

IDEOLOGIES AND REALITIES OF THE MASSES IN COMMUNIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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This thesis rethinks some of the core arguments of the Western theories of the masses. By demonstrating the inapplicability of these theories in the situation of the Twentieth Century totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia, this study argues for a replacement of the dominant paradigms with new theories of the masses relevant to the specific historical and social conditions. History of the masses in communist Czechoslovakia shows that the masses were not viewed as an inherently destructive social element. Instead, the masses functioned as supportive social structures for the oppressive regime, but also as the expressions of the nascent democratic civic interaction that later challenged this regime.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Many of my childhood memories of growing up in socialist Czechoslovakia involve participation in public mass events and organizations. I can vividly recall walking in May 1st parades with my elementary school classmates, attending the celebrations of the Great October Socialist Revolution with my parents, exercising in the mass gymnastic events called Spartakiads, and joining the children's organization – the Pioneers. I also remember the many jokes that my parents and their friends made about the official parades, about their own involvement in the state-organized 'work collectives,' and about the nation-wide mass traveling to and from weekend houses in the countryside. The connection between these two sets of memories is clear – the first refers to my participation in the official representations of the united socialist citizens, the second to the private perceptions of these representations by the millions of people who endured the socialist regime.

Years after the collapse of the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia in 1989, I tried to explain to my American husband the extent to which my socialist experience was structured by both the ideology and reality of collective life. I realized that most Western ideas of organized socialist life revolved around, and perhaps was even limited to, the images of perfectly lined rows of soldiers walking in unison at a May 1st parade in Moscow's Red Square. But there was so much more to what collectivity and mass events meant for the Czechoslovak people. This thesis is a result of my attempts to articulate the magnitude of organized mass activities and their impact on the lives of Czechoslovak citizens.

Much has been written about resisting totalitarian oppression in the countries of the former Soviet Bloc, primarily focusing on the dissident groups and individuals, who were brave enough to challenge their regimes openly. On the other hand, very little has been written about

the daily lives of the masses of seemingly ordinary people, who were overshadowed by the outspoken and persecuted heroes. My goal is not to condemn these ordinary people for their passivity or what some have called idleness or fear to oppose the regime. Rather, I wish to examine how they responded to the official propaganda and pressure in their own way. Instead of resisting the regime openly, a majority participated willingly in the required public rituals. While many criticized their situation in private, in public they felt the need to conform. As a result, two radically different sets of public and private behavior and morals emerged, and this separation between the two far exceeded the division between the public and private spheres in Western democracies.

In the following chapters, I examine the ideologies and realities of the socialist masses. My definition of these masses is threefold. First, the masses are an *ideological unit* synonymous with a nation-wide homogeneous collective. These masses exist only on a theoretical level, and were depicted in official representations, including posters, paintings, poems or films. In addition, they were used as a model for real life events in Czechoslovak society. Public mass ceremonies, work relationships, housing schemes, sports activities or vacation patterns were all affected by this theoretical construction of mass collectivity. Both the imposed theoretical concept and the real life mass events resonated with a deeply-felt need for a national community as a protective and celebrative togetherness. The socialist masses as an ideological unit and especially as its staged public representations therefore attempted to fill the void of independent communal interaction that the regime had previously silenced.

Second, the real life mass events point to another perception of the masses: masses as *controlled density* within spatial proximity. Parades, official ceremonies, mass gymnastics, factory meetings or collective holidays all involved physical massing of people, who were

unrelated to one another and yet functioned temporarily as a homogeneous unit. Unlike the endless and uncontrollable crowds feared by the crowd theorists of the Nineteenth Century, the socialist masses were always perfectly organized – the Communist Party representatives tolerated no spontaneous, crowd-like behavior and always issued detailed instructions for the masses' behavior. Undoubtedly, most people participating in these events were unified and organized only through their pretended public conformity to the prescribed mass activities. Yet, as the post-1989 polls revealed, many Czechoslovaks living in the totalitarian regime kept longing for a genuine expression of mutual solidarity. For these people, the communist versions of mass collectivity were the only available, and officially sanctioned, forms of communal and national togetherness.¹

Third, the socialist masses are also the *invisible multitudes* of real people, whose lives were involuntarily homogenized through required participation in the public collective rituals and through their remarkably similar private lives. These masses, although comprised of real people, have no empirical form in the sense that these individuals did not gather in one place at one time. Such invisible multitudes correspond to the description of the masses by Raymond Williams in which he stresses the illusionary quality of masses as a concept: "The masses are always the others, whom we do not know, and cannot know. ... To other people, we are also masses. Masses are other people. There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses."² As this thesis shows, both public and private lives of these invisible multitudes followed specific mass patterns. As a result of various factors, ranging from government incentives to the effects of the deteriorating economic situation, which resulted in a

¹ I discuss the results of these polls and the nostalgia for the communist rituals in the Conclusion.

² Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780 – 1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 299-300.

lack of many basic products and services, marriage, divorce and reproductive patterns or vacationing schemes were homogenized on a mass scale in communist Czechoslovakia.

My dissertation addresses the evident lack of literature about the masses in a totalitarian context of Eastern European communist states. So far, most Western European theories and definitions of the masses have focused on either the situation of modern capitalist societies or the totalitarian regimes in the Nazi Germany or Soviet Union. Despite stark contrasts, the same criteria and evaluative frameworks have been mistakenly used for the masses in capitalist and totalitarian systems, fascist or communist. These approaches ignore the fact that participation in mass activities in a communist totalitarian situation acquired a range of different meanings and distinct manifestations. For example, the classic conclusions of the Western ‘crowd-rule’ theories often do not apply in the communist totalitarian contexts, where in many cases the masses actually do not present a threat to a dominant ideology, but rather become one of its most significant building blocs and manipulative tools. As I will show, the communist ideologists in Czechoslovakia did not perceive the masses as a threat to society, but rather as one of its fundamental ideological supports; in fact, they declared that the masses were the most significant part of a new communist society. Unlike the Nineteenth Century crowd theorists or the cultural critics of the Twentieth Century, the communist totalitarian regimes honored the masses, or at least the imagery of mass homogeneity and support. Consequently, in official depictions, the socialist masses were an orderly and fully conscious social and political body; almost the exact opposite of the threatening and unconscious masses of the Western crowd theories. The communist leaders in Czechoslovakia resolutely differentiated the socialist masses from the capitalist mobs, which, in their view, remained uncontrollable and thus without any revolutionary potential. In contrast, the socialist masses, led by the Communist Party, supported

the established order and actively built their imagined utopia. This thesis examines the crucial role that both the officially created images of the masses and their real life embodiments had in structuring the public and private lives of Czechoslovak people. My goal is to point to the inadequacy of not only the Western European crowd theories but also the theories of totalitarian masses in the Soviet Union in explaining all mass phenomena in communist Czechoslovakia. For example, the ubiquitous mass colonies of weekend houses or the country-wide mass gymnastic events – Spartakiads, did not have their equivalent in any other communist countries, including the Soviet Union.

Another reason for this work is my fascination with the ways in which the ideology of mass collectivity affected people's lives. Almost any nation's history contains numerous incidents characterized by people's 'mass' participation, e.g., elections, demonstrations, revolutions, or wars. However, the totalitarian regime of communist Czechoslovakia took these events to an extreme, turning the regularly occurring and elaborately planned mass events and activities into one of its primary defining characteristics. The main goal of these organized activities was to demonstrate the mass support for the regime to the outside world, but also to the masses themselves. In Chapter 1, I examine the ideology and reality of the masses in the public space of a socialist state. I look at mass parades, celebrations, and staged demonstrations through their official depictions and through the unofficial interpretations of their participants. I also consider the phenomenon of a 'socialist collective' which the communist regime presented as the real life embodiment of the collective coherence at work. Socialist collectives were usually comprised of colleagues who not only worked side by side, but also participated in officially organized activities as one unit. I aim to investigate how effective these imposed structures were in creating, or stifling, a genuine sense of collectivity among the people involved.

As Chapter 2 shows, the ideology of mass collectivity targeted both public and private spaces. Home, for example, was constructed as a private place with many public qualities, always open to an outside inspection and possibly even intervention. Again, I am interested in the differences between theory and reality: the official ideology elevated and the reality of people's private lives demonstrated homogeneity and mass unification of lifestyles and experiences. However, in most cases, the homogenization of private spaces, recreation habits, or marriage and divorce patterns, did not occur as a consequence of imposed ideological models. People's homes were involuntarily homogenized simply as a consequence of the deteriorating economic situation in the 1950's and 1960's. Their free time activities, including vacationing, were homogenized because there were few available alternatives for relaxing away from public supervision. Consequently, millions of Czechoslovak people spent their free time in remarkably similar ways at the most characteristic places of socialist recreation – family cottages grouped together in the countryside. Finally, people's private decisions regarding marriage, divorce, or having children were homogenized to an unprecedented extent through various state incentives, such as subsidies for young families or state-provided accommodation.

Chapter 3 discusses the presentation of collective mentality through mass gymnastic performances called Spartakiads. These monumental events were organized every five years and involved hundreds of thousands of participants exercising in precise, geometric formations. From an ideological perspective, the Spartakiads aimed to provide a model of collective discipline and coherence. In reality, they only achieved a mechanical unity among the exercising people. The Spartakiads explicitly focused on the elimination of elements of individuality which were replaced with an emphasis on functionality: the exercising individuals were symbolically reduced to anonymous particles, fully controllable and interchangeable.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I analyze the state-run children's organization – the Pioneers – through which youth was ideologically constructed as an embodiment of a healthy and optimistic collective future. Through their nationwide participation in the Pioneer movement, Czechoslovak children functioned as showcase collectives of disciplined and responsible socialist citizens. The comparison of ideology and reality of mass collective mentality brings some interesting results in the case of the pioneers. Unlike their pessimistic and rather passive parents, traumatized by the 1968 invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies in Czechoslovakia, these children-pioneers grew into open critics of the totalitarian regime. I consider this as proof that under certain political and historical conditions, such as weakened pressure of the Communist Party or a group disconnection from dominant oppressive experiences, exit spaces can be created even in the seemingly unbreakable totalitarian structures. Because the children-pioneers of the 1970-80s did not experience the unsettling events of 1968, and because they were growing up during the years of the so-called 'normalization' when the political and ideological pressure weakened, they were able to impose their own, regime-independent, meanings of collectivity into their Pioneer activities. While the Pioneers never came anywhere close to turning into a dissident or anti-regime movement, it nevertheless failed in its original function as a training ground for disciplined collective youth. The children-pioneers participated in roll calls and organized summer camps, but they spent a considerably larger amount of time in non-political, often self-designed, communal activities. Unlike their parents, they were not so much intimidated as irritated by the official demands on collectivity. Therefore, they accepted the compulsory frame of the Pioneer organization, but transformed most of its contents according to their own ideas or following the suggestions of their slightly older group leaders. This is something that most of their parents never dared to do within their collective endeavors.

Through these four chapters, or four case studies of different manifestations of mass collectivity, I intend to show that the masses should not always be perceived as a threat to a society. In the images and rhetoric of communist propaganda, the masses were presented as a positive, community-building force. At the same time, through the unofficial activities within the Pioneer movement, the masses of young people engaged in their own spontaneous interpretations of communal interaction. The results of their genuine collectivity were threatening to the totalitarian system, but not to the democratic society they were interested in. The goal of this thesis is to rethink some of the core arguments of the Western theories of the masses, but also the suggestions made about the totalitarian masses in countries like the Soviet Union. I will demonstrate that most of these theses are inapplicable to the radically different situations of the Twentieth Century totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia. By reevaluating the traditional concepts of the masses, I argue for a replacement of the dominant but inapplicable paradigms with new theories of the masses relevant to the specific historical and social conditions.

1.1 Methodology

In order to present a compelling alternative to the dominant theoretical frameworks, it is necessary to challenge their major methodological premises. Instead of the linear histories characteristic of most traditional theories, I chose the method of episodic counter-comparison. The dissertation does not move chronologically, but rather goes back and forth in history, and contrasts mutually related individual episodes from different periods between 1948 and 1989. These episodes include state-organized parades, sports events, such as the Spartakiads, and public activities of mass organizations, like the Pioneers. I believe focusing on specific incidents

that are most characteristic of the described phenomenon can be more useful than a chronological account. While even the episodic history should include the relevant links between the described incident and the previous or following events, its main distinction from the linear history lies in its ability to concentrate solely on the relatively isolated aspects of a few specific events. These individual episodes can then be effectively contrasted throughout time within a wider historical and cultural context, in this case the totalitarian regime of Czechoslovakia.

An episodic approach also enables one to focus on seemingly insignificant historical phenomena, which are often overlooked by more traditional methodologies. For example, mass vacationing patterns may be ignored by the traditional theories of the masses, but they serve as an important source of information about the extent to which the everyday life of the Czechoslovak citizens was affected by the official ideal of collectivism. Similarly, jokes, as examples of sporadically occurring individual mockery of the ideology of mass collectivism, offer a unique insight into the unofficial interpretations of the imposed mass mentality.

Although clearly massive in scope, the mass activities of Czechoslovak people left fewer material traces than might be expected. Many propagandistic films, books and newspaper and magazine articles have been lost, damaged or, often purposefully, destroyed. After the fall of the totalitarian regime, the documentary value of these records was frequently undervalued, if not directly ignored, while their political and ideological coating served as a good enough reason for their rejection as important sources of information. Furthermore, there are very few theoretical works that consider the phenomenon of the masses in a communist totalitarian regime, especially the effects of ideology of mass mentality on everyday life. In fact, the lack of such theoretical materials was one of the motivating factors for this dissertation.

The most useful resources that I eventually located were in the collection of newspapers and magazines at the archive section of the National Library. In particular, I focused on the visual and verbal representations of the masses in one of the most commonly deployed tools of communist propaganda – the daily *Rude Pravo* (*The Red Right*). This newspaper openly declared as its main goal the fight for the Czechoslovak and worldly proletariat and was for a long time the only widely available, and officially supported, newspaper in the country. Subscription to *Rude Pravo* was required in many factories, offices, schools, and of course all governmental organizations. Since its coverage spans the entire 40 years of the totalitarian regime, it is an excellent source for detecting even minor changes in the political and ideological climate.

Together with other periodicals that I studied, such as the dailies *Prace* (*Work*) and *Mlada Fronta* (*The Young Front*), or the weekly family magazine *Kvety* (*Flowers*)³, *Rude Pravo* often concentrated on big mass events in an effort to portray the supposedly genuine spirit of mass collectivism. Events like May 1st parades or the Spartakiads always featured prominently on the first page, accompanied with huge aerial photos of the gathered masses. Because the official mass events took place almost every month (sometimes even several times during one month), the articles and photos or other illustrating material about them became a regularly occurring news material, similar to weather forecasts or results of sports games.

The ubiquitous presence of the visual images of the masses in these newspapers is significant, because these images attracted the immediate attention of their readers. In the cases of newspapers like *Rude Pravo* or *Prace*, the appeal of these images was further increased by the

³ Although the name of the magazine implies a specific focus on flora, *Kvety* was a family oriented weekly covering topics from culture and society to household-keeping to fashion.

fact that the written content of these dailies was full of ideological clichés and regularly repeated boring articles that almost nobody read.

At this point, many questions might arise as to the actual impact of articles that nobody read or of visual images that might catch one's eye but only momentarily and seemingly to no effect. Why publish a newspaper that people do not read and create posters and photographs that people privately ridicule? It seems as if the communist government in Czechoslovakia did not care what the people thought nor whether they would be influenced by these messages. Instead of informing or persuading its readership, the goal of government-controlled dailies like *Rude Pravo* was simply to manifest the unbreakable solidity of the system. These newspapers, together with other materials, did not strive to truthfully examine the world. Instead, their propaganda strategies aimed to “evoke, through logical consistency and illusion of necessity (not by persuasion), *a feeling of truthfulness*, or ‘perception’ that the ideological laws *are the reality itself*, ontologically more perfect than the world of ‘mere phenomena.’”⁴ While the ordinary citizens stood in lines for food or suffered through the catastrophic consequences of air pollution caused by the communist mining industry, the newspapers touted the same enthusiastic phrases about work devotion, exceeding the targets and racing ahead of the Western world. Most people privately ridiculed the annoying daily dosage of official phraseology, but they nevertheless registered its permanent and uncontested presence, accepting it as an inevitable reality of their daily lives. Just as there were propaganda posters in workplaces, so was there an issue of *Rude Pravo* in almost every office, school or waiting room. *Rude Pravo* and other communist dailies therefore have to be viewed as powerful icons of the regime – insignificant in directly affecting the opinions of Czechoslovak citizens, but important for deciphering the regime's ideology. It

⁴ Jakub Zelnicěk, “Ideological Magic: Rough and Subtle Distortions of Reality as an Essential Instrument of Totalitarian Government” in *Power of Images, Images of Power*, ed. Tomas Bojar, Jan Trestik and Jakub Zelnicěk (Praha: Galerie U Krizovniku, 2005), 27, both emphases mine.

did not matter that almost identical articles and phrases appeared in *Rude Pravo*, *Prace* or *Mlada Fronta*; in fact, that was exactly what the regime wanted. The phrases from the newspapers would be further repeated in posters, movies, songs and vice versa, all of which created a closed system of references precluding an independent input from the outside. If an individual citizen wished to express his/her opinion, he or she had to follow the strictly established rhetorical patterns. This approach successfully eliminated any potential for an autonomous view. The communist-dailies' tactics of tight editorial and visual control resulted in articles that were boring and rarely reflected the reality. At the same time however, these articles and photos functioned as the rhetorically bullet-proof symbols of the Party's imperatives. These imperatives continuously emphasizing collective spirit would then structure the real life experiences, such as the public housing schemes, work relationships or sports events.

Similarly as the government-controlled newspapers, many feature films, especially from the 1940s and 1950s, illustrate well the official attempt to turn the ideal of collectivism into a popularized view to be shared and liked by the ordinary citizens. Often these films portray their heroes firmly embedded within their work collectives, with their individual wishes and plans overtaken by the grand schemes of the socialist state planners. The heroes happily sacrifice their own potential for the good of the collective – they are willing to give up their individual summer vacations and instead build a dam or join a mammoth agricultural project. These heroes stand in sharp contrast to the main characters of the films made during the 1960s – the first and last period of relative political and artistic freedom. Throughout the dissertation, I discuss some of these more critical cinematic approaches to socialist mass mentality, especially the prevalent theme of absurdity of the publicly staged mass unity.

One of the most significant weaknesses of the materials from socialist Czechoslovakia is that the interpretation of the author's specific message is always dependent on identifying the imposed ideological layer. This layer is usually easily detectable but it nevertheless distorts the original message to a considerable degree. Distortion of a text by its author's specific political, cultural or social grounding takes place in democratic and non-democratic regimes, but in the case of the latter, this distortion is further compounded by obligatory rhetorical style. This style was imbued with almost identical phrases and visual images and was common to the works of journalists, writers, poets and even film makers in Czechoslovakia.

Yet this unanimously shared rhetorical approach also makes it easier to analyze the different communist-produced materials. Because the ideological layer is forcefully homogenized, it is recognizable almost instantly. Reading between the lines of an old newspaper or a magazine is greatly aided by the fact that within a certain timeframe, they all contained nearly the same narrative and visual techniques. The change between the two homogeneous sets of rhetorical tools from the 1950s and 1970s is therefore instantly noticeable because of the lack of any other 'interfering' styles. For example, the ideologically loaded descriptions of work *heroism* of socialist collectives from the 1950s, as declared by newspaper articles, poems, theater plays or films, are distinctly different from celebrations of work *dedication* of the 1970s' articles or films. Both eras are characterized by ideological clichés which follow the same general patterns, but each era also contains time-specific characteristics. The 1950s rhetoric is full of radical, almost militant-style statements announcing war not just to the regime's political opponents but also to laziness at work. The 1970s rhetoric is similarly homogenized across the

media spectrum but recognizably distinct in its emphasis on collective sharing both at work and at home.⁵

In addition to the materials from the communist times, I also assess individual, post-1989 Revolution perceptions of the official and unofficial collective events in totalitarian Czechoslovakia. A significant part of my evidence for this discussion is based on 65 interviews with student organizers and participants of the mass demonstrations which sparked the Velvet Revolution in 1989. These interviews, published under the title *One Hundred Student Revolutions*,⁶ document the most influential moments of the students' lives before, during and after the Revolution in 1989. Significantly, many of these reminiscences include their participation in the Pioneers, the Spartakiads or other forms of mass events, i.e., the same historical episodes that this thesis sets to explore.

Before I begin to discuss the differences between the totalitarian and non-totalitarian masses, I want to include a brief historical overview of Czechoslovakia (and later the Czech Republic) in the Twentieth Century. The next section aims to aid a better understanding of particular conditions and events that shaped the lives of all Czechoslovaks.

1.2 Czechoslovakia in the Twentieth Century

Czechoslovakia was one of the “successor states” of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, created in the wake of the Empire's defeat in the First World War. On 28th October 1918, the National Committee, an organization formed to unite the various Czech political parties, declared

⁵ This change will be documented in analyses of newspapers, magazines, poems, films and other materials in the following chapters.

⁶ Milan Otahal and Miroslav Vanek, *Sto studentských revolucí – Studenti v období padu komunismu (One Hundred Students' Revolutions – Students during the Fall of Communism)* (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1999).

Czechoslovak independence in Prague. Later that year, Slovakia and a small section of present day Ukraine⁷ joined the new state.

