Cultural Opposition: The Czechoslovak Writers' Union's Contribution to the Prague Spring, 1967-1968

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Introduction

In April of 1968, The Czechoslovak Communist Party (CPCS) under Alexander Dubček completed the *Action Program*, a document that vaguely outlined a program for democratization that promised the citizens of Czechoslovakia the right to participate in the political decision-making process, as well as freedom of the press, decentralization of the overly bureaucratic economy, and a free cultural sphere where criticism of the government's policies would be encouraged. Dubček and his regime attempted the fusion of democratic, political and cultural spheres with a socialist economic system: "socialism with a human face." Opinion polls of the time indicated that Dubček commanded the support of over 90% of the population of Czechoslovakia, a popularity unheard of for any national leader.[1] Only five months after the publication of the *Action Program*, on August 27, the Warsaw Pact nations invaded the country in order to put a stop to the movement. By 1969, all of the reforms of this "Prague Spring" had disappeared.

One of the most important forces in initiating the Prague Spring was the Czechoslovak Writers' Union. Originally meant to be the cultural arm of the party's

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[1]Radio Free Europe; *Audience and Public Opinion Research* (Munich, September, 1968), 1.

propaganda machine, the Union was somewhat successful in resisting repeated attempts by Antonín Novotný's hard-line regime to infiltrate and control it. The party line called for writers to inspire the nation in the building of a new socialist society. According to Dusan Hamsík, former editor of the Union's weekly, *Literární noviny*, that line meant participating in "a harmonious chorus in which each voice sang its own part strictly as the choirmaster indicated."[2] The politicization of the cultural sphere was successful but not in the way that the regime would have liked. The suppression of creative freedom through censorship, intimidation, and other means had the effect of consolidating opposition to the regime within the Union.

In totalitarian regimes, the government tries to monopolize of the power to produce knowledge. The "knowledge" referred to here is not necessarily truth, or scientific knowledge, however it may present itself as such. This knowledge is a type of "social knowledge," or, in other words, what is commonly held as truths and beliefs about the surrounding world. This knowledge is intimately linked with power, political or otherwise. The Czechoslovak Communist Party wished to control the production of this knowledge through what Antonín J. Liehm, one of the principal reformers in the Writer's Union at the time of the Prague

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[2]Dusan Hamsík, *Writers Against Rulers* (New York, 1971), 32.

Spring, calls "transmission belts."[3] These transmission belts were the institutions like labor unions, student organizations, farmers' unions, and artistic unions that the regime constructed in order to control society. The Czechoslovak Writers' Union was meant to be one of these transmission belts, as the regime wished to use the talents of the writers and intellectuals in the production of a certain type of social knowledge, or "truth," about the nation's political, social, and economic situation. Through this production of knowledge, the party would be able to ensure the survival of its power and dominance over Czechoslovak society.

In the early years of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, the party was fairly successful in controlling the Writers' Union. The Union was given some degree of power and autonomy so that it would be able to function effectively in its role as a transmission belt of the regime's ideology. It controlled popular magazines and journals, published its members' work for profit, and controlled a large financial base. Its power, however, was eventually turned against the regime, as the Union's members, as well as other sectors of society, began to spread a social knowledge that challenged the survival of the regime. This "knowledge" claimed that the current system of government was insufficient and had to be reformed

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[3]Antonín J. Liehm in Vladimir V. Kusin's *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement; 1968* (Santa Barbara, 1973), 72-73.

if the nation was ever to realize the socialist ideals that it upheld. While the works of the Union's elite intellectuals probably did not have a great influence on the masses, their works were widely read by the country's educated classes. It must be remembered that the nation was ruled by a small elite. The writers only had to reach this section of society in order to effect political change.

Novotný resisted the de-Stalinization process that was initiated in 1956 after Stalin's death, since he and many of those in the government around him could be implicated in the many atrocities of the Stalinist period. The government increasingly relied on censorship and suppression because it no longer was willing to use the more brutal methods used under Stalin, in order to hide the fact that the current regime was responsible for the blood that had been spilled in the fifties. The regime also tried to hide the desperate economic situation of the early sixties from the population. Anything that exposed the current situation in any way was considered a danger to the safety of the state. This suppression caused increasing resentment and consolidated the regime's opponents.

As Antonín J. Liehm contends, the Writers' Union was the only institution within the party's power "pyramid" that was able to oppose the regime openly. The party's attempts to break the solidarity of the Union's members failed.[4] As

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[4]Liehm in *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement*,

H. Gordon Skilling argues in *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, the regime encountered an embarrassing situation as it increasingly needed the services of the intelligentsia, including the writers, but was not willing to entertain the ideas of reform that proliferated among this group. The new power that the intellectuals gained as a result of the regime's reliance on them eventually brought Novotný and his supporters down.[5]

The culmination of nineteen years of this situation in the cultural sphere finally came in June of 1967, with the Fourth Writers' Congress. Leading writers and cultural figures such as Ludvík Vaculík, Milan Kundera, Václav Havel, and Karel Kosík, openly denounced the policies of the current regime and called for moral, political, and social reform. The dissenting speeches were harshly criticized by the party representatives who attended the congress, and the party took action against the writers and their Union. In conjunction with other events at this time in Czechoslovakia, the incident with the writers became sort of an international embarrassment for Novotný. By this time he was already losing his legitimacy in other sectors of society because of the nation's ailing economy and the regime's slow pace of de-Stalinization. The mounting opposition and the inability of the government to solve the country's problems gave the impression to the Soviet Union

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[5]H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton, 1976), 132.

and some members of the CPCS that the situation was out of Novotný's control. They were forced to abandon him.

In January, Novotný was replaced by Alexander Dubček, who started the nation on a democratization campaign that lasted until August, when the forces of the Warsaw Pact invaded. After Novotný's fall the Writers' Union was given a large degree of autonomy and began to act as a free political organization. The Union published political journals, and its members spoke at workers' meetings. The most important political act of the Union, however, was the publication of the *Two Thousand Words*, on June 27, 1968. This manifesto called for a more humanistic form of socialism and is considered one of the major reasons for the Soviet invasion in August. It went so far from the old party line that even Dubček was forced to distance himself from it in order to appease party moderates and the Soviets.

The Czechoslovak Writers' Union became one of the most influential forces in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring. The cultural policies of the Novotný regime politicized the Writers' Union as a force of opposition, rather than transforming it into a party apparatus as was intended. The Union was instrumental in bringing down the regime because it could spread the "knowledge" of reform despite the wishes of the Party. The Union was granted a certain amount of power by the regime. This power, however, was turned back upon the regime and contributed to its downfall.

The Triumph of the Communists

In September of 1938, the British and French capitulated to Hitler's demand of the annexation of the Czech Sudetenland. Soon after, Slovakia and Carpatho-Ukraine broke off and were placed under the "protection" of Nazi puppet regimes, while Poland seized the disputed Teschen area in Silesia. This partitioning of the country was looked upon by many Czechoslovaks as a betrayal by the Western democracies and the Benes government, contributing to the Communist party's popularity after the war.

During the war years, resistance in the former Czechoslovak lands was minimal. The Nazis were particularly cruel there, at one point executing 23,000 people after the assassination of the Reichsprotector (a sort of governor), Reinhard Heydrich.[6] The CPCS at the outset of the war was the only legal communist party in any East European nation and was a fairly strong political force. It was the only organized institution that was able to carry out effective resistance to the Nazi occupation because of its traditional emphasis on discipline and its strong ties to Moscow. The high point for Czechoslovakia during the war was the Slovak Uprising in 1944, when the forces of the communist-

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[6]E. Garrison Walters, *The Other Europe* (New York, 1988), 283.

controlled Slovak National Council were successful in recapturing large parts of the country. The Nazis struck back however, and the rebels were defeated and forced back into the hills.[7]

Because Czechoslovakia had not willfully joined the Axis powers at the outset of the war, the Soviet Union did not behave toward it as a defeated nation in the post-war period. The Czechoslovak people looked toward the Soviet Union and Stalin as liberators of their land. The CPCS enjoyed considerable popularity because of its association with the Soviet Union, the Slovak Uprising, and its opposition to the Western bourgeois democracies that had sacrificed Czechoslovakia at Munich. Its membership in 1945 was over one-million, and in May 1946, it won more than any other party with 38% of the vote.[8] But as the war receded further into the past, the party began to lose its support. The new system that was being imposed by the the Soviet contrlled party went against the the democratic tradition that had developed during the inter-war period. As a result, the CPCS resorted to the traditional communist "salami tactics," of takeover. The party infiltrated trade unions, professional organizations, and other political parties, and then "sliced off" the more right wing factions of these organizations. The party also entered into a "National Front" with other parties, seizing control of

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[7]Walters, 283.
[8]Ulc, 116-117.

state apparatuses such as the police, the ministry of the interior, and the government bureaucracy. The Communists then forced president Beneš to issue an order for one-party rule in February 1948. Under the guise of the National Front, the CPCS controlled the nation. Party leader Klement Gottwald assumed the presidency, and a new constitution was ratified in May 1948. The CPCS then swelled to 2.5 million members in March of that same year.[9] Many writers, intellectuals, and other members of the intelligentsia supported the coup, looking forward to the coming socialist utopia.

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[9]Ulc, 118-119.

The Stalinization of Culture

Gottwald had convinced Stalin during the war that a gradual pace of socialization would be appropriate for a nation like Czechoslovakia that had enjoyed a tradition of real parliamentary democracy in the inter-war period. After the Italian and French communist parties had failed to become part of their respective governments, Stalin became impatient and formed the Cominform (Communist Information Bureau). The Cominform's purpose was to integrate the various Soviet block parties under one ideological and administrative head.[10] Under the leadership of the Cominform, Czechoslovak society was to be reorganized on the Soviet model with little regard for its native structure and traditions.

As mentioned before, according to Antonín J. Liehm, the regime erected a power pyramid on the Soviet model, and all of its institutions were meant to be transmission belts of the regime's orders. These transmission belts took the form of unions for interest groups such as students, farmers, workers, and artists. The Minister of Culture, Václav Kopecký, at the 9th congress of the CPCS proclaimed the regime's attitude toward the cultural sphere when he said,

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[10]Vladimir V. Kusin, *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring* (Cambridge, 1971), 8-10.

