# THE POLITICS OF OPPOSITION IN A ONE-PARTY STATE: THE CASE OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA 1977-1988

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# ABSTRACT

In conditions of normalization, political and economic stagnation and popular apathy, the Czechoslovak opposition placed its emphasis on the ostensibly 'non-oppositional' demand for human rights and legality, coupled with the development of an independent political and cultural life.

The first section of this thesis presents a study of the Charter 77 movement, which for the first time united people of disparate political viewpoints behind the non-ideological demand for human rights. This demand, which is seen to be a fundamental challenge to the regime, was coupled with a new concept of politics which emphasized the 'moral foundation of all things political', and called for a moral revival or 'revolution' from below. Chartist thinking also centred on the development of independent civil initiatives and the creation of a 'parallel polis'. It emphasized the individual citizen, and sought to transform the relationship between the citizen and the state.

The second section examines the spectrum of viewpoints expressed in the parallel political life in Czechoslovakia, from Marxist to conservative. Despite the reduced emphasis on ideological labels in the late '70's and '80's, basic ideological differences remained, reflecting the traditional plurality of Czechoslovak political life.

The third section examines the oppositions' concern with international problems and solutions. The Czechoslovak opposition in the 1980's abandoned the idea of seeking separate national solutions, and instead argued that change in the geo-political status quo in Europe was the necessary pre-requisite for any significant internal improvements. It sought the democratic transformation of the Eastern bloc and European reunification.

This thesis charts the increasing politicization of the Czechoslovak opposition in the late 1980's, from 'anti-politics' to the enunciation of more directly political goals, and culminating in the 'rehabilitation' of politics in the pre-revolutionary period.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# INTRODUCTION

With the Soviet invasion of 1968 and the subsequent purge of reformist communists from the ruling party, any chance of reform from above in Czechoslovakia was closed off. The regime initiated a policy of political and cultural repression in which no independent expression was tolerated. In response, society retreated into apathy, indifference and internal exile. A section of the expelled reform communists attempted to organize themselves into a socialist opposition based around the Socialist Movement of Czechoslovak Citizens (SMCC), however following further arrests the movement was forced to concentrate largely on the defence of its own imprisoned members. Some non-communist intellectuals also voiced their resistance to 'normalization'. Vaclav Havel addressed an open letter to Gustav Husak in April 1975 in which he argued that the apparent consolidation in the country really masked a severe moral, cultural and human crisis. During the 1970s the issue of human rights increasingly gained importance for reform communists and non-communists alike and became a unifying factor for different currents within the opposition when they united in defence of the musical underground in 1976. The form taken by the sudden revival of independent and oppositional activity, initiated by a group of leading intellectuals and expelled reform communists centred around Charter 77, was clearly shaped by the specific conditions of 'normalization', and the resulting spiritual, moral and political crisis in society.

The Czechoslovak opposition in the 1970s and 1980s clearly defined the political system against which it struggled as totalitarian, albeit an evolved totalitarianism lacking some of the attributes of a classical totalitarian dictatorship. The mass terror and the demands for mass participation of the Stalinist era had been abandoned, and 'normalized' Czechoslovakia presented a quiet and stable facade - what Havel has described as the quiet of the graveyard.[1] Fear no longer had to be reinforced by show trials and executions, but was maintained by more subtle means - the all pervasive state police and the threat of loss of livelihood or education, or of lengthy spells in jail. In his analysis of totalitarian dictatorships Tesar notes:

> "It might even be said that the cruelty of a dictatorship is a sign of its
> imperfection: a perfectly functioning totalitarian dictatorship completely

subjugates the whole of society without necessarily having to resort to any excesses whatsoever".[2]

Revolutionary zeal had long since given way to stagnation and total ideological bankruptcy, whilst all that was demanded of a citizen of 'normalized' Czechoslovakia was political apathy and indifference. Josef Vohryzek writes:

> "The pre-1968 totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia demanded that everyone act in conformity with aims it laid down itself. Non-participation was an expression of disagreement that weakened the totality...the totalitarianism of today has given up its former goal, and now demands precisely the opposite: a total vacuum of civic will, a *perpetuum silentum*, passivity and quiescence."[3]

Whilst the post-1968 system had thus evolved in several ways from the totalitarianism of the fifties (Havel has called the post 1968 system 'post-totalitarian'[4]) the Czechoslovak opposition, in their analyses of the system, still defined it as totalitarian, even, as Tesar has suggested, as a 'perfected' form of totalitarianism. Havel writes: "I do not wish to imply by the prefix 'post-' that the system is no longer totalitarian; on the contrary, I mean that it is totalitarian in a way fundamentally different from classical dictatorships, different from totalitarianism as we usually understand it."[5]

In its analysis of the totalitarian system in Czechoslovakia, the opposition identifies several important features which act as the pillars of this system, enabling it to maintain its power and total control over society. In his 'Letter to Husak', Vaclav Havel argues that fear is one of the main building blocks of the social structure. Everyone has something to lose, whether it be loss of a job or a chance of promotion, loss of housing or travel privileges, or loss of prospects for one's children's education, and it is within the power of the regime to withhold any or all of these privileges. Fear is maintained by the vast mechanism of the secret police, "the hideous spider whose invisible web runs right through the whole of society".[6] Milan Simecka describes the 'community of fear' in which everyone lives:

> "It is a fear that derives from one's defenselessness vis-a-vis a social organization, a total and very real power concentrated into an anonymous pinnacle and then extending outward and downward like rays into the lower components of the social structure."[7]

Another mechanism by which the totalitarian regime maintains itself is its use of ideology. Havel identifies two central functions of ideology - as a means of ritual

communication within the system of power, and as a bridge of excuses between the regime and the people. Miroslav Kusy writes of the 'real socialist man': "As an ideologist he has taken over and almost perfected an Orwellian language designed to cloud over the negative reality of real socialism and make it positive."[8] Although bankrupt, ideology cannot be abandoned, as it provides the official excuse - the idealized view of reality - from which the regime claims its legitimacy.

The opposition also identifies state sanctioned consumerism as a method of control, the abandonment of rights in return for material rewards inherent in the 'social contract'. Consumer aspirations are encouraged at the expense of moral and spiritual values. Jiri Ruml writes: "So long as citizens set no great store by honour, conscience, truth and dignity, they have consumer socialism at an 'acceptable price."[9] Havel concludes that, in simplified terms, it could be said that the post-totalitarian system was built on foundations laid by the historical encounter between dictatorship and the consumer society.[10]

The suppression of culture and the replacement of history with pseudo-history are also important components of totalitarian control. Havel describes culture as the main instrument of society's self-knowledge. A society robbed of cultural identity and memory will more easily fall victim to total manipulation by the regime.

Central to the very nature of the totalitarian system is the role of the institutionalized lie. The system demands that each individual must 'live within the lie'. As Havel points out, the individual need not believe the lie, but must accept their life within it. Thus, like Havel's Greengrocer[11], each individual must participate in and perpetuate the lie, the idealized view of reality expounded by the official ideology. The acceptance of this institutionalized lie must be universal. Havel writes:

> "The principle must embrace and permeate everything. There are no terms whatsoever on which it can coexist with living within the truth, and therefore everyone who steps out of line *denies it in principle and threatens it in its entirety*."[12]

In characterizing the post 1968 totalitarian system in Czechoslovakia the opposition emphasizes its absolute totality, its politicization of every sphere of life. Every area of social life is brought under party control through the establishment of transmission belts. Tesar notes:

"It is this mechanism that ultimately makes it practically possible to govern all of society and all spheres of social life totally...in the totalitarian system this mechanism replaces the entire rich structure that we call civil society..."[13]

Kusy sees the source of this total politicization of every aspect of life in the very essence of the totalitarian regime.

"For what is specific about real socialism is that once it has started that kind of idealization of reality, it cannot stop halfway, it cannot limit itself to only some aspects or spheres of life, for that would undermine the entire result"[14]

Another aspect of this totality, central to the maintenance of the regime, is that each citizen is required to be at least a partial collaborator with the regime. By accepting their life within the lie, Havel argues, individuals confirm the system. The line of conflict between life and the system runs through each person "...for everyone in his or her own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system".[15]

These assessments of the fundamental nature of the totalitarian system in post-1968 Czechoslovakia provide an essential background to a study of the nature of opposition to that system. The characteristics which the opposition identifies as being central to the totalitarian system - the universality of 'living within the lie', the elimination of cultural identity and historical memory, political apathy as a pillar of the system, and the role of each individual in the maintenance of that system - are central points of departure for the Czechoslovak opposition. 'Living within the truth' gains its crucial political significance from the regime's need to maintain the universality of 'living within the lie'. Hence the opposition's emphasis on moral and spiritual values as their fundamental starting point. Similarly, the creation of an independent cultural life is a direct response and political challenge to a regime which attempts the total suppression of culture. Perhaps most significantly, it is the very totality of the regime which empowers individuals and gives disproportionate political significance to individual acts of independence. Any breach in the regime's totality, the opposition argues, threatens to weaken and undermine the whole system. This is fundamental to the nature of the Charter, which is based not on the power of a mass movement, but on the political significance of individual challenges to the totality of lies and fear. Havel writes:

"As long as living a lie is not confronted with living the truth, the perspective needed to expose its mendacity is lacking. As soon as the alternative appears, however, it threatens the very existence of appearance and living a lie in terms of what they are, both their essence and their all inclusiveness. And at the same

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time, it is utterly unimportant how large a space this alternative occupies: its power does not consist in its physical attributes but in the light it casts on those pillars of the system and on its unstable foundations."[16]

This thesis presents a study of the politics of the Czechoslovak opposition from the time of the Charter's inception in 1977 until the end of 1988 when the Charter began to be superseded by more directly political organizations in the pre-revolutionary period.

The thesis concentrates on the political ideas, values and conceptions of the Czechoslovak opposition. It examines the political and philosophical foundations of the opposition, and the political alternatives which it articulates. A detailed analysis of other areas of independent activity, such as the rapidly developing alternative culture, or the role of Christianity within the opposition, would thus be beyond the scope of this thesis. Cultural activity is examined in relation to the concept of 'parallelism', and Christian activity in relation to the political formulations of the Catholic Vaclav Benda.

The thesis is divided into three sections. Section one examines Charter 77 itself. The Charter came into being in 1977 as a demand for the observation of human rights as enshrined in the International Covenants. This section examines the political implications of the demand for human rights, and also of the offer of a dialogue. However, from the beginning the Charter was more than simply a human rights monitoring group, and its evolution over the period from 1977 to 1988 saw a substantial increase in the scope and influence of Charter 77 activity. Firstly, the Charter has produced an extensive range of official documents addressing a diverse variety of political, social and economic concerns. Charter documents have presented political critiques of the problems of the existing system, and also have proposed solutions to several pressing social and economic problems, often through the publication of discussion documents. Secondly, the Charter itself has developed into an independent alternative community, and has created a space for independent expression to thrive. In this sense the Charter has introduced a new, non-traditional element to oppositional activity. It does not seek to directly replace or bring down the political system, but to change the realities of life within that system, through the development of an alternative community governed by alternative forms of behaviour.

Thus the Charter does not simply voice political demands, but has created an alternative

model of political and social behaviour. Hence Vaclav Havel asks:

> "...are not these informal, non-bureaucratic, dynamic and open communities that comprise the 'parallel polis' a kind of rudimentary prefiguration, a symbolic model of those more meaningful 'post-democratic' political structures that might become the foundation of a better society?"[17]

Thirdly, the Charter is an expression of several fundamental political and philosophical

conceptions which most Chartists hold in common and which govern their activity. These

include: the importance of morality in politics, the philosophical belief in the "supreme

moral foundation of all things political"; the role of citizens initiatives, and the belief that

change is only possible 'from below'; and an emphasis on the individual and the need for

the emancipation of the individual citizen and society as a whole from control by the state,

through the renewal of a free civil society.

Section two presents an analysis of the political groupings which make up the 'parallel'

political life in Czechoslovakia. Skilling and Precan noted in 1981:

> "There is at present no chance of developing any kind of real alternative or parallel politics in the form of political parties, programmes or an organized opposition. Beneath the surface of public life, however, a surrogate, narrow and circumscribed, has appeared in the crystallization of embryonic political tendencies, the expression of diverse ideological or philosophical standpoints, and the conduct of debate among their advocates."[18]

These political tendencies or groupings encompass a wide spectrum of political

thought, from the Trotskyist revolutionary ideas of Petr Uhl, to the ideological

conservatism of Vaclav Benda. What they share in common, as distinct from many within

the opposition as a whole, is a belief in 'politics', and in the necessity and value of

formulating political alternatives to the existing system. These individuals and groupings

have kept the traditional plurality of political life alive in Czechoslovakia, in circumstances

where the regime tries to eliminate 'politics' altogether and replace it with its own

monolithic and lifeless order.

Section three examines the increasingly important international orientation of the

Czechoslovak opposition. The section concentrates on three major aspects of this emphasis

on international concerns. Firstly, the development of East European solidarity through a

series of meetings and joint declarations between the Czechoslovak opposition and the

opposition in Poland, Hungary and elsewhere, stemming from a desire to overcome the

'iron curtains' which separate the societies and opposition movements in Eastern Europe. Secondly, the dialogue between the Czechoslovak opposition and the Western peace movements, and the debate over the interpretation of the term peace. And thirdly, the important debate which took place in the mid 1980s, centred around the Prague Appeal, promoting the idea of the reunification of Europe and the need to overcome the post war geo-political status quo.

There follows some brief background information on the individual Chartists referred to most frequently throughout this thesis:

Jan Patocka.

Patocka was an influential philosopher with a large following, especially amongst youth. He was never involved in politics, and in 1968 supported reforms in his own academic sphere. In 1977 he became one of the first three spokesmen for Charter 77. In his essays examining the nature and aims of Charter 77 he emphasized the moral foundation of all political action. Patocka died on March 13, 1977, following a lengthy police interrogation.

Vaclav Havel.

Vaclav Havel was an active proponent of reform in 1968, and at that time advocated the creation of a two-party political model. An influential playwright and essayist, Havel was never a member of any political party and is not associated closely with any of the political groupings which developed within the opposition in the 1980s. He was one of the first three spokesmen for Charter 77. His essay "The power of the powerless' presented an influential study of the relationship between morality and politics.

Jiri Hajek.

Hajek was active in the Social Democratic Youth in the 1930s and was imprisoned during the German occupation from 1940-45. He joined the Communist Party in 1948. He was Minister of Education from 1965-68 and was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1968, but resigned after the invasion. He is one of the leading figures in the reform communist grouping which developed within the opposition in the 1970s and 1980s.

Jaroslav Sabata.

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Sabata joined the Communist Party in 1947 and became head of the Department of Psychology at the Prukyne University in Brno in 1964. In 1968 he was elected to the Central Committee at the 14th underground Party Congress. A vocal opponent of the Moscow Protocols, he was expelled from the party in 1971. An independent communist, he cannot be closely associated with the reform communist grouping. He frequently emphasizes the need for dialogue with the political authorities and the importance of relations with the peace movement.

### Ladislav Hejdanek.

Hejdanek worked at the Philosophical Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in 1968, but was dismissed in March 1971. He is an active member of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren. He is a non-communist socialist , and is not associated with any of the political groupings which emerged in the 1970s and 80s. For many years he organized an unofficial philosophical seminar in Prague.

### Petr Uhl.

Uhl was active in founding the Revolutionary Youth Movement in 1968 and later founding the Revolutionary Socialist Party. A revolutionary Marxist, Uhl advocates the revolutionary overthrow of the existing bureaucratic dictatorship and the establishment of a system of social self-mamagement. He was a co-founder of VONS (The Committee to Defend the Unjustly Prosecuted) and edited Informace o Charte since 1978.

### Zdenek Mlynar.

Mlynar was a Secretary to the Central Committee and a close associate of Alexander Dubcek in 1968. He was expelled from the Party in 1970. Mlynar was the leading figure in the reform communist grouping until his emigration in March 1977.

### Miroslav Kusy.

Kusy was one of the few Slovaks prominent in the Charter. He was head of the Ideological Department of the Slovak communist Party in 1968-9. He was expelled from the party in 1970. Kusy advocates a more organized and more political role for Charter 77 and its development into a socialist movement with an alternative socialist programme.

### Vaclav Benda.

Benda graduated from the Philosophical Faculty of Charles university. Benda is an active lay Catholic and has written several essays advocating a major political role for Czech Catholics in the political revival process in Czechoslovakia. He supports conservative political values and rejects both communism and socialism.

Rudolf Battek.

Between 1965-9 Battek worked at the Institute of Sociology of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. In 1968 he was one of the founders of the Club of Committed Non-Party Members (KAN). He has never been a member of any political party. He is a leading figure in the independent socialist grouping and was a co-founder of VONS.

Jan Tesar.

Tesar was a member of the Historical Institute until his dismissal in 1969. He was a former member of the Communist Party, but was associated with the independent socialist grouping in the 1970s. He was a co-founder of VONS. In 1980 he went into exile in West Germany.

# References

1. Havel argues that what prevails is "order without life". Vaclav Havel 'Open letter to Gustav Husak' in Voices of Czechoslovak Socialists (London, 1977) p. 114.

2. Jan Tesar 'Totalitarian dictatorships as a phenomenon of the twentieth century and the possibilities of overcoming them' *International Journal of Politics* Spring 1981. p. 96.

3. Josef Vohryzek 'Thoughts inside a tightly-corked bottle' in *The power of the powerless* ed. John Keane (London,1985) p. 200.

4. Vaclav Havel 'The power of the powerless' in Keane op. cit., p. 27.

5. Ibid, p. 27.

6. Vaclav Havel 'Open letter to Gustav Husak' in Voices op. cit., p. 94.

7. Milan Simecka 'Community of fear' *International Journal of Politics* Spring 1981. p. 19.

8. Miroslav Kusy 'Chartism and real socialism' in Keane op. cit., p. 158.

9. Jiri Ruml 'Who is really isolated?' in Keane op. cit., p. 178.

10. Vaclav Havel 'The power of the powerless' op. cit., p. 38.

11. Havel illustrates the role of ideology, ritual and conformity by reference to a typical greengrocer who places in his shop window, among the onions and carrots, the slogan 'Workers of the World Unite' (Keane, p. 27). Havel's greengrocer is shown to be both a victim of the system and its instrument (Keane, p. 36).

12. Vaclav Havel 'The power of the powerless' op. cit., p40.

13. Jan Tesar, op. cit., p. 91.

14. Miroslav Kusy, op. cit., p. 160.

15. Vaclav Havel 'The power of the powerless' op. cit., p. 37.

16. Ibid p. 40.

17. Ibid p. 95

18. H. Gordon Skilling and Vilem Precan Introduction *International Journal of Politics* Spring 1981. p. 4.

SECTION ONE

# THE CHARTER

# THE PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS BEHIND CHARTER 77:
# PATOCKA AND HAVEL

The values and ideas which lay behind the Charter 77 movement did not develop suddenly or in isolation, but were an expression of recurring themes in Czechoslovak political and philosophical thinking. Several values which were emphasized by the Charter and manifested in Chartist activity had their roots in ongoing discussions about the role of the individual and the crisis of modern humanity. In particular the roots of the Chartist emphasis on individual responsibility (both for oneself and for the world), its moral and spiritual foundation, its rejection of consumer values in favour of concern for environment, culture and the human spirit, and its emphasis on the need to sacrifice oneself for higher values, can be found in the philosophy and philosophical ideas of two of its founding spokesmen - Jan Patocka and Vaclav Havel.

The philosopher Jan Patocka (1907-1977) was an influential force behind the founding of Charter 77, and his philosophical essays, with their message of hope and belief that the human spirit, even in a situation of extreme hopelessness, can be saved, and can thus save the world, were widely read in intellectual circles. Patocka was influenced by the writings of Masaryk, Husserl and Heidegger.

Havel, in turn, was influenced by Patocka, among other philosophers, and often writes on similar themes to those explored by Patocka - the importance of the 'natural world', individual human responsibility and sacrifice, and the crisis of modern society. Havel makes no claims to be a philosopher, although his essays 'The power of the powerless', 'Politics and conscience' and particularly his collection of letters from prison, 'Letters to Olga', frequently elaborate on philosophical themes. Havel writes: "I'm no philosopher and it is not my ambition to construct a conceptually fixed system".[1] He thus uses terminology in a non-rigorous, 'eclectic' fashion, and does not look to any one all encompassing 'world view' or philosophical set of beliefs to provide all the answers. Indeed, he is sceptical of any formulation which offers easy pre-set solutions, seeing a complete understanding of the 'order of Being' as too elusive, and requiring constant

mental struggle.[2] He adds: "I have neither the education nor the experience to be a true philosopher."[3]

The central underlying theme in the writings of both Patocka and Havel is a belief that modern humanity is in a state of crisis, what Havel calls a 'crisis of human identity'[4], a theme also explored in the writings of T. Masaryk. Patocka writes:

> "Humankind today, torn by ideologies and discontented amid affluence, looks fervently and feverishly for solutions to ever new technologies. Its reliance on the power of politics and of the state is no less a part of this."[5]

Similarly Havel writes of:

> "...the crisis of contemporary technological society as a whole... Technology...is out of humanity's control, has ceased to serve us, has enslaved us and compelled us to participate in the preparation of our own destruction. And humanity can find no way out : we have no idea and no faith, and even less do we have a political conception to help us bring things back under human control."[6]

For Havel, in essence, the source of this crisis of modern civilization is to be found in modern science and technology. The values of the age of science - rationalism and objectivism - have alienated mankind from his 'rootedness' in the 'natural world'. The pre-scientific values emanating from mans rootedness in the natural world include, according to Havel, an emphasis on actual personal experience ( a "personal 'pre-objective' experience of the lived world"[7] ), a sense of personal responsibility and conscience, an acceptance of mystery, and above all, a belief in absolute moral values, in an absolute 'horizon' which gives meaning to life.

> "The natural world, in virtue of its very being, bears within it the presupposition of the absolute which grounds, delimits, animates and directs it, without which it would be unthinkable, absurd and superfluous, and which we can only quietly respect."[8]

Modern science and rationalism has torn mankind away from his rootedness in this natural world, banished myth, mystery and the existence of a moral absolute. As a result of this alienation, man has lost his sense of responsibility and conscience, his belief in good and evil: "Man has rejected his responsibility as a subjective illusion."[9]

Havel points to two main symptoms of this crisis of man in the scientific age - destruction of the environment and consumerism.

Havel sees environmental pollution not simply as a technological problem which can have a technological solution (eg. filters on factory chimneys), but as a symptom of mans

alienation from the 'natural world' - his loss of respect for the forces of nature and loss of feeling of responsibility for his natural environment. Havel sees the environmental problems of North Bohemia as resulting from "...a crisis of our experience of the absolute horizon" which "inevitably leads to a crisis in the intrinsic responsibility that man has to and for the world".[10]

The second symptom, consumerism, is also emphasized by Patocka, who writes of the "..soul-corroding unidimensionality of consumerism." Havel sees consumerism as a process by which man's moral and spiritual degeneration is guaranteed. Materialism, self-interest, and the everyday preoccupations of a consumer lifestyle ensure that man will be enslaved by his own concerns and become an easy target for the manipulations of the 'post-totalitarian' system.

> "Is it not true that the far-reaching adaptability to living a lie and the effortless spread of social auto-totality have some connection with the general unwillingness of consumption-oriented people to sacrifice some material certainties for the sake of their own spiritual and moral integrity."[11]

An important aspect of this perceived 'crisis of humanity' is that it is not a function of any particular political system, but is common throughout the modern world. Thus it is not a disease of the East in particular, and in fact Havel argues that it was 'exported' to the East from Western Europe. He argues that the West provided and even forced on the world all that has become the basis of impersonal power - natural science, rationalism, the industrial revolution, the cult of consumption, the atomic bomb and Marxism[12]. He sees the totalitarian systems of the East as a "convex mirror of all modern civilization", an "avant-garde of a global crisis of this civilization", which should act as a warning to the West. He thus concludes that the way out of the crisis facing mankind lies not in any geo-political solution, but in a world wide existential revolution which would succeed in reconstituting the natural world - the world of personal experience, morality and responsibility - as the "true terrain of politics".[13]

On occasion Havel expresses a fiercely anti-science viewpoint, depicting science and technology as the root of all evil. In 'Letters to Olga' he writes:

> "...our civilization, founded on a grand upsurge of science and technology, those great intellectual guides on how to conquer the world at the cost of losing touch with Being, transforms man its proud creator into a slave of his consumer needs,

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breaks him up into isolated functions, dissolves him in his existence in the world..."[14]

Havel seems to hold an idealized view of the pre-scientific age, ignoring any benefits of scientific progress and instead looking back to, and perhaps hoping to recapture, some idyllic pastoral past. In his essay 'Politics and conscience', however, he argues that he is not proposing that mankind prohibit science and return to the middle ages, but simply that it should recognize the source of the crisis of modern civilization: "The fault is not one of science as such but of the arrogance of man in the age of science. Man simply is not God, and playing God has cruel consequences."[15]

Both Havel and Patocka see the solution to this crisis of humanity in a renewed belief in a moral absolute. In his essay 'The obligation to resist injustice' Patocka writes:

> "Humankind needs to be convinced of the unconditional validity of principles which are..."sacred", valid for all humans and at all times...we need, in other words, something that in its very essence is not technological, something that is not merely instrumental: we need a morality that is not merely tactical and situational but absolute."[16]

For Havel, this moral absolute is to be found in what he calls his 'absolute horizon'.

> "We must honour with the humility of the wise the bounds of that natural world and the mystery which lies beyond them, admitting that there is something in the order of being which evidently exceeds all our competence; relating ever again to the absolute horizon of our existence."[17]

This horizon is abstract, concealed and beyond human understanding, but at the same time it is a certain and lasting presence giving meaning to life, a framework against which all human activities may be judged. "It is final and absolute...the horizon which - as the metaphysical vanishing point of life, defining its meaning - many experience as God".[18]

It is interesting to note that both Patocka and Havel, whilst advocating faith in a moral absolute, and occasionally expressing this absolute in terms of 'God', are not believing Christians, and do not find the solution to their spiritual quest in any established religion, but rather in philosophical concepts. Kohak has described Patocka as a "deeply religious yet unbelieving man"[19], and I believe that this aptly applies to Havel as well. The absolute horizon which, for Havel, gives meaning to his life, is highly abstract in form. In 'Letters to Olga' he writes: "...I still can't talk of God in this connection: God, after all, is one who

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rejoices, rages, loves, desires to be worshipped: in short, he behaves too much like a person for me."[20]

For Havel, the question of faith is an important one. This is clearly not faith in a particular religion or set of beliefs, but the faith each individual has that life has meaning, that there are some spiritual and moral values which exist on a higher plane, which are absolute and all encompassing. Opposed to this 'order of life', characterized by a longing for meaning and an "experience of the mystery of Being", Havel sees an evil, dark alternative, the 'order of death', characterized by indifference, fear of mystery, uniformity, boredom, and the order of the graveyard, in which man is conceived as "a cybernetic unit without free will." The existence of faith is what determines which shall be victorious - the 'order of life' or the 'order of death'.

> "...faith, with its profound assumption of meaning, has its natural antithesis in the experience of nothingness; they are interrelated and human life is in fact a constant struggle for our souls waged by these two powers."[21]


For both Patocka and Havel, the most important manifestation of this belief in a higher moral absolute is to be found in individual human responsibility. Patocka sees the "assumption of responsibility in freedom" as the "authentic alternative" to mindless consumerism.[22] He argues that in order to attain this level of responsibility and freedom, a citizen must first be 'shaken', by some catastrophe or shock, out of the shackles of his everyday concerns. Havel does not apparently subscribe to this shock theory, instead seeing the struggle between responsibility and indifference - between faith and lack of faith - as taking place constantly within each individual. Havel though, like Patocka, does emphasise the importance of transcendence - of going beyond the world of everyday concerns and preoccupations. In 'Letters to Olga' he writes:

> "Everything meaningful in life...is distinguished by a certain transcendence of individual human existence - beyond the limits of mere "self-care" - toward other people, toward society, toward the world".[23]

For Havel, the assumption of individual responsibility is directly linked to the belief in an absolute horizon. He argues that human responsibility is not simply a question of a man's relationship with other people, with society or with the world. Nor is it simply a result of a person's education, or his conscience. Human responsibility, Havel argues, is

thus not merely the relationship of something relative to something else relative, but of something relative (mankind), to that which defines it - the omnipresent absolute horizon.

It is the assumption of human responsibility - as an expression of man's relationship to his absolute horizon - which, Havel argues, is the source of human identity. Human responsibility is the "fundamental point from which all identity grows".

> "...as an ability or a determination or a perceived duty of man to vouch for himself completely, absolutely and in all circumstances...human responsibility is precisely the agent by which one first defines oneself as a person vis-a-vis the universe, that is, as the miracle of being that one is."[24]

It is this belief in the importance of individual responsibility which was the driving force behind the foundation of the Charter. Havel writes in 1982 of the meaning of Charter 77: "I am responsible for the state of the world. After all, that is what we meant five years ago..."[25]

This emphasis is not a new one in Czechoslovak thought. Kohak points out that Patocka's emphasis on responsibility in freedom is in line with Masaryk's belief in moral maturity as the fundamental meaning of being human, a belief echoed in Havel's equation of human responsibility with human identity.

The assumption of responsibility by the powerless in the circumstances of a totalitarian dictatorship is thus not simply a selfless act of altruism or a foolish act of suicide, but an attempt to assert one's own human identity, emanating from one's relationship to a higher moral absolute.

An integral aspect of the need for responsibility and transcendence, which is emphasized by both Patocka and Havel, is the importance of sacrifice. Patocka writes: "...people today are once again aware that there are things that are worth suffering for, that the things for which one might suffer for are the ones that are worth living for."[26]

Havel similarly emphasizes the importance of sacrifice, of man's "...ability personally to guarantee something that transcends him and so to sacrifice, in extremis, even life itself to that which makes life meaningful."[27] Havel argues that without the horizon of the ultimate sacrifice, all sacrifice becomes senseless, and everything loses its worth and its meaning. The result is a "philosophy of sheer negation of our humanity".[28]

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Here we can see the philosophical root of Havel's disagreements with the peace movement and its emphasis on safeguarding human life above all. Havel argues that it is better to die for the right cause than to surrender to a safe life without meaning.

Both Patocka and Havel, it should be noted, have 'practiced what they preached' on the subject of the importance of individual sacrifice.

The Charter always emphasized, above all else, its moral imperative. From this survey of the philosophical ideas of two of its founders, it is possible to gain a better understanding of the source of this moral imperative. Both Patocka and Havel subscribe to ideas close to those expressed by Christianity, but the source of these beliefs is not any specific religious conviction, but a profound faith in a philosophical concept - the existence of a moral absolute. Their actions are based on the belief that the problems of Czechoslovakia - indifference, apathy, alienation - are not caused by the totalitarian system, but rather, that the converse is true. The solution to the 'crisis of humanity', which is a spiritual, not a political crisis, is a return to a rootedness in the natural world and a pre-speculative belief in an absolute horizon.

Thus Havel sees the essential question which will determine the fate of Eastern Europe, and Europe as a whole, not as that of a political choice between socialism and capitalism:

> "The question is wholly other, deeper and equally relevant to all; whether we shall, by whatever means, succeed in reconstituting the natural world as the true terrain of politics, rehabilitating the personal experience of human beings as the initial measure of things, placing morality above politics and responsibility above our desires...responsible to oneself because we are bound to something higher, and capable of sacrificing something, in extreme cases even everything...for the sake of that which gives life meaning."[29]

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# HUMAN RIGHTS

The Charter 77 Declaration defines the Charter as an "open community of people of different convictions, different faiths and different professions united by the will to strive, individually and collectively, for the respect of civic and human rights in our own country and throughout the world." This chapter will examine the origins of this human rights orientation, its scope and implications, the reason for its broad appeal, the differing interpretation and emphasis placed on human rights by various groups and individuals within the Charter, and finally the international context of the human rights issue.

## Background to the adoption of the human rights issue

A combination of factors, both internal and external, accounted for the growing significance of the human rights issue for the Czechoslovak opposition during the 1970s, and the eventual creation of the Charter with its commitment to the struggle for human rights and legality.

Developments in Czechoslovakia were clearly influenced by developments in other countries of the Eastern bloc, in particular the Soviet Union and Poland. The developments in the Soviet Union from the late 1960s, with the espousal of human rights by the Democratic Movement, influenced the way in which the human rights issue was viewed in Eastern Europe. According to Janos Kis:

> "The flourishing of Soviet samizdat around the turn of the decade, and of the movements that congealed around it...suggested that...it was already possible to make human and civil rights into a public issue, and that the state was becoming more sensitive to the pressure of public opinion."[1]

Another international factor which influenced the growth of the human rights movements was the process of detente in general, and Helsinki and the International Covenants on Human Rights in particular. Not only did these developments place the problem of human rights on the international agenda and make the observation of human rights in Czechoslovakia a legitimate international concern, exposing the Czechoslovak human rights record to Western public opinion, they also served to provide a formal legal and legitimizing basis for criticisms of the regime, whilst at the same time exposing the gulf

between what the Czechoslovak authorities endorsed on an international level, and what they permitted at home.

The human rights issue also gained impetus due to significant internal factors. Firstly, the suppression of human rights during normalization brought their importance home to all members of the opposition. Mlynar argues that it was a "paradoxical achievement" of normalization that it forced the ex-communists expelled from power after 1968 to appreciate the basic importance of human rights and the inseparability of civic and political rights.[2] The importance of human rights as a prerequisite for any other action was understood by all members of the opposition as a result of their daily experiences. Secondly, the failure of attempts to formulate specific political programmes and create oppositional organizations encouraged the adoption of human rights as a basic, non-programmatic point of departure. Thirdly, the very plurality of the Charter itself led naturally to the adoption of the human rights issue as the single common denominator. The immediate stimulus for the creation of the Charter came from the encoding into Czechoslovak law, and the subsequent publishing, of the International Covenants on Human Rights, and at the same time the clear violation of those rights by the Czechoslovak regime in its persecution of the Plastic People of the Universe.

As this brief survey shows (these factors are covered at length in existing literature[3]) the crystallization of the opposition around the issue of human rights was the result of a combination of internal and external factors, in part a natural result of the dissidents' experiences and frustrations under normalization, and in part a response to international stimuli.

Petr Uhl presents an interesting outline of what he sees as the combination of factors which led to the adoption by the opposition of the human rights issue:

> "It wasn't even a choice, rather a logical culmination of preceding activities and events; the joint co-operation of the political opposition, Christians and the cultural underground in defending the Plastic People, the release of political prisoners, the growing significance of Amnesty International, discussion about the conclusion of the Helsinki Conference, about the development of so-called Eurocommunism and about the course of the Berlin Conference, and especially the fact that Czechoslovakia ratified the two International Covenants on Human Rights."[4]

There is little discussion in the mainstream Charter documents about the philosophical and historical origins of the human rights issue. Hejdanek does address this question and appeals for a debate on the subject. In his contribution to the 'Informace o Charte' debate he writes: "This struggle for the practical application of the idea of human and civil rights needs first of all a clarification of what exactly these rights are, what their idea is based on and in what they are ultimately anchored."[5]

He argues that the principle that the Charter is not linked to any particular ideology must apply to the concept of the idea of human rights which is historically tied up to the philosophy of natural law. "This does not mean purging the concept of human rights of its philosophical connotations, but consistently keeping alive a dialogue about the deepest sources of individual and collective rights."

Elsewhere Hejdanek expands on the nature of human rights. He rejects the concept of natural human rights and freedoms and argues:

> "Man does not assert his rights and freedoms...as some natural gift, as a part of the equipment he brings with him into this world, but actually as a response to a challenge, an answer to a plea that he occasionally encounters, and can also overlook, if he is too concentrated on himself and his own opportunities..."[6]

Other Chartists stress the Christian sources of the struggle for human rights. Seven Czech Evangelical pastors, in a letter expressing their support of Charter 77, emphasize what they see as the spiritual basis of the human rights question.

> "The question of human rights...has grown from spiritual roots which go back to the Reformation and the non-conformist movement in the church of the Anglo-Saxon world. These subjects are very close to us, together with the emphasis of our Reformation on the free preaching of God's Word and the idea of religious tolerance."[7]

Others stress the development of the principle of the equality of rights in the Enlightenment, the American Declaration of Independence and the socialist movement of the 19th century.[8]

In general, all human rights contained in the International Covenants are accepted as a whole. As a rule, Chartists do not draw distinctions between more or less desirable human rights. Some rights are stressed more frequently than others, for example the right to freedom of expression and belief, but the indivisibility of all human rights is generally emphasized. However the Marxist Petr Uhl does present a critique of specific human

rights which he considers undesirable. In his essay 'Human rights and political revolution' Uhl frankly states: "I must confess that for example in the UN General Declaration on Human Rights...there is one point which I don't like at all: the right to the private ownership of the means of production."[8]

He argues that if the owners of the means of production are neither the workers, nor people with whom the workers can deal freely, "...then such ownership of the means of production is certainly a racket and I cannot support it." This, he argues, extends also to the monopolistic ownership of the means of production by people other than the workers, which is then passed off as socialism, as is the case in Czechoslovakia.


**The appeal and interpretation of the struggle for human rights**

The defence of human rights may seem a rather narrow and limiting base for activity, involving simply an appeal to the regime to abide by its own laws and a series of legalistically phrased protests when human rights are violated. In fact, however, the struggle for human rights, as interpreted by the Charter, proved to be a remarkably broad, flexible and appealing base for a variety of activities and outlooks.

Several factors account for the broad appeal of the human rights issue. Firstly, the principle of legality was accepted as the starting point for all 'dissident' activity. The Charter both operated legally - openly rather than clandestinely - and appealed to the laws. Havel explains this emphasis on legality as resulting partly from the realization of the futility of any attempt at open revolt in the "soporific" conditions of normalized Czechoslovak society, partly as a rejection of the notion of violent change per se - the sacrifice of human lives for some abstract political vision - and partly through an understanding of the way the law functions in a 'post-totalitarian' society.[9] Havel describes the law as providing both a "bridge of excuses" between the system and individuals, functioning in the same way as ideology, and also as an "essential instrument of ritual communication" providing a common language and a formal code to bind the power structure together. "Without the legal code functioning as a ritually cohesive force, the post totalitarian system could not exist."[10]

It is because the law plays such a vital role for the functioning of the regime, Havel argues, that appeals to the law on the part of the opposition have such enormous significance.

> "Because the system cannot do without the law, because it is hopelessly tied down by the necessity of pretending the laws are observed, it is compelled to react in some way to such appeals... over and over again such appeals make the purely ritualistic nature of the law clear to society and to those who inhabit its power structures."[11]

Chartists emphasize that change brought about by non-legalistic methods - violent change - is not necessarily change for the better, as it is not rooted in responsible, active citizenship. The legalism of the Charter is based on a desire for constructive, deep-rooted change without the sort of violent disruption that can open the door for a new type of tyranny. Vohryzek writes:

> "This legalism does not merely make a virtue out of necessity; its background lies deep in the national experience. A violent coup d'etat...could just as easily replace the mass discrimination of today with a new wave of discrimination that would only deepen the social degeneration. The purpose of Charter 77 is to oppose this degeneration, which is a result of the apathy of those who do not demand their rights."[12]

A second factor explaining the appeal of the human rights issue was that the defence of human rights involved practical action on a basic human level - the defence of persecuted individuals, solidarity with their families etc. Uhl regards this concrete help and solidarity as the most significant aspect of the strategic struggle for human rights, leading also to a heightened sense of critical awareness, and he views the work of VONS very positively.[13] Havel also emphasizes this aspect of the appeal for human rights, describing it as: "...an attitude that turns away from abstract political visions of the future towards concrete human beings and ways of defending them effectively in the here and now..."[14]

The appeal of human rights was also in large part a result of the heterogeneous nature of the Czechoslovak opposition. It was an issue that could unite people of different political outlooks and those who held no political views because it was essentially non-ideological. The respect of human rights can be seen as an ultimate criterion against which all political systems can be judged. In this sense it is 'above' politics - it can supersede both left-right and East-West divisions and have universal applicability. Hejdanek argues that it is this universal aspect of the human rights issue which gives it much of its significance.

> "Charter 77...represents, above all for the future, an important base and platform for all public activity, and the political profile of individual personalities, movements, organizations or political parties can in future be measured only by their readiness, in theory and practice, to respect, defend and apply all human and civil rights... This aspect of Charter 77 in its significance transcends national boundaries and represents a suitable basis even for international relations."[15]

Defence of human rights and legality also appealed to a heterogeneous opposition because it could be characterized as constructive and positive criticism of the regime, rather than negative or oppositional dissent. This was a point especially emphasized by some of the former communists within the Charter. Hajek writes of the Charter:

> "It is a reminder to all...that it is not essential...to limit one's options to the alternatives of obedient conformity (real or feigned) and negation (expressed or real). It offers another, third way: the path of constructive criticism and legal debate."[16]

Similarly, the October 1977 letter to Husak from the Charter emphasizes that;

> "...the critique it sets forth is not destructive, but highly constructive, since it is directed against the violation of constitutional and legal rights of citizens...Revealing shortcomings is often linked with positive proposals and suggestions as to how to overcome and eliminate these defects."[17]

This interpretation of the demand for human rights as simply 'constructive criticism', however, comes into conflict with different interpretations of what the full application of human rights would mean for the survival of the regime, as will be shown later.

The demand that the regime abides by its own laws and respects human rights declarations may seem to be a very narrow base for activity, but in fact it was interpreted by the Charter fairly broadly. From the beginning Chartists made it clear that their struggle for human rights would involve criticism not just of violations of human rights, but also of the underlying systemic causes of these violations. The initial Charter 77 declaration, for example, contains a critical analysis of a major aspect of the system of government which lies behind the human rights violations.

> "One instrument for the curtailment or, in many cases, complete elimination of many civic rights is the system by which all national institutions and organizations are in effect subject to political directives from the apparatus of the ruling party and to decisions made by powerful individuals."[18]

The declaration makes clear the wide scope of the Charter's role in the defence of human rights - it seeks to 'promote the general public interest', draw attention to individual cases, and also suggest solutions and submit "other proposals of a more general character aimed at reinforcing such rights and their guarantees".

Significantly, the Charter characterizes itself as a 'community' striving for the respect of human rights, rather than simply a committee monitoring human rights violations. The fact that the Charter is a living community enriches the scope of its basic commitment to human rights. It becomes not only a pressure group for the implementation of human rights, but creates a space, a community in which human rights are practiced - an area of free expression, debate and participation. Also it encouraged further developments outside the bounds of the Charter itself, which pursue aspects of human rights further, both through the development of parallelism, especially in cultural fields (Hejdanek emphasizes the importance of the role of cultural workers for the human rights movement; "...without such eminently important mediation, human rights groups will remain relatively isolated and on the fringe of events most of the time."[19]) and through the work of VONS, concentrating on practical support for persecuted individuals and their families.

Two concepts which are frequently voiced by Chartists and can be identified as Charter concerns tie in closely with the human rights question. Firstly, Chartists frequently stress that each individual shares responsibility for the state of the nation. The Charter is a call to active citizenship, a call to each individual to reject apathy and indifference and take up his responsibility personally by demanding his rights. This sense of co-responsibility for the observance of human rights is a driving force behind the Charter. The initial declaration states: "...everyone bears his share of responsibility for the conditions that prevail and accordingly also for the observance of legally enshrined agreements, binding upon all citizens as well as upon governments."[20]

Secondly, the assertion of human rights is linked by several Chartists with the question of the place of the individual in relation to the state. Hejdanek expounds this theme in his essay 'Prospects for democracy and socialism in Eastern Europe'. He writes: "Society must gradually overcome its enthrallment by a state which seeks...to achieve total domination of the life of society as a whole and of every individual down to the last detail."[21] He argues that the original role of human rights in this field must be expanded:

> "The purpose of human rights campaigns was, at the outset, to establish the
> bounds beyond which all state and government intervention ceases to be
> legitimate and legal: in short, to prevent the political enslavement of the citizen. It
> has turned out that the defence of civil and human rights must be looked at in a
> much wider sense."

Hejdanek argues that the human rights struggle must be extended to free the citizen from economic and social dependence, through the emancipation of civil society from state domination, including the emancipation of the workplace, decentralization, and the separation of culture, education, information etc. from the state.

Hajek also links the struggle for human rights with the need to defend the individual, not only from the arbitrary rule of the state, but also from other factors over which individuals, and even governments, currently have no control, for example environmental, social and technological problems. Writing about the significance of the International Pacts on Human Rights he argues:

> "...this is not just a matter of observing the letter of these documents: By its very existence and activity, Charter services to remind state authorities, the public and every fellow citizen, of a very simple idea...the idea that any reasonable and just arrangement of society should never lose sight of the individual human being and citizen, who in today's complex reality must retain a means of defence against manipulation by the diverse factors of today's world"[22]

Both Hejdanek and Hajek, through their emphasis on the position of the individual in relation to the state, extend, in different ways, the scope and implications of the concept of human rights.


The scope and appeal of human rights is also broadened by the fact that the struggle for human rights takes place on three different levels; individual, national, and international. Firstly, it sets standards for relationships between individuals. It is a call for each individual to behave morally in his private life, a point emphasized by Hejdanek who stresses the individual obligation to observe and respect human rights in specific everyday human relations. "Respect for human rights does not begin in public but in the home and family."[23] Secondly, on the national level, human rights provides a framework and even a language for communication between citizens and the state authorities. The dialogue that the Chartists desired did not come about, but a kind of dialogue takes place through this common legal language - the Chartists criticize the regime on the basis of the law, the regime prosecutes Chartists by citing the law, Chartists respond by citing the law in their defence. Paragraphs of the law and articles of the constitution provide a common language, if not a means of constructive communication or dialogue. Also on the national

level the struggle for human rights is a call for active citizenship and the moral and cultural regeneration of the nation. On the international level, the human rights issue facilitates solidarity and co-operation with other human rights groups, East and West, regardless of political boundaries. Helsinki and the International Pacts placed human rights firmly on the international agenda, linking the observation of human rights with the detente process (a linkage that had already been stressed by individuals within the Czechoslovak opposition). The scope of human rights, therefore, ranges from the level of personal individual behavior, to the level of international politics.

The struggle for human rights proved to be a very flexible framework for the Charter. It can be viewed on several different levels depending on the different emphasis of individual Chartists. Some Chartists see human rights fundamentally as a moral issue, whilst others see it as part of a political struggle.

The most prominent exponent of the moral viewpoint was Jan Patocka, who described human rights as "the supreme moral foundation of all things political."[24] The observance of human rights and legality is an expression of the recognition of the supremacy of moral over political considerations, and of the existence of a higher authority, on the part of both individuals and states. Patocka argues:

> "The concept of human rights is nothing but the conviction that states and society as a whole also consider themselves to be subject to the sovereignty of moral sentiment, that they recognize something unqualified above them...and that they intend to contribute to this end with the power by which they create and ensure legal norms."[24]

Other Chartists also stress the moral basis of human rights, but perhaps see the connection between morality and legality as less automatic. Vaclav Havel, for example, in his essay 'The power of the powerless', does not see the implementation of human rights and legality as an automatic recognition of the moral foundation of life, but instead warns of the limitations of an exclusive appeal to legality without sufficient stress on morality and human dignity. "Establishing respect for the law does not automatically ensure a better life...the key to a humane, dignified, rich and happy life does not lie either in the constitution or in the criminal code."[25] He argues that the function of the law is merely to limit or permit, it cannot by itself create a better life, and respect for the law alone is no guarantee of quality of life. Havel concludes:

"The struggle for what is called 'legality' must constantly keep this legality in perspective...Without keeping one's eyes open to the real dimensions of life's beauty and misery, and without a moral relationship to life, this struggle will sooner or later come to grief on the rocks of some self-justifying system of scholastics."

Ladislav Hejdanek also argues that the appeal to legality and human rights must be accompanied by a broader moral renaissance than is inherent in the appeal to legality itself. He writes of the need for: "...a profound spiritual renewal grounded firmly in the lives of the widest sections of society. Without this, our efforts to achieve respect for inalienable human rights...will soon founder."[26]

Other Chartists stress the political, rather than the moral, aspect of the human rights question. The political implications of the struggle for human rights are interpreted differently by different individuals and groupings within the Charter, and range from a reformist to a revolutionary view of the political role of the human rights struggle. Most politically oriented Chartists, however, with the exception of Miroslav Kusy, view the struggle for human rights as the best strategy by which to bring about their long term aims, whether these be the reform, transformation or overthrow of the existing political system. Several basic contradictions emerge between the assessment by different Chartists of the political significance and ramifications of the Charter's demand that the regime fulfil its human rights obligations.

Contradictions and ambiguities are inherent in the whole question of the Charter's 'non-oppositional' demand for the respect of human rights. Firstly, the Charter appears to 'take at its word' the regime's good will and intentions when it signed the International Covenants, whilst the regime openly flouts all its promises. Secondly, whilst the Charter claims to be non-oppositional, the issue of human rights has fundamental political implications. Many of the human rights which the Charter demands would be impossible for the regime to implement without changing its very nature and would involve widespread transformations and reforms of the whole political system. These are problems frequently addressed by Chartists. In his essay 'Paralelni Polis' Benda describes the Charter as being in a schizophrenic position. On the one hand, he argues, everyone, across all ideological differences, agrees on a very gloomy assessment of the current political regime, whilst on the other hand: "...we behave as though we would not admit that the

arguments of the political regime about its good intentions and legal regulations...are mere propagandistic fig leaves."[27]

Benda concludes that this 'taking at its word', though a shrewd manoeuvre, cannot have a mobilizing effect if it cannot bridge the gulf of this contradiction. Kusy also sees a fundamental contradiction in the Charter's attitude to human rights. On the one hand the Charter claims not to demand any changes, not to be a political opposition, whilst at the same time its demand for the observance of human rights "threatens the very power base of real socialism"[28]

> "To demand consistent adherence to socialist legality means that the law be set above political programmes established by the ruling power clique, above everything it does...Accepting this demand would thus mean voluntarily undermining the foundations of their personal power, abdicating their privileged positions as creators and holders of power, and as interpreters and enforcers of the law."[28]

Kusy concludes that: "The Charter takes the regimes declarations and proclamations seriously, something that neither the regime nor the nation does."

Vohryzek also points out the inherent contradictions in the Charter's appeal to legalism:

> "Charter 77 is merely a legal expression of the will to demand proper citizen's rights; it is not an appeal to eliminate the power structures without which these systemic illegalities would be no more than anomalous abuses which, lacking deeper roots in Czechoslovakia, could therefore never have lasted so long."[29]

To understand how these contradictions are resolved and how Chartists of differing political viewpoints assess the political implications of the demand for human rights, it is useful to examine the arguments of three individual Chartists in some detail.

Petr Uhl emphasizes the political, the revolutionary, implications of the demand that human rights be respected. In his essay 'Human rights and political revolution' he writes:

> "Many signatories of Charter 77, the 'more political' ones, myself among them, were in 1977 under the suspicion that they signed the Charter a little insincerely...that they are not concerned about human rights, but rather about political change...I am concerned about political changes, but nevertheless I signed the Charter quite sincerely. By my thinking of course the full or at least substantial assertion of human rights...is conditional on deep political (and social) changes in Czechoslovakia and on an international scale."[30]

Uhl argues that the demand for human rights is a good and correct strategy in the struggle against bureaucratic dictatorship in Czechoslovakia. Drawing attention publicly to all the rights which are guaranteed by law, but in reality exist on paper only, has direct impact on several levels. Firstly, either the authorities must yield to the demands, and thus

facilitate further substantial breakthroughs against their monolithic power, or they will

refuse to yield, and thus the regime will demonstrate to Czechoslovakia and the world its

dishonesty, inability to develop, and its illegitimacy. Secondly, both citizens and those

within the power structures will watch the regime's action, and will realize the gulf between

declarations and their realization. Thus: "The critical outlook of people intensifies, their

consciousness grows, concern about social issues increases."[30]

Thirdly, the practical aid given to people in concrete cases of persecution creates an

important atmosphere of solidarity which, as we have seen earlier, Uhl feels is of vital

importance.

For Uhl, it is the very fact that the present political regime is unable to implement

human rights fully, coupled with the unceasing demand that it does so, that makes the

demand for human rights so revolutionary. In his essay 'On the need for a dialogue' Uhl

argues that only the revolutionary transcendence of bureaucratic centralism can lead to the

full enjoyment of human rights, but that the demand for human rights under the existing

circumstances is not an illusion: "It is, on the contrary, the correct and...only way to bring

socialist ideals to a large number of people."[31] It enables them to understand the true basis

of the political system. Uhl argues that the unceasing demand for human rights, which the

authorities cannot implement, forces the regime to demonstrate to the people that the

condition for the assertion of their everyday interests is the solution of other, universal

problems - ie. the contradictions of bureaucratic power - and that without their solution it is

not possible to ensure that human rights are implemented. Uhl concludes:

> "So the scope of Charter 77's concern, and its method of permanently offering a
> dialogue about human rights and legality, is the way to politicize still larger circles
> of people, and this politicization is again the essential condition for the
> revolutionary solution of universal political problems."[31]

In his essay 'The place of dissidents on today's political map' Zdenek Mlynar also

argues that one of the apparent contradictions of the Charter's demand for human rights -

that it demands rights which the regime is unable to implement without undermining its

own position - is in fact the element which gives the demand for human rights great

political significance. He describes human rights as a "key political problem" from the

viewpoint of totalitarian political power. The basic principle of totalitarian power, he

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argues, is the relationship between the authorities and the individual, in which the individual is purely an object of manipulation and has no rights. If the totalitarian authorities lose this ability to manipulate the individual, if they become subject to legal norms and limits, then their very existence is threatened. At the same time, he argues, totalitarian systems of the Soviet type are currently not in a position to admit this fact. For internal and international reasons, these systems must claim that they recognize the equality of civil rights for all citizens.

> "The movement for the defence of human and civil rights makes this contradiction of contemporary totalitarianism of the Soviet type visible...it brings it to the consciousness of both totalitarian power, the controlled society, and also to the consciousness of people living outside its sphere."[32]

Mlynar describes this contradiction as the 'Achilles heel' of these totalitarian systems, which find themselves in a constant dilemma. They are either exposed, or they must begin to abandon the basic preconditions of their existence, neither of which they can politically afford in the long term. Mlynar argues that the legal activity of demanding human rights is a much more radical political act than formulating various reform programmes, because it strikes at vitally important principles of totalitarianism and demands the application of principles which are unacceptable for the totalitarian system. He argues that the political significance of the movement for human rights is definitely not short term. Its success does not depend on establishing dialogue with, or gaining concessions from the authorities. On the contrary, the rigid inflexibility of the authorities can be a more fertile ground on which the political significance of the struggle for human rights grows stronger and more vital. The success of the human rights movement will come when the majority of society will see its own position not in terms of official ideology or its own momentary partial interests, but in terms of what kind of real possibilities to protect their own interests, determine their own goals, and in general live according to their own will, the people have in relation to the authorities: "...consequently the majority of people will cease to consider themselves nothing but subjects, and begin to consider themselves citizens."

This consciousness raising and appeal to active citizenship, by which the populace becomes aware of its need for human rights and their denial, will result, argues Mlynar, in a mass movement for the fundamental political transformation of the existing system.

> "On such a base then, of course, further developments would have to be directed at institutional, systemic changes...In other words, development would be directed at the downfall and transformation of totalitarian systems of a Soviet type."[33]

Jiri Hajek views the political implications of the human rights struggle from a different starting point. For Mlynar and others, the regime's ratification of the human rights pacts was merely a propagandistic tactic. The regime signed an agreement which it could not fulfil and had no intention of honouring. Mlynar writes: "Charter 77 exposed this hypocritical tactic, by which the regime wants to give the impression that it is something other than it really is."[34]

Hajek starts from the opposite premise. In his essay 'Human rights, peaceful coexistence and socialism' he states:

> "Charter 77 does not want to view Czechoslovakia's signing of the pacts as some sort of error or tactical trick. It sees in this action a confirmation of the full compatibility of human rights, as formulated in the treaties, with the socialist system."[35]

Hajek, then, does seem to take the regime's ratification of the human rights pacts 'at its word', as a genuine statement of good intentions. He further argues that an awareness of the need for a full guarantee of human rights for every citizen, in order to realize the full potential of the socialist state, is present amongst the ruling circles.

> "The fact that this tendency is felt even in the leading circles in socialist countries (although a plethora of day to day tasks perhaps does not permit it to penetrate more clearly and in a more reasoned manner into the consciousness of the authoritative organs) is also indicated by the very acceptance by the socialist states of the International Pact on Human Rights..."[36]

This premise is indicative of a different attitude to the political implications of human rights, on the part of Hajek, from that of both Uhl and Mlynar. Like Uhl and Mlynar, Hajek sees the movement for human rights as part of a schema for change, but he stresses this change in terms of the improvement and development of the existing system, rather than its fundamental political transformation. He frequently emphasizes the full compatibility of human rights with socialism - with the 'contemporary socialist system' - and makes no mention of the argument raised by Mlynar and Uhl that the implementation of human rights by the present regime would involve political suicide. Hajek writes of the Charter:

> "Although some of the signers take as their point of departure a world outlook that is not Marxist, they join with the Marxists in accepting the contemporary

socialist system of our country as the self-evident foundation and framework within which these treaties are to be realized."[37]

Hajek argues that the guarantee and development of civil, economic, political, social and cultural rights for all citizens is fundamental to the process of opening up society to conflicts between progressive and conservative elements, the resolution of which would result in a "really functioning socialist democracy" able to reach its full potential. He argues that citizens initiatives emphasizing the rights of individuals, citizens, and society, will help to bring about "democratic modifications of technologically geared solutions" which will become inevitable under the pressure of contradictions and problems in the economy and society.[38]

Here, then, are three rather different assessments of the political significance of the human rights movement, from the reformist to the revolutionary. For Uhl and Mlynar it is the apparent contradictions within the human rights issue - the fact that the Charter asks the regime to implement pacts which it in fact cannot implement without fundamental change - which, far from being 'naive' and an expression of 'Svejkism'[39], in fact gives the human rights movement its mobilizing and consciousness raising role. Hajek, on the other hand, does not address this contradiction and instead emphasizes the full compatibility of human rights with a reformed, humanized socialism, and sees the signing of the pacts as evidence of a growing awareness of the need for human rights on the part of the authorities. For all three, human rights is an instrument for political change.

Kusin has described human rights as a "programma minimum", a recognition that conditions are not right for the advocacy of systemic transformation by the opposition.[40] He is critical of what he sees as the limited nature of the human rights issue, he describes the Charter as mainly "a movement exposing victimization practices", thus creating a "self perpetuating conflict", and argues that the Charter needs to enlarge its field of activity from the defence of human rights to the promotion of changes in other fields.[41] However, as the examination of the views of Uhl, Hajek and Mlynar shows, for some politically oriented Chartists human rights is far from being a "programma minimum". In the view of some Chartists, the demand for human rights is a political act of great significance which, whilst avoiding divisive political programmes and ideologies, aims at mobilizing the population to active citizenship and creating the conditions for fundamental political change. As Mlynar

points out: "...this activity is a much more radical act than various reform programmes...it strikes at vitally important principles of totalitarianism."[42]

I would argue, therefore, that the demand for human rights is not necessarily a 'minimal' demand, but in fact has proved to be a very flexible concept, open to several differing interpretations. For some its significance lies in its pragmatic and practical attempt to improve conditions in the 'here and now', for others it represents an appeal to moral values and an attempt to 'live in the truth', whilst for others it is clearly a demand of fundamental political significance, creating pressure in society for political change. For many, perhaps, it is the combination of all these aspects of the human rights question which gives it its significance and appeal.

## Human rights in the international context

### Human rights and Detente

Many Charter documents emphasize the relationship between human rights and the process of detente and peaceful coexistence. As both Kusin[43] and Skilling[44] have pointed out, Chartist writings rarely contain any critique or examination of the problems involved in the relationship between detente and human rights. Kusin writes: "What admittedly seems to lacking in the various pronouncements on detente...is the drawing of distinction between detente and appeasement."[43] The desirability of detente and its beneficial influence on the human rights struggle is taken as an automatic starting point by most Chartists. Hajek writes of the human rights movement:

> "Those who involve themselves in such activity are naturally advocates of detente and opponents of the cold war, its mentality and methods. They are naturally in favour of military detente and disarmament."[45]

However it becomes clear that Chartists did see the dangers involved in the processes of detente and international pressure for human rights - the dual threat of appeasement or a return to cold war - from the very fact that they always and repeatedly emphasized the indivisibility of human rights and detente. They did not argue that they are inherently indivisible - it is possible to conceive of one without the other - but that, in order to be both desirable and effective, they must be considered indivisible, that is, detente must be made to include the question of human rights, and criticism of a country's human rights record

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must not be used as an instrument of cold war. Chartists did not place any faith in detente without human rights or human rights without detente. In the same essay in which Hajek writes that human rights activists are naturally advocates of detente, he emphasizes that this detente must include the question of human rights. Hajek also warns of the dangers of the human rights issue being separated from the question of detente. He emphasizes the "dialectical unity of all endeavours for the respect of human rights and the process of detente as a whole", and argues that the Charter does not welcome support from those who express sympathy for its human rights message: "...but in fact are alien to its endeavours since their statements are merely a weapon...directed against the dialectical unity of human rights and peaceful coexistence."[46]

Chartists were also aware of the difficulties implicit in this emphasis on the indivisibility of human rights and detente in the sphere of practical politics. Hajek writes of the Helsinki process:

> "It doesn't involve the way of confrontation, the way of cold war...at the same time it is of course necessary...to name things by their real names and not abandon the problems of human rights and freedoms under the guise of 'non-interference'. It isn't easy, it is a delicate matter."[47]

The interrelationships between human rights and detente are emphasized by the Chartists on several different levels.

Firstly, there is the basic assumption that an atmosphere of cold war encourages the authorities to intensify repression, whilst an atmosphere of detente is more conducive to a greater level of tolerance and democratization. Hajek explains this connection from a Marxist viewpoint. He argues that respect for individual rights is a fundamental element of the socialist movement: "It is not just a frill when the Communist Manifesto contains a sentence saying that...'the free development of each is a condition for the free development of all' - in precisely that order and mutual relationship."[48]

But because the country entered the socialist revolution at a time of cold war, he argues, this order was inverted. With the end of cold war the socialist countries can rid themselves of anachronisms dating back to a time when they were "surrounded and threatened by capitalism". Detente and relaxation of tension should allow a return to the original order.

