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# The 'Club of Politically Engaged Conformists'?

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Popular Opinion and the Crisis of Communism, 1956

By Kevin McDermott and Vitezslav Sommer, March 2013





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## **The 'Club of Politically Engaged Conformists'? The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Popular Opinion and the Crisis of Communism, 1956**

Kevin McDermott and Vítězslav Sommer

The year 1956 was truly momentous for communist Eastern Europe. In February, Stalin's myth of infallibility was demolished by Nikita Khrushchev's 'secret speech' before a closed session of the Soviet party's 20<sup>th</sup> congress. In the weeks and months that followed, the shockwaves unleashed by the speech threatened to destabilize the fragile political and ideological legitimacy of the Soviet bloc regimes: in June a workers' uprising in Poznań, Poland, was bloodily put down at the cost of scores of lives; in October 'national communist,' Władysław Gomułka, came to power in Warsaw with the reluctant blessing of the Soviet hierarchy, and immediately thereafter a full-scale popular anti-Stalinist revolution broke out in Hungary requiring the massive intervention of the Red Army. It would be little exaggeration, then, to conclude that 1956 represented a 'crisis of communism' of monumental proportions. Yet in the midst of this turmoil it is almost universally agreed that Czechoslovakia remained a haven of political stability, ideological orthodoxy and social cohesion, the consequences of which were portentous. If the Czechs and Slovaks had rebelled in the fall of 1956 like their Polish and Magyar neighbors, the very existence of the Soviet bloc could have been put in serious jeopardy. Hence, the stakes were very high indeed for both Moscow and Prague.

This paper has two main aims. First, contrary to the current historiographical consensus, we propose that the perceived 'passivity' of the Czechs and Slovaks in 1956 is, in part at least, misleading and overdrawn. There is abundant evidence that many rank-and-file members and lower-level officials of the ruling Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (*Komunistická strana Československa* - KSČ) were thrown into disarray by the embryonic destalinization measures initiated in the wake of the 'secret speech.' Some responded in a highly critical manner, asserting the need for wide-ranging change in the party and country, while others sought refuge in tried and tested Stalinist methods. Most used the temporary relaxation of ideological control to voice pent up feelings of confusion, doubt and unease. As is well known in the existing historiography, several leading writers and many students joined the bandwagon of reform. What is not commonly understood, however, is that large numbers of Czech and Slovak citizens from all social strata were galvanized by events in Poland and

Hungary, taking a lively interest in developments there and expressing a multitude of views, many of which were far from regime affirming. Political discontent, socioeconomic grumbling and demands for change were widespread, not only among the educated elites, but also among 'ordinary' people. In this sense, the populace was very much 'politically engaged' in 1956, although this engagement very rarely manifested itself in organized associational forms.

Our attempt to gauge popular opinion 'from below' offers a fresh perspective on the evolution of post-Stalinist Czechoslovakia by conceiving of the socialist dictatorship not as a static unchanging 'totalitarian' monolith or field of unambiguous conflict between 'regime' and 'society,' but as a living organism in which individuals struggled to empower themselves and thereby shape and make sense of the world around them. This approach in no way seeks to attenuate the repressive nature of the communist system, or make facile comparisons with state-society relations in liberal democracies: civil society in Czechoslovakia was undoubtedly dealt a crushing blow after 1948, but it was not completely destroyed. Even in conditions of fierce one-party authoritarianism, many Czech and Slovak citizens devised various forms of interaction, negotiation and bargaining with party-state organs and their representatives, and were able to create limited spaces in which to 'work the system' to their 'minimum disadvantage,' particularly at the local level and at times of perceived crisis as in 1956.<sup>1</sup>

Second, while fully agreeing that manifestations of outright 'resistance' and overt anti-communist action in Czechoslovakia were minimal, certainly compared to Poland and Hungary, our fundamental explanation for this 'conformity' differs from that of most experts in that we believe the majority of citizens at best accepted or at worst tolerated the socialist framework of the republic as a home-made project rooted in the 'national democratic revolution' of 1945-48. While many verbally attacked aspects of the system and a vocal minority totally rejected it on ideological grounds, many others found shared values, or 'bridges,' with the regime around which a 'tacit consensus' may be discerned in the fall of 1956.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, we conclude that Czechs and Slovaks were neither 'passive' nor 'revolutionaries' in the crisis year. Rather, they were 'politically engaged conformists' who adopted a stance of 'critical loyalty' towards the communist authorities and favored meaningful democratization within the existing system. The linkages with the 'Prague Spring' twelve years later are evident.<sup>3</sup>

More broadly, this paper can be seen as a contribution to the ongoing vexed debate among scholars about the nature and meaning of ‘popular opinion’ and the extent of resistance and consent in ‘totalitarian’ regimes. These polemics started with studies of Nazi Germany, spread to Stalinist Russia and now encompass work on post-war Eastern Europe, notably the East German dictatorship.<sup>4</sup> It is notoriously difficult to judge with any surety public moods and attitudes, especially in regimes that seek to suppress open debate, curtail heterodoxy, and mold social discourse according to ideological preferences. But in line with much recent thinking, we concur with Paul Corner that a nuanced understanding of popular opinion, though intrinsically problematic, is vital because it ‘relates to the fundamental workings of the regimes’ and indeed ‘may be one of the key factors in explaining the success or failure’ of any political system.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it is clear that the communist authorities themselves took the monitoring of social dispositions extremely seriously, as evidenced by the voluminous archival discoveries of the last twenty years or so.<sup>6</sup> In response to the basic question ‘what is socialist public opinion?’ – posed by Walter D. Connor and Zvi Y. Gitelman as long ago as 1977 – our research on Czechoslovakia in the mid-1950s, which charts not only the existence of a plurality of conflictual views on all vital areas of political life but also certain ‘bonds’ and interactions between regime and society, shows that the totalitarian myth of enforced homogeneity and sharp binary divides pitting a united ‘us’ (the good people) against the monolithic ‘them’ (the evil state) is in significant ways wide of the mark.<sup>7</sup> We seek to reclaim ‘the voices of the people’ in all their multifarious forms and insist on a broad conception of ‘the people’ by including party members as integral components of society, not as alien implants divorced from ‘popular opinion.’ In the process, we attempt to grapple with the meanings of these differentiated social mentalities in relation to such contentious issues as consent, accommodation, apathy, opposition and resistance.

The paper is divided into four parts. In part one we appraise the evidential problems posed by our archival materials, review existing historiography on Czechoslovakia in 1956 and, by way of historical context, provide a brief narrative survey of Stalinist Czechoslovakia in the period 1948-55. Part two discusses how the KSČ responded to the unprecedented demands of the 20<sup>th</sup> party congress and especially Khrushchev’s revelations about Stalin. We demonstrate the upheaval in party ranks and, even more pronounced, among sections of the intellectual and student body, while simultaneously outlining the Czechoslovak leadership’s attempts to limit the dissemination and impact of the ‘secret speech.’ This tumult is illustrated

by a case study of the party's Institute of History in which the effects of the 20<sup>th</sup> congress were particularly visible. In the final two parts we examine in some detail Czech and Slovak popular reactions to the 'crisis of communism,' focusing on the Hungarian Revolution of October and November 1956 by means of an analysis of hundreds of party and police reports from all corners of the republic. In part three we consider the political engagement of the population and gauge the extent of oppositional activity and thought. The final part of the paper assesses to what extent, and why, Czechs and Slovaks were 'passive' in 1956 by identifying and exploring the sources of what we call the 'critical loyalty' of the majority of citizens.

## **Part I**

### ***Evidential Dilemmas***

It is essential to say a few words about the evidential and interpretational dilemmas inherent in the study of popular opinion.<sup>8</sup> There are significant potential pitfalls for historians using secret police and party records. Above all, it has often been asked: why should scholars give credence to the writings of security officers whose very jobs, status, and privileges depended on locating and eliminating 'dissident' views and activities? Is it not inevitable that in such documents, often comprising snippets of reported conversations taken out of context, misheard, misquoted, misconstrued, even possibly invented, 'oppositional' currents and expressions will be grossly exaggerated to the extent that we begin to see anti-communist sentiment as endemic in society? This danger is particularly likely at times of turmoil such as 1956 when the authorities feel vulnerable and see the 'enemy' as ubiquitous. Or conversely, is it not the case that regional bureaucrats in their haste to reassure party bosses in Prague that their domains are bastions of orthodoxy and that local rank-and-file members and workers stand solidly behind the party line will accentuate positive moods and conformist attitudes?

More problematic for the historian, however, is the realization that these polarized sources – one tending to emphasize 'dissent,' the other 'conformity' – cannot do justice to the multiplicity of views and beliefs, sometimes highly contrasting, that are often held by one and the same individual. How can official documents begin to grasp the complexities and ambiguities of the citizen who on the one hand bemoans socioeconomic conditions and material shortages while on the other is generally supportive of the socialist and egalitarian project of the system?<sup>9</sup> How can the sources impart a sense of the intention behind an anti-boss joke told by a drunken worker in a pub or verbal abuse of a local collective farm

director? Should they be considered indicators of consistent politicized ‘opposition,’ or merely spontaneous outpourings induced by alcohol or personalized rivalries? After all, a threatened attack on an individual representative of state power does not necessarily imply an outright rejection of the system *per se*.

In addition, official memoranda are not infrequently worded obliquely and equivocally, rendering their meaning ambivalent. Two examples will suffice. First, according to one party ‘Information Bulletin’ from early November 1956, factory workers in the Pardubice region asked whether the ‘present situation [in Hungary and Poland] is not a consequence of the cult of personality.’<sup>10</sup> Does this report signify that workers at the Elektropraga plant in Hlinsko blamed the disorders on the ‘Stalin cult’ and hence adopted a ‘reformist’ view, or that they believed these events would never have happened if the ‘cult’ had not been undermined by the decisions of the 20<sup>th</sup> congress and therefore followed a ‘hard-line’ prognosis? Probably the former, but with only partial evidence we cannot be sure. Second, a civil police (*Veřejná bezpečnost* - VB) report from 2 July 1956 noted that: ‘In general, it can be said the public condemns the events in Poznan [sic].’<sup>11</sup> Whether this means they rejected the workers’ uprising itself or the violent response of the Polish authorities is not clear. In short, no firm conclusions can be drawn from these and many similar archival records.

The sources also speak eloquently of confusion, contradictory views and mixed messages. What should one make of this classic example from a central Bohemian farmers’ meeting in late November 1956, at which some locals ‘sharply attacked party and state representatives,’ stood ‘against our system’ and spoke of ‘poverty and hunger,’ but where the majority said they trusted former party leader Klement Gottwald and Stalin, the other communists only being out to feather their own nests.<sup>12</sup> It is possible that the farmers harshly criticized the existing order and its lackeys while accepting the sincerity and beneficence of its founding fathers, even if one of them had recently been exposed as a mass murderer. Or take this seemingly bizarre wall inscription in Hungarian in the southern Slovak town of Dunajská Streda: ‘Long Live Nagy and Stalin – Down with all Jews – Long Live Hitler.’<sup>13</sup> Ideologically this is very difficult to decode, but the clear implication is that the three leaders were all perceived to be anti-Semites.

Given that party and police archival materials are inherently fragmentary and problematic, they cannot portray an ‘objective’ overall picture of popular moods, do not

provide concrete statistical evidence on the scale and frequency of opinions and most certainly do not permit any sweeping generalizations on societal attitudes. At best, they record the alleged views and comments of only a small minority of the population, those who had come for whatever reason under the purview of the party or security apparatuses. To this extent the attitudes of the 'silent majority' remain a mystery. As such it may be tempting to underestimate, or even dismiss, the historical significance of official sources.<sup>14</sup> But this would be a mistake as they are indispensable in two ways: First, in the absence of extensive oral history research, they are the primary, perhaps the sole, means of reconstructing popular opinion and responses to regime policies, especially in times of crisis such as 1956. Second, communist leaders acted on these reports as their main source of information on social moods and thus, one imagines, insisted that the data be as accurate as possible since consistently misleading or false reporting would be detrimental for the system. Indeed, there are indications that police investigators did their best to verify the 'facts' of any given incident or statement and on occasion even admitted that mistakes had been made.<sup>15</sup> That said, the documents doubtlessly represent the perceived 'reality' of party and police bosses (often filtered through their subordinates), and, combined with their ideologically conditioned beliefs and stereotypes, give us a vital insight into the mindset, hopes and fears of the central and regional authorities.<sup>16</sup> But they additionally offer a rare opportunity to peer behind the façade of enforced uniformity and commonality of a regime that sought, though never fully achieved, monolithic control over social processes and public discourse. They allow us to glimpse the rich diversity of popular experiences, attitudes and beliefs in a non-pluralistic society and to assess the alternative visions and often confused, and confusing, mentalities of individuals living in turbulent and uncertain times.

### ***Historiographical Survey***

Existing historiography on Czechoslovakia in 1956 has tended to prioritize the stark contrast between the stormy eruptions in Hungary and Poland and the pervasive calm in Czechoslovakia. A specter hovers over much of this historical work: the Hungarians' explicit rejection of communist hegemony and the resultant creation of normative assumptions by which events in Czechoslovakia are judged and critiqued. Hence, historians seek to establish why Czechs and Slovaks remained 'passive' and 'apathetic' in the midst of such ferment.<sup>17</sup>

There are a number of works in contemporary Czech and Slovak historiography specifically on the 'crisis year.' For our purposes, they can be divided into two groups. The

first charts the general development of Czechoslovakia in the mid-1950s, concentrating on the activities of the KSČ and its elite structures or on concrete examples of the tentative ‘thaw.’ The second trend focuses directly on the reactions of Czechs and Slovaks to the so-called ‘Hungarian events’ of October and November. Thus, we have more or less empirical studies on the party leadership’s response to the challenges posed by the recurrent crises in 1956,<sup>18</sup> on the various political and military measures taken by the authorities to prevent the outbreak of unrest in Czechoslovakia, notably the deployment of the army<sup>19</sup> and, at the opposite pole of the conventional ‘regime versus society’ dichotomy, on the emergence of critical social voices, above all those of students and writers.<sup>20</sup>

By far the most complex and extensive study is by the French historian Muriel Blaive, who offers a penetrating and wide-ranging analysis of what she calls ‘the anatomy of a non-event.’<sup>21</sup> Addressing the key question of why Czechoslovakia did not experience upheaval similar to Poland and Hungary, Blaive adopts a *longue durée* approach to the evolution of the Czech state and Czech nationalism, arguing that the two main reasons for the ‘passivity’ of 1956 were the improved economic and material conditions in the country and the influence of Czech and Slovak nationalism directed against Germans, Hungarians and Poles, compounded by mutual animosities. Fear of German revanchism in the Sudetenland and Magyar irredentism in southern Slovakia with its substantial ethnic Hungarian minority, together with relatively full stomachs, meant that Czechs and Slovaks had no cause to rebel. Blaive concludes that ‘Czechs and Slovaks were completely normal compared to their neighbors; they were prepared to defend their interests when threatened as in 1951 and 1953 and were not too inclined to struggle over abstract and intellectual issues.’<sup>22</sup>

Another rubric which characterizes much of the historiography of 1956 is ‘the crisis of the communist regime’ in the 1950s. The prolific historians of Czech Stalinism and post-Stalinism, Karel Kaplan and Jiří Pernes, view this decade as a veritable ‘crisis era,’ epitomized by widespread criticism of the state socialist system and its economic failings.<sup>23</sup> 1956, however, is a contested moment in this ‘crisis narrative.’ For Kaplan, the events of that year are a sign of the continuing instability of the system and its problematic social legitimacy,<sup>24</sup> whereas Pernes interprets the absence of overt anti-regime sentiment as striking proof of the stability of the system whose leaders had managed to overcome the worst of the crisis, which Pernes dates to the period 1950-53.

Historians often regard the reaction of the Czechoslovak people to the Hungarian Revolution as a litmus test of their loyalty. In a ground-breaking 1996 article based on political police sources, Pernes famously described the situation in Czechoslovakia in the fall of 1956 as 'deathly calm' (*mrtvý klid*) and 'apathy.' He explained this torpor, as Blaive would several years later, partly by the auspicious economic conditions and higher living standards, but also by the lack of reformist party leaders who could have galvanized a critically attuned public.<sup>25</sup> Kaplan, using extensive archival citations, has attempted to problematize this assessment by stressing the range and variability of negative moods among the Czechoslovak population during the Hungarian uprising.<sup>26</sup>

Developments in Slovakia occupy a special chapter in the historiography of 1956. Michal Barnovský's impressive monograph and Juraj Marušiak's various studies elucidate events in Slovakia from the perspective of party elites, intellectuals, and students but without omitting the view 'from below.'<sup>27</sup> A related, and important, historiographical controversy concerns the attitudes of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. The Slovak scholar, Jan Pešek, somewhat uncritically adopts the official party standpoint from December 1956, which spoke of the overwhelming allegiance of the Slovak Hungarians to the Czechoslovak state during the revolution,<sup>28</sup> while Pernes incorporates the Hungarians into his general thesis of 'apathy.'<sup>29</sup> By way of contrast, Atilla Simon points to the clear, albeit largely symbolic, manifestations of support for the uprising on the part of the Magyar minority as does Blaive on the basis of several archival quotations.<sup>30</sup> More radical is the Hungarian historian Pál Germuska, who goes as far as to characterize the events as 'a revolution of all Hungarians [which] mobilized the revolutionary feelings of the Magyar minorities living in neighboring states.'<sup>31</sup> Kaplan's treatment of this problem is more nuanced. He outlines the changing responses of the Slovak Hungarians in the course of October and November 1956, defining them as 'exceedingly diverse,' and thus casts doubt on the widely accepted notion of the fully loyal and submissive Hungarian minority.<sup>32</sup>

As we have seen, it is normally argued that the main motivations for Czechoslovak 'apathy' were higher living standards and the improving social situation of the years 1953-56. The crucial implication is that the people, corrupted by party bosses, pragmatically or even cynically, exchanged 'democracy for consumption.' In this way, historians have minimized the affirmative dimensions of state socialism, the underlying significance of its strategies of social inclusion and the centrality of the issue of 'higher living standards' in the realm of official ideology. Indeed, representing the 'deal' between society and regime as a victory of



the material over the political overlooks the reality that the promise of social equality was a pillar of state socialism's legitimacy and as such an intrinsic factor in the creation of affirmative ties between citizen and state. In our opinion, the population was highly sensitive to the shifting fortunes of consolidating a socially equitable society and the project itself was transformed from an ostensibly material into an essentially political affair. To reduce social policy to a sophistic instrument for the silencing of disagreement and discontent seriously hinders both a deeper understanding of the socio-political evolution of Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and a more nuanced analysis of popular reactions to the events of 1956.

### ***Historical Context***

The Czechoslovak communists came to power in a bloodless coup in February 1948 and thereafter sought to 'construct socialism,' albeit in a fierce Stalinist guise. The burning political goal for the KSČ after the 'victorious February' was to consolidate and extend its monopoly of power and the prime method was coercion of 'class enemies.' Repression was unleashed almost immediately and lasted until well after Stalin's death in March 1953. Numerically, it is still impossible to arrive at precise overall figures of victims but the latest archival findings indicate that just under 90,000 citizens from all social backgrounds were prosecuted for 'political crimes' in the years 1948-54. In addition, in the period October 1948 to December 1952, 233 death penalties were pronounced, of which 178 were carried out, the most notorious being the executions of Milada Horáková, a leading National Socialist parliamentary deputy, and Rudolf Slánský, the former General Secretary of the KSČ, after much publicized show trials in June 1950 and November 1952 respectively.<sup>33</sup>

Emphasis on the terroristic essence of the communist regime in the period of 'socialist construction,' however, should not obscure the fact that Czechoslovak Stalinism was a highly contradictory political, economic, and socio-cultural phenomenon which elicited divergent and hybrid responses not only from different social strata, but also often *within* individuals. On the one hand, the Soviet-inspired 'militarization' of the economy, the repression visited on many 'ordinary' citizens and the fierce labor discipline imposed by the infant communist regime undoubtedly contributed to embedded alienation and resentment, although overt and active resistance to the regime was comparatively rare. Crucially, gross imbalances in production and investment, steep price rises, depreciated real incomes, a lack of decent housing, and a concomitant plunge in living standards by the early 1950s showed definitively

that the cherished hopes and expectations of abundance under socialism were far from being fulfilled. Similarly, recurrent collectivization drives embittered large numbers of farmers, many of whom were targeted in 'anti-kulak' campaigns. On the other hand, important components of Stalinist 'lived experience' and governmental policy, such as large-scale nationalization of industry, security of employment, an egalitarian wage structure, expanded social benefits and improved cultural and educational opportunities facilitated a fragile bond between worker and state based on the strident 'class perspective' (*trídni hledisko*) at the heart of Stalinist rhetoric and reinforced by the manipulation of ritualized public discourse and terminology. Upward social mobility for hitherto disadvantaged groups was a particularly noteworthy aspect of 'Stalinization' with as many as 300,000 'traditional' workers moving into non-manual administrative jobs to be replaced by over 600,000 'new' workers from largely non-proletarian backgrounds.<sup>34</sup> In these circumstances an ideologically privileged, but exploited, Czech and Slovak working class was able to forge a strictly limited social and institutional space to voice discontent over specific government policies deemed to have broken the unwritten 'social contract.'<sup>35</sup>

This unease exploded in early June 1953 less than three months after Stalin's death. On 30 May the government announced a far-reaching currency reform which had a sudden and devastating impact – retail prices roughly doubled – on the savings and standards of living of millions of people, outraging many citizens. The result was a wave of strikes and demonstrations, which in a few places, notably the important industrial city of Plzeň, culminated in violent street protests and the ransacking of local party offices. The disorders were suppressed by specially dispatched armed detachments and harsh punishments, including internment in labor camps, were meted out to hundreds of rioters. Nevertheless, regional and central authorities were shaken by the outpouring of pent-up worker anger, and repression was soon tempered by belated, though meaningful, socioeconomic concessions, which formed part of the Moscow-sponsored 'New Course.'<sup>36</sup> This reform-minded strategy, which was applied throughout the Soviet bloc, sought to reduce huge state investments in the military and heavy industry in order to expand consumer and agricultural production and thereby ameliorate general standards of living. Indeed, the equation 'socialism = higher living standards' was a goal which was partially achieved in Czechoslovakia in the years after 1953: economic imbalances were alleviated, real wages rose, there were several rounds of price cuts, and housing construction was given greater priority. Indicative was the emerging rhetoric about 'socialist technology,' encapsulated in the production of the 'People's Car.'<sup>37</sup>

However, opinion on the ‘New Course’ was ambivalent. On the one hand, it fostered hope among the people and ‘changed [the] attitude of a large section of the population towards the regime,’ but on the other, the ‘overwhelming majority of the Party *aktiv* retained their opposition to the changes.’<sup>38</sup>

This contradictory nature of the ‘New Course’ in the mid-1950s seems to us to be crucial in understanding Czech and Slovak responses to the tumults of 1956. The socioeconomic reforms and the more nebulous political changes, focused on an ‘anti-bureaucracy’ drive, went some way to assuage popular discontent and thus acted to bolster the communist system, while the limitations placed on the ‘New Course’ by the neo-Stalinist leadership were welcomed, and in part conditioned, by the ‘conservative’ party apparatus at all levels. In these circumstances, the authority of the party was cautiously restored, political centralization persisted intact, the power holders remained overwhelmingly united, and to a certain extent expectation, mingled with a measure of inertia, was engendered among a confused and divided citizenry. These complex domestic developments and moods were accompanied by an equally ambiguous foreign scene in which anti-West German propaganda sat uneasily with a relaxation of international tension associated with the ‘spirit of Geneva.’ Both internal and external imbroglios in our view militated against overt popular mobilization in 1956 and hence form an important distinction between conditions in Czechoslovakia and those in Hungary and Poland.