"The new literary and artistic production is an important agent of the ideological and cultural rebirth in our country and is destined to play a great role in the socialist education of the broad masses."[11] Clearly, the Writers' Union was meant to play the role of the regime's ideological transmission belt.[12]

Strict control was initially enforced in the cultural sphere. The state had a monopoly on all publishing, nationalized the film and theater industries, and retained strict censorship standards on all magazines, journals, and newspapers through the party's ideological department. Works of writers such as Jaroslav Hašek, who wrote *The Good Soldier Schweik*, Franz Kafka, and others that did not seem to support the ideological position of the party, were denounced as "bourgeois," and banned. Only strict adherence to the theory of "Socialist Realism" in the arts and literature was tolerated. The proceedings of the First Writers' Congress in 1946 exemplify this atmosphere, where Poet Frantisek Halas declared in his speech, "The First great task of literature and its creators is to show the moral greatness of socialism and its side to fight for the coming justice."[13] Another poet, Jaroslav Seifert, closed his work, "Song of Freedom" with the verse, "You, who are

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[11]Joseph G.Whelan, *Aspects of Intellectual Ferment and Dissent in Czechoslovakia* (Washington, 1969), 13.

[12]Antonín J. Liehm in *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement: 1968* (Santa Barbara, 1973), ed, by Vladimir V. Kusin, 72.

[13]Peter Hruby, *Daydreams and Nightmares; Communist and Ex-Communist Literature;* 1917-1987 (New York, 1990), 70.

older, change the world; be in good health, our President, be healthy, great Stalin."[14] Resistance to the regime was minimal during the first years of the new republic because many believed that they were taking part in a humanistic movement that would soon bring the triumph of the working classes over capitalism. Even so, resistance to the regime was not be tolerated and was dealt with through imprisonment, or in some cases, execution under the accusation of "bourgeois nationalism."

The preconditions for future resistance were already contained within the structure of the Writers' Union. It was given a large Literary Fund that was initially intended as a monetary incentive for the writers to support the regime. The fund instead became shield against the pressures of conformity, and was used to support those members who might fall into disfavor in the party's eyes. The Union ran its own publishing house, published its own journals, and sold its members' works abroad as well as home, reaping considerable profits for itself and the government. It was also given its own administrative and governmental structure, modeled on the party's, with a central committee, presidium, a secretariat, and a control commission run solely by writers who were members of the party.[15]

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[14]Hruby, *Daydreems and Nightmares*, 70.
[15]Liehm, in *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement*, 69.

The Union inherited the large readership of the liberal press of the pre-war period, possessing a great influence on the country's intelligentsia.[16] Its level of autonomy eventually contributed to its being the only forum where criticism of the regime was possible. It became the only institution within the pyramid capable of mounting an offensive against the powerful party leadership. For this reason, the regime attempted to strip the Union of some of its influence through censorship, threats, infiltration, and financial pressure, but with only limited success. These attempts would further polarize relations between the top of the pyramid, the party Central Committee, and the Writers' Union.

[16]Liehm, in *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement*, 73.

The Thaw of 1956

Between 1948 and 1953, the Gottwald regime followed the lead of the Soviet Union and Joseph Stalin in its policy making. It eliminated its opponents through threats, police suppression, imprisonment, and executions. As was noted earlier, Czechoslovak prisons and concentration camps housed over 100,000 political prisoners during the 1950's. The Cominform used Tito's deviation from the Soviet economic model as an excuse to tighten the Soviet Union's grip on the nations of Eastern Europe.[17] As noted earlier, in 1951, CPCS secretary general Rudolf Slánský, and eleven others were hanged as "Titoists," after they were forced to recite their own confessions in the courtroom. These trials and other atrocities of the period would later reflect on the Novotný regime, when he and other officials would be implicated in them.

In 1953 both Stalin and Gottwald died. Novotný took over the leadership of the CPCS rather painlessly and continued the same Stalinist line as the previous regime. Khrushchev, Stalin's successor, tried to start the Soviet party on a more revisionist course. In 1956, at the CPSU 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev denounced the hard-line policies and repression of the Stalinist era, and called for

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[17]Karel Kaplan, "Thoughts About the Political Trials," *Studies in Comparative Communism*, vol. 2, April 1969, 102.

a loosening of central bureaucratic control. While other East European nations likewise began a period of de-Stalinization, the Novotný regime merely played lip service to Khrushchev. Among the writers and intellectuals, however, there was a call for a re-evaluation of the polices of the Stalinist period, and an investigation into the political trials of the fifties.

Some of the liberal forces in Czechoslovakia that had been unleashed by Khrushchev's criticism of Stalin were represented in the Second Czechoslovak Writers' Congress of April 1956. The proceedings of this Congress escaped the intentions of its organizers, and followed a much different course than the First Congress. Jaroslav Seifert took up a much different stance this time than at the previous Congress. He complained that "a man presided over Czech literature who did not even know Czech." This same official had ordered the confiscation and destruction of many books. Seifert advised:

> May we truly be the conscience of our own people. Believe me, I am afraid we have not been that for quite a few years; we have not been the conscience of the masses, the conscience of millions; we have not even been the conscience of ourselves . . . If somebody else keeps silent about the truth, it can be a tactical manoeuvre. If a writer is silent about the truth, he is lying.[18]

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[18]George Gibian, ed. *The Selected Poetry of Jaroslav Seifert* (New York, 1986), 8-9.

The poet Frantisek Hrubin and other writers such as Ladislav Mňačko also spoke out against censorship and expressed concern over the atmosphere of terror that existed in the country. The writers even succeeded in electing a liberal Union presidium.

Students followed the lead of the writers and turned the traditional May Day Majales Festival into an anti-government protest, calling for increased political liberty, abolition of censorship, and the freedom to travel abroad. The protest was brutally suppressed by the police.[19]

The thaw of 1956 did not last long, as events in other parts of the Eastern Bloc prompted the Czechoslovak government to put a stop to the liberalization movement. 1956 had seen an attempted uprising in Poland, and a revolution in Hungary that was stopped by the Soviet Red Army. Novotný and his regime wanted no part in any liberalization course that would compromise their power and cause the intervention of the Soviet Union. At a national party conference in June, Novotný harangued the writers for their "attacks against our people's democratic system," and their display of "unprincipled liberalism."[20] The proceedings of the Congress were not published, and the press launched vigorous attacks against the writers. Frantisek Hrubin was eventually forced to renounce his

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[19]Hruby, *Fools and Heros* (New York, 1980), 66.
[20]Whelan, *Aspects of Intellectual Ferment*, 22.

speech to the Congress in front of a Writers' Union plenary session in 1957. Many other writers and editors were also forced to pledge their allegiance to the party anew.[21] An upcoming journalists' conference was cancelled for the fear that it too would become a forum for criticism of the regime. Even as late as 1959, as proof that the party had not recovered from the blow, orthodox communist Ladislav Štoll addressed the All-State Writers' Conference with a speech entitled "To Make and End to the Tradition of the Spirit of the Second Writers' Congress." At this same conference, the pro-regime poet Pavel Kohout, criticized Seifert for his unorthodox political views.[22]

In the late fifties, the regime also attacked the financial well-being of the writers in order to induce conformity. A popular anecdote in the literary community at this time was an alleged conversation between Novotný and Khrushchev. Khrushchev supposedly inquired about the Czechoslovak government's inability to silence the writers' criticisms. He asked, "After all, they are like a sparrow in the palm of your hand. And what do you do when you catch a bird in your hand?" Novotný replied:

> You hold the sparrow by his legs and you pull out all of his feathers, one at a time. When he's bare, you open your hand -- and what happens? Your palm is nice and warm, the bird is shivering

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[21]Whelan, *Aspects of Intellectual Ferment*, 22.
[22]Hruby, *Daydreams and Nightmares*, 123.

in the cold, he'll be only too glad to snuggle up to you.[23]

The government followed this policy and began to impose a heavy tax on the writer's works.[24]

After the thaw of 1956, the party's attempt to crack down on the liberalization push was somewhat successful in silencing criticism, especially through its pressure on the Writers' Union. The regime could no longer use the brutal force that it once had used, however, because it had to pander to the Kremlin's line of de-Stalinization. The regime slowly began to lose its legitimacy during the late fifties and early sixties, as a result of its resistance to de-Stalinization, and the worsening economic situation in the country. The regime could no longer tolerate the true situation of the nation being exposed to the population. Novotný and his government increasingly used censorship and economic coercion to silence the Writer's Union, only causing a widening of the rift between the party leadership and the writers. Despite the government's policies, or more likely, as a result of them, criticism increased and finally exploded in the mid-sixties. The regime was forced to capitulate to calls for reform to a certain degree, therefore further weakening its control and legitimacy.

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[23]Liehm in *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement*, 74.
[24]*Ibid.*, 15.

The Contribution of *Literární noviny*

The Writers' Union began to publish its own journal in 1952. The name of this journal was *Literární noviny* (Literary News). Like the Union, the journal was set up with what appeared to be an autonomous structure. The editorial board, which oversaw general matters such as the ideological direction of the journal, and the staff itself were composed mainly of Union members, although their was no specific regulation regarding this. The contributors to the journal also needed not be Union members. The Party kept a *de facto* control over the journal and the Union through intimidation and covert manipulation.

This behind the scenes control failed in the long run as *Literární noviny* gained in popularity and the Union achieved a certain amount of financial independence. From 1956 to its official dissolution in 1969, the journal's circulation, which was usual lower than its actual demand, averaged about 130,000, and often reached 300,000. By comparison the nation's largest daily had a circulation of only 900,000.[25]

Ever since the slow cultural thaw that had been initiated in 1956, the Union began to reap rather large profits from the sale of previously banned works. With its growing Literary Fund it was able to become increasingly

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[25]Rudolf Perina, *Intellectuals and political Change in Czechoslovakia: A History of* Literarni Noviny *and its Contributors, 1952-1969* (Columbia, 1977). 5-6.

concerned with the interests of the writers and the intellectual community in general, rather than merely being an ideological transmission belt of the party. In 1963, Josef Rybák, a conservative Party supporter, left the post of chief editor of *Literární noviny*. The union replaced him with a prominent reformer Milan Jungmann. While the Party did not endorse this move, it let him act as the editor for two years without official confirmation. This replacement of the old-guard with the younger more reform-minded writers is typical of the Union in general. In a random sample of issues of *Literární noviny* from 1956 to 1965, Rudolf Perina has noted a 75% turnover of contributors.[26] Many of the new contributors had come of age during the war and the ensuing revolution in 1948 and had actively supported the regime during its first few years. These same writers, such as Milan Kundera, Eduard Goldstücker, and Ludvík Vaculík would help to destroy that same regime in 1968.

