THE ANTI-AUTHORITARIANISM OF THE MOVEMENT OF REVOLUTIONARY YOUTH?

Three Contextualisations*

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Abstract

The article aims to bring about a deeper understanding of the strong emphasis placed on the anti-authoritarian dimension of radical left politics by the Movement of Revolutionary Youth (HRM), a group made up mostly of students that was active in 1968–1969 in Czechoslovakia and was harshly repressed by the normalisation regime. This emphasis is expressed not only in their demands for cultural freedoms but also through a critical dialogue with the history of revolutionary Marxism and a rethinking of the past and the future of the socialist movement in which the most important divide is seen as being between authoritarianism and libertarianism or, in another formulation, centralism and

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self-government. Taking into account the prevalent image of Trotskyism, this anti-authoritarian emphasis might be considered surprising. Therefore, we discuss three possible explanations for it: (1) a generational reflection of the state socialist dictatorship and the experience of the student movement; (2) the internal dynamics of the development of Trotskyist and post-Trotskyist ideas; (3) the more general development imprinted in the so-called "global 1968" and "the long 1970s." The combination of all these three contexts opened up space for various analytical insights and political accentuations that made it possible for the group to transcend both Western Trotskyism and the Czechoslovak "socialism with a human face."

Keywords

Movement of Revolutionary Youth, Petr Uhl, Czechoslovak student movement, post-Stalinism, Trotskyism and post-Trotskyism, global 1968

Introduction

On December 2, 1968, a group of Prague students inspired by radical left wing ideas founded the Hnutí revoluční mládeže (Movement of Revolutionary Youth, HRM). They declared both their adherence to revolutionary socialism and to radical resistance to the Soviet occupation of the Czechoslovakia. The HRM only existed for one year, but was important enough to become the target of a political trial that led to prison sentences.

What was the HRM? In the Czechoslovak context, the ideology of struggle and revolution together with its organisational form differentiated the HRM from those who are considered to be dissidents. Still, many former members of the HRM participated in the dissident movement and became important actors in this milieu. The ideology of HRM was radical left-wing, and it is sometimes labelled a "Trotskyist" organisation. While the movement was influenced by the Trotskyists, above all the French Trotskyists, and one of its leading representatives, Petr Uhl, later went on to become a member of the Fourth International in 1984–1991, the ideology of the movement was much more differentiated and richer than might be suggested by a reductionist reading of this label. Most of the members of the HRM were students and they framed their position with the word "Youth" in the name of the organisation. But they definitely did not represent the mainstream of the Czech student movement of the time (and not all of them were students). Much more so, they expressed disillusionment at the unsuccessful activity of the more moderate student movement, and tried to become its radical wing.

The story of the HRM has been told both by some of its actors (above all by Petr Uhl) and by the historian Jaroslav Pažout.[1] Pažout was very painstaking in telling the

[1] Jaroslav Pažout, *Hnutí revoluční mládeže 1968–1970: Edice dokumentů* (Prague: ÚSD AVČR, 2004). The memoirs are as follows: Petr Uhl, *Dělal jsem, co jsem považoval za správné* (Prague: Torst, 2013); Petr Uhl, *Právo a nespravedlnost očima Petra Uhla* (Prague: C. H. Beck, 1998); Sibylle Plogstedt, *Im Netz der Gedichte: Gefangen in Prag nach 1968* (Sulzbach/Taunus: Ulrike Helmer

story of the group, its activities, and the repression against it, and he also published a nicely edited collection of documents regarding it.[2] Pažout's work presented the story of the activities of the HRM and the trial of its members, and it also placed them in the context of the Western student movement.[3] However, there is another story to be seen in the historical records as well as in some of the memoirs: the story of the *ideas* which inspired the movement and which were developed within it. This story has hitherto been told only partially,[4] and we do not aspire to tell it in its fullness. The aim of our article is to tell the story of HRM's ideas from one particular point of view. We focus on its anti-authoritarian aspects, which we regard as the most puzzling and which we therefore want to properly contextualize and explain.

What can be identified in the texts of the HRM are particularly strong anti-authoritarian accents and ethos. They were concerned with concrete freedoms and anti-authoritarian issues (relationships of superiority and inferiority, bureaucracy and hierarchy, the position of the young generation) and reflected the need for an anti-authoritarian cultural transformation of society as part of the path towards socialism.[5] But not only this. Their writings contain critical (sometimes very critical) dialogue with the history

Verlag, 2018, first edition 2001), in Czech, Sibylle Plogstedtová, *V síti dějin: Zatčena v Praze po roce 1968* (Brno: Doplněk, 2002); Aleš Macháček and Jane Kirwan, *Druhý exil* (Prague: Novela bohemica, 2011); "Petruška Šustrová (*1947). Historie je složitější než mýtus o hrdinech a vrazích (Interviewed by Michal Šimek)," *Paměť národa, Příběhy 20. století TV*, Dec. 11, 2018 (online at pametnaroda.cz/cs/sustrova-petruska-20181112-0 [accessed Mar. 25, 2021]); Jan Patočka, "Tenkrát na východě 4–6," undated (online at cdk.cz/tenkrat-na-vychode-4; cdk.cz/tenkrat-na-vychode-5; cdk.cz/tenkrat-na-vychode-6 [accessed Mar. 25, 2021]).

[2] Pažout, *Hnutí*, pp. 31–138.

[3] Jaroslav Pažout, *Mocným navzdory: Studentské hnutí v šedesátých letech 20. století* (Prague: Prostor, 2008).

[4] Cf. Dirk Mathias Dalberg, "From Class-Society to a Democracy in Permanence: Petr Uhl's *Program of Social Self-Management,*" *Studia Politica Slovaca* 9 (2016), no. 2, pp. 5–23; Dirk Mathias Dalberg, "Die tschechische 'Bewegung der revolutionären Jugend.' Kritik, Programm und ideologische Verbindungen mit der westlichen Studentenbewegung," in Knud Andresen, Mario Kessler, and Alex Schildt (eds.), *Dissidente Kommunisten: Das sowjetische Modell und seine Kritiker* (Berlin: Metropol, 2018), pp. 229–262; Dirk Mathias Dalberg, "The 'Program of Society's Self-Organization:' The Political Thinking of Petr Uhl," in Krzysztof Brzechczyn (ed.), *New Perspectives in Transnational History of Communism in East Central Europe* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2019), pp. 293–325; Bent Boel, "Western Trotskyists and Subversive Travelling in Soviet Bloc Countries, 1956–1989," *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 25 (2017), no. 2, pp. 237–254. For example, no contribution analysed the important anthology published by HRM *Byrokracie ne – revoluce ano*.

[5] "Zakládající manifest HRM," in Pažout, *Hnutí*, pp. 41–43. See also Petr Uhl a kolektiv, *Program společenské samosprávy* (Köln and Berlin: Index and Informační materiály, 1982), pp. 30–32, 62–64, 160–167, 220–231, 235–241. A scan of this exile edition was published in 2012 on the website of Socialistický kruh with a short commentary by Petr Uhl, where he confirms that the "collective" ("kolektiv") means above all Jaroslav Suk, but the book also has a chapter on the economy written by Štěpán Steiger. Petr Uhl a kolektiv, "Program společenské samosprávy. Předmluva," *Socialistický kruh* (2012) (online at sok.bz/clanky/2012/petr-uhl-a-kol-program-spolecenske-samospravy

of revolutionary Marxism. Not only are important figures criticised (Nikolai Bukharin as an author of the *Programme of Russian Communists [Bolsheviks]*[6]) or reconstructed (for example, Lenin is remembered mostly as an anti-state thinker).[7] Members of HRM also re-thought the history of the socialist movement from the point of view of the most important divide being authoritarianism vs. libertarianism,[8] or in another formulation centralism vs. self-government.[9]

An anti-authoritarian ethos was also present in their vision of the future, formulated later on by the leading members of the HRM, Petr Uhl and Jaroslav Suk, in their *Program společenské samosprávy* (The program of social self-government).[10] Socialism is reconstructed here in a radical Marxist way, as a society where human emancipation will be realized by overcoming the division of labour. Nevertheless, this is reconstructed in the framework of the radical democratic ethos of the document, which places social self-government at the centre of the socialist project and attempts to replace hierarchical relationships in all aspects of human society.[11]

The centrality of these anti-authoritarian aspects in its radical socialist vision makes the HRM peculiar and puzzling. At first sight it can be explained quite easily as a part of the spirit of the time – the exhaustion of the authoritarian "real" socialism, the ideological development taking place within the Western radical left that featured a strong criticism of bureaucracy, and the revolt against the various faces of the authoritarian "old guard" of the war generation around the globe. However, a deeper look at these explanations shows none of them is sufficient by itself without taking into account local specifics.

