
To Drive the Slogan of Human Rights out of the Hands of Opponents of Socialism. Discussions on Human Rights on Warsaw Pact Summits in the Years 1985–1989

Matěj Bílý

This study addresses the as yet only marginally researched topic of the approach to human rights as discussed at the political summits of the Warsaw Pact in the late 1980s after Mikhail Gorbachev became the leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Following research in the Czech, Polish and German archives, the paper analyses the course and consequences of this debate and puts them in the context of the last stage of the Cold War. The topic of the approach taken by the Warsaw Pact member states to the upholding of human rights was opened by the new Soviet leader in the very first year of his rule. It was undoubtedly part of his broader plan to improve the tense relations between the East and the West. The discussion that followed and intensified especially from the spring of 1987 played a significant role in the disintegration of the alliance. Although in the late 1980s the Warsaw Pact was functioning at its best in structural terms, the course of the debate shows that the strengthening of the political cooperation of the member states which occurred after Gorbachev came to power did not always have the intended effects. The vision that more regular and more open consultations would lead to the formulation of a more efficient joint foreign policy line was not fulfilled. On the contrary, freer discussion and the end of the Soviet pressure on the uniformity of opinions meant that the leaderships of the member states came to defend their own, often conflicting interests. That made the alliance unable to coordinate its work in many matters, which was especially true in relation to Gorbachov's reforms, which also included a change in their approach to the protection of human rights. It turns out that the pressure from the West to uphold these rights not only affected the inner situation in the Warsaw Pact countries, but also created a source of friction between them that weakened the cohesion of the organisation as a whole. It therefore also undermined the multi-lateral relationships in the Eastern Bloc, symbolised by the Warsaw Pact.

Key words: Warsaw Pact, Warsaw Pact summits, human rights, perestroika, Eastern Bloc, Mikhail Gorbachev, disarmament, Second Cold War/Cold War, economic problems, political crisis, 1989

The Reaction of the Polish Opposition to Acts of Repression and Civil Rights Violations in Other Communist States in the Years 1987–1989

Dariusz Dąbrowski – Kamil Dworaczek

In the second half of the 1980s, the first symptoms of what was to come became visible in Poland. At that time, a new generation of oppositionists was coming of age,

who rejected the principle of underground resistance against the regime and instead opted for open manifestations of dissent. On the other hand, in other countries of the Soviet Bloc any expressions of dissatisfaction were still harshly punished. As the decade drew to an end and the process of liberalization progressed in Poland, this rift grew wider. Sensitive to the plight of their neighbours, Polish oppositionists staged acts of solidarity with other countries. It was an exceptional situation in which citizens of a non-democratic state were standing up for the rights of oppositionists living under dictatorships in other countries. This text is an attempt to describe this phenomenon. Apart from recreating the course of the most important actions, this paper is also intended to find out who the main actors in those events were, determine the role of young people whose generation came of age in the late 1980s, and describe which forms of protest were used most frequently.

Keywords: Polish People's Republic (PRL), Security Service (SB), secret police, Citizens Militia (MO), Solidarity movement (Solidarność), Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), hunger strike, passive resistance, opposition, civil rights violation, Eastern Bloc, China, 1989

The Last Days of the Security Service. Transformation of the State Security Services in Poland in 1989–1990

Tomasz Kozłowski

The study describes key issues related to reforms and the abolition of the communist secret police in Poland in 1989–1990. Agreement between the communists and the democratic opposition during the Round Table Talks and partly free parliamentary elections in 1989 opened the door to the transition to democracy. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who was prominent member of the Solidarity movement camp, became prime minister. That started the power shift process – power gradually slipped out of the hands of the communists, who, however, retained control over the army and secret police (Służba Bezpieczeństwa). Over the next few months, negotiations were held and attempts made to transform the secret police into a new intelligence agency free from communist control. There were many disadvantages to this process. During that time officers of the Służba Bezpieczeństwa managed to destroy or appropriate a large part of the secret materials. And when the new intelligence and counterintelligence agencies were established, it turned out that the overwhelming majority of their employees were former secret police officers.