Other Chartists see the significance of detente in the international pressure it brings to bear on the Czechoslovak government to observe human rights. Firstly, concern for its international image led the Czechoslovak regime to sign international documents which expound principles which are the same as those expounded by its persecuted domestic critics. Secondly, the fact that the regime fails to implement these principles becomes a matter for legitimate international concern and debate under the Helsinki process - to borrow Patocka's quote, "the Eastern countries will sit in the dock in Belgrade."[49] Finally, and this is a point frequently emphasized by Chartists, a country's record in the observance of human rights agreements can be considered a measure of its good intentions and trustworthiness when it comes to honouring all other international agreements. Here the relationship between human rights and detente becomes circular. Not only will detente be beneficial to the human rights struggle, argue the Chartists, but the full implementation of human rights agreements will be beneficial to the desired process of detente and will increase the willingness on the part of Western governments to enter into agreements with the Eastern bloc. As early as 1975 Mlynar and Hajek emphasized this point in relation to Helsinki. Mlynar argued that co-operation is based on trust between partners, and that if a country violates human rights internally, it will be less likely to gain trust on an international level. "States, which are noted for traits not corresponding to European civilization...self evidently have less chance of achieving trust towards co-operation."[50]

Here again there is little analysis of the relationship between a country's internal respect for human rights and its ability to do business on an international level. The argument seems to be based more on an ideal view of which priorities should govern international relationships than on political reality.

Similarly a Charter declaration on the tenth anniversary of the International Covenants states of the struggle for human rights: "We do not consider this struggle to be merely an internal matter for our country, but a contribution to the observance of contractual obligations at a universal level."[51]

Hajek concludes that in the context of Helsinki:

> "...the respect for human rights and freedoms may be considered the essential criterion for judging whether a state, or rather its government, is treating the entire complex of principles seriously and is willing to honour them all."[52]

Chartists also argue that the reduction of tensions within states, through the observation of human rights, will contribute to the reduction of tensions at an international level and thus aid detente and peaceful coexistence. The Charter document on the resumption of the Madrid Conference states:

> "Tension between states can be diminished if potential sources of conflict between those in power and the powerless can be removed. We are thinking, for example, of the arbitrary and unreliable nature of power over which the people have no control."[53]

Jakub Trojan, on the other hand, warns against overloading the connection between human rights and peace. He argues that wars have been waged in the past between countries enjoying a good level of human rights, and that Western democracies are also capable of proving a threat to peace.


*Helsinki and the international covenants*

In 1981 H. Gordon Skilling wrote:

> "Charter 77 was somewhat ambivalent in its attitude to Helsinki and Belgrade...Charter 77 described the Helsinki Final Act as 'an inspiring document of great moral and spiritual force' and welcomed its concern with human rights. Yet the Charter attributed less importance to Helsinki...than to the International Covenants...No doubt this reflected a feeling of sober realism, or even pessimism, among leading Chartists as to the significance of the Helsinki-Belgrade process."[54]

And yet only a few years later the Charter 77 document on the resumption of the Madrid Conference stated:

> "Charter 77 was founded by Czechoslovak people as a response to the challenge of the Helsinki Final Act. The purpose of its task over several years has been to ensure that the principles contained in the Final Act would also enter into the life of our country...The Helsinki Final Act is a very important and meaningful document which could enhance the dignity of life and the peaceful existence of mankind."[55]

In the light of this, was Skilling wrong in his assessment of the low relative importance assigned to Helsinki by the Charter, compared to the International Covenants, and the 'ambivalent' attitude of Chartists to the Helsinki process? I would argue that in fact Skilling's assessment was largely correct at the time, but that since then the Charter's emphasis significantly changed.

In its initial declaration, the Charter made only passing references to Helsinki, but strongly emphasized the importance of the International Covenants, quoting them passage

by passage. The timing of the Charter declaration itself - 1977 rather than 1975 - shows

that the Charter was founded initially as a response to the Covenants rather than Helsinki.

Skilling points out that there was no mention of Helsinki and Belgrade in Charter

documents during the nine months preceding the Belgrade meeting. The Charter did

publish a very positive assessment of Helsinki in its letter to the delegates at Belgrade:

> "The Final Act of Helsinki...proclaims respect for human rights and basic
> freedoms to be one of the principles and conditions of peaceful coexistence,
> security and co-operation in Europe. In our opinion, this represents considerable
> progress, unequivocally stating the link between peace and human rights and their
> mutual connection."[56]

Even before the Charter came into being, individuals in the opposition had assessed

Helsinki very positively. Mlynar and Hajek, for example, in a 1975 discussion,

emphasized the positive aspects of Helsinki; it grants everyone the right to know their place

in society, principles accepted externally have internal validity, it is a recognition of

common European values etc., and they even interpreted the regime's signing of the

Helsinki Final Act as a criticism of the invasion of 1968. Yet in 1977 it is the International

Covenants on Human Rights in particular, rather than Helsinki, which Hajek describes as

the "raison d'etre and the main content of the Charter".[57]

One reason for this emphasis is clear - the human rights provisions of the Helsinki

Final Act were fairly brief and not legally binding, whilst the International Covenants on

Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural rights enunciated all the

rights in detail and, most importantly, they became legally binding within Czechoslovakia

on 23rd March 1976 and were subsequently published in full within Czechoslovakia on

13th October 1976. Thus by addressing themselves to the International Covenants the

Chartists could base themselves firmly on the principle of legality and demand that the

authorities abide by their own laws.

What lies behind the change of emphasis from the initial declaration, placing the Charter

firmly on the basis of the International Covenants with only passing reference to Helsinki,

and the 1983 Charter document with its assertion that "Charter 77 was founded by

Czechoslovak people as a response to the challenge of the Helsinki Final Act"? I would

argue that whilst the initial emphasis on legality, dialogue and the addressing of problems

to the Czechoslovak authorities gave precedence to the International Covenants, an

increasing concern with questions of peace and European development led to an increasing emphasis on Helsinki. This is not to say that the initial emphasis weakened, but that the Helsinki process grew in importance alongside it and became a more frequent point of reference than it had been in 1977. Chartists were not uncritical in their assessment of the Helsinki process. They were concerned about the slowing down and even reversal of the Helsinki process, and write of the need to radicalize it. But Helsinki, with its clear linking of human rights with the question of peace and co-operation in Europe, became an important point of reference for Chartists who increasingly took up the question of peace and also began to see the basis for change in terms of the democratic transformation and reunification of Europe. They assessed the aims and significance of the Helsinki process very positively and pressed for its implementation. The difference between the largely internal, legalistic nature of the appeal to the International Covenants, and the European context of the appeal to the Helsinki Final Act, is revealed clearly by a comparison of two Charter documents; the Charter document 'On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the ratification of the International Covenants on Human Rights', and the document marking 'Ten years after Helsinki'. The former contains a summary of rights and details of discrepancies between the text of the Covenants and Czech legal reality, a discussion on the nature of the state, and a call to active citizenship. It only briefly mentions the role of human rights in contributing to the reduction of tensions between states. The 'Ten years after Helsinki' document is very different in tone, less legalistic, and addressed firmly to the problems of European development. The document emphasizes the need to:

> "..awaken the process of transforming Europe into a community of free, sovereign and equal nations, living in peace, security and co-operation, while respecting the rights and duties and human dignity of every individual human being."[58]

The Prague Appeal, the document marking the culmination of the Charter's concern with questions of peace and the unification of Europe, also stresses the importance of the Helsinki process, describing it as establishing in principle: "..the sort of relations which, if implemented, would open the way to the unification of Europe."[59]

Petr Uhl presents a dissenting voice against this general trend towards increasing emphasis on Helsinki. Uhl argues that the struggle for human rights must not be limited to a solely European context. In a 1987 interview Uhl stated:

> "Charter 77 is based on the two international human rights covenants which have been ratified by a large number of states from all over the world. For me it is unacceptable to view human rights only within their Helsinki context, which would mean to monitor observance of these rights only in Europe and North America and ignore countries where the human rights situation is frequently worse than in Czechoslovakia."[60]

In his essay 'Human rights and political revolution' Uhl expands on this theme. He is critical of the geographical limitations of Helsinki, which applies only to one billion people, a quarter of the world's population, whilst ignoring the interests and needs of the remaining three billion living in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Uhl argues that anyone who wants to limit the general struggle for the observance of human rights to the Helsinki space, ie the Northern hemisphere, and wants to exclude the people of the Southern, third world, is open to the suspicion that they want to use human rights only as a critical tool to protest against Soviet politics. Uhl argues that the gap between the North and the South is fast becoming the most serious human problem, in which human rights plays a not negligent role. He argues that one should be distrustful about concepts of Europeanism and European exclusiveness:

> "...the majority of 'European' concepts...are established in an effort to conserve and consolidate the supremacy of the U.S.A. and Western Europe over the world...Let us have the courage to disclaim it and reveal it as inhumane."[61]

He concludes that whilst it is self evident that the centre of gravity of Charter activity must remain Czechoslovakia and its part of Europe, the initial emphasis of the Charter declaration should be remembered, with its expression of the will "to strive, individually and collectively, for the respect of civic and human rights in our own country and throughout the world..."[61]

## Czechoslovak perceptions of human rights

Does the nature of the Charter's advocacy of the human rights issue mark a move away from traditional East European perceptions of human rights? Tokes has argued that East European perceptions of human rights are traditionally different to those of the West.

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"...historical experiences have conditioned the people and the elites to define fundamental rights more in collective, economic and political than in individual terms."[62] He argues that:

> "For most East European dissidents the original point of entry for criticism and the advocacy of alternative plans for development has been the crisis of social, rather than political rights in the 1970s."[63]

It was the economic bankruptcy and social stagnation of Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, he points out, that provided the point of departure for Czechoslovak intellectuals and which resulted in the political groundswell of 1967/8. Is the Charter's commitment to human rights in the 1970s and 80s based on this same initial concern for primarily economic and social problems? I would argue that in general this is no longer the case. Although the Charter does express concern for economic and social issues, its main point of emphasis is the individual and his right to freedom and self-fulfillment. I would argue that in 1977 it was the moral bankruptcy and political and cultural repression in Czechoslovakia, rather than economic stagnation and social problems, which provided the main impetus for the Charter.

Some individual Chartists do see the struggle for human rights as a process which aims at enhancing the social, economic and political development of socialist society. Hajek writes:

> "Socialists and communists...consider the systemic observance and realization of the treaties as a positive contribution to the development of the socialist society in our land as a truly mature, humanist and in all respects effectively functioning society."[64]

Hajek sees the guarantee of fundamental civil, economic, political, social, and cultural rights as essential to the process of opening society to the conflicts which have inevitably emerged between "society's creative forces - sparked by socialism's potentials for growth and expansion - and the power structures." He argues that: "Only by introducing a new dimension of genuine humanism will socialism be able to demonstrate, for the first time, its superiority in resolving the tasks of a mature society, developing all the advantages of modern science and technology..."[65]

But for many Chartists the main impetus for the struggle for human rights lies not in any expectation of improving the scientific and technical functioning of socialist society,

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but in the defence of the individual and his protection from manipulation. Vaclav Havel writes:

> "It seems to me that today this 'provisional', 'minimal' and 'negative' programme - the 'simple' defence of people - is in a particular sense...an optimal and most positive programme because it forces politics to return to its only proper starting point, proper that is if all the old mistakes are to be avoided: individual people."[66]

The Charter directly challenges the primacy of socioeconomic rights, and emphasizes instead the indivisibility of all rights. Chartists reject consumerism and the renunciation of individual and political rights in return for guaranteed social and economic rights implicit in the 'social contract'. Whilst in Poland dissent can be traced in part to the failure of the regime to deliver the level of social and economic benefits promised in the 'social contract', in Czechoslovakia it is the very success of consumerism and the subsequent moral degradation of the individual which is one motivating force behind the demand for human rights. In his 'Open letter to Gustav Husak' in 1975 Havel wrote:

> "By nailing a man's whole attention to the floor of his mere consumer interests, it is hoped to render him incapable of appreciating the ever-increasing degree of his spiritual, political and moral degradation. Reducing him to a simple vessel for the ideals of a primitive consumer society is supposed to turn him into pliable material for complex manipulation."[67]

One significant factor behind the Charter's emphasis on the indivisibility of all human rights - political as well as social and economic - was the mass expulsion of the reformers of 1968 from the party and the subsequent denial of all their basic individual and political rights under normalization. The effect was to reinforce in the minds of the communists within the opposition the indivisibility of all human rights. Mlynar writes: "These people needed a profound personal experience in order to arrive at a profound inner understanding of the inseparability of civic and political rights."[68]

The acceptance by the Czechoslovak regime, on paper at least, of the interpretation of human rights contained in the Helsinki Final Act and the International Covenants was also instrumental in "banishing the doubts" of some members of the opposition that just such an interpretation could be considered "anti-socialist".[69] In his essay 'The human rights movement and social progress' Hajek concludes:

> "While it is true that people cannot be really free unless they enjoy the right to work, education and social security, it is equally true, and experience in the socialist countries has proved it, that these eminent social, economic and cultural rights are not worth the paper they are printed on for many people if there is a

failure to guarantee and implement those 'classic' civil and political rights and freedoms, and if restrictions are placed on what people may think and say."[70]

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# THE POLITICAL AND MORAL ASPECTS OF CHARTER 77

From the outset Chartists emphasized the non-political, non-oppositional nature of the

Charter, based on a moral rather than a political consensus which emphasizes the

importance of the defence of human rights, individual responsibility and an attempt to 'live

within the truth'.

This chapter will examine the implications of this 'non-political' stance, the reasons

behind the Charter's rejection of a traditional 'political' role, and the relationship between

the political and the moral spheres. It will also analyze the implications of 'anti-politics',

and the rehabilitation of politics in the late 1980s.


## The 'non-political' Charter?

Whilst groups and individuals were encouraged to express political opinions and

formulate political concepts outside the framework of the Charter, the Charter consistently

claimed for itself a 'non-political' role. It typically depicted itself as being 'non-political'

and 'non-oppositional'. The Charter 77 Declaration states:

> "Charter 77 is not an organization...it does not form the basis for any
> oppositional political activity...It does not aim, then, to set out its own
> programmes for political or social reforms or changes."

In a statement typical of Charter documents, Charter Document 20/83 argues:

> "Charter 77 is a pressure group which, while being independent of state power,
> does not fight that power in particular, nor seek to replace it with another. It is
> concerned with one thing and one thing alone - that mankind should live as far as
> is possible free and humanely, ie like people."

Clearly this claim by the Charter to be 'non-political' and 'non-oppositional' is

problematic. Firstly, in a totalitarian system which requires political conformity or at least

silent alienation (internal exile) from every citizen, the Charter's attempt to expose the gulf

between the regime's human rights laws and its actual practices was a direct political

challenge to the regime. The regime could not tolerate the creation of autonomous areas

outside its control, the creation of horizontal relationships in society - such as the citizens

initiative of the Charter represents, and it could not allow its 'subjects' to present

themselves as 'independent citizens'. The very claim, by the Charter, of independence

from state power was a political act and an act of opposition to the basic relationships by which the regime maintained its power.

Secondly, the Charter went beyond the role of a human rights monitoring group and presented a set of alternative values which, if implemented, would undermine the totalitarian regime at the most fundamental level. The Charter's advocacy of the supremacy of moral over narrowly political considerations and the emancipation of the individual from the control of the state strikes at the heart of the totalitarian system. The Charter, then, although it did not present an alternative political programme, did present a set of alternative values by which political life should be governed.

Thirdly, through its many documents the Charter presented an extensive and detailed critique of most aspects of the functioning of the regime. It was strongly critical of many aspects of the existing system - social, economic and political, and encouraged all citizens to take up an equally critical stance. In the late 80s the Charter even sought to rally public action in defiance of the regime (for example see the 'Appeal to fellow citizens'). The Charter then was clearly an opposition, a 'political opposition' in the general understanding of the phrase, as it presented a challenge to the fundamental basis of the totalitarian regime.

How then could the Charter claim to be non-political and non-oppositional, or was this claim simply an act of self-defence or strategic posturing? The Charter's claims to be non-political were based on its determination to draw a distinction between the 'narrow' or 'traditional' and the 'broad' or 'general' definitions of political activity.

It is interesting to note that Chartist's disavowals of any political role for the Charter often include a qualification defining what they mean by the term 'political'. For example Jan Patocka wrote in 1977:

> "Charter 77 is not an act that is political in the narrow sense...it is not a matter of competing with or interfering in the sphere of any function of political power. Nor is Charter 77 an association or an organization, but it is based on personal morality."[1]

In 1986 Vaclav Havel wrote similarly of the:

> "...misconception...that the Charter is a political movement (in the traditional sense of the word) or some political or politically motivated force or organization, an institution with a political programme or even with the aim of acquiring political power."[2]

Patocka and Havel are clearly drawing a distinction between politics in the 'narrow' sense of the word and politics as a broader (or less traditional) concept. This desire to draw a distinction between the 'narrow' and the 'broad' meaning of politics is important in understanding the non-political claims of the Charter. What Chartists are disavowing in relation to the Charter is politics in the 'narrow' sense - the organizational, oppositional, programmatic and competitive aspects of politics, and the tendency to try and place the Charter anywhere on the left-right political spectrum. Chartists do not deny the political role and political significance of the Charter in the broader sense of the term.

Jiri Dienstbier, in an interview with Petr Uhl, explains what he sees as the difference between the narrow and the broader meaning of political activity. He argues that the Charter is not a "political partner of the state power" but adds:

> "I used the expression 'political partner' in the narrow sense of a concrete struggle for the management of society and public affairs. Charter 77 does not strive for that. Otherwise, every activity which affects relations among people in society and their attitude to life is political. And the Charter's activity is certainly that."[3]

The broader political significance of the Charter is clearly recognized by Chartists as being an important element of its makeup. Mlynar writes:

> "Since the outset of the Charter it was clear that its significance was far from being simply political...At the same time, however, it was also clear from the outset...that the charter is a highly political phenomenon."[4]

Chartists accept that by criticizing the policies and practices of the regime in terms of their violation of human rights, the Charter is assuming a political role. Hejdanek writes of all groups calling for the implementation of human rights:

> "The political role of such groups and movements is obvious: they hold a mirror up to the face of the regime which claims to be democratic and humane, but rejects any criticism of its undemocratic and inhumane nature."[5]

Miroslav Kusy, whilst criticizing the Charter's non-political stance in the narrow sense, ie its non-programmatic, non-ideological, non-organizational nature, underlines the strong political significance of the Charter in the broader sense:

> "The immanently political aspect of the Charter has been there from the beginning in that it presented a moral critique of politics and enunciated the moral principles by which politics might be revitalized. Each Charter document, therefore, is in fact a political document, and everything it does is a political act. Nor has the Charter ever tried to hide or camouflage that fact."[6]

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Charter document No. 21 makes clear this distinction which is drawn between the Charter's non-political stance in the narrow sense, and its more general political role expressed through its concern for social problems and its strongly critical stance towards many aspects of the existing social and political order.

> "Charter 77 did not come into being as an expression of a particular, clearly defined political position in the narrow sense of the word...We reserve the right to deal with the general, philosophical and political aspects of concrete social phenomena."

It is also necessary to examine what the Chartists mean when they state that the Charter does not constitute an opposition. In his essay 'The Power of the Powerless' Havel presents a useful analysis of what the term opposition means to Chartists. He considers that most Chartists understand the term in the traditional sense, associating it with the concept of a politically defined force with an alternative political programme interested in attaining political power. Because the Charter has none of these features, most Chartists reject the term opposition. They are not, then, denying, by their rejection of the label 'opposition', that the Charter is presenting a fundamental critique of the regime, but are emphasizing that its critique of the regime is not based on a desire on its part to take the place of that regime. The Charter, they argue, by not aspiring to political power, will never need to relinquish its critical political role. Hejdanek makes it clear that in this sense he sees the Charter's role as very different from that of a traditional opposition:

> "The goal of an opposition political movement is to expose the regime, in which the act of drawing attention to individual acts of injustice...becomes an instrument of political struggle. As soon as the opposition wins power, its criticism of injustice, illegality etc., ceases to be functional...On the other hand, a human rights movement maintaining its detachment from all political power conflicts and not striving to share power, will continue to pursue its vital work whatever the regime or social system, and in every political situation."[7]

Havel concludes that if the term opposition is defined differently - not as a political force competing for power but as "everything that manages to avoid total manipulation and which therefore denies the principle that the system has an absolute claim on the individual" - then the Charter can be considered to be an opposition.

> "If we accept this definition of opposition, then of course we must, along with the government, consider the Charter a genuine opposition, because it represents a serious challenge to the integrity of post-totalitarian power, founded as it is on the universality of 'living with a lie'."[8]

Both the 'non-political' and the 'non-oppositional' claims of the Charter can, therefore, be better understood in the light of how the Chartists themselves define and use the terms - that is in their 'narrow' or 'traditional' sense. When the Chartists emphasize that the Charter is non-political and does not constitute an opposition they are emphasizing the fact that it is a loose association of people of differing views united around the principles of human rights and legality, that it presents no political programme, has no organizational structure, favours no political ideology, and is not interested in competing for political power. They are not however denying that, in the circumstances of a totalitarian state, all Charter activity takes on a political significance and presents a fundamental challenge to the Czechoslovak regime.

However, some contradiction still exists. Although, as the Chartists point out, the Charter was not an opposition party with an alternative programme, it did in effect constitute a broadly based political opposition to the regime, and not just because all expressions of independent thinking in Czechoslovakia were automatically political. It is hard to square the claim, made by some Chartists, that the Charter was not asking for a change in the political system and did not pose opposition demands, and thus did not constitute a political opposition, with the reality of the Charter documents which, taken en masse, presented a fundamental critique of the existing regime and demanded specific changes - for example freedom of speech and assembly, an end to the nomenclatura etc. - which would have required fundamental changes, if not the complete demise of the totalitarian regime. Even the call for dialogue with the regime was an offer by the Charter to engage in discussions with the regime on the level of 'politics' - the level of implementation of law, which in Czechoslovakia was governed by the political sphere. Also, although the Charter did not seek to replace the regime and take its place itself, it did seek to initiate an alternative set of relationships between the individual and the regime - the granting of all basic civil rights, the emancipation of the individual from the state and the creation of a civil society - which would in the long term have had the effect of undermining the power base and the relationships by which the totalitarian regime maintained itself. Why did the Charter go out of its way to deny this political, oppositional label?

To some extent these claims were part and parcel of a general desire on the part of the Charter to depict itself in a certain way - as a positive, non-confrontational, 'helpful advisor' to the regime - expressed through its offer of a dialogue with the regime, its emphasis on legality, and tendency to take the regime 'at its word' in the area of its intentions over human rights covenants, a stance which the Charter maintained in the face of the fact that the regime had no intention of conducting a dialogue with it, listening to its complaints or implementing the human rights covenants, and the fact that the regime from the outset viewed the Charter as a dangerous expression of political opposition. In part this stance derived from strategic considerations - a 'self-limiting' and non-confrontational, legal movement may expect less immediate repression than an expression of overt opposition. However it also derived from some of the values and concerns held in common by Chartists, such as the emphasis on good citizenship and the rule of law, and from the reluctance on the part of some within the Charter to be associated with any movement which could be depicted as a 'negative' opposition and thus as 'anti-socialist' (see the emphasis placed by Hajek on this aspect of Charter 77 in the Reform Communist chapter). It was also connected with the concept of 'parallelism' and the idea that it is possible to improve conditions within society without challenging the system directly.

The Charter's claim to be 'non-political' was also an expression of a desire to move beyond the traditional concept of politics - which is concerned with the state and political power, and the traditional concept of a political opposition - which seeks to replace one regime and one political system with another. In this sense it was similar to the 'new politics' of the Polish opposition in the 1970s.[9] The political role of the Charter was non-traditional. It was concerned first and foremost with the self-emancipation of the individual citizen from repression and manipulation by the state. It was concerned with the creation and defence of a civil society, an autonomous area of social and cultural activity free from domination and control by the totalitarian regime.

Also, by denying that it was a 'political' opposition the Charter was in effect rejecting the regime's interpretation of what is political - rejecting a system where every sphere of life is dominated by political needs and designated as political by the regime, whether it be culture, education, science, religious beliefs or pop music. The Charter was challenging

this system and trying to roll back the regime's political conquest of society, to return politics to a smaller arena and regain an independent sphere for citizen's activity. The Charter functioned from within this independent sphere and sought to enlarge it. By claiming a 'non-political' status, the Charter was declaring its own independence and challenging the concept that every sphere of activity is the rightful domain of the regime. The Charter was thus trying to create a new reality in Czechoslovakia, one where culture, education, belief and even the implementation of law would no longer be dominated by political considerations.

## The rejection of traditional political activity

In a 1985 essay[10], Miroslav Kusy urged that the Charter should develop into a political movement with an alternative political programme - in other words it should adopt a traditional oppositional political stance. Such proposals were always strongly resisted by most Chartists.

Was the rejection of politics in the narrow sense of the formulation of political programmes and structured organizations, and the emphasis instead on a 'programma minimum' through the defence of human rights (which however itself has far reaching political implications), simply a result of the politically heterogeneous nature of Chartists, making agreement on any such political programmes impossible, or was it a rejection of traditional politics as such on the part of Chartists?

Clearly, the diverse political outlooks, beliefs and backgrounds of many Charter signatories was a significant factor in explaining the Charter's 'non-political' nature. By limiting its sphere to the defence of human rights and legality, the Charter was, for the first time, able to unite individuals and groupings of disparate political beliefs and backgrounds around a common cause. The existence of diverse political groupings and standpoints amongst the Charter signatories made the adoption by the Charter of any single political programme impossible. Vaclav Benda argues that this was the crucial factor dictating the nature of the Charter - Chartists could not have found a political consensus, the only thing they could agree on was moral responsibility and the defence of human rights.[11]

Another consideration, often cited by Chartists as influencing the non-political and non-oppositional nature of the Charter (in the 'narrow' sense), was the belief that any attempt to create an oppositional political party would present the regime with an easy target and would be swiftly crushed. Petr Uhl argues that the limited scope of Charter activity was influenced in part by the consciousness, or rather the estimation, of what could publicly exist in Czechoslovakia without arousing a disproportionate level of repression.[12] Hejdanek, in a 1986 essay, also cites the problem of repression as being influential in determining the limited nature of the Charter:

> "First of all, it is clear that now as ten years ago, the time is not yet ripe for the establishment of any movements, or organizations, let alone opposition political parties. We can safely assume that Charter 77, if conceived from the beginning as something more 'radical' or better organized, would never have survived its first decade."[13]

Another factor which lay behind the Charter's non-political stance was the reluctance, expressed by some within the opposition, to engage in the formulation of political programmes and alternatives when they were powerless to implement these alternatives at the time or in the forseeable future. Havel in particular emphasizes this feeling which he characterizes as a reluctance on the part of the dissidents to indulge in utopias. Havel draws a distinction between the formulation of ideals and of utopias, arguing that when the method for implementing ideals becomes more important than the ideal itself, utopias can become dangerous.[14] Havel argues that the proper role of the dissident should be to formulate ideals and emphasize political and moral values, rather than to try to develop blueprints for a new political system. He writes of the Eastern bloc dissident:

> "As for the future, he is more concerned with the moral and political values on which it should rest than with thoroughly premature speculation as to who will secure these values for humankind and how...A dissident runs the risk of being ridiculous only in the moment when he transgresses the limits of his natural being and enters into a hypothetical realm of factual power, that is, in effect, into the realm of sheer speculation."[15]

Thus it is not that Havel does not hold crystallized political opinions about how society should be governed, but that he is reluctant to espouse them, because he feels neither able nor willing to put them into practice himself.[16]

Was it, therefore, simply the combination of the fact that the adoption of a more programmatic political oppositional stance was inappropriate for the existing circumstances

and would have invited repression, coupled with the existence of diverse political groupings within the Charter (reform communists, social democrats, revolutionary socialists etc.) which made the adoption by the Charter of any single traditional political programme impossible? This would seem to imply that a belief in traditional politics was still alive and well within the framework of the non-political Charter. However, this does not appear to be the case, as another major factor contributing to the non-political nature of the Charter was the fact that the majority of Charter signatories did not hold any clear cut political views and were not associated with any of the crystallized political groupings. Petr Uhl estimates that the majority of the first 240 signatories of the Charter were people with crystallized political opinions or at least with crystallized political pasts, however "in the following months and years the large majority of people entering the Charter were less politically crystallized", in particular young people, workers and Christians. He concludes that:

> "...the majority of all the signatories of Charter 77 are not politically crystallized to such a degree as to be willing - in the sense of traditional European political life - to seek some realistic one-word or two-word political designation for themselves, which would...correspond to a specific political platform. I even think that this unwillingness applies to more than 90% of the signatories of Charter 77, including a considerable part of the former members of the KSC...with the exception of the vague designation 'democrat' it is not possible to attach any apposite political label to this vast majority of Chartists."[17]

Indifference to political platforms and conceptions, and to narrowly 'political' struggle in general, derived in many cases from a widespread disillusionment with the concept of 'politics' itself, which had become so tainted by the regime as to become suspect to many. Politics was seen as a dirty game played by corrupt and unprincipled individuals for their own self interest.

Petr Uhl argues that most Chartists in fact "abhor politics".[18] Havel writes of the unambiguously negative meaning that the word politics has acquired in the public mind - "politics is rot".[19]

One manifestation of this popular rejection of 'politics' and the need for political programmes comes from the part serious, part allegorical manifesto of the Czech Children (May 1988) which declares: "Czech Children are convinced that a government does not

have to have a political programme: either it is a good government by nature or it is a bad government."[20]

Amongst signatories of the Charter, many different opinions have been expressed on the question of the desirability and relevance of traditional political activity - that is political activity in the 'narrow' sense of formulating political programmes and alternatives and organizing political groupings or movements around them. Some Chartists continued to emphasize a political (in this narrow sense) approach, whilst others rejected traditional politics as largely inappropriate or incapable of bringing change, and instead placed their faith in a moral approach to the solution of Czechoslovak problems.

An advocate of the former position to an extreme degree is Miroslav Kusy, who urged that "the Charter's moral position may be developed into a political programme and movement appropriate to the Charter's objectives".[21] However, this belief that the Charter itself should develop into an opposition political movement remained very much a minority position within the Charter. Other Chartists expressed a point of view combining the moral and the political approaches. Emphasizing the importance of the moral basis of politics, they did not, however, reject the formulation of and commitment to political alternatives and concepts. Rudolf Battek, for example, argues that "no mere political transformations" can solve all contemporary problems, but at the same time he strongly defends the role of politics:

> "Objections are constantly being made...to commitments of an expressly political nature, as though opposition only stood a chance of succeeding if it eliminated all political commitment. But politics cannot be banished either from one's thoughts or from practical activity merely by declaring them to have no future...In today's system of 'real socialism', political opposition has a fundamental significance that cannot be denied, nor can any other activity take its place."[22]

He argues that any political opposition must be able to offer an alternative conception, "...in a totalitarian system, this alternative cannot be mere hot air." He advocates a democratic, self-managing socialist society in which all official power is balanced by the pressure of voluntary citizens associations - a balance between the political and moral spheres.

> "Hope for those who would liberate themselves, therefore, lies in a symbiosis of the moral and the social, of humanity and democracy, in the realization of a social

order in which the formalized and functionalized structure of society will be regulated and controlled by this 'newly discovered' spontaneous civic activity."[22]

Vaclav Benda also seeks to combine the political and the moral approach to some extent in his formulation of 'political Catholicism'. His 'new' politics is a rejection of traditional politics, something "light years away from politics in the present sense of a struggle for power", and is an attempt to "return to the sources" of life and politics. Yet he defends the use of politics as a "techne". He argues, like Kusy, that the Charter's non-political unity is its greatest handicap:

> "Those who share that unity have given up on politics - that is, on politics as a
> techne - in the name of a struggle against everything that makes human life unfree
> and undignified...The problem is that freedom and human dignity are not absolute
> givens, but are rather gifts that humanity and society must learn to accept in their
> history, and for which they must also learn to struggle. Therefore in my opinion,
> politics as techne (ie as the art of waging a struggle over the fate of the polis) will
> be justified in the future as well..."[23]

A large number of Chartists, however, reject traditional political activity per se, and emphasize instead a 'pre-political' or moral approach. For some this rejection of traditional politics is based on the belief that any major reform of the existing political system is impossible, and therefore there is no point in advocating detailed political alternatives. Hybler and Nemec argue that:

> "...generally inside the dissident movement...the belief prevails that any
> fundamental systemic change in totalitarian socialism is impossible...The
> dissidents' conviction that socialism cannot be reformed sometimes comes to the
> surface as a profound doubt as to the sense of any systemic political
> transformation. Only a minority of dissidents in Czechoslovakia entertain any
> belief in a specific programme of ideas that form a context for their activities.
> This sort of thing is particularly rare among young people."[24]

Hybler and Nemec describe dissident activity as taking place on a "simpler and more elementary level, one that is at one and the same time pre-ideological and pre-political." This more elementary dissident activity is not a complete rejection of politics in the most general sense, but is clearly a total rejection of politics in the narrow sense of the term. Hybler and Nemec consider that:

> "If a political element is present it is far closer to the classical meaning of the word
> than it is to the idea of parliamentary government: that is, it is more an elementary
> interest in the affairs of human society - in the polis - which is proving to be a
> vital human need and necessity."[25]

This formulation of a concern with a more 'elementary' form of politics is close to Benda's concept of 'political Catholicism', with its "return to the sources" of life and

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politics, and its understanding of politics as a "commitment to a playful and sacred concern for the affairs of the polis."[26]

For others, the rejection of politics in the traditional or narrow sense is based not so much on a belief that the existing system cannot be reformed, but rather on a belief that any mere systemic reform is incapable of solving the problems of Czechoslovak society. Vaclav Havel, for example, sees the problems of society as arising, fundamentally, from a moral rather than a political crisis. He writes:

> "I believe that modern society - not only here, but also in the West - is in deep crisis. I understand it as, above all, a spiritual, moral, existential crisis. All other crisis phenomena ...I consider to be consequences of this general crisis of man."[27]

Havel, therefore, rejects any solutions based on traditional political changes 'from above', and seeks instead solutions at a more elementary human level, solutions 'from below'. "I don't believe...in various political parties, systems, coalitions, blocs and doctrines. Rather I believe in smaller...more genuine communities of people...concerned about a dignified and purposeful life."[28] Above all Havel emphasizes moral, rather than narrowly political solutions: "I see the only real way out...in the prospect of some extensive and deep 'existential revolution', in some spiritual and moral reconstruction of man and society."[28]


It appears, therefore, that whilst a significant and active minority of Chartists retained a commitment to specific political viewpoints and alternative political conceptions - to politics in the 'narrow' sense - the majority of signatories had little interest in this form of politics, and instead commited themselves to action on a more elementary political or moral level. Thus the non-political (in this narrow sense) nature of the Charter was not simply a reflection of the political diversity of its signatories, but also a reflection of the fact that most of its signatories were concerned with issues other than the formulation of political programmes and alternative political concepts.

**The moral basis**

Central to the Charter was a belief in the absolute primacy of moral and ethical values. Michnik has argued that the rediscovery by the Polish opposition of the primacy of moral values was only possible through the opposition's rapprochement with the Catholic Church, which had preserved these values in society.[29] In Czechoslovakia the moral basis of the opposition has a different foundation. Although Christianity has had a powerful influence on the Charter, and Christians are very active within it, its moral basis largely derives from the philosophical intellectual tradition personified by Masaryk, Patocka and Havel. (See chapter 1).

The strong moral approach of the Charter was first emphasized by Jan Patocka in 1977. His argument was based on the belief that salvation cannot be found by relying on "political power and the state", but rather by underlining society's moral foundation - "the supreme moral foundation of all things political". This commitment to the "sovereignty of moral sentiment" applies to states and society as a whole (through the concept of human rights) and also to individuals, who should not act out of personal advantage or fear, but "freely, willingly and responsibly", taking upon themselves all their moral obligations, both to themselves and others. Patocka emphasizes that participants in Charter 77 do not take upon themselves any political rights or functions:

> "...their effort is aimed exclusively at cleansing and reinforcing the awareness that
> a higher authority does exist, to which they are obligated, individually, in their
> conscience, and to which states are bound by their signatures on important
> international covenants."[30]

Through this emphasis on a 'higher authority' than any political authority, Chartists are appealing to a set of values against which all political values and systems can be judged. In this way the Charter is placing itself not 'outside' politics, but 'above' politics. Hejdanek describes the Charter's decisive 'position' as:

> "...its positiveness in its recourse and appeal to something that transcends every
> set of principles or regulations...every opinion or doctrine, that is, to something
> to which every opinion or doctrine must appeal as the highest instance."[31]

For many Chartists the strongly moral approach of the Charter is its greatest strength. Havel argues that the Charter's most significant feature is its impact on the moral, rather than the social or political sphere:

"I personally consider the most important aspect of the Charter to be that which Professor Patocka already accented, that is its moral significance. Its social, legal or political significance is derived solely from this."[32]

Many Chartists also emphasize that it is in this moral sphere that the Charter is most effective and has achieved its greatest success. Vaclav Cerny writes:

"In my view, the Charter has achieved a moral victory, and in the given circumstances this means a complete and total victory. It has spoken the truth about the way things are and placed them in a correct perspective."[33]

Mlynar concluded in 1979 that:

"The greatest success of the Charter is that, after two years, it continues to function as...a powerful moral factor in an immoral system...In this sense, the Charter was not only not defeated by the regime, but, by holding out against the regime, it gained a moral victory."[34]

An emphasis on the moral approach to the problems of Czechoslovak society is generally accompanied by a rejection of more narrowly political solutions. However the moral approach is not without its own broader political implications. The difference between the 'political' and the 'moral' approach is not the difference between an 'active' political commitment and a 'passive' moral outlook. The moral approach demands active commitment in the defence of moral values. It is not something that can be internalized or confined to one's private life. It entails a call to active citizenship, a commitment to defend oneself and others against injustice, a commitment to openly speak the truth and expose lies. In his essay 'What Charter 77 is and what it is not' Patocka writes:

"...all moral obligations rest on what may be referred to as man's obligation to himself, which includes his obligation to protect himself from any injustice commited against his own person ...part of the duty to defend oneself from injustice involves also the possibility to inform any and all of an injustice commited against an individual."[35]

The moral approach is in no way an individual retreat into the moral sphere, relinquishing one's interest in and responsibility for political and social affairs, as is made clear by Havel in his essay 'The power of the powerless'. When Havel's greengrocer decides to 'live within the truth' his desire to "manifest his new-found sense of higher responsibility" takes him beyond a "personal self-defensive reaction against manipulation" towards a more active commitment:

"He may, for example, organize his fellow greengrocers to act together in defence of their interests. He may write letters to various institutions, drawing their attention to instances of disorder and injustice around him. He may seek out unofficial literature, copy it and lend it to his friends."

All such action, though not overtly political, takes on a clearly political significance in the 'post-totalitarian' state which Havel describes. The moral approach also does not mean avoiding any conflict with the regime. Havel argues that it is often impossible to avoid such conflict without compromising one's principles:

> "More and more frequently, those who attempt to practice the principle of 'small scale work' come up against the post-totalitarian system and find themselves facing a dilemma: either one retreats from that position, dilutes the honesty, responsibility and consistency on which it is based and simply adapts to circumstances...or one continues on the way begun and inevitably comes into conflict with the regime."[36]

Vaclav Benda also argues that it is not enough to retreat into a passive, private moral stand: "...it is not enough merely to look out for one's own soul and believe that Truth...is no more than a position which has to be maintained."[37]

An emphasis on moral values and a moral revival is not, then, a rejection of politics in the general sense. Havel argues that in the 'post-totalitarian' society, where 'living within the lie' is the fundamental pillar of the system, 'living within the truth' has an "unambiguous political dimension". Benda concurs that "under such circumstances, every genuine struggle for one's own soul becomes an openly political act".[38] Central to the moral approach, however, is the belief that the source of all action must be moral rather than political. All genuine political activity must have its roots in the moral sphere, and must reflect a strong moral element - described by Patocka as "the supreme moral foundation of all things political". Similarly J.S.Trojan argues that "...the rebirth of politics must grow out of the spiritual power that addresses us , despite the harsh reality around us."[39]

In his essay 'The power of the powerless' Havel explores this relationship between morality and politics in the special circumstances of post-totalitarian Czechoslovakia. He argues that all genuine and effective political activity originates in the 'pre-political' moral sphere. Because all overt expressions of political alternatives are repressed, 'living within the truth' becomes the natural arena and point of departure for all independent critical activity. Because of the nature of what Havel describes as the 'post-totalitarian' system, all such attempts to 'live within the truth' immediately acquire a political dimension, although they were not originally political in nature:

"Given the complex system of manipulation on which the post-totalitarian system is founded...every free human act or expression, every attempt to live within the truth, must necessarily appear as a threat to the system and, thus, as something which is political par excellence."[40]

Alternative political ideas and concepts may grow out of this pre-political moral sphere, but because of their origins, all such political concepts will reflect their original moral foundations. Hence the moral dimension will become an important political phenomenon. Havel concludes:

"The very special political significance of morality in the post-totalitarian system is a phenomenon that is at the very least unusual in modern political history, a phenomenon that might well have...far reaching consequences."[41]

For many Chartists the moral approach is regarded as the only solution to the problem of how to bring about change. The best hopes for eventual improvement are seen by many to lie in the long term and fundamental moral renewal of society, rather than in any more superficial political changes. Havel rejects the prospects of any traditional political methods leading to a fundamental improvement:

"A genuine, profound and lasting change for the better...can no longer result from the victory...of any particular traditional political conception, which can ultimately be only external, that is, a structural or systemic conception."[42]

Havel has moved away from his position in 1968, when he advocated the creation of an opposition party and competition for political power. He now argues that no "dry organizational" changes alone can guarantee improvements, change must occur at a much more fundamental level, on the level of a "moral reconstruction of society". Havel concludes that: "If a better economic and political model is to be created, then perhaps more than ever before it must derive from profound existential and moral changes in society."[42]

Hejdanek agrees that all attempts at improvement can only be successful if based on the long-term and fundamental renewal of society:

"The main tasks facing us now are long term: raising the people's political understanding to a much higher level, kindling and encouraging the moral integrity and independence of mind of ordinary citizens, and promoting a profound spiritual renewal grounded firmly in the lives of the widest sections of society."[43]

The emphasis on the moral approach, therefore, can be seen as an attempt to bring about transformations in society at a more fundamental level than any previous attempts at reform. The aim is no longer the change and renewal of the political elite or the political

system, but the renewal of the whole of society from the bottom up. The moral approach, therefore, has profound political significance, because it contains a long term but fundamental orientation towards change. The moral sphere is seen as the starting point for a "genuine, profound and lasting change for the better", and as the source of all genuine and effective political activity.

One question which emerged at the centre of several discussions within the Czechoslovak opposition was that of the mobilizing power of the 'moral' versus the 'political' approach - that is, the ability of each approach to appeal to large sections of the population and gain their support.

In his critique of the Charter's purely moral approach, Kusy cites this inability to mobilize mass support as one of the Charter's major weaknesses. He argues that few citizens are willing to risk themselves in defence of a purely moral standpoint. Kusy argues that "abstract moral values do not count for very much here". If the Charter retains its moral approach and fails to develop a political one, it will continue to appeal to only a few individuals, an "exclusive community of the Just". Kusy concludes:

> "The moral strength of the Charter...carries within it a fundamental political weakness. A moral programme cannot inspire the public to mass protests, to mass actions. It is a commitment taken by individuals upon themselves not to betray their own consciences and to remain faithful to their own principles in the face of opposition."[44]

He argues that an exclusively moral appeal is utopian, and that instead the Charter should develop an 'alternative political programme' and an 'alternative positive ideological conception' corresponding to the moral aims of the Charter.

Havel, on the other hand, argues that it is the formulation of alternative political programmes and models which is abstract and utopian, and which has little appeal for most people and is unable to activate them politically.

> "There is no way around it: no matter how beautiful an alternative political model may be, it can no longer speak to the 'hidden sphere', inspire people and society, call for real political ferment. The real sphere of potential politics in the post-totalitarian system is elsewhere: in the continuing and cruel tension between the complex demands of that system and the aims of life."[45]

Havel argues that what concerns people most are the fundamental and elementary needs of human dignity, freedom from humiliation and harassment, the ability to express themselves freely and creatively, and to enjoy legal security, etc. He argues that this is

where people's real concerns and interests lie, not in abstract political models and programmes, which, not rooted in the 'here and now', can easily "degenerate into new forms of human enslavement". It is interesting that Havel sees the same flaws in the narrowly political approach as Kusy ascribes to the moral - it is impractical, utopian and without general appeal.

Other authors argue that the Charter's moral, rather than political, emphasis makes the question of the mobilization of mass support less important. Hejdanek explains that although social support is necessary, it is the 'quality' and not the 'quantity' of support for independent initiatives which is important:

> "This is not a question of having a large number of sympathizers but, rather, of the nature and quality of that sympathy, and the degree to which social support is firmly anchored. In brief, what is chiefly required is 'moral' support rather than political support, however numerically strong it might be."[46]

Whereas a narrowly political approach presupposes the mobilization of mass support, by which its success is judged, the moral approach is not so dependent on the numerical strength of its supporters, gaining its strength instead from the perceived correctness of its moral stand and the moral courage of individuals. Hence Vaclav Cerny writes of the Charter: "Its aim is to shake consciences, not the constitution. Its strength is derived solely from the morality of its cause in the face of lies, subterfuge, manipulation of people and the hegemony of police power."[47]

The numerical weakness of the Charter, therefore, is not a sign of fundamental weakness, because the Charter does not aspire to success on a narrowly political level - that is on the level of the competition for political power. Sabata concludes: "If we think in terms of power politics, we are weak. We are up against a huge repressive apparatus. But although we are weak in this direction, we are very strong in the moral sense, and that is also power."[48]

Throughout Chartist writings, several moral values are articulated and emphasized which, though not specifically claimed as 'Charter' values, appear to be commonly held amongst Chartists. As well as general values, such as 'truth', the following more specific

values can also be identified: individual civic responsibility, the indivisibility of freedom, equality of all, and co-operation and tolerance.

Individual responsibility: Charter 77 was based on the premise that every individual shares responsibility for the state of society. The Charter Declaration states that:

> "...everyone bears his share of responsibility for the conditions that prevail and accordingly also for the observance of legally enshrined agreements...It is this sense of co-responsibility, our belief in the meaning of voluntary citizen's involvement and the general need to give it new and more effective expression that led us to the idea of creating Charter 77."

Hence the principle of individual responsibility was fundamental to the Charter and to the nature of Charter activity. It is frequently emphasized that this individual responsibility is 'non-transferable', that each individual stands alone with his conscience and cannot be represented by anyone else.

Indivisibility of freedom: The principle that it is the responsibility of each individual not only to defend his own freedom and rights, but equally to defend the freedom and rights of others is also one of the fundamental principles on which the Charter was founded. Hejdanek writes:

> "...freedom is indivisible: if my fellow-citizen is limited in his freedom, even if he is my political opponent, I am also limited de facto. We must join forces to defend ourselves against this common limitation...we must not only defend ourselves, but also each other, and above all, the one who is not very well able to defend himself."[49]

It was this sense of the indivisibility of freedom which, in 1976, prompted many 'dissidents' to defend the rights of a persecuted rock group, an event instrumental in the birth of Charter 77. Havel wrote in 1978: "In the spiritual hotbed of the Charter the concept of civil equality and the indivisibility of freedom plays a significant role."[50] Through their defence of the 'Plastic People', the better known 'dissidents' rejected their status as some kind of 'protected species' and defended the rights of those less well known. Havel concluded that "...injustice will be criticized regardless of who it is commited against."[50]

Equality of individuals: Connected with the first two concepts is the belief in equality. This leads to Charter 77 being a very open and non-hierarchical community, in which former prominent politicians and young unknown musicians are on an equal footing.

Tolerance and co-operation: A combination of the principles of tolerance and equality is inherent in the nature of Charter 77 as an open community in which everyone is equal and from which no one is excluded. Havel writes: "Charter 77 is not merely a coalition of communists and non-communists...but is a community that is a priori open to anyone, and no one is a priori assigned an inferior position."[51]

The Charter's strongly moral emphasis must be viewed against the background of the perceived moral decline of Czechoslovak society. Chartists are strongly critical of a society governed by fear and self interest, by consumer values, by apathy and indifference. They depict a society in which every individual is caught up in the all-pervasive network of 'living within the lie', by which the regime maintains its control. The Charter seeks to replace fear and self interest with civic responsibility and courage, to replace consumer values with the highest moral values, to replace apathy with a sense of human dignity. In short, to move from 'living within the lie' to 'living within the truth'. This is of course a fundamental move, one which would challenge the very foundations of the power structure.

Implicit in the moral approach is the idea that the baleful conditions within Czechoslovakia stem not only from political power - from 'above'- but also from the moral degeneration of the individual and society 'below', which allows an immoral system to be imposed upon it. Havel argues:

"Human beings are compelled to live within a lie, but they can be compelled to do so only because they are in fact capable of living in this way. Therefore not only does the system alienate humanity, but at the same time alienated humanity supports this system as its own involuntary masterplan, as a degenerate image of its own degeneration, as a record of people's own failure as individuals."[52]

A morally sick society, it is argued, will naturally produce and tolerate an immoral system. Hence the appeal to solutions based on the moral regeneration of the individual and society as the first and most essential basis for any improvements. Albert Cerny writes: "The roots of our present crisis lie...in us ourselves, in our personal lack of independence. Our national crisis is a moral crisis."[53] He argues that even without the repressive apparatus of state, solutions will remain impossible without the re-education of citizens towards an increased consciousness of their duty towards themselves and others

and their individual responsibility for the present and future condition of society. What is

needed, Cerny argues, is the revival of the individual, his personal sovereignty, dignity and

freedom.

Several Chartists also emphasize the universality of moral solutions. Because the moral

approach addresses fundamental problems of human existence, rather than narrowly

political problems, it is not addressing problems specific only to Czechoslovakia or Eastern

Europe. Chartists argue that the moral crisis in Czechoslovakia is only an extreme

expression of a general worldwide crisis. Havel writes:

> "The post-totalitarian system is only one aspect - a particularly drastic aspect and
> thus all the more revealing of its real origins - of this general inability of modern
> humanity to be the master of its own situation...the human failure that it mirrors is
> only one variant of the general failure of modern humanity."[54]

Because this general crisis is identifiable in the East in a more extreme and obvious

form than in the West, it is the East European countries, some Chartists argue, which can

lead the way in discovering its true roots and formulating fundamental solutions. Benda

argues: "I believe at this point the countries of the Eastern bloc are the most competent to

formulate the basis of a radically new political order, and suggest a way out of the

worldwide crisis of politics."[55]

Charter solutions and proposals, it is argued, because they address this worldwide

'crisis of man', albeit in a most extreme manifestation, can be seen to be relevant and

applicable far beyond Czechoslovakia itself. Hejdanek concludes:

> "Charter 77...is in its deepest essence an expression of the awareness that this
> free responsibility of every human being and citizen must be respected on the
> most fundamental anchoring and aiming of life and thought...In modern societies
> this dimension of humanity has unfortunately been to a large degree forgotten.
> The idea behind Charter 77 is a significant one not only in our society, but in fact
> universally, because it points out this most profound source and foundation of
> truly human existence in the world."[56]

## Anti-politics

The 'anti-politics' advocated by some Chartists has several basic features. Firstly, as

has been shown, it involves action based on moral rather than political considerations, and

stresses moral solutions to social problems. Secondly, 'anti-politics' is practiced by

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individuals, based on their own sense of personal responsibility. No one can represent anyone else. Havel writes of the typical East European dissident: "All he does, he does in the first place for his own sake: something within him simply revolted and left him incapable of going on 'living a lie'".[57]

Thirdly, 'anti-politics' is politics 'from below'. It is not concerned with the political power structure, but with the individual and his needs in society. Havel defines anti-political politics as "politics of man, not of the apparatus".

> "I favour 'anti-political politics', that is, politics not as the technology of power and manipulation, of cybernetic rule over humans or as the art of the useful, but politics as one of the ways of seeking and achieving meaningful lives, of protecting them and serving them. I favour politics as practical morality, as service to the truth, as essentially human and humanely measured care for our fellow humans."[58]

Central to the idea of 'anti-politics' is a belief in the confrontation of aims between society and the state. The complex needs and aims of society, which reflect those of each individual within society (what Havel calls the 'aims of life') are suppressed and trampled by the needs of the state apparatus, which seeks to pursue its own aims, which are technological rather than human in scale. Politics is the preserve of the state, 'anti-politics' is how society can defend itself. It is politics from below, reflecting the genuine needs of the citizen, and it develops organizations which mirror these needs - small scale, open, informal and existing in parallel to the state apparatus.

Those engaged in 'anti-politics' are concerned with voicing and defending the needs of society, rather than with creating alternative political conceptions for the running of the state. Havel writes of the typical dissident: "He sees his mission more in the defence of man against the pressure of the system than in imagining better systems."[59]

'Anti-politics' is seen by some as being the most effective method of action in a totalitarian state. Havel writes of the impact of anti-politics:

> "...under totalitarian conditions...an action that has no ambitions of political power can have surprising political effects, the significance of which are long term and greater than the effects of so-called 'political' actions within the realms of power."[60]

Anti-political politics is seen as being more effective than directly political action because it expresses and responds to the needs of society without indulging in political

utopias. It avoids the need to formulate alternative political models on which the opposition could not agree and which they are in any case powerless to implement.

Is 'anti-politics' simply a function of the dissidents powerlessness in a totalitarian state where they are banished from the sphere of political power, or does it reflect a more fundamental, anti-statist political ideology?

Several Chartists argue that the enthrallment of society by the state is the greatest evil which must be overcome. Ladislav Hejdanek, for example, describes a situation where the state has gained control over society at every level. "There is only one way to right this: by emancipating civil society from domination by the state and its machinery."[61] This cannot be achieved, he argues, by the establishment of a political opposition. "Power struggles inevitably enhance the importance of political power...the right way to tackle this will be by slow but steady pressure, avoiding confrontation and wide-scale conflict."[61]

Hejdanek looks forward to a time when the rest of the world, led by the societies of Eastern Europe, will construct societies in which peace will be preserved, not just superficially but also inwardly, on the basis of a thorough-going democratization of all aspects of life. "This will be inconceivable without the emancipation of the overwhelming majority of the lives of societies and individuals from the clutches of *dirigisme* and control by the machinery of state."[62]

Havel agrees that the root of the problem lies in the subjugation of society by the state:

> "The post-totalitarian system, after all, is not the manifestation of a particular
> political line followed by a particular government. It is something radically
> different: it is a complex, profound and long-term violation of society, or rather
> the self-violation of society..."[63]

Havel concludes that the solution lies in a fundamental revolution in politics both East and West, with a return to the starting point of individual people. He notes that the line of confrontation between the power wielders and the subjugated society is not clear cut, rather the line of conflict runs through each person - hence the term "self-violation".

Both Hejdanek and Havel seek solutions not in the political reform or programmatic or ideological change of the ruling state apparatus, but in the emancipation of society from the total rule of that apparatus. Much Charter activity is concerned with creating and

maintaining a space for autonomous, independent citizen's initiatives, and with the enforcement of rights which allow the citizen to escape total manipulation by the state.

However anti-political politics can also be seen as a natural reaction to circumstances in which all independent political action is suppressed. As such, action in the non-political moral sphere is really a form of pre-politics, rather than a complete rejection of politics as such. Havel uses the term 'pre-politics' rather than 'anti-politics' in his essay 'On responsibility in politics and for politics', in which he argues that pre-political action at the grass roots level is only a first stage, which will lay the groundwork, when circumstances are right, for the return of the kind of overtly 'political' politics which has been suppressed under the totalitarian state.

Havel argues that the regime has attempted to abolish real politics, with the result that politics has ceased to be an area of activity for professional politicians, and has become instead an area of conflict between the totalitarian state and life, a conflict which takes place everywhere.

> "Because politics in the traditional sense of the word (ie as a specific area of human activity) was abolished, it overflowed 'into the surrounding areas' and flooded everywhere...this affected every region to a certain extent, and yet nowhere completely. Everything here is krypto-politics."[64]

The problem remains how to renew politics in its original sense, as a concrete area of human activity, a specific publicly controlled profession. Havel argues that the first step towards this renewal of politics is to speak the truth and articulate the needs of society out loud. This first step is based on the fact that it is easier to agree on what is bad and undesirable, than on what should take its place.

> "All the movements for human rights in the Soviet bloc, including Charter 77, grow from this background and are in some way a consequence of this 'first step': they serve truth and are founded on a compact ("Charter") about what is bad and what we don't want. It is of course still very very far from this to the real renewal of politics in the original sense of the word."[64]

The renewal of politics, then, is the ultimate goal of such pre-political activity. Havel argues that this strategy, although a lengthy and indirect road to the renewal of politics, has one important advantage - its moral basis must inevitably influence the nature of the future political renewal, the 'second step'.

> "This second stage - that is to say beginning the work of political programmes and practical politics - will logically be linked to the first stage, it will be its child

and fruit and it is therefore evidently unthinkable that it will not carry in itself something of its 'spirit' or 'ethos'."[65]

Havel argues, therefore, that 'anti-politics', or 'pre-politics' is thus not a rejection of traditional political activity, but its precursor, and a result of conditions in which it is neither possible nor appropriate for the opposition to formulate its own political programmes. It is the initial stage in a process of returning politics to its traditional, limited confines, and de-politicizing civil society. It is also an attempt to influence the nature of the future political renewal in which, Havel argues, the moral foundations so emphasized by 'anti politics' will be retained.

## The renewal of politics

In 1985 Havel wrote, somewhat prophetically:

> "With all this, I do not wish to say that Soviet bloc dissidents should not comment on political realities and political possibilities... that they should not examine the various limits of their effectiveness and seek to push further...(Besides, history is unpredictable, and we need to be prepared for a whole range of eventualities: recall, for instance, how the dissidents of the Polish Workers Defence Committee KOR had to become practical politicians overnight)."[66]

By 1988 it was becoming clear to Chartists that the "limits of their effectiveness" were expanding, and Charter activity increasingly reflected this renewal of political activity in the traditional sense, and the rehabilitation of the whole concept of political action.

In the late 1980s the Charter began to evolve new methods of action, which involved greater numbers of people and an expansion of the traditional role of the Charter. It promoted public demonstrations, appealed to the public to take direct action, and sought to increase the participation of Chartists outside Prague and beyond its own active core. These changes were accompanied by an increase in the number of independent groups and political groupings developing outside and around the Charter (see later section). One new development within the Charter - the creation of Charter 77 Forums - demonstrated both the desire on the part of Chartists to increase the active participation of a wide range of people, and also a new willingness to address political issues, and to provide a forum for the articulation of the different and opposing political viewpoints of Charter signatories. The third Charter 77 Forum (January 1988), which was broken up by the police, was to have involved a discussion of the political situation in Czechoslovakia, and reactions to

Gorbechev's reformism were prepared by representatives of different political orientations within Charter 77 - reformists, conservatives and non-conformists.

The fourth Charter 77 Forum (May 14 1988) marked an important stage in Charter activity and, perhaps, the beginning of the end for the Charter as the leading force in Czechoslovak oppositional activity. In response to the rapid flourishing of new independent groups, the Forum declared:

> "Charter 77, whose role is to seek the observance of human rights, is in no position to try to formulate and implement a specific political programme. Nevertheless, the Charter should in future provide more support for budding political activities in Czechoslovakia, since the right to political self-realization is one of the fundamental civil rights."

Most importantly, the Forum concluded:

> "Charter 77 should therefore lend support to the idea of setting up in Czechoslovakia an association for democracy. Such an association would form the basis of an open political movement which would consider an alternative political programme and create prerequisites for the free political assembly of Czechoslovak citizens."

The rehabilitation of the concept of political activity in the narrow sense of the formulation of alternative political programmes was rapid, in response to the realization that this activity was now possible, relevant and necessary.

The Manifesto of the Movement for Civil Liberties (HOS), published on the 15th October 1988, signed by the majority of all leading Chartists from a wide spectrum of political currents, was a clear declaration that the Czechoslovak opposition had moved on to the 'second stage', as Havel had described it: the renewal of politics. The Manifesto declared:

> "The time has come to start working in earnest in the political sphere. Let us now enter the arena of politics. It is true that people are generally suspicious of politics. This is because for decades politics has been usurped by dictators and incompetents.
> The political arena must be revived. Politics must become yet again a vehicle for expressing and realizing the true interests of society."

The HOS manifesto declared itself to be a response to the challenge of the times, in much the same way as the 'non-political' Charter had been a response to the challenge of its times. In 1977 the challenge had been to "describe life in our country truthfully"[67] and to overcome apathy and resist manipulation by the all powerful regime. The opposition was powerless to bring about real political change, so it sought strength in a moral, rather than a narrowly political resistance. In 1988, with the crumbling of the totalitarian regimes

throughout Eastern Europe, the time had come to enter the political arena and articulate solutions, not just problems.

Can we say, then, that the Chartists' non-political stance, emphasis on morality and human rights, and the 'anti-politics' espoused by many Chartists, was simply a function of the circumstances of political powerlessness in which they found themselves, to be swiftly abandoned when these circumstances changed and the opportunity for real political action opened up. To some extent this is true. Much of the rejection of political programmes on the part of the opposition appears to have been contingent on the impossibility of actually putting these programmes into practice. However it is also clear that many of the values and ideals formulated in the 'non-political' years have been retained, and are expressed in the HOS manifesto. Firstly, HOS, like the Charter, emphasizes consensus and dialogue rather than competition and confrontation. HOS is envisaged as a "loose association of political groups and clubs" and will involve an "open debate on all political issues", from which "various concrete political programmes" should take shape. HOS is thus envisioned as an 'umbrella group', rather than a political party based on a single ideology. Like the Charter, HOS is politically heterogeneous, but unlike the Charter, its aim is to promote and develop these different political viewpoints within its own structure. The HOS manifesto also declared some "general common principles of the new movement" which included, as well as a general advocacy of democracy and pluralism, some more specific points on which the various groupings had agreed, most significant of which were the rejection of the leading role of the Communist Party and the advocacy of economic reforms based on plurality of ownership. This degree of political consensus, though broad, did not encompass all the political opinions which supported the 'non-political' Charter. Petr Uhl, for example, did not sign the HOS manifesto and was opposed to several elements within it.

Secondly, HOS was to be decentralized, spontaneous, and to develop from the grass roots level. The groups and clubs which join in it would "...arise independently and spontaneously up and down the country and be subordinate to no central political control". Thirdly, HOS continues to emphasize the 'Chartist' argument that a moral 'existential' revolution is required if the situation is to be fundamentally improved: "No democracy can

be born without an overall moral revival of society and without a new flourishing of the creative potential of its citizens. Democracy cannot be born of an official decree."

However the HOS manifesto also emphasizes the necessity of giving this moral and democratic revival an organizational structure: "...if democratic (social) structures are not created, society's moral and creative energy can never fully develop."

