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# In the shadow of liberalization

Repressions in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s

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JAROSLAV CUHRA

## IN THE SHADOW OF LIBERALIZATION

### Repressions in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s

*Jenom si nedejte namluvit,  
že mor ve městě ustal.  
Viděl jsem sám ještě mnoho rakví  
vjíždět do brány,  
která tam nebyla jediná.<sup>1</sup>*

...  
Jaroslav Seifert, *Morový sloup*

The fundamental shape of history in postwar Czechoslovakia was determined by that of the so-called Eastern bloc as a whole. Even so, within the outer Soviet empire we find, alongside all the common elements and tendencies, a number of independent story lines originating either in the actions of the local communist regimes, or from movement within society itself, or specific national or civic traditions. In short, the Soviet domination of its Eastern European satellites had its limits. While there is some justification for contemptuously dismissing the local communist rulers as mere “puppets,” nevertheless there was a certain amount of room for autonomous policies, in both the positive and negative sense of the word: for example, Kádár’s policy of “goulash Socialism” or, at the opposite end of the spectrum, the “phony” liberalization in Czechoslovakia. The Khrushchev decade is one of the least researched stages of modern Czechoslovak history; in examining it, we run up against the limitations of the prevailing historical interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

This interpretation has been influenced by the idea that the 1960s culminated in the events of the Prague Spring, an unsuccessful attempt to create a new model of

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1. Just don’t let them tell you / that the plague in the village is over. / I saw a lot of coffins coming in / riding through the gate / and that’s not the only gate./... Jaroslav Seifert: *Plague Column*.

2. For more on the Czechoslovak historiography dealing with the postwar period, see Jaroslav Cuhra, Michal Kopeček: « L’Historiographie tchèque du communisme depuis 1989 », *La Nouvelle Alternative*, 19, 60-61 (2004): 199-211.

socialism, “Socialism with a human face.” Such an interpretation accents currents and tendencies that in hindsight came to play a role in 1968, resulting in the picture of a duel between the reform Communists (plus a part of the younger generation and artistic community) on one side, the conservative wing of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) and their allies on the other. Other strata of society are neglected; the non-Party public comes in for criticism for their alleged passivity in the “struggle” of “progressive circles” to remove the “remnants of Stalinism.” This interpretation pattern came into being immediately after the suppression of the Prague Spring among historians and writers expelled from the Communist Party after 1968, and played a particularly important role in the Czechoslovak exile press and foreign publications.<sup>3</sup> After 1989 it was accepted by the domestic historian community and became part of the “textbook version” of history.<sup>4</sup> Although recent research has tended to mitigate such pointed interpretations,<sup>5</sup> we have yet to see a focused examination of the “narratives” within social segments outside the previously emphasized groups.<sup>6</sup>

The following study attempts to illustrate such a need by focusing on instances of repression and political violence in Czechoslovakia from the death of Stalin to the mid-1960s. Such a narrowly defined topic is of course as narrow as the above interpretation stressing almost exclusively the role of the reform circles. The reader should be aware that this is really just another aspect, intended to highlight previously neglected trends and events. The author is, of course, aware that people also “lived and got married” then, and that their life at the time revolved around other things than just political repression and show trials.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, it should also be perceived that direct judicial persecution was only the last mode of repression employed by the communist regime. Social persecution of all kinds and preventive police action (i.e. warning and threats) formed an inherent part of the period’s atmosphere. However, these are beyond the scope of this study.

Czechoslovakia’s entry into the post-Stalin era was marked by the following events: Stalin’s death was followed a few days later by that of KSČ Chairman and

3. See, for example, works by Zdeněk Mlynář, Jiří Pelikán, and Zdeněk Hejzlar.

4. See the newest interpretation set forth by Jan Křen, leading Czech historian and member of the liberal wing of the Party at that time, who asserts that “A significant portion of society, if not the majority, remained on the sidelines during this process, and observed this process and liberalization as such with sympathetic detachment at best.” Jan Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy* [Two centuries of Central Europe] (Praha: Argo, 2005), 753.

5. Karel Kaplan’s unfinished work *Kořeny československé reformy* [The Roots of the Czechoslovak Reform] (Brno: Doplněk) is fundamental in this respect. Its first two volumes were published in 2000 and 2002, the third volume is expected this year. The work is based on deep knowledge of the archives, and describes various aspects of the social development, from foreign policy and economy to expressions of civic dissatisfaction. For a reinterpretation of the 1960s see also František Koudelka, *Státní bezpečnost 1954-1968* [State Security 1954-1968], (Praha: ÚSD AV ČR, 1993).

6. Some attempts have been made, e.g. Vojtěch Vlček, *Perzekuce mužských řádů a kongregací komunistickým režimem 1948-1964* [The Communist Persecution of Male Orders and Congregations, 1948-1964] (Olomouc: Matice cyrilometodějská, 2003); Jaroslav Cuhra, *Příběh procesu s “ilegální křesťanskodemokratickou stranou” v roce 1961* [The Story of the “Illegal Christian Democratic Party” Trial in 1961] (Praha: ÚSD AV ČR, 1997).

7. This study made use of the newly accessible State Security files in the Archives of the Ministry of Interior in Prague.

President of the Czechoslovak Republic Klement Gottwald, then the undisputed top authority among local Communist functionaries. The search for a successor was a tense one, in an atmosphere of growing economic crisis caused by the unscrupulous rush to build up the country's heavy (military) industry. A compromise was finally reached, which met Soviet demands that the new leadership be a collective one. The function of party chairman was eliminated and quietly replaced by the newly created function of First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (ÚV KSČ), to be filled by the heretofore relatively unknown Antonín Novotný. Antonín Zápotocký became President, and Viliam Široký prime minister. The object of this reorganization was to solidify the principle of control of the state apparatus by the Communist Party: the key posts would be occupied by members of the ÚV KSČ Presidium. This new-wine-in-an-old-bottle regime faced a difficult task: how to respond to the current economic difficulties and expressions of popular dissatisfaction which included public demonstrations.<sup>8</sup> The solution they found was a monetary reform, already in the works, introduced in order to devalue the population's growing monetary savings. The regime, unable to supply consumer goods on which these savings could be spent, instead launched a propaganda attack on the "class enemy," which "logically" meant the ones with excess buying power. The exchange for the new money was severely disadvantageous. Only a limited amount could be exchanged at the somewhat reasonable rate of 5:1 (i.e., one new crown for five old ones); any amount above that had to be exchanged at 50:1. This meant a "profit" of 14 billion crowns for the state treasury. The confiscation of its citizens' wealth allowed the state to retire its existing debt and created the financial conditions for spending programs that would tie selected elements of society closer to the regime. In the long term it was a strategically decisive step, with clear advantages to the regime despite a prompt outburst of popular wrath. On the date the monetary exchange took effect (1 June 1953), demonstrations and strikes broke out in more than 130 places, the strongest being in working-class Plzeň. The town was actually taken over for a short time by the demonstrators, but military units and the communist People's Militia soon restored order. Throughout the country at least 800 people were arrested, and about 300 of them were sentenced to prison, some for years. It was one of the first demonstrations against the communist regime in Eastern Europe; even so, it was a minor incident in comparison with the explosions of resistance in the GDR, or the later Polish and Hungarian revolts. Unrest remained more or less isolated; the demonstrations were quelled by the police, and at no point did the regime lose the ability to monitor and react to events.