Therefore, after a brief presentation of the most important facts concerning the HRM, we will reconstruct three important contexts that may to some extent explain the libertarian aspects of their thought and praxis. These are as follows: (1) A generational reflection of the *experience of state socialist dictatorship*. In a dialogue with the historiographical literature, we present the context of the regime and the rest of the student movement in which the HRM emerged. (2) The second context focuses mainly on the history of ideas and discusses the HRM in terms of the development within West-

[accessed Mar. 25, 2021]). The program is now accessible along with other of Uhl's texts in an anthology edited by Matěj Metelec, see Petr Uhl, "Program společenské samosprávy," in *Za svobodu je třeba neustále bojovat: Vybrané texty*, ed. M. Metelec (Neklid: Prague 2021), pp. 151–333. The anthology of Uhl's texts was published after the finalization of this article.

[6] *Byrokracie ne – revoluce ano* (Prague: [Hnutí revoluční mládeže], [1969], unpaginated), section on Bukharin.

[7] Josef Sýkora [Jaroslav Suk], "Byrokracie a stát," in *Byrokracie*, unpaginated.

[8] Petr Uhl and Jaroslav Suk, "Několik poznámek k deseti bodům deseti pražských intelektuálů," in Pažout, *Hnutí*, pp. 56–59.

[9] *Byrokracie*, section on Bukharin.

[10] Uhl, *Program*.

[11] *Ibid*.

ern Trotskyism towards a more libertarian approach, which we label *post-Trotskyism*. (3) The last context then turns to a dialogue with historical sociology and its more abstract framing of the *global 1968 and the long 1970s*.

While the first historical context that we will be discussing shows the specifics of Czechoslovak socialism, it also underlines way in which the HRM differed from the rest of the student movement as being the most "Western." The second historical context then claims that, from the ideational point of view, HRM's anti-authoritarianism is much closer to developments within the Western radical left. It corresponds to them in some aspects, but cannot be reduced to them, partly because it was engaged in a critical dialogue with them. The last context then places these discrepancies into an abstract narrative of 1968 as a time that contains at least two different historical types of anti-authoritarian revolution.

Before going on to debate these three contexts, we will briefly present the most important facts concerning the HRM.

The Movement of Revolutionary Youth[12]

When a group mostly made up of students met in a Prague student dormitory on December 2, 1968, their organisational efforts followed in the wake of a historic year. Since January 5 of the same year, when the long serving First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist party, Antonín Novotný, was replaced by Alexander Dubček, Czechoslovakia experienced an eruption of hope and debate on the democratic possibilities of socialism (which were in fact an accelerated continuation of cultural developments since 1956, see the next section of the article). These hopes were dashed by the invasion of Warsaw Pact armies on August 21, 1968, and many of the student participants at the meeting had been active in various anti-occupational activities, above all the student strike on November 18–20, 1968. The founding of a revolutionary organisation was a manifestation of their will to continue the struggle, but also of their frustration at moderate forms of activity that seemed to have no impact and at the defeatist atmosphere that was starting to prevail in the majority of the society, including students.

But it would be misleading to reduce the political content of the group to its resistance to the occupation. The group was also influenced by the far left in the West and by its themes: socialism understood as emancipation and radical democracy, solidarity with the Third World, questions of social hierarchies and inequalities in relationships between men and women, the generational relationships, majorities and minorities. The movement probably had between 50 and 100 members. There were students of the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University in Prague (Jaroslav Suk, Petruška Šustrová, Jan Frolík, Jaroslav Bašta, Vavřinec Korčiš, Egon Čierny), some of whom participated previously in the Societas Cosmopolitica, which discussed left-wing ideas, played with

[12] This section is mostly based on Pažout, *Hnutí*. Where we rely on other sources than Pažout we will quote them, otherwise we will rely on the information in his book.

student humour, organised solidarity for Biafra in Nigeria, and collected signatures for a petition demanding the renewal of diplomatic relationships with Israel. There was a group of students and alumni of the Faculty of Natural Sciences of the Charles University (Jan Mařík, Pavel Rejnek, Pavel Šremer), as well as freedom-loving students from the College of Agriculture in Prague (nowadays Czech University of Life Sciences Prague; Ivan Dejmal, Aleš Macháček), sometimes labelled "anarchists" but without a clear connection with any ideology. There were also other students of law, math/physics, engineering, and economics. The group also included the West German student and the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (Socialist German Student Union, SDS) activist Sibylle Plogstedt.

There were also a few older members, including Petr Uhl (born 1941), a high-school teacher who had repeatedly visited France during the 1960s and who had contacts with the French Trotskyists. Uhl also co-translated Jacek Kuroń's and Karol Modzelewski's *Open Letter to the Party*[13] and was active in the radical left theoretical platform Názorové sdružení levice (Intellectual Association of the Left).[14] An even older member was the economist Štěpán Steiger (1922–2019).

The group had an ambivalent relationship to the Prague Spring of 1968. While they were influenced by the debates of that year and by the emancipatory movement in society, they had a much more radical and at the same time much more democratic concept of socialism than "socialism with a human face" (in which the Communist Party played the leading role). They rejected the party because of its role in society (being the political expression of the bureaucratic strata) and the party leadership because of its compromises with the occupiers and the limits on the democratisation process. They considered themselves part of the broader anti-occupational movement, but they also criticised the most important parts of the movement, the intellectual leaders of the Prague Spring, for being too moderate and too patriotic.[15] The HRM wanted to be

[13] Published in Czech in June 1968 by the Prague Students' Parliament. Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski, *Otevřený dopis straně*, trans. Petr Uhl and Miloš Calda (Prague: Pražský studentský parlament, 1968).

[14] Founded by Egon Bondy, poet, Maoist, and philosopher (and also, before and after, a collaborator with the secret police). Cf. Jan Mervart, "Envisioning Socialist Utopia: The Czechoslovak Program of Self-Governing Socialism," in Jana Ndiaye Berankova, Michael Hauser, and Nick Nesbitt (eds.), *Revolutions for the Future: May 68 and the Prague Spring* (Lyon: Suture Press, 2020), pp. 260–279.

[15] We do not have many sources to analyse how the members of the HRM were perceived by members of the mainstream anti-occupation movement. One source is the memoirs of Jan Tesař (co-author of the opposition manifesto criticised by Petr Uhl and Jaroslav Suk), a radical historian who tried to contribute to workers' self-organisation in Kladno against the occupation. While he recognized "Uhl's boys" as "the most devoted" militants of the movement, he considered their "hrm-rrrrevolutionary leaflets" to be counter-productive to the mobilisation of workers, who were waging a "hard internal struggle" and were trying to find democratic legitimacy and legality for their activities, while the HRM was trying to get them to refuse legality and to engage in illegal activity. Jan Tesař, *Zamlčená diagnóza* (Prague: Triáda, 2003), pp. 15–17. Later on, Tesař also

radical both in its goals and means (including defence of illegal activities), as well as to defend an internationalist position. This was demonstrated by a day of solidarity – June 10, 1969 – with students from Burma, who were being forcibly repatriated by the repressive East German regime.