## **Part II**

### ***Destalinization in the KSČ and Beyond, March-June 1956***

The impact on the KSČ of Khrushchev’s assault on Stalin’s ‘cult of the personality’ at the 20<sup>th</sup> Soviet party congress has been quite extensively documented by historians.<sup>39</sup> This section summarizes the existing literature and focuses on the important, but under-researched, question of responses ‘from below’ among the party rank-and-file and *aktiv*. We demonstrate that while many communists took the opportunity to criticize past party policy and demand change, others displayed a propensity to what has been termed ‘indigenous Stalinism,’ facilitating efforts by the leadership to control the potentially destabilizing and damaging effects of the turmoil at the grassroots. We then briefly discuss the reactions to embryonic destalinization among Czechoslovak writers and students, arguing that the political and ideological concerns of the intellectual elites were rarely overtly ‘anti-communist’ and

moreover often became entwined with 'in-house' professional and academic matters. This contention is substantiated by a case study of how the party's Institute of History managed to negotiate the uncharted waters of destalinization.

### *'Chaos in Our Heads': Rank-and-File Doubts and Challenges*

As elsewhere in the Soviet bloc, the 20<sup>th</sup> congress acted 'like a bomb' in the Czechoslovak party.<sup>40</sup> According to Kaplan, it 'aroused the most diverse emotions and thoughts, disappointment, distrust and criticism of the leadership,'<sup>41</sup> and for Miloš Hájek, a budding young communist, it put an end to 'monolithic unity.'<sup>42</sup> A diplomat in the British Embassy in Prague captured the mood succinctly:

The rumors that are going round at the present time [April 1956] are indicative of a general state of uncertainty not only among the population as a whole but, more particularly, among party members....there is clearly a good deal of confusion within the party about how to apply the doctrines of the XXth Congress, especially as regards the right (or possibly even the duty) of criticism. Behind all the confusion is the profound uncertainty caused by the de-deification of Stalin.<sup>43</sup>

In the aftermath of the Soviet party congress, worried, embarrassed and shell-shocked KSC bosses did their best to contain the whirlpool of doubts, vacillations and strictures among grassroots communists often directed at local and central luminaries. Both the immediate and longer-term response of the Czechoslovak leadership in 1956 was that although ideological and political 'mistakes' had been made in the previous years, the party's 'basic line' was, and remained, essentially correct and inviolable. But the new spirit emanating from Moscow could hardly be ignored. Hence, on 27 February, just two days after Khrushchev's address, the Politburo decided to rapidly arrange regional meetings of the party *aktiv* at which lower-level functionaries would be informed about the results of the Soviet congress.<sup>44</sup> These sessions took place on 5 and 6 March. At this stage and throughout the following weeks nothing was uttered in public about the 'secret speech,' and even high-ranking officials had scant information about it before the end of March. It is likely, however, that news of its existence was fairly widely disseminated via illegal foreign radio broadcasts. In contrast, over two million copies of Khrushchev's opening address to the congress were printed in the Czechoslovak press and party leader Novotný, probably under pressure from

Moscow, insisted at the Politburo session on 2 March that 'Stalin's cult of personality' should be a topic of discussion at the *aktiv* gatherings.<sup>45</sup> It was also the main item on the agenda of the Central Committee plena of 29-30 March and 19-20 April. Here, Novotný explicitly referred for the first, and only, time to the 'secret speech,' although his assessments of the conclusions of the 20<sup>th</sup> congress were generally cautious. Nevertheless, his words had an immediate impact at all levels of the KSČ, including the base, where unexpectedly forthright and heated discussions ensued throughout April until being gradually reigned in by the leadership from mid-May. As one letter writer said: 'criticism from below is outstripping self-criticism from above.'<sup>46</sup> Muriel Blaive even maintains that a 'wave of emotion' and 'sensations' were engendered by Novotný's reports, which were interpreted as an admission of the collective responsibility of the party leadership for fostering Gottwald's 'cult of personality.'<sup>47</sup>

These passions were evident at the *aktiv* meetings.<sup>48</sup> No doubt to the chagrin of the KSČ elite, disoriented party members at these 'numerically very well attended' gatherings posed rather too many disconcerting questions: 'why was there no decisive struggle against the cult of personality while Stalin was still alive?'; what exactly were 'Stalin's mistakes in the Soviet Union and the international communist movement?'; 'what were the errors in the policy toward Yugoslavia?'; 'is it possible in Czechoslovakia to speak about a parliamentary road [to socialism]?'; and most acutely 'how and in what ways did the damage of the cult concretely affect our country?' There were 'sharp' comments about 'hypertrophied administration' and 'bureaucratic methods of operation in state and economic organs,' which should be countered by 'broader collective decision-making' and 'the raising of authority of lower-level workers.'<sup>49</sup> At meetings in the Pardubice region, Stalin was compared to Hitler 'because both were murderers.'<sup>50</sup> In some places, notably Bratislava and Prešov, no discussion was permitted after the official reports and this 'incorrect' attitude elicited 'dissatisfaction' among the audience.<sup>51</sup> Where public input was welcomed, there was 'criticism directed at many higher party functionaries,' including Politburo members Zdeněk Fierlinger and Jaromír Dolanský whose answers to queries about the 'cult' were deemed inadequate by the *aktiv* in Plzeň and Frýdek Místek.<sup>52</sup> In Slovakia, too, the March regional, district and enterprise *aktiv* meetings, in which almost 27,000 Slovak Communist Party (*Komunistická strana Slovenska* - KSS) members participated, revealed the extent of rank-

and-file unease and the debates continued with undiminished intensity in the following weeks.<sup>53</sup>

Heated discussions peaked in April after Novotný's address to the Central Committee at the end of March. At party cell and enterprise assemblies, top figures in the Politburo and government came in for stinging rebuke. In Prague 3, speakers 'at almost all meetings with few exceptions are critical of leading workers [who] have no links with the people, especially....[Minister of Defence Alexej] Čepička and [Václav] Kopecký.' The latter ruled over the Ministry of Information with 'the most brutal terror' and broke nearly all the principles in the party's statute book.<sup>54</sup> Other 'comrades' deplored Kopecký's 'luxurious lifestyle' and nepotism and assailed Čepička's 'bourgeois manners' and arrogance.<sup>55</sup> The cult, it appears, was not restricted to Stalin. A party worker in Poděbrady insisted that Gottwald, Antonín Zápotocký, the president of the republic, and 'many members of the present CC [Central Committee]' expect 'adulation' and 'personalized glory.'<sup>56</sup> Even Novotný did not escape the wrath of the underlings, some calling for greater 'self-criticism' in his speeches or impugning his use of official cars for private purposes.<sup>57</sup> Further down the scale, the attack on the 'cult' opened the door to wide-ranging gripes about the 'post-February careerists' and petty bureaucrats who seemingly populated the system at all levels.<sup>58</sup>

If such negative views about individuals were not bad enough, there were signs that faith in the party elite as a whole had been undermined. In Prague 1, it was asserted that 'some members' of the Central Committee should be changed 'because there is no guarantee at all that the same comrades who implemented the old Stalinist policies will be able to successfully carry out the new Leninist line....The party is losing trust [and] we need a radical reform [*náprava*] in everything.'<sup>59</sup> Railwaymen in Česká Třebová said more or less the same: 'The party has lost faith among the workers, because it does not do what it says it will.'<sup>60</sup> At cell meetings in Prague 6, 'the behavior of our leading workers is universally criticized,'<sup>61</sup> and in Prague 10 and many other places a common refrain was: 'members of the CC, government representatives, [parliamentary] deputies and such like do not go into the factories' and 'our political and economic bosses are cut off from the workers.'<sup>62</sup> One comrade lamented the formation of Soviet-style '*troiki*' composed of local party and security bosses, who 'decide everything themselves regardless of people's opinions' and some even contended that 'a class struggle exists today in the party. On one side are the ordinary [*prostí*] workers, and on the other the top functionaries, the so-called red aristocracy.'<sup>63</sup>

Several highly sensitive issues were aired in these party fora, none more so than Czechoslovakia's relationship with the USSR, which fed into hesitant ideas of alternative paths to socialism, and the activities of the security services, especially during the Slánský affair. In Plzeň, Pardubice, and Bilovec, where local communists evidently had long memories, doubt was cast on the Soviet Union's willingness and ability to provide military support to Czechoslovakia at the time of the Munich Treaty in September 1938.<sup>64</sup> A party member in the Škoda (ZVIL) engineering works in Plzeň bemoaned the fact that 'we take over everything [from the USSR] mechanically' and another could not understand why 'we even copy mistakes made in the Soviet Union.'<sup>65</sup> Similarly, in Prague 10 communists asked, 'why have we taken on board even bad models from the experiences of the USSR?'<sup>66</sup> An angry young distillery worker from Pardubice in a 'most remarkable contribution' demanded: 'Why have we given uranium to the Russians free of charge for ten years....Why are the Jáchymov [uranium] mines under Russian leadership....Why did they take Sub-Carpathian Rus from us [in 1945]....How could our party representatives so blindly follow Stalin like sheep?'<sup>67</sup> Rank-and-file communists in central Prague put it very starkly: 'The ČSR [Czechoslovak Republic] is an ideological and economic colony.'<sup>68</sup>

These were dangerous heresies and by the fall they were beginning to coalesce into an embryonic conception of a 'Czechoslovak road to socialism,' or at least a notion of a more independent stance toward the Soviet Union, based on the Yugoslav model. In late October, a party member in Rakovník asked pointedly: the Yugoslavs 'are going their way, why can't we go on our own?'<sup>69</sup> Another party stalwart and former officer in the National Security Corps agreed, saying that it is 'correct to build socialism according to one's own conditions,' as the Yugoslavs and Poles were doing.<sup>70</sup> Supportive comments about Tito and Gomułka were relatively common, and the slogan 'Long Live Tito's Policies' was daubed on a factory in Fil'akovo.<sup>71</sup> Several press editors were deemed guilty of pro-Tito opinions by a classified KSČ assessment of the outcomes of the Hungarian events,<sup>72</sup> and, just as disconcerting, army personnel in Brno were accused of 'disseminating the theory of "national communism"'.<sup>73</sup> An extreme version was put forward by a secondary school teacher in Košice, who declared that the Soviet satellite states 'will break away from the USSR and unite with Tito, who is creating a Central European union led by Yugoslavia.'<sup>74</sup> The significance of these nebulous strivings is that already by late 1956 and early 1957 they were given greater theoretical clarity and muscle by younger political philosophers who propounded a nascent Czech

Marxist revisionism, a reconceptualization of Marxist-Leninist theory which ultimately culminated in the ideological formulations of Czechoslovak reform communism in the 'Prague Spring' of 1968.<sup>75</sup>

The official line on Slánský was that, although certain 'transgressions of socialist legality' had regrettably occurred, his trial was essentially valid and what is more, as Novotný asserted at a Politburo meeting in June, Slánský himself was responsible for the worst excesses of the security services while he was General Secretary of the party in 1948-51.<sup>76</sup> It was even suggested in higher party circles that he was the 'Czechoslovak Beria.'<sup>77</sup> But not all KSC members were persuaded. One comrade in Prague 12 had the impression that Slánský was 'unjustly condemned' and another in Prague 16 asked: 'who in the country [*u nás*] is to blame for the mistakes in the Slánský trial?'<sup>78</sup> In Plzeň, the following awkward questions arose: 'how should party members explain the violently forced confessions of the Slánský band and 'what will happen to those who broke socialist legality in the ČSR' and carried out 'Gestapo methods?''<sup>79</sup> The answer of a communist in the Jan Šverma works in Brno was frank: 'the perpetrators....in security should resign from their posts.'<sup>80</sup> Far more damaging and contentious, since it was not clear whether the speaker referred to Soviet advisers in the StB,<sup>81</sup> was the demand in Pardubice that 'those who introduced these incorrect procedures into our country should be publicly exposed and punished.'<sup>82</sup> In Časlav, interlocutors asked, 'who is culpable for the tyranny?' and seemed to point the finger at Novotný and Karol Bacílek, the former Minister of National Security and First Secretary of the Communist Party of Slovakia, 'who were the main accusers in the Slánský trial.'<sup>83</sup> In short, party loyalists wanted 'to know the truth about the question of the security services and their methods.'<sup>84</sup> This new requirement for an objective 'truth' struck at the very heart of the party's claim to a monopoly of knowledge and doctrinal purity and hence must have been considered close to apostasy. Linked to this were complaints about the lack of timely and accurate information in the press, with one communist in Prague 13 even declaring that the party daily organ *Rudé právo* ('Red Right') 'lies.'<sup>85</sup>

Another frequent demand was for the convocation of an extraordinary party congress, not merely a national conference as had been planned, to hammer out the implications of the 'cult.' Such claims were heard mainly, but not solely, in Prague.<sup>86</sup> They were also pronounced in party organizations in the army, the Ministry of National Defence, and among political workers in the army. By 30 April, the Central Committee had received 146 resolutions in favor of a congress from basic party cells comprising 11,936 members and by 8



May it was 200 resolutions with around 15,000 members.<sup>87</sup> By June, 326 organizations with a total membership of 21,237 were still advocating a congress.<sup>88</sup> To be sure, this was a small minority of party caucuses, but it was enough to concern the leadership in that these demands could reach mass proportions and moreover were occasionally accompanied by pleas for ‘democratic elections.’ Novotný, palpably worried about the situation in the army in particular, spoke at the Politburo meeting on 14 May of ‘attacks on the party and its policy’ and of ‘fractional activity,’ emanating ‘from the ranks of the intelligentsia....[and] various petit bourgeois and bourgeois elements.’<sup>89</sup>

Such ‘elements’ had evidently wormed their way into the Slovak party, where truly radical proposals were put forward in the spring of 1956: the abolition of the National Front,<sup>90</sup> the legalization of opposition parties, a call for free elections and the introduction of an independent press. As in the Czech lands, an extremely sensitive issue was the responsibility of leading party functionaries for the Stalinist repressions of the early 1950s.<sup>91</sup> In Slovakia, this burning question was given added poignancy by the charges of ‘bourgeois nationalism,’ an ideological campaign which had culminated in April 1954 in the show trial and imprisonment of several prominent Slovak communists, including Gustáv Husák and Ladislav Novomeský. Critical discussion of this affair came to a head at a stormy meeting of the Bratislava municipal *aktiv* on 26 April 1956 at which local party intellectuals attacked the official line on the so-called ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists.’<sup>92</sup> This was one of the first public expressions of destalinization by the Slovak intelligentsia and their demands were to grow in the following months. Indeed, Slovak writers publishing in the pages of the literary journal *Kultúrny život* (‘Cultural Life’) were the most vocal supporters of diverse destalinization measures, even at the price of constant conflict with the KSS leadership.<sup>93</sup>

For a short period in the spring of 1956, then, Czech and Slovak communists appeared rudderless, lacking in concrete directives from above, either from Prague or Moscow, detailing the ‘correct’ way to respond to the ‘secret speech.’ The resultant political and ideological space allowed party members to grope toward their own conclusions about Stalin and Stalinism. Profound bemusement, uncertainty, shock, and recriminations were engendered at the rank-and-file level and potentially highly damaging questions were being posed: what should replace the orthodoxies of the Stalinist era; who in the present Politburo and Central Committee was trustworthy; how to deal with the incumbent perpetrators of Stalinist injustices; and how would future policy improve on past mistakes?<sup>94</sup> The

straightforward word 'chaotic' may not be too much of an exaggeration to describe some member's reactions. It was a term used by a party stalwart in Prague 16 in April: 'The CC KSČ told party members one thing earlier and something different now. So today I cannot trust the CC....there is chaos in the heads of communists.'<sup>95</sup> Similarly, a former university student and party loyalist, wrote to a friend that 'The XX congress really mixed up our heads.'<sup>96</sup> A fine example of the gross confusion was the response of a Prague regional committee representative, who, when asked about the cult of personality, 'compared Stalin with [the disgraced] Slánský.'<sup>97</sup> A former border guard said 'Communists....did not know what to say in discussions with non-Communists' following the destalinization campaign, while a Radio Free Europe (RFE) report asserted that the 'standard answer' to questions about the 20th congress at the Škoda works was: 'we'll have our instructions in about a fortnight'! An émigré doctor from Ostrava summed up the attitude of party functionaries to the congress more graphically: they were 'at their wits end and went around as uncomfortable as a wet hen.'<sup>98</sup>

This quip, however, should not hide the fact that the clamor and discontent among relatively large sections of the KSČ membership ultimately went to the crux of party functioning and represented a call for a more transparent democratic relationship between 'them' and 'us,' for greater decentralization and accountability, for more open media and less bureaucratization and 'top-down' imposition of policy. Hence, it would appear that a latent assault on the dominant methods of the party elite and apparatus was smoldering just below the surface. This political fluidity, bordering at times on outright dissent, seriously concerned party bosses and middle level officials, accustomed as they were to 'Stalinist' certitude and strict discipline. This is clearly demonstrated in Novotný's admission that after the 20th congress:

A number of incorrect views alien to our principles were expressed....We must devote threefold attention to these views and tendencies, especially when they emerge inside the party....The voices of hidden enemies have even been heard and attacks directed against the general line [of the party]....These bourgeois liberal opinions....are evident mainly outside the party, but attempts have also been made to smuggle them into party ranks.<sup>99</sup>

Novotný's final comment referred obliquely to the most influential and potentially deep-seated challenge to party orthodoxy in Czechoslovakia in 1956: the oppositional

currents that had been brewing for quite some time among writers and students, KSC members included.

### *Intellectuals in Revolt?*

In April, the second congress of the Union of Writers was the scene of a forthright critique of the regime's cultural policies. In May in Bratislava, Prague and several other cities, thousands of university students participated in rag festivals before and during which political demands were made and contentious resolutions drawn up. At the writers' congress, held between 22 and 29 April, various authors, most overtly the poets František Hrubín and Jaroslav Seifert, took advantage of the more open self-critical atmosphere and delivered scathing speeches on past party interventions in creative life, defended incarcerated and repressed colleagues, and revived the challenging notion, first articulated in the national awakening of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that writers were the 'conscience of the nation.'<sup>100</sup> This formulation undoubtedly represented a veiled ideological threat to the party's hegemony in national culture and as such was fiercely, though belatedly, resisted by the leadership, which in the course of the next few months gradually decapitated the intellectuals' 'congress front' and reshuffled the editorial board of their prime mouthpiece, *Literární noviny* ('Literary Gazette'). Thus, while the 'political and moral significance of the writers' congress went beyond its actual period.... [and] was a public protest and revolt against the past, a symbol of courage,' its import 'in terms of power was incomparably smaller.' Indeed, soon after the gathering the writers' 'political activity and commitment petered out' under increasing pressure from the authorities.<sup>101</sup>

The students' challenge to the status quo in 1956, though equally symbolic and certainly more visible, proved ultimately just as ephemeral as the writers'. Their protest began in late April and was sparked by undergraduates in the School of Chemistry at Prague's Charles University. The prime mover was Ladislav Němec, a disillusioned party member and convinced Marxist who had been galvanized by the recent revelations. The students' main resolution, drawn up under the auspices of the official Czechoslovak Union of Youth (ČSM), noted that in the past 'the principles of socialist democracy' had not always been observed and went on to list *inter alia* the following academic and political demands: more prompt and accurate reporting in the press, radio and film; access to western newspapers and periodicals and an end to the jamming of western radio broadcasts; banned

books should be returned to libraries; greater ease of foreign travel; a public review of the Slánský trial and punishment for those who tolerated and carried out 'illegal procedures'; less emphasis on the compulsory teaching of Marxism-Leninism and the Russian language; and a stop to the practice of 'mere copying of the USSR' in educational and especially economic affairs.<sup>102</sup> The most provocative political section of the resolution read: 'We do not consider correct the view of Mr Novotny [sic]' when he spoke of the Central Committee's right to decide 'the most important questions of the Party and state.'<sup>103</sup>

These issues were taken up by students in Bratislava and other university towns and found their most overt and bizarre expression in the Majales demonstrations in the Slovak capital and Prague on 12 and 20 May 1956 respectively, during which the authorities were openly lampooned in a colorful and carnivalesque atmosphere. This was the first time since 1947 that the authorities had permitted the traditional Majales celebrations, although under close police scrutiny.<sup>104</sup> Some scholars have even reasoned that the demands and actions represented an 'abortive student revolt.'<sup>105</sup> However, there is little evidence to suggest that they were motivated by anti-communism. Indeed, one of the Prague ringleaders later recalled that 'we didn't intend to make any sort of organized resistance against the Communist regime,' a stance epitomized by a slogan shouted at the May Day rally: 'we don't want to rebel, we want discussion.'<sup>106</sup> Similarly, Michal Barnovský, the leading historian of Slovak destalinization, has concluded that the Bratislava student movement was more concerned with 'professional' interests than wider political and social problems and was easily pacified and brought under official university and youth organizational control by the early summer.<sup>107</sup> In sum, we would argue that the students' prime aim was a meaningful liberalization of the existing academic, and to a lesser extent political, system, compounded by youthful optimism and naivety.

