

(Proto)underground

Several comments on the development of the underground movement

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In this study the authors explore the development of the movement later dubbed the underground, a group of people who had retreated into society's undergrowth to get away from the regime but whose harsh punishment by the latter inspired and kick-started the Charter 77 movement.

Operation Sycamore

The uncovering of a "spy" at the West German Embassy in Prague

Tomáš Malínek

The action taken by the State Security (StB) against Charter 77 is something that at least in its basic contours has entered the historical consciousness of the great majority of Czechs and Slovaks. By contrast, Operation Sycamore, whose final phase played out at the start of 1977 and was not directly connected to Charter 77, is totally unknown. That was the intention of the StB and the Czechoslovak foreign ministry. This remarkable story, in which the worlds of the Prague underworld, the secret service and international politics intertwined, was meant to remain a secret chapter of Czechoslovak-German relations forever.

Human rights, or Humanity

Charter 77 in the context of the émigré organisation Opus bonum

Petr Placák

The Charter 77 opposition movement was instituted as a civic initiative demanding adherence to human rights in Communist Czechoslovakia. Its inception involved Czech independent intellectuals and Christian activists, as well as reform Communists from 1968 who had lost their positions in the wake of the Soviet occupation that August. Opus bonum was founded as a lay Catholic organisation in exile in Frankfurt in 1972.

Magor's prison years

Five trials in the life of Ivan Martin Jirous

Roman John

He spent eight years, five months and three days in prison. Though he intended to render this stage of his life into literary form, all that remains are fragmentary accounts touching on his remand in Ruzyně and his time at Mírov, Valdice and other places where he was held against his will. Unfortunately, and as Václav Havel did, he regarded his prison experience as incommunicable, although certain aspects of imprisonment are indeed very hard to comprehend for those unfamiliar with that environment. The paper's author attempts to explain it to them.

Capital trials of food stamp counterfeiters

Ivo Pejčoch – Jiří Plachý

Television viewers who have watched the normalisation-era series Thirty Cases of Major Zeman will undoubtedly recall the episode entitled Copperplate. It depicts a reckless group of supporters of the old order printing fake food stamps in an effort to not only get rich but also to undermine the hated people's democratic regime. An essential element of the vicious plan was of course to cause maximum damage to honest working people.

The aim: Complete disintegration...

The 3rd Division of the 1st Section of the 10th Directorate of the National Security Corps

Adam Havlík

Pretty much as soon as its declaration was published, Charter 77 became the focus of major State Security interest. This key moment in the development of the Czechoslovak dissent didn't just spark a reaction in the form of particular repressive measures against individual signatories – it also had an impact on the organisation of the security agencies.

My conscience is clear; I worked for socialism regardless of the late hours and my family

Milan Bárta

Ladislav Vávra's February 1977 service assessment includes a call to improve the management of the State Security's regional administrations. This was to bring about a unified approach to handling anti-socialist forces. In those days a new opponent had appeared – the Charter 77 document had been published in January 1977. Vávra was the first head of division at the State Security's central level tasked with the battle against the Charter.

Put his mind under maximum pressure so he recants his part in and signature of the Charter

Milan Bárta

A State Security record from January 1977 held at the Security Services Archive contains information on former members of the Operative Technology Directorate (4th Directorate) expelled after 1968. A total of 16 of them remained under the control of the State Security, three others were acquired as covert collaborators and there were suspicious persons files on four others. One of the four attracted particular attention from the State Security in subsequent years. After all, Oldřich Liška was one of the first signatories of Charter 77.

The withdrawn signature

The story of Jiří Záruba, Charter 77 signatory for a few weeks

Petr Blažek

In the first wave in January 1977 the names of 241 signatories of the Charter 77 Declaration were published. Though the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia launched a massive smear campaign against it, only one person withdrew its signature: academic architect Jiří Záruba. The circumstances of the case illustrate the methods used by the State Security against opponents of the Communist regime at that time.