Members of the HRM promoted resistance to the occupation using illegally printed leaflets[16] and participated in a large street protest on the first anniversary of the occupation on August 21, 1969. But the HRM was also active in the ideological field: beside its manifesto, it also published an extensive reader featuring extracts and comments by left-wing authors, *Byrokracie ne – revoluce ano* (No to Bureaucracy – Yes to Revolution; see especially the section "The Context of (Post)Trotskyism" below) in an illegal print run of a thousand copies in late May 1969.

While the group did not initially operate in complete secrecy (its manifesto was publicly displayed on the notice board of the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University, for example), it soon shifted to a more secretive method of organising, both because of the atmosphere in the country as well as foreign inspiration. But even this did not prevent the group from being infiltrated by Josef Čechal, a worker from Kladno. He gained some respect because of his supposed experience in the World War II resistance. However, he also terrified the group with a provocative proposal to "physically eliminate" traitors. While members of the HRM did not know that Čechal was a police agent, they rejected his proposal, and at the same time recognized that they had been infiltrated by the police. On December 4, 1969, they decided to dissolve the HRM.

The arrest of HRM members began on December 13, 1969. On March 19, 1971, sixteen people were found guilty. Petr Uhl was sentenced to four years in prison. Two members of the HRM were sentenced to jail for two and a half years, others to between one and two years. Two members were given suspended sentences, and one member was acquitted for insufficient evidence. Two young people were spared having to undergo the main trial for health reasons. Sibylle Plogstedt was deported to the GDR in May 1971. After their release from prison, some of them did not engage in any opposition activities at all while others (Ivan Dejmal, Jaroslav Bašta, Petruška Šustrová, Petr Uhl, and Jaroslav Suk) participated in the activities of the Czech human rights dissident platform, Charter 77. Some of them in fact lost their radical left sympathies, becoming more attracted to other parts of the dissident movement. The most important participants in the HRM who retained left-wing positions were Petr Uhl and Jaroslav Suk. They together wrote

declared his scepticism towards the idea of social self-government, the ideal of the HRM, along with many other Marxists. He believed the idealisation of social self-government omitted the despotic dangers present in it. Tesař argued that socialism needed a division of power, a control of power, and the rule of law, and that socialist self-government without institutional correction could produce despotism in a way similar to the dictatorship of the party. Jan Tesař, *Co počít ve vlkově břiše: Práce o vytváření struktur občanské společnosti z let 1968–1980* (Prague: Triáda, 2018).

[16] Some of them had fairly large circulation, in one case a print run of two hundred thousand copies.

Program společenské samosprávy (The program of social self-government) and collaborated with the exile journal *Informační materiály* (Information materials; published in Berlin and later on in Berlin and Paris, 1971–1982).[17] Jaroslav Suk emigrated in 1981 to Sweden, where he organised some activities in support of the Czech dissidents, and also tried to publish the radical left journal *Krtek* (The mole, 1984).

In the end, Petr Uhl, in addition to his Charter 77 activities (he was one of the most active signatories, and was imprisoned for another five years for his activity in the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Persecuted), worked closely with the Fourth International during the 1970s and 1980s and was a member of it from 1984 until 1991. In 1989 he co-founded Left-wing Alternative as an open platform for the anti-Stalinist radical left. At the same time, he devoted most of his political energy to dissident struggles for human rights and against dictatorship. In the new, post-1989 regime he retained a radical left identity on the level of declarations of identity and sympathy, but he did not continue to develop his previous theoretical works and political activity. He became a member of the Federal Assembly of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic for Civic Forum (1990–1992), director of the Czech News Agency (1990–1992), and later as a left-wing journalist he focused much more on anti-racism and human rights (becoming Government Plenipotentiary for Human Rights in the social democratic government in 1998–2001) and later on a member of the Czech Green Party.[18]

The Context of the State Socialist Dictatorship

In this section we will analyse possible sources of the HRM's anti-authoritarianism on two levels: that of the political regime and its paradoxes, and of the student milieu and movement. While in the first subsection we discuss the historiographical literature on the topics (above all the stimulating debate on post-Stalinism from recent years), in the second subsection we combine historiographical literature with research using primary sources conducted by one of the authors of this article.

The Ambivalence of "National Communism" and the Post-Stalinist Paradox

To understand the rule of the Communist Party between 1948 and 1969, we need to think about the aspects of repression and voluntary support in the same moment, to connect images of violent dictatorship with the evocation of hegemony in Antonio Gramsci's meaning. We have to underline the fact that in the Czech part of Czechoslovakia the Communist Party won the election in 1946 with forty percent of the vote. Its democratic legitimacy was connected to the promise of a "Czechoslovak national way" to

[17] Petr Blažek, "Bylo nás pět: Rozhovor s Ivanou Šustrovou o vydávání českého exilového časopisu za berlínskou zdí," *Listy* 33 (2004), no. 3, pp. 63–67, (online at listy.cz/archiv.php?cislo=034&clanek=040318 [accessed Mar. 25, 2021]).

[18] Uhl, *Dělal jsem*; Pavel Pečínka, *Pod rudou vlajkou proti KSČ: Osudy radikální levice v Československu* (Brno: Doplněk, 1999).

socialism, which was to mean a more moderate approach than in Russia, the inclusion of "Czech democratic traditions," the absence of forced collectivisation, a tolerance of small businesses, and so on. This promise remained frustrated and unfulfilled after the 1948 Stalinist *coup d'état* and Sovietisation of Czechoslovakia. Stalinism brought about some elements of emancipation and modernisation, but mostly in a repressive framework.[19] Collectivisation sometimes modernized the countryside and emancipated some poorer rural strata from a dependent position, but at the same time it was connected to many human tragedies, repressive methods, and new forms of dependency. According to some recollections, family experiences stemming from the violence connected with collectivisation made some HRM members from the College of Agriculture in Prague suspicious and critical of power.[20] The Stalinist dictatorship also continued to develop a fusion between socialism and nationalism. This continued under post-Stalinist conditions, and the declaration of "socialism with a human face" in 1968 is often recognized as an updated version of the promise of 1946: the nationalisation of communist rule by combining socialism with the local traditions of humanism and democracy.

When we consider its various forms during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, the main ambivalence flowing from the idea of "national communism" consisted of the fact that it contained an element of democracy. Not only did this element constantly clash with the real forms of dictatorship (being frustrated because of domestic Stalinist and Moscow advisors during the period of 1948–1953, or because of the Soviet invasion in 1968), but this concept of democracy was also localised, based in a national essentialism. As such, it was a product of Stalinist localising as a correction of the original globalist aspirations of the Leninists. Thus, not only did the idea of "national democracy" bump up against the limits caused by the dictatorial nature of the power of communist parties in the Eastern Bloc, but the promise of (national) democracy was also at least implicitly contradictory with another democratic promise connected with the Bolshevik tradition: with the original promise of a Soviet system and workers' democracy connected with the hopes (though much less with the reality) of the original phases of the Russian revolution, with class clearly and completely prevailing over nation. While some politicians and ideologues joined "national democracy" with the original Leninist "socialist democracy," there was in fact a tension between the two. One of the primary sources of this tension originated in the fact that "national democracy" had to mean some form of "moderation" of revolutionary socialism, its responsibility to particular nations, while the "workers'

[19] We can find an interesting debate on this in the case of feminism. See Denisa Nečasová, *Buduj vlast – posílíš mír! Ženské hnutí v českých zemích 1945–1955* (Brno: Matice moravská, 2011); Hana Havelková and Libora Oates-Indruchová (eds.), *The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism: An Expropriated Voice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014); Kateřina Lišková, *Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style: Communist Czechoslovakia and the Science of Desire, 1945–1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[20] Pažout, *Hnutí*, pp. 15–16.

democracy" or "socialist democracy" was connected with the idea of a return to the original radical ethos of revolution. While "national democracy" meant some form of "revision" of the original Leninist communism, "socialist democracy" came before any "compromise with reality" moments and had therefore a strong utopian flavour.

