REFERENCE

LEFT DISSENT

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Abstract

The article examines the conceptual history of the terms "dissent" and "dissidence" and their equivalents in English, French, German, and Czech. It demonstrates that each language has its own terminology with unique nuances of semantics and connotations that require attention when studying expressions of "left dissent" in different linguistic contexts. The second part of the text discusses how scholars and practitioners of dissidence/dissent in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have defined and understood these terms and their relationship to the semantically close concepts of "resistance" or "opposition." The essay then gives a brief survey of research literature on left dissent in the West and under state socialism before concluding with some reflections on possible new approaches to the topic.

Keywords

Conceptual history, dissent, dissidence, opposition, left dissent, transnational entanglements

Unlike "civil society" or "state capitalism," two terms already discussed in *Contradictions*,[1] "left dissent" has no well-established status as a single lexical unit in socio-political vocabularies. We must therefore analyse the concept and idea of "dissent" in its own right, historically and in its contemporary usages, before we add the qualifier "left," which has its own conceptual history dating back to the association of specific political views in relation to the seating in the French National Assembly in 1789, and requires its own definitional work.

The following account will start with an outline of the conceptual history of "dissent" and of the etymologically unrelated concept of "dissidence." Although often used inter-

[1] Petr Kužel, "Státní kapitalismus," *Kontradikce. Časopis pro kritické myšlení* 2 (2018), no. 1, pp. 239–259; *Kontradikce. Časopis pro kritické myšlení* / *Contradictions: A Journal for Critical Thought* 3 (2019), no. 1–2 (thematic volume devoted to civil society).

changeably, close inspection reveals semantic nuances in their usage in contemporary English, distinctions that become more evident if we study the nouns applied to the practitioners of "dissent." In some contexts, such persons appear as "dissenters," in other contexts as "dissidents." To complicate matters, German and French make little or no use of words related to "dissent." Instead, they have terms derived from "dissidence," but these only partly cover the main semantic meanings of the English "dissent." "Disent" has entered the Czech vocabulary (along with "disidentství" and "disident"), but again the term does not function as a direct equivalent of the English "dissent." An awareness of the historical, socio-political, and linguistic contexts in which these terms appear is therefore indispensable for any transnational study of the phenomenon of (left) dissent.

As Václav Havel argued in his seminal 1978 essay *The Power of the Powerless*, "dissent" or "dissident" were terms applied from abroad, with which, for many good reasons, he and his associates could not identify.[2] When studying the concept of "dissent," we must therefore distinguish between its uses as a *category of practice*, as an ideologically charged term used in public discourse, and as a *category of analysis,* that is, as a scholarly term defined for analytical purposes and applied to phenomena or actors that may not have used it in self-description.[3] Consequently, the second part of this essay will discuss key present meanings and uses of "dissent" and "dissidence," including their status vis-à-vis semantically related terms such as "opposition" or "resistance." With this established, the essay will end with a brief outline of the historical and contemporary affiliation of these terms with the concept of "the left" in "the West" and under state socialist regimes. A key aim of this sketch is to emancipate the history of left dissent from the prevailing bipolar reading of its global history, and to challenge the liberal teleology that has framed most interpretations of left dissent under state socialism.

Dissent – Etymology and Meanings

Etymologically, "dissent" derives from the Latin verb *"dissentire,"* to feel or think differently, to differ in opinion, to disagree. When defining the core meanings of "dissent" as a verb and a noun, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) has only religious examples of specific uses of the word.[4] As Tony Crowley points out, the *OED* "does not record a more

[2] See Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 2 for an excellent analysis of Havel's "extreme scepticism" towards the word and the idea.

[3] On this dichotomy, see Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 15.

[4] "To differ in religious opinion; to differ from the doctrine or worship of a particular church, *esp.* from that of the established, national, or orthodox church […] Difference of opinion in regard to religious doctrine or worship," *Oxford English Dictionary* (online at oed.com/search?searchType=dictionary&q=dissent&_searchBtn=Search [accessed Sept. 4, 2021]).

modern sense of "dissent" in the sense of disagreement with *any* prevailing orthodoxy, particularly social, cultural, or political opinion."[5]

As indicated by the *OED*, the idea of "dissent" (and the appearance of "dissenters" to articulate it) originated in theological debates about how to handle differences in religious opinion in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. The first registered occurrences of the word in English date back to the sixteenth century, and they all cover religious disagreement or deviation from the established Church.[6] "Dissent," it seems, appeared as a concept when "apostasy" or "heresy" no longer sufficed. As Barbara J. Falk has astutely pointed out, communities of dissenters could only emerge once a monarchical or state authority chose to tolerate religious deviation in speech and practice, rather than to eradicate it. This toleration, Falk continues, "does not connote a pre- or proto-liberal multicultural acceptance of the Other. Rather, the object of what was to be tolerated was considered *a priori* to be inferior."[7] There is a certain parallel in this to the emergence of dissent in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The voicing of dissent required the minimum of toleration consisting in *not* immediately being arrested or eliminated. Obviously, this rudimentary tolerance on the part of the regime remained conditional and contingent; it never expressed an acceptance of the equal status of those dissenting.[8]

As suggested above, "dissent" is today both a frequently used category of practice and an analytical term. From her scholarly perspective, Falk laments the interference of public and media discourse that often plays "fast and loose with the terminology of dissent, particularly because we normatively *choose* to attach the label 'dissent' and 'dissident' to sub-state activism of which we approve. Indeed, we valorize dissent and consider it worthy and deserving of the label when it is anti-authoritarian, inclusive, liberal in character."[9]

[5] Tony Crowley, "'Dissident:' a brief note," *Critical Quarterly* 53 (2011), no. 2, pp. 1–11, here 3, emphasis in original. As Rob Watts and others have pointed out, "dissent" in Anglo-American legal tradition also refers to "a judge's minority opinion in a multi-member appeal panel." Rob Watts, *Criminalizing Dissent: The Liberal State and the Problem of Legitimacy* (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 28.

[6] Crowley, "'Dissident:' a brief note," p. 2.

[7] Barbara J. Falk, "The History, Paradoxes, and Utility of Dissent: From State to Global Action," in Ben Dorfman (ed.), *Dissent Refracted: History, Aesthetics and Cultures of Dissent* (New York: Peter Lang 2016), pp. 23–50, here 26.

[8] We may extend the parallel further: just as the religious "dissenters" saw themselves as carriers of the true faith, not merely as someone disagreeing with doctrine, Havel and other "dissidents" objected to having their "telling truth to power" reduced to some kind of profession or personality trait.

[9] Falk, "The History, Paradoxes, and Utility of Dissent," pp. 28–29. Notice the deictic "we," and the values Falk ascribes to the in-community of users of the term. This liberal adoration of dissent represents an inversion of the historical valence of the term.

Kacper Szulecki has similar reservations. In his opinion, "dissent" is, even in scholarly use, a term that "can take it all" – too broad and all-encompassing to be capable of expressing "what is unique about it."[10] As an example of overstretch, Szulecki points to Ben Dorfman's definition of dissent as "a moment, an act. It's a putting up of a hand and stopping things in their tracks."[11] Indeed, Dorfman presents a host of phenomena from *Occupy* to "the murdering of cartoonists and editors at *Charlie Hebdo*" as manifestations of a dissenting "no."[12] For Dorfman, however, such broadness is required to reflect how today we are inevitably confronted with the consciousness of dissent, how dissent at times is worn as a badge, visualized, commemorated, and how as much as outsiders, institutions and individuals of power can pose as "dissenters." "Dissent," he concludes, "hovers over us as a figure – an idea, desire, and a want many of us engage," which is why it must be approached from many different angles.[13]

Rob Watts takes Dorfman's multi-perspectivism an analytical step further in his detailed discussion of the challenges of defining "dissent." He quotes various scholarly definitions of the concept[14] in order to demonstrate that any attempt to define the *essential* features of dissent must fall short, since dissent is not a "thing" but a variety of practices, including the practice of labelling certain activities as such. Dissent, Watts argues, must be approached relationally, be it sociologically (he refers to Bourdieu and others) or socio-linguistically. "Dissent" and related ideas like "disagreement" or "dispute" are deictic words, as their meaning derives directly from the spatial and temporal context of their utterance, from who is involved as speaker and addressee.

Unlike Falk, and with a very different focus and ambition, Watts claims that "dissent" today has mostly negative connotations.[15] He makes this point as part of a larger argument against theorists of deliberative democracy, claiming that "some liberals are scandalized by disagreement." For Watts, the key assumption of deliberative democracy that there has to be a common, rational ground between all members of society

[10] Kacper Szulecki, Dissidents in Communist Central Europe: Human Rights and the Emergence of New Transnational Actors (Cham: Springer, 2019), pp. 28–29.