### *'Love for Comrade Stalin is Great': The Limits of Destalinization*

Despite these strivings for greater democratization among ordinary party members and, more explicitly, sections of the intellectual elite, the KSČ as a whole, most crucially its *aktiv*, remained essentially united and the leadership was able to contain the debates within desired limits, isolate and eventually reject the more radical demands and undertake a gradual counter-offensive by mid-May. This retrenchment, combined with a series of moderate reformist measures, such as economic decentralization, administrative debureaucratization, enhanced autonomy for Slovakia and at least a theoretical commitment to 'socialist legality,'

plus the concession of the sacrificial lamb Čepička, who was unceremoniously relieved of his party and government posts in mid-April, meant that the Politburo never lost control of the situation, even at the height of the ‘cult’ controversies.<sup>108</sup> In addition, the KSČ was largely free from damaging personality clashes and ideological frictions and harbored no potential Gomulka or Nagy in its upper echelons, anyone with a modicum of independence having been eliminated in the purges. In these circumstances, as Kaplan argues, the ‘majority [of communists] returned to their old pattern of thought’ and inertia, emphasizing ‘the practical issues of everyday life’ rather than broader political and ideological bones of contention.<sup>109</sup> In short, as asserted by one émigré in July 1956, party functionaries continued ‘to apply the principles of Stalinism,’<sup>110</sup> many fearing, no doubt, that if real change occurred their privileged positions would be in jeopardy.

Indeed, the archival record reveals a distinct strain of conservatism and a concrete sense of nostalgia for tried-and-tested Stalinist methods – even pro-Stalin sentiments – among many party veterans. For example, in the tool-making workshop of the Jan Šverma factory in Brno ‘comrades attempted to excuse and sometimes even refute’ the accusations against Stalin, and typists wept when they were informed about ‘Stalin’s mistakes.’ A party instructor summed up local feelings by stating that: ‘Love for comrade Stalin is great.’<sup>111</sup> This view was reiterated by a university student, seemingly a party member, who in a letter to his brother in May, said: ‘I loved and still love Stalin.’<sup>112</sup> In the Olomouc region, it was pointed out that ‘some [party members] are unable to cope with criticism’ of Stalin, which they regard as ‘incorrect,’ and at the giant Vítkovice ironworks in Ostrava a certain Jindřich Wolczik announced: ‘I am not capable of changing my opinion of Stalin and so I can no longer remain a member of the party.’ He was not the only one to hand in their party card. Doubts about Stalin’s ‘guilt’ were likewise expressed in the central Bohemian towns of Hořovice and Kolín, and in Prague 6.<sup>113</sup> Two employees in the State Planning Office summed up the situation in the KSČ thus: the 20<sup>th</sup> congress ‘sowed distrust among party members who divided into two camps, a minority who believe unreservedly in the correctness of the congress decisions, and a majority who continue to believe in the correctness of Stalin’s policies.’<sup>114</sup> Other sources appear to corroborate this balance of opinion in the party. Kaplan maintains that at district conferences in mid-March ‘more often Stalin was being defended and there were demands that his person should not be discussed.’<sup>115</sup> One month later British embassy staff in Prague reported that the Hungarian ambassador considered ‘it would be

quite some time before the rank-and-file would accept the new estimation of Stalin conscientiously.’<sup>116</sup>

Similar ideas were evident also in late October and November. An upbeat memorandum on workers’ attitudes written by Vasil Bil’ak, secretary of the Prešov district in northern Slovakia, noted ‘almost everywhere it is emphasized that a firm Stalinist hand is not bad.’<sup>117</sup> Admittedly, Bil’ak was not the most impartial of observers, but his comments were broadly replicated by several old comrades in the Jihlava, Olomouc, Bratislava, Banská Bystrica and Šafarikovo regions, who blamed Khrushchev’s 20th congress speech for the events in Poland and Hungary and retrospectively supported Stalin in his struggle against Tito. One of them even praised Stalin’s emphasis on the sharpening of the class struggle and another said: ‘We shouldn’t blacken Stalin’s name so much.’<sup>118</sup> Stalinist rhetoric and mentalities were deeply ingrained in the party: ‘the class enemy does not sleep....[and] has not abandoned his sordid schemes....[Therefore] the remnants of the defeated exploiting classes....attempt, with the assistance of foreign imperialists, to use every opportunity for their enemy designs....[and hence] we need systematic vigilance and watchfulness.’<sup>119</sup>

The important conclusion to be drawn is that there existed among many party officials and members a tenacious predilection for ‘Stalinist’ conventions and ascriptive class designations which facilitated a fairly rapid return to normality after the upheavals of the spring and helped to bind the party together in the turbulent days of the Hungarian uprising. The KSČ was certainly never a monolithic ‘Stalinist’ party, but a persistent ‘indigenous Stalinism’ ran through its core in the 1950s and beyond by which ‘the more democratic and national aspects of communist tradition were....submerged by the dominant Stalinist patterns of thought and behavior, and communists were torn between conflicting loyalties and clashing precepts.’<sup>120</sup> Such contradictions are illustrated in the following case study of the destalinization process in 1956 in the party’s Institute of History.

### *Turmoil in the Party Institute of History*

The Institute of History of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (*Ústav dějin KSČ* - ÚD KSČ) was founded in 1950, its main aims being to coordinate and conduct research on the history of the KSČ and to organize party museums and exhibitions on the labor movement. The Institute was a component of the central apparatus of the KSČ and was regarded as an important player in party propaganda. In the first three years of its existence, however, the Institute struggled against a dearth of qualified personnel and only slowly

acquired the stature of a regular party body. An account of the deliberations in the ÚD KSČ in 1956 graphically illustrates the deep-seated political and professional concerns of its employees and scientific workers.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, a view from inside the Institute acts as a barometer showing how far discontent at the heart of the party and among its official historians had built up during the Stalinist period. The subterranean tensions surfaced in the course of the party organization meetings that followed in the wake of Novotný's cautious report to the Central Committee session on 29-30 March. Workers at the Institute gathered on 27 April and 10 May 1956 to consider the speech, and the debates continued on 26 and 30 November.<sup>122</sup> The archival records of these stormy sessions demonstrate that the subject of the discussions evolved relatively quickly from general issues of past party policy to internal, and often highly personalized, problems at the Institute. So much so that the November meetings focused exclusively on 'everyday' affairs, probably reflecting the crackdown on debate after the Hungarian uprising. Speakers deliberated the recently exposed wrongdoings of Stalinism, pointed to the authoritarian excesses which they encountered in their immediate professional milieu and frequently mentioned their own hesitations and misgivings. Some discussants spoke of their personal failings, or at least referred to their ignorance of the real state of affairs. Others criticized the functioning of the ÚD KSČ in the first years of its existence, opening up to wider scrutiny the hitherto unresolved disputes inside the Institute.

The possibility to evaluate Novotný's speech in effect broke down the inhibitions and accumulated doubts about the situation in the party and Czechoslovak society as a whole. Novotný's lack of concrete detail was particularly censured: 'The material is unsatisfactory because it does not address the defects in our country. It is misdirected and seems to me to be insincere.'<sup>123</sup> Another said 'I expected a critical approach in the report of the CC meeting, but there was nothing.' Others remarked that the text did not refer to specific responsibility for the misdemeanors of the past: 'In his speech Novotný calls for criticism and self-criticism in the party....but....in criticizing the CC it should have been indicated who among us was an active bearer of the cult of personality.' As in the rank-and-file party meetings mentioned above, demands were heard for the guilty to be unmasked: 'We want to know what it was really like in the party leadership, who was responsible for what, and who ran security.' The unwillingness of party leaders to inform members about recent changes in the KSČ also came in for attack:

Radio Free Europe carried a report on Čepička's sacking two hours after the CC session, and yet we learned of it completely formally. There was insufficient self-criticism in the CC. People expect an answer; they're saying, it's not enough to throw Čepička adrift, we need a total overhaul of party work.

It was only a short step from criticism of the latest CC plenum to expressions of doubt about past party policies. Some voiced their discontent with the prevailing conditions in the KSČ: 'The cult of personality ran very deep and was evident in the dictatorial system of work.' Above all, the nonexistence of any meaningful inner-party discussion alienated many: 'Every voice raised in criticism was silenced, driven into some kind of faction.' The practice of 'hoarding secrets' (*tajnůstkaření*) and the consequent suppression of important information isolated the party from society. Other speakers were openly anxious about the barriers that divided the party from the public: 'If we don't learn to tell people the truth, we will not gain the full loyalty of the masses.' This reluctance to inform the public was not simply construed as a relic of the era of the 'cult,' but as a living contemporary problem. As an example participants emphasized the extremely limited news coverage in the Czechoslovak press:

Even today non-party people are not told who has been rehabilitated, but they have the right to find out these things, they have the right to control elected organs. *Rudé právo* writes that people believe in us, but that's not quite the full story....The western press writes more.

One female employee in the Institute spoke openly of her experiences of how rank-and-file party members were deliberately misinformed: 'The divorce between the masses and the leadership is caused by poor information....In my work as a propagandist I was expressly instructed to teach the duties, not the rights, of party members.'

As noted above, another source of profound discontent, even shock, was the disclosure of the political trials and the illegal activities of the security services. Lack of information was acutely felt here too: 'It is necessary to tell the public who gave the orders for the trials. Sometimes security is blamed, at other times the CC.' A few individuals were taken aback by the scale of the recently revealed repressions and insisted that they be explained as quickly as possible. Others were left with a feeling of confusion and bewilderment: 'We have found out that the charges were invented and many comrades ask



themselves, so what then *wasn't* concocted?' Closely linked with the issue of Stalinist repressions was the problem of the activity of the hypertrophied security services. One of the participants in the meetings related this theme to her daily working environment:

It is said that state security has been instructed to keep our intellectuals under surveillance, to watch their behavior. This doesn't look good, and we are concerned that if we voice our opinions then there will be certain consequences....I demand that the organizational committee find out whether it's true that the secret police are keeping tabs on the intelligentsia.

The critical potential of party functionaries, awakened by the 'exposure of the cult of personality,' was almost immediately unleashed on the workings of the Institute itself and the impact of party historiography. Already at the meetings in April and May some speakers were fairly uncompromising about conditions in the ÚD KSČ and a number of reprimands were leveled at František Pór, the vice-director. He was charged with mistrustfulness and untoward practices in personnel policy, deserving of the title 'cult of personality.' The working environment in the ÚD KSČ's archive came under specific scrutiny:

In the Institute, the situation was such that I was afraid to express my opinions and verify certain problems....we were silenced. We archivists undoubtedly made some mistakes, but instead of helpful explanations we were designated as a fraction and were said to lack faith in party work. At the head of all this was c[omrade] Pór, who threatened us and let it be known that we could be sacked....I do one thing at home and another at the Institute. Here, I'm afraid to speak my mind and I feared certain comrades.

Other employees confirmed the baleful atmosphere in the Institute: 'I came here full of zest and enthusiasm; I thought I would meet mature people. But I found out that they are really scared and are afraid to speak.'

Personal relations and the leadership's cadre policy were among the main themes discussed at the fall meetings. Gustav Bareš, a top ÚD KSČ functionary and a former prominent Stalinist in the cultural field, sharply criticized the prevailing conditions: 'we have replaced political education with administrative methods, sometimes even with denunciations.' He pointedly named the prime culprit: 'C[omrade] Pór uses methods that are

not compatible with party work.' This accusation led to a heated argument between the two men which ended up in the Institute's 'special commission.' Here, Bareš's charge was totally rejected and his criticism was described as exaggerated and grossly personalized. In addition, his alleged oversensitivity was noted. However, it was recognized that Pór had committed certain indiscretions and had behaved unjustly toward several employees. Despite their deep-seated animosities, both men retained their positions.

The year 1956 in the party's central Institute of History was marked by often very sharp debates following Novotný's 'cult of the personality' speech in late March. Speakers at official discussion sessions were critical of past party policies, including the repressions and the role of the security services, and anxious about the future direction of party historiography. The weighty resolution passed on 29 May by the Institute's KSČ organization summarizing the debates on Novotný's address and the CC decrees that accompanied it, indicates that employees voted in favor of greater criticism and self-criticism and spoke of the need to open up and regulate a 'clarification process' in the party. It was demanded that party members and lower-ranking *apparatchiks* should be better informed of events and that so-called 'bureaucratism' should be curtailed. Significantly, this was linked to the idea of decentralized management and demands for the speedy reorganization of the Institute. An allusion was also made to the 'struggle' for the maintenance of socialist legality. A substantial section of the resolution, however, was concerned with the formulation of party policy, in which the ÚD KSČ itself had played a major role. It called for a qualitative change in propaganda activity aimed at greater objectivity and the strengthening of the party's links with non-communists, instead of the creation of insurmountable barriers between them. It appears the framers of the resolution wished to create the impression that during April and May 1956, ÚD KSČ employees had resolved all outstanding conflicts, critically evaluated the preceding period, and fully agreed on the future direction of the organization.

It is evident, then, that in the course of the spring and early summer of 1956 ordinary Institute workers adopted a new mode of inner-party debate marked by relatively open conversations about KSČ policy and the evolution of party history writing. However, by the fall these discussions had become more personalized. The minutes of the November meetings demonstrate that the general critique of Stalinism and its 'imperfections' in the work of the Institute had opened the sluice-gates to accumulated discontents. But rather than demanding more radical destalinization measures from the party leadership, this critical potential was directed *within* the Institute and its departments. Hence, the November discussions above all

‘solved’ individual scores and served as a first personal ‘reckoning’ with Stalinism. The minutes of the meetings also show that, while party historians were highly critical of the KSČ’s previous policies, this did not lead to a revisionist confrontation with the party hierarchy, but merely to a compromise program based on a consensus behind the ‘construction of socialism’ and the ‘harmonious development of society.’

### **Part III**

#### ***Czechoslovak Popular Opinion in 1956 (1): Engagement and Opposition***

The final two parts of this paper gauge in some detail popular responses to the events of 1956, notably the Hungarian Revolution which began on 23 October and ended in mid-November after several days of fierce fighting between armed Magyar rebels and the Red Army. We address the following issues: how did Czech and Slovak citizens, both communists and non-communists, make sense of the dramatic developments in the fall of 1956? How far do the sources speak of ‘resistant’ behaviors and sentiment, or, alternatively, can regime-affirming moods be identified? To what extent did popular attitudes change over time in the rapidly evolving circumstances? Is there any evidence that a ‘tacit consensus’ existed between the communist state and parts of society, engendering a measure of political stabilization and social cohesion? Ultimately, we aim to modify the stereotype of Czech and Slovak ‘passivity’ in 1956 by emphasizing the population’s discriminating engagement with events, while simultaneously reassessing the factors behind their conformity and lack of revolutionary élan. We term this intermediate stance ‘critical loyalty.’ It is a notion closely related to that of ‘grudging loyalty’ or ‘loyal reluctance’ (*loyale Widerwilligkeit*) put forward by East German and Third Reich specialists, but which seem to us to be rather restrictive in the Czechoslovak context in their assumption of a basic unwillingness or reticence on the part of citizens, as if their ‘loyalty’ is wrung out of them.<sup>124</sup> ‘Critical loyalty,’ by comparison, offers the perspective of both positive and negative criticism and hence denotes more open-ended social attitudes toward the political authorities. We use it in the same sense as the Czech social historian, Dana Musilová, who draws a semantic distinction between ‘loyalty’ and ‘faith’ in the system, arguing that a majority of citizens, including party members, were ‘loyal’ rather than ‘faithful.’<sup>125</sup>

Conceptually, we follow what has been termed the ‘new social history’ of Stalinism, which contends that ‘social groups, rather than merely being a site of regime action, are

actors in their own right,' an understanding that privileges the inter-mutuality of state and society.<sup>126</sup> More specifically, our idea of 'critical loyalty' approximates Sheila Fitzpatrick's and Alf Lüdtke's emphasis on the 'inclusionary' and 'exclusionary' practices of the regime, which demonstrated its capabilities to involve, as well as excise, large numbers of people in the state project. They argue that the grand vision of the Stalinist utopia, or at least important aspects of it, engaged and 'energized' the everyday activities of numerous citizens, particularly the youth, and forged inclusive practices and social bonds.<sup>127</sup> To be sure, these are deeply contested issues, but a consensus has emerged in western historiography based on a more nuanced theoretical grasp of the production of Stalinist power and the multifaceted inter-relationship between state and society in the USSR and this interpretation is worth testing in the different conditions of mid-1950s Czechoslovakia.

By way of context, this section starts with a brief examination of the extraordinary political and security measures undertaken by the Czechoslovak authorities in response to the explosion of unrest in Hungary. These military and ideological innovations, operative primarily in the southern border regions of Slovakia, formed the backdrop to social attitudes at a time of confusing and rapidly-moving events, not the least of which was an outbreak of panic buying. It will then assess citizens' engagement with the Poznań uprising in Poland in late June and the Hungarian Revolution, continue with an in-depth analysis of seditious comments, attitudes, and actions, and finally identify and evaluate forms of 'tacit consensus' and 'critical loyalty' toward the communist system.

### *Historical Legacies, Extraordinary Measures, and Panic Buying*

The atmosphere in Slovakia after the eruption of violence in Hungary was tense, given the geographical proximity and the existence of a half-million strong ethnic Magyar minority living in the southern and eastern areas of the territory. Further complicating the situation were the bitter historical legacies and memories of the stormy relations between the two peoples in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1918, the resultant rise of Magyar irredentism and the occupation of parts of Slovakia in 1938 and the uneasy 'resolution' of Slovak-Hungarian tensions after 1945 were all noteworthy milestones in this living memory. The internal political upheavals in Hungary in 1956 not only undermined the stability of the Soviet bloc, but also presaged an alteration, or at least a possible redefinition, of the fragile post-war settlement between Czechoslovakia and Hungary. In these circumstances, it was obvious to communist leaders in Prague that

Slovakia was the first line of defence against ‘counter-revolution,’ which in turn represented a dire threat to the physical existence of the Czechoslovak state as reconstituted at the end of World War II.

The Czechoslovak authorities therefore reacted swiftly to the uprising in Hungary by introducing extraordinary military and security measures. The aim was to strengthen party, army and police supervision of the situation in Slovakia and simultaneously to reinforce the eastern part of the republic in case of armed conflict. Some of these operations were implemented directly by the Central Committee of the Slovak Communist Party, components of which became a kind of special military headquarters of leading party, army, and security representatives coordinating the activities of all interested organs. Similar bodies arose at the local level and the People’s Militia was placed on heightened alert.<sup>128</sup> At the same time, the KSS leadership despatched reliable functionaries to the regions and created an ad hoc *aktiv* of Magyar-speaking officials whose job it was to normalize conditions in the border districts. The main purpose of these emissaries was to prevent any ‘vacillations and provocative acts,’ but in addition they helped with ‘mass political work,’ transported leaflets and journals to Hungary, and even supplied weapons to trusted Hungarian communists together with food, medicines and propaganda materials.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, the Prague party center took the situation in Slovakia extremely seriously, sending the certified Stalinist Bruno Köhler to oversee developments there.<sup>130</sup>

The Czechoslovak armed forces also responded immediately to the unwelcome events in Hungary, above all the prospective instability on the frontiers.<sup>131</sup> From 25 October, border guard units were strengthened, discipline tightened and the ‘military preparedness’ of the entire army was upgraded. The overriding goal was to secure the Czechoslovak-Hungarian state boundary and resolve any potentially damaging border incidents. The prime ideological task was the creation of a defensive wall against the spread of ‘counter-revolution’ into Czechoslovak territory, the likelihood of which seemed to increase with the perceived success of the Magyar rebels in late October and early November following the Red Army’s temporary withdrawal from Budapest. The result was a further reinforcement of the borders, including a draft of reservists and an alternative plan for partial mobilization, which in the event went unrealized.<sup>132</sup> The massive entry of Soviet troops into Hungary on 4 November brought another intensification of military activity in Slovakia, particularly after 8 November when the Czechoslovak General Staff, fearing an escalation of international conflict in the

wake of the Suez Crisis, yet again strengthened the army's fighting preparedness and security measures. According to Jan Štaigl, these procedures were intended to act as cover and indirect support for the Soviet intervention in Hungary.<sup>133</sup> After the defeat of the revolution, the principal aim of the Czechoslovak army was to prevent the excursion of remnant rebel groups into Slovak territory and only in the second half of November were military exercises gradually scaled down.

The Hungarian uprising and the Suez debacle did not only have major security repercussions. They also engendered the social phenomenon of panic buying, or 'increased shopping' (*zvýšený nákup*) as the official euphemism went. The very real fear of impending war and the sense of profound uncertainty that accompanied the two crises found their expression in the hoarding of foodstuffs and other goods.<sup>134</sup> A student letter writer in Košice neatly summed up the shopping frenzy at the start of November: 'people....are terribly worried by events in Hungary and the prospect of war. They are buying sugar and similar items by the sack because they have been told that stocks will run out. Shops cannot keep up with the demand and you cannot imagine how many police officers there are on the streets.'<sup>135</sup> On occasion it was reported that citizens 'directly in the stores' condemned bulk buyers as 'panic mongers.'<sup>136</sup> The central authorities were alarmed because panic buying clearly worsened the already fragile food supply and threatened to corrode the political outlook of the 'masses' in a context in which it was widely believed that the trouble in Hungary was caused by poor living standards and hunger. In addition, it served as a potential fertile breeding ground for scare-mongering, rumor, and social and ethnic tensions. In response, on 1 November the Central Committee limited the amount of goods and food people could buy, but repeatedly assured the population that supplies were adequate.<sup>137</sup> Soon after, a report on conditions in the Bratislava region announced that more meat had been made available in factory and university canteens and this had 'pleased' the workers and students.<sup>138</sup> Although the problem remained acute for several days, the party was able to gradually stabilize the situation and ensure a measure of social calm.<sup>139</sup>

In sum, it was this combination of geopolitics, contested historical memory, real or imagined ethnic conflict, short-term extraordinary measures in Slovakia, and panic buying which created a heightened social sensitivity to the stormy events in Budapest. The next section will integrate these complex factors into our analysis of popular opinion at the time of the Poznań uprising and the Hungarian Revolution.