From the beginning, Czechoslovak leaders emphasized the ideal of Czechoslovakism, which presented the Czech and Slovak peoples as a common entity. Czechoslovakism, as Petr Cornej and Jiri Pokorny wrote, “was an expedient political construction based on the extreme similarity of the languages, ... but it glossed over the differences arising from separate histories and cultures.”⁸ In addition to cultural and historical differences, the Czech Lands (i.e., the Czech half of the Republic) were far more economically developed than the Slovak and Ukrainian portions. In fact, the Czech Lands inherited 70 to 80 percent of the industrial infrastructure of the *entire* Austro-Hungarian Empire, including the chemical factories, sugar refineries, china and glass factories, breweries, distilleries, and the Skoda Factory in Plzen (Pilsen), which produced automobiles, machinery, locomotives and weapons.⁹

Due to such a strong industrial base, the Czech Lands suffered only briefly from the post-war economic disruption, with the working class disproportionately impacted. Social tension grew especially in towns, with many workers openly agitating for Bolshevik ideals. The radicalization of the working class was more pervasive in the industrial Czech lands than in the mostly agricultural Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ukraine. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) was established in 1921, and as Cornej and Pokorny argue, “it developed as a mass party from the beginning.”¹⁰ Strong support from the average worker distinguished the Czechoslovak communists from most other communist parties that typically developed “from a

⁷ An area called Sub-Carpathian Ukraine

⁸ Petr Cornej and Jiri Pokorny, *A Brief History of the Czech Lands to 2000*, trans. Anna Bryson (Prague: Prah Press, 2000), 45.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Petr Cornej and Jiri Pokorny, *A Brief History of the Czech Lands to 2000*, 47.

small revolutionary core.”¹¹ The early popularity of communist ideas also elucidates the relatively unproblematic communist takeover after the Second World War.

Nevertheless, during the First Republic between 1918 and 1938, centrist and right-wing parties mostly dominated the political system.¹² This period of pronounced economic prosperity¹³ and the frenetic cultural and social developments was disrupted by the economic crisis in the 1930s, a period characterized by the growth of unemployment, political tension, and increasing threats of the German minority, which drew substantial support from Nazi Germany. Czechoslovakia faced increasing pressure from Hitler but also from its Western Allies. In particular, France and Great Britain hoped to avoid an impending war with Germany, and they therefore agreed to support Hitler’s claims over the Sudeten regions of Czechoslovakia occupied largely by ethnic Germans. The infamous Munich Agreement of September 1938 allowed an annexation of the Sudeten regions, which had formed a significant part of the Czech Lands’ border areas. Devoid of its border fortifications, Czechoslovakia was left completely unprotected against the German army. Inevitably, Munich “left its imprint on the (Czechoslovak) nation, creating an ingrained distrust for the Western Allies and long-term deep depression at Czechoslovakia’s own weakness.”¹⁴

On 15th March 1939, Germany invaded the Czech Lands,¹⁵ and by the following day, the truncated Czech Lands became the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. During the war, the sizeable Jewish community was exterminated. Other ‘undesirable’ groups, notably the Roma (Gypsy) minority, were sent to concentration camps. As Cornej and Pokorny point out, the Nazi

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The First Republic Czechoslovakia belonged among the world’s ten most industrialized countries. See Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, Country Studies, Czech Republic.

¹⁴ Petr Cornej and Jiri Pokorny, *A Brief History of the Czech Lands to 2000*, 56.

¹⁵ Slovakia in the meantime declared independence, and became a Fascist state closely aligned with Germany.

regime planned to exterminate, resettle or Germanize the Czech population too, but during the war “the Germans needed the Protectorate principally as a secure hinterland reliably fulfilling industrial and arms production requirements.”¹⁶ Several resistance organizations developed in and outside Czechoslovakia. Abroad, the resistance centered among two groups: one led by the former democratic President Edvard Benes in London, and the other consisting of communist-oriented Czechoslovak representatives in Moscow.

Czechoslovakia was liberated by the joint efforts of the Soviet Army and the Anglo-American forces on 8th May 1945. Post-war Czechoslovakia had different borders than during the First Republic – the small Ukrainian section was seized by the USSR. Moreover, the large German and smaller Hungarian minorities were forcefully expelled.¹⁷ A new Czechoslovak government was created, in which communists secured many key positions from the outset and quickly gained popular support. In the elections of May 1946, the Communist Party became the strongest party in the parliament with 40.17 % of the popular vote.¹⁸ The communist-led National Front started a radical program of national reconstruction which included land and tax reforms, and nationalization of banks, insurance companies, mines and key industries.¹⁹

Historian Ladislav Holy argues that the mass support of the Communist Party reflected the demand among the Czechoslovak people for state-provided security within a new and more just social system.²⁰ It may seem paradoxical that the communists gained such support in a country with a strong industrial basis and a successful pre-war economy. Yet many industries in the First Republic Czechoslovakia were owned by the German minority, which the majority of

¹⁶ Petr Cornej and Jiri Pokorny, *A Brief History of the Czech Lands to 2000*, 59.

¹⁷ Approximately 2,700,000 Germans were expelled. Petr Cornej and Jiri Pokorny, *A Brief History of the Czech Lands*, 65.

¹⁸ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 22.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Czechs and Slovaks perceived negatively. The communists promised to confiscate all foreign-owned property, thereby fueling their popularity. Additionally, their plan of nationalization declared to transfer the national property into ‘everybody’s hands’ and this promise resonated strongly with the large numbers of the working class citizens.

The Communist Party intensified its political pressure throughout 1947, gaining influence within most political and social organizations, unions and committees. Other political parties lacked coherent and stable political strategies and were further divided by fights for the half of the population that had not already thrown its support behind the communists. The struggle for power culminated in the communist putsch of February 1948, during which the Communist Party, led by Klement Gottwald, seized control over the whole government. The leaders of the democratic parties were unable to react adequately, while the working class people celebrated the communist takeover as a beginning of a new era of freedom. Gottwald replaced President Benes, and declared the new motto for the country’s future – dictatorship of the proletariat.

Despite significant support from the populace, the February coup nevertheless divided Czechoslovak society. As Cornej and Pokorny claim:

Some were enthusiastic and convinced that the victory of communism was in harmony with the development and spirit of history. Others suffered the first wave of persecution. Yet others went back into emigration.²¹

It soon became apparent that the new regime was anything but a free and fair society. The Communist Party began to employ terror as a means of intimidating anyone who would protest or even doubt the regime. During the ‘years of terror’ in the 1950s, the communists used

²¹ Petr Cornej and Jiri Pokorny, *A Brief History of the Czech Lands to 2000*, 68.

targeted provocations, political trials, imprisoning and executions to reach their goal of unanimous mass support for their rule.²² Under the guidance of the USSR, Czechoslovak industry was ‘reconstructed’ following the “unrealistic conception of Czechoslovakia as a machine-tool superpower.”²³ The change from a mostly light industry and service-oriented economy to a heavy industry system, along with the Soviet-enforced restrictions on foreign trade, made Czechoslovakia almost exclusively dependent on the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. The dysfunctional economy, further weakened by a devalued currency and inefficient centralized leadership, brought increasing political tension. It seemed inevitable that a major reconstruction of the socialist system was necessary, and Khrushchev’s demotion of the ‘cult of personality’ surrounding Stalin aided the emergence of similarly critical opinions in Czechoslovakia.

The early 1960s were marked by gradual moderation of the harshest forms of political terror, but were also a time of continuing economic and cultural stagnation. A section within the Communist Party led by Alexander Dubcek proposed a new program of social and political reform which aimed at a genuine democratization of the country. Dubcek and his followers advocated the so-called ‘socialism with a human face,’ a reform program which gained mass support among frustrated Czechoslovak citizens. The mid 1960s were the only time under communist rule when media regained their independence, censorship was abolished, and culture and society thrived – many new theatres opened and previously forbidden literature and films became available again.

The reform period, however, lasted just a couple years during which the Soviet regime put significant pressure on Czechoslovak conservative communists to restore the old order.

²² The total number of victims of communist repression is estimated between 200,000 and 280,000. Petr Cornej and Jiri Pokorny, *A Brief History of the Czech Lands to 2000*, 69.

²³ Ibid., 70.

When Czechoslovakia resisted the diplomatic pressure of the socialist countries led by the USSR, Moscow ordered a military intervention. On 21st August 1968 the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia. The Soviet troops never left the country: the so-called Moscow Protocols legalized the permanent presence of the Soviet Army in Czechoslovakia.²⁴ Dubcek and most other representatives of the reform movement were forced to step down from their posts. Gustav Husak, a Moscow-approved and very conservative communist, assumed Dubcek's position. With Husak, the era of the so-called 'normalization' began.

The reinstated communist old guard focused on gaining firm control over the country. Political and economic decision-making became extremely centralized again and anti-regime activities firmly suppressed. Traveling abroad required official permission, which was especially hard to obtain for all western countries. An important goal of the communist government during the normalization period was to remove citizens from active political participation in the public sphere. This of course contradicted the official declarations about the actively involved socialist masses, but it encouraged a withdrawal into the private sphere, political apathy, and guaranteed political stability. Nevertheless, the discrepancy between the official ideology of active masses and the reality of citizens' passive participation in the staged public rituals is remarkable, and this thesis will examine its different forms in the following chapters.

In return for a severe restriction of their basic human rights, the regime offered citizens a life of relative comfort thanks to state-provided social services and subsidies, free healthcare and education, and zero unemployment. This strategy was very successful. As Ladislav Holy wrote, 20 years after 1968, "attempts at economic and political transformation of the socialist system and campaigning for adherence to human rights were restricted to a small group of

²⁴ Ibid.

intellectuals.”²⁵ The most influential anti-regime activities were initiated by a group of signatories to the Charter 77 Declaration, which urged the Czechoslovak government not to violate human rights. The lives of the majority of people however were characterized by conformism and lethargic acceptance of the new political and economic realities of the post-invasion society.

Even the state-provided amenities did not placate the citizens forever. The economic crisis significantly deepened throughout the 1980s, leading to a growth of dissatisfaction among the general population. Inability to travel freely abroad, lack of various goods on the market and bad housing conditions only exacerbated the tension in society. The “fossilized regime”²⁶ represented by the communist leaders in their 70s lost the ability to react effectively to the growing number of disapproving voices. State repression no longer brought the desired effect, especially at a time when Gorbachev was introducing sweeping changes in the Soviet Union. The Velvet Revolution, which overthrew the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia, began on 17th November 1989 when the police brutally suppressed a previously announced student demonstration. This sparked nation-wide massive demonstrations, followed by a two-hour general strike on the 27th of November. It is estimated that about one fourth of all Czechoslovak citizens went out to demonstrate.²⁷ Two days after the strike, the leading role of the Communist Party in the Czechoslovak Constitution was officially abolished. The new government proposed by the communists failed, and another government was formed with the majority of non-communist members. Playwright Vaclav Havel, who had repeatedly been persecuted by the

²⁵ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*, 33.

²⁶ Petr Cornej and Jiri Pokorny, *A Brief History of the Czech Lands to 2000*, 79.

²⁷ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*

communists, became the first president of the newly democratic Czechoslovakia on 29th December 1989.

Since 1989, Czechoslovakia has been undergoing an intense economic, political and cultural transformation. One of the most radical initial changes was the split of the country into two separate units – the Czech Republic and Slovakia – in 1993. In this work, I focus only on the developments within the Czech Lands of Czechoslovakia. As I have already noted, there were significant ethnic, economic, social and cultural differences between the Czech Lands and Slovakia; consequently, each of these two parts of former Czechoslovakia calls for a separate theory of the masses. I also narrowed the scope of my work to the communist times, even though various types of mass events have continued to take place even after the fall of communism. Concentration on the communist era is a conscious effort on my part to address the lack of adequate theories of the communist masses. The following section reviews some of the major theories of the masses in capitalist regimes, and contrasts them with the available theories of the communist masses, notably those by Hannah Arendt. I show that even Arendt's theories are not fully applicable to the situation of socialist Czechoslovakia which necessitates a separate approach sensitive to historical and cultural differences.

1.3 Masses in Non-Totalitarian and Totalitarian Contexts

The masses, as discussed in most Western European theories, are a distinctly modern phenomenon, the result of the population explosion and rapid urban growth during the Industrial Revolution. In one of the best discussions of the emergence of the masses, Raymond Williams²⁸ argues that the masses and their classification arrived at the social scene as a consequence of three historical developments. First was the physical massing of people in the industrial towns,

²⁸ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780 – 1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

which gave rise to the concept of mass meeting. Second was the physical and social massing of workers in the factories, which signaled the new phenomenon of mass production. Third was the social and political massing of the working class itself through which the idea of mass action originated.²⁹ Despite the new conditions under which the masses appeared, most interpretations of modern masses, Williams claims, retained the unflattering characteristics of the pre-modern mobs: “gullibility, fickleness, herd-prejudice, lowness of taste and habit.”³⁰

Even though the masses were initially perceived as not much different from the mobs, their perception changed with time. The descriptions of the Nineteenth Century’s masses as the uncivilized hordes were later replaced with Twentieth Century portrayal of the masses as passive and manipulated consumers. In this section, I will compare the characteristics of the classic Western European theories of the masses with the specific qualities of the totalitarian masses of socialist Czechoslovakia.

Almost all early western theories portrayed the capitalist masses as a negative and even destructive phenomenon. Critics and philosophers at the end of the Nineteenth Century in particular reacted with great defensiveness; the masses in their eyes signified a dangerous, new power, whose “divine right (was) about to replace the divine right of kings.”³¹ One of the first influential theorists of the masses, Gustave Le Bon, emphasized their uncontrollability. The modern age, or ‘the age of the crowds’ represented “a period of transition and anarchy,” an era in which “the popular classes enter political life” and eventually become the ruling classes.³² This new ruling group, Le Bon warned, would rapidly obliterate the culture, laws and institutions, and generally the civilized character of the Western society: “today the claims of the masses are

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 298.

³¹ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: The Viking Press, 1960, originally published in 1895), 16.

³² Ibid., 14-15.

becoming more and more sharply defined, and amount to nothing less than a determination to destroy utterly society as it now exists.”³³

In Le Bon’s writing, the modern masses are brutal, impulsive and irritable, acting irresponsibly on the presumption of anonymity. They also always act unconsciously: “an individual immersed for some length of time in a crowd in action soon finds himself ... in a special state, which much resembles the state of fascination in which the hypnotized individual finds himself in the hands of the hypnotizer ... (his) conscious personality has entirely vanished.”³⁴ When alone, a man “may be a cultivated individual;” in a crowd, however, “he is a barbarian – that is, a creature acting by instinct.”³⁵ A crowd’s irritability, excessive sentiments, and absence of responsibility, critical spirit and judgment, all apparently the typical feminine characteristics, are the consequence of their inferior evolutionary status. Just like “women, savages, and children,”³⁶ crowds think in images and are incapable of objective decisions. Because of their willingness to be manipulated by imposed imagery, and their readiness to “bow down servilely before a strong authority,”³⁷ crowds also love strong authoritarian heroes, whose absolute and uncompromising attitude impresses them.

The fundamental question of how a gathering of autonomous civilized individuals transforms them into an anonymous primitive crowd was never explicitly answered. At one point, Le Bon claimed that it is “under certain given circumstances, and only under those circumstance (that) an agglomeration of men presents new characteristics (of the crowd), very different from those of the individuals composing it.”³⁸ Yet he never specified those given

³³ Ibid., 16.

³⁴ Ibid., 31.

³⁵ Ibid., 32.

³⁶ Ibid., 36.

³⁷ Ibid., 55.

³⁸ Ibid., 23.

circumstances responsible for the miraculous transformation. At the same time, he also explained that “as soon as a few individuals are gathered together they constitute a crowd, and, though they should be distinguished men of learning, they assume all the characteristics of crowds.”³⁹ For Le Bon, it was clearly the irrational and therefore threatening power of the crowds that dominated the entire discussion of the phenomenon. How exactly the crowd emerges was less significant for him than the destructive potential of such crowd with implications to the entire culture and society.

Despite its many shortcomings, for which it is criticized today, Le Bon’s study was immensely popular and influential among other intellectuals and politicians of his time. According to P. David Marshall, President Theodore Roosevelt, Mussolini, and many other world leaders sought Le Bon’s advice.⁴⁰ Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* was described by Horkheimer and Adorno as a cheap paraphrasing of Le Bon’s ideas, which were “one of the dominant intellectual forces of the Third Republic.”⁴¹

In addition to their influence on world leaders of the first half of the twentieth century, several important insights that Le Bon brings into the theory of the masses are still applicable today. For example, Le Bon draws attention to the impact of visual images in regulating and manipulating the crowd behavior. It is not even necessary for these images to reflect the truth or reality, or to be fully understandable for the crowds: “How numerous are the crowds that have heroically faced death for beliefs, ideas, and phrases that they scarcely understood!”⁴² The power of the images lies precisely in their pseudo-mythical quality that affects crowds’ imagination: the crowds long for legendary, not real, heroes.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

⁴⁰ P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 31.

⁴¹ Ibid., 31. Quote by Moscovici, cited in Marshall.

⁴² Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 57.

Le Bon's conclusion that it is completely irrelevant whether the images used for crowd manipulation reflect reality or not connects his theory of the crowd with the writings of today's scholars researching the impact of mass-produced imagery. At the same time, his pre-electronic-media observations of simultaneous crowd experiences foresee similar future occurrences in the lives of mass media audiences. Admittedly, many of Le Bon's research methods were questionable, and several of his insights possibly exaggerated or even plagiarized, as P. David Marshall points out.⁴³ Notwithstanding these accusations, his remarks about the artificially induced feeling of simultaneous crowd experience provide support for many later theories of social movements, including Benedict Anderson's thesis of the imagined communities.⁴⁴ Anderson's theory, similarly to Le Bon's writing, emphasizes the importance of feelings of homogeneity, simultaneity and synchronicity in the creation of the sense of identification with the modern nation-state. Le Bon's vision of the new masses prepares the ground for the future theories of mass society.

Similarly to Le Bon, Friedrich Nietzsche found the masses repulsive, and approached them with extreme suspicion and aversion. He gave them the status of a herd, i.e., the 'lower species.' The masses in Nietzsche's writing represented the extreme example of the vulgarization of human existence.⁴⁵ Nietzsche argued that the masses can never participate in governing either themselves or the whole society, because their very nature prevented them from ever reaching the status of a freely deliberating mind. The masses, he claimed, embodied degeneration to the point of ultimate weakness of mind, which would consequently lead to widespread nihilism and threaten all of human existence. The herd and herd-democracy therefore represented the biggest

⁴³ P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*.

⁴⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁴⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968, originally published in 1901).

threat to society: it was the wrong preference for the interests of the “weak but many” over those of the “stronger but few” that endangered the healthy social development.

The fact that Nietzsche elevated certain individuals, including himself, above the status of the herd poses a fundamental question about the character of ‘mass-ness.’ Are the masses defined strictly through physical massing, or through non-physical attributes of belonging, or a combination of both? Can an individual truly separate him/herself from the masses? The communist ideologists would answer that the socialist masses ideally include everybody – working classes as well as intellectuals – and that they combine in themselves the meanings of masses as concrete physical gatherings with masses as homogeneous citizenry. Yet in reality, even the socialist masses were not entirely all-encompassing: some citizens were formally excluded from the socialist masses because, as former land-owners or right-wing politicians, they did not deserve to belong among them.⁴⁶ Membership in the socialist masses is therefore a matter of prestige. In contrast, Nietzsche considered membership among the masses the most debasing form of human existence, something that capable individuals can and should avoid.

For many critics from the mid-Twentieth Century, the masses continued to be a major threat to culture and society. Jose Ortega y Gasset’s *The Revolt of the Masses* set the tone for the discussions of the dictatorship of the masses in the age of hyperdemocracy.⁴⁷ The rebellious masses of the new century consisted of average men-consumers, and they were everywhere. In fact, overcrowding was one of the most distinguishing and frightening features of the modern multitudes: “what previously was ... no problem, now begins to be an everyday one, namely, to find room.”⁴⁸ The masses, Ortega y Gasset claims, aim for nothing less than a political domination: “they act directly, outside the law, imposing (their) aspirations and desires by means

⁴⁶ I discuss this distinction among those worthy and unworthy the socialist masses in Chapter 1.

⁴⁷ Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: Norton, 1993, originally published in 1930).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

of material pressure. ... I doubt whether there have been other periods of history in which the multitude has come to govern more directly than in our own.”⁴⁹ The refusal of the masses to relegate politics and law to the specialized minority leads to hyperdemocracy, in which the masses intervene in everything, “imposing (their) own vulgar views without respect or regard for others, without limit or reserve.”⁵⁰

As with Nietzsche’s herds, Ortega y Gasset’s masses lack intelligence and sophistication. The new masses, Ortega y Gasset argues, may be more technical, but that does not automatically guarantee that they are civilized: “the mass man has no attention to spare for reasoning.”⁵¹ Nevertheless, Ortega y Gasset’s selfish and tasteless mass consumers resemble more often the uncontrollable crowds of Le Bon’s theories. Just like Le Bon, he always emphasizes the masses’ physical brutality and primitivism. While Nietzsche’s herds are dehumanized, they remain basically meek and tolerant – Nietzsche despises their suffocating passivity and lack and fear of “exercising rights.”⁵² Conversely, Ortega y Gasset presents the masses as actively obsessed with power. “We are living under the brutal empire of the masses,”⁵³ he claims, and this rule of masses brings Europe into the greatest crisis of the modern era.

Like Nietzsche, Ortega y Gasset called for an elitism of the chosen few, who would restore the moral order of the world. Yet the results of similar demands in the Twentieth Century were the totalitarian rulers in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. These rulers rose above the masses, but their rule certainly did not bring an improvement in general morality or even to the masses’ wellbeing. Rather, the self-alienation of the masses that those regimes encouraged has reached such a degree, Walter Benjamin argued, that mankind could “experience its own

⁴⁹ Ibid., 17-18.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 97.

⁵¹ Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, 85.

⁵² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 159.

⁵³ Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, 19.

destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order.”⁵⁴ Benjamin, who feared the destruction of individual consciousness through pre-packaged, over-reproduced products, including art, suggested a direct connection between mass reproduction of products on the one hand and the reproduction of masses on the other hand. “The greatly increased mass of participants has produced a change in the mode of participation,”⁵⁵ Benjamin wrote. Instead of being absorbed by the works of art, the new masses were absorbing them, thus eliminating the uniqueness of their experience.⁵⁶

Unlike Western European theories of the masses, communist propaganda presented the masses as a defining element of a happy and successful socialist society, as will be demonstrated throughout this dissertation. The masses received only praise from their communist theorists, who described them as disciplined and well-behaved collectives. Unlike the capitalist masses, the socialist masses supported and directly guaranteed the established order. Therefore, these masses ultimately stabilized society. Czechoslovak propaganda materials, as Chapter 1 shows, celebrated precisely what theorists like Le Bon, Nietzsche, or Ortega y Gasset feared: a dictatorship of the masses. While Ortega y Gasset warned of the political domination of the multitudes, the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia based its entire ideology on emphasizing the active involvement of the masses in ruling their own country. In reality, such active involvement of the masses never materialized, but the regime relied to a significant extent on the silent, yet cynical, support of millions of its intimidated citizens. Whether active in theory or passive in reality, the masses’ corroboration of the regime’s ideology cannot be explained through the application of the Western European theories of capitalist masses.