As *Literární noviny* became more progressive, or reformist, during the late fifties and early sixties, it increasingly came under fire from the Party. Starting in late 1963, the journal was suddenly the victim of attacks from *Rudé Právo* and other Party publications for "unprincipled liberalism" among other Marxist cliches.[27] At a December meeting of the Party's Central Committee the Union was heavily criticized. The committee produced a

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[26]Perina, *Intellectuals and Political Change*, 199-200.
[27]*Ibid.*, 201.

document which pointed a finger specifically at *Literární noviny* and three other journals. The document listed specific articles which were considered to be ideologically incorrect, and amounted to an ultimatum for the journals and their contributors to take "greater responsibility" or face increased censorship.[28] The Party lived up to its word as the censors altered or confiscated 124 documents in 1964, as opposed to only 25 times in 1963.[29]

The Party's intimidation failed, however, and the intellectuals and writers continued to contribute more and more bold criticisms and calls for reform. Some of the most provocative and influential contributors were Petr Karvas, Antonín J. Liehm, Ivan Svítak, Milan Kundera, Karel Kosík, Ladislav Mňačko, among many others. Their articles ranged from topics such as de-Stalinization, economic de-centralization, repudiations of "socialist realism in the arts and letters, to the humanization of Marxist philosophy.

In 1967 a new censorship law was passed that officially was to regulate the actions of the censors. But the Publishing Board again mutilated *Literární noviny,* this time on 141 occasions.[30] The campaign of official criticism against the journal was renewed. The journal and its contributors became even more bold in their criticisms. In one article during a that year, Antonín J. Liehm called for the formulation of "positive socialist alternatives," to the

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[28]Perina, *Intellectuals and Political Change,* 202.
[29]Hamsík, *Writers Against Rulers,* 141.
[30]*Ibid.*

current regime. Karel Kosík called for the Czechoslovaks to make its offering to the world through a new cultural and political flowering. Another writer, Miroslav Jodl, urged the nation to " . . . make a contribution to the creation of a democratic, humanitarian and scientific socialism," and criticized the country's lack of "civil courage."[31]

The writers were soon to take up this call as they planned for the Fourth Writers' Congress. The Congress finally opened up on June 27, 1967, after repeatedly being pushed back by the authorities. The Party leadership could not have been ignorant to the potential of allowing a gathering of dissatisfied intellectuals, and they did their best to reduce the event's impact.

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[31]Perina, *Intellectuals and Political Change*, 230-232.

Writers Push for Reform

The late fifties and early sixties in Czechoslovakia were characterized by a cultural awakening. The period witnessed the rebirth of sociology, history, philosophy and political science outside of sterile Marxist ideology.[32] Many philosophers, writers and social scientists questioned the policies of the regime and conceptualized new political, social, and cultural models. Some of the Union's members contributed to the discussion and were instrumental in the reform movement that would bear fruit in 1968. The most important and well known reformers in the union that would challenge the regime in '67 and '68, were Karel Kosík, Václav Havel, Ivan Sviták, Milan Kundera, and Ludvik Vaculík. An examination of all of the works of these men would be a large research project in itself, but a brief discussion of some of their ideas will contribute to a greater understanding of their actions and the actions of the Writers' Union of which they were members.

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[32]H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton, 1976), 90-133.

Karel Kosík

At the heart of the new awakening among the intellectuals was an attempt to redefine the concept of Man, and from there, to construct a more humanistic model of socialism than the existing one. One of the most important philosophers that dealt with this problem was Karel Kosík. His prominence in the Prague Spring is demonstrated by his election to Party Presidium at the Fourteenth Congressjust after the Soviet Invasion of August 1968.

Kosík was a philosophy professor at Charles University in Prague. During the fifties he served the regime by merely regurgitating the party line. An example may be found in a review in 1950 of a new edition of Engels' The *German Peasant War.* Kosík states:

> Peasant uprisings can lead to success only when -- teaches comrade Stalin -- they are linked to workers uprisings and if the workers direct the peasant uprisings . . . Bourgeois thickheaded persons cannot explain medieval religious struggles otherwise than as nonsensical quarrels about interpretation of the Bible and wrangling of scholastic theologians . . . .[33]

In 1954 he slandered one of Czechoslovakia's fathers of democracy, Thomas Masaryk, for assuming " a *parasitic-opportunist pose,* of a bourgeois politician . . . in order

[33]Hruby, *Fools and Heros* 188.

to make capital for *his* aims. . . ."[34] Statements such as these were typical of Kosík and other writers of the time; the government allowed nothing but praise for itself and the Stalinist system.

During the late 1950's, Kosík became more critical of the regime. He wrote that the bureaucratic system after 1948 contained within it a concept of man that was denigrating to humanity and irreconcilable with reality. The official Man was "*Homo economicus* . . . a manipulatable unit . . . . blind to the needs of others, unthinking, unfeeling, prone to demoralization." The system produced, and reproduced these people because it needed them for its survival. The system did not account for "the grotesque, the tragic, the absurd, death, laughter, conscience . . . moral responsibility, and other human phenomena." Under the present system man was an object that was manipulated for the end of production.[35] Man therefore becomes alienated in the absurd world of his own political, economic, and bureaucratic creations.

The theme of alienation and the absurdity of the human condition is a pervasive one in modern Czechoslovak culture. One of the most influential writers on these themes in Czech cultural history was Franz Kafka, who was rehabilitated by the Novotný regime in 1963. Many of the philosophers and intellectuals of the sixties in Czechoslovakia saw Kafka as

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[34]Hruby, *Fools and Heros,* 189.
[35]Karel Kosík in Antonín J. Liehm's *The Politics of Culture* (New York, 1971), 398-399, 404.

a sort of prophet of the alienation and absurdity that bureaucratic communism and capitalism would bring. They saw themselves in the same predicament as his characters. Kosík himself wrote that Kafka's world was

> . . . The world of the absurdity of human thought and action, of human dreams, a world of a monstrous and unintelligible labyrinth, a world of human powerlessness in the network of the bureaucratic machines, mechanisms and reified creations.[36]

Kosík saw a way out of this predicament, however, through a new definition of man. In his *Dialectics of the Concrete*, he sees man as being defined by his concrete actions and practices. This concept of "practices" goes beyond the traditional Marxist definition of practices, where human action is seen only in the context of production, class interest and struggle, or in the interest of the party leadership. According to Kosík:

> In addition to the element of work, practice also comprehends an existential element. It manifests itself not only in man's objective activity whereby he transforms nature and he imparts human value to natural materials, but also in the formation of the human personality, the molding of the human subject wherein existential elements such as dread, disgust, joy, laughter, hope, etc.

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[36]Hruby, *Fools and Heros*, 192.

> enter into play, not as passive "experience," but as ingredients in the struggle for recognition -- i.e., the process of the realizing of human freedom.[37]

Man must create himself through independent and free action. Through action, man realizes his freedom. But this action is more than mere productive activity. Kosík's "practice" also encompasses uniquely human experience such as simple emotion.

Through acceptance of the party's orthodox view of practice, the individual suppresses his own reason and conscience in the hopes of a better socialist society somewhere in the future. "Existential elements" are not recognized under the system because they do not serve the interests of the future that the system looks forward to. Humanity is ironically repressed and enslaved for the hope of freedom.

> To 'live in the future' and to 'anticipate events' in a certain sense means denial of life: the individual does not live in the presence [sic] but in the future because he negates what is and anticipates what is not, his life happens in futility, i.e. in non-authenticity.[38]

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[37]Peter Ludz, "Philosophy in Search of Reality," in *Problems of Communism*, July -October 1969, 36.

[38]Hruby, *Fools and Heros*, 190.

Thus, man becomes alienated, not only from the government and society, but also from his true self. Furthermore, the "official" man of The Party is inclined toward practices that are morally reprehensible to him for the future of socialism. This contributed to an atmosphere where atrocities could be committed by party members in the name of socialism during the fifties.

Václav Havel

The intellectual consciousness in Czechoslovakia during this period is exemplified by the popularity of the literature of Sartre, Camus, Kafka, and Ionesco. One of the most popular young literary figures in the country at this time was Václav Havel, with his absurdist plays, *The Memorandum*, and *The Garden Party*, his most important works of this period. In regard to the theme of these two works, Havel said in an interview in 1968, that alienation of the modern individual

> . . . originates in the ever-increasing tension between the scientific and technical approaches to reality on the one hand, and the real needs and possibilities of human individuality on the other. We possess more and more data about man, about society, about ourselves, yet the picture of the world which this scientific knowledge gives us is less and less applicable to our own lives.

Havel went on to say that although Czechoslovakia at that time was not as technologically advanced as the West, socialism is supposed to espouse scientific principles, therefore, technical and scientific approaches were use to solve problems, disregarding the human dimension.[39]

Havel discussed this theme of alienation in an speech to the Union of Czechoslovak Writers in 1956. The speech was later printed in part in a Czech literary magazine and discussed the subject which he called "evasive thinking." In the speech, Havel mentioned an event in Prague when a window ledge fell from a building, killing a woman. Soon afterward an article appeared a major paper that commented on the public outcry that followed the event. The author stated that one should be thankful that at the present time one had the right to criticize such a lack of foresight by the proper authorities. He then went on to praise all of the progress that had occurred toward the goal of socialism in Czechoslovakia. The author then implied that there was often too much criticism of the present system, and too much attention paid to unimportant matters.[40]

Havel used this illustration to explain what he meant by the "evasive thinking" that had become the status quo of his society. The issue at hand, the problem of window ledges falling on people, had been clouded by "false

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[39]Václáv Havel in Liehm's *The Politics of Culture*, 384.
[40]Václáv Havel, *Open Letters*, (London, 1991), 10-11.

contextualization."[41] The immediate problem was put within a context that renders it meaningless. In this mode of thought, "the false testimony and forged documents of the show trials" of the Stalinist era were explained to be "created by the atmosphere of the cult of personality," instead of by real individuals. One would say that a hydroelectric dam was built by "the atmosphere of enthusiasm for building" instead of by the workers on the project.[42] The individual person or specific issue gets lost in this linguistic ritual of "false contextualization" and the proper foci of problems are never addressed. In this sense, the human becomes linguistically alienated from the focus of political discussion.