*'The Entire Population is Following Events with Anxious Attention': Poznań and Budapest*

We have seen how keenly the revelations of the 20th congress were debated inside the KSČ and how eagerly party members and intellectuals sought accurate and full reporting on subsequent political developments. The same can be said of the general population during the Poznań revolt and especially the Hungarian Revolution. Regional party officials and police operatives regularly informed their superiors about the reactions of the Czechoslovak public to these crises and it is clear from these memoranda, and also from perustrated citizens' letters, that the responses were highly differentiated and contrasting, ranging from harsh criticism of the communist regime and the USSR to trenchant support for the system and violent opposition to the 'counter-revolution' in Hungary, from virulent anti-Semitic outbursts to reasoned reflections on the future fate of the country, the Soviet bloc and wider international relations. Security sources indicate that agents were dispatched to, or possibly worked in, local factories and enterprises with the express aim of monitoring the moods of workers and 'class enemies.' Even in villages and agricultural collectives (JZD), the police kept a close watch on social attitudes and private conversations.<sup>140</sup> While revealing that interest was far from universal, the files demonstrate that many people from all classes were galvanized by, and avidly discussed, the unfolding events in Poland and Hungary. Within a few days of the outbreak of trouble in Poznań in late June 1956, civil police informers were closely documenting citizens' comments on the armed crackdown on Polish workers. The general tenor of the reports is that the majority of people condemned the brutality unleashed in Poznań by the Polish security forces, but the causes of worker discontent were often laid at the door of the catastrophic socioeconomic conditions, not the system itself. Several individuals were very well informed about events and a few voices even reflected the official party version insisting that the unrest was inspired by local 'reactionaries' in league with 'western imperialists.'

The following quotations give a flavor of the popular reaction to Poznań. On 30 June a 41 year old woman in Prague 5 informed her friends that 'in Poland the communists have sent tanks against the workers' and one employee in a milkshop called it an 'ongoing massacre.'<sup>141</sup> Railroad workers condemned the use of violence as 'drastic,' a view shared by their colleagues in Smíchov who were angry over the deployment of tanks: 'even the capitalists didn't do that.'<sup>142</sup> Youths in Karlovy Vary district shouted: 'Long Live Poznań, we are Poznanians and the communists can go to hell,' and in the infamous 'Vojna' forced labor

mine near Příbram there appeared an inscription: Long Live a Free Poland.'<sup>143</sup> In Jindřichův Hradec region in southern Bohemia, the chairperson of a National Committee and vice-president of the local People's Party, František Kučera, said: 'recent events in Poznań have confirmed that a reversal [zvrát] is also possible in our country. Poland has shown that the communists are not as strong as they say they are. Even workers are showing resistance and soldiers are willingly handing over arms to the insurgents. I reckon we can expect the same.'<sup>144</sup> Workers in a restaurant in Prague 6 agreed, as did a group of 'intellectuals' in the capital, who supported the uprising in Poznań as an attempt to overthrow the system.<sup>145</sup> Some citizens drew unflattering comparisons between the state of affairs in Poland and that in Czechoslovakia, especially the issue of low wages which angered industrial workers.<sup>146</sup> Unsurprisingly, Radio Free Europe sources announced that 'Prague people applaud Poznań rioters' and are daubing pro-rebel slogans on walls in the Czech capital.<sup>147</sup>

The lack of coverage of the uprising in the official Czechoslovak media helped to engender a veritable rumor mill. In Nymburk there were wild conjectures that 3,000 had died, others spoke of '1,000 deaths,' while workers in Benešov said 63 people had been killed and 230 injured, which was much closer to the truth.<sup>148</sup> There were stories in the Brno and Pardubice regions that 'the Russians had intervened and quashed resistance with the help of tanks,' or that the disturbances had spread throughout the country, including Warsaw, leading to a state of emergency.<sup>149</sup> As a result of Poznań, it was speculated that strikes were breaking out in various Czech factories, including the huge Zbrojovka armaments plant in Brno. There was even the occasional rumor that in one or two Czech localities communists had been 'murdered.'<sup>150</sup>

Not all statements, however, were in favor of the Polish demonstrators. One health worker from Benešov asserted that the Poznań events were merely localized and 'senseless,' while 'older employees' in Jindřichův Hradec believed the disturbances were 'the work of foreign enemies' who aimed to 'weaken faith in the leadership of the state.' Care needed to be taken to ensure such things did not occur in Czechoslovakia.<sup>151</sup> In much the same way a laborer at a sugar factory in Sered' condemned the renewed outbreak of trouble in Poland in October, insisting that 'the Americans' definitely stood behind it and were willing to incite similar unrest in Czechoslovakia.<sup>152</sup> A letter writer cursed 'these idiotic Poles,' who brought 'shame' on themselves by demonstrating in front of western guests, while communist workers in the Brno region thought the Poznań disturbances were inspired by 'former capitalist elements....in responsible positions' in the factories who should be replaced by



‘working-class cadres.’<sup>153</sup> Several people, reflecting later on the events, considered that the punishments meted out to the rioters ‘should have been higher.’<sup>154</sup> As for the causes of Polish discontent, self-satisfied Czechs were convinced that ‘poverty and hunger,’ high prices, low wages, and a poor standard of living lay at the root of the problem, implying that conditions were better at home.<sup>155</sup>

Party and police files show that the Hungarian uprising, and to a lesser extent the concurrent ‘Polish October,’ engaged the attention of Czechs, Slovaks, and the republic’s Hungarian minority even more intensely than Poznań. Although a few local reports noted a lack of popular interest in the early days of the upheavals,<sup>156</sup> by late October ‘everyone from all walks of life was talking about the events in Hungary and Poland.’<sup>157</sup> Quite simply, ‘the situation in both countries’ had become ‘the main subject of debate among our citizens’ and was ‘a regular topic of discussion among the population of the [Slovak-Hungarian] border areas.’<sup>158</sup> Public deliberations in Piešťany were ‘very lively’ and workers’ ‘constant interest’ and knowledge of events were recorded in several localities.<sup>159</sup> In the Košice region, and in many other Slovak and even Czech districts, local Magyar-speakers listened ‘with great intent’ to Hungarian radio, occasionally *en masse* which meant that ‘working morale’ suffered.<sup>160</sup> Radio Free Europe’s ‘own reporter’ enthusiastically announced that the ‘hunger for news is very great...throughout Czechoslovakia’ and the ‘entire Czech population is following events in Hungary with anxious attention.’<sup>161</sup> This was, no doubt, an exaggeration, but Ministry of Interior extracts from perlustrated letters in early November indicate that many citizens were deeply affected not only by developments close to home, but also by the evolving Suez crisis. One letter writer informed her friend that ‘we sit up the whole night listening to the radio,’ others wrote that ‘everyone’ is concerned with the state of affairs abroad, and another that ‘we speak of nothing else here apart from the political situation.’<sup>162</sup>

The authorities did their best to jam foreign radio stations such as RFE, Voice of America, and the BBC World Service, but it is clear that large numbers of people, including party members and army personnel, illegally tuned into western broadcasts in search of reliable and up-to-date news. This was partly a result of the strict censorship and untimely reporting of the domestic media, which were subjected to frequent complaint.<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, one Czech émigré noted as early as July that newspapers were being read more assiduously and *Rudé právo* and other dailies were sold out on 5 November, the day after the Soviet crackdown in Hungary.<sup>164</sup> Both internal and external sources recognized that young

people in particular were energized by developments. For instance, the Czechoslovak Union of Youth convened many 'full meetings,' notably in border areas, at which awkward and sometimes unanswerable questions were posed about the role of Soviet troops in Hungary and the nature of the 'democratic demands' there.<sup>165</sup> Given that students were often viewed as the instigators of the troubles in Hungary, it is little surprise that university and college dormitories were regularly patrolled by the police and student correspondence to friends and relatives was carefully monitored.<sup>166</sup>

### *'We Will Hang the Red Dogs': Anti-Communist Threats, Mockery, and Humor*

The archives, especially the Ministry of Interior and civil police files, are replete with anti-communist outpourings, diatribes and countless threats, invariably alcohol induced, against party leaders and lower-level functionaries. Even allowing for the pronounced tendency on the part of security officers to exaggerate negative opinion, the documents strongly suggest that verbal and written dissent, if not overt resistance, to the regime was widespread. It is impossible to arrive at firm conclusions about the class, demographic, or ethnic background of this 'opposition,' because the sources rarely provide detailed biographical information on their subjects and routinely employ tendentious ideologically loaded terminology such as 'reactionary,' 'former businessman,' or 'kulak.' Nevertheless, it can be surmised that dissentient attitudes were evident among all classes of the urban and rural population, men and women, young and old, Czechs, Slovaks, German-Czechs and Slovak-Magyars, even among KSCĚ members. The existence of relatively pervasive negative popular opinion undoubtedly concerned the authorities, as evidenced by the massive surveillance machinery directed against it, but it remained overwhelmingly at a rhetorical level, scarcely manifested itself in organized form and hence never seriously threatened the regime. In addition, for most industrial and agricultural laborers, including some party loyalists, the prime motivation for anti-government grumbling was everyday hardship, low wages, increasing work norms and compulsory deliveries and comparatively high prices.<sup>167</sup> Only under certain circumstances did these socioeconomic discontents become politicized, as in June 1953.

By late October 1956, a common refrain, even among ranking local communists, was a variation on the theme 'what has happened in Hungary will soon break out in Czechoslovakia.'<sup>168</sup> The concrete meaning of this comment was rarely, if ever, spelled out in the sources, but it can be inferred that most speakers who used it welcomed the possibility of

democratic changes on the Hungarian model, but without the accompanying brutality, which was regularly and vehemently rejected. Paradoxically, however, some citizens resorted to gross threats of violence, insisting that ‘we will hang the red dogs,’ ‘we should [*je třeba*] shoot the communists,’ ‘communist pigs - I’ll kill them,’ or ‘death to communists.’ One Slovak villager was arrested for crying out: ‘We’re only waiting for the signal and we’ll hang all the communists, it’s only a question of time,’ as was a bricklayer from the Spišská Nová Ves district, who ‘in a local pub and in a drunken state berated the communists, shouting that a similar situation to that in Hungary would develop in Slovakia.’<sup>169</sup> Individual leaders, at the highest and lowest levels, were targeted: ‘Zápotocký and all members of the party should be shot.’<sup>170</sup> The despised Slovak party boss, Bacílek, would be the ‘first to be hung’ according to two employees in Bratislava.<sup>171</sup> Neither did the former Soviet dictator escape: ‘that bastard [*kurva*] Stalin is the biggest murderer in the world.’<sup>172</sup> A doctor in Litvínov was ‘looking forward to see how the communists will be thrashed’ (*jak budou komunisty řezat*).<sup>173</sup> Such mutterings or scribbles were logged by police informers in all parts of the republic, although invective appears to have been stronger and rather more frequent in Slovakia than the Czech lands.<sup>174</sup> Indeed, the palpable threat of anti-communist violence, all too vividly embodied in the lynch mobs of Budapest, continued to haunt party big-wigs. In his memoirs published over twenty years after the event, Zdeněk Mlynář, a leading protagonist of the ‘Prague Spring,’ recalled, ‘we Communists were quite simply afraid.’<sup>175</sup>

It was an elemental human feeling that finds its echo in the contemporary archival record. Direct threats against party incumbents became so much a source of concern, particularly in Slovakia, that there were many credible reports of communists being fearful of their safety. By early November, Slovak procurators had ominously noted ‘a big increase in provocations.’<sup>176</sup> In Nitra, a menacing letter-writer warned that he was going to shoot the entire family of a local party dignitary and in Galanta district a former shop owner and a few other citizens drew up a list of communists whom they intended to murder.<sup>177</sup> There were even rare instances of actual physical attacks on communists, like the assault on a municipal official in the Košice region by a private farmer, who struck the employee in the head four times with an axe before being arrested.<sup>178</sup> Such personalized conflicts typically resulted from old disputes, as in the case of Ján Majer, a worker at a cooperative shepherd’s hut in Hronec, who had been suspected by a KSS functionary of stealing sheep. Majer ‘abused’ the official’s ‘communist Gods’ and proclaimed: ‘the game is up for communists in Hungary and

he will take care of the communists from Hronec.’<sup>179</sup> An extreme case occurred on 27 October 1956 in the Martin district. Here a man armed with a knife burst into the apartment of a female KSS member and ‘yelled that every communist must be killed just as they are doing in Hungary.’<sup>180</sup> Evidently it did not dawn on these anti-communists that they were threatening to unleash the same kind of violence that presumably they abhorred in its Bolshevik guise.

Mockery was also rife. Workers in Bratislava subverted the party greeting ‘*čest práci*’ (‘Honor to Work’) to ‘*čepe*,’ meaning ‘we’re expecting a revolution’ (*čakame prevrat*), while their brothers in Trnava preferred the provocative ‘*sláva Titovi*’ (‘Glory to Tito’).<sup>181</sup> Others chose to belittle their overlords: ‘the president of the republic [Zápotocký] is a mere harmonica player and goes around busking in pubs like a beggar’; there are ‘some old grandpas [Kopecký and Zdeněk Nejedlý] in the government who should have been pensioned off long ago’; ‘I shit on your Zápotocký’...[he is] an idiot [*vůl*].’<sup>182</sup> According to émigrés, the ‘hideous’ Stalin monument in Prague was ‘an inexhaustible source of amusement for the people’ and was even ridiculed on stage by the famous cabaret artist Jan Werich.<sup>183</sup> That such ribald or disparaging comments were made suggests that Czech and Slovak citizens were not completely intimidated by leather-clad StB officers or their undercover co-workers. Indeed, on occasion members of the public, well aware of the ubiquity of the secret police, still chose to scorn their presence: ‘the organs of the StB and VB are stupid,’ or ‘the SNB (National Security Corps) is shit.’ One worker in southern Bohemia announced that ‘he could name how many police informers [*fizlů*] there were in the pub.’<sup>184</sup>

The Czechs, moreover, specialized in a specific form of humor: self-mockery and self-deprecation. Their less than glorious conduct in 1956 was summed up in this oft-repeated barbed witticism which was doing the rounds of Prague already in early November 1956, judging from a British Embassy report: ‘The Hungarians behaved like Poles, the Poles behaved like Czechs, and the Czechs behaved like swine.’ Another joke particularly took the fancy of British diplomats: ‘A Hungarian approached a Russian officer in Budapest and asked him if they really would not like a counter-revolution in Moscow also. The Russian looked furtively around and replied: “Yes, we would, but we are frightened of the Czechs.”’<sup>185</sup> Presumably as a way of explaining their lack of political passion, a student noted that ‘the Czechs are known as a dumpling-loving people’ (*knedlíkový národ*).<sup>186</sup>

How best to interpret these threats and mockery toward the authorities? From a conventional standpoint they are evidence that large numbers of people held the regime in

contempt and that disaffection with communist officials and with the ‘system’ as a whole was widespread. There is no doubt quite a few citizens fell into this category. However, a counter-argument is that anti-communist outbursts were often the result of personalized or localized discontent, not always of an ideological nature. Rather than viewing them politically as explicit resistance to communism, it might be more salient to evaluate humor and abuse from a sociocultural perspective. A witty or coarse jibe in a crowded pub at the expense of an unpopular boss lent the teller a measure of social esteem and was a ‘cheap’ way of male bonding based on trust. In the words of an expert on humor in the Stalinist 1930s: ‘These exchanges of trust tokens....led....to a population which retained a space in which to exercise its *critical and interpretational faculties*, an exercise which was then to enable acceptance of and adaptation to the regime.’<sup>187</sup> It is dangerous to blithely apply conclusions relating to prewar USSR to postwar Czechoslovakia, but the attempt to assign a measure of instrumentality to ‘ordinary’ people in their relationship with a seemingly omnipotent state represents a more profitable and nuanced approach to the highly complex issue of power structures in socialist dictatorships.

*‘Democracy is Only on Paper’: Solidarity with Poland and Hungary*

Citizens also demonstrated their independence from, and opposition to, the regime by voicing solidarity with the Polish and Hungarian rebels, anti-Soviet comments, and demands for greater democratization. Although party and police reports routinely described such ‘negative’ attitudes as ‘isolated,’ their frequency and wide geographical location suggest that they were shared by many people. Pro-rebel sentiment was prevalent in Slovakia, and not just among the Magyar minority. For example, in the Nitra region some citizens rejected the official designation of the Budapest uprising as a ‘counter-revolutionary putsch,’ calling it rather a ‘fight for freedom by the Hungarian people.’<sup>188</sup> Local party functionaries identified ‘individuals, especially from the ranks of the intelligentsia, who agree with developments in Hungary and with the stance of the counter-revolutionary elements there,’ and one Slovak party member since 1945 supported Nagy’s government and ‘cursed the Soviet army.’<sup>189</sup> In the Trnava district home-made ‘inflammatory leaflets’ appeared: ‘Poland is free, Hungary is fighting for freedom, when will we get it in the ČSR?’<sup>190</sup> In Komárno it was believed that ‘some citizens secretly sympathize with counter-revolutionary elements in Hungary.’<sup>191</sup> Students at a meeting in Košice observed a one-minute silence for their fallen Magyar

counterparts in the struggle for freedom, who were considered 'more revolutionary than us.'<sup>192</sup> In Příbram provocative slogans were found in several places: 'Poznań – Budapest – Warsaw – hero cities.'<sup>193</sup> Night shift workers at the ČKD-Modřany plant somewhat prematurely 'celebrated the victory of the counter-revolution in Hungary.'<sup>194</sup> An 'ex-fascist' worker, Jan Vrchota, from Kaplice surely put his finger on the regime's worse fears when he allegedly declared: 'It's a pity that these events did not occur all at once. First there were disturbances here in Plzeň, then in Poland and now in Hungary. It would be different today if they had all happened together.'<sup>195</sup>

The entry of Red Army troops into Hungary elicited powerful reactions and emotions. Some, even army officers and soldiers, perceived it as ultimate confirmation of Soviet 'colonial' hegemony in Eastern Europe and spoke openly about 'intervention into internal Hungarian affairs.'<sup>196</sup> Similarly, though rather more colloquially, citizens from the České Budějovice and Jihlava regions berated 'these meddling Russian pigs [and] whores,' and another bluntly declared that 'the USSR has attacked Hungary.'<sup>197</sup> More colorfully still, anti-Russian crudities appeared in Čalovo: 'Why don't the Russians fuck off!' (*Prečo Rusi nejdu do pičy!* [sic]), and an 'anti-state' leaflet discovered in Žilina read: 'Slovaks, the Russian jackboots are crushing Hungarian freedom and killing its people, come to your senses and help us – death to the Russian murderers.'<sup>198</sup> Communist party members were not above such implacable invective. An employee in the Department of Marxism-Leninism in Košice, Arnošt Zelenovitz, expressed 'nationalist Hungarian viewpoints,' opining that 'Hungarians have lived for a thousand years without the Russians and can live even longer without them. The Asiatics cannot understand Magyar culture.' The security officer who logged this file laconically noted that '[Zelenovitz] is first and foremost a Hungarian and only then a communist.'<sup>199</sup> Another KSČ member and chair of a local National Committee 'condemned....the assistance of Soviet troops in Hungary,'<sup>200</sup> and an official party evaluation of the uprising was forced to admit that there were 'enemy voices' which 'portrayed the Soviet Union as the aggressor, suppressing the "rightful struggle" of the Hungarian people.'<sup>201</sup>

It was clearly dangerous to engage in such verbal attacks. According to a confidential party report on the Hungarian events, in the whole republic up to 5 November 1956 there were 665 politically motivated criminal prosecutions.<sup>202</sup> This works out at roughly one person in every 23,000 or around 48 each day since the onset of the Hungarian uprising on 23 October. A table produced by the General Prosecutor's Office for Novotný on 10 November

1956 provides an overview of these cases and offers us at least an approximate idea of the scale of ‘anti-regime’ manifestations in Czechoslovakia, or more precisely of the events that the authorities considered worthy of repressive measures. The table refers to 646 civil prosecutions and a further 19 cases dealt with by military courts, and lists by region and class the numbers of those indicted. Exactly one third, 222 in total, took place in Slovakia which in terms of overall population is proportionately quite high. An interesting pattern is observed when individual Czechoslovak regions are compared. For example, the Slovak regions of Nitra, where 49 prosecutions were carried out, and Banská Bystrica with 54 occupied second and third place in the table, behind Prague with 93 prosecutions. There was a marked similarity in Slovakia and the western half of the country with regard to the ‘social status’ of the convicted. Almost one half was categorized as manual laborers (*dělníci*), with the highest percentage (approximately 70 per cent) recorded in the Ostrava and Košice districts. This ratio was found in all regions except Prešov, where 9 of the 23 convicted were small and middle peasants (*malí a střední rolníci*).<sup>203</sup> We have not been able to locate details on the sentences handed down to those convicted, although in one case in Jindřichův Hradec a ‘kulak’ was sentenced to eight months imprisonment and a fine of 2,000 crowns for ‘disseminating alarmist reports’ about Hungary.<sup>204</sup> From these statistics, it seems safe to assume a fairly high level of seditious sentiment, although one that is hardly indicative of mass unrest and passionate opposition. Indeed, most arrests were for minor verbal, drink-related infringements and ‘provocations,’ which were consciously politicized by the regime.

Aside from rebellious and incendiary remarks, there were calls for meaningful political ‘democratization,’ both from rank-and-file party members and non-communists of different social backgrounds. A woman doctor in Skalica said that in Czechoslovakia ‘democracy is only on paper; in reality it is a dictatorship,’ but the people will enforce freedom.<sup>205</sup> Slovak writers and intelligentsia were disappointed at the slow pace of change and elimination of mistakes after the 20th congress. Compared to Poland and Hungary, ‘we are far behind because here there is no freedom of expression.’<sup>206</sup> Workers too engaged with these thorny issues, belying the image that they were interested solely in socioeconomic conditions. At one plant meeting in the Liberec region in early November 1956 there was ‘plenty of discussion about democracy,’ which was perceived as ‘limited’ in Czechoslovakia. Elections by united candidate list were regarded as ‘incorrect,’ and there was even ‘a demand to establish more political parties.’<sup>207</sup> At a factory meeting in Písek, two former army officers

'shouted out: "We want free elections under the international control of the Americans, English, and French,"' and a worker in Poprad said 'there's no democracy in the USSR and it's the same here.'<sup>208</sup> We might speculate that in these difficult times for the party, workers gained a certain confidence that further concessions would be forthcoming as the authorities sought to regain a foothold in the enterprises.

