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EAST EUROPE

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

27 January 1966

THE LITERARY SCENE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

(July-December 1965)

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Summary: The second half of 1965 began with a diminution of the lively discussions on cultural periodicals seen earlier in the year. Toward the end of the year the Party introduced a more restrictive policy, as seen in the removal of a moderate Minister of Education and Culture, and the suppression of two progressive literary periodicals. Within this more somber framework, however, writers went on creating and critics continued to be disrespectful of the tabus of a stodgy Communist officialdom.

The death on 2 August of the most important inter-war Czech dramatist, Frantisek Langer, brought forth sharp public criticism from several of his colleagues for his "isolation" since 1948. Langer was best known for his dramas on the Czechoslovak legions who opposed the Communists in Siberia during the Russian Civil War.

The highlight of the year was perhaps the new play by Vaclav Havel, The Memorandum performed in Prague during the summer. A profound satire on Communist society, this play was the more effective for not naming names, but instead transferring the action to the sphere of the theater of the absurd. In brief, the play concerned the tribulations of an important bureaucrat because he had received a memorandum in an artificial language, "Ptydepe," translation of which was only authorized for people who had not recently received a communication in it. In the end the official is vindicated, but a new artificial language, "Chorukor" is introduced.

Symptomatic of the growing relativization of Soviet prestige in Czechoslovakia and other East European countries was a sharp attack on a Soviet Kafka study (by D.V. Zaton'skiy) by Literarni Noviny. This official paper of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union condemned Zaton'skiy for his "foggy and strongly emotional," "over-simplified," and "prejudiced" approach to Kafka.

The Third Congress of the Association of Czechoslovak Theatrical and Film Artists toward the end of the year was generally a pedestrian performance, but several of the participants managed to make good points, including one who lambasted the trade union for expressing solidarity with Swiss musicians while at the same time playing "an extremely dirty role" in the question of taxation of Czech actors.

A Lull in the Ferment

The often fervent literary discussions, which were a feature of Czechoslovak literary weeklies in the first half of 1965 (1) abated somewhat during the summer months.

Although the May issue of the press organ of the Union of Slovak Writers, Slovenske Pohľady, initiated a discussion on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of liberation, the only contributions of real importance appeared in the first part of this discussion, which was devoted to an appraisal of the new literature since 1945. This part dealt with the literature of the years between the liberation and the Communist coup d'état. In its review of the years from 1945 to 1948 or 1949, the efforts of young or emerging writers in particular were acclaimed as progressive. (2)

For instance, Milan Hamada pointed out at the very beginning of the discussion:

"After 1945, art was almost possessed with a passion for accurately describing the essence of reality, for revealing concealed connections of things and for finding and examining latent dangers which internally and externally threaten man and society. I believe that it is this period in particular ... which has been greatly neglected and insufficiently studied -- to which most attention should be devoted in this discussion. Between 1945 and 1949 various possibilities were explored and therefore one may claim that the process of creating artistic values predominated in it. The fifties, in contrast to the preceding years, were years in which all values collapsed and in which an empty mechanism replaced the artistic process." (3)

However, this realistic look at literary creation prior to the Communist coup and shortly afterward, was bound to evoke a response in the Party press. The Bratislava Pravda, official organ of the Slovak Party Central Committee, dealt with the Slovenske Pohľady discussion in a long commentary. In it Daniel Okali said: (4)

(1) See Background Information Czechoslovakia, (A.K.): Literary Scene in Czechoslovakia in the First Quarter of 1965, April 1965 and The Situation on the Literary Front in the CSSR, 24 July 1965.

(2) Slovenske Pohľady No.5, May 1965.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Pravda, 25 July 65 Dr. Daniel Okali, literary critic of the DAV circle, who (like Vilem Novy, J.J. Kolar and also Eduard Goldstucker) is among the Party cultural activists who were not broken by imprisonment during the time of the personality cult. Like Kolar he too specializes in carrying on the argument with the young generation.

"In this discussion opinions have been voiced which must produce ideological chaos. I have in mind Milan Hamada's introductory observations which, in a certain sense, formulate opinions which, in identical or similar shape, appear in manifestoes and in the creation of some young writers. And these observations define a state of mind the tendencies of which are also clearly discernible in our abstract art and in the experiments involved in the theater of the absurd.

"The author started with the premise that the Second World War had brought about a dissolution of the homogeneous and classical image of the world -- which aggravated the spiritual crisis of the world. However, a homogeneous and classical image of the world did not exist even before the war. From its inception, the class society could provide a homogeneous image only in the form of a dialectical unity of contradictions, of constant tensions and of class war and of clashes, which, as Lenin explained, also occurred in the cultural sphere.

"After the war, Slovak literature regarded revolutionary activity as its chief purpose and therefore it is not possible to speak of a crisis in this period. And in this direct connection with the period of crisis of the so-called cult after 1950, one cannot agree with the contention that a 'collapse of values,' a loss of values in general occurred.

In another part of his commentary Daniel Okali criticized Hamada's comparison of the crisis in the sphere of art caused by the cult with the "inherent crises of capitalism" and he avers that the assertion about the liquidation of values is tantamount to making negativism absolute.