⁵⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 242.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Passivity of the masses is one of the few areas that both Western European and Eastern European communist theories address: the former criticize it, the latter deny it. Transformation from active and uncontrollable multitudes of the nineteenth century to a passive and cynical public of consumers of the Twentieth Century is the only significant change in the Western European classification of the masses. Mass public experience in the modern industrial city, Richard Sennett⁵⁷ argued, became more intense and less sociable: the masses were a lot more visible but also a lot more atomized. The public life of active interpersonal communication, as envisaged by Habermas⁵⁸ for example, was further silenced, not advanced, by modern technology – “the mass media (intensified) the patterns of crowd silence ... (and) the idea of a disembodied spectator, a passive witness.”⁵⁹

Sennett’s passive spectators are the media-manipulated and self-obsessed masses of consumers. His description of the impersonal urban masses lacks Raymond Williams’ cautious optimism in the popular culture of the majority. Sennett’s consumers are scared of the images of themselves as the uncivilized crowds. They try to protect their strictly contained and controllable community through making it into a morally sacred space that stands in sharp opposition to the outside world. Sennett warns before the consequences of such strict delimitation of a communal space – it makes intimate and local the only acceptable alternative, he says, “it is celebration of the ghetto.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of the Public Man* (New York: Norton, 1976).

⁵⁸ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger and Patrick Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989). Jurgen Habermas’ concept of a public sphere considers the masses a primarily constructive, not destructive, element in the modern society. The defining principle of the bourgeois public sphere, at least in theory, is its inclusiveness – Habermas envisages it as an open space, in which rational-critical debate of different groups of participants takes place. The debate participants, he writes, are an assemblage of otherwise disconnected “private people,” who in the bourgeois public sphere “come together as a public.” (27).

⁵⁹ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of the Public Man*, 283.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 295.

The public life of the modern masses is deeply marked by their fear of openness, spontaneity, and multiplicity – all the important ingredients of any democratic interaction, but also the typical characteristics of the ‘violent crowds’ in many theories, including the radical hypotheses of Le Bon or Ortega y Gasset. The distorted modern images of crowds therefore affect the modern ideas of community: as Sennett points out, modern community “has a surveillance function.”⁶¹ In such an environment, he claims, an open and free communication is impossible: “the experience of local community life, seemingly an exercise in fraternity in a hostile milieu, often becomes an exercise in fratricide.”⁶²

Increased visibility as well as isolation and passivity of the masses of capitalist consumers are to some extent applicable to the socialist masses. But the official communist propaganda almost never acknowledged the possibility of passive socialist masses. In public, as Chapter 1 illustrates, the masses radiated with orchestrated activity and enthusiasm. In private, as Chapter 2 argues, people’s passivity was constantly attacked by the official images of organized collectivity that aimed at even the most intimate aspects of private life. For example, communist propaganda encouraged the opening of private experiences of love, marriage or parenthood to public discussion and intervention. The official plans for collective involvement of everybody in anybody’s public and private lives did not eliminate the passivity of Czechoslovak citizens, but they made them hide it through adjusted public and private behavior.

As with their passivity, the masses’ anonymity is a phenomenon for which Western European theories are not fully applicable in a totalitarian situation. The Western European critics split into two positions. On the one hand, the masses’ anonymity only increased the fear or suspicion with which people like Le Bon or Nietzsche approached them. Le Bon warned that

⁶¹ Ibid., 300.

⁶² Ibid., 300.

the modern masses acted in a brutal, impulsive and irritable way, precisely because they relied on the presumption of their anonymity.⁶³ Nietzsche described the members of the herds happily sacrificing their individuality in order to feel safe in the anonymity of large numbers.⁶⁴ Shifting the argument slightly, Richard Sennett claimed that the particular conditions of modern industrial society encouraged anonymous massing of people, who became the disembodied spectators and consumers, not the active threat to the established order.⁶⁵

On the other hand, theorists like Elias Canetti or Jurgen Habermas discussed anonymity of the modern masses as potentially enabling a more democratic interaction. People feel safe, united, and equal within the anonymity of the crowd, claimed Canetti, who further argued that all theories of equality and justice were ultimately inspired by the experience of absolute equality in the crowd.⁶⁶ Similarly, Habermas' concept of the public sphere,⁶⁷ even if just in its ideal form, relied on the temporary suspension of status and rank creating a situation of equalizing anonymity of participants.⁶⁸

In contrast to these two Western positions, anonymity in the totalitarian system signifies an involuntary and permanent surrendering of individuality, officially presented as a voluntary expression of people's total devotion to the regime. Such imposed anonymity is therefore different from the system-threatening anonymity of Le Bon or Nietzsche's works as well as the

⁶³ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*

⁶⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*

⁶⁵ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of the Public Man*

⁶⁶ Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (London: Phoenix Press, 2000, originally published in 1960).

⁶⁷ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*

⁶⁸ Many critics of Habermas pointed out to his neglect of social movements, his inadequate discussion of the role of religion or science in the formation of the public sphere, or his reliance on utopian universality. See, for example, Craig Calhoun or Michael Warner in Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999). Notwithstanding these shortcomings, Habermas' theory is important for its emphasis on a transformation that takes place when independent persons enter the realm of a public debate. Through sharing the same ground and discussion topic, the participants of the public debate have to temporarily give up their particular identities in order to create a truly open and fair environment for communication.

equalizing anonymity of Canetti or Habermas' theories. There was nothing democratic about totalitarian anonymity, which more than anything was evidence of the total obliteration of individuality and the freedom of personal expression. Chapter 3 discusses the totalitarian celebration of anonymity of the Spartakiads' participants, symbolized by their complete interchangeability as the building elements of the unanimous whole. I argue that the official rhetoric often used themes of 'drowning' or personal 'disintegration' among the exercising masses to emphasize the irrevocability of collective uniformity.

Finally, the question of controlling the masses leads to an interesting comparison between the Western and communist theories. Most Western writers agreed that the masses need strong-willed leadership. In Nietzsche's view, the masses must be controlled precisely because of their deceiving tolerance and veneration of the powerful.⁶⁹ Arguing that the masses' "constant fear of disintegration means that (they) will accept *any* goal,"⁷⁰ Canetti acknowledged the need for a strong leader, who would prevent any irrational or self-destructive behavior of the masses. At the same time, however, he warned against aggressive, potentially totalitarian rulers – the real danger for society were not the masses, but a type of individual he described as 'the survivor' – the ruler, who "can easily destroy a good part of mankind."⁷¹ Similarly to Canetti, Hannah Arendt⁷² stressed the masses' vulnerability to manipulation. Arendt elaborated a depressing list of qualities of the modern masses: "radical loss of self-interest,⁷³ the cynical or bored indifference in the face of death or other personal catastrophes, the passionate inclination toward

⁶⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*

⁷⁰ Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 29, emphasis original.

⁷¹ Ibid., 468.

⁷² Hannah Arendt, *Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1968).

⁷³ In a rather surprising move, Arendt, writing more than half a century after Gustave Le Bon, footnoted his *The Crowd* to support her claim about the peculiar selflessness of the masses. The popularity of Le Bon's often exaggerated theories among the Nazi ideologists might be the reason why Arendt resorted to his writing as a source in her interpretations of the masses in the Nazi Germany.

the most abstract notions as guides for life, and the general contempt for even the most obvious rules of common sense.”⁷⁴ All of these characteristics made the modern masses perfect targets for exploitation by a manipulative leader.

Arendt’s theory of totalitarian systems applies in many respects to the situation of socialist Czechoslovakia. One of the main arguments of this dissertation is that the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia dramatically shifted the boundary between the public and private spaces. The ideology of mass collectivity advocated a constant public involvement in private matters, which would eventually even eliminate the need for privacy; every personal or intimate experience could, in theory, be shared with others. Although this development was presented by the official propaganda as the victory of collective spirit, its real aim was an increase in internal control of totalitarian subjects. Arendt identified the same trend in totalitarian regimes of fascist Germany, Italy and Stalinist Russia:

Totalitarianism is never content to rule by external means, namely, through the state and a machinery of violence; thanks to its peculiar ideology and the role assigned to it in this apparatus of coercion, totalitarianism has discovered a means of dominating and terrorizing human beings from within. In this sense it eliminates the distance between the rulers and the ruled.⁷⁵

In addition to her theory of totalitarian control, Arendt’s descriptions of mass atomization of totalitarian society, especially in the case of the Soviet regime, are also relevant for socialist Czechoslovakia. The first three chapters of this thesis portray a rather gloomy picture of passive

⁷⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 14.

⁷⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 23.

and isolated citizens struggling with the constant pressure of the public intervention. However, I also consider the totalitarian systems described by Arendt not entirely transferable to the specific circumstances of Czechoslovak society which justifies a need for a separate theory of the totalitarian masses that this thesis attempts to provide. I will show that one of the most important differences between the Soviet and Czechoslovak totalitarian regimes is the distance between the official ideology and the unofficial reality of everyday life, which intensifies in the case of socialist Czechoslovakia (or any other country of the former Eastern Bloc). While the Soviet totalitarian regime developed according to the concrete historical and social situation in Russia, the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia was to a great extent a reflection of an imposed Soviet model, which did not fully correspond with particular developments in Czechoslovak society. Therefore, the distance between ideology and reality extended further than what it was in Soviet Russia/Union.

Arendt insisted that totalitarian movements depended on “the sheer force of numbers to such an extent that totalitarian regimes (seemed) impossible, even under otherwise favorable circumstances, in countries with relatively small populations.”⁷⁶ The fact that totalitarian regimes did in fact exist in several relatively small countries of the former Eastern Bloc appears to prove Arendt wrong. But in reality this only reconfirms her point, since these regimes existed under the supervision of the Soviet regime, i.e., they were united into one large homogeneous cluster of small Soviet-style replicas. Such homogenization made the application of unitary model possible, but it inevitably brought problems too⁷⁷. Despite the official attempts in the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁷ It should be noted that many people in the post-1945 Czechoslovakia supported the ideas presented by the communists. Millions of disillusioned citizens did not trust the western-style democracy and its values anymore and longed for a stable and yet radically new solution to their situation. The communist regime was therefore openly welcomed by many of them, because it promised a seemingly easy cut from the old (real) world, and a fast transformation into a bright new future. After the few initial and optimistic years, the reality of the imposed Soviet

individual countries to follow the Soviet model closely, for example through a similar style of political terror in the 1950s, differences between these small countries and the Soviet regime were bound to bring difficulties. The 1956 revolution in Hungary or the period of ‘socialism with human face’ in the 1960s Czechoslovakia, are examples of situations when the incongruity between the imposed ideological system and the non-corresponding reality escalated into tension.

At the same time, the impossibility to duplicate the Soviet-style regime in countries like Czechoslovakia created opportunities for challenging the imposed system which did not exist in Soviet Russia/Union. For example, the involvement of the Czechoslovak pioneers in their own versions of collective interaction in the 1980s did not materialize, at least not to a comparable extent, in the much more ideologically rigid Soviet Pioneers Movement.⁷⁸ The collapses of the Czechoslovak and Soviet totalitarian systems were therefore initiated by different factors. In 1989 Czechoslovakia, many young people (almost all former pioneers) united with people from all strata of society to revolt against the system that was imposed on the country from the outside. In contrast, the main reforms in the 1980s Soviet Union were started from within the system itself. Of course, these events are obviously interconnected – the 1989 revolutions in Czechoslovakia and other Eastern European countries were in many ways possible only because of the internal changes in the Soviet regime. But in spite of this element of interconnectedness, the differences between the totalitarian regime in the Soviet Union and in the countries like Czechoslovakia were significant, and they led to significantly distinct responses to ideological

model began to dominate daily life in Czechoslovakia. The political terror of the 1950s already reflected a society with very few genuine supporters of Soviet-style socialism. See, for example Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁷⁸ For a discussion of the Soviet Pioneer Movement see Susan E. Reid, “Khrushchev’s Children’s Paradise: The Pioneer Palace, Moscow, 1958 – 1962,” in *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Oxford: Berg, 2002).

oppression. Consequently, the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia was characterized by specific social and historical developments that cannot be fully interpreted through the classic models of totalitarianism that focused on either Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union.

In most traditional and modern theories, the masses were feared or despised. Many critics argued that because of their truly ‘massive’ arrival on the modern scene and because of their supposedly destructive power potential, the masses constituted a permanent threat to the values and stability of developed society. Fear of loss of control over these ever-growing multitudes led to many irrational observations and conclusions. This combination of fear and irrationality generated arguments calling for ultimate solutions – applications of power that would restore the status quo. Some of the most extreme solutions included the ideas of extermination or sterilization of the ‘undesirable’ masses, initially interpreted more as utopian fantasies of a few elite intellectuals,⁷⁹ later practiced through concrete mass-annihilation programs by the Nazi and Soviet regimes. As Raymond Williams⁸⁰ pointed out, our understanding of the masses derives not from our experiential knowledge, but rather from our interpretations according to a specific formula. Because the formula proceeds “from our intention,”⁸¹ it follows that the subsequent definitions of, and attitudes towards, the masses will reflect that particular intention, not reality. Masses as democratic majority can consequently be linked with masses as violent mobs, even though the two concepts might have little or nothing in common.⁸²

⁷⁹ John Carey discusses numerous solutions to the ‘revolt’ of the modern masses, as suggested by the leading intellectuals of the early twentieth century. See John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligensia, 1880 – 1939* (Chicago: Academy, 2002).

⁸⁰ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780 – 1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁸² *Ibid.*

This thesis does not pretend to present a theory of the masses completely devoid of subjective interpretations; since to produce such a theory about any topic would be impossible. Instead, I expand the number and scope of existing theories of the masses, by challenging the allegedly ‘classical’ and therefore dominant hypotheses with a new perspective informed by the Czechoslovak experience. In contrast to the traditional theories of the masses in the Western Europe, the theories expounded by Czechoslovak ideologists placed the masses in a central and decisive position in society. Furthermore, the Czechoslovak masses distinguished themselves from the Soviet masses in terms of the structures of mass dominance and resistance. Different mass events, experiences, and ways of challenging the regime were the result of the fact that a Soviet-inspired public discourse was imposed on the private lives of members of a historically and culturally different society. Consequently, the mass phenomena common throughout Czechoslovakia, such as the Spartakiads gymnastics events or the homogenized colonies of weekend houses, did not have an equivalent anywhere else in the former Soviet bloc. This dissertation will show that the lives of totalitarian masses in Czechoslovakia were distinct from other masses throughout history and as such they need to be addressed through a separate reevaluation reflecting their particular situation.

2.0 PUBLIC COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Following the spirit of the socialist way of life, demands of individuals can only be fulfilled after the demands of the society have been met. If the demands of the individuals differ from those of the society, then they are not only incompatible, but actually sharply conflicting with, and harmful to, the efforts of the socialist society.¹

Communist rhetoric presented the masses, or more specifically the working masses, as the only rightful inhabitants of the socialist public space. United and (self) disciplined, the masses built and celebrated their happy socialist society. In the eyes and words of the communist ideologists, the masses' efforts and views were so united that the old-fashioned concepts of plurality or politics as such were of no use to them, because everybody in socialism ostensibly shared the same world view. Individual disagreement or even doubt belonged to the privacy of one's mind; expressed publicly, it was considered a threat to the general well-being. "Who does not go with us goes against us"² declared the famous communist phrase of that era.

Despite their central position in socialist society, the productive participation of the masses in public matters always required structure and direction from the supervising mind of the Communist Party. Without the Party masterminds, the official texts warned, the masses turned into mere raw material or, worse yet, a potentially uncontrollable force. The need for their constant supervision was therefore justifiable and quickly transferred from a merely theoretical argument to the common practices of mass surveillance and control of Czechoslovak citizens. The resulting strict regimentation of society inevitably diverted far from the original

¹ Editorial in *Rude Pravo*, cited in Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 25.

² This phrase is well-known to most people who have lived through communism in Czechoslovakia.

ideological model of the cheerful, organized masses – it gradually created a reality of people entirely dependent on instructions and favors, or fearing retribution, from above. Millions of Czechoslovaks turned into rather passive recipients or plain cynical observers, a position that contradicted the official propaganda of enthusiastic masses, but suited the often paranoid communist government.

One of the best portrayals of the publicly cheerful and privately passive and disillusioned socialist citizens appeared in the film *White Lady* – a satirical comedy made in 1965, during a brief period of liberal reform period, which in 1968 ended with an invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact armies. In the film, citizens of a small town gather to celebrate the grand opening of a new bridge. The only problem is that the bridge does not exist yet. This fact does not deter the masses of officially dressed people from listening to the mayor's speech about the (nonexistent) bridge, and then walking in an organized and ostensibly cheerful way into the river, pretending to march across the new bridge. While the fireworks explode in the background and the brass band plays the fanfare, people enthusiastically waive their banners and shout: "Long Live the New Bridge!" At one point, people, who cannot walk in the river anymore, start swimming, holding the banners and flowers with one hand or in their teeth. "But there is no bridge here!" whispers one man to his wife. "Just shut up and keep swimming," replies his wife, who is obviously aware of the noticeable lack of the bridge, but prefers to avoid the trouble that she and her husband would face by merely stating the truth. Instead, she passively repeats doing what everybody else is doing, even though such behavior is completely irrational.

Although the film is an obvious parody of mass conformity of Czechoslovak citizens, it illustrates powerfully an important aspect of public life under a totalitarian regime: the mass adjustment to imposed forms of public collective behavior. Both totalitarian and non-totalitarian

public spaces rely on certain formal norms of interaction; in fact, many theorists argue that without imposed rules and conventions, public order would not survive.³ The totalitarian regime, however, replaces the democratic public interaction, which can vary in size, occur irregularly, and include spontaneous impulses, with regularly staged mass public activities. The only way for mass interaction to take place in a totalitarian state is through an organized and government-controlled activity – the participating citizens have no real input in such public discourse despite their truly massive presence at these events. It is telling that the wife's phrase from *White Lady* became a well-known saying among Czechoslovaks, who in public never had to swim in a river during a bogus parade on a nonexistent bridge, but who nevertheless conformed to the official representations of organized mass mentality.

In this chapter, I focus on the role of the organized masses in the public space of a socialist state. I begin with a discussion of the ideology of organized collective identity as depicted in theoretical definitions and official portrayals of the masses. I then examine the reality of public collective life as embodied by the so-called “socialist collectives” that I consider the basic unit and real life representation of the concept of socialist masses. Finally, I analyze the conflict of the official ideology of masses with the reality of public mass events. I look at the ways in which the official symbolism was confronted by its unofficial mockery from below, and assess how effective that mockery was in encouraging public civic resistance to the regime. I argue that contrary to expectations, these acts of private resistance reinforced rather than undermined the existing regime. Instead of focusing on challenging the regime through public confrontation, most Czechoslovak citizens settled for what Slavoj Žižek calls ‘false exits’⁴ –

³ See, for example, Richard Sennett, *The Fall of the Public Man* (New York: Norton, 1976).

⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso, 2002).

cynical private rebellions, which rather than challenging the system became one of its routine parts, just like the officially staged mass performances.

Official propaganda presented the masses as a single, homogeneous body, undivided by class or political struggle. The organized masses had a unique position in the terminology, ideology, and reality of the communist state. While I will show that the terminology often presented conflicting, even contradictory, definitions of the socialist masses, the ideology stood firm in its emphasis on the masses playing a key role in socialist society. Furthermore, even if the terminology stumbled at times and the ideology often remained too broad in its claims, the orchestrated public life of the masses, exemplified by the socialist work collectives and the yearly mass rituals, provided concrete representations of the public collective identity at its best.

Socialist work collectives and public mass ceremonies, such as parades, national and/or communist holidays and other official celebrations, represented the favorite occasions for putting the ideological representations of organized mass mentality in practice. The outside world, but especially the masses of Czechoslovak citizens themselves were to see that individuality was an insignificant and undesirable quality. The official images of socialist work collectives therefore symbolized the productivity, strength and health of the undivided communist society. The absolute supremacy of the collective needs over the individual ones was indisputably confirmed when the communist ideologists declared the needs of the society and its people identical: “Socialism is based on fundamental and increasingly stronger unity of interests of all citizens and society.”⁵

The masses marching in front of their proud leaders were supposed to demonstrate the unanimous support of the people for the totalitarian regime. Consequently, parades and other

⁵ Frantisek Koranda, “Cesta ke svobode a osobnimu rozvoji” (“The Road to Freedom and Personal Development”), *Rude Pravo*, November 10, 1978, 4.

official rituals had important ceremonial and symbolic meanings for the regime: they reinforced the patterns of the existing social order and emphasized the permanence of the ideology behind it. Judged from the publicly exhibited perspective of the mass ceremonies, the nation was comprised of collectives with nearly identical needs and reactions. An ideal society that arose from such public collective identity was characterized not simply by egalitarianism, but by the exchangeability of its standardized members. As Party centralism replaced democratic plurality, uniformity superseded equality, and centrally imposed monologue silenced any signs of the public dialogue.

2.1 Defining the Socialist Masses

Although communist ideology defined the role of the masses as pivotal to building the new era, defining the masses as such proved to be rather tricky. Meanings of the Czech word ‘masses’ included, among other interpretations, ‘people,’ ‘working people combined with *the others*’ (artists and intelligentsia) or most commonly just ‘working people.’ Many official definitions offered confusing combinations of several of these meanings, thus rendering a precise understanding of the socialist concept of the masses difficult. I perceive such ambiguity as a combination of linguistic inconsistency and, in some cases, a deliberate move on the side of the communist theorists, who might have tried in this way to gain more space for adjusting or rephrasing the concept(s) of the masses according to their momentary need.

In his analysis of the key terms of communist propaganda,⁶ Petr Fidelius argues that the terms ‘people,’ ‘people’s masses,’ and ‘masses’ were in fact interchangeable in the language of communist ideology. I extend his observation to claim that all of these terms, however apparently interchangeable, imply controlled and organized people/people’s masses/masses, and

⁶ Petr Fidelius, *Jazyk a moc (Language and Power)* (Munich: Edition Arkyr, 1983).

thus eliminate any connection with uncontrollable mob mentality. Whereas in the theories of capitalist mobs that I have discussed in the introductory chapter, mobs typically attempt to revolt against the current social order, the socialist masses stand united in their support for the communist rule.