Finally, HOS seeks to represent society, to allow the will of the people to be expressed 'from below', rather than organizing them 'from above'. "The Movement for Civil Liberties should...become an arena within which the political will of our citizens may be manifested without hindrance."

The opposition is advocating the return of political control and political decision making to society. The manifesto argues that the current ruling authorities are incapable of solving the crisis in which society finds itself: "That is why it is high time that society itself, ie we, its citizens, entered the political arena."

Although political standpoints had been formulated in opposition documents before, by the different independent political groupings, and several Charter documents had had a strong political content in the general sense, the HOS Manifesto marked the first time that several different political currents within the Czechoslovak opposition had come together and agreed on the political principles which should govern their work, and sought to create a mass movement to promote these principles. As such it marked a major turning point in the history of the Czechoslovak opposition, and in the balance between its moral and political elements. Havel writes of the HOS Manifesto that its value does not lie in the originality of its ideas, most of which are self-evident:

> "The value of the Manifesto lies in the fact that these self-evident truths have now been expressed publicly, comprehensively and in a single document which presents them as a point of departure for political work, not just a set of somebody's private views."[68]

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66. Vaclav Havel 'Anatomy of a reticence' op. cit., p. 29.

67. 'Democracy for all' The Manifesto of the Movement for Civil Liberties (HOS) *EER* Vol 3 No 4 p. 38.

68. Vaclav Havel 'Cards on the table' *EER* Vol 3 No 4. p. 55.

# PARALLEL STRUCTURES

## Origins and achievements

The origins of parallel or independent activity in Czechoslovakia antedate the birth of the Charter 77 movement. Under the harsh conditions of post 1969 'normalization' the traditional pluralism of Czech society found a voice through independent cultural activity. The important Petlice independent publishing series was established in 1973, a diverse political culture existed, and a musical underground flourished. Some basic parallel structures, then, were already in existence when the concepts of 'parallel structures' and a 'parallel polis' were championed and given theoretical justification in Czechoslovakia and Poland in the late 1970s. Zdenek Mlynar noted in 1979: "The fact that parallel structures have only been discussed in the recent period doesn't of course mean that the phenomenon which lies behind this concept...didn't exist before now."[1]

The concept of parallel structures arose in the changed circumstances after 1968. To a large extent the development of parallel or alternative initiatives was a direct result of the crushing of the Prague Spring. During the reform process of 1968 social pressure from below had not resulted in the creation of parallel structures of the kind evolving in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s - structures that 'parallel' the function of the official structures and are clearly their antithesis. Havel writes:

> "Neither the proper conditions nor the raison d'etre existed for those limited, 'self-structuring' independent initiatives familiar from the present era...that stand so sharply outside the official structures and are unrecognized by them en bloc. At that time the post-totalitarian system in Czechoslovakia had not yet petrified into the static, sterile and stable forms that exist today, forms that compel people to fall back on their own organizing capabilities."[2]

August 1968 crushed the hopes of the revisionists and showed the impossibility of seeking reform 'from above' via the existing official structures. Thus it was to alternative parallel structures that the opposition gradually turned, as the only prospect for short term improvement and long term change. Similar ideas were adopted in both Poland and Czechoslovakia in the 1970s. In his essay 'The New Evolutionism' Michnik writes of the failure of attempts at reform 'from above'. At times of social conflict, he argues:

> "...one must choose between the point of view of the oppressor and that of the oppressed. When the crunch comes, both revisionism and neopositivism, applied consistently, must inevitably lead to taking the point of view of the regime."[3]

Michnik concludes that any successful programme of evolution must be addressed to independent public opinion and involve social pressure 'from below': "The duty of the opposition is to participate continually and systematically in public life, to create political facts through collective action, and to propose alternatives. All the rest is just literature."[3]

Similarly Tesar writes of the lessons of the failure of 1968: "...its essential cause lies in the fact that the 'revival process' in Czechoslovakia...ignored the need to create new democratic structures...for that is the only way to break out of the vicious circle."[4]

Charter 77 was in large part a product of this growing emphasis on independent structures - an independent citizens initiative existing completely outside the power structures - and its foundation proved an immediate stimulus for the further growth and development of parallel structures.

> "...Charter 77 gave a substantial fillip to such activity, stimulating new forms of action, imparting courage to the hesitant or fearful, and pushing back a little further the limits on freedom. The result was a richer and more voluminous output in many and varied forms."[5]

However, the development of parallel structures was not the initial driving force behind the Charter. The initial Charter declaration was addressed to the authorities, rather than society in general, and did not mention the need for the growth of parallel structures. Michnik has written of parallelism: "Instead of acting as a prompter to the government, telling it how to improve itself, this programme should tell society how to act".[6]

The Charter, on the contrary, offered a dialogue with the government on how to improve its implementation of human rights, and did not 'tell society how to act'. In its defence of human rights and legality the Charter was, of course, defending the rights of citizens to create their own independent structures, and to express themselves independently (one of the driving forces behind the creation of the Charter was the desire to defend those persecuted for their independent rock music), but it was not in itself a call to create new structures. However, parallelism was an issue which gained importance during the early years of Charter 77, and was frequently raised in the discussions of 1977 and 1978 on the future direction the Charter should take. The proposal 'Co s Chartou', reportedly drafted by Sabata and Uhl, advocated the development of civic activity in all

directions,including higher education, the environment, and the creation of independent

trade unions. The Charter communique of 21st September 1977 acknowledged the

increasing interest in the question of encouraging parallel or independent activity.

> "Because Charter 77 is not concerned with its own prestige, but with the actual
> development in the sphere of its mission, we support and intend to support...the
> most varied civic initiatives which are appearing and will appear around us."[7]

The Charter 77 document No.21 similarly states:

> "...Charter 77 considers it to be its responsibility to support and encourage the
> activity of all citizens, so that it will take the form of wider and more mature
> initiatives and will take an ever more independent course."[8]

The term parallel structures was, however, not mentioned in these documents, and the

Charter's role remained that of supporting and encouraging, rather than directly organizing,

the growth and development of independent parallel structures.


In 1978 Vaclav Benda provided a theoretical argument for the development of parallel

structures in his essay 'Paralelni Polis'. The discussions, and sometimes bitter polemics,

in Charter circles during 1977 and 1978 had, to some extent, centered on differing

approaches towards possible future developments between 'radicals' and 'reformists'

within the Charter. Benda proposed the creation of parallel structures as a solution that

would be acceptable to both and that would provide a positive strategy, a third way, for

future development. Benda argued that the moral position of the Charter had proved to be

formulated too abstractly and was unable to mobilize people in the long term. It required a

more positive direction and function, and the creation of a parallel polis would provide this.

He argued that the majority of official structures important to the life of the community

functioned inadequately and even detrimentally. He proposed, therefore, the gradual

creation of parallel structures, capable, at least to a limited degree, of providing the

beneficial and essential functions which the official structures failed to do. This plan,

Benda argued, would fulfill, to some extent, the requirements of both 'radicals' and

'reformists':

> "It doesn't necessarily lead to direct conflict with the political authorities, at the
> same time, however, it isn't burdened with illusions about solutions...by means
> of 'cosmetic adjustments'...it leaves open the key question of the viability of the
> system."[9]

Benda outlines the areas in which he feels that his plan for developing a 'parallel polis' should be carried out. He argues that the existing parallel culture, the "most developed and most dynamic" parallel structure to date, should be used as a model for other spheres, and at the same time its own further development should be encouraged. He calls for the creation of a parallel education structure, vital both for the development of the community as a whole, and for the children of Charter activists discriminated against in the official higher education structures. He calls for the revitalizing and enlarging of the parallel information system which, though successful in the first months of the Charter, has degenerated to a point where it reaches only a small number of people. In the economic sphere, Benda argues, the prospects for developing parallel structures are not good, but a system of self-help and international solidarity is necessary to relieve the intolerable economic pressures to which Chartists are subjected. In the sphere of parallel politics Benda argues:

> "It is necessary to create the background for the rise of parallel political...structures and aid their development. This point involves a wide range of tasks, from education towards civic consciousness and responsibility, through the creation of conditions for political discussion and the formulation of theoretical opinions, to the concrete support of political currents and groups."[10]

Finally, Benda calls for the creation of a parallel foreign policy, especially in the field of co-operation with similar groups and movements in the rest of Eastern Europe.

Other Chartists echoed Benda's proposals. Hejdanek emphasized the importance of 'alternative culture' and of educational and discussion circles.[11] Uhl called for the creation of an independent foreign policy[12], whilst the 'Co s Chartou' document also mentioned higher education and the need for independent trade unions.

In 1988, ten years after these proposals were first introduced, it was possible to evaluate how successfully these desired parallel structures had been created and defended and which areas had fallen short of expectations, and also to evaluate the political and social impact of what was achieved.

The most vital and dynamic area of 'parallel' or 'alternative' activity remained the field of culture. Successful book series, journals, periodicals, and non-conformist music continued to extend their area of independent activity and involve fairly large numbers of

people. They were considered to achieve much higher standards than their counterparts in official culture. Hejdanek has argued that unofficial culture represents a 'position' against which the official culture is just an opposition. He argues that a vigorous and lively alternative cultural front plays a vital role as a bridge between human rights movements and the population in general. The human rights workers need the help of those working in the field of culture to find ways of reaching the majority of the population.[13] Literary samizdat included, as well as Petlice and many literary feuilletons, such journals as 'Kriticky Sbornik' (a literary quarterly), 'Obsah' (literary samizdat essays), 'Prostor', 'Horizont', and 'Vokno' (a 'magazine for the second and other culture'). Successes were also achieved in the areas of historiography, the creation of academic seminars, and scholarly publications and journals. Stimulated by the birth of the Charter, the Patocka University was established, however, the goal of a parallel higher education structure proved elusive.

The extensive output of samizdat materials - books, periodicals and information bulletins - especially in the fields of culture, philosophy and historiography, created in effect a parallel information system. As well as cultural and scholarly works, the information bulletin 'Informace o Charte' was established in January 1979 as an independent source of information about Charter 77 activity. Other journals contributing to this parallel information system included 'Solidarnosc' (1985, a journal on Polish events), 'Paraf' (1985, a philosophy journal), 'Stredni Evropa', 'Komentare' (addressing problems of peace and European politics), and 'KIFU' (Magazine of the society for the distribution of information in Czechoslovakia). The authorities' monopoly of the communication and information media was substantially challenged and weakened in these areas.

Benda's proposals for the creation of a parallel foreign policy also met with success at some levels. A considerable amount was achieved in terms of establishing relations with other East European groups, in particular with human rights groups in Poland. (In 1979 the 'Group for Czechoslovak-Polish co-operation' was established, and border meetings and joint declarations took place, despite repression). Contacts were also established with groups in the West, especially peace and human rights groups, and Chartists were increasingly viewed as important discussion partners by visiting Western officials.

Opposition documents addressing central concerns in the field of international relations also proved influential (for example see the Prague Appeal).

Hopes for the establishment of a parallel economy and an independent trade union movement, however, proved too optimistic. Influenced by events in Poland, the 'Preparatory Committee of Free Trade Unions' was founded in June 1981, but met with little success. (The 'Preparatory Committee' in fact did not aim for the creation of a parallel or independent trade union, but instead initially sought to bring about changes within the existing official trade union structure.)

Similarly the official church in Czechoslovakia does not provide a powerful parallel structure, as it does in Poland. Liehm has written of the Polish church: "It's defence of religion, a parallel ideology by definition, based on a strong organized structure, made the church a parallel polity sui generis."[14]

The less independent official churches in Czechoslovakia failed to provide this role, however, unofficial religious activity experienced a significant regeneration and became an important force in society, with an extensive output of independent religious samizdat (for example the successful 'Informace o Cirkvi', and 'Vzkriseni' (1979), a magazine for Catholic families), and the increased political activization of believers. Benda notes that in the late eighties many demonstrations and protests were organized by people from within the Christian circles, and that "...Christians, in particular the Catholics, have participated in a measure which was far greater than their percentage within the population".[15]

Finally, Benda also advocated the development of a parallel political life and even parallel political structures. In this field a rich and varied parallel and independent political life developed, composed of various different outlooks and currents. Benda wrote of the need for a growth in civic consciousness and responsibility and also the creation of the conditions for political discussion and the formulation of theoretical opinions. Both these areas of activity proved fruitful, with the result that there further developed in Czechoslovakia a vital level of political pluralization. As Skilling and Precan point out, this political pluralization has deep political significance. They write of: "...the crystallization of embryonic political tendencies, the expression of diverse ideological or philosophical standpoints, and the conduct of debate among their advocates..." All of which constitute:

"...at least the beginning of an escape from the communist doctrinal straitjacket and a revival of independent and pluralistic political thinking after three decades of silence."[16]

Mlynar also emphasizes this point, judging it to be one of the most important results of the Charter's "impulse for further development of parallel structures." : "In the sphere of parallel political life...the positive consequences of the Charter are, in my opinion, still more prominent: there arose in effect a mutually communicating *plurality* of parallel politics."[17]

Mlynar argues that this degree of interaction and political plurality was lacking in the years between 1968 and the founding of the Charter, and evaluates its future political significance highly.

> "This parallel political life should become a...workshop, in which there arises not only...theoretical and programmatic political concepts, but also the necessary political culture essential in a democratic society."[17]

In some areas, therefore, the proposed parallel structures could not be successfully established, and developments fell short of what was achieved, under different conditions, in Poland, especially in the fields of parallel education, religion, and trade unions. Benda's concept of creating a whole 'parallel polis' proved, perhaps, over ambitious, but in several fields, especially culture, information, scholarship and political life, flourishing parallel structures proved durable. Skilling and Precan conclude: "Without hyperbole one can speak of a parallel information service, a parallel literature and music, a parallel history and philosophy, even a parallel legal and investigative system in ...VONS."[18]

Benda assesses the development of the parallel polis in Czechoslovakia in the years 1977-1988 very positively. He argues that the parallel polis was successful on many levels. In particular he cites the total success in breaking the information monopoly of the government, the development and activization of Christian circles, success on the international level (he argues that the government in fact agreed that the opposition was more influential in the West than it was itself and "...for several years tried to convince us to use our own influence...to persuade the U.S. government to grant Czechoslovakia most favoured nation status"[19]), and in the field of culture:

> "Of course there were certain cultural parallel structures before the Charter - there were a couple of publishing houses, a few titles with a few dozen copies each. In the 80s there are hundreds of periodicals, large numbers of publishing houses,

concerts, films, theatre, and the number of books run into the hundreds of thousands."[19]

These parallel structures created for themselves areas of intellectual and spiritual freedom, and undermined the regime's attempt at total manipulation of society and total control over the means of communication. Within their admittedly often narrow spheres (few structures reach the large mass of Czechoslovak citizens), they have provided a lifeline for Czechoslovak culture and political thought, and provided an essential element of pluralism under the monolithic facade of the totalitarian state. After the failure of attempts to introduce an element of pluralism into the official structures, this 'unofficial', 'parallel' pluralism provides an alternative strategy. Hence Eva Kanturkova writes:

> "...is it not possible...to 'Europeanise' socialism by establishing a sort of less conspicuous - and therefore less vulnerable - pluralism? Isn't it more effective to rely on what always existed here..., but was never sufficiently formulated and institutionalized : namely the pluralism of the parallel society."[20]

As Jan B. de Weydenthal argues, it is this development of an "element of inherent pluralization" in East European politics, through developments outside the official power structures, which characterizes East European dissent in the 1970s: "More than any specifically political demands or complaints, this was a major change in the nature of contemporary dissent."[21]

## Defining the nature of parallel structures

Defining what exactly does and does not constitute a 'parallel structure' is not always a simple task. There is a 'grey area' of activity which does not constitute a parallel structure in the sense advocated by Chartists, but nevertheless displays many similar features - it is unofficial, it 'parallels' the function (or lack of function) of an existing institution, and it is (to a greater or lesser degree) considered to be illegal and punishable by the regime. The 'second economy' is clearly an example which falls into this 'grey area'. In his essay 'Paralelni Polis' Benda cites the existence of the parallel economy, as well as parallel culture, to show that his plans for a parallel polis are realistic and based on existing successful structures. He describes the parallel economy as a negative though functional factor which, under the "glossy surface of official economic facts", controls not only the majority of consumers, but also the majority of commercial relationships.

It is necessary, then, to try to define what is meant by the term 'parallel structure', what specific attributes all such structures share, and to what extent they can be completely independent.

Firstly, a parallel structure should, of course, have a counterpart in the official structures of the state. Benda argues for the creation of structures capable of fulfilling, at least to a limited degree, the function which the lifeless official structures fail to provide. Most of the parallel structures which have grown up around the Charter fulfill this condition - culture, communication, education etc. - but for some structures it is difficult to demonstrate an exactly parallel role. VONS (the Committee to Defend the Unjustly Prosecuted) for example, can perhaps be viewed as a parallel legal system, although basically, as a pressure group that champions the rights and monitors the trials of persecuted individuals, it is not strictly a 'parallel' structure in this sense. It is, however, a much valued 'independent' structure and 'citizens initiative' and certainly falls within the scope of what is meant when Chartists write of the need for 'parallel' or 'independent' structures.

Benda also argues that his proposed parallel structures would be an extension and expression of the fundamental moral position of the Charter. Parallel structures, therefore, should embody a strong moral position, in contrast to the entangling web of deceit, apathy and corruption which engulfs the official structures and the majority of society. Petr Uhl writes of the new internal relationships created within the parallel structures, which offer a "genuine alternative" to the forms of social life that have been "fettered and deformed" by bureaucratic power.[22] Mlynar similarly sees in the parallel structures the expression of different value orientations and different relations between people than those that exist within the official structures:

> "They are...not only spaces for verbal protests, but spaces for putting into practice other values, and for the rise of other relations between people, than those which, in their own interest, the totalitarian system demands in official structures."[23]

Judged by this criterion the second economy is certainly not a 'parallel structure' as intended by Chartists, as it exhibits just the same moral values and relations between people

(corruption, greed and self-interest) as those which, in the Chartists view, motivate much of the activity in the official structures.

Parallel structures, therefore, share a common 'alternative' moral basis, but they do not, however, share a common alternative ideology. In his essay 'Six asides about culture' Havel feels it necessary to emphasize this point because of what he describes as the failure, on the part of some of the exile press, to understand the true nature of parallel culture. These authors, he argues, consider that just as the official culture is subservient to official ideology, so the parallel culture should be governed by some parallel ideology. Such authors are disappointed when they fail to find this common political orientation. Havel argues that this is based on a misconception of the very nature of parallel culture.

> "All those hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people of all sorts and conditions...gathered under the umbrella of 'parallel culture', were led to it exclusively by the incredible narrow- mindedness of a regime which tolerates practically nothing. They can never agree on a common programme because the only real thing they have in common...is their diversity and their insistence on being just what they are."[24]

This leads to a fourth feature of parallel structures, particularly parallel culture, scholarship and politics. They are a direct result of the official restrictions and narrow censorship imposed by the ruling authorities. All independent expressions which cannot find an outlet through official structures are automatically pushed into the parallel structures. Parallelism itself, therefore, is no guarantee of quality. No restrictions or standards are imposed on what can and cannot be produced within the parallel structures. Havel writes:

> "A great many people can peck at a typewriter and, fortunately, no one can stop them. But for that reason, even in samizdat, there will always be countless bad books or poems for every important book."[25]

The false assumption that everything published in the parallel culture is automatically of a high quality leads to the false conclusion that everything published in the official culture is completely worthless. Havel calls this a "sectarian view of parallel culture":

> "...the view that whatever does not circulate only in typescript or whatever was not recorded only privately is necessarily bad and that not being printed, publicly performed or exhibited is in itself an achievement...while the reverse is always and automatically a mark of moral and spiritual decay, if not of outright treason."[26]

Havel argues that such a view is misplaced, and that in fact interesting and important achievements can be obtained within the realms of the 'first' official culture.

Mlynar warns that the same considerations must be made in the sphere of parallel politics. He argues that parallel structures are a very significant political phenomenon, but contends that not every element within these structures has the same political significance.

> "The totalitarian regime pushes back by force into the framework of these parallel structures all orientations which do not conform to its own 'rules of the game'. This is not to say, however, that were it not for the totalitarian regime all these orientations, without exception, would gain support in society."[27]

Some, he argues, even in free conditions, would still be without political significance, or would only play the role of sectarian political currents. (Mlynar places the revolutionary Marxists in this second category). The very nature of parallelism means that it is not possible to verify how much support specific groups really have within society as a whole.

Another question which Mlynar raises about parallel, independent structures is to what extent they can be genuinely and totally independent of the totalitarian regime. He argues that their parallelism, their existence alongside official structures, to a certain extent makes them dependent on these official structures. He cites the parallel economy as the clearest example of this problem. The 'second economy' would not be able to exist in the form it does today without the official state sector, and likewise the official economy is dependent on its 'parallel compliment' in the unofficial sector. "Official and parallel structures thus live in symbiosis".[28] Mlynar argues that the relationship between very different parallel structures - for example parallel cultural and political life and the parallel information system - and the regime is much more complex and at the same time more contradictory. He writes: "With these parallel structures a critical relationship to the official structures is a precondition of their origin and it can therefore never disappear."[28]

Mutual influence between the two spheres is also evident in the case of these structures. The regime "consciously and unconsciously co-determines, on many occasions, the direction and possibilities of activity in parallel structures of this type". Parallel structures are defined by their exclusion from the official sphere. These facts, Mlynar argues, can deform the consciousness of those living within the parallel structures. This can result in people within the parallel structures attaching to their own orientation

"...disproportionately greater socio-political significance than these orientations would be able to have in a democratic political system."[28]

The term parallel structures is used to describe a wide variety of activity, then, not all of which is strictly either parallel, independent, or even a structure in any formal sense. Some Chartists have used alternative names with which they prefer to designate such activity. Uhl argues that Benda's parallel structures should really be called 'alternative structures', or an 'alternative polis'. Havel writes of the 'independent life of society' and refers to parallel structures as 'self-structuring independent initiatives' and 'informal, non-bureaucratic, dynamic and open communities'.[29] The Charter similarly refers to 'the most varied civic initiatives'.[30] These descriptions are useful in that they convey the open and informal nature of the 'second' cultural and political life, which is perhaps not sufficiently conveyed by the term 'parallel structures'.

## The relationship of parallel structures to the Charter

In his essay 'Paralelni Polis' Benda addresses the question of the possible future relationship between the proposed parallel structures and the Charter. He argues that the different parallel structures would be linked to the Charter to different degrees. Some would be 'integral components' of the Charter, towards others the Charter would play the role of 'midwife and wetnurse', and the Charter would act to defend and guarantee the legality of all structures. He argues, however, that all such parallel structures will certainly develop beyond the framework of the Charter in different areas and "sooner or later must gain autonomous existence", partly so that they don't infringe upon the nature and mission of the Charter, but most importantly to avoid creating a ghetto instead of a parallel polis. Hejdanek warns that it would be a "fundamental error" if the increasingly crystallizing groups based on different outlooks and programmes should take action "under the caption of Charter 77". He calls for:

> "...the gradual but permanent transfer of the focus of our work towards concrete activities which will not have the official imprint of Charter 77, but will be planned and realized in its spirit and for the most part with its blessing."[31]

The Charter communique of September 21st, 1977, which declared the Charter's support for 'the most varied civic initiatives' uses a similar formula to that later used by

Benda. The Charter will support all such initiatives: "...irrespective of whether these initiatives formally come into existence and develop directly within the framework of Charter 77, in loose connection with the Charter or entirely outside it."[32] The communique emphasizes that what is essential is that they be in keeping with its aims and that this support helps "fulfill the moral obligation implicit in our signatures".

At the same time Benda warns that the Charter should not try to act in complete isolation from these structures:

> "...the Charter should definitely not have some policy of detaching itself from these initiatives, cordoning itself off from them; by such a step it would shift itself from the position of a civic initiative to that of a mere observer, and would thus deprive itself of the larger part of its moral charge."[33]

In fact the relationship that developed between the Charter and parallel structures seems to be best described by the phrase in the September 21st communique proposing initiatives "in loose connection with the Charter". No structures seem to have developed 'directly within the framework' of the Charter, although this is hard to define as the Charter itself was such a loose structure lacking a strict and formalized framework. Some independent initiatives were clearly very closely connected with and stimulated by Charter activity, (eg. Infoch and VONS), and most shared a common active 'membership' with the Charter. In some cases, especially that of the political currents and groupings, it was important that their independence from the Charter be stressed and carefully maintained. Other independent activity involved larger sections of society not directly active in the Charter (the musical underground, religious activity, publishing etc.) In all cases the Charter defended their legal right to exist and publicized the frequent instances of repression.

In his essay 'Charter 77 po dvou letech' (Charter 77 after two years), Mlynar outlines what he sees as the advantages and disadvantages inherent in the relationship between parallel structures and the Charter. He argues that, in a certain sense, one of the basic impulses for the creation of the Charter was the common desire on the part of all the already existing parallel structures to defend their right to activity, which the authorities themselves proclaimed. He argues that this "initial practical unity of interests" is very significant and should be the cornerstone of relations between parallel structures and the Charter. The Charter, he argues, can help parallel structures only in that which is common to them, ie.

the defence of their legality and of the space allowed for independent activity. The danger, on the other hand, is that instead of being governed by the criteria of their own creative work, other criteria may be imposed on parallel cultural activities, such as how radical they are in defending the 'interests of Chartists' and their "willingness to risk conflict with the authorities in questions not directly related to the work of these people". This, Mlynar argues, would be to lead parallel culture into a ghetto. In fact, the opposite relationship must be strived for: "The needs of the active people in all these structures must be the deciding criteria for the...goals and standpoints of the Charter."[34]

But as well as the dangers, Mlynar sees many positive features in the relationship between the Charter and parallel structures. He talks of the Charter providing an impulse for the further development of parallel structures. In the field of parallel culture, this is not so much seen in any new organizational forms, as in new 'qualitative features' - new personal contacts, more mutual trust and a stronger sense of individual equality. The development of parallel structures, especially parallel political life, has at the same time benefitted the development of the Charter, argues Mlynar, protecting the Charter from misuse in the interests of certain political groups by enabling political debates and arguments to take place outside the Charter, in the sphere of parallel politics, rather than inside the Charter itself.

## How will parallelism bring about change?

Central to the whole concept of parallel structures is the problem of the relationship between these parallel structures and the existing official structures. Is parallelism simply an attempt to improve conditions in the 'here and now', without any more long term goals? Does it involve divorcing the independent life of society completely from the functioning of the official structures, or alternatively is it seen as a means of bringing pressure to bear on the official structures and even replacing them? Does the creation of parallel structures, therefore, represent a long term plan for the transformation of the existing system?

Clearly the concept of parallel structures, as it evolved in Poland and Czechoslovakia in the late 1970s, centred on developments within society, rather than the official structures of the totalitarian state. Jacques Rupnik characterizes the 'self organization' of society in

Poland in the 1970s as going beyond the traditional concept of politics centred on the question of state and political power.

> "The 'new politics' of the Polish opposition are turned towards society. The goal is not to replace one state power by another: the opposition sees its recent attempts to create areas of independent social activity as a means to extend the limits of tolerance, as the beginning of a long journey aimed at progressive transformation of relations between state and society in Poland."[35]

Similarly Havel writes of the growth of parallel structures in Czechoslovakia: "The primary purpose of the outward direction of these movements is always...to have an impact on society, not to affect the power structure, at least not directly and immediately."[36]

Parallel structures develop within, and are primarily addressed towards, society. They create areas of activity independent of the state, increase the sphere of 'living within the truth', and, in Benda's plan, provide the beneficial functions which the official structures have failed to provide. What, then, will be the relationship between these parallel structures and the state? Do Chartists believe that the two can or should coexist separately, without affecting each other?

In his essay 'Opposition or juxtaposition' Kusin is critical of the concept, attributed to Kuron, that parallel structures and a pluralist society can exist "beneath this totalitarian facade without disturbing it." Kusin argues:

> "...the notion that a kind of collateral contrariety can exist for any length of time, involving a militantly dogmatic and conservative political structure on the one side and a parallel democratic and progressive infrastructure on the other, does not seem realistic..."[37]

However, just as Kusin concludes that Kuron and others in Poland are really advocating that the parallel sphere must exert pressure on the regime in the direction of reform and transformation, so a study of the views expressed by Chartists on the dynamics of the relationship between the parallel structures and the totalitarian state reveals that Chartists have no illusions that the two can coexist peacefully, and indeed for many Chartists it is the very fact that parallel structures will inevitably come into conflict with the regime which gives parallelism its political significance. Havel writes:

> "There seems to be very little likelihood that future developments will lead to a lasting coexistence of two isolated, mutually non-interacting and mutually indifferent bodies - the main polis and the parallel polis...the practice of living within the truth cannot fail to be a threat to the system. It is quite impossible to imagine it continuing to coexist with the practice of living within a lie without dramatic tension."[38]

Havel concludes that the relationship between the 'post totalitarian' system and the independent life of society will always be one of either latent or open conflict.

How do Chartists view the possible outcome of this conflict? Havel argues that the regimes response to pressure from society will be one of either repression or adaptation. The process of adaptation could involve several phases. Firstly, the official structures may try to reform and integrate values from the parallel structures. Secondly, a process of internal differentiation may take place within the official structures by which they would become independent and a "direct expression of the authentic needs of life". The ultimate phase of the process, Havel argues, would be the withering away of the official structures, to be replaced by new structures that have evolved from below.

Petr Uhl agrees that the development of parallel structures will inevitably come into conflict with the regime.

> "Here any form of expression that is not under bureaucratic control is necessarily disruptive. Every independent act ...consequently provokes conflict with bureaucratic power, regardless of whether it is deliberately aimed against the system or whether it merely desires to exist...'outside', without provoking conflicts."[39]

For Uhl, this constant conflict with the state authorities plays an essential role, constantly deepening peoples' political awareness. He writes: "The capacity to evoke conflict and social awareness is the primary justification for alternative forms of living, or, if you like, of the 'parallel polis'."[40]

For Uhl, the outcome of this conflict would be rather different to that anticipated by Havel. Uhl sees in the existing parallel structures the potential for the future 'avant-garde' of society, which will be the leading force in the coming 'revolutionary process'. For this to happen, he argues, the parallel structures - or alternative structures as he prefers to call them - must become increasingly organized, and "self-organization must gradually push out spontaneity". He argues that the parallel polis will always be a minority phenomenon. He dismisses as utopian the idea that society as a whole will 'merge' with the parallel polis, causing the state machinery to simply wither away. Uhl argues that it is only during a revolutionary process that the parallel polis will 'absorb' society. The parallel structures will act as a 'revolutionary avant-garde' during this process, genuinely expressing the main interests of oppressed society. Havel directly challenges this concept of the parallel

structures playing a 'leading role' in society. He argues that, on the contrary, parallel structures do not assume a messianic role, they are not a social 'avant garde' or elite which tries to "raise the 'consciousness' of the...masses" and lead society.[41]

Whilst most Chartists agree that the relationship between parallel structures and the regime will be one of 'dramatic tension', and even conflict, the outcome of the conflict and the way in which pressure from below will affect the existing structures is not so easily predicted. The future of the existing official structures is not viewed altogether negatively. This is a key element of Vaclav Benda's original proposals for a parallel polis - it leaves open the key question of the viability of the system. Benda argues that the development of a parallel polis would expose the official structures to pressures under which they would necessarily either collapse or be usefully restored. In other words, the development of parallel structures leaves all the options open. It creates an active sphere of civic awareness, responsibility and independent moral values in society which exerts pressure on the regime from below. The independent structures thus created will either be successful in bringing pressure to bear on the regime in the direction of desired changes in the official apparatus itself, or, if such a rebirth of official structures proves unachievable, will maintain necessary independent social bases ready to step into the breach in the event of a crisis. As Liehm argues, parallel activity creates: "...some elementary structures that could be ready for use in case the contract should be dissolved."[42]

Certainly the idea of restoring or 'reforming' the existing structures, via pressure from below, to a point where they can fulfill their original function rather than acting as mere 'transmission belts' for the regime is not ruled out by many Chartists. Benda writes in his original 'Paralelni polis' proposal that alongside the creation of parallel structures "it is possible also to take advantage of existing structures and 'humanize' them". Benda argues that one's view of whether existing structures would break down or prove reformable under pressure from below would depend on whether one accepted the diagnosis of the 'radicals' or the 'reformists'. Yet interestingly Petr Uhl, certainly no reformist, also considers both outcomes possible:

> "There are two ways to overcome the political system and its numerous economic, social and cultural aspects: the Charter chose the path of parallelism,

alternative and independent forms of social life. Another path, which cannot be excluded, is the transformation of the official structures..."[43]

Indeed he argues that both processes should work together to advance the democratization process:

"The future depends on a link-up between the development of independent structures and the process of reform 'from below' of the existing institutions...I believe that at a certain point in society's development these two forms of change cannot be separated; nor can one take precedence over the other."[44]

Havel also argues, in his essay 'Six asides about culture', that future success depends on the ability of society to transform the existing structures into structures able to express the genuine needs of society. He argues that despite the importance of parallel culture as the "sole bearer of the spiritual continuity of our cultural life", it is the 'first culture' that remains the decisive sphere. Only when society begins to reclaim the first culture will things really improve:

"It will be in the 'first' culture that the decision will be made about the future climate of our lives; through it our citizens will have the first genuine, wide-scale chance to stand up straight and liberate themselves."[45]

This process of winning back the first culture would not be possible without the existence of the 'interim' parallel culture, yet this parallel culture in itself is not able to liberate the whole of society. Havel writes that the relationship of the 'second' or 'parallel' culture to the first would be like that of a match to a stove: "...without it, the fire might not have started at all, yet by itself it cannot heat the room."[45]

It is perhaps important to note that the question being addressed by the Chartists here is not that of the 'reformability' of the whole totalitarian system (including the communist party), but the reform of the official structures to make them work from the bottom up and exert pressure on the regime, instead of from the top down as transmission belts.


## The fear of the ghetto

Closely linked with the question of the relation of parallel structures both to society in general and to the official power structures is the fear, expressed by many Chartists, that the sphere of parallel life may be pushed into a ghetto, isolated and cut off from the official structures and from society, unable to extend its influence beyond its narrow confines and out of touch with the genuine needs of the people. In his essay 'Charter 77 po dvou

letech', Mlynar argues that parallel structures in totalitarian systems inevitably have some of the features of a ghetto. This is unavoidable, he argues, but it must be a major task of everyone involved in parallel structures to overcome the negative features of this position. Mlynar advocates the creation of effective communication links outside the ghetto, that is, to society living not only in parallel, but to the substantial sections of society living within the official structures, in the sense that they comply with the official 'rules of the game' of totalitarianism. Mlynar concludes that it is one of the main goals of all those active in the parallel structures to ensure that the "irremovable, but not fatally dominant" features of the ghetto are not able to govern activity within the Charter and the parallel structures. It is an essential goal, he argues, if parallel structures are to keep their real political significance for overcoming totalitarianism.

Vaclav Havel also addresses the problem of the ghetto. He puts the case that it is wrong to see parallel structures as a ghetto, as a retreat into isolation. This would mean that it would be essentially a group solution that has nothing to do with the general solution. On the contrary, parallel structures, Havel argues, present a solution that is applicable and available to everyone, and can be taken as a 'model' for future developments. Havel looks here to what he calls 'post democratic' political structures which, based on the 'symbolic model' of current parallel structures, may become the foundation of a better society. Parallel structures, he concludes, "foreshadow a general solution". They are not just an expression of an "introverted, self-contained responsibility that individuals have to and for themselves alone", but of "responsibility to and for the world".[46]

Jan Tesar echoes the fear that the independent space created by the opposition will become a ghetto. From this point of view he is critical of the whole concept of a parallel polis. His advocacy of the creation of 'new democratic structures' and 'civic activity and emancipation' seems close to the formulation of a parallel polis advocated by Benda. Tesar writes of the need for:

> "...an irrepressible trend to civic emancipation that will assume for itself all the basic democratic rights and create its own democratic structures as elements of civil society; In time they will begin to replace the already disintegrating system of 'transmission belts'."[47]

However Tesar's plan for democratic structures is in fact different to Benda's parallel structures, although both are based on common principles - the need for genuine change 'from below'. Tesar argues that the concept of parallel structures is not an appropriate solution in a totalitarian system. He writes of the concept of parallel structures: "It originated...in other circumstances, to which it corresponded...The idea of 'parallel structures' is connected with the self realization of the minority in democratic societies."[48]

He argues that the situation in Czechoslovakia is that it is the whole of society which lacks freedom. Realizing partial freedoms in specific areas is not the solution. He concludes:

> "The liberation of the whole of society cannot come without the creation of democratic structures in the whole society...our struggle...must be for the greatest and most permanent contacts of the opposition with the whole of society."[48]

It is hard to square Tesar's interpretation of the meaning of parallel structures with that outlined by Benda. The creation of parallel, unofficial structures which aim to serve society and provide the beneficial functions which the official structures fail to provide (they function simply as transmission belts) seems to belong uniquely to totalitarian systems, rather than democratic ones.

Tesar's charge that parallel structures are the solution only for a small section of society and do not meet the needs of the whole of society is also echoed by Kusin. He argues that only independent music and religion have a connection with large sections of the public. In general, the parallel structures in Czechoslovakia remain limited and unable to stimulate mass support and opposition. He concludes that the opposition needs to broaden its scope: "If unofficial...'social movements' are to arise, all the participating strata must feel that such movements can help them promote their immediate interests, not only someone else's."[49]

Mlynar is also critical of aspects of parallelism which he fears will result in the Charter and parallel structures assuming more and more the features of a ghetto. He is critical of every instance where Benda's plan attempts - though not explicitly - to create some pre-figured more moral society inside an immoral system. He argues that an attempt to create a "society within society" in the whole complex of structures necessary for modern society

would not only lead the Charter into a ghetto, but would also encourage the tendency towards the control of this ghetto by individual groups or sects. He concludes that in circumstances where all independent thought and action is subject to persecution and repression it is necessary to orientate not on the whole complex social structure, but only on selected structures, in particular the information system, culture and politics.[50]

## Moving away from parallelism?

Although not specifically endorsing the concept of 'parallelism' in its official documents, the Charter consistently supported the creation of 'varied civic initiatives' and was an important factor in stimulating the growth and development of parallel structures. However in 1987 the Charter spokespersons produced an interesting document which seemed to mark a move away from the emphasis on parallelism. Charter document no.2/87 entitled "Appeal to fellow citizens" seemed to be an appeal to revitalize the existing structures rather than create parallel ones. The introductory section of the document talks of new changes in the political climate, and calls on fellow citizens to understand "the historic possibilities of this moment". The document then goes on to describe the many areas in which citizens could stand up for their rights and be critical of the current state of affairs.

Firstly, citizens are asked to take the official trade unions seriously and to make them work for the workers: "All of us can take seriously our trades union membership and demand our formally declared but unrespected right to elect to union committees authentic, courageous representatives of the genuine will of the workers."

In the field of communications the document states: "We can demand true information, write the truth in the existing media..."

In the field of education: "Teachers should teach the truth in accordance with their conscience...It is possible to adhere to the syllabus while keeping one's own opinion and conveying it to pupils and students."

In the field of religion: "Believers should not be afraid to go to their Church and should not hide their beliefs. Clergymen should fulfill their vocation as dictated by their conscience and convictions."

In the field of culture, self-censoring artists should "overcome their fear and create freely".

Interestingly, the document says nothing about work in 'independent' trade unions, 'parallel' communications and education systems, 'independent' religious activity and 'unofficial' culture. The document is clearly an appeal to people *within the official structures* to end their passivity, act independently and revitalize these structures. It marks an apparent shift in emphasis away from the independent life of society towards the regaining by society of the official structures which have thus far acted only as transmission belts for the regime. This apparent shift seems to have beeen based on perceived changes in the political climate, resulting from changes in the Soviet Union, which raised hopes for new possibilities and progress.

> "Even the representatives of state power in this country occasionally speak of democracy, justice and public control of their actions. These are usually empty words, hiding dictatorial arbitrariness, and our society has got used to not taking them seriously. Recently however there have been signs that at least some of their statements reflect an awareness that changes are necessary."[51]

The document also speaks of the need for a "true national reconciliation on a democratic basis". The concluding statement of the document seems to indicate that the authors see the arena of action as moving away from Charter 77 and alternative structures:

> "...we do not ask anyone to join, support or enlarge our community. Charter 77 is not, and has never believed itself to be, the only hope of our society. We ask our fellow citizens to do something different and more important. Let them wake up to their freedom and realize the hopeful meaning of the slogan that was given to the modern Czechoslovak state at its foundation: "Truth prevails"."[52]

As we have seen, Chartists never ruled out the possibility of humanizing the existing official structures, and indeed some have seen this as the only real hope for the future. By 1987 they seem to be saying that the time has come for the 'match' of the Charter and parallel structures to spark into life the potential 'wood stove'[53] of the official structures.

Petr Uhl, however, is critical of the new tone of this document. In an interview with spokesperson Josef Vohryzek, Uhl says of the 'Appeal to fellow citizens':

> "It seems to me that there is something important missing...I understand the movement of Charter 77 above all, as an independent community, and it is this dimension of independence which was...very much emphasized by Charter 77...Those aspects of independence...are not mentioned anywhere in its anniversary document nor is there any mention of them when speaking of the future and outlining future perspectives."[54]

Uhl argues that the appeal to citizens to behave freely in their work places and within official institutions - trade unions, churches, schools etc. - is one that is often more difficult for people to follow than is the 'way of the Charter' - independent, parallel or underground activity. He argues that the two approaches are not mutually exclusive and should compliment each other in the future, but expresses surprise that the "way of action preferred by Charter 77" is not even mentioned in the 'Appeal' document. He goes on to ask Vohryzek, in his capacity as a spokesman of Charter 77, whether the document reflects a change of strategy and whether the previous strategy of "ant-like work in the various initiatives independent of official state and social organizations" has been abandoned or is now considered less important. Uhl also asks whether there are people within the Charter who now feel that the political climate has improved to such an extent that, in contrast with the situation five years ago, it is now possible to pursue the course of free action within the official structures. Vohryzek, in reply, argues that there has been no change of strategy and that the Charter will continue to follow its previous course. However he argues that there has been a change of climate which has opened up many more areas of activity where people combine work within the state structures with independent activity. He cites the Jazz Section as one such area. Vohryzek argues, though, that independent activities, such as VONS, are extremely important and concludes that "Charter 77 will naturally strive to support all such activities in the future".[54]

The 'Appeal to fellow citizens' document did not, perhaps, mark a completely new strategy for the Charter, but I feel that it certainly expressed a new emphasis. It was based on a belief that, in the future, changes in the political situation may require a new balance between what Uhl has called the two approaches to overcoming the political system - parallelism and the transformation of the official structures. The Charter was a major stimulus for the creation of parallel, independent structures, and indeed gained much of its own stimulus from the desire to defend the rights of those engaged in independent 'underground' activity. Ten years after its defence of the 'Plastic People', the Charter found itself similarly defending the rights of the 'Jazz Section'. However, the differences in the position of these two persecuted groups in relation to the official structures is perhaps indicative of the changing role of Charter 77.

Developments in 1988 saw both the growth of parallel structures and efforts to transform the existing structures gaining increasing importance and vitality. Critical voices began to be raised in the official unions, especially the cultural unions. For example, at the Congress of the Union of Czech Fine Artists, Ivan Bukovsky complained of the total lack of accountability of the union leadership and the banning of artists. Jan Bauch criticized the sterile atmosphere of the official union, and its stifling of youthful talent.

Meanwhile the independent, parallel community experienced a major revitalization and expansion through the emergence in 1988 of many new, often more political, independent groups. Among the most prominent of these were: the Independent Peace Association (IPA-IDS) April 1988; Czech Children, May 1988; Initiative for Social Self Defence (ISD), October 1988; The Movement for Civil Liberties (HOS), October 1988; The Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee, November 1988; and the East European Information Agency (VIA), December 1988 - a classic parallel structure founded by East European independent journalists to disseminate information on East European events to independent publishing groups.

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## CHARTER CONCERNS AND LIMITS

The first ten years of Charter 77 demonstrated that the Charter was more than simply a

human rights declaration, it was a living community which was constantly developing and

evolving. In 1987 the Charter issued a 'Letter to Charter signatories', marking the tenth

anniversary of Charter 77, which addressed the question of the Charter's development, its

search for identity, and the limits of Charter action. The letter notes that many people

initially thought that the Charter could not last, or that if it did it would simply become an

"uninteresting stereotype condemned to repeat itself ad nauseam".[1] During its first ten

years the charter had proved these sceptics wrong. It had become, as the letter points out, a

'living organism', not a "fossilized souvenir of its beginnings".

Over ten years the Charter frequently engaged in internal debates about its own

possibilities and directions. One problem frequently addressed was that of the Charter's

relationship to its founding declaration and the extent of the limits this placed on the scope

of Charter action. One such example is the 'Informace o Charte' debate. Here, for

example, Hejdanek argues that the uniqueness of the Charter rests on the fact that there are

some limiting factors, and questions whether it is permissible for Charter documents to deal

with subjects without relating them to the founding declaration. Uhl meanwhile argues that

the limits are changeable and that what makes the Charter interesting are "...our frequent

arguments about how far these limits can be stretched".[2] Benda also refers to the necessary

balancing act involved in determining what is permissible:

> "Charter's art of survival and continued creativity and its validity as a public
> voice, rests on the skill of compromise between, on the one hand, what all
> signatories respect as fundamental, and, on the other hand, practical steps which
> in one way or another are outside the fundamental framework."[3]

The tenth anniversary document also addresses this question. Accepting that, strictly

speaking, the Charter is nothing other than its founding declaration and being a signatory

means nothing other than agreement with this declaration, the document goes on to argue

that this fact should not narrow the sphere of the Charter's interests or preclude its further

development, because in fact the founding declaration is not as narrow a base as it may

seem. "We are convinced that the original statement has much greater scope than is usually

thought and has been made use of so far."[4] The document also concludes that: "In fact and in practice Charter 77, in accordance with its purpose, is of course something considerably greater than its original statement." It is an area of independent spiritual and political life, a living community.

This chapter will examine the nature and development of this living community of Charter 77, its relationship with the authorities, the range of issues which it addresses, how it relates its activity to the founding declaration, and the way it evolved over ten years, including its response to changes in the Soviet Union.


## The attitude of Charter 77 to the authorities

In a letter to the Federal Assembly written at the time of the birth of the Charter, Hajek and Patocka state that the initial Charter declaration:

> "...considers our state and social system as the self-evident basis and framework for the effort to secure the observance of the pacts on human rights. This is where its signatories see their contribution to the progressive development of our socialist society."[5]

Chartists frequently emphasize that the Charter does not aim to remove the existing system, that it is not anti-state or anti-socialist. As has been discussed earlier, the Charter's assertion that it accepts the existing system when viewed alongside its demand for fundamental human rights and respect for the law which would undermine the power base of that system, is problematic. However the assertion that the Charter is neither anti-system nor anti-state raises several interesting questions about the nature of the Charter.

Firstly, does the Charter's claim that it does not seek to remove the existing system, combined with its fundamental criticism of many aspects of that system, mean that the Charter believes that the existing system is capable of major reform? In his assessment of East European dissent in the late 1970s, Jan B de Weydenthal characterizes the emerging dissident groups (KOR, Charter 77) as not politically hostile to the communist system but motivated by a desire to point out the inefficiencies and failures of the official policies so that they could be corrected in the interests of both the existing system and the population. He argues:

> "The aim of the dissidents was not to make a revolution in order to transform the existing system, but to demonstrate the necessity for an internal evolution that

would make it possible to introduce both structural and operational changes within the established patterns of rule..."[6]

Is this belief that the system can be 'reformed' without being 'radically transformed' implicit in the Charter message? In some respects the Charter bypasses the issue of whether it believes in the reformability of the system by stressing the long term and universal nature of its demands. The full application of all human rights is a goal which can probably never be completely achieved and which all systems have to strive towards. The Charter's goals, therefore, go beyond reform.

However, much Charter activity seems to be based on the belief that the system is capable of reform, not by itself, but as a result of pressure from society. Charter document 9/85 clearly expresses the belief that improvements and regeneration are possible without a fundamental change in the 'social system'. The document calls for a change in the social climate in Czechoslovakia:

> "A change in the social climate does not imply a change of social system, but instead could provide the impetus to regenerate the present system of government and make it more productive, more dynamic and more flexible."[7]

Another question arising from the Charter's acceptance of the social system as the "self evident basis and framework" for its efforts is whether this acceptance is simply a result of pragmatic realism - the system cannot realistically be removed and therefore must be accepted - or whether this is a result of some degree of loyalty towards the existing system, as is perhaps implied by the phrase about contributing to the "progressive development of our socialist society" in the Hajek and Patocka letter to the Federal Assembly[8]. (It should be noted that this is not a Charter document and therefore cannot be seen as expressing the views of the Charter) Clearly different elements within the Charter hold different views on the question of system loyalty. Some of the reform communists would certainly express their goals in terms of strengthening and improving socialism whilst others would strongly reject any such political role. Can the Charter itself be viewed in any way as a 'loyal' opposition? Is this what lies behind its reluctance to appear oppositional or negative in its criticism of the existing system? I would argue that this is not the case. The Charter's framework of activity is civic not political. What may appear to be signs of a desire to co-operate with the authorities in the manner of a loyal opposition - the offer of a dialogue etc. - stem from a sense of civic rather than political loyalty, from a sense of citizenship and co-

responsibility for the fate of the country, which would not be served by confrontational methods. The Charter's aim is not to strengthen and perfect the system, but to improve the lives of Czechoslovak citizens. The Charter's declared acceptance of the social system is not the result of any satisfaction with the 'achievements of socialism'. In the case of the Charter I would disagree with Tokes when he writes of dissidents in the 1970s:

> "Most of them are democrats or socialists who seek reforms within the system and are opposed to the dismantling of the positive social, cultural and economic achievements of the last thirty years."[9]

On the contrary, the Charter depicts Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 80s as facing a social, cultural and economic crisis. Charter document 9/85 'On the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II' soberly assesses the results and achievements of the radical transformations which have taken place in the last forty years, including the areas of public education, the health service and the economy, and concludes that similar and better results have been achieved in other European countries and that each of the achievements in Czechoslovakia has engendered a whole set of snags which have effectively devalued them.

> "If we weigh up what we have achieved over the past forty years in the name of socialist ideals, we are obliged to declare that, in comparison with the first republic or what has been achieved over the same period by other developed European countries, today's achievements in no way justify the cruelties of the past."[10]

Another important aspect of the Charter's relationship with the political authorities is its offer of a dialogue. In the founding declaration the concept of holding a dialogue with the political authorities is clearly established as a major aspect of Charter activity:

> "...within its own sphere of activity it wishes to conduct a constructive dialogue with the political and state authorities, particularly by drawing attention to various individual cases where human and civil rights are violated...by submitting other proposals of a more general character aimed at reinforcing such rights and their guarantees."[11]

In accordance with this desire, most Charter documents are addressed to the authorities, rather than to society, requests are made and suggestions are submitted earnestly to the major organs of power and to the leading political figures as part of the Charter's side of a very one sided 'dialogue'.

The offer of a dialogue raises difficult questions. Did the Charter sincerely believe that the regime would be willing to accept it as a partner in dialogue? Is the offer of a dialogue a

sign of naivety or a shrewd political tactic? What principles motivate the Charter to offer

such a dialogue to its oppressors?

Firstly, was the offer of a dialogue a miscalculation on the part of the Charter? Did

Chartists have the genuine expectation, soon to be disappointed, that the authorities would

be ready to engage in a dialogue with them. Antonin J Liehm takes this view in his essay

'The new social contract'. Writing of the Charter he argues:

> "The signers' intent was to break out of their own isolation, to attempt in a sense
> to institutionalize their critical voice. They believed that the political authorities
> might be interested in such a step, if only to neutralize a potential opposition and
> to vent the accumulating tensions inherent in the system. Obviously, they
> miscalculated."[12]

Comments by some Chartists seem to confirm that they viewed the offer of a dialogue

as a viable proposition, and felt that the regime could have been expected to respond

positively. Cerny, for example, sees the miscalculation not on the part of the Charter, but

on the part of the regime:

> "...it was a political mistake of the first order for the powers that be to have
> rejected from the outset the dialogue proposed by the Charter...dialogue was
> chiefly in their own interest. After all, not only would it have been possible but it
> would have been a wise and circumspect move to have accepted the Charter as an
> expression of discontent at the violation of the states own laws and to have
> entered into a debate with it regarding the ways and means of guaranteeing those
> laws."[13]

However, the general tone adopted when referring to the chances of dialogue soon

became more sceptical on the part of many Chartists. They accepted that the offer had been

rejected and argued that they had had no naive illusions that it would be accepted, but

meanwhile sought to demonstrate that it had even so achieved some partial results.

Dienstbier argues: "...a certain dialogue is being conducted...after the issuing of nearly

every Charter document the official media publicize material on the same theme."[14]

Similarly the Charter communique of the 21st September argues that the state has to

take Charter 77 into consideration and react in the media: "Even if Charter 77 has not

succeeded in establishing a direct dialogue with state power...a certain indirect dialogue,

though far from satisfactory, has none the less come about."[15]

The offer of a dialogue, enshrined as it is in the founding declaration, presents

problems of interpretation even for Chartists themselves and Charter supporters. It has

been the subject of criticism on the grounds that it shows political naivety, or even a desire

to collaborate with the authorities. Uhl notes that for some people in exile what is "least

acceptable" about the charter is the offer to hold a dialogue with the state authorities on the

question of human rights, which is seen as a form of collaboration with those in power.[16]

Uhl argues that the offer of a dialogue cannot be interpreted this way. He emphasizes that

the dialogue was to be strictly limited to the field of human rights, it was not to be a

dialogue about power.

> "The dialogue which Charter 77 offered to the state authorities ten years ago had
> nothing to do with the concept of co-operation. The dialogue was to be realized
> only in the spirit of the founding declaration of the Charter in which it was
> precisely defined."[17]

Three different interpretations of the meaning of the offer of a dialogue are presented by

three chartists with differing political viewpoints - Jaroslav Sabata, Petr Uhl and Ladislav

Hejdanek.

Jaroslav Sabata is a very strong advocate of seeking dialogue with the authorities,

regardless of the circumstances. The clearest expression of this was his attempt to conduct

a constructive dialogue with his interrogator in a prison cell. Sabata addressed a letter to

his interrogator, rather than to the state and political representatives because, as he points

out: "...'dialogues' held with citizens who are interested in independent political views,

continue to be a matter for the security service first and foremost."[18]

He argues that these 'security dialogues' take place in a most unsuitable atmosphere and

that he can quite understand those who refuse categorically to discuss ideological and

political subjects when on the security forces' home ground. Nevertheless he takes

advantage of the only situation presented to him to engage in a 'dialogue' and argues with

his interrogator about the need for a genuine 'conflict of ideas' to take place to solve the

pressing problems facing Czechoslovakia. In his letter to his interrogator Sabata states:

> "What I am asking is whether there is an honourable way out of this situation for
> both parties. I am not only asking you of course. You are an executive organ
> and your jurisdiction is limited; you do not have jurisdiction over political affairs.
> However I am asking you as well because you are accessible, whereas those who
> do have jurisdiction are not."

Sabata, then, clearly feels that a dialogue with the authorities is essential and his

continued attempts to initiate dialogue, even under the most unpromising circumstances,

seem to indicate a belief that such a dialogue is not only necessary, but possible.

Petr Uhl takes a very different view on the question of a dialogue between the Charter and the authorities. He admits that he was at first hostile to the very concept of a dialogue as expressed by Sabata. He later decided that the offer of a dialogue was acceptable, even useful, provided it was qualified by a major pre-condition - those offering the dialogue must be aware that it is unrealizable. "The idea that it is possible to achieve a real dialogue with the state and political authorities is an illusion."[19]

Once this is realized, Uhl argues, the continued offer of a dialogue becomes useful in several different ways. If a large number of people are made aware of the offer it will have a mobilizing character, making people realize that the Charter is a force capable of critical thought and of analyzing social problems. Also, the permanent rejection of a dialogue by the state authorities reveals the true nature of these authorities and helps people to "shed their illusions" and understand the truly totalitarian nature of the regime. Thus the offer of a dialogue, he argues, forces the authorities to reveal themselves and demonstrates to people that the pre-condition for the assertion of their everyday interests is the solution of other, universal problems ie the nature of the bureaucratic power structure. Uhl underlines that the offer of a dialogue is only valuable if it is recognized as unrealizable: "A movement that believed in the realizability of such a dialogue would soon lose its impetus or would become a politicking group seeking concessions from the bureaucratic dictatorship."[20]

Given this major pre-condition, coupled with the pre-condition that the offer of a dialogue must always be expressed in public, to retain its mobilizing element, Uhl finds the permanent offer of a dialogue to be a useful element of Charter activity.

> "The permanent offer of a dialogue to the state authorities is a strategic (not tactical) element of our struggle. Its strength and publicity reinforces our own real dialogue and expands the region of freedom and independence."[21]

Ladislav Hejdanek also finds the concept of a dialogue with the political authorities problematical, but is critical of Uhl's interpretation. In his essay 'The possibilities and limits of dialogue' Hejdanek explains that in every text, even the best, one can find formulations which it is not possible to fully hold with. The expressed desire to lead a constructive dialogue with the political authorities in the Charter 77 founding declaration is one such formulation. He argues that it is necessary to develop one's own interpretation of

such a formulation and at the same time to defend the formulation against the interpretations of others, in particular that of Petr Uhl.

Hejdanek begins by stating that he absolutely agrees with Petr Uhl when he says that the idea that it is really possible to achieve a dialogue with the state and political authorities is an illusion. However, his reasons for taking this view are very different to those of Uhl. He bases his argument on an analysis of the fundamental meaning of the term dialogue. It is a meeting of two or more people on the level of speech, words. It requires that each participant has, in a sense, a partner or partners, which they can address personally, whether or not they are physically present, and the dialogue must take place in an atmosphere of absolute truthfulness between the partners. One must turn to one's partner as a "whole, unique individual". Given this definition, any genuine dialogue with the state authorities, Hejdanek concludes, is impossible, because state and political authorities do not have a personal character, they are not individuals. "In short: state and political authorities, which are in essence not individual, cannot meet on a personal level, and only on this level is it really possible to discuss, to have a genuine 'dialogue'."

Hejdanek also agrees with Uhl that "our movement must continue to offer a dialogue", but he is very critical of Petr Uhl's reasons for supporting this. He is critical of what he sees as the dishonest and false position of giving the impression that you are fully willing to take part in a dialogue only on the pre-condition that you are sure that this offer of a dialogue cannot be accepted. Hejdanek argues that this position would bring into question the credibility of the opposition's willingness to take part in a dialogue in all other circumstances as well. A genuine offer of a dialogue must be made in all truthfulness and must not be used to discredit people. He argues: "...this is not a question at all about whether the...state and political authorities...deserve or don't deserve this treatment, but about the fact that it disturbs and corrupts our own internal integrity and honesty."[22]

Hejdanek argues that the offer of a dialogue only has any meaning if the basic possibility exists for it to be accepted. The state authorities or regime cannot enter into dialogue, only individual people can take part in dialogue. Thus Hejdanek concludes:

> "It is therefore necessary to understand and interpret the purpose of Charter 77
> 'conducting a constructive dialogue with the political and state authorities' as a
> willingness and openness on the part of the signatories (and spokesmen) of

Charter 77 to enter into dialogue with the representatives of the political and state authorities."[23]

Hejdanek recognizes that these representatives on their part do not display a similar willingness and openness, but argues that he does not consider that it is inherently impossible that they could. He argues that Petr Uhl's views on dialogue are too pragmatic and utilitarian. An important condition for dialogue is the exclusion of pressure or coercion of any kind, and by viewing dialogue as a "strategic element in our struggle", argues Hejdanek, Uhl is creating political factors which can be a gigantic obstacle in the path of real dialogue. He also argues that it is not right to rule out the possibility that it may sometimes be necessary for dialogue to temporarily leave the public arena. He argues that the offer of a dialogue with representatives of the political authorities cannot and must not be simply a political trick, on the contrary, it should help to draw these representatives out of their official shells, help them to disengage from the grip of power and pull them into a discussion where they cease to be only functionaries and representatives and can express themselves as people amongst people. The goal, according to Hejdanek, is to create the maximum space for society and private life, independent of state and political power, and the offer of a dialogue invites the representatives of power to enter into this free, open space. This offer regards the representatives of power as real people, although Hejdanek has some doubts about whether these people, who are deeply alienated from society, will be able to respond to this appeal.

In conclusion, Hejdanek presents this assessment of what the offer of a dialogue means to him:

> "What does it really mean, when people without power positions offer dialogue to the representatives of power? Nothing other than that they appeal to them to step aside from their position of power, for a while to put aside party power-political calculations and considerations and meet as equals with people without power in a discussion, where arguments and critical thinking rather than power pressure and compulsion are valued."[24]

As is clear from these assessments, the stated desire to conduct a dialogue with the political authorities raises problems for many Chartists, and their interpretation of the meaning behind this offer differs. Uhl believes that any such dialogue is in fact impossible, due to the nature of those in power. Sabata seems to feel that dialogue is possible, and must be sought at every opportunity. Hejdanek, sometimes referred to as the

voice of Charter orthodoxy, also feels that the authorities themselves cannot take part in dialogue, but that perhaps individuals from the power structure can.

If the offer of a dialogue is something that Chartists themselves find hard to interpret or to apply to the really existing conditions in Czechoslovakia, why then was it given such prominence in the founding declaration? Is it, as Uhl argues, a strategic manoeuvre, employed solely for its propaganda effect and without hope of fulfillment, or is it a sign of political naivety on the part of the Chartists, and in this sense a mistake or miscalculation, or is it rather an expression of some of the fundamental principles that lie behind the Charter - in other words whether or not Chartists believe it can be successful, it is inherent in the nature of the Charter to make such an offer. I would argue in favour of this last explanation. The question of the offer of a dialogue is part of a larger question which can be raised about the Charter. Why is it primarily addressed to the political authorities rather than to society? Whilst it is the case that the Charter increasingly discussed the problems of society and in the late '80s, as will be discussed later, sought to mobilize society to act, the vast majority of Charter documents were addressed to the authorities rather than to society. Indeed, the founding declaration was sent directly to the authorities and the population in general largely only learnt of it as a result of the anti-Charter campaign conducted by the authorities. In his essay 'The character of East European dissent during the late 1970s'[25] , Jan B de Weydenthal argues that dissidents were aware of the need for social support and that they sought to stimulate popular pressure on the authorities. They were not primarily directed at effecting a dialogue with the party, he argues, but instead attempted to appeal to and guide society itself. Clearly this generalization cannot be supported in the case of the Charter, especially during its early years. Several underlying factors explain why, in contrast for example to KOR in Poland, the Charter addressed itself primarily to the authorities, to the extent of seeking a dialogue, rather than to society.