"For all practical purposes, this means to deny the revolutionary change of our economic, social, cultural, etc. structure which was carried out throughout the years of the cult; this means to deny the historical revolutionary process which transformed Slovakia from a backward land of itinerant peddlers, emigrants and paupers which had been ruined and ravished by the war into a modern, economically, socially and culturally highly developed country. This means to ignore the liquidation of the exploiting, parasitic classes and, chiefly to ignore the worker who creates values for the future and to ignore the inspiring role of Communism. Failure to observe the era of the cult dialectically, means to disregard the fact that, in spite of all deformations, the process of revolutionary transformation

of society for the benefit of man continued... and means to evaluate this process in a schematical and one-sided manner. It is a perverted look that only sees the ebbing tide of the revolution and the decaying morass of bureaucracy in the Kafka manner!" (5)

If we apply the whole of Okali's apologia of the Communist system to the sphere of culture and disregard the involved Marxist jargon, we recognize that the motif of his explanations consists in the assertion that the "non-engaged" postwar literature bore all the characteristic marks of the decadent Western literatures -- the mark of the feeling that the values of the old order had been destroyed and the mark of moral instability. According to Okali, Hochhuth's Deputy also belongs to this category. On the other hand, integral socialist literature had always looked ahead, in spite of all difficulties.

The Reaction to the Death of National Artist Frantisek Langer

The reaction to the death on 2 August of the most important Czech dramatist in the period between the two wars, Dr. Frantisek Langer, was surprising in Western publications as well as in the Czechoslovak non-Party press. Criticism of the regime, which had kept this creator of the modern Czech comedy (6) in artistic isolation, came both from National Artists (Zdenek Stepanek and Jan Werich) and from among writers who had been imprisoned in the fifties for political reasons (Michal Mares). For instance, Zdenek Stepanek, addressing himself to the cultural politicians, remarked in Lidova Demokracie:

"We ought to learn to make better use of our cultural wealth! Frantisek Langer was nominated National Artist in 1947. And ever since, clouds and silence seemed to envelop him. Now he has become silent for ever!" (7)

Stepanek also enquired of those supervising culture whether they were aware of how much more Frantisek Langer could have written

(5) Ibid.

(6) The following plays by Frantisek Langer were especially successful internationally: The Periphery (1925), Conversion of Ferdys Pistora (1929), Camel through the Needle's Eye (1923), Grand-hotel Nevada (1927), Prisoner No. Seventy Two (1937).

(7) Lidova Demokracie, 9. August 1965.

for us during the past 20 years.

Jan Werich said in the chief press organ of the Union of Czechoslovak writers:

"Langer had to pay his toll for having been close to the names of T.G.Masaryk and Karel Capek in the history of our culture. This was the reason why his plays were not performed or printed.!" (8)

And finally, Michal Mares, whom the West had assumed deceased in a Communist prison, said in Lidova Demokracie:

"After I had been arrested and sentenced, Langer not only wrote to me in prison, he even visited me and came to my place of work, to Liben island (9) where I had to unload building material from railroad cars. He came to visit me at the time of Stalin's greatest glory -- he came wearing his general's uniform! He brought me a bottle of brandy and some pastry his wife had sent me." (10)

In order to appreciate fully the significance of the reaction to Langer's death, some background on his career is necessary. For Communist ideologists the chief problem of appraising Langer's literary heritage continues to be his prose and dramas on the Czech legions' participation in the Russian Civil War -- on the "wrong" side. This was the reason for his isolation. In 1916 Langer was taken prisoner on the Galician front, and in the spring of 1917 he joined the medical corps of the Czechoslovak legions in Russia and soon became chief surgeon of the first regiment. Langer experienced the whole of the famous Siberian Anabasis. He described this experience in profoundly human, as well as political and moral terms in his book of legionnaire short stories, The Iron Wolf. The most prominent literary historian of the first republic, Arne Novak, said: (11)

"In this work we see Frantisek Langer as a man matured through his war experiences and as an epic writer robustly painting heroic pictures of the legionnaires' deeds in Siberia."

The legions in Russia, the struggle for liberation and the battles of the legionnaires against the Red Army absorbed Langer's

(8) Literarni Noviny, 7 August 1965.

(9) A river island on the outskirts of Prague.

(10) Lidova Demokracie, 8 August 1965.

(11) Prehledne Dejiny Literatury Ceske (Concise History of Czech Literature), Olomouc, 1939.

creative and artistic talent almost throughout his whole life. He reached the peak of his creative dramatic mastery in The Mounted Patrol, a legionnaire tragedy set in Siberia, which was first performed in 1935 and was filmed as a motion picture soon afterwards. This great drama was ushered in by Langer's minor legionnaire plays, performed already during the war in Siberia: The Surrender of the 28th Regiment, At Dawn, and On the Highway. Subsequently these three plays were published in one volume entitled The Victors. In 1935, Langer received the State Prize, the highest literary award of the Masaryk republic, for The Mounted Patrol. The action of this stark tragedy of manly comradeship in the Siberian fighting of the Czechoslovak legionnaires against overwhelming Bolshevik forces is rather simple: in the setting of revolutionary fever and civil anarchy in February 1919, the safe passage of a company of legionnaires returning home on a troop train has to be protected and mounted patrols are sent out along the railroad track. One of these patrols is pinned down in an isolated hut by more than 150 Communist partisans. One after the other, the men of the patrol are killed. All of them reject the blandishments of a political commissar. Only one of the eight men is alive when the patrol is relieved. The end of the play is symbolical.

Langer's famous book for young readers, The Dog of the Second Company (first published in 1923) was also a legionnaire story. At the time of the Masaryk republic, this book was among the most widely read. In it, Langer adopted the style of the American writer Jack London.