In official texts, the presence of the supervised/organized masses guarantees the established order and protection of the country: “The most significant defenders of our republic ... (are) the people’s masses.”⁷ Furthermore, the socialist masses actively *fight* against any reactionary forces or disorder: “People’s masses are determined and strong enough to prevent the return of foreign or domestic reactionaries.”⁸ The masses thus not only guarantee social order, but also literally eliminate any harmful elements that might disturb such order – they “clean up the republic from all saboteurs, traitors and unreliable elements.”⁹

The masses struggle against the alien forces in the socialist society; therefore, their “anger is just.”¹⁰ Yet their fight for a “clean republic...happens in a disciplined and peaceful way: ‘the world has never seen such an orderly revolution’ remarked a foreigner from the West.”¹¹ The socialist masses never loot or purposefully destroy public property: “The visiting foreigner noted that he only saw two cases of broken shop windows during the last six hectic days¹² and those were the result of people momentarily squashed (rather than of a deliberate destructive attempt). And that is two broken shop windows in streets filled with the masses

⁷ Transcript of a speech given by the Chair of the Czechoslovak National Assembly J. Smrkovsky, *Rude Pravo*, October 1, 1968, 4.

⁸ *Rude Pravo*, February 22, 1948, 1.

⁹ *Rude Pravo*, February 26, 1948, 1.

¹⁰ *Rude Pravo*, February 25, 1948, 1.

¹¹ *Rude Pravo*, February 29, 1948, 1.

¹² The events discussed in this article are a part of the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia in 1948. *Rude Pravo*, February 29, 1948, 1.

comprising hundreds of thousands!”¹³ Clearly, even the smallest hint associating the socialist masses with unorganized ‘crowds’ or a ‘mob’ pushing forward with a considerable destructive force would present a problem for the communist ideology. As James C. Scott points out, terms like ‘mob’ are highly charged, implying almost automatically an implicit threat,¹⁴ because they include a potential of autonomous activity. Dominant elites, Scott argues, always present social action as precluding the possibility of independent social action by subordinates: “Inferiors who actually assemble at their own initiative are typically described as mobs or rabble.”¹⁵ The socialist masses are therefore always defined as active and revolutionary yet also organized, well-behaved, and supervised by the Communist Party. Such definition automatically excludes any connection with threatening, disobedient, and above all autonomous, ‘mobs.’

As we follow the rhetoric of the communist propaganda that portrays the masses as fighting against “reactionary scum that used to only loot and prey (on our country),”¹⁶ we find that the ‘reactionary scum’ includes especially the bourgeois industrialists, bankers, noblemen and other powerful individuals from the First Republic. These people, despite their often high level of education and social involvement, are typically portrayed as pompous and scornful traitors and conspirators, who, as communist ideologist Vilem Novy pointed out, “treated (the masses) as cattle, not realizing that our people are politically experienced and mature.”¹⁷ In the eyes of ideologists, the socialist masses represent stability, in contrast to the bourgeois elites of the country, who represent a throwback to an era of mass inequality. Through their mature and constructive attitude, the masses guarantee a healthy development of society.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 63.

¹⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹⁶ *Rude Pravo*, January 18, 1948, 1.

¹⁷ *Rude Pravo*, February 29, 1948, 1.

In many fundamental aspects, the communist definitions of the masses and their enemies reverse the traditional theories of crowds/mobs. Whereas the latter (e.g., in the works of Le Bon or Ortega y Gasset) define the unruly mobs by their urge to destroy the established order, the former emphasize the masses' role in supporting and actively protecting such order. The socialist masses "give all their strength into the services of (socialist) Czechoslovakia."¹⁸ Through their daily work, they prevent chaos and anarchy. While the traditional theories portray the mobs as irrational, uncivilized, gullible and instinctive, the communist theories present the masses as organized, well-informed and politically engaged. These qualities enable the masses to eliminate the corrupt power of the seemingly aggressive and greedy bourgeois imperialists, who are closer in their communist definitions to the rabble-rousing mobs of the traditional theories. The capitalist mobs and the communist-portrayed imperialists struggle with their inner divisions and thus always remain on the social periphery with other incompatible asocial minorities. The communist masses, on the contrary, stand united in their role as the ultimate stabilizing element in socialist society.

The acknowledged existence of the remains of asocial, destructive minorities in a socialist society enables the communist propaganda to give the membership within the socialist masses an exclusive status. In theory, the masses are all-encompassing, but in practice, only those, who deserve their place among the socialist citizens, are welcome. "The people's masses include all those, who ... not only support, but also actively participate in building of, advanced socialist society. Small groups of bourgeoisie that did not reconcile themselves to their new

¹⁸ *Rude Pravo*, January 1, 1948, 3.

position in society, various asocial elements, and of course all those working against the people's masses, are excluded.”¹⁹

Fidelius contrasts a general, or what he calls global, meaning of the word people, i.e., *all* citizens of a given state or other unit, with a restrictive meaning of the term, which includes only *some* people. He claims that the official definition of socialist people/masses was restrictive in that it included or excluded social classes or groups according to the momentary appraisal of their worthiness by the Communist Party: “Whether one is a valid member of people's masses is decided by the Communist Party according to its judgment as to the current level of ‘progressiveness’ of that or other social class, group, or individual.”²⁰ Furthermore, Party guidance not only defines the masses but also enables them to reach their full potential: thanks to the Party, the masses are alerted to “their momentous role in history,”²¹ and it is only under the Party's leadership that the masses can perform with “a minimum of mistakes and losses.”²²

Inevitably, defining the masses is tied to the question of power, or more specifically the power they hold in society. Many texts presented the masses as the ultimate bearers of power in the socialist society. “The (Czechoslovak) republic belongs and will belong to the people's masses” announced Gustav Bares in a communist daily *Rudé Právo*.²³ Fidelius cites the communist president Klement Gottwald declaring that the will of the masses “will be the law in this country.”²⁴ Similarly, Czechoslovak constitutions repeatedly emphasized that the masses were “the only source of all power in this state” (1948 Constitution) or that “all power belongs to

¹⁹Ladislav Hrzal, “Uloha lidu v nasi spolecnosti” (“The Role of the People in Our Society”), *Rude Pravo*, February 10, 1978, 4, cited in Petr Fidelius, *Jazyk a moc (Language and Power)* (Munich: Edition Arkyr, 1983), 46.

²⁰ Petr Fidelius, *Jazyk a moc (Language and Power)*, 48.

²¹ Ladislav Hrzal, “Uloha lidu v nasi spolecnosti” (“The Role of the People in Our Society”), *Rude Pravo*, February 10, 1978, 4, cited in Petr Fidelius, *Jazyk a moc (Language and Power)* (Munich: Edition Arkyr, 1983), 37.

²² Ibid.

²³ Gustav Bares, “Na prahu jubilejního roku 1948” (“At the Threshold of the Jubilee Year 1948”) *Rude Pravo*, January 1, 1948, 3.

²⁴ Petr Fidelius, *Jazyk a moc (Language and Power)*, 31.

the working people” (1960 Constitution).²⁵ These documents described the will of the masses as unanimous; aware of their historic role in society, the responsible masses always reached the Party-outlined conclusions.

The socialist masses therefore apparently do not need the traditional decision-making mechanisms of the Western democracies. The ‘will of the people’ in capitalist states is more unpredictable – it can and does change contrary to the governmental expectations. The will of the masses in a totalitarian regime is always predictable, because it follows precisely the lead of the Party and the Party-controlled government.

The masses’ power, as described by official ideology, enables them to act as a single body capable of isolating the dangerous elements/people from the healthy rest, “relegating the villains to the social periphery,” or even expelling them forever to the “dumping ground of history.”²⁶ Interestingly, what these depictions suggest is that the masses represent a “threatening force operating *outside* the state legal institutions,” as Fidelius points out.²⁷ It is obvious that this apparent ability of the masses to separate the good social elements from the evil ones, albeit in a clearly unlawful manner, was celebrated by the communists.

Even though the masses have the capability to break up the bad from the good, they remain in need of constant supervision. They cannot set and pursue their goals by themselves. Portrayed as a strong body without a head, the masses represented sheer energy, a material ‘mass’ incapable of making decisions on its own. In the official rhetoric, the masses can “carry mountains,”²⁸ or fill the streets as “lakes constantly refilled with fresh streams,”²⁹ but this

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Both quotes in Petr Fidelius, *Jazyk a moc (Language and Power)*, 32-3.

²⁷ Ibid., 33, emphasis original.

²⁸ Fidelius points out that this phrase was very popular in the official propaganda materials. See Petr Fidelius, *Jazyk a moc (Language and Power)*.

²⁹ *Rude Pravo*, February 25, 1948, 1.

powerful element needs a specific direction that can be only provided by the Party. As communist theorist Frantisek Havlicek described it: “To lead the masses means *giving* them a goal that corresponds to their needs. ... To give them the right goal means to provide (them) with the knowledge of what they should fight for in that particular time.”³⁰

If the socialist masses are powerful yet cannot operate on their own, then the leading role of the Communist Party in Czechoslovak society is logical and justified. “The people’s masses need political leadership in order to consciously create history,” asserted Ladislav Hrzal in his essay on the role of the masses in society.³¹ What is interesting about this formulation is not only the depiction of the masses as creators of history who are nevertheless helpless without the assistance of the Party, but also the use of the word ‘consciously’ – the statement suggests that there might also be an unconscious way to make history. Hrzal further argued that “the activity of the people’s masses does not become conscious automatically ... leadership of the Party is the fundamental condition for the most effective supervision of the masses’ performance.”³² It follows that the masses act consciously and productively *only* under the political leadership of the Party. If not directed by the Party, Fidelius points out, the masses lose their awareness of their role in history, and they become just a “simple impetus of a process, whose meaning escapes them;”³³ in short, they lose their historical consciousness.

Nevertheless, this potential threat of the masses slipping into an unconscious and possibly hazardous motion, which can be dangerous for the society and even the masses themselves, was never associated with mob-like unconscious urges and uncivilized behavior. As I explained,

³⁰ Frantisek Havlicek, *O vedouci uloze Strany (About the Leading Role of the Party)* (Prague: Svoboda, 1974), 9, cited in Petr Fidelius, *Jazyk a moc (Language and Power)*, 40, emphasis mine.

³¹ Ladislav Hrzal, “Uloha lidu v nasi spolecnosti” (“The Role of the People in Our Society”) *Rude Pravo*, February 10, 1978, 4, cited in Petr Fidelius, *Jazyk a moc (Language and Power)* (Munich: Edition Arkyr, 1983), 37.

³² Ibid.

³³ Petr Fidelius, *Jazyk a moc (Language and Power)*, 39.

communist ideology always made a clear distinction between the orderly and homogenous socialist masses and the forever wild mobs, which were under all conditions uncontrollable and thus without any progressive historical potential.

The nature of the relationship between the Communist Party and the masses was sometimes twofold: the Party presented itself as an integral part of the masses, but also as a force necessary to define their direction. Yet these two definitions need not be regarded as contradictory. The reason the Party understood the masses better than anyone else was precisely the inner connectedness between the two – the Party remained inextricably tied to the masses because it originated in them. The communist leaders always proudly declared their humble, working class beginnings, which represented their closest possible relationship with the socialist masses. Because of this inseparable link, the Party could foresee the needs and wishes of the masses, but it was also able to transform the masses from the position of a material ‘mass’ to a status of an active maker of history. This miraculous transformation was possible because “the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia ... unlike the bourgeois ideologists ... approaches the people’s masses from the scientific perspective of Marxism-Leninism.”³⁴ As Fidelius rightly argues, the emphasis on the scientific position of the Party guaranteed objectivity, and thus practically gave the official ideologists an exclusive competency in all matters related to the masses.³⁵ It also made the Party look almost apolitical – since its methods were determined by science, they apparently could not be manipulated by political or ideological interests.

James C. Scott³⁶ uses the term “marginalization of resistance in the name of science” when discussing various methods of suppressing public resistance to domination. His term

³⁴ Ladislav Hrzal, “Uloha lidu v nasi spolecnosti” (“The Role of the People in Our Society”) *Rude Pravo*, February 10, 1978, 4, cited in Petr Fidelius, *Jazyk a moc (Language and Power)* (Munich: Edition Arkyr, 1983), 35.

³⁵ Petr Fidelius, *Jazyk a moc (Language and Power)*, 36.

³⁶ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 55.

describes well the deceptive ‘scientific’ attitude of the Party towards the masses. The Party’s fully ideologically justified ‘objective’ view precluded the possibility and validity of any independent subjective (and potentially dissenting) voices from individual citizens. The individual did not mean anything unless s/he was a part of the masses that in turn could not function properly unless they were led by the Communist Party.

With the masses’ lifelong dependency on Party directions firmly established in official rhetoric, the regime focused on maintaining the stability of its ideology. First, it aimed to emphasize the ideological position of the masses in society through their official visual representations. Second, it started promoting the real life representations of the organized masses – the socialist collectives. Finally, it staged massive public ceremonies in order to exhibit a firm and everlasting connection between the Party and the masses, and to reinforce the permanence of the existing order.

2.2 Visual Representations of the Masses – ‘United We Stand’

In the official representations,³⁷ the Czechoslovak masses typically walk in a compact, well-structured group, often in some sort of a parade. They almost always wave optimistically, either with work tools and flags (men) or scarves and flowers (women and children). The dress code is purposefully very simple – the goal is to bring the masses visually as close as possible to the most privileged part of the communist society: the working class. Consequently, the deeply ideologically-laden representations from the 1950s, such as communist propaganda posters,

³⁷ It is important to stress that publishing caricatures under communism had a very different social meaning than in democratic regimes. Caricatures printed in communist-controlled newspapers and magazines, just like any other materials, were censored. Consequently, only certain types of caricatures that corresponded to the official ideology were allowed. These included either harmless parodies of some minor contemporary problems (big and serious problems could not be exposed to criticism) or ideologically-fuelled caricatures of the evil West always plotting against the peaceful socialist bloc. For examples of such caricatures, see Jiri Pernes, *Dejiny Československa očima Dikobrazu: 1945 – 1990 (The History of Czechoslovakia through the Eyes of Dikobraz: 1945 – 1990)* (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2003).

present people in overalls, wearing hard hats, welders' masks, boots or other typical work clothing and instruments. The social position of men and women was primarily determined by their contribution to society as workers and politically involved citizens. In the case of women, the official materials also emphasized their social role as mothers. Fashion as a symbol of a consumer capitalist society obviously had no place in a communist environment. Theater plays, films and literature also highlighted the need to break away from the 'bourgeois' conventions, which they replaced with new socialist standards: "a hat, tie or suit became characteristic of a typical baddy, or at least a wavering person, still connected to the 'old world' and its 'false norms' ... the 'new person' on the other hand, was always portrayed wearing a cap and an open shirt which suggested his connection to the world of work and working classes as well as his humbleness and honesty."³⁸

Later depictions from the 1960-70s, for example photographs from official parades and demonstrations, portrayed the masses in more regular clothing, but the theme of highlighting modesty was still apparent. Modesty – as signified by people's appearance – did not suggest poverty but rather lack of interest in unimportant thrills. Extravagance and luxury remained unacceptable because they symbolized the corrupt and backward bourgeois culture.

People in the images of the masses are the youthful, slim, and attractive inhabitants of the new communist era. Contrasted with their radiant smiling faces are the plump, old, bald, ugly and expensively clad imperialists, crouching with a malicious grimace on their faces.³⁹

Typically, the imperialists – people from the Czechoslovak capitalist past or from the West – remain divided and isolated, and whether they oppress or are oppressed, their existence is one of

³⁸ Vladimír Macura, *Stastný Vek. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)* (Prague: Prague Imagination, 1992), 86.

³⁹ See examples of officially approved caricatures of imperialists in Jiri Pernes, *Dejiny Československa ocima Dikobrazu: 1945 – 1990 (The History of Czechoslovakia through the Eyes of Dikobraz: 1945 – 1990)* (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2003).

stagnation and decay. A caricature of the enemies of the nationalization of Czechoslovak industry and banks in 1945, published in a communist-controlled satirical weekly *Dikobraz*, depicts a characteristic group of corrupt individuals: a fat bald landowner, a snobbish-looking aristocrat in a tailcoat,⁴⁰ and a fat entrepreneur. They all look irritated and frustrated, very much unlike the happy worker standing next to them and listening to their complaints with a knowing smile.⁴¹ In a similar caricature from 1946, non-communist and non-working class members of the former Czechoslovak government are portrayed as an orchestra out of tune, where each instrument plays its own song disrupting the work of the others.⁴²

The masses, on the contrary, are always united in their efforts. They move and even look in one direction, walking in parades⁴³ or towards election stands.⁴⁴ Their faces are often literally turned one way, as in a propaganda painting called “The Peace Front” where just the united glaring of the masses scares away a NATO plane.⁴⁵ In a typical socialist-realism-style painting “May 1st” from 1956,⁴⁶ the masses walk in a May Day parade, covered in flowers. Almost all hands are up, again in one direction, holding Soviet and Czechoslovak flags, carrying banners, waving, or holding waving children. All children are wearing pioneers’ uniforms and everybody is smiling radiantly. The smiles are also the only clearly visible features in everybody’s faces, which otherwise intentionally blur in the homogenous masses of walking people. The masses in

⁴⁰ Reflecting the communist xenophobic attitudes towards Jews, the figure of the aristocrat also displays recognizable and purposefully exaggerated Jewish features.

⁴¹ Caricature reprinted in Jiri Pernes, *Dejiny Československa ocima Dikobrazu: 1945 – 1990 (The History of Czechoslovakia through the Eyes of Dikobraz: 1945 – 1990)* (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2003), 31.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴³ See, for example, depictions of the unanimous masses walking in parades in Jiri Pernes, *Dejiny Československa ocima Dikobrazu: 1945 – 1990 (The History of Czechoslovakia through the Eyes of Dikobraz: 1945 – 1990)* (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2003), 62, 91, 111.

⁴⁴ Jiri Pernes, *Dejiny Československa ocima Dikobrazu: 1945 – 1990 (The History of Czechoslovakia through the Eyes of Dikobraz: 1945 – 1990)*, 50.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴⁶ Painting reprinted in Tereza Petiskova, ed., *Československý Socialistický Realismus: 1948 – 1958 (Czechoslovak Socialist Realism: 1948 – 1958)* (Prague: Gallery, 2002), 72.

the painting appear to be moving according to some inner rhythm, there is no sign of chaos typical of an unruly mob. Despite the size of the parade, everybody seems to know their exact place and function.

One of the most evocative official representations of the united socialist masses was Prague's infamous 30 meter (100 feet) high Stalin monument, built between 1949 and 1955 and quietly destroyed in 1962 when the cult of Stalin was officially abandoned in Czechoslovakia. The monument featured a huge marble plateau with a statue of the Soviet dictator, portrayed leading the way forward, followed by a group of archetypal socialist characters including male and female industrial and agricultural workers. At the back of the group stood 2 soldiers, who, unlike the rest of the group, looked backwards, i.e., in the opposite direction than Stalin, but obviously only for the sake of protection.

Sarcastically dubbed 'The Bread Line', the monument, at that time the largest group statue in Europe, unmistakably emphasized the sheer size and unity of the masses behind Stalin. He is not presented with just one male worker and one female farmer, as embodiments of socialist industry and agriculture. To symbolize the vastness of the masses' support for Stalin with just two figures would not be enough; consequently, there are 4 men and 2 women (in addition to 2 soldiers in the back), standing behind him, shoulder to shoulder with resolute expressions on their faces. The message of the monument is that the nation's men and women, the old and the young, in fact *everybody* stands united behind Stalin.

Many authors of the most famous propaganda works claimed that they were inspired by their genuine experiences among the enthusiastic socialist masses. For example, a famous Czechoslovak painter Adolf Zabransky wrote in the 1980s that when creating his posters for the May 1st Parades, he was "simply reflecting on his observations in the previous parades ... and

transforming them into monumental representations.”⁴⁷ At the same time, however, he also stressed that “a May 1st poster has to *awaken* the feeling of collective joy; it has to radiate enthusiasm and a fighting spirit.”⁴⁸ If there was a need to awaken the collective feeling among the masses, then the idea of homogeneous mass unity did not exactly come through for most Czechoslovak citizens. The necessity to constantly (re)create the feelings of collective togetherness therefore called for more intense propaganda work, but also for more specific evidence of the positive effects of organized collectivity.

2.3 Socialist Collectives as the Real Life Masses

The only way we can compensate for the loss of a leading spirit of comrade Gottwald is through collective life. The strength of our leadership lies in its collective quality, and in our unification and uniformity.⁴⁹

The transformation of society inevitably involved active rigorous work, but the masses in the definitions and visual depictions remained essentially a passive theoretical concept detached from real life. This conflicted with their ideologically outlined active political and social role. In order to better connect the ideological representations with reality, the communist planners supplemented the theoretical concept of the masses with concrete representations of the masses – the socialist collectives. While the masses remained the key players in theory, the collectives functioned as their real life embodiments, tangible proof that collective identity not only exists

⁴⁷ Cited in Herbert Brynda, “May 1st in Bohemia: A Conflict or Idyll?” Czech Public Radio, June 15, 2004.

⁴⁸ Ibid., emphasis mine.

⁴⁹ Deputy Chairman of Czechoslovak government Jaromir Dolansky on the death of the first communist president Klement Gottwald in 1953. Cited in Jiri Pernes, *Dejiny Ceskoslovenska ocima Dikobrazu: 1945 – 1990 (The History of Czechoslovakia through the Eyes of Dikobraz: 1945 – 1990)*, 85.

but also works better than all alternative forms of social units. The collectives varied in size from a few people to nation-wide, yet regardless of their size, they still displayed many desirable qualities of the theoretically-defined masses, such as homogeneity and need for constant control. The concept of collective way of life, exemplified by the socialist collectives, underlay almost everything in Czechoslovakia, from ownership to decision making to organization of agricultural work, art, free time or raising children.

