contrary to socialist principles. Jaroslav Rybár, the principal deputy director of Public Security Central Administration, justified the measures taken against "long hairs" with following statement in 1966:

> And that's why the large majority of "long-hairs" consider long hair to be part of their lifestyle- after the model of various Western groups like the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, and the Kinks. *This copying is something foreign to us, a way of life contrary to our principles.* It is a form of penetration of foreign ideology into our society, aimed at our youth and to a certain extent supported by a portion of our press.[62]

Consequently, in the summer of 1966 the Czechoslovak government, under the leadership of Antonín Novotný, started an anti-long hair campaign declaring that

[61] Jiri Donné, entry to *Publication on the Occasion of the Exhibition 'Beatlemania!'* by Czech Museum of Music, 21. Ithalics are mine.

[62] Jaroslav Rybár ,entry to *Publication on the Occasion of the Exhibition 'Beatlemania!'* by Czech Museum of Music,34.

long hair was the infiltration of the western bourgeoisie. In the following months, people were forced to cut their hair in schools, "long-hairs"(or *maničky* in Czech) were restricted from government services and those who refused to cut their hair were fired from their jobs. However, these efforts to wipe out the foreign ideology met with no success. Indeed, to a certain extent, it boosted the popularity of long hair, since whoever had the slightest possibility to have long hair, "at least in a Beatles style" as one of my interviewer recalled, began to grow it.[63] Many students grew long hair during their summer holidays and more and more young employees, who could negotiate with their superiors on having long hair in the work place, became "long-hairs." Pavol Zelenay, who was working as an editor in the Czechoslovak state radio, recalls the struggle to grow and keep long hair, despite the government restrictions through his conversation with the famous Dežo Ursíny, who was arguably the most famous Slovak rock musician in socialist Czechoslovakia:

> I started to work in April 1967 in the radio (Slovak Radio), Dežo Ursíny was preparing there programs, in which he presented music he liked and which in those times was progressive. One day he came to me and said that he wouldn't be able to do these programs anymore. He said it is because the janitor didn't want to let him into the radio. And I asked:"Why doesn't he want to let you in? Because I don't have an ID." And I said: "Come on, you will go and get a new one, and you will continue working." "Oh, but it is not that easy." "And why not?" "Because I need a photograph." "Well, then just go and get a photograph." "But they don't want to take a picture of me." "And why is that?"
>
> Because the photographers had the order that they must not take picture of people with long hair, and when he was already wearing long hair in those times, it was unsolvable, and I feel sorry but the cooperation must have stopped also from this reason.[64]

[63] My personal interview with Pavol Demeš on 18.07.2011 in Bratislava.

[64] Pavol Zelenay in the documentary about Slovak bigbeat.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brmQwpWpjt4

As I already suggested, "the cultural logic of late capitalism" had been penetrating into the country through various mediums: televisions, movies, music and books. It was not relevant only for the educated people or university students. The autobiography of Jiři Wolf testifies to the widespread acclaim of the cultural products from the West in Czechoslovakia during 1960s. He spent his first fifteen years in various orphanages until adopted by his aunt. Afterwards, he attended agricultural high school; however, since he was always having problems with the authorities, he was not accepted into university. During the normalization years, he was imprisoned for ten years because of his anti-party political activism. He described his youth years in the 1960s as follows:

> Like other trampers or hoboes of the time, we jumped on and off moving trains, we ate potatoes and fruit from the fields and we built campfires to keep warm at night. We had long hair and we wore army surplus clothes. We read and discussed novels by Jack London and Jack Keruoac, we sang Beatles songs, and we espoused the philosophy of rebels… At that time it was more of a philosophical expression than a political movement, but things in Czechoslovakia were about to change.[65]

American journalist Tad Szulc depicted Czechoslovakia in 1960s as "jazz and big-beat sound with "blue jeans and beards," "as if in retaliation against years of Stalinist monotony and boredom." [66] One rather absurd example of such phenomenon was the famous visit of American beatnik poet, Allen Ginsberg, to Prague in 1965. He was surprised by his fame in the country and that his poems were performed every weekend in Viola Café in Prague. On Mayday 1965, he found himself sitting on a wooden throne located in the wagon of a half-truck, crowned as the King of May and paraded in the streets of Prague while being escorted by fellow

[65] Jiri Wolf and Stuart Rawlings, *Good Soldier Wolf : One Man's Struggle For Freedom in Czechoslovakia* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994), 20.

[66] Tad Szulc, *Czechoslovakia since World War II* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 194.

"bohemians," until being dethroned by the secret police and eventually expelled from the country.[67] On the plane from Prague to London, he wrote a poem, called *Kral Majales*; a testimony to Prague during 1960s:

> "And the Communists have nothing to offer but fat cheeks and eyeglasses and lying policemen…
> And the Communists create heavy industry but heart is also heavy…
> In the Future, in the Future, but now drink vodka and lament the Security Forces…
> And I am the King of May, which is the power of sexual youth,
> and I am the King of May, which is industry in eloquence and action in amour…
> and I am the King of May, which is Kral Majales in the Czechoslovakian tongue…
> And though I am the King of May, the Marxists have beat me upon the street, kept me up all night in Police Station, followed me thru Springtime Prague, detained me in secret and deported me from our kingdom by airplane…[68]

As elsewhere in the world, the newly emerging counter-culture movement was an expression of the will against any type of authority figure, imitating its counterpart in United States. However, the penetration of such cultural atmosphere did not necessarily have an anti-communist political signification. In fact, during the Prague Spring there were incidents that the party and the counter-cultural groups seemed to get closer ideologically. For instance, during the Prague Spring, far from being anti-communist, Czechoslovak hippies demonstrated solidarity with the socialist camp. They organized protests against the Vietnam War in front of the U.S Embassy and paraded in the Mayday of 1968. However, the brutal suppression of Prague Spring turned such politically ambivalent cultural movement into an hidden arena of

[67] Darrel Jonsson, "When Poetry was King" *The Prague Post*, May 7, 2008, http://www.praguepost.com/archivescontent/5976-when-poetry-was-king.html

[68] Allen Gingsberg, *Kral Majales* (Berkeley: Oyez, 1965) For Allen Ginsberg's reciting of the poem, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y73rEuQVr6s

resistance for the people, who were deprived of freedom of speech, freedom to travel and right to have a word in the political decision-making process.

Prague Spring and Its Afterward

The election of Alexander Dubček as a Party Secretary significantly loosened the party's totalitarian grip on individual choices and cultural life. Consequently, to the fear of international *nomenclatura*, the Prague Spring, which started as a top-down political reform movement, gained a revolutionary momentum via the mass participation of students and intellectuals, who had been excluded from politics. Within six months time in the post-January government of Dubček 18,282 citizens, whom Brezhnev refused to see as "healthy injection," joined the party to contribute to designing of "socialism with a human face."[69] There were also, surely, non-communist citizens, who undertook political action benefiting from the Spring's "democratization" era.[70] However, it was during the Prague Spring that the Czechoslovak Communist Party gained unprecedented public support only comparable to the revolutionary vitality of February 1948. After the February 1948 takeover, as in the rest of the central Europe, the establishment of power stratum in the hands of small circle of Stalinist elites (and the terror employed to achieve it) created what I would call a "spaceship effect." Various united social and political groups that made "Victorous February" possible had been broken down by the party elites like aircraft modules released during a rocket launch as they became useless for rest of the journey. The Prague Spring was the first and only time that the party opened doors for meetings with such outsiders, which constituted the great majority of the population, having no political power. Consequently, in the absence of party

[69] Navratil (ed.), *The Prague Spring 1968,*. xxxi.

[70] For instance, an action group for the restoration of the Social Democratic Party, which was existed until 1948 and was then forced to join the Communist Party, was formed in March.

restrictions and censorships, many social and cultural clubs were founded. The Czechoslovak Union of Youth emerged as a militant supporter of reform communism, while fiercely attacking the ex-Party elites, especially those who took part in the now-condemned show trials of 1950s. These young reformists were using a discourse of "us" and "them," clearly separating themselves from the high communist officials of the earlier years. Ludvík Vaculík, in his very influential and controversial manifesto called "Two Thousand Words that Belong to Workers, Farmers, Officials, Scientists, Artists, and Everybody," expressed his disgust with the earlier generation of party apparatchiks:

> Most of the nation welcomed the socialist program with high hopes. But it fell into the hands of the wrong people. It would not have mattered so much that they lacked adequate experience in affairs of state, factual knowledge, or philosophical education, if only they had had enough common prudence and decency to listen to the opinion of others and agree to being gradually replaced by more able people… We feel we must say this, it is familiar to those of us who are communists and who are as disappointed as the rest at the way things turned out.[71]

Its publication in the all four major newspapers signed by seventy public intellectuals was the major show of defiance to the elites of international communism, who were increasingly becoming uneasy with the changes in Czechoslovakia. Arguably, the manifesto was one of the most influential challenges to the legitimacy of traditional *nomenclatura* elites. The main strength of the text was coming from its communist underpinnings: Vaculík was condemning those, who were seeking for democratic revival without the Party, as "fools." At the same time, though, the text confronted all the non-democratic wrongdoings of the previous governments. In addition, the text demanded that the new leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the entire population stand firm against the domestic and international

[71] Ludvík Vaculík, The "Two Thousand Words" Manifesto "Dva tisíce slov," *Literární listy* (Prague), 27 June 1968, p.1. in Navratil (ed.), *The Prague Spring 1968,* 177.

retrograde elements to protect the momentum of the Spring. Naturally, these "two thousand words" and its wide appearance in the mass media without any censorship created shock and anger among the leaders of the Warsaw Pact countries. They, rightfully, took it very personally. During the Warsaw meeting in July 1968, East German leader Walter Ulbrich, who was one of the chief Stalinist in central Europe and almost a prototypical example of the *nomenclatura* elite that Vaculík's manifesto was condemning, expressed his hatred against the text:

> "The question is about counterrevolutionary forces. The "Two Thousand Words" Manifesto expressed their goal: to destroy the party's power. If the "Two Thousand Words" Manifesto is not counterrevolutionary, then certainly there is not a counterrevolution. The reality of the situation is Czechoslovakia indicates that there is a counterrevolutionary underground. There is a gradual shift toward bringing this underground counterrevolution to the surface…"[72]

Here what Ulbricht probably called "underground counter-revolution" was the reformists' intentions to break with the dictatorship of the small rulling clique in the name of proletariat, and reunite with the bulk of the population, which was excluded from any political decision process. In addition, reform communism's reunion with the outsiders, particularly of university students, corresponded with its truce and even alliance with the cultural influence from the West. It was probably the combination of such public displays (e.g hippies parading in the Mayday) together with the open attacks of some young reform communists against the international *nomenclatura*, and most important, the resistance of Dubček's government to persecuting the perpetrators of such actions that led to the intervention of Warsaw Pact armies to the country.