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8. In particular the demonstrations around the anniversary of the birth of first Czechoslovak President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (7 March 1850, died 1937), whose popularity as "the President-Liberator" was still very high despite communist denunciations. Attempts to destroy his statue in Prostějov in April 1953 led to direct clashes between the population and the police. See Jiří Pernes, *Snahy o překonání politicko-hospodářské krize v Československu v roce 1953* [*Efforts to Overcome the Political-Economic Crisis in Czechoslovakia in 1953*] (Brno: Prius, 2000), 11.

Just a few weeks later top Czechoslovak officials visited Moscow. Like their East German and Hungarian counterparts, they were told of the need for a “new course” to raise living standards and to halt the radical collectivization of agriculture. It seems<sup>9</sup> that the Czechoslovak group was spared the kind of severe criticism that was directed at the Hungarians. At the risk of oversimplification, it was at this very point, still before the 20th Congress of the CPSU, that the Czechoslovak approach to the post-Stalin re-evaluation began to diverge from that of its Polish and Hungarian neighbours. The events in Hungary were decisively affected by the rise of Imre Nagy to government; while in the Polish case Gomulka became, at least unofficially, the great hope of the “reformists.” The case of Czechoslovakia followed an entirely different scenario. In the regime’s propaganda, former ÚV KSČ General Secretary Rudolf Slánský, who was executed along with ten other high Party officials in 1952, turned from a mere agent of Zionism and imperialism into the Czech Beria, but his guilt and the correctness of his execution were not to be questioned. And while the Communists imprisoned and detained in neighbouring countries were being released, in Czechoslovakia the great purges in the Party cadres continued much as before. Especially interesting in this regard was the trial of Gustáv Husák and other Slovak politicians, who were accused of “bourgeois nationalism” and convicted in April 1954; nor was this the only trial of important Party members.<sup>10</sup> It was significant that the Party leadership, aware of its compromising ties to the past, strove to present a united front. There was little advantage that any of the power factions could have in coming out with a critique of Stalinist repression and show trials; or, in other words, none of the major functionaries could play that card to advance their personal careers or viewpoints.

The difference between Czechoslovakia and its “people’s democratic” neighbours becomes especially clear when comparing the rate of political repression and the question of rehabilitation of noncommunist victims of persecution. The Polish and Hungarian societies were immediately confronted (before the CPSU’s 20th Congress) with at least fragmentary information; they had the opportunity to come into contact with victims of these trials, now released; information trickled down to the public about the real “work” of the secret police; and citizens carried off to the Soviet Union were now allowed to return.<sup>11</sup> Nothing like that was happening in Czechoslovakia. No amnesty for political prisoners, however partial, was forthcoming. In 1955, a small number of prisoners were released, but practically none of the noncommunist victims. The most these could hope for was a symbolic

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9. The minutes of this meeting are missing from the Czech archives; they can only be reconstructed from the subsequent steps taken and the working materials.

10. Husák was sentenced to life in prison, four others to terms ranging from 10 to 22 years.

11. For example: the description of the methods of the Polish secret police after the emigration of one of its high functionaries Józef Światło, whose account was broadcast by Radio Free Europe in September 1954; the broad amnesties for political prisoners in Poland and Hungary in 1954-55, and the decisive withdrawal of previously loyal intellectuals from the existing political system (in the words of Hungarian poet László Benjámín: “I am guilty, I believed in a crime”). By that time both regimes had lost their complete control over public discourse.

shortening of their sentences. On the contrary, the reluctance of the Party leadership and the State Security (StB) to upset the established order of things was reflected in the continuation of repressive policies, even if they were increasingly shy about publicizing such cases. The absurdity of this approach is shown by the attitude of the state toward its own citizens carried off and imprisoned in the Soviet Union and now being released from the Gulag: they immediately became the targets of the StB, and were prevented from fully reintegrating into community life. Recent research has shown cases of returnees who, after being “rehabilitated” by the Soviets, were arrested immediately upon arrival in their home country and convicted again for the same “antistate” activities they had already served time for.<sup>12</sup> The political show trials continued to be understood as a tool for policy promotion. As the general prosecutor said in May 1953 in his instructions for organizing public trials, “it’s still important that we, in punishing criminal acts, [...] fulfil our educational mission in relation to the working people” and assist in “the education of the population in the spirit of Socialism.”<sup>13</sup> The statistics show that it took a very long time for the repression to wind down. Of the nearly 10,000 persons sentenced in 1955 for criminal acts of a political nature, more than 1,200 were punished under laws allowing sentences longer than five years in prison. The next year, nearly 8,000 people were condemned in political trials, and in the following three years there were 21,000 victims of judicial persecution.<sup>14</sup> According to official statistics, 10,779 political prisoners were in Czechoslovak jails as of January 1, 1957<sup>15</sup>; six months earlier the KSČ leadership had been informed that the prisons contained 433 bishops, priests, and students of theology.

The severity of the KSČ’s reaction to the slightest sign of spontaneous activity is evident in the renewed hard-line approach to the collectivization of agriculture. After a mass exodus from the cooperative farms, President Zápotocký’s declaration that the government and the KSČ would no longer force farmers to join the cooperatives, nor prevent anyone from leaving, was quickly reversed. In the spring of 1954 the Minister of Justice noted with concern that the trials of “rich villagers” had stopped, and in early 1955 the KSČ authorities criticized the approach of the security and justice departments as being too lenient. A new stage of forced collectivization was introduced, though the most extreme methods were quietly abandoned. The struggle against religion was revived in a similar manner. Openly

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12. See for example Petr Čuka: « Únosy lidí z Československa sovětskou KGB » [Kidnappings of People from Czechoslovakia by the Soviet KGB], *Securitas imperii*, 7 (2001): 192-223.