Party stalwarts also anticipated change. In Slovakia 'rank-and-file members of the KSS talk a lot about the fact that the cult of personality here has still not been overcome and they expect a decisive step towards democratization in Czechoslovakia. Members of the party reckon that the cult of personality should be solved first and foremost in the CC KSS.' That is, they felt that discredited leaders, including Bacílek, should go and be replaced by more popular, trustworthy figures.<sup>209</sup> A late October report on communists' attitudes in universities and artistic unions was largely positive, but noted that there were calls for greater 'democratization' in the party, an 'over-emphasis on the specific characteristics' of socialism in Czechoslovakia, and interest shown in the 'principles of socialist democracy' and Gomulka's 'incorrect theses.'<sup>210</sup> Rank-and-file members in České Budějovice, Pardubice, and Gottwaldov were concerned that measures on the 'decentralization of state administration' and the elimination of 'bureaucratism' in the national economy, agreed on at the National Conference in June, had not been fulfilled. Moreover, 'the majority of points put forward [from below] in the internal party discussion have fallen by the wayside.'<sup>211</sup> As we have seen, these and similar strivings for democratization in the party seriously worried KSČ leaders. It was officially admitted that in the course of 1956 'the Central Committee....had vigorously resisted miscellaneous liberal and pseudo-democratic claims,' including no less 'the creation of more political parties.' Likewise, 'open and hidden opponents of socialism,' who raised their heads at the time of the Hungarian 'counter-revolution,' stood condemned. The real meaning of 'democratization,' according to the party oligarchs, was 'the ever greater participation of the broadest masses in all economic and public affairs, and the widest participation of the workers in the management of the state.' On the contrary, 'the various demands for freedom and democracy, as understood in the bourgeois sense' and which are 'especially evident among certain intellectuals and students,' must be 'more sharply....eradicated.'<sup>212</sup>

Indeed, students were seen by the regime as the most likely social group to transfer these beliefs into some kind of overt anti-state action or organization and these fears occasionally surface in party and police files. In České Budějovice an erstwhile resistance



group calling itself the 'Student Popular Anti-State Opposition' (*Protistátní lidová oposice studentstva* - PLOS) apparently existed and daubed their acronym on two columns in the city centre.<sup>213</sup> An analogous 'illegal student body' was discovered in Bratislava, where several students called for 'a change of state system.'<sup>214</sup> Teenage school pupils were not above detection. In Košice a 14 year old girl was caught with an anti-state leaflet: 'Down with the Soviet Union – we want independence.' It was reported that local school children had formed an 'anti-state organization' and were distributing these inscriptions.<sup>215</sup> In late October the authorities were particularly concerned that young people might use the two forthcoming symbolic anniversaries – Czechoslovak national independence day on 28 October and the Bolshevik Revolution on 7 November – as pretexts to launch mass demonstrations, or even a revolt, in several cities. The security services, informed that 'counter-revolutionary bands' from Hungary had entered Czechoslovakia, were placed on 'the highest level of activity and vigilance' and instructed to 'monitor the moods and situations at larger gatherings of citizens, such as student faculties [and] halls.'<sup>216</sup> In the event no more than a handful of arrests were made, and both celebrations passed off without serious incident, clear signs that the intensity of student activity had dissipated since the time of the Majales.<sup>217</sup>

## Part IV

### *Czechoslovak Popular Opinion in 1956 (2): A Case of 'Critical Loyalty'*

These multifarious examples of seditious intent would seem to suggest that opposition to the communist system was endemic. But it is equally obvious from the archival record that negative opinion was tempered by more regime-affirming views and not just from party members. Even if we ignore the ideologically loaded upbeat party reports on the 'positive attitudes' of workers, most of which are ritualistic, there is plenty of evidence of 'critical loyalty.' Our broad argument is that there existed several important 'bridges' linking state interests with those of society as a whole, all of which helped to create a fragile, and perhaps temporary, bond between rulers and ruled in the fall of 1956. These 'bridges' can be grouped under three, sometimes overlapping, headings: comparative socioeconomic achievements and broad acceptance of the basic principles of 'socialism' and socialist development; profound apprehensions about the security and territorial integrity of the Czechoslovak state in conditions of perceived German and Magyar 'revanchism'; and revulsion over the barbarity of the 'counter-revolutionary' violence in Hungary. These ties between state and society were

augmented by two other notable factors: class antagonisms and micro-level collusions between local authorities and citizens, and anti-Semitic sentiment, occasionally bordering on the virulent, which in turn tended to nurture negative national stereotypes and bolster the latent sense of Czech 'national superiority.' All were underlay by pervasive fears and uncertainties engendered by the extremely tense international situation surrounding the Hungarian Revolution and Suez Crisis, which for many people opened up the possibility of a Third World War. In these inauspicious circumstances, the majority of Czechs and Slovaks opted to 'play it safe' rather than risk descent into unpredictable turmoil and convulsive 'bestiality' on the Hungarian scale.

*'I Stand with My Heart and Mind behind the Socialist System'*

There is no doubt that the fairly buoyant standards of living and consumption in Czechoslovakia were a key component in the relative political and social quiescence of the country. Between 1953 and 1956 the prices of many essential foodstuffs were lowered six times resulting in an overall 18 per cent drop, which as Pernes has noted, was definitely felt in people's wallets.<sup>218</sup> Throughout the crisis year a series of other socioeconomic measures were ratified by the Politburo: retail prices of consumer goods were cut twice, pay rises were announced for 'important groups' of workers, engineers, and officials, pensions were raised, the working day was reduced, including for young people, spa care and factory recreation were improved, and the problems of housing construction were earmarked for attention. At a Soviet party Presidium meeting on 24 October, Khrushchev himself recognized Czechoslovak social policies as a model for other socialist states to emulate.<sup>219</sup> It would be easy to dismiss these emendatory steps as mere concessions to 'buy off' the population in times of dire need, and more likely than not there was an element of cynical manipulation on the part of the authorities.<sup>220</sup> But it would be a mistake to overlook the ideological underpinnings of the regime's social measures. In his speech to the KSČ Central Committee at the end of March, Novotný stressed that the amelioration of living standards 'would convincingly display the superiority of the socialist over the capitalist system.'<sup>221</sup> Indeed, under Khrushchev this became one of the focal ideological ambitions of the Soviet regime, epitomized by an article published in 1957 which insisted that 'the essence of the Great October Socialist Revolution was an improvement in the material conditions of the workers.'<sup>222</sup> Portrayed as fundamental socialist achievements on the road to a communist polity, the social provisions of 1953-56 had the effect of raising popular expectations and

hopes for incremental growth in consumption in line with the official Khrushchevite rhetoric of socialist abundance and the ‘superiority’ of communism over capitalism.

Not only the leading lights of the communist movement, however, were persuaded by this notion of ‘socialist achievements.’ Czech émigrés interviewed by RFE in Austria and West Germany saw many positive socialist aspects of the system – no unemployment, nationalized industry, state-controlled prices, compulsory sickness insurance, abundance of work, pensions, child and maternity allowances and medical and recreational care. Another RFE source said ‘the communist regime....decidedly has some success, above all in social and economic fields.’ In August 1956 émigré ideas were summarized thus: ‘it cannot be presumed that the people would agree to the re-establishment of a regime similar to that in power between the two world wars. Practically nobody thinks in terms of returning to a capitalist system and the belief is general that key industries should remain under public ownership.’<sup>223</sup> It appears, then, that even opponents of communism embraced cardinal aspects of the socialist project and British diplomats in Prague also noted that ‘pro-Communist sympathies, which were strong immediately after the war, have not been entirely spent’ and commented on the relative well-being of the Czechs and Slovaks. A dispatch from the embassy in April 1956 was almost ebullient about the recent price reductions:

They have conferred some real benefits; and they have provided a contrast to the prevailing trend in the free-enterprise economies....in general it is true to say that the material circumstances of the population have noticeably improved during the past year; this is to some extent reflected in the well-stocked food shops and full restaurants.

Sir Wavell Wakefield, the Tory leader of a multiparty group of British MPs which toured Czechoslovakia in June 1956, wrote after the trip that ‘Czechoslovakia is the one country [in the Soviet bloc] where there is a much better standard of living than elsewhere.’<sup>224</sup> A Canadian-Slovak visitor reportedly stated in early November 1956: ‘I’m surprised at what I see [because] in Canada the newspapers say that there is hunger, people are not allowed to go to church and there are no priests at all....[but] in the ČSR it is altogether more beautiful than it was twenty years ago when I was last here.’<sup>225</sup>

More important for our purposes, however, are domestic reactions to the socioeconomic situation. A non-party worker in southern Bohemia believed that ‘there are no

reasons in the ČSR why people should rise up against the government since here we live decently and every worker is content on the whole.' Such views were expressed by other workers, one maintaining that 'we have it better now than under Masaryk.' A pensioner from České Budějovice reckoned that 'whoever works in Czechoslovakia lives well.' Those Czechs who had been abroad, presumably to neighboring socialist states, called it 'Golden Czechoslovakia,' because it had much higher living standards than other People's Democracies, while a visitor from Western Ukraine considered the ČSR a 'paradise' compared to the 'great shortages [and] very expensive' goods in her homeland.<sup>226</sup> A student letter writer also emphasized that 'self-evidently' Czechoslovaks are materially better off than the Hungarians and Poles.<sup>227</sup> A party report from the Nitra region said local laborers harbored bad memories of capitalism – they had been poor then and toiled a 14-hour working day, but now it is only 46 hours a week.<sup>228</sup> The point of this is not to suggest that post-Stalinist Czechoslovakia was a consumer haven with ever-improving standards of living – life was tough for the majority of people. Rather, it is to relativize scholarly understandings of conditions in Eastern Europe and to show that perceptions of everyday life could and did influence popular opinion.

Other citizens broadened their positive assessments of life in Czechoslovakia to include a more general appreciation of the socialist basis of the state. One remarked that 'our government thinks about the people' and 'the socialist system is firmer than the reactionaries believe.'<sup>229</sup> A Dr. Tibor Dalloti, a resident in the Bratislava region, insisted that everything is quiet in Czechoslovakia because 'the government enjoys full loyalty, the party is strong and there are no [internal] clashes.'<sup>230</sup> In the same vein a non-communist worker backed the line of the KSČ: 'What's happened in Hungary and Poland is impossible here because we have a united party and government supported by the working class.'<sup>231</sup> Many letter writers, or perhaps more accurately those whose missives were handpicked by the censors, were passionate about the superiority of socialism over capitalism, epitomized by the words of one female author: 'I stand with my heart and mind behind the socialist system.'<sup>232</sup> According to a husband writing to his wife in Havířov, this sentiment was fairly widespread: 'Not only party members, but also non-party people, remain firmly behind the policies of the KSČ.'<sup>233</sup>

#### *'We Will Again Be Surrounded by Enemies as in 1938'*

A second potent source of confluence between state and society was deep anxiety among Czechs and Slovaks over perceived German and Hungarian 'revanchism.' The fear of

German irredentism was particularly pronounced in north Bohemia, the former Sudetenland, where large numbers of Czechs had replaced expelled ethnic Germans in 1945-46. For example, a railway worker from Ústí-nad-Labem spoke of his dread of German retaliation for the postwar forced expulsions: 'the Germans will come to our republic and throw all us Czechs into the Elbe,' no doubt a reference to the Ústí massacre of July 1945 when dozens, perhaps more, of Czech-Germans were killed in the town, some by drowning.<sup>234</sup> The prognosis often went like this: the 'terrible' Hungarian 'chaos' will spread to Czechoslovakia and create turmoil; then the Germans will come back for their property, 'take revenge on us,' and the Czechs will be booted out. It was an embedded historical memory which regime propaganda actively fostered and reflected. As a young émigré from southern Moravia said, one of the most refined communist arguments was against the so-called 'German danger' and threat of retribution.<sup>235</sup> In Gottwaldov, 'some non-party and party members....say that now we will again be surrounded by enemies as in 1938,' a judgment shared by people 'in a number of places' in the Pardubice region.<sup>236</sup> A police report from early November spoke of citizens in the Jihlava region fearing a war 'in our country' and a West German 'attack on the GDR and then Czechoslovakia.'<sup>237</sup>

Westerners also remarked on the propensity of Czechs to view contemporary events through a distorted historical lens. For instance, an American journalist travelling in the ČSR soon after the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution observed that Czechoslovak army and party officials wholly accepted the notion that US and German agents fomented the revolt in Budapest and that it was aimed at the restoration of Nazi rule in Central Europe.<sup>238</sup> According to a British embassy memorandum, the French ambassador in Prague believed that 'the fear of a German resurrection and a second Anschluss....was....the main reason why the average Czech accepts Soviet tutelage as inevitable and why the Communist leaders can reconcile the population to subservience to the Kremlin.'<sup>239</sup> Already in October 1955, Clinton Pelham, the British ambassador, had written that 'the German problem [is] ever present in Czech minds' and the USSR is seen as the 'protector' of the country.<sup>240</sup>

Magyar revanchism was likewise widely feared and rooted in the historical consciousness of both Czechs and Slovaks. There was a host of rumors about 'Hungarians occupying Slovakia' and concerns that 'Hungarian irredentists are working full speed.'<sup>241</sup> A letter, whose author was most likely a soldier or security officer stationed on the border, reads: 'The situation in Hungary is probably that of a hundred years ago....they want the lands

of St. Stephen's crown [the Kingdom of Hungary] back and the whole of Slovakia. Let them come and try [*Mohou si přijít*].'<sup>242</sup> A report from Banská Bystrica region claimed that local workers of Magyar nationality were 'openly' talking about the need to return lost lands to Hungary and a renewal of the 'St. Stephen's crown,' a view that worried a professor at the Pedagogical School in Jihlava, Josef Výborný, who decried 'the various chauvinist elements [in the Nagy government who have] begun once again to propagate the idea of a St. Stephen's crown linked to parts of Slovakia.'<sup>243</sup> In several places in the Karlovy Vary region, it was asked what the Czechoslovak government was doing about the 'demand of certain elements' that Slovakia should join Hungary.<sup>244</sup> In the České Budějovice district, workers of Slovak origin said that 'the Hungarians will yet again wish to seize southern Slovakia,' or that 'Slovakia will liberate itself anew' and have 'free elections.'<sup>245</sup> Slovak-Magyars in Čalovo and Dunajská Streda allegedly welcomed the 'counter-revolution' across the border which meant that 'south Slovakia will once more return to Hungary.'<sup>246</sup> According to a report from Nitra, such hearsay was disseminated mainly by 'kulaks' and intelligentsia.<sup>247</sup> These politicized demands for Slovakia to become part of Hungary or for the formation of a 'Hungarian-Slovak republic' or a 'Greater Hungary' seriously alarmed the regime, as evidenced by the prosecutions enacted against perpetrators.<sup>248</sup> Verbal outpourings reflecting ethnic issues in Slovakia were similarly subject to investigation with prosecutors' reports focusing chiefly on anti-Slovak remarks and threats made by Hungarians resident in Slovakia.<sup>249</sup> Those instigating these attacks did so with the aim of ousting Slovaks from the areas which they (the instigators) considered 'Hungarian.'

In these circumstances, exacerbated by the British and French military action in Suez which was widely condemned by Czech and Slovak citizens, the fear of war, even civil war, was almost ubiquitous.<sup>250</sup> Given this, it seems reasonable to speculate on three important points. First, many Czechs, though perhaps less so Slovaks, looked to the communist authorities to uphold national territorial integrity and security, which in turn required a measure of Soviet protection and hence a degree of 'pan-Slavic' sentiment. To this extent, the regime in Prague enjoyed a certain level of legitimacy as defender of the state in unpredictable dangerous times. It is undoubtedly going too far to suggest that in the fall of 1956 a sense of national unity emerged in Czechoslovakia bonding state and society in their common aversion to the threat of political chaos, war, and foreign intervention, but in our estimation the eerie tense calm at that time cannot be adequately explained by full stomachs and cheap beer. Second, it is also possible that the ritualized Stalinist discourse of 'enemies,'

‘conspiracies,’ ‘socialist patriotism,’ and ‘vigilance’ entered popular consciousness and the routinized use of such terminology limited the ability of citizens, intellectuals in particular, to free themselves of ‘Stalinist’ mentalities.<sup>251</sup> In short, it may be that not insubstantial numbers of Czechs and Slovaks succumbed to the Stalinist ‘logic’ of the need for a strong state to defend the ‘nation’ from its historical ‘enemies.’ Third, it appears to be the case that many citizens were disillusioned with the West in the mid-1950s because of the emerging rapprochement with the USSR epitomized by the ‘Geneva spirit’ of 1955 and Khrushchev’s espousal of ‘peaceful co-existence.’ Indeed, anti-American ideas were occasionally expressed, and even among Czechoslovak defectors to the West, 43% ‘hold that the U. S. seeks some kind of world domination, economic and/or political.’<sup>252</sup>

*‘They Now Murder Without Mercy, Not Sparing Women or Children’*

The sheer barbarity of the violence on the streets of Budapest and other Hungarian towns, fiercely and selectively propagandized by the Czechoslovak media, formed a third bond between regime and citizen and did much to alter popular attitudes toward the uprising. Even before images of lynched Hungarian security officers reached Prague, there were clear indications that not all Czechs and Slovaks supported the Magyar revolutionaries. On 26 October, three days after the outbreak of the uprising, it was reported that ‘the majority of workers’ at a construction site in Jindřichův Hradec ‘condemn the events in Hungary and consider them a stupidity, which will lead nowhere.’<sup>253</sup> On the same day, the view in Piešťany was that the breakdown of law and order was ‘completely unwarranted’ [zbytočné], will achieve nothing, and will only hit innocent people.<sup>254</sup> It was a point repeated by a pensioner from Ústí-nad-Labem, who said the ‘putsch’ in Hungary was ‘foolish, unnecessary and made no sense at all.’ It will result merely in ‘a useless loss of blood.’<sup>255</sup> In the Hodonín district, there were demands that ‘armed intervention’ should be undertaken in Hungary, which would ‘put an end to reactionary elements.’<sup>256</sup> A non-party foreman concluded: ‘The situation in Hungary has long been supported by the western imperialists and nurtured by reactionary individuals.’<sup>257</sup> Party reports from Ostrava likewise intimated that local workers believed the ‘Hungarian laboring people have been betrayed [and] foreign and Magyar reaction has successfully repeated the year 1919.’<sup>258</sup> A despondent memo, dated 27 October, from ambassador Pelham summed up on-the-spot British assessments: ‘There are no signs of sympathy with Poland and Hungary,’ a view reiterated a month later by a visiting western

businessman, who noted 'no evidence of indignation at or disgust with the situation in Hungary and the Russian intervention there.'<sup>259</sup>

By late October party propagandists and journalists were beginning to whip up public resentment against the violence inflicted on Hungarian communists and 'workers' and this appears to have significantly bolstered negative responses to the uprising.<sup>260</sup> For example, laborers 'in many factories' in Hradec Králové, Nová Paka, and Trutnov became agitated about the fact that 'we are allowing the murder of workers and communists in Hungary' about which 'we are doing nothing.'<sup>261</sup> In the Bratislava region, 'comrades' returning from Hungary gave firsthand descriptions of the 'gross bestiality' and 'the chopping off of heads' there.<sup>262</sup> It was even asserted by another witness that Magyar women were 'amputating the genitals' of Soviet soldiers.<sup>263</sup> An 'unknown soldier,' probably serving in the south-eastern border area, wrote home:

The [Hungarian] capitalists....have joined forces with the saboteurs....criminals and long-standing enemies of the Hungarian people....They now murder without mercy, not sparing women or children. In Miškolc [sic]....they hanged three officers and have [committed] other assassinations in a similar way to those carried out by the fascists during the Second World War.<sup>264</sup>

In the Gottwaldov district, police agents observed that 'a large part of the population condemns the barbarity perpetrated by the rebel bands' in Hungary, and the 'bloodletting' was likewise rejected by a 'German woman pianist' from north Bohemia and a returnee émigré from France.<sup>265</sup> A 'tipsy' waiter in a fish restaurant in České Budějovice said: It's utter nonsense [*volovina*] when people start butchering each other.'<sup>266</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that rumors abounded about the number of casualties: 'around 7,000 dead in Budapest'; '18,000 dead and 50,000 wounded. Russians account for 2,500 of the dead'; there are 'over 50,000 dead and injured'; even '70,000' deaths.<sup>267</sup>

The suppression of the Hungarian uprising seems to have been welcomed by many citizens, not so much because it represented a victory of 'progressive forces' over 'counter-revolution,' but because it ended the barbarous violence and sense of uncertainty and prepared the way for 'normality.' A retrospective report by the Bratislava Regional Administration of the Ministry of Interior concluded not altogether fancifully that 'when news came in from Hungary about various bestialities, the majority of people broke from their previous views and agreed with the action of the Soviet army on 4 November.'<sup>268</sup> It was



an interpretation shared by their Nitra counterparts, who on 1 December noted that ‘the overwhelming majority of the population, including workers, condemned the counter-revolutionary offences in Hungary.’<sup>269</sup> But it was not only police sources that affirmed the positive popular response to the crackdown in Budapest. A woman from Prague wrote to her friend that ‘I’m glad the Russians have restored order in Hungary’ and another letter writer told his mother that ‘our people have accepted the end in Hungary with genuine and great joy....The main thing, mama, is that we must never doubt the USSR.’ Somewhat more vividly, another correspondent blurted out: ‘Thank God we have put down these Hungarian counter-revolutionaries, bandits, fascists, terrorists, and imperialist elements and there is peace....Now we can calmly get back to work.’<sup>270</sup> Regardless of the ideologically infused terminology, it was a sentiment that was not lost on relatively large numbers of people.<sup>271</sup>

#### *Class Antagonism, Collusion, and Anti-Semitism*

In addition to these three ‘bridges,’ there are other signs that citizens had internalized the values and goals of the regime and that the party’s attempts to ‘divide and rule’ had a broader social resonance. One of these was a kind of knee-jerk class antagonism or ‘workerism.’ For example, a České Budějovice police report on a train conversation at the time of the upheavals in Budapest recorded that a ‘worker’ insisted that the Hungarian party leaders had ‘betrayed the achievements and rights of the working people,’ which led to the ‘counter-revolutionary putsch’ and ‘great and bloody sacrifices.’ A ‘well-dressed man [in a] brown beret [and] grey suit’ responded by asserting that Hungary would now get American aid and the country will become more prosperous than Czechoslovakia. Hearing this, the worker replied: ‘Yes, they might have it better, but only the bosses [*páni*], the working people will still be badly off because capitalists will be in power.’<sup>272</sup> Or take this instance of class hostility: in a supermarket in a southern Bohemian town a lawyer, František Dvořák, bought a large quantity of goods – tea, sugar, rice – at the considerable sum of 500 crowns. A woman shopper witnessing the scene said dismissively ‘they say the intelligentsia doesn’t have any money, but you see how they buy up everything....merely creating panic.’<sup>273</sup> Such resentment and suspicion toward the ‘middle classes’ ran deep, as shown by frequent workers’ concerns about the dubious class credentials of students and professors, who needed to be selected much more strictly.<sup>274</sup> This residual faith in ‘the working class’ and the existence of class antagonisms were exploited by the party as a means of constructing a sense

of 'us' and 'them' and identifying scapegoats and 'enemies,' a not altogether unsuccessful undertaking which seriously hindered attempts to forge cross-class 'opposition' to the regime, particularly as Czechoslovak society had been brutally atomized and ruptured by years of Stalinist repression.