[11] Ben Dorfman, "Refractions: Dissent and Memory," in *Dissent Refracted*, pp. 11–22, here 11.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 13–16. Notice again the "many of us." Evidently, writing about dissent often involves an emotional engagement with the object of analysis.

[14] One example: "Dissent is any practice – often verbal, but sometimes performative – that challenges the status quo (the existing structure of norms, values, customs, traditions, and especially authorities that underwrite the present ways of doing things)." Robert Martin, *Government by Dissent: Protest, Resistance, and Radical Democratic Thought in the Early American Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), p. 3. Quoted in Watts, *Criminalizing Dissent*, p. 18.

[15] Somewhat problematically, Watts seeks to demonstrate this point with the help of a thesaurus. *Ibid.*, p. 34. The same, he argues, holds true for words like "whistle-blower" or "protest."

for democracy to function is philosophically and politically problematic.[16] According to Watts, such socio-political expectations may explain why, despite the ubiquity and normalcy of disagreement in everyday life, it is broadly assumed that people who challenge conventional ideas or institutions possess some special qualities. Dissenters/dissidents are often held to stand out by their courage, by what Foucault has called their "fearless speech" (*parrhesia*) as a specific modality of truth telling within the context of unequal power relations.[17] (With a related figure, Falk refers to dissent as "speaking truth to power.")[18] This raises the further question as to "why and under what circumstances disagreement becomes "dissent" and a problem so serious that governments deem it significant enough for it to be criminalized or repressed?"[19] As Watts' monograph documents, this question is as relevant for liberal-democratic states today as it was for the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe.

Returning to the history of the concept of dissent, we have seen how the term, after its long initial association with religious disagreement, expanded its meanings in the nineteenth and twentieth century to include political, social, or cultural disagreement with prevailing institutions, norms, or opinions.[20] The specific use of "dissent" as a label for certain forms of "independent" or "oppositional" activity under Communist regimes only became widespread in the late 1960s and 1970s.[21] However, before we

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 33–35, here 32. Together with Isaiah Berlin, Watts seeks to challenge core assumptions of deliberative democracy in Habermas, Bohmann, and others, as well as the "monism" of US utilitarianism.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 34. Characteristically, a Polish-Russian edited, multi-national "Dictionary of Dissidents" refers to these as "heroes" when discussing the criteria for their selection. Václav Havel and Ludvík Vaculík, who are both included in the dictionary, would surely object to such labelling. Alexandr Daniel and Zbigniew Gluza (eds.), *Slovník disidentů: Přední osobnosti opozičních hnutí v komunistických zemích v letech 1956–1989 /I* (Prague: ÚSTR, 2019), p. 18.

[18] Falk, "The History, Paradoxes, and Utility of Dissent," p. 24. Václav Havel's idea of "living in truth" as a subversive act in a post-totalitarian society, expressed most famously in the "The Power of the Powerless," has close affinities to this understanding of what constitutes an act of dissent. Szulecki is sceptical of this idea, since "speaking truth to power is much more than saying no to power … [and the] definition implies that dissenters are in the right, while 'the powers that be' are necessarily in the wrong," This need not always be the case. Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, p. 28.

[19] Watts, Criminalizing Dissent, p. 35.

[20] A search in *Google Books Ngram Viewer* on the use of "dissent" in digitized English texts from 1800 to 2018 shows that its frequency peaked between 1810 and 1840, reaching 0.0011 % in 1814. It hit a low in 1927 at 0.00026 %, while from the mid-1960 to 2008 it has had a stable frequency slightly below 0.00050 %. The term has always been far more frequently used than "dissident," which climbed above 0.00001 % only in 1931.

[21] Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, p. 22, argues that this practice began in the 1920s. There may have been scattered uses of "dissident" or "dissent" in references to Soviet

zoom in on what exactly defines "dissent" in this sense, we must take our discussion beyond semantic practices exclusive to English.

Despite its origin in a common Latin verb, neither French nor German have incorporated "dissent" into their socio-political vocabularies. French goes exclusively with "*dissidence*" and "*dissident*," while German has "*Dissens*" only as a rare and formal term for "differences of opinion in relation to specific questions."[22] The online dictionary *dict.cc* translates the English verb "*dissent*" as "*widersprechen*," "*differieren*," "*dissentieren*," "*anderer Meinung sein*" and so on, and the noun as "*Widerspruch*," "*Meinungsverschiedenheit*," "*Unstimmigkeit*," "*Einwand*," and so on, but none of these words fully cover the activism or political charge often present in the English "dissent." Discussions in French or German about the phenomena addressed above as "dissent" thus require a different vocabulary with separate historical and contemporary connotations.

Czech has recently incorporated "*disent*" into its socio-political vocabulary as a neologism, though with a different meaning from the English "*dissent*." In 1893, *Otto's Encyclopaedia*, a pioneering multi-volume Czech encyclopaedia, had a short entry on "*Dissens*," defining it simply as "difference of opinion, disagreement," and a longer entry on "*dissenters*" devoted to English religious communities that had broken with the state Church.[23] We find "*dissenter*" again as a specialized historical-religious concept in an interwar dictionary,[24] but neither "*dissenter*" nor "*disent*" figured in the 1960 or 1989 editions of the *Dictionary of Standard Czech* (*Slovník spisovného jazyka českého*). "*Disent*" appears in two dictionaries from the 1990s, defined as "exclusion from society, opposition against a/the totalitarian regime," or as "1. Opposition against a/the totalitarian regime, often persecuted and brought to silence; a non-conformist attitude to the ruling ideology in general … 2. The dissidents as a whole."[25] These definitions show that the Czech "*disent*" corresponds only to *one*, very specific usage of the En-

and East European politics prior to the mid-1960s, but my own research establishes the mid- to late 1960s as the time when the use of dissent/dissident in the Cold War political sense became common. Peter Bugge, "A Western Invention? The Discovery of Czech Dissidence in the 1970s," *Bohemia* 59 (2019), no. 2, pp. 273–291, in particular pp. 277–278.

[22] "Meinungsverschiedenheit in Bezug auf bestimmte Fragen," *Duden Online* (online at duden.de/rechtschreibung/Dissens [accessed Aug. 4, 2021]). *Duden* also has an entry on "*Dissenter*," but defines it narrowly as a "member of a [Protestant] Church in Great Britain that has separated itself from the state Church." Online at duden.de/rechtschreibung/Dissenter [accessed Aug. 4, 2021].

[23] "*Dissens*" and "*dissenters*" were the headwords used in Czech. *Ottův slovník naučný, Sedmý díl, Dánsko – Dřevec* (Prague: J. Otto, 1893), p. 615.

[24] *Příruční slovník jazyka českého. Díl I. A-J* (Prague: Státní nakladatelství, 1935–1937), p. 425.

[25] „Vyřazení ze společnosti, opozice proti totalitnímu režimu," *Slovník spisovné češtiny pro školu a veřejnost* (Prague: Academia, 1994), p. 59. "1. opozice proti totalitnímu režimu, často pronásledovaná a umlčovaná; nekonformní postoj k vládnoucí ideologii vůbec … 2. disidenti jako celek." *Nová slova v češtině. Slovník neologizmů* (Prague: Academia 1998), pp. 67–68.

glish "dissent" – to the expression of opposition to dictatorial, primarily Communist regimes.[26]

The *disi*-vocabulary entered the Czech independent discourse in the 1970s, but at first almost exclusively with words derived from "*dissident*" ("*disidenství*," "*disident*," "*disidence*," and so on).[27] Havel's famous opening lines of his 1978 essay *The Power of the Powerless*: "A spectre is haunting Eastern Europe, the spectre of what in the West is called 'dissent,'" has "*disidenství*," not "*disent*," in the Czech original.[28] Whether – as Jonathan Bolton suggests – "*disidenství*" gradually gave way to "*disent*" in Czech because the latter is more sonorous, or whether it was rather because "dissent" dominated in British and American writings about the topic, will require further analysis.

Dissidence/Dissident – Etymology and Meanings

"Dissidence" has different etymological roots from "dissent." It is derived from the Latin "dissidere" – a composite of "dis" + "sedere" – to sit or settle oneself apart, that is, to take action as a consequence of differing or disagreeing. Still, it may be far-fetched to claim that this original emphasis on doing rather than merely feeling reverberates today in how the two terms are used.