13. *National Archive, Prague* (NA), fond ÚV KSČ — právní komise ÚV KSČ, a.j. 113, Instrukce k procesům s organizovanou veřejností, Praha 19.5.1953.

14. The figures are derived from the rehabilitations carried out after the fall of the communist regime. In view of the method of blanket rehabilitation on the basis of entire passages of criminal law, the numbers are more or less orientational; they include both suspended and unconditional sentences and provide no information about the length or concurrence of sentences. See František Gebauer, Karel Kaplan, František Koudelka, Rudolf Vyhňálek, *Soudní perzekuce politické povahy v Československu 1948-1989 [Politically Motivated Persecution: Statistical Data]* (Praha: ÚSD AV ČR, 1993).

15. NA, fond ÚV KSČ — politické byro ÚV KSČ, sv. 128 a.j. 164, 5.2.1957.

violent public repression was toned down, but the criticism of religion and faith was intensified. If the Stalinist period was characterized by a “struggle” against the Catholic Church under the pretext of its “antinational” and “antistate” character, now the agenda was expanded to the promotion of atheism and eradication of faith in God as such. The rhetoric of the struggle against religion was also reflected in the verdicts against members of the clergy (mostly the Catholic Church), where religious activity itself was clearly the true offence. This was not a deviation from some liberalized, post-Stalinist norm, but rather a rule: after all, nearly two thirds of the known trials of members of the religious orders took place until 1955!<sup>16</sup> The severe measures taken against an alleged attempt to revive the Social Democratic Party and the “treasonous” activities of its former officials climaxed in a series of trials in 1954-55, demonstrating that any expression of doubt about the communist monopoly on decision-making would be severely punished.

To summarize the first three post-Stalin years in Czechoslovakia, it is clear that the political atmosphere was not conducive to social currents of the kind that had galvanized neighbouring Hungary and Poland. And the fault did not lie with a passive citizenry alone. A phenomenon such as the Petöfi Circle in Hungary would have been unthinkable without some relaxation on the police’s part, or a certain amount of open or concealed disunity in the Party leadership.

The 20th Congress of the CPSU put the Czechoslovak party leadership in a situation characterized by President Zápotocký, referring to criticism of the cult of personality, as follows: “Do you want us to rub it in? [...] The right policy is not to meddle in these things.”<sup>17</sup> In Czechoslovakia, Khrushchev’s speech did not become a “public issue” as it did in Poland, nor did it provide a pretext to introduce the question of rehabilitation and re-evaluation of past “excesses.” Its social impact was more or less restricted to limited circles such as Party assemblies, which confined themselves to demanding more detailed explanations of unclear interpretations, and holding an extraordinary congress. Only a couple of events had any broader public impact, but it is tempting to overrate even these events, as both were of a basically isolated nature. The Second Czechoslovak Writers’ Congress produced some previously unheard-of calls to de-muzzle the silenced and imprisoned artists and protect the artistic community from political manipulation; however, a threat coming from the authorities was enough to force the Writers’ Union to distance itself from these “demagogic demands.”<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, that year’s traditional student “Majáles” (rag day) procession, held a month later, had a

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16. See Jaroslav Cuhra, “Církevní procesy [Clerical Trials]”, in Jiří Pernes and Jan Foitzik eds., *Politické procesy v Československu po roce 1945 a „případ Slánský“ [Political Trials in Czechoslovakia After 1945 and the “Slánský Case”]*, (Brno: ÚSD AV ČR, 2005), 147-157.

17. Karel Kaplan, *Československo v letech 1953-1966 [Czechoslovakia in 1953-1966]* (Praha: SPN, 1992), 37.

18. Much talked about were the speeches of later Nobel Prize winner Jaroslav Seifert, and of writers Katarína Lazarová, František Hrubín, and Dominik Tatarka. The regime was so irritated by this effrontery that even three years later the writers’ conference was required to discuss these “negative” tendencies and to condemn them in its resolution. By that time the poet Hrubín had already distanced himself from his earlier statement.

clearly formulated “program” of resolutions adopted at faculty meetings, but no real effort was made to push them through. It was enough to ignore the demands and conduct selective measures against the more active ones by expelling them from school.<sup>19</sup> That was more or less the extent of the Czechoslovak contribution to the revolutionary year 1956, aside from a few severely suppressed protests by political prisoners.

The memory of 1956 was undoubtedly coloured by the Czechoslovak passivity in contrast to the revolts in neighbouring countries. Criticizing the Czechoslovak society may be justified, but for reasons described above, the chances of successfully speaking out against the regime were much more limited. Two more minor details for illustration. Although the students were probably spared arrest for their statements and demands, similar restraint was not observed regarding other segments of society, especially persons of “wrong origin” such as Colonel Jaroslav Hájíček, who fought against Nazism in the ranks of the Czechoslovak army in the West.<sup>20</sup> Because he had been imprisoned and interned for several years in the early 1950s, his “cadre profile” begged for severe measures. For merely distributing excerpts of the students’ appeals and resolutions, he was arrested along with his accomplices in June 1956 and sentenced to three years in prison. His case is typical of the broader measures applied by the organs of repression toward the slightest indication of nonconformist or opposition activity during the supposedly “most liberal” months of 1956 — provided such measures could be taken without attracting too much public attention. Similar cases found in the StB materials have been cited productively by French researcher Muriel Blaive in her work *Promarněná příležitost* [*The Lost Opportunity*]. However, her conclusion is that the nature of these — verbal and other — expressions of dissatisfaction with the domestic situation and of sympathy with Hungary and Poland, was characteristic of the general atmosphere in society, i.e., that the relative scarcity of such occurrences reflected the society’s lack of interest in fundamental changes of the system.<sup>21</sup> But there is yet another interpretation. The way in which the StB registered and pursued such fringe voices (including immediate imprisonment) is clear evidence that the regime’s attitude towards the population was completely different from that of the neighbouring countries. If mere “pub talk” about Poland and social dissatisfaction meant immediate repression, it would have been hard to imagine the emergence of the kind of prerevolutionary atmosphere then prevalent in Poland or Hungary. In

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19. At least one student trial, however, was held at the end of 1956, when a group of students at the University of Chemical Technology in Pardubice was convicted of group listening to foreign radio, with sentences ranging from eight months to three years. See Antonín Kratochvíl, *Žaluji [I Blame]*, vol. 3 (Praha: Dolmen, 1990), 36-53.

20. The communist policy divided up the wartime resistance veterans ruthlessly. The soldiers who fought in units alongside the Anglo-American forces ended up in prisons and camps, while East front warriors had better chances for a comfortable life, as long as they kept their knowledge of Soviet reality to themselves.