In addition to these works, Langer also wrote a number of legionnaire stories and memorial volumes. The subject of the legions is tabu for all practical purposes in the CSSR. Probably this will remain the only case in the history of Czechoslovak culture in which one of the major parts of the work of a National Artist is constantly subject to censorship and eliminated from popular libraries. Although passing references were made to the legions in Langer's obituaries, no one dared to mention The Mounted Patrol, The Victors, or The Iron Wolf in any detail. This fact illustrates the limits of the liberalization process on the cultural scene in Czechoslovakia. It is interesting to note how Langer's profile is drawn in Czech literary encyclopaedias. For instance, in Kunc's Dictionary of Czech Contemporary Writers, published in 1957 (12) all of Langer's minor works and puppet plays are listed, but The Mounted Patrol and The Iron Wolf.

are conspicuous by their absence. Although The Mounted Patrol is listed in the generally excellent Dictionary of Czech Writers, (13) recently published by the Institute of Czech Literature of the Prague Academy of Sciences, a comment in it says that "in this play Langer openly appears as a supporter of the government policies founded on the anti-Soviet orientation of the Czechoslovak legions."

A New Play by Vaclav Havel

After the September 26 opening of The Garden Party at the Vienna "Volkstheater," an "absurd realistic play" by Vaclav Havel, (14) several Austrian theater critics expressed the view that the Czech place in the European dramatic forum vacated by the death of Frantisek Langer has not remained empty for long -- it has been occupied by the young Czech vanguard playwright. (15) While 17 West European theaters have played The Garden Party, the Prague "Balustrade Theater" during the summer months staged a new absurd satire by the young dramatist Vaclav Havel, The Memorandum. (16)

The daring subject of Havel's new play caused a political and cultural stir. The essence of The Memorandum is an analysis of the depersonification of man in the process of social and political adjustment. A comparison between the two plays, The Garden Party and The Memorandum, shows that in the latter Havel went beyond the ideological-thematical limits of the former.

Although the absurd forms the basis of the plot in The Memorandum also, it has been elaborated in a manner designed to present a realistic view of the socialist world. In spite of the many hints which have a local character, the new play could be applied to any socialist country. By replacing a few key words with other ones (Communist Party, cadre section, police informers, etc.) the play could be presented on the non-absurd stage. This would, however, deprive the play of its great effect, and would thus represent a sort of reverse censorship. Theater critic Zdenek Bidlo wrote:

"Havel's satire is as cruel in The Memorandum as it was in The Garden Party. The self-denunciation of man -- embodied in the figure of the director -- is frightening, as is the absolute indifference, e.g. of the director's secretary."

- (13) Lexicon of Czech Writers, Prague, 1964.
- (14) See Background Information Czechoslovakia: The New Czech Dramatic Avant-Garde, 17 February 1965.
- (15) E.g. Kurier, 29 September 1965.
- (16) First performed 25 July 1965.

In conclusion Biblo notes:

"The Memorandum is a satirical picture in which the hyperbole of the vicious circle of organizational and ideological somersaults is not an expression of pessimism but simply a warning." (17)

The key element of the absurd in the play, which we could -- but won't replace with the term "Party line," is an artificial language called "Ptydepe." The action takes place in an office, an important and big office, for it has its own special translation pool with schooled Party linguists who are the only one's in the office (the director is no exception) who know "Ptydepe." The plot is described by literary critic Zdenek Horinek in his article "From Ptydepe to Chorukor." (18)

"The director of the office, Gross, becomes aware of the existence of the new language only when he receives an official memorandum written in 'Ptydepe.' Here starts his Odyssey in pursuance of a translation of the memorandum. A complicated situation ensues. Translations from 'Ptydepe' can be made by the translation pool only after approval has been obtained from the 'Ptydomete' Kunc, who only issues approval to persons (who can prove.. that they) have not recently received any official memorandum in 'Ptydepe.' In view of the fact that Gross had received the memorandum in 'Ptydepe,' he is unable to obtain the (required) personal cadre document... If we cut this vicious circle short we come to this simple conclusion: Gross is unable to ascertain the contents of the memorandum which he received for the very reason that he received it, or as he himself describes this paradoxical situation 'what is said in this memorandum may be brought to our knowledge only if we already know it.' This dead end, as well as the suspicion that the memorandum may be unfavorable to the addressee, is exploited by deputy Balas. The usual personnel changes follow. Balas goes up (is promoted to director) and Gross drops (is demoted from the position of director to deputy and later to that of an observer).

"In the second part of the play, constructed symmetrically to the first part, the situation is reversed. Balas, the new director, receives a memorandum in 'Ptydepe.' He, too, gets

(17) Vecerni Praha, 28 July 1965.

(18) Host do Domu (Brno), 9 September 1965.

into the vicious circle of official musts and must nots. His position becomes shaky. 'Ptydepe' proves to be not much of a success and what is more, the higher echelons, which have never given their express approval to the introduction of 'Ptydepe' and have never made clear their stand in this question, have in the new situation taken a negative stand toward the new language. A definite solution of the whole case becomes clear only at the moment when Gross finds out the contents of the memorandum in which his superiors express their acknowledgement of his uncompromising struggle against 'Ptydepe.' At the moment when 'Ptydepe' is definitely done away with, a delegation of employees deliver a note of protest against the use of the new language. Balas' partner Kubs is sacrificed, and 'Ptydepe' condemned, but otherwise everything returns to the old order. Gross is director, Balas -- after the expected self-criticism -- retains the position of deputy, Kubs returns having masked himself by a new moustache and a new name (Suba), his job again being to keep a record of compromising statements made by the superiors. Only Marie, the secretary, who contributed to the liquidation of 'Ptydepe' and Gross' rehabilitation, by her illegal translation of the memorandum, is dismissed. Instead of 'Ptydepe' a new artificial language is introduced, the 'Chorukor.' " (19)

The realism of the absurd situation in The Memorandum is expressed by director Gross' being commended by his superiors for his "uncompromising fight" against something the existence of which he has been completely unaware. The non-Communist literary critic, Jindrich Cerny, emphasized in Lidova Demokracie that The Memorandum is firmly tied to reality.