National communism could have emancipatory, humanist, and democratic aspects, but it definitely should not be reduced to them. Its problems, *inter alia*, consisted of a complicated reconstruction of its key term *the people*: while it was often considered some sort of extension of the working class, sometimes it was simply the "good part" of the nation. The Czech case is important and illustrative because of the importance of Zdeněk Nejedlý, the left-wing nationalist scholar, who informed Czech Stalinism with a late 19th century aesthetics in which his "people" were much more of a neo-Romantic "das Volk" than anything else.[21]A very important factor present in the Czech communist nationalism was the anti-German position, sometimes combined with the image of Slavic brotherhood. But the most obscene component of communist nationalism became anti-Semitism, never officially declared, but sometimes strongly present under different names. The wave of Stalinist trials against leading Jewish members of the Communist Party had a strong anti-Semitic message, and sometimes they were re-interpreted by local national communists in a similar way to Joseph Stalin's split with Leon Trotsky: as the triumph of the localised, national, and potentially more moderate national communists over globalist, revolutionary, and violent Jewish communists. Of course, this aspect of communist nationalism was unacceptable to many national communists. While in Poland anti-Semitism helped some national communists receive public support in 1968 (and also used it against the student protest movement), in the Czech context anti-Semitism was recognized, especially by the intelligentsia, as being backward and unacceptable (this was connected with T. G. Masaryk's legacy as well as with the attention paid to the Holocaust); even the solidarity of the party leadership with Arab countries in 1967 became one of the last straws towards its being discredited among the ranks of the intelligentsia. Support for Israel became a way of signalling the criticism of the regime's backwardness, something that may also explain why, only a few months before the group was founded, many members of the HRM collected signatures for a petition demanding the renewal of diplomatic relations with Israel.[22]

Anti-Semitism was resolutely rejected by the representatives of the Prague Spring. Nevertheless, Czechoslovak democratic socialism was framed by a culturalist legitimisation of democracy resulting from a tradition that was different from the other countries of the Eastern bloc, as we have discussed above. Especially after the Soviet invasion in

[21] Cf. Michal Kopeček, "Czech Communist Intellectuals and the 'National Road to Socialism:' Zdeněk Nejedlý and Karel Kosík, 1945–1968," in Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan C. Iacob (eds.), *Ideological Storms: Intellectuals, Dictators and the Totalitarian Temptation* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2019), pp. 345–389.

[22] Pažout, *Hnutí*, p. 9.

1968, the defence of Czechoslovak democracy often adopted a civilizational or even xenophobic form: as an "educated and developed nation," Czechoslovakia needed different political forms for its path to socialism than "Russian muzhiks" from the "steppes."[23]

After 1953, and especially after Nikita Khrushchev's speech in 1956, the communist parties found themselves facing a difficult task: the need to relieve the communist dominions of the burden of the past but, at the same time, to maintain the political primacy of the communist parties.[24] The post-Stalinist period (ca. 1956–1969) was thus characterized not only by the rejection of the past, but even more by the dialectical overcoming of Stalinism and the search for new starting points that would take the building of socialism in a new direction.[25] After 1956, the Czechoslovak Communist Party found itself in a brief ideological vacuum. There was new scope for different interpretations of Marxism-Leninism, and consequently for different views on what it means to overcome Stalinism and the cult of personality.[26]

As noted by Jan Mervart and Jiří Růžička, the paradox of Stalinism was that the internal party debate and thereby the society-wide debate were suppressed, and at the same time this discussion was retrospectively demanded.[27] Post-Stalinism reversed this paradox: discussions on society as a whole were opened and demanded, however the need to maintain the legitimacy of the party's political primacy often led to retrospective correction, along with a repressive reaction. The result of this paradox was a certain double-tracking character of post-Stalinism with a resulting tension between efforts to reform socialism and repressive reactions to maintain party primacy, between mobilizing for greater political activity by broader sections of society and subsequent corrections for deviating from the party's political line, between official promises and the failure to fulfil them in everyday practice.

The party came to terms, for example, with the "cult of personality" and Stalinist trials, but on the other hand refused to rehabilitate the non-communist victims. The party encouraged the overcoming of Marxist dogmatism, but on the other hand there were repeated campaigns against so-called revisionism.[28]

The tensions arising from this paradox also touched the cultural life of the time. A cultural and intellectual flourishing marked, for the most part, the 1960s. A number of high-quality works were published, not only of Czech provenance, but also of foreign

[23] Cf. Ondřej Slačálek, "The Postcolonial Hypothesis: Notes on the Czech 'Central European' Identity," *Annual of Language & Politics and Politics of Identity* 10 (2016), no. 1, pp. 27–44.

[24] Pavel Kolář, *Soudruzi a jejich svět: Sociálně myšlenková tvářnost komunismu* (Prague: NLN and ÚSTR, 2019).

[25] Jan Mervart and Jiří Růžička, *"Rehabilitovat Marxe!" Československá stranická inteligence a myšlení poststalinské modernity* (Prague: NLN, 2020).

[26] Kolář, *Soudruzi a jejich svět*, p. 49.

[27] Mervart and Růžička, *"Rehabilitovat Marxe!"* p. 91.

[28] Kolář, *Soudruzi a jejich svět*¸ p. 53.

literature in translation. The French existentialists, for example, resonated strongly. The newly established theatres presented plays by Czech and foreign playwrights, and last but not least, there were more opportunities to travel to the West. But there was also regular censorship and repressive reactions to critical presentations by authors at the Writers' Congresses, interventions in the publication of cultural magazines,[29] and a campaign against "people with long hair" and other representatives of alternative culture.[30]

The "Prague Spring" of 1968 can be considered the apex of post-Stalinism while at the same time it transcended its limits and to a large extent overcame the post-Stalinist paradox, only to find itself confronted by it even more on an international level in the form of the Warsaw Pact Invasion. Public debate without censorship brought a large amount of self-reflection to various temporal layers of the state socialist regime and opened the way to a vision of democratic socialism based on the self-correction of the many problems from the previous era. The idea of Marxist humanism and Leninist democracy was connected to the idea of the national democratic tradition to create socialist democracy.

The participants in the HRM were part of this atmosphere, and this public debate was of major importance for them. They were also "post-Stalinist" in accepting that the regime had an emancipatory core (they considered it to be a social revolution but one disfigured by bureaucratic rule).[31] But they could not accept the national framework for their thinking about democratic socialism. While the mainstream of the Prague Spring considered democratisation a moderation of socialism and its rooting in the national framework, the HRM had a clearly internationalist identity and considered democracy (understood as self-government) a radicalisation of socialism.

The Post-Stalinist Paradox in the Student Movement

The tension of post-Stalinism's own double-tracking character was also reflected in the students everyday political reality. The 1960s were marked by a declarative policy of trust in university students. Along with the overall post-Stalinist trend of cooperation between various social groups whose interests should no longer be antagonistic, and the efforts to achieve greater political participation by broad sections of society, there was meant to be greater political activity by students. University-based communist functionaries thus declared that students should be given a greater degree of independence, leading to independent political action and critical thinking, and that students should partici-

[29] Jan Mervart, *Naděje a iluze: Čeští a slovenští spisovatelé v reformním hnutí šedesátých let* (Brno: Host, 2010).

[30] Filip Pospíšil and Petr Blažek, *"Vraťte nám vlasy!" První máničky, vlasatci a hippies v komunistickém Československu* (Prague: Academia, 2010).

[31] See Zakládající manifest, *inter alia*.

pate independently in solving the problems of both the university and society.[32] On the other hand, many conservative Communists continued to be suspicious of students on the basis of the student demonstrations in February 1948 and the Majáles (traditional student May) celebrations, a massive critical carnival, in 1956. Student expectations associated with a policy of trust often clashed with everyday reality.