For Havel, as well as Kosík, the way out of alienation was through concrete action. Actions are seen for their concrete positive or negative effects in the liberation of the individual from his alienation, not as "Marxist," or "bourgeois" acts.[43]

Ivan Sviták

Philosopher and activist, Ivan Sviták, also played a pivotal role in the Prague Spring. Even though he was not a member of the Writers' Union, he dealt closely with other members of the Union and was also published in the Union's

[41]Havel, *Open Letters*, 13.
[42]Havel, *Open Letters*, 15-16.
[43]Havel in Liehm's *The Politics of Culture*, 390-391.

journals. Like Kosík, Sviták's past was tainted with collaboration with the regime during the Stalinist fifties, as a lecturer on the history of philosophy at the University of Economic Sciences in Prague. Being attacked by the party central Committee for lacking discipline in 1956, he set out to prove his loyalty to the regime through a series of anti-religious articles. In 1964 he again came under attack by the Central Committee for a study on the tasks of philosophy that he had attempted to publish. The Committee reviewed the article and decided to expel him from the Institute of Philosophy and the Party, citing the following passage:

> A philosopher shouldn't be a household servant, a drudge of concocted laws, and a qualified clown who professes the spirit and depth of science where only yawns an abyss of spiritlessness.[44]

From this point onward, Sviták would become one of the most radical critics of the Novotný regime and bureaucratic socialism in general.

Sviták was highly suspicious of the ability of the party to push reform in the direction of democracy. His cynicism was shared by many others because of the party's dismal record of pseudo-reform. He expressed extreme dissatisfaction with the party apparatus and wished that the working class and the intelligentsia could dispense of it altogether.

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[44]Hruby, Fools and Heros, 201.

> Apparatchiks have become accustomed to treating the people, the working class and the intelligentsia, like children, as objects to be manipulated. They have been and still are managing our work, our ideas, our confidence and our money badly . . . We know all about them, and we say -- 'Enough!'[45]

In the state that Sviták envisioned, the communist party would not assume the dictatorial role that it currently did. The state would be ruled in by a Western style parliament, with the full participation of the population.

> The path of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia to power and towards the leading role in this country can only lead through a properly elected parliament . . . Elections as an expression of the secret will of the electors . . . will cleanse the Communist party of its obsession with the idea that the future of the state and of socialism depends on the Party alone.[46]

> The most pressing problem today is to replace totalitarian dictatorship . . . To solve this problem . . . it requires the real possibility of human and civil rights 'at least as extensive as

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[45]Ivan Sviták, "Open Letter to the Workers and Technicians of the Doubrava Mine," in Andrew Oxley, Alex Pravda, and Andrew Ritchie's *Czechoslovakia*, (London, 1973), 178-179.

[46]Sviták, "What Words Can Do," *Czechoslovakia*,279-281.

those of the bourgeois-democratic Czechoslovakia.'[47]

Needless to say, these ideas shocked may of the old-guard communists, and party apparatchiks. Sviták was advocating a political system much like that of the Western "bourgeois" democracies, where the citizenry would be allowed to choose the type of leaders that they wished, Communist or otherwise. To members of the Party leadership this seemed reactionary.

Another reason for the Party's suspicion of Sviták was that his analyses were more politically pertinent than the abstract theorizing of Kosík. Sviták also took a more activist stance than many other intellectuals. In 1968 he was invited to attend a workers' meeting at the Doubrava Mine where he talked with the delegates for eight hours. As a result of the meeting, the Mine's conservative representative was not reelected to represent the miners at the Fourteenth Party Congress. On April 2 of that same year an article of his appeared in a journal calling for an investigation into the death of Jan Masaryk, Czechoslovakia's great democratic leader. The article supplied evidence that implied that the Czech Security had collaborated with the Soviet secret police in murdering Masaryk.

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[47]Sviták, "Open Letter to the Workers and Technicians . . ," *Czechoslovakia*, 180.

Sviták's article is a typical example of what many party members feared by the relaxation of press controls. Dubcek was forced to take a more conservative stance on censorship because of articles like this one, for fear that the Soviets might intervene. This situation intensified as the population, and especially the intelligentsia, pushed for greater reform, and the Party leadership became more resistant.

Milan Kundera

Of all of the writers associated with the Prague Spring, the most widely read is probably the novelist Milan Kundera. He is known for his ironic and erotic novels, *The Joke, Life is Elsewhere,* and more recently, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being.* Although Kundera denies that he is a political writer, his works have definite implications for the political realm, especially with respect to the individuals relation to it. Aside from his literary work, he was also a politically active member of the Writers' Union. He contributed many article to Czech journals, including *Literární Noviny.* He also initiated the stormy session of the Fourth Writers' Congress in June of 1968.

At the age of fourteen Kundera began to write poetry. In 1948, at the age of nineteen he left his hometown of Brno to study Film in Prague. He wished to use his talent in

producing "art which serves the people."[48] Like many other young idealistic students he joined the Communist Party with a youthful zeal to participate in the genesis of a new society. He soon discovered that his abilities as a scriptwriter left something to be desired, so he took up poetry again.

Kundera's first book was entitled "*Man the Vast Garden,*" and was a collection of love poems. It was criticized for being concerned with individual love, instead of portraying people as workers in the collective joy of socialism. He was kicked out of the party for this transgression.

In 1956 he published a lengthy poem dedicated to the country's communist hero, Julius Fucik, who supposedly resisted conceding information to Nazi torturers during the War. He was readmitted to the party for his efforts. From then on, however, he was continually criticized by the Party for his poetry, and later on for his novels.

Late in the fifties and early sixties, Kundera devoted himself first to literary criticism, and then to drama. He also did extensive translation of foreign works. His first novel, *The Joke,* was published in 1967. The book exposed the absurdities of Czechoslovak life since 1948, and was an expression of Kundera's disillusionment with the dream of communism.

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[48]Milan Kundera, interview in Leihm's *The Politics of Culture,* 137.

The protagonist of the novel, Ludvík, jokingly writes a note to his girlfriend who is away for a few weeks taking courses on revolutionary strategies. The note reads:

> Optimism is the opium of the people!
> The healthy atmosphere stinks!
> Long live Trotsky!
>
> Ludvík[49]

Ludvík is found guilty of anti-state activities by a student court and sent to work in coal mines for seven years. Hardened by his sentence, Ludvík devises a plan to avenge himself through sadistically seducing the wife of a former friend who had betrayed him during his time as a student. The plan fails because the woman enjoys the humiliating treatment. Ludvík is a product of a regime and a society that has no sense of humor. Kundera has remarked about the Stalinist period in his country:

> The period we are discussing had no sense of humor, but unwittingly it produced some marvelous paradoxes. In art, the official doctrine was realism. But it was forbidden to speak of the real. The cult of youth was publicly celebrated, but our enjoyment of our youth was frustrated Official slogans were full of joy, yet we didn't dare to even play the slightest prank.[50]

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[49]Philip Roth, introduction to Milan Kundera's *Laughable Loves.* (New York, 1974), x-xiii.

[50]Kundera, in Liehm's *The Politics of Culture,* 141.

Similarly, according to Kundera, socialism, a doctrine that is based on the elevation and liberation of humanity, subverted humanistic values. The regime utilized cruelty, repression, denunciation, and intimidation in the service of its supposed humanistic goals.[51]

Ludvík's attempt at revenge reveals another aspect of Kundera's work that pertains to his analysis of Stalinism. His characters often take pleasure in humiliating and abusing women sexually, and discover the dichotomy between physical pleasure and love. These themes were first explored in his collection of short stories, *Laughable Loves,* and then developed more fully in *The Joke* and his later works. Like the system that he criticizes, people are also capable of extreme cruelty and sadism. His cynical view of humanity and its paradoxes was no doubt influenced by his disillusionment with the dream of his younger years and the society around him.

At the time of the Prague Spring Kundera also entertained a nationalist attitude concerning the role of Czech culture in the world. In August of 1968, Kundera published an article in *Literární Noviny* entitled, "The Small and the Big" which criticized the Soviet Union's constant interference in Czechoslovak affairs. After the Soviet invasion, Kundera praised the Czechs for proof of

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[51]Kundera, in Liehm's *The Politics of Culture,* 141.

superiority over the Russians through their non-violent, passive resistance.

> Czech patriotism does not have its roots in fanaticism but in criticism; that is what I find imposing in my nation, that is why I love it . . . This criticism which underpinned the whole of the Czechoslovak Spring and which was able to withstand the attacks of lies and irrationality in the Fall, is not the property of just an elite; it has proved to be the greatest virtue of the whole nation.[52]

Also in an interview in 1967, Kundera discussed the problem of the realization and preservation of Czech culture. With regard to the twentieth century trend of greater integration of cultures through electronic communication he declared:

> All small nations are threatened by this integrationist trend, and they can defend themselves only by the intensity of their own culture . . . and nothing else . . . Under these circumstances, ideological snoopers or political bigots who try to prevent our current cultural expansion jeopardize our very future as a European nation.[53]

Kundera's thought and writing seem to epitomize the thrust of the Prague Spring. Like many other intellectuals

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[52]Hruby, *Daydreams and Nightmares*, 246.
[53]Kundera, in *The Politics of Culture*, 149-150.

and writers of this period in Czechoslovakia, he originally supported the regime and believed in the Party's plan for the forging of a new society. He became disillusioned with the party, and in Kundera's case, with humanity in general. By 1968, he was so disturbed by the condition of his nation that he resolved to declare war on the regime that he once supported. He wished to overturn the situation of Soviet hegemony in Czechoslovak life and to destroy the system that was the product of this dominance.