The socialist collective is the basic unit of the socialist masses. It is the real life representation of a theoretical concept of an internally and externally controlled group of people, not necessarily related by birth, friendship or any kind of regional or social ties. People in the socialist collective are related by shared work or externally organized public activity. The socialist collective is imposed from above, defined by the ideology of the Communist Party; consequently, it is by no means synonymous with a civic community, which is typically built more or less spontaneously from below. Collective life takes place within the socialist public space, with the intention, supported by substantial efforts of the communist planners, to eventually extend the effects of collective mentality to as many aspects of people's private lives as possible. To encourage this planned invasion of people's private spaces, public campaigns, articles in newspapers or posters on the walls of workplaces called on the members of the work collectives to "attend cultural events collectively, be interested in the family lives of the other members of the collective, and help each other square up to 'bourgeois moral anachronisms,' such as individualism or preferring one's interests to the public good."⁵⁰

The most ideologically developed forms of socialist collectives, the so-called 'Brigades of Socialist Work' were established in almost every work place, with their members publicly

⁵⁰ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 25.

committing themselves to “not only work but also live in a socialist way.”⁵¹ In order to receive the title ‘Brigade of Socialist Work,’ collectives had to compete with one another. The nationwide campaign for the ‘Brigades’ started in 1959, and within just the first three years, there were 71, 000 collectives competing for the title and 8, 538 collectives already awarded. By 1963, the number of competing collectives grew to 89, 000, with 31, 000 already awarded ‘Brigades.’⁵²

In his discussion of life in communist Czechoslovakia,⁵³ Ladislav Holy points out a crucial quality of the socialist collectives: people in them were socialized *formally*.⁵⁴ For example, as Vladimir Macura argues in his analysis of socialist norms of etiquette, new rules about collective voting specified when and how the members of a work collective should meet, and emphasized that during the voting “they should always attune their individual interest with those of the collective.”⁵⁵ Any kind of spontaneous activity *outside* the official framework was unwelcome and dangerous: “The threat of punishment for an unwarranted and unauthorized interference into politics, i.e., administration of public matters, was always there, and everybody knew about it.”⁵⁶

A proper socialist collective followed strict guidelines determining its public activities. During regular meetings, members of collectives addressed each other in prescribed ways, i.e., as comrades, and filed reports that used the proper socialist phrases testifying to their dedication to collective interests. Once the meeting or other collective public activity was over, the mask of the collective coherence fell apart: people would rush to their homes, ignoring or even denying

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*

⁵⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁵ Vladimir Macura, *Stastny Vek. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 - 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)* (Prague: Prague Imagination, 1992), 89.

⁵⁶ Jiri Vancura, “Obcan a totalitni stat” (“A Citizen and a Totalitarian State”), *Proc jsme v listopadu vysli do ulic (Why We Went Out into the Streets in November)*, ed. Jiri Vancura (Brno: Doplněk Publishing, 1999), 85-86.

any ties they might have with the other members of the collective. The greater the enforcement of collective life, the more detached people felt from it. According to Ladislav Holy, only very few people made friends with their work collective colleagues; most reduced their social interactions to their family members and relatives, or to friends from circles unrelated to their work. Holy cites a study of a large factory in Czechoslovak town of Pardubice, where only 8.35% of employees maintained some relationship with their work colleagues, while 24.33% preferred their relatives, 15.58% work-unrelated friends, and 13.64% claimed to have no regular social contacts at all.⁵⁷

The enforced collectivity in the public space also alienated many people from the idea of individual involvement in the civic community, especially through volunteer work. Communal activities, such as the organized weekend building of children's sports facilities, parks and playgrounds, or cleaning of public spaces by the work collectives, were officially presented as voluntary, but actually required by the local Party units or labor unions. The initiative for these events always came from above, not from the citizens themselves.

Although this detached and passive attitude contradicted the official ideology, one advantage for the regime that this situation offered was that people's total apathy towards communal and political matters prolonged their lack of desire to challenge the oppressive system. As a study of public opinion carried by the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in 1968 showed, people had much greater interest in individual well-being than re-organization of the political life in the country:

⁵⁷ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*, 27.

While economic development and improvement of quality of living represented the top priority for the majority of correspondents, democratization of the political system ended up seventh on the list of preferences.⁵⁸

Similarly, a public poll from 1988 – just one year before the collapse of the communist regime – revealed a small interest of citizens in communal matters, and their low opinion of local administrative units: only 2% of respondents felt that they had a significant influence on communal decisions, 42% stated that they had no impact whatsoever. Another study among young people in May 1988 reported an extremely low interest in politics as such.⁵⁹

Separation of the public/collective sphere from the private/non-collective sphere reached unprecedented levels especially during the so-called normalization period after the crushing of the Prague Spring in August 1968. Public and private spheres are separated to various degrees in other, non-totalitarian, societies too. However, what distinguishes the Czechoslovak case from a public/private divide in a western-style democracy is the degree to which the totalitarian divide transformed people's norms of public and private behavior and their attitude towards public and personal property.⁶⁰ "Proper behavior under communism did not begin at home: it stopped there," noted Ladislav Holy. As he puts it:

⁵⁸ Ibid., 32. It is also important to stress that this research completed in 1968, i.e., the year during which attempts at a general transformation of Czechoslovak society culminated, and many of previously suppressed freedoms (e.g., free public speech) were reinstated, if only temporarily. The invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968 crushed all of these promising developments to pieces. 1968 was the only year in which such research could have been carried out, and the only year in which there was a substantial chance for a greater number of people who would be optimistic about restructuring of Czechoslovak politics. Yet, the results still showed that there were many other issues that were clearly more important for the majority of the country's citizens.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁶⁰ After the communist takeover in 1948, private property was eradicated in socialist Czechoslovakia; only the categories of personal and national property remained. I discuss the consequences of this national restructuring of property in the next chapter.

Norms of helping the other person in need or of politeness were not applied in the public sphere even in the cases when the care of the others was a part of one's job. ... Smiles were reserved only for communication with friends; salespeople, waiters, postal and bank officers, gas station workers and everybody else greeted their customers with icy expressions in their faces. The verbal communication was reduced to an absolute minimum, with answers to questions quick and brief.⁶¹

Any kind of collectively learned and shared responsibility for the other 'comrades,' for common welfare and one's country was an ideological fiction. The ideology of collective life produced subjects profoundly detached from genuine involvement in the public sphere, and constantly alternating between their public and private faces and attitudes. In officially organized public activities, such as work meetings, parades, or state celebrations, people followed the prescribed collective scenarios, thus exhibiting their "positive relationship to the People's democratic establishment"⁶² in the country. In private, they swallowed their disappointment and despair, and focused on the only thing that successfully escaped the collective pressure – their family life. Milan Simecka described these two worlds as "an artificial world of politics, and the real world of small histories of people, sealed off (from the political world) by a fence of one's yard."⁶³

People's attitudes towards public and personal property reproduced the same logic of strict separation between the home and the outside world. From the official point of view,

⁶¹ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*, 29.

⁶² A "positive relationship to the People's democratic establishment" was something that the Czechoslovak government required from its subjects; there was no alternative to it, such as a neutral or even negative attitude. See Jiri Vancura, "Obcan a totalitni stat" ("A Citizen and a Totalitarian State"), *Proc jsme v listopadu vysli do ulic (Why We Went Out into the Streets in November)*, ed. Jiri Vancura (Brno: Doplněk Publishing, 1999), 77.

⁶³ Milan Simecka, *Konec nehybnosti (The End of Stillness)* (Prague: Lidové Noviny Publishing, 1990), 105.

“stealing public property constituted a more serious crime than stealing personal belongings, as it indicated disrespect of collective morals.”⁶⁴ Yet from the perspective of the ‘common-sense’ morals, pilfering of state property was understandable and more or less justified by the fact that “it was often the only way for people ... to get access to materials, tools, and goods in extremely short supply ... and to supplement a regular income that the majority of people considered insufficient.”⁶⁵ According to a 1988 report of Czechoslovak government published in a daily *Práce* (the title translates as: *Work*), at least one quarter of all material used for building private family houses came from ‘unidentified sources,’ meaning they were stolen from state supplies. Similarly, the data from the 1970s estimated the losses from stolen goods in hundreds of millions of Czechoslovak Crowns each year. Yet very few of these crimes were fully investigated or even reported thanks to “the silent support that this type of criminal activity received”⁶⁶ from ordinary Czechoslovak citizens.

At the same time, the ideology of collective mentality infiltrated the public sphere and its political jargon to such an extent that even the most progressive political reformers in the 1960s found themselves unable to carry on outside of it. Having witnessed the results of this ideology, such as massive political manipulation and persecution, and having lived through the times of enormous scarcities caused by collectivization, the majority of these leading intellectuals and reform politicians still upheld many of the ideals imposed on them by formal socialization.

A case in point is the most famous representative of the Prague Spring, Alexander Dubcek, who in 1968 held the position of the first secretary of the Central Committee of the

⁶⁴ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*, 29.

⁶⁵ Ibid. According to a 1969 public poll cited by Holy, Czechoslovak people considered 3,153 Czechoslovak Crowns to be an adequate income for a family with two school-age children. However, only 2 % of all families in Czechoslovakia reached that income.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 30.

Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.⁶⁷ During one of his visits among the industrial workers, Dubcek declared: “We have taught people to think in a communist way, now let’s put their collective wisdom into action.”⁶⁸ At first glance, this proclamation looks like a typical product of the 1950s hard-core communist propaganda. Yet it appeared in newspapers in 1968, during the most radical attempts at transformation of Czechoslovak society,⁶⁹ and the person who voiced it was widely regarded as a leading reformist in the country. The fact that Dubcek used the same rhetoric as his Party adversaries, and that he used such rhetoric when it was not necessary,⁷⁰ is significant for understanding the full impact of the ideology of collective mentality on people’s public communication. After 20 years of ideological oppression, the leader of the reformist wing of the Communist Party still felt the need to address the people of his country as a unified, homogeneous socialist collective. Looking for a new way to rebuild society, Dubcek apparently could not find other means of expressing his efforts than with the phrases that everybody, including himself, had grown used to. It is hard to determine whether Dubcek used these words unaware of their previous ideological connotations (which would be almost impossible), or out of habit or calculation. But his dependence on such terminology testifies to the fact that even the short-lived reform ideology of ‘Socialism with a Human Face’⁷¹ continued to rely on the previous models of a collective as the basic unit of *their* vision of a new socialist society.

⁶⁷ One of the highest posts in communist hierarchy.

⁶⁸ *Rude Pravo*, January 13, 1968, 1.

⁶⁹ Period called the Prague Spring.

⁷⁰ During the first and last time when censorship and other forms of communist control of public life briefly halted.

⁷¹ The concept of ‘Socialism with a Human Face’ was advocated by the reformers within the Communist Party who did not want to depart from the socialist ideals altogether but demanded a real, not just declared, application of democratic principles within Czechoslovak society. After the invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies in Czechoslovakia in 1968, almost all of the reformist communists were expelled from the Communist Party, many of them imprisoned and/or persecuted.

The extent to which the official collective rhetoric was embedded in people's public communication precluded any possibility for criticizing or reforming the dominant political discourse. Even those, who, like Dubcek, tried challenging the old system ended up caught in it: their proclamations were almost indistinguishable from those made by the Party conservatives. In fact, anti-reform hardliners often adopted 'reformist-style' progressively sounding phrases in their attempt to maneuver in the uncertain terrain of the Prague Spring. Yet, these phrases inevitably reverted to the old phraseology, as the following excerpt from a speech by Oldrich Svestka illustrates:

The point (of life in socialism) is not that everybody intervenes in everything and everything is indefinitely discussed in a bogus 'collective decision-making.' We want an effective and pragmatic democracy that does not disperse our means and strength, but centralizes and unites. Nobody can claim that we did not think of a common man, that we did not adjust our political goals to his interests. The extreme criticism from this point of view is completely unjust. Until very recently, however, we had to focus on the tasks that pertained to the class relations (rather than to a common man). The goal of the fight that we had led here was to accomplish the most important task of the revolution: to secure the power of the working class and the rule of the people's masses...⁷²

⁷² *Rude Pravo*, January 14, 1968, 1. Oldrich Svestka was one of the five top-positioned Party conservatives in 1968. Together with Vasil Bilak, Drahomir Kolder, Alois Indra and Antonin Kapek, he was personally responsible for writing two secret letters to Leonid Breznev asking for an urgent Soviet assistance that would prevent the imminent 'counterrevolution' in Czechoslovakia.

On the one hand, Svestka's speech resonates with the reformers' criticism by drawing attention to an artificially imposed collectivity ("bogus 'collective decision-making'") and arguing in favor of an "effective and pragmatic democracy." On the other hand, he always hastens to mock any kind of autonomous individual input, the only result of which is apparently that "everybody intervenes in everything and everything is indefinitely discussed." Collective interests also overrule those of a "common man" out of a historical necessity ("we had to focus on ... securing the rule of the people's masses"). The speech therefore does not undermine but actually reconfirms the old arguments by combining them with seemingly new language of the reformers.

The long-term result of an imposed collective mentality was a total stagnation of independent political activities. This situation was sustained by deeply distorted patterns of public communication that relied on imposed linguistic and political models of a homogenous collective. Another consequence of the ideology of collectivity was an abnormally profound separation of people's public and private forms of behavior, including moral standards, and their attitude toward public and personal property. These developments created an environment in which implicit norms of collective passivity enforced from above contradicted the explicit public declarations of organized mass activity. Yet such contradiction was not perceived as problematic by the Czechoslovak citizens used to living their double lives. While repeating the prescribed phrases with fake enthusiasm in public, in private they further reinforced the standards of collective compliance by self-imposed passivity, which served both as a defense mechanism against, and a means of escape from, the pressure of supervised public life.

2.4 Official Enthusiasm: Masses in Public Staged Events

Even though millions of Czechoslovak people unofficially withdrew from public life as a result of their detachment from the Party politics, on an official public level they continued to participate in numerous staged events, which yet again portrayed them as socialist masses, i.e. a single, homogenous body, undivided by class or political struggle.

Following the example of the Soviet Union,⁷³ the communist government in Czechoslovakia organized massive parades in order to celebrate communist victories in building socialism or to commemorate important moments in the country's new history. The parades had important ceremonial and symbolic meanings for the regime as rituals of the Party's authority and the masses' controlled subordination; consequently, they took place as frequently as possible, often several times in just one month. Celebrations of the Victorious February (February 25),⁷⁴ International Women's Day (March 8), International Workers' Day (May 1), Liberation Day (May 9),⁷⁵ International Children's Day (June 1), Nationalization (October 28),⁷⁶ and The Great October Socialist Revolution (November 7)⁷⁷ were some of the most significant anniversaries that required mass parades.

⁷³ The first mass-scale public parades were organized in the Soviet Union as early as 1920. Initially, many of these activities resembled public performances with reenactments of the storming of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg or huge film installations. After Stalin took power, the parades were restructured into more straightforward propaganda events, which focused on the effects of physical massing of people as the best representation of the strength of the new regime. See Tereza Petiskova, ed., *Ceskoslovensky socialisticky realismus: 1948 – 1958* (*Czechoslovak Socialist Realism: 1948 – 1958*) (Prague: Gallery, 2002).

⁷⁴ Victorious February was a term designed by communist ideologists for the communist putsch in 1948.

⁷⁵ Although the Soviet Red Army liberated the biggest part of Czechoslovakia, other countries of the Allies, especially the U.S. and British troops, were also significantly involved. However, after the communist putsch in 1948 their participation was intentionally blurred and later simply omitted in the yearly celebrations of the country's liberation.

⁷⁶ October 28 is also the anniversary day of the declaration of the national independence of the first Czechoslovak state in 1918. The communist ideologists obviously preferred to emphasize the new meaning of this day – nationalization of private property by the communist regime.

⁷⁷ Celebrations of the communist putsch in Russia in 1917 under the name of the Great October Socialist Revolution were a part of the Month of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship that included exhibitions, parades and public meetings organized every year between November 2 and December 21. Because the Eastern Orthodox nations, including

The communist regime in Czechoslovakia did not allow mass religious or any other independently organized civil ceremonies, but it strongly relied on their symbolic language in its own mass events. Just like the religious festivals, the totalitarian parades and other celebrations took place cyclically and thus reproduced a well-functioning pattern of regularly expected events. The parades became a routine part of people's lives, or more specifically, something that they might not have appreciated but nevertheless had to consider when planning other activities. As with religious or civil processions, communist mass events typically included a parade of people through main streets. The march usually culminated at a huge meeting (similar to a church/town summoning) where the communist leaders (just like a priest or monarch) would deliver a speech intended to reconfirm the stability of the current order. The religious festivals' participants carried consecrated flags, objects or portraits of saints; likewise, the people in the communist parades often carried banners with socialism-inspired slogans, flags or portraits of the communist 'spiritual' leaders. Both types of events also included organized mass singing and/or crowd chanting of slogans.

In *Rabelais and His World*⁷⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin draws a distinction between carnival festivities and the comic spectacles as representations of unofficial folk humor and culture on the one hand, and the official ecclesiastical and feudal/state celebrations on the other. Bakhtin argues that in the early stages of pre-class and pre-political social order, the serious and the comic aspects of festivities were equally 'official.' However, in the new environment of a consolidated medieval state and class structure, the folk humor could not coexist with the official civil and social ceremonies anymore. Consequently, the unofficial world of the folk carnival, which offered a temporary escape into "the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and

Russia, used the Julian calendar until 1923, the events that happened in Russia in October 1917 were celebrated in Czechoslovakia in November, following the Gregorian calendar.

⁷⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

abundance,”⁷⁹ started to challenge the official festivities, whose goal was to actually sanction and reinforce the current structures. The official feast became an irrefutable symbol of the righteousness of the medieval class, and of the existing social and political order, which was certainly no laughing matter. Obviously then, there was no space in it for the mocking, ambivalent and disruptive carnival laughter:

The official feast asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms and prohibitions. It was the triumph of a truth already established, the predominant truth that was put forward as eternal and indisputable. This is why the tone of the official feast was monolithically serious and why the element of laughter was alien to it.⁸⁰

Many comparisons have been made between Bakhtin’s concept of carnivalesque mockery and modern forms of revolt against authority. I want to focus on the similarity between Bakhtin’s medieval official ceremonies and the twentieth century communist celebrations as representations and confirmations of the dominant power. The goal of both is to reinforce the existing order and to suppress any signs of provocative laughter. James C. Scott describes similar authorized gatherings as “the self-dramatization of elites” in which the main goal of the ruling groups is “to make a spectacle of themselves in a manner largely of their own choosing.”⁸¹ Both the medieval official festivities and the communist parades follow strictly the criteria set by

⁷⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 58.

the dominant power designed to emphasize the permanence of the ruling ideology. The planners of these events also strive to formalize them as much as possible in order to eliminate any potentially unpredictable improvisations, individualized performances or any other spontaneous responses that do not fit into the original schedule. These official (medieval or communist) celebrations are therefore “conducted with high seriousness...any evidence of the disorder, divisions, indiscipline, and of everyday informality is banished from the public stage.”⁸² In the case of the communist parades and other public ceremonies, the necessity to control and formalize everything to the smallest detail is demonstrated by the meticulous planning of every event, as exemplified by the following excerpt from the program of the official meeting in a Prague 4 city district, in 1983:

The representatives of the District Board of the National Front and the District Peace Council will supervise organizing a sufficient number of manifesting people according to the approved plan. ...In district Prague 4, there will be at least 5000 participants, including the representatives of the National Front, factories and schools. The parade will begin from the meeting ground in front of the Klement Gottwald bridge, and it will proceed through the route set by the preparatory team of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak National Front. There will be 3 bands, and a sufficient number of Czechoslovak flags and banners with peace slogans.⁸³

⁸² Ibid., 60-61.

⁸³ Collective of authors, “Politická organizace ukolu v Praze 4 při přípravě na Světový kongres míru” (“Political organization of tasks in preparation for the World Peace Summit in a district Prague 4”), Central National Archive of the Czech Republic, Czech Peace Council Fund, file 120.

Scott provides a remarkably similar description of a publicly staged event that happened in another totalitarian regime halfway across the globe at about the same time. In his account of the tenth anniversary celebration, in December 1985, of the ‘liberation’ of Laos by the Laotian communist party, almost identical steps were taken by the organizers weeks before the celebration. “To ensure a smooth performance...curfews were imposed, banners were hung, ... an ‘appointed’ crowd of cadres and employees was issued placards and told to assemble on the appointed morning.”⁸⁴ Whether in totalitarian Czechoslovakia or Laos, the extent to which the planners of communist public events go exceeds by far the preparation procedures of medieval festivities. The goal of the communist organizers is not just an efficient and uninterrupted display of power, i.e., they do not simply want obedient crowds observing the event. They want the masses to actually participate in the spectacle with their leaders in order to demonstrate their unity to the leaders and the world, but above all to *themselves*. Unlike the medieval crowds, the socialist masses are simultaneously the actors and the audience. To reformulate Scott’s previous statement about the rulers for the case of the masses, the masses make a spectacle of themselves and for themselves, but not in the manner of their own choosing. They participate in the celebration of their unity with each other and with their leaders, yet this celebration is forcefully imposed on them, even though it is simultaneously presented as genuine and sincere.

Bakhtin suggests that an important part of the medieval state or religious celebrations is exhibiting rank: “Everyone was expected to appear in the full regalia of his calling, rank, and merits and to take the place corresponding to his position. It was a consecration of inequality.”⁸⁵ The same consecration of inequality takes place during the communist parades: despite the official proclamations of absolute egalitarianism and the leaders’ total identification with the

⁸⁴ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, 59.

⁸⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.

masses, the communist leaders always remain visibly separated from the masses, standing on platforms high above them. In fact, the platforms for the leaders in the Czechoslovak parades were constructed so high that any physical contact between the leaders and the masses was impossible.⁸⁶ The leaders, just like the medieval high priests or kings, became ‘unreachable’ – both physically and symbolically.

What is so perplexing about the communist leaders is that they are both symbolic representatives of the regime – the best of the best, visionaries with almost mythical qualities – and also real human beings. The latter, however, does not bring them closer to the ‘normal’ people from the masses: the leaders are not regular members of the masses. Quite the contrary, their human features, as Vladimir Macura argues, “are bewildering ... because how is it possible that the great Leader himself is in many ways like us ... for example, he also eats cookies?”⁸⁷ In order for the leader to retain his⁸⁸ leadership aura, his worldly existence needs to be pushed aside; it has to shift to an extraordinary, nearly divine, level. At that point, “attributes like ‘he is like us’ or ‘he is with us’ characterize the leader’s omnipresent...and omniscient”⁸⁹ rather than human qualities.