Firstly, the Charter was founded as a response to the promulgation into Czech law of the International Pacts on Human Rights. Charter's main area of concern, especially in the early years, was the failure of the regime to abide by its own laws. It follows from this logically that the Charter should address itself to the regime, rather than society. The Charter's legalistic, 'non-political' approach means that it was more a pressure group,

lobbying the government over the way it governs, than a group aiming to arouse society or identify with any particular social group or problem.

Secondly, the Charter was also a response to the Helsinki Accords, which laid down the principle that every individual has the right and duty to participate in the running of his own country and ensure the application of human rights. This was a responsibility to be taken up by each individual according to his own conscience. Hence the Charter from the beginning was basically about the relationship between an individual and the government - whether an individual had the right to have a say in the running of his own country - rather than about gaining a mass base of support or addressing the problems of any particular social group.

Finally, another important element explaining the Charter's desire to seek a dialogue with the regime is the emphasis on citizenship. The Charter's claims to be non-oppositional and to seek a constructive dialogue with the authorities appear either tactical or politically naive, but they stem from the way the Chartists see themselves, as active citizens endeavouring to contribute to and improve the running of their country. To some extent the Charter sees itself more as a potential partner to the government than a political opponent. Charter documents frequently express the desire to 'co-operate' with those in power and 'help' to solve the problems of society. The Charter's letter to Husak, for example, talks of the Charter offering its "active and positive co-operation in overcoming various negative phenomena in our society".[26] Charter document 33/82 calls for a "spirit of honest partnership in our society" and asks the president to accept the letter as expressing the "well intentioned concern of citizens of this country".[27] Ladislav Hejdanek sums up the Charter approach:

> "Having signed the founding declaration, Charter 77 signatories have accepted their civic responsibility, or more precisely, co-responsibility, for the rectification of this state of affairs, and have offered their help and co-operation to politicians and government officials."[28]

Battek emphasizes the positive approach which is so important to the nature of the Charter:

> "What must become fundamental to us is *initiation*, not *dissidence*. That is, we should consider ourselves first and foremost as *initiators* of future possibilities and not as subversives, dropouts or rebels who are anti-a, anti-b, or anti-c."[29]

This emphasis on co-operation, help and positive criticism is also evident in the Charter's later calls for 'national reconciliation' to overcome society's problems - every element in society should work together to contribute to solutions.

Does the desire to co-operate with the regime and conduct a constructive dialogue with it, demonstrate a belief on the part of the Charter that a reformist element exists within the party that would be able to respond positively to the Charter? I would argue that to some extent the offer of a dialogue was made without any realistic calculations about the likelihood of the regime, or elements within it, being willing to respond to it. The offer of a dialogue expresses something about how the Charter sees itself, rather than how it sees the regime. The offer thus has an important symbolic element.

The Charter itself does not speculate on the existence of reform elements within the party, though Charter documents clearly express the hope, if not the expectation, that the regime will respond positively to their appeals. Charter 77's letter to Husak calls for "...straightforward discussion, in all appropriate government agencies, of the individual and collective initiatives of all citizens."[30]

Individuals within the Charter hold varying opinions on the viability of appealing to reform elements within the party, but the document 'Co s Chartou', for example, argues that the Charter should not assume the existence of "monolithic unity" within the party, and should seek to accelerate a process of differentiation within the ruling elite.

## Political, social and economic concerns

Although the Charter, in its founding declaration, addressed itself primarily to the implementation of the international pacts on human rights, it consistently and increasingly addressed wider social problems and made very critical assessments of the functioning of the regime and of its responses to the crises which affect society.

Soon after the Charter was founded, internal debates developed about the direction it should take and it was decided that the Charter should begin to address itself more to the broader social issues which affected society. This was in part a consequence of the lack of response to the Charter's offer of a dialogue on the part of the regime, and the perceived failure of this policy by some. In his essay 'Paralelni Polis' Benda argued:

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"If we want to remove the general feeling of futility and precariousness and not contribute to it, I think we must review the hitherto dubious record of attempts at a dialogue with the political authorities and we must learn from it."[31]

Benda suggested, as did others, that the Charter should broaden its scope and deal, in its documents, with universally important problems.

However, the increased scope of Charter activities did not represent a break from the founding declaration. The seeds for both the extensive political critique of the regime and the concern with social and economic problems can be found within the text of the founding declaration.

Whilst the Charter declares that it does not aim to change the social system (document 9/85) and Hajek and Patocka declare the state and social system to be the self-evident basis and framework for Charter efforts, it is clear from the Charter's extensive critique of fundamental aspects of the political system, that whilst the Charter may be 'self limiting' in its approach to the overthrow of the system, it is ready to criticize major aspects of the functioning of the political regime.

In the founding declaration the Charter is critical of the system of political directives from above, a theme repeated in other documents. "One instrument for the curtailment...of many civic rights is the system by which all national institutions and organizations are in effect subject to political directives from the apparatus of the ruling party."[32]

The Charter is also critical of the "overgrown bureaucracy" with its centralized executive power to control and punish (document 20/82). The Charter also attacks the policies of 'cadre ceilings' and the 'nomenclatura', vital instruments for the regime's control over society (document 11/85), and frequently advocates that recruitment and promotion should be according to ability, not party membership (document 9/85). In document 16/86 the Charter proposes voting reforms, giving citizens a genuine choice among candidates and the opportunity to add their own candidates to the list in the pre-election period. The Chartists cite here the example of Hungarian electoral law. The Charter is also critical of the privileges of the leading officials, by which these officials have alienated themselves from ordinary citizens (document 2/87). Charter document 20/85 states "in the absence of any public control, a new aristocracy is being created", and Charter document 9/85 proposes, amongst other measures designed to promote a better

social climate, the "institution of public control of the operation of government, particularly by allowing public opinion to operate once more".

The Charter's critique of social and economic problems is thorough and sweeping. Charter 77 document 21 states:

> "We reserve the right to deal with the general, philosophical and political aspects of concrete social phenomena...There exists a whole field of indisputable phenomena and needs where positive efforts can be made to improve the quality and level of social life as a whole."[33]

The document then presents a lengthy list of all the areas of social life which are "crying out for attention". This list gives a good indication of the breadth of issues tackled in later Charter documents. It includes "trade union rights, questions of emigration and political exile, economic problems, foreign trade, planning, programming, architecture, health services, safety at atomic power plants and general environmental problems", and educational questions such as "school reform, science and research, the conditions of free and effective research and of scientific and technical development in general". It also particularly emphasizes problems of "Czech-Slovak relationships and of national minorities and of Gypsies (Roms)", and concludes with the problems of women and young people.

In the field of social problems, the Charter does not see its role as simply presenting criticisms of existing practices. Instead it aims to promote discussion and seek solutions. In document 21 the Charter initiates this process by asking for contributions from anyone interested in taking on the task of investigating some specific social problem. Many Charter documents on social issues consist of an introduction by the Charter, followed by a detailed document prepared by a group of experts, either from within the Charter or outside it. In the field of social problems the Charter addresses itself to the public, to society, to a greater degree than it does in other areas, in particular human rights. It seeks to draw the public into discussions, and also to disseminate information so as to better inform the public about the problems which concern "all of our lives and our future and that of our children" (document 42/83). Charter document 42/83 (on drug abuse) makes these aims clear:

> "At its inception, Charter 77 made it one of its goals to draw attention also to those negative aspects of our society which are ignored, which are not discussed publicly or written about, or those about which our citizens are not sufficiently informed. The aim of Charter 77 in these cases is to put the public on its guard or

to gain the support of its fellow citizens in finding an enterprising and positive solution to these very real problems."

The next section will look at the social and economic problems addressed most prominently by Charter documents, and the criticisms and proposed solutions contained in these documents.

*The economy.* As a response to what the Charter saw as the growing economic malaise in the country, it produced a number of documents dealing with the economic situation, and presented several detailed analyses of Czechoslovak economic problems by Dr Kadlec.

In its introduction to document 4/83 the Charter likens the current "ominous trends" in the national economy to the reversal of 1963. It cites as the major problems the negative growth rate, technological backwardness and heavy debt. The accompanying document also cites the low rate of production of consumer goods, the domination of heavy industry at the expense of consumer goods, low productivity in agriculture and balance of trade problems. Charter document 6/83 presents an analysis by Prof Dr Vladimir Kadlec, which is based only on official statistics. Prof Kadlec points to the signs of long term stagnation, the failure of all five year plans and serious problems in supply and demand resulting in shortages, especially of spare parts for machinery. Prof Kadlec concludes by describing the basic tone of the Czechoslovak economy in 1983 as "dark grey", and he does not see the cloud lifting without a change in the existing economic mechanisms and in the social and psychological climate. In another essay, Prof Kadlec concludes that the Czechoslovak economy is characterized by an attempt to postpone tackling the fundamental problems of the present by redirecting resources away from long term objectives towards short term solutions.[34] Charter document 28/85 goes beyond cataloging the failures of the economy, and makes proposals as to what direction necessary reforms should take. The authors of the document argue that the existing centralized quota system run by directives does not work. It gives too much priority to heavy industry, places restrictions on market forces and means that there is no responsibility for what is produced - "the directive is more important than the result". As a way out of these problems the authors of the document cite the economic reforms of the second half of the 1960s, and also the "thoroughgoing transformations" which have been taking place in neighbouring countries, often based on the principles of the Czechoslovak reform proposals of 1968.

"The direction that the economic reforms ought to take is already generally acknowledged. There is the quite extensive experience of Hungary, above all. Even within the framework of official Czechoslovak theory and practice, a number of proposals have been put forward. However, ideological and political barriers stand in the way of their publication, particularly the 'bogeyman' of the 1968 reform."

The document then outlines the main features of the proposed reform. Firstly, the transition from centralized quota-based management methods to the direct employment of economic instruments, including restrictions on the right of the central authorities to dictate to enterprise managements, and also a stress on efficiency as a prerequisite for a firm's continued existence. Secondly, economic reform should "create the conditions for the workforce to participate autonomously in the running of enterprises". This would involve the establishment of enterprise-level workers councils which would be entrusted with the exercise of ownership rights. The document concludes that the healthy development of the economy depends on the free circulation of information and advocates an open debate on the question of economic reform, which the economists amongst the Charter 77 signatories declare their readiness to participate in.

In this document the authors are getting very close to drawing up their own programme for reform, something that the founding declaration declared was not within the Charter's jurisdiction. Uhl raises this question in his interview with Vohryzek. He argues that the concept that the Charter "...should or could give practical help to those who are critical of current practices in the economy...that it should and could directly demand changes in the economic system by submitting concrete proposals..." is becoming increasingly apparent in Charter publications, and he asks whether such activity is proper for the Charter. Vohryzek agrees that submitting concrete proposals for changes in the national economy is not the Charter's work, but argues that the Charter should continue in the tradition represented by the documents on economic problems, ecology etc., presumably including the '85 document.[35] Document 28/85 is quite specific in outlining the kind of economic reforms it would like to see. They would be based on the same principles as those employed in 1968 and would include the abolition of centralized quota-based management and the introduction of workers councils. It also points out that economic reform depends on the removal of ideological and political barriers.

*The environment* The Charter published many documents concerning the destruction of the environment in Czechoslovakia, a subject which aroused considerable concern within Charter circles, as is demonstrated by the fact that the first Charter 77 forum, which was held in Prague on the 10th of June 1987, chose the ecological question as the theme of its discussion.

Charter document 26/83 addresses the severe environmental problems of North Bohemia. The situation in Bohemia is described as an ecological catastrophe. Extensive mineral exploitation threatens the health of the population. The air is unbreathable, and the occurrence of cancer and risks to pregnant women are reported to be very high. The document concludes:

> "Charter 77 strives for a dialogue. We are aware that the submitted document may appear gloomy. We do not seek criticism at all costs. We are convinced that only in an open, truthful and honest discussion throughout society...can we contribute towards the creation of a healthier atmosphere in the CSSR, and in this case in North Bohemia."

Charter 77 document 36/83 also addresses the ecological situation in Czechoslovakia. It focuses on four main problem areas: the forests in Czechoslovakia are endangered and in Bohemia and Moravia face destruction; there is a problem of water pollution, including supplies to the cities; the overuse of chemical fertilizers in agriculture is resulting in toxic materials entering the food chains; the health of the people is deteriorating in the affected areas. The document points to what it sees as the three main factors contributing to this situation. Firstly, the deterioration of the environment is directly linked to plans for the development of the economy. A change from extensive to intensive economic methods is required. Secondly, the situation is allowed to continue in part due to the population's lack of information on the subject. People are not made aware of the risks they are exposed to, and so there is not enough public pressure for improvements. Finally, environmental protection is under funded. The document points out that expenditure in this field is much lower than in other industrial countries, for example the Soviet Union. The authors conclude: "Only a fraction of the arms expenditure used to maintain the balance of fear would often suffice to prevent ecological catastrophes."

The Charter addresses documents to a wide variety of questions which have an impact on the environment. For example Charter document 13/85 reviews the impact of the

construction of a new Brno motor racing circuit. Document 22/85 publishes a document produced by the 'Danube Circle' Hungarian ecological group about the threats posed by the construction of a new Hydro-Electric project.

*Education and scientific research* In several documents the Charter is critical of the overall tone and aims of the education of children and young people in Czechoslovakia. Charter document 20/82 argues that children should be educated for freedom and tolerance, not as the next generation of soldiers. Charter document 7/86 attacks the party communique that declares that young people should be educated "in the spirit of unlimited devotion to their party and country": "...unbounded devotion was the condition of Man Friday, and not that of a citizen towards something as changeable and fraught with human error as a political party of whatever kind."

Charter 77 document 7/84 is critical of the new law on education, specifically the compulsory specialization at age fourteen, when children are divided between three unequal types of school, and the reduction in humanities teaching, which is being replaced by practical agricultural or industrial courses. The authors conclude that the standard of national education is being subjugated to economic imperatives. Charter document 26/82 addresses the problems of scientific research in Czechoslovakia. It argues that the function of scientific research in any society should be the solution of social and economic problems and the provision of all the spiritual and material needs of society. Scientific research in Czechoslovakia is fulfilling this role inadequately. The Charter introduction to the document cites the basic problems hampering research: interference by bureaucracy and red tape, the reduction of scientists to the status of executors of narrow ideological interests, the short sighted preference for applied science over theoretical research, and the lack of freedom from political considerations, accompanied by the constant threat of the loss of one's job. The accompanying document, prepared by a group of scientists, also mentions problems caused by the inflexible imposition of five year plans, problems of funding and the provision of equipment, lack of international contacts, the promotion of people according to their political views rather than their ability, and the overgrown bureaucracy. The document concludes that science is seen as a mere fulfillment of momentary ideological objectives. True scientists are not allowed to develop and research is ruled by opportunistic

and unqualified individuals. Charter 77 document 32/86 on the subject of universities draws many of the same conclusions. Universities have lost their traditional role as independent and self-governing centres of education and thought, and have become totally dependent on the state apparatus. No academic freedoms remain: "The result is that the most important element in decision making regarding the contents of higher education is no longer the fundamental needs of society...but state interests."

*Health care and drug abuse* The Charter produced detailed documents on both these subjects. Charter document 14/84 entitled 'Health is an integral part of the right to life', for example, was prepared at the suggestion of Charter 77 by a group of working doctors and health workers. It documents the major problems in the Czechoslovak health service, which is the subject of "pervasive discontent" on the part of the population. It lists the intrusion of ideology and five year plans, poor geriatric care, long queues at doctors offices, poorly paid doctors, delays for operations, poor standards of hygiene, and a shortage of medical supplies. The document also points to the special health services provided for the party elite. This document, and its Charter 77 introduction, also assess the background to these problems and draw conclusions fundamentally critical of the political system which lies behind them. The document argues that whilst the health service aspires to realize the communist principle of everyone receiving the care that they need, the problem is that it is solely the state which decides what these needs are. "In an era of rapid technological development the bureaucratic system becomes an obstacle to effective health care and defeats its own purported purpose of representing the interests of society."

The document argues that the problems of the health service have the same roots as the overall crisis of Czechoslovak society and concludes that only by changing a system where the individual is viewed as having no importance, as merely constituting an irritating anomaly within the functioning of society, will it be possible for the health of individuals to be looked after properly. The Charter introduction to this document thus concludes: "The document perceives the causes of the adverse situation...in the overall crisis of a society governed by totalitarian methods."

Charter document 42/83 addresses the problem of drug abuse in Czechoslovakia, a problem which it argues is underestimated and concealed by officialdom. The problem

includes alcohol and drug abuse, which largely consists of the misuse of medicines which are available cheaply on the open market. The document underlines the importance of society being informed about these problems. It concludes that young people are most likely to succumb to drug addiction because of the pressures of ideological conformity and double-think: "...young people who have at their disposal and for the purposes of their creativity and experimentation neither pen, nor platform, nor exhibition halls, nor travel - that is, the world - but only themselves."

Other important Charter documents have been produced, for example, on the problems of youth and popular music (31/83, 7/86), the right to history (11/84), discrimination in employment (11/85), housing for young people (8/87) and the problem of national service (27/87).

Throughout these documents assessing Czechoslovak economic and social problems, four basic underlying themes are evident.

Firstly, the documents are frequently critical of the system of centralized control and planning. In the economic field much blame is placed on the system of centralized quota-based management. Similarly, the fields of education, research and the health service are hampered by excessive bureaucracy, five year plans and directives sent from above with no consideration for the real needs of people working in the field.

Secondly, the documents frequently attack the politicization of the process of recruitment and promotion through the imposition of 'cadre ceilings', resulting in the promotion, in general, of the most ideologically correct, least skilled and most unprincipled and corrupt individuals.

Thirdly, many of the documents see the root cause of most of the problems that make up the economic and social crisis in the indifference, on the part of the power structure, to the needs of individuals. The document on health care (14/84), for example, describes a situation where the individual is conceived as being merely an "irritating anomaly" within the functioning of society. This is a central theme for Chartists. Charter document 2/85 'Eight years of Charter 77' asserts that the Charter is concerned with something more far

reaching than a change of government or system: "...it is more the rehabilitation of the individual as the real subject of history."

Hajek also emphasizes this aspect of Charter 77:

> "This is why the Charter came into existence; to remind everyone that the state system, economic means and technology are nothing but tools designed to serve man, not to enslave him and manipulate him."[36]

It is the inversion of this relationship between the individual and the power structure which, the documents argue, leads to social and economic crisis.

Finally, these documents frequently reiterate the need for dialogue and for the free flow of information. No solutions can be reached unless people are well informed about the problems. Charter document 6/84, on the economic outlook, states: "We share the long-standing human belief that there is no remedy without true understanding. For that, however, we need information, refined through an exchange of opinion."

The role of the Charter 77 documents on social and economic problems is to initiate this exchange of opinion, and inform people about the nature of the problem. The authors frequently stress that they do not wish to simply present negative criticism of existing problems, but aim to promote dialogue and seek positive solutions.


These Charter documents on social and economic problems also have in common a noticeable lack of reference to the International Pacts on Human Rights. Most of the Charter's early documents, on subjects such as freedom of speech, police harassment, political trials etc.,contained frequent references to the rights enshrined in the international covenants, on which the Charter's demands were based. In its assessment of economic and social problems the Charter has clearly gone beyond the limited confines of the human rights pacts, and its criticisms are not aimed at violations of the international pacts or the Czechoslovak law, but at the actual functioning of the political system and its impact on specific areas of social and economic life. (Whilst it is true that some of the above mentioned documents are intended as contributions to discussion , published by Charter 77 but not necessarily expressing a Chartist viewpoint, the Charter's own introduction to the documents frequently echoes the criticisms expressed by the specialists who wrote them.)

How, then, does the Charter relate its work in assessing social and economic problems to the International Pacts on Human Rights and the founding declaration? Hejdanek, for example, refers to the question of the subject matter of Charter documents and asks whether it is permissible for them to deal with subjects without relating them to the founding Charter 77 declaration or the Charter's principle direction.[37] The founding declaration, however, does contain a passage which would seem to give great scope to Charter documents. It states the Charter's intention of "...submitting other proposals of a more general character aimed at reinforcing such rights and their guarantees." Chartists argue that the problems of human rights and of society and the economy are inter-related, and one area cannot be improved if the other is neglected. Charter 77 document 42/83 on drug abuse thus states that whilst the Charter's main goal is the monitoring of human rights and legality:

> "We are, however, aware that there are far reaching links between freedom and the dignity of man, between justice and a democratic society...harmonious existence of humankind in a world entrusted to it, or ecological disaster; abundance, or hardship borne by all or some - these are the paradoxes which must be acknowledged, otherwise the concept of rights and freedoms becomes at best abstract, or even contradictory."

Similarly, Chartists argue that improvements in the social or economic sphere would be meaningless unless accompanied by an improvement in the sphere of human rights. Charter document 14/87 states:

> "A reconstruction concerned solely with the economic mechanism will be but another bureaucratic act if it does not progress along the lines of a relaxation in the social climate and a wide application of civil and human rights."

Taken together, the Charter documents on social and economic problems present a sweeping indictment of the state of the republic. It is interesting to compare the Charter documents with a report published in Poland in 1979 on the same theme, the state of the republic. The Polish report, which was drawn up by the 'Experience and future discussion group' (DIP) in Warsaw, was originally initiated under the auspices of the party, but was then forced into a position of 'loyal' opposition. Some aspects of the DIP report, however, are very similar to points raised in Charter documents on the social and economic crisis in Czechoslovakia. The report addresses problems in the areas of legality, morality, culture, education and health, and emphasizes the need for genuine information about these problems. The section on health is very similar to Charter 77 documents on the same

subject - it mentions under-investment, special treatment for the elite, housing problems, corruption, alcoholism, deterioration of the environment etc. It also reaches some of the same conclusions as those reached by the Charter documents about the root causes of these problems and how to overcome them. The DIP report argues that an authentic social life must be restored if the complex needs of society are to be met. It also argues for the need to overcome delusions that have seized politics and the economy: "One such delusion is powerful and centralized authority, since the excess of matters it has to deal with condemns it to impotence or arbitrariness."

The authors of the report share another characteristic with the Chartists. The report states that all its contributors have in common "...an obstinate desire to reach an agreement and to initiate a dialogue with those in power". It emphasizes that the picture it draws of society is not the result of bitterness, calls for a frank discussion of all the problems, and adds that its attitude is the result of "a feeling of civic responsibility".

In his analysis of the DIP report George Schopflin writes:

> "The reform proposals are noteworthy for their acceptance of the existing political framework in Poland...and for emphasizing a programme of changing what can be changed rather than sudden revolutionary transformations. They are therefore in the 'realistic' rather than the 'romantic' tradition of Polish political thought."[38]

The Charter documents, which clearly have many similarities to the DIP report, can also be considered to be based on a 'realistic' desire for change.

In the several cases where the Charter documents give an indication of the sort of changes they are advocating, the proposals are clearly more realistic than revolutionary. Frequently these documents refer to the moderate level of reforms in neighbouring East European countries, in particular Hungary, as pointing the way for future reform in Czechoslovakia. Charter document 28/85 on the economic situation cites both the economic reforms of 1968 and the "quite extensive experience of Hungary" as showing the direction that economic reforms ought to take. Charter 77 document 16/86 concerning the right to vote proposes that voting reform in Czechoslovakia should be modeled on Hungarian lines. The document advocates that citizens should have a genuine choice among candidates and be able to add their own candidates to the list.

> "To a certain extent such an approach is made possible by the electoral law of our Hungarian neighbours...such a reform does not imply any change of system.

Nonetheless it has the advantage over former practice of helping candidates realize that their election is not a foregone conclusion."

The document, addressed to the Federal Assembly, concludes: "We therefore ask you to consider whether such a reform might not also benefit the Czechoslovak electoral system."

Similarly, Charter document 20/85, marking the 17th anniversary of August 21, 1968, argues that seventeen years of inertia is too long and changes are urgently needed: "That other policies are possible is testified to by attempts at reform in neighbouring states with similar social systems."

## What kind of opposition is Charter 77?

The Charter always resisted any political labels, and indeed it is impossible to associate the Charter with any one political concept except the very general term 'democracy'. An advocacy of democracy, of a democratic society, increased in Charter documents in later years. It may have been implicit in the founding declaration, but it was not stated explicitly in early Charter documents. In an interesting interview between Petr Uhl and Joseph Vohryzek, Uhl raises this question of the relationship between the Charter and the concept of democracy. Vohryzek argues that the call for democracy has always been an important element within the Charter:

> "Charter 77 has been calling for legality and human rights from the very beginning. We also demand democratization and democracy. In this, there is a continuous logical development from the beginning."[39]

Uhl, on the other hand, argues, I believe correctly, that the Charter has not been speaking of democracy and democratization since the very beginning, but rather that the emphasis on democracy is a recent and growing trend.

> "One can see a certain democratic orientation in the founding declaration; there is criticism of undemocratic conditions but there is nothing specific about democracy or the political system as we would conceive it."[40]

The idea of a democratic society is mentioned explicitly, however, in a 1985 document (20/85) the 'Declaration on the 17th anniversary of 21st August, 1968'. The document states:

> "There is only one possible solution to our internal crisis, and that is by renewing and continuously strengthening the democracy which is deeply rooted in the political culture of our nations as part and parcel of their very identity."

Charter document 20/86 also cites democracy as one of the goals of the Charter, describing the Charter as an ongoing initiative of citizens who have decided to take on their share of responsibility for more democratic and just social conditions. Charter 77's 'Appeal to fellow citizens' (2/87) gives this commitment to greater democracy much emphasis, and it is perhaps the central theme of the document. Uhl argues that in this sense the 'Appeal' document represents "a new quality, a certain deepening...". The document argues that the need for change in Czechoslovakia is becoming ever more pronounced, and that, in the light of recent experiences, even the direction of this change is obvious:

> "...it is towards greater democracy. There are of course great differences about the interpretation of this term - or more precisely about the direction to take, and how quickly and how far to proceed. Whatever the differences of opinion, one thing is clear; a step towards greater democracy would not be a step into the unknown for our nations. There are precedents on which we could base this: we have our own democratic traditions."

The document then cites three such precedents - the First Republic, founded on the idea of "democratic self-government and social justice", the revival of these ideas "in a different way" in the period after the Second World War, and the emergence of "important democratizing impulses and projects" in the 1960s. The document argues that the way forward is to learn from the past, but most importantly to seek to carry on the nations' democratic traditions in innovative and original ways, without prejudice or the burden of ideological considerations, taking into account the current situation and past experiences. The document then appeals to fellow citizens to take action, arguing that: "Democracy is not something that someone can give to another; it is everyone's duty...there has never been and never will be a democracy without citizens." In conclusion, the document calls for a "national reconciliation on a democratic basis".

Several factors become apparent in the Charter's increasing emphasis on democracy. Firstly, the Charter never narrows the term sufficiently for it to have any specific political implications. Its positive terms of reference embrace everything from a parliamentary type system of democracy to the 'democratization' of Dubcek's 'socialism with a human face'. From what we know of the views of individual Chartists, it would not be possible to reach agreement among Chartists as to what the desired democracy should mean in practice. For the Charter, therefore, the call for democracy is an indication of the direction in which to

move, rather than a clear statement of the desired destination. It is an appeal to certain political values, rather than to a specific political agenda.

Another theme apparent in the Charter's advocacy of democracy is the emphasis on Czech and Slovak political traditions. The Charter clearly expresses the view that a desire for democracy is a basic element of Czech and Slovak political culture, and a move towards greater democracy would thus be a natural expression of the nations' political desires and a revival of national traditions.

How does this emphasis on democracy relate to the founding declaration and its emphasis on human rights? Previously the Charter had called for the full implementation of human rights without explicitly acknowledging that this would require political changes. In its call for democratic change the Charter acknowledges that political changes, in the direction of increased democracy, will be necessary if human rights are to be fully implemented. Petr Uhl argues that the reason that democracy was not initially a central idea of the Charter was in part due to the limited concept of human rights:

> "The bourgeois concept of human rights on which the two covenants are based, omits any mention of a political system...of course, taken to its logical conclusion, any society which realized all the rights from both covenants...would have become democratic automatically."[40]

The reasons behind this apparently increased politicization on the part of the Charter will be discussed in the concluding section reviewing the influence of developments in the USSR on the tone of Charter 77 documents.

In assessing what kind of opposition the Charter is it is useful to examine what goals and ambitions the Chartists themselves set for Charter 77, and what role they see the Charter playing. Three central factors are emphasized in Charter discussions. Firstly, the goal of the Charter is not to recruit signatories, it does not aim to become a mass organization. Several Chartists thus reject the term movement and prefer the term 'civil initiative', emphasizing that signing the Charter is an individual act of citizenship and responsibility, and not part of a signature drive.[41] Hejdanek thus argues that the actual number of signatories is not the decisive factor in evaluating the Charter. He argues that it would be pointless to direct Charter activities towards collecting new signatories "...in

much the same way as it would be pointless to collect signatories on a declaration that two plus two make four."[42]

Secondly, Chartists see a specific role for the Charter as an element within the diverse and expanding field of independent activity. The Charter does not have to be the centre or base of all activity, rather it is seen as an 'ice breaker', a 'catalyst', opening up and enlarging the space in which independent activity can take place and encouraging other initiatives. Hejdanek sees as the most significant aspect of Charter activity: "...its function as a social 'enzyme' or 'catalyst' which never enters the action permanently but gives it perspective, suspense and meaning."[43]

Similarly Havel describes the Charter as: "...a kind of precedent, an example, a challenge, and an experience."[44]

Thirdly, the goals of the Charter can never be fully achieved, and consequently the Charter will always have a role to play - in this sense it has a limitless role. Dienstbier argues that even if there was a significant opening up of society and citizens could participate in a diversity of activity, not necessarily Charter activity, the Charter would not lose its reason for existence.

> "It would be essential to monitor respect for and extension of human rights even if the Charter had an office in Wenceslas Square and 'Information about the Charter' was published by a public printing house."[45]

Hejdanek also underlines this aspect of the Charter. Although the Charter is bound by limiting factors in practical matters related to politics and socio-political authorities, he argues, it has no limits in the 'infinite aims':

> "Charter is an association which has infinite aims, that is aims which can never be completely reached or declared as fulfilled, realized or identified with a political situation...in this dimension, Charter has no limits."[46]

In his 1968 work 'Background to the study of opposition in communist Eastern Europe'[47] H. Gordon Skilling identified four types of opposition characteristic of the communist systems of Eastern Europe at that time. These were integral opposition - seeking the revolutionary overthrow of the system; factional opposition - opposition by rival groups within the party; fundamental opposition - opposition to a whole series of the key policies of the regime, usually intra-party or by some occupational group; and specific opposition - opposition to specific policies, without a rejection of the regime's basic

policies. Clearly in the changed circumstances of the 70s and 80s new definitions are required. If we accept that the Charter is an opposition - understood as Havel's definition of an opposition as "every attempt to live in the truth" which inevitably represents a "serious challenge to the integrity of post-totalitarian power"[48] - it clearly does not fit into any of Skilling's previously defined categories of opposition. The Charter could perhaps be described as an 'open-ended civic opposition'. It has no short term satisfiable goals and advocates no alternative type of system, but constantly seeks improvements and also acts as a stimulus and catalyst for other independent activity. It is not an opposition political programme, but may open the way for the development of political programmes. Its activity is thus 'open-ended'. The Charter is also based firmly on the idea of citizenship and is an expression of each citizen's acceptance of individual co-responsibility for the state of his country, hence it is a 'civic' rather than a group or special interest opposition, always seeking a positive role in finding solutions for the problems which face society.


**Charter 77 after ten years**

Throughout its first ten years the Charter was constantly evolving and developing. Whilst retaining its original basis of concern for human rights and legality, the Charter also developed other concerns and interests. It is possible to detect changes in the tone and emphasis of Charter documents throughout the ten year period. Three different phases can be roughly outlined. The initial phase with its emphasis on human rights and legality was marked by documents written with constant reference to the international pacts. The second phase, when, after internal discussion, the Charter expanded the range of subject matter of its documents to include economic and social problems, was also accompanied by an increased emphasis on parallel structures, and growing interest in dialogue about peace. The third phase which I would argue is evident in Charter documents comes as a reaction to Gorbachev's proposals for reform in the Soviet Union. These phases are by no means cut and dry, and what really takes place is a development or deepening of Charter activity, rather than a sudden change of direction or break with the past.

The third phase of this development is an interesting one. The reform proposals in the Soviet Union met a response in Charter 77 documents, which involved not just a change in

tone or emphasis, but to some extent a new approach, particularly in the case of the Charter document 'Appeal to fellow citizens'. The Charter's response to developments in the Soviet Union was one of interest and cautious optimism. Charter document 20/85 the 'Declaration on the 17th anniversary of 21st August 1968', draws attention to the new Soviet developments, which it argues are being avidly watched by the Czechoslovak population. It compares the speeches of Gorbachev, which were censored in the Czech press, with what it calls the "deathlike torpor" in Czechoslovakia. The document concludes:

> "Without getting carried away with fleeting illusions, we would like to express the hope that the present social developments in the Soviet Union may assume wider significance and be shared by the democratic public."

Charter document 2/87, the 'Appeal to fellow citizens', strikes an even more optimistic note. The document argues that society in Czechoslovakia is changing, there are changes at the international level, and slowly even the political climate is changing in Czechoslovakia. The document cites an apparent change even in the statements of the representatives of state power:

> "...at least some of their statements reflect an awareness that changes are necessary. The fruitless immobility of the present social and economic system...the insufficient concern for the needs and requirements of citizens - all this is becoming more pronounced...and awakening in them a desire for change."

The whole tone and emphasis of the Appeal document gives evidence of the fact that the authors feel that at last some movement is perceptible, and that opportunities for change are opening up. The document states: "Against this background the values that Charter 77 propagates and defends acquire new meaning. Current events make these ideas more topical, and the struggle for them no longer seems so unrealistic." The document writes of the "...historic possibilities of this moment".

An analysis of the Appeal document and other documents issued on this theme reveals several important developments that emerged apparently as a response to this perception that the situation presented "historic possibilities" for Czechoslovakia.

Firstly, the Appeal document is addressed for the first time directly to fellow citizens, and not to the political authorities. It is an appeal for direct action on the part of the population, to make use of the historic possibilities "for the benefit of our nations". The document contains an appeal for people to have the courage to become citizens in the fullest

and strongest sense of the word. They should speak the truth about the causes of the everyday mess in which society finds itself. Echoing the documents on economic and social themes, the Appeal document draws attention to the incredible inefficiency of centrally planned production, the incomprehensible but generally tolerated insolvency of the largest industrial enterprises, waste of energy and the "horrible monster of bureaucracy". Citizens should take action to combat these ills. Trade Unions, for example, should demand "real and independent participation in economic decision-making and the formulation of social policy", and should make use of the right to strike. Informal political forums should be created: "In such forums no political taboos need exist, and nothing need stand in the way of a criticism of such phenomena as the unlimited power of party secretariats." Teachers should teach truthfully, believers should not hide their beliefs, artists and scientists should overcome their fear and create freely.

This call for citizens to "wake up to their freedom" clearly shows a change of direction for Charter documents, appealing for society, rather than the authorities, to take action. It is also strongly worded, evidence of a belief that the regime will not feel able to take action against the authors:

> "The appeal suggests a measure of trust that the influence of 'Gorbachevism' will not allow the diehards to clamp down too hard on those who suggest the creation of independent political forums, speak of strikes and denounce leadership privileges."[49]

However, it is important to note that although appealing to citizens rather than the authorities marks a change of direction for Charter documents, it does not mark a change in basic philosophy. Although the Appeal document expresses hope that the time has come for change, it does not argue that Czechs should expect this change to be handed to them from above, or be content to wait and see what direction it will take. Rather, the document emphasizes that the fate of the country is in the hands of its citizens, not just its rulers, or the rulers of its larger neighbour. The idea that no real improvements can be achieved 'from above' but depend instead on the actions of citizens has been a constant Charter theme. This document for the first time takes this idea to its logical conclusions, encouraging citizens to act in defence of their rights. The document states:

> "We do not know of course when and in what way the changes in this country will occur, but we do know that they have to happen sooner or later. And we

also know that the fate of this country does not depend on political power alone...it relies much more on the action we all take, the action society takes...when and how much political power will move, and the direction it takes, will depend upon all of us...let us stop waiting for others to do something, let us do something ourselves."

The document argues that the value of such agreements as the International Human Rights Covenants and the Helsinki Final Act, depends not on governments, but on citizens and how seriously they take the implementation of these rights. "We believe that the time is ripe for us in Czechoslovakia to remind ourselves of this truth again and to do so urgently, and to try to act in its spirit with renewed energy."

The Appeal document does not display any overly optimistic illusions that changes in Moscow will automatically result in changes for the better in Czechoslovakia. Instead it sees the changing situation as presenting an opportunity for Czechs and Slovaks to take the fate of society into their own hands and take action themselves to influence developments.

The second element which emerges in the Appeal document is the emphasis on the need for "national reconciliation on a democratic basis". This is not the first time that the idea of national reconciliation has been raised in a Charter document. The Charter has frequently stressed that all sections of society should work together to seek solutions, that it does not seek to divide people, but to unite them in discussion. This concept is implicit in the Charter's offer of a dialogue to the authorities. Charter document 27/82, for example, appeals for "...a policy of reconciliation aimed at using all the peoples efforts and skills to gradually overcome the social crisis". However in the Appeal document the idea of national reconciliation is given much emphasis and underlined as the only solution to the present crisis: "After all the tragic events and tremors of recent decades we can see the only feasible perspective in a true national reconciliation on a democratic basis."

What does the Charter mean by this term? The Charter 77 document marking the nineteenth anniversary of the Soviet invasion addresses this question. The document states that a national reconciliation on a democratic basis does not mean reconciliation to military intervention, nor to the "dismal state of affairs" in the country, with the mountains of accumulated problems which make any further developments impossible.

"National reconciliation means to us an attempt at a *new beginning*, an attempt which would be acceptable to all people of good will for whom the well being of their country is a matter of great concern."

It appears from both documents that for Chartists 'national reconciliation' means a democratic discussion, in an atmosphere of truth and tolerance, in which all citizens and social forces could participate, with the aim of reaching some level of agreement about the solutions to the pressing problems facing society and the direction changes should take. Implicit in the concept of national reconciliation is a willingness to work with, or at least talk with, the political authorities. Hence the Appeal document states:

> "We are against struggles fuelled with hatred, incitement, new conflicts, and revenge...we know that total agreement by all is impossible...but we do believe that even opponents can respect each other as people and citizens and, in a peaceful discussion unbiased by passions or bitter memories, can seek areas of agreement."

The concept thus recalls the early emphasis on the offer of a dialogue with the political authorities. The other side of the coin of national reconciliation is that all the creative forces in society must be able to participate in this discussion, in particular this includes all those silenced or ignored under the process of 'normalization'. The pre-requisite for a national reconciliation must therefore be the creation of a new social and political climate, where trust, tolerance and co-operation would replace fear, distrust and alienation. This requirement is given much emphasis in Charter documents. Charter document 9/85 argues:

> "The willingness, enterprise and creativity that would benefit all of us, will not come about until people sense that they are trusted...and until they are given scope for initiative. If they are to become fully participating citizens with a sense of responsibility for social conditions, there will have to be a change in the social climate in Czechoslovakia."

The Charter document on the nineteenth anniversary of the Soviet invasion concludes that only with an improvement in the political climate of the country will national reconciliation be possible. "The most fundamental and important change would be a change in the political atmosphere, which is still polluted by mistrust and fear."

The two documents also outline the basic measures which would help to improve the social and political climate in the country, and thus enable all citizens to participate in the necessary national reconciliation. Charter document 9/85 mentions the following: recruitment and promotion according to ability; the re-employment of people who lost their jobs in 1968; an end to censorship and restrictions placed on the influence of Christianity; the institution of "public control of the operation of government" by permitting public opinion to operate; and an amnesty for political prisoners. The document points out that

these proposals are "by no means revolutionary". The Charter document marking the nineteenth anniversary of the Soviet invasion demands an amnesty for political prisoners; free access to all employment according to ability, with an end to the 'nomenclatura' and 'cadre ceilings'; the resolution of the "grave problem of exile", which has resulted in a great loss to the country of talented people, by the possibility of return without humiliating conditions for all exiles; and the withdrawal of foreign troops.

It would be possible to argue that these listed demands constitute a 'realistic' approach on the part of the Charter. Although they would have fundamental implications, they are clearly less sweeping than a demand for the full application of all human rights. Here the Charter is only demanding the specific reforms needed to create an improvement in the social and political climate and to allow all citizens to participate in the proposed national reconciliation.

The nineteenth anniversary document, with its emphasis on national reconciliation, has come under fire from Petr Uhl, who attacks it as marking a 'politicization' of the Charter by reform communists. Uhl argues that the text contains a "reformist orientation", he sees it as an expression of the desire on the part of the reform communists to co-operate with those in power, and return to their old policies and positions of 1968. Uhl writes of:

> "...an ever more pronounced tendency apparent in Charter documents of recent months, a tendency to offer a hand to those in power, or, at least to those who show alleged signs of progressive attitudes, or, if these are not to be found in Czechoslovakia, then at least to 'invoke' them by praising 'glasnost' and 'perestroika'"[50]

Uhl is very critical of the demand for national reconciliation, which he argues is unclear and is used very vaguely. He argues that it is not an appropriate concept for Czechoslovakia, where nearly everyone co-operates with the system. Uhl himself believes that the system can only be conquered from the outside and that any attempt at co-operation with the powers that be is in vain and politically blind. He argues that these concepts represent a "new thinking" emerging in Charter 77, a "new Charter orientation". He concludes that a discussion is needed about the orientation of Charter 77: "It might be an occasion at which we could also speak about the Charter's overall orientation, about its present and future relationship to the state authorities, including the new-think."[51]

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Is the concept of national reconciliation on a democratic basis, as expressed in the Appeal document and the nineteenth anniversary document, then, the result of the reform communists within the Charter trying to impose a reformist orientation on the Charter itself? Is it simply an attempt on the part of the reform communists to get their old positions back, encouraged by the promise of Gorbachev's influence spreading to Czechoslovakia? I would argue that this is not entirely the case. Individual reform communists within the Charter may harbour such hopes, but the line taken in these Charter documents, though expressing a new tone and emphasis, is consistent with previous Charter thinking, and in particular it echoes the original offer of a dialogue enshrined in the founding declaration - hardly a reformist document. The central issue here is, as Uhl has pointed out, the relationship of the Charter to the state authorities. Uhl has difficulty accepting both the offer of a dialogue (which he found acceptable only when limited by his own strict interpretation) and the proposal for national reconciliation on a democratic basis because, as he states, he believes the system can only be conquered from outside and that co-operation with the regime is politically blind. However I would argue that most Chartists, and most Charter documents, express a different view on the relationship between the Charter and the authorities, or between society and the authorities. The Charter frequently expresses the belief that nothing can be achieved without society taking the lead, that is, any lasting improvements will have to be initiated 'from below'. But at the same time both the offer of a dialogue and the concept of national reconciliation express the belief that society acting alone, ignoring political power, cannot achieve change. At some point social pressure must be able to influence the working of the power structures, and if this is not to involve violent revolution and upheaval, which is rejected by most Chartists, it must involve dialogue and even co-operation.

How, then, does the Charter view the prospects of the Gorbachev era? The Charter expresses hope that the changes in the Soviet Union will prove to be significant, but it does not express the belief that changes will automatically come about in Czechoslovakia also. Instead the Charter appears to place its hope in the fact that changes in Moscow and the changing international climate will present Czechs and Slovaks with a "historic opportunity" to take charge of their own fate through a widespread civic activization.

Several Charter documents also hint that coming changes will require a change of leadership in Czechoslovakia. For example document 21/87 on the occasion of Gorbachev's visit states: "Those who are unwilling to grasp the historic opportunity now offered...should stand aside and make way for others."

However, the Charter also warns that limited or partial changes will not be sufficient. No simple leadership reshuffles or superficial policy changes will solve the problems facing Czechoslovakia . The basis for all change must be respect for human rights and an end to discrimination. "Until such fundamental changes are wrought, it will be impossible either to overcome the stagnation of the past twenty years or to restore dynamism to any area of national life."

The Charter does not talk of 'restructuring' or 'openness', but instead calls openly for democracy. Whilst much Charter criticism is aimed at the current economic system, the Charter does not place any hopes in a reconstruction concerned solely with the economic mechanism (document 14/87). The Charter sees society's forthcoming struggle as one for "its emancipation and renewal and for democratic order" (the Appeal document), and the Charter document on the trial of Pavel Wonka warns: "...the whole proclaimed reconstruction of society will remain on paper only, as a matter for bureaucrats, if we do not create a democratic social climate."

As was discussed earlier, this emphasis on democracy was a relatively new phenomenon in Charter documents, a feature of what I have described as the third phase of Charter development. It appears that once the prospects for change seemed to be improving, the Charter felt it necessary to outline the general political direction that this change should take - towards greater democracy - rather than leaving this interpretation up to others.

Vladimir Kusin writes of the Charter Appeal document:

> "...what the Charter maps out in its anniversary statement is not a road to efficient communism but to democracy. Charter 77's concept goes much beyond Gorbachev's. It is about man, his freedom and rights, and truth rather than just about discipline, technology, performance and the survival of a one-party system."[52]

Whilst I would argue that it is difficult to ascribe a 'concept' to charter 77 that would be comparable to Gorbachev's concept for political reform (the Charter has no such clear cut

political concept), it is true that the Charter advocates something much broader than simply

economic efficiency. The Charter sees the solution to economic and social problems in

fundamental questions concerning the relationship between citizens and the government,

and the need for greater democracy and freedom.


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# CONCLUSIONS, SECTION 1

Miroslav Kusy has described the Chartist movement as an "absurd reaction to absurd conditions".[1] Certainly the Charter does contain some elements which, on the face of it, appear absurd. It says it is neither political nor oppositional, when by the very nature of the system it must be both. It says that it simply wants human rights laws to be observed, when by the very nature of the system they cannot be - the system maintains its control through the negation of citizens' rights. It seeks a dialogue with a regime which wants only to silence and crush it.

Charter 77 often portrays itself as simply a demand that the regime abide by its own laws - this is what holds it together and forms its consensus. But meanwhile the wide range of activity within and around the Charter - the promotion of citizens' initiatives and parallel structures, analysis of social problems, the emphasis on morality as the basis for politics, and the goal of the emancipation of the individual from the state etc. make the Charter much more than this. Its makeup and origins, as an 'umbrella' movement which must retain consensus, and as a movement deriving from a single founding document, present it with certain constraints, and thus it tends to portray itself as less than the sum of its parts.

One fundamental point, which Kusy is also making when he describes the Charter as an "absurd reaction to absurd conditions", is that to understand the Charter, you must understand the conditions in which it arose. Havel makes this clear in his essay 'The power of the powerless'. To understand the profound political significance and challenge of the Charter's call for truth, human rights, citizens initiatives and individual responsibility requires an understanding of the nature of the totalitarian system where political power is shored up by facades and ritual, by the fear, apathy and manipulation of the individual citizen, and by the total control of the individual by the state. In other words the significance of 'living within the truth' derives from the importance to the system of the universality of 'living within the lie'.

There are several main ideas behind the Charter 77 movement, all of which derive in part from the conditions in which it originated, and which go some way to explaining its apparently 'absurd' elements.

Firstly, the central and unifying idea behind the Charter movement is that politics must be governed by moral values - 'the supreme moral foundation of all things political'. This insistence on the absolute primacy of moral values represents a new concept of politics, a new political ideology, for the Czechoslovak opposition. (It is shared to some degree by other East European opposition movements, for example see the 'moralization of politics' in Poland in the 1970s[2]). It leads to an emphasis on moral, rather than narrowly political change. It also entails a rejection of decisions made on the grounds of purely practical or utilitarian political considerations.

Secondly, the political approach of the Charter is non-traditional. The Charter is not concerned solely with transforming the system, but with transforming the relations between the system and the individual. It aims at the self-emancipation of the individual. This self-emancipation is to be achieved through the assumption of individual responsibility for social and political conditions. The individual citizen refuses to be excluded and manipulated by the system. This is the fundamental meaning of the offer of a dialogue - through an insistence on his co-responsibility, the individual achieves dignity and freedom.

Thirdly, the Charter seeks to create an area for independent citizens initiatives, to create a sphere of autonomous social activity which will form the basis for the recreation of a civil society in Czechoslovakia. This will involve a 'roll back' of the influence and control of the state over every aspect of life. Parallelism is the first step in this direction. In the long term, as Charter documents show, the aim is the liberation of all aspects of the life of society - culture, education, religion, economic decision making and even the legal system - from the direct control by and service to the needs of the state.

The Charter, then, seeks to transform the relationship between the state and both the individual citizen and society as a whole. Ultimately, this is the meaning of the demand for human rights. If a citizen is granted his basic human rights he ceases to be the subject of total manipulation by the state.

This simple demand is clearly a fundamental challenge to the totalitarian regime. The Charter does not formulate 'political' programmatic alternatives, but demands the application of an alternative set of principles and values, which would in effect undermine the regime at its very foundations. The full application of charter demands would require the totalitarian system to be replaced by a democratic one, but this is largely implicitly rather than explicitly stated in Charter documents. Only in the mid 1980s does the Charter begin to call directly for democracy.

The Charter is at the same time both 'reformist' and 'revolutionary' in its demands. Its suggestions for solutions to specific social and economic problems often advocate realistic changes which could be achieved without fundamental change to the system. They echo the reformist programme of 1968, and often cite Hungarian developments as a model. The implications of its demands for human rights, a moral basis for politics, and the emancipation of the individual, however, can be revolutionary. The Charter is concerned with continually expanding the realm of what is possible, by seeking improvements 'here and now', whilst its long term aim is the fundamental change of the system.

The main achievements of the Charter did not take place in the realm of political power - it had little impact on the regime's human rights practices, and the offer of a dialogue was met only by repression. It did not become a mass movement - it did not intend to do so, and without a dissatisfied and activized social base in a workers or students movement, such a development was probably impossible. The Charter's main achievements took place at the social level, the level of citizens initiatives. The Charter did not just voice demands of the regime, it created an alternative community with an alternative set of values. Within the Charter community tolerance and pluralism thrived, and Chartists became experienced in the art of debate and consensus. One Chartist has described the Charter as "a small laboratory of democratic conflicts of opinion".[3] Solidarity, respect and a certain unity of purpose was achieved amongst people of disparate political views and backgrounds. The community which developed around the Charter, and was inspired and protected by it, played an essential role in maintaining the traditional pluralization of Czechoslovak intellectual, cultural and political life. The Charter succeeded in shattering the monopoly of the regime in many areas of citizens activity, and created an independent, autonomous,

expanding community in which genuine cultural, social and political needs found expression. In this sense the Charter succeeded in its aim of creating conditions in which the individual citizen can live in dignity and freedom, free from total manipulation by the state.

The Charter was unique in its ability to unite people of very disparate political viewpoints and backgrounds. It represented a new kind of opposition, one that sought to promote the fundamental political and moral values shared by all. For many Chartists, this became the most important aspect of Charter activity. Rudolf Slansky writes:

> "Participation [in Charter 77] has meant for me above all an education in tolerance with regard to the opinions and attitudes of others. It has shown me that it is possible to discover what is essential, what unites within diversity and differences."[4]

Chartists express the hope that this new method of political activity will provide a model for the future as well. In assessing the impact of the Charter, Jiri Dienstbier concludes:

> "Personally, I hope that the experience of the interaction of different currents of opinion in Charter 77...will somehow be applied to future political contests. That never again will people be judged according to what kind of current they follow...but according to whether and in what way they want to cooperate with others..."[5]

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2. Jacques Rupnik 'Dissent in Poland, 1968-78: the end of Revisionism and the rebirth of the Civil Society' in *Opposition in Eastern Europe* ed.Rudolf L. Tokes (London, 1979) p. 91.

3. Jiri Dienstbier 'Mladi pratele' *O odpovednosti v politice a za politiku* (Praha, 1986) p. 39.

4. Rudolf Slansky 'The growth of independent activity' *Labour Focus* Vol 9 No 2 July-August 1987 p. 42.

5. Jiri Dienstbier op. cit., p. 39.

SECTION TWO

# POLITICAL GROUPINGS

# THE REFORM COMMUNISTS

The expelled reform communists active within the Czechoslovak opposition were a grouping in the sense that they shared a common background and experience, but since 1970 they had diversified to such an extent that the term 'ex-communist' told you little about a person's current political outlook, embracing as it did a great variety of viewpoints, from those still loyal to the action programme of 1968 to those who had since rejected communism completely.

This chapter will examine the evolution of the 'ex-communists' since 1970, their place in the Charter, the variety of different opinions which 'ex-communists' expressed, and their relationship with non-communists.

## 1970-1977

The series of purges in 1970 which affected nearly the whole of the reformist element of the Communist Party resulted in the creation of what became known as 'the party of the expelled'. The expelled communists immediately began the organization of an active opposition to the suppression of of the reforms of 1968 and the process of 'normalization'. Though non-communists participated, the group of expelled Communist Party members made up by far the largest group within this opposition.

Within the 'party of the expelled' differing views were held on what form this opposition should take. Jiri Pelikan's account of the discussions on how to react to the situation in which the expelled communists now found themselves reveals that some still felt that any progress could only be made from within the existing Communist Party, and rejected the idea of an organized opposition. Others argued that the Communist Party no longer offered any possibility for any kind of internal opposition, but at the same time rejected the idea of creating an organized opposition outside it, and instead advocated caution and waiting for an improvement in the international context. A third tendency, arguing that opposition within the party was no longer possible, emphasized the need for an organized opposition to be created. Some of them advocated the creation of an alternative Communist Party based on the resolutions of the Fourteenth Congress of 1968.

Pelikan says that this proposal was given serious consideration, but it was turned down because it was felt that perhaps the term 'communism' itself had become too discredited in the eyes of the population, because it would be an easy target for repression, and because the hope that it would be recognized by the international communist movement was felt to be over optimistic. However the possibility of creating such a new party at some later date, when the situation had improved, was not ruled out.

> "These considerations, which are tied up with a particular situation, might lose their validity later on. Precisely because of this, discussion continues about the emergence of a new party, regardless of whether such an organization with a socialist programme calls itself communist or otherwise."[1]

It was finally concluded that the best form of opposition for the existing situation would be the creation of a 'socialist movement'. Thus the Socialist Movement of Czechoslovak Citizens (SMCC) was formed. The '28th of October Manifesto' (1970) and the 'Short Action Programme of the Socialist Opposition' (Jan-Feb 1971) give details of the organizational structure and the aims of this movement. The basic features that emerged were:

1. Reiteration of the goals of 1968. "Let us work on the preparation of a new complex programme of action. Our basis for this will be the Action Programme of 1968... These ideas are not to be allowed to rest, they must be put forward again and again, compared with the changing face of the existing reality."[2]

2. Emphasis on the need for a thoroughly worked out political programme. The authors of the 'Short Action Programme' declare their aim to be "...to hasten the maturing of conditions for the formation of a guiding political force which could put forward a representative programme, and, as a genuinely representative force, provide backing for that programme."[3]

3. The 'movement', though not a "thoroughly structured party with its own top hierarchy, its centralized bodies, its discipline, but rather a political trend..." to which "..several progressive opposition trends" could contribute, would however have an organized structure with an "intellectual centre which would determine the general political line of the movement and take practical initiatives." The 'Short Action Programme' describes the need to create a "new political vanguard of socialism" a "genuine leading

political structure" formed from the "leading political stratum", the "membership base" and the "sympathizers". There should also be a "vanguard of the vanguard" which, though not an "authoritative centre issuing directives and allotting tasks, that is, a centre in the bureaucratic sense", would fulfil the function of a centre in the "non-bureaucratic sense" - co-ordinating and taking the initiative in bringing to life all the potential sources of political activity.

4. Co-operation between communists and non-communists (eg. socialists, but not including anti-communists) and the establishment of the principle of plurality through an "alliance of vanguard forces", which presupposes a "tendency towards unity and integration, convergence rather than divergence", but which does not aim for "a uniform structure which would entirely and without trace erase the ideological differences."[4]

5. The 'Short Action Programme' declares the first and basic tactical aim to be "that the left opposition in Czechoslovakia should win the support of the West European left."

The communist opposition which organized itself in the early 1970s was, then, one based on traditional communist forms of organization and expression. It advocated active structured political opposition to the existing regime and sought to base its activity on the formation of political programmes. From this starting point, the degree to which the nature of the 'ex-communist' opposition changed during the 1970s can clearly be seen. Although some aspects of the early declarations continued to be advocated or grew in importance (for example links with the West European left), other aspects of these early programmes and declarations disappeared almost entirely from the oppositional scene. After the arrest of many of the SMCC members between November 1971 and January 1972 the movement was drastically weakened. No more attempts to develop a political programme for the SMCC were published and the new organizational structures were not created. Instead the movement concentrated largely on the defence of those arrested and imprisoned - in February 1972 it issued a 'Declaration against oppression' and a further document, 'The Socialist Movement of Czechoslovak Citizens on the political trials'. The 'Statement by the Socialist Movement of Czechoslovak citizens', published in August 1973, showed a new orientation, being largely devoted to the question of international detente. The optimism about the prospects of the organized political struggle and its wide base of support,

expressed in earlier documents, seems to have faded and given way to a more pessimistic

view of the existing situation:

> "This country...presents a gloomy picture of silent, apathetic people, intimidated
> by the arrogance of power, which despises their opinions, a society under police
> despotism and with its prisons full."[5]

The period between 1972 and 1977 was one in which the 'ex-communist' opposition

became much more pragmatic and changed much of its emphasis. Kusin describes this

change that took place after the imprisonment of many of the leading figures of the SMCC:

> "...the idea that the regime can be opposed by a structured, semi-communist
> movement, died. Those who considered it their moral duty not to lay down the
> arms of active dissent had to look for less organized yet, so they hoped, more
> effective forms of protest."[6]

The early use of communist phraseology, emphasis on structured organizations and

hierarchies, and the formulation of action programmes declined after 1972. In the face of

the persistent persecution of all members of the opposition under 'normalization', political

labels and differences became less important and the 'ex-communists' formulation of

theoretical political alternatives gave way to a more pragmatic search for a response to the

existing practical problems that surrounded them:

> "Ideological charades appear less and less fascinating...the totalitarian regime of
> today presents the thinking man constantly ...with a heavy barrage of practical
> problems...all ready-made prescriptions and unequivocal answers are worth
> nothing."[7]

It is in this context that the human rights issue gained increasing importance for the

opposition and became an issue around which communists and non-communists united.

Ideological and political differences could be put aside in the common demand for the

respect of basic rights, which the opposition in general, including the ex-communists, now

increasingly saw as the most fundamental issue and pre-requisite for any further

formulations. This development was an important factor in the creation of Charter 77 and

the strong participation of several ex-communists in it. Mlynar argues that the ex-

communists only arrived at this realization of the fundamental importance of basic rights

and freedoms due to the bitter experience of being deprived of all their privileges, rights

and freedoms under 'normalization'. He writes of the unity achieved by Charter 77:
> "...this unity demonstrates that the most diverse political trends have now realized
> how indispensable for their own existence is an atmosphere of political
> democracy and an effective legal system. What is new about this awareness is
> that it is shared even by communists and Marxists who, after 1968, were kicked

out of their privileged positions...The paradoxical achievement of the ruling power has been to force hundreds of thousands of communists to appreciate the significance of political democracy. These people needed a profound personal experience in order to arrive at a profound inner understanding of the inseparability of civic and political rights."[8]

Kusin has argued that the distinctions between communists and non-communists within the opposition faded almost completely during this period:

"Less communism in theory meant easier co-operation with social democratic and liberal oppositionists. In fact, the difference in outlook between revisionists and liberals became so blurred as to be practically nonexistent...With a measure of over- simplification, one can suggest that opposition in Czechoslovakia became social-democratic in the period from 1973-6."[9]

I would argue, however, that the differences in political and ideological outlook between communists and non-communists within the opposition have not faded to this extent. Despite the movement of the ex-communists away from several of their earlier organizational and tactical formulations, and the movement of some individuals away from communism completely, there still remained a loyal core of 'reform communists' within the opposition, whose ideological and political outlook remained distinct from that of the non-communist socialists and 'liberals'. (For example, see the differences between the documents '10 years since the Prague Spring' and '100 years of Czech socialism', issued in April 1978.) I would argue that the process which took place in the 1970s was not so much the fading of differences in political outlook between communists and non-communists, but that the existence of these differences faded in importance in the context of the struggle for human rights and the common support for the non-political Charter.


## The 'Ex-Communists' and the Charter

As Pelikan's account of the discussions and differing opinions over the formation of the SMCC show, the 'party of the expelled' was not totally united on what form, if any, its opposition should take even in the early 1970s. With the birth of the Charter, however, the divisions and differing outlooks amongst the whole body of former reform-communists were highlighted. The 'party of the expelled' was now openly divided, a minority becoming active supporters of the Charter, the majority withholding their support for it. Uhl wrote in 1978 that of the ex-communists' "supposed base of half a million people" (the number expelled in 1969-70), "only 130 individuals (followed by 150 more) signed the

Charter.[10] Whereas in the early '70s the opposition had been made up largely of these expelled communists, within the Charter they formed only a minority of the signatories. Because of their status and past experience and organization they did form one of the largest and most crystallized of the political tendencies that could be recognized within the Charter, a position recognized indirectly by the fact that one of the Charter spokesmen was usually chosen from amongst their ranks, but numerically the ex-communists had become reduced to an active minority within the opposition. The ex-communists who signed the Charter were themselves not a united grouping.

The ex-communists have held differentiated and diverse positions both 'inside' and 'outside' the Charter since 1977. In 'Charter 77 po dvou letech' Mlynar identifies the basic tendencies. Firstly, there is the majority of the one-time 'party of expelled communists' who have resigned completely from political life and do not see the sense in active oppositional political activity. Mlynar characterizes them as being unwilling to risk anything through oppositional activity, surviving simply as private people, their goal in this way to live to enjoy their retirement. This resignation by the majority, Mlynar argues, had serious consequences for the fate of the communist opposition as a whole:

> "In this way, in my opinion, the 'Party of the expelled' also ceased as a whole to play the role of a suppressed, but possible, political alternative, which it played originally. It is self evident that it also had to have consequences for the development of the minority part of the 'Party of the expelled' which did not resign in this way and henceforth created an active oppositional current against the regime."[11]

Mlynar describes the section of the ex-communists who have not resigned from political life in this way as having developed into two basic tendencies, with further differentiation between groups and individuals within these tendencies. The first of these basic tendencies he describes as being:

> "...firmly rooted...above all in waiting for changes inside the power structure and inside the KSC which would, as so often in the past, again lead to some kind of 'pardon', to some 'rehabilitation'. This tendency rests on the belief that sooner or later the present normalizing regime must begin to change in the direction of 'Kadarization'"

Then these ex-communists will be able to "once again assert themselves as moderate reformers within the official system."