"No allegorical drama takes place here comparable with the disappearance of Hugo Pludka in The Garden Party; everything we see on the stage could happen in reality. In The Memorandum Havel invented only one absurd motif, the new language 'Ptydepe.' However, the method by which this new means of communication is introduced into the official use, the way it is accepted by the officials and later the discovery of its harmfulness and the headlong condemnation of it, the manner in which its supporters exculpate themselves and its adversaries are rehabilitated, all this as well as the final conclusion of the whole story, this clearly discernible working of the mechanism of cowardice, is only to a very small degree the fruit of the dramatist's absurd

imagination. Havel's play is the most honest satirical text of the present day." (20)

What Jindrich Cerny could only delicately indicate in the introduction to his report, namely that the play had difficulties with the censors, was said openly by Andreas Razumovsky in Frankfurter Allgemeine.

"The performance of this play, written more than a year ago, was announced a month ago but had to be postponed repeatedly due to the fact that permission was not obtained. As soon as it was issued, the opening night followed almost immediately." (21)

The time of the play's introduction was very unfavorable -- in the middle of the dead holiday season. The reviews were very favorable in the whole press -- except that naturally Rude Pravo and Svoboda (CPCS official daily for the Prague region) ignored the play.

In his review in Mlada Fronta (Czechoslovak Youth Federation daily) Pavel Kohn notes:

"Here he (Havel) touched a serious contemporary philosophical problem, the problem of science which is turned by dilettantes into the very opposite, into a caricature dangerous to life. A dirty trick is made good by cheap self-criticism ('subjectively it was all well intentioned'), the culprits save themselves by maneuvering with blackmail, what is one day declared to be a mark of progress is condemned the following day with equal 'enthusiasm' and professional opportunism, while blame is laid conveniently and anonymously upon the situation which prevailed at that time and was qualitatively quite different from the one today. Intrigues and mechanization rule this world in which while some people can do anything they like, others are allowed nothing, the strong tread down the weak, the tough dominate the decent, nobody is responsible and the system of the 'vicious circle' prevails. The Memorandum is an important work which is destined to address audiences outside the frontiers of our country. The philosophical problems involved are of a much wider appeal than might be apparent at first sight -- in this we should not let ourselves be misled by the local angle." (22)

(20) Lidova Demokracie, 30 July 1965.

(21) Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 5 August 1965.

(22) Mlada Fronta, 31 July 1965.

Pavel Kohn could not say that The Memorandum does not apply to the Czechoslovak system alone but also to that of the Soviet Union and other East European countries.

In his recent talk at the club of the Austrian Society for Literature in Vienna Vaclav Havel emphasized that he considered Ionesco as his spiritual father and, perhaps to a still greater degree, Franz Kafka. The resemblance is unmistakable (the anonymity, the impossibility of grasping the fundamental principles, the impenetrability of official processes, the backstairs methods of obtaining information about official files, etc.). Zdenek Horinek sees the dividing line between Havel and Kafka in the fact that "Kafka's material was his experience with the Austrian bureaucracy whereas Havel's play is inspired by the atmosphere of contemporary officialdom." (23)

Change at the Ministry of Education and Culture

One of several negative events on the cultural-political scene during the last quarter of 1965 was the sudden removal of the Minister of Education and Culture Cestmir Cisar from his office and his replacement by Jiri S. Hajek, previously Czechoslovak ambassador at the United Nations. (24) During the two years of his tenure, Cisar tried to enforce in the school sector (especially at the university level) and in the sphere of literature a number of measures aimed at liberalization. His adversary was Dr. Pavel Auersperg, former chief of Antonin Novotny's office at the CPCSS CC and since January 1965 head of the ideological department of the Central Committee. Cisar's fall is generally attributed to Auersperg's efforts. Thus Cisar's fall is the result of a duel between the progressive forces at the Ministry of Education and Culture and the dogmatic forces in the secretariat of the CPCSS CC. (25)

According to Die Welt, Cisar's removal was not altogether smooth. Thus for example undergraduates in the eighth term at the Faculty of Philosophy, Charles University in Prague, submitted a petition to the leadership of the CPCSS protesting against Cisar's

(23) Host do Domu, September 1965.

(24) Dr. Jiri S. Hajek was Czechoslovakia's permanent delegate to UNO. He was appointed Minister of Education and Culture effective 11 November 1965. (Radio Prague, 11 November 1965).

(25) See also explanation below on the discontinuation of Tvar and Knizni Kultura.

removal. (26) Dr. Cisar applied for the post of Ambassador in Paris but his application was turned down; (27) he was actually posted as ambassador to Bucharest. (28)

Just what kind of influence Hajek will have at the Ministry of Culture is difficult to say. It seems certain, however, that it will not be as positive and strong as that of Cisar. (29)

The Problem of the Young Literary Generation -- The Suppression of Tvar and Knizni Kultura

The discussions and polemics on the subject of the monthly of the young literary generation, Tvar, culminated at the end of the year in its demise. Beginning 1 January 1966 Tvar was to have been removed from affiliation with and protection by the Czechoslovak Writers Union and henceforth administered by the publishing house "Ceskoslovensky Spisovatel," at present headed by Jan Kristek, a man known for the rigidity of his views. (30)

(26) Die Welt, 27 November and 2 December 1965.