21. Muriel Blaive, *Promarněná příležitost: Československo a rok 1956* [*The Lost Opportunity: Czechoslovakia and 1956*] (Prague: Prostor, 2001), esp. 287 ff.



Czechoslovakia, the hard-line course — so far away from an idea of “thaw” — was to continue.

By October and November 1956 any kind of liberalization had become unthinkable. As Antonín Novotný put it, “[...] We need to be tough even now; if we let up, comrades, I don’t know what kind of consequences we’d face.”<sup>22</sup> The Party rank and file, frightened by the propaganda image of “raging counterrevolution” in Budapest, paid heed. Although there is no doubt that the events of that year were the first breaking point for many future reform Communists, the immediate reaction was to tighten the screws even more.

The atmosphere was clearly reflected in the result of the first attempt at re-examination of the show trials, reluctantly opened in January 1955.<sup>23</sup> The final report, which was discussed by the KSC leadership in October 1957, was a mockery of justice. Out of nearly 7,000 pleas for review of sentence, only 50 of the sentences were acknowledged as unjustified, and 213 sentences as “disproportionately high”. Most of these were the cases of Communist functionaries who were quietly released anyway. By all appearances, the re-examination was closed until 1962, as confirmed by the grudging confessions of “just a few” StB agents who admitted using “illegal methods” of investigation. After a long hesitation and resistance by Interior Ministry authorities, two interrogators (Bohumil Doubek and Vladimír Kohoutek) were sentenced to prison time, only to be released three months later (in December). In the years 1953-61, only 21 (!) members of the StB were dismissed for violating the law, even though the Doubek report listed another 64 people that had used the same methods of interrogation.<sup>24</sup> The StB fought off the threat of independent interference in its investigations by defeating a proposal made by the judiciary to restore the institution of investigating judge. Thus the StB continued to have absolute power over detainees, and an independent oversight remained a mere illusion. In this regard the Minister of Justice bitterly criticized similar legal considerations that, in his opinion, incorrectly interpreted the term “observance of the law” to mean “increasing the protection of citizens against state authorities, and not the protection of the state.”<sup>25</sup> The StB had no doubts about the legitimacy of continued

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22. Karel Kaplan, *Nekrvavá revoluce [The Bloodless Revolution]* (Praha: Mladá fronta, 1993), 377. (*The Short March*, London: Hurst, 1987).

23. Paradoxically, the review committee consisted of persons responsible for a whole series of trials, led by Interior Minister Rudolf Barák, who supervised the trials from 1953 on (including the trial of Gustáv Husák).

24. At the order of Rudolf Barák, none of them were even disciplined professionally. Historian Karel Kaplan has edited the records of extensive reports by investigator Doubek on StB interrogation methods, use of physical violence and provocations. See Karel Kaplan, *StB o sobě: Výpověď vyšetřovatele Bohumila Doubka [The StB: A Report by Investigator Bohumil Doubek]* (Praha: ÚDV PCR, 2002); Koudelka, *Státní bezpečnost...*

25. Kaplan, *Československo v letech 1953-1966*, 62; also: *Kořeny československé reformy: IV. Struktury moci [The Roots of the Czechoslovak Reform: IV The Structures of Power]* (Brno: Doplněk, 2002), 294. He also declared that the term “investigating judge” is unacceptable in itself because “it is linked to the principle of judicial independence” and “the false cloak of independence for investigating judges was used by bourgeois justice.”

political trials as a means of applying Party policy. This notion was reinforced by various resolutions of the Party leadership. In January 1957 the KSČ resolved to redouble its efforts to stop foreign espionage, which sought its agents “among the ranks of the class enemy,” but also among people “with Party membership cards.” This was a reaction to the recently concluded trial of Josef Potoček and Václav Kvíčera, sentenced to death for cooperation with the British intelligence, during which Potoček was accused of using his KSČ membership to obtain secret information.<sup>26</sup> Nor did it stop with orders for the StB; all levels of Party organization were to take up the task, for “... if one big Potoček was discovered at the central level, then in the regions, districts, and so forth, a lot of little Potočeks can be at work.”<sup>27</sup> A KSČ politburo resolution of December 1957 on “political class screening” touched off a massive new political purge of the state and Party apparatus. The intention was not just to “unmask” politically unreliable individuals who “work in the central authorities under the cover of their professional qualification”; the goal was also to increase the number of officials of working-class origin in the top functions. The millenarian conviction of the previous decade had returned: not education, but class origin was the decisive qualification for managing enterprises and institutions. The number of persons affected by these purges has never been precisely determined, but it may have been as many as 50,000 state employees. Reasons for action against them included: “wrong origin,” “inappropriate” relatives, or previous membership in a noncommunist political organization. Teachers formed a special category; they were especially vetted for religious convictions. With the tacit agreement of top KSČ officials, affiliation with a church now disqualified a person for employment in the field of education, although professional or other reasons were to be emphasized.<sup>28</sup>

The campaign against “liberalism” and “revisionism” also affected social groups standing outside the central state bureaucracy. The February 1957 order by the Politburo to apply strict class-based criteria for permission to study at secondary schools and universities was another effort to revive the atmosphere of “intensified class struggle.” The academic sector had long lost its “revolutionary enthusiasm”; more and more young people were seeking their models outside the official culture. Here the new measures could be only partially implemented. Contributing to this was the passivity and indifference of the official Czechoslovak Union of Youth, once an effective instrument for implementing communist directives in this area; some of the teachers also played a mitigating role. Especially at the universities there were plenty of voices criticizing current policies; thus the result of the crackdown

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26. For an overview of the case see Zora Dvořáková, *Z letopisů třetího odboje* [From the Chronicle of the “Third Resistance”] (Praha: Hřibál, 1992), 232-239.