Uhl describes this group of ex-communists in very negative terms:

"This milieu is politically inert, without a programme, without self-criticism. It is sectarian and sterile...The negative development of this milieu has also affected even those who have joined or collaborate with the Charter."[12]

Mlynar identifies the second basic tendency as being made up largely, but not exclusively, of those ex-communists who participated in the creation of the Charter and are active within its framework and within the parallel structures around it. Mlynar argues that the ex-communists who support the Charter have adopted two important political concepts which distinguish them from the ex-communists outside the Charter and go beyond the limits of the proposed reforms of 1968:

"On the basic question - the question of the indivisibility of political freedom and human rights - they exceeded, in the framework of the Charter, the limits of their reform concepts from the year 1968 and united their political hopes with the fate of democracy in general, with the fate of democracy for non-communists, not only with the hope of some kind of new inner -party pardon."[13]

Mlynar feels that this need not perhaps apply without exception to every individual, but that most of the ex-communists who support the Charter are fully aware that by this support they have overstepped the limits implied in waiting for some 'Kadar' to grant them a pardon.

The second development which Mlynar identifies as having taken place amongst the ex-communists who support the Charter concerns their relationship with the Communist Party:

"...it is a fundamental positive fact, that part of the ex-communists ceased to consider...which concerns, needs and possibilities of socialism...are merged with the needs and possibilities of the communist party, that these ex-communists...identify with the concerns of society, which, as is known, is made up of a large majority of non-communists."

The basic goal, he argues, is not to consider what is best from the point of view of the power position of the communist party, but "...to create conditions in which society itself will be able to say what it considers as the optimal model of economic, social and political relationships."[14]

The section of the ex-communists who support the Charter are themselves divided. A core of reform communists make up a loose, though diversified, grouping known as 'reform communists', 'uternici' or 'Eurocommunists' (I will refer to this group from now on as the 'reform communists'). The more prominent figures in this grouping include Jiri Hajek, Milan Hubl and Jiri Dienstbier. Hajek is perhaps the most active in the context of the Charter and served as Charter spokesman for several years, a role also taken by

Dienstbier. Mlynar was the leading figure in this grouping until his emigration in March 1977. This grouping is characterized by continued support for many aspects of the reform programme of 1968, and by its emphasis on Eurocommunism. Some indication of its supporters is given by the list of signatories of the document '10 years since the Prague Spring'.[15]

Other ex-communists take up more independent positions outside this grouping, some still describing themselves as communists, though not necessarily reform communists, such as Sabata, whilst others have undergone a total rejection of their communist pasts and have become non-communists, such as Tesar. Mlynar describes this diversification amongst the ex-communists who support the Charter:

> "Inside this current...exist various individuals and smaller groups with various opinions. It is possible to observe frequent ...differences of political and theoretical ideas, some of these ex-communists already don't designate themselves as reform communists, whilst others, on the contrary, retain such a designation."[16]

Mlynar argues that this diversity is simply a normal reflection of the development towards real plurality and democracy, and should not be evaluated as a degeneration and weakening of the ex-communist opposition.


## The 'Reform Communists'

### Human rights and socialism

For the reform communists, the relationship between human rights and socialism is of great importance and is a question much emphasized in their writings. They place much emphasis on the ratification by the Czechoslovak authorities of the International Covenants on Human Rights. In his essay 'The human rights movement and social progress' Hajek explains why this ratification is so important to communists and socialists, and is a central factor in their support of the Charter. He describes how the Stalinist-style power structures limit and suppress citizens' rights: "Universally-proclaimed freedoms are strictly circumscribed...in the 'interests of society', the latter being defined in practice as the interests of the leading force of that society: The Communist Party."

Anyone countering this interpretation of these rights and freedoms is branded as 'bourgeois', 'anti-socialist' and 'anti-communist'. This, he argues, is a very powerful

deterrent for socialists and makes them "think twice" before criticizing this official

interpretation. But this situation is changed when the authorities themselves endorse a

different interpretation of human rights.

> "This inhibition diminishes and finally disappears...the moment that a regime
> which imposes on society and its citizens its narrow and
> restrictive...interpretation of democracy, rights and freedoms, proclaims or
> indicates elsewhere, and in other circumstances, its readiness to accept, or at least
> tolerate, other interpretations."[17]

By endorsing the interpretation of human rights expressed in the International

Covenants, the Czechoslovak regime has completely removed from such an interpretation

the stigma of 'anti-socialism' or 'anti-communism', thus enabling communists and

socialists to support human rights and the Charter without qualms. Hajek concludes that

this ratification of the International Covenants by the socialist states, and the upholding of

this interpretation of human rights by the Berlin Conference of European Communist and

Workers Parties, are significant factors which

> "...banish the doubts of active socialist-motivated citizens of the Warsaw Pact
> countries, and dispel any fear they might have had that the implementation of just
> such an interpretation of democracy as that set out in those documents might be
> viewed as falling outside the scope and framework of socialist society, or even
> regarded as hostile to it. Corresponding to this realization, the participants of
> Charter 77 represent a wide spectrum of ideological standpoints."[18]

Having endorsed this interpretation of human rights in the International Treaties, Hajek

argues, the Czechoslovak authorities put themselves in a difficult position when they attack

the same concepts, when defended by the Chartists, as bourgeois and anti-socialist:

"...people must ask themselves: if the covenants on human rights are the expression of

such a concept, one that is alien and hostile to socialism, why then did our republic...enter

into such agreements?"[19]

Hajek, then, gives much weight to the Czechoslovak regime's ratification of the

International Pacts and argues that it shows the compatibility between human rights and

socialism: "Charter 77 does not want to view Czechoslovakia's signing of the pacts as

some sort of error or tactical trick. It sees in this action a confirmation of the full

compatibility of human rights, as formulated in the treaties, with the socialist system."[20]

This argument, however, seems to ignore the fact that the Czechoslovak authorities fail

to implement most of these basic rights in practice. It seems somewhat contradictory to

argue that the Czechoslovak government's ratification of the human rights agreements shows the "full compatibility of human rights...with the socialist system" when, as the Charter 77 Declaration states, "their publication...serves as an urgent reminder of the extent to which basic human rights in our country exist, regrettably, on paper only." The argument that the Czechoslovak government's ratification of the International Pacts "banished the doubts" of socialists that just such an interpretation might be viewed as being anti-socialist appears to place the Czechoslovak government in the role of legitimate arbiter of what can and cannot be considered socialist. As a socialist in opposition to a socialist state, Hajek seems reluctant to step outside the limits of what is accepted in theory by that state, whilst being critical of what it does in practice. This raises the question of whether, had the Czechoslovak government not ratified the human rights agreements, Hajek would feel able to support the human rights issue so strongly himself.

Zdenek Mlynar expresses a different attitude towards the government's ratification of the International Pacts. In contrast to Hajek, he argues that the Charter does view the ratification as a tactic, rather than a sincere expression of intent, and he admits that the fulfilling of these treaties would be incompatible with the interests and the existence of the present Czechoslovak regime. In a 1977 interview he was asked: "would it not be better to demand only partial changes and reforms instead of the realization of such freedoms and rights which none of today's regimes in Eastern Europe can grant, without risking their own disintegration?". Mlynar replied:

> "It is true, that if the regime were really to apply these rights to all citizens, the possibility of very effective critical oppositional activity would arise in society. But is it not then better to put this question instead: Why does today's Czechoslovak regime sign an agreement in the international forum, which it does not want to and cannot fulfil? Charter 77 exposed this hypocritical tactic, whereby the regime wants to give the impression that it is something other than what it really is."[21]

Reform communists also emphasize that human rights can and should be better defended through a socialist system than a capitalist one. In his essay 'The human rights movement and social progress' Hajek describes what he calls the 'unity' of human rights:

> "While it is true that people cannot be really free unless they enjoy the right to work, education and social security, it is equally true...that these eminent social, economic and cultural rights are not worth the paper they are printed on for many people if there is a failure to guarantee and implement those 'classic' civil and

political rights and freedoms....Socialist society is far better equipped than any other society to realize this unity and sustain it."[22]

This is an argument echoed in other reform communist documents. In a letter to the Communist parties of Europe, eleven former members of the Czechoslovak communist party write: "In addition to economic and social rights, socialism must also safeguard a larger measure of political and civil rights for its citizens than does capitalism."[23]

In his 'Appeal to West European communists and socialists for help in halting the persecution of Chartists' Mlynar writes: "I am a communist who is convinced that socialism must give people a larger measure of political and civil rights and liberties than capitalism."[24]

These declarations are a close reflection of the view expressed in the Action Programme of 1968 which advocated the need to "...ensure constitution based freedom of speech and political and personal rights to all citizens...Socialism cannot mean only liberation of the working people from the domination of exploiting class relations, but must provide for a greater degree of self-fulfillment than any bourgeois democracy."

*The Charter and Socialism*

The reform communists also emphasize that the Charter itself is not anti-socialist in nature. Hajek explains that the Charter is not in negative opposition to the existing regime:

> "It is a reminder to all who hear, read or learn of its call, that it is not essential...to limit one's opinions to the alternatives of obedient conformity...and negation...It offers another, third way: the path of constructive criticism and legal debate. It warns and shows that in a society that has been atomized by the regime and geared to the values of consumerism ...it is possible freely and voluntarily to opt for moral values which are closer to the essence of socialism than those for which the majority toil."[25]

Far from being anti-socialist, argues Hajek, the socialists within the Charter believe that it can strengthen and improve the development and effectiveness of socialist society:

> "Socialists and communists, who make up a substantial part of the signers, consider the systematic observance and realization of the treaties as a positive contribution to the development of the socialist society in our land as a truly mature, humanist and in all respects effectively functioning society."[26]

The non-political and non-oppositional nature of the Charter is central to the reform communists' arguments that the Charter is in no way anti-socialist or anti-communist:

> "Although some of the signers take as their point of departure a world outlook that is not Marxist, they join with the Marxists in accepting the contemporary

socialist system of our country as a self-evident foundation and framework within which these treaties are to be realized. They all agree that the Charter is not to be a basis for any sort of political opposition."[27]

In line with this, the reform communists oppose any suggestions that the Charter should become more political or adopt a more organized structure. During the discussions in 1977 on the aims and methods of the Charter, Skilling records that the ex-communist group, particularly Milan Hubl, were reported to be strongly opposed to the questions contained in the 'Co s Chartou?' document - a proposal for a more organized and radical approach drafted by Sabata and Uhl.

> "They are said to have criticized the idea of making the Charter 'an oppositional political organization with a firm structure' and to have warned that a confrontation with the state power would lead to increased repression and a split in the ranks."[28]

*Attitudes to 1968*

The reform communist grouping remains closely associated with the ideas and programmes of the Communist Party under Alexander Dubcek in 1968. In April 1978 the document 'Ten years since the Prague Spring' was issued by this grouping, to mark the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Action programme of 1968. Most of the signatories of the 'ten years' document were involved in drawing up the 1968 Action Programme and the declared aim of the document is to "recall the truth about 1968", to counteract the distorted impression given by official documents and the media since 1969. The document outlines in brief the proposals contained in the Action Programme. It is interesting to note the order in which the Action programme proposals of 1968 are presented in 1978, reflecting the increasing importance of the human rights issue. The Action Programme's support for citizens rights and freedom of expression is the first main point mentioned in the 'Ten years' document, preceding such questions of the leading role of the party and the National Front, thus inverting the order of the original document. (It is also perhaps noteworthy that some of the qualifications and parentheses in the Action Programme on this issue are ommitted in the 'Ten years' document. For example the 'Ten years' document states of the Action Programme that "It demands that every citizen should have the right to travel abroad and even to spend long periods of time in other countries." The Action Programme itself states that "a citizen should have the legal right to long term or

permanent sojourn abroad" but adds, "at the same time it is necessary to protect by law the interests of the state, for example, as regards the drain of some categories of specialists, etc." The Action Programme also adds that freedom of speech for minority interests and opinions must be "again within the framework of socialist laws".)

The authors of the 'Ten Years' document then outline the proposals of the Action Programme on the question of the federalization of Czechoslovakia, the legal and economic spheres, culture, foreign policy and the renewal process inside the Communist Party itself. They then assess the consequences of the forced suppression of reform since 1969, resulting in a situation in which "the symptoms which forced us along the path of reform in the 60s are now once again becoming more and more pressing."

The document gives no critical assessment of 1968, and is rather a reaffirmation of the authors' belief in the correctness of the direction initiated by the Action Programme and the continued relevance of the proposed reforms. This is made clear especially in relation to the economic sphere:

> "...this promising development in the economy was suppressed after august 1968 and the bureaucratic-centralist system was re-established...It is not surprising to find that the situation is now similar to that of the early sixties before the reform was introduced: in the last ten years, the relevance of these propositions has increased."[29]

In an interview with Der Spiegel in 1978 Jiri Hajek outlined his views on 1968. He defends the record of the Dubcek leadership on the question of whether the intervention could have been avoided. "In my opinion, the Dubcek leadership did everything possible in order to avoid a forceful confrontation. Who can say whether it was at all possible."[30]

He also argues that the Prague Spring policy of strictly limiting the degree of democratization and political plurality which it would allow was correct and justified. This interview gives an important illustration of the fact that, on such issues, wide differences exist between the political outlook of reform communists such as Hajek and that of other non-communist democratically oriented socialists, such as the Independent Socialist grouping. Hajek makes it clear that he felt that the developments of 1968 were threatened almost as much by 'extreme' democrats, as by Stalinists. In response to the question 'How would things have developed without intervention?', Hajek replies:

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"We didn't envisage any idyllic development. We were conscious that we had to lead a struggle on two fronts - not only against Stalinism, but also against certain extreme forces which envisaged democratic development 'without limits'...We must not lose sight of the fact that our democratic process occurred in specific geo-political and historical circumstances. I feared at the time, that some friends had ceased to think about these circumstances. They were not numerous but, after all, it involved a process of fermentation, which had in itself certain explosive elements."

He makes it clear that he considered the demand for party pluralism to be such an explosive element: "It was realistic to keep pluralism within the framework of the national front. This did not exclude existing parties, but made the rise of new parties impossible."

Hajek has also clearly not changed his 1968 position on the question of the revival of the Social Democratic Party: "Our historical and geopolitical position did not afford any space for a renewed Social Democratic Party. I often persuaded my friends about this at the time, and also now, with hindsight, I cannot change my previous opinion."[31]

The former leading figure amongst the reform communists, Zdenek Mlynar, gives a rather more critical assessment of the policies and tactics of 1968. In his article 'Charter 77 po dvou letech'[32] he writes that the vital weaknesses of the 1968 alternative, which led to its overthrow, are now very clear : it was initially defeated by force due to its lack of pragmatism and consideration for the limits of power at the time, whilst later during the period of normalization it was defeated by being too pragmatic. He writes that today there are already few people who seriously believe that the elaborated reformist-communist concepts can be employed, without alteration, sometime in the future as a point of departure for programmatic changes. He also argues, however, that to date the concepts outlined by the reformist communists in 1968 remain the most comprehensively worked out political programme for a socialist alternative to the totalitarian Soviet model, and that they should be taken into consideration by those trying to create new concepts and alternatives. He argues that the concepts of the Prague Spring can, in the socialist oriented opposition, only be surpassed by a solution that will be both "more deeply critical...in some fundamental questions (for example in questions of political democracy, human freedom and human rights)", and at the same time in the sphere of practical politics more correctly appraise and exploit the realities of internal and international politics than did the reform communists in 1968.

The question of the Moscow Protocols is mentioned briefly in the 'Ten Years' document - the document states that the Protocols were one-sidedly interpreted in order to suppress the renewal process. The appearance of this document at the same time as the document '100 Years of Czech Socialism', marking the anniversary of the Czech Social Democratic Party, highlighted the fact that this issue is in fact a source of differentiation amongst ex-communists. As Jan Kavan has pointed out[33], the communists who were known for their opposition to the Moscow Protocols from the beginning - Frantisek Kriegel, Gerta Sekaninova-Cakrtova and Jaroslav Sabata - supported the '100 Years' document, and were not amongst the signatories of the reform communist document. In a discussion between Mlynar and Hajek in 1975[34] both seemed concerned to explain and justify their actions in signing the Moscow Protocols. They argue that the Protocols were not responsible for any of the developments that took place after 1969-70. Hajek writes: "I would even emphasize, that on the contrary it was specifically stated in the Protocol that it is necessary and possible to continue the post-January democratization process."

Mlynar adds: "The Protocols really guaranteed the post-January...political reforms, the political continuity of democratization."

He concludes that it is in no way possible to regard the present state as a consequence of the action of the Czechoslovak political representatives of that time. Hajek and Mlynar also argue that one of their major considerations in signing the Protocols was their concern for peaceful coexistence in Europe. They wished, they explain, to solve the crisis in such a way as to not endanger the future of such peaceful coexistence.

> "We felt responsibility towards the whole socialist community...as far as a criticism of our actions at that time is possible, it is only this, that we also remained communists, that we subordinated our specific interests to broader interests, we considered that there must not arise in Europe irremovable foci of tension, the preconditions must not be thwarted for the kind of international policies that recently led to the Helsinki Conference."[35]

The 'Ten Years' document also links the spirit of the Prague Spring with the aims of Charter 77: "The Charter comprises citizens of different political outlooks and aims to fight for the maintenance and application of laws on human and civil rights which are in the spirit of the Prague Spring - in the spirit of the concept that socialism is either democratic or not socialism."

But reform communists are also quick to point out the differences between the two. In an interview in 1978 Hajek is asked whether he sees the Charter as a continuation of the reform attempt of 1968. He replies: "It is natural that Charter 77 links up with the Prague Spring, however not in the sense that it would call for a rebuilding of the political system, but that it demands the observance of accepted legal norms."[36]

In another interview Hajek makes it clear that the goals of the Charter are very different to those of the reform communists of 1968. "Certainly, the Prague Spring is in the background. But today's situation differs in many respects from the year 1968. At that time the goal was nothing less than the change of the political system in Czechoslovakia. Today our goals must be more modest."

He clearly links these different goals to the different international context in which the Charter operates. He sees the Charter's goals as being closely tied up with the post-Helsinki international emphasis on the relaxation of tensions.

> "Today's international situation is characterized by the removal of tensions in Europe...It makes our task at least morally easy : the problem of removing tension is indivisible, and against the background of Helsinki, we know, that the internal problems of Czechoslovakia are only a part of the larger international context..."[37]

Hajek sees Charter 77, therefore, not as the continued expression of the political aims of 1968, but as a movement with much more 'modest' goals in keeping with the new international situation.


*Prospects for the reform of communism*

Do reform communists believe that a reformist element exists within the ruling Communist Party and how do they assess the prospects for reform?

Hajek expresses the belief that the ruling Communist Party does contain some elements which may be able to react positively and with sympathy to the challenge of the Charter.

> "The Charter will...have to gain the sympathy and support of those in the ranks of power and in the supreme decision-making circles who have not yet been (apparently) overwhelmed by the tide of dogmatism, bureaucracy and plain and simple careerism and double-dealing associated with the post-August 1968 'normalization' process. It will have to be accepted by those who have retained a speck of Marxist thinking, not to mention normal human thinking and the ability to behave responsibly in a decent human fashion."[38]

In a series of polemical exchanges in 1978 Jan Tesar accused Hajek of holding the conviction that his 'political tendency' will eventually come to an agreement with those in power, and that: "...you will be taken back into the party and the leadership of the state, whereupon you will reform it...You are relying on an enlightened ruler."[39]

However, there is no evidence that Hajek or the other reform communists within the Charter believe that a reformist element within the party would enable them to gain political reinstatement into the Communist Party. As Petr Uhl points out[40], Tesar is here attributing views to Hajek which are in fact to be found only amongst the sections of the ex-communists who do not participate in the life of the Charter. In reply, Hajek argues that he does not proceed from a naive faith in an 'enlightened ruler': "...on the contrary, (I proceed) from the realization that the regime is not as monolithic as such a faith would expect, that it is a more complex phenomenon...in which ideas as well as elements of inertia, the interests and endeavours of concrete people carry their weight."[41]

Hajek's hopes that the regime may slowly move in the direction of reform and some degree of democratization seem to be based on the belief that the weight of contradictions and tensions building up in the economy and society as a whole will eventually force the regime into seeking some new solutions, and that pressures from society in the form of citizens initiatives, will be able, even if only to a limited extent, to influence the direction these solutions take. The regime cannot completely resist such social pressures: "...this regime, however much it may strive to divorce itself from external influences and pressures, remains exposed to them more than it desires and is subject to development."[42]

In his essay 'The human rights movement and social progress' Hajek outlines the way in which both these factors can come together to bring about a slow change of direction. He argues that the regime, though strongly resisting change, is unable to cope with the buildup of problems and contradictions, and the ideological and organizational structures are losing all their effectiveness:

> "This state of affairs is coming home at least to the part of the ruling elite that is involved directly in these pressing issues...these groups will continue to seek a solution to these crucial problems chiefly through organizational and technological measures; at best, they can be expected to replace bureaucratic measures with technocratic ones."

Nevertheless, this movement provides a space for the initiatives of the democratic forces and currents within society. "In such situations citizens initiatives...could help bring about democratic modifications to technologically-geared solutions, and act as a corrective to the general direction being taken by the society as a whole."

Hajek, therefore, though not stating that the present ruling party is, by itself, capable of major reform, does express the belief that it may initiate some change of direction influenced by both internal and external factors. Zdenek Mlynar expresses a similar view in an interview in 1977. He argues that, whilst he agrees with Kolakowski that the period of 'revisionism' - that is the 'revisionists' struggle for reforms inside the ruling parties of individual states of the Warsaw Pact - is over in Eastern Europe:

> "However, I hardly think that this means that reform efforts could not arise in the future...inside the power structures themselves. It is probable, however, that these efforts will be of a rather different, pragmatic-technocratic nature, whilst the democratic-humanist orientation is largely...connected with the movement from below, outside the power structures."[43]

Jiri Dienstbier argues that the very question of whether the Communist Party is capable of reform or not is irrelevant:

> "I don't see much sense in a discussion on whether the Stalinist model of socialism...is capable of reform or renaissance. It is not a question of whether the Stalinist model can be reformed: it must be reformed. Otherwise there would be no point in our work...It is all the same what the agent of reform is called. If it is a party calling itself communist, it will of course be a very different organization from the present one."[44]

The reform communists still express great faith in the potential of a genuinely reformed communism once rid of Stalinist structures and able to initiate a democratic reconstruction along the lines of 1968:

> "Only by introducing a new dimension of genuine humanism will socialism be able to demonstrate, for the first time, its superiority in resolving the tasks of a mature society, developing all the advantages of modern science and technology, and simultaneously contributing in a decisive manner to the resolution of the global problems of mankind..."[45]

## The relationship between communists and non-communists

The relations between communists and non-communists have, on occasion, been the source of some tension and ill-feeling within the Charter. The motives and methods of reform communists have been treated with suspicion by some - for example see Tesar's

criticisms of Hajek in 1978. Skilling writes: "By 1978 there seemed to be a widespread aversion to communists in general, without too fine a distinction being drawn between the various shadings of their current outlook."[46]

Mlynar outlines what he sees as the sources of these problems[47]. He argues that the different experiences of communists and non-communists in the past - the difference between communists, who held positions of power and privilege, and in contrast non-communists who largely experienced controls and discrimination - is hard to overcome and makes mutual understanding difficult. There is also the problem of psychological aversion originating in personal and group relationships. The ex-communists, he argues, are themselves not without blame for this aversion that is felt by some non-communists towards the whole range of ex-communists:

> "Habits and stereotypes are observable not only in the thinking, but also in the practical action of many of them, which are a consequence of the fact that these people were never politically active elsewhere than in a communist setting. General insensitivity to the necessary differences of experience, gained at different sides of the totalitarian system, can generate personal aversion which is difficult to overcome or sometimes insurmountable."

There are also individuals whose own "personal cantankerousness and intrigue" damages the reputation of the whole current. In addition the ex-communist milieu as a whole "still shows considerable everyday isolation", creating their own closed quarter inside the whole oppositional "ghetto": "...its inhabitants often know only themselves mutually, and their personal relations with other inhabitants of the ghetto will be nonexistent, or are clearly formalized and functional and don't influence the 'transmission' of different human experiences."

Mlynar concludes that the Charter has meant a breakthrough in this sense, but it could not do away with all the problems which had originated years before. The problem then arises for the ex-communists who have taken the step of severing their umbilical cord with the party viewpoint that this step will not be convincing enough to persuade the other currents to accept them. Mlynar argues that this would be deeply negative and possibly even fatal for the fate of the formulation of alternatives to 'real socialism'.

Such conflicts and resentments between communists and non-communists have on occasion taken on a bitter and personal character. Tesar's strong criticism of Hajek's spokesmanship contains evidence of this resentment: "If you express fear of reprisals it is

still quite clear to us all that the first victims will not be you, either in person or as a political

tendency, but me."; and of suspicion: "Your whole outlook depends on this enlightened

ruler who will open the door back into the party for you."[48]  (In response to this attack

several Chartists wrote in defence of Hajek's spokesmanship.)  Petr Uhl also describes the

features which mark some of the signatories of the Charter who were previously members

of the Communist Party, and which falsely give the other signatories the impression that

"some of the attributes of Stalinism are a chronic characteristic of the ex-communist milieu"

- these include "slanders schemes and rumours", "the habit of considering the Charter as

the ideological child...of the liberalization process of 1968", the "tendency to isolation and

conspiracy" and "rejection of all new forms of struggle for human rights and all attempts to

introduce an element of organization into the activities of some Chartists."  Uhl argues,

however, that it is wrong to judge the whole ex-communist milieu in the light of these

features, which are attributable to only a few:  "This is a dangerous and false idea which

originates from the behavior of a few people or even only one individual who represents

the conservative attitudes which are to be found outside the Charter."[49]

Uhl's criticism seems to be aimed largely at Hubl.  In the same letter he writes of the

bad impression caused by some ex-communists:

> "Sometimes it takes only one person: for example remember what happened with
> the rumours...on the subject of my terrorism.  These did immense harm in the
> Charter, and it was above all the ex-communist milieu which took them up and
> helped to spread them."

In a letter to the Palach Press in 1979 he writes:  "...during the past year Mr Hubl has

devoted a considerable part of his activity to convincing a number of people that I was a

terrorist, or at least suspected of being one."[50]

Uhl emphasizes, however, that the ex-communists should not be judged by the actions

of just a few of their members.  He defends the spokesmanship of Hajek and underlines the

differentiations within the ex-communist current:  "What is really important is that Jan

Tesar erases in a completely impermissible way the whole range of different attitudes which

exist in the ex-communist milieu and amongst its most active militants."[51]

The interview between Polish KOR and three Chartists (Havel, Uhl and Hejdanek) in

1979 is also instructive on the relationship between communists and non-communists, and

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the need to differentiate between the various communist currents and individuals is again emphasized by the non-communists.

> "We non-communists wish to co-operate with the communists. We have to know how to distinguish between the various communists, working with those who really wish to act for democracy. Only the communists who give up plans to establish their own hegemony can be our partners. Under conditions of democracy the communists may be in power at one moment, but afterwards they must become just one party among others. Otherwise they will disappear from the political stage."[52]

It is clear that the communists and non-communists within the opposition are eager to co-operate with each other in the context of the Charter, and that they have successfully established, through the Charter, a common base of concern and activity in which communist/ non-communist distinctions have little relevance. It is also clear, however, that the differences between them in the sphere of political outlooks are still very much in existence and are keenly felt. Kusin has described the Charter as:

> "...the product of a combined democratic and socialist tendency...At the very heart of this coalescence of democratic and socialist attitudes is an exchange of concessions both on the part of the socialist and the non-socialist dissenters. The reformists have given up the concept of the leading role of the party and the democrats have acknowledged a social-democratic framework for the oppositional programmes."[53]

I would disagree with this view that a coalescence has taken place between the reformist communists and the non-communists on the level of political ideology and outlook. The reform communists have certainly moved away from some of their earlier standpoints, for example, by abandoning highly organized and politicized oppositional forms in favour of co-operation with non-communists on non-political issues. However I see no evidence that the reformists have "given up the concept of the leading role of the party", or have gone any further in this respect than the changes advocated in the Action Programme of 1968. Most reform communists express themselves in terms of continued loyalty to the ideas of 1968. There is also, I believe, little evidence that the 'reformists' and 'democrats' within the opposition have agreed on a "social-democratic framework for the oppositional programmes." The Charter is certainly neither an 'oppositional programme' nor an expression of a 'social-democratic' framework, and there is no clear expression of a social-democratic oppositional programme outside the Charter on which the majority of reform communists and non-communist 'democrats' agree.

The differences in political and ideological outlook between the majority of the reform communists, and those who were never members of the communist party or who have rejected their communist beliefs, has not been overcome or faded away. The unity and coalescence of the opposition only exists in the context of the non-political Charter and the struggle for legality and human rights. On political issues and the search for political solutions the different outlooks within the opposition would not be in agreement, except on the basic principle that everyone has an equal right to hold and express their own political views. Mlynar makes this clear in an interview for 'Espresso' in 1977. In response to the question: "Former communists are participants in this movement (for human rights). Does it mean, however, that they don't differentiate their own programme from that of the other participants, and that they don't try to achieve autonomy within this movement or outside it?", Mlynar replies:

> "Charter 77 is neither a communist nor a non-communist... political programme.
> It is a demand...for freedom of speech. On this demand those communists who
> remain convinced about the correctness of the policies of the KSC in 1968, really
> agree with all other citizens. If political and civil rights were in reality guaranteed,
> undoubtedly of course discussion would begin, disagreements would begin about
> various political...questions and orientations...amongst the supporters of Charter
> 77."[54]

## The dwindling emphasis on Marxist terminology and language

Even before 1977 the expelled communists active in the opposition had begun to drop the emphasis on Marxist-Leninist terminology and forms of organization. Within the context of the Charter this process has continued, to the extent that there is now little reference to Marxist-Leninist ideology in much of the reformist communist writings. Petr Uhl argues that this dwindling of interest in ideological discussion is experienced by at least half of the reform communists:

> "Most of the signatories of the Charter get irritated as soon as you start quoting
> the classics of Marxism: that is to say, except for a few 'rogue' Marxists, nearly
> everyone out of the 500 who have never been in the communist party, and a good
> half of the rest. J Hajek, yourself (L Kohout) and myself...are part of this
> minority."[55]

The 'Ten years since the Prague Spring' document provides a clear indication of how the language of the reform communists has changed during ten years in opposition. Although the 1978 document covers many of the same points as the original Action

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Programme of 1968, and is drawn up by many of the same people who were involved in drawing up the original Action Programme, the language used has changed. The 'Ten Years' document contains no reference to the 'working class', 'socialist intelligentsia', the 'Marxist-Leninist concept of the development of socialism', 'open ideological struggle' or 'Marxist scientific knowledge', all of which were phrases and concepts frequently used in the original Action Programme.

In opposition, and especially within the context of the Charter, many reform communists place more emphasis on the need for co-operation and understanding between all groupings and outlooks on the practical prospects for improving the present situation, than on distinctions along ideological lines. The ideological and political distinctions remain - the reform communists still retain their Marxist beliefs - but, as the example of Jiri Dienstbier shows, for some the holding of such beliefs has become a purely "personal and private" matter, with little relevance to oppositional activity in the present circumstances.

> "I personally don't attach much importance to terminology and think that in our circumstances we should be little concerned with personal convictions and not at all with former Party membership. The important thing is to agree on mutual, concrete aims and methods of achieving them...I still support the Marxist orientation towards the liberation of man, as well as positive developments in some communist parties, described imprecisely as Eurocommunism. I am, then, a communist, a reformist communist, if you like. But this is a matter of my personal and private standpoint."[56]

Mlynar also argues that Marxist terminology and language should be dropped in the interests of a better understanding of the real political issues and outlooks that divide communists and non-communists. He envisages creating a 'synthesis of experience' amongst all socialist oriented groupings within the opposition in order to clarify the conceptual alternatives to 'real socialism'. He argues that the ideological forms acquired by those on opposite sides of the totalitarian system in the past merely serve to obscure their real concerns and make understanding difficult. Instead of 'slogans and phrases', he argues, concrete ideas and plans should be developed based on the solution of concrete theoretical and practical questions and the analysis of alternative systems of economic, social and political relationships:

> "On the basis of...disagreements about these problems - not on the basis of disagreements about general ideological slogans - there would then...arise, in the socialist oriented currents of the parallel political life...a synthesis of different experiences."[57]

From this would follow a programmatically formulated alternative to the existing system. Mlynar's advocacy of the creation of concrete plans and programmatic alternatives to the existing system, formulated in exile, does not reflect the views of the majority of reform communists inside Czechoslovakia, but his argument illustrates the fact that, for many, Marxist forms of language and 'ideological slogans' are increasingly seen as a barrier to communication and are fading from usage.

## Independent Communists

Some communists expelled in 1968 and politically active in the Charter express opinions and positions which differ in several respects from those that can be identified, loosely, with the reform communist grouping. These individual communists often express opinions that are more 'radical' than those of the reform communists, especially in the area of the increased organization and politicization of the Charter.

*Miroslav Kusy* Kusy was a Communist Party member from 1952 to 1970, and was head of the Ideological Department of the Slovak Communist Party in 1968-9. His view of the Charter differs greatly from that of the reform communists, and many other Chartists, in that he advocates that the Charter should move away from its original moral and non-political position, and become an active political movement with a political programme. He argues that the Charter in its present form has several weaknesses. Firstly, the purely moral standpoint of the Charter is unable to inspire the public to mass protests and actions. Secondly, the Charter claims to be non-political but by its very nature it is a political challenge to the regime and is treated as such. Thirdly, the Charter, by declaring itself to be non-political, allows the regime to misinterpret its political outlook:

> "By leaving the interpretation of its own political significance and the misinterpretation of its objectives to the regime, the Charter has put itself on the defensive. It must continually protest that it is not anti-socialist and anti-communist...For this very reason...it must not leave it up to the regime to make such political interpretations and misinterpretations; rather, it must integrate them into its own political programme."[58]

This would involve an "alternative political programme that implicitly and explicitly thinks through the political implications of its moral appeal" and the working out of a "positive ideological conception". To carry out this political programme the Charter must

also become an active political movement: "one that has shifted...from moral appeals to a whole range of different, focused political activities, from the humanistic attempt to enlighten the regime, to actual political confrontations with it."

Kusy argues that by becoming openly political the Charter could take over the role of defender of socialism from the regime. It could form:

> "...an alternative socialist programme, an alternative socialist movement...this would lead to a confrontation not between an existing socialist programme and anti-socialism, but between the pseudo-socialism of the regime and an alternative socialist programme that embodies the moral and political aims of the Charter."

Kusy is largely isolated amongst Chartists in his belief that the Charter should formulate political solutions, develop an alternative political ideology and seek direct political confrontation. Other groupings support the formulation of political alternatives and formation of political organizations, but they see this as a process which would take place independently, outside the Charter, and not something that would transform the Charter itself. Kusy's ideas are perhaps a little closer to Mlynar's concept of working out a socialist alternative to 'real socialism' expressed in 'Charta 77 po dvou letech', although Mlynar recognizes that this will be a long and difficult process involving much discussion, the completion of which is still far from being achieved. Kusy seems to see no such difficulty involved in the Charter adopting a political programme. His argument seems to ignore the differences of political outlook that are to be found amongst Chartists. Describing the Charter as "a free association of like-minded people" he does not explain how agreement would be reached on a political programme that would be acceptable to all the different currents within it. Kusy argues that the alternative programme would be socialist:

> "This would be a logical development for, from its inception, socialism was accepted as a given framework for Charter activity, even though it was understood as a socialism deformed by real socialism."[59]

However Kusy gives no clear outline of what this socialist programme would comprise. He assumes that the Charter would naturally be socialist in nature, an assumption which ignores not only the 'non-political' outlook of many of its signatories, but also the 'anti-socialist' outlook of some, for example Vaclav Benda.

Kusy's conception of the Charter as a political movement with a political programme is not, then, one that would be endorsed by the majority of Chartists. As two Chartists have written: "Attempts at formulating programmes that have so far appeared within the Charter (Kusy, Pithart etc.) have usually been met with hesitance and criticism."[60]


*Jaroslav Sabata*   Sabata joined the Communist Party in 1947 and was elected to the new Central Committee at the underground meeting of the 14th Party Congress, and was one of the few who outspokenly rejected the Moscow Protocols. He is active within the Charter and was chosen as spokesman in April 1978. A Marxist but not a 'reform communist', his radicalism and emphasis on democratic self-government give him something in common with both the Trotskyist Petr Uhl and the Independent Socialists, although he cannot clearly be placed within any grouping.

A theme that recurs in Sabata's writing is the need for a dialogue with the ruling party. In July 1973, when serving a long prison sentence, Sabata first proposed the idea of a dialogue between the socialist opposition and the Communist Party. In his 'Letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party'[61] he explains the first steps that had been taken towards dialogue, and the goal of such a dialogue:

> "I expressed the wish to meet responsible people in order to discuss the possibility of finding a political solution to the differences which divide us and set us against each other. The preliminary exploratory talk...indicated that a dialogue between the ruling party and the left-oriented part of the opposition is, in principle, possible."

Sabata poses as the 'prime question' in the dialogue that of civil rights: "The prologue to our trials and convictions was the severe restriction of these rights, which explains why we could be publicly labelled as enemies of socialism without any opportunity to defend ourselves in a dignified and effective manner."

He argues that a dialogue would strengthen, rather than weaken, the cause of socialism in Czechoslovakia:

> "...why should a dialogue between different views lead to weakening socialism, if those engaged in it are socialist?...A well considered policy of dialogue can certainly contribute more to the unity of socialist society than any policy which ignores the actual state of affairs in the society and...the fact that socialist unity will, for a long time to come, remain 'unity in diversity'."

Sabata concludes that by refusing a dialogue the authorities will only be preparing the ground for another crisis.

Despite the fact that this early offer was ignored, Sabata continues to seek a dialogue with the authorities. In his 'Letter to his interrogator'[62] Sabata reiterates his offer of a dialogue, despite the fact that an interrogation by the security forces provides "a most unsuitable atmosphere for the exchange of political ideas". He writes: "What I am asking is whether there is an honourable way out of this situation for both parties."

Sabata frequently emphasizes the positive nature of his standpoint. Far from being a negative opponent of the regime, he offers himself as a partner in a "constructive dialogue". He also underlines his loyalty to socialism, and his support of the achievements of Czechoslovak communism. In 1973 he wrote from prison:

> "Our disagreement and our criticisms do not concern the essence of socialism, but the concrete forms and methods of governmental and political administration, which have long since been deeply infected by the bureaucratic disease."

Sabata defined his socialism as being a rejection of liberalism and a firm belief in the "revolutionary democratic stand of the working class" as the driving force for socialist change.

> "We are not liberals or petty-bourgeois democrats...We agree with you that the results of socialist construction are superior to that which deserves to be condemned or is simply negative...Under normal circumstances we shall - if you so wish - stand with you to defend the principles on which this state was founded, by which it maintains itself and develops."[63]

Sabata touches on these themes again in 1982 in his "Letter to his interrogator". He argues that socialism needs to be strengthened through democratization: "The dam preventing the restoration of capitalism must of course be consciously built. Above all by ensuring the prosperity of socialism. This necessitates that it functions within a democratic framework to include all socialists."

Again he emphasizes that this democratic approach is in no way a liberal approach:

> "Many communists start to bristle when they hear the words democracy, democratization, democratic renewal. In such words they instantly perceive the devil of bourgeois or petty bourgeois liberalism...Using phrases about a class viewpoint they seek to deny the revolutionary tradition of the workers movement in its real sense, which is a democratic and in no way a liberal sense."

Sabata's views on several issues distance him from the reform communist grouping. In an interview with 'Extrablatt' in 1978[64] he is quoted as saying: "Frankly, I'm not a

reform communist. I don't want to awaken the illusion in any quarter that the Party could reform itself - and certainly no longer as a result of its own inner processes."

The accuracy of the published interview has, however, been questioned, and in one version Petr Uhl adds his own notes where he feels that Sabata has been misinterpreted.He adds here that Sabata is expressing the view that the Party is not 'reformable' and capable of rebirth of itself, but that it is reformable through pressure from a certain type of social development. Sabata does not see the Communist Party as monolithic, and argues that there still exist within it tendencies which would be favourable to reform, and that it is necessary for the opposition to differentiate between different tendencies within the ruling Communist Party:

> "The Communist Party isn't only composed of bureaucracy. In certain circles Party members are still motivated by ideological rather than purely personal and unworthy concerns...We can and must, therefore, allow for reforming tendencies within the Communist Party."

In a 1988 essay, Sabata explains the reasons for his rejection of 'reform communism' and break with the reform communist grouping:

> "I am first of all a Charter 77 signatory. That's why I say I am not a reformist communist. I mean a communist who regards his 'party allegiance' as more important than 'non-political' principles - the principles of defending the civil and political rights of all citizens."[65]

Sabata notes that he reached this conclusion during a debate in 1977 on the future of Charter 77. Whilst Sabata advocated the expansion of Charter activity, some reform communists opposed this and expressed very different views on the future and role of the Charter. "In private conversations they argued that Charter 77 should be either put to sleep or limited to 'protecting the hinterland' of reformist communist activity, that reformist communism was the only practicable alternative to the existing status quo."[66]

Sabata's political outlook is based on the belief in the need for a democratic expression of the plurality of socialist views. In 1982 he wrote:

> "I am consciously coming around to the question of 'plurality' - that is, whether it is possible in our society to have and to contest different political viewpoints. The official line is that "we do not need pluralism"...But this is not convincing, we do not live in a society free from contradictions."[67]

What Sabata advocates is the creation of a 'democratic socialist bloc'. This would be a:

"...democratic framework to include all socialists...a strategic alliance (not one of mere

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temporary convenience) which is to be anchored in the power structure, the political,

ideological and judicial life of social relations as they actually exist. This alliance would

use radical methods to expose and discard the National Front."

As Sabata points out, the idea of a 'democratic socialist bloc' was put forward by

Vaclav Havel in 1968 (a solution which Havel now feels is inadequate[68]).Sabata points out

that such a democratic socialist bloc is in itself an expression of a 'closed plurality':

> "It would and could not include all political tendencies...It presumes unification
> around a programme and voluntary democratic discipline, which would
> discourage a tendency towards a fight 'without rules'...but it is not an expression
> of political monopoly...It does not limit political democracy by 'excluding on
> principle'; it does not deny the principle of free expression of all independent
> viewpoints."

Sabata concludes that the project of a democratic socialist bloc is the only way forward:

"The only way to overcome stagnation and crisis...whilst avoiding solutions of the left or

right which history has discarded."[69]

Sabata does not explain in any detail, however, how such a bloc would function, and

what its relationship would be to the existing Communist Party, and whether the

Communist Party would retain its leading role. Havel's conception of a democratic

socialist bloc in 1968 involved a two party system and a competition for power. It is not so

clear what Sabata's would involve, but he makes no reference to a two party system.

Sabata also emphasizes the need for democratic self-management. The goal of

democratic self-management is, he argues, an international one. He describes as a

'mistaken approach' the assumption that it is possible to construct a communist, self-

managed society in this or that country "without the whole world, and above all the whole

of Europe (united, not divided) maturing into a system of democratic self-management." In

his "Letter to his interrogator' Sabata concludes that what he is advocating is a "democratic

turn to the left":

> "It is of course a turn to socialism of a democratic and self-managing type. The
> strategy of a democratic turn to the left is the precise opposite of a liberal (pro-
> capitalist) turn to the right, and it must not be narrowed down to a reform
> communist policy of liberal steps to the right following the example of the
> 'Hungarian Road' (exclusively 'from above')."

Sabata argues that the conditions for this political turn are ripening, both amongst the

ruling circles and the opposition.

In the context of the Charter, Sabata is one of the more 'radical' Chartists, advocating new and more organizational forms. The document 'Co s Chartou?', issued in 1977 by an 'initiative group', was said to have been drafted by Sabata and Uhl.[70] The document advocates changes in Charter activity - it should take up concrete cases of human rights violations, issue a regular bulletin, appoint special 'representatives' of 'various informal groupings', support the development of 'civic activity in all directions' and co-operate actively with all those struggling for human rights in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. (Most of these suggestions were adopted by the Charter or surrounding groups.) The authors also described the Charter as a 'solid body' with a 'significant political base'. The view that the Charter was becoming a 'new political formation' seems to be underlined in Sabata's interview with 'Extrablatt':

> "The orientation which I support is based on the premise that an independent political force must be established. Most of the Charter shows a healthy tendency to unity. And it is not a question of some kind of pragmatic and tactical effort to co-operate on a certain issue, but a real movement for a new political formation."

He sees the document 'One hundred years of Czech socialism' as an expression of this process. Sabata also implies that agreement on the problem of the socialist alternative to 'real socialism' has been reached by the majority of Chartists: "We have agreed on the phrase 'democratic self-government'."

However many Chartists would resist this interpretation of the Charter as a political movement, and there is no evidence that any specific agreement on the concept of democratic self-government had been reached, even by those who signed the '100 years' document. This was a fairly general document, the signatories of which declared their "allegiance to the traditions of our early workers and socialist movement" and it makes no mention of 'democratic self-government'.

Sabata's views differ from those of the reform communists, not so much on the question of the prospects for the reform of the Communist Party, but in his attitude to the 'politicization' of the Charter and his formulation of new political initiatives, such as the 'democratic turn to the left'. In his advocacy of a 'democratic socialist bloc' Sabata is going beyond the reform proposals of 1968. His emphasis on workers self-management and the need for plurality bring him close to the viewpoint of the Independent Socialists, however he differs from them in that the Independent Socialists support the concept of

competing political parties, whereas Sabata advocates a 'closed plurality' in the form of a 'democratic socialist bloc'.

## Eurocommunism

One of the main features of the reform communist grouping within the Czechoslovak opposition in the 1970s was the increasing emphasis placed on Eurocommunism. During the second half of the 1970s reform communists produced many documents stressing both the importance of Eurocommunist support for the persecuted members of the Czechoslovak opposition, and the close affinity between the Eurocommunist cause and that of the reform communists in 1968, and in opposition.

As early as 1971 the 'Short Action Programme' identified the creation of links with the West European left as an urgent goal for the socialist opposition:

> "The first and basic tactical aim should be that the left opposition in
> Czechoslovakia should win the support of the West European left; that the Party
> (communist) opposition in the country should win recognition from the West
> European communists."[71]

The early approaches of the reform communists in opposition to the West European left also, however, contained warnings about the direction that West European communism should take. Much hope was placed on the development of the West European left, but also fears were expressed that opportunities would be squandered, and that the Western left would fail to learn from the lessons of 1968. Jiri Pelikan concludes his account of the socialist opposition in Czechoslovakia with the warning to the Western left that they cannot afford to ignore developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe:

> "The left in the West must realize that its endeavour for a 'different socialism' can
> be crowned with success only in the event of a democratization of the USSR and
> of the East European countries. The militarily and economically strong
> bureaucracy in Moscow cannot tolerate authentic socialism in Paris or Rome just
> as it could not tolerate it in Prague, Budapest or Warsaw. It is this
> realization...which must become the point of departure for a new strategy of
> world socialist forces...Unless this is grasped in time, a great historic opportunity
> for socialism will be lost."[72]

East European developments, then, should be viewed as the legitimate concern of the West European left, as they will have a direct effect on their own prospects for success. This theme became a central feature in many of the reform communists' discussions about the importance of Eurocommunism.

From 1975 onwards, with the elaboration by several West European Communist

parties of their own concepts of a democratic, pluralist socialism, and the growing

influence of Eurocommunism, relations with the West European left took on increasing

importance for the reform communists. Between Helsinki in 1975 and the Berlin

Conference of European Communist and Workers Parties in June 1976, the confidence and

hopes placed in Eurocommunism by many reform communists was at its peak. There are

several reasons why reform communists felt links with the Western Eurocommunists to be

of such importance.

Firstly, the solidarity shown by some West European communist parties to those

communists persecuted and imprisoned in Czechoslovakia was valued. Mlynar cites in

particular the concrete support given by the Italian Communist Party in the defence of J

Smrkovsky, M Hubl, K Kosik and himself.[73]

Secondly, Eurocommunism by its very existence and especially by its support for the

Charter, helps the reform communists to counter the allegations made by the regime that

they are anti-socialist. This is a point much emphasized by Jiri Hajek, and he argues that

the support of Eurocommunism is his strongest weapon in countering the allegation of anti-

socialism:

> "It isn't any secret, that Eurocommunism is...my strongest trump during dealings
> with the representatives of power. I say "You really think that the Charter is anti-
> socialist? Then what about the articles and declarations in the Italian, Spanish and
> French Party press. Are these communist parties also anti-socialist, when they
> support us?" The authorities don't have answers to such questions."[74]

Mlynar also argues that the existence of communist parties with political orientations

very similar to those of the reform communists of 1968, clearly exposes any charge that the

reform communist opposition is anti-socialist:

> "If the KSC orientation of 1968 is pronounced...in Prague, Moscow and other
> communist parties as 'counter-revolutionary', and at the same time
> Eurocommunist orientated communist parties are acknowledged as 'fraternal
> parties', which have the right of sovereignty - then a visible discrepancy arises.
> This by itself has already very much strengthened, and continues to strengthen,
> communists expelled after August 1968 from the ranks of the KSC."[75]

Thirdly, the similarity of the Eurocommunist political orientation to that of the reform

proposals of 1968 is clearly of central importance to the reform communists, and they often

seek to underline the close affinity of the two. In an 'Open letter to communists and socialists in Europe' Mlynar writes that in Czechoslovakia:

> "Thousands of people are silenced and persecuted, who... constituted, and today constitute, a certain current of opinion... This current of opinion is, through its ideas, very close and sometimes quite identical to the currents of opinion which are increasingly and positively asserting themselves in the European workers movement, in the recent period."[76]

In another discussion, Hajek and Mlynar again emphasize that the new roads taken by the Eurocommunists, especially the Italians "...in essence agree with what we aimed at (and are aiming at)."[77]

Hajek writes that the fundamental link between the Czechoslovak reform communists and the Eurocommunist parties is "above all the idea that in industrially developed countries and societies socialism cannot function without democracy."[78]

The Czechoslovak reformers of 1968 and the Eurocommunists share the need to find a model of socialism more appropriate for a developed, industrial, European state with democratic traditions. Mlynar argues that it is this factor which explains the differing appeal of Eurocommunism in the countries of Eastern Europe:

> "On the whole it is possible to say, that the direct influence of Eurocommunism is strongest where conditions in ...countries of the Warsaw Pact most resemble the conditions in West European states...the similarity of historical development, social structure, cultural traditions etc. In this way the influence of Eurocommunism in the CSSR is understandably very strong."[79]

This awareness of common European traditions and identity is accompanied by a shared desire to overcome the post-war division of Europe into opposing military blocs. In his 'Open letter' Mlynar argues that the division of Europe into military-political blocs should be overcome in the name of the agreements at Helsinki. This view is also reflected in an interview with a leading Spanish communist, Manuel Azcarate: "...(the Eurocommunist) parties are fighting to achieve peaceful coexistence, an end to military blocs, the removal of (foreign) military bases wherever they may be."[80]

This shared desire by reform communists and Eurocommunists to overcome the political consequences for Europe of the Second World War is underlined by Tokes: "These shared ambitions affirm the common heritage of Europeans against all outside powers and openly challenge the hegemony of the two superpowers."[81]

Reform communists frequently emphasize the similarity of the Eurocommunist outlook with that of the Prague Spring. However, there is no discussion about the differences that exist between the two programmes, especially in their attitudes towards political plurality and a multi-party system. There is no analysis of whether these differences, arising as they did in very different political circumstances, are simply a reaction to these circumstances, or denote a more fundamental difference in political outlook.

Finally, Eurocommunist links are given emphasis because of the belief, expressed especially strongly by Mlynar at one time, that to a large extent the key to the fate of Czechoslovak reform lies in Eurocommunism, and the key to the fate of Eurocommunism lies in developments in Czechoslovakia. This concept of mutual interdependency is clearly expressed by Mlynar in his 'Open letter'. He addresses this letter to comrades and friends in the communist and socialist parties of Europe:

> "...in the hope that in this way I can at least in part contribute to the solution of the pressing political problems in my own country, which are today hardly solvable without the help of the European workers movement...I am convinced that some political concepts, applied by the authorities in today's Czechoslovakia, damage not only the development of socialism in this country, but are also a serious threat for the perspectives of the development of socialism in the whole of Europe."[82]

It was this belief, that developments in Czechoslovakia were of direct relevance to the Eurocommunist parties and central to the whole question of relations inside the international communist movement, that convinced Mlynar that the fate of Czechoslovakia would have to be a major point for discussion at the European Conference of Communist Parties in Berlin. In 1975 he optimistically argued that:

> "The European Conference of Communist Parties should be able... to clarify a series of questions which trouble the communist movement on this continent. And it is not possible, self-evidently, to in any way exclude from these questions the development and problems in Czechoslovakia."[83]

Mlynar and Hajek argue that Czechoslovakia must be a central issue, firstly, because the Czechoslovak reform attempts were in essence not just specific to Czechoslovakia, but concerned the whole question of the possible future developments of socialism in Europe in general. They "revealed many problems and voiced many concepts and ideas, which are extraordinarily important also for communist and socialist parties of Western Europe." Secondly, the issue of Czechoslovakia should be central to the whole communist

movement because, as Hajek argues, the suppression of reform by military intervention became "one of the strongest factors of differentiation in the international communist movement since the 2nd World War." Mlynar expresses the hope that the Berlin Conference can establish new relationships between communist parties based on a rejection of any single centre, of any uniform pattern of development imposed on all, and introduce instead the principle of equal rights and the right of each party to decide its own policies. "Future unity is, after all, only possible to imagine as unity in diversity." Clearly, Mlynar felt that it would be impossible to discuss all such questions without reference to Czechoslovak experience, and expressed hope that the conference would result in an improvement of the Czech situation:

> "The problems, which will be discussed at the European Communist Conference, repeatedly touch upon the development of Czechoslovakia. The conference can hardly pass by in silence the reality, that after August 1968 the development of socialism here was deeply disturbed, and that it is necessary to look for ways out of this closed situation."[84]

The relationship between Czechoslovak reform communists and the west European Eurocommunists, however, is far from being a simple one. Although, as has been seen, Eurocommunism is generally viewed very positively by the reform communists, the relationship is complicated by the Eurocommunists position within the international communist movement, which has led to some reluctance on their part to risk a split with Moscow through open support of the Czechoslovak opposition, which in turn has resulted in many of the hopes placed by reform communists in Eurocommunism being disappointed. The question of the continued unity of the international communist movement presents the reform communists with a dilemma. A rift between the Eurocommunists and Moscow would remove the constraints placed on the Eurocommunists support for the Czechoslovak opposition, and Mlynar considers that such a split could come about.

> "Under certain circumstances it would of course be impossible to avoid - just as the Yugoslavs could not avoid a split with Stalin in 1948 if they didn't want...simply to capitulate before Stalinism. This historical experience also shows that a similar kind of split would by no means lead to the victory of the apparently larger and more powerful party."[85]

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But he concludes that it would be of more benefit to the communist opposition in
Eastern Europe if the Eurocommunists could avoid such a split with Moscow, despite the
constraints which this places on their support for such opposition groups:

> "As long as...it is possible to prevent a similar split, it is clearly in the interests of
> the struggles of democratically oriented communists in the countries of the Soviet
> bloc, that the Eurocommunists not be 'excommunicated' from the official
> communist movement; in the name of this, then, compromises are inevitable and
> fairly substantial."

Hajek also expresses the opinion that a split in the international communist ranks would
not be desirable: "We would be sorry if a split occurred. It would make our situation much
more difficult."

But he is optimistic that such a split will not take place, arguing that in the leadership in
Moscow there are people who wish to avoid such a split, agreeing with Lenin's view that
"Russia can and must learn from a future socialist Germany or France, from all the more
developed countries of the West." He also argues that Moscow would wish to avoid a split
with Eurocommunism, because through such a split it would lose its previous position in
the international communist movement, which in turn would be bound to have political
consequences inside the Soviet Union.[86]

Two major factors most probably contribute to this desire, on the part of the reform
communists, to avoid such a split. Firstly, the hope that Eurocommunists can influence the
course of events taken in Eastern Europe from inside the movement, and ensure that the
Czechoslovak question is put on the agenda, and secondly the fact that, as has been seen,
the acceptance of the Eurocommunists by Moscow as a 'fraternal party' helps the reform
communists to refute the allegation of anti-socialism themselves.

However, even those such as Mlynar who feel that compromises are acceptable in the
interests of continued unity, at the same time express disappointment at the weakness of the
support given by many Eurocommunist parties to the Czechoslovak communists in
opposition. Mlynar argues that even within the confines of the international communist
movement and the maintenance of relations with Moscow, the Eurocommunists could
perhaps offer more active support.

> "...for example, the publishing of political documents and texts, the courage to
> establish direct contacts etc. Why, for example, would it not be possible for

some leading functionary of the KSI to quite officially assert his right to visit and discuss political problems with Alexander Dubcek?"[87]

The results of the European Communist Conference held in Berlin in June 1976 did much to dampen the very optimistic and positive expectations expressed by leading reform communists in the proceeding year. It had been hoped and assumed, most prominently by Mlynar, that the Eurocommunists would use their influence at the conference to bring Czechoslovak questions to the forefront of discussions. In the event, although the influence of the Eurocommunists was apparent in the acceptance by the conference of the principles of equality and independence of all communist parties, Czechoslovakia was hardly mentioned. The results of the conference were of some value to the reform communists - the emphasis by the communist movement on the principles of the Helsinki Final Act helps the reform communists to refute their governments allegations that these same principles are anti-socialist when expressed by the opposition: "Face to face with these documents, it takes a lot of courage (to use the mildest of expressions) to call Charter 77 - which proceeds precisely along the line of the Berlin communist appeal - an attack on socialism..."[88]

But the results of the conference clearly disappointed Mlynar:

> "I hoped...that Czechoslovak questions would receive larger consideration during the preparation and proceedings of the Conference of European Communist Parties, that above all Eurocommunists would understand, that the struggle for an objective view of 1968 is a struggle inside the communist movement itself. The result was...the well known closing document of the Berlin Conference - and time shows how far off this result is from guaranteeing the creative development of the European communist movement."[89]

In the light of events, Mlynar explains that he feels it necessary to re-assess and re-evaluate some of his published theses on 1968, written with the expected developments of the Berlin Conference in mind, "at the same time, it is also necessary to formulate and express more prominently some questions, which were consciously pushed into the background..."[90] Clearly Berlin was a serious disappointment, requiring Mlynar to reappraise his previous emphasis on the role of Eurocommunism. In 1984, an emigre in the West, he concluded that "the hope inspired by Eurocommunism has not fulfilled the promise of the early seventies."[91]

In 1979 the reform communist Milos Hajek wrote a detailed account of the development of the Eurocommunist parties. He places fewer expectations on Eurocommunist

development than did the reform communists prior to '76, but at the same time still assesses it very positively. He points out that the Eurocommunist parties have little chance of obtaining power in the near future, and indeed that they do not aim to gain any monopoly of power: "There aim is to participate in a coalition government with other parties." He refutes the argument that Eurocommunism may just follow the same pattern of development as Czechoslovakia in 1945-48:

> "I often hear the objection: Gottwald said the same things that Marchais and Berlinguer are saying. As soon as they gain power, they will necessarily have to introduce dictatorship in order to maintain it...Its weakest point is its unhistoric identification of pre-February Gottwald with today's Eurocommunist leaders."[92]

Hajek argues that whereas the Czechoslovak leaders up to 1948 saw their model in the Soviet Union and did not consider pluralism essential or see their development in terms of a different 'model', but only as a different 'road', today's Eurocommunists clearly reject 'real socialism' and have no aspirations to gain a monopoly of state power. Hajek praises the wide ranging discussions which take place within the West European communist parties on such issues as their relationship to Marxism-Leninism. In his conclusions about the value of Eurocommunism, Hajek voices few expectations of it being capable of influencing developments in Czechoslovakia, but concludes that it is a very positive phenomenon in the development of West European communism:

> "Is Eurocommunism then really a new programme or only a new pitfall? I am convinced...that it concerns a new programme...It is, in my opinion, the only viable trend of West European communism, the only one which introduces hundreds of people...to the struggle for socialism, for democracy of a really higher type."[93]


## Reactions to Gorbachev's reforms

The reform communists have reacted very positively to Gorbachev's reform policies in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. Whilst others within the Czechoslovak opposition, and the Charter through its own documents, have responded to the changes in the Soviet Union in a hopeful but cautious tone, the reform communists express views fully supporting Gorbachev's policies. For the reform communists the most important aspect of Gorbachev's 'perestroika' and 'glasnost' is the parallel that can be drawn between attempts at Soviet reform and the reform programme of the Prague Spring. In the late 1980s

considerable reform communist activity, both in Czechoslovakia and in exile, has been devoted to restating and assessing the reform programme of 1968 due to the perception of its increased relevance in the light of Gorbachev's reforms. For example the document marking the 20th anniversary of the Action Programme of the Czechoslovak Communist Party[94], signed by 42 reform communists, including Hajek, Dienstbier, Hubl and Lis, gives a detailed account of the original Action Programme. From exile Zdenek Mlynar presented a lengthy assessment of the impact of the Prague Spring in his article 'The lessons of the Prague Spring'[95] Many reform communist documents are concerned with drawing parallels between the Prague Spring and Gorbachev's reforms - for example see from exile Jiri Pelikan's 'Gorbachev, the European Left and the Prague Spring'[96], and from Prague Zdenek Jicinsky's 'Once more on the theme of Gorbachev and the year 1968'.[97]

Reform communists argue that Gorbachev's reforms are in many respects very close to those advocated in 1968. The document marking the 20th anniversary of the Action Programme states:

> "Today, when the new Soviet leadership headed by M. Gorbachev has embarked on the historic task of the complex reconstruction of the Soviet society and state, there is at home and abroad a quite logical tendency to draw comparisons with their demands and the reform process of the Prague Spring...and its Action Programme... and it must be said that all the basic demands are the same. That which M. Gorbachev proclaims as a revolutionary transformation of Soviet society was contained - and in many ways more concretely - in the Action Programme of April 1968."[98]

The fact that the Soviet Union is embarking on a course so similar to that which, twenty years before, the reform communists in Czechoslovakia advocated, is seen by them as a vindication of the correctness of their course. Jiri Hajek states:

> "...in a sense, I suppose I do feel myself vindicated by what Mikhail Gorbachev is trying to do...There are certain times in history when the creative forces in a society try to break through the contradictions. This is such a time in Moscow and 1968 was such a time here."[99]

Jiri Pelikan writes from exile:

> "I think that I would not be exaggerating when I declare that Gorbachev's political and economic reforms, expressed by the words 'perestroika' and 'glasnost', de facto rehabilitate the Prague Spring, even if conservative forces in Prague and also in Moscow attempt to disguise or refute it."[100]

This argument, that Gorbachev's reforms in some way 'rehabilitate' the ideas of the

Prague Spring is an important one for the reform communists. In many of their documents

they argue that not only are Gorbachev's reforms and those of the Prague Spring very

similar, but that they must be acknowledged as being so by the current Communist Party

leaders, both in Moscow and in Prague. The reform communists argue that, in the light of

Soviet events, a reassessment of the events of 1968 is required on the part of the

authorities. They argue that if any progress is to be made towards change in

Czechoslovakia, the authorities must first publish the truth about the reform proposals of

the Prague Spring, and review their negative assessment of them. The Action Programme

must be cleared of the charge that it was counter-revolutionary and anti-socialist, and be

subject to an objective political discussion. The 'lessons of the crisis years' must be

overturned. The authors of the document marking the 20th anniversary of the Action

Programme argue that for Czechoslovak society an understanding of the truth about itself

and its past is one of the most important preconditions for real change. Understanding the

truth about 1968 is all the more important as this is one of the periods most falsified by

official propaganda. The authors argue that without truth, there cannot develop any trust

between the people and their political representatives. They argue that if change is to take

place, and if there is to be any chance that socialism can be revived in Czechoslovakia, the

curse of counter-revolution must first be removed from the Action Programme and the

whole of the Prague Spring, and its demands and practical steps must be critically, but at

the same time positively evaluated. The Prague Spring, they argue, was a "significant

stimulus and contribution" to the development of the theory and practice of socialism, and

even today its inspirational force is not quite exhausted. The Czechoslovak Communist

party's negative assessment of it blocks any future development:

> "Without removing this road-block, which the Breznev era and normalization
> constructed against socialist development in Czechoslovakia, even today no real
> 'restructuring' is possible in Czechoslovakia."[101]

Reform communists have always retained a positive reference towards the Prague

Spring, but the adoption of similar concepts in the Soviet Union has in their view made the

reform proposals of 1968 even more important and relevant today. The 20th anniversary

of the Action Programme document states:

> "The Action Programme and the whole of the Prague Spring of 1968 belong to the most significant and brightest period of socialist development in Czechoslovakia...the Action Programme acquires new inspirational meaning for present developments...due to the reconstruction which is taking place in the USSR."[102]

Similarly from exile Mlynar writes:

> "Regardless of the power-political defeat of the Czechoslovak Communist Party's reform policy, the conceptual legacy of the Prague Spring programme remains highly topical today, at a time of a fresh attempt at changing the system in the USSR."