Keywords: Polish People's Republic (PRL), Security Service (SB), secret police, intelligence, counterintelligence, Citizens Militia (MO), Solidarity movement (Solidarność), State Protection Office (UOP), Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), reforms and abolition of the secret police, 1989

1989 in Slovakia: Between Reform and Radical Change

Juraj Marušiak

The author elaborates on the political development in Slovakia at the end of the 1980s, namely in 1989, which was crucially influenced by a document entitled *Bratislava/nahlas* (Bratislava/Aloud) published by a group of Bratislava-based environmentalists in 1987, and the so-called Candlelight Demonstration, which demanded that freedom of religion be respected, organised by the so-called Christian dissent activists in Bratislava on March 25, 1988. Both events were also a certain momentum for those active in independent initiatives in Bohemia. One other key moment in the consolidation of the opposition was the trial with a group of dissidents from Bratislava, the so-called Bratislava Five, arrested in August 1989. This paper tries to uncover the factors which made the situation in both parts of the former joint Czechoslovak state similar and how the story of the “fall of the communist regime” in Slovakia differed from that of the Czech lands. It outlines the “lines of conflict” which had a decisive influence on the development of events in the political course. It also analyses how prepared the agents of the November 1989 events were for the political changes, their “politicisation”, but also uncovers specific conflicts that resulted from Slovak-Hungarian relations and the question of the position of Slovakia within the Czechoslovak Federation. The paper tries to answer the question of the extent to which the development at the time influenced the political processes immediately after the fall of the communist regime. One specific aspect of the changes in Slovakia was the relatively permeable boundary between the “official” and “unofficial” discourse, which provided room for a non-realised model of negotiated transition. The political transformation in Slovakia was principally influenced not only by nationwide events but also local impulses.

Keywords: Slovakia, Velvet Revolution (Sametová revoluce), dissent, nationalism, negotiated transition, Alexander Dubček, Charter 77 (Charta 77), Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS), normalisation, democratisation, 1989

1989: The Czech Prison System at a Crossroads

Klára Pinerová – Michal Louč

The Czechoslovak prison system was at a crossroads after 1989. It was clear to everyone that it would have to be humanised and modernised, and also that a system would have to be set up to ensure respect for convicts’ basic human rights. This was an elaborate task, complicated especially by the fact that a successful reform depended on many factors, from human resources to the economy of the newly established state. The paper explores three topics. The first part outlines the key trends in the prison system in the last years of the Communist Party dictatorship. After that, the authors

analyse the situation in the prison system during the so-called Velvet Revolution in 1989 and shortly afterwards. That time saw repeated riots in the prisons, the establishment of prisoner organisations as well as prison staff who were critical of the previous development of prison system, and the start of the process of ridding the prison staff of its most compromised officers. The third part describes the post-revolution transformation of the basic operational principles of the Czechoslovak prison system, which can be summarised as depoliticisation, demilitarisation and humanisation.

Keywords: Czechoslovakia (ČSSR), prison system, normalisation, Velvet Revolution (Sametová revoluce), abuse of prison system, humanisation of prison system, modernisation of prison system, prison riot, Charter 77 (Charta 77), dissent, 1989

Those who are not against us, are they with us?

Cultural Policy of the Kádár Consolidation and the Opposition of the Political System in Hungary

Nora Szekér

When János Kádár and his government came into power in November 1956, after the October Revolution, it was terror deployed on a large scale that laid the foundations of Kádár's so-called "consolidation" that followed the far from general amnesty, which was granted as a precondition of international acknowledgement. From the middle of the 1960s onwards, although Hungarian society did not come to like it, an increasingly large proportion of society came to accept the so-called "Kádárism" as the best that could be achieved in the given international framework. The dictatorship's Hungarian variant now resorted to a more refined complex of means, such as subversion, indoctrination, propaganda, and severe existential constraints, instead of the spectacular open terror of earlier times. The regime was becoming less repressive, politics were taken out of everyday life and cultural liberalism was gaining ground. The spiritual father of this variant of cultural liberalism was György Aczél. He exerted a very sophisticated form of power. He called this "federal policy", while others spoke of "favour management". This policy was based on the principle that the opposition or potential opposition must not be intimidated, but made to become the obligors of the regime. In this playing field, free-thinking is not a narrow area of individual autonomy, but the result of a bargain. The study explains how the culture-politics of so-called Goulash Communism affected the operations of the Hungarian State Security, and how that affected the Hungarian opposition movements and the political changes in Hungary in 1989.