While the *OED* has a relatively brief entry on "dissidence," defining it as "Disagreement (in opinion, character, and so on); difference, dissent,"[29] its close relative "dissident" receives far more attention. Like "dissent," "dissident" first appeared in English in the sixteenth century as an adjective defined in the *OED* as "disagreeing or differing (in opinion, character, and so on); at variance, different." Its nominal form appeared in the late eighteenth century, but it came to refer to disagreement in ecclesiastical matters also only in the nineteenth century. The one exception was a specific use for Polish affairs, first registered in 1767: "Under the kingdom of Poland, the name (Latin *dissidēntes*) given to Protestants, members of the Greek Church, and other Christians, not of the established Roman Catholic Church." Historically, English thus has a "West-East" distinction between domestic "dissenters" and Polish "dissidents." Unlike in the case

[26] Consequently, Szulecki argues that it would be more accurate to translate it into English as 'dissidence:' "The Czech language has adopted *dissent* directly from English… In any case, *dissent* is not a translation of dissent, but rather Czech for dissidence." Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, p. 34, note 7. We must add that not all scholars/users follow Szulecki's distinction between 'dissent' and 'dissidence.'

[27] Bugge, "A Western Invention." Jaroslav Suk, "Slang Chartistů," *Svědectví* 17 (1981), no. 65, pp. 32–36.

[28] Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, p. 218. The English translation of *Moc bezmocných* stems from Paul Wilson.

[29] Examples range from 1656 to 1891, with only one of six, from 1775, referring to religion, and none specifically to politics. See *Oxford English Dictionary* (online at oed.com/view/Entry/55457?redirectedFrom=dissidence#eid [accessed Aug. 4, 2021]).

of "dissent," the *OED* mentions the contemporary political meaning of "dissident" as an adjective and a noun: "Disagreeing in political matters; voicing political dissent, usually in a totalitarian state," and "In political contexts, one who openly opposes the policies of the government or ruling party, esp. in a totalitarian system." The first examples are from 1955 and 1940 respectively, and most refer to issues related to the Soviet Union.[30] To conclude: Although by no means exclusively reserved for independent or oppositional activity under Communist or authoritarian regimes, "dissident" and "dissidence" are typically used in contemporary English in a far more specific sense than the more common and broader "dissent."[31]

The situation is once again different in French. In its entries on "*dissident(e)*" (as adjective and noun) and on "*dissidence*," the 1989 edition of *Le Grand Larousse de la langue française*, the French equivalent of the *OED*, defines the two words in categories similar to those ascribed in English to "dissent." From the eighteenth century, "*dissident*" referred to those who for doctrinal reasons had separated from the religious, philosophical, or political community to which they belonged, while since the beginning of the twentieth century it has also had the meaning "who no longer obeys the political authority to which he was until then subjected." "*Dissidence*" follows the same historical-semantic pattern.[32] The contemporary online *Larousse*, as one of three meanings for "dissidence," states "critique of the existing order, in the last decades of the Soviet Union."[33]

[30] *Oxford English Dictionary* (online at oed.com/view/Entry/55459?redirectedFrom=dissident#eid [accessed Aug. 4, 2021]). Emphasis in original. Crowley, "'Dissident:' a brief note," pp. 2–4. Crowley writes: "the real shift that took place in the use of the term 'dissident' is evident from its use in Cold War rhetoric, particularly from the 1960s to the 1980s." This corresponds in time to the growing use of 'dissent' in discussions of the same political issues.

[31] A search on 'dissident' in *Google Books Ngram Viewer* shows that the word was very rare (a frequency of appearance below 0.00001%) until the 1920s. Susbsequently, its frequency of use increased steadily, culminating at 0.00014% in 1989. It dropped below 0.00010 % in 2017.

[32] "Dissidence" may also function as a collective noun for a group of dissenting persons or – in literary use – as reference to a divergence of opinion. *Grand dictionnaire des lettres, 1–7. Grand Larousse de la langue française, tome 2, CIR–ERY*, ed. L. Guilbert et al. (Paris, 1989), p. 1330 (online at gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1200533r/f616.item.r=dissidence.zoom [accessed July 28, 2021]). The dictionary gives the following synonyms for dissident: "1 Déviationniste, hérétique, hétérodoxe, schismatique, scissionniste; 2 partisan, rebelle, résistant, révolté, séparatiste." The antonyms are: "1 conformiste, orthodoxe; 2 fidèle, soumis."

[33] See online at larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/dissidence/25999 [accessed July 29, 2021]. *Google Books Ngram Viewer* searches on the frequency of "*dissidence*" and "*dissident*" in its French corpus, 1800–2019, reveal that the former has typically been about twice as common as the latter. "*Dissidence*" had relative peaks above 0.00015% in the 1840s and 1940s, and it grew quickly in frequency from the early 1970s, peaking in 2003 at 0.00028%, after which it rapidly declined to its 1960s levels. "*Dissident*" had minor peaks around 1918 and 1941, before showing the same pattern of growth and decline as "dissidence" from the 1970s to the early 2000s, peaking at around 0.00013% in 1987 and 1992.

Turning from semantics to contexts of usage, a search in the French encyclopaedia *Universalis* has 225 entries containing the word "*dissidents*." The articles covering historical issues until the mid-twentieth century mention religious and artistic *dissidents*, while those with a more contemporary focus primarily discuss political *dissidents* from all over the world. The subset "*Dissidents, URSS et Europe de l'Est*" comprises thirty-one articles. "*Dissidence*" appears in 167 articles, with entries on artworks, artists, or writers, on religion and psychoanalysis, on a broad variety of countries, and on numerous individuals (Václav Havel, Alexander Ginzburg, Andrei Amalrik…) associated with political dissent.[34] This quick survey aligns well with Robert Horvath's argument that in France, the concept and figure of the Soviet/East European *dissident* became central to political debates in the 1970s as "a catalyst for the displacement of revolutionary socialism by human rights as the dominant framework of radical activism." Significantly, he holds, this dissident-inspired activism had numerous advocates among "left-wing anti-totalitarian intellectuals."[35]

Like French, German did not incorporate any terms derived from "*dissentire*" into its standard socio-political vocabulary of disagreement and resistance, but neither did it opt for words derived from "*dissedere*" to cover the broad meanings associated with "dissent" in English. As Martin Dehli shows in his fine account of the history of the term "*Dissident*" in German, the word found its way into German in the eighteenth century as a name for Polish Protestants. The Latin word had been in use in Poland since the so-called *Pax Dissidentium* of 1573. It lost its contemporary relevance with the Polish partitions, and so it resurfaced only around 1848 with a new meaning. It now applied to liberal trends among German Protestants and Catholics alike. From 1860, it also became a legal term for recognized religious communities outside the official denominations. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, "*Dissident*" became a self-designation for non-confessional freethinkers and atheists advocating secession from the Church. Social Democrats like Karl Liebknecht used it, as did the interwar Communists in their struggle against organized religion. In 1936, the National Socialists banned the word from all public correspondence, and it largely disappeared from German political language for several decades.[36]

The word made a major comeback in German in the 1970s, now as a fully secularized and politicized term for representatives of the oppositional intelligentsia in the USSR,

[34] See online at universalis.fr/recherche/q/dissidents [accessed July 29, 2021]; universalis.fr/recherche/t/article/napp/84602/q/dissidents (for the subset "*DISSIDENTS, URSS et Europe de l'Est*," and www.universalis.fr/recherche/q/dissidence [accessed July 29, 2021]).

[35] Robert Horvath, "The Solzhenitsyn Effect: East European Dissidents and the Demise of the Revolutionary Privilege," *Human Rights Quarterly* 29 (2007), no. 4, pp. 879–907, here 880 and 900.

[36] Martin Dehli, "Dissidenten: Die Geschichte eines Begriffes weltanschaulicher Pluralisierung," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 43 (2001), pp. 173–198.

Eastern Europe and over the course of time also other authoritarian states. According to Dehli, its resurfacing expressed no continuity of conceptual development, since it "appeared as a sudden import from the Anglo-Saxon countries and France."[37] Despite this discontinuity and its secular use, Dehli argues, "*Dissident*" still preserves connotations of deviation or heresy, as it expresses an exceptional mode of thinking and acting, as against any down-to-earth normalcy. "Opposition" by contrast, connotes engagement in a political space that recognizes the legitimacy of competition and pluralism.[38]

Czech has similarities with the German developments with regard to words derived from "*dissidere*." *Otto's Encyclopaedia* had a detailed 1893 entry on "*Dissidenti*" as a term for non-Catholics in pre-partition Poland.[39] An interwar dictionary had entries on "*disident*" with accompanying adjectives, all with the strictly religious meaning of "schismatic."[40] The 1960 *Dictionary of Standard Czech* had entries on "*disidence*" and "*disident*" with adjectives, still with reference to religious deviation, but now with politics added.[41] This extension of the semantics in a secular direction does not invalidate the observation above that, as in Germany, the *disi*-terms entered the Czech non-official political vocabulary in the 1970s from abroad. The pre-1970 evolution of the semantics of "*disident*" in Czech may, however, suggest why words with this root were accepted long before "*disent*" became common.[42]

Defining East European Dissidents, Dissidence, Dissent

We will now take a closer look at scholarly definitions and actors' understandings of the phenomena associated with "the public and deliberate manifestation of political

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 195. A crude search in *Google Books Ngram Viewer* tentatively supports Dehli's findings. The frequency of "*Dissident*" and "*Dissidenz*" in German texts in the Google database was extremely low (below 0.000005%) until the 1970s, when "*Dissident*," and with a certain delay also the abstract "*Dissidenz*," experienced a rapid growth, culminating at 0.000044% in 1993 for the former, and at 0.000045% in 1997 for the latter. Both have declined steadily in frequency since then, landing around the 1980 level in 2018.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 198. As we will see, Dehli's reading of the semantics of "dissidence" vs "opposition" does not fully correspond to how the terms were understood and used in the Czech or Polish contexts in the 1970s and 1980s.