Mlynar concludes: "I believe that in an historical context where twenty years are virtually irrelevant, the Prague Spring has been designated as a positive projection of current endeavours for a qualitative transformation of the Soviet system."[103]

However, although reform communists assert that the example and legacy of the Prague Spring has acquired new meaning, they also concede that the Prague Spring does not provide a model which can be simply repeated in present day Czechoslovakia. They argue that conditions have changed too much, both within the Czechoslovak Communist Party and within society, for the events of 1968 to be repeated, and that the situation in present day Czechoslovakia is fundamentally different than it was in 1968. They also argue that Gorbachev's reforms cannot be simply adopted as a model for Czechoslovakia. Zdenek Jicinsky argues that it is not possible to implement a Soviet type reform based on the concepts of 'glasnost' and 'perestroika' in Czechoslovakia: "...due to the character of its current authorities...this is not achievable in Czechoslovakia. At the same time, for Czechoslovak society, considering its political and cultural... development, including the Prague Spring, it would be limiting and insufficient."[104]

Reform communists argue that during the period of normalization the Czechoslovak Communist Party, and its relationship to society, has been severely damaged, making the prospects for democratization initiated by the Communist Party "not too promising".[105] Zdenek Jicinsky argues that under normalization:

> "...the internal life of the Czechoslovak Communist Party was suffocated. It became a party only of government, not ideas and political leadership...the possibilities of it changing from the governing party into the party of political hegemony in Czechoslovak society, without which 'perestroika' in Gorbachev's conception is impossible, are very limited."[106]

The official Communist Party ideology, Jicinsky argues, is now neither accepted by society, nor by those who officially expound it. Hajek also argues that the current Czechoslovak Communist Party is so lacking in legitimacy and dynamism that it would not be possible for it to lead a programme of reform. He argues that whereas in 1968 the Communist Party's Action Programme gained the spontaneous support of the majority: "...it is not possible to expect that today's leadership of the Communist Party would be able to give effective stimulation to social movements in the direction of democratic reform."[107]

Hajek argues that in 1970 the Czechoslovak Communist Party was stripped of its most active, loyally socialist members, and it changed from a living organism into an obedient power apparatus, deprived of all force and dynamism. At the same time, he argues, social organizations were transformed into passive transmission belts and society was reduced to a powerless mass, subject to manipulation by the authorities. He argues that only with difficulty could this leadership stimulate it to movement. Jiri Dienstbier also emphasizes the sterility of the current Communist Party leadership and its inability to lead society, in a 1987 article. In particular he argues that the first sign of a serious effort for change must involve the departure of Vasil Bilak:

> "Until such a time hardly anyone will believe that anything has happened at all and will be prepared to wake up from the present lethargy, start to risk creative thinking in public or believe it useful to commit himself in society or simply in his job."[108]

However he does express the belief that somewhere within the ranks of the party people can be found to initiate new policies, if not in the present leadership, then amongst the ranks of the younger party members.

The question of whether the reform communists within the opposition believe that, as a result of changes in the Soviet Union, change can be initiated 'from above' by the current Czechoslovak Communist Party, or by a new Communist Party leadership, has led to some hostility towards the reform communists on the part of others within the opposition, and to suspicions that the reformists simply want their old jobs back. Petr Uhl, in particular, is very critical of what he sees as the increasingly apparent willingness of the reform communist tendency to co-operate with those in power. He argues that the outlook of

many reform communists is "subordinated to the August trauma" and that they are incapable of viewing themselves and their pasts critically. He argues that a strong negative reaction is developing on the part of many towards the reform communists unreservedly pro-Gorbachev attitudes and statements. He sees in the reform communists support of Soviet developments an ambition on their part to return to power themselves:

> "They live in the illusion that the present changes in the USSR might lead not only to a rehabilitation of their past attitudes, and even of themselves personally, but also to a kind of restoration of their policies and, in some cases, to the restoration of their positions of power."[109]

He argues that the reform communist grouping is able to influence and manipulate the Charter itself, resulting in a "harmful politicization" of the Charter. In particular he is critical of the texts marking the 19th anniversary of the 21st August, and the 'Appeal to fellow citizens' with its demand for 'national reconciliation', which he argues are influenced by the thinking of the pro-Gorbachev supporters who form a strong lobby within the Charter. Uhl writes of this group:

> '...their welcoming gestures towards those in power, their nodding agreement with Big Brother Gorbachev, all of their efforts to rehabilitate their political and economic concepts...beg the question: is not our common struggle for human rights merely a means to them - whether they realise it or not - to attain political ends?"[110]

To what extent can Uhl's accusations be supported? As we have seen, the reform communists do view Gorbachev's reform programme as a rehabilitation and vindication of the reform concepts which they formulated in 1968. However they also make it clear that in their view neither Gorbachev's reforms, nor the reforms of the Prague Spring, can simply be introduced or repeated in the conditions of present day Czechoslovakia. Several reform communists have expressed pessimism at the prospects of the current Communist Party and its current leadership being able to initiate a programme of reform. However the question of whether they would be interested in rejoining a Czechoslovak Communist Party under new leadership and committed to reform is left open. In April 1987, in response to the question whether, if offered a Communist Party card, he would accept it, Jiri Hajek replied: "I would have to think about it, but I do not think there is any danger of such an occurrence."[111]

The reform communists, though losing influence in the late 1970s and 1980s in comparison with their leading position in the opposition in the early 1970s, remained a numerically large and politically significant grouping within the Czechoslovak opposition. Though the group fragmented to some extent, many reform communists retained the political loyalties and convictions which they held in 1968. There was no mass conversion to social democracy - most retained their Marxist beliefs. The reform communists remained the largest of the crystallized political groupings within the opposition, and were significantly revitalized in the late 1980s by the proposals for reform in the Soviet Union, with which they closely identified.

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# THE INDEPENDENT SOCIALISTS

The 'Independent Socialist' grouping was founded in 1978 and in that year published the document 'Declaration on one hundred years of Czech socialism' (April 1978). The Independent Socialists formed a fairly crystallized political grouping, united around their common political orientation towards 'democratic socialism'. The group produced many documents expounding the ideas of social democracy and self-management, and developing links with the socialist international. Its leading members also produced the journal 'Dialogy'. However, following the arrest or exile of several of its co-founders, the group faded from visibility during the 1980s, and had effectively ceased to exist by 1988.

Although short-lived, the Independent Socialist grouping was a significant factor within the Czechoslovak political opposition. It was the largest non-communist grouping to crystallize around a political orientation, and demonstrated the broad based appeal of the concept of democratic socialism within the opposition as a whole.

At first sight the Independent Socialist viewpoint may appear to be a very broadly based and almost all-encompassing platform, receiving the support of nearly everyone within the opposition who considers themselves 'socialist'. The breadth of the appeal of the democratic socialist viewpoint in its most general terms is demonstrated by the document 'Declaration on one hundred years of Czech socialism" (1978).[1] This document, looking back to the demands of the early Czech Social Democratic Party at Brevnov and criticizing the present political regime for its failures in the light of these socialist demands, was signed by 23 individuals representing a broad span of political opinion - communist, socialist, catholic, protestant, etc. Jaroslav Sabata, in a 1978 interview[2], described the hundred years document as representing the tendency to unity within the opposition " a real movement for a new political formation... This document is not signed only by socialists in the narrow sense of the term but also by ex-communists... The front is quite large and includes the greater part of politically active and thinking people in Charter 77 and the opposition." He adds that, although the Revolutionary Socialists did not sign the document, "Petr Uhl told me that he was sorry that he wasn't asked to do so. He thought that, as a revolutionary Marxist, he would have been able to sign." Sabata describes the

concept on which they have agreed - the socialist alternative to 'real socialism' - as the phrase "democratic self-government". Zdenek Mlynar also emphasized the mass appeal of the hundred years document[3], and described it as being in the same tradition as the "the attempt to overcome totalitarian dictatorship by democratic socialism in the period of the 'Prague Spring' in 1968". Here democratic socialism is being used as a very broad political term, one supported by Eurocommunists and Trotskyists alike. It should not, however, be confused with the more specific Independent Socialist political standpoint. The Independent Socialist grouping, made up of people who clearly call themselves Independent Socialists and are active in producing Independent Socialist documents and letters, is very much smaller and their political outlook more specific and clearly defined than the above passages might indicate. Although Mlynar and Uhl feel able to support the fairly general hundred years document, they are not in fact close to the Independent Socialists in political ideology. Sabata, though a close sympathizer, is also not an Independent Socialist in its narrower sense. The central core of Independent Socialists consists of Rudolf Battek, Jiri Muller, Jan Tesar, Jaroslav Meznik, Vendelin Komeda, Jindrich Vohryzek and Albert Cerny. Of these, the most active are Battek, Muller, Tesar and Meznik. With the arrest of Battek in June 1980 and his sentence to five and a half years imprisonment, along with the exile of Tesar and Komeda in the same year, the size of this active core was much reduced. The Independent Socialists had been further weakened by a split in the ranks between Tesar and the other leading figures. This split did not stem from any ideological disagreements, but was based on personal differences (especially between Tesar and Muller) and also different opinions about tactics. Tesar rejected the legalistic, moderate approach of the Independent Socialists in favour of revolutionary and conspiratorial tactics. He brought out his own journal to compete with 'Dialogy', entitled 'Misto Dialogy' ('In place of Dialogue'). Tesar continued to produce his journal in exile (now retitled 'Dialogy') and in it advocated revolutionary methods, which brought him close tactically to the Trotskyists.

The political backgrounds of the leading Independent Socialists are very diverse, as their activities in 1968 demonstrate. Rudolf Battek, born in 1924, was one of the founders of KAN - The Club of Committed Non-Party Members - in 1968. He has never been a

member of any political party. An active Chartist, he was a Charter spokesman in 1980 and a founding member of VONS.

Jiri Muller, born in 1943, was a prominent student leader in the 1960s. He was a leader of the movement to transform the Party-controlled official Youth Union (CSM) into a genuinely representative, autonomous organization. Jiri Pelikan writes: "He belongs among those representatives of the younger generation who had been fighting for the idea of a democratic socialism since long before January 1968 and who had been persecuted for that reason."

In 1968 and 1969 Muller was active in promoting co-operation between students and workers, through the establishment of workers councils. In December 1968 Muller, as chairman of the student commission for co-operation with workers, organized an agreement between the Congress of Czech Metal Workers and the Student Union, and many other similar agreements followed, initiating the establishment of worker-student action committees and promoting the principles of worker self-management.

Jan Tesar, born in 1933, was a former member of the Communist Party in the 1960s, and a member of the Historical Institute until dismissed in 1969. He was arrested in that year for 'subversive activity'. He was an active Chartist and founding member of VONS.

These leading Independent Socialists - non-communist, student radical and former communist, have in common a history of political commitment and resulting official persecution. All three, for example, were arrested and imprisoned in 1971 for their participation in the election leaflet campaign.

Despite the differences in political background of its leading figures, the Independent Socialists' political standpoint, as expressed in their documents and letters, is quite homogeneous and clearly defined.

One of the goals of the Independent Socialists was to create a political standpoint which would be unifying rather than divisive. This goal is clearly expressed in the "Letter to the General Council of the Socialist International:[4]

> "In the given situation the Independent Socialists consider it their fundamental task to generate new ideas and tendencies that would overcome traditional group interests. This means to search for a conception of the relationship between politics and economics that could be shared by socialists and democratically oriented communists. Of similar fundamental significance is a rapprochement of

Christians and Socialists in determining the extent of individual and institutional responsibilities in matters relating to values essential to life."

This goal leads logically to the rejection of any dogmatic ideological structures. In a letter to Miroslav Tucek[5], Rudolf Battek rejects the need for any rigid ideology: "This is not ideological nihilism. Each political concept of society has its own ideological motivation, but it is...motivation of an open form of ideas, without resting on dogmatic systems." The mature Czech citizen, he argues, has through bitter experience outgrown the ability to believe in any messianic or exclusive set of ideological claims. "The conceptual sign of democratic socialism isn't any definitive ideology."

This goal also leads to the rejection of any party label that would alienate those who basically share the opinions and values of the Independent Socialists. The Independent Socialists repeatedly reject any direct link with the Czech Social Democratic Party that existed before 1948:

> "We have no direct historical affiliation with any of the political groupings that existed in Czechoslovakia before 1948... Party affiliation or the defence of historical ideological sources are not of decisive importance to us."[6]

One of the major reasons for the Independent Socialists distancing themselves in this way from the pre-48 Social Democrats is the desire to provide a socialist platform on which different shades of socialist can meet. The use of old party labels would provide a barrier to this goal. In a letter to Miroslav Tucek[7], Jaroslav Meznik explains why, although he is a supporter of democratic socialism, he does not label himself as a Social Democrat. Although sympathetic with the program and traditions of the Social Democratic Party, "... the idea of democratic socialism represents for me higher values than the tradition of one political party". Most importantly in the present situation, many people who come from diverse political backgrounds but who now hold similar beliefs (former communists, former members of the National Socialist Party, etc.) and a large number of younger people who were never members of a political party can unite on the platform of democratic socialism. The revival of the Social Democratic Party traditions, it is argued, would be divisive, alienating those with different party traditions.

> "People who have the same or very similar opinions on current problems would then be separated from each other for the sake of traditions which bear upon conditions in Czechoslovakia (or even in Austria-Hungary) thirty, sixty, or even eighty years ago... In the contemporary period it is necessary for people who

believe in democratic socialism to act together.... That is why we simply call ourselves Independent Socialists."

Whilst rejecting the divisive qualities of a rigid ideological framework and traditional party labels, the Independent Socialists however do not reject the concept of some form of structured political organization. At a time when most within the opposition were advocating 'anti-politics' and the 'non-political politics' of citizens initiatives, and eschewed any overtly 'political' organization, the Independent Socialists provide an interesting contrast, through their defence of both 'politics' and the role of organizations, even political parties based on an alternative political platform.

In his essay 'Spiritual values, independent initiatives and politics' Rudolf Battek rallies to the defence of politics and of political opposition. He points out that this is a source of differences of opinion within the opposition:

> "Objections are constantly being made, for instance, to commitments of an expressly political nature, as though opposition only stood a chance of succeeding if it eliminated all political commitment. But politics cannot be banished either from one's thoughts or from practical activity merely by declaring them to have no future...In today's system of 'real socialism', political opposition has a fundamental significance that cannot be denied, nor can any other activity take its place."[8]

In a 1985 essay Jaroslav Meznik also comes to the defence of politics, even of politics as a struggle for power. He is critical of the view expressed by a young Christian contributor to the 'Young Christians from Moravia' initiative, who argued that in the future, politics will not be a question of the competition with power or for power. Meznik, on the other hand, argues that as long as the state exists it is necessary to have certain institutions and individuals in a position of power. Power itself, he argues, is ethically neutral, it can serve either good or evil. "In my opinion it is not possible to condemn the struggle for power if it is a struggle to achieve something good."[9]

Meznik argues that politics must not be reduced merely to a struggle for power - so that gaining power becomes its major aim - but that at the same time political struggle, including the struggle for power, is the only way to find and implement solutions to pressing social problems.

> "Politics isn't only a struggle for power, but also a struggle for values; here lies the essence of politics for me. Serving values would not be enough for me if it avoided the problems of society, and the problems of society cannot be solved without politics. For me, this amounts to a moral duty to engage in politics."[9]

Battek similarly argues that the apparatus of power is a necessity for the functioning of the state, and cannot simply be ignored or wished away:

> "...we must avoid political leaps in the dark and shun those fascinating social utopias with their visions of the elimination of power, government and the state, visions in which power will be held by all, or better still, by none, and no one will rule over anyone else. Given the complexity of modern social structures, power cannot be eliminated..."[10]

In line with their defence of the concept of politics, and of political struggle, the Independent Socialists also stress the need for some form of structured political organization as a base for political activity. In several documents Independent Socialists write in defence of organized political parties as the only true expression and guarantee of political plurality. Here again they contrast with the general current within the Czechoslovak opposition as a whole of renouncing any organized political structure and advocating instead direct and informal action by individuals. In a letter to the General Council of the Socialist International (1978) the Independent Socialists write:

> "We sympathize with the notion of unmediated and direct political activity on the part of citizens, without the participation of all-powerful apparatuses of political parties, but at the same time we are aware that at this point in history, it is impossible to overlook the function and purpose of political organizations."[11]

Meznik argues that the essential condition for pluralism in political life and also for a functioning democracy is the existence of some kind of political parties. He argues that organizations of a different kind - such as unions or churches - cannot permanently fill this role, because their growing political activity would alienate them from their original function.[12]

Independent Socialists thus also defend the need to formulate political alternatives on the part of opposition groups. Their own documents contain not simply a critique of the existing system, but a conception of the type of political system that they would advocate in its place. Rudolf Battek writes: "Any political opposition, that is, any new political position, must be able to offer an alternative conception; in a totalitarian system, this alternative cannot be mere hot air."[13]

It is not stated whether the Independent Socialists consider themselves to be, or aspire to be, a 'political party', but I understand that they do hold numbered 'party' or 'membership' cards, though it is not clear how seriously these are taken. Jiri Muller notes

that in a situation where the regime is specialized in the fight against political organizations, any attempt on the part of the independent socialists to organize into a political party would be subject to immediate punishment and failure. He argues that the Independent Socialists are only a conceptual movement and are not geared towards gaining a membership base.[14]

What is clear is that the Independent Socialists see their former lack of any independent organization as a source of past weakness: "One factor that has historically limited our potential is the absence of our own institutions and foreign contacts for several decades."[15]

Unlike reform communists, those sharing social democratic viewpoints have had no movement or organization to draw them together and thus no way of breaking through their isolation.


The basic principles and political standpoints that make up the Independent Socialists' position are outlined in many of their documents. In the letter to the General Council of the Socialist International[16] they state:

> "Our fundamental viewpoint can be summed up in the concepts of democracy, socialism, equality of rights, solidarity, self-management and self-determination for nations. We consider it our duty to revive the elementary principles of morality in politics."

The political roots of the Independent Socialists lie in the early Czech working class movement. Although they renounce any direct links with any pre-February political party, and emphasize that the decisive influence on them is the East European experience of the last thirty years, they feel a strong allegiance to the traditions and demands of the early working class and socialist movements in Czechoslovakia. In reference to the Brevnov programme, they emphasize "the extent to which Czechoslovak socialists and democrats are still indebted to those 'century-old' demands...we must regard it as an unpaid debt and a task yet to be fulfilled."[17] Despite the hundred years that have elapsed since the original Czech Social Democratic Party programme was formulated, there is a strong political continuity between the leaders of the working class movement at Brevnov and the Independent Socialist leaders today. The Independent Socialists are able to adopt the Brevnov demands almost word for word and assert them as valid and desired reforms in present-day Czechoslovakia. This despite the ascendency and rule of a political party claiming to represent these working class socialist interests. The Independent Socialists

point out the gulf between these claims and the political realities in Czechoslovakia. In the 'Declaration on 100 years of Czech socialism' they state:

> "The signatories of this declaration proclaim their adherence to the traditions of the early working-class and socialist movements in this country. So does the ruling Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, but the present system falls far short of recognizing many of the principles formulated by the pioneers of the working-class and socialist movement. As socialists and democrats, we feel a personal responsibility to see that these principles are fulfilled."[18]

In the document "Opinions and points of departure"[19], the Independent Socialist authors outline the type of economic system and economic relationships which would conform to their conception of socialism. The major points that they advocate are:

(1)   The public ownership of the means of production.

(2)   The establishment of self-government as the fundamental ingredient of public ownership of economic management.

(3)   The worker should carry all-round responsibility for his work and his living standard should be dependent on his work.

(4)   Social security provisions - the right to work, protection of health, security in old age and illness, the right to education and housing - for all citizens.

(5)   Legislation limiting economic power, privileges and property differences.

The Independent Socialists' criticism of the existing system of the public ownership of the means of production is that it does not ensure that the proceeds of labour are used for the general good of society, or that the distribution of income is just.[20]

The Independent Socialists also outline other basic features of a democratic and socialist society:

1. An independent judiciary. They quote the Brevnov programme in its demand for the "independence of courts, the election of judges by the people, the introduction of...free legal aid,...the abolition of capital punishment".[21]

2. The freedom of the press and of expression, and the free development of culture. "Man's creative activity expresses itself in its broadest form in the sphere of culture. Its freedom to develop, without manipulation by powerful and dogmatic ideologies, has primary social importance."[22]

3. Social and political equality. The Independent Socialists attack the present system of political persecution and the system of appointments to leading positions (the nomenklatura) on the basis of politics rather than qualifications - either technical or moral. The unequal and unjust treatment of party members results in a situation where "many workers in our country no longer regard the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia as a party of the workers, but rather as a party of 'masters'".[23]

4. Conservation. The Independent Socialists believe that economic relationships should safeguard the balance between economic growth and the conservation of the environment. This balance is described as "a fundamental pre-condition of each social and political concept. Without the policy and perspectives for solving ecological problems, without halting the until now continuous devastation and decay of the natural world, people's concern about material standards and intellectual culture could lose their justification."[24]

5. National Self-Determination. The Independent Socialists also stress the importance of national self-determination as an essential element of political democracy and international understanding. "Integration into...broad political groups is only possible by the consistent respect for the principles of national self-determination and the sovereignty of states."[25]

The Independent Socialists also define what the term democracy means to them:

> "Political democracy is, in its essentials, the equal right of all individuals to voice their own opinion, disseminate it, publicly promote it, and base an association upon it. There follow from this further signs of a system of political democracy: political plurality, dialogue between different opinions, rights of opposition, the majority principle and protection of minority opinions."[26]

They also quote the Brevnov programme in its demand for "equal rights for all citizens ... to elect representatives to the provincial and central parliaments" and add "... the pioneers of our workers' movement certainly did not envisage an electoral system in which the citizen may vote for one candidate only, as is the case today."[27]

In his essay "On the principle of political plurality"[28], Battek examines the justification for political pluralism. His argument is based not on the desirability of political plurality

but on the fact that it actually exists in the social structure of every society, and so needs to find practical expression through "institutional political pluralism".

> "Whether political pluralism is good or bad ... can be the subject of ideological controversy. What is always beyond dispute, however, is the fact that a plurality of political interests is not something artificially introduced into the social structure but is a 'natural' expression of existing differences in the political opinions of citizens. As long as that difference exists, every authoritarian and unitary political structure of society will be an 'unnatural' state that does not correspond to the real spectrum of attitudes in society."

Battek attacks the attempts of the East European Communist Parties to appear democratic by agreeing to the existence of more than one political party whilst maintaining that the 'leading force in society' is the Marxist-Leninist party. The degraded non-communist parties which are thus allowed to exist - giving the formal appearance of democratic institutions - are in fact "completely derived from the power monopoly of the communist parties". He also attacks the way the communist parties exploit the democratic institution of elections in order to give the appearance of democracy whilst in fact establishing a fictitious 'unity' of opinion.

> "There is no method of nominating candidates ... that is ideally free and democratic, but the institution of elections with a single candidate chosen and approved once and for all by the appropriate hierarchical body in the communist party clearly disqualifies such elections and degrades the notion of political citizenship to the level of 'the obedient fulfilling of tasks' demanded by the governing elite."

In this paper, Battek states unequivocally exactly what a 'democratic political system' means to an Independent Socialist and clearly rejects the concept of the 'leading role' of the communist party:

> "A democratic political system is distinguished by constitutional or other forms of legal guarantee, as well as by the practical possibility of institutionalized political plurality. The only possible way this can be understood is as an equal partnership of independent political groupings in which the so-called 'leading force' or 'core' of the political system can only be formed by a certain group exclusively through democratic means, i.e. by free, direct and secret balloting with freely selected candidates."

The concept of self-government in all areas of society is a fundamental one for the Independent Socialists. In the economic sphere they advocate "the mutual coordination of government and self-governing institutions in the management and distribution of the national wealth."[29] Politically, the idea of a self-governing society is fundamental to their conception of political democracy. They believe that the unmediated cooperation and participation of all citizens in decision making will overcome the limitations of

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institutionalized party politics and decentralize political power. Decision making should

come from 'below', rather than be imposed from 'above'. There should be social control

of every power structure. Battek warns that although it is necessary for the functioning of

society that political power be vested in institutions of government, it is also essential that

this power be limited and controlled to avoid its abuse:

> "...political power, the highest form of decision-making power, must be
> prevented, both through law and through 'power' from becoming totally
> concentrated in a single place. One constant task, therefore, will be to control,
> limit and criticize power, to make it practically impossible for power to grow to
> suffocating proportions."[30]

A self-managing socialist society, Independent Socialists argue, will be well adapted to

this task: "Social self-government makes the rise of totalitarian power impossible and

opens the way towards the effective and desirable decentralization of power, the

democratization of every sphere of society, the extension of the direct participation of

citizens in decision making...".[31]

An essential feature of the Independent Socialist standpoint is that the concepts of

socialism and democracy are fundamentally linked. The establishment of one to the

exclusion of the other would violate Independent Socialist values. "The assertion of

socialism as an economic system without at the same time the assertion and respect of the

principles of political democracy is in direct variance with the humanist conception of

society."[32]

The Independent Socialists' definition of democracy goes much further than the

'democratization' of the reform communists of 1968, especially in their advocacy of

institutionalized political pluralism through the free competition of political parties and their

rejection of any leading role for the communist party.

Whilst defending the role of politics and political activity, the Independent Socialists at

the same time emphasize the fundamental importance of human rights, morality in politics,

and the role of the individual. Morality and politics, they argue, cannot be separated, and

the struggle for human rights is not just a moral but a political imperative:

> "The struggle for their unified interpretation and application cannot be only a
> general humane and civic activity, but an important and permanent political
> concern...Politics with a moral base engages in a permanent struggle for the
> realization of human rights and freedoms and respect for the moral norms of
> society and the highest values of human existence."[33]

They argue that the rights and freedoms of the individual in society take precedence over any other socio-economic criteria when it comes to evaluating different social systems: "It is possible to judge the value of a social organization above all according to the actual position, rights and freedoms of the individual."[34]

Independent Socialists also emphasize the importance of civic activity from below as a necessary pre-condition for political change and as a corrective and controlling factor in any political system. Tesar argues that it is the strengthening of civil society which is the most important factor if the totalitarian system is to be overcome. The spiritual and political emancipation of civil society will lead to the creation of new democratic structures from below. On the reversal of the 1968 reform process Tesar writes:

> "Its essential cause lies in the fact that the 'revival process' in Czechoslovakia, and the whole long period of preparation that preceded it, ignored the need to create new democratic structures ...For that is the only way to break out of the vicious circle."[35]

Battek argues that it is essential that civic activity and social pressure from below continue to act as a counterweight to political power even in a non-totalitarian political system.

> "Every proposed organization of society, even one with a maximum of self-management, will need to be balanced by extra-governmental, extra-managerial, extra-organizational activity on the part of voluntary associations established for the widest possible variety of both short-term and long-term needs and purposes."[36]

Thus the Independent Socialists' viewpoint involves a combination of moral, civic and political elements, recognizing both the essential role of structured political parties and institutions of power, and also the need for these structures to be governed by the needs of society, expressed through direct and informal forms of civic activity. Battek concludes:

> "Hope for those who would liberate themselves...lies in a symbiosis of the moral and the social, of humanity and democracy, in the realization of a social order in which the formalized and functionalized structure of society will be regulated and controlled by this 'newly discovered' spontaneous civic activity, which will be a permanent and essential source of social self-awareness, while the bureaucracies ruling society shrink to assume merely compliant executive roles."[37]

## The Socialist International

The Independent Socialist have a very strong political orientation towards Western Europe and the parties of the Socialist International. Of the 19 letters contained in the

'Nezavisle Socialiste 1977-1979' collection of documents, 14 are addressed to, or are replies from, parties and organizations in Western Europe. (2 to the Socialist International, 2 replies, 1 to the Socialist and social democratic parties, 2 to the Socialist Party of Austria, 1 describing a meeting with representatives of the Socialist Party of Austria, 1 to James Callaghan, a letter to Jiri Pelikan at the European Parliament and his reply, 2 to the Czech Social Democratic party in exile, 1 to the West German Social Democratic Party.) A similar number of documents produced by Charter 77 would reveal a much higher percentage of documents addressed to the Czechoslovak authorities and fewer to the West.

This international orientation is a very significant factor for the Independent Socialists. Firstly, on a practical level, strong international links help to break through their isolation, providing moral solidarity and, it is hoped, practical deterrence against arrests and persecution by creating a large network of international support and interest. (However, this failed to prevent the arrest and imprisonment of Rudolf Battek).

In the document 'Opinions and points of departure' Independent Socialists wrote:

> "An important factor of internal political development is international political solidarity. For the democratic forces in Czechoslovakia the solidarity of the Socialist International, Christian Democrats, Eurocommnists and other...democratic elements, has a fundamental significance."[38]

Links with the Socialist International are also very important on a political level. Their association with the parties of the Socialist International, and the support they receive from them, enhances the Independent Socialist's position within Czechoslovakia. The support and solidarity of the powerful parties of the Socialist International is clearly a major political achievement for such a numerically small group susceptible to governmental repression. Although they have not received the official recognition they may have hoped for, they have established firm political contacts and understanding with leading figures within the Socialist International. The practical example of democratic socialism at work given by parties with political ideologies close to their own lends weight to the Independent Socialists within Czechoslovakia.

> "Our political direction as Independent Socialists derives from values common to the parties of the Socialist International...from the international point of view we feel the most important thing is to establish contact with the Socialist International as the most significant political reality of democratic socialism."[39]

In keeping socialist thought alive in Czechoslovakia, the Independent Socialists see a dual role for their activity, not only expressing the continued adherence to European socialist tradition, but also explaining that tradition, and the current policies of West European socialist parties, to the Czechoslovak people and so increasing their understanding of, and sympathy for, these policies. Addressing the Socialist Party of Austria, Independent Socialists explain:

> "We are convinced that (our activity)...not only contributes towards an objective understanding of the state of the theory and political practice of democratic socialism in central and western European countries, to which we and our historical traditions belong, but also, above all, that it enables the interested part of our public to understand the justification of your policy of co-existence with the Soviet Union."[40]

The Independent Socialists feel that they are very much part of the central European political tradition. Despite the post-war divisions and years of separate political development, they emphasize the common European social democratic tradition in which they and the parties of the Socialist International have their political origins. In a letter to the Socialist Party of Austria the Independent Socialists emphasize "our common central European tradition of democratic socialism'.[41] They see the solidarity and support of western and central European socialists as: "...proof that our common historical socialist origin is mutually alive, despite the unfavourable post-war political development in Central Europe..."[41]

Despite the relatively small number of active Independent Socialists, even when the grouping was at its peak, the Independent Socialist grouping represented an important element within the framework of the Czechoslovak opposition. One reason for the significance of the Independent Socialist viewpoint lies in its large potential base of support. As has been seen, the Independent Socialists were able to achieve broad based support from within the opposition for the general concepts of democratic socialism in their 'One hundred years of Czech socialism' document.

The Independent Socialists also express the belief that they would find a large potential base of support within society as a whole, were people able to express their political

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choices freely. This argument is based on their perception of Czech political culture and political traditions. The Independent Socialists seem to support the opinion, expressed in some studies of Czech political culture[42], that the dominant Czech political culture is based on a belief in political plurality and social democratic values, despite the efforts of the ruling Communist Party in the field of political socialization. In the document 'Opinions and points of departure' the Independent Socialists refer to the values which they see as being contained in the nation's common subconsciousness as being; "humanity, faith in the future of the nation, the struggle for social justice, humanistic and democratic ideas of human, civil and national freedom".[43]

The Independent Socialists, however, do not see their role as that of gaining wide popular support or a membership base, but rather emphasize the crucial and, in the circumstances, more practical role of keeping democratic socialist thought alive in Czechoslovakia.

> "We are political realists and we well understand our real limits. And if the potential possibilities of the movement of democratic socialism in Czechoslovakia are considerable, as it corresponds largely to the political tradition of the Czech nation and the level of industrial development in our society, at the present time we are struggling above all...to take up once again the interrupted continuity of socialist thought in our country."[44]

The Independent Socialist grouping was a significant element within the Czechoslovak opposition, and was unusual both for its traditional and its innovative qualities. It was a new and unique phenomenon amongst the political expressions of opposition in Czechoslovakia since 1968 because it was clearly socialist but also non-communist. It also contained a strong element of political continuity with its emphasis on links with pre-war Czech traditions. It was an important expression of the social democratic viewpoint, which had been largely silenced since 1948.

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# CATHOLIC RADICAL CONSERVATISM - VACLAV BENDA

As this title suggests, there are three important inter-linked factors which characterize the political outlook and thinking of Vaclav Benda, and his writings contribute an important element to the diversity of the political outlooks within the Czechoslovak opposition.

Firstly, Benda speaks from a Catholic point of view. As an active lay Catholic he was selected as spokesman for the Charter in February 1979 (as a reflection of the large numbers of religious believers in the Charter, one spokesman is usually an active Christian and unofficial 'representative' for the religious groupings). Although he is not a leader of any specific Catholic 'grouping' or 'party' he has the respect and support of many Catholics and his is an influential voice within the opposition. Benda's is a specifically Christian voice not only because his political opinions have their roots in his own Catholic beliefs, but because he sees a special and important political role for the Czech Christians, specifically the Catholics, to perform. He sees the mission of Catholics to be the overcoming of the "general crisis and deterioration of politics" and the creation of a 'new politics':

> "I believe that the 'new politics'...is possible, that it is the only alternative to the apocalypse, and that our nations in general, and their Catholic inhabitants in particular, have a unique chance to articulate its initial stages."[1]

As one of the largest groupings within the opposition, Benda argues, the Catholics have the potential to become an active political force. Unlike most of Czech society, which has become alienated and apathetic under the pressure of the existing system, the Catholics have retained their positive Christian beliefs and ideals. In his essay 'Christianity and politics once again'[2] he describes Christians as an important social force: they are organized and at the same time relatively independent of the totalitarian authorities, and they are the only large community which has withstood destruction and atomization. Benda argues that Catholics are also most suited to this role due to their specific characteristics: they are sceptical of liberal or socialist solutions, but clearly understand 'co-responsibility' and the need for "concrete efforts to prepare the ground" for the arrival of the Kingdom of Christ. He concludes that Catholics are "extremely sceptical of politics in general, while being aware that only 'something like politics' can save us at the present time".[3]  The goals of

Christianity and politics are in Benda's view, in the present situation, interelated and interdependent:

> "I am convinced that their are only two paths open to Catholics in the Czech lands at the present time: the path leading to political and therefore to Christian failure, or the path - toilsome and thorny - of looking for a new, conservatively radical politics."[4]

Benda argues that tendencies towards a cautious private profession of faith, retreat into private life, avoidance of any confrontation with the authorities, and automatic 'self-censorship' prevalent amongst Catholic believers are inadequate in the face of the challenges of the present situation and will achieve little. He describes communism in Czechoslovakia as a "callous, gloomy and all consuming" heaviness, which "all citizens carry on their shoulders and at the same time bear within them...the only possibility is to shake that evil off, escape its power and to seek truth".[5] The way out for society oppressed by the burden of lies and 'nothingness' and retreating into increasing indifference is through a new political upsurge, a search for a 'new polis'. "Under such circumstances, every genuine struggle for one's own soul becomes an openly political act."[5]

It is the responsibility of the individual Christian, Benda argues, to actively concern himself with the fate of the whole community:

> "...it is not enough merely to look out for one's own soul and believe that Truth...is no more than a position which has to be maintained...we are in a situation where the very foundations of the universal church, and the polis in the widest sense of the word, are in grave danger and everyone...is faced with a challenge: which would you rather save, your own life or the life of this community."[6]

For Benda, then, Christianity requires a political, rather than simply a moral or spiritual commitment. It requires directly political action in defence of both the Church and the whole of society.

> "By shifting the meaning of Christ's statement from the spiritual level - from that of a personal approach to the Kingdom of God - to the political level and even, I am bold to say, to the level of a struggle for political power, I have opened a way to that fundamental source of all hope, including hope on this earth."[7]

In his essay 'Christianity and politics once again' Benda again argues that Christians must not shy away from political activity, and instead must become aware of their importance as a leading social and political force in the political struggle. He sees the 7

July 1985 pilgrimage and mass ceremony at Velehrad as positive evidence that Catholics are beginning to understand and take on this role. He describes the Velehrad pilgrimage as "an event of universally historic significance".[8]

Secondly, Benda's outlook is clearly 'radical' in its advocacy of an active political role and political struggle. Within the spectrum of outlooks that make up the Czechoslovak opposition, Benda's emphasis on 'political' solutions places him amongst the 'radicals' and gives him something in common with people who have very different ideological views, but who also emphasize the need for political activity (for example, the Independent Socialists).

Benda's radicalism and desire for direct political action initially led him to view the Charter with some hesitancy, especially its appeal to the regime's own laws, which could perhaps be viewed as an indirect acceptance of its legitimacy.

> "...I have felt a certain 'mental reserve' towards the Charter from the beginning.
> If it was possible I would prefer to raise the banner of the cross and launch a
> direct attack on the capital rather than appealing in a somewhat schizophrenic
> manner to a democratic and legal facade when there is a general consensus that it
> is nothing but a facade."[9]

Benda has thus advocated a more active political role for the Charter. He found the moral and 'non-political' unity which the Charter had successfully achieved in its early years unsatisfactory. In his essay 'Paralelni Polis'[10] he argues that the price of this unity is that the Charter "from the beginning found itself to be, to a considerable extent, in a schizophrenic situation". On the one hand everyone shared a very gloomy evaluation of the political system, but on the other hand the Charter took at its word the regimes' stated good intentions (Helsinki, human rights guarantees etc.) and did not admit that they were just propagandist 'fig-leaves'. This, he argues, was a shrewd manoeuvre, but not an approach that can have a very mobilizing effect. He also sees the achievement of this unity, across a very wide gamut of political opinions, as a handicap in that it entailed its participants giving up on politics "...that is, on politics as a techne". Benda, on the other hand, emphasizes the need for politics and political struggle:

> "The problem is that freedom and human dignity are not absolute givens, but are
> rather gifts that humanity and society must learn to accept in their history, and for
> which they must also learn to struggle. Therefore in my opinion politics as techne

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(ie. as the art of waging a struggle over the fate of the polis) will be justified in the future...and in this sense the unity enjoyed so far in Charter 77 seems provisional and inadequate."[11]

Benda is also critical of what he describes as the Charter's initial "extreme emphasis of ethical aspects and preference for the moral over the political position".[12] Benda argues that the chief reason for what he sees as the failure of this solution lies in the fact that the moral position was postulated abstractly, without any kind of positive content and direction. He argues that such an abstract moral position can only remain effective in the short term, and he cites as a symptom of this failure a phenomenon common amongst Charter signatories - that of the almost ecstatic sense of liberation on signing the Charter giving way to gradual disillusionment and deep scepticism. The solution which Benda proposes is to combine the moral commitment of the individual with a positive and mobilizing programme - that of creating a 'parallel polis'. He proposes the creation of parallel structures to fulfill the functions which the existing lifeless official structures fail to fulfill, as the way forward "out of today's blind alley". Unlike both the classical 'radical' and 'reformist' concepts, this plan, Benda argues, has the advantage of advocating neither direct, and in the present situation suicidal, conflict with the regime, nor morally unacceptable compromises with the authorities, based on false illusions about solutions through 'cosmetic adjustments'. Benda makes several detailed proposals about how and where such parallel structures should develop. The weaknesses of the legal system which he describes as "one of the worst in the world, because it is drafted exclusively for the purposes of propaganda and is consequently unusually vague and without guarantee" should be exploited by constantly testing the limits of what is permitted. Parallel culture, one of the most dynamic and most developed existing parallel structures, should be used as a model for other areas. The creation of parallel educational structures should be considered an urgent task. The task of regenerating the parallel information system should also be worked on. In the field of the parallel economy, where Benda feels the present possibilities are not good, urgent work should be done to develop charitable work, mutual material support and international aid and solidarity in order to prevent the regime controlling the population and demoralizing the Chartists by exposing them to intolerable economic punishment and pressure. In the field of politics Benda emphasizes the need to

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create "the background for the rise of parallel political (in the narrower sense of the word) structures and aid their development" through increasing civic consciousness, the creation of conditions for political discussion and the formulation of theoretical opinions and "the support of concrete political currents and groups"[13] In the region of foreign policy, effective foreign support should be welcomed, but also the mutual co-operation and coordination between parallel movements and related currents within the countries of the Eastern Bloc, which he describes as "lamentably inadequate", should be urgently improved on: "In the past ten years perhaps every nation of the Eastern bloc has paid heavily for the lack of such coordination."[14]

As to the relationship of these parallel structures to the Charter itself, Benda feels that some structures would be an "integral part" of the Charter, whilst others would gain their initial impetus from the Charter, but would move beyond its framework and eventually acquire an autonomous existence. He feels, however, that the Charter should not deliberately separate itself from these structures and mark itself off from them: "...by such a step it would move from the position of a civic initiative to the role of a mere observer and would so deprive itself of the larger part of its moral charge."[15]

On the subject of the preparation and contents of documents, Benda proposes that a larger circle of people should participate in drafting the documents and deciding on their themes. It should be accepted that the documents will express the personal opinions and standpoints of their authors, which others may disagree with, rather than trying to produce compromise documents, which would be empty and meaningless. The documents should be addressed not just to official offices "but also, and even more importantly, to our fellow citizens".[16]

Benda's essay 'Paralelni Polis' was the culmination of quite an extended debate between Chartists about the way forward for the Charter. Several individuals had advocated the development of "civic activity" ('Co s Chartou', Sabata and Uhl) "varied civic initiatives" (Charter 77 communique, 21 September 1977), and "new institutions" ('Manifesto on a positive approach', Tesar[17]) Benda's 'Paralelni Polis' was one of the most detailed and influential of the arguments put forward for creating parallel institutions, and one of the more radical, for example in its support for the development of political

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groupings, but it is perhaps noteworthy that it contained no reference to the creation of independent trade unions, an issue included in some of the documents mentioned above. The idea of independent civic initiatives gained much support within the Charter and was incorporated in Charter document 21, October 1978, although this was to some extent a compromise document and did not include the more radical suggestions. The two sides in the debate can be roughly categorized as 'moderates', who wanted the Charter to retain its moral and individual approach and resisted any tendency towards politicization and increased organization, and 'radicals' who advocated a more active and mobilizing role, in particular through the creation of parallel structures. (This rough categorization however ignores many shades of opinion between these two extremes). Benda is clearly a leading force in the latter group, a position which brings him close to other 'radicals' whose political backgrounds and beliefs are very different to his own. His views on parallel structures are similar to those of Tesar, who advocates "...civic emancipation that will assume for itself all basic democratic rights and create its own democratic structures as elements of civil society."[18] Petr Uhl, a 'revolutionary Marxist' who describes Benda as "a Catholic intellectual and revolutionary democrat"[6], strongly supported Benda's ideas of parallel structures, which Uhl preferred to call 'alternative structures' which would "...offer a genuine alternative to the forms of social life that have been fettered and deformed by bureaucratic power."[19]

Benda is close to both Uhl and Tesar in his rejection of any compromise with the regime and any policy based on faith in reforms or 'cosmetic adjustments', and his belief that the existing system must eventually be challenged and overcome. Both Uhl and Benda reject too much emphasis on legality and on the Charter's demand that the regime abide by its own laws, and instead stress the Charter's mobilizing role.

The third element which makes up Benda's political outlook is that he is a conservative. He is the only leading figure within the Czechoslovak opposition who is strongly critical of socialism - not simply critical, as others are, of 'real socialism' failing to live up to genuine socialist principles - but critical of these fundamental principles themselves. In his essay 'Notes on frequently heard remarks'[20] Benda sets out to challenge two ideas. Firstly, that socialist ideas are "in essence good and were only spoilt by bad practice", and secondly

"the idea that social equality is something which is our common human mission and which cannot be...doubted - at most it is possible to discuss the proper means of attaining it." Benda is concerned that both these views are expressed frequently by Christians. For Benda, on the other hand, it is his Christian beliefs which lead him to reject these ideas, and his criticisms of them are often based on theological references and arguments. Benda's rejection of socialism is fundamentally based on the rejection of any claim by man to bring about "paradise on earth".

> "It is exceedingly useful to adopt one quite simple criterion: as soon as someone promises to bring about paradise on earth by his own human efforts...it is unnecessary to read further - in the best case he is a clever imposter, in the worst a fanatical madman."

Historical experience, he argues, demonstrates that every claim "to change only this and that, remove only this or that obstacle...spoiling the harmony of the whole plan" in order to in the end reach absolute good "always signifies only the groans of the dead and the unbearable enslavement of the survivors".

In this essay he confines his detailed criticism to just one of the tenets of socialism, which he feels has the most appeal and is most likely to become confused with Christian ideas - the ideal of social equality. He argues firstly that "the price of attaining social equality is the liquidation of political and civil equality, the denial of individual human dignity and freedom". But despite this criticism of the method and effectiveness of the idea, he feels he is left with the problem of discrediting the idea itself, and the belief that social equality is something for which it is a Christian's permanent obligation to struggle. Here his argument is based on the 'dual nature of possession' expressed in the scriptures. On the one hand salvation depends upon generosity, charity and sharing with one's brother. On the other hand 'coveting one's neighbours possessions' is categorically prohibited. He concludes that: "...any attempt to introduce the ideal of social equality is founded on the disrespect of this prohibition...and denies one commandment for the sake of the other." Possession, or wealth, is, he argues, then also deprived of the ability to justify itself through generosity and by its creative multiplication.

Benda uses further references to show that social equality should not be considered a Christian goal. "Our father said that the poor will always be with us and sharply rejected the offer to change all the stones into bread", in this way the offer of 'positively' bringing

about social equality was also rejected. Charity, generosity and sharing are, Benda argues, Christian virtues, but they should not extend to the expression of the ideal of implementing social equality. Benda concludes: "...not only, then, is the struggle for social equality not the duty and neglected mission of Christians, it is one of the greatest temptations."[21]

Benda's rejection of communism is even more outspoken. In 'Catholicism and politics'[22] he states: "For most Czech Christians, communism was and is identical with Satan and the Anti-Christ - and I readily agree".

He expresses understanding of the fears of many Czech Catholics about cooperating with and trusting the former 'reform communists' now active in the opposition, a fear which partially explains the reluctance of many Catholics to actively support the Charter 77 movement. As one commentator notes: "The majority of people had decided that the presence of former communist reformers in the movement weakened its credibility."[23]

Benda has some sympathy for this view:

> "It...contains an element of justified mistrust of their former persecutors who now, having been denied their rights, make loud appeals for general solidarity, frequently without giving sufficient guarantees that when they speak of rights, they are not really talking about their lost privileges."[24]

However, although Benda shares this deep-rooted Catholic anti-communism, he does not share the view that political activity and cooperation with communists within the opposition should be avoided, but on the contrary expresses the belief in the need for tolerance of diverse political views, and strongly advocates political activity and commitment by Catholics in order to bring about his proposed 'new politics' of 'radical conservatism'.


What then does the political concept of 'radical conservatism', combining this radical view of political action with ideological anti-socialism, entail, and what does Benda mean by 'new politics'? The outline of this 'new politics' which Benda gives in 'Catholicism and politics' is rather vague and hard to pin down, but it contains the following essentials: Firstly, the rejection of the current definition of politics and reassessment of politics itself as something which goes beyond 'party politics' and seeks "a more essential unity". Benda avoids the use of any firm political programme, "the transformation I have in mind

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is essentially above political programmes or, rather, it bypasses them altogether and deals directly with life". He perceives the future form of politics as:

> "...something light years away from politics in the present sense of a struggle for power and, at the same time, as something even 'more political' if we understand by that a commitment to a playful and sacred concern for the affairs of the polis".

Secondly, this 'more essential' unity is not an attempt at reconciliation or compromise, but an attempt to change the fundamental basis on which political disagreements take place, "...an appeal to those who, in the given conditions and despite all their fundamental disagreements, are willing to work together to move the conflagration to a new, less well mapped and therefore more interesting field".[25]

Thirdly, this new kind of politics is in fact a return to a more fundamental type of political life, and a rejection of current arbitrary political distinctions.

> "I believe that the 'only thing that can save us' is a 'return to the sources' of life and politics - the sources being considered not nineteenth-century practices, with their arbitrary division between 'right' and 'wrong'...but rather as a genuine quest in which everything 'good' and 'evil' in the development of politics will be re-examined, thought through and reinterpreted."

In some respects, however, this 'new politics' will in fact be a return to old forms: "It should be a politics in which human rights and the rules of parliamentary democracy and even...the privileges and freedoms of the 'feudal' world and the demands of social justice, are all a matter of course."

In his 1985 essay in reply to young Christians[26], he outlines what he sees as the future political structure of Czechoslovak politics more clearly: "For our conditions...it is not possible to recommend anything other than a return to the traditional structures of parliamentary democracy."

He argues that although parliamentary democracy does in itself afford enough variety of choice, it is still possible to consider various ways to add to it, for example through elements of self-government, but warns that such experimentation should not go too far: "I am sure of this...that this return to the starting point of traditional democratic forms is essential, and that every attempt to jump over it or bypass it threatens to assist the forces of evil."

He argues that as even traditional democratic forms can easily lead to dictatorship, especially in their treatment of religious and political minorities, they must be limited both

by law - the 'will of the people' must not be above the law - and by the development of a strong democratic culture. Only a strong democratic culture, emphasizing respect for plurality, human dignity and freedom, can protect democracies from the slide towards totalitarianism.

In both essays, Benda also examines the role of the state in the future Czech political system. He argues that the jurisdiction of the state should be clearly limited. Every politician should strictly respect the difference between the private and the public spheres and the state should not seek to interfere in the sphere of private life. Benda writes of the 'new politics':

> "...it should demand an obligation...Yet it should not tie one down: a state or any other type of social organization, for instance, may be perceived as a useful factor in limiting evil, but it must never become an instrument for creating a 'heaven on earth'."[27]

Benda opposes every attempt by a paternalistic state to take upon itself all an individuals' responsibilities - such a system leads very quickly to the loss of freedom. However he also warns against what he sees as the other side of this coin - a liberal view which seeks a 'minimalist' state, regarding politics as a necessary evil which should be limited to the smallest extent possible. The result is a state which is unable to defend itself from the evils which threaten it, and which has a good chance of being swiftly usurped by a totalitarian system. Benda concludes: "...the state should not and must not resign from its responsibility...in the 'public political' sphere, it should not and must not become a mere powerless observation point which lacks any system of values..."[28]


Benda's views on the likelihood of achieving major political change in Czechoslovakia have themselves undergone changes. In 'Notes from my personal file'[29] he addressed the question of whether he acted as he did simply because he had been given such a commandment, or because he expected any concrete results. He concluded: "I consider...that all injustices, illegalities and social evils are so bound up with the system as a whole, that I do not entertain too much hope of any substantial improvement."

In 'Catholicism and politics', however, he is more positive about the prospects for far reaching change. He argues that a regime such as that in Czechoslovakia that bases its

power and stability on the passive, opportunistic obedience of its citizens, where "fear is largely a fiction maintained by nothing more than inertia", is in fact not as stable as it seems:

> "Even its cohesiveness and power are deceptive because they are not the functions of a living organism, but the mechanical operations of a worn-out machine that can be brought to a halt when the least important of its parts seizes up."

The regime is susceptible when people deny its 'carrot and stick' forms of control and struggle for the truth, which immediately becomes, in the context, a political struggle.

> "Thus in a society whose typical features are a mass exodus into private life and utter indifference to the stage scenery of the official pseudo-politics, it is paradoxically possible to observe a latent politicization, the growth of a political potential."

Benda believes that, under certain circumstances, this politicization will be able to bring about radical change.

> "My earlier pessimism...is based on the fact that it would seem to be almost humanly impossible to grasp this opportunity...The historical perspectives are hopelessly blocked, the regime is more cohesive and powerful than ever before...But my optimism springs from the fact that all this is true only at the moment and that the slightest social groundswell...may call into life processes whose tempo and consequences no one can foresee."

Benda is willing to outline his concepts for a future political system, and rejects the view that in the present circumstances it is more realistic to seek more modest goals:

> "...I believe that any half-hearted goals, any reliance on various transformations of the existing power structures, are nothing other than unconditional surrender before these structures ...we must never for a moment lose sight of what we are really struggling for and what once and for all we reject."[30]

Benda was a spokesman for the Charter in 1979 and again in 1984. On this occasion his spokesmanship led to some criticism and controversy after the publication of the document 'The right to history' as Charter document 11/84. This document came under criticism from many within the Charter who saw it as an expression of a Catholic viewpoint , containing an ideological bias unacceptable for a Charter document. Petr Uhl, for example, argued that the 'Right to history' document aroused his fears that the Charter was being used as a Catholic platform.[31] Most critics agreed that the document should have been released as a discussion document, rather than as a document claiming to represent the views of all Chartists. Benda has been a firm supporter of the Charter, and several of his

essays emphasize the need for tolerance of differing political opinions. However he does argue against too much 'compromise' in Charter documents. In his essay 'On the ethics of polemics and the necessary level of tolerance'[32] he is critical of the use of polemics, which he argues are unethical, and also of those who criticize Charter 77 from the right. In 'Paralelni polis' he argues that the sort of tolerance that is needed is one in which everyone respects and tolerates the opinions of others, however much they differ from their own, rather than an attempt to avoid any differences of opinion through compromises:

> "Real tolerance requires...full respect for the fruits of other peoples efforts and intellectual struggle. Only such tolerance makes possible the creation of a plurality of opinion; the tolerance of compromises leads only to greyness and toothlessness."

The example of Vaclav Benda demonstrates the impossibility of fitting the political viewpoints of individuals and groups within the Czechoslovak opposition into any simple categories (eg. left/right, radical/conservative). Benda speaks from a Christian point of view, and yet his emphasis is on 'political' commitment rather than individual 'abstract' morality. He advocates a 'radical' active and mobilizing role for the Charter, through the development of the parallel polis, whilst his political values and his conception of 'new politics' are conservative. Although his is not a 'reactionary' political viewpoint - his 'new politics' is based on democracy, pluralism and human rights - it is unique within the Czechoslovak opposition in its clear rejection of the fundamental principles of socialism.

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# REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM - PETR UHL

Whilst the revolutionary Marxism espoused by Petr Uhl found support amongst only a tiny minority in the Czechoslovak oppositional circles, it is useful to study Uhl's ideas, both because they mark one extreme of the ideological spectrum of Czechoslovak oppositional political thinking, and because, as an active and highly committed participant in Charter 77, Uhl presents a very different evaluation of the significance of the Charter than that of most other signatories, whilst at the same time frequently acting as an insightful critic of Chartist tendencies.

Uhl has been active in political opposition since 1968 when he joined the left wing discussion group The Prague Club. He then participated in founding the Revolutionary Youth Movement, a discussion club comprised mainly of students, from which arose the Revolutionary Socialist Party, a clandestine underground organization associating itself with the aims of the Fourth International. Pelikan notes that even at that time the programme of the Revolutionary Socialist Party represented very much a minority viewpoint.[1] Since signing the Charter Uhl has been instrumental in founding VONS (The Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted) in April 1978, and has edited the information bulletin 'Informace o Charte', founded in January 1978. As a result of his activities he has spent many years in prison.

What is perhaps most striking about Uhl in the context of the Czechoslovak opposition is his advocacy of a revolutionary Marxist ideology at a time when ideological concepts, and even 'political' concepts in the narrow sense of the word, are in decline and can claim few loyal followers. Uhl is unusual in that he presents a detailed picture of his political aims and the methods by which he believes they can be achieved.

Uhl presents Marxism as an opposition ideology. He writes: "...in this country Marxism is a suppressed political-philosophical system which has probably been subjected to more distortion than any other."[2]

He describes his fundamental beliefs as, firstly, the need for equal rights in society, that is equal access to rights and to material and spiritual resources. Secondly, the 'harmonious development of each individual is a precondition for the development of the social whole',

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a Marxist tenet which he argues has been distorted and inverted by Stalinism, and thirdly, a

'democratic social system', by which Uhl means a self-managing democratic society.[3]

Uhl advocates the revolutionary overthrow of the existing bureaucratic dictatorship as

the means to achieve these ends. He argues that the revolutionary process which began

with the overthrow of capitalism in post war Czechoslovakia was derailed by Stalinism.

The Central European nations are thus going through a period of transition between the first

revolutionary stage - the overthrow of capitalism - and a future socialist development. "The

anti-bureaucratic revolution will, in a sense, complete the revolutionary process that was

going on between 1945 - 1948."[4]

Uhl rejects the idea that the current political system is reformable:

> "I start from the premise...that this political system is not reformable within the
> framework of the existing power structures and political institutions...An anti-
> democratic system can be conquered only from the outside by a move which
> would dissolve its institutions or change their functions."[5]

He argues that reforms always stop short of fundamental solutions, but attempts at

reform do have a useful revolutionary function in that, by their very failure they reveal the

illusory nature of reform and strengthen the growth of a revolutionary consciousness.

Uhl's opposition to reformism leads him to be highly critical of those reform communists

who, he argues, are attempting to co-operate with those in power. He concludes that the

main motive of any reform programme is the preservation of the existing system.[6]

A central condition of Uhl's proposed anti-bureaucratic revolution is that it must take

place on an international level. This does not just mean that other East European states

should join the revolution, but that Western societies must also undergo a revolutionary

process and overthrow their capitalist, parliamentary systems. Uhl argues that this

revolution is necessary because the capitalist systems of the West pose more of a threat to

future global development than do the 'bureaucratic dictatorships' of the East. He

describes the capitalist system, with its "web of economic relations which entangle almost

the whole world" as "the greatest obstacle to the harmonious development of humanity",

compared to which the Soviet Stalinist system plays only the "second fiddle in the orchestra

of world politics".[7]

"The sufferings inflicted on humanity by this system [Stalinism] and the dangers which it threatens...are in a whole series of ways of a lower level than the conflicts which are being stoked up by world capitalism and imperialism".[7]

The revolutionary process in the West, he argues, should involve the overthrow of capitalism and the destruction of the bourgeoisie as a class. Uhl concedes that the idea of the necessity of a proletarian revolution in the West is defended by hardly anyone and has even been abandoned by reformist Marxists and Eurocommunists, but he maintains that it is the only solution to the present problems. "...this social revolution is the condition for the entry of the West European nations into the European society of the future."[8]

He briefly notes that the East Europeans must draw attention to the lessons of Stalinism to ensure that the West European revolution does not go "via a bureaucratic detour".

Another aspect of Uhl's proposed overthrow of the bureaucratic dictatorship in Czechoslovakia is that it must necessarily involve violence. However, Uhl notes: "...if it is well organized, this need not degenerate into brutality, nor, even less, into terror".[9]


The aim of this violent revolutionary overthrow of the existing system will be the establishment of a system of social self management. The concept of social and economic self management is at the core of Uhl's political thinking - for Uhl, true democracy can only be achieved through a self managing system. In his essay 'The alternative community as a revolutionary avant garde'[10] Uhl argues that the basic feature of this self management is that it will combine direct and indirect forms of democracy, thus overcoming the shortcomings of a parliamentary system which ignores the development of direct democracy. For Uhl, direct forms of democracy are essential preconditions for the emancipation of society and individuals and the overcoming of alienation. Social and economic self management would involve an element of indirect democracy through a system of workers councils.

"Workers (and other) councils, horizontally co-ordinated...would invest authority in a general council to replace today's legislative and executive state organs. It would be a democracy of the productive forces complimented by the territorial principle."[11]

To this system would be added important elements of direct democracy - referenda, public opinion polls with legally binding results, direct administration by organized groups of people etc. Political parties in this system would function like clubs, presenting

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proposals but not governing society. It is the development of direct forms of democracy in this system which Uhl sees as its most important feature.

> "Social self management is not a panacea: it is only worthy of support if it guarantees the continual expansion of direct democracy in favour of the gradual dismantling of representative democracy."[12]

Uhl is highly critical of the alternative of parliamentary democracy. He argues that it preserves class stratifications and leads to illusions about participation in the running of society, it rests not on the responsibility of deputies to their electorate, but on loyalty to party leaderships, whilst all extra-parliamentary political tendencies are excluded.[13] However, he recognizes that the model of the Western parliamentary system is a popular one in Czechoslovakia. Arguing that "people in new situations turn to old symbols" he concedes that tendencies towards parliamentarianism will be strong in Czechoslovakia. Indeed, he argues, a parliamentary or other representative system may emerge during the anti-bureaucratic revolution, and exist parallel to a system of social self management, and even dominate it for a time.[14] However, Uhl would oppose all such attempts to adopt a system of parliamentary democracy. In his essay 'Human rights and political revolution' he states: "I...would try to convince the population of its limitations".