27. Koudelka, *Státní bezpečnost...*, 24.

28. “Some [teachers] are still captive of idealistic opinions and religious prejudices. [Their dismissal] was fundamentally correct... [but] religious conviction or membership in a church should not be and must not be emphasized.” Kaplan, *Československo v letech 1953-1966*, 39.

was less clear-cut, and depended on the attitude of each school.<sup>29</sup> Much more decisive was the decision of the KSČ to complete the destruction of the private sector and the so-called middle class as the main pillar of the “old way of life.” This was one of the preconditions for the planned “introduction of socialism,” and so the decision was carried out in all seriousness. Administrative pressure and outright violence were used especially against the self-employed (craftsmen, small retailers, pub owners, truck owners, etc.) and private farmers. In April 1957, KSČ officials declared that, despite all efforts, the number of private business people had risen. The relatively accurate information that the increase following the failure of state-controlled enterprises to fulfil the demands of the population resulted in the decision to entirely eliminate small businesses. It now became nearly impossible to register as a self-employed person, and two years later this type of business activity was banned altogether. Out of almost 40,000 self-employed people in 1957, there were only some 2,000 left by the mid-1960s. This was achieved partially by simply revoking business licenses; there was also a vindictive campaign by the Ministry of Interior against former businessmen and the “persistent” self-employed, who were supposedly retaining possession of “hidden” property and goods. There was a propaganda campaign in the best Stalinist tradition to stoke resentment against “former capitalists” by means of newspaper articles, radio and television programs and exhibits of confiscated items that encouraged “denunciation of suspicious persons”. No wonder that the “former capitalists” were now hearing “rumours” about their impending liquidation — for, in the symbolic sense, this was the exact intention.<sup>30</sup> The theory of socialist production relations was obviously more important than real-life evidence. As a result, the elimination of self-employment merely pushed these activities into the “grey economy,” which went along with misappropriation of state property by state employees. The same socialist theories determined the fate of the last private farmers, despite the fact that more sober voices warned that Czechoslovak agriculture was not ready for the shift to collective mass production. The policy was clearly spelled out in a resolution of the KSČ Congress in June 1958: “To eliminate the remnants of the antagonistic classes, i.e., to gradually achieve the liquidation of the *kulaks* as a class and the remaining self-employed elements in urban areas by means of constant constriction and pressure.”<sup>31</sup>

At some stages the intense pressure on private farmers unleashed in 1955 nearly matched that of the Stalin years. According to officially filed complaints (which of course cannot be considered exhaustive), the methods included physical violence,

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29. The degree to which the instructions were fulfilled varied. Some students were able to formally interrupt studies, then return to complete their education after the Party lost interest. On the other hand, there were examples of teachers who lost their jobs and were expelled from the KSČ; there was also the case of Pardubice students, which predated the resolution; the fact that school officials made no effort to defend them featured the attitude of that institution .

30. See Koudelka, *Státní bezpečnost...*, 92; NA, fond ÚV KSČ — politické byro ÚV KSČ, sv. 217, a.j. 294, bod 6.

31. Karel Jech, *Soumrak selského stavu 1945-1960 [Twilight of the Private Farmer in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1960]* (Praha: ÚSD AV ČR, 2001), 173.

illegal detention, harassment of the farmers' relatives, and their economic liquidation through requisition demands that were impossible to fulfil. The StB increased pressure, cynically taking advantage of the worsening situation of small farms to create fictional cases of sabotage and "antistate" activities. In the following years the so-called "*kulak*-agrarian elements" made up a large proportion of the victims of political trials. By no means were all of these people actually private farmers. The "*kulak*" label was easily acquired, and difficult to escape; a vaguely defined category that the KSC leadership was clear about ("the *kulak* has been and continues to be the arch-enemy of all working people") was now bestowed not only upon original owners of bigger farmsteads and their children, but everyone farming over 15 ha of land. A *kulak* could commit a "crime" by farming as well as by entering a cooperative: in 1958 the KSC leadership warned that "[...] nearly 20,000 *kulaks* have gotten into the JZDs [agricultural cooperatives], and some have even infiltrated cooperative management."<sup>32</sup> Logically, all failures in agriculture had their root cause in *kulak* sabotage<sup>33</sup>, and the StB made sure of the conjectures' plausibility. And it congratulated itself in 1960: "Concentrated efforts to break down the *kulak* base and the JZDs that have exhibited severe shortcomings in their economic results, have led to the detection of intentional sabotage by *kulaks* and agrarians."<sup>34</sup> Even though Czechoslovakia, thanks to the communists' senseless policies, had not achieved prewar levels of agricultural production even by 1960, the persecution could hardly be halted. Unlike the situation in the neighbouring countries, the Czechoslovak plan defined by the KSC in May 1958 as "the liquidation of the *kulaks* as a class" was actually achieved. Out of 23,000 farms with more than 15 ha of land still operating privately in 1954, there were only 6,000 left by 1958, and practically none in 1960. What remained were tiny plots allotted to co-op members (most of less than 2 ha), operating mainly in Slovakia; but the centuries-old face of the rural society was destroyed forever. The malice behind the communist attitude toward cultural traditions and history was fully revealed in the KSC's 1959 decision to raze abandoned farmsteads and buildings connected to them, to tidy things up before the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia.<sup>35</sup> The disappearance of ancient farmsteads and vacant buildings left behind by the expelled German-speaking population, erased forever many of the elements that made up the country's "stone memory" — an incomprehensible act of barbarism.<sup>36</sup>

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32. NA, A ÚV KSC — politbyro, sv. 178, a.j. 15.

33. "The resistance of the *kulaks* within the cooperatives is a frequent phenomenon today [...], they sabotage the animal production sector, hinder the construction of communal social facilities and animal housing, and steal the feed stocks." NA, A ÚV KSC — politbyro, sv. 178, a.j. 15.

34. Archiv ministerstva vnitra (Archives of the Ministry of Interior, A MV ČR), fond A 9, i.j. 79.

35. NA, A ÚV KSC — politbyro, sv. 236, a.j. 316.

36. The continuing "transfer" of Soviet agricultural practices into the Czechoslovak context, by no way limited to the early 1950s, would require a study of its own. Khrushchev's favorite Trofim Denisovich Lysenko and his pseudo-scientific theories of agriculture were treated with all seriousness, as was Khrushchev's emphasis on maize. The baleful consequences of these experiments were to be borne by the farmers, whose "sabotage" allegedly caused the failures. The ludicrous theories of Soviet charlatans were still landing people in prison as late as the early 1960s.

The paranoid approach that sought out enemies by stressing the “class perspective” reached its most extreme form with a directive issued by Interior Minister Barák in January 1959, ordering that close watch be maintained on the so-called “former persons” (an unfortunate term taken straight from Soviet terminology) as individuals who together formed a “base for enemy activity.” This was nothing new; the StB had long kept files on “inappropriate” citizens, monitored them, etc., but this order brought the degree of surveillance to a height. For none other than “class” reasons, more than 80,000 people in sixteen categories of “former persons” were placed on file in the first year, and in 1961 the number of monitored persons reached its peak at 97,943. Among them were alleged kulaks and members of their families, members of churches and sects, of the “bourgeois” anti-Nazi resistance, persons previously convicted of “antistate” activities, and others. The order authorized active surveillance either by the StB and its agents, or at least by the Public Security (uniformed police), as this category of citizens (nearly 100,000 of them) was regarded as the international reaction’s last hope for instigating unrest.<sup>37</sup> Although the massive apparatus proved unable to completely carry out the Minister’s order and, according to available data, it was able to “monitor and control” only about half of the people on the list, it still is an unbelievable figure. And in an atmosphere of intense scrutiny of this segment of the population, the StB operatives undoubtedly saw these instructions as a basis for direct action: “the detection and neutralization of the enemy activities of former persons remains the main goal of our work.”<sup>38</sup> The “former persons” seem to have made up the vast majority of those investigated for criminal political activities in the late 1950s and early 1960s. From the StB’s viewpoint, this was entirely logical (“it can be considered a plus that former persons predominated among the realized cases, and that their numbers are growing especially at this time”<sup>39</sup>). In this perspective, the “former persons” “blinded by class hatred” were “poisoning the air”<sup>40</sup> just at the time when the entire country was preparing to formally enter socialism.