Ludvík Vaculík

Ludvík Vaculík was perhaps the most outspoken and courageous writer involved in the Prague Spring. His work amounts to a complete and outright rejection of the leadership of the Party and the state. His novels are highly biographical, and concerned with the social degeneration brought on by Stalinism. During the Writers' Congress he proclaimed that socialism in Czechoslovakia had not succeeded in solving even a single problem in society. For his accusation he was deprived of his party membership and accused of anarchism. After the fall of Novotný his party membership was restored. During the brief period of cultural freedom, he wrote many articles and also created the famous *Two Thousand Words* manifesto that was one of the pretexts for the Soviet invasion of August 1968.

Vaculík worked as an apprentice in a shoe factory during the war and afterward he moved to Prague to continue his studies. While still working at the factory he joined the Communist Party because, "It was supported by literature, by theory, and it presented an extensive program, whereas the other parties defined themselves only in a negative sense."[54] He soon lost faith in the Party. "I had imagined that we were about to begin the struggle for decency and nobility, that we would hold philosophical discussions like Stalin and party intellectuals, when in reality here we were dealing with mundane matters, and not very justly at that."[55] He taught for a few years, served in the military, worked in the editorial offices of *Rudé právo,* and then ended up with a radio show after 1959. In 1963 his first novel, *An Animated House,* was published after much reluctance from the authorities. While the book did criticize some aspects of Party life and the current situation of the nation, it did not constitute a direct threat to the Party or the state in the view of the censors.

In 1965 Vaculík joined the editorial board of *Literární noviny* where he was able to enter into in the growing dissent and publish some of his articles. His second and best known novel, *The Axe,* was published in 1966. The novel is about a journalist, which no doubt represents Vaculík, who grows increasingly dispirited with the society around

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[54]Ludvík Vaculík in Liehm's *The Politics of Culture,* 190.
[55]*Ibid.*

him. At one point the journalist investigates a case of a young girl who commits suicide after she is rejected by a university on political grounds. Her father protests and is subsequently forced into a mental institution. In imaginary conversations with his father, who was an ardent Communist, the journalist comes to the conclusion that the political situation must change. He can no longer stand idol while the regime destroys the culture and spirit of his people.[56]

As can be imagined, *The Axe* was published with much reluctance, but it had appeared at a time of a brief relaxation in cultural policy. Later in 1967, in an interview, Vaculík, with regard to *The Axe,* and his works in general:

> If literature, or art in general, is supposed to liberate people, that means it leads them to act. And action is essential for health. In the political and social spheres (sic). This is accepted as far as intimate, personal morality is concerned. Why shouldn't the same apply in a much broader sphere?[57]

Vaculík strove hard to stir his people into action during 1968. As will be described in a later section, he openly criticized the regime at the Fourth Writers' Congress in June of 1968 for which he was expelled from the Party. His most famous contribution was the *The Two Thousand Words*

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[56]Hruby, *Daydreams and Nightmares,* 281-283.
[57]Vaculík in *The Politics of Culture,* 185.

to Farmers, Scientists, Artists, and Everyone. The manifesto, which was signed by many prominent public figures condemned the erosion of democracy and its replacement with party hegemony since 1948.

> After the war people had great confidence in the Communist Party, but it gradually preferred to have official positions instead of the peoples' trust, until it had only official positions and nothing else.[58]

The document called for the continuance of the struggle against the conservative elements of the Party and society, but it also noted that care should be taken that these actions be performed legally. Probably as assurance to the Soviets and the party leadership, Vaculík also expressed the need for the process of democratization to occur under the influence of the Party, and the need to maintain a positive relationship with Moscow.

> The recent apprehension is the result of the possibility that foreign forces may intervene in our internal development. Face to face with these superior forces, the only thing we can do is to hold our own and not indulge in any provocation . . . We must assure our allies that we will observe our alliance, friendship, and trade agreements.[59]

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[58] *Two Thousand Words,* in Gale Stokes' *From Stalinism to Pluralism,* 126.
[59] *Two Thousand Words,* in *From Stalinism to Pluralism,* 130.

The great care that Vaculík took not to push the party leadership too far and to not offend the Soviets was futile. The Party rejected the document as a call for a Western style bourgeois-democracy, and the Soviets cited the document as evidence that Dubcek had lost control of the nation.

After the normalization of Czechoslovakia, Vaculík was again deprived of his membership in the Party. He and his family were subject to strict police surveillance, and were often publicly humiliated in the media. He continued to be active in resisting the regime and publishing works in the West. He was also responsible for preserving non-official Czech literature through his clandestine publishing and distribution network.

In the works of all of the above writers one can point to some general trends. First and foremost, these writers exemplify the dissatisfaction of many people in Czechoslovakia with the political alienation that the totalitarian regime produced. They were all, with the exception of Havel, enthusiastic supporters of the utopian dream of socialism in their youth. Over the years they abandoned the idealism of their youth and began to think more critically, something which the Party had no interest in. They called for the end of the bureaucratic management

of and encroachment of the party into all sectors of society.

Another common denominator between these writers was their struggle to overthrow the dominance of the Soviet Union in Czechoslovak affairs. While this is spelled out more plainly in the work of Kundera, it is implicit in the work of the others. The desire of Kosík to reinterpret Marxism was a *de facto* renunciation of the official dogma, which was handed down to the Czechoslovak Party from the Soviet Communist Party. Havel's critique of bureaucracy and its mind-set can also be interpreted as a desire to overthrow the system which was imposed upon Czech society from the Soviet Union. In the same light, Svítak's and Vaculík's desire to replace the current regime with an idealistic social democratic society was also a desire to subvert Soviet hegemony, as the current system was a product of this.

Another common denominator that demonstrates something about the ethnic situation in Czechoslovakia is that all of the writers discussed in this section are Czechs, and not Slovaks. The Slovak writers were generally more conservative than the Czechs, and the leading positions in the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, as is the case with the Party as a whole, were held by Czechs. As we will see in the following chapter, it was the Slovak Party which was instrumental in dislodging Novotný and his supporters. The

Czech writers, the Slovak Party, and other groups were able to find a common interest in toppling the regime.

The Fourth Writers' Congress

The proceedings of the Fourth Writers' Congress in 1967 represented an explosion of the cultural fermentation that had continued since the fifties under the Novotný regime. The Congress produced a schism between the Writers' Union and the party leadership at a time when a growing reform faction of the Party was working toward a loosening of the Party's hegemony in every sector of society, especially in the economic sphere. The confrontation between the Party and the Writers' Union would be a test case for this de-centralization. The Congress, in conjunction with other events during the Autumn of 1967, did much to discredit Novotný in the eyes of many party members, and especially in the opinion of Moscow. His response to the growing desire for reform and to the dissident writers made apparent the resistance of the Party's leadership to any change. The reformers, who had gained much power in the party and were joined by the Slovak Communist Party. Together they were forced to discontinue Novotný's rule in the interest of de-stabilizing the hegemony of the Prague leadership.

As part of the attempt to bring the writers, journalists and intellectuals under closer control, a censorship law was enacted in 1967 that merely legalized what the party had been doing since 1948 in the cultural sphere. Any published material was subject to editorial review by the party's "Central Publications Board." The law

forced many writers and journalists to compromise their style and artistic integrity in order to ensure that their manuscripts could be published.

On June 26 1967, the eve of the Fourth Writers' Congress, a meeting of the communist members of the Union was held according to standard procedure. At these meetings the Party leadership usually dictated the tone and direction that the Congress should take. The meeting was chaired by F. Havlíček, who a few days earlier had published an article warning about the recent criticisms of party policy and ideological deviations that appeared in the Union's journals.

The meeting was opened up by a speech by the number two man in the party, Jirí Hendrych. He, like Havlíček in his articles, scolded the Union for the recent "open attacks on the Party" that had appeared in the Union's journals.[60] Specifically he mentioned the recent symposium held by four writers of *Literární noviny* questioning the government's support of the Arab side in the recent Arab-Israeli War. Hendrych's speech was a *de facto* ultimatum for the writers to shape up or face disciplinary measures from the Party. He implied a conspiracy by the group of writers and editors of *Literární noviny,* and commented that the party censors should be thanked for protecting the nation against the attacks on party policy that the journal had attempted to publish.

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[60]A. French, *Czech Writers and Politics*, (New York, 1982), 251.

Immediately following Hendrych was a Union member named Sotola, whose speech was in direct contrast to Hendrych's. Sotola described some of the situations in which the party's censorship had been particularly damaging in the field of journalism. He expressed the anger and frustration experienced by many other members of the Union. He exposed numerous examples where the writers in question could not be considered anti-socialist by any stretch of the imagination, but were still suppressed, even though the party supposedly regarded criticism as "the motive force of society."[61]

Arnold Lustig, one of the contributors to the symposium on the Arab-Israeli conflict, then rose to speak. He explained that he had been concerned by the tone that the party daily, *Rudé Právo,* had taken in its discussion of the war. The official line in Czechoslovakia was so fanatically anti-Israeli that many were embarrassed by obvious comparisons to the Nazi anti-semitic propaganda of the occupation years. Lustig went on to say that he had purposefully tried to publish the controversial article so that it would be confiscated by the authorities and read by the most important members of the party elite, as he had no other channel to express his concern. Hendrych's speech was evidence that the strategy had worked. Lustig's speech illustrated the gap that had opened up between the party leadership and the writers.

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[61]Hamsík, *Writers Against Rulers,* 39.

The meeting ended in a discussion of the list of candidates for the elections of the Union's new central committee. A Union member who was known to have close contacts with the party leadership requested that the names of three writers, Milan Jungmann, Ivan Klíma and Ludvík Vaculík, all known to be associated with *Literární noviny*, be struck from the list of candidates. Discussion and debate carried on late into the night until a secret ballot resulted in the dropping of only one candidate, Ivan Skála. Skála was the was a member of the Party Central Committee, the National Assembly, an editor of *Rudé Právo,* and a supporter of the party leadership. The writers had refused to comply with Hendrych's and the Party's wishes.

Thus, hope that a compromise between the regime and the Union would be reached at the Congress had been dashed even before it opened. It was clear that the writers would no longer sacrifice the integrity of their work by giving concessions to the party leadership, but would now enter into complete opposition and open conflict with the regime.