With the hierarchy between the rulers and the ruled firmly established and the celebration proceedings fully formalized, there seems to be no room for parody and subversion in either the

⁸⁶ The only exception to this rule was a May 1st parade in 1968, when the short-lived reformist wing within the communist government attempted to get closer to the real people also during the official events. Consequently, the platform for this parade was constructed so low that ordinary people from the masses could, and did, reach the government and Party representatives to shake their hands and hand them flowers. For a discussion of this parade, see Jan Mechyr, “Transformace Československé společnosti 1960 – 1989” (“The Transformations of the Czechoslovak Society 1960-1989”) *Proč jsme v listopadu vyšli do ulic (Why We Went Out into the Streets in November)*, ed. Jiri Vancura (Brno: Doplněk Publishing, 1999), 43.

⁸⁷ Vladimir Macura, *Státní Věk. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)*, 55.

⁸⁸ And it is only ‘his’ and ‘he’ in such cases, because there were no great communist female Leaders. See also Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*, 25-26 for a discussion of a lack of women in communist politics.

⁸⁹ Vladimir Macura, *Státní Věk. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)*, 56.

medieval festivals or communist parades. Yet, as Bakhtin demonstrates⁹⁰ carnival laughter managed to insinuate itself into the dominant culture in the form of the highly ambivalent folk humor based on the concept of grotesque realism. It is significant that the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation: “lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract ... it is a transfer to the material level.”⁹¹ The only effective way to challenge the medieval system is to bring it down to earth, degrade it through laughter from below. But how does subversion and parody work in a highly constrictive environment of a Twentieth Century totalitarian regime defined by its strong symbolism and set hierarchies?

In the case of communist Czechoslovakia where the public behavior is thoroughly formalized, and displays of support for the regime are always orchestrated from above, all genuine civic activities, including protests, inevitably move outside the official public sphere, into private non-official cultural and social events. As in Bakhtin’s medieval society, grotesque laughter is the only available subversive weapon for the rebellious elements within the socialist masses. The masses have no recourse to democratic tools, such as free elections, or to public forms of independent political or civic pressure with which to challenge the regime. They are left with grotesque laughter, but in their case, the laughter is moved entirely out of public sight: what might go unnoticed or ignored by an indifferent ruler in the Middle Ages is considered a serious offense to the system by the communist ideologists. In the modern age, the effects of subversive laughter can theoretically reach the most distant parts of the country or large numbers of people quickly and rather effortlessly. The communist state therefore needs to detect and monitor even the smallest and most innocent versions of the grotesque laughter, such as jokes shared among factory workers, caricatures drawn by university students, or sarcastic happenings

⁹⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin. *Rabelais and His World*

⁹¹ Ibid., 19.

organized by small groups of dissidents. Consequently, all of these activities happen unofficially – the masses mock themselves and the dominant ideology only in privacy.

2.5 Unofficial Laughter: The Masses Mocking Themselves

Jokes, mockery or humorous proverbs about the current political, economic or social situation represent perhaps the most common type of ‘folk humor’ exhibited by the socialist masses. Because these jokes do not and cannot belong to the public sphere, they are created and shared only among friends or family members, so they are not likely to be detected by the authorities. Unfortunately, these subversive verbal compositions are among the fastest disappearing documents from the communist era – they are a part of privately shared oral history that has remained largely unrecorded.

The most famous jokes and mockeries developed during the 1970s and 1980s focused on lack of progress in totalitarian Czechoslovakia. A well-known sarcastic proverb described socialism as “the most difficult route from capitalism to capitalism.”⁹² Other jokes criticized the economic situation implicitly, as in the case of the following popular joke from the 1970s:

“Why are you going to Radotin?” “For meat.” “They have meat in a Radotin meat-store?” “No, but in Radotin is the end of a meat waiting line that started in Smichov.”⁹³

⁹² Cited in Jan Mechyr, “Transformace Československé společnosti 1960 – 1989” (“The Transformations of the Czechoslovak Society 1960-1989”), *Proč jsme v listopadu vyšli do ulic (Why We Went Out into the Streets in November)*, ed. Jiri Vancura (Brno: Doplněk Publishing, 1999), 35.

⁹³ Radotin and Smichov are two parts of Prague, each situated at the opposite end of the capital. The joke cited in Jan Mechyr, “Transformace Československé Společnosti 1960 – 1989” (“The Transformations of the Czechoslovak Society 1960 – 1989”), 42.

This joke highlights the existence of a common socialist phenomenon thoroughly incompatible with the official ideology – long lines to obtain basic necessities. Communist rhetoric presented collectivized agriculture and industry as the most efficient and productive organizational structures, designed not just to meet, but easily exceed national demand. Yet huge shortages of food and other products paralyzed the Czechoslovak society, especially in the 1950s. The writer Frantisek Novotny described a situation in Brno, the second biggest city in the country in the late 1950s as follows: “Twice a week in the early evening, horrendous lines for meat filled up Brno’s streets, or any other streets in any other town in Czechoslovakia. Hundreds, but sometimes even thousands, of people, mostly women, would stand in them the whole night.”⁹⁴ The situation improved slightly towards the end of the 1960s, but the lines in front of stores remained a common occurrence until the end of the totalitarian regime in 1989. In a way, lines for meat and other products resembled unofficial version of publicly self-organized masses. Like the official parades and other events, people participated in them publicly and regularly. Like the parades, people’s participation in lines was not a result of their own wish but rather of necessity. Even though the lines, unlike the parades, were not officially controlled or organized, people in them nevertheless developed intricate semi-official schemes of participation that included family members, relatives or friends taking turns or tracking potential stores with fresh unannounced supplies.

One of the most innovative examples of the anti-regime activity inspired by grotesque laughter was The Society for a Merrier Today,⁹⁵ which emerged in the late 1980s and focused on organizing ironic happenings. The main point of these events was not to break laws openly, but rather to challenge some of the most sacred ideological concepts through humor. Public ‘runs’

⁹⁴ Frantisek Novotny, “Vzpominky na komunismus” (“Remembering Communism”), *Intercom Magazine*, July 3, 2004.

⁹⁵ In Czech: Společnost za veselejší současnost

by the members of the Society, most of them previously persecuted dissidents, took place on Prague's well-known Political Prisoners' Street⁹⁶ and were organized in the name of 'the merrier today.' They also attempted to draw attention to the issue of releasing all political prisoners. Running in support of releasing political prisoners on a street named after political prisoners was of course highly ironic, especially since according to the official ideology there should have been no political prisoners in a socialist society.

These rather open confrontations with the regime were nevertheless extremely rare. Constant public surveillance by the repressive bodies, notably the secret police units and their informers, resulted in the impossibility if not the inability of Czechoslovak citizens to develop local civic communities and engage in independent public political activities. Bitter memories of the brutal suppression of independent civic and national initiatives in 1968 also contributed to an atmosphere of resignation and general passivity with relatively small number of public anti-regime protests. This applies especially to the generations who lived through the initially hopeful but eventually disappointing 1960s. It was only in the last decade of the communist rule (1980s) in Czechoslovakia that a noticeable disagreement with the regime among the young generation became more public and more widespread. Until then, most of the disagreement was expressed through various forms of disguised laughter in private.

The socialist masses often ridiculed the official communist rhetoric of the collective life and organized and homogenized People. A well-known joke from the 1960s focused directly on the masses as the People:

⁹⁶ The name of the street did not, of course, refer to the political prisoners of the communist regime, who were confined for their political and religious beliefs, but to the Czechoslovak citizens persecuted by the Nazis during the Second World War.

“What is a difference between ‘the People’ and people? ‘The People’ build socialism, whereas people don’t give a shit about it.”⁹⁷

The authors of this joke obviously mock the empty communist declarations about the decisive role of the masses in socialism. *The People* referred to by the joke are the homogenized rhetorical unit that is over-employed in official statements, but an otherwise meaningless concept to most ordinary *people*. The joke points to the fact that citizens have learnt to ignore the ideals of collective life imposed by the government. Yet it also makes clear that these ordinary people are still aware of the powerful presence of these ideological models even if they register them just as a nuisance. Regardless of what they think and do in their private life, the real-life people know that they have to adjust their behavior in public to the criteria still determined by the communist ideology of unanimous masses. The vicious cycle is therefore complete – the ordinary people lie and pretend in front of their leaders, who in turn lie and pretend to these people. As many theorists of the communist period note, this development inevitably alters general moral standards in society. The ubiquitous lying by the state, Milan Simecka argues, sets a generally accepted norm of lying, which is not only unpunished but actually rewarded. “A citizen, just like the state (representatives), considers lying a beneficial tactics ... it is the cunning crooks and liars, who are generally appreciated ... not the honest people sweating for the state, which does not deserve it.”⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Cited in Jan Mechyr, “Transformace Československé společnosti 1960 – 1989” (“The Transformations of the Czechoslovak Society 1960 – 1989”) *Proč jsme v listopadu vyšli do ulic (Why We Went Out into the Streets in November)*, 38.

⁹⁸ Milan Simecka, *Obnovení pořádku (Restoring the Order)* (London: Edice Rozmluvy, 1984), 148-150, cited in Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*, 28.

The masses lived their public lives as an orchestrated lie – even worse, they did not see it as a problematic development. In fact, parents actively taught their children to switch between public lying and private honesty according to their current situation. The official lie became a public norm. As Vaclav Havel put it, “the official interpretation ... merges with reality. A general and all-embracing lie begins to predominate; people begin adapting to it, and everyone in some part of their lives compromises with the lie or coexists with it.”⁹⁹

These radically different moral and behavioral standards in public and private life point again to a much deeper separation between the public and private spheres under communism than in traditional democratic regimes. I have already discussed this wide division in connection with people’s attitudes to public and personal property, and publicly staged activity versus privately shared passivity of the masses. In the public sphere, people continued to affirm wholeheartedly their “devotion to socialism and the Communist Party, love for the Soviet Union, settling the religious question,¹⁰⁰ and regular attendance of the mass meetings and manifestations.”¹⁰¹ In the privacy of their homes, however, they ignored official politics, and focused almost exclusively on their family lives. The only revolt they could afford was a *secret* laughter at the oppressive regime: jokes and gossip about the communist leaders, or condoning stealing from the state in order to help one’s own family. A famous saying “Who does not steal from the state, robs their own family” illustrates well a different attitude of the masses regarding the public and private property. Stealing of personal property was strongly denounced by citizens, whereas stealing of public property was never condemned if not outright encouraged by the attitudes of the common man. The bad economic situation in the country, especially the

⁹⁹ *Times Literary Supplement*, January 23, 1987, 81.

¹⁰⁰ I.e., being undeniably atheist.

¹⁰¹ Milan Simecka, *Obnovení porádku (Restoring the Order)* (London: Edice Rozmluvy, 1984), 148-150, cited in Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*, 28.

permanent shortages of material and products, naturally provided even more incentives to steal whatever *was* currently available. Public toilets, for example, never featured any toilet paper, soap or towels, all of them precious commodities under socialism that were promptly stolen after they had been distributed.¹⁰²

However, this bitter and cynical laughter/attitude of Czechoslovak people did not bring them any closer to a real criticism or revolt; it brought them even further away from reforming the public life or rebuilding civil society. In fact, as Slavoj Žižek argues, such cynical attitude towards official ideology is what an oppressive regime really wants: “the greatest catastrophe for the regime would have been for its own ideology to be taken seriously, and realized by its subjects.”¹⁰³ The sustained ideological pressure combined with tolerance of small private rebellions guaranteed that the masses of cynical grumblers in Czechoslovakia were rarely willing to step out of their relative safety of anonymity and confront the regime openly. Instead, the private revolts provided the citizens with “false exits – false modes of distance towards the ruling ideology, including cynicism and seeking refuge in the apolitical niche of the ‘small pleasures of everyday life.’”¹⁰⁴

The communist leaders silently approved of the privately dissatisfied masses, since they were far less subversive than the publicly dissatisfied individual dissidents, who posed a real threat and effective challenge to the system. As Žižek would add, the cynical and apathetic citizens were also much less dangerous than the truly devoted supporters of the regime who through their full adherence to the official ideology lay demands on the regime’s own loyalty to its principles. Unlike the cynical masses mechanically repeating the staged rituals, the ‘sincere’

¹⁰² For a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*

¹⁰³ Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso, 2002), 92.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

believers refused to be comfortably indifferent, and were thus “already one step from dissidence.”¹⁰⁵

In return for citizens’ passivity, the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia tolerated their cynical laughter, jokes, even their stealing of public property. Through official declarations, the government condemned these attitudes toward public property, and the growing civic indifference. Unofficially, it relied on the resigned public position of its often corrupt citizens. Their “acts of indifference, of making fun of official rituals in private circles, (were) the very mode of reproduction of the official ideology.”¹⁰⁶ In the end, the regime was content with its publicly recognized and yet generally uncontested lie of unity, while the cynical masses withdrew from the active public life into the privacy of their homes.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

2.6 Conclusion

In effect, the regime has said to the people: ‘Forget 1968. Forget your democratic traditions. Forget that you were once citizens with rights and duties. Forget politics. ... All we ask is that you will outwardly and publicly conform: join in the ritual “elections,” vote the prescribed way in the “trade union” meetings, enroll you children in the “socialist” youth organization. Keep your mind to yourself.’¹⁰⁷

As Ladislav Holy pointed out,¹⁰⁸ the well-known statement by Margaret Thatcher that there is no society, only individuals and families, would certainly not work in communist Czechoslovakia. There, at least according to the official ideology, individuals and families carried much less value and significance than society, which consisted primarily of the People, or the People’s masses. Communist society in Czechoslovakia was ideologically defined by the concept of collective identity, which became “the focal point of political and economic efforts and in whose name and interest everything happened.”¹⁰⁹

This chapter showed that the ideology and reality of the socialist masses were thoroughly incompatible, yet this contradiction did not weaken the oppressive regime as much or as fast as we might initially expect. On an official level built by definitions and portrayals, the masses stood united and homogenous. This image was further reinforced by organized public ceremonies and work collectives, both of which exhibited real life representations of organized mass mentality. On an unofficial level, the real people from the socialist masses experienced a

¹⁰⁷ Timothy Garton Ash, *The Uses of Adversity: Essays on the Fate of Central Europe* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 55-56.

¹⁰⁸ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

profound separation between the public and private spheres. The consequences of this unnaturally deep division included distorted public moral and behavioral norms, and the elimination of independent patterns of public communication, resulting in a destruction of a functioning civic community. The masses were therefore homogeneous, but only in their private passivity. In public appearances, they simply followed the public rituals as automatons, never as true believers. Both of these trends – private passivity and publicly controlled activity – were ideal for the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia, which officially touted the ideology of active masses changing history, but in reality wanted nothing else more desperately than passive and compliant subjects.

3.0 “EVERYDAY LIFE IS NOT A PRIVATE MATTER” – COLLECTIVIZATION OF LIFE IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE

Back home from the public world of collective education, work, sports, and mass parades, Czechoslovak citizens encountered a fundamental challenge – how to maintain their privacy. Political and ideological pressure did not stop at their doorsteps; it gradually extended into the previously untouchable domains of domestic space and private recreation. The ideology of collective identity aimed to structure not only public life but also the private experiences. “Everyday Life is Not a Private Matter” declared one Soviet agitational brochure from 1959,¹ and the communist leaders in Czechoslovakia were eager to wage a war on privacy along these lines.

Communist propaganda therefore advocated the construction of private spaces with public qualities in Czechoslovakia. Personal life, home, or family recreation, were to be opened to state inspection as well as available for collective supervision. The state and the Party interfered in people’s private lives ideologically, for example through official definitions of ideal homes, but also directly, through restrictions on access to accommodation or traveling abroad. In addition, free time activities, such as individual sports, cultural events, recreation, or even voluntary work were constructed around the idea of a socialist collective. Government-controlled mass media, arts, and official documents presented images of a socialist private sphere as open, homogenized to the smallest detail, and happily shared by the masses.

This chapter looks at the ways in which the changed boundary between the public and private spheres in socialist Czechoslovakia affected the private lives and activities of ordinary

¹ Quoted in David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 12.

citizens. I examine the condition of ‘public privacy,’² which I characterize as a forceful intrusion of the elements of the public sphere into the private realm, and the consequent adjustment of certain aspects of the private life to their constant public exposure. The public and private spheres in any system are never static; democratic as well as non-democratic countries are characterized by a constant struggle over what counts as public and private. As I will show, the uniqueness of the Czechoslovak case lies in the extent to which the public intervention in the private sphere changed the individual private practices of citizens, and also in the ways in which Czechoslovak people responded to this public intrusion. Public privacy brought an unprecedented involuntary homogenization and unification of private spaces which led to a standardization of lifestyles in general, and marriage and reproductive patterns in particular. In the western democracies, homogenization of certain aspects of lifestyles is typically class, gender or race specific. In totalitarian Czechoslovakia, this phenomenon affected the entire society, in which class differences had been previously eliminated through nationalization of private property and leveling of wages, gender equality ‘officially’ achieved through the compulsory participation of women in the labor force, and where ethnic tensions were minimal, at least in comparison with the western countries.

The opening of the private sphere to public influence affected people’s free time activities, including most forms of recreation. Typical leisure activities in socialist Czechoslovakia in the era of public privacy therefore reflected the official emphasis on collective life. Socialist recreation was embodied by organized mass vacations (often involving entire

² Term used by Katerina Gerasimova in “Public Privacy in the Soviet Communal Apartment” in David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 210. My own definition of this term for the situation in Czechoslovakia differs from Gerasimova’s description, which applies to a specifically Soviet phenomenon of communal apartments.

work collectives) and the mass building of weekend country houses, where hundreds of thousands of Czechoslovak citizens spent their free time in remarkably similar ways.

As I argued in the previous chapter, on an unofficial level the socialist masses experienced a profound separation between the public and private spheres. Nonetheless, socialist propaganda portrayed the border between the two spheres as gradually disappearing. The actual homogenization and unification of homes, lifestyles, and recreation patterns was more a result of the dire economic situation in Czechoslovakia – characterized by lack of choice and goods – than a direct outcome of the official policies. Whether official or unofficial, this homogenization took place in many aspects of the private sphere, and was to some extent internalized by the Czechoslovak people as an inevitable part of their lives. In many cases, mass acceptance of, and adjustment to, the conditions of public privacy inadvertently affected life in the public sphere. For example, the homogenization of the weekend habits affected work patterns and even work hours in public institutions. Many offices and factories in Czechoslovakia were almost deserted on Fridays, because of the mass transit of the citizens to their weekend dwellings. While such behavior testifies to an interaction and tension between the official concepts of public and private and their interpretations by individual citizens, it also shows that the citizens' reactions to these official norms in a totalitarian regime were different from the response of citizens in western democracies.

A direct result of life in public privacy was a reduction and consequent increased protection of the spaces of real privacy and intimacy. A border between the private and public became blurry, and a new realm of a semi-public emerged, where many previously private activities, such as family recreation were organized as public collective activities. At the same time, access to uniquely private experiences became more guarded. In a world where closing a

door to one's apartment did not automatically guarantee true privacy, people learned to live in constant vigilance against possible public intrusions. Home, the archetypal place of refuge from public pressure, became a primary target for these intrusions, as its privacy-protecting function was increasingly challenged by the official definitions of domestic life.

3.1 Socialist Home as a Place for the Production of New Citizens

Official propaganda always described the new home in sharp contrast to its non-socialist predecessors, in particular the bourgeois home of the First Republic.³ The image of a socialist home was decidedly anti-traditional in that it purposefully excluded any elements of 'bourgeois' individualism or privacy which were classified as asocial and therefore anti-socialist. The literal and metaphorical constructions of closed spaces in the home were unacceptable, especially during the period of the highest ideological pressure, the 1950s. As Vladimir Macura points out, the traditional attributes of home, such as quietness, peace, or stability, were often attacked or even ridiculed in the contemporary media. A case in point is a scene from a popular theatre play from 1949 which mocks a 'traditional' housewife concerned more with the tidiness of her house and the temperature of the meals served rather than with the real problems of the public sphere. Consequently, she is hushed repeatedly by both her husband and her son, who discuss over dinner innovation schemes for an assembly line in a factory where they work. The wife's insistence on following the proper order in the house is portrayed as pathetic and backward – "it suggests her lack of understanding for the new world of socialism and its ideals."⁴ Clearly, this woman is expected to abandon her old-fashioned morals and domestic standards, and open her home and life to the world outside in order to become a proper socialist citizen.

³ The First Republic was the period of a democratic government between 1918 and 1939.

⁴ Vladimir Macura, *Stastny Vek. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)* (Prague: Prague Imagination, 1992), 42.

To increase the effects of propaganda in the private sphere, the socialist home had to become more accessible to the outside world and its collective supervision. It therefore had to open itself up by “including in itself the relevant signs of the public space.”⁵ Since these signs was limited, their incorporation into the formerly private space of home also meant that all homes, at least theoretically, began to resemble one another. This homogenization was often purposefully portrayed in art and media as a desired ideal:

Theater plays, films, paintings, and literature created an ideal norm of the private quarters ... For example, (writer) Pavel Kohout in his description of a scene of an apartment during an intimate wedding reception of the main characters ... sets down the interior as follows: ‘A simple but modern and tastefully furnished studio – on the wall above the couch is a big reproduction of a Soviet painting The Dawn of Our Country, in which comrade Stalin walks through an efflorescent dawn of the Soviet factories and collective farms. Between the kitchen door and a window is a bookshelf with a bust of comrade Gottwald⁶... Helena in a Youth Union uniform⁷ is adjusting plates on the table.’⁸

In the decades following the 50s’ Socialist Realism and its strong ideological demands, the popular and professional articles on housing withdrew from describing the home through its correspondence with various symbols of the regime. Instead, the focus shifted to presenting the

⁵ Ibid., 43.

⁶ The first communist president of Czechoslovakia.

⁷ Apparently, Helena, a character representing the young and progressive socialist generation, is getting married in a uniform rather than a wedding dress.