Although the degree of judicial repression did not reach the heights of the Stalin era, as mentioned above, it was still by no means negligible. Up to 1961 the number of convictions on political charges ranged around 5,000 a year; more importantly, in many cases the sentences were far more than symbolic. Even as late as in 1962, there were more people sentenced for “serious” political crimes (carrying sentences

37. More on the “former persons” in Koudelka, *Státní bezpečnost...*, 88-91.

38. A MV ČR, A 9, i.j. 99.

39. A MV ČR, A 9, i.j. 80, Zpráva o činnosti Krajské správy MV České Budějovice za rok 1960 [Report on the activities of the Regional Department of the Ministry of Interior in České Budějovice for the year 1960].

40. A MV ČR, A 2/2, i.j. 1181; A 9, i.j. 26. It is interesting that even ministry officials were aware of the illegality of this surveillance of the population; their concern was to conceal it. In the words of Minister Barák: “Politically it would be incorrect if it were to leak out on us that we are keeping files on people, even if they are the class enemy. We have to keep it within the departments. [...] another thing is to conceal it within the MV [Ministry of Interior], so that our own departments don’t spread it around.”

of more than five years) than during the entire twenty-year period of the so-called “normalization” after the Prague Spring (1969-1989), and a death penalty was executed after a political trial. Between 1957 and 1962 a total of 3,144 people were convicted of “serious” political crimes; of these, more than 800 were sentenced to more than five years.<sup>41</sup> We can only approximately define the social strata from which the victims were recruited, but the basic contours are clear. The repression conformed to Interior Ministry directives — the “enemy” must be actively liquidated, especially the ranks of the clergy (“the class enemy, represented here by the Vatican, has made its task to influence new groups of young people, disrupt the work of youth organizations, and expand the base for the selection and further education of anti-socialist cadres”); among members of the former political parties (the People’s and Agrarian parties, “which are characterized by various attempts to disrupt the process of socialization in the villages”); and last but not least among the “bourgeois intelligentsia”. A major share of those persecuted were Christians (both lay and clergy), especially Roman Catholics, officials of the former political parties (the Agrarian and the People’s Party, and others), and people actively engaged in youth work outside the official structures (within the proscribed Scouting movement, for example). In Slovakia there were renewed attempts to discredit Slovak ambitions for self-administration by accusing and trying people on the basis of nationalism, in the spirit of earlier theories of “bourgeois nationalism.” The trials for World War II war crimes were also exploited for political purposes, presented by propaganda as a struggle against Slovak separatism and “Catholic clericalism.” The so-called “amnestants,” i.e., the people who were released from prison at the beginning of the 1960s, made up a special category that we will examine later.<sup>42</sup>

A brief glance at some of the cases and their consequences makes up an impressive picture. Particularly the tough action against the churches was almost as bad as it had been during the first years following 1948. It should be pointed out that Czechoslovakia was no exception in this regard: in more or less all of the Soviet satellites, most of the Khrushchev years were marked by direct repression of religious groups. The Czechoslovak comrades were merely somewhat more eager than their neighbouring counterparts. They did not hesitate to apply the severest measures, led on both by their own ideological enthusiasm, and by unquestionable

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41. See František Koudelka, Jana Váchová, *Trestní postih pro trestné činy proti republice v letech 1957-1968 v Československu* [Sentences for “Crimes Against the Republic” 1957-68 in Czechoslovakia] (Praha: ÚSD AV ČR, 1993).

42. On the trials of the late 1950s/early 1960s see Jaroslav Cuhra, *Příběh procesu...*; see also “Politické procesy s věřícími začátkem šedesátých let a případ ‘ilegální křesťanskodemokratické strany’” [The Political Trials of Christians in the Early 1960s, and the Case of the “Illegal Christian Democratic Party”], in Jan Štříbrný, *Církevní procesy padesátých let* (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2002), 245-259; for Slovakia see Robert Letz, “Perzekúcia proti rímskokatolíckej cirkvi na Slovensku v rokoch 1959-1963” [The Persecution of the Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia in 1959-1963], *Soudobé dějiny*, 8, 2-3, (2001): 332-349; Jan Pešek, “Vlna politických procesov na Slovensku koncom 50 rokov” [The Wave of Political Trials in Slovakia in the late 1950s], in Jiří Pernes and Jan Foitzik, eds., *Politické procesy v Československu po roce 1945 a “případ Slánský”* [Political Trials in Czechoslovakia after 1945, and the “Slansky Case”] (Brno: Prius, 2005), 179-191.

StB intelligence that the churches (or the Catholic Church) represented the main bastion of antistate activities. The party language was somewhat more euphemistic than the StB documents, but it was clear enough. A 1957 resolution of the ÚV KSČ Secretariat that served as an instruction for the lower bodies specifies quite clearly that “the state’s oversight over the activities of the church cannot be diminished; instead, it must be intensified.”<sup>43</sup> A year later the party leadership was even more explicit: “Imperialism uses religion as one of the instruments of the Cold War to carry out its counterrevolutionary plans.” The Catholic clergy were “professional disseminators of obscurantism.”<sup>44</sup> One thing reinforced another — the party resolutions assured the StB that its attacks on Christians corresponded to the party line; in the opposite direction, StB reports on the “detected” enemy activities by the church were seen by the party leadership as proof that this was the correct line... And of course, the StB had no doubts: “An analysis of the subversive activities of the church shows that the Roman Catholic Church in this country, controlled by enemy elements, has practically become the strongest antistate organization...”<sup>45</sup>