[72] Transcript of the Warsaw Meeting, July 14-15, 1968 (Excerpts) Protokol ze spotkania przywodcow partii i rzadow krajow socjalistycznych… in Navrátil, ed., *The Prague Spring 1968 National Security Archives Reader ,* 218

The suppression of the Prague Spring marked the eventual ideological annihilation of non-Stalinist members of the 1948 generation. They were expelled from the Party, lost their jobs, and many of them emigrated to the West, losing their citizenship. Dubček disappeared from politics, first as an ambassador in Ankara, and then as a low-ranking public servant in the Ministry of Forests. During the so-called normalization period, legal opposition to government was practically made impossible; meanwhile, the field was still open for the youth underground. In the absence of formal political opposition, counter-culture became the only source and symbol for resisting the system. Hence, the above mentioned "postmodern" global culture intertwined with the act of symbolic resistance and formed a covert challenge to the Communist Party's rule in Czechoslovakia. Because the underground fashion of the 1960s became the symbol of resisting the Party and thus fashionable, it stayed with the people longer than it did in the West. David Leviatin depicts his surprise when he encountered the people of Prague shortly after the 1989 Velvet revolution:

> I was, however, distracted by the numerous displays of public affection, accompanied by the echoing sounds of the 1960s…A girlfriend sitting on a boyfriend's lap, literally draped over him, even though there were empty seats on either side. In the background, the chords of the Beatles "I Want to Hold Your Hand"; the singer's English, too thickly accented to comprehend. It was also difficult to ignore the fashions, especially the slavish worship of anything denim…denim boats, denim skirt, a denim jacket, and a denim hat. I slowly sensed that a part of the city's cultural life appeared to be stuck in the late 1960s, like a scratched record skipping over and over.[73]

The suppression of the Prague Spring established sixties culture as a form of resistance against the Communist Party. Wearing blue jeans, having long hair and listening to rock and roll music were not only matters of personal choice but

[73] David Leviatin, *Prague Sprung: Notes and Voices from the New World* (Westport: Praeger, 1993), 9-10.

symbolic messages against totalitarianism. Moreover, the intervention of Warsaw Pact countries led to the mass discommuniciation between the state elites and the public, while cultural capitalism was penetrating into every corner of society. The Public Opinion Polling in Czechoslovakia, a survey conducted right after the Soviet intervention in 1968, shows that only 1.2 percent of Czechoslovak society shared the reasoning behind the intervention, and the rest simply felt deprived of the right to publicly criticize the goings-on within the society.[74] This brought widespread mistrust, as well as indifference to the Party's policies and increased the popularity of the Western media, because the local TV and radio broadcasting was nothing more than propaganda. One of my interviewees, Č.A, explains why the Austrian TV channels became more popular among people living in Bratislava:

> All the real news was on Austrian channels. On Czechoslovak TV, they were always talking about nonsense stuff and making propaganda. Since Vienna was so close, we could easily watch the TV channels from there. I had learned some German during the Nazi occupation years, and my children learned it via TV. Once, the teacher asked my daughter the name of the President of Czechoslovakia and she did not know. Then, when the teacher asked "how come you don't know? Don't you watch TV at home? My daughter told her "my father always watches Austrian TV." Although it sounds funny now, at that time I felt quiet uncomfortable with it, because if the teacher told this to the Party officials I might have gotten into trouble. But she was a nice person, she did not do such thing.[75]

The new leadership of Czechoslovak Communist Party under Gustáv Husák was successful in directing citizens to their 'quiet life', in which individuals were required to stay away from party politics and not openly express their critical beliefs. Since the party imposed heavy censorship on the press, the domestic media lost its

[74] E.J Czerwinski and Jaroslaw Piekalkiewicz, *The Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia: Its Effects on Eastern Europe.* (New York: Praeger, 1972), 6.

[75] My personal interview with Č.A on December 21, 2011 in Bratislava. His name is kept confidential upon his request.

credibility in the eyes of the citizens and people began to follow foreign media thanks to the geographical proximity to Austria and Western Germany. Meanwhile, as the political resistance was marginalized and the party imposed strict bans for travelling to the West, its cultural products became the materials of heavy fixation.

Czechoslovak Phoney War

On 21 August 1968, the intervention of Warsaw Pact armies marked the beginning of a 'phoney war' between neo-Stalinist and the reform communists. On the day of intervention, all the members of Czechoslovak Central Committee were brought to Moscow and forced to sign the so called "Moscow Protocol," which allowed Warsaw Pact troops to remain in Czechoslovakia indefinitely. Probably having in mind the tragic end of Imre Nagy (the Hungarian leader during the Hungarian revolt in 1956) and fearing the escalation of violence in the country, all of the members capitulated, except for the famous František Kriegel. However, as a result of the *nomenclatura*'s obsession with the public display of their good will, the majority of the reform Communists, including Dubček, held their positions for another eight months after the intervention. During this period, he and other reformists assured society that they were in control and tried to negotiate with the Warsaw Pact leaders to protect the achievements of the Prague Spring, especially on the issues, such as freedom to travel and abolition of censorship. However, retrospectively, they ended up fulfilling their primary mission (assigned by Warsaw pact leaders) of calming the society. Even in today's Czech and Slovak Republics, many people above the age of sixty, still remember the first and the most remarkable of such 'calls for tranquility' by Dubček; his tired and disappointed voice on the Czechoslovak radio, urging people to remain calm and not to confront the Soviet soldiers in the streets. Eventually, the student activism facing the Soviet tanks

gradually lost its momentum; Dubček's helplessness was shared by the society. He was still keeping his post, but everyone rightfully doubted the extent of his power. Facing the end of the resistance to the occupation and hardliners taking the initiative against the changes made during the Spring, one isolated but remarkable protest happened on January 19, 1969. Nineteen year old university student Jan Palach committed suicide by self-immolation in Wenceslas Square to protest against the political situation in the country. Jaroslava Moserová, who later became a dissident and then a senator after 1989 in the Czech Parliament, was the first doctor to attempt to treat Palach in the hospital. Before his eventual death, she had an opportunity to talk with him. She recalled the event and explained her analysis of his action to Radio Prague in 2003.

> It was not so much in opposition to the Soviet occupation, but the demoralization which was setting in, that people were not only giving up, but giving in. And he wanted to stop that demoralization. I think the people in the street, the multitude of people in the street, silent, with sad eyes, serious faces, which when you looked at those people you understood that everyone understands, all the decent people who were on the verge of making compromises. It certainly had a huge impact on young people, students, in this respect.[76]

The tragedies continued. In the coming months two more people set themselves on fire until death in the country. The forty years old dedicated reform communist Evžen Plocek left a small note before his suicide stating, "Truth is revolutionary-wrote Antonio Gramsci. I'm for the human face, I can't stand with the unfeeling ones." Despite such individual suicide protests, facing the huge Soviet army at the gates of cities and their domestic allies in the top ranking offices, the great majority of the people understandably chose pacifism over resistance. However, there were some exceptions in the exceptional moments. On 28 March 1969, when

[76]Jaroslava Moserova, "Remembering Jan Palach" *Radio Prague*, January 21, 2003. http://www.radio.cz/en/section/witness/jaroslava-moserova-remembering-jan-palach

Czechoslovak national ice hockey team defeated Soviet Union in the World Cup in Stockholm, thousands of Czechoslovaks gathered all over the country and celebrated this most desired victory. In Prague, the celebration was turned into a small scale riot; the angry mob destroyed the Soviet Aeroflot office in Wenceslas Square, attacked various government building and clashed with the police. The violence, which would later be called Czechoslovak Hockey Riots, ended the 'phoney war.' It gave awaited legitimization to hard-liners, who had been slowly gaining the upper hand in the central committee, for taking control of the government. They quickly forced Dubček to resign and the committee chose fellow Slovak, Gustáv Husák.

During the eight months between the intervention and the election of Husák, many disappointed people emigrated to the West, since the travel ban had not yet imposed. When the hardliners gained the upper hand, one of the first decision was the ban of travel to the west. The regime called émigrés to come back to their country, threatening that they would lose their citizenship. Losing citizenship itself would not mean a lot to those who made it to the West; but as I argued in the first chapter, the transgressing the regime's rules was not an individual act in normalized Czechoslovakia. The party's suspicion towards family members of those who emigrated left émigrés in a difficult situation. Their personal survival would, for instance, simply prevent their siblings from attending a university, or from having any white-collar job in the future. Some returned; some did not; but all of them suffered. František Dušek explained his depression after coming back to Czechoslovakia from Switzerland for his sister:

> "I went to Switzerland in 1968, when I was 18. I was young and one of my friends invited me there; so I said, why not? I really liked it there. At that time, you could easily find a job in Switzerland. So I had a good job, earning good money, having a good life. However, I had to come back because my sister would be in trouble for the rest of her life because of me, staying there.

> So after four years, I came back and everything was so depressing that I could not leave the home for three months. It was horrible here."[77]

Subsequently, all the reformist policies and programs of the Prague Spring government were abolished except the reform granting autonomy to Slovakia. The change in the party leadership succeeded by purges, screenings and forced public confessions. In the end, 327,000 party members were expelled while 150,000 voluntarily resigned. "Such a shrinkage was unprecented in the Communist World in the post-World War II period, outside Mao's cultural revolution."[78]

Despite the persecution of reform socialists, nothing changed at the official level. The censorship was still prohibited by law, which unfortunately no one took seriously. As I explained in the first chapter, people were not only forced to capitulate, but also to announce their own capitulation. Using Max Weber's allegory, as the chance to emigrate outside of the country was blocked by the party, those who were left inside were put in an "iron cage." The word "cage" is indeed a better metaphor than "curtain" for describing Czechoslovakia during normalization, since the interaction with the West still continued through its iron bars. Under the condition that the absolute ideological minority (the only two percent of society that supported the suppression of Prague Spring) was ruling the country without any possibility of counter-action, the resistance went into the "underground."

[77] My personal interview with František Mužsky on July 24, 2012 in Bratislava.

[78] Stephen Kotkin (with a contribution by Jan. T. Gross) *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: Modern Library, 2009), 153.

The Curious Case of Talented Mr Husák

History is not always written by the victors, at least not by the short-term ones. Any person, who is interested in the history of Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, would be able to find dozens of books about Alexander Dubček. He was after all, the main protagonist of the intervened endeavors for designing the "socialism with a human face," a dream which European socialist movement and its welfare state-middle class-left shared. He was the one whose family immigrated to Soviet Union from United States because of their socialist beliefs, grew up in Kyrgyzstan, participated in the Slovak national uprising against fascist forces during the Second World War, lost his brother and was wounded twice during the anti-fascist struggle. He was a war hero, dedicated Marxist, but at the same time had democratic humanist ideas. He was simply, all in one, an interesting historical subject; someone deserves to fill the books. Gustav Husák, on the other hand, seemed to be the opposite of Dubček. He was the main villain of the story and appears only as a side note. While Dubček receives all the credits for the efforts of creating "socialism with a human face," Husák is generally perceived simply as the puppet of Soviet Union in the country, or the visible mascot of an invisible, almost theological entity, called totalitarianism. Probably, because of this ascribed ineffectiveness, there is no single biography of him either in Czecho-slovak nor in English. However, in many ways, he was the prime author of normalization, which lasted for twenty uninterrupted years.