[39] *Ottův slovník naučný, Sedmý díl*, p. 615. "*Dissenters*" was thus historically associated with England and "*Dissidenti*" with Poland.

[40] *Příruční slovník jazyka českého. Díl I. A–J*, p. 421. All entries in this paragraph appear as found in the consulted Czech dictionaries.

[41] *Slovník spisovného jazyka českého* (Prague: Nakladatelství Československé akademie věd, 1960), p. 322. We find "*politický disident*" and "*disidentská vláda*."

[42] If the Czech 1998 *Dictionary of Neologisms* can be trusted, Czech still prefers words derived from "*dissidere*." The dictionary has five such entries: "*disident*," "*disidentka*" (with the "most famous female dissident of the world," the Burmese Aung San Suu Ky, as the example) "*disidentsky*," "*disidentský*," and "*disidentství*," and only "*disent*" itself with roots in "*dissentire*." *Nová slova v češtině*, p. 68.

disagreement" with the party states of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe,[43] that is, the sort of activism discussed as "left dissent" in this volume of *Contradictions*.

In her comprehensive 2011 review of the historiography on dissent in Central and Eastern Europe, Falk seeks to clarify the relationship between "resistance" and "dissent." She understands the latter as a subset of the former, with "resistance" covering a huge variety of responses to the ruling regime, ranging from absenteeism or drug abuse to retreat into the private sphere or various "grey zone" activities. Falk locates "dissent" as the most politically conscious endpoint of a continuum of forms of resistance, describing it as characterized by the "production and distribution of *samizdat*, public protest, active involvement in independent groups outside the control of the party-state." In passing, Falk introduces yet another category of resistance when mentioning "individual moral resistance and organized opposition," but she does not address the difference between "dissent" and "opposition."[44] Falk stresses that her categories are dynamic and suggestive, but we may still characterize her approach to the definition of dissent as a search for dissent *sui generis*, for an object constituted by what "dissidents" do and how they do it.

The 2007 *Dictionary of Dissidents* takes the same approach. The editors point out that the term "dissident" is used very differently across countries and contexts, reflecting also a large variety of practices, but eventually the dictionary defines a dissident as "a person performing dissident deeds" and as "a person, a considerable part of whose public activity can be characterized as oppositional."[45] Neither of these definitions is particularly helpful. The former includes the definiendum in the explanation of the term, while the latter never clarifies the relationship between "dissidence" and "opposition." In practical terms, the *Dictionary* delimits its subject with a list of selection criteria. Only persons "whose non-conformist activity was connected with an open and manifest, non-violent resistance to the communist system and also with the defence of human rights or the struggle for civil rights" qualify for inclusion in the pantheon of dissident heroes.[46]

[43] Robert Brier, "Entangled Protest: Dissent and the Transnational History of the 1970s and 1980s," in Robert Brier (ed.), *Entangled Protest: Transnational Approaches to the History of Dissent in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Osnabrück: Fibre, 2013), p. 11–42, here 17.

[44] Barbara J. Falk, "Resistance and Dissent in Central and Eastern Europe: An Emerging Historiography," *East European Politics and Societies* 25 (2011), no. 2, pp. 318–360, here 320 and 322.

[45] Daniel and Gluza, *Slovník disidentů*, p. 18.

[46] *Ibid*., p. 19. Despite the centrality of non-violence and human and civil rights in this definition, the *Dictionary* has included some "exceptional cases of … particularly characteristic activities close to dissident ones" that included armed struggle against the regime or other forms of violence (*Ibid*.). Falk has also discussed the relationship between dissent (as a category including, but not exclusive to East European dissidence) and violence and warns against accepting only non-violent forms of protest and resistance as legitimate expressions of dissent. Falk, "The History, Paradoxes, and Utility of Dissent," p. 28–31.

Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs strive to clarify what separates "dissidence" (or "'dissent," since they use both synonymously) from "resistance" or "opposition." They define "resistance" far more narrowly than Falk, reserving the term for "individual or collective action directed at the removal of the Communist regime."[47] "Dissidence," they argue, should not be defined as an ideological orientation (as for example the rejection of the socialist utopia and the orientation towards individual freedoms and human rights), but in terms of the position of the critical discourses within the system of social communication. They write:

> We … understand as 'dissidence' all discourses and activities critical of the regime that constituted, or wished to constitute, an autonomous sphere of public, political and cultural communication outside of the official institutions of the party state and which in so doing openly denied the claim of the regime to full control of public life.[48]

The conditions under which "dissidents" or "opposition groups" operated, Pollack and Wielgohs continue, make it difficult to draw a "boundary between 'simple' dissidence and political opposition." To a considerable degree, the level of political repression determined how far it was possible to formulate oppositional viewpoints or organize around them, which might force people or groups with oppositional intentions to remain at the level of dissidence. Eventually, they reserve the term "opposition" for "the political parties of the anti-communist resistance in the initial phase of state socialism as well as, and in particular, the political formations that emerged from the dissident milieu in the late 1980s to challenge the regimes and press them to give up…"[49]

Two points deserve elaboration. First, the authors define "dissidence" in terms of the acts and ambitions of its performers, but their reference to positions within the broader system of social communication, and to the impact of the level of repression on the possible transition of "dissidence" into "opposition," points towards a relational understanding of "dissidence" as constituted by an interplay of internal and external factors. Second, while many texts use "dissent" and "opposition" interchangeably, Pollack and Wielgohs identify a difference of gradation, with "opposition" being necessarily collective, political, and programmatic, and "dissidence" not. We will return to this issue.

Taking the relational perspective on definitions further, Szulecki declares in his 2019 monograph on *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe* that his argument "is set on

[47] Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs, "Introduction," in Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs (eds.), *Dissidence and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. ix–xvii, here xii.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

[49] *Ibid.* The authors immediately break with their own nomenclature by mentioning "critical and opposition groups of the 1970s and 1980s."

the premise that the 'dissident' is not a simple descriptive category, and not really an academic concept. It is a transnationally functioning *figure*."[50] The author elaborates: "The elements which are constitutive for dissidentism and enable the dissident figure, in my conceptualization, are three: open, legal, and non-violent action under a repressive sanction (dissidence), Western attention, as well as domestic recognition." Together, the three elements form "the dissident triangle."[51] This transnational figure is rooted in a certain reality (dissidence), while also detached from it as a concept and representation developed in Western discourses on non-Western Others. "Dissidents" were, according to Szulecki, created, constructed, and empowered through transnational recognition, which inevitably affected the objects of this labelling as they criticized, remodelled, or took advantage of the figure. One becomes a "dissident" not only through Western labelling – and through regime naming and shaming – but also through mutual, often transnational recognition from other "dissidents," through inclusion in "the library of dissidence."[52]

Szulecki's argument is not without its issues. He has a fine survey of different definitions of "dissident" within various temporal and linguistic contexts, and he presents definitions of key terms in the "vocabulary of resistance."[53] But throughout his own historical account from 1956 to 1989 and beyond, he uses "dissent" and "dissidence" as analytical terms that unproblematically capture and express a social reality. Moreover, Szulecki repeatedly refers to "oppositionists" without ever defining the term or discussing what constituted "opposition" under the conditions of state socialism.[54] As argued, all

[50] Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, p. xi.

[51] *Ibid*., p. 3. See also pp. 79–80 and p. 208 for an elaboration on the three elements and an illustration of the triangle.

[52] The phrase stems from a 2007 interview with Jaroslav Šabata. Šabata claimed that even though no longer of political relevance to him in the late 1970s, people like Robert Havemann and Milovan Đilas belonged to such a library. See Tomáš Vilímek, "Oppositionists in the ČSSR and the GDR: Mutual Awareness, Exchanges of Ideas and Cooperation, 1968–1989," in Brier (ed.), *Entangled Protest*, p. 78. In a 1978 letter to Adam Michnik, sent along with the essay *The Power of the Powerless*, which was to be included in a multinational anthology of Soviet and East European "oppositional" or "dissident" texts, Havel listed a number of people he wished to see included. See Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, p. 183. Although Havel talked only about "our planned collection" and about "authors from other countries" without labelling them, his list contributed to constituting the library or canon of "dissidents" that he objected to in his essay. For an English translation of the letter, see Elzbieta Matynia (ed.), *An Uncanny Era: Conversations between Václav Havel and Adam Michnik* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 23–27.