(27) Die Welt, 27 November 1965.

(28) Radio Prague, 29 December 1965.

(29) Hajek graduated at the Faculty of Law, and in 1937-1939 worked at the Ministry of Finance. After the war he worked at the Trade Union Council in the ideological commission, in 1948-1949 he was with the cultural-propaganda section of the CPCSS CC, for a short period he was vice-rector of the High School of Political and Economic Sciences, and he taught at Charles University. In 1954 he went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There he was ambassador, deputy minister, and in 1962, became the permanent representative of the CSSR to the United Nations with the rank of ambassador. During his career he has never come in direct contact with the problems of culture and art. By his appointment the ideological section of the CPCSS CC evidently hoped to regain the influence in the Ministry of Education and Culture which it lost under Cisar's administration.

(30) "In view of the crystallization of the periodical Tvar it must be definitely considered to be essentially a specialized periodical appealing to a limited group of readers. Therefore the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Writers Union has agreed to transfer it from the structure of the Union press and to publish it from 1 January 1966 through the publishing house 'Ceskoslovensky Spisovatel' ... (Excerpts from the decision of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Writers Union; Literarni Noviny, 4 December 1965).

From the Party point of view, the problem of the young literary generation in Czechoslovakia is a chronic one. This problem has frequently been attacked by administrative measures of the CPCS CC. Other examples are the 1958 confiscation of the first printing of Josef Skvorecky's novel Zbabelci (The Cowards) and the prohibition of the mouthpiece of the young literary generation, the periodical Kveten in 1959. The situation of the young literary group which had gathered around Tvar is today as open to question as was in 1959 that of the young writers who had gathered around Kveten. The attacks on the young writers who had been expressing their views in the pages of Tvar, and which led to the periodical's suppression, may be divided in three categories.

First, the Party accused them of an anti-Marxist attitude. Ivan Skala formulated it in Rude Pravo as follows:

"Tvar presents very busily all kinds of views and concepts which are antagonistic to Marxism. A young critic places beyond the limits of art the concepts of partisanship and engagement because their very use in a sphere alien to them is the cause of their being only pseudo-problematical. This conclusion has its source logically, in the author's notion that art is something that exceeds the 'schemes of ideological systems' -- certainly a very partial truth -- and that life is the personal affair of every individual, a truth certainly even more partial. The critics have done their best in this periodical to contribute to the efforts aimed at turning into ruin all that the socialist art has so far created." (31)

The chief editor of the theoretical and political monthly of the CPCS CC, Nova Mysl, Frantisek Havlicek was much sharper than Ivan Skala in his criticism of the young literary generation, of the ideological side of Tvar, and of the young dramatist, V. Havel, a member of the editorial board of Tvar. He used as an excuse the censored and unpublished address by Vaclav Havel, which had been given at the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union on 9 June 1965. (32) Havel had emphasized that it was generally known that the best postwar literary periodicals were Kriticky Mesicnik and Listy pro Umeni a Filosofii (33) and demanded their rehabilitation. "We have a feeling" said Havel, "as if the

(31) Rude Pravo, 5 and 6 October 1965.

(32) See discussion on Havel earlier in this paper.

(33) Both periodicals were prohibited after February 1948.

people who were responsible for these periodicals were guilty of having known certain things before the others. Of the collaborators of these periodicals only those have all the rights and command attention who have retreated from their former views. Those who have done nothing worse than to stick to their opinions, despite the adversity of the time, have lost these rights..." (34)

In his long polemic Havlicek referred to international anti-Communism and quoted a number of dogmatists (e.g. Gustav Bares) trying to prove that the attitude of Vaclav Cerny and "others like him" has not changed and that Kriticky Mesicnik and Listy played a negative role in the process of building socialism.

"The critical spirit is an attribute of Marxist socialism, especially today when the way must be cleared for progressive tendencies in the struggle against non-socialist deformations. However, he who has no interest in the defense of the revolution but in the restoration of the pre-socialist order, clings like a parasite to the living process of recognition, to the critical stand toward reality, especially where criticism of socialism is concerned. The fight against dogmatic prejudices, for the true understanding of reality, is enormously complicated not only due to the nature of the task, but also because the fight for a creative Marxist approach and the purity of Communist life is carried on today under a heavy attack by imperialist propaganda and under conditions of the new refined forms of ideological diversion now used by anti-Communism. -- In the fight against socialist democratism, against the popular character of the state, Kriticky Mesicnik misused the widespread prejudices about Masaryk and Benes and, making use of their names and authority, argued against socialism and the Communist Party.