Gustáv Husák was born in 1913 in Bratislava and became a member of the party when he was sixteen years old. By the time of the Second World War, he was already one of the top-ranking members in the Slovak branch of the party, which was banned by the Protectorate and the clero-fascist Slovak Republic under Tiso and

operated underground. Like Dubček, he participated in the Slovak National Uprising in 1944 and became one of the members of Slovak National Council, until it joined the Czechoslovak National Front. After the war, he resumed his role as a party agitator, struggling primarily against the Democratic Party, which was the most popular party in the Slovak part of the Republic. After February 1948, he was persecuted during the Stalinist trials and condemned for being a "bourgeois nationalist", sentenced for life. After spending six years in jail, he was released from the prison in 1960 and in 1963, his party membership was restored as a result of the international de-Stalinization process. During Dubček's leadership, first in Slovakia, then in the entire country, he was one of the critical voices against the neo-Stalinist tendencies within the party and a supporter of the reforms. However, as the Soviet Union began to send worrying signals about the idea of "socialism with a human face," Husák's attitude began to change. He was strongly against the radical reformists, such as Kriegel and Smrkovský and had asked Dubček for caution. Arguably, he was more successful than Dubček in analyzing the political situation and estimating the danger on the horizon.

It was through such pragmatism and political cleverness that Husak became the moderate leader for the anti-Prague Spring groups, as well as the one who hoped to get through the Warsaw Pact intervention with least possible harm in the top ranks of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. He was, after all, the victim of unjust political persecutions during 1950s, a supporter of the idea of reform communism initially, but at the same time a firm Marxist and hardliner; hence, he was expected to be a better negotiator than his processor with the Soviet Union.

To what extent, he was responsible for the purges and screenings, which thousands of people suffered in the post-Prague Spring Czechoslovakia, is still

debated. According to historian Jiří Maňak, Husák capitulated only after pressure from hard-line domestic communists such as Bil'ak and Indra, with the support of Soviet advisers such as Kosygin, and approved the wide-scale purges all over the country.[79] Aside from the purges, he is generally believed to be the man behind the genuine design of Czechoslovak normalization even though after 1989, he denied his primary role:

> The concept of normalization was not my invention. We all voted for it as the only possible outcome. If some country experiences an earthquake- what then? It tries to normalize life. And what can it do when a 100,000-plus-strong army descends upon it?[80]

As stated in the previous chapter, Husák's normalization aimed at providing an optimal quality of life to its citizens, while expecting political pacifism from them. Unlike Kadár's Hungary, where freedom of speech was greater than other socialist states and a small-scale free market economy and travel to west was allowed, "normalization" imposed a central-command economy, unofficial heavy censorships and strict bans on travel outside of the bloc. At the same time, unlike in German Democratic Republic, normalization did not exert an obsession with people's private lives. In fact, the regime showed absolute indifference to individuals' personal opinions, as longs as these remained in a close circle. After the purges, forced public confessions, and the eventual 'mass capitulation' of society -at least on the surface level, the party became only interested in the keeping its dominance in the public sphere. Unlike the Stasi, the StB did not intervene to critical individuals as long as their criticisms stayed in the closed doors and did not become available for the public through any sort of medium. One gruesome example of such an obsession against

[79] Jiří Maňak, *Čistky v Komunistické Straně straně Československa 1969-1970* (Prague:ÚSD Publication, 1997), 28. quoted in Paulina Bren, *Greengrocer and His TV,* 213.

[80] Quoted in Jiří Pernes, Takoví nám vládli. Komunističti prezidenti Československa a doba, v níž žili (Prague, Brána 2003),285.

public criticism was that party officials put signs in movie theatres warning people against expressing their opinions aloud. They feared that the newsreels, which the normalization government was showing before each movie, might cause some small-scale public disarray. However, the party did not prevent audiences from being sarcastic towards the official, propogandish newsreels once the lights were turned off:

> "I remember very well the moment when the lights went out, the curtain opened, and the familiar opening music sequence filled the air. The screen showed an airplane after landing and the well-known face of a political figure descending from stairs. Then came the bouquets of flowers and the usual embraces. Murmur and giggles were heard from the row of seats. The laughter was subdued and quiet first, then it grew louder, words were called out loud. Parts of the commentary received applause. We were all so brave in the dark." [81]

The quotation above is important for understanding the success of Husák's normalization for two reasons. First, the regime's strict grip on the public sphere, itself, was negotiated. Over the years, there emerged a tacit agreement between the party and the rest that people could demonstrate a form of transgression only when it was "dark" and were to remain silent when the lights were turned on. Second, the owner of the quotation was not a student or lower-ranking worker or public servant. She was a team member of Report Film Studios and herself directed several of normalization's newsreels. She personally did not agree with the most of the content that she was filming, but nevertheless helped to produce it. In this sense, she was representative of the great majority of the people in the country, living and working in a world in which she did not believe but had to endure in order to maintain her livelihood, the so-called quiet life.

[81] Marcela Plítková-Jurovská, in *Selected Newsreels* (Bratislava: Slovenský Filmový Ustav, 2008), DVD.

In short, the Czechoslovak Communist Party adopted three different cultural policies with regard to penetration of the cultural logic of late capitalism in the country. First, until the election of Dubček as general secretary in January 1968, the party recognized the growing popularity of western cultural forms as a serious threat to its ideological coordinates. The cultural department of the party declared an all-out attack against the so-called degraded, western bourgeois influence in society. Despite these efforts, the party was not able to prevent the immense popularity of western cultural products. The anti-democratic power structure and its Stalinist *modus operandi*, its vigorous endeavours to design and control every aspect of society resulted in widespread discontent especially among the younger generation and the intellectuals. In the second epoch, Dubček's administration tried to break away with this discontent and reconcile with the large number of people who were deprived of participating any political decision process. Reform socialism's efforts to create "socialism with a human face" were aimed at designing a communist system that would integrate the new global culture into the main premises of the socialist rule. For this reason, for the first time since 1948, the party was able to stimulate an almost revolutionary energy and gained broad support, especially of younger generations and educated individuals. However, the suppression of Prague Spring abruptly ended this consensus. By its persecution of reform socialists and replacement of Dubček with Husák, the party returned to its authoritarian status with some modifications. In this third era, the party, on the one hand, brought back heavy-handed censorship, political persecutions and imposed restrictions on travelling outside of the bloc. On the other hand, as a compromise, living a quiet, conformist family life was encouraged and the party no longer intervened in individuals' private lives, as long as their actions remained non-threatening to the party's power. During

this era, which was later called the normalization period, the party apparatchiks were no longer trying to stop the consumption of cultural products from the West, but rather to confine this consumption to the "non-political" sphere. Although this policy and helplessness facing the Soviet occupation generated a compliance among the citizens for almost twenty years, the normalization regime was never able to reach the hearts and minds of the citizens. As I discuss further in the third chapter, in the absence of the possibility of creating a formal political opposition, seemingly apolitical consumption of the western cultural products turned into a counter-hegemonic political action against the totalitarianism in the country.

CHAPTER III

"Life is Elsewhere" as a Structure of Feeling in Late Communism

> So, although economy is the real site and politics is a theater of shadows, the main fight is to be fought in politics and ideology. Take the disintegration of Communist power in the last years of 1980s: although the main event was the actual loss of state power by the Communists, the crucial break occurred at a different level—in those magic moments when, although formally the Communists were still in power, people suddenly lost their fear, and no longer took the threat seriously; so, even if "real" battles with the police continued, everyone somehow knew that the game was up.[82]

The Fallacy of Radical Structuralism and the Velvet Gorbachev

Stephen Kotkin, in his recent book *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment,*[83] analyzes the 1989 revolutions in East Germany, Poland and Romania; his main thesis is that despite the popular "myth" focusing on civil society activism, which brought the communist parties in central and eastern Europe to their knees, the entire system collapsed solely because of the "Gorbachev effect" that broke away from the doctrine of intervention. Kotkin claims that, with the exception of Poland, there were no organized opposition groups in any of the central European countries; and the dissidents, who later received wide acclaim in

[82] Slavoj Zižek, *Parallax View* (Cambridge: Massachusets Institute Press, 2006), 314.

[83] Stephen Kotkin (with a contribution by Jan. T. Gross), *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: Modern Library, 2009).

Western media, were rather unknown figures for the common people. It was the inefficiency, corruption and demoralization of the party structure, which Kotkin defines as *Uncivil Society*, that led to the collapse of the system. In short, for him the party itself gave up the power because of its own failure.

However, Kotkin seems to miss, or rather ignores a fundamental point that the term "civil society" does not necessarily refer to the Western style, organized, institutionalized and sometimes subsidized, NGO-like platform. In its broadest term, at least in central European context in which organizing a critical opposition to government was illegal, the civil society simply implies the arena outside of government, "where people associate to advance common interests" other than the official propaganda.[84] In the absence of legal platforms for organizing an opposition to the Party, the consumption of cultural products from the West (music, TV, radio, books etc.), forming and following its distinctive fashion through having long hair, short skirts, denim jackets and jeans, all had political symbolism. Kotkin admits such phenomenon:

> …(despite the Wall) East Germans could continue to make direct comparisons with life in West Germany from their own living rooms-just by watching West German television. In Albania the populace could watch Italian TV and in Estonia Finish TV-rare windows. But in GDR, Western TV was accessible in the inhabitants' native tongue (except in a poor reception area around Dresden, dubbed 'the valley of clueless.') North Koreans have never had anything like this vis-a-vis South Korea. West German TV offered East Germans a "nightly emigration"-and a frustrating tease. [85]

[84] CIVICUS Civil Society Index, Summary of Conceptual Framework and Research Methodology. Last accessed on July 20, 2012, https://www.civicus.org/new/media/CSI_Methodology_and_conceptual_framework.pdf

[85] Kotkin, *Uncivil Society,* 38.

While acknowledging the continuous observation of the life in the West by Eastern bloc citizens, Kotkin seems to perceive the role of structural problems and people's agency for overthrowing the regimes as mutually exclusive categories and insistently rejects the view giving credit to the latter for the fall of communism in Europe. He writes, "the precipitous collapse of the GDR cannot be explained by citing some quest to fulfil German identity, a generational change or civil society. The GDR collapsed because of the Soviet Union let it."[86]

The sentence above is the reason for me to discuss his book in my thesis. I believe his book is prototypical example of –what I call the "fallacy of radical structuralism." In analyzing the success of the central European revolutions in 1989, most of the structural explanations, rightfully, focus on the chronic macro-economic problems (especially of Poland and Hungary) and Gorbachev's non-interventionist policy. Although these structuralist accounts disown the role of crises of legitimacy in the dissolution of communism, Gorbachev emerges as the new-age Jesus in their accounts; all of the sudden he appeared at the top of the *nomenclatura* and attempted to overcome the long-standing problems of the communist system; he was a supporter of individual freedoms, respected the will of the people and did not intervene in the revolutions in central Europe in 1989. However, I believe there is an apparent need to historicize Gorbachev's heroic portrayal. Here, historicizing does not only refer to rationalizing Gorbachev's politics with the economic hardships of the late-Soviet era, but rethinking him within the cultural framework in Soviet Union during and after the 1960s. Vassily Aksyonov provides valuable insights about the mindset of Soviet intellectuals during the Thaw era:

> We had posters of the Russian Futurists, girls were coming over all the time, sometimes through the windows; there was

[86] Kotkin, *Uncivil Society*, 40.