The Congress opened the next day, June 27, with a welcome speech by Union veteran, who was then followed by Milan Kundera. Kundera presented the *Draft Statement of the Writers' Union,* which, according to tradition, was to be passed by the Union with no discussion or revision of its contents. The document was not controversial, as it only generally described the role of writers in the modern socialist world. Kundera, however, took issue with the

document's failure to deal with literature of the recent past. Kundera defended this omission in an ironic tone so as to subvert the validity of the document as an expression of the Union's program. Kundera had attempted to open up discussion of the document, something rare at official meetings.

Kundera was followed by Hendrych, who again harangued the Congress about the dangers of opening up the cultural sphere to enemy influences. He called for an end to ideological pluralism, and dismissed the possibility of any compromise with the writers. In ordinary circumstances, Hendrych's speech would have extinguished any dissent that was to arise during the proceedings of the Congress. Instead, his speech produced indignation on the part of many writers.

Pavel Kohout spoke next. He was a popular playwright who in his early years was extremely orthodox in following the regime, but like many other intellectuals soon became disillusioned by it. He went on to describe the situation of a small country surrounded by large hostile nations. He implied a parallel between Czechoslovakia in 1939 and Israel in 1968. He commented on how unfortunate it would have been if Czechoslovakia had attacked Germany as a defensive measure and then called an aggressor by the international community. He asked why the censors had confiscated all material that did not support the party's assertion that Israel was the aggressor. This confiscation was especially

absurd since it was done under the pretext that the writers should not concern themselves with politics, which was in contradiction with the party's contention that writers should be overtly political for the sake of the advancement of society towards communism. Kohout went on to criticize censorship as the cause of the nation's general political apathy.

Another writer who had contributed to the symposium on the Arab-Israeli War, Alexander Kliment, came to the podium next. He asked for a motion to ensure freedom of speech and press, and to declare censorship unconstitutional, because it was an embarrassment to the writers that they had to rely on foreign sources for information about world events. He recalled the lack coverage of a letter from Alexander Solzhenitsyn to the Soviet Writers' Union, which had expressed much of the same concerns about censorship and cultural policy that been raised by Czechoslovak writers. At that point Pavel Kohout rose with a copy of the letter, made his way to the podium after a vote on a motion to read it. While Kohout read the letter, which had not even been read before the Soviet Congress, Hendrych and his assistants walked out. On the way out he passed Kundera, Lustig, and Jan Procházka, another novelist, and said, "You've lost the lot now. The lot!"[62]

After the lunch break a speech by a Slovak poet Laco Novomeský was read before the Congress. It also dealt with

[62]French, *Czech Writers and Politics,* 254.

the issues of state cultural hegemony and censorship. As the afternoon progressed, some speakers tried to reconcile the break between the leadership and the Union, and petitions of those trying to disassociate themselves with the dissenting members of the Union were circulated. None of these, however, gained substantial support.

Under the threat of intervention by the authorities, the Congress continued the next day out of the control of the party leadership. Film critic A. J. Liehm denounced the inconsistency of the party leadership in instituting cultural policy and questioned the very right of the party to create such policy.

> The constant debacles which socialist cultural policy has suffered in the past and continues to undergo to this day, have finally convinced many people that socialism is incapable of solving cultural problems, and this in turn has resulted in an idealization of the cultural life in the West . . . This naturally . . . discredits socialism by revealing it as incapable of solving a problem as old as humanity itself . . .[63]

Liehm's speech amounted to an open attack on the leading role of the Party in the affairs of culture, and was particularly distasteful to the leadership.

Playwright, Ivan Klíma, later that day, sarcastically remarked in his speech that the authorities possessed an

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[63]French *Czech Writers and Politics,* 256.

"absurd sense of humor," in that they had erected the censorship laws in 1967, the hundredth anniversary of the restoration of freedom of the press under the Hapsburg Monarchy.[64] Václav Havel criticized the Union for it being a mere "transmission belt" for the program of the party leadership. Karel Kosík read from a letter that the Czech hero Jan Hus had written from prison after he was sentenced to death by the Council of Constance in 1415.

> A certain theologian said to me that for me everything is good and permitted, if only I submit to the Council, and he added, 'If the Council declared that you have only one eye, although in fact you have two, it would be your duty to agree with the council that it was so.' I answered him, 'And if the whole world told me the same, I, possessing reason, would not be able to acknowledge it without my conscience being repelled.'[65]

Kosík then went on to say that one who defies his own reason in submission to authority also betrays his conscience. The parallel with the present situation was obvious.

The second day of the Congress ended with a speech that the authorities considered the most damaging. The novelist Ludvík Vaculík's address was perceived as a direct and open attack on the Novotný regime. He remarked that a nation

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[64]French, *Czech Writers and Politics,* 256.
[65]Karel Kosík, "Reason and Conscience," in *Czechoslovakia,* 26.

whose government relies on bullying and brutality to enforce its ends forces its citizens into "political apathy or civic resignation," to the point that they become "serfs of a new kind."[66] He also commented on the problem of political power tending to reproduce itself at all costs no matter who held it. Power always employs those who lust for it in order to reproduce it. This is what happened in Czechoslovak society, where the creative, the witty, the decent, the industrious and the conscientious had all been crushed by the advocates of power.

> Every cultural achievement, in fact everything worth-while that our people have done, including every good piece of manufacture, every good building and every good application of thought in our laboratories, studies or institutes -- all this has been in spite of the behavior of our governing circles for years past, rather than because of it.[67]

Vaculík had not abandoned socialism, as he would be accused of doing later, but instead openly criticized the regime that had caused political, economic, social and cultural stagnation in Czechoslovakia since World War II.

Before the Congress opened on the third and final day, another meeting for the communist members of the Union was

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[66]Ludvík Vaculík, Speech to the Fourth Writers' Congress, printed in Hamsík's *Writers against Rulers,* 182-183.

[67]*Ibid.*, 192.

held. Hendrych did not waste any time. He accused Vaculík of being an anarchist, and the other writers who expressed dissatisfaction with party policy were charged with anti-state activities. He expressed a need for the Party to alter the list of candidates for the Union Central Committee that had been decided on at the last meeting. He threatened that all party members would have to vote for the new list or the Union would be dissolved.

Before the head of the Ideological Department could read the list of new candidates, Vaculík took the floor and explained that during previous day at the Congress he "challenged [himself] to say the plain truth about everything. . . ."[68] Vaculík asked Hendrych to substantiate his accusations. Hendrych answered that Vaculík had no right to criticize the nation, and that his speech was full of "arrogance", was "ridiculous," and "all anarchism."[69] This resulted in a brief shouting match during which Vaculík had to be calmed be some of his colleagues.

The new list of candidates was then read. Eleven out of thirty of the writers that were previously agreed upon were deleted from the list. Other writers that were still on the list began to ask to also have their names removed, including Eduard Goldstücker and Milan Kundera. Since Hendrych did not want to be associated with forcing the dissolution of the Writers' Union, he was forced to

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[68]Hamsík, *Writers Against Rulers*, 67.
[69]*Ibid.*, 68

capitulate, and offered a revised list on which only Vaculík, Havel, Klíma, and Kohout were omitted. This was deemed less objectionable by the delegates at the meeting, and was accepted accordingly. The last session of the Congress concluded rather uneventfully as the list of candidates and the *Draft Statement* were both formally approved by the whole body.

The close of the Congress by no means closed the gap that had opened up between the party leadership and the Writers' Union. The Party subsequently tried to prevent widespread publicity of the proceedings of the Congress. The efforts failed, however, when other events brought the situation in Czechoslovakia into the international spotlight.

The Aftermath of the Congress and Novotný's Defeat

After the congress the problem of reporting on its proceedings took on great importance. In the past the transcripts of congresses had been reproduced in its entirety, even if things had not gone as the authorities had planned. During the congress Juraj Spitzer, editor of the journal of the Slovak Writers' Union, *Kultural zivot,* had received an assurance that all of the speeches could be published with corresponding rebuttals. Shortly after the Congress, at meeting in the Ideology Department, the editors of *Literární noviny* were informed that the speeches by Klíma, Vaculík, Liehm, and Kohout could not be printed because the party had decided to open disciplinary hearings against them. The speeches by Havel and Kliment were also to be withheld due to their "anti-state" tones, and the Publishing Board objected to parts of many of the other speeches.

The editors of *Literární noviny* decided not to publish the speeches at all, as the cuts that were proposed in the account of the congress would have to be approved by the Union as a whole. This was impossible since the Union at this time virtually had no leadership because the list of candidates for the Union's Central Committee was pending approval by the party, and an interim Committee had been declared illegal by the Party's Central Committee.

The only active decision-making body in the Union was the editorial board of *Literární noviny*. This board came to a decision to publish what the censors would allow of the transcript of the Congress, rather than let the whole affair be covered by less sympathetic journals. Some members of the board, including Kundera and Hamsík, met with the Central Publishing Board. After hours of negotiation and much compromise on the part of both the writers and the officials, a final draft of the transcript was agreed upon. Shortly after the meeting, however, Hamsík received a phone call from a representative of the Party Central Committee stating that the compromise was unacceptable, and the original requests of the censors should be upheld. Thus, the next issue of *Literární noviny* was strangely silent concerning the Fourth Writers Congress. The only aspects of the congress that were printed were two non-controversial speeches, Hendrych's address and the *Draft Statement*. This no doubt caused suspicion among the journal's readers, many of whom became aware of the events of the Congress through word of mouth or through hints in the official condemnation of it expressed in the Party's press. Later, the editorial board would come under fire for an alleged anti-state conspiracy for remaining silent regarding the Congress.

It is difficult to imaging that the ravings of a few utopian intellectuals could bring down a totalitarian state. It is equally doubtful that the events of the

Writers' Congress, and the actions of some of the Union's members, would have had any significant effect on the political power base of the Novotný regime except that the regime was already in a crisis situation. As was mentioned before, news of the events of the Congress spread rapidly by word of mouth. Eventually, in the autumn of the same year, the full texts of the speeches at the Congress were printed in the emigré journal *Svedectví,* and many of the speeches were also reprinted in the Western press. These revelations of the cultural and political situation in Czechoslovakia were the root of much embarrassment for the party. The official image of civic harmony under socialism was quickly losing its legitimacy. The Soviet Union also kept a watchful eye on the growing dissent in Czechoslovakia, as Brezhnev and the Soviet Communist Party began to question the ability of Novotný to maintain order within his party and state.