⁸ Vladimír Macura, *Stastný Věk. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)*, 43.

home as a modern and functional place of the masses' everyday life. These articles were therefore homogenizing the home not in terms of particular 'decorative' (and ideologically loaded) items, but rather in their emphasis on standardized and utilitarian aspects of socialist living. Not surprisingly, the new trend was strongly influenced by Soviet definitions of post-Stalinist domesticity:

Practically, this meant stripping ornamental features from old-fashioned furniture and eliminating 'knick-knacks' from the home; adopting centripetal interior schemes that diminished the significance of fixed features like the traditional hearth or the centrally placed dining table; and developing new types of transformable furniture that could perform two or more functions.⁹

Many ideological visions of collectively shared semi-public spaces which were thoroughly inapplicable to the situation of underdeveloped economy of the 1960s yet vigorously implemented in the new housing schemes affected the planning and building of new socialist homes in Czechoslovakia. Architect Daniela Grabmullerova writes that following these visions led to many serious shortcomings, especially in the design of new prefabricated blocks of flats, which became the predominant housing model in cities. The image of collective life and the consequent gradual disappearance of individually prepared meals in homes thus resulted in an absurd minimalization of kitchen space. Similarly, the vision of common laundry and ironing areas outside the home eliminated the need for these spaces in a socialist apartment (which

⁹ David Crowley, "Warsaw Interiors: The Public Life of Private Spaces, 1949-65" in David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, 195. Although Crowley focuses on homes in Poland, he also discusses the ideology of domesticity in the Soviet Union. Many of his conclusions are applicable to the situation in socialist Czechoslovakia.

meant that bathrooms and kitchens were made too small for a washing machine to fit), just as the vision of disposable goods led to absence of storage spaces.¹⁰

In addition to homogenizing homes in the cities, the regime also declared that any differences between cities and countryside were to be eradicated.¹¹ New prefabricated, multiple floor houses with identical grey facades were built in villages among the centuries-old farmhouses. The result of this re-building of the socialist countryside was an aesthetic and cultural devastation of Czech villages. Coherence of village architecture, as well as many forms of village life, were impaired because of a forceful introduction of residential elements into spaces that previously functioned exclusively as places of public interaction. Walking in the village square, everybody could see and compare the whiteness of laundry in different balconies or windows. Slavenka Drakulic observed this phenomenon in the cities of socialist Bulgaria, but the same parade of laundry displays was also typical of new multi-storey houses in the centers of Czechoslovak villages:

Clothes dangle of the wind under the windows, on balconies and terraces, ... Sock, pants, shirts, diapers, dresses, aprons, handkerchiefs, slips – they make a foreign city all of a sudden look intimate, friendly, familiar to me. By looking at the clotheslines I can tell who is a good housekeeper, whose laundry is white enough and properly hung, how big the family is, who lives alone.¹²

¹⁰ Daniela Grabmüllerová, “Bydlení po česku – hledání prasečiku funkce, kvality a dostupnosti” (“Housing Czech-Style – The Search to Combine Function, Quality and Affordability”) in *Forum Architektury*, July 20, 2004.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Slavenka Drakulic, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* (New York: Norton, 1991), 52.

Village squares therefore lost much of their formal character, while at the same time many aspects of private life in villages became publicly visible. Mixing of public and private elements in formerly public spaces, and the introduction of public surveillance into private life, both typical qualities of totalitarian public privacy, affected city and village life.

In real life, a different kind of homogenization and unification of homes took place, caused by the bad economic situation of the country in general, and lack of choice in building materials, furniture and many other building necessities in particular. As a result, most homes in Czechoslovakia did look similar, and thus inadvertently fulfilled the ideological goal of mass unification of home styles. Many homes, especially in bigger towns and cities, were further homogenized by another socialist trend of housing employees of one factory or office in the same place. These monocultures, as Olga Smidova calls them, began to grow especially in industrial agglomerations, and their most significant social effect was “the interference of the public (professional) sphere with the private one. The work relations and hierarchies, evaluation criteria all pour out from the factory, office, from work to the home, to the school where the employees’ children go, to the playground. Social control is thus almost complete.”¹³

In addition to the homogenization of homes, life under public privacy inevitably brought about homogenization of lifestyles: marriage and family life patterns became very similar in regard to the age of getting married and having children, but also in regard to the number of children and even the reason for getting married. In order to increase the dropping birth rate, the communist government promised young married couples with children various kinds of state support, including accommodation. In a time of extreme housing shortages, this was a very tempting offer, because many young people lived in small apartments in two and even three or

¹³ Olga Smidova, “Co vypraveji nase byty” (“What Our Apartments Tell”) in Zdenek Konopasek, ed., *Otevrena minulost (The Open Past)* (Prague: Karolinum, 1999), 180-181.

four-generation families. One of the few ways to escape both parental control and the overcrowded conditions of the parents' apartments was to get married, have a child, and apply for a state assigned accommodation for young families. These 'marital apartments' were in high demand and short supply. Because of the continuing shortage of accommodation the chance to receive a state assigned apartment was still low, even for families with children. But this did not deter thousands of young couples from following the mass trend of marrying and having children at an extremely young age. These young couples married very early and had children not so much as a result of their own family planning but rather as a response to state housing incentives. According to the Czech Statistical Office, 45.8 percent of all women who were married in 1965, had not reached their 20th birthday. In 1995, when the communist policies on state-provided accommodation were long gone, the percentage of women in this category dropped to 28.2, in 2000 to just 7.8 percent. Similarly, 70.3 percent of men, who were married in 1970, ranged between 20-24 years of age category. In 1980, the percentage of men in this category dropped to 65, in 2000 to 39 percent.¹⁴

While some couples were getting married and having children in order to gain access to the state-provided housing, many others were getting divorced for the same reasons. In cases when an old relative died, and his or her apartment would have to be returned to the state, some couples filed for divorce in order to claim the free apartment for one of the divorcees. Many of these couples continued to live together, but in the eyes of the public institutions, they lived separately. Possession of such a valuable asset – a 'free' apartment for children or relatives – justified such publicly performed adjustment to personal and marital life.¹⁵

¹⁴ Czech Statistical Office, 2003, reference number: 893/2003-3301, code: 4015-03.

¹⁵ Olga Smidova, "Co vypraveji nase byty" ("What Our Apartments Tell") in Zdenek Konopasek, ed., *Otevrena minulost (The Open Past)* (Prague: Karolinum, 1999).

Hana Havelkova argues that the standardization of marital and family models was an “*indirect* consequence of official policy and arose from the specific role which family life attained under communism.”¹⁶ Havelkova, who generally focuses on the situation of women in communist Czechoslovakia, writes that because almost all women were employed under communism (including 95 percent of mothers), and almost all of them worked in full-time, permanent jobs, most married early and had children almost immediately afterwards. The fact that they had to juggle both work and family at the same time meant that “they could not manage more than two children...so the number of children became ‘standardized’ to usually one or two, seldom more than three.”¹⁷ As Myra Marx Ferree claims, women in the socialist countries were a lot more dependent on state and state policies than on individual men – husbands and fathers. Ferree distinguishes between public patriarchy, which was typical of the socialist bloc, and private patriarchy, which has been characteristic of the western countries. In public patriarchy, state “(played) a major role in systematically shaping women’s experiences of paid work, marriage and motherhood.”¹⁸ Because women’s lives under communism were so strongly formed by a unified system of state social assistance, and not by individual living conditions of men as breadwinners, the homogenization of women’s public and private lives reached unparalleled levels. Jacqui True summarizes such homogenization in the case of Czechoslovakia as follows: “By the 1970s, virtually *all* Czechoslovak women in their mid-twenties were married with a child and working full time.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Hana Havelkova, “Women in and after a ‘Classless’ Society,” in C. Zmroczek and P. Mahony, eds., *Women and Social Class – International Feminist Perspectives* (London: Taylor and Francis/UCL, 1998), 78, emphasis original.

¹⁷ Ibid., 78. According to Havelkova, only 7 percent of women in the population had more than four children, whereas today, more than 80 percent of married women over 30 years of age have at least two children.

¹⁸ Myra Marx Ferree, “Patriarchies and Feminisms: The Two Women’s Movements of Post-Unification Germany,” in Nancy Fraser, ed., *Crossing Borders: Gender and Citizenship in Transition* (Stockholm: Swedish Council for Planning and Coordination, 1997), 160.

¹⁹ Jacqui True, *Gender, Globalization, and Postsocialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 30, emphasis mine.

The homogenization of homes or family and lifestyles patterns did not always occur as a direct result of official propaganda, but in most cases was a consequence of the poor economic situation in communist Czechoslovakia. Notwithstanding this fact, the ideological vision of mass unification of these significant parts of private sphere seemed accomplished – with the public privacy firmly established, the regular public control of the private life became a natural, and therefore expected, part of people's lives.

Unlike in western democracies, mass homogenization of public and private activities affected evenly all spheres of Czechoslovak society. State-provided incentives, such as family subsidies or housing schemes for young families, combined with virtually full-employment of women structured people's private lives on a mass scale, and to a much larger extent than did their personal initiative or independent decisions. At the same time, lack of goods and services left people with a minimal choice in furnishing their apartments or buying their cars, and therefore brought another level of homogenization of home and life styles. Living in remarkably similar apartments and driving the same types of cars, Czechoslovak citizens also faced the official pressure to open their private matters up to public inspection.

3.2 A Personal Problem? Ask Your Collective!

The purported self-openness of home to public interference, combined with its involuntary homogenization, resulted in many conflicts and difficulties. Olga Smidova emphasizes that the personal relationships of neighbors were often deeply marked by the new ideology of the collectivized private sphere. Social envy thrived in this supposedly egalitarian climate.²⁰ Instead of sharing certain tasks, such as washing the laundry, people stole the drying clothes from

²⁰ Olga Smidova, "Co vypraveji nase byty" ("What Our Apartments Tell") in Zdenek Konopasek, ed., *Otevrena minulost (The Open Past)* (Prague: Karolinum, 1999).

common areas. Any kind of personal difference or possession of an otherwise unavailable object (foreign-made car, furniture or electronics) was perceived negatively in an environment of overcrowded apartments with identical layouts and equipment.²¹ In contrast to the official plan of collective unity, people often tried to distinguish themselves from the rest. Collecting and walking around with western-made plastic shopping bags, preferably those displaying recognizable icons of the West, such as the Marlboro Man, became very popular in the 1980s. The owners of such bags signaled their access to unavailable goods, and thus clearly stood out from the masses equipped with almost identical 'socialist-style' bags.

Despite these problems, official propaganda depicted the private sphere as a progressive space shared by the involved masses. In a letter to the communist daily *Rudé Právo*, entitled "A Collective Educates Us," the leader of a 'Brigade of Socialist Work'²² describes the troubles of a member of his Brigade, for whom saving the money for a new car apparently became the goal of his life. "Our collective often talks to this comrade about this issue," the leader of the Brigade writes, "we explain to him that his good attitude towards work cannot be based just on his private interest (in buying a car)." The author also points out that "in this case, a good advice of an individual would not help...here, only the right opinion of the entire collective must take effect."²³ In addition to a need for a collective to impose an opinion on such private matters as life goals, this writer also advocates other ways of intervening into the private sphere. "We

²¹ Ladislav Holy discusses the emergence of envy as a widely-present social phenomenon also in connection with the Czech nationalism and its construction of the Czech nation as an egalitarian homogeneous unit: any kind of vertical or horizontal stratification negates such collective unity and therefore has to be excluded. See Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²² These ideologically most developed forms of socialist work collectives are discussed in the previous chapter.

²³ *Rude Pravo*, April 8, 1960, 2.

widen the range of questions that we collectively deal with...we talk about family life, our relationship towards our women, or raising children.”²⁴

Although the collectivity described in this case is explicitly male (with a rather possessive attitude toward ‘their’ women), the communist regime made great effort to deny any gender differences in the public sphere, since obviously both genders belonged to the socialist collective. The housewife in the 1949 theater play that I discussed earlier in this chapter was mocked for her adherence to the old-fashioned domestic routines which pointed to her inability to become involved in the collective matters of the public world. While her husband and son discussed the improvement schemes for their factory’s assembly line, she desperately insisted that they eat their dinners – a proof of her failure to recognize that the problems of the public collective work were more important than mere domestic activities.

Following the official proclamations about gender equality, newspapers and magazines often published articles emphasizing the participation of men and women in public and private collective decisions. For example, the daily *Rudé Právo* published a letter entitled “The Declaration of Male and Female Workers of the Libcice Steelworks: The Young Announce a War to Slackers.”²⁵ In the letter, both gender groups commit themselves to fighting laziness among the employees of the Steelworks. The concerned authors of the letter pledge to re-educate the young people, “who had been contaminated with ... bourgeois habits.”²⁶ The re-educating process cannot stop at work – it also extends to behavior connected with private free-time activities: “we promise to eliminate ... drunkenness, parties, and foppish manners.”²⁷

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ *Rude Pravo*, July 8, 1948, 2.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

In such supposedly genuine, yet clearly officially produced or at least controlled, documents, the masses of Czechoslovak people simply extended their work collective ethics into the private sphere. Home was a place where individualism or privacy had no place – they signaled unhealthy and asocial behavior that was in sharp contrast with the ideals of the officially sanctioned socialist lifestyle. Being involved in ‘other people’s business’ was actively encouraged and portrayed as an expression of one’s genuine involvement in the life of the socialist collective.

A hugely popular film “Vacation with Andel” depicts the main hero, Mr. Andel²⁸ – a grumpy but good hearted tram ticket controller – vacationing with his co-workers and trying to resolve collectively a private marital crisis of a young couple. The topic of the film is therefore not only a depiction of an idyllic collective vacation, but also a portrayal of collective involvement in the life of its members that does not stop even during time spent far from work. The collective spends all its time together, meeting at exact times for group exercises, relaxation, meals and trips. In addition, they hold daily evening meetings, where they discuss, among other issues, different strategies for solving the marital problems of their young colleague and his wife. Despite the fact that these two never requested any help from the outside, the collective arranges various ‘accidental’ meetings of the two estranged people, during which they eventually fall in love with each other again. In the end, they both happily join the collective activities organized by the recreation supervisor. In the eyes of the communist ideologists, the home and other spaces outside the public sphere, such as places for free time activities or vacationing, were supposed to be deliberately deprived of privacy. In fact, the masses, just the young couple in Mr. Andel’s collective, were expected to expose their problems, hopes and secrets to public

²⁸ Strangely, even though the film was made in 1952, i.e., during the time of the most intense communist pressure, the main character’s name literally translates as Angel. Rather than any religious connotations however, this name most probably suggested the ‘angelic’ character of Mr. Andel, hidden under the rough façade of his behavior.

inspection. Everything, even the most personal aspects of people's lives, such as illness or love, became more than a personal matter.

Love, as Vladimir Macura argues, literally became a political matter. Macura cites writer Pavel Kohout, who declared that: "love is a part of the politics of our country. It is thoroughly a matter of the state."²⁹ In fact, the more open this love was to the outside world the better. In the words of a communist poet M. Cervenka: "If you tell twenty comrades about your love, you will be happy twenty times more."³⁰ Love left the privately shared spaces and the intimacy of a couple, and entered the realm of collective matters – lovers from poems and plays viewed each other primarily as politically involved citizens. Traditional attributes of love poetry were also pushed aside: women's beauty or men's devotion or courage were secondary and mentioned only as accompanying features of characters' public position. Poet Jan Pilar thus wrote a monologue of a lover to his new socialist woman as follows: "I greet you, woman in blue overalls, who smells of spring wind mixed with grease."³¹

In an attempt to escape the physical and ideological constraints of their homogenized homes, and avoid the exposure of their most intimate personal experiences to the public eye, many people began to build small weekend recreation houses in the countryside. Yet although spending time at these cottages initially signaled an escape from the collective life of public spaces, it gradually developed into yet another mass activity.

²⁹ Vladimir Macura, *Stastny Vek. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)*, 50.

³⁰ Ibid., 49.

³¹ Ibid., 44.

3.3 Weekend Escape of the Masses: The *Chata* and the *Chalupa* Cultures

In order to travel abroad, or even to receive a passport, Czechoslovak citizens had to apply for official permission. This process was particularly difficult if an entire family wanted to visit a ‘non-socialist’ country, because the officials feared that issuing passports to all family members would enable them to emigrate easily. Therefore, travel permits for such countries were typically given to parents only (i.e., the children had to stay in the country) or just one member of the family. Communist Party membership often functioned as leverage in obtaining travel permission.

Under such conditions, traveling abroad became almost impossible, especially to the countries outside the Soviet bloc. Most people resorted to substituting their vacations abroad with weekend and summer stays in Czechoslovakia. A massive tradition of weekend living in a *chata* or a *chalupa* developed. A *chata* – a simple, usually newly built wooden cabin or cottage typically in a forest or by a river stream – and a *chalupa* – a renovated old farmhouse in a small village – became the only destinations for the millions of vacationing Czechoslovak citizens. I will show that there were several distinct differences between *chaty* and *chalupy* and the kinds of people that occupied one or the other type of these country houses. At the same time, I will argue that the extent to which the Czechoslovak people homogenized and unified their private weekend vacationing experience is remarkable. Ironically, it parallels the official vision of the united masses working and relaxing together.

In addition to restrictions imposed on traveling abroad, the phenomenon of mass building and using of weekend dwellings was often a consequence of the poor living conditions of many Czechoslovak families. With the small exception of those who retained or received their residency in spacious urban apartments built by the rich families during the First Republic, most

people in cities lived in new, but small and unattractive, prefabricated blocks of flats. Owning a weekend cottage or a renovated farmhouse therefore enabled them to escape the cramped conditions of these city homes, and to design at least the weekend spaces as they wished. Ladislav Holy notes that “those, who could afford to do so, spent as much free time as possible in their recreational dwellings ... indulging in the luxury of fireplaces or wine cellars that they could never have in the limited spaces of their city apartments.”³²

At the same time, the social diversity of the weekend house owners extended far beyond the frustrated inhabitants of communist blocks of flats: other city, town, and sometimes even village residents, including people with relatively comfortable living situations, regularly spent their weekends and vacation time in the mass cottage communities in the countryside.

Geographer Dana Fialova emphasizes that the people who owned weekend cottages, came from a wide social spectrum of society – a new trend of mass ownership of weekend dwellings, regardless of people’s education, occupation, or political affiliation began to spread rapidly among the Czechoslovak citizens from the 50s on.³³ Spending time at a weekend house was not just a matter of necessity but also one of the few ways to assert certain social status – something that was extremely difficult to do in a society that declared egalitarianism as its main goal.

The boom in these recreational houses was unprecedented in a country of 15 million citizens. Although already in 1934 the inhabitants of Prague alone owned 3000 weekend houses, the *chata* and *chalupa* culture gained the biggest popularity during the communist years: by 1974, the Prague residents owned 65 000 weekend houses just in central Bohemia.³⁴ By the early 1970s, as Paulina Bren points out, even the official press was “openly referring to the

³² Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*

³³ *Lidove Noviny*, June 8, 2004, 4.

³⁴ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*, 140.

phenomenon as ‘*chata*-mania’” with the *chata* in particular becoming “part of the physical and cultural landscape” of the country.³⁵ According to an analysis made in the early 1980s, on average people were spending 100 to 120 days a year at their weekend houses.³⁶

Chata was logically the more common, and also much cheaper, choice, as the supply of old farmhouses that could be turned into a *chalupa* was limited, whereas almost everybody could afford to build their own new cottage/*chata*. Despite the restrictions imposed by the Czech government in 1974, the number of new recreational dwellings continued to grow – nationwide, there were 100 000 in 1960, 151 000 in 1971, 230 000 in 1980, and 260 000 in 1991.³⁷ Jiri Vagner estimates that in 1991, around 20 percent of all houses in the country were solely used for recreational purposes.³⁸ Many of these weekend dwelling were multi-generational and often shared by friends which increases the number of regular *chata*-goers even further.

Every weekend and almost every longer holiday, hundreds of thousands of Czechoslovak citizens embarked on their journey to a *chata* or *chalupa*. The regular mass traveling to and from the weekend houses could be easily observed on the highways that were packed with cars going in one direction (away from a city on Friday and towards the city on Sunday), complete with entire families and their dogs, bags, and tools for home improvement projects. On Sundays, the contents of the returning cars also traditionally included whatever produce the *chata/chalupa* gardens supplied.

The weekend traveling back and forth to the recreation areas was not, however, a real escape from the city into the solitude of nature. Rather, it was an orchestrated move from

³⁵ Paulina Bren, “Weekend Getaways: The *Chata*, the *Tramp*, and the Politics of the Private Life in the Post-1968 Czechoslovakia,” in David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 124.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Jiri Vagner, “Tourism in the Czech Republic” in *Geographical Aspects of Second Homes in the Czech Republic* (Prague: Karolinum, 1999), 15.)

³⁸ Ibid.

overcrowded cities to overcrowded recreation areas. In fact, the concentration of the weekend houses and cabins in certain parts of the country was so large that the formerly pristine forests, river banks, and other locations with weekend dwellings were suffering from significant environmental damage. The forested regions south and west of Prague were, according to Ladislav Holy, “literally over-contaminated with weekend houses, whose disproportionate number led to devastation of nature and major hygiene problems.”³⁹ In addition to ignoring plumbing and sewage regulations, *chata* owners also “tossed their garbage on the ground, and washed their cars outdoors, letting the soapy water drain into the rivers.”⁴⁰

The mounting environmental concerns only emphasized the fact that the original purpose of these weekend dwellings practically disappeared. Instead of spending time away from the chaos and rumble of city streets and apartments, the *chata* owners in particular found themselves literally surrounded by other cottages filled with people. Since the plots for these cottages were much smaller than those of residential houses – usually around an eighth of an acre – the *chatas* and their little gardens were very close to one another, very much resembling the proximity of a city’s prefabricated blocks of flats. Walking around such a recreational area on a weekend day, a passerby would not escape blaring music from one cottage window blending uneasily with a soccer game transmitted by the radio in the middle of another yard, interrupted periodically by a sound of a chain saw from another cottage, and children’s screaming from yet another one. Such experiences were obviously far from any idyllic images of solitude, quiet and peaceful nature, or relaxation in the middle of countryside. Even the contemporary communist media noted the gradual disappearance of the original aspects of weekend houses and their replacement with

³⁹ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*, 140.