> drinking and playing "jazz on the bones". Do you know about "jazz on the bones"? It was home-made jazz records, recorded on X-ray plates. We had no magnetic tape, no tape recorders, no nothing—so we would find jazz on the radio and we would record it on the X-ray plates. It was a whole movement, a gigantic movement in the Soviet Union. We would have this so-called disc, with, say, Dizzy Gillespie on it, and on this disc was a picture of a guy's chest, or maybe some arm or leg bones. So you had "jazz on the bones"… our generation was very important in Russia, for changing society—**Gorbachev always identifies himself as a man of the Sixties**. And to me the Sixties was a bohemian time of a semi-underground world of people who were challenging the very existence of the totalitarian regime, not by political means but in other ways, doing something which was totally unthinkable.[87]

It is an undeniable fact that Gorbachev's first-hand experiences with the problems of production in the Soviet Union during his earlier posts in the governmental ranks played significant role in shaping his convictions on the necessity for reforms within the country and, even more important, for other Eastern bloc countries to form their own reform movements, which meant the end of Soviets' long time support for the dictatorships of the communist parties in central and Eastern Europe. On the other hand, one can find a historical relationship, or even continuity, between Khrushchev's thaw and Gorbachev's glasnost; Gorbachev symbolized the recognition of the international communist elites that they could no longer compete with the cultural logic of late capitalism within the coordinates of totalitarianism, and he tried to create a genuine socialism through reformation. However, as in the case of Dubček, the result was epic failure for his initial intentions.

In addition, Mikhail Gorbachev's non-interventionist, liberal policies provided conditions for the chain of revolutions; however, providing conditions is different from making the revolution. The revolution did not start because of Gorbachev's policies, but rather when the Polish Solidarity movement gained strength through

[87] Vassily Aksyanov, Interview by John Pohlmann, Conversations with Vassily Aksyonov, http://www.sovlit.com/conversationswithaksyonov last accessed in November, 2011. (emphasis is mine.)

widespread strikes all over the country, and the party did not have a choice but to sit down to the round-table negotiations. In this sense, the radical structuralist emphasis on the absence of organized opposition in the bloc, with the exception of Poland, does not have much political significance, because the unrest in Poland was followed in the rest of the region with great attention. Solidarity made the first crack in the system and served as the main opposition group not only against the Polish Communist Party but the entire Eastern bloc. Zoltán Máté (55), who had long been an anti-communist despite coming from a working class family, explained how they observed the political climate in Poland from Czechoslovakia:

> The situation in Poland was a lot nicer when it comes to opposition. I think Czechs and Slovaks are more laid back people; historically they got used to living under the rule of oppressors. There was a defeatist mood here. However, when we heard the Polish roundtable talks, it was great. It appeared even in the state television since they knew we would see it in the Austrian channel anyways, or in Radio Free Europe. And suddenly, there came Hungary, then the Berlin Wall fell. And then we made our move. It was fantastic.[88]

Although each country in the bloc had its own peculiar history of communism, the collapses were strongly linked. The new media technologies brought not only influence from the West but also a political awareness that any opposition movement, actions, or gestures were quickly circulated through underground samizdat publications, as well as foreign television and radios. The domino effect would not have had such an effect if the dominos were standing distant and unrelated to each other. This explains the phenomenon that Timothy Gorton Ash famously declared: "In Poland the transition [from communism to democracy] lasted ten years, in Hungary ten months, in Czechoslovakia ten days."[89] Because of the 1968 Soviet

[88] My personal interview with Zoltán Máté on 23.07.2011 in Bratislava.

[89] Timothy Gorton Ash, "The Revolution of Magic Lantern" *The New York Review of Books,* December 21,1989

intervention, the shell-shocked Czechoslovak society was mobilized only after the Poles pulled the trigger by roundtable negotiations with the party. However, the ideological transition away from communism began to take place a long time before 1989. The political transformation was possible because of the global cultural revolution, which began to influence Czechoslovak society decades earlier. As Marshall McLuhan noted, the new media technologies signified the "extension of consciousness" in a much smaller world in terms of the circulation of fashion, tastes and aspirations.[90] The year 1989 was the triumphal realization of this extension of consciousness with its new ideology leading to a qualitative leap for a new way of seeing things, a new value system or in Heideggerian terms the new *Dasein* over the old forms of authority, meta-narratives and political aspirations.

On the other hand, the Czechoslovak party elites became aware of the fact that the totalitarian cultural policies of Stalin's era could no longer be sustained. For this reason, the post-Prague Spring government ceased its endeavours to fight against the "bourgeois culture from the West." On the contrary, the regime imitated the Western cultural products in order to attract the viewer's attention. Czechoslovak party officials were no longer seeking to create a socialist alternative to the global culture, but to form its domestic version so that they could reach society.

Tracking the Normalization's Coordinates through Newsreels

In October 1969, the regular Czechoslovak movie-goers were probably surprised by the content of the newsreel that was shown before the movie. The program began by describing the women's lives in Kysuce, one of the poorest regions in

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http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1990/jan/18/the-revolution-of-the-magic-lantern/?pagination=false

[90] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994).

Czechoslovakia, located in the northern Slovakia. Unlike the earlier newsreels, rather than making propaganda on women's emancipation or the activities of the Union of Women in the village, the newsreel was about the problems of women in their daily lives: level of unemployment, long lines for acquiring goods, or the alcoholism among their husbands. Then the film made a sudden turn and described the use of astrology to determine the gender of babies. The filmmakers interviewed some mothers, who successfully applied the lunar fertility charts, which were provided by Doctor Jonáš from Nitra. They interviewed the doctor, who found the discipline of "astrobiology" and, supposedly, attracted even international attention for his successes. After briefly explaining how to make use of such astrobiological charts together with the images of cute babies, the newsreel made another loop and moved onto the story of Soňa Stenová from Prague, who was one of the first strippers in the country. With her dyed blonde hair and elegant make up, she explained why nudity should not be taboo and that the female body should be perceived as aesthetic beauty. At the end of the newsreel, Stenová dressed in an oriental belly dancer costume and made her show to be seen in every socialist movie theatre in the country. The newsreels ended suddenly as she finished her show by taking her bra off, covering her breasts with her hands and sitting on the floor in a sexually arousing manner before the audience.[91]

In many ways, the newsreel outlined the three-legged political curriculum of the post-Prague Spring leadership: betterment of the consumer goods supply, the shelter of the quiet life, and the providing of *jouissance* to the society. For the first problem, shortly after Husák's election in April 1969, consumer good production was

[91] Filmový týždenník Týždeň vo Filme 10/1969 (Bratislava: Spravodajský film) in *Deň Náš Každodenný,* directed by Otakar Krívanek (1969; Slovenská Požičovna Filmov, Bratislava: Slovenský Filmový Ustav, 2008), DVD.

intensified and its distribution was significantly improved. The second, as the appearance of pseudo-scientific "astrobiological" methods together with the images of cute babies and their caring parents implies, the new regime, fearing the revival of reform communism and the continuation of public unrest, deliberately encouraged people to stay outside of the politics, to establish their own families and have a happy and what Marx would probably call a conformist life. Subsequently, "government policies of subsidized housing, long maternity leave and, crucially, the lack of anything else to do, combined to produce a genuine baby boom."[92] Later, these genuine baby boomers were ironically to be called Husák's children. Third and most important, the appearance of a stripper in the socialist newsreel was one of the earliest signs of the hard-line communism's acceptance of defeat in the face of cultural capitalism. Although in the "normalization" era the government closed down the cultural establishments with the Western tendency, such as the Hippie Club, unlike pre-Prague Spring government, they never attempted to conduct a full-scale campaign against such cultural forms. As I discuss in the next chapter; when the regime did persecute the members of the psychedelic rock band the "Plastic People of Universe" in rather an isolated incident, they provoked major intellectual resistance, which came into being as "Charter 77." Although the regime's distaste for the Western cultural forms such as the "long-hairs" continued, instead of campaigning against their life style, their existence was simply ignored, but as long as such cultural forms did not pose a serious threat to the authority of the party (such as by organizing open air concerts as in Česke Budovice in 1975), they were not banned.

[92] Veronika Suchá and Pavel Vondra, "Baby boom and immigration prop up Czech population." Aktuálňé, September, 20,2007. http://aktualne.centrum.cz/czechnews/clanek.phtml?id=508527

Unlike the newsreels of pre-1968 era, which were predominantly about the achievements of the Socialist Republic in terms of industrialization; the normalization era newsreels focus on the everyday life of the citizens, betterment of the consumer goods production as well as the international cultural events, such as Miss World competitions. One would also notice the extreme focus on the upbringing of the children; together with the new kindergardens and playgrounds. There were surely still old-style reports on the socialist development, the history of the Czechoslovak socialism, or the level of inequality in United States; but the emphasis has clearly shifted towards seemingly non-political aspects of the life. Although newsreels, naturally, did not have a critical tone, they were not discreet on the problems of the governmental services.

One example of such new attitude was the newsreel covering the story of construction work on newly built residential district of Petržalka in Bratislava in 1979. The interviewer talked with the managers behind the projects and asked about the reasons for the delays in the finishing of the buildings. The managers provided the usual reasons: delays in the building of the technical equipment, energy connections, problem of non-continuous works for various organizational reasons, etc. After interviewing the manager behind the construction project, the camera began to show various identical blocks with the fast-paced cartoon music. The commentator said, "problems and again problems… Our head starts to spin." Then they showed the shabby exterior and gardens of the supposedly finished buildings. The camera shot children playing next to the left-overs, or rather the dirt, of the construction materials; then the voice said, "this is how the neighbourhood looks two years after people moved in." The ironical cartoon music continued; the camera showed the initial plan of the green garden arrangement placed next to the

constructed blocks and the current shabbiness, full of dirt and rotten metals from the construction. Then the camera showed a closed grocery store, a small shop, and a cabin with non-functioning telephone inside. The commentator said, "Let us shine a light to it. So there is light during the day," and the camera showed a street lamp, the only working device in the neighbourhood, ridiculously left on in the middle of the day.[93]

After the suppression of Prague Spring; the party, obsessed with appearances in the public sphere, significantly reduced the tone of crude propaganda in their struggle to maintain public order. Instead, as Paulina Bren's study on the appearance of Czechoslovak soap opera-like TV series suggests, the normalization's political elites became aware that the only way to reach people by mass media was to entertain them, rather than subjecting them to uninteresting, one-sided reports on the achievements of the party, which no one seemed to believe. Moreover having borders with the Austria and West Germany and sensing the deep attraction of satellite television among the citizens, Czechoslovak authorities decided that the only way to compete with the West was to imitate it. Hence, Czechoslovak TV during 1970s and 1980s was filled with domestic soap opera-like TV series with almost no socialist content. Similar concerns made newsreels less propagandistic and more involved in the daily problems of the citizens. In addition, the push-and-pull between the official propaganda and demonstration of everyday problems of the citizens (the clips covering the newly built monumental Soviet port in Odessa and the problems of producing rubber for female knickers could be seen in the same newsreel) aimed at widening the gray zone between the ruling elites and the citizens. The newsreels occasionally still showed the betterment of some services or advances in

[93] *DVD obsahuje nasledovné vzdania týždenníkov*, No: 31/ 1979 (1979, 2007: Slovenský filmový ustav, Bratislava) DVD.

international socialism, but at the same time by showing the acute deficiencies in the system together with the helplessness of the managers desperately explaining the reasons for falling behind the initial plans, newsreels tried to break with the horrific, subhuman image of the party in post-Prague Spring era and humanize party apparatchiks. Just like ordinary citizens, the apparatchiks too were hopeless in facing these structural problems. They too were the side products of Stalinism with a human face, like their country, a small but indispensable element of the complex and monumental structure called the socialist bloc.