Another blow to the regime was the fact that a few days after the Writers' Congress a political trial was commencing. The defendants were Jan Beneš, a writer, Karel Záměček, a screen writer, and the editor of *Svedectví,* Pavel Tigrid, *in absentia.* The case was widely publicized. It was covered in The London *Times,* the *New York Times, Le Monde,* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeiner Zeitung.* A representative of Amnesty International also arrived to scrutinize the proceedings. The temporal proximity of this trial and the Writers Congress gave the appearance that

Novotný's regime was encountering widespread opposition and resorting to the old Stalinist police-state tactics to maintain order.

In August, an internationally known Slovak writer, Ladislav Mňačko, defected to Israel. The incident was a shock in Czechoslovakia because Mnacko had close associations in the leadership of the Slovak Communist Party. The statement that he wrote regarding the defection warned of the revival of Stalinism in Czechoslovakia.[70] Foreign press and television also capitalized on this incident.

Yet another embarrassing incident for the Party leadership was a letter that appeared in the Western press in early September. The letter, which was later determined to be a fraud, was entitled "Manifesto of the Czechoslovak Writers to the World Public." It was allegedly signed by 183 writers, 69 artists, 21 television and film people, and 56 scientists and other intellectuals. The document criticized the repressive policies of the Prague regime, and emphasized the socialist solidarity of the dissident intellectuals.[71] The leadership in Prague denied the validity of the letter, but *Literární noviny* refused to address the issue because it was still unable to reproduce the opinions of its own writers from the Congress. This was the cause of much anger from the party leadership.

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[70]French, *Czech Writers and Politics,* 264.
[71]French, *Czech Wrters and Politics,* 267.

In late September the Party Central Committee met to discuss how the dissident writers, the Union, and *Literární noviny* should be dealt with. It was determined that the Union and its journal were coming under the control of a subversive anti-communist minority. The outcome of the meeting was that Vaculík, Liehm, and Klíma were expelled from the Party, and *Literární noviny* was taken out of the hands of the Union and transferred to the control of the Ministry of Culture. The justification for the Party's appropriation of the journal was that its editors had neglected to apply for a new license under a recently passed law.

On October 6, the Ideological Department held a meeting of the Communist members of the Union to discuss its new relationship with them. Hendrych's address to the meeting was more mild this time. He expressed the Party's willingness to reconcile the differences between it and the Union, if the Union silenced its dissent. The speech, however, was not well received. Kohout and Goldstücker rose to refute Hendrych's claims and to criticize the Party's policies. They were joined by some of the Slovak writers who had previously been more cautious in their criticism. Extraordinarily, a representative from the journal of the Union of Slovak Writers, *Kultural zivot,* most likely with the complicity of his superiors, offered the Czech writers space in his journal. Thus, the leadership's strategy to silence the Czech writers was an

utter failure. The move by the Slovak writers represented the beginning of a closing of the ranks of the different anti-Novotný factions in the party.

The Slovak writers had taken a decisive step in coming to the aid of the Czech writers, and the Slovak Communist Party now came to aid of its own writers. The Slovak Party possessed an intense interest with reducing the influence of the power center in Prague. The Slovaks had long perceived that their interests had been subordinated to those of the Czechs. Novotný and other Czech leaders had openly expressed their dislike for the Slovaks also. Furthermore, the Slovak party contained many economic and technical experts, such as the reformer Ota Sík, who advocated a decentralization of industrial controls. The Slovak Party met with the Slovak writers for a preparatory session two weeks before the Czechoslovak Communist Party Central Committee meeting to be held on the eve of the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution on October 30.

The tone of the meeting was vastly different from the meeting between the Czech writers and their party. The Slovak Party promised its writers that it would not intervene in their affairs as had been done in Prague. The writers, on the other hand, expressed their disapproval of the repression that the Czechs were performing on their colleagues in Prague. This meeting illustrated a willingness of the Slovak Writers and the Slovak Party to support the dissident Czech writers. Two weeks later the

Slovak Party delegation, under the leadership of Alexander Dubcek, would travel to the Central Committee meeting and succeeded in toppling the Novotný regime.

As forces within Czechoslovakia were mobilizing for reform, Novotný looked to Moscow for an endorsement of his rule. To his dismay, this endorsement was not forthcoming. Novotný lead a delegation to Moscow for the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution with the hope of speaking personally with Brezhnev. The opportunity never arose, but Brezhnev did agree to visit Czechoslovakia in early December. During his visit he spoke with various Party leaders including Dubček. Before the Party Presidium, rather than saving Novotný with an endorsement, he indicated that he did not want to get involved with what he considered a Czechoslovak internal affair. At this time the CPSU had its own difficult problems to contend with, but their is little doubt that Brezhnev and the CPSU perceived that Novotný was no longer able to maintain order and discipline in his Party. Brezhnev's indifference to the situation no doubt gave the green light for those interested in overthrowing the Prague leadership.

From Spring to Summer 1968

On January 5, 1968 Novotný was deprived of his position as the Party First Secretary by the Central Committee, but retained the office of president for the next few months. This move effectively removed all power from his hands. In his place, the Slovak apparatchik, Alexander Dubček was unanimously elected by the Central Committee. Dubček was selected because of his sober and uninspiring record. No one expected the political situation to change much, as many viewed the change in leadership as only an attempt to merely replace the discredited Novotný, and continue the same policies. As a precedent for this Czechoslovaks could look back to Poland in 1956 when Vladislav Gomulka was brought to power on a wave of popular unrest. Gomulka eventually went back on his promises of reform, and "normalized" the country again.

With Novotný out, the reformers within the Party could now voice their concerns. Joining the reformers were many conservatives in the upper ranks of the party who expressed half-hearted support for reform, and complained they had been inhibited by the previous leadership in their desire for change.[72] In this way they would be able to save their political careers from the ensuing purges that had always characterized changes in leadership in the communist world.

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[72]French, *Czech Writers and Politics*, 285-286.

The new party leadership soon made moves to reconcile itself with the Writers' Union. In early January, the president of the National Assembly wrote to the Union apologizing for the remarks that the leadership had made regarding the writers and their Union. Later that month, the Union central committee met to elect Eduard Goldstücker as chairman of the Union, and Jan Procházka as vice-chairman, who had been previously blocked from that position by the party. The central committee also asked the Party to reconsider the expulsions of Vaculík, Kundera, Klíma, and also wrote to Novotný requesting the release of the writer, Jan Beneš, from prison.

After lengthy deliberations with the authorities the Union was able to publish its own journal again under the name of *Literární listy*. Within six weeks the journal had achieved a circulation of 250,000. During the summer the readership would exceed 300,000.[73] The first issue appeared on March 1, and carried a two part series of replies to a questionnaire asking, "Where from? With whom? and Where to?" Alexander Kliment listed his views:

> Free elections. A well functioning parliament with an opposition. The rehabilitation of public opinion. Active neutrality. The federalization of an independent state. Socialism of our own

[73]Perina, *Intellectuals and Political Change*, 258.

type suited to our needs, in keeping with our possibilities, and according to our choice.[74]

Ivan Sviták replied to the questionnaire, "From totalitarian dictatorship to an open society, to the liquidation of the monopoly of power, to an effective control of the power elite by a free press, as well as by the public opinion."[75]

This free press was instituted as the censorship authorities ceased to function under Dubček's leadership. Their offices remained staffed in case the leadership wished to introduce censorship again. The free press was the only concrete reform that was instituted during the Prague Spring. The void that had existed because of the ban on free speech since 1948 was quickly filled with a wealth of public discussion. In fact, the press started to reflect opinions that went far beyond the desires of even the most reform minded party leaders. The discussion that was taken up in the press eventually had to be curtailed by Dubček. The free press was one of the principal reasons for Soviet dissatisfaction with the Czechoslovak reform movement.

One of the major themes that was taken up in the press, which party conservatives and the Soviets were fearful of, was the discussion concerning the revival of active political parties and a parliamentary system. Ivan Sviták

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[74]Kliment, Alexander, in "From Where? With Whom, and Where To?," reprinted in Radio Free Europe's *Czechoslovak Press Survey*, March 11, 1968, 2.

[75]Ivan Sviták, in "From Where? With Whom, and Where To?," reprinted in Radio Free Europe's *Czechoslovak Press Survey*, March 11, 1968, 8.

was a major proponent of this move. In his article in *Literární listy*, "An Open Letter to the Workers and Technicians of the Doubrava Mine," he expressed that the new system of government must allow for political and civil rights "at least as extensive as those of the bourgeois-democratic Czechoslovakia."[76] Václav Havel also dealt with the theme of opposition parties in his article "On the Subject of Opposition." The idea began to take form when, political clubs began to organize around the country which many thought would develop into political parties. KAN, a club of non-party members, and K231, an organization of former political prisoners, were two such clubs. The old Social Democratic party of the inter-war republic also began to reorganize.

On March 22, the National Assembly asked Dubček to reconsider the presidency of Novotný. Two days later the old leader resigned just after signing the papers for the release of Jan Beneš. Along with Novotný, many other conservative party members resigned or were removed from their positions, such as the Head of the Ideological Department, Jiri Hendrych.

The reformers now held a more firm grip on the party and the state. But many Party reformers had a different idea about the extent and the course of reform than the most vocal writers and journalists. When Dubček and the party

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[76]Sviták, "Open Letter to the Workers and Technicians of Doubrouva Mine in Ostrava," in Andrew Oxley, Alex Pravda, and Andrew Ritchie's *Czechoslovakia*, (London, 1973), 178-179.

revealed the anxiously awaited Action Program, it already lagged behind the increasingly radical demands that were voiced in the press. The document called for moderate reforms, and was vague concerning specific implementation and extent. The party was to be the unmistakable leader in the political arena. "The role of the Party is to seek such a way of satisfying the various interests [of society] which would not jeopardize the perspectives of society as a whole. . . ."[77] The party must guarantee that non-communists are not deprived of their "rights, freedom, and interests." The party will have "informal, natural authority based upon its working and managing ability and the moral qualities of communist functionaries."[78] The document called for the collaboration of the party with technical and scientific experts, and less restricted educational and cultural fields. The Program offered a broad range of interpretations because of its ambiguity.