There was thus a paradoxical situation in which students were pilloried for their political passivity and called to greater activism, but such activism carried a threat of greater or lesser penalty with it. Examples were the calls for the publication of purely student-run magazines, which were then followed by bureaucratic interventions against the magazines for "inappropriate" content, or the calls for the active organization of the Majáles May festivities in 1965 and 1966, but then the subsequent sanctions against the organizers for the slogans that were on some of the banners.[33]

This tension also defined the political field of the student movement, which was organized under the rubric of the university student institutions of the Československý svaz mládeže (Czechoslovak Youth Union, ČSM, which was official organization covering all youth). On the one hand, in order to increase its political capacity for action, University District Committees in individual university cities were established in 1963, their aim being to enable better communication between students of different faculties and to promote student interests.[34] On the other hand, all ČSM faculty student organizations were subordinated to the central leadership of the Union, which from 1958 was subject to the direct leadership of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.[35]

Membership in the ČSM thus provided the student movement with institutional support and a number of benefits. As Petr Uhl, who as a ČSM activist travelled to a number of Western European countries over the years, recalled, it provided inspiration and ties to student and other movements.[36] However, due to constant interventions by the Union's leadership, throughout the 1960s the most politically-active students criticized the Union for its bureaucratic nature. They called its structures authoritarian, rigid, and unable to provide a platform for the promotion of students' interests. These students, known as the "Prague radicals," used ČSM structures for political organizing while at the same time striving for its federalization, and even, in the second half of the

[32] Archiv hlavního města Prahy (Prague City Archives), fond (collection) Komunistická strana Československa – Vysokoškolský výbor Praha, karton (box) 1, inventární číslo 1, Dokumentace ustavující konference VV KSČ, 3. 11. 1963.

[33] Národní archiv (National Archive), fond (collection) KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Sekretariát ÚV KSČ 1966–1971, archivní jednotka 2, bod 3, Zhodnocení Majáles 1966.

[34] Pažout, *Mocným navzdory*, p. 81.

[35] Zdeněk Nebřenský, *Marx, Engels, Beatles: Myšlenkový svět polských a československých vysokoškoláků 1956–1968* (Prague: Academia and MÚ AVČR, 2017), p. 328.

[36] Uhl, *Dělal jsem*, pp. 62, 67–78.

decade, for the establishment of independent student self-governments.[37] It was from these circles that a large number of HRM members were recruited after the military intervention in August 1968.

The idea of independent student self-governments gained popularity among students after the ČSM leadership failed to stand up clearly for the students who were beaten up after they spontaneously demonstrated in October 1967 to protest the poor technical state of the Strahov dormitories.[38] By January 1968, independent student self-governments were beginning to form spontaneously from below, and in May of the same year the umbrella organization Svaz vysokoškolského studenstva (Union of University Students, SVS) was established outside of party control.

Although for some students the SVS represented a suitable platform, part of the student movement criticized it for its mass character and warned against a similar bureaucratization, refusing to include the newly formed self-governing bodies in the Union.[39] After the military intervention of the Warsaw Pact troops, the student movement sought to defend the freedoms gained, and for some time the movement united under the banner of the SVS. Their activities culminated in a student occupation strike in November 1968, but soon most students began to fall back into passivity. In the last months before the abolition of the SVS, discussions were mainly about whether the Union should become part of the National Front and thus not only support the reform wing of the Communist Party, but also gain official patronage for its activities.[40]

The membership of the students in the anti-authoritarian and revolutionary Marxist HRM can thus be explained as a reaction both to the political situation and to the experience of specific students from the 1960s with the tension arising from a vertically-organized structure. Some politically active students did not want to accept the political passivity of the majority of students while, at the same time, they no longer believed in the emancipatory potential of the reform wing of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and therefore did not see a way out in the organization of the SVS.[41] At the same time, some of them had no problem identifying with Marxism, an ideology they shared with the ruling regime on a declarative level. Unlike a large part of the student body, they not only tried to defend the freedoms they gained, but to look for

[37] Michael Polák, "Street Politics: Student Demonstrations in Prague in the 1960s, and the Disintegration of the ČSM University Structures," *Czech Journal of Contemporary History* 8 (2020), no. 1, pp. 45–72, here 52–55.

[38] *Ibid.*, pp. 68–72.

[39] Jiří Müller, "Otázky studentského hnutí," *Spiritus Expres. Časopis Spolku posluchačů VŠCHT v Pardubicích,* 1 (1969), issued April 10, 1969, pp. 3–5 (online at cdn.libpro.cz/content/uploads/2019/03/spiritusexpres-c01-10-04-1969-lp-i5b_1348737579.pdf [accessed Mar. 25, 2021]).

[40] Pažout, *Mocným navzdory*, p. 129.

[41] Libri prohitibiti, fond (collection) Československé studentské hnutí, inventární číslo 442, karton 7, Zakládající manifest HRM deklarující vznik organizace a její cíle; see also Pažout, *Hnutí,* pp. 41–43.

ways to achieve self-governing socialism. Although these students shared the ideas of the Prague Spring, they were not interested in the return of post-Stalinist reality associated with the leading role of the Communist Party.

The HRM's political strategy of action contrasted with the passivity of the majority of the students and the bureaucratizing tendencies in the SVS, which relied on the support of the Communist Party's reform wing. It is this aspect that is used by those who claim that they did not identify much with the movement's radical left-wing ideology to retrospectively explain their membership in the HRM.[42] Thus, the more comprehensive ideological anti-authoritarianism of the HRM may be only partially explained by the shared experience of Czechoslovak students. There was definitely a need for it across the young generation.

The Context of (Post)Trotskyism

The Movement of Revolutionary Youth had various foreign contacts and inspirations. The most important contacts were Petr Uhl's links to the Fourth International, especially via Alaine Krivine and Hubert Krivine.[43] He also had important contacts in the German student movement via Sibylle Plogstedt, who participated personally in the movement, being Uhl's partner and a member of his cell together with the economist Štěpán Steiger.[44] Indeed Steiger was in contact with the Raya Dunayevskaya group of Marxist humanists and even published, in their pamphlet on the Czechoslovak 1968, a long analysis of the Czechoslovak sixties from the Marxist humanist point of view.[45] In 1968, Petr Uhl translated (together with Miloš Calda) *An Open Letter to the Party* by Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski. The HRM published an anthology of samples and excerpts from various left-wing texts called *Byrokracie ne – revoluce ano* (No to Bureaucracy, Yes to Revolution). While it is often presented only as an anthology of texts,[46]

[42] Petruška Šustrová: "We then published, as the HRM, a leaflet under the name Revolutionary Socialist Party. Typical lefty style, to keep changing your name. I wasn't bothered, I'd have joined with the devil. And I didn't meet anybody who was willing to do anything, only these people! (…) And also, we were young and those kind of friendships start relatively easily." *Petruška Šustrová (* 1947). Historie je složitější…*, unpaginated.

[43] Uhl, *Dělal jsem*, pp. 71–74; Boel, *Western Trotskyists*, p. 241.

[44] Uhl, *Dělal jsem*, p. 137.

[45] X [Štěpán Steiger], "At the Crossroads of Two Worlds," *Czechoslovakia: Revolution and Counter Revolution* (Detroit and Glasgow: News & Letters Committees and The Marxist Humanist Group, 1968), pp. 17–52. Online at marxists.org/archive/dunayevskaya/archives/3940.pdf [accessed Mar. 25, 2021].

[46] From the slightly paternalist introduction to the English translation of the manifesto of the HRM written by Ian Fraser, see *Manifesto of the Revolutionary Socialist Party Czechoslovakia* (London: International Marxist Group, 1970), pp. 3–4 (online at marxists.org/history/etol/img/img-pamphlets/manifesto-of-the-revolutionary-socialist-party-czechoslovakia-rotated.pdf [accessed Mar. 25, 2021]). See also Pažout, *Hnutí*, p. 17.

it in fact included not only short texts by members of the HRM but also introductory commentaries and polemical remarks which give us some insight into the thinking of the members of the HRM, making it a valuable and overlooked source.