The Life is Elsewhere-ness and the Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu

Although the normalization regime succeeded in granting the obedience of people and even attracted the viewers through soap opera like television series shown in the socialist state television, the craving for cultural products from the West still continued. The introduction of cassette players brought another dimension to consumption of the popular western songs. People, no longer needed to buy the albums through legal or illegal ways; instead, they could wait until the foreign radio stations played their favourite songs so that they could record them to their tape cassettes. On the other hand, young people listened foreign radio also to be informed about the recent musical trends in the West because of the fact that being informed about the popular music there before anybody else was considered "cool:" Micheala Nubidinska explained her method for "being informed" through Austrian radio without speaking German:

> "I learned from one of my friends that in particular day and time they were playing the international hit list of the week in Österreich 3.The program's name was Hit Panaroma. So, every week when the presenter began the program with "Guten tag" or something, I was ready with my pencil and paper. They were

> playing the songs from twenty to one. So I was making the list of the names of songs and artists while recording them."[94]

In fact, decoding process of the foreign cultural products, interestingly, did not require any comprehension of foreign language. One can argue music has its international feel, and it was normal as the films were either dubbed or shown with the subtitles. However to my surprise, one did not need to speak German for watching West German or Austrian TV channels neither. Anna Mátéová, a middle-aged woman originally from Žilina region, reveals such phenomenon to a great extent.

> People were watching Austrian TV a lot with great admiration. When I looked at the Austrian channel, I could see the difference. (when I asked how was it possible considering that she does not speak any foreign language…) It doesn't matter. I could still feel that… The roads, the clothes, the cleanness of the streets… They were incomparable to what we had here.[95]

Western media products had a similar impact or function to that of religious icons and decorations for the early Christians. The visual digestibility of the message had a tremendous effect on the citizens of the socialist bloc as the gap in quality of lives between the citizens of two blocs was widening, at least in the perception of individuals. Although music, television and movies were the most popular and effective weapons for extending the consciousness on the late modern condition in the capitalist bloc, they were not the only ones. Slavenka Drakulič's dramatic description of her feelings in analysing western women's magazines during the time of socialist Yugoslavia is representative of the feelings of Eastern bloc women during the era of late communism.

[94] My personal interview with Micheala Nubidinska on 27.07.2012 in Bratislava.

[95] My personal interview with Anna Mátéová on 24.07.2011 in Bratislava.

> Living under such conditions and holding *Vogue* magazine in your hands is very particular experience- it's almost like holding a pebble from Mars or a piece of a meteor that accidentally fell into your yard… For us, the pictures in a magazine like *Vogue* were much more important: we studied their every detail with the interest of those who had no other source of information about the outside world. We tried to decode them, to read their message.[96]

All in all, in the absence of powerful opposition group to the party and facing a strict censorship, together with the strong sense of defeatism in the society after the Warsaw Pact intervention in 1968, the only possible act of resistance for breaking away from the government's strong grip in the country was to have a breathe of "freedom" through the music, movies and magazines from the outside world. As I argued above, the fundamental policy of the party during the normalization era was to forbid all possible political mobilization against its power; in return, unlike pre-Prague Spring governments, the normalization government let citizens alone in their private lives and individual choices. The regime's distaste for such "western bourgeois elements" surely continued, but as long as they remained apolitical, they were not persecuted. It made the acquiring of western cultural products either legally (the ones which were somehow approved by the party) or more important illegally (through satellite TVs, radios, or the black market) an errant action by itself. In this sense, the medium became the message of resistance, a way to form at least a common sense of a counter-hegemonic group, a feeling of a resentment, which I would like to summarize with the title of one of Kundera's lesser known books: Life is Elsewhere.[97]

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[96] Slavenka Drakulič, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed*. (London: Hutchinson, 1992),28.

[97] Milan Kundera, *Life is Elsewhere* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986).

The complex structure of feeling or mental geography, that I call "life is elsewhere-ness" was simply the qualitative leap of the quantitative resentments towards totalitarianism. Normalization's strict bans on travel to the West, observing the blessings of the post-war welfare state in the Western bloc through televisions and films while standing in huge lines for acquiring a kilogram of bananas, which was available only a few times a year, created the immense feeling of "iron cage" with its communal traumas. Pavol Demeš (60), currently a famous figure in the political scene of Slovak Republic, told me about the scars of such traumas, which he feels even today:

> It has been more than twenty years since the borders were opened. Since 2007, there has not even been a border control between Austria and Slovakia. The police buildings for the border controls are abandoned now. However, even today when I cross that empty check point and pass the Austrian border with my car, I feel relief. I feel quite an irrational happiness for a second as if it was still an impossibility.[98]

The cultural products from the west became the only objects for breaking away with such feeling, much needed oxygen in the "gray," suffocating existence under the twentieth-century socialism.

The 2010 Czech film, *Občanský Průkaz* (Identity Card) [99] describes this suffocation through the lenses of high school "longhairs" in the mid-1970s. In one scene Venca, a keen member of the longhair group, invites his friends to his flat. When they enter his room, full of posters of The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Ginsberg and Dylan, they find out that Venca's older brother, who was doing his army service somewhere in Slovakia, is sitting angrily in the chair in his underwear and open

[98] My personal interview with Pavol Demeš on 18.07.2011 in Bratislava.

[99] *Občanský Průkaz,* directed by Ondrej Trojan (2010; Total Helpart Česka Televize, Prague: Sony Music Entrartainment, 2011) DVD.

military shirt, drinking alcohol. It turns out that he came for a one-day leave and got extremely angry that his brother was wearing his blue jeans and denim jacket and lent his records of Rolling Stones to one of his friend. Out of such disappointment, he yells "I'll be back in f…ng barracks by midnight. The whole time I was in that shithole all I could think about was how I'd sit here in my jeans, getting pissed and listening to Stones. Where are my Stones, you c.nt!" Being in the state of delirium; he grabs his belt, begins to hit the bed with it and throws the alcohol bottle to the wall, sits down and cries in total desperation. The Western cultural products functioned in a similar way to this probably exaggerated story. Watching and then experiencing Western cultural products served almost as the spiritual getaway from the iron cage of late communism:

> "At that time (late 1970s and 1980s), the movies were so cheap and there was not censorship with the movies. So they were showing American, French or Italian movies. I remember I was watching three-four movies in a row until the night time during the weekends. It was pleasure to watch such movies; to look at how they lived etc. Then, I was looking at our environment and what a filth we had."[100]

Petr Novak, who was one of the famous musicians in the Prague's underground scene, described a similar feeling of dissatisfaction aroused by the continuous comparison of his life with the western subculture:

> "To be a hippie in the west meant above all not to work and to be on the road. Well, here one couldn't do that, however much one wanted to. It was forbidden by the law on parasitism. And traveling from Prague to Ostrava is also not the same as setting out from New York to San Francisco."[101]

[100] My personal interview with Zoltán Máté on 23.07.2011 in Bratislava.

[101] Czech Museum of Music, *Publication on the Occasion of the Exhibition 'Beatlemania!'* (Klatovy: Dragon Press, 2010), 58.

Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualizing of "cultural capital" can help us to examine the phenomenon of "life is elsewhere-ness" further. In his book *The State Nobility,*[102] Bourdieu touched upon the similarity between the economic and cultural capitals as both of them acquired through constant competition with others, and the strategic ability of the agents lay in discrediting "the form of capital upon which the force of their opponents rests."[103]

> Structure of distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represent the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices.[104]

The "structure of distribution" rarely allows the congregation of "different types and subtypes of capital" (i.e economic, cultural, social or political) at the hands of one social group and these different capitals are not isolated from each other. Unlike Weber's distinction between "party", "status" and "class," Bourdieu suggests that different forms of capital are necessarily linked and convertible.[105] For example, an individual, group, or particular habitus with high economic but low cultural capital probably will gain the latter in time if -in Bourdieu's terms, the player has the "sense of the game," in which the agents are competing with each others in the given sets of rules.[106] In such interaction or competition, one's artistic tastes and aesthetic

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[102] Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power,* trans. Lauretta C. Clough. (Oxford: Polity Press, 1996).

[103] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practise,* trans. Richard Nice. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 99.

[104] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research fort he Sociology of Education* in J. Richardson (Ed.) (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241.

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[105] Bridget Fowler, *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory: Critical Investigations* (London: Sage Publication, 1997), 31.

[106] Craig Calhoun, "Pierre Bourdieu" www.nyu.edu/ipk/calhoun/files/calhounPierreBourdieu.pdf (accessed last in August, 2012)

dispositions (cultural capital) are not independent of the social structure in which individuals dwell.

> Where some only see 'a Western starring Burt Lancaster', others discover 'an early John Sturgess' or the 'latest Sam Peckinpah'. *In identifying what is worthy of being seen and the right way to see it*, they are aided by their whole social group… and by the whole corporation of critics mandated by the group to produce legitimate classifications and the discourse necessarily accompanying any artistic enjoyment worthy of the name.[107]

In this regard, the normalization era party elites were deprived of the cultural capital, the ability to generate the valuable and legitimate in the society. However, they established a Bourdieusian conceptualizing of *doxa*, "unquestioned social conceptions which acquire the force of nature."[108] Václav Havel's above mentioned example of the greengrocer, explains such phenomenon of late communism to a great extent:

> I think it can safely be assumed that the overwhelming majority of shopkeepers never think about the slogans that they put in their windows, nor do they use them to express their opinions. That poster was delivered to our greengrocer from the enterprise headquarters along with the onion and carrots. *He put them all in the window simply because it has been done that way for years, because everyone does it, and because that is the way it has to be.*[109]

Thanks to their political capital with its military power, *nomenclatura* elites managed to establish such doxic relationship with a very large part of the Czechoslovak society. However, their firm, authoritarian grip in the political arena was overshadowed by their absolute poverty in terms of cultural capital, a capacity to generate legitimacy for the structure of power in society. After the suppression of the

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[107] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1984) 28. (with my emphasis)

[108] Fowler, *Pierre Bourdieu*,92.

[109] Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless,* 31. (emphasis is mine)

Prague Spring, for the great majority of the Czechoslovak citizens, the party came to represent a tyrannical power stratum and its existence solely depended on military power, especially of the Soviet Union. In my interviews, the word *primitiv* was often used to describe the middle and higher party officials, referring not only their lack of understanding and empathy but also their philistinism. They were portrayed as uneducated, greedy people, who were lacking any valuable artistic taste and intolerant to any other opinion than their own. "Some of them (the party members) might have been nice people. But I couldn't stand those who were in the upper ranks. They were primitive people, with no understanding of anything," told Č.A during my interview in Bratislava.[110] During the 1980s, because of their absolute poverty in terms of cultural capital the party elites' hold on power increasingly depended on their military power. After 1968, the majority of citizens may have capitulated and compromised with the regime, because, for practical reasons, they simply had to. This did not mean they believed in the party's politics or ideology, even if they were working for the party. In 1989, as citizens' fear of the government forces was dissolved; the party elites were ridiculed by the opposition in the public space. In November, 1989 when Karel Urbánek, the new prime minister of the country, made some grammar mistakes in his speech on television, "people remarked… Masaryk spoke seven languages. Can anybody be found here who can at least speak good Czech or Slovak?"[111] It was probably what Pierre Bourdieu exactly meant when he

[110] My personal interview with Č.A in Bratislava on December 23, 2011 in Bratislava . His full name is kept confidential upon his request.