[53] Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, pp. 21–34.

[54] The closest we get to a definition of the difference is the distinction made between the solitary and limited activities of "Soviet rights activists and internationally renowned dissident intellectuals" and the far more extensive activities and networks established by the "Central European opposition." *Ibid*., p. 8. Still, Szulecki refers to Central European "oppositionists" even in cases where their scope of action was as limited as that of their Soviet dissident counterparts.

these categories can (or as Dorfman and Watts held: must) be approached relationally. Though limited to the analysis of the "dissident," Szulecki's approach provides valuable insights into the complex, transnational dynamics generated by the emergence and propagation of this figure, including its impact on the social practices of both oppressors and oppressed. For example, it enables the author to notice the highly gendered representation of who counted as true dissidents, an imagery produced and reproduced by Western analysts, the male "dissidents" and the Communist authorities alike.[55]

The huge gap between contemporary Western observers' or later scholars' generalising understandings of "dissent" and "dissidents" and the actual experiences and perceptions of the people identified as such is the starting point for Jonathan Bolton's perceptive monograph *Worlds of Dissent*. Arguing that research on dissent has reached an impasse due to these generalizations, Bolton seeks to reconstruct the lifeworlds of a number of actors involved in what has come to appear as "Czech dissent." "We speak of 'the dissidents' as if we know who they were and, indeed, as if *they* knew who they were," Bolton writes, before proceeding to demonstrate that dissent constituted *many* different worlds of experience, "encompassing many characters, styles, and genres, as well as controversies and sharp debates." Bolton emphatically warns against "backshadowing," that is, against narrating and interpreting dissent in the light of 1989, since none of the "dissidents" operating in the late 1970s did so in anticipation of any collapse of Communism in their lifetime.[56]

Part of this "dissident" lifeworld was finding a vocabulary for one's position and activities. Szulecki observes that among Poles, there was a strong hostility to the term "dissident," since it had both the older religious (Protestant) connotations discussed above, and suggestions of Communist "renegades" or "heretics," with whom the oppositionists did not want to be associated. The Polish opposition, he argues, "very often used the term 'dissident' as a negative benchmark," associating it with solitary passivity and elitist and intellectual outsiders, and contrasting it with "opposition," which they used in self-description, and which for them had connotations of activism and social outreach.[57] The idea that Poland in the 1970s and 1980s had an "opposition," while the

[55] *Ibid*., pp. 155–158. The role of women in dissent has finally become a more central topic in the scholarly literature. See Robert Brier, "Gendering Dissent: Human rights, gender history and the road to 1989," *Eurozine*, Sept. 2, 2019 (online at eurozine.com/gendering-dissent [accessed Aug. 10, 2021]). For a Czech example, see Marcela Linková and Naďa Straková (eds.), *Bytová revolta: jak ženy dělaly disent* (Prague: Academia, 2017).

[56] Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, pp. 13, 13, and 45.

[57] Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, p. 22, p. 25 (with quotation), and pp. 164–165. Szulecki claims that despite the broad recognition of the courage and moral integrity of Soviet dissidents, "since the late 1970s, both the Czechoslovak and Polish communities constructed their positions in relation to the negative benchmark of [these]." His evidence is, however, exclusively Polish, and my research in Bugge, "A Western Invention?" (admittedly based only on textual evidence until around 1980) found only few negative attitudes in Czech perceptions of Soviet dissidents.

Soviet Union or Czechoslovakia had "dissidents" is widely present also in contemporary scholarship on forms of resistance in Communist Eastern Europe.[58]

Eventually, from the mid- to late 1970s, Czech and Slovak independent activists and their supporters in exile came to accept and use the term "*disident*" with derivations, both in informal in-house use and in essays meant for *samizdat* or *tamizdat* publishing.[59] A close reading of how the reform Communist journal *Listy*, published in exile, described critics of the normalization regime in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s reveals an interesting semantic distinction between "opposition" and "dissidence." *Listy* (with the telling subtitle *Journal of the Czechoslovak Socialist Opposition*) used only "opposition" and "oppositionists" until 1975, when "dissident" made its first appearance. From around 1978, *Listy* contributors used the term frequently and without explanations or inverted commas, documenting its rapid domestication. Especially in articles by Jiří Pelikán, Zdeněk Hejzlar, Zdeněk Mlynář and other reform Communist leaders, we encounter a clear hierarchy between "dissidence" and "opposition," with parallels to the one encountered in Polish discourse. "Dissidence" appears as a noble, but largely individual and ideologically diffuse phenomenon, which needs to advance organizationally and to formulate a political programme in order to become a real "opposition." For these *Listy* authors, a dissident can be a leftist and dissidents can make leftist statements, but for "dissidence" as a collective phenomenon to become truly leftist, it must transform itself into an "opposition." To put it pointedly: Within this logic, "'left dissent" is essentially a contradiction in terms![60]

This, of course, is not the only possible way to understand the relationship between "dissent/dissidence" and "opposition." We can find inspiration in an article written within the context of international political theory. Christopher Daase and Nicole Deitelhoff define "opposition" as a practice "which accepts the ruling order as such and makes use of the institutional forms of political involvement to express its dissent," while "dissidence" is more radical, since it "rejects the rules of the order and chooses unconventional forms of organization and articulation to exercise radical critique of rule."[61] Within the context of state socialism, we can apply this distinction to argue that the conception of "opposition" heralded by *Listy* was embedded in a political logic

[58] Petr Blažek, "Typologie opozice a odporu proti komunistickému režimu. Přehled koncepcí a limity bádání," in Petr Blažek (ed.), *Opozice a odpor proti komunistickému režimu v Československu 1968–1989* (Prague: Dokořán, 2005), pp. 10–24. See also Bugge, "A Western Invention?" pp. 273–274.

[59] *Ibid*., passim. The penetration of the term into informal use is documented by Jaroslav Suk's 1981 dictionary of the slang used by Charta 77 activists. See "Slang Chartistů," pp. 32–36. Szulecki has a hilarious example of an ironic Slovak use of the verb "*disiduju*" ("I dissidentize") in a 1981 samizdat. Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, p. 196.

[60] Bugge, "A Western Invention?" pp. 283–288.

[61] Christopher Daase and Nicole Deitelhoff, "Opposition and dissidence: Two modes of resistance against international rule," *Journal of International Political Theory* 15 (2019), no. 1, pp. 11–30, here 12–13.

that constituted no deep political or ideological challenge to the normalization regime, which – cf. the arrests and trials of left oppositionists 1969–1971 – knew how to handle it. For many outside the *Listy* circle, this "oppositional" mode of activism therefore increasingly came to look like a road to nowhere. "Dissidence" in this sense was *more radical*, since its legalism and universalism of human and civil rights abandoned the binary logic of the Leninist *kto-kogo* present in the *Listy* conceptualization of a "socialist opposition," that is, it rejected the rules of the political game. This may explain the attraction of "dissidence" also for freethinking leftists.[62]

Defining the Left

There is no scope here for a full conceptual history of "the Left" as a political term since its introduction in France in 1789.[63] Nor will I offer a comprehensive discussion of what constitutes "the Left" today. For the purposes of the following brief survey of "left dissent" in the West and under state socialism, we may start with Geoff Eley. In the introduction to his comprehensive 2002 monograph, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000*, Eley argues that "the Left" has always been larger than socialism, but that socialism was always at the core of the Left. After 1968, a number of new, radical agendas appeared from "*outside* socialism's familiar class-political frameworks," but for these to remain robustly leftist, they would have to promote not only pluralism, tolerance, and so on, but also egalitarianism and a democratic extension of the boundaries of politics.[64] We notice the strongly normative element in Eley's firm association of the Left with the expansion of democracy, which makes it difficult to analyse the nature of the leftism of those radical or socialist movements and parties that embraced authoritarian means as a way to promote their agendas, including the Communist parties in power.[65] Such an analysis, however, was pivotal for the left dissent in East Central Europe in the 1970s and 1980s.[66]

[62] I develop this argument further in Bugge, "A Western Invention?" pp. 289–291.

[63] See the entry on "left" as noun and adjective in *Oxford English Dictionary* for examples of how this association of "the left" with progressive or radical view was soon taken up in English (online at oed.com/view/Entry/106982?rskey=2Lr0ps&result=4&isAdvanced=false#eid [accessed Aug. 8, 2021]).

[64] Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 8–12, here 10, emphasis in original.