Keywords: János Kádár, György Aczél, the change to Hungary's political/communist regime, consolidation, cultural policy of the Kádár regime, Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP), state security, Hungarian Writers' Union, democratic opposition, Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), 1989

But They're Threatening and Cursing Us!
A Study of the Complaints and Notices Sent in by Czechoslovak
Citizens during Czechoslovakia's Perestroika

Tomáš Vilímeček

This paper looks at the complaints and notices filed by Czechoslovak citizens during the period when the legitimacy of the communist regime was in crisis in 1986–1989. They represent not only the “soft stabiliser of the rule of dictatorship” but also a remarkable and in its own way the most intense interaction between the state power bodies and the citizens demanding, often quite resolutely, that the regime fulfil its promises. Drawing on archival sources, scholarly literature and period press, the author describes the topics, form and overall numbers of complaints and notices; however, the responses from the party, state and trade union bodies are also explored. In consequence of the transformation of the international situation and the deepening economic, environmental and social issues in Czechoslovakia, there were a growing number of complaints and notices in the late 1980s, written by people especially in the hope of improving their own living standards, while at the same time they were growing increasingly critical and forthright. The complaints are also a remarkable and authentic reflection upon the individual and society-wide problems of the time, and can be seen as one of the symptoms of the society-wide crisis and a manifestation of the majority society's sole focus on consumption, while the recipients were probably better aware of the dimension and the potential destabilisation effects of the crisis than the senders. Despite complaints being presented in the state media as a means for citizens to protect their guaranteed rights and interests, in practice they were understood rather as a tool for controlling the work of the state and economic authorities and institutions, intended to help eliminate the adverse factors in society, thus increasing workers' involvement in management and administration. However, the complaints and notices from the end of the 1980s imply that the ruling regime was not particularly successful in its effort to make them another link in the chain of control, or more accurately, was unable to take advantage of the stimuli it received in this area. For the complainants, they were often the last and relatively safe option for defending their own interests, or a means to voice, often anonymously, their dissatisfaction with the reality of late-socialist everyday life. Although for many years complaints served as a kind of release valve, or a means of directing the conflicts between the powerful and seemingly powerless, it turns out that in this very period of so-called perestroika the potential for conflict rose remarkably, a problem the power bodies were unable to deal with.

Keywords: Czechoslovakia (ČSSR), Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), complaints, notices, anonymous letters, perestroika, bureaucracy, shortage of goods, social problems, environmental protection, 1989

The Emergency Security Measures and “Operation Student” An Overview of the Activities of SNB Units and Troops of the Ministry of the Interior on November 17, 1989

Pavel Žáček

The intervention by the communist security forces on November 17, 1989, as part of an emergency security operation and the security measures codenamed “Student”, carried out in the centre of Prague and especially on Národní Street was to become a milestone in modern Czechoslovak history. The operation, whose objective was to prevent the student demonstration from moving to the centre of the capital, was led by the Head Commander of the Municipal Directorate of the National Security Corps, Colonel JUDr. Michal Danišovič, and the main public order unit was the Trainee Emergency Brigade under the command of Major Bedřich Houbal, complemented by forces from the Special Purposes Section, State Security officers, four reserves from the local District National Corps Offices and other support and auxiliary units. As a reserve unit, which eventually played a key role in controlling the movement of the demonstrators and the operation as a whole, there was a professional operation unit – the Public Security Emergency Regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Břetislav Zdráhala. Both units surrounded the core of the demonstrators on Národní Street, pushing them from both sides after a brutal intervention and the deployment of two armoured vehicles and eventually forcing them into a side street and scattering them. A dramatic role in this was played by members of the anti-terrorist squad headed by Major Petr Šesták who, in cooperation with secret police officers, selected individuals from among the demonstrators and, like the intervention squad members, brutally beat them with batons in the archway of Kaňkův Palace. The disproportionately harsh response by the security forces gradually led to the downfall of the communist totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia.

Key words: end of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, Velvet Revolution (Sametová revoluce), student demonstration, “Operation Student”, Ministry of the Interior (MV), State Security (StB), Special Purposes Section (OZU), Public Security (VB), National Security Corps (SNB), Trainee Emergency Brigade (ŠPO), Emergency Regiment (PP), emergency security measures (MBO), emergency security operation (MBA), November 17, 1989