The case of the Catholic bishops, who, for the most part, were still imprisoned or interned, shows how the rhetoric of the StB influenced the considerations of top officials. In the spring of 1956 the KSČ leadership was considering the release of internees, although they were not to be given back their functions; the sentences of some imprisoned bishops were suspended. It was a cautious gesture, not applying to all of the unjustly imprisoned, nor to the interned Archbishop of Prague Josef Beran, who was considered to be the main leader of clerical resistance against the regime. Yet it was a minor progress. But in 1957, StB reports on the religious activities of some of the released (they had remained under constant observation, with their place of residence prescribed) led the regime to reconsider how to isolate them from the population. In the spring of 1958 the KSČ leadership decided to take decisive measures. Bishop Jan Vojtaššák, over eighty years old, was rearrested and put back in prison to serve the rest of his sentence of 1951 (24 years); other bishops were taken into strict internment. There they either died, or remained until 1963. Their fate was by no way exceptional. For example, the campaign against members of the proscribed male religious orders<sup>46</sup> launched in the mid-1950s continued claiming victims until 1964. An estimated 400 monks went to prison (nearly 250 in Bohemia and Moravia). As in previous cases, the crime that was actually being punished was religious activity as such. The former routine accusations of espionage or similar crimes were now seldom invoked. By this time, the investigators and judges found the subversive or treasonous activities to include teaching of religion, secret worship,

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43. Jan Pešek, Michal Barnovský, *Pod kuratelou moci: Cirkvi na Slovensku v rokoch 1953-1970* [*In the Custody of Power: The Churches in Slovakia 1953-1970*] (Bratislava: Veda, 1999), 83.

44. *Ibid.*, 104.

45. A MV ČR, A 2/1, i.j. 301.

46. Male religious orders were banned in Czechoslovakia in 1950, and their members were interned or imprisoned for several years. After they were released, they were forbidden any common activities, with the StB treating any attempt at coordinated activities as criminal.

lectures on theology, listening to foreign radio, or reading foreign texts. The sentences often reached the double digits; later complaints by the investigated persons mention the use of psychological duress during interrogation, and distortion of the affirmations made by the accused as well as witnesses. The trials of lay persons, who usually worked behind the scenes of religious life, were similarly constructed: a model example was the “liquidation” of secret groups that were inspired by the Belgian-French movement *Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne* (JOC). Their main activity was an effort to bring Christian principles into everyday life and promote education in theology and philosophy. At the beginning of the 1960s the StB cracked down, the courts declaring these activities treasonous and subversive. In a model trial in Ostrava in the spring of 1961, over twenty leaders were sentenced to terms ranging from 4 to 14 years, with a number of spin-off cases related to this one.

However, a new category of “former persons” — the so-called “amnestants” — became the most remarkable group among the prosecuted. In the Czechoslovak context this term did not appear until the end of the 1950s, as the first extensive amnesty did not occur until May 1960. Officially, it was justified by the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Army. On this anniversary, the country was officially declared to have entered the era of Socialism. This milestone of progress was announced by President Novotný in June 1960. He also declared that “only a few informers from the ranks of the former bourgeois classes” were left standing “against the people,” therefore, an amnesty would cause no great state security problem. However, Novotný’s optimism in this regard was entirely disingenuous, as illustrated by a series of measures designed to minimize the direct impact of this amnesty on society. Three thousand political prisoners regarded as the instigators of “antistate” activities were excluded from the amnesty. Those who were amnestied were warned not to speak out in public or discuss their painful experiences. However, these and other measures failed to satisfy the StB hardliners who were convinced that the more than 5,500 released prisoners represented the seed of a new, even more refined and subtle activity against the state. Extensive new measures (recruitment of agents among the released, social discrimination, etc.) culminated in the thorough classification of these people as “former persons,” the majority of whom fell under the category of “amnestants.” These people were singled out by Interior Ministry officials for priority attention, on the assumption that their future crimes would be all the more highly conspirational and dangerous. In the twisted logic of the StB, it was the imprisonment which had given the conspirators the opportunity to inspire one another and create tightly linked networks. The cynicism of this approach reached an extreme in the case of one such artificially created group in 1961. The prosecutor then charged and the court convicted a group of amnestied prisoners on the basis of an accusation that “until early May 1960 in the Prague 4 district, out of hatred toward the people’s democratic system and in mutual complicity and in complicity with other co-conspirators, they conducted constant propaganda before other persons...” The Prague 4 district actually meant the Pankrác prison, where the prisoners were being held at the time of the alleged crime. Meanwhile the court itself noted that they had done nothing illegal after their



release.<sup>47</sup> The StB devoted maximum effort to monitoring the released individuals, with the specific purpose of promptly putting on at least a few show trials that might serve as a warning, not only for the amnestants, but for the party leadership as well. In January 1961, one of the deputy ministers of Interior boasted that under the operation “Amnestant,” 90 percent of those amnestied were under control. Regional reports show that the regional departments of the ministry were aware of their superiors’ keen interest in the matter.<sup>48</sup> The total extent of the trials of amnestied prisoners is still not known, but even conservative estimates speak about hundreds of prosecutions and subsequent convictions with at least short-term sentences. The relatively short sentences cannot be identified with a liberalization of the courts and the StB: in fact, they were simply easier to prove than any broader “criminal activity.” An amnesty was officially considered a mere “interruption” of sentence, which was suspended provided that, usually for ten years, no other conviction for a “premeditated criminal act” came up. The length of the new sentence was no longer important, for as amnestied persons who had “abused the privilege of amnesty,” they were made to serve out the rest of their draconian sentences left over from the 1950s.<sup>49</sup> The StB investigators were actually well aware of the powerful tools they possessed for dealing with accused persons and witnesses. Deputy Interior Minister Kotál summed it up concisely — why go to the trouble of developing a new sedition case “when they can just be sent back to serve the rest of their sentences”?<sup>50</sup> Nor was the nominal length of the sentences in any way short: in a number of cases severity of the sentence was comparable to that of the Stalin era.<sup>51</sup>

In short, the early 1960s did not represent a decisive turning point in terms of political trials or the eagerness of the StB to exert control over the widest possible segment of society. The second amnesty of political prisoners in May 1962 was accompanied by similar measures to intimidate those released. Nor did the tendency to assume that antistate activities were endemic to the circles of the “class enemy” disappear when Lubomír Štrougal took office as Minister of Interior<sup>52</sup>: religious activity was still being regarded as criminal in the mid-1960s. It is clear that the

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47. See Cuhra, “Politické procesy s věřícími...,” 252-253.

48. A MV ČR, A 2/2, i.j. 1181. As the Prague regional department of the Ministry of Interior proudly declared less than six months after the amnesty, out of 900 cases “[...] 18 persons have already been [...] taken back into custody.” A MV ČR, A 9, i.j. 79.