[65] To give one example, Eley "solves" the problem of how to handle authoritarian socialism by referring to Brezhnev, the USSR and those Communists who opposed the Prague Spring as "conservative." *Ibid.*, p. 359.

[66] Marxist Hungarian dissidents/oppositionists were deeply engaged in this type of analysis. See for example Iván Szelényi, "Socialist Opposition in Eastern Europe: Dilemmas and Prospects," in Rudolf L. Tőkés (ed.), *Opposition in Eastern Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 187–207.

Left Dissent in the West

An admittedly sketchy review of contemporary literature on dissent (despite some references to the Tea Party movement and other cases of populist, conservative dissent) gave a strong impression that dissent in the USA, or more broadly in "the West" and in its global manifestations today, is predominantly, if not inherently a left-wing phenomenon. To give one example, the American magazine *Dissent*, founded in 1954 and still appearing in 2021, remains proud of its socialist origins and committed to leftist values. As Mitchell Cohen, co-editor emeritus of the journal and professor of political science argued on the occasion of the magazine's sixtieth anniversary in 2014, "dissent, as a left-wing activity, sustains certain values, even if they are reshaped and take on different characteristics as the world changes." Core among these, he continued, "is the idea that liberty and democracy are sabotaged in societies that freeload on inequality." The struggle against ideologies and political forces that do such freeloading is, in Cohen's understanding, the task and ethos not just of his journal, but of dissent as such.[67]

From the outset, Cohen stresses, the journal was opposed to Stalinism "and styles of thinking associated with it," and during the Cold War the journal was a natural ally of East European dissidents. Before and since 1989, *Dissent* has dissociated itself from dictatorial and murderous regimes or movements dressed up in anti-capitalist or anti-imperialist rhetoric. Instead of searching for (or proclaiming to have found) "a single, universalizing, and homogenizing force of social transformation," anti-authoritarian socialism has been at its best, Cohen holds, "when in a 'dialectical relationship' with 'classical liberalism' to expand political freedom." According to Cohen, the key task for left dissent today is to support a pluralism that does not land in the postmodern "ontological tantrum" of declaring the world irrevocably fragmented and celebrating "'differences' to such an extent that it [falls] politically through the cracks between them." Instead, left dissent must consistently seek coalitions tugging countries in a democratic and egalitarian direction.[68] Eley would gladly subscribe to this.

The close association in the USA between "dissent" and "the left" has a long trajectory. Falk has identified the "central contradiction" between the liberal republican ideology of the American Constitution and Bill of Rights and capitalist exploitation as the main motor of dissent in the country. She writes:

> [W]aves of dissenters – from abolitionists to anarchists, from labor activists of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) and the Civil Rights Movement to the Women's and Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Rights Movements – have

[67] Mitchell Cohen, "The Values of Dissent," *Dissent* 61 (2014), no. 3, pp. 26–27.

[68] *Ibid.*, pp. 27–29.

> sought the *actual* fulfillment of the American dream for everyone (as opposed to for elites privileged by economic and historical advantage).[69]

"Dissent" also features in the subtitle of a two-volume anthology of 2018 on *Contemporary Left-Wing Activism*.[70] Like Eley, John Michael Roberts in his introductory discussion of left-wing perspectives on democracy and participation links leftist activism to socialism and an expansion of democracy: "for left-wing protagonists, politics should be thought of as an entry point to encourage ordinary people to participate in their own democratic mechanisms and institutions." This, he stresses, includes *economic* democracy, which in his opinion is a prerequisite for socialist politics and socialist societies.[71] Like Watts, Roberts briefly discusses the value of "*dissensus*" as a tool to highlight the real inequalities and power relations that are often glossed over in liberal versions of deliberative democracy. The *dissensus* expressed by contemporary global social movements can, the two volumes are to demonstrate, "lead to the formation of a wide reaching progressive politics."[72] Noticeably, while covering countries from Chile to Turkey, not one of the eighteen chapters devoted to specific case studies addresses activism in a post-Communist state.

Left Dissent/Dissidence under State Socialism

State socialism poses separate problems for the study of left dissent. First, it is difficult to apply the traditional terminology of left and right to factions within the Communist movement, since they all identified as leftist and socialist, and all propagated social and economic policies traditionally associated with the left.[73] Maoism is often held to be more leftist than Soviet Communism under Khrushchev or Brezhnev, but Mao

[69] Falk, "The History, Paradoxes, and Utility of Dissent," p. 28, emphasis in the original. The same perspective characterizes the 2007 *Columbia History of Post-World War II America*, in which Richard Lingeman devotes a full chapter to the "Downfall of Postwar Idealism and Left Dissent, 1945–1950." Lingeman ends his account by drawing long lines from the "Old Left" movements active from the late nineteenth century onwards until the peak of the Cold War in the early 1950s to the "self-styled New Left" born in the 1960s. Richard Lingeman, "Domestic Containment: The Downfall of Postwar Idealism and Left Dissent, 1945–1950," in Mark Carnes (ed.), *The Columbia History of Post-World War II America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 201–225.

[70] Joseph Ibrahim and John Michael Roberts (eds.), *Contemporary Left-Wing Activism: Democracy, Participation and Dissent in a Global Context*, vol. 1–2 (London: Taylor & Francis, 2018). Searches for scholarly literature on right-wing activism and dissent produced no comparable findings.

[71] John Michael Roberts, "Democracy and Participation: Liberal and left-wing perspectives," in *Contemporary Left-Wing Activism*, vol. 1, pp. 1–26, in particular p. 2 (with quotation) and p. 19.

[72] Roberts, "Democracy and Participation," p. 3–4.

[73] One can of course argue that the "socialist" states were in reality "state capitalist," a view that could render calls for a democratization and socialization of the "state capitalist" economies a leftist critique. See Petr Kužel, "Státní kapitalismus," *Kontradikce* 2 (2018), no. 1, pp. 239–259.

broke with Khrushchev with reference to the latter's break with Stalinism, and Eley is not alone in referring to the neo-Stalinists resurfacing during the Prague Spring as "conservative." "Dissent" too causes trouble, since one can make the argument that Communist – or more specifically Leninist – "dissent" is a contradiction in terms, given Leninism's core ideological doctrine of democratic centralism. Ultimately, in the Leninist view, A. J. Polan has argued, power, truth, and right are and must be monolithic, and in the possession of the party.[74] Dissent can make no sense if by definition you cannot be right against the party. Notably, the British *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* of 1983 has only a short entry on "democracy," a much longer one on "democratic centralism" and no entries on "dissent/dissidence" or "opposition."[75]

Accordingly, the scholarly literature focussing on "dissent/dissidence" in what used to be the Soviet Union and Communist Eastern Europe mostly presents a very different story to the one of dissent in "the West." Authors typically find a precursor of dissent in the Marxist revisionism that evolved from the mid-1950s as a reaction to Stalinism, especially as it turned into open critique of the ruling regimes in the mid-1960s, be it in the Soviet Union, Poland, Yugoslavia[76] or elsewhere. By the early to mid-1970s, however, the standard literature agrees, dissidents largely converged around a human rights-based platform, which – to the extent that clear political positions are discernible in dissident writings – was predominantly liberal or conservative.

Archie Brown, an eminent historian of the Soviet Union, points out that while the Soviet dissidents most known and followed in the West

> were mainly those who were concerned with issues of human rights and civil liberties … [t]he most dangerous segment of the dissident movement from the point of view of the Soviet authorities was that associated with nationalism, especially when national and religious identity coincided.[77]

Robert Horvath gives more credit to Soviet liberal dissent. Although it never came to power as in East Central Europe, this dissent played, he argues, "a crucial role in the establishment of democratic institutions" in the Gorbachev era, and contributed significantly to the "terminal crisis of Soviet totalitarianism." Horvath identifies four

[74] See A.J. Polan, *Lenin and the End of Politics* (London: Methuen, 1984), for a penetrative critical reading, inspired by the emergence of the Polish *Solidarity*, of Lenin's *The State and Revolution*. Lenin's vision, Polan argues, made politics an ontological impossibility.

[75] See entries on "democracy" and "democratic centralism," in Tom Bottomore (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 133–137.

[76] The Yugoslav *Praxis* group with its international summer school is an interesting case of leftist critical thinking from this period bordering on dissent. See the article by Milivoj Bešlin, Gazela Pudar Draško, and Balša Delibašić in this issue.

[77] Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), p. 407.

"dissident 'vectors:' the repudiation of revolutionary violence; the theory and practice of glasnost; the defence of law and rights; and Russophobia," and argues that a "common feature of these vectors was their fundament divergence from the agendas of party reformers" who still operated within Marxist/socialist paradigms.[78] By contrast, back in 1981 Marshall S. Shotz identified three broad trends among Soviet dissidents: Marxist purifiers, religious humanists/Orthodox conservatives, and "those who wish the introduction of Western-style liberal and pluralistic practices, usually combined with significant elements of socialism."[79] Two of these trends can be called leftist, but as the quote from Horvath suggests, their ideas have largely disappeared from sight in post-1989 scholarship, except as precursors to human-rights based dissidence. The work of Ilya Budraitskis,[80] presented in the interview with him in this issue, represents an important correction of this line of interpretation.