"Havel's demand to rehabilitate Kriticky Mesicnik amounts to the wish to achieve a political rehabilitation and to justify, even in the present situation, the bourgeois liberal course of fight against socialism. Does Havel actually want such a rehabilitation? This is how the question must be posed in order to clarify Havel's actual aim" (35)

Second, the editorial circle of Tvar was officially criticized as artistically weak and colorless. However, this judgement,

(34) Nova Mysl, December 1965

(35) Ibid.

in view of the "artistic strength" and "color" of Party approved culture, requires no comment. Such accusations against Tvar are encountered in articles by Jiri Sotola, e.g. in his polemic. "An Exchange of Views in General" (36) or in Jiri Hajek's article "Tired of Skepticism." (37)

Third, Tvar was blamed for "Catholic trends and spiritualism." One of the reasons for this charge was the fact that Tvar printed several excerpts from the literary heritage of imprisoned or persecuted authors (e.g. Zahradnicek, Durych), some articles devoted to meditation on the writings of Czechoslovak and foreign Christian thinkers (Josef Florian, Romano Guardini), etc. These attacks on the "Catholicism" of Tvar may be encountered in Sotola's polemics and in the articles by Jiri Hajek. (38)

Jaromir Lang summarized all the attacks against the ideological line of Tvar in his article in the daily Prace entitled "Heidegger and Jaspers, the spirit of existentialism and mysticism, on the Gingsberg fashion, on the literature of the naked man." According to Lang the editors of Tvar used all this to replace "the values of the revolutionary and battle heritage which, years ago, helped us to achieve political and cultural victory. In spite of all the whims of history and the semi-literacy and deafness of some individuals we shall never give up the fruits of this victory. (39)

After all these frontal attacks nothing else but the ban of the monthly by an administrative order could be expected. The formulation of the ban puts the whole blame on Tvar of course.

"The editorial circle of Tvar has rejected the demand regarding the composition of the new editorial board made by the ideological section of the CPCS CC in the jurisdiction of which it is to approve the editorial board of every cultural periodical. The presidium of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union was left with no other choice but to state that, in spite of the efforts made by the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union to keep Tvar going, the differences assumed such proportions that the chief editor, J. Nedved, refused in his own name and on behalf of the editorial circle to accept the conditions. As a result of this the monthly Tvar ceased to be published effective 1 January 1966." (40)

There can be no doubt that this step was well considered

(36) Literarni Noviny, 4 September 1965.

(37) Plamen, September 1965.

(38) Ibid.

(39) Prace, 17 October 1965.

(40) Literarni Noviny, 1 January 1966.

at the ideological section of the CPCS CC for in the same issue of Literarni Noviny it was announced that from 1 May 1966 a new literary periodical of the young generation will be published. The announcement said further that J. Lopatka, V. Havel, and J. Benes had left the Commission for Young Literature which approved the editorial board of the new periodical. Under the title "A Polemic" there appeared an "obituary" for Tvar, written by Jan Trefulka, a writer from Brno, who once before championed the cause of the young authors gathered around Tvar.

"Tvar is singing its swan song. (I do not wish to, and cannot, go into details at this time.) For some people this means that their goal has been reached. I do not intend to defend the people at Tvar.... I believe, however, that this move is politically very questionable for there are once again views which have remained unexpressed and which, therefore, have not been able to demonstrate their own shortsightedness and delusion, not to mention justification... there are once again people with a halo of capability who have not been allowed to use it, etc. Thus, this abnormality (not immorality, as erroneously printed in Literarni Noviny), in the cultural sphere still continues in this sense. I am writing this as a man with a good memory who remembers well similar arguments used against Halas, Holan, Seifert, Kundera, Florian; a man who has gone through all sorts of things himself." (41)

Simultaneously with Tvar, another significant monthly, Knizni Kultura, (42) was prohibited. The announcement of the discontinuation was made in a few lines at the back page of the December issue of the monthly:

"With this 12th issue this monthly ceases its publication. If it is replaced by another periodical of this type our readers will be notified. Do not therefore renew your subscriptions for the next year."

Knizni Kultura under Josef Grohman was a periodical of a high literary standard. It printed, among other things, an article by the persecuted (and for many years imprisoned) poet, Josef Palivec, entitled "In the Footsteps of Literary Culture in Romansh-speaking Switzerland." (43) The end of this periodical is also the work of the

(41) Ibid.; J. Trefulka is secretary of the Brno section of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union.

(42) The publisher was the Czechoslovak Center of Literary Culture, Orbis, Praha.

(43) Knizni Kultura, April 1965.

ideological section of the CPCSS CC, more accurately it is the result of the conflict between Auersperg and Grohman. (44)

Franz Kafka -- Prague versus Moscow

When the international conference devoted to the work of Franz Kafka, a native of Prague, took place in Liblice on 27 and 28 May 1963 it was not attended by any Soviet scholars, in spite of the fact that, with the exception of Fischer, Schumacher, and Garaudy, it was a conference of "socialist" countries. In the Soviet Union Kafka was considered to be a secondary literary figure whose work plays into the hands of the bourgeoisie. Kafka was first published in the Soviet Union, in translation, in the January 1964 issue of Inostrannaya Literatura. At the same time, the first Kafka monography was published in the USSR in the Russian language, D.V. Zatonskiy's Franz Kafka and the Problems of Modernism. Zatonskiy's work is fundamentally different from the new Kafka criticism in the West as well as in Prague, Warsaw, or Belgrade, for it sticks to the old dogmatist ideological formulae.

The Czechoslovak reaction to this Soviet study is symptomatic of a growing tendency in Czechoslovakia, and in other East European countries, to form independent judgements, sometimes critical of things Soviet. (45) The official paper of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union wrote:

"Zatonskiy did not arrive at his conclusions as a result of the analysis of the available material; he fixed them in advance and therefore his analysis had to arrive at these conclusions. He operates with ideas the essence of which is very foggy and strongly emotional which reduces their scientific value. Let us take the unfortunate term 'modernism' which is, in his words, ideologically and aesthetically bourgeois and thus should be condemned. Zatonskiy does not define 'modernism' but places Kafka a priori among the modernists and thus among the decadent bourgeois figures... Similarly problematic is the reverse evolution which Zatonskiy finds in Kafka's work. What

(44) Grohman, second deputy to the Minister of Culture; during the Cisar era he was in charge of the literary section of the Ministry. In Knizni Kultura he was chairman of the editorial board.