To some extent, the ideas of the HRM members bear many parallels with the development of the Trotskyist movement and the development of some of its participants into what could be called "post-Trotskyists" (having an emphasis on a critique of bureaucracy, on a vision of radical democracy or self-government, a libertarian ethos, and a focus on various hierarchical relationships). We can see that while they knew some parts of post-Trotskyist writing and appreciated them, at the same time they criticised some aspects of post-Trotskyism, and Petr Uhl in particular gravitated mostly towards collaboration with the "orthodox" Trotskyists of the Fourth International. To understand this, we need a short excursion into the development of Trotskyism and post-Trotskyism in the West as well as a discussion of the relationships and parallels of the HRM to these movements.

Trotskyism and Post-Trotskyism

Trotskyism is based not on the Trotsky of 1904 (criticising Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?*)[47] but on the Trotsky of 1917–1925 (Lenin's collaborator and later Stalin's competitor in the struggle to succeed Lenin); "orthodox" Trotskyism is relatively authoritarian, based on the idea of the vanguard party with a focus on "technical issues"[48] of power alongside criticism of the Soviet Union as being "degenerate" but still a "workers' state" that has to be defended against the capitalist West.

Post-Trotskyist is a label we can give to persons and groups which have undergone (personally or in the genealogy of their groups) a Trotskyist period, but then split with "official" Trotskyist organisations (the Fourth International above all) and/or with at least some important elements of Trotsky's thought. Key figures in post-Trotskyist thought and militant activity include the Johnson-Forest Tendency in the United States, led by Raya Dunayevskaya (pseudonym Freddie Forest) and C. L. R. James (pseudonym J. R. Johnson), the group Socialisme ou Barbarie (Socialism or Barbarism), led by young Cornelius Castoriadis (and Claude Lefort), and the Movement for Democracy of Content led by Josef Weber. All of them left the Trotskyist movement because they could not agree with

[47] Leon Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks (1904)* (London: New Park, 1979). Online at marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1904/tasks [accessed Mar. 25, 2021]; Tony Cliff, "Trotsky on Substitutionism (1960)." Online at marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1960/xx/trotsub.htm [accessed Mar. 25, 2021]. Originally published as "The Revolutionary Party and the Class or Trotsky on Substitutionism," *International Socialism*, 2 (1960), pp. 14–17, 22–26.

[48] We should remember Lenin's well-known words in his testament concerning Trotsky's "excessive preoccupation with the purely administrative side of the work." Vladimir Lenin, "Letter to the Congress (1922)," in V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, 1900–1923, vol. 36 (Moscow: Progress, 1971), pp. 593–611, here 595. Online at marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1922/dec/testamnt/congress.htm [accessed July 20, 2021].

Trotsky's position, especially with his idea that Stalin's USSR was degenerate but still a workers' state that should be defended in the case of conflict with imperialist powers. As well as Grandizo Munis, surrealist poet Benjamin Péret, Trotsky's widow Natalia Sedova, and Tony Cliff, who later founded International Socialists, they considered the Soviet Union to be a capitalist society of a special kind. For post-Trotskyists, this state capitalism had much in common with Western capitalism: namely the importance of bureaucracy.[49] This analysis had different political implications, but mostly led to the support of struggles from below, be they wildcat strikes and other workers' struggles or reorientation towards "democracy of content" in the case of Josef Weber. While in the case of Socialisme ou Barbarie the split with Trotskyism led also to criticism of Marxism as a whole, Dunayevskaya and James tried to renew Marxism by returning to its Hegelian foundations.[50]

Many parallels with the Western post-Trotskyists can be found in Jacek Kuroń's and Karol Modzelewski's *Open Letter to the Party* (1965). The text, which attracted police persecution that made its authors political prisoners, described Polish society as state capitalism where state bureaucrats gained surplus value for their collective class interests while exploited workers received only subsistence wages. The authors, inspired by the workers' strikes and revolts of 1956, called for an anti-bureaucratic revolution led by the proletarian class which would liberate the whole society from bureaucratic dictatorship.[51]

The HRM and Post-Trotskyism

We can see that authors inspired by Trotsky did not need to experience directly and physically oppression by state socialist dictatorships to develop a more radical criticism of those dictatorships and more anti-authoritarian political stances than those presented by Trotsky and his orthodox followers. With their possibilities of theoretical work uninterrupted by the repression of the kind which was faced by left-wing opposition in the Soviet bloc, they could of course come up with more developed theoretical positions.[52] The move of some of them away from the dictatorship of the proletarian party and towards radical democracy can be considered parallel or to some extent even an anticipation of

[49] Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union: A Survey of Critical Theories and Debates since 1917* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009); Marcel van der Linden, "The Prehistory of Post-Scarcity Anarchism: Josef Weber and the Movement for a Democracy of Content (1947–1964)," *Anarchist Studies* 9 (2001), no. 2, pp. 127–145; Loren Goldner, "Facing Reality 45 Years Later: Critical Dialogue with James/Lee/Chaulieu," *Break Their Haughty Power*, August 13, 2002 (online at breaktheirhaughtypower.org/facing-reality-45-years-later-critical-dialogue-with-james-leechaulieu [accessed Mar. 25, 2021]).

[50] van der Linden, *The Prehistory*; Goldner, *Facing*.

[51] Kuroń and Modzelewski, *Otevřený dopis.*

[52] See *Byrokracie*, commentary on the text of Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski.

the development of the Czech radical leftists, former HRM members, in the direction of the defence of human rights and quality of democracy or, in some cases, green issues.

Left-wing opposition circles in state socialist dictatorships were very often in the position of latecomers who needed to orientate themselves. This gave them the position of a fresh pair of eyes and an outsider status. The collection *Byrokracie ne – revoluce ano* can be especially identified as a form of dialogue with radical left thought. The collection contained commented excerpts and summaries by various authors that were meant to document the nature of bureaucracy and its rule in state socialist dictatorships. The authors start with lengthy commented excerpts from Nikolai Bukharin's *Program of Russian Communists (Bolsheviks)* from spring 1918, which they commented is a document of "conflict between self-government and centralism" and of the "historical error of the Bolsheviks who believed in the symbiosis of both of self-government and the centralist way of development" and in fact declared loyalty to the former while realizing the latter.[53] The ideas of the program are described as "a direct negation of Marxism as a conception of socialist man and society."[54] The authors declare that maybe it was necessary to lead the Russia of that time in centralist way, but what they could not accept was the centralist mentality, the victory of centralism in the ideas and ideals of "the only victorious Russian revolutionaries" who "with their philosophical basis touch the foul-smelling 'ideologies' of black shirts and swastikas."[55]

This is followed by excerpts of Alexandra Kollontai's *Communism and the Family*, Leon Trotsky's *Betrayed Revolution*, and Milovan Djilas's *New Class*. While these texts are mostly uncommented, the text of the summary *Open Letter to the Party* by Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski is followed by a long and very polemical commentary. *Open Letter* is criticised not only for its "bureaucratic language," but it also "suffers from the common insufficiencies of Stalinist reports": the unclear definition of terms.[56] While these and other problems of the text are excused by the difficult conditions in which the authors wrote them, by the "atmosphere of persecution and speed," as well as by an absence of contacts, the criticism of the text is no more moderate.[57] Part of the criticism focuses on the nature of bureaucracy and the proletariat (focusing on the position that bureaucracy cannot be a class and thus its power will be challenged not by social but by political revolution). Moreover, Kuroń and Modzelewski are also criticised for their focus on the *exploitation* of the working class. Not only does this term make the problem too focused on the economy, obscuring the political nature of bureaucratic dictatorship, but according to the Prague critics, "it appears as if the authors do not underline the

[53] *Byrokracie*, section on Bukharin.

[54] *Ibid*.

[55] *Ibid*.

[56] See *Byrokracie*, commentary on the text of Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski.