[111] Wheaton and Kavan, *The Velvet Revolution*, 83.

highlighted the relationship between the (usage of) language and symbolic power, which the communist elites lacked in the magical year of 1989.[112]

On the other hand, one must note that the feeling of "life is elsewhere-ness" was not simply the penetration of consumerism into the Czechoslovak society. It was a feeling, in which the abstractness of the concept of "freedom" became almost concrete, a value system that had a "political unconscious" of a consumer society that nobody had dreamed of. Meanwhile, it was a traumatic mental geography, which many people still dwelt on when crossing the borders to Austria or the former West Germany. It was at the same time, the revolutionary call for the "radical generation," as Kundera called it, to mobilize for an "errant act." During the 1970s, the counter culture was the only space for communal expression of such an "errant act." However, when such errant acts became more popular and attracted more attention than the regime could tolerate, the latter intervened. The well known example of such confrontation emerged when the rock band, The Plastic People of Universe, began to organize concerts around the country and gathered several thousand people. The Party quickly intervened in this newly emerging underground commune, which was becoming more and more popular amongst Czechoslovak youth. In March 1974 over one thousand people gathered in the small Moravian town of České Budejovice to attend the group's concert. Because such counter cultural public displays were very rare during the normalization era, the audience, of which the great majority were *maničky*, travelled from the big cities such as Brno or Prague. When they arrived at the train station, the police were waiting for them and led the crowds through an underground tunnel, connected to the train station. As they entered the tunnel, they were suddenly attacked and beaten by the People's Militia; a few of them were

[112] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power,* trans. G. Raymond and M. Adamson. (Cambridge: Polity, 1991)

arrested, and the rest were forced to go back to the cities that they came from. Such brutality, which was later called the "České Budejovice Massacre,"fuelled the guerrilla warfare of the counter-culture against the Party. Ivan Jirous, nicknamed Magor, one of the most active members of the Prague underground in 1970s, coined the term "second culture," as opposed to the party's official culture, and organized two illegal music festivals, codenamed "weddings" in small villages in order to stay away from the police as much as possible. However, in March 1976, twenty- seven members of the Prague's underground, including the members of the Plastic People of the Universe, were arrested. They were accused of "organized disturbance of the peace" and sentenced to between eight and eighteen months in jail. However, their persecution led to the first organized dissident action since the time of the Prague Spring.

Following the persecution of the "second-culture" activists, the preeminent figures in the Czechoslovak cultural life, such as playwright Václav Havel, the respected philosopher Jan Patočka, who was once the pupil of Edmund Husserl, and the well-known figures of reform socialism such as Vaculík or Mlýnar prepared the text of Charter 77. It was published along with the names of 242 signatories (which eventually became 2000), first in samizdat circulations, then in the international press. The text basically criticized the government for not fulfilling its obligations under the 1975 Helsinki Accords, which grants "respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief."[113] Since the Charter as well as its architects gained an international fame, the signatories evaded imprisonment. However, the party quickly organized a series of anti-charter rallies, forcing the well-known cultural figures such as musician Karel

[113] Reprinted in Falk. *The Dilemmas of Dissidence*, 88.

Gott and actor Jan Werich, who was one of the signatories of Vaculík's "Two Thousand Words," to gather in Prague's National Theatre and attend the meeting condemning the critical voice raised against the party. The whole event was televised: "ultimately it did not matter whether the participants were enthusiastic; it mattered only that they were there." [114]

Arguably this first round of media wars between the party and the dissident movement ended in a stalemate. Despite the international fame, the charter remained rather an intellectual endeavour for challenging the absolute political hegemony of the party. In spite of the later efforts of the chartists, it never gathered broad public acclaim nor transformed into a social movement. On the other hand, it was still an important act of protest, because it was the first major opposition action against totalitarianism in the country since 1969. It broke the inertia --at least-- among the Czechoslovak intelligentsia and because of its high international recognition boosted the confidence of counter hegemony groups. Yet the scars of 1968 were so fresh, and the general mood of normalization was so overwhelming. It was only "in the latter half of the 1980s, that the generation gap provided impetus to greater dissident activity, the young being much less subject to the control of the regime and accordingly neither demoralized nor sunk into apathy."[115] The long awaited carnival of revolutions needed a new, more radical, "scarless" generation.

[114] Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV*, 107.

[115]Wheaton and Kavan, *The Velvet Revolution*, 13.

Chapter IV

Konkretny Generation and the Making of the Revolution

The seven wonders of Czechoslovakia:
Everybody has a job
Although everybody has a job, nobody works.
Although nobody works, the Plan is fulfilled up to 105 percent.
Although plan is fulfilled up to 105 percent, there's nothing in the shops.
Although there is nothing in the shops, we've got enough of everything.
Although we've got enough of everything, everybody steals.
Although everybody steals, nothing ever goes missing anywhere.
And the Eighth Wonder of the World is that it has been working for forty-one years.[116]
(one of the slogans of the revolution in February 1989 in the city of Brno)

In his account of the revolutionary generation of 1989, Padraic Kenney focuses on the new generation of opposition groups against the communist establishment in central Europe. He argues that starting from the mid-1980s, opposition groups all over the region changed their tactics for challenging the party. Kenney credits the appearance of new generation of activists, whom he calls the *konkretny generation*, united for an effective action against totalitarianism in the region. Unlike the earlier generation of dissidents, such as the Chartists in Czechoslovakia, the new generation demonstrated a political stand on the concrete policies of the regime: environmental issues, the destruction of playgrounds in a city, the persecution of Catholic clergy and others.

> *Konkretny* meant focused on reality: on everyday problems and on realistic, effective means of overcoming, or at least exposing, them. *Konkretny* meant someone who knew how to organize a demonstration, or to use the media, and who could

[116] Wheaton and Kavan, *The Velvet Revolution*, 20

> implement ideas effectively. The opposite- and I talked to many of these, too- would be someone who enjoyed analyzing the communist system or the opposition and believed in the power of a devastating critique. Truth -about the workings of the communist system or the promise of say, liberalism- was for such activists the prerequisite to opposition. It became clear, though, that by the mid-1980s the time of the "truth-tellers" had passed, giving way to what I call the *konkretny* generation.[117]

In order to effectively challenge the regime, the various groups gathered together and formed a counter-hegemonic movement. It was a performance of an internal pluralism as various identities were melted together for the sake of destabilizing the party establishment. Hence, "a nationalist pacifist, or a pro-market green, was not an uncommon species" among the anti-communist opposition groups.[118] However, Kenney does not explicitly answer the question why such a transformation from idealistic truth-tellers to goal-oriented, internally pluralistic opposition happened. There were religious, nationalist, liberal democratic elements prior to the mid-1980s in Czechoslovak society. But the question is what created this "popular front," an urgent and hopeful call for united action against the party?

In addition to the above discussed ideological liquidation of the communist party in the hearts and minds of citizens, two historical occurrences shaped this new wave of revolutionary mobilization in central European countries. The first is the well-known Gorbachev factor. In addition to generational change, which brought the *konkretny* generation, a new radical youth without the traumas of the Prague Spring to the political arena, Gorbachev's perestroika and signals of non-interventionism provided impetus for the revolutionary confidence of the opposition groups to undertake political action against the government. *Perestroika* and his clear reformist tone bolstered the hopes for a change in central European societies. Before

[117] Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution, 13.*

[118] Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution, 13.*

Gorbachev, as a result of the still recent memories of the Soviet interventions to the 1956 Hungarian uprising and 1968 Prague Spring, the main mood among the dissident groups was that the ultimate power was the invincible Soviet Union. In Czechoslovakia alone there were over one hundred thousand Soviet soldiers as part of "friendly aid," and more were deployed at the borders. As long as Moscow backed the central European Communist parties, the dissident groups had absolutely no chance of overthrowing the party's power. It was for this reason that Václav Havel could only call citizens not to buy the regime's lies and develop an ethical stance, which he called "living in the truth."[119] Instead of calling citizens to political action or protest, the only activism that the Czechoslovak opposition (mainly the chartists) could do was to prepare declarations and smuggle them into Western bloc in order to create international pressure on the government. However, Gorbachev's *perestroika* brought confidence to opposition groups to take effective action against the government's policies. However, as I argued earlier, rather than overthrowing the communist parties, the "Gorbachev factor" provided a suitable political climate for opposition groups to operate. The new groups, such as the Initiative for the Demilitarization of Society or the John Lennon Peace Club, began to appear and conduct street demonstrations against the policies of the party. This new generation of activists (most of them were in their early twenties) blamed the older generation of dissidents, including Havel, for being pacifist and called society to active political opposition.

The second reason for the political push to overthrow the party was the Chernobyl disaster. During the 1960s, the possibility of a third world war and nuclear war was the source of the greatest fear, especially in the borderland countries of the

[119] Václav Havel , *Václav Havel or Living in Truth: Twenty-two essays published on the occasion of the award of the Erasmus Prize to Václav Havel,* ed. Jan Vladislav (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1986)

Eastern bloc. But this time, the threat of Armageddon came from inside the bloc. The Chernobyl nuclear disaster was a gruesome demonstration of the infectiveness of the communist system, which was now perceived as a great danger for the citizens of the Eastern bloc:

> When we began to hear about Chernobyl from the Western radios, not from ours... It was like of "this is it." Before Chernobyl, we hated the Communists. But this time, it was a matter of life and death. I felt like we were going to die because of those idiots up there, not because of a war with the West.[120]

Chernobyl, surely, convinced the then-mushrooming opposition groups of the urgency of the situation and greatly aided the forming of the united front against communist rule in Czechoslovakia. For this reason, the first major public campaigns of the opposition groups concerned environmental issues. In addition, since the Chernobyl disaster had a cross-national impact on citizens, opposition groups from different eastern bloc countries began to undertake united environmentalist actions against the bloc's international projects, such as the Gabčikovo-Nagymaros dams project, signed between the Hungarian and Czechoslovak governments. The project was enormous in scale; it simply required changing the entire topography in the region. The main aim of such a massive project was basically to divert the slow-moving Danube River into a 15 mile long canal from the Czechoslovak side to the power plants and large number of dams to be contructed in Hungary, so that hydroelectric power could be obtained. Although the plan was initiated in 1977, the organized resistance with an optimal public mobilization emerged only after the scale of the catastrophe at Chernobyl was understood and had galvanized society. The Slovak Union of Protectors of Nature and the Land (SZOPK) and the Hungarian Danube Circle issued samizdat publications informing society of the upcoming

[120] My personal interview with Jiři Maček on August, 12 2011 in Bratislava.

environmental slaughter. In 1988, the Danube Circle began to organize a series of large public manifestations, which gathered up to fifteen thousand people, against the project in more liberal Budapest, opening "the door to public activism" in the country.[121] The event was attended by Czechoslovak activists and this cooperation created a strong sense of solidarity among the opposition groups as well coordination, increasing the chances for a domino effect for overthrowing the communist regimes in the region. In fact, such environmentalist mobilization was another example of the curtain not being iron; the new type of socio-political perception, which were famously defined as a "risk society" by Ulrich Beck, simultaneously emerged in both blocs, establishing "reflexive mobilization", in which people felt a lot less secure with the industrial advancements.[122]

It was for these reasons that in 1987 "A Letter from Forty Signatories of Charter 77," written by those who described themselves as the "passive majority" of the association, criticized the charter's aged, Prague and Brno-based core for establishing a top-down power structure, and more important, for being pacific against the party's policies. The letter revealed the generational difference between the dissidents and activists: "Charter 77 has gained a huge respect and influence internationally, but its position among our own young generation does not respond to this same respect and influence."[123] Facing such radical energy, older Charter 77 activists were caught off guard. Despite his fame in the West for being the man behind the Velvet Revolution, Václav Havel was skeptical about the success of such radicalism until the very last moment in 1989. During most of the revolutionary turmoil of 1989, he waited in his

[121] Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*, 243.