There are also indications that, at the micro-level, a minimal trust existed between communities and the authorities, probably dependent on the personal qualities of individual party and police functionaries. One émigré Slovak reported in the early 1950s that in their village 'there were only few Party members....and they were Communists in order to help the community more or less – that is, to prevent the party leaders from sending strange [non-local] Communists to our village.'<sup>275</sup> This observation suggests that, importantly, the 'state' was not monolithic and could be worked to the advantage of local interests, raising the question posed by Sheila Fitzpatrick in the admittedly different context of the Soviet 1930s: where does the boundary lie between the people and representatives of the state in a system where many minor officials in the rural areas were poverty-stricken, whose social background and status was not far removed from the villagers, and who had to mediate the center's directives to suit local conditions and demands?<sup>276</sup> There are even a few cases of individuals affording active assistance to the civil militia as in Hodonín in early December 1956, when 'with the helpful cooperation of citizens' a certain Josef Bursík was apprehended for preparing 250 'anti-state' leaflets.<sup>277</sup> The implication is that lower-level functionaries, from both the party and security services, were not always entirely external to local inhabitants, relied partly on the willing collusion of the citizenry, and could on occasion 'go native' in their attempts to negotiate conditions on the ground.<sup>278</sup>

Anti-Semitism was another powerful, though not unproblematic, source of convergence between 'state' and 'society.' As in the Slánský trial, the events of 1956 brought anti-Semitism to the fore and allowed traditional prejudices and deeply-rooted animosities to boil over.<sup>279</sup> Anti-Jewish feeling was recorded in many parts of the country, but appears to have been particularly strong in Slovakia. This is documented all too depressingly in the security services archives housed in the Institute of Public Memory in Bratislava. For example, the secretary of a Municipal National Committee in eastern Slovakia stated brusquely, though equivocally, that the 'bastard [*zkurvení*] Jews' were the cause of the Hungarian Revolution, and a bank clerk in Košice opined 'Hungarian Jews in high-ranking positions are behind everything....Hitler should have eradicated all' of them.<sup>280</sup> The view of a lathe operator that 'the unrest in Hungary is due to Jewish rulers who have brought the

workers to a state of calamity' was by no means an isolated one.<sup>281</sup> An employee at the Agroprojekt enterprise also in Košice maintained that 'in Hungary there are a million Jews in positions of power; they are well off, and this is why everyone else has a lower standard of living and why they are rebelling.'<sup>282</sup> A similar statement, according to which the Jewish-led government did not care about people's living standards, paid low wages, and provided insufficient food supplies, was made by a former court official working as a miner in Spišská Nová Ves.<sup>283</sup> Such anti-Semitic views are replicated many times over in the sources.<sup>284</sup>

These beliefs were certainly indicative of commonly-held ideas about Jewish elites exploiting the masses and may have denoted a revival of the notorious concept of 'Judeo-Bolshevism,' which had been widespread in Slovakia, Poland and elsewhere during the era of the communist movement's growth after the First World War.<sup>285</sup> However, a key interpretational problem remains: how do manifestations of anti-Semitism relate to popular attitudes toward communism? Were comments aimed at 'Jewish' communists an outright rejection of state socialism in the sense of 'Judeo-Bolshevism?' Or were they racially motivated criticisms of individual members of the political elite, not a principled repudiation of the socialist project as a whole? The archival sources we consulted do not provide a categorical answer to these questions and indeed it may be more productive to assess the evidence through a slightly different lens. Rather than assuming anti-Semitic sentiments represented a contested arena between the 'people' and the 'system,' it might be better to consider them a site of mutual 'tacit consensus.' Since the late 1940s and especially at the time of the Slánský affair, sections of the party had used ideologically sound 'anti-Zionism' as a cloak for crass anti-Semitism and had thereby garnered a measure of popular support. Four years later, echoes of these campaigns were still apparent. A Bratislava regional police report from 27 October 1956 noted that the 'general feeling' among workers in the Dimitrov factory was that events in Poland and Hungary were 'an attack on socialism by international Zionism.'<sup>286</sup> District KSČ officials were even blunter. In Humpolec they warned that 'some party functionaries are expressing anti-Semitic opinions' and in Prostějov it was admitted that 'anti-Semitism is appearing among members of the party.'<sup>287</sup> It seems likely, then, that a mutually reinforcing relationship between party-sponsored 'anti-Zionism' and pre-existing forms of popular anti-Semitism continued to fester, an excrescence which represented a useful, if potentially incendiary and necessarily camouflaged, tool for propagandists to promote social cohesion and regime-affirming attitudes.

Jews were not the only ethnic minority that suffered from national stereotyping. A latent sense of Czech, though less so Slovak, 'national superiority' is also apparent in popular discourse toward Poles and Magyars. Thus, we learn that a group of workers in Žďár nad Sazavou branded Hungarians as 'a hot-blooded people who flare up for no good reason,' while a woman clerk from Jindřichův Hradec called them 'savages [*divoši*] who lag far behind us' as if they are from 'the orient.'<sup>288</sup> A Slovak official said the same: Hungary is '100 years behind us.'<sup>289</sup> A report on the views of army recruits bemoaned 'incorrect anti-Polish and anti-Magyar opinions – "all Poles and Magyars should be shot,"' and a Prague resident wrote to a friend in Brazil that 'we are too intelligent' to succumb to 'the bloodshed and killing' in Hungary.<sup>290</sup> The haughtiness and condescension of many Czechs were summed up at a meeting of road workers in České Budějovice on 25 October 1956: 'the majority asserted that conditions do not exist in the ČSR for similar developments [to those in Hungary]. Reason: higher level in all respects.'<sup>291</sup> This assumption that Czechoslovakia was more advanced and enjoyed better living standards than her neighbors was common and to the extent that it was buttressed by the regime's espousal of the greater productivity and 'modernity' of the Czechoslovak economy, one can detect a final line of confluence between state and society.

We do not claim in this working paper to have found a definitive answer or monocausal explanation for the complex and contradictory web of political attitudes and social mentalities that typified Czechoslovak public life in 1956. We have attempted to grapple with several intractable issues which demand multicausal explications and a nuanced picture of society and its relationship with the communist state: what impact did the revelations of the 'secret speech' have on the KSČ and how united was the party's response to embryonic destalinization after the 20<sup>th</sup> congress? To what extent were Czechs and Slovaks 'passive' and 'dead calm' in 1956 compared to the rebellious Poles and Magyars? How best to conceptualize the multifarious popular reactions to the events in Poland and Hungary in the fall of that year? What fears, hopes, and expectations motivated the people of Czechoslovakia not only in relation to the tumultuous upheavals of the 'crisis year of communism,' but also to the project of 'state socialism' as a whole? And, crucially, how persuasive is the notion of 'critical loyalty' as an explanatory factor for the 'engaged conformism' of the majority of Czechs and Slovaks in 1956 and, more broadly, as an overarching indicator of state-society

interconnections in a polity in which ‘resistance,’ sedition, and dissent are commonly regarded as self-evident phenomena?

We have argued that, contrary to the historiographical consensus, the startling developments of 1956, notably the Hungarian Revolution, became ‘social events’ in Czechoslovakia. That is, all sections of society throughout the republic actively engaged with them and assumed a wide gamut of responses ranging from overt and vocal support for the official line and the party’s socialist mandate to reformist and democratizing strivings in concert with Khrushchevite destalinization to strident opposition, vilification of party dignitaries and ideological rejection of communism and perceived Soviet hegemony, and much in between. This rich mosaic of opinion, both in and outside the KSČ, is of itself historically significant, convincingly demonstrating that the party was far from a ‘totalitarian’ monolith and that Czechoslovak society retained pluralistic tendencies despite several years of fierce ‘Stalinization.’ We have also contended that through intricate processes of engagement with, and often reasoned assessment of, the potentialities and dangers of the ‘crisis year,’ many Czechs, though arguably less so Slovaks, adopted a stance of ‘critical loyalty’ to the goals and visions of the regime. This intermediate and constantly shifting nexus was based on a set of shared values and perceptions, or ‘bridges’ as we described them, some of which were short-term and provisional, others longer-term and more durable, some ideological, others practical, some more embedded, others contingent on rapidly changing circumstances.

Logically, four important avenues of future research can be extrapolated from these interpretations. First, how far were Czechoslovak citizens unique in their ‘critical loyalty,’ or can the concept be applied to other Soviet bloc countries, both in the years of destalinization and beyond? Second, what do the ambivalent attitudes to reform and change in the KSČ in the mid-1950s tell us about the origins, vicissitudes and outcomes of the Prague Spring in the mid-to-late 1960s? Third, can we justifiably speak of varieties of ‘popular support’ for the socialist experiment and, if so, to what extent do they partly elucidate the relative longevity and stability of the communist regime into the era of ‘normalization’? Finally, which processes undermined the ‘tacit consensus’ between state and society under ‘real existing socialism,’ culminating in the collapse of the system in the late 1980s? These are decidedly open-ended questions and must await their historian, but it is to be hoped that our paper has at

least contributed to a deeper understanding of Czechoslovak social history in the immediate post-Stalinist period.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The quotations are from S. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995), 237, who has adapted it from E. Hobsbawm, 'Peasants and Politics,' *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1, 1 (1973), 13.

<sup>2</sup> The notion of 'tacit consensus' is derived from T. Lindenberger, 'Tacit Minimal Consensus: The Always Precarious East German Dictatorship,' in P. Corner (ed.), *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes: Fascism, Nazism, Communism* (Oxford, 2009), 208-22.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the title of our piece is adapted from the non-communist grouping KAN (*Klub angažovaných nestraníků* -- the Club of Engagé Non-Party Members), which was active in 1968.

<sup>4</sup> There is a vast literature on resistance and conformity in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia; less so on popular opinion. The most recent overview is Corner (ed.), *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes*. Representative works on the USSR and the socialist states of Eastern Europe include: S. Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934-41* (Cambridge, 1997); S. Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York, 1999); L. Viola (ed.), *Contending with Stalinism: Soviet Power and Popular Resistance in the 1930s* (Ithaca, 2002); V. A. Kozlov, S. Fitzpatrick, and S. V. Mironenko (eds), *Sedition: Everyday Resistance in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev and Brezhnev* (New Haven and London, 2011); M. Allinson, *Politics and Popular Opinion in East Germany 1945-68* (Manchester, 2000); C. Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London, 2002), chaps 3 and 5; G. Bruce, *Resistance with*

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*the People: Repression and Resistance in Eastern Germany, 1945-1955* (Lanham, 2003); K. McDermott, 'A "Polyphony of Voices"? Czech Popular Opinion and the Slánský Affair,' *Slavic Review*, 67, 4 (2008), 840-65; P. Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland 1956* (Stanford, 2009); M. Feinberg, 'Fantastic Truths, Compelling Lies: Radio Free Europe and the Response to the Slánský Trial in Czechoslovakia,' *Contemporary European History*, 22, 1 (2013), 107-25. A useful overview of state-society relations in Eastern Europe is M. Pittaway, 'Control and Consent in Eastern Europe's Workers' States, 1945-1989: Some Reflections on Totalitarianism, Social Organization, and Social Control,' in C. Emsley et al. (eds), *Social Control in Europe, 1800-2000*, vol. 2 (Columbus, 2004), 343-67. The most recent historiographical and theoretical survey on resistance, far broader than its title suggests, is V. Sommer, 'Cesta ze slepé uličky "třetího odboje". Koncepty rezistence a studium socialistické diktatury v Československu,' *Soudobé dějiny*, no. 1 (2012), 9-36.

<sup>5</sup> P. Corner, 'Introduction,' in Corner (ed.), *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> The partial opening of communist party and secret police archives since 1990-91 has revealed that the regimes spent vast amounts of time, money, and energy on monitoring the moods and attitudes of their publics. Extracts from these findings regularly landed on the desks of top party officials. See, for example, National Archive of the Czech Republic (NA), Archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (AÚV KSČ), fond (f.) 014/12, svazek (sv.) 25, archivní jednotka (a.j.) 916, list (l.) 3.

<sup>7</sup> W. D. Connor and Z. Y. Gitelman, *Public Opinion in European Socialist Systems* (New York, 1977), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Our main sources are reports generated by officers and agents of the Czechoslovak State Security (*Státní bezpečnost* - StB) and civil police (*Veřejná bezpečnost* - VB) located in the Security Services Archive (*Archiv bezpečnostních složek* - ABS) in Prague and Brno-Kanice, in the Archive of the Institute of Public Memory (*Archiv Ústav paměti národa* - AÚPN) in Bratislava, and in the Hungarian National Archive (*Magyar Országos Levéltár* - MOL) in Budapest. We also rely heavily on the 'Information Bulletins' regularly compiled by regional party functionaries and on other official party memoranda deposited in the National Archive (*Národní archiv* - NA) of the Czech Republic in Prague and the Slovak National Archive (*Slovenský národný archiv* - SNA) in Bratislava. Other important documents are the summaries and extracts of perlustrated private letters and reports from the Czechoslovak Prosecution Service housed in the personal files of the KSČ First Secretary, Antonín Novotný, and in the Security Services Archive. We have also

sifted through a large number of émigré interviews and published materials in the Open Society Archives in Budapest and the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam. Finally, British embassy diplomatic reports in The National Archive in London are fruitful on developments in the mid-1950s and offer a countervailing perspective to official Czechoslovak sources. We also endeavored to locate letters sent by citizens to Antonín Zápotocký, the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, but were told by the archivist in the Presidential Office that many of them had been destroyed in an administrative reshuffle in 1979. Despite our best efforts, the rest have proven undetectable. Similarly, the Ministry of Interior reports on perlustrated letters in the 'Novotný - secret' file in the National Archive of the Czech Republic only include material up to early July 1956.

<sup>9</sup> This interpretation is adapted from J. Plamper, 'Beyond Binaries: Popular Opinion in Stalinism,' in Corner (ed.), *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes*, 64, 75.

<sup>10</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 923, l. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Security Services Archive (ABS), f. H1-4, inventární jednotka (inv. jedn.) 316, l. 12.

<sup>12</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 930, l. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Hungarian National Archive (MOL), XXXII-16-a, box 2, file 4, p. 180. The reformist communist Imre Nagy became the figurehead of the abortive Hungarian Revolution in October and November 1956. He was later captured and executed in June 1958. He was also one of the relatively few non-Jews at the apex of power in the Hungarian party.

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, Stephen Kotkin's comments on Soviet secret police reports (*svodki*) in his review of Sarah Davies's book *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia* in *Europe-Asia Studies*, 50, 4 (1998), 739-42.

<sup>15</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, l. 41; ABS, f. N2/1, inv. jedn. 5, l. 99; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, ll. 147b, 182, 443, 453.

<sup>16</sup> Perfect examples of the irrational fears of the authorities are the 'unknown' or 'alien man' stories that appear frequently in the police archives. These characters were often described as 'foreigners,' as in the case of an 'unknown man with a foreign accent (German)' talking about the Poznań revolt in a Prague pub, or another 'unknown man' inciting students to action on 7 November to 'fight for the freedom of the republic.' These cases exemplify the mistrust and suspicion of persons 'who spoke bad Czech and Slovak' or were dressed oddly, and who were regarded as possible 'spies' and provocateurs. It also suggests that citizens had been mobilized to be vigilant against these 'aliens' and may have identified with the desperate search for



dangerous ‘outsiders.’ The quotations above are from ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, ll. 33, 45; and MOL, XXX-16-a, box 1, file 3, p. 51. For other examples, see ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, l. 48; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, l. 26; MOL, XXX-16-a, box 3, file 5, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> A fine summary of this key question can be found in O. Tůma, ‘The Impact of the Hungarian Revolution on Czechoslovakia, 1956-1968,’ in J. M. Rainer and K. Somlai (eds), *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the Soviet Bloc Countries: Reactions and Repercussions* (Budapest, 2007), 69-78.

<sup>18</sup> See for example J. Pešek, *Slovensko v rokoch 1953-1957. Kapitoly z politického vývoja* (Brno, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> M. Nejedlý, ‘Činnost jednotek Československé lidové armády v době tzv. maďarských událostí,’ *Historie a vojenství*, no. 5 (1971), 760-78; J. Bílek and V. Pilát, ‘Bezprostřední reakce československých politických a vojenských a politických orgánů na povstání v Maďarsku,’ *Soudobé dějiny*, no. 4 (1996), 500-11; J. Bílek (ed.), *Vojenská opatření Československa v souvislosti s maďarským povstáním 1956* (Prague, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> J. P. C. Matthews, *Majáles 1956. Nevydařená revolta československých studentů* (Brno, 2000). The original English text was entitled *Majales: The Abortive Student Revolt in Czechoslovakia in 1956*, Cold War International History Project, Working Paper No. 24 (Washington D.C., 1998); see also J. P. C. Matthews, *Tinderbox: East-Central Europe in the Spring, Summer, and Early Fall of 1956* (Tucson, 2003), 55-85; J. Marušiak, ‘Slovenskí študenti v roku 1956,’ in A. Blaha et al. (eds), *Pyžamová revolúcia* (Bratislava, 2007), 7-64; J. Marušiak, *Slovenská literatúra a moc v druhej polovici päťdesiatych rokov* (Brno, 2001); M. Bauer, ‘Úzkost spoluviny. II. sjezd Svazu československých spisovatelů jako pokus o vzdor vůči moci,’ in M. Bauer (ed.), *II. sjezd Svazu československých spisovatelů. 22.-29. 4. 1956. Svazek I - protokol* (Prague, 2011), 7-32. For a useful overview of 1956 in Czechoslovakia, see M. Svoboda, ‘Rok 1956 v Československu. Odezva událostí v Polsku a Maďarsku v Československu,’ MA thesis (Masaryk University, Brno, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> M. Blaive, *Promarněná příležitost. Československo a rok 1956* (Prague, 2001). A French translation appeared as *Une déstalinisation manquée. Tchécoslovaquie 1956* (Brussels, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Blaive, *Promarněná příležitost*, 312.

<sup>23</sup> K. Kaplan, *Sociální souvislosti krizí komunistického režimu v letech 1953-1957 a 1968-1975* (Prague, 1993); K. Kaplan, *The Overcoming of the Regime Crisis after Stalin's Death in Czechoslovakia, Poland and*

Hungary (Cologne, 1986); J. Pernes, *Kríze komunistického režimu v Československu v 50. letech 20. století* (Brno, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Kaplan discusses popular attitudes at length in his book, *Kronika komunistického Československa. Doba tání 1953-1956* (Brno, 2005), 365-590.

<sup>25</sup> J. Pernes, 'Ohlas maďarské revoluce roku 1956 v československé veřejnosti. Z interních hlášení krajských správ ministerstva vnitra,' *Soudobé dějiny*, no. 4 (1996), 512-26.

<sup>26</sup> Kaplan, *Kronika komunistického Československa*, 430-578.

<sup>27</sup> M. Barnovský, *Prvá vlna destalinizácie a Slovensko (1953-1957)* (Brno, 2002); M. Barnovský, 'Maďarská revolúcia roku 1956 a Slovensko,' in E. Ivančíková and A. Simon (eds), *Maďarská revolúcia roku 1956 a Slovensko* (Šamorín-Bratislava, 2006), 25-40; J. Marušiak, 'Maďarská revolúcia 1956 a Slovensko,' in "Spoznal som svetlo a už viac nechcem tmú..." *Pocta Jozefovi Jablonickému* (Bratislava 2005), 183-227; J. Marušiak, 'Slovenské postoje počas krízy komunistického systému v rokoch 1956-1957,' in M. Štefanský and M. Zágoršeková (eds), *Krízy režimov sovietskeho bloku v rokoch 1948-1989 (Historicko-politologické pohľady)* (Banská Bystrica, 1997), 180-96; and J. Marušiak, 'Slovakia and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A Comparison with Slovak Perceptions of the Polish October,' in Rainer and Somlai (eds), *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution*, 79-96.

<sup>28</sup> J. Pešek, 'Maďarské udalosti roku 1956 a Slovensko,' *Historický časopis*, no. 4 (1993), 432.

<sup>29</sup> Pernes, 'Ohlas maďarské revoluce,' 526.

<sup>30</sup> A. Simon, 'A szlovákiai magyarok és az 1956-os forradalom,' in Ivančíková and Simon (eds), *Maďarská revolúcia roku 1956 a Slovensko*, 41-56; Blaive, *Promarnená príležitosť*, 296-9. However, in a few citations it is not always obvious whether the persons mentioned in these police reports were of Hungarian nationality.

<sup>31</sup> P. Germuska, 'Najnovšie poznatky o maďarskej revolúcii roku 1956 a maďarsko-slovenské vzťahy roku 1956,' in Štefanský and Zágoršeková (eds), *Krízy režimov sovietskeho bloku*, 159.

<sup>32</sup> Kaplan, *Kronika komunistického Československa*, 226-7.

<sup>33</sup> Statistics are taken from several Czech sources cited in M. Hauner, 'Crime and Punishment in Communist Czechoslovakia: The Case of General Heliodor Píka and his Prosecutor Karel Vaš,' *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 9, 2-3 (2008), 343-4. According to the Rehabilitation Law No. 119 of 1990, in the entire period of communist rule in Czechoslovakia - 1948 to 1989 - 257,864 people were prosecuted for

‘political crimes,’ although even this figure does not appear to cover all cases. See K. Kaplan and P. Paleček, *Komunistický režim a politické procesy v Československu* (Prague, 2001), 39. For a general overview of repression in the Stalinist period, see K. McDermott, ‘Stalinist terror in Czechoslovakia: origins, processes, responses,’ in K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester, 2010), 98-118. On the Horáková trial, see P. Formánková and P. Koura, *Žádáme trest smrti! Propagandistická kampaň provázející proces s Miladou Horákovou a spol.* (Prague, 2008). It should be noted that the Czech National Socialists bore no ideological relation to their German namesake. On the Slánský trial, see K. Kaplan, *Report on the Murder of the General Secretary* (London, 1990); I. Lukes, *Rudolf Slansky: His Trials and Trial*, Cold War International History Project, Working Paper No. 50 (Washington D.C., 2006); and I. Lukes, ‘The Rudolf Slánský Affair: New Evidence,’ *Slavic Review*, 58, 1 (1999), 160-87.