(45) See Background Information Czechoslovakia; Czechoslovak-Soviet Relations -- Have They Changed? Part III, Culture, 6 December 1965; and The New Look in Czechoslovak Radio Programs, 17 December 1965.

does he actually mean? Although history knows quite a few cases of wavering or actually regressive development of the artist's creative ability, the establishment of a regressive sequence of Kafka's novels America, The Trial, and The Castle is possible only if criteria are used which absolutely defy every aesthetic viewpoint. Also from the ideological point of view all three novels may be interpreted so differently (even in the Marxist sense) that Zatonskiy's hierarchy may be considered purely personal and an unproven opinion of the author. It is similar with the concept of realism. Zatonskiy uses this term, without clarification (except for a doubtful marginal note that to a realistic artist the criterion of truth is the external reality), as a yardstick for Kafka so as to present him as an enemy, an antipode of realism. The comparison of Kafka's method with the method of the naturalistic novel (e.g. Flaubert) has a certain justification. But this cannot lead straight to a conclusion of Kafka's anti-realism. Zatonskiy is the victim of over-simplified and inconclusive judgements (for example, saying that every vanguard movement has so far, sooner or later, been adopted by the bourgeoisie), he creates antinomies (on the one hand Kafka was a socialist, on the other an irrationalist and mystic; on the one hand he exposed the bourgeoisie and on the other he was an adversary of realism, etc.). We agree that Kafka cannot be copied, but we do not agree that nothing can be learned from him by contemporary artists. It is possible to pass a decree that Kafka's influence in contemporary socialist art is undesirable. The practice, at least in socialist Czechoslovakia, proves however that our contemporary art, and especially literature and films, have to thank Kafka for valuable and fruitful stimuli. Zatonskiy's book loses in value due to the a priori prejudices which have been in principle long overcome in Marxist research on Kafka's work." (46)

By this polemic, as well as by the course adopted at this year's international conference on German literature in Prague, (47) Czech Germanists taught a lesson on the Marxist interpretation of modern literature to Soviet Germanists.

The Third Congress of the Association of Czechoslovak Theatrical and Film Artists

The third congress of Czechoslovak theatrical and film artists (November 29 - December 1) had been awaited in Czechoslovakia

(46) Literarni Noviny, 21 November 1965.

(47) Rude Pravo, 23 November 1965; Aufbau und Frieden, Prague, 20 November 1965 and 4 December 1965.

and abroad with great interest. Much has changed in Czechoslovak theatrical and film art since the second congress of the Association was held in Prague March 30 - 1 April 1961) Czechoslovak cinematography is today a European event and the Czech vanguard theater (48) has attracted attention in foreign countries for over a year. According to the published materials there was, however, no dramatic clash between the progressive forces of the Association and the dogmatists in the CPCSS CC. The young dramatists (Havel, Uhde, Mahler, Topol and Klima) who, through the medium of the "absurd theater" (49) have criticized existing political reality either did not talk at all at the congress or their speeches were censored. Judging by the published materials, the third congress was a working one.

The main point of the program was the division of the Association into two independent associations, the Association of Czechoslovak Theatrical Artists and the Association of Czechoslovak Film and Television Artists. The congress took place in the International Hotel in Prague. O.Krejca, M. Gregor, R.Lukavsky, J.Vostrý, and Dr.E.Kolar were elected to the leadership. National Artist Martin Fric, director of the Barandov studios, was elected chairman of the new Association of CS Film and Television Artists. The leading article of Theater and Film News (50) said:

"The waning authority of the Association and the lack of interest of many artists in its work was discussed at the congress. Many of these justly criticized deficiencies have been caused by inadequate respect for the work of the Association on the part of the higher authorities; often the suggestions made by the Association were rejected or accepted only in part and in a distorted form."

The political speech to the congress was given by the head of the Party and government delegation Jiri Hendrych, secretary of the CPCSS CC. (51) He expressed dissatisfaction with the weak ideological attitude on the part of many dramatic artists. Although he did not mention any names, he clearly meant the artists responsible for the "absurd theater."

"I particularly have in mind the weak attitude of some people toward bourgeois ideology, toward hostile class views

(48) The Balustrade Theater, Theater Pravan, Vecerni Brno, etc.

(49) See Background Information Czechoslovakia: The New Czech Dramatic Avant-Garde, 17 February 1965.

(50) Theater and Film News, 8 and 15 December 1965.

(51) Rude Pravo, 1 December 1965.

and attitudes. This is expressed in various forms, for instance by the manner in which works from the West are sometimes presented without due discrimination in this country, works which attempt to suggest to the spectator the feeling of human helplessness, to depict life and all human endeavor as nonsensical, to create a psychosis of skepticism and to convince the spectator that 'life is beyond the powers of man.' And what more, there are some people who inculcate such views on the public in their own works.

We believe that our art has an extraordinarily important task to fulfill in the course of the coming stage of development in the strengthening of socialist social relations, the principles of the socialist style of life, and cultivation of the socialist man." (52)

Of the many congress speeches published in Theater and Film News many concerned practical points (such as the poor salaries of actors and theater staff in the provinces, the poor state of theater buildings, etc.), but only few dealt with the political and aesthetic side of the theater.