The dominant narrative with regard to East Central Europe is similar, except that the literature stresses that dissent here could take on far more substantial organizational forms, in particular in Poland, and that it was therefore more politically articulate. In his already mentioned monograph on *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, Szulecki begins his historical survey with "Marxist neophytes and democratic heretics." After the crushing of the Prague Spring and the March events in Poland in 1968, however, the dissenters broke with Communism and eventually developed a "much looser relationship to Marxism combined with the search for a new opposition identity."[81] This identity soon crystallized around ideas of human rights and "democratic opposition," and from around 1976–77, Szulecki holds, Marxist or left-wing dissent became marginal phenomena in the region. Szulecki refers to a 1976 letter from Jacek Kuroń to the Italian Eurocommunist leader Enrico Berlinguer as "perhaps the last clearly leftist symbolic communiqué," and although we find sporadic references to left-wing dissidents such as Jaroslav Šabata in post-1977 contexts, left dissent is largely invisible in the core parts of Szulecki's account.[82]

[78] Robert Horvath, *The Legacy of Soviet Dissent: Dissidents, Democratisation and Radical Nationalism in Russia* (London: Routledge, 2005) pp. 12, 21–22. See also Philip Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge 2005), in particular Chapter 7, "Dialogue and division in the dissident movement," pp. 114–131.

[79] Marshall S. Shotz, *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 158.

[80] Ilya Budraitskis, *Dissidents among Dissidents: Ideology, Politics and the Left in Post-Soviet Russia* (London: Verso forthcoming).

[81] Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, p. 87.

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 122. See p. 184 on Šabata's leftist visions for Charter 77. Szulecki has several references to Petr Uhl's activities in Charter 77 and VONS without mentioning that he never abandoned the leftist convictions of his youth. See the article in this issue by Matyáš Křížkovský, Michael Polák and Ondřej Slačálek on Petr Uhl and the *Movement of Revolutionary Youth*.

Barbara J. Falk's important 2003 monograph, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe*, had equally little room for left dissent in the 1970s and 1980s, except for her detailed analysis of Adam Michnik's essay *The Church and the Left* of 1975–76.[83] Falk goes on to argue that the strong post-1989 embrace of the market among

> morally influential voices of the opposition … was consistent with the *political* liberalism of the dissidents … [d]espite their sociological genesis on the Left and past support for egalitarianism, socialist ownership, or at least self-management.[84]

Some scholars have noticed one exception to this developmental trajectory in East Central Europe: the GDR. Here, Marxist and reform Communist ideas long remained dominant. Generally, however, this trend is analysed in terms of "delay" or "backwardness," as in Szulecki's remark that "the East German intellectuals were *not yet* tuned to the same frequencies as their Czechoslovak and Polish counterparts."[85] Similarly, Robert Brier claims that among "many future GDR dissidents, the experience of 1968 needed *quite some time* 'to sink in,'" which made the abandoning of socialism as a viable framework for dissent a protracted process in the GDR.[86] In his valuable study of mutual exchanges between "oppositionists" in Czechoslovakia and the GDR in the 1970s and 1980s, Tomáš Vilímek gives several examples of how East German activists who followed events in Poland, Czechoslovakia, or Hungary came to subscribe to this idea of a need to "catch up." He mentions Gerd Poppe, a civil rights activist, who had learned from travelling in the neighbouring countries "that many oppositionists had *freed themselves* from reformist visions of a socialist alternative, even though some of them had formerly been Marxists. He had been astonished that in the GDR, people *still believed* in such reformist concepts."[87] Essentially, all three accounts thus translate a

[83] Barbara J. Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2003), pp. 165–177. Falk discusses the "Budapest School" of Marxist philosophers inspired by György Lukács as contributing to dissidence in Hungary, but again primarily as precursors to the main, non-Marxist Hungarian dissident contributions. See pp. 122–125 and 257–261.

[84] *Ibid.*, pp. 328–329. Emphasis in original.

[85] Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, p. 136 (emphasis added). Alexander Amberger's article in this issue on the alternative eco-socialism of Wolfgang Harich, Rudolf Bahro, and Robert Havemann presents a radically different approach to East German dissent.

[86] Brier, "Entangled Protest," p. 18 (emphasis added).

[87] Vilímek, "Oppositionists in the ČSSR and the GDR," pp. 55–85, here 66 (emphasis added). Vilímek does not discuss how the fact that Poppe presented his recollection of his mid-1970s views in a 2007 interview – that is, with a knowledge of the eventual collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe that was unthinkable thirty years before – may have influenced his interpretative framework. The "delay/backwardness" framework is less dominant in Jan Pauer, "Disent

difference in space into a difference in time, a procedure typical of the linear, teleological view long dominant in Western social thought of a historical development logically culminating in liberal democracy and a market economy.

Alternative perspectives

The history of left dissent must be emancipated from the dominant bipolar reading of its global history, and from the liberal teleology and its close companion, the backshadowing, that have determined modes of interpretation and priorities of focus, inclusion in, or exclusion from the historical narrative, as shown above in the analysis of the post-1989 neglect of left dissent in the Soviet Union and East Central Europe.[88] The articles by Alexander Amberger, Dirk Mathias Dalberg, and Kristof Nagy and Szarvas Márton in this issue of *Contradictions* give fine examples of the vitality of left dissent in a number of countries under Communist rule even after the breakthrough of the human rights paradigm. In conclusion, I will outline some further possible approaches that may contribute to a fuller understanding of left dissent in what used to be Eastern Europe.

Conditions for protest may have been very different, but East and West were never fully separate, and nor was their dissent. Inevitably, most dissident activities had domestic agendas and local or national resonance only, but as Robert Brier, Padraig Kenney, and others have shown, East European dissent also had its transnational dimensions.[89] The Korčula Summer School organized 1963–1974 by the Yugoslav *Praxis* group is an influential example of this.[90]

v trojí perspektivě: Diskursy o politice, společnosti a dějinách v českém, slovenském a východoněmeckém disentu v 70. a 80. letech," *Soudobé dějiny* 19 (2012) no. 1, pp. 71–81. See in particular pp. 77–78.

[88] For an example of how the dominant logic works, see the online *Antologie textů z disentu a exilu (1969–1989)* [Anthology of texts from the dissident and exile (1969–1989)], edited by the Institute for Contemporary History in Prague. The anthology comprises 272 texts, divided into seventeen thematic areas, one of which is "Perspektivy levice a socialismu" [Perspectives of the left and socialism]. Nearly half of the eighteen texts included here are critiques of Marxism and socialism, including from militant Catholics. Petr Uhl is not represented, although his substantial 1979 text *Program společenské samosprávy* [Programme of societal self-government] was translated into French and German, and we find only two contributions from the 1980s by authors identifying with Marxism or socialism (Jaroslav Šabata and Miroslav Kusý; Kusý is represented with the 1984 article "To Be a Marxist in Czechoslovakia," published in English translation in this issue). In stark contrast to this, the thematic areas devoted to Konzervativní myšlení [Conservative thinking] or Křesťanství jako východisko z krize československé společnosti [Christianity as a way out of the crisis of Czechoslovak society] contain only texts written from within these perspectives, except for a single text "merely" sympathetic to Christian ethics. See online at disent.usd.cas.cz/o-projektu [accessed Sept. 7, 2021]).

[89] Brier, "Entangled Protest," pp. 18–19; Padraic Kenney, "Electromagnetic Forces and Radio Waves *or* Does Transmnational History Actually Happen?" in Brier (ed.), *Entangled Protest*, pp. 43–52.

[90] See the article by Milivoj Bešlin, Gazela Pudar Draško, and Balša Delibašić in this issue.

Numerous contacts across borders took place among dissidents and their sympathizers, be it between people or texts. Hungarian students travelled to Poland, East Germans to Czechoslovakia and so on in search of inspiration and exchanges of ideas. Western friends of the cause frequently crossed the Iron Curtain, and on a few occasions, Eastern "dissidents/oppositionists" could go West – and return home![91] *Tamizdat* was as important as *samizdat* for the dissemination of dissident ideas, and its production and distribution required extensive transnational cooperation.[92] Many of those engaged in the smuggling were leftists, and as Bent Boel has demonstrated, Trotskyists were particularly active in this regard.[93] Many activists, moreover, had transnationality embedded in their life stories as émigrés or descendants of them.