[122] Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society:Towards a New Modernity*, (London: Sage Publications, 1992).

[123] Bren, *Greengrocer and His TV*… 110.

cottage, urged activists not to confront the police and expressed a rather pessimistic attitude, claiming that Czechoslovakia was different from Poland and Hungary, that the regime would not give up that easily.[124] However, the course of events and the participation of large numbers of people in demonstrations proved wrong the prognoses of Havel and other elder dissidents.

The Velvet Revolution in Four Acts:

November 1989 was a magical month for many people in central Europe. There was a sudden eruption of revolutionary energy, first among the youth, then transmitted to the entire society. People were hitting the streets every day; students occupied schools and with the exception of November 17, security forces became increasingly reluctant to intervene or stop the protestors. The communist establishments, which had ruled these countries for forty years, became paralyzed and began to surrender power in rapid succession. With the exception of Romania, these were peaceful revolutions. There were very few cases of brutality, and the police generally stayed inactive facing the protestors, while the military remained in the barracks. After living so many years under oppression without any sort of freedom of speech, when people suddenly realized that the power of the international *nomenclatura* was crumbling all over the region, they lost their fear of the party's power. All of a sudden, gray and monotone existence under real socialism was turned into a colorful one. John Keane vividly describes the atmosphere in Czechoslovakia during 1989 in his biography of Havel:

> They (people) feel lighter, joyful, more enthusiastic, even passionate about their family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances, and fellow citizens. They feel they have a future. Astonished, they discover boundless energies within themselves. They

[124] John Keane, *Václav Havel: A Political Tragedy in Six Acts* (London: Bloomsurby, 1999), 326-335.

> experience joy in their determination to act and to change the world. Their participation in the turbulent thrill of the revolution becomes a giddy exploration of the unknown. The Germans call this giddiness *Freude.* The French call it *jouissance.* The Spanish call it *alegria.* The Czechs call this state of intoxication *euforie.*[125]

"The pursuit of an errant act" became a popular, joyful action. Hundreds of thousands demonstrators filled the squares on a daily basis, sang freedom songs and chanted for free elections. However, the avalanche of such public mobilization was not achieved in one day. The new generation of activists had to struggle for more than a year to prove to society (and to themselves) that what was achieved in Poland could also be achieved in Czechoslovakia. The early signs of public unrest were already appearing in 1988, little sparks started a prairie fire and the revolution slowly gained momentum, and then turned into a firestorm.

Stage One: March, 1988 Hviezdoslav Square, Bratislava

Although massive public demonstrations were held in November 1989 in literally every city of the country, the first signs of public unrest were already appearing in 1988, even before the Polish roundtable talks. On March 25, 1988 around two thousand people gathered in Bratislava's historical Hviezdoslav Square to attend a demonstration, which would later be called the "Candle Demonstration." It was organized by Roman Catholic religious groups to demand the right of Catholics to worship and respect for human rights in general. Religious activists called believers to a half-hour, silent protest with candles. It was a cold night, with a light rain. People began to gather with a feeling of excitement and fear: no one had dared to conduct such an activity in the country for almost twenty years. Non-religious groups

[125] John Keane, *Václav Havel*, 344-345.

also participated in the event to show their solidarity. One of the non-religious protestors was Martin Šimečka, who later reported the event in one of the samizdat publication in Bratislava:

> I've never flown in a plane (since there was nowhere to fly to) but this is how I imagine it: *I blink, and I see another world…* A colorful roof of umbrellas and a crowd of people where there was supposed to be no one… There were well dressed women and middle-aged ladies; youth of the sort one glimpses in church, and old women with new hairdos. One woman held an umbrella over me; someone handed out candles. People lit their candles from another. It began to get crowded.[126]

Despite the peacefulness of the protestors, there was a 'fog of war' in the air; the police were well aware of the planned event and waiting for people in the square with water cannons. For unknown reasons, first they let people gather in the square and then tried to disperse them. The water cannons were used extensively; police cars slowly moved towards the protestors in order to force people out from the square, while the crowds were singing religious hymns.

Bratislava's candle demonstration was an important act of courage, because it opened a way for a new public sphere in the Czechoslovak society. The reports of the demonstration were circulated throughout the country through samizdat editions, together with the pictures depicting the first major gathering against the party for twenty years. A few days after the manifestation, opposition groups captured the records of the radiotelephone talks between the policemen during the demonstration and smuggled them to the West to be broadcast on Radio Free Europe and Voice of America along with the exaggerated stories of police brutality against demonstrators.

On the other hand, there began to appear an ideological split among the people working for the state organs responsible for securing the authority of the party in the

[126] Martin M. Šimečka, "Sviatki jari," Fragment K 2 (1988): 26-27; quoted in Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution,* 216. (with my emphasis)

country. One of the drivers of a water cannon vehicle recalled the atmosphere in their department:

> "…(after our shift) we got an offer to disrupt the course of a demonstration that was to take place in the evening and was not permitted by the state authorities. Well, the colleagues of my shift refused, they rather went to enjoy their time off. There were some ardent ones, though, who went because of promised new dungarees and 200 crowns. But after they returned from the event on the next day, we didn't talk to them, and as they were afraid to drive the vehicles in the city, they had to respray the license plates."[127]

As public activism became stronger, more and more members of the security forces became increasingly reluctant to intervene the masses' peaceful demonstrations. In November 1989, the people lost their fear of the power, while luckily the great majority of the lower and middle ranked members of the security forces representing the state "power" felt the same way. Stalin never had to deal with such a large-scale legitimacy crises, which would even hit the security forces.

Stage II: August 21, 1988 Wenceslas Square, Prague

The Candle Demonstration was followed by a protest condemning the "invasion" on the twentieth anniversary of the Soviet intervention. In August 1988, Charter 77 activists were preparing for a declaration condemning the "invasion" and the presence of the Soviet army in the country as on earlier anniversaries of the Soviet intervention in the Prague Spring in 1968. However, the members of the Independent Peace Association planned something more radical for the twentieth anniversary: a peaceful public demonstration in Prague's main Wenceslas Square. Although Bratislava's Candle Manifestation resulted in no serious injuries or arrests for more than three days, many of the Charter elders, including Havel, found the plan too

[127] *Sviečkova manifestácia alebo Bratilavský Vel'ky piatok,* directed by Ondrej Krajňak (2008: Ústav pamäti národa, Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2010), DVD.

daring and went to their summer cottages in order not to be taken into police custody, because they were considered the usual suspects for any challenge to party authority.

However, these young activists were fighting a battle that the charter elders were unfamiliar with. They were not interested in writing declarations and making them appear in the Western media. Instead, they aimed to challenge the party in the streets through mobilizing society in a similar fashion to the Polish opposition. The people were called to demonstrate with flyers stating "Overcome twenty years of apathy forced on us by the Husák regime, and COME!!"[128] On 21 August 1988, twenty years after the Soviet intervention, people began to gather in the heart of the city. Towards the late afternoon the number of people reached up to ten thousand. For the first time in twenty years, people were shouting the slogans that no one dared to voice in public. Probably having the large impact of "candle protests" in mind, the police did not intervene in the protests, because this would have meant to "concede the very unpleasant (for them) fact that a demonstration is really taking place."[129] However, towards the end of the protest strange things began to happen. Some young participants began to challenge the police, provoking their own arrest by laying on the ground in front of the police vans or only by handing over identity cards. It was the definite end of the normalization era; people no longer wanted to stay out of politics nor feared the party. Although some of the protestors were detained, none of them stayed more than few days in custody.

The two major manifestations in Bratislava and Prague in 1988 opened the space for public manifestations in the country. They were followed by the various other public protests such as Palach Week in January 1989 or the Prague Mother's

[128] Oldřich Tuma, *Zitra zase tady! Protirežimní demonstrace v předlistopadově Praze jako politický a socjalní fenomén.* (Prague: Maxdorf, 1994) 80. Quoted in Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution,* 239.

[129] Oldřich Tuma, *Zitra zase tady!,*22 quoted in Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution,* 240.

environmentalist manifestation throughout May. Although these early protests did not bring any change to actual policies of the party, they were vital in breaking out of the common defeatism and political apathy, prevalent among "normalized" Czechoslovak society. The young organizers of such upheavals popularized the intellectual resistance of the Charter 77, made the opposition movement visible to the people, and prepared them for the upcoming tornado, which they, themselves, were not expecting.

Stage III: November 1989, Czechoslovakia

On the symbolical level, the events that led to collapse of communism in central Europe are marked by two historic moments: the Polish roundtable talks and the fall of the Berlin Wall. The former escalated the revolutionary uprising, because it showed that the communist parties were in fact paper tigers, far from invincible political establishments. The latter proved to all the remaining communist parties in Europe that the game was up. It crumbled a large part of the remaining will of the party leaderships to resist the changes demanded in their countries. With one final push, they were all gone.

The date 17 Novermber 1989 was the fifteenth anniversary of the death of Jan Opletal, a student who was killed during the protest against Nazi occupation in 1939. It was declared as Independence Day by the Communist Party after 1948. It was made obligatory for students to attend the parade and demonstration organized by Socialist Union of Youth every year on November 17 in memory of the anti-fascist struggle during the Second World War. However, the regime was in a deadlock in 1989. The Berlin Wall had fallen eight days earlier and they were very well aware that this year's Independence Day was very likely to turn into an anti-party

demonstration, but cancelling this annual demonstration would mean accepting defeat. For this reason, they approved the parade with the deployment of an unusually large number of police forces.

The official demonstration on Vyšehrad Hill ended in the late afternoon. The signs of anti-party protest were already emerging during the official ceremony, as some student groups chanted "We want a new a government" and other slogans for change in the country. When the official ceremony was over, students, instead of going back to their homes, began to march towards Wenceslas Square, now the Mecca of the Czech opposition. Along the way, they were joined by a large number of passerbys, making the crowd even bigger than the opposition organizers could have imagined. Walking along the way from Vyšehrad to Wenceslas, protestors were greeted by horns from cars, whistles from tram, V-for victory signs from people in the windows.[130] At the entrance to the square, the crowd met with a cordon of riot police. The protestors and police stared at each other for half an hour, while the people chanted "We have bare hands!" However, this did not prevent things from getting violent. The riot police first separated the spearhead of the protestors (about 1,500 people) from the rest, blocked their escape routes, and then attacked and beat them mercilessly. When they finished, around five hundred people were hurt, twenty four needed to be hospitalized. "Brutal treatment was meted out indiscriminately; as depositions later showed, the police did not hesitate to attack the elderly, professional people, and even parents with their children. Indeed, the youngest casualty was thirteen and the oldest eighty-three."[131]

[130] Wheaton and Kavan, *The Velvet Revolution,* 43.