[57] *Ibid*.

very meaning of socialism: the self-realisation of each individual working person, his activity and initiative, his participation in the management of the society (that is, the Marxian inversion of economic subject and object)."[58] This focus on exploitation leads Kuroń and Modzelewski to focus on consumption, but "consumption is not a goal, only a means to the liberating of the producer, to the expression of his own personality. (The growth of consumption by workers may be assured also by capitalist society.)"[59]

A large part of the anthology consists of a document from the Fourth International on state socialist dictatorships and of writings by leading theorists of this organisation (Henri Weber and Ernst Mandel), which are followed by some left-wing analyses of Michael Bärmann, Serge Mallet, and Mihailo Marković, and also of two texts by authors connected with the HRM, a summary of the long study "Czechoslovakia and Socialism" by Vladimír Skalský (pseudonym of Petr Uhl) and the essay "State and Bureaucracy" by Josef Sýkora (pseudonym of Jaroslav Suk).

While HRM member Štěpán Steiger was in contact with Dunayevskaya's group, the group and its theoretical production is not present in the collection. In contrast with it, extracts from the text of Socialisme ou Barbarie (article from 1964) is the longest text reproduced in *Byrokracii ne – revoluci ano*. The translator's introduction to the text provides some information both about the attractiveness of post-Trotskyism and about its divisive aspects. Socialisme ou Barbarie is appreciated for the freshness of its ideas as well as for the fact that "unlike the majority of political texts of the far left" their essay has an "acceptable vocabulary and language culture."[60] The translator also appreciates the fact that the group refers to Workers' Opposition in the Bolshevik party (in 1921) and talks about workers' self-government. What was unacceptable for the author of the introductory commentary, however, was the somehow homogenizing view of Socialisme ou Barbarie: according to its authors, both East and West were capitalist societies with a key role played by bureaucracy. This, according to Socialisme ou Barbarie, made Marx obsolete, and according to the HRM, made Socialisme ou Barbarie's analysis very undifferentiated. While the role of capitalism (and the relevance of Marx's analysis of it) is downplayed in the First World by such an analysis, capitalism is projected into the Second World.

This may be one part of the explanation why the HRM, somehow attracted to the post-Trotskyist ethos, accepted an important part of the analysis of the "orthodox" Trotskyist Fourth International. The HRM shared an emphasis on the differentiation of the world into three zones, with developed capitalism in the First World (where the key struggle is capital versus labour and there is need of social revolution), in the Third World (with conflict with neo-colonialism and the need for a national liberation struggles),

[58] *Ibid.*

[59] *Ibid.*

[60] *Byrokracie*, section on Socialisme ou Barbarie.

and in the Second World where social revolution has already taken place and political revolution is needed to overthrow bureaucracy. This view left socialist revolutionaries in the Second World with both enough space to analyse its special conditions and to develop their own (at least partial) analysis of it. This focus on political revolution and the declaration that social revolution had already taken place also created space for a focus on the "superstructural" factors of social life and politics.

The Context of the "World Revolution of 1968"

Remembering a visit by one of the leading figures of the German student movement (SDS), Rudi Dutschke, to Prague in March 1968, participants talked about a "misunderstanding" between the Western and Czechoslovak student movements. In his speech, Dutschke called for an international opposition which would fight against all forms of authoritarian structures.[61] In contrast, Milan Hauner noted that Dutschke was highly critical of current capitalism, while he had many illusions about the possibilities of its transformation under direct democracy. Hauner then stresses that for the Czechoslovak students the situation was exactly opposite.[62]

The German student Clemens Kuby, who came with Dutschke to Prague, described the position of Czechoslovak students as pragmatic and not significantly utopian. He described the situation as a revolution from above. According to him, intellectuals and part of the Communist party of Czechoslovakia had made an alliance and were trying to ensure freedoms and economic effectiveness through the democratization process.[63] Kuby's observation is confirmed also by the memories of Petr Uhl, who travelled quite extensively to the West, especially France. When remembering the occupation strike on the 18th of November at universities in Czechoslovakia, Uhl described how he had tried to influence Czechoslovak students with the ideas that motivated the French May, but failed to make much of an impact. The aim of the November occupation strike was to support the progressive wing of the Communist Party against the conservative wing, rather than a rejection of technocratic and authoritarian rule in general.[64]

In the following part, we will contextualize this "misunderstanding" in a dialogue with the framings of 1968 and the long 1970s that is offered by views on historical

[61] Pažout, *Mocným navzdory*, p. 169.

[62] Milan Hauner, "Rudý Rudi v Praze," *Student* 4 (1968), no. 17, pp. 1 and 4, here 4. Quoted in Pažout, *Mocným navzdory*, pp. 172–173, and also Paulina Brenn, "1968 East and West: Visions of Political Change and Student Protest from across the Iron Curtain," in Gerd Rainer-Horn and Padraic Kenney (eds.), *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), pp. 119–135, here 124.

[63] Clemens Kuby, "Brave New Praha," *Juristen Blatt* 1 (1968), no. 2 (May), pp. 6–11. Quoted in Pažout, *Mocným navzdory*, pp. 174–175.

[64] Petr Uhl, "Social Self-Government Is a Dream I Haven't Given Up On: Interview with Petr Uhl, by Petr Kužel," *Contradictions: A Journal for Critical Thought* 1 (2017), no. 2, pp. 169–184, here 176.

sociology and with the findings of the previous two sections. In contrast to the unifying view of 1968, we offer for consideration at least two different but general types of revolution with different implications for the understanding of anti-authoritarianism.

Single or Multiple 1968? "World Revolution" in an Already Revolutionized Society

One of the common patterns of 1968 is, according to Immanuel Wallerstein, the exhaustion of the "two-step strategy" that had been common for the so-called Old Left and which consisted of "first gain power within the state structure, then transform the world."[65] Taking over state institutions initially seemed the only way to defeat the ruling class and its economic and cultural power. While the first step was actually achieved by many leftist organizations, none of them seemed to be able to achieve the second step. And thus all the revolutionaries of 1968 shared the argument that the revolutionism of the Old Left was "not part of the solution but part of the problem."[66] A similar argument is also made by Grzegorz Piotrowski, who frames the events of 1968 in all countries as a reaction against "the old" – "the communist regimes of Eastern Europe, the establishment, the cultural and political elites of the West, the old Institutional-Revolutionary party of Mexico, etc."[67] According to this understanding, there was an underlying common unity in the rejection of the state structures as dominated by the "old." The "new" was looking for revolutionary changes outside of these structures, reversing the two-step strategy.

The other global feature, potentially interconnecting the experiences of revolutionary students from different regimes, were the outcomes of the scientific and technological revolution and ideals connected to its promises. Despite the Cold War divisions, the countries of so-called democratic capitalism, state socialism, and developing countries shared a vision of planning and managing the economy and society through the central institutions of nation states.[68] However, while the student and other emancipatory movements in the "First World" rejected technocratism as an oppressive tool of liberal-capitalist domination, in the "Second World," and especially Eastern Europe, the new technocratic class was, according to György Konrád and Ivan Szélenyi, taking part in the liberalization and struggle for decentralization of the power of ruling party elites. Konrád and Szélenyi take the Prague Spring as an example of change led by the technocratic intelligentsia. The ensuing "normalization" in the 1970s was

[65] Immanuel Wallerstein, "New Revolts against the System," *New Left Review* (2002) new series, no. 18, pp. 29–39, here 30.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[67] Grzegorz Piotrowski, "Preface," in Grzegorz Piotrowski (ed.), *1968: A Global Approach* (Gdańsk: Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, 2020), pp. 7–13, here 7–8.