<sup>34</sup> K. Kaplan, *Proměny české společnosti 1948-1960. Část první* (Prague, 2007), 300-10.

<sup>35</sup> For details, see P. Heumos, ‘Vyhrňme si rukávy, než se kola zastaví!’ *Dělníci a státní socialismus v Československu 1945-1968* (Prague, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> For details, see K. McDermott, ‘Popular Resistance in Communist Czechoslovakia: The Plzeň Uprising, June 1953,’ *Contemporary European History*, 19, 4 (2010), 287-307.

<sup>37</sup> For details, see V. Fava, ‘The Elusive People’s Car: Imagined Automobility and Productive Practices along the “Czechoslovak Road to Socialism” (1945-1968),’ in L. H. Siegelbaum (ed.), *The Socialist Car: Automobility in the Eastern Bloc* (Ithaca, 2011), 17-29.

<sup>38</sup> Kaplan, *The Overcoming of the Regime Crisis*, 25-6. The *aktiv* was composed of full-time party officials and the most engaged voluntary workers.

<sup>39</sup> Blaive, *Promarněná příležitost*, 52-68, 84-9, 118-34 and 149-53; J. Pernes, ‘Československý rok 1956. K dějinám destalinizace v Československu,’ *Soudobé dějiny*, no. 4 (2000), 594-618; Kaplan, *The Overcoming of the Regime Crisis*, 36-41; Z. Suda, *Zealots and Rebels: A History of the Ruling Communist Party of Czechoslovakia* (Stanford, 1980), 268-76; E. Taborsky, ‘Political Developments in Czechoslovakia since 1953,’ *Journal of Politics*, 20, 1 (1958), 89-113.

<sup>40</sup> The word ‘bomb’ was repeated twice in the memoirs of a high-ranking communist victim of the Stalinist show trials: E. Goldstücker, *Vzpomínky 1945-1968* (Prague, 2005), 114. It also appeared in an interview

conducted by Radio Free Europe with a 19 year old émigré from the Brno region. See Open Society Archives (OSA), 300-30-2 Czechoslovak Unit, microfilm 140 (unpaginated). See also the comments by a communist party member in eastern Bohemia in NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 733, l. 24.

<sup>41</sup> Kaplan, *The Overcoming of the Regime Crisis*, 33.

<sup>42</sup> M. Hájek, *Paměť české levice* (Prague, 2011), 164.

<sup>43</sup> The National Archive (TNA), FO 371/122144, 'Political Leaders in Czechoslovakia.'

<sup>44</sup> NA, f. 02/2, sv. 86, a.j. 104, bod (point) 18.

<sup>45</sup> Khrushchev's public speech, and the congress as a whole, elicited 'extraordinary interest.' See NA, f. 02/2, sv. 90, a.j. 108, ll. 12 and 15. For Novotný's demand, see NA, f. 02/2, sv. 88, a.j. 106, l. 18.

<sup>46</sup> NA, f. ÚV KSČ, Antonín Novotný - tajné, kartón (k.) 4 (unpaginated). In the period 4-8 May as many as 15,824 private letters were intercepted by the authorities, thirteen per cent of the total number.

<sup>47</sup> Blaive, *Promarněná příležitost*, 64, 67.

<sup>48</sup> Perlustrated missives from early May 1956 attest to the 'stormy' nature of many of the lower-level party meetings. See NA, f. ÚV KSČ, Antonín Novotný - tajné, k. 4 (unpaginated).

<sup>49</sup> NA, f. 02/2, sv. 90, a.j. 108, ll. 4-8, 14. See also NA, f. 05/1, sv. 369, a.j. 2235, l. 9.

<sup>50</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 733, l. 4.

<sup>51</sup> NA, f. 02/2, sv. 90, a.j. 108, l. 10. In Bratislava, the main report was delivered by Viliam Široký, the Prime Minister of the Czechoslovak Republic, and he too came in for criticism. See Blaive, *Promarněná příležitost*, 56.

<sup>52</sup> NA, f. 02/2, sv. 90, a.j. 108, ll. 8-9; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 735, l. 8.

<sup>53</sup> Barnovský, *Prvá vlna destalinizácie*, 59.

<sup>54</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, ll. 31b, 33b. In this, and all other subsequent cases, the number after Prague refers to the administrative district of the capital city.

<sup>55</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, l. 31b; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 733, l. 22; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 732, l. 6. For other personalized attacks on Čepička, see NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 735, ll. 7, 11; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 22, a.j. 754, l. 9.

<sup>56</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, ll. 29, 31.

<sup>57</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, ll. 30b, 36. See also NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 733, ll. 22, 24.

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<sup>58</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 362, a.j. 2199, l. 26; NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, ll. 24b, 25; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 735, ll. 3, 11.

<sup>59</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, l. 31.

<sup>60</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 733, l. 18.

<sup>61</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, l. 33.

<sup>62</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 22, a.j. 743, l. 16; NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, l. 34. See also NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 735, l. 5; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 733, ll. 6, 22; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 732, ll. 11-12. For similar complaints about the lack of contact between trade union officials and workers, see All-Trade Union Archive, Czech and Moravian Chamber of Trade Unions (VOA ČMKOS), f. ÚRO/Sekretariat II, k. 67, inv. jedn. 225/1 (unpaginated).

<sup>63</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, ll. 34b, 35.

<sup>64</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 732, l. 9; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 733, l. 5; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 735, l. 7.

<sup>65</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 732, ll. 6, 11.

<sup>66</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, l. 34.

<sup>67</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 733, l. 19.

<sup>68</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, l. 30b. A 29 year old student émigré from Nitra asserted that ‘even Communists are disgusted by the slavish dependency on the Soviets.’ OSA, 300-30-2 Czechoslovak Unit, microfilm 139 (unpaginated). Perceived Soviet imperialism was also heavily criticized in October and November 1956. For a sample of such views, see NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 915, l. 3; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 916, ll. 3, 4; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 919, l. 4; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, ll. 49, 72, 73, 89, 95, 99.

<sup>69</sup> NA, f.014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 915, l. 3.

<sup>70</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 5, sv. 2, l. 70.

<sup>71</sup> MOL, XXX-16-a, box 4, file 6, p. 9, report from 26 October 1956. A western businessman on a trip to Czechoslovakia in late November 1956 noted that: ‘The great hero is Gomulka [sic].’ See OSA, 300-30-2 Czechoslovak Unit, microfilm 140 (unpaginated).

<sup>72</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 26, a.j. 994 (unpaginated).

<sup>73</sup> NA, f.014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 937, l. 9.

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<sup>74</sup> Archive of the Institute of Public Memory (AÚPN), KS ZNB S-ŠtB Košice, OP-8417, Spisy o udalostiach v Maďarsku, Vnitřní zpráva Krajské správy MV Košice, 24 October 1956. For other comments broadly sympathetic to Tito and the attempts of the Poles and Hungarians to follow a 'Yugoslav' policy, see ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, ll. 86, 87, 92; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 5, sv. 2, ll. 33, 39, 49, 51, 65, 77, 117, 131, 134, 138, 219, 262b.

<sup>75</sup> For details, see M. Kopeček, *Hledání ztraceného smyslu revoluce. Zrod a počátky marxistického revizionismu ve střední Evropě 1953-1960* (Prague, 2009), 293-341; also V. V. Kusin, *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring: The Development of Reformist Ideas in Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge, 1971), 36-52.

<sup>76</sup> Blaive, *Promarněná příležitost*, 102.

<sup>77</sup> Pernes, 'Československý rok 1956,' 599.

<sup>78</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, ll. 34b, 36.

<sup>79</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 732, ll. 6, 10; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 22, a.j. 754, l. 4.

<sup>80</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 22, a.j. 743, l. 16.

<sup>81</sup> Links between the Czechoslovak and Soviet security agencies were firmly established by the early 1950s. For details, see K. Kaplan, *Sovětské poradci v Československu 1949-1956* (Prague, 1993). For the later period, see several relevant documents in the Wilson Center Digital Archive, such as 'Protocol on coordination of the Czechoslovak Interior Ministry delegation and border troops of the Soviet Union on state security,' March 1958, and 'Agreement between the KGB and the interior ministry of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic on governmental officials' advisory roles,' December 1958. Last accessed on 4 March 2013 at <http://digitalarchive.org/document/113495> and <http://digitalarchive.org/document/113509>

<sup>82</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 733, l. 4.

<sup>83</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 733, l. 6.

<sup>84</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 22, a.j. 754, l. 8.

<sup>85</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, l. 35.

<sup>86</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, ll. 27, 30b, 31, 32b, 35, 36b. Demands for an extraordinary congress were also voiced in Slovakia. See Barnovský, *Prvá vlna destalinizácie*, 69.

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<sup>87</sup> Pernes, 'Československý rok 1956,' 601. Kaplan gives the figure as 12,936 members, *The Overcoming of the Regime Crisis*, 39.

<sup>88</sup> Kaplan, *The Overcoming of the Regime Crisis*, 110.

<sup>89</sup> Pernes, 'Československý rok 1956,' 601. Novotný was equally dismissive of intellectuals in his later published interviews. See R. Černý, *Antonín Novotný. Vzpomínky prezidenta* (Prague, 2008), 142-6.

<sup>90</sup> Between spring 1945 and early 1948, the National Front grouped together the main Czechoslovak political parties (excluding the right) as the basis of coalition government. After the 'victorious February,' however, it became little more than a façade for KSČ domination, even though formally communist Czechoslovakia was never a one-party state.

<sup>91</sup> Marušiak, 'Slovenské postoje,' 182.

<sup>92</sup> Barnovský, *Prvá vlna destalinizácie*, 73.

<sup>93</sup> For details, see Marušiak, *Slovenská literatúra a moc*; and Barnovský, *Prvá vlna destalinizácie*, 103-6.

<sup>94</sup> It is striking that very similar ambivalent and confused reactions were apparent in the Soviet Communist Party following the secret speech. For details, see M. Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca, 2009), 79-105; and P. Jones, 'From the Secret Speech to the burial of Stalin: Real and ideal responses to de-Stalinization,' in P. Jones (ed.), *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating cultural and social change in the Khrushchev era* (London, 2006), 41-51.

<sup>95</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, l. 36. The word 'chaos' was also used by workers at a factory meeting in Frenštát. See NA, f. 014/12, sv. 22, a.j. 748, l. 8.

<sup>96</sup> NA, f. ÚV KSČ, Antonín Novotný - tajné, k. 4 (unpaginated).

<sup>97</sup> NA, f. 02/2, sv. 90, a.j. 108, l. 10.

<sup>98</sup> OSA, 300-30-2 Czechoslovak Unit, microfilm 140 (unpaginated).

<sup>99</sup> From Novotný's opening speech to the KSČ National Conference, 11-15 June, cited in I. Kolesár et al., *Antologie k mezinárodnímu dělnickému hnutí a k dějinám KSČ, II. část* (Prague, 1966), 133-4.

<sup>100</sup> For a textual analysis of some of the speeches at the writers' congress, see M. Shore, 'Engineering in the Age of Innocence: A Genealogy of Discourse Inside the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, 1949-67,' *East European Politics and Societies*, 12, 3 (1998), 411-19. See also A. French, *Czech Writers and Politics, 1945-1969* (Boulder, 1982), 109-17.

<sup>101</sup> See Kaplan, *The Overcoming of the Regime Crisis*, 43-6, quotations at 45; and Pernes, 'Československý rok 1956,' 602-06. The Foreign Office and British diplomats in Prague were also less than impressed by the writers' show of opposition: 'The Congress was clearly revolutionary only in the mildest sense, if at all,' although it was gratifying to see that 'Zápotocký reportedly lost his temper' at the congress, asking the delegates: "'What do you want? We've sacrificed Čepička to you - who else do you want?'" One writer apparently muttered: "The whole lot of you". See TNA, FO 371/122195, 'Journalism in Czechoslovakia.'

<sup>102</sup> For interesting comments on the meetings and demands, see the extracts of perlustrated student letters in NA, f. ÚV KSČ, Antonín Novotný - tajné, k. 4 (unpaginated).

<sup>103</sup> For details, including a translation of the resolution, see Matthews, *Majales: The Abortive Student Revolt*, especially the non-paginated Appendix.

<sup>104</sup> Operatives of the VII Department of the Ministry of Interior were warned that the 'reactionary part of the student body' was expected to turn the Majales celebrations into an 'anti-state demonstration' and hence they were mobilized on the streets of Prague from 17.00 on Saturday 19 May to 8.00 on Monday 21 May. See ABS, A25, inv. jedn. 178 (unpaginated).

<sup>105</sup> Matthews, *Majales: The Abortive Student Revolt*. There were fairly major student disturbances in Romania too, especially at the time of the Hungarian uprising. See J. Granville, 'If Hope is Sin, Then We are All Guilty': Romanian Students' Reactions to the Hungarian Revolution and Soviet Intervention, 1956-1958, Carl Beck Papers, no. 1905 (Pittsburgh, 2008). Students, at least those studying in Poland, Hungary, and the USSR, also caused headaches for the hard-line leaders of Albania. See E. Mëhilli, 'Defying De-Stalinization: Albania's 1956,' *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 13, 4 (2011), 31-5.

<sup>106</sup> Matthews, *Majales: The Abortive Student Revolt*, 16, 36. The Foreign Office in London was somewhat cynical about the 'student revolt,' one official writing: 'Any sign of spirit in Czechoslovakia is welcome, even if reports are exaggerated and the "movement" leads nowhere.' TNA, FO 371/122217, 'Union of Youth.'

<sup>107</sup> Barnovský, *Prvá vlna destalinizácie a Slovensko*, 84-9. See also Marušiak, 'Pyžamová rebélia.'

<sup>108</sup> Čepička's dismissal was welcomed by several letter writers, although one called it 'a scant result of the promised self-criticism.' However, the planned debureaucratization measures made many officials fear for the security of their jobs - 'at my ministry only a quarter are to remain [in their posts].' It was reported that in the Ministry of Culture 'a half of employees are to be sacked,' causing 'panic' and 'unorganized chaos'



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and making the place ‘a veritable madhouse.’ See NA, f. ÚV KSČ, Antonín Novotný - tajné, k. 4 (unpaginated).

<sup>109</sup> Kaplan, *The Overcoming of the Regime Crisis*, 38, 41.

<sup>110</sup> OSA, 300-30-2 Czechoslovak Unit, microfilm 140 (unpaginated).

<sup>111</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 369, a.j. 2235, l. 10; NA, 014/12, sv. 22, a.j. 743, ll. 14-15. It is less surprising to learn that pro-Stalin sentiments were common in the Soviet party. See Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, 99-101.

<sup>112</sup> NA, f. ÚV KSČ, Antonín Novotný - tajné, k. 4 (unpaginated).

<sup>113</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 735, ll. 4-5, 10, 11; NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, ll. 28, 28b, 33.

<sup>114</sup> ABS, f. H-669-2, Ministry of Interior reports on censored letters dated 6 November 1956.

<sup>115</sup> Kaplan, *The Overcoming of the Regime Crisis*, 37-8.

<sup>116</sup> TNA, FO 371/122144: ‘Political Leaders in Czechoslovakia.’

<sup>117</sup> Slovak National Archive (SNA), Bratislava, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 39, l. 375. Bil’ak was a prominent hard-liner in 1968 and one of the leaders of the ‘normalized’ regime between 1969 and 1989.

<sup>118</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 39, ll. 374, 379; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 920, l. 9; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 930, l. 3. MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 2, file 4, p. 126; MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 4, file 6, p. 3, report from 26 October 1956.

<sup>119</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 26, a.j. 994 (unpaginated). See also the Stalinist platitudes employed by Ministry of Interior reports on the Poznań uprising in late June in ABS, f. N1-1, inv. jedn. 3, ll. 1-2. Stalin often employed the ‘sleeping,’ or ‘yawning,’ metaphor. See K. McDermott, *Stalin: Revolutionary in an Era of War* (Basingstoke, 2006), 96-7.

<sup>120</sup> H. G. Skilling, ‘Stalinism and Czechoslovak Political Culture,’ in R. C. Tucker (ed.), *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York, 1977), 257-80, quotation at 279.

<sup>121</sup> For details, see V. Sommer, *Angažované dějepisectví. Stranická historiografie mezi stalinismem a reformním komunismem (1950-1970)* (Prague, 2011), 153-83.

<sup>122</sup> The debates were due to begin at a meeting on 20 April, but regrettably no records of this gathering are preserved in the archives.

<sup>123</sup> All citations in this and subsequent paragraphs are from NA, f. ÚD KSČ, a.j. 1015, k. 140, ll. 60-87 and 159-68.

<sup>124</sup> The first term is used by A. Port, *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic* (Cambridge, 2007), 275; the second by K-M. Mallmann and G. Paul, 'Resistenz oder loyale Widerwilligkeit? Anmerkungen zu einem umstrittenen Begriff,' *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 2 (1993), 99-116.

<sup>125</sup> D. Musilová, *Měnová reforma 1953 a její sociální důsledky. Studie a dokumenty* (Prague, 1994), 35.

<sup>126</sup> M. Geyer with assistance from S. Fitzpatrick, 'Introduction: After Totalitarianism - Stalinism and Nazism Compared,' in M. Geyer and S. Fitzpatrick (eds), *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (New York, 2009), 34-5.

<sup>127</sup> S. Fitzpatrick and A. Lüdtke, 'Energizing the Everyday: On the Breaking and Making of Social Bonds in Nazism and Stalinism,' in Geyer and Fitzpatrick (eds), *Beyond Totalitarianism*, 266-301.

<sup>128</sup> The People's Militia, composed of armed communist workers, sought to ensure security in and around industrial enterprises.

<sup>129</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 39, ll. 178-85.

<sup>130</sup> Pešek, 'Maďarské udalosti roku 1956 a Slovensko,' 431.

<sup>131</sup> The following account is based on Nejedlý, 'Činnost jednotek Československé lidové armády,' 760-78; Bílek and Pilát, 'Bezprostřední reakce,' 500-11; J. Štaigl, 'Vojenská opatření na teritoriu Slovenska,' in Bílek (ed.), *Vojenská opatření Československa*, 33-40; and J. Dufek and V. Šlosar, 'Rekonstrukce čs. vojenských opatření na čs.-maďarských hranicích,' in Bílek (ed.), *Vojenská opatření Československa*, 41-52. For an overview, see Pešek, 'Maďarské události roku 1956 a Slovensko,' 434-7.

<sup>132</sup> Nejedlý, 'Činnost jednotek Československé lidové armády,' 770.

<sup>133</sup> Štaigl, 'Vojenská opatření na teritoriu Slovenska,' 40. See also Bílek and Pilát, 'Bezprostřední reakce,' 509.

<sup>134</sup> For a sample of the many party and police reports on panic buying in late October and early November often linking it to fears of impending war, see NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 922, ll. 13-19; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 940, l. 2; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 26, a.j. 994 (unpaginated); SNA, f. ÚV KSS, a.j. 39, ll. 119-27, 132-7; ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, ll. 78-9; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 308.

<sup>135</sup> AÚPN, KS ZNB S-ŠtB Košice, OP-8417, Zpráva o verejnej mienke obyvateľ'stva k udalostiam v Maďarsku, 4 November 1956.

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<sup>136</sup> ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, l. 118. See also ABS, f. N2/1, inv. jedn. 5, l. 7.

<sup>137</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 532, ll. 43-4.

<sup>138</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS, a.j. 39, l. 119. The supply of foodstuffs and other products was complicated by the fact that the plan for coal production had been under-fulfilled in the vital Ostrava-Karviná region, enforcing the temporary despatch of soldiers to the coalfields. This was deemed 'a very serious situation,' and one that was exacerbated by Poland's decision to send lower quantities of coal to Czechoslovakia. See the memorandum by Oldřich Černík, dated 9 October 1956, in SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 532, l. 127.

<sup>139</sup> AÚPN, f. B10, inv. č. 72, KS MV Košice, Kontrarevolucia v Maďarsku a Pol'sku - poznatky a bezpečnostné opatrenia k týmto udalostiam, 4 November 1956.

<sup>140</sup> ABS, f. N2/1, inv. jedn. 5, ll. 162, 164. It is worth noting, however, that internal police reports reveal that not all officers were politically reliable and that the security forces and civil militia were not always adequately staffed or equipped, lacking cars and other motor vehicles. See ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, ll. 64, 65, 69, 69b, 70, 70b, 71b.

<sup>141</sup> ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, ll. 8, 9.

<sup>142</sup> ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, ll. 15, 42.

<sup>143</sup> ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, ll. 8, 14, 20. Ominously, the latter case was 'investigated' by the police. For similar utterances and inscriptions, see ABS, f. N1-1, inv. jedn. 3, l. 40; ABS, f. H1-5, inv. jedn. 11 (unpaginated).

<sup>144</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, l. 7.

<sup>145</sup> ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, ll. 14, 15.

<sup>146</sup> ABS, f. N1-1, inv. jedn. 3, ll. 6, 7, 11, 20.

<sup>147</sup> OSA, 300-30-2 Czechoslovak Unit, microfilm 140 (unpaginated).

<sup>148</sup> ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, ll. 9, 44.

<sup>149</sup> ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, ll. 13, 14, 29b; ABS, f. N1-1, inv. jedn. 3, ll. 18, 44.

<sup>150</sup> ABS, f. N1-1, inv. jedn. 3, ll. 7, 19, 34b; ABS, f. H1-5, inv. jedn. 11 (unpaginated).

<sup>151</sup> ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, l. 9; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, l. 15.

<sup>152</sup> MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 2, file 4, p. 5.

<sup>153</sup> ABS, f. N1-1, inv. jedn. 3, ll. 12-13, 25. An international trade fair was being held in Poznań at the time of the riots.

<sup>154</sup> MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 2, file 4, pp. 5, 12.

<sup>155</sup> ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, ll. 29, 44; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, ll. 27, 122; ABS, f. N1-1, inv. jedn. 3, ll. 12, 16, 20, 22, 22b, 30, 42. Some of the observations on the harsh socioeconomic conditions in Poland were made first-hand by Czech citizens who had recently visited the country or were studying or working there.