Many writers and others that pushed for more radical reform did all they could escalate and the reform movement, distancing themselves from the moderate Party leadership. They attempted to seek out allies in other sectors of society to form a larger coalition that could pressure the Party leadership. Mentioned earlier was Sviták's "Open Letter to the Workers and Technicians at the Doubrava Mine," and his meeting with the delegates of the mine. A group of

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[77] *The Action Program,* in Paul Ello's *Dubcek's Blueprint for Freedom,* (London, 1968), 145.

[78] *Ibid.*

party members, including the party reformer Smrkovský, and the writers Procházka and Kohout, addressed a mass of students in an attempt to win them over. Sviták also gave a lecture a Charles University on March 20 demanding democracy and expressing solidarity with the students.

Some of the writers went as far as directly challenging the Soviet hegemony over Czechoslovak affairs. On April 2, a particularly damaging letter from Ivan Sviták, addressed to the public prosecutor, was published in the journal *Student*. The letter asked for the opening of an investigation into the death of the inter-war national leader, Jan Masaryk, in 1948. The letter referred to an article in the West German periodical, *Spiegel* which uncovered evidence that Masaryk was murdered by an agent of the Russian secret police. The letter was viewed as a provocation by the Soviet leadership.

Another action by the intellectuals was the publication of Vaculík's *Two-Thousand Words* manifesto on June 26. As mentioned before, the document asked for the continuance of the nation's struggle against the tyranny of the old one-party authoritarian rule through strikes and boycotts. Despite the manifesto's assurance of cooperation with the Soviet Union, the Soviet leadership considered it an "incitement to counter-revolution."[79] The manifesto was considered so serious that Brezhnev called Dubček personally and asked why the document was allowed to be published.

[79]French, *Czech Writers and Politics*, 324.

Dubček replied that he had not seen the document yet, but assured Brezhnev that the party was still in control of the country. Later that evening, the party Presidium issued a statement against the manifesto, and rumors were spread that the minister of the Interior would be purged.

The party failed in its efforts to assure the Soviets and the other Warsaw Pact allies that it still maintained control of the country. The *Two-Thousand Words,* and the disquiet of the intellectuals in general, were severely criticized in the presses of the other Eastern Bloc nations and the Soviet Union. The Warsaw Pact allies invited Dubcek and the party leadership in early July to a conference to be held in Warsaw. Dubcek refused the invitation, but the meeting was still held in his absence. A letter was drafted that condemned the *Two-Thousand Words* and called on the Czechoslovak Party to crush all opposition and assume control of the press again. The Czechoslovak Party replied to the letter, rebutting each charge, and reaffirming its commitment to the Warsaw Pact. The attacks on Czechoslovakia in the Eastern Bloc press continued, however, and the Czechoslovak party did not take steps to control its own press. Instead, the Czechoslovak press generally began to use sel-restraint its criticisms in order not to provoke the Soviets.

On July 28, bilateral talks were held between Dubcek and Brezhnev at the small Czechoslovak-Russian border town of Čierná in order to come to some kind of an agreement.

Two days later the Warsaw Pact allies met at the Slovak town of Bratislava as a follow-up of the Čierná meeting. The day before the Čierná talks, *Literární listy* published a letter from Pavel Kohout asking the leadership to stand firm and defend the reform course that the country was taking. Over a million signatures in support of the letter were collected from the general population.[80] The gesture displayed the faith and hope that the people invested in Dubček and the party leadership.

The official outcome of these meetings were communiques full of vague proclamations, which resulted in increasing suspicion by many observers that the true essence of the agreements were purposely hidden from the public. The truth of the matter was that Dubček had agreed to the banning of all non-party organization, including the Social Democratic Party, and a reassertion of state control over the media.[81] The antagonism of the presses of the Warsaw Pact countries quieted down for a few weeks. This pace of reassertion of party control in Czechoslovakia was not rapid enough for Brezhnev, who contacted Dubček almost daily with complaints about his progress in fulfilling the Cierná and Bratislava agreements. On the night of August 20, 1968 the Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia with little resistance except the rearranging of street signs and the refusal of collaboration by the citizenry.

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[80]French, *Czech Writers and Politics*, 330.
[81]*Ibid.*, 332.

Aftermath and "Normalization"

Czechoslovakia entered a period of "normalization" after the Soviet invasion. This meant the implementation of neo-Stalinist control once again. Dubček was allowed maintain control of the party for a short time in order to appease the country. He was eventually replaced by Gustav Husák, who had been a reformer during 1968, but changed his tone as the movement radicalized. Other reformers were slowly replaced by those who would align themselves with Husák and the Soviet Union.

The Writers' Union was eventually split into a Slovak section and a Czech section, according to the national federalization plan of the Action Program. This prevented the writers from forming a united opposition to the leadership as they had done before. The two new unions were also deprived of their financial independence, which had been so crucial before. The Union's journal, which had been renamed *Listy* after the invasion, was banned. The reform writers encountered three options. Some signed loyally oaths to the new regime, and repudiated what they had written or said during 1968. Others like Milan Kundera, and Ivan Sviták eventually immigrated to the West to continue their careers. Writers such as Ludvik Vaculík, and Václav Havel elected to stay. These writers were often stripped of their publishing rights and forced to take up menial work to survive. They often published their work in the West and

circulated copies of their works among small circles of dissident writers. As a result, they were kept under strict police surveillance and sometimes spent time in prison.

"Normalization" was an attempt to crush the spirit of Czechoslovakia through bureaucratic methods. This attempt was largely successful. Except for a few outbursts by intellectuals during the seventies, the country remained docile until the "Velvet Revolution" of 1989.

Conclusion

The Czechoslovak Writers' Union played important role in the Prague Spring of 1968 in two mayor ways. First, many members of the Union began to criticize the party and the state. During the late fifties and the sixties many writers became disillusioned with the system that they had helped bring about. Their dismay was characteristic of the malaise that had begun to afflict the whole society under the oppressive Stalinist control of the Communist Party since 1948. In the system that was first under the control of Gottwald, and then Novotný, all policy was handed down from above. As a result, the masses became alienated from the decision-making process.

The Union occupied a unique situation in the state's power pyramid. It was given limited autonomy by the regime in order to serve as a propaganda tool. The Union was given its own Literary Fund, and collected the profits from the sale of its writers' works. By the mid sixties, however, the Union had become a major center of reform semtiment and political dissent. The autonomy that the Union was given by the Party was used to distance itself from the hegemony of the Party's leadership, and establish a forum for criticism of the state and party.

One might doubt whether the Union and its writers contributed to the political change that occurred in Czechoslovakia in 1967 and 1968. The intellectuals and

writers undoubtedly could not have had mass appeal because of their elitist nature. The nature of the system, however, was such that very few individuals, all members of the upper echelons of the party, had any influence on government policy. The Union and its journals, *Literární noviny, Literární listy, and Listy,* were influential among sectors of society that had a marginal influence on the government like the industrial experts, the economic intelligentsia, and the reformist party members. Contributors to the Union's journals discussed subjects that had been hitherto taboo, such as the democratization of political life and permanently free press and cultural sphere. These were common concerns of all reformist party members, and the economic and technical experts. Some writers, however, went much further than most party members in their calls for reform, with a desire to resurrect opposition parties and to improve relations with the West.

Generally, even the most radical intellectuals wanted the country's socialist ownership of production to remain intact. The intellectuals wanted to do away with the bureaucratic rule that was instituted in Czechoslovakia over the years. They wished to throw off the alienation that the system produced in order to effect a greater popular participation in political affairs. Many writers brought attention to the absurd situation that a system which was supposed to bring about liberation and equality for all people had become a the source of systematic subjugation.

They pointed to the need for a free forum of ideas so that the problems that had built up over the years could be dealt with. In short, they wanted a nationally appropriate form of socialism with the interest of the human being as its foremost principle.

Those in the Party that wished to effect political change, such as the Slovak Party members, the writers, journalists, and economic reformers, shared a common interest in overthrowing Novotný. These groups heeded the warnings and the calls for change that the writers sounded. If the writers only influenced a few elites, it must be remembered that the country was controlled by an elite faction of Party members. Whether the masses were influenced by the writers is not the most important consideration. The shift of power in the top ranks of the party went unrecognized initially by most of society.

Secondly, the Writers' Union was influential in exacerbating a national crisis, and giving the appearance that Novotný was no longer in control of Czechoslovakia. The Fourth Writers' Congress and the dissenting articles that appeared in *Literární noviny* were manifestations of the writers' determination to disregard the wishes of the Party leadership. As a result of the general divisiveness in the Party and the nation in late 1967, The Soviets and the Czechoslovak Communist Party were forced to abandon Novotný and search for a new leader in Alexander Dubček. Thereafter, the writers pushed Dubček and the Party toward

increasingly radical reforms. Eventually even Dubček, with his moderate reform program, had to reject the radicalism of the intellectuals in order to appease the Soviets. The soviets, however, were forced to invade the nation and force the replacement of Dubček because his inability to quell the growing anti-Russian sentiment and calls for democracy of which the intellectuals were and integral part.

The intellectuals in the Czechoslovak Soviet Republic were supposed to help prepare they way for the coming communist utopia. The Union of Czechoslovak writers was given extensive power and responsibility to work toward this goal. In a sense they performed their task well. It is inconceivable to discuss the Prague Spring without mention of the writers and intellectuals. The Prague Spring was the awakening of real cultural, philosophical and political dialogue that the intellectuals generated. They took the lead in a movement to revolutionize the stale Stalinist system, and create a free socialist society on the basis of a humanistic interpretation of Marxism. This ambition was not compatible with the interests of conservative party leaders and the Soviet Union. Even after the assurances of Dubcek and the pledge of faithfulness to the Soviet Union at the Čierna and Bratislava meetings in August, the Warsaw Pact forces still invaded. In retrospect, it is easy to say that the reform ideas of the intellectuals were doomed to failure, but their persistence in the face of neo-Stalinist repression proves their dedication to their cause.

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