[68] Vítězslav Sommer et al., *Řídit socialismus jako firmu: Technokratické vládnutí v Československu 1956–1989* (Prague: NLN and ÚSD AV ČR, 2019), p. 22.

then in their perspective a counter-offensive by the conservative party elites.[69] This is also partially confirmed by Vítězslav Sommer et al., when they note that the official theoretical thought in Czechoslovakia after 1968 clearly rejected any interconnection of socialism and technocracy and criticize the technocratic reformism of the Prague Spring for ignoring the decisive role of politics and politicians.[70]

The Czech writer Milan Kundera observed further discrepancies when comparing the Paris May and Prague Spring. According to him, it was "thanks to a miraculous coincidence that the two springs, each from a different historical time, ended up (…) on the 'operating table' of one year."[71] Among the differences between the two springs he finds that, firstly, while the Paris May was an "unexpected explosion," the Prague Spring was the climax of a "long-term process." And secondly, while the Paris May was fulfilled by "revolutionary lyricism," the Prague Spring was more inspired by "post-revolutionary scepticism."[72]

It is worth noting that the second difference was later described in the context of the post-revolutionary development in the West by Ulrich Beck. He refers in this context to an "utopia of equality" that contains a wealth of substantial and positive goals of social change and that was, in the second half of 20th century, substituted by a new type of utopia, more negative and defensive: "Basically, one is no longer concerned with attaining something 'good,' but rather with preventing the worst; self-limitation is the goal which emerges."[73] Samuel Moyn writes in this context about human rights as a minimal utopia and states more precisely that the turning point was the failure of the 1968 revolutions. During the 1970s human rights became central for the emancipatory left "as they became bound up with a widespread desire to drop utopia and have one anyway. And their substitution of plausible morality for failed politics may have come at a price."[74]

If we compare these general frameworks regarding 1968 and the long 1970s, derived from the historical development in the West, with the generational experience of state socialist dictatorship ("The Context of State Socialist Dictatorship" section) and ideational formation of the HRM ("The Context of (Post)Trotskyism" section), we need to outline at least two important distinctions. First, in Czechoslovakia, we are dealing

[69] Györgi Konrád and Iván Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power: A Sociological Study of the Role of the Intelligentsia in Socialism* (New York: The Harvester Press Limited, 1979), p. 216.

[70] Sommer et al., *Řídit socialismus*, pp. 49–50.

[71] Milan Kundera, "O dvou velkých jarech a o Škvoreckých," in Milan Kundera, *Zahradou těch, které mám rád* (Brno: Atlantis 2014), pp. 58–64.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[73] Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), p. 49.

[74] Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Humans Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press), p. 175.

with an already revolutionized society. The question was thus not how to make a revolution from scratch, but rather how to continue the revolutionary development and save it from slipping into tyranny. In this sense, we can follow Kundera and claim that the general goal was not that much about substantial transformation to an anti-authoritarian socialist society. The Czechoslovak attempt at "socialism with a human face" pursued more of a defensive vision of creating negative limits to revolutionary socialist authorities, developing a national path to socialism, and preventing a slide into the dystopia of the Stalinist period. The goal was to enhance the transition from the revolutionary period towards a lawful socialism that was hesitantly being pursued by the progressive wing of the Communist Party. Thus, when Moyn sees 1968 as the last attempt at a substantial utopia, it is mainly the view from the West. The Czechoslovak 1960s can, in contrast, be described as being in some sense an anticipation of the long 1970s and a gradual weakening of the centrality of revolutionary utopias in favour of the more minimalistic, defensive type of revolutionary project. From this perspective, we can understand the conclusion that Dutschke made on the tenth anniversary of 1968. According to him, one of the main problems was a failure to see that there are not only problems with liberalism, but also with socialism. This was the reason for not understanding the importance of the Prague Spring.[75] They failed to understand that the defensive struggle against tyranny does not have to be a mere slip slide back to liberalism and capitalism, but an important part of the socialist project.

Second, the formation of the revolutionary HRM in the context of an already revolutionized society offers a historical example that suits neither Wallerstein's framework of "world revolution" nor Beck's and Moyn's observation on the exhaustion of the strong revolutionary utopia in the long 1970s. In fact, it can be understood as a contrary example. HRM did not accept the unifying view of the capitalist world system and in this sense was more on the side of the "old" ("orthodox") Trotskyist left. According to HRM, in contrast to the movements in the West, the goal was not a social revolution of one class against another. This revolution had already taken place and the need was now for a second, political revolution of self-government against the bureaucracy. Moreover, this revolutionary utopia came at a price after the exhaustion of the legalistic approach of the Prague Spring. So while historical sociology observes the exhaustion of revolutionary goals, giving way to more defensive ones within the new left, the case of HRM gives an example of the opposite development. This was enabled by the self-understanding of their position as being in an already revolutionized (non-capitalist) society, that is, the understanding that is overshadowed by the narrative of "the world revolution."

We believe that this understanding is important if we are to grasp the peculiar position of HRM's anti-authoritarianism. It uses a combination of a defensive and a revolutionary approach. The proclamation of HRM from 1969 emphasizes the need

[75] Rudi Dutschke and Jacques Rupnik, "The Misunderstanding of 1968," *Eurozine.com* (2008) (online at eurozine.com/the-misunderstanding-of-1968 [accessed Jun. 5, 2021]).

to demand concrete rights for workers and maintain positions in formal institutions, namely unions. However, it also reflects the exhaustion of the "myth of legalism" and calls for a combination of legal work in the unions, the Communist Party, and so on, with illegal forms of self-organisation.[76] The aim was to defend the outcomes of the social revolution while pursuing political revolution. However, the illegal work soon became the dominant mode of self-organization.

Conclusion

As we already declared above, it was not our goal to tell the inspiring story of the political thought of the Movement of Revolutionary Youth (HRM) fully and completely. Such work needs to be done and we hope that it will be carried out soon, but it was not the task we had undertaken. What we wanted to do was to reconstruct one aspect of this thought and rethink the participants in HRM as actors and thinkers acting and thinking in various contexts.

To reconstruct the relationship of HRM towards the rest of the student movement and towards society in the West and in the East, we may reformulate our discussion of these societies in the 1960s in terms of (de)politicisation and technocracy. The Czechoslovak student movement was connected with the West European movements by an effort to democratize and politicize undemocratic or depoliticized (university) structures. Western European student movements thus won a larger representation of students in academic senates at a number of universities, while Czechoslovak students sought to rid the student structures of the bureaucratic and authoritarian character that prevented them from carrying out independent political activity. In both cases the university or student structures could be or were a model of the whole of democratic society. However, they were distinguished by the relationship between the depoliticisation of various personal spheres of life in relation to technocracy.

Schematically put, while the Western student movements challenged the power of technocracy and tried to re-politicise many depoliticised aspects of the life (relationships between men and women, inter-generational relationships, and so on), "socialism with a human face" was a reaction against the previous repressive politicisation of the human totality. Thus, there was a large amount of trust in technocracy in Czechoslovakia and its power could be perceived as an emancipatory counterbalance to the power of an incompetent bureaucracy. Also, the depoliticisation of some spheres of life and values (including such spheres as family or nation) could be viewed as humanizing in a society with a fresh memory of an overpoliticising regime. Being both anti-bureaucratic and anti-technocratic, and also anti-nationalist, was what made the HRM much closer to the Western radical left-wing factions of the student movement than to the rest of the student movement in the Czechoslovakia. Even their anti-authoritarian and radical

[76] "Provolání ideologické sekce Revoluční socialistické strany (Československo)," in Pažout, *Hnutí*, pp. 48–50.

democratic ethos can only be partially considered a reaction to the experience of state socialism. As we have seen, these aspects can also be traced in the Western post-Trotskyist milieus and other movements; on the other hand, the HRM did not simply negate state socialist dictatorship.

While their position towards both the repressive regime and various versions of its bureaucratic rule was a resolute and principled opposition, the group was sensitive towards the emancipatory possibilities of the historical trajectories of the Eastern bloc – with the social revolution finished, it promised to change the political form, through political revolution, to create socialist self-government. While this position was shared with orthodox Western Trotskyists from the Fourth International, it also opened up space for various analytical insights and political accents which made it possible for the group to transcend both Western orthodox Trotskyism and the Czech "socialism with a human face."

Thus, we can conclude that the anti-authoritarianism of the Movement of Revolutionary Youth (HRM) cannot be reduced to a mechanical reaction to three, reconstructed contexts. It makes sense only if it is considered to be creative thinking that reflects all three contexts.