<sup>156</sup> See, for instance ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 18.

<sup>157</sup> AÚPN, fond B10, inv. č. 72, Krajská správa MV Košice, Zpráva operatívnej skupiny KS-MV o situácii k udalostiam v Maďarsku a Poľsku, 27 October 1956.

<sup>158</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 940, l. 2; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 958, l. 19. For other evidence to this effect, see Marušiak, 'Maďarská revolúcia 1956 a Slovensko,' 183-227, and Pernes, 'Ohlas maďarské revoluce,' 516-26. Unfortunately, Pernes does not provide exact archival references for his sources on popular reactions.

<sup>159</sup> MOL, XXX-16-a, box 2, file 4, p. 78; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 926, l. 5. ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 4.

<sup>160</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 912, l. 11; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 940, l. 2; MOL, XXX-16-a, box 2, file 4, p. 53; MOL, XXX-16-a, box 4, file 6, p. 7, report from 26 October; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 100.

<sup>161</sup> OSA, 300-30-2 Czechoslovak Unit, microfilm 140 (unpaginated).

<sup>162</sup> ABS, f. H-669-2, reports dated 1, 2, 5 and 8 November 1956.

<sup>163</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 916, l. 8; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 923, l. 4; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 940, l. 2; ABS, f. N2/1, inv. jedn. 5, ll. 22, 28; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, ll. 43, 44, 120; MOL, XXX-16-a, box 4, file 6, p. 7, report from 25 October; SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 39, l. 392; SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, l. 135.

<sup>164</sup> OSA, 300-30-2 Czechoslovak Unit, microfilm 140 (unpaginated); ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 434.

<sup>165</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 39, ll. 162-72; OSA, 300-30-2 Czechoslovak Unit, microfilm 140 (unpaginated).

<sup>166</sup> ABS, f. H-669-2, report from 1 November 1956.

<sup>167</sup> The archives are teeming with proletarian complaints about low wages and standards of living, sometimes linked to dangerous 'social democratic moods.' For a representative example, see NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 912, l. 5; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 926, l. 4; SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, l. 96; MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 2, file 4, pp. 128-9; MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 3, file 5, p. 4. For bitter recriminations on the wage issue among ethnic German workers in north-western Bohemia, see VOA ČMKOS, f. ÚRO/Sekretariat II, kart. 67, inv. jedn. 225/1 (unpaginated).

<sup>168</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, ll. 34, 46, 47b, 48, 51b, 59, 90, 104, 106, 137b, 160, 231b; ABS, f. N2/1, inv. jedn. 5, ll. 81, 98; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 916, l. 3; SNA, ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, ll. 52, 135; MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 2, file 3, p. 21; MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 2, file 4, pp. 44, 45, 74, 76, 113, 127, 167; MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 3, file 5, pp. 10, 11. It is interesting that many Soviet citizens reacted in the same way to developments in Hungary - we shall 'do what they did in Hungary.' See Kozlov, Fitzpatrick, and Mironenko (eds), *Sedition*, 110.

<sup>169</sup> NA, f. 05/1, sv. 375, a.j. 2270, l. 8; NA, f. ÚV KSČ, kancelář 1. tajemníka A. Novotného, inv. jedn. 166, k. 117, report from 10 November 1956.

<sup>170</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 950, l. 5.

<sup>171</sup> MOL, XXX-16-a, box 2, file 4, p. 203; SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, l. 32.

<sup>172</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, l. 286; MOL, XXX-16-a, box 1, file 3, p. 32.

<sup>173</sup> MOL, XXX-16-a, box 3, file 5, p. 15.

<sup>174</sup> For numerous verbal and written variants on the 'shoot/hang the communists' threat, which was occasionally made even against women communists, see ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, ll. 94, 223, 261, 283, 311, 332, 333, 411, 427, 454; ABS, f. N2/1, inv. jedn. 5, ll. 72, 78, 93; ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, ll. 20, 36, 124; ABS, f. N1-1, inv. jedn. 3, ll. 3, 4; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 915, ll. 3, 5; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 920, ll. 15, 16; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 938, l. 7; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 950, ll. 3, 4; SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 39, ll. 347, 357, 365, 370, 429; SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, ll. 5, 286, 292, 296, 313, 314; SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 73, ll. 3, 11, 13, 15, 18, 25, 35; MOL, XXX-16-a, box 2, file 3, p. 20; MOL, XXX-16-a, box 2, file 4, pp. 17, 155, 174, 193, 207; MOL, XXX-16-a, box 3, file 5, pp. 8, 80, 110, 114. British Embassy staff noted that 'there is inadequate enthusiasm for Communism in the towns and countryside of Slovakia'. TNA, FO 371/128450, 'Internal Political Situation, 1957.'

<sup>175</sup> Z. Mlynář, *Night Frost in Prague: The End of Humane Socialism* (London, 1980), 41.

<sup>176</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 73, l. 24.

<sup>177</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, ll. 5, 296.

<sup>178</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 39, l. 385. The report did not say if the official died or not. For another, more minor, act of physical violence, see SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 73, l. 3.

<sup>179</sup> NA, f. ÚV KSČ, kancelář 1. tajemníka A. Novotného, inv. jedn. 166, k. 117, report from 8 November 1956.

<sup>180</sup> NA, f. ÚV KSČ, kancelář 1. tajemníka A. Novotného, inv. jedn. 166, k. 117. It is noted in the report, dated 16 November, that the local law enforcement agencies released the man after he had been questioned and did not report the case to the regional prosecutor.

<sup>181</sup> MOL, XXX-16-a, box 2, file 4, pp. 180 and 202.

<sup>182</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 959, l. 5; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, ll. 24, 250. For similar criticisms of Zápotocký, see MOL, XXX-16-a, box 1, file 3, ll. 82, 89.

<sup>183</sup> OSA, 300-30-2 Czechoslovak Unit, microfilm 140 (unpaginated).

<sup>184</sup> ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, l. 32; ABS, f. N2/1, inv. jedn. 5, l. 29; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 117b.

<sup>185</sup> TNA, FO 371/122142, 'Internal Political Situation in Czechoslovakia, 1956.'

<sup>186</sup> Cited in Blaive, *Promarněná příležitost*, 97. Admittedly, this remark was made in the 1960s.

<sup>187</sup> J. Waterlow, 'Intimating Trust: Popular Humour in Stalin's 1930s,' *Cultural and Social History*, 10, 2 (forthcoming, 2013), (our emphasis).

<sup>188</sup> MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 1, file 3, p. 36.

<sup>189</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 917, l. 8. SNA, ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, l. 322.

<sup>190</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 926, l. 5.

<sup>191</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 916, l. 9.

<sup>192</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 921, l. 8.

<sup>193</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 915, l. 4.

<sup>194</sup> ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, l. 124b.

<sup>195</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, ll. 286, 428. Similar sentiments were expressed by farmers in the Prachatice district. See ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 134.

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<sup>196</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 950, ll. 13, 28; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, ll. 127, 162, 177.

<sup>197</sup> ABS, N2/1, inv. jedn. 5, ll. 61, 66; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, ll. 72, 102.

<sup>198</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 73, l. 18; SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, l. 333. The inclusion of expletives in official reports suggests that officers and agents did not invent statements. Would they have risked shocking their superiors by concocting gross crudities?

<sup>199</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, l. 135.

<sup>200</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 134b.

<sup>201</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 26, a.j. 994, l. 54 (unpaginated).

<sup>202</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 26, a.j. 994, l. 54 (unpaginated). Kaplan, however, insists that these figures are incomplete, not least because 'disturbances' occurred well after 5 November. He argues that around 1,000 people were prosecuted or otherwise repressed. See Kaplan, *Kronika komunistického Československa*, p. 543. By way of comparison, in England during the August 2011 urban riots over 3,000 people were arrested in the course of a few days.

<sup>203</sup> NA, f. ÚV KSČ, kancelář 1. tajemníka A. Novotného, inv. jedn. 166, k. 117 (unpaginated). From the total of 665 criminal prosecutions, 322 were designated as 'workers,' 90 'small and middle farmers,' 30 'kulaks,' 78 'intelligentsia,' 51 'bourgeoisie,' and 94 'others.'

<sup>204</sup> ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, l. 57.

<sup>205</sup> MOL, XXX-16-a, box 2, file 4, p. 53.

<sup>206</sup> MOL, XXX-16-a, box 2, file 4, p. 42. See also SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, l. 33.

<sup>207</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 925, l. 6. A resolution reflecting these ideas was not ratified, presumably under pressure from above. The case was brought to the attention of the party's District Committee. The 'united candidate list' refers to the franchise system in Czechoslovakia whereby all parties in the National Front (KSČ, National Socialists, and People's Party) put forward candidates on a unified list. This meant that officially voters did not elect communist delegates, but those of the 'united' National Front.

<sup>208</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 443; SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 73, l. 3.

<sup>209</sup> MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 2, file 4, p. 13.

<sup>210</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 913, l. 3.

<sup>211</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 923, ll. 3, 9-10; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 924, l. 7.

<sup>212</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 26, a.j. 994, (unpaginated). It was reported in the émigré press that demands had even been made, both inside and outside the KSČ, for the creation of an 'opposition Party.' See *Information* (published by the Regional Board of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia in Great Britain), no. 2 (February 1957), 1.

<sup>213</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 5, sv. 2, ll. 326, 442.

<sup>214</sup> MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 2, file 4, p. 126.

<sup>215</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 941, l. 2. Non-student oppositional groups also 'existed.' In Olomouc an anonymous writer from the 'Headquarters of National Resistance' (*Velitelství národního odboje*) warned on 30 October 1956 that 'in the next few days an uprising will break out like the one in Hungary.' See NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 959, l. 3.

<sup>216</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 962, l. 23; ABS, A 25, inv. jedn. 178 (unpaginated).

<sup>217</sup> For details, see Pernes, 'Ohlas maďarské revoluce,' 514-16, 520-2.

<sup>218</sup> Pernes, 'Československý rok 1956,' 612.

<sup>219</sup> Pernes, 'Československý rok 1956,' 612-13. In addition symbolic acts, such as ending the broadcast of the Soviet national anthem on radio, were undertaken.

<sup>220</sup> Indeed, according to a British embassy memo, the price cuts in early December 1956 were 'openly referred to in Prague as the "Hungarian" reductions' - presumably as a sop to the population for their 'good behavior' in October-November. See TNA, FO 371/122165, 'Economic Developments in Czechoslovakia, 1956.'

<sup>221</sup> TNA, FO 371/122141, 'Internal Political Situation in Czechoslovakia, 1956.'

<sup>222</sup> For a wide-ranging assessment of Soviet-style economic practice and theory, emphasizing the impact and rhetoric of the reformist 'New Course,' see D. C. Engerman, 'The Romance of Economic Development and New Histories of the Cold War,' *Diplomatic History*, 28, 1 (2004), 23-54, quotation at 41.

<sup>223</sup> OSA, 300-30-2 Czechoslovak Unit, microfilms 139 and 140 (unpaginated). The advantages of the socialist system were also commented on by émigrés interviewed in the USA in the early 1950s. See S. Kracauer and P. Berkman, *Satellite Mentality: Political Attitudes and Propaganda Susceptibilities of Non-Communists in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia* (New York, 1956), 82-9. It should be noted, however, that public attitudes in Slovakia may have been less well disposed to 'socialism' and nationalization than in the Czech lands. Police documents reveal relatively wide criticism of collectivization and the lack of free



enterprise and private ownership among Slovak citizens. See, for example, AÚPN, f. B10, inv. č. 72, KS MV Košice, Kontrarevolucia v Maďarsku a Poľsku - poznatky a bezpečnostné opatrenia k týmto udalostiam, 2 November 1956.

<sup>224</sup> TNA, FO 371/122142, 'Internal Political Situation in Czechoslovakia, 1956'; FO 371/122163, 'Visits to Czechoslovakia by MPs and Civic Authorities, 1956.' The British ambassador, Clinton Pelham, wrote in October 1955 that there were 'fewer men and women in rags to be seen in Prague, Brno and Bratislava than in many cities of the west.' See FO 371/116179, 'Impressions of Life in Czechoslovakia by Various Visitors, 1955.' Indeed, it is worth remembering that material conditions in Western Europe in the first half of the 1950s were hardly a bed of roses - rationing ended in the UK as late as 1954.

<sup>225</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, ll. 317-8.

<sup>226</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, ll. 70, 164, 220, 246, 247, 435.

<sup>227</sup> ABS, f. H-669-2, report from 1 November 1956.

<sup>228</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 39, l. 13.

<sup>229</sup> MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 3, file 5, p. 104.

<sup>230</sup> MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 2, file 4, p. 43.

<sup>231</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, l. 86. A very similar view was expressed by a miner in Rožňava. See AÚPN, f. B10, inv. č. 72, KS MV Košice, Kontrarevolucia v Maďarsku a Poľsku - poznatky a bezpečnostné opatrenia k týmto udalostiam, 7 November 1956.

<sup>232</sup> ABS, f. H-669-2, report from 9 November 1956.

<sup>233</sup> ABS, f. H-669-2, report from 2 November 1956.

<sup>234</sup> MOL, XXX-16-a, box 3, file 5, p. 19. For details on the Ústí massacre, see E. Glassheim, 'National Mythologies and Ethnic Cleansing: The Expulsion of Czechoslovak Germans in 1945,' *Central European History*, 33, 4 (2000), 463-86.

<sup>235</sup> OSA, 300-30-2 Czechoslovak Unit, microfilm 139 (unpaginated). For a typical official publication on the German threat, albeit from 1958, see *Bílá kniha o agresivní politice vlády Německé spolkové republiky* (Prague, 1958).

<sup>236</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 923, ll. 6, 10; see also NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 958, l. 19.

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<sup>237</sup> ABS, f. N2/1, inv. jedn. 5, l. 76. According to an ex-member of the People's Party, the events in Hungary 'cannot bring us any danger. This can only come from Germany.' See ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, ll. 148, 230.

<sup>238</sup> L. B. Bain, *The Reluctant Satellites: An Eyewitness Report on Eastern Europe and the Hungarian Revolution* (New York, 1960), 223.

<sup>239</sup> TNA, FO 371/128450, 'Political Situation, 1957.'

<sup>240</sup> TNA, FO 371/116179, 'Impressions of Life in Czechoslovakia by Various Visitors, 1955.'

<sup>241</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 1, l. 31; ABS, f. N2/1, inv. jedn. 5, l. 80; ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, l. 120b; MOL, XXX-16-a, box 2, file 4, pp. 137, 220; SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 73, ll. 32, 33; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 913, l. 12; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 918, l. 7; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 923, ll. 5, 6, 9.

<sup>242</sup> AÚPN, KS ZNB S-ŠtB Košice, OP-8417, Zpráva o verejnej mienke obyvateľ'stva k udalostiam v Maďarsku, 1 November 1956.

<sup>243</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 918, l. 7; MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 3, file 5, p. 76.

<sup>244</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 923, l. 5.

<sup>245</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 940, l. 2.

<sup>246</sup> MOL, XXX-16-a, box 2, file 4, p. 137.

<sup>247</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, l. 328.

<sup>248</sup> NA, f. ÚV KSČ, Kancelář 1. tajemníka A. Novotného, inv. jedn. 166, k. 117, report from 12 November 1956. The procurators and police also regarded public manifestations of support for the independent wartime Slovak state as acts of 'resistance,' a symbolic aspect of which was the singing of the so-called Guardsmen Marching Songs used by the Hlinka Guard, the paramilitary wing of the republic. See NA, f. ÚV KSČ, Kancelář 1. tajemníka A. Novotného, inv. jedn. 166, k. 117, report from 3 November 1956.

<sup>249</sup> NA, f. ÚV KSČ, Kancelář 1. tajemníka A. Novotného, inv. jedn. 166, k. 117, report from 6 November 1956. An exception was the discovery of graffiti on houses and shop windows in the village of Dobšiná displaying messages such as 'Hungarians out, long live Stalin, Jews out.'

<sup>250</sup> Party and police reports are full of citizens' anxieties that the Hungarian and Suez crises would result in international armed conflict, one stating that people operated 'under a psychosis that there will be war.' SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 73, l. 23. See also ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, l. 81; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, ll. 71, 166, 167, 207, 217b, 230, 240, 255, 262, 269, 453; ABS, f. N2/1, inv. jedn. 5, ll. 21, 68, 76; ABS,

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f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, ll. 122b, 128; MOL, XXX-16-a, box 3, file 5, pp. 26, 27, 52, 103, 104, 133; SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, l. 296. Citizens' letters likewise give a crystal clear indication of these concerns. See ABS, f. H-669-2, reports from 2, 5, 8, and 9 November 1956; AÚPN, KS ZNB S-ŠtB Košice, OP-8417, Zpráva o verejnej mienke obyvateľ'stva k udalostiam v Maďarsku, 4 November 1956.

<sup>251</sup> For details, see Shore, *Engineering in the Age of Innocence*, 400-11, especially 409-10. The 'unknown man' stories mentioned in note 15 above also indicate how far Stalinist mentalities and fears had infiltrated the police, and possibly the general, consciousness.

<sup>252</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 226; Kracauer and Berkman, *Satellite Mentality*, 97-8. By comparison, only 14 per cent of Hungarian defectors acknowledged the global pretensions of America. RFE sources also spoke of the 'fickle views' of Czechs toward the West. See OSA, 300-30-2 Czechoslovak Unit, microfilm 139 (unpaginated).

<sup>253</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, l. 95.

<sup>254</sup> MOL, XXX-16-a, box 2, file 4, p. 78.

<sup>255</sup> MOL, XXX-16-a, box 3, file 5, p. 12.

<sup>256</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 923, l. 10.

<sup>257</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, l. 92; see also ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 131b.

<sup>258</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 921, l. 5. In the summer of 1919, the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic under Béla Kun was quashed by foreign troops and replaced by a repressive rightwing regime led by Admiral Horthy.

<sup>259</sup> TNA, FO 371/122142, 'Internal Political Situation in Czechoslovakia, 1956'; OSA, 300-30-2 Czechoslovak Unit, microfilm 140 (unpaginated).

<sup>260</sup> See the summary in Tůma, 'The Impact of the Hungarian Revolution,' 73.

<sup>261</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 923, l. 8.

<sup>262</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 950, l. 22.

<sup>263</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 225.

<sup>264</sup> AÚPN, KS ZNB S-ŠtB Košice, OP-8417, Spisy o udalostiach v Maďarsku, Zpráva o verejnej mienke obyvateľ'stva k udalostiam v Maďarsku, 1 November 1956.

<sup>265</sup> MOL, XXX-16-a, box 2, file 3, p. 21; MOL, XXX-16-a, box 3, file 5, p. 8; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 250.

<sup>266</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 121.

<sup>267</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, ll. 187, 190, 257; ABS, f. H-669-2, report from 2 November 1956.

<sup>268</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, l. 3.

<sup>269</sup> ABS, f. H1-4, inv. jedn. 316, ll. 83-4.

<sup>270</sup> ABS, f. H-669-2, reports from 8 and 9 November 1956.

<sup>271</sup> See ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, ll. 292, 292b, 293, 303, 304, 305, 313, 427, 432; MOL, XXX-16-a, box 3, file 5, p. 43.

<sup>272</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 264.

<sup>273</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 279.

<sup>274</sup> MOL, XXX-16-a, box 4, file 6, report from 26 October, p. 11; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 912, ll. 3-4; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 923, l. 7. See also J. Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956* (Durham: NC, 2000).

<sup>275</sup> Kracauer and Berkman, *Satellite Mentality*, 55.

<sup>276</sup> S. Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York, 1999), 191.

<sup>277</sup> ABS, f. H1-4, inv. 316, l. 71.

<sup>278</sup> For a fascinating exploration of 'the collaborative part played by locals' under late communism in the 'patriotic' duty of guarding the state borders, see M. Blaive, 'Multiple identities and Europeaness at the Czech-Austrian and Slovak-Hungarian borders,' *Eruditio - Educatio*, 4 (2009), 5-15.

<sup>279</sup> For details on the wave of anti-Semitism at the time of the Slánský trial, see McDermott, 'A "Polyphony of Voices"?,' 850-5.

<sup>280</sup> AÚPN, fond B10, inv. č. 72, Krajská správa MV Košice, Zpráva operatívnej skupiny KS-MV o situácii k udalostiam v Maďarsku a Poľsku, 27 October 1956.

<sup>281</sup> AÚPN, KS ZNB S-ŠtB Košice, OP-8417, Spisy o udalostiach v Maďarsku, Agentúrna zpráva Krajské správy MV Košice, no. 11/2, 31 October 1956.

<sup>282</sup> AÚPN, fond B10, inv. č. 72, Zpráva o operatívnej situácii na 3. odbore, undated.

<sup>283</sup> AÚPN, fond B10, inv. č. 72, Zpráva Krajské správy MV v Košicích, 30 October 1956.

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<sup>284</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 914, l. 12; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 937, l. 12; SNA, ÚV KSS David, a.j. 39, l. 410; SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, l. 136; MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 1, file 3, p. 50; MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 2, file 4, p. 154; MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 4, file 6, p. 5, report from 26 October 1956.

<sup>285</sup> Adherents of 'Judeo-Bolshevism' stereotypically asserted that Jews 'en masse supported Communism....enjoyed a privileged position in the regime....while imposing it on everybody else.' See J. T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York, 2007), 192. On anti-Semitism and 'Judeo-Bolshevism' in Slovakia at the beginning of the twentieth century, see M. Szabó, "'Židovská otázka" na Slovensku v prvých rokoch Československej republiky,' *Střed. Časopis pro mezioborová studia střední a východní Evropy*, 3, 2 (2011), 59–80. For an analysis of the 'Judeo-Bolshevik' narrative among members of the Czech nationalist elite, see V. Strobach, 'Tělo, židovství a český nacionalismus (1918-1920),' *Střed. Časopis pro mezioborová studia střední a východní Evropy*, 2, 2 (2010), 23–53.

<sup>286</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS David, a.j. 40, l. 14.

<sup>287</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 920, ll. 8, 10.

<sup>288</sup> ABS, N2/1, inv. jedn. 5, l. 107; ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, l. 88. See also ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 325.


<sup>289</sup> MOL, XXXII-16-a, box 4, file 6, p. 4, report from 25 October 1956.

<sup>290</sup> NA, f. 014/12, sv. 25, a.j. 950, l. 14; ABS, f. H-669-2, report from 8 November 1956.

<sup>291</sup> ABS, f. B2, inv. jedn. 15, sv. 2, l. 174.

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