Another important aspect of Uhl's political thinking is his attitude to national and international questions. Uhl strongly rejects nationalism and nationalist viewpoints in favour of internationalist conceptions which emphasize the need for solidarity against an internationally repressive bureaucracy. Uhl writes: "Personally, I do not like the use of the word 'nation'...I do not have an emotional relationship with the Czechs...".[15]

Uhl argues that the appeal of nationalist conceptions differs with each generation. He belongs to a generation which rejects any 'pathos and nationalist ballast' because it was fed on such ideas during childhood. He argues that people of the generation about ten to fifteen years younger, who make up almost half of the signatories of the Charter, do not have any such crystallized critical response to nationalism, but at the same time nationalism is even less comprehensible and more foreign to them than it is to his generation.[16]

Uhl rejects the view, which is commonly held in oppositional circles, which identifies Czechoslovakia with strongly democratic nationalist traditions. He argues, on the contrary,

that Czechoslovakia knew nothing of democracy until the short inter-war experience of the First Republic, and that compared to other European nations all attempts at democracy in Czechoslovakia have been short-lived: "In fact the Czechs (and the Slovaks) do not come out especially well from a balance sheet of democracy in European history."[17]

He also rejects the view, which he sees as "arrogantly nationalistic", that the current oppression can be blamed on the Russians, who, it is argued, lack fundamental democratic traditions. Uhl argues that the Russians are victims of the system of bureaucratic dictatorship just as the Czechs and Slovaks are. In line with his Trotskyist beliefs, Uhl advocates the dissolution of the standing army, a reduction in the importance of state frontiers, and the eventual 'withering away' of the state, though he concedes that this will be a very long term goal.[18]

Uhl also emphasizes European responsibility towards the third world, and the need for international solidarity in North-South as well as East-West relations. He is critical of what he sees as the European exclusiveness inherent in the Helsinki Accords, and argues that concern over human rights must not be confined to the USA and Europe. More self criticism is needed, he argues, in addressing the problems of unjust trade and the exploitation of the South by the North. He argues that the East Europeans have a twofold duty, to show solidarity with third world countries, for example in Latin America, and also to convey to them the realities of the failure to implement socialist ideals in the Eastern bloc.[19]

Uhl's dislike of nationalist appeals has led him to be strongly critical of some Charter documents which he sees as expressing a nationalist viewpoint. In particular he is critical of the document marking sixty years since the founding of the Czechoslovak state, which recalls the efforts to gain and maintain Czech statehood and emphasizes the continued importance of this struggle. Uhl is critical of the fact that the text "...takes as absolutely self-evident the fact that the 'struggle for Czechoslovak statehood' is correct and that the existence of the Czech state...is a national concern, beyond all discussion."[20]


Since its foundation, Petr Uhl has been very active in the Charter, and one of its most committed supporters. However, Uhl's revolutionary Marxist viewpoint leads him to an

assessment of the political significance of Charter activities which is different than that of most other Chartists. Uhl sees the advocacy of a Chartist agenda - human rights, dialogue with the authorities, the development of parallel structures - as a political strategy which will increase the political awareness of the people (the masses) and thus initiate the revolutionary overthrow of the existing system. Uhl rejects the explanation of the Charter as purely a moral standpoint. In his essay 'The alternative community as a revolutionary avant garde', he argues that the Charter has suffered from the incorrect explanation that it arose as the consequence of a sudden decision to 'live within the truth'. This, he argues, creates a feeling of moral exclusivity and places the Charter in a ghetto.

Uhl makes explicit what for many in the Charter remains only implicit - the fact that the full observance of all human rights in Czechoslovakia will require a fundamental change in the existing political system. In his essay 'Human rights and political revolution' he responds to the charges that he and other more 'political' signatories of Charter 77 did not sign the Charter in total good faith, but had the ulterior motive of pursuing political change rather than human rights. Uhl argues that in fact a guarantee of human rights is dependent on basic political and social changes in Czechoslovakia and on a world scale. He concludes: "I am interested in political change, but signed the Charter in good faith."

For Uhl, several elements of Chartist and other independent activity have a clearly strategic value, as part of a struggle to achieve this basic political and social change.

Firstly, drawing attention to the legal guarantees of human rights which exist only on paper in Czechoslovakia, is a "good and correct strategy"[21] in the struggle against the bureaucratic dictatorship. He argues that each demand has a revolutionary dynamic. The authorities must either concede to it, or resist it, and thus demonstrate their rigidity and lack of legitimacy. In turn the people, even those within the official power structures, will see that the demands are not met and thus become aware of the "ludicrous discrepancies between promise and reality", so heightening their critical consciousness.[22] Uhl argues that, whilst the existing political system is incapable of applying full human rights, the demand that it should do so is the only way to bring socialist ideals to a large number of people: "...the way to help them to understand the basis of the political system which

oppresses them...It is the way to mobilize people for the socialist struggle, regardless of whether they are prepared to call it this."[23]

The call for a dialogue with the political authorities, Uhl argues, also fulfills a similar function. "The permanent offer of a dialogue to the state authorities is a strategic (not tactical) element of our struggle."[24]

Uhl warns that it must be realized by those who offer it that any dialogue is in fact impossible. However it is worthwhile to continue to make the offer because its continuous rejection will further reveal the true nature of the authorities. The permanent offer of a dialogue "...is the way to politicize still larger circles of people, and this politicization is again the central condition for the revolutionary solution of universal political problems."

For Uhl, much of Charter 77's activity forms part of the strategy of 'demanding the impossible', which has a mobilizing effect. He opposes all formulations which suggest that any real dialogue, co-operation or significant progress can be achieved within the existing political system. Uhl hopes that the people will become aware that the solutions to their problems cannot be found within the existing system, and instead require revolutionary change.

The independent activity which has developed around the Charter also has a revolutionary political role, according to Uhl. Uhl supports the development of parallel structures, which he prefers to call 'alternative' structures, as they provide genuine alternatives to the forms of social life governed by the power structures. These alternative structures or communities, he argues, have a double role. Firstly, by coming into conflict with the authorities, they play the same instructive, mobilizing role as the demand for human rights and the offer of a dialogue. "The capacity to evoke conflict and social awareness is the primary justification for alternative forms of living."[25]

Secondly, Uhl sees in the alternative communities the embryonic forms of a future revolutionary avant-garde force. He argues that the parallel polis will always be a minority phenomenon, but during the revolutionary process the self organized alternative communities will play an essential role. To be as peaceful and orderly as possible the future revolution will have to be well organized. Uhl argues that in the past the avant-garde, usually a revolutionary party, has taken on the role of organizer, but this party has

always proved to be "the cradle of bureaucracy". He argues that in Eastern Europe, however, this lesson has been learned, and instead the alternative associations will join forces to create a new type of avant-garde to lead the revolution.

It is important to note, however, that whilst Uhl sees Chartist and other independent activity as part of a political strategy leading to the overthrow of the existing system, he is very much opposed to the politicization of the Charter itself, that is the adoption by the Charter of any particular political programme or political ideology. Uhl has been described as a 'radical' Chartist, which is sometimes taken to mean that he would like the Charter to develop into an organized political party. In fact, Uhl opposes any such development. He argues that efforts to unite Charter 77 around a political platform are dangerous and unrealistic, not only because of the difference in the political outlook of some Chartists, but because, in his estimation, about 90% of signatories are apolitical and have no clear cut political platform. Uhl's opposition to any attempt to impose such a platform on the Charter leads him to be something of a Charter watchdog, criticizing several Charter documents in which he perceives a political bias, whether it be socialist, nationalist or religious. He is critical of a series of documents (Nos. 7, 15, 16, 22, 23, and the 1978 Charter Letter to Brussels) for their socialist orientation, of the document marking sixty years since the founding of the Czech state for its nationalism, of the 'Right to History' document (11/84) for its Catholic and religious bias, and of the Letter to the British peace movements (9/84) which expresses the conviction that classical democratic structures constitute a vital basis, the denial of which has always led to greater evil. Uhl describes this viewpoint as a "malicious piece of anti-revolutionary invective".[26]

In particular his sensitivity to any political viewpoints finding expression in Charter documents has led him to be highly critical of two documents - the document marking the 19th anniversary of the Soviet invasion (1987) and the 'Appeal to fellow citizens', and of the reformist communist grouping which he sees as manipulating these texts in order to express their own political viewpoints. He accuses some within this grouping of wishing to rehabilitate their political ideas and their own personal power positions, by offering a hand to those in power. He argues that these pro-Gorbachev reformers have been

successful in influencing Charter documents, in part because most within the Charter do not support clearly defined political concepts.

> "...the most numerous group of Chartists who are politically oriented and linked by their pasts, stereotypes and illusions are none other than the ex-members of the Czech Communist Party...with the help of a small phraseological adjustment in order to accommodate a 'Chartist civic' tone, it is easy for them to proclaim their attitudes and ideas in the name of Charter 77 as a whole".[27]

Whilst Uhl is a staunch opponent of any politicizing tendency within the Charter, he takes a different view of organizational tendencies and argues that the Charter would benefit from better organizational rules: "From the beginning, I was amongst those who wanted greater organizational elements in the Charter..."[28]

He argues that the aversion to organization of any type within the Czechoslovak opposition has damaged the Charter and created some basic weaknesses. In particular he cites the gulf between the 'active' and the 'passive' signatories of Charter 77, highlighted by some criticisms from within Charter circles of the role taken on by the 'active minority'. Uhl argues that democratic elements within the Charter are very weak: "...it must be said that democracy within the Charter, as far as democratic organization and running are concerned, is in terrible condition."[29]

He concludes, in fact, that all the rules adopted by Charter 77 have a bureaucratic, rather than a democratic character, or at least are bureaucratically deformed. He argues that the need for democracy is a practical one - every community such as Charter 77 must be governed by certain rules, not only in its relations with the rest of society via the spokesmen, but also in intra-Charter relations between the signatories. "The non-existence of democratic rules seriously hinders, and in many respects even directly paralyzes, the work of the Charter."[30]

Uhl argues that in order to overcome the gulf between the 'active' and the 'passive' Chartists and ensure that all signatories can share in the work of the Charter it is necessary to create democratic structures and formalized relationships. In particular the establishment of organizational elements would help the work of the Charter in three areas: firstly, by strengthening internal Charter linkages; secondly, by strengthening linkages between Charter 77 and the public; and thirdly by establishing the democratic control of the Charter

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spokesmen and the active minority by all Charter 77 signatories. The adoption and formalization of organizational elements would, Uhl argues, stimulate the activity of the signatories and strengthen the community aspect of Charter 77. As a result of the revival of relations between the spokesmen and the signatories and between Prague and other areas, some signatories from particular regions or from certain interest groups would fulfill the role of co-ordinators, ensuring the flow of information between signatories. From this group of co-ordinators there may arise after a time individuals who could act as advisors to the spokesmen, whether for certain regions of for specific problems. Uhl argues that in the future co-ordinating committees of Charter 77 could be established, made up of these advisors or co-ordinators, but that this would only become necessary in a future stage of Charter 77 development when there are a greater number of groups, publication committees etc. requiring better co-ordination than can be provided by three or four spokesmen.

Uhl however does not advocate that Charter 77 itself take on a formal organized structure. He warns that any organizational elements must not put any constraints on the action of the individual signatories of the Charter. "This is the condition which separates a movement (in which people attempt to create a democratic structure) from an organization."[31]

Therefore organizational elements should not necessarily become institutions of Charter 77, but could grow up on its soil, whilst retaining some independence towards it. Two such organizational elements are VONS and Infoch, both co-founded by Uhl.

Uhl identifies several organizational elements already existing within the Charter or the independent structures which, he argues, give justification to his attempts to define some democratic rules for the community. As well as VONS and Infoch he cites the many journals and cultural activities, the development of independent groups, the system of rules which govern the production of Charter documents and discussion documents, and the institution of the spokesmen itself, although he describes the system of rotation of spokesmen as demonstrating the bureaucratic character of many Charter 77 rules.

Uhl is critical of those within the Charter who advise caution in response to every new suggestion for action or new organizational element - people who see their role in Charter 77 as that of a systematic brake on all initiatives. He expresses the hope that in the future

people will gradually understand "...that self-organization is the only way by which it is possible to achieve emancipation."[32]

Petr Uhl is one of the most active members of the Czechoslovak opposition, he edits Infoch and has produced many essays and letters, often addressing controversial issues or making pertinent observations about the changing nature of the Charter. Despite his radical political expressions, which with their didactic elements and class based ideological language are alien to most in the Charter, he is a respected Chartist, and through VONS shows his commitment to help concrete individuals in practical ways. H. Gordon Skilling writes of Uhl's ability to subordinate his political beliefs to the broader interests of the Charter.[33] However, I would argue that Uhl's political beliefs have not been subordinated to the Charter, but rather have led him to make a different assessment of the value and significance of Charter 77 activity than that of most Chartists. Many Chartists emphasize the moral and legal nature of Charter 77. For Uhl, neither of these characteristics are important. He rejects the argument that Charter 77 arose out of a moral decision to 'live within the truth'.[34] He also does not emphasize the Charter's call for the observance of existing laws and legality, but instead sees the Charter as an appeal for change in existing regulations and laws. In a 1987 interview with spokesperson Vohryzek, Uhl argues that although the call for legality is essential for a number of charter activists

> "...for me and many others it is much more important to expose the contradictions which exist between practice, law and the constitution on the one hand, and the two international covenants on the other."[35]

Uhl values the Charter as an open, dynamic movement, rather than a moral initiative. (He rejects the title 'citizens initiative', preferring to call the Charter a 'movement'.) Through it and the independent structures which have developed around it he sees the potential for the education and mobilization of the people towards revolutionary struggle and the overthrow of the existing political system.

Uhl was one of the few leading Chartists who did not support the Manifesto of the Movement for Civil Liberties (HOS) in 1988. He objected to its 'liberal' aspects, including its support for private enterprise, and to the fact that it did not explicitly state that the system of bureaucratic centralism was not reformable.[36]

The existence of a revolutionary Marxist Chartist gives evidence not only of the plurality and diversification of the political viewpoints within the Czechoslovak opposition, but also of the basic appeal and flexibility of the Charter itself, which seems able to offer something to everyone, and to unite people of diverse and opposing political views in an atmosphere of tolerance and co-operation.

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# CONCLUSIONS, SECTION 2

Throughout these chapters analyzing the political formulations of the politically oriented individuals and groupings within the Czechoslovak opposition, two political concepts recur quite frequently.

Firstly, many of those who express themselves politically support, to some degree or other, the concept of 'democratic self-management'. The advocates of self-management, as has been seen, come from different political orientations - the revolutionary Marxist Petr Uhl, the former reform communist Jaroslav Sabata, and the members of the Independent Socialist grouping. However, the concept, though supported by many, is envisioned rather differently by each grouping. For the Independent Socialists, democratic self-management would complement a parliamentary system, for Sabata it would enhance a system based on a limited 'socialist bloc', whilst for Uhl it would involve a system of workers councils and important elements of direct democracy. Despite this lack of a single or clear cut formulation, democratic self-management is clearly an appealing and important concept for many socialists within the Czechoslovak opposition.

Another concept shared by many is an often vague and even less well defined advocacy of 'socialism'. Generally there is little discussion of the meaning of the term, partly a reflection of the increasing distaste for ideological labels, but most leading figures within the Czechoslovak opposition express some support (whether publicly or privately) for the general concept of socialism. This concept spans the socialism and Marxism of the reform communists and Trotskyites, through the democratic socialism of the Independent Socialists, to the vaguely defined socialism of Havel or Hejdanek, based on a general desire for social justice and some degree of equality. (Hejdanek advocates a 'socialism based on humanism', Havel's socialism does not involve loyalty to any particular political ideology or economic doctrine, but is a "human, moral and emotional category".[1]) Most Chartists of course do not express themselves in terms of socialism or any other political concept (see section 1) but of those leading figures within the Czechoslovak opposition who do express themselves politically, only Vaclav Benda clearly rejects the fundamental ideals of socialism in any form.

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Despite the existence and expression of a diverse range of political viewpoints within the Czechoslovak opposition, one noticeable trend, especially during the late 1970s and early 1980s , was the reduced appeal and the reduced articulation of political and ideological conceptions. None of the more politically and programmatically oriented groups have flourished. The Independent Socialist group faded, whilst the influence of the reform communists also lessened during the late 1970s and early 1980s, although they remained a significant group numerically. Most of the newer and younger individuals who took up oppositional or independent activity within these years were engaged in religious or cultural activity, or were associated with the issues of peace and ecology, rather than wishing to identify with any political conception. This trend was also reflected amongst those who did express themselves politically. There was a reduced emphasis on ideology, and more emphasis on shared concerns. Petr Uhl noted in 1978 that "most of the signatories of the Charter get irritated as soon as you start quoting the classics of Marxism"[2], including many who would consider themselves to be Marxists. Even the term 'socialism' has been abandoned by some. Havel declares that he no longer designates himself a socialist "simply because I realized that the word no longer meant anything at all and that the use of it would obscure rather than illuminate my views".[3] Such political labels have been so corrupted by their use in the sterile ideological propaganda of the regime, that they have become meaningless to many. Instead, increasingly, an individual is judged by the extent to which he wishes to cooperate with and defend the rights of those with different political views, and a political system is judged by what relationship it will establish between the state and the individual. In such circumstances, for many, ideology and political belief has become largely a private matter. Hence Jiri Dienstbier argued in 1979 that "...in our circumstances we should be little concerned with personal convictions and not at all with former party membership...I am a communist...But this is a matter of my personal and private standpoint.[4]

However, as this section has shown, important political distinctions remained, reflecting and maintaining the natural plurality of Czechoslovak political life. Less articulation of ideological differences has not meant that these differences themselves have disappeared. Under changing circumstances in the late 1980s there was a substantial

rebirth of overtly political activity and the increasing relevancy and urgency of outlining

political alternatives to the existing system led to a resurgence in the articulation of and

association with alternative political conceptions.

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SECTION THREE

# NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONCERNS

# NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY

> "...in moments of clairvoyance the Czech nation can glimpse its own death at close range. Not as an accomplished fact, not as the inevitable future, but as a perfectly concrete possibility. Its death is at its side."[1]

This chapter will examine the problem of Czech national identity, and the importance to the Czech opposition of the maintenance of authentic national culture, history, spiritual and political traditions in resistance to the attempts by the totalitarian system to eradicate national culture and national memory. It will also examine problems connected with Slovakia and the Hungarian minority. Finally, it will examine the significant growth in East European solidarity, with its advocacy of regional, rather than narrowly national solutions.

## Czech national identity

The Czech opposition frequently addresses the question of Czech national identity. The continued existence of the Czech nation, as something more meaningful than simply a Czech speaking region of the Soviet bloc, is perceived as being under threat. The nation's independence and national identity is under siege on two levels.

Firstly, there are the concrete limits on Czech sovereignty and independence imposed by its enforced membership of the Soviet bloc. Above all the Warsaw Pact invasion and subsequent stationing of Soviet troops on Czech territory is a continuous reminder of the lack of Czech sovereignty and ability to determine its own political course. Hence the frequent demands on the part of the Czechoslovak opposition for the withdrawal of Soviet troops. In a joint Czechoslovak-Polish declaration on the tenth anniversary of the occupation[2], the signatories adopt the phrase 'national non-sovereignty' to describe the existing state of affairs. Charter 77 Document 15/84, typical of many such Charter documents on the subject, argues:

> "We think it right...to recall once more Charter 77's proposal that the Republics constitutional bodies should take steps to review the agreement on the temporary stationing of Soviet troops on our territory...An agreement to end the stationing of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia would...clear the way for our society to overcome its historical trauma and lay firm foundations for its future independent political development."

However, of greater concern to the Czech opposition than these concrete violations of Czechoslovak sovereignty is the threat to the very identity of the Czech nation which is

taking place on a more fundamental level, through the deliberate erosion of authentic Czech identity by the regime, and its replacement with an artificial, imposed and alien identity. Charter Document 24 states:

> "Since the 1968 invasion, Czechoslovakia has experienced a period of destruction of all the outstanding achievements of its national culture....the consequences of this policy represent a frontal attack threatening the very spiritual, cultural and thus also national identity of Czechoslovak society."

The strategy of the regime is to eradicate Czech national identity, through attacking its cultural base, and thus create a society which, without authentic cultural, political and national traditions, will be less likely to try to assert its independence. Jan Vladislav writes:

> "The regime...discovered, in 1968, that a nation which manages to retain even part of its own identity...cannot be brought under control totally or permanently. That is the reason why, ever since that time, the regime has spared no effort to erase their true identity from the minds of the Czechs and Slovaks, and to replace it with another, artificial, foreign, international identity, of a kind that can be more easily manipulated."[3]

One of the main targets of this attack on Czech national identity is the sphere of culture. In conditions where all overtly political resistance is repressed, culture becomes to a large extent a substitute for politics, and the maintenance of an independent cultural life becomes a lifeline for Czech national identity. Jan Vladislav writes: "Culture has...become one of the last areas of at least a modicum of freedom, where the nation can defend its threatened identity."[4] Hence the importance of parallel and independent cultural activity. Without the work of the parallel cultural community, the regime would have succeeded in erasing nearly every aspect of authentic Czech cultural life and replacing it with a sterile 'official' culture of its own making. Vaclav Cerny writes of samizdat publishing: "All the nation's literature worthy of the name and of its great past has been published in this form over recent years."[5]

Jacques Rupnik concludes: "...totalitarianism's victory over society can never be lasting so long as the nation's culture has not been quelled, so long as there survives the 'resistance of the typewriter'."[6]

It is not just culture that is under attack, but also the perceived moral and spiritual traditions which, along with culture, go to make up the Czech national identity. Several Czech writers present a very positive picture of Czech moral and spiritual values. Josef Zverina writes: "Throughout the course of our history...we did not fail, I believe, to show

respect for human dignity. After all, a love for the truth has tended to dominate our national character."[7]

Similarly Vaclav Cerny writes: "...it has always been the renown of the Czech ethos at its greatest to speak with the voice of universal humanity and to reject evil, wrongdoing and falsehood unconditionally."[8]

The values associated with the imposed system of 'real socialism' are seen as an assault on these traditional moral and spiritual values. These national moral characteristics are being eroded and replaced by a system which encourages and rewards apathy and indifference, consumerism and self-interest, lies, deceit and fear.

For the Czech opposition, however, defining the nature of Czech national identity is not always straightforward. In two areas in particular - the nature of Czech national political traditions, and the nature of Czech history, controversies and debates have arisen.

Most commentators within the opposition consistently identify with what they see as very positive national political traditions and values. The democratic and humanistic aspects of Czech political culture are strongly emphasized, with the First Republic frequently cited as a positive affirmation of Czech political values. An Independent Socialist document argues:

> "It is possible to find in the common subconsciousness several ideas which, in the course of its history, the nation has inculcated into memory - humanity, faith in the future of the nation, struggle for social justice, humanistic and democratic ideas of human, civil and national freedom."[9]

The Charter 77 document marking the 65th anniversary of the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic typically identifies the ideals of democracy, freedom and justice as making up the national political culture.[10] The inappropriate and alien nature of the imposed communist totalitarian system, given the basically democratic and pluralistic nature of Czech political traditions, is frequently emphasized. However, these positive assessments of Czech political traditions do not address the question of why, given these strongly democratic traditions and the interwar experience of democracy unique in Eastern Europe, Czech political culture and traditions have been so completely dominated by

totalitarianism and why the Czech nation has tolerated one of the most authoritarian and Stalinist regimes in the region.

A more critical view of Czech political culture is presented by some individuals. In 1968 Kosik presented a picture of Czech politics as naive and gullible, and wrote of the "permanent wretched state and crisis of Czech politics in the nineteenth century", which was typified by a tendency towards "illusionism" and "ideological facades".[11] Albert Cerny presents a strong critique of Czech political traditions in his 1979 essay 'A look at the problem of the Czech nation'. He argues that the national revival, although achieving much, failed to instill in the Czech population the principles of good government, the need for internal and external consolidation, and the determination to fight incessantly for the freedom of the nation. He argues that particular and regional politics, and the splits and lack of co-ordination associated with them, have been weaknesses of the Czech political tradition, which has lacked experience in "well thought out parliamentary politics". He characterizes Czech politics as being governed by the principles of "huddle down and survive" and "biding one's time". He is critical of what he sees as the lack of political realism at the time of the Prague Spring, and complains that:

> "...at that time none of us - including the prominent leaders of the nation - managed to look soberly and matter-of-factly at a map of Europe and draw conclusions from this for the general approach of our national politics."[12]

Petr Uhl is also critical of the view which attributes very positive national political traditions to Czechoslovakia. He argues that Czechoslovakia knew nothing of democracy until the First Republic, and that compared to other European nations all attempts at democracy in Czechoslovakia have been short lived (See chapter 9).

A more polemical debate has arisen over another aspect of Czech national identity - the interpretation of the nation's history. The importance, for the nation, of retaining a sense of its own history has long been emphasized by the opposition. In 1968 Kundera wrote: "People who live only in the immediate present, unaware of historical continuity and without culture, are capable of transforming their country into a desert, without history, without memory."[13]

He quotes the statement by Milan Hubl: "The first step in liquidating a people, is to erase its memory."[14]

History, like the rest of Czech culture, has been under siege by the totalitarian regime, which rewrites history in its own image, suppressing the observance of national anniversaries and replacing them with its own pseudo-anniversaries. Charter Document 15/85 states:

> "Every people has the right to its own history...this right, which follows from the right of nations to self-determination, implicitly authorizes nations ...to defend themselves against the deformation or deliberate concealment of historical events."

However, the controversy surrounding the Charter's 'Right to history' document illustrated not only the deep concern felt by the opposition for the survival and independence of history and historiography and its importance to Czech national identity, but also the fundamental importance to the Czechs of the way that history is interpreted. The 'Right to history' document was published as a Charter document in 1984 (No 11/84). It addressed the problem of the damage done to the nation by the distortion and suppression of its history, but in doing so the document's authors presented their own interpretation of Czech history, which triggered a fierce and critical debate amongst many in the opposition. As Jan Kavan points out: "The discussion reveals not only the importance Chartists attach to the question of the nation's history, but also the wide range of opinions and interpretations held."[15]

Most of the controversy concerns the 'Right to history' document's statements about the role of Catholicism in Czech history. The document is critical of the way that the role of the Catholic Church is portrayed by modern historians: "The Catholic Church, which played a crucial role in Czech history up to the eighteenth century, is portrayed uniformly as a reactionary and repressive force."

The document's emphasis on the positive contribution of the Catholic Habsburg dynasty in Czechoslovakia is seen by many as a challenge to the traditional emphasis of Czech history of the Protestant, Hussite and Reformist traditions. It is this issue, and the perceived bias of the 'Right to history' document's Catholic author (Vaclav Benda), which has sparked some of the sharpest debates ever experienced within the Charter movement.

Kren criticizes the "party Catholic position adopted, which is one sided and somewhat extreme even within the Catholic framework itself."[16] He argues that the document ignores the contribution of liberal nationalism and socialism in forming Czech historical culture. In

'Two conflicting views of Czech history'[17], Milan Hubl describes the argument in terms of a dispute between the 'integral Catholic' interpretation of Czech history, and the undogmatic historians with Marxist backgrounds. Lubos Kohout criticizes what he sees as an attempt to re-evaluate Czech traditions in favour of the anti-reformation traditions of the Catholic Habsburgs.[18] Petr Uhl, who is critical of not only the Catholic, but the entire Christian emphasis of the document, argues: "The history of the national and social struggle could be understood in many cases as one of striving for emancipation from the Catholic, and even sometimes from other Christian churches."[19]

What emerges from most contributions to the debate is a strong indignation that what is seen as such a ideologically biased document should have been issued, without prior discussion, as a Charter document.

The debate over the 'Right to history' document underlines the fact that Czechsolovak history does not present a unifying rallying point for national identification - ideological and religious differences lead to differing interpretations of history. In Czechoslovakia the traditional interpretation of the history of the predominantly catholic population is one with which it is easier for protestants to identify. Vaclav Benda, one of the spokesmen who signed the 'Right to history' document and probably its main author, describes this "paradox" in his essay 'Catholicism and politics'[20]:

> "When the independent Czechoslovak Republic was created in 1918, the vast majority of its population - formally, at least - was Catholic, whereas the official idea of the country's statehood derived...from an anti-catholic, reforming tradition (which although historically absurd, was none the less an appropriate punishment for the spiritual, cultural and political sterility of the Catholic Church in the country at that time)."

In the 'Right to history' document Benda seems to be trying to go some way towards rectifying what he sees as this "historical absurdity" and emphasize instead a more Catholic version of Czech history, which could perhaps act as a rallying point for the renewed active Catholic involvement in politics which he advocates. The resulting debate shows that attributing any such interpretation of history to the Charter as a whole arouses strong opposition.

The depth of emotion seen in the responses of the 'Right to history' debate reveals how deep-rooted and important the interpretation of Czech history is to many individuals. It is not simply a debate between historians over differing opinions of historical events, but a

challenge to peoples perception of their historical, and hence their national identity. Zdenek Kavan writes:

> "The debate, in which all participants are agreed on the importance of history for contemporary society as well as the relevance of enquiries into the meaning of Czech history, also shows that the intelligentsia of a small nation threatened by a catastrophe and fearing for its existence is more likely to think about the meaning of the history of such a nation."[21]

One traditional aspect of Czech nationalism was raised in the 'Declaration of Charter 77 on the 60th anniversary of the Czechoslovak republic' - this is the principle of 'small scale work' (drobna prace) first put forward by T G Masaryk, with its emphasis on 'working for the good of the nation'. The 60th anniversary document seems to strongly support this approach as the only way forward:

> "Let us strive unceasingly to act as good citizens at work and where we live. Let us help everyday and in small ways to create ...a social atmosphere, in which we would want to and be able to work well and with satisfaction for our country. Only then could we also hope to restore the best traditions of our state..."

H Gordon Skilling also emphasizes the importance of 'small scale work' when he assesses the contribution of the Charter to the national crisis. He writes: "The main hope rests in the ability of Charter 77 to continue its 'small scale work' (drobna prace) to use the famous phrase of T G Masaryk, often cited by Chartists (for example Havel, 'Power of the powerless)"[22]

However some Chartists, including Havel, are in fact critical of the principle of 'small scale work' when applied to present Czechoslovak circumstances. Havel has sympathy for those who advocate the principle of 'working for the good of the nation' in one's workplace and within the official structures: "These people assume, correctly, that every piece of good work is an indirect criticism of bad politics"[23]

However, he considers that in the present circumstances there are "very clear limitations to this attitude". In the face of the 'post totalitarian' system the choice is more frequently that between adaptation or conflict, with little middle ground remaining. He concludes:

> "There is...no neat, universally valid way of determining the point at which small-scale work ceases to be 'for the good of the nation' and becomes 'detrimental to the nation'. It is more than clear, however, that the danger of such a reversal is becoming more and more acute and that small-scale work, with increasing frequency, is coming up against that limit beyond which avoiding conflict means compromising its very essence."[24]

Petr Uhl is strongly critical of the call to 'work for the good of the nation' at work and at home, implicit in the 60th anniversary document: "The closing words of the text, which call for good behaviour in the work place and place of residence, took my breath away."[25]

He is indignant that the authors of the document should dare to advise him to work well in a situation in which he was sacked from his job and harassed at home simply for signing the Charter.

Kusin wrote of Czech national aspirations at the time of the Prague Spring:

> "In 1968 the Czechs were able to understand their nationalism more as a matter of content than form, notably a disentanglement from Soviet type concepts and a return to Europeanism. Theirs was essentially a national philosophy, relying on a combination of the national heritage plus plans for social and democratic improvement...Looking for a succinct description, we might call Czech nationalism 'political and philosophical' and Slovak 'institutional'".[26]

The Warsaw Pact invasion and stationing of foreign troops on Czech soil has added an element of 'form' to the Czech national agenda - a concrete physical grievance -but Czech nationalism remains predominantly 'political and philosophical', expressed through a desire to reassert Czech political, moral and cultural traditions, and to achieve a democratic and pluralist political system more in keeping with these traditions.

## European identity

An important aspect of Czech cultural identity is the maintenance of links with European culture as a whole. These links are seen to be under direct attack from the totalitarian regime, which seeks to isolate Czechoslovakia from the rest of Europe and destroy its European identity. Vilem Precan writes: "They believe that if they can cut Czechoslovakia off from the rest of the world, from European culture and its spiritual heritage, they will build a deep enough moat which it will be impossible to bridge."[27]

The aim of much parallel cultural activity is to resist this threat and maintain the traditionally European nature of Czech culture and thought. Hence Hejdanek writes of his independent philosophy seminars: "...the seminar is a way of keeping the bridge open to European thought. I think it's essential that we remain a part of Europe."[28]

Many within the Czech parallel culture see the crisis in Czechoslovakia arising from the incompatibility of the imposed Soviet political model with the developed European traditions of Czechoslovakia. Milan Simecka writes:

> "Czechoslovakia lies in Central Europe. Geographically speaking, it lies in the heart of Europe...Ideologically speaking, it lies in Eastern Europe...Many of the problems that our citizens suffer...can be traced, to a certain extent, to this ambivalent situation of their homeland. With its advanced economy, democratic traditions, typically Central European culture and mentality, Czechoslovakia...provided the most fertile conditions for an experiment with a different model of socialism than the one which has been created in quite different conditions in the Soviet Union."[29]

The Czechs frequently emphasize their European, or Central European, political traditions, and argue that of all the East European countries which found themselves consigned to the Soviet sphere after World War Two, the Czechs were the worst hit, having the most European political culture and having remained a 'firm bastion of democracy' in Central Europe in the interwar years.[30]

However, some within the opposition challenge the view that the plight of Czechoslovakia can be blamed solely on the imposition of an alien totalitarian system by the Soviet Union. Some, as we have seen, see the ease with which totalitarianism took hold in Czechoslovakia as a sign of an internal moral and political crisis. Albert Cerny writes: "Our national crisis is a moral crisis."[31]

Others resist the idea that the Soviet Union is the sole source of totalitarianism, whilst identification with the Western and European tradition, with its democratic and humanist values, is the way to resist this imposition of totalitarianism from the East. Simecka notes that European traditions also have their negative aspects and share responsibility for the fate of central Europe. The first attack on Central European traditions came from the West, rather than the East: "It was Hitler who tore up by the roots that certain decency of political and cultural standards which the Central European nations managed to preserve more or less intact up to 1937."[32]

He also points out that Marxism was cultivated and developed in the West. Havel sees the deep moral crisis in Czechoslovak society, which leads people to participate in and thus maintain the totalitarian system, as originating not in the East, but in the West. Modern science and rationalism, he argues, have deprived mankind of his rootedness in the natural

world, and paved the way for the imposition of modern impersonal power (See chapter 3).

Like Solzhenitsyn, Havel depicts Western Europe, and modern civilization in general, as

being in deep crisis, and argues that totalitarianism is merely an extreme manifestation of

this European crisis.


## Slovakia

Very few Slovaks are active in the Charter. Miroslav Kusy and the Czech Milan

Simecka are the only prominent Chartists based in Bratislava. Several factors explain this

low participation in the opposition on the part of Slovaks.

Firstly, there is the problem of isolation and difficulty of communication. It has proved

more difficult for the Charter to effectively communicate with signatories outside Prague,

and the active core of Chartists has typically been based in Prague.

Secondly, the normalization process in Slovakia has been less repressive than in the

Czech lands, and has therefore not given rise to the same level of discontent. Jiri Hajek

writes:

> "In Slovakia the 'normalizing' repression was and is substantially milder than in
> the Czech lands...the political leaders in Bratislava are obviously more shrewd
> than their colleagues in Prague. They don't want to destroy their creative
> intelligentsia. After the defeat of the 'Prague Spring' repression in Slovakia was
> almost exclusively directed only against active 'reform communists', not also
> against large groups outside the party" [33]

Slovak cultural life, though strictly limited, was not threatened with the same sort of

extinction as Czech culture faces. In 1977 the Slovak writer Hana Ponicka wrote a speech

critical of the censorship in Slovakia, but added that the situation in the Czech lands was

much worse: "It must be said, regretfully, that the losses of the creative forces in literature,

art and culture as a whole are incomparably greater among the Czechs than among the

Slovaks."[34]

Finally, Slovakia has been a stabilizing element in the normalization process, with a

low level of dissent, largely because Slovak aspirations were satisfied after 1968 to a much

greater extent than were those of the Czechs. The attitudes of the Czechs and Slovaks to

the reform process of 1968 were largely based on different sets of expectations. Most

advocates of reform in Slovakia, with the exception of what Kusin has termed the

"reformist federalists', saw federalization and Slovak national aspirations as the most important goals of reform, with political democratization as only a secondary goal. Kusin writes: "One cannot help feeling, when looking at the development of Slovak aspirations in 1968, that they were largely motivated by national factors as opposed to the political reform sought by the Czechs."[35]

By retaining the federalization element of the 1968 reforms, therefore, the normalizers were able to satisfy, to a large extent, the Slovak demands of 1968. Thus whilst normalization in the Czech lands has meant a negation of all the hopes of 1968, the Slovaks have some cause to feel that their aspirations have been met under normalization. Hajek argues that this is one of the main reasons for the lack of Slovak interest in the cause of the Charter:

> "...the federalization of Czechoslovakia was the only major reform of the Prague Spring to be retained. It was a great national improvement for Slovakia, which also remains under 'normalization'. The Slovaks do not have a national motive for the general disappointment of hopes, such as the Czechs have."[36]

George Schopflin argues that although Slovak national demands were at first useful to the reformers in 1968 as an instrument in bringing about decentralization, the fundamentally different aspirations of the two nations proved to be a source of weakness and an instrument that could be utilized instead by the normalizers:

> "The fact that Slovak objectives were quite different from Czech ones during the Prague Spring was regarded by Prague as something of a distraction. But here again the existence of two divergent national political agendas in one state came back to haunt Czechoslovakia in the 1970s, when the Slovaks were satisfied by normalization and came to act as one of the bases of stabilization which still endures."[37]

## The Hungarian minority

In 1987 the Charter issued several documents in support of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. Charter document 23/87 asks for an investigation of the 'acts of terrorism' against the Hungarian ethnic minority in Bratislava, outlined by Miklos Duray (March 1987) in his letter to the General Prosecutor of Slovakia. The Charter also supported the eight point proposal to the Vienna CSCE meeting (22 January 1988) submitted by the Committee for the defence of the Rights of the Hungarian Minority in Czechoslovakia, of which Duray was leader.

Several factors motivated the Charter's support for the rights of the Hungarian minority. Firstly, the Charter supports the rights of minorities in principle as an aspect of its support for human rights. The persecution of an ethnic minority by the authorities is part and parcel of the general principle of exclusion by which the totalitarian regime rules, and the suppression of all the natural pluralism and diversity within society. The Charter 77 letter to the Committee to Defend the Rights of the Hungarian Ethnic Minority in Czechoslovakia thus states:

> "It is evident that a minority's experiences may provide a useful incentive to a thorough assessment of the problems related to the complex composition of a society, and the tensions arising from a tolerance which is inadequate to the natural needs of all groups coexisting within that society."[38]

Another factor is the recognition that the problem of the Hungarian minority has become a problem of Hungarian-Czechoslovak relations, and thus is important to the Charter's increasing emphasis on East European solidarity. Petr Uhl points out: "Our contacts with the Hungarians have been slightly marked by the unsolved national - and even nationalistic - problem of Hungaro-Slovak relations."[39]

The opposition expresses the view that the authorities deliberately allow these national tensions to remain, to divert attention from common goals. The Charter letter to Duray's Committee argues that totalitarian conditions suppress a public exchange of opinions and thus the possibility of a mutual understanding necessary for easing tensions. Petr Uhl similarly argues that a number of complex questions concerning Hungarians and Slovaks are deliberately left unanswered and are "used by the authorities to manipulate society".[39]

Some of the points outlined in the Eight point proposal to the Vienna CSCE Conference, supported by the three 1987 Charter spokespersons and also the Bratislava residents Kusy and Simecka, include: free contacts across borders; free cultural exchanges and the use of TV and radio in one's mother tongue; the right to a complete education in one's mother tongue; bilingual administration of the territories inhabited by an ethnic minority; and a legal ban on all forms of forceful assimilation of minorities. The document admits that the proposals open up a sensitive question, but argues that it is an important one for for future security. The implications of the Charter's support for the claims of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia for Czech-Slovak relations in general are not examined,

although the inclusion of the signatures of Kusy and Simecka on the document is clearly intended to demonstrate the support for the proposals on the part of the Slovak opposition.


## East European solidarity

During the 1980s independent opposition groups in several East European countries increasingly recognized the importance of international solidarity and co-operation, not just with groups in the West, but equally importantly, with each other.

Increasing internationalization marks one of the most significant developments in the evolution of Czechoslovak and East European opposition since 1970. East-East contacts began on a small scale, for example the 1978 meeting of Czechoslovak and Polish activists on the border, and at first were only sporadic. However, by the late 1980s a close working relationship had been developed between several East European groups, most notably the Czechs and the Poles, and they began to draw up joint policy documents on several important issues, and to seek a "common approach to common problems"[40]

Contacts between Charter 77 and the Polish opposition were co-ordinated by the establishment of the 'Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity' group in 1981. The existence of this 'underground' group was only announced publicly in 1987. The groups spokespersons are Anna Sabatova in Czechoslovakia and Josef Pinior in Poland. In July 1987 a new group was announced - the 'Circle of Friends of Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity', with membership including Havel, Dienstbier, Uhl and Sabata. Contacts between Charter 77 and the polish opposition have included meetings, joint statements and solidarity protests, and the exchange of books, information, periodicals and videos. Petr Uhl notes that the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity group believes in political plurality, and therefore relations have been established not just with well known KOR and Solidarity leaders, but also with members of a variety of other groups, including the group 'Freedom and Peace', which Uhl argues is close in nature to Charter 77, as it concentrates on human rights and ecological problems.[41] Though the Charter has established the closest contacts with the Poles, it also has contacts throughout Eastern Europe, in particular with the 'Peace and Human Rights' group in the GDR, the 'Danube Circle' group and the editors of 'Beszelo'

in Hungary, and with Peace groups in Yugoslavia, and contacts were also established with Soviet dissidents.

By 1987 these increasing East-East contacts resulted in the formulation of joint statements on several issues. The August 1987 meeting on the Czecoslovak-Polish border resulted in an agreement to co-operate on the questions of military service, free travel within eastern Europe, and ecological problems. In 1988 other joint declarations were published, facilitated by the co-ordinating work of the East European Cultural Foundation. The January 1988 Charter 77 call for solidarity with Romanian citizens was supported by individuals from Hungary and Poland, as well as by Soviet dissidents. The 1st of February 1988 was designated as a day of solidarity with the Romanian people, whose plight was declared to be a common concern for the whole of Europe. In February 1988 Czechoslovaks, Poles, Hungarians, Yugoslavs and Soviets signed a protest against the crackdown on demonstrators in the GDR. The 'Conscientious Objectors Appeal', sent to the Vienna follow-up meeting of the CSCE, received widespread support. In August 1988 a text marking the 20th anniversary of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia was signed by Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, East Germans and Soviets. The text called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe and declared: "We in East Central Europe can become victorious only as free, democratic and equal nations."

On 20th December 1988 a statement issued in Prague, Warsaw, Budapest and Moscow announced the foundation of the 'East European Information Agency' (VIA). VIA was to be an independent information agency with the aim of disseminating information on events taking place in East-Central Europe.

The motivation behind the increasing emphasis on East European co-operation was, broadly speaking, threefold. Firstly there was the realization that, despite their differences, the East European societies all faced common problems, and that the responses to these problems on the part of their oppositional groups was increasingly similar. A joint 1987 Polish-Czechoslovak declaration, resulting from a border meeting, states:

> "...however different the situation in the individual European countries of the Soviet bloc and however varied their views on ways of solving the problems of these societies, the basic ideals of all those engaged in independent civic activities are on the whole identical."

The document identified these common ideals as: respect for human rights; respect for social rights, including the rights of independent trade unions; political pluralism and self-government; religious and cultural freedom; respect for the rights of national minorities; freedom to 'search for and create' a better economic system; the creation of a peaceful, democratic and environmentally conscious Europe. There had thus emerged a platform of consensus on which the East European groups could base their co-operation.

The second and perhaps most compelling factor was the increasing realization on the part of the individual East European opposition groups that separate, isolated attempts at change on a strictly national level had not and could not succeed. For any solution to be successful, it was increasingly stressed, it must go beyond national boundaries and involve change in the whole East European bloc. The opposition had become disillusioned with national solutions, with attempts to find a 'Czechoslovak' road. The ease with which such attempts could be crushed in the past was seen to stem from their isolation. Havel writes: "This is, after all, why in the end all the campaigns for self-emancipation have been quite easily suppressed - primarily because they have been limited to a single country and there were no broader international links."[42]

He concludes: "...it is highly likely that any self-liberation movement in the Soviet bloc countries will only succeed if it goes beyond the borders of any single country."

Similarly Petr Uhl writes: "...fundamental change for the better is conceivable only by means of internationally co-ordinated efforts."[43]

The combined forces of the opposition movements throughout Eastern Europe would strive to achieve a regional transformation of the system, avoiding the dead ends previously encountered through struggles which sought systemic change in just one country, whilst leaving the regional bloc system in place. Hence the appeal of regional concepts, with their emphasis on common political and cultural traditions, including ideas for European federations and the concept of a Central European identity. Jaques Rupnik writes that the common denominator in the idea of Central Europe "...is the belief that the small nations of the Other Europe are condemned to remain helpless before the great powers as long as they conceive of emancipation only in national terms".[44]

A third factor influencing the growth of East-East contacts was a desire to change the internal relations of the Eastern bloc, in response to the impetus of Gorbachev's call for a 'common European house', and the increasing emphasis on European reunification. It was noted by many in the Czechoslovak opposition that whilst East-West contacts had improved by the late 1980s, contacts between East and East were still limited. It was easier for many activists to get permission to travel to the West, than to their East European neighbours. The Hungarian Janos Kis noted that the "completely impossible situation" has come about that contact between the two halves of Europe is closer than between the societies of the Eastern half.

The existing links between the East European countries were instigated 'from above', at the highest official levels, whilst "autonomous, horizontal contacts between economic and cultural organizations are as sparse as those between individuals."[45]

The isolation of the East European countries was perpetuated by the authorities in concrete ways, for example through travel restrictions, but also in more subtle ways. Havel notes that whilst the authorities declare the "pseudo friendship" of the Warsaw Pact countries at the official level: "Sometimes the ruling echelons inconspicuously try to incite the antipathy of one Eastern bloc nation towards another. The power-wielders rely on the old well-tried and tested slogan 'Divide and Rule'."[46]

Citing the numerous obstacles put in the way of East-East contacts, Petr Uhl concludes that the East European authorities regard East-East contacts as much more dangerous than those between East and West: "...they are afraid of the international movement which our co-operation might bring about...".[47]

It is the aim of the opposition groups to change the nature of these relationships within the Soviet bloc, to replace official top level contacts, dominated from the centre by Moscow, with horizontal contacts at all levels. Thus they advocate the rights to freedom of travel, cultural exchanges, and contacts between individuals and organizations across Warsaw Pact frontiers. The East European independent groups also seek to transform the internal Warsaw Pact relations at the official level - the level of member states rights. In a joint East European statement issued to mark the 20th anniversary of the invasion of 1968, the participants declare the need for the Warsaw Pact treaty to be democratized: "Equal

political status for all member states should be secured". The Polish-Czechoslovak border declaration of July 1988 also addresses the question of relations within COMECON. It proclaims the right of each state to choose and establish its own economic system and argues that the 'principle of diversity' has to govern relations within COMECON: "No member-state has a right to impose any economic system on another state".

Attempts to improve East-East relations and to democratize the Warsaw Pact are directly related to the question of the reunification of Europe as a whole. Before the division of Europe can be overcome, it is argued, the existing European structures must be transformed.

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# THE PEACE ISSUE

For a short period in the mid 1980s the question of 'peace' seemed to dominate much

Charter activity. Contacts with the West European peace movements, which were first

established in 1981, developed into a full scale debate on the issue of peace by the mid

1980s, with many numbered Charter documents and many individual Chartists addressing

the problem. The peace debate also coincided with increasing discussions on proposals for

overcoming the division of Europe, of which the peace issue became an integral part. The

Czechoslovak opposition's emphasis on the peace issue and relations with the Western

peace movement declined after reaching a peak in 1984, but the issue still remained on the

agenda (eg. the 1988 Prague 'Peace Symposium'). Meanwhile in the late 1980s the

question of peace was taken up in a slightly different form by mostly different individuals.

The peace activists were young people not necessarily associated with Charter 77, and the

emphasis changed from external questions - international relations and the threat of war - to

internal ones - the consequences of the militarization of Czechoslovak society.

This chapter will explore the problematic nature of the peace issue for the Czechoslovak

opposition, and also examine the implications of the international and the internal aspects of

the peace issue.

For the Czechoslovak opposition, the term 'peace' is a problematic one. It finds itself

caught between two conceptions of peace, both of which it rejects. On the one hand, there

is the official peace struggle waged by the Czechoslovak authorities through a constant

barrage of peace propaganda. The term peace has become simply part of the ideological

verbiage of the regime, and has thus lost all authentic meaning. As a result, the

Czechoslovak population in general responds to the term peace with distrust, distaste, and

apathy. Havel writes:

> "For 37 years...the 'struggle for peace' has been an inseparable part and parcel of
> the ideological facade of the system within which we live...A citizen of our state
> simply starts yawning whenever he hears the word 'peace'..."[1]

This 'peace struggle' is waged in Czecholovakia through the official peace councils and

their much publicized international assemblies. The 'World Assembly for Peace and Life,

Against Nuclear War', for example, was held in Prague in June 1983. All those in Czechoslovakia without an ideologically correct view of the peace issue, such as Chartists, are denied participation and subject to persecution if they speak out on the issue.

The second conception of peace which the Czechoslovak opposition rejects is that associated with groups within the Western peace movement. This is the conception which equates 'peace' with disarmament, or more specifically with nuclear disarmament. Its aim is a nuclear free status quo. The Czechoslovak opposition takes exception in particular to two aspects of this interpretation of peace. Firstly, it puts the right to life before all other rights and considers that there are no values that are worth fighting for. Secondly, it tends towards the appeasement of potential aggressors. References to Munich and the Western appeasers of the 1930s recur frequently in the Czechoslovak oppositions' discussion on peace. Clearly the traumatic experience of 1938 makes them alert to any expression of the idea 'peace at any price'.

This 'naive' conception of peace is associated with those sections of the Western peace movement which refuse to include human rights on the peace agenda, and perhaps even view the human rights activists in the East as anti-socialist, pro-Western saboteurs of the issue of peace. The Charter 77 'Open letter to the 3rd Convention on European Nuclear disarmament in Perugia' thus contains a criticism of:

> "...the sort of myopic pacifism which regards the peace movement as nothing more than a movement opposed to weapons, chiefly nuclear ones, and fails to appreciate the external circumstances which dictate arms policies. We are of the view that this, in a sense, decadent pacifism is harmful in that it divests the peace movement of spiritual and democratic significance."[2]

In opposition to both these interpretations of peace, the Czechoslovak opposition puts forward its own definition of the term. Broadly, the Czechoslovak oppositions' definition has two main assertions. Firstly, peace requires respect for human rights. Secondly, peace requires overcoming the division of Europe.

Charter documents repeatedly stress the view that peace and human rights are 'indivisible'. This, above all, is what separates 'real' peace from the other alternatives described above.

"...it is solely in relation to all other human rights that peace is not what it can become, namely a temporary strategy of the powerful or a naive demand of those who wish to protect life at all costs, regardless of human responsibility to the values which surpass life itself."[3]

Charter 77 document 20/83 makes the point even more explicit. Peace and human rights are not simply interrelated, they are one and the same thing.

"We do not presume here a connection (be it tight or loose) of two different and more or less independent concepts, rather, we mean a single phenomenon and its two elements, a unique and indivisible problem."[4]

The Czechoslovak opposition argues that the observance of human rights by all governments is the condition for and guarantee of genuine peace. A regime which denies its citizens rights and is thus not under their control cannot, Chartists argue, be trusted to observe international treaties, and is thus a threat to peace. Furthermore, a regime which is not responsible to its own citizens and is in fact at war with them, is more likely to be an aggressor on the international scene as well - democracies do not start wars, dictatorships do. Only, then, by bringing all governments under the control of their citizens can peace be guaranteed. Trying to improve the international relationships between nations without changing the internal relationships within nations is thus, Chartists argue, too superficial.

Equating peace with human rights and equating human rights with the control of a government by its people naturally leads to the equation - peace equals democracy. As debates with the Western peace movement developed, this equation gained emphasis. The Czechoslovak opposition began to describe the peace it wanted as 'democratic peace'. Elements of the independent peace movement, East and West, which support this interpretation of peace are described as a 'democratic peace movement'[5], or a 'mighty democratic coalition'[6], working for the democratic transformation of Europe and thus for genuine and lasting peace.

Thus peace, as defined by the Charter, is a very broad concept, involving not only international relations, but internal relations between a government and its people, and even perhaps interpersonal relations. (This concept of peace sometimes seems so all encompassing as to become absurd - for example Charter document 20/83 writes of 'real peace'; "...that means at peace with oneself, with one's nearest and dearest, one's government and with citizens of other countries. And last but by no means least, with one's descendants.") The most important point, however, is that the issue of political

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systems and political democracy must form an integral part of the agenda of the peace movement.

The second key factor in the Czechoslovak oppositions' discussion of peace is the assertion that genuine peace cannot be achieved without fundamentally altering the existing international status quo, and overcoming the division of Europe. Limiting peace to a question of disarmament merely perpetuates the existing state of 'non-war' with all its inherent tensions. Havel writes: "What threatens peace in Europe is not the prospect of change but the existing situation."[7]

(The Czechoslovak oppositions' extensive debates on the reunification of Europe are discussed in a separate chapter.)

Thus the Czechoslovak opposition defines peace not as a cease-fire or a nuclear free version of the status quo. Peace is not simply a period without war, or the immediate threat of war. Peace requires harmonious and just relations between people, governments and nations. Thus ensuring peace requires addressing the basic sources of tension and injustice. This in turn requires fundamental changes in the existing internal and international status quo.

During the mid 1980s the Czechoslovak opposition was successful in establishing a network of relations with many sections of the Western peace movement, and also with independent peace movements in the East. By 1983 the Charter was in dialogue with IKV in Holland, CODENE in France, and END in Britain, among others, and important ideas were exchanged and developed through correspondence and through personal contacts. However, this dialogue was not without its difficulties, and not only because of the sometimes differing emphasis of each side. In the first place, Charter 77 was not a peace movement and therefore could not respond as an 'equal partner' to the peace movements in the West. Charter 77 was in fact the only suitable partner for this dialogue in Czechoslovakia, as no independent peace movement existed. (Jiri Hajek argued that he would like to see the creation of a genuine peace movement in Czechoslovakia.[8]) The problem that this presented was that as a politically heterogeneous movement, the Charter could not have a united voice on the often politically controversial issue of peace. Though

nearly everyone within the Czechoslovak opposition could agree on the two basic

principles - the indivisibility of peace and human rights and the need to overcome the

division of Europe, on other issues there was disagreement, and the messages reaching the

Western peace movement from Prague were often conflicting. Some within the

Czechoslovak opposition were highly critical of the Western peace movement itself.

Vaclav Racek, for example, wrote a very critical letter to E.P.Thompson attacking the

fundamental views of the Western peace movement and accusing Thompson of pro-Soviet

bias. Others however, in particular Jaroslav Sabata and Jiri Hajek, felt that the ideas of the

Western peace movement were close to their own and to those of the Charter. Hajek

describes Charter 77 as being "...very close in spirit to the independent peace movement"[9],

whilst Sabata writes that "...the Western European independent peace movement has

intrinsically the same aims as ourselves."[10] Disagreement was also evident on specific

issues. Whilst most Chartists, including for example Ladislav Hejdanek, argued that the

preservation of certain values is more important than the preservation of life[11], Hajek

warns that:

> "...it is hard to invoke this argument when we are talking of the life of the entire
> human species and along with it all the values that would lose any meaning in a
> depopulated world burnt out by nuclear war."[12]

Differences are also evident on the question of disarmament. Most documents express

the view that whilst nuclear disarmament is not a solution or an end goal, it is a useful first

step to reducing tension. Radim Palous expresses a different view, arguing that nuclear

weapons may be beneficial - the threat of their use prevents localized conflicts developing

into major wars, and protects against the abuse of conventional weapons. "For almost

forty years neither a world nor a European war has broken out - a fact which I consider

empirical proof of my position."[13]

Vaclav Racek takes the most extreme view, arguing that the peace movement should

support the military build up of the Western powers: "I would see the task of a non-naive

peace movement as that of supporting military force as an instrument of democracy

confronting totalitarianism."[14]

Rev Jakub Trojan is critical of several views on peace which are widely held in the

Charter. In particular he is critical of the argument that proclaims that there is only one

'true peace' - that of justice, freedom and respect for human rights - and that rejects any other. Trojan rejects this 'all or nothing' approach, arguing instead that even 'false' peace can be beneficial, and doubting the existence of any such thing as 'true peace'. He is also critical of Chartists overloading the connection between peace and human rights. He argues that wars have been waged between states whose citizens enjoyed a good measure of human rights, and points out that Western democracies can also provide a source of conflict through their unjust relations with third world countries.[15]

Even the voice of the Charter itself, through its official documents, has not always been a consistent one in its dialogue with the peace movement. For example it is possible to detect a changing tone, coinciding with changing spokespersons, between Charter documents like 20/83 (To the World Congress 'For Peace and Life against Nuclear War'. Spokespersons: J. Kozlik, M.R.Krizkova, A.Marvanova), which were very positive in their approach to the peace movement, and Charter document 9/84 (Open Letter to the British Peace Movements. Spokespersons: V.Benda, J.Ruml, J.Sternova), which takes a more critical tone. (This document met with some controversy within Charter 77 after the passage arguing that "at least some of us would sooner take the risk (however great) of a firm stand, to the inevitably unhappy consequences of appeasement..." was quoted in a Reagan speech.)


Given the difficulties inherent in the dialogue with the Western peace movement, why did the Charter choose to get involved?

Firstly, despite some differences in viewpoint, the Charter sees a natural ally in the Western peace movements simply because they are independent, unofficial 'citizens initiatives'. Several feel a natural affiliation to the Western peace activists because they, like Chartists, are concerned with the fate of the planet and are taking on individual responsibility for the way things are and trying to change things at a grass roots level. One Charter document states:

> "This renaissance of European citizenship, of concern for the fate of Europe and
> the world, transcends, in terms of significance, even the struggle against
> immediate danger which is the basis of today's peace movement, because it
> awakens something fundamentally human."[16]

Secondly, the successful establishment of a dialogue with elements within the peace movement enables the Charter to overcome its isolation and for its voice to be heard on important issues. Via contacts with the Western peace movement the Charter can seek to influence the agenda of official East European peace Assemblies, from which it is excluded, and even in this way establish an indirect three cornered dialogue, via the intermediary of Western peace movements, with the Czechoslovak official peace groups. Thus relations with the Western peace movement appeal to two basic Charter tenets - support for independent initiatives stressing individual responsibility, and the desire to establish dialogue, even with those with whom it fundamentally disagrees.

Thirdly, groups within the Western peace movement have provided practical support for Chartists, especially through publicizing cases of persecuted individuals in Czechoslovakia who have been active in the peace debates. (See, for example, their solidarity with Ladislav Lis)

Finally, the dialogue with the Western peace movement enables the Charter to contribute to, and influence, the direction taken by the movement. It has encouraged the peace movement to move away from an emphasis on simple disarmament, and to increasingly emphasize the importance of human rights as an integral part of peace. It has also enabled the Charter to put the reunification of Europe on the peace agenda, and to struggle to overcome the tendencies within the West European peace movement that see peace only as the maintenance of the existing geo-political status quo. For several Chartists, such as Jaroslav Sabata, the evolution of the peace movement into a 'democratic' peace movement is of central importance. Sabata writes: "The most important theatre of the peace struggle is the peace movement itself in its widest sense."[17]

Relations between Charter 77 and foreign peace groups reached a culmination in 1988 with the 'Prague 88' peace seminar, hosted by Charter 77 and the newly formed Independent Peace Association (NMS-IDS), and attended by many Western peace activists. The weekend peace seminar was the first of its kind to be held in Czechoslovakia, and although largely broken up by the police, it was able to issue a proposal which highlights the main points of the Charter's interpretation of peace - an emphasis on independent, unofficial initiatives, an emphasis on democracy as an essential element of peace, and an

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emphasis on overcoming the division of Europe. The proposal called for the establishment of a European Peace Parliament, based in Prague, made up of non-governmental organizations, to be called the 'European Assembly for Peace and Democracy' and with the aim of overcoming the division of Europe.

The late 1980s saw the development in Czechoslovakia of its own nascent peace movement, supported mainly by young people, many of them Christians, who had for the most part not been involved in Charter 77 or the other established groups in the Czechoslovak opposition. Whilst these peace activists echoed the basic calls for world peace and nuclear disarmament, and also emphasized such basic tenets as the indivisibility of peace and human rights, their emphasis was somewhat different to that of the dialogue between Charter 77 and the Western peace movements, in that they were concerned with the internal as much as the international aspects of the peace issue. In particular they campaigned for the demilitarization of Czechoslovak society, opposed many of the conditions of compulsory military service, and emphasized the connection between militarization and the destruction of the environment. Several of these issues were in turn addressed by Charter 77 documents.

These issues proved capable of mobilizing significant numbers of people, particularly young people, and these peace activists were the vanguard in several landmark demonstrations which challenged the limits of permissible action in Czechoslovakia.

Jan Svoboda's proposals on military service, including the legalization of the rights of conscientious objectors, gained much support, and more than 400 signatories, in 1983. In December 1985 a significant peace demonstration took place to mark the anniversary of John Lennon's death. The John Lennon memorial wall on Kampa Island had become the symbolic centre for this movement. A thousand people took part in a largely undisrupted peace demonstration, chanting such slogans as "no missiles are peaceful" and "scrap the army". This was the first event of its kind since 'normalization'. The NMS (Independent Peace Association) was also involved in calling for the large scale 20th Anniversary demonstration in Prague in 1988. The NMS called for a dispersed demonstration and asked people to wear clothing in the national colours.