49. Cases in which people sentenced to one or two years ended up serving ten or more were not uncommon.

50. A MV ČR, A 2/2, i.j. 1181.

51. For example, the case of Vladimír Daniel, formerly a social democratic functionary, convicted for alleged involvement in the so-called Christian Democratic Party in 1961. There were 9 years remaining on his old sentence; the new one was for 12 more. See Cuhra, *Příběh procesu...*

52. Interior Minister R. Barák was removed from office in June 1961; in April 1962 he was convicted of sabotage and theft, and sentenced to 15 years. This was no punishment for crimes committed in his office, but a result of vendettas among top party officials. After Štrougal took office, the activities of the ministry changed only gradually; for example, the directive on “former persons” was not revoked until 1964, only to be replaced by the files kept on so-called “enemy persons.” Most of the previously gathered materials remained available to the respective departments of the StB, which were making efforts to continue the surveillance. Koudelka, *Státní bezpečnost...*, 93-95.

political trials and subsequent persecution wound down only gradually. In the amnesty of May 1965 another 170 political prisoners were released; only a year earlier, the KSČ leadership had been informed that there were 134 Roman Catholic clerics in prison.<sup>53</sup> In early 1968 (!) there were still nearly 700 people in Czechoslovak prisons serving time for “antistate” activities, among them Roman Catholic bishops Ján Korec and Dominik Kalata.<sup>54</sup> Most of those released continued to live under the threat of having to serve out the rest of their old sentences and having new ones imposed. This threat had an understandable impact on their further social involvement.

Analogous was the failure of the second attempt to bring the show trials up for revision, which was again limited to the cases of party functionaries only. In 1962-1963, the new commissions (the “Kolder” and “barnabite” commissions) led to the revocation of sentences in the well-known cases of Slánský or Husák, but completely ignored the cases of non-communists imprisoned during the Stalin era, let alone the people sentenced during the second half of the 1950s. The question of — political or legal — responsibility for the trials was more or less not even raised at the time. Ironically, a tiny dent in the wall of silence in Czechoslovakia was made only after the fall of Khrushchev, when the courts handled complaints filed by some convicted persons in the late 1960s; a rehabilitation was granted a few in isolated instances. But even that could not undermine the basic taboo: the chapter was closed, related matters not open to question, and a financial compensation mostly out of the question. The High Court bluntly acknowledged this approach in 1965 in its instruction on the property claims by former “kulaks”: the law had been broken frequently, it said, but “the revocation of sentence would also revoke the confiscation of property, and it would be necessary to return the property to the convicted persons.” However, a restitution of property “would unquestionably face public opposition and unfavourable criticism.” Therefore, a meeting of the respective ÚV KSČ departments decided that “for these reasons, there will be no revision of the agricultural cases.”<sup>55</sup> The chain of injustice had come full circle, with no hope of redemption.

If we consider the facts about the degree of repression and violence still existing in the first half of the 1960s, it becomes difficult to stick to the interpretation that during this period “mass terror came to a halt, and the omnipotence and impunity of the Security was trimmed back through reorganization.”<sup>56</sup> On the contrary, all that

53. NA, fond ÚV KSČ — předsednictvo, sv. 54, a.j. 57; also sv. 117, a.j. 122. The authors of the report probably included members of the orders and students of theology in their definition of the clergy.

54. Róbert Letz, “Justícia — ‘služka komunistickéj moci’” [The Judiciary — “the Servant of the Communist Power”], in *Štruktúry moci na Slovensku 1948-1989* [Power Structures in Slovakia 1948-1989] (Prešov: Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, 2004), 426. The reasons for their conviction and the proportions of the sentences are not known, in any case there were at least 20 clergy members sentenced at the beginning of the 1960s among them. NA, fond Sekretariát pro věci církevní MK ČSR (SPVC MK ČSR), carton 19.

55. See Šárka Rokosová, “Administrativní opatření — jedna z forem perzekuce sedláků komunistickým režimem” [Administrative Measures as a Form of Persecution of Farmers by the Communist Regime], *Securitas imperii*, 10 (2003): 147-194.

56. Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy...*, 695.

can be said is that the regime no longer chose to present its repression and judicial persecution in spectacular show trials; and also that membership in the Communist Party could sometimes provide space for the utterance of critical opinions. Over time this space spread and diminished: critics did not always escape punishment, and there were also attempts to stop the internal party criticism completely. The measures applied, however, were much more lenient than those taken toward majority society, as illustrated by the “punishments” meted out in a number of the larger intra-party cases. Expulsion, party reprimands, or removal from function and employment are punishments on a different level than the judicial persecution of the trials described above.<sup>57</sup> One example for all: the case of Party members Jindřich Puš and Jaroslav Jindra, who were sentenced in 1965 to suspended sentences for criticizing the party leadership and debating the need to solve the situation “by force if necessary.” Meanwhile, six months earlier, “criticism of political conditions” had earned clergyman Alfons Čevela six years in prison.<sup>58</sup> For Čevela, the mere presence of his relatives at the trial, or the unwillingness of the prosecutor to “try to highlight my case somehow,” were simply out of the question.<sup>59</sup> It was this application of a double standard in applying repressive measures that served to give credence to the illusion of a quickly advancing liberalization in Czechoslovakia. In the words of Petr Pithart, “they were living in a permanent illusion that they are the vanguard of society; this is why they seem to have such clean consciences.”<sup>60</sup> The after-effects of this illusion are still palpable today.

The darker picture of events in Czechoslovakia during this period as outlined here is naturally only one aspect of the multilayered historical picture that is to be sought if we wish to understand the social life and the population’s attitude toward the 1968 reform. The publication of Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in 1963 did little to change the fortunes of many political prisoners. Their stories, too, belong to Czechoslovak history, at least as much as the struggles and failures of the “liberals” both within and without the Party. One cannot grasp the Prague Spring without first understanding Czechoslovak society in the 1960s, its “worries” and attitudes to the regime. With a deeper knowledge of the society in the first two decades of the communist rule, the historical explication of the Prague Spring would not tend to be limited to descriptions of internal party struggles.

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57. Especially illustrative are the cases of the “detected” groups at universities, which mostly ended up in party discipline only. One of the biggest cases (the “antistate” group of Klement Lukeš in 1961, supposedly linked to Yugoslavia), despite the best efforts of the StB, also resulted merely in expulsion from the party or party reprimands. See Kaplan: *Kořeny československé reformy...*, IV, 173-175.

58. Vlček, *Perzekuce mužských řádů a kongregací...*, 237.

59. Information on the prosecution of Jindřich Puš and Jaroslav Jindra, a copy in the archives of the author.

60. Petr Pithart, *Osmádesátý* [Nineteen sixty-eight] (Praha: Rozmluvy, 1990), 38.