Images and projections also travelled. Szulecki's stimulating analysis of the evolution of the figure of the "dissident" has been mentioned, as has the "looping effect" that this figure generated in authorities and "oppositionists" alike. Inevitably, this "Western" figure had mixed effects. It offered a platform and some protection for the "dissidents," but Western observers tended to find what they were looking for, that is, to interpret dissent and dissidents as confirmation of their own agendas or ideas about life under Communist rule.[94] The fascination of the French Left in the mid-1970s with Solzhenitsyn had as much to do with domestic intellectual repositioning and agenda setting as with the actual views of Solzhenitsyn, while the dedication of the 1977 Venice Biennale to East European dissent also served Italian agendas.[95] Moreover, the Western liberal focus on human rights agendas tended to overlook the leftist and socialist ideas present among many dissidents.

Projections – whether glorifying, reticent, or dismissive – went both ways,[96] and they could hamper cross-border, left-wing solidarity. One could write a transnational history

[91] Perhaps most famously Adam Michnik, who in 1976 toured France, Italy, and Western Germany. See Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, pp. 123–125

[92] Friederike Kind-Kovács, *Written Here, Published There: How Underground Literature Crossed the Iron Curtain* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2014).

[93] 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.

[94] Julia Metzger, "Writing the Papers: How Western Correspondents Reported the First Dissident Trials in Moscow, 1965–1972," in Brier (ed.), *Entangled Protest*, pp. 87–108. Metzger's article convincingly supports her conclusion (p. 108) that "the contingency of information on dissent and opposition becomes part of the story."

[95] Horvath, "The Solzhenitsyn Effect," pp. 895–902; Furio Colombo, "Italy: The Politics of Culture," *The New York Review of Books*, July 14, 1977 (online at nybooks.com/articles/1977/07/14/italy-the-politics-of-culture/ [accessed Oct. 15, 2021]); Carlo Ripa de Meana, "News from the Biennale," *The New York Review of Books*, Sept. 15, 1977 (online at nybooks.com/articles/1977/09/15/news-from-the-biennale/ [accessed Oct. 15, 2021]). The Biennale made a substantial impact on Czech understandings of dissent and its international scope. Bugge, "A Western invention?" p. 287.

[96] Barbara Walker, "Moscow Human Rights Defenders Look West: Attitudes toward U.S. Journalists in the 1960s and 1970s," *Kritika* 9 (2008), no. 4, pp. 905–927.

of Cold War dissent as a history of *misunderstandings*,[97] be it of contexts, intentions, or words. Examples are numerous, ranging from the encounters of West German and Czechoslovak students in 1968,[98] through attitudes to peace movements and détente (where misperceptions very much went both ways),[99] to understandings of words such as "totalitarianism"[100] or "feminism."[101]

This necessary precaution should not make us forget another crucial dimension of this history, that of transnational *solidarity*. Unlike aid, and more radically charity, which operate on hierarchical principles and keep the recipient in the position of an object, solidarity is horizontal, mutual, egalitarian. It is no coincidence that Trotskyist and other leftist groups in Western Europe framed their actions of support for dissidents, whether imprisoned or not, as acts of solidarity.[102] For the Trotskyists and the new Left – including the emerging Green Party in West Germany – East European leftist dissidents were a source of inspiration as like-minded partners in a dialogue about how to reconcile socialism and liberty, reconceptualize politics, develop new forms of societal self-organization, and secure peace without accepting the Cold War logic of bloc politics.[103]

[97] The term is used programmatically in Jürgen Danyel, Jennifer Schevardo, and Stephan Kruhl (eds.), *Misunderstanding 1968/89: Fremde Zeitgenossen und umstrittene Deutungen/Cizí současníci a sporné výklady* (Berlin: Metropol, 2009). In their article in this issue, Matyáš Křížkovský, Michael Polák, and Ondřej Slačálek also refer to participants noticing a "misunderstanding" at this meeting. See, "The Anti-authoritarianism of the Movement of Revolutionary Youth? Three Contextualisations," *Contradictions* 5 (2021), no. 2. pp. 31–55.

[98] Paulina Bren, "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, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), pp. 119–135.

[99] Bent Boel, "Western European Social Democrats and Dissidence in the Soviet Bloc during the Cold War," in Brier (ed.), *Entangled Protest*, pp. 151–169; Kacper Szulecki, "Hijacked Ideas: Human Rights, Peace, and Environmentalism in Czechoslovak and Polish Dissident Discourses," *East European Politics and Societies* 25 (2011), no. 2, pp. 272–295; Václav Havel, "Anatomie jedné zdrženlivosti" [Anatomy of a reticence], in *Spisy 4* (Prague: Torst, 1999), pp. 523–561. The essay was written in April 1985.

[100] Robert Brier, "Adam Michnik's Understanding of Totalitarianism and the West European Left: A Historical and Transnational Approach to Dissident Political Thought," *East European Politics and Societies* 25 (2011), no. 2, pp. 197–218; Piotr Wciślik, "'Totalitarianism' and the Limits of Polish Dissident Thought: Late Socialism and After," in Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik (eds.), *Thinking Through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts, and Intellectual History in East Central Europe After 1989* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2015), pp. 73–107.

[101] Václav Havel's condescending remarks about two Italian feminists visiting Prague and his conclusion that feminism "in our environment … simply appears as 'dada'" is emblematic of this issue. Havel, "Anatomie jedné zdrženlivosti," pp. 541–543, here 543.

[102] Boel, "Western Trotskyists," p. 244.

[103] *Ibid.*, pp. 246–247; Robert Brier, "Beyond the 'Helsinki Effect:' East European Dissent and the Western Left in the 'Long 1970s,'" in Poul Villaume, Rasmus Mariager and Helle Porsdam

Significantly, East European leftist "oppositionists" did not shy away from expressing *their* solidarity with people persecuted in the West or the Third World. As French and Belgian solidarity campaigns with the Polish *Solidarność* gathered momentum, the *Solidarność Coordinating Office Abroad*, established in Brussels by Polish trade union activists stranded in the West after the imposition of martial law, linked the Polish crisis with the ones in Chile and South Africa, and sent messages of solidarity to both countries.[104] From Czechoslovakia, we may point to a 1974 letter signed by thirty political prisoners expressing solidarity with all the victims of persecution in Pinochet's Chile,[105] or a 1977 letter signed by seven left-wing dissidents in support of the victims of *Berufsverbot*[106] in West Germany.[107]

I hope that these tentative reflections have underlined the continued need to investigate the history and intellectual contributions of left dissent under Communist regimes, and that the preceding longer discussion of the conceptual history of "dissent" and "dissidence" can sharpen our attention to how all actors – whether objects of our studies or producers of them – define and use key terms. It genuinely does matter as to whether we see left dissent only as an embryonic precursor to real "opposition" or as its radical alternative!

(eds.), *The 'Long 1970s:' Human Rights, East-West Détente and Transnational Relations* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 71–86.

[104] Kim Christiaens and Idesbald Goddeeris, "The East Versus the South: Belgian Solidarity Movements with Poland and Nicaragua during the Early 1980s," in Brier (ed.), *Entangled Protest*, pp. 173–197, here 182–183 and 192–193. The authors show how perceptions of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua as "Communist" kept *Solidarność* from expressing solidarity with the Nicaraguan struggle against foreign (U.S.) intervention.

[105] For a translation into English with introduction, see Karel Kovanda, "A Document of Our Time," *The New York Review of Books*, Oct. 31, 1974 (online at nybooks.com/articles/1974/10/31/a-document-of-our-time/ [accessed Oct. 15, 2021]).

[106] In 1972, the West German authorities issued an "Anti-Radical Decree," which banned people who were members or aligned to organizations considered extremist and in radical opposition to the Constitution from work as civil servants. Opponents of the ban, which hit also public sector employees who were members of the legal West German Communist Party, used the term *Berufsverbot* ("occupational ban") to describe the consequences of the Decree.

[107] The two examples stem from a pamphlet, published in Danish in 1980 by the *Socialist Workers' Party (section of the 4th International)* and translated from English. The pamphlet also contains a 1979 interview with Petr Uhl, a 1977 letter from Uhl to "the revolutionary Left in Western Europe" and a November 1977 open letter to Heinrich Böll signed by sixteen 'dissidents.' See *Vi er med jer. Er I med os? Petr Uhl og fængslede Charter 77 medlemmer i Tjekkoslovakiet* [We are with you. Are you with us? Petr Uhl and imprisoned Charter 77 members in Czechoslovakia] (Copenhagen: Prinkipo, 1980). The pamphlet's genesis and content testify to the transnational character of left dissent and solidarity in the 1980s. In Scandinavia and elsewhere, active solidarity work with Charta 77 and other East European "dissidents" and "oppositionists" was predominantly (though by no means exclusively) performed by leftist individuals, movements, and parties situated 'between' the Social Democrats and the pro-Moscow Communists.