The NMS-IDS (Independent Peace Association - Initiative for Demilitarization of Society) was the largest of several peace groups which sprang up in 1987/8. (Others included SPUSA (Society of Friends of the USA), May 1978, and the John Lennon Peace Club, December 1988.)

Given the general skepticism and distrust of the term peace amongst the general population - as described by Havel in his essay 'Anatomy of a reticence' - the use of the term in the name of an independent group was something new. What was significant, however, is that the NMS addresses largely short term, concrete goals, and problems which affect many young people directly, particularly the issue of national service. The main points in the NMS agenda involve improvements in the conditions of military service so that it could be perceived as an 'honourable duty' rather than a 'necessary evil'. They propose greater rights for those in national service, shorter terms, longer leave and provisions for those with small children. They also propose changing the text of the military oath to remove ideological bias. They advocate the right to refuse military service on the grounds of conscience, and propose that an alternative civilian service should be introduced. They also oppose what they see as the militarization of small children, through 'pre-military' training in schools and the sale of 'war toys'. They point out the imbalance of the Czechoslovak economy, with its preponderance of steel production, which is geared to serve the needs of the military and results in economic and environmental damage. Finally, they seek to reduce the power and influence of the army in Czechoslovak society in general, and declare themselves to be against policies which are bureaucratic and militaristic.

The NMS calculated that of its 400 members in 1988, only about ten percent were Charter 77 signatories. It thus represented a significant new level of activism and organization on the part of independent young people in Czechoslovakia. It also seems to have had a significant mobilizing force, as its representatives claimed in a 1988 interview: "...the NMS is the first opposition group which has succeeded in getting people onto the streets."

At the same time, these concerns were also increasingly addressed by Charter 77 and the rest of the Czechoslovak opposition. The Charter document demanding space for the

younger generation, for example, addresses the question of military service and the introduction of an alternative service for conscientious objectors, and Charter document No. 27/87 was also on the subject of national service. The 'Prague 88 Peace Seminar', co-hosted by NMS, also explored the consequences of the militarization of society. The Movement for Civil Liberties (HOS), established on 15th October 1988, also placed the demilitarization of society and changes in national service and children's education on its agenda.

The question of the rights of conscientious objectors was an issue which was strongly promoted by groups in other East European countries. It became a subject for international solidarity within Eastern Europe. Havel described the issue of conscientious objectors as: "...one of the most pressing issues which the East European societies have in common."[18]

Like other peace issues, the question transcends national boundaries and gives the Czechoslovak opposition allies in efforts to overcome iron curtains both within Eastern Europe and between East and West.

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# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND THE REUNIFICATION
# OF EUROPE

## Introduction

On March 14, 1985 the Charter issued the Prague Appeal, calling for discussions and
proposals that would contribute to the goal of creating an "undivided, democratic and
autonomous Europe of free citizens and nations".[1] The document was signed by a wide
cross-section of the Czechoslovak opposition, representing every political grouping, with
few dissenting voices. As Jan Kavan writes: "The achieved consensus makes the Prague
Appeal the most representative document to date released by Charter 77 dealing with a
controversial political issue."[2]

The Prague Appeal was the result and centrepiece of an extensive debate in the mid
1980s, carried out both inside Czechoslovakia amongst Chartists, and between Chartists
and peace movements in the West, about the future of Europe and the prospects for
European reunification.

This chapter will discuss the many key issues of international relations raised in this
debate, such as the Czechoslovak oppositionists' views on Helsinki, detente and the role of
the superpowers. It will also analyze the proposed transformations outlined in many of the
debate documents, including the proposals for the reunification of Germany, the future of
the military-political alliances and the new role envisioned for a united Europe in world
affairs. Finally, it will assess the political assumptions which lie behind these proposals,
and their prospects for success.

## Helsinki

The importance of the Helsinki agreements for the Czechoslovak opposition is
underlined by the Prague Appeal, which sees Helsinki as a vital basis for future European
unification. According to the Prague Appeal, Helsinki "...established in principle the sort
of relations which, if implemented, would open the way to the unification of Europe."

The Czechoslovak opposition has viewed Helsinki positively from the outset. In 1975
the reform communists welcomed Helsinki and even interpreted it as a self-criticism on the

part of its Soviet and East European signatories for their role in the invasion of 1968. Mlynar and Hajek stressed: "It is basically necessary to consider the results of Helsinki as positive, and it is necessary to disassociate ourselves from attempts to minimize or depreciate it."[3]

Jiri Hajek credits the survival of the Charter to the atmosphere created by the Helsinki agreement.[4] In 1985 Jaroslav Sabata underlined the importance ascribed by many Chartists to the Helsinki Final Act, describing it as the "supreme post-war watershed" and "the most striking historical and political landmark of the post-war epoch".[5]

Why do Chartists ascribe so much significance to the Helsinki agreement? Two basic factors were underlined from the beginning: the linking of detente with the observation of human rights, and the role Helsinki gave to citizens initiatives in monitoring the application of the Helsinki principles. Both these aspects of Helsinki were naturally significant for the Charter, legitimizing its work and emphasizing the indivisibility of peace and human rights. Other aspects of the Helsinki Accords, however, have received increasing emphasis in the 1980s, in particular the 'European' aspects of the Helsinki proposals. Chartists argue that the principles laid down at Helsinki reflect historical European values, such as a belief in the equality and self determination of nations and an emphasis on human rights, "principles rooted in European traditions and inspired by the highest values of the European nations' political culture".[6] Above all they see the significance of Helsinki in the fact that all the European states, not just the superpowers, participated independently in its decision making. As such it initiated a process of European co-operation which the Czechoslovak opposition hopes can eventually lead to European reunification. The Prague Appeal states of the Helsinki programme:

> "It is a process in which the participants are not power blocs, but equal partners.
> It affirms the independence of all participating states and sets down principles of
> mutual relations whose application opens up a prospect for a reunification of
> Europe."[7]

Similarly, Sabata writes of the Helsinki Final document:

> "It is not merely an agreement about European security; it represents a programme
> of all-European (and Euro-American) *co-operation*, the essential significance of
> which lies in the prospect it offered for overcoming the division of Europe..."[8]

Thus much of the significance of Helsinki for the Czechoslovak opposition lies not so much in what was agreed upon in the Final Document, but in the very fact that European countries co-operated to reach an agreement, and that a process of future co-operation was initiated. In the 1980s, the Helsinki talks of 1975 are valued not so much as a high point of detente between the superpowers, but as the beginning of the participation of Europe in its own fate, through a process of co-operation which it is hoped will enable Europe to overcome the limitations of detente.

This very positive view of Helsinki is not in general shared by dissidents in other East European countries. Elsewhere the Helsinki process is seen more as a confirmation of the status quo than as a process offering hope for overcoming it. In their response to the Prague Appeal Polish Kos argued: "Neither do we share your completely positive opinion of the negotiating process of Helsinki. In spite of its pretensions, this process has reinforced the bloc-logic instead of overcoming it."[9]

As a result, the Poles felt that they could not endorse the Prague Appeal. Dissidents in the GDR issued a similar response, arguing that Helsinki "...did not challenge the existing military and political status quo in Europe in the detente era."[10] The Hungarian Janos Kis has presented other detailed criticisms of the Prague Appeal's emphasis on Helsinki. In his reply to the Prague Appeal he argues that it is not really true to say that the Helsinki negotiations were conducted between equal, independent European states, as the Soviet bloc governments could not act independently. He also points to the complete stagnation in the Helsinki process since 1975, with little being achieved in any sphere, and even some decline. He concludes: "If you confirm that Helsinki offers a proper frame of reference for those who want to further European unification, you must be able to say why this is so in spite of the well-known facts of its crisis."[11]

Although the Chartists view Helsinki very positively, they are also quick to recognize this crisis in the Helsinki process. In letters to the conferences on European Security and Cooperation the Charter has expressed hope that the conferences will succeed, whilst deploring the slowing down, and even the failure, of the Helsinki process. Chartists expressed disappointment in the results of both Belgrade and Madrid, where they felt that the Conference on European Security and Cooperation had entered a blind alley.[12] By

1985 Chartists entertained few illusions about the current state of the process initiated at

Helsinki. Charter document 18/85 marking ten years after Helsinki noted that European

nations were rightly asking what use their governments had made of the "unique and

historic opportunity" presented by Helsinki:

> "...the 'Helsinki process' has slowed down, halted and even gone into reverse.
> The talks within its framework, particularly concerning the non-implementation
> and violation of the Helsinki principles and obligations are in the doldrums."[13]

In a statement to the Milan Forum, Czechoslovak oppositionists stated that they fully

shared the critical attitude of their partners in the Forum towards what Helsinki had so far

achieved: "In stressing the importance of the Accords, it has never been our intention to

ignore the lamentable state of our divided European home."[14]

In an article on Helsinki, Jiri Dienstbier refers to a general indifference towards

international agreements on the part of governments and the man in the street. There is

much evidence of the futility of the Helsinki process. However, Dienstbier refuses to

resign himself to indifference towards Helsinki. He points out instead the successes of

Helsinki, and asks whether the rise of KOR, Solidarity and Charter 77 would have been

possible without it. He concludes that International Agreements can only be what

governments and nations make of them.[15] In a 1985 essay Jiri Hajek also recognizes the

stagnation of the Helsinki process, which he attributes to a return to the ideology of the

cold war and the growing influence of military industrial complexes. He argues that a

power struggle has taken place in which that part of the establishment which actively

participated in achieving the positive results of Helsinki and certainly was willing to work

to continue this process, was not able to resist the pressures of a return to cold war

ideology. Although the subsequent talks have resulted at least in a certain

'institutionalization' of Helsinki, and discussion of the issues of European peace, this is in

danger of degenerating into a routine diplomatic exercise with few real results.[16]

However, although Chartists recognize that in practice Helsinki has achieved little, and

that the process it initiated is stagnating, they still view the impact and importance of

Helsinki very positively. Their disappointment has not given way to skepticism. They

reject the view, expressed by other East Europeans, that Helsinki is simply a recognition of

the post war political status quo. For Chartists, Helsinki is a "double edged" phenomenon.

Whilst it does confirm the post war status quo and the division of Europe, at the same time it offers the prospect of overcoming that status quo, through a new "Helsinki inspired" situation in Europe and the Northern Hemisphere.[17] The Chartists reject the static interpretation of Helsinki as simply an agreement enabling mutual coexistence in a divided world, and instead emphasize an active interpretation of Helsinki as the first step towards a democratic and peaceful Europe. Charter document 31/87 (to the participants of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Vienna) underlines this optimistic approach, pointing out that the Charter has consistently emphasized the hopeful side of the Helsinki process and has faith in its potential.

> "We believed from the beginning and still think now that the Helsinki Final Act must be taken seriously and that we must strive patiently so that it is truly brought to life in all countries...We believe that the positive potential dormant here will be more and more openly realized and there will be fewer and fewer reasons for skepticism."

Why, despite the obvious failures of the Helsinki process to achieve improvements, do the Chartists invest so much hope in it? In part it may be an expression of a general tendency in the Charter to 'take them at their word' and to use international agreements to the hilt even when everyone else regards them as a dead letter. But the Chartists faith in the potential, though not the existing practice, of the Helsinki process is also based on the belief that it is a process which can be revitalized. The statement by some Chartists to the Milan Forum argues that the Helsinki process must be "radicalized".[18] One answer to the question of how the Helsinki process can be "relaunched" and "radicalized" seems to involve the international peace movement. This point is alluded to in the Prague Appeal:

> "The demand that governments live up to the obligations they themselves have undertaken appears to us a hitherto little utilized opportunity for the peace movement. Yet this conception ...offers to citizens both a public control of governments and a creative overcoming of petrified attitudes."[19]

This proposal is expanded further by Jiri Hajek in his 1985 letter to the END Convention in Amsterdam.[20] He argues that in order to overcome the current stagnation of the Helsinki process, it is evidently necessary to develop strong pressure from below. He argues that the peace movements, which so effectively mobilized millions of people against nuclear weapons, could further their long term goals by calling forth such a movement from below to revitalize the Helsinki process and give it new life and dynamism. He

argues that the Helsinki concept of peace in Europe could provide a solid basis for cooperation between the Western peace movements and both the citizens initiatives and the official peace organizations in the Eastern bloc. An all-European peace movement developed on such a basis could overcome the present stagnation, Hajek argues, and relaunch the dynamic forces of ten years ago. He concludes:

> "A well considered, forceful struggle to revive the Helsinki process 'from below' could effectively support such forces inside the establishment which are able to fully understand the absurdity of the present division of our continent and confrontation on its soil, and encourage them to bolder initiatives..."[21]

## Detente

The Czechoslovak opposition has traditionally viewed international detente positively, arguing that cold war only enhances the ability of governments to suppress their own citizens, whilst detente on the other hand offers greater opportunities for the development of civil initiatives within Eastern Europe. Detente was thus welcomed by reform communists in the opposition in the early 1970s, reflecting their foreign policy standpoints of 1968. The Charter's attitude towards detente has consisted in emphasizing that detente and human rights are interdependent goals. The Helsinki Accords were welcomed for the fact that they unequivocally stated that military, political and economic detente is indivisibly linked with the maintenance of human rights within participating states, and that the violation of human rights agreements threatens the general process of detente.

Several writers have rightly noted that the Charter presents little analysis of this relationship, and does not seem to take into account the fact that the interdependency of detente and human rights is not automatic (Skilling[22], Kusin[23]). Kusin charges that the Czechoslovak opposition fails to consider the possibility of having a bad detente, a one way street in which the East gains much whilst continuing to persecute its citizens. He argues that the Czechoslovak opposition accepted detente in a static fashion, without demanding that it be understood as an active policy, involving the public and not just governments: "...it seems rather surprising that a more profound study of the meanings of detente has not emerged from the oppositional circles."[24]

Yet, interestingly, one such analysis was presented by Jiri Pelikan in 1976[25] in which he raises many of the problems associated with detente which Kusin points to. Pelikan raises the question of whether detente and broad East-West co-operation are beneficial to the activities of the opposition, or whether they hinder them. He does not take the interdependent relationship between detente and human rights as an automatic given. He writes: "Medvedev was right when he wrote that detente will not automatically change the political climate and lead to greater democratization and respect for human rights."

Pelikan argues that it is necessary to consider what kind of detente is being sought, and recognizes that there are basically two kinds of detente. One is based on the "ossification of the political status quo", on the division of the world into spheres of influence, and the limitation of international contacts to the governmental level. The second, which Pelikan argues is the conception of detente which was advocated during the Prague Spring, involves the loosening of military and economic blocs, reducing the monopoly position of the two superpowers and strengthening the role of smaller states, and encourages unhindered contacts and political and cultural dialogue between citizens of all states. It "makes possible a political development independent of spheres of influence, without jeopardizing the security of this or that great power." Pelikan argues that Stalinist forces in the Soviet Union seek to limit detente, so that it is closer to the static model above, but even in these circumstances the opposition should not reject it. Even limited detente has its beneficial effects, it acts in a long term way, alleviating fear and activating the opposition, leading to some exchanges, even if only at the official level, and accelerating differentiation within the ruling groups. It would be naive however, Pelikan argues, to believe that this limited detente will mean automatic liberalization in Eastern Europe. He argues that democratization will essentially result from pressures from internal, not external forces: "Western governments cannot put forward ultimatums or preliminary conditions regarding their relations with the USSR and Eastern Europe."

In his essay 'The place of dissidents in today's political map' Mlynar agrees with this view, arguing that the concerns of the peoples of the Soviet bloc are a secondary consideration in determining the foreign policy of Western governments towards Eastern bloc governments.

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> "The basic fact, which is really quite natural in politics, which however 'dissidents' formerly often underestimated, is this, that all political forces outside the totalitarian systems of the Soviet type judge these systems and formulate their relations with them according to their own power political concerns - and not according to the concerns of the society which is ruled by these totalitarian systems."[26]

This distinction which Pelikan draws between the two possible types of detente - one reinforcing the status quo, the other working to overcome it - provides an interesting pointer to what I will argue is the increasing disillusionment in the Czechoslovak oppositional circles with the current policy of detente. In the 1970s, the Czechoslovak opposition welcomed detente even in its limited, static form, and encouraged it to develop into the detente that they really wanted. By the mid 1980s some Chartists have concluded that detente has failed to do this, and seek to move beyond detente. Some Chartists see the failure of detente simply in the return to a cold war atmosphere. Charter document 19/85 described the existing international climate as one of "...the assertion of a spirit and methods which run counter to the process of detente. A cold war climate seems to have descended on international relations."

Others, however, argue that the basic premise of the old attitude towards detente is flawed. Jaroslav Sabata is a leading proponent of this viewpoint. He argues that detente was a "declining, but necessary, interim stage" and that it is now necessary to go beyond the old conceptions of detente and seek a "new convergence".[27] In his essay 'A democratic and revolutionary identity for today's left'[28] Sabata draws attention to Gorbachev's speech of 8 May 1985 in which he argued that detente was "...only a transitional stage in the process of transforming the situation of a world burgeoning with arms into one of a complex system of international security". Sabata sees this as evidence that "the framework of the old attitudes to detente is beginning to crumble on all sides", a development which he welcomes. Sabata's criticisms of the old detente are threefold: Firstly, it lacked a democratic basis:

> "...Europe travelled a long and arduous path before arriving at detente and Helsinki. It soon became obvious, however, that this was a detente without genuine democracy and that we must radicalize it by introducing a democratic spirit into the proceedings."

Secondly, it was based on bloc interests and an acceptance of the status quo, and the conviction that the division of Europe was the "be all and end all of world history",

encouraging a policy of 'small steps' in the field of disarmament, but "blocking the perspective of a major change". Thirdly, Sabata is critical of what he describes as the "liberal reformist" view of convergence, which seeks stability and the maintenance of the status quo. "The concept of convergence of two opposing social systems does not allow for a fundamental crisis in social structures... Thus concepts of stability and the balance of forces assume prominence."[29]

The convergence which Sabata seeks is, he explains, of a quite different type, involving a wide variety of initiatives at all levels, both political and apolitical, moving in the direction of a democratic peace. This new convergence will not just be a matter between governments. Sabata concludes: "Our 'small' change of direction - detente - will fail to develop into a major change if we do not imprint on it issues which attract spontaneous attention and open new horizons."

This dissatisfaction with the existing detente is shared by other East European oppositionists. One Polish commentator presents a very negative assessment of 'old' detente, arguing that it is based on the principle that existing borders between states and political orders within states must remain unchanged. He concludes: "...there seems to be no direct or immediate link between efforts in the sphere of domestic policies and the detente between the military-ideological 'camps'."[30]

However, there is also some optimism expressed that international relations are now entering a period of 'new' detente, which will have a more democratic basis than the old detente. This optimism owes much to the new possibilities opened up by Gorbachev. Sabata argues: "The new Soviet policies may succeed where non-democratic detente failed."[31]

The final report of the Prague 88 seminar on peace and human rights also viewed the prospects for the new detente favourably. The report argued that the INF Treaty and the summit process had opened up the opportunity for a new detente, an opportunity which must not be undermined by either side. This new detente enhances the prospects for achieving the goals of a united, peaceful and democratic Europe. The report argues that the new detente has apparently overcome many of the limitations inherent in the old detente:

> "It seems that the new detente is anchored more deeply than the detente of the
> 1970s which reached a climax at Helsinki and which was primarily seen as a

confirmation of the status quo...But in order to realize this democratic perspective of detente we have to overcome the consequences of the cold war, especially the division of Europe."[32]

The Prague Appeal makes no mention of the concept of detente, but instead advocates a 'mutual rapprochement'. However the methods advocated in the Prague Appeal to bring about this rapprochement - the development of contacts at all levels, the renunciation of force, the participation of all citizens and nations, the overcoming of the division of Europe into blocs, combined with guarantees to assuage the security fears of al concerned - closely resemble the steps outlined by Jiri Pelikan in 1976 for achieving the kind of detente which the Czechoslovak opposition should advocate. Pelikan wrote of:

> "...a detente which not merely eliminates military conflict but also loosens the military and economic blocs...which bans military intervention against other countries and creates opportunities for human contacts between citizens of all states...and which makes possible a political development independent of spheres of influence without jeopardizing the security of this or that great power."[33]

Ten years later, the Czechoslovak opposition seems to feel that the opportunity has now opened up for it to move beyond the old static interpretation of detente and to push for the acceptance of its own interpretation of detente as an active process of rapprochement with the goal of overcoming the existing status quo.


## Views of the Superpowers

The basic premise on which the Prague Appeal is based is the need to overcome the dominance of the two superpowers in European and world affairs. For several contributors to the discussion on the future of Europe the role of the superpowers is seen as a very baleful one. Both superpowers, they argue, have proved themselves incapable of solving pressing world problems. Both are inflexible and shortsightedly committed to maintaining the status quo. Jakub Trojan charges the superpowers with presenting themselves as saviors of the entire planet, whilst in reality:

> "...they have become incapable of identifying the roots of the present problems. Both of today's principal global ideologies: the 'American Dream' and the 'Communist Tomorrow', see the world in terms of their own images...Both sides however lack any capacity for genuinely global thinking. They each have built in reflex mechanisms for preventing any change in their underlying philosophies which they regard as untouchable."

Trojan ponders whether they are in fact just two sides of the same coin, and concludes that it is time that superpower interests be tempered by planetary interests.[34] Similarly Jiri

Dienstbier charges both sides with ideological posturing and inflexibility, and writes of the "dam of rhetoric" which has built up on both sides and blocked any progress.[35]

In the Prague Appeal, the view presented of the superpowers is based on a symmetrical approach, both are treated equally without any moral or political distinctions being drawn. The question of whether the two superpowers should be viewed symmetrically raises some controversy within oppositional circles. Vaclav Havel points out that different perceptions of the United States divide dissidents rather significantly, with views ranging from anti-American to Reaganite. Havel argues that he himself has no illusions about the US as the 'land of the good', but at the same time he cannot accept the view that the two superpowers are just symmetrical.

> "...the degree of internal freedom and so of international political credibility of the two superpowers appear to me so deeply different that to consider the current situation as simply symmetrical, in the sense that both colossi are equally dangerous, appears to me a monstrous oversimplification. Yes, both are dangerous, each in a different way, but they definitely are not dangerous in the same way."[36]

Similarly Vaclav Benda has expressed his rejection of any symmetrical view of East and West. He argues that both are in crisis, but to a different degree, and that "they cannot be compared on any rational, theoretical or practical grounds".[37] Others charge the opposition of being guilty of the opposite tendency, that of unquestioningly supporting and praising the US whilst ignoring its faults. Trojan, for example, warns that the Western democracies are capable of providing a threat to world peace through their unjust relations with the third world. He condemns a tendency he perceives in Charter circles to idealize the Western world.[38] Both Lubos Kohout and Petr Uhl are critical of the Prague response to the Milan Document[39] on these grounds. Kohout asks if we haven't "gone over the top in our support for one side"[40]. Petr Uhl charges that: "...the text makes insufficient mention of the social contradiction of Western Europe, including violations of human rights."[41]

Lubos Dobrovsky warns that black and white views of the two superpowers, which depict the Soviet sphere of influence as one of non-freedom and political terror, whilst the US sphere is one of democracy and freedom, are tempting in their "simplicity and

unambiguousness" but as points of departure for improving the current situation they are unworkable.[42]

Thus some oppositional documents are perceived by different Chartists as being either too symmetrical, or too one sided, in their assessments of the role of the superpowers.

The Prague Appeal reflects the symmetrical view, carefully apportioning no blame and treating both sides equally. This is partly a continuation of the tone taken in most Charter documents - a refusal to take sides on ideological questions (which of course is itself a reflection of the Chartists' ideological heterogeneity) - but also it is in part a reflection of the tone expressed in the international debate on the peace issue, of which the Prague Appeal is a part. This approach accounts for the wide ideological spectrum of the documents' signatories, but, as the Hungarian Janos Kis has pointed out in his analysis of the Prague Appeal, it is also the source of some weakness and vagueness in the document. He argues that the strictly symmetrical approach of the Prague Appeal results in several important factors being ignored, namely, the different geographical locations of the two superpowers in relation to Europe, and the unequal and different degrees of dominance exercised by the superpowers over their allies. So for example the Prague Appeal's call for the withdrawal of all US and Soviet military units from European soil does not address these problems, and the resulting proposal contains a basic imbalance - the US would withdraw much further from Europe geographically, and the political dependence of the Eastern bloc countries on the USSR would remain unchanged. Kis is critical of the use of this strictly symmetrical presentation in the Prague Appeal, which he sees as tactical. He argues that it should be possible to point out the severe problems of the Eastern bloc without trying to show that there are equal ones in the West.[43]

## The reunification of Europe

The Prague Appeal forms the centrepiece of an extensive discussion within Czechoslovak oppositional circles, and with groups and individuals abroad, about the nature of a future united Europe, and about the steps required to bring this unification about. Some of the most important contributions to this discussion can be briefly outlined here. An extensive debate took place in the early 1980s between Czechoslovak

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oppositionists and the peace movement. One important document resulting from this debate was Jaroslav Sabata's letter to E P Thompson (April 1983)[44], in which he described the aim of the democratic peace movement as that of overcoming the division of Europe and unifying the artificially divided continent. In September 1984, in his essay 'Pax Europeana'[45], Jiri Dienstbier raised many of the proposals which were later to be contained in the Prague Appeal. He emphasized the problem of the division of Germany, and presented a five point list of appropriate measures for the European nations to take. The Prague Appeal was published in March 1985. In July 1985 Jaroslav Sabata replied to the Prague Appeal with his essay 'A democratic and revolutionary identity for today's left (re the Prague Appeal)'[46]. Other responses to the Prague Appeal appeared in the periodical 'Komentare' 2, 1985, including those of Vaclav Slavik and Erazim Kohak. Interesting responses to the Prague Appeal also came from other East European countries, such as the reply to the Prague Appeal by Janos Kis[47]. In April 1986 a group of Chartists issued a lengthy 'Statement of views of some signatories of Charter 77 submitted to the Milan Forum'[48], which was a response to the European Network for East-West Dialogue's draft memorandum 'Putting the Helsinki agreement into practice', which was to be discussed at the Milan Forum. Lubos Kohout and Petr Uhl expressed reservations about this text[49, 50]. Other important contributions to this discussion include Vaclav Havel's 'The anatomy of a reticence'[51] and Jiri Hajek's 'Some notes to the END Convention in Amsterdam', 1985.[52]

These debates raise many key issues concerning the type of transformations that are advocated and the methods envisaged to bring these transformations about. Amongst the most important are: The future role of the superpowers and the military-political alliances in a united Europe; whether the proposed united Europe should be neutral, a third superpower, or should follow the model of Finlandization; the significance of the German question and how it fits into the time frame of overcoming the division of Europe as a whole; and the role envisaged for a united Europe in global affairs.

*The role of the superpowers and the military-political alliances*

One of the basic steps advocated by Jiri Dienstbier in his essay 'Pax Europeana' is listed simply as the "demand for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from European

countries along with the dissolution of NATO and the Warsaw Pact". This two fold

demand, the removal of foreign troops and the dissolution of military pacts, is also

presented very simply in the Prague Appeal. NATO and the Warsaw Pact should "enter

forthwith into negotiations on the dissolution of their military organizations" and withdraw

all troops from the territories of their European allies. These simply phrased demands fail

to examine the clearly complex nature of this issue. Several Chartists raise the complexities

involved in this issue in other documents. Vaclav Havel, for example, sees a basic lack of

realism in the proposals:

> "...a simple dissolution of the two military blocs and a withdrawal of Soviet and
> American armies from the territories of their European allies...To me, personally,
> that seems just lovely ...though it is not quite clear to me who or what could
> induce the Soviet Union to dissolve the entire phalanx of its European satellites -
> especially since it is clear that, with its armies gone from their territory, it would
> sooner or later have to give up its political domination over them as well."[53]

Others argue that mere military withdrawal and the dissolution of NATO and the

Warsaw Pact will not be enough to bring about the reunification of Europe. The letter to

Milan, for example, points out that the blocs are not just military, but political. Military

withdrawal whilst the political alliances remained in place would not be a tenable proposal:

"Were the present dependent regimes of the Warsaw Pact to remain in place, it would be

easy to organize a lightning attack on Western Europe, which would be at a strategic

disadvantage."[54]

The authors of the document conclude that the fundamental issue is under what

circumstances the Western powers would feel sufficient confidence in the Warsaw Pact

governments to be able to act on disarmament proposals without fear.

Another question raised is the fate of the nations incorporated into the Soviet Union -

the Baltic Republics, Ukraine etc. Would the Soviet Union be expected to withdraw from

these nations also, or would the 'European' solution be at their expense.

Finally, there is the fundamental objection that the mere military withdrawal of the

superpowers from Europe will not end superpower rivalry, but will simply transfer it to

another arena. Jakub Trojan writes: "It is not enough to want to throw off the yoke of the

blocs, it is necessary to consider where the yoke will land."[55]

It becomes clear from the proposals in the debate documents that the withdrawal of foreign troops and the dissolution of military alliances is not perceived as a complete solution. In order to be both practical and to have significant impact it must be accompanied by two other pre-conditions. First, it must be undertaken with the co-operation and support of the superpowers, not in opposition to them, and secondly, the political alliances and the superpowers themselves must undergo fundamental transformations.

Jiri Hajek notes that the concept of a pluralistic community of sovereign, equal European states, as expressed in the Helsinki Accords, also involves the co-operation of non-European elements - the USA and Canada on one side, and the non-European parts of the USSR on the other. It is this, he argues, that makes the concept a practical one, ruling out the "less realistic and even fantastic idea of creating an all European society in opposition to both world superpowers."[56] The letter to Milan notes:

> "A European process excluding the Soviet Union and the United States is a non-starter. In this sense, no project for a pluralistic community of sovereign countries with equal rights can get off the ground in opposition to both superpowers, or even one of them."[57]

Dienstbier even sees the superpowers as military guarantors of a united Europe. He argues that a united Europe would have defensive, not offensive capabilities, and would have to be guaranteed by a Euro-American treaty and backed by the nuclear potential of both superpowers.[58] Sabata takes up Havel's question concerning who or what could compel the Soviet Union to loosen its grip on its East European satellites. Sabata argues that the question is wrongly formulated: "It is based on a dual assumption that 'someone' or 'something' both can and ought to 'compel' the Soviet Union to do something against its wishes." This, he argues, would be an impossible task. Instead we should be guided by what the Soviet Union "would like to do".

This of course raises the question of why the USSR would want to withdraw from Eastern Europe. As becomes clear from many of the debate documents, it is assumed that this voluntary withdrawal on the part of the superpowers will take place against the background of the fundamental transformation of the superpowers and of the nature of their political alliances. Indeed it is proposed that the political and economic ties of the current

blocs will not have to be abolished, but will instead develop towards a mutual rapprochement, based on the principles of democracy and co-operation.

> "We cannot count on a complete collapse of the ties that have been formed in this part of Europe. A realistic strategy should rather think in terms of a democratic transformation of the Soviet bloc; it is equally unthinkable to do away with Western Europe's integration either. But Western Europe too will have to break through the bounds of the existing common market and the present level of political integration."[59]

Thus the reunification of Europe should not simply shift superpower conflict to a different arena, it should be part of a process which would eliminate all conflict through the democratic transformation of the blocs, and a fundamental change in the nature of the superpowers. The Milan Letter states that pressure must be put on the superpowers to get them to give up their hegemonistic behaviour and start acting as democratic partners.

> "As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, one condition is its transformation into a truly democratic federative entity which would be linked with the process of all-European economic and political integration."[60]

This vision of the USSR as a democratic federative entity is repeated by Sabata in his essay 'Gorbachev's reforms and the future of Europe'[61]:

> "Nothing short of a democratic restructuring of the Warsaw Pact would enable its member states to become 'socialist pluralist' societies...not even the Soviet Union can be transformed into a genuinely democratic federation of nations without the democratization of the Warsaw Pact."

This vision of a democratically transformed Soviet Union is not viewed as realistic by all Chartists. Petr Uhl is critical of the formulations in the Milan Letter. He argues that the idea of putting pressure on the superpowers to stop behaving hegemonistically and to behave like 'democratic partners' is a good one, but only if it is part of a strategy of "demanding the impossible". It is not something that is realistically attainable:

> "...the joint letter is fostering the illusion in a number of circles that the superpowers are capable 'of their own accord' - ie. by their political leaders realizing the need for change - of transforming themselves into qualitatively different entities."

Uhl argues that qualitative change is only possible through a revolutionary process and that it is an illusion to believe that the democratization of East and West can be achieved within the framework of existing institutions and political and social systems.

Sabata seems to place his hope for the democratic transformation of the superpowers in a two fold strategy - the pressure from below of a European-wide democratic movement,

which must include the peace movement, coupled with the new Soviet policies of Gorbachev: "The movement should...put its weight behind the democratic wing of the official reform movement, help bring the reforms along and enhance their revolutionary aspects."[62]

The reunification of Europe outlined in these documents, therefore, is not simply a process of disengaging the superpowers from Europe, militarily and politically, and dismantling the European blocs. It is seen as a process which requires not only the support and co-operation of the superpowers, but their transformation, and the integration, rather than the dismantling, of the economic communities of Eastern and Western Europe.


### European neutrality and Finlandization

Closely connected with the question of the role of the superpowers and the military-political blocs is the question of European neutrality. Should a united Europe declare itself to be a neutral zone of demilitarized and non-aligned nations? In general, the idea of European neutrality as a solution in itself, or an interim stage preceding the transformation of the blocs is rejected by Chartists.

The Prague Appeal suggests the removal of all foreign troops and the scaling down of all arms in Europe to a defensive capacity. However the complete unilateral disarmament of Europe in its current divided state was firmly rejected by Ladislav Hejdanek. He argued that European disarmament in the present state of superpower hegemony would mean capitulation. It would shift the arms build up to other parts of the world, whilst providing no safeguards for Europe itself, which would lay itself open to domination by one or other superpower.[63] Another interim proposal, that of creating a belt of neutral states in central Europe, is also rejected by some Chartists, although the Prague Appeal does contain a proposal for 'neutral zones'. Havel describes what he sees as the hopelessness of this step. It would, he argues, create a 'no man's land' between the blocs, would not overcome the divisions of Europe and the world, and would not bring peace.[64]

Dienstbier proposes the idea of Finlandization as a prospect for European reunification. He argues that friendship with neighbouring states is essential for peace and that Czechoslovakia's relations with the Soviet Union can only ever be friendly, and the same is

true for relations with Germany. Dienstbier argues that the populations of Central and Eastern Europe would readily choose a Finnish status in preference to a transfer to the other bloc.[65]

In their rejection of neutrality, the Czechs differ from some other groups in Europe, including elements of the peace movement. The key argument is that a neutral Europe cannot be a realistic alternative nor a satisfactory solution if superpower rivalries remain unchanged. The Europe they envisage instead is not one that has withdrawn from the bipolar superpower structure, but has overcome it. The transformation of Europe can only be a part of a wider transformation, which would include the superpowers. In the Milan Letter, a group of Chartists respond to the proposals of the 'European network for East-West dialogue':

> "We do not believe that it is possible for Europe to be neutral or non-aligned in the currently accepted sense of those terms. Your vision is based on the assumption of a Europe wedged between superpowers retaining their present characters...In such a situation, the neutralization of Europe is an abstract concept."[66]

Sabata similarly argues in his letter to E P Thompson that he is not advocating a neutral Europe:

> "...a policy of neutrality for Western (and Central) Europe in its relations with the two competing superpowers will not separate the two giants. The democratic transformation of Europe is only possible as part of a plan that will change the strategic ground plan of the entire world, and hence also the situation of both superpowers within it..."[67]

*The reunification of Germany*

The most controversial element in the Prague Appeal is the call for the reunification of Germany. The Prague Appeal recognizes that this is a topic which has hitherto been taboo, but argues: "If our aim is European unification then no one can be denied the right to self-determination, and this applies equally to the Germans."

Other documents also echo the call for the reunification of Germany, and not simply in order to honour the German peoples' right to self determination. The division of Germany is seen not only as an expression of the division of Europe, but as an obstacle in the way to its reunification. For this reason, Chartists argue, the German question cannot be ignored, as it is not possible to envisage a united and peaceful Europe if Germany remains divided.

Proposals for the reunification of Germany are always accompanied by safeguards. Firstly, it is to be left to the German people to decide how to unite their two states, and secondly, German unification must take place within existing frontiers. The Prague Appeal emphasizes that German unification must not be at the expense of others, and declares unequivocally that "no solution shall be sought through a further revision of European frontiers". The authors are clearly aware of the dangers some perceive in the prospects of a united Germany. The Milan Letter describes the German question as providing "the clearest expression of the limit between respect for the status quo and its transcendence". Clearly it is hoped that the division of Germany will be transcended, but its present frontiers, also the result of the post war settlement, must be respected. Sabata argues that both the Sudetan question and the issue of German frontiers are not open issues - here the status quo must be respected.[68] Chartists emphasize that the reunification of Germany, however, is still an open issue. Sabata argues that whilst it can be conceded that Yalta and Potsdam represent valid international rulings on the issue, this does not mean that there is no option for change. Sabata points to the lack of a German peace treaty and argues that we must come to terms with the fact that "the German question as a political reality is an open issue". Jiri Dienstbier emphasizes that the division of Germany was not inevitable - it was not sealed until well after the war and Germany could have gone the way of Austria instead.

Taken together the debate documents do not present a single clear picture of the precise role of the reunification of Germany in the general reunification of Europe. This vagueness over the proposed time scale has been the source of some controversies within Charter circles. Some documents seem to argue that the reunification of Germany is a necessary first step, without which the reunification of Europe as a whole is impossible, whilst others are adamant that the reunification of Germany is only possible as a result of, not a precondition for, the reunification of Europe. The Prague Appeal seems to take the former view, arguing that the signing of a peace treaty with Germany could become one of the most important levers for the positive transformation of Europe. Sabata states similarly: "...it cannot be stressed enough that a 'breakthrough' in the German question is the key to any significant breakthrough in efforts towards overcoming the division of Europe."

However at the same time he warns that this does not mean that the German question can be considered separately from all-European issues. In his essay 'A democratic and revolutionary identity for today's left'[69], Sabata argues that the unification of Germany is advocated solely as "part and parcel of an ongoing process of all-European co-operation and reconciliation", but at the same time rejects the view that it is first necessary to solve the problem of East-West relations before tackling the German question, an argument which he regards as "a totally static view of European issues". He concludes that arguing about the precise order of events is pointless - overcoming the division of Europe is a dynamic process, for which it will be impossible to fix any timetable in advance.

Nevertheless, the apparent suggestion that the unification of Germany could be seen as a first step for European reunification has been criticized by some in the Czechoslovak opposition. Erazim Kohak, for example, in his response to the Prague Appeal, writes: "I don't know if you have chosen the correct tactics, when you elevate the unification of the two German states as the highest priority."[70]

He argues that German reunification is not even in the forefront of German concerns, and many obstacles lie in its way, including the economic disparity between the two states. Kohak believes that the reunification of the two Germanies will be the last, not the first step, and that placing it as a top priority makes an already difficult problem even more difficult. The Hungarian Janos Kis similarly concludes that the solution of the German problem can only be the result, not the starting point, of a "comprehensive re-arrangement of things in Europe."[71]

Lacking in any of the documents is a detailed analysis of what form a united Germany could take and how unification could be achieved. It is generally agreed that a confederation is the most likely solution. Dienstbier argues that "socio-economic differences would probably make a federal or confederal solution likely".[72] Sabata does at one point address the question of how the unification of Germany could come about - it would require the "democratic restructuring of the Warsaw Pact":

> "The democratization of East Germany would open the way to a Confederation of both German states (with their present borders unchanged). Such a Confederation would become the cornerstone for an extensive process of pan-European reunification."[73]

Clearly then it remains a very long term goal, but Sabata rejects the idea that this should mean that the demand for a unified Germany is not voiced. In his letter to E P Thompson he writes that the question of whether he believes that the reunification of Germany can be achieved in this century is limiting: "The point is that we must start to formulate a strategy for the democratic transformation of Europe 'here and now', or we will just fumble and dither."

The Prague Appeal's inclusion of the call for German reunification met a very mixed reaction inside Czechoslovakia and in Europe as a whole. The Milan Letter concedes this and argues that it reflects the present state of European public opinion, which itself can be changed, and which the authors of the document are seeking to influence. Within Czechoslovakia the raising of the German question by the Prague Appeal came under fire from several individuals. Lubos Kohout, who did not sign the Prague Appeal, argued that treating the unification of Germany as a burning issue is "something demanded chiefly and solely by revanchists". He argued that it is impossible to create a German Confederation whilst Germany is militarily occupied by both blocs (here again criticism centres on the sequence of events). Kohout argues that a better policy would be to adopt the position of the opposition Social Democrats in West Germany who work towards "...laying the foundations for the future unification of Germany within the frontiers of the two German states - in a truly unforeseeable future, that is..."[74]

Some criticize the Prague Appeal's approach to the German question as utopian and unrealistic. Ludvik Vaculik sees it as a futile gesture, although he is sympathetic with the ideal expressed, because the present Lords of the GDR "will never relinquish their fief willingly". Others see the proposal as dangerous. The anonymous 'Laureatus' argues that the Prague Appeal sows the seed of conflict by stirring up the German question. He believes that to refer to German unity as an 'open' issue is to use the slogans of the most reactionary section of German opinion.[75] Clearly there is some fear even among advocates of the Prague Appeal that raising the German issue could encourage the more reactionary nationalist elements in Germany. The Prague Appeal warns that European rapprochement must not be seen as an opportunity for a revival of nationalism, whilst Sabata argues that ignoring the German question may have the same result. Failing to deal with the German

question, he argues, plays into the hands of "those who are capable of dealing with it solely in nationalistic terms".[76]

The question of German reunification was a relatively new element in the formulations of the Czechoslovak opposition, although the importance of the German problem had always been emphasized. The statement of the SMCC (Socialist Movement of Czechoslovak Citizens) on international questions contained in the Manifesto of 28 October, 1970, expresses the desire that the "unnatural and dangerous policy of power blocs can be eliminated" through the co-operation of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and also refers to the problem of the two German states as "the biggest political issue in Europe at this time". However, the option of reunification is not raised: "It [the German problem] can only be solved by recognizing them as two independent, sovereign states, while their own mutual relations are decided by themselves."

Whilst the Prague Appeal goes far beyond the Manifesto of 28 October in its call for a reunified and democratic Europe and the reunification of Germany, it is also interesting to note similarities. The methods advocated for overcoming the "dangerous policy of power blocs" are very similar. The Manifesto's call for "bilateral and multi-lateral agreements on non-aggression... agreements on the creation of nuclear-free zones... zones in which the use of arms is forbidden altogether" and "treaties dealing with the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the territory of another country" are echoed in the Prague Appeal, fifteen years later.


*A new Europe*

The term 'reunification' implies perhaps the return to some past unified European condition, a return perhaps to pre-war Europe. However, it becomes clear from many of the documents that what is being advocated is not a return to the Europe of old, but the creation of a new type of Europe, which could play a new role in international affairs. The term 'reunification' also raises the question of what degree of unity is being advocated. Will Europe be united simply in the sense that it is not cut in two by superpower blocs, but still formed of sovereign nations, acting independently of each other in most matters, or is a

more united, centralized solution proposed, where European nations are participants in and subject to a centralizing European governing body?

The future shape of Europe is only outlined sketchily. The Prague Appeal describes: "...an alliance of free and independent nations within a democratic and self governing all-European community living in friendship with nations of the entire world." The Charter introduction to the Prague Appeal writes of "a united, democratic and sovereign Europe of free citizens and nations."

It is made clear that the reunification of Europe will not involve a return to the past. The Milan letter emphasizes that all-European integration in the future will be brought about not by a return to the past, but by looking ahead. Sabata also emphasizes this point. "First and foremost it is clear that the slogan of self-government cannot be taken as a call for the restoration of pre-war conditions."[77]

Dienstbier argues that in the course of European reconciliation state frontiers in Europe should anyway become theoretical borders, like those between certain West European states. This is echoed in the Prague Appeal, which similarly expects frontiers to "gradually lose much of their significance". Integration is a key word used when referring to a united Europe, which would build on, rather than replace, the existing levels of European integration, which are seen as a "semi-detached" style of integration.[78] Sabata advocates a "democratic extension of international economic and political integration".[79] The Prague Appeal envisages a rapprochement between the EEC and COMECON. In his assessment of the Prague Appeal, Erazim Kohak advises that the term 'reunification' should be used cautiously. He writes that whilst he understands that what the Prague Appeal authors mean by unification is the removing of the artificial divisions of East and West, it is a word which means something different to the Western reader - the strengthening of the political unity of the West European community. He concludes: "Therefore I translated it so as to be clear to you it is a matter of 'uniting' in the sense of removing the divisions between the two superpowers' spheres of influence."[80]

However, many of the debate documents imply that what is envisaged is something more integrated than simply a Europe without artificial divisions. The Prague Appeal speaks of an 'alliance' of European nations, and of an all-European 'community'. An

interesting pointer is provided by the 'Prague 88' weekend seminar on peace and human

rights. Despite the fact that the meetings were largely broken up by the police, the

participants agreed to establish a 'European Assembly for Peace and Democracy', a

"representative all-European institution which would set itself the aim of overcoming the

division of Europe". This 'European peace parliament' of non-governmental organizations

would be based in Prague. In the final report from the seminar, the Czechoslovak

participants stated:

> "We do not wish to destroy the existing political and economic structures in
> Europe, but to further develop them. We wish to work for the mutual
> convergence of all European countries. To achieve this we need to create new
> structures - institutional ties in all spheres of social life - to bring about an integral
> process of democratic change in Europe... Our initiative is not defined by any
> ideology. It is a positive effort to grasp the originality of the ideal of 'unity in
> diversity'."[81]

The proposed united Europe, then, will be more than just a Europe that is not divided,

but rather a Europe integrated through mutual convergence, international structures and

institutional ties at all levels.

When describing the united Europe of the future, Chartists often use the terms

'democratic' and 'self-governing'. These rather general aspirations are never made more

specific, but a key underlying element common to nearly all the Chartists' descriptions of a

united Europe seems to be an emphasis on the role of citizens rather than states. The

Prague Appeal argues: "The freedom and dignity of individual citizens is the key to the

freedom and self-determination of nations. And only sovereign nations can transform

Europe into a community of equal partners."

The future rapprochement should not just be between governments, but between

peoples at every level. Sabata envisages the growth of a "new political bloc" resulting from

an all-European political dialogue.[82] The reunification of Europe, he argues, would

involve the creation of a new political reality.

> "The reunification of Europe along democratic lines cannot happen without the
> revival of democratic structures and an 'open' society in all its components. This
> would not mean a simple return to the traditional structures of late capitalism, but
> the birth of a new political reality based on universal humanist values."[83]

Hejdanek also emphasizes the view that only free citizens and democratic movements

from below can reunite Europe. He concludes: "... perhaps we can look forward to the

day when, in Europe itself, we witness the liberation of society from total state domination... Perhaps then we would see the end of the division of Europe."[84]

The international role of a united Europe is also emphasized by Chartists. The Prague Appeal notes that "we do not seek to turn Europe into a third superpower". A united Europe, the Chartists argue, would pose no threat to anyone, and instead would have a very beneficial influence on global problems. The introduction to the Prague Appeal writes of a united, democratic and sovereign Europe "... capable of acting as an effective partner in the task of establishing peace and tackling the growing crisis of today's world."

Particular emphasis is given to the problems of the third world, which some Chartists see as reaching crisis proportions and potentially providing one of the greatest threats to world peace. A common vision shared by several of the documents is that a united Europe will be able to correct the currently unjust relations between North and South, and that peace in Europe will liberate resources to aid the third world. Jakub Trojan writes:

> "It is not a matter of asking for a greater degree of freedoms and rights in Eastern Europe in order to merely share complacently the privileged position of the North - capitalist and socialist alike - vis a vis the suffering South."

Instead, he argues, they are asking for freedom to share decision-making power and responsibility to solve problems and eliminate planetary tensions.[85] The letter to Milan similarly expresses this concern with global problems:

> "... we are profoundly convinced that serious progress towards a safer Europe based on democratic and peaceful co-operation is an important - if not the most important - condition for solving the question of North-South relations as well as other major global problems, including ecological ones."[86]

Jaroslav Sabata's vision of the future impact of a united Europe on global affairs is perhaps the most utopian. A united, democratic Europe, he argues, would not only bring peace and solve third world problems, it would fundamentally change the political makeup of the entire globe.

> "A neo-democratic change in Europe would radically intensify the democratic development of the entire industrially developed North - including the United States and Japan. A neo-democratic transformation of the North would release unimaginable amounts of wealth and resources which could be used to tackle the global problems of humanity."[87]

The tendency for proposals for a united Europe to indulge in utopias will be discussed in the concluding section.

*The threat to peace*

The belief that the best future for Czechoslovakia and Europe as a whole lies in overcoming the military and political status quo and the division of Europe touches on several other issues, in particular the issue of peace. The peace issue is raised repeatedly in the documents proposing the reunification of Europe. In particular, the equating of the existing status quo with peace is rejected. Sabata writes: "It is an insidious formula which is capable of making the coarsest intolerance appear as a contribution to peace by linking matters that are disparate."[88]

Instead, Chartists seek to emphasize that the division of Europe has not resulted in peace, but has contributed to the danger of war. The opening passages to the Prague Appeal depict divided Europe as a great threat to world peace, and "the foremost arena of the friction between the two power blocs". The document states that Europe is not a continent at peace. This is perhaps not an emphasis that would be generally echoed in Western Europe, from where Europe seems relatively stable, and other international hot spots would be identified as having provided "the foremost arena of the friction between the two power blocs" in the past forty years. The Czechoslovak opposition is clearly aware that proposals to alter the post-war status quo may be perceived as threatening world peace, and seeks to emphasize that, on the contrary, the existing peace is only fragile and that real world peace, including the overcoming of superpower rivalries, is only possible through the reunification of Europe.

Closely involved with this question is the issue of Yalta. Many of the Czechoslovak opposition reject the idea that by seeking to overcome the division of Europe they are seeking to overturn Yalta. They argue that, in fact, the agreements at Yalta did not confirm the division of Europe into spheres of superpower influence. Jiri Dienstbier, for example, argues that this consolidation of Europe was confirmed much later.[89] Similarly, Jiri Hajek maintains that the Yalta accords were not responsible for the present division of Europe - the fault lay rather in the failure to implement their provisions, and no mention was made at Yalta of post-war spheres of influence.[90] Thus, they argue, the fate of Europe cannot be

considered a closed issue, the division of Europe was not sealed at Yalta, and so an attempt to overcome it does not undermine the post-war peace settlement itself.

## Background to the call for the reunification of Europe

The Prague Appeal represented a major new initiative for the Czechoslovak opposition. The Charter had advocated the improvement of international relations from its inception, but Chartists had never before advocated such a major change. The Prague Appeal was an extremely ambitious programme, and a controversial one. Sweeping proposals to overcome the post-war military and political status quo in Europe strike a very different tone than the usual legalistic and human rights orientation of Charter documents.

Clearly, the growing dialogue with the peace movement had an impact on the direction and emphasis of Czech oppositional thinking. However, the main impetus for the call for European reunification lay in the growing realization that no fundamental changes were possible inside the nations of Eastern Europe if the military-political status quo continued to consign these nations firmly to the Soviet sphere of influence and allow the Soviet Union to wield unlimited control. In his essay 'Pax Europeana', Dienstbier writes of the "vicious circle of the present status quo with the sole prospect being one of cosmetic adjustments."[91]

Janos Kis argues persuasively that the belief that no change was possible within Eastern Europe without a fundamental change in the external status quo arose as a result of the imposition of martial law in Poland and the apparent failure of Solidarity to achieve change. He identifies three phases of the East European opposition since 1950. The 50s to the end of the 60s were dominated by hope in the prospects of reform from above. The 70s and early 80s saw the adoption of the model of self-limiting social movements from below, and the issue of human rights. Both phases "presupposed... that the desired changes could be achieved even if the inter-bloc status quo remained". The human rights movement, Kis argues, was "built on the assumption that it was unnecessary to disturb the situation symbolized by Yalta". Events in Poland altered this belief.

"One of the lessons many East Europeans drew from the 1981 Warsaw putsch was that there was no chance of success for democratic movements in Eastern Europe without some change in the external status quo."[92]

Therefore, a third approach has taken over. "Its protagonists think in terms of the dissolution of of the bloc system and the cultural and political unification of Europe."[93]

The late 1980s has seen a significant shift from the largely internal and domestic emphasis of the Czechoslovak opposition, with appeals to human rights and legality, to a more international approach, centred on the realization that no significant change is possible within the existing geo-political status quo.

This approach began with a growing emphasis on international co-operation at the grass roots level. Co-operation began at a regional level, with contacts with other East European human rights groups, and extended to involve a dialogue with the peace movement. Some Chartists place their hopes in the European-wide co-operation of what they see as a burgeoning democratic and peace movement. Sabata, for example, writes of a "pan-European democratic movement" fighting for the transformation of Europe.[94] The international co-operation of such non-governmental groups, for example as was seen in the Prague 88 Seminar, seems to be seen increasingly as the best hope for achieving the goals of the Czechoslovak opposition. These goals themselves are stated more ambitiously than in the past, and are more explicitly political. Instead of simply demanding the respect for human rights, these documents place their hopes in the democratic transformation of Eastern Europe.

## Reticence about utopias

Despite the wide spectrum of opinion represented by those within the Czechoslovak opposition who signed the Prague Appeal, several individuals have expressed reticence about its contents. The main criticism is that the proposals for a united Europe are too sweeping and lack short term achievable goals. Havel in particular voices a feeling of unease that the opposition is indulging in utopias. He argues that difficulties arise when dissidents move from outlining their fundamental perspectives on the question of peace, to trying to formulate actual steps to put this 'philosophical' concept into practice - "what actually should we be demanding and what political measures, in what order, would we

expect to take in the light of our perspective". One difficulty, Havel explains, is the lack of

agreement on how best to proceed amongst East European dissidents, especially for

example in the questions of neutral zones and German unification. But the main problem is

a powerful sense of the futility of such considerations:

> "... this feeling did not come over us as long as we were only generally
> 'philosophizing' about peace, but only at the point when our reflections had to
> touch upon concrete politics...For a local dissident, it is no great problem to
> concoct this or that vision of European development...The problem is...how to
> rid himself of the fear that any concrete...technical conception of the longed for
> transformation of Europe...is, today, every bit as ludicrous as all other utopian
> constructs...".[95]

In this situation, Havel concludes, the dissident is "trading the respectable role of a

champion of humanity for a somewhat grotesque one of a self-appointed adviser to the

mighty".[96]

These concerns are also expressed by other Chartists. Lubos Kohout, for example,

writes: "It is easy to reach agreement on a set of noble principles, but extremely difficult to

do so on tactics and how to put them into practice."

Other criticisms of the proposals for the reunification of Europe are that they are too

long term, lack detail, and fail to consider the complexity of the problems involved. The

Hungarian Janos Kis raises this argument in his reply to the Prague Appeal. He maintains

that the proposals in the Prague Appeal are all long term ones, in which improvements are

not likely in the short term. More realistic short term aims and attainable targets would at

least allow some progress to be made. "In the short run, maximalism means stagnation."[97]

Kis cautions that if the goal of European unification is to be taken literally, expectations

must be very modest. "The dissolution of NATO and the Warsaw Pact can only be hoped

for as the end product of a very long historical process indeed."[98]

Others criticize the lack of attention paid in the Prague Appeal and other documents to

the complexities of the European situation. Vaclav Slavik notes critically that the Prague

Appeal text does not contain even a word about the socio-political divisions in Europe, in

particular the existence of different social systems. Slavik emphasizes the view that social,

national and peace issues are all inter-related and add up to a vastly complex situation,

which the Prague Appeal has failed to address.[99] Lubos Dobrovsky advocates a more

thorough examination of the motivations, goals and fears of the superpowers in their

relations to the European question, in order to arrive at logical conclusions on the issue.[100] Petr Uhl is critical of the Letter to Milan, arguing that whilst it declares the need to understand the complexities involved in the evolution of Europe, the letter itself does not display this understanding.[101]

Jaroslav Sabata is perhaps the staunchest supporter of the formulations for a united, democratic Europe, and denies that they are utopian. He describes the Prague Appeal as a "radical vision", but maintains that the most important thing is to agree that "a radical change in the present state of affairs is not a wildly utopian vision".[102] He argues that it is unrealistic to believe that Eastern European countries can continue as they are. "Economic and political needs demand that the whole of Europe be reunified along democratic lines."[103]

Despite these problems, the adoption of the goal of a united Europe opened up a new, dynamic arena for oppositional activity, in its attempt to find new ways out of the stalemate in Eastern Europe. The opposition succeeded in identifying new trends, and the Prague Appeal presented a highly innovative and influential approach to European development.

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# CONCLUSIONS, SECTION 3

Increasing internationalization has been perhaps the most significant development of the Czechoslovak opposition in the 1980s. The international element has always been present within the Czechoslovak opposition, for example Helsinki was always viewed positively by the Czechs, a view not shared by other opposition currents within Eastern Europe. However in the 1980s there was an increasing realization that no fundamental change was possible within the existing geo-political status quo. This led to developments in two important areas.

Firstly, the idea of national solutions based on isolated change within any one East European country gave way to an increasing emphasis on East European solidarity and the need for joint developments. The goal became the democratic transformation of the Eastern bloc as a whole. The barriers which had kept the democratic initiatives isolated in the past were increasingly breached in the 1980s, allowing for the rapid spread of ideas and developments.

Secondly, the Czechoslovak opposition was the first to take up the controversial issue of European reunification, including the need to overcome the division of Germany. The Prague Appeal, with its proposals for European reunification and plans to overcome the bipolar superpower structure, proved to be an innovative and influential document.

The Prague Appeal, and the debate which surrounded it, reflect two important trends which have become evident in the evolution of the Czechoslovak opposition in the 1980s, and which are discussed in the preceding sections. Firstly, it reflects the increasing politicization of the Czechoslovak opposition, expressed through the advocacy of directly political goals, such as democracy, rather than the 'non-political' terminology of human rights. The Prague Appeal calls for the democratic transformation of Europe and the superpowers. It is clearly a 'political' document, but has achieved a wide basis of support within the Czechoslovak opposition. Secondly, the discussion surrounding proposals for the reunification of Europe continues to expand the concept of the liberation of society from state domination which is central to much Czechoslovak oppositional thinking in the 1980s. The Czechoslovak opposition is calling for the revival of civil society at the international

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level. It sees hope for future change in the ability of citizens initiatives and civil society to overcome artificial divisions imposed by states and superpowers, and initiate a process of democratic transformations, both within Eastern Europe, and in Europe as a whole.

# CONCLUSIONS

From this analysis of the Czechoslovak opposition 1977-1988 the main features of the alternative which the opposition is advocating become clear. Whilst the Czechoslovak opposition does not put forward specific alternative programmes, it does delineate a series of fundamental values and principles which should influence the nature of the future polity.

Firstly, the opposition advocates the development of a strong independent civil society and the liberation of society from state domination. State power must be rolled back and social structures and the life of society must be depoliticized. It is in the development of a strong civil society that the opposition sees the best hope of resisting any future degeneration towards totalitarianism. The revival of civil society must take place on an international level - only then will the artificial divisions placed within society and between nations be overcome. Hejdanek looks forward to a day when "...in Europe itself, we witness the liberation of society from total state domination...perhaps then we will see the end of the division of Europe."[1]

The alternative which the opposition presents would place morality above politics. Any future political system must be founded on moral and ethical values, and ensure the dignity, freedom and human rights of each citizen. It would involve a rejection of the values of consumerism and other ills of western technological civilization. The hope is expressed that the values developed within the alternative and parallel communities will be retained by any future political system - these include openness, the equality of all opinions, tolerance and an emphasis on cooperative rather than adversarial politics. The moral reconstruction of society, expressed by Havel as an 'existential revolution', should also take place on an international level. The moral and political crisis in Czechoslovakia is not perceived as being solely of national, or even Soviet origin, but as a reflection of an international moral crisis affecting the whole of western civilization. Czechoslovak totalitarianism is seen as just an extreme manifestation of the twentieth century crisis of man.

At the centre of any new political system must be the rights and needs of the individual. Charter 77 document 2/85 describes the goal of the Charter as being "the rehabilitation of the individual as the real subject of history". In the totalitarian system the individual is

purely an object of manipulation and has no rights. The opposition seeks to transform this relationship and give each individual responsibility for his own life and for the fate of the polis. Politics must be returned to a human scale. The Czechoslovak opposition opposes all relationships where the individual is powerless against manipulation by inhuman and impersonal power machines, and this extends to industrial, military and even superpower machines. Modern technologies, with their potential for environmental damage on a massive scale, must be brought under human control. Hajek writes that the Charter serves as a reminder of a very simple idea:

> "...the idea that any reasonable and just arrangement of society should never lose sight of the individual human being and citizen, who in today's complex reality must retain a means of defence against manipulation by the diverse factors of today's world."[2]

Any future political system must be democratic, but there are different interpretations within the Czechoslovak opposition of what form this democracy should take. For some it would involve a return to a multi-party parliamentary system, whilst for others this would be inadequate. Many within the opposition, including Havel, Uhl and the Independent Socialists, advocate elements of self-management or direct democracy. Democratic transformations must take place not only within Czechoslovakia, but in Eastern Europe as a whole. The Prague Appeal calls for the democratic transformation of Europe and the superpowers in order to overcome the division of Europe.


The Czechoslovak opposition is characterized by political diversity combined with a unity of basic perspectives. This unity is 'non political', centering on the issue of human rights and the development of the moral and cultural spheres, but these issues in turn, as has been shown, have fundamental political significance. This deferment of directly political action in favour of unity around common principles was in part a recognition of existing conditions and a function of powerlessness, but it also derived from an understanding of those values and principles which are fundamental to politics. As Havel notes, the opposition was more concerned with the moral and political values on which any future system would rest, than with speculation about the makeup of that system.

Although much oppositional activity was concerned with improvements in the 'here and now', in life under the totalitarian system, it was also geared towards establishing the sort of political and moral values which would not only help to overcome that system, but would shape the nature of any future political organization. Much oppositional activity, therefore, was preparatory, ensuring not only the survival of traditional political and cultural diversity, but the creation of a community based on common moral and political values which could act as a model for future developments. The opposition's hopes for future change were based on a belief in the fundamental fragility of the apparently stable political system, dependent as it was on maintaining the universality of fear of lies. Havel writes:

> "...the crust presented by the life of lies is made of strange stuff. As long as it seals off hermetically the entire society, it appears to be made of stone. But the moment someone breaks through in one place...everything suddenly appears in another light and the whole crust seems then to be made of a tissue on the point of tearing and disintegrating uncontrollably".[3]

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