[131] Wheaton and Kavan*, The Velvet Revolution, 46.*

After Independence Day, the events took a *kafkaesque* turn. The police brutality against the people on Independence Day was immediately reported to the public through samizdat and (more effectively) foreign media. A fictitious 19-year-old university student named Martin Šmid was reported killed during the police brutality on November 17. Radio Free Europe reported the incident with the false news of the dead student; and it went viral in the country. The student organizations decided to go on strike to protest against the murder by state forces. Two days after the police attack, a group of students visited and placed candles on the action's site, where dried blood of the protestors could still be seen. They draped a large black banner over the street, saying "Jan Opletal 17.11.1939- Martin Šmid 17.11.1989." It is still unknown, who was actually behind the spread of that lie, as no one was killed during the manifestation; but we know for sure that it sped up the collapse of the party's power in the country. Jan Urban, a former dissident and journalist, who had believed in that lie and helped to spread it, explained to *New York Times* how effective tool this tool was for transmitting student revolutionary vitality to the common people in the streets, not only in Prague but also in the entire country:

> Until that day, there had been a deal between the Communist regime and the people: 'You shut up and we will take care of you. But the moment people had the impression that their kids were being killed, the deal was off. As a journalist, I am ashamed of the lie because it was a professional blunder. But I have no regrets because it helped bring four decades of Communism to an end.[132]

It was a decisive victory for the opposition side in the propaganda wars against the party. Within a week, all the universities together with the majority of high schools were on strike and every night, ever growing numbers of people were

[132] Dan Bilefsky, "Celebrating Revolution with Roots in a Rumor." *New York Times*, November 17, 2009 http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/18/world/europe/18czech.html?_r=1

gathering in the main squares of every town demanding free elections in the country. On November 20 in order to unite all the opposition groups under one umbrella organization, older Czech and Slovak dissidents founded Civic Forum and Public Against the Violence respectively. Václav Havel, as the spokesman for the Civic Forum, coordinated the anti-party activities in the Czech Lands, giving interviews to foreign media and appearing before hundreds of thousands of people during the nightly manifestations.

Meanwhile, the massive number of protestors turned police officers into passive state party officials, stating that they would be in the squares for the protection of the general order, but not to intervene against the protestors. As a result, the party called six hundred armed men from the People's Militia, paramilitary irregulars of the regime, to Prague's Old Town Square to secure the party's order. However, the party's misfortunes continued. Members of militia were sent from the small towns in northern Bohemia, and when they arrived in Prague, in the heat of political turmoil, they realized that the party simply did not arrange any place for them to spend the night. They had to stay in their buses in freezing temperatures and were grateful to receive constant supplies of soup and hot drinks delivered by students, occupying the nearby faculties. Within a few days, members of the militia participated in a public meeting of the workers of Kolben-Daněk and supported the declaration demanding the Party to end censorship and "open dialogue involving all society."[133] A few days later, various People's Militia units began to vote themselves out of existence. With the army in the barracks, a passive police, and non-existing People's Militia, the party did not have any option but to bargain with the opposition's demands.

[133] Wheaton and Kavan, *The Velvet Revolution*, 71 and 209.

Stage IV: Letná Plain, 25 November 1989

As a part of the bargaining, all the Presidium members, including General Secretary Miloš Jakeš, resigned on 24 November 1989, only a week after the brutal Independence Day demonstration and a day before the long planned *Letná Plain* demonstrations, which had been expected to be the biggest of all the public protests to date. They were replaced by supposedly more moderate party members, but the rotation of presidium members was far from sufficient for the opposition. "The resignation resembled collective suicide. It was an act of grave political stupidity, and it convinced Havel and his supporters who immediately afterwards drank a champagne toast to 'A Free Czechoslovakia', that the Party was dissolving in chaos."[134] It was definitely the impression on Letná Plain, a plateau overlooking Prague Castle, where nearly seven hundred thousand people were gathered to celebrate the resignation of the old party leadership, and demanded that the new presidium allow free elections. Sensing victory in the air, about nine hundred thousand people gathered in the same place the next day. One of the speakers during the manifestation was police lieutenant Pinc. He apologized to the crowd for the police brutality at the 17 November demonstration, argued that vast majority of the police corps did not agree with the ruthlessness of the party, and that they were only obeying orders. Then, Havel made a moving speech on the freedom demands of the people, and when he finished his speech, he announced to the crowd that the Civic Forum had invited new Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec to give a speech, and that he had accepted. It was a big surprise for the people, but because of his fame as a moderate party member and with the hope of promise for a change, some parts of crowd began to chant for him. Adamec began his speech by announcing that the

[134] Keane, *Václav Havel*, 356.

government accepted all the fundamental demands of the people. All the plain roared with joy; people felt that the Czechoslovak Berlin Wall was collapsing in front of their eyes. However, he continued by insisting on the necessary leading role of the party for the future transformations in the country. He was immediately booed by the crowds and had to leave the stage.

A day later, Civic Forum and Public Against the Violence made the final push by succeeding in organizing a two-hour general strike, which was supported by the great majority of the population. Two days later, the Federal Assembly abolished the constitutional article, granting the Communist Party a leading role in government affairs. In two weeks time, the party agreed to abolish the law declaring Marxism and Leninism as the official ideology of the state and formed an interim coalition government with the representatives of Czech and Slovak dissident groups. On December 29, Václav Havel was elected President of the country. The dictatorship came to an end, together with the carnival of revolution.

When Evžen Plaček committed suicide by self-immolation in 1969 as a political protest against the Warsaw Pact intervention in the Prague Spring, the party was able to hide the incident from the society. Not a word was made in the central press; his protest was unknown for the great majority of the population. However, on 17 November 1989, history took its revenge by sparking a revolution out of the false news of the killing of a fictional university student by police brutality during the protests. This time, the communist party was in no position to suppress the spread of this false news, nor was it able to convince citizens to stay away from the protests through deterrence. As the communist parties were giving up their power all over the region, the Czechoslovak government was no longer able to keep its citizens outside of the political sphere. There was surely multi-causality behind the change between

1969 and 1989, in terms of communist regimes' capacity to repress public discontent: the macroeconomic failure of communist project in the cold war, immense bureaucracy, totalitarianism, lack of initiative etc. In addition to such chronic problems, the Gorbachev factor and Chernobyl disaster provided material conditions for the mass mobilization of the people and the successful overthrowing of the party. I argue that despite the importance of all these factors, the main underlying force for creating this wide-scale crisis of legitimacy, a crises so severe that it paralyzed government forces to function for suppressing the massive protests, was the impact of the culture of late capitalism and its ideology on the society. It was the reason for creating an immense mental geography, which I called "Life is Elsewhere-ness." It was the relative deprivation, a feeling that Stalin probably would have called of being behind the locomotive of history.

Conclusion

Durkheim was one of the very first social scientists, who looked at the relationship between individuality and the premises of socialist projects. In his less known work, *Le Socialisme*, he criticized the newly emerging socialist movement of his time for being solely interested in "regulation and control of production," while ignoring consumption.[135] For him, there was a contradiction within the socialist project, because controlling the means of production would naturally require the controlling of consumption patterns. However, "there is no socialist doctrine, in Durkheim's view, which considers that consumption should be regulated centrally: on the contrary, socialists hold that each individual should be free to use the fruits of production for his own individual fulfillment."[136] However, for Durkheim it was practically an impossible condition to accomplish.

The best seller autobiography of Mina Urgan, a Turkish socialist and the professor of English literature, testifies to this problem addressed by Durkheim in the context of twentieth-century European socialism. As a firm believer in socialism, she openly describes her shock during her first visit to Soviet Union in June 1979:

> In Russia, one of the most disturbing things was to see how greedy were the Soviet citizens to have even the most banal products of the consumer society. In the moment that they understood we were foreign, they were approaching us to have some things to exchange. Little kids wanted chewing gum in exchange for their Lenin badges. Looking at the Lenin's beautiful face in the badges, and then the package of chewing gum, I felt sick. Older ones wanted dollars, or blue jeans, a jacket, t-shirt in exchange for *ruble*. Furthermore I realized that they wanted the motliest ones with the writings. Since I did not have money to give a tip, I gave a pair of socks and blue t-shirt

[135] Emilé Durkheim, *Le socialisme; sa définition, ses débuts, la doctrine saint-simonienne* .(Paris: F. Alcan, 1928),25. quoted in Antony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 96

[136] Antony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory, 96.*

> to the cleaning lady at the hotel as a gift. She seemed to be happy but she put her hand on her chest and made movements as if she was writing or drawing picture. Probably she wanted writings like *I love Micheal Jackson*, or some silly pictures on the t-shirt.[137]

Although Marxist theory had long ignored the possible problems of the consumption, the communist politicians of the post-Stalinist Eastern bloc countries were quick to acknowledge the need for the betterment of production of consumer goods. In the Czechoslovak context, although the chronic problems especially with the distribution of the products continued, the party, to a certain extent, succeeded in improving the quality and quantity of the products and bringing a variety of goods. However, as I have argued throughout the text, the resentment of the people towards the party was not linked only to the shortage and lack of variety of consumer goods. As Urgan's memoirs demonstrate the citizens of late socialism were not in need of simple pants but blue jeans, not the plain t-shirts but the ones with slogans of cultural capitalism. This structure of feeling or a value system, which I have defined as "life is elsewhere," provoked widespread resentment towards the party. The endeavors to design "socialism with a human face" were aimed at breaking away from this resentment by reuniting with the outsiders and reconciling with the new cultural and ideological predicament of the late-capitalist era. However, its suppression marked the end of the hopes for genuine socialism, which would go hand in hand with the culture of late-capitalism.

In the long run, the "normalization" government's policy of directing citizens to their conformist, 'quiet' life, in which individuals were expected to be obedient to the party's rule, functioned as a vicious circle for the party's rule. The party was able to sustain public order and marginalize the few anti-communist intellectuals.

[137] Mina Urgan, *Bir Dinozorun Gezileri* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999), 203-204.

Meanwhile “vy mate Lenina, nechte nám Lennona“ (You have Lenin, let us have Lennon) gradually appeared as the popular slogan among the youth. People developed an apathy for party policies; however, they were in no way depoliticized. With the strong presence of the domestic and international security forces in the country and bans for travelling to the West; listening to radio Free Europe and American music, watching Austrian or West German television, having long hair, wearing denim jacket and blue jeans all had their political messages. The strong feeling of “life is elsewhere-ness” was developed among the people, while the threshold of rebellion was gradually increased. The much awaited signal came when the Polish mass strikes convinced the communist Party to negotiate with the Solidarity movement. This created an avalanche effect, and all the communist parties in central Europe were overthrown within a year. The ruling elites’ crisis of legitimacy was so severe that the regime could not use the security forces to maintain its power. The only leader who tried to use this option, was Ceausescu, and it did not bring anything but his own death.

After the revolution, as a testimony to the companionship of rock’n roll music during the gray existence under the authoritarian rule of the party in the name of proletariat, Rita Klímová, the dissidents’ translator to English, coined the term Velvet Revolution, inspired by the legendary American rock band, Velvet Underground. So the revolution was named, German and Austrian cities were filled with the gazing Czechoslovaks and despite the deep problems of post-socialist era, “Life” certainly became closer.

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