Following is an excerpt from the speech by the dramatist Frantisek Pavlicek: (53)

"The cultural-political atmosphere of recent years has permitted us a more regular encounter with foreign dramatic works and it appears that the drama and theater in this country have adapted many an impulse in a truly creative manner. We have realized that the artistic description of the world cannot be made with the use of only two colors. We make use of the works of authors who pose pressing questions both to individuals and to society as a whole. We have realized that the works of the Communist Brecht and also those of Ibsen, Miller, Beckett, Frisch, Sartre, and others are our property as well, that they help us too in our search for the answer to new problems, more complicated and difficult than ever before."

The following excerpt is from the speech of Premysl Koci, member of the opera ensemble of the National Theater in Prague:

" Criticism. Has anyone ever found out to whom the critic is responsible, apart from his own more or less clear

(52) Ibid.

(53) Theater and Film News, 8 and 15 December 1965.

conscience? To the chief editor? In the daily press the latter has no special knowledge of culture and, in the best of cases, he will apologize to you for any rudeness or untruth published about your work in his paper. There is no appeal and slandering and discrediting of artists is a daily occurrence from one end of the country to the other." (54)

Ota Ornest, director of Prague Town Theaters, said:

"I have heard, very often recently, responsible officials of the highest Party and government places say 'You Prague theater people must admit that the National Theater should and must have a privileged position, justified by its function and nature.' I want to emphasize that I do not agree with this formulation. As a matter of fact I do agree that the National Theater should have a privileged position if it earns it. It has a number of advantages compared with the other Prague theaters, economic, technical and organizational, which, in my view, it should have; however, to have a truly privileged and leading position requires much more than a mere principle! The privileged position must be a consequence of the artistic success achieved. Any other reason for occupying such a position would be as foolish as the belief which was current at one time that a Communist should have a privileged position only because he holds a Party card. A Communist could have a privileged position if by his qualities, his work morale, all that he does, he is ahead of everybody else, if he outdoes everybody by 150 per cent! The same should be true of the privileged position of the National Theater." (55)

Darek Vostrel, artistic director of the "Rokoko Theater," emphasized:

"I wanted to talk about the unions, how the unions are to win the confidence of their members about which they talk so often at every opportunity, when they have played in my view an extremely dirty role in the question of taxation of Czech actors -- at a time when they were expressing their solidarity with the striking Swiss musicians. I believe that this is a serious weakness, and that there remains only the last word of the original title, the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement."

(54) Ibid.

(55) Ibid.

In conclusion there is an excerpt from the contribution made to the discussion by Jarmila Cmiralova, an actress on the staff of the Victorious February Theater in Hradec Kralove, devoted to the material problems of provincial actors.

"The starting salary of a graduate of the Academy of Arts is 900 Kcs gross. The husband, a talented producer at a puppet theater, receives 1,100 Kcs monthly gross salary. They have a two-year old baby. It is proved by statistics that a child costs the parents 600 Kcs monthly; add another 200 paid to the daily baby sitter and all that is left for the two talented artists to cover all their needs is 500 Kcs monthly each. They don't yet have their own apartment and live in a small room which is divided from the theater's office by a plywood partition." (56)

The speeches made in the discussion by the members of the newly formed Association of Czechoslovak Film and Television Artists were quite understandably devoted mainly to organizational matters of the new association (FITES). It is headed almost exclusively by creative artists, in the first place by National Artist M. Frice, the producers Kadar, Klos, Josef Skvorecky, and the National Artist Jiri Trnka. (57)

Conclusion

As 1965 drew to a close, the Party undertook a series of moves (removal of Cisar, suppression of Tvar and Knizni Kultura, etc.) which presented a rather somber picture of the prospects for Czechoslovak literature in the immediate future. (58) At the same time, however, Czechoslovak Writers and such lively periodicals as Literarni Noviny and Kulturny Zivot not only showed no signs of being intimidated, but rather continued their outspokenness and quest for a literature responsible to truth and artistic beauty. Whatever the motivation of the Party's intensification of restrictions -- one more periodic effort to stem revisionism, a desire to bring writers under closer control in the period leading up to the next Party Congress in May, or an increased concern with intellectuals in a period when the Party was preparing to grant more independence to technocrats -- it appeared doubtful that any new "freeze" would take on the proportions of the major repression of 1958-1959. Not only should

(56) Ibid.

(57) Ibid.

(58) See Background Information Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovak Regime Bent on Defining Limits of Cultural Freedom, (Hajek and Niznansky), 15 January 1966.

the Party have drawn some conclusions regarding the final ineffectiveness of that full-scale counter-offensive, but the progressive forces in Czechoslovak cultural life are much stronger today than they were seven years ago.

A. Kratochvil
(Czechoslovak Unit)

"The starting salary of a graduate of the Academy of Arts is 1,000 Kčs gross. The husband, a talented composer at the National Theatre, receives 1,100 Kčs monthly gross salary. They have a two-year-old baby. It is covered by state insurance. The child costs the parents 500 Kčs monthly; and another 200 Kčs paid to the daily baby-sitter, and all that is left for the two talented artists to cover all their needs is 500 Kčs monthly each. They don't yet have their own apartment and live in a small room which is divided from the theatre's office by a plywood partition." (55)

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(57) See background information Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia: Background on Defining Limits of Cultural Freedom. (11) See also (12) and (13). 15 January 1966.