⁴⁰ Paulina Bren, “Weekend Getaways: The *Chata*, the *Tramp*, and the Politics of the Private Life in the Post-1968 Czechoslovakia” in David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, 134.

mass-built and mass-shared cottages crammed side by side in the allocated countryside areas. In 1973 the communist-controlled satirical weekly *Dikobraz* published a cartoon depicting the weekend cottage situation. Small plots with little weekend cabins and even smaller adjacent gardens are filled with people working hard on improving their miniature property or ‘relaxing’ surrounded by the noise of their neighbors. In the middle plot, a three-story cottage towers like a skyscraper, with its owner looking down proudly, clearly aware that he made the most out of his little plot by building his cottage as far up as possible. Looking down from the still unfinished 4th floor on the people below, he screams: “You pathetic romantics!”⁴¹

For this pragmatic cottage owner, the point of building a cottage is no longer relaxation, spending time in the unpolluted countryside, or escaping the masses and stress of the city. He cannot relax until he beats the other cottage owners *and* nature in having the biggest and best weekend house. There is no escaping the masses or stress there either – the masses are everywhere around him, toiling in their gardens and cottages, trying to outdo their neighbors in bigger and better fireplaces, pools, or home-grown vegetables.

3.4 *Chata* vs. *Chalupa*: Collective vs. Individual Style

Despite many similarities between the *chata* and *chalupa* owners, there was one significant difference that distinguished them in regard to their relationship to the concept of the collective. While the *chata* owners retained strong collective elements in their weekend house habits, the *chalupa* residents were decidedly more individualistic. This was a result of the smaller number of, and more importantly the greater spatial differences among, *chalupas* that were often located

⁴¹ Cartoon reprinted in Jiri Pernes, *Dejiny Československa ocima Dikobrazu: 1945 – 1990 (The History of Czechoslovakia through the Eyes of Dikobraz: 1945 – 1990)* (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2003), 175.

in little isolated villages. In contrast, *chatas* were built from scratch in designated areas where the limited space for each *chata* led to a high concentration in close proximity.

The *chata* owners therefore had to accept the fact that their vacation houses will be devoid of any real privacy, and very much open to constant public intrusion. However, many of the owners did not seem to mind. In fact, they welcomed the presence of the other people, and developed complex systems of collective rules and customs, many of which remain in place even today. According to Bernard Safarik, *chata* owners in one *chata* colony revealed that they are regularly involved in personal matters of the other members of the colony – a notice board is kept in a colony assembly place with announcements, including those of the members' deaths. Members attend funerals together, even though they might live hundreds of miles away, and only see each other during their *chata* weekend stays.⁴² Another group of *chata* owners practices formal roll-calls at the beginning and end of each season, very much reminiscent of the organized masses in the official parades. During such an assembly, the members of the colony line up in orderly rows, and listen and respond to the orders of the 'chairman' of the colony. In yet another colony, the members adhere to the policy of safeguarding life at the colony by collectively deciding about possible new members. If a current member decides to sell her/his *chata*, s/he has to first address the colony assembly that will advise her/him in the process of choosing a buyer. Only a buyer, who will respect the colony rules, will be permitted to purchase the *chata*. Apart from participating in various collective activities in the *chata* colony during the weekends, the members of this colony also travel together for longer vacations abroad. As one

⁴² Bernard Safarik, "Český fenomén – Homo Chatar" ("Czech Phenomenon – Homo Chatar"), Czech Public Television (July 27, 2004).

of the *chata* owners said: “35 to 40 people will regularly assemble to go together for a camping vacation. We’ve been doing this for the last 30 years.”⁴³

Many of these rules and habits were developed over decades of weekend vacationing. Owning a cottage in the countryside was popular long before the communist putsch in 1948. As early as 1920s, *chata* colonies began to appear in Czechoslovakia, especially in places frequented by tramps.⁴⁴ Bigger and better cottages soon replaced the simple camping grounds or wooden cabins, but the tramping ideal of spending free time collectively persisted. As Dana Fialova points out, the owners of new cottages often played sports and engaged in other entertainments together. This also distinguished them from the *chalupa* owners. Vacationing at a *chalupa* was still a prerogative of intellectuals and artists in the 30s. The end of WWII and the following expulsion of ethnic Germans from the border areas⁴⁵ combined with socialist industrialization signaled a boom in the trend of vacationing in the old farm houses. Young generations were moving into towns in search of work, and many village houses were left empty after the old parents died. These houses were subsequently transformed into weekend *chalupas*.⁴⁶

The owners of *chalupas* were decidedly different, because they were spatially and often also socially separated from the collective *chata* residents. The numbers of old farms suitable for *chalupas* were limited, and their reconstruction often more difficult and time consuming, at least compared to building a new *chata*. Architects point out that today, many of these buildings

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ *Lidove Noviny*, June 8, 2004, 4. Tramping was a popular holiday activity especially for young people, who tried to imitate their romantic images of the Wild West by building simple wooden log cabins and vacationing there in close connection with the nature.

⁴⁵ Thousands of empty houses and farms were left after the ethnic Germans moved away, many of these buildings appropriated by Czechs as weekend houses.

⁴⁶ *Lidove Noviny*, June 8, 2004, 4.

would be extremely expensive in foreign countries, because of their historical value.⁴⁷ Yet they were acquired at a time when their price was extremely low due to the specific circumstances of the socialist regime: low acquisition cost of the dilapidated farm houses in the border areas, free permits for reconstruction, and cheap or stolen building materials.

Despite the official ideology of egalitarianism, intellectual, cultural, and to some extent social differences continued to exist among Czechoslovak people. Typically, privacy-demanding intellectuals or artists opted for the more challenging *chalupa*, while working class masses settled for an uncomplicated, if crowded, weekend life at a *chata*. As Bernard Safarik noted, “the sociable *chata* owner does not mind the switch from the prefabricated hutch in a city blocks of flats to a similarly crowded quarters of a *chata*’s ‘blocks of flats’, whereas the individualistic *chalupa* owner a few kilometers away builds a high wall around his weekend house in order to absolutely isolate himself from the rest of society for these two days.”⁴⁸ Safarik further argues that the biggest interest in the *chalupa* ownership among these people was during the years of socialism, when it offered the only available escape before the enforced collectivism.⁴⁹

The *chalupa* owners were a distinct minority, with the collective *chata* residents considerably exceeding their numbers. In addition to the *chatas* in the countryside, people also built small garden cabins and cottages in various parts of the cities. This trend was quite popular among those who lived in the prefabricated blocks of flats and could not afford a proper weekend house, but longed for at least a few square feet of their own land on which they could grow vegetables, fruit, flowers, or just relax in the open air. Many of these garden-and-cottage colonies were built on the outskirts of cities and towns, but several can be still found today in the

⁴⁷ Architect Zdenek Lukes in *Lidove Noviny*, June 8, 2004, 4.

⁴⁸ Bernard Safarik, “Cesky fenomen – Homo Chalupar” (“Czech Phenomenon – Homo Chalupar”), Czech Public Television (October 8, 2001).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

middle of Prague, surrounded by industrial or commercial buildings. These cottages averaged 16 square meters (or approximately 160 square feet) in size and were crammed right next to each other. As one part-owner of such cottage explains: “My parents have been commuting by public transportation to such a cottage for the last twenty years. They grow anything imaginable there – from lettuce to fruit. After working the whole week in their jobs, they just move over to the cottage and continue working during the weekend.”⁵⁰ Another owner has a miniature cabin in a cottage colony in the district of Prague 6 – he can barely fit a table, two chairs, bed, small stove and some tools there, but he is happy he has a place where he can spend his weekends by working in his small garden.⁵¹

Although spending time in a weekend house, particularly in the case of a *chalupa*, involved some genuine elements of independent behavior, I want to argue that other aspects of this style of vacationing, especially in the case of the *chata* owners, pointed to qualities typical of collectivized citizens. While at their *chatas*, people engaged in a series of homogenized collective activities in a pseudo-private space with significantly public qualities.

The semblance of privacy was often vigorously emphasized by obvious but completely unnecessary fences around the miniature plots, or by window shades and multiply locked doors.⁵² Real fences were often not allowed by the officials, as they would suggest private property, which officially did not exist in communism. The only type of property aside from state property was personal property. Because most *chatas* were built on state property (which included forests and river banks), the land officially belonged to the state and could not be

⁵⁰ *Lidove Noviny*, June 8, 2004, 4.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² This and subsequent discussion of *chata* life is informed by works of Ladislav Holy and Paulina Bren. See Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*, and Paulina Bren, “Weekend Getaways: The *Chata*, the *Tramp*, and the Politics of the Private Life in the Post-1968 Czechoslovakia” in David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*

fenced off by the *chata* owners. To demarcate their little plots in some way, the owners developed various substitutes for wire or wooden fences, such as ‘green fences’ that included trees, bushes, ponds, etc. Yet because of a small proximity between individual cottages, almost everybody could literally see into another family’s dinner plates, hear and see what they were watching on television, or even listen to their conversation. Constant exposure to, and pressure of, others’ presence made claims of real privacy preposterous.

At the same time, the cottage owners regularly, even if sometimes unwillingly, participated in collectively shared activities, such as organizing garbage disposal or repairing access roads to the cottage colonies. These activities required collective planning and organization similar to projects that were publicly carried out outside the private sphere of vacationing. Other *chata* colonies even practiced collective roll-calls, formal assemblies, or organized group vacationing abroad, as I have already discussed in this chapter.

Notwithstanding the particular differences between the *chata* and *chalupa* owners, the two groups shared many general traits and habits resulting from the specific political, social, and economic situation in socialist Czechoslovakia. Spending a weekend at a *chata* or *chalupa* was primarily designed as an escape from the monotonous world of work and the cramped living conditions in cities and towns. Building and furnishing a weekend house according to their own, not the officially imposed, design provided many people with a feeling that they could decide independently about some parts of their lives. Such small private rebellions against official definitions of living spaces were tolerated and even encouraged by the regime, because they placated the citizens through similar kinds of ‘false exits’⁵³ as the cynical mockery and anti-regime jokes discussed in the previous chapter. The government even approved of the existence of monthly magazines for the *chata* and *chalupa* owners, where articles focused on various do-it-

⁵³ Term used by Slavoj Žižek in Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso, 2002).

yourself projects and style improvements in the weekend houses.⁵⁴ The *chata* culture in particular, Paulina Bren argues, perfected a vision of a publicly shared private world in which “citizens were encouraged to define and locate themselves in a private world, one that was at the same time being replicated by others around them, thus offering the pretence of public life while avoiding its dangers.”⁵⁵

Chatas and *chalupas* also functioned as the only available substitutes for the missing concept of private property. After the communist takeover in 1948, private property was eradicated in socialist Czechoslovakia; only the categories of personal and national property remained.⁵⁶ As Hana Havelkova points out, personal property was only allowed within specific limits: “if, for example, a family house exceeded a certain size, it was expropriated for public purposes.”⁵⁷ The state was strict about regulations on public housing in cities and towns, but more lenient regarding people’s recreation dwellings: “restrictions on owning small-scale (personal) property in the countryside had always been much looser and less likely to be investigated.”⁵⁸ Owning a *chata* or *chalupa*, even if it still stood on state land and was built only by means of bribery, satisfied people’s material needs, while it pushed aside any serious anti-regime activities. People spent their free time building swimming pools from stolen material rather than discussing their dissatisfaction with the current political situation. Officially tolerated consumerism in the private sphere thus played directly into the regime’s hands. Vaclav Havel

⁵⁴ Paulina Bren, “Weekend Getaways: The *Chata*, the *Tramp*, and the Politics of the Private Life in the Post-1968 Czechoslovakia” in David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵⁶ See Hana Havelkova, “Women in and after a ‘Classless’ Society,” in C. Zmroczek and P. Mahony, eds., *Women and Social Class – International Feminist Perspectives*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵⁸ Paulina Bren. “Weekend Getaways: The *Chata*, the *Tramp*, and the Politics of the Private Life in the Post-1968 Czechoslovakia,” in David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, 125.

wrote about this moral devastation of the masses in his letter to the First Secretary of the Communist Party and later President of Czechoslovakia Gustav Husak in 1975:

By nailing a whole man's attention to the floor of his mere consumer interest, it is hoped to render him incapable of appreciating the ever-increasing degree of his spiritual, political and moral degradation. Reducing him into a simple vessel for the ideals of primitive consumer society is intended to turn him into a pliable material for complex manipulation. ... People today are preoccupied far more with themselves, their families and their homes. ... They fill their homes with all kinds of appliances and pretty things, they try to improve their accommodations, they try to make life pleasant for themselves, building cottages, looking after their cars, taking more interest in food and clothing and domestic comfort. In short, they turn their main attention to the material aspects of their private lives.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the private homogenization of weekend habits in turn affected the public world of work – almost all employees with a *chata* or *chalupa* habitually left their workplaces on Friday ahead of the regular schedule so that they could get on the road early to their weekend house, and avoid huge traffic jams. This phenomenon was so common that it was sarcastically referred to even in officially produced films. For example, in a popular comedy from the 1980s, employees departed from work early on Friday according to the distance of their *chatas* from the workplace – the one with a *chata* in the most distant location left first, while the one with a *chata* just a few kilometers away left last. Weekend traveling to a *chata* or *chalupa* was also counted

⁵⁹ Vaclav Havel, *Open Letters: Selected Prose*, trans. Paul Wilson (London: Faber, 1991), quoted in Jacqui True, *Gender, Globalization, and Postsocialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 34.

on by the employers themselves, who planned their most important projects outside the unusable Fridays (when everybody left early) or Mondays (when everybody arrived late). The condition of public privacy therefore to some extent structured the life in the public sphere: the official work hours, projects, or meetings were planned in regard to the private habits of the citizens.

3.5 Conclusion

The mass tendency to spend free time in a strikingly similar way did not have its equivalent in either the other communist countries or the rest of Europe. Even today, Czechs lead the European charts in the number of weekend houses per capita. According to a daily *Lidové noviny*, 12.6 percent of Czechoslovak citizens owned a weekend dwelling in 1988, i.e. one year before the fall of the communist regime. Contrary to all expectations, the demand for these types of real estate dropped only temporarily in the early 90s. By 1997, the percentage of weekend dwelling owners climbed to 13.6, while the demand still continues to grow.⁶⁰

Today, vacationing at a weekend house is just one of many options that people in the Czech Republic have in spending their free time. In contrast, life in the system of public privacy offered very few choices in planning private activities away from public supervision. As I have argued throughout this chapter, the changed boundary between the public and private spaces in socialist Czechoslovakia led to a reduction of spaces of real privacy and intimacy. Public privacy established a system of collective public norms, through which many aspects of people's private lives – homes, marriages, or vacationing – were structured.

Everyday life was not a private matter for most Czechoslovak citizens. Yet the constant public intrusions and the consequent discomfort of life in public privacy was something that they complained about, but nevertheless accepted. In exchange for their passivity, the regime

⁶⁰ *Lidové Noviny*, August 13, 2003, 8.

provided them with a modicum of security in the form of state-provided housing, health-care and family subsidies, and with material pleasures of officially supported consumerism.

4.0 BODIES IN MOTION: MASS GYMNASTICS AS A COLLECTIVE SOCIAL PERFORMANCE

The goal of the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia was not just to create a perfectly organized collective mentality, but also to exhibit it through mass public ceremonies. Mass gymnastic performances called Spartakiads belonged among the regime's favorite and most effective representations of disciplined masses. Czechoslovak Spartakiads, organized every five years to celebrate the country's liberation by the Red Army in 1945, took place in the Strahov Stadium – the biggest sports stadium in the world with seating capacity of 220,000, floor space the size of 5 full football pitches and 200 underground loudspeakers. With budgets reaching 40 million contemporary US dollars for one Spartakiad, these events became, in the words of Petr Roubal, “the most spectacular mass gymnastic displays ever held.”¹ Spartakiads were designed to function as giant ideological devices of the new regime, displaying its power and celebrating the total union of the state and its people.

Spartakiads were not the first mass gymnastics of such cultural significance though. Czechoslovakia has been unique in this respect because public displays of exercising masses reached an unprecedented scale and impact throughout its history, including during the inter-war democracy of the First Republic. But even before Czechoslovakia became independent from the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, hundreds of thousands of Czechs were active members of the Sokol gymnastic movement, which promoted national revival through mass exercise. After the communist takeover in 1948, a communist-organized version of mass gymnastics – Spartakiads – forcefully replaced the Sokol movement and its ideology, but still relied on the Sokol's

¹ Orsolya Dano and Petr Roubal, eds., *Bodies in Formation. Mass Gymnastics under Communism* (Budapest: Open Society Archives at Central European University, 2001), 1, 12.

nationwide popularity, which made a transition towards a new form of the official mass events much easier.

This chapter explores ritualized displays of bodies in mass gymnastics as one of the ideologically most important public collective performances in socialist Czechoslovakia. I examine the ways in which these spectacles functioned as validations of the regime's authority. I start with discussing the use of the body as a symbolic tool, especially in connection with mass body displays. I then focus on the relationship between mass gymnastics and construction of national imagery as exemplified by the Sokol movement. Finally, I look at the ways in which the communist mass gymnastics – Spartakiads – were constructed to reflect the newly required public image of the collectivized masses.

Throughout, I argue that the forceful transformation of the Sokol movement into Spartakiads involved a political as well as discursive shift, the latter characterized by a qualitative difference in the body-controlling mechanisms. Although both movements organized their performances as political spectacles, each revolved around a different set of political and ideological agendas, with a different approach to the individual bodies of the athletes. The athletes' bodies in Sokol and Spartakiads signified two radically different political regimes as well as opposing images of community. Whereas the Sokol body was primarily an *individual* body summoned to reinforce the rhetoric of a national recovery, the Spartakiad body belonged to, and represented, the newly designed communist *collective*. Furthermore, Sokol's exercising athletes were noticeably different from the audiences that observed them, while Spartakiads consciously blurred any such distinctions in an effort to exemplify the absolute egalitarianism of the socialist masses. Anybody could and did become involved in the Spartakiads, regardless of their education, occupation, physical condition, or age.

To understand the difference between the Sokol movement and the Spartakiads, it is necessary to examine the extent to which they, as collective corporeal practices, to use Pierre Bourdieu's² phrase, reached a specific point of separating the control of the body from the control over the mind. While it is relatively easy to manipulate the body to perform in a certain way, controlling the mind requires a lot more external and internal influence and sophistication. Changing people's minds as well as bodies was, ironically, more important for the Sokol movement, whose goal was a total transformation of the Czech nation through a newly established harmony of body and mind. It was therefore extremely important to the Sokol leaders that the Sokol members understood, and agreed with, the organization's political and social goals. In contrast, understanding or agreement of citizens was not exactly important to the communist ideologists. As I will show in this chapter, the communist planners of Spartakiads did not primarily aim for a total control of people's minds. The results of such efforts would never be as certain and easy as a relatively straightforward control of people's bodies. By separating the control of the bodies from the control of the minds, and by focusing solely on the former, the ideologists obtained a perfect visual display of docility and order. Such ideologically powerful demonstration of unity could then be employed in other propaganda materials – images from the Spartakiads therefore often appeared on official posters, in literature and films.

4.1 The Body as a Symbolic Tool

Writing about gymnastics, Eugen Weber noted: "...physical exercise and the role that men attribute to it, that society envisages for it, can document times and mentalities as suggestively as can their industrial enterprises; and physical training always begs the question: training for

² Pierre Bourdieu, "Program for a Sociology of Sport," *Sociology of Sport Journal*, May 1988.

what?”³ While often overlooked by theorists, the immense symbolic potential of the public displays of perfectly organized athletic bodies was certainly not ignored by political and social leaders throughout history. Bodily discipline, as Pierre Bourdieu argues, has therefore become “the instrument par excellence of all forms of ‘domestication,’ ... providing regimes with the type of consent that the mind could refuse.”⁴ Collective disciplining of the body helped to “somatize the social by symbolizing it”⁵ with or without the conscious consent of the exercising individuals. Consequently, totalitarian regimes were naturally quite fond of using mass gymnastics as visible demonstrations of people’s overwhelming support. Organized body displays also conveniently suppressed the competitive element of individual sports disciplines that was undesirable in the environment of a communist regime, and concentrated instead on collective obedience and uniformity.

While various bodily performances have had profound effects in different regimes and cultures, the athletic body in particular has been a unit through which the virtues of strength, order, productivity and health were commonly symbolized. As Cheryl Cole and Melissa Orlie argue, sport offers a compelling myth-generating space as well as a space of surveillance and spectacle where the body is multiply inflected through invisible mechanisms of power. These mechanisms shape “whether bodies are met with enthusiasm and pleasure, anxiety and horror, or some combination of these.”⁶ As a result, the same body can be viewed as a victorious symbol of health and strength, or as a living proof of despiritualized degeneration. This was the case, for example, of radically different interpretations of Soviet athletes’ performances at the 1952 Olympics, which were naturally celebrated by the Soviets, but interpreted by the Americans as

³ Eugen Weber, “Gymnastics and Sports in *fin-de-siecle* France,” *American Historical Review*, February 1971, 70.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, “Program for a Sociology of Sport,” *Sociology of Sport Journal*, May 1988, 161.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Cheryl L. Cole and Melissa A. Orlie, “Hybrid Athletes, Monstrous Addicts, and Cyborg Natures,” *Journal of Sport History*, March 1995, 229.

the results of the dehumanizing Soviet sports industry.⁷ Similarly, it was possible for the communist regime in Czechoslovakia to interpret two almost identical mass performances as radically different activities: Sokol as capitalist, bourgeois, or even reactionary; Spartakiads as revolutionary, progressive and egalitarian.

Sokol and Spartakiads were not the first sports movements that were interpreted and manipulated differently by different regimes. The German Turners (the Gymnastic Movement Turnverein), or various gymnastic displays in the Nazi Germany, Soviet Union, Hungary, Romania or Yugoslavia all produced their own official and unofficial readings that changed with time and according to the location of the interpreter. In fact, even official interpretations often consisted of blatantly contradictory claims. A case in point is when the Turners Movement proclaimed the wish to include all strata of society and thus eliminate class and regional differences, while it also openly excluded some groups of society, such as various national minorities. As Petr Roubal remarked, “xenophobia and anti-authoritarianism...were not mutually exclusive.”⁸

What makes the Czechoslovak case unique is both the extent to which these mass gymnastic activities affected the nation and country, and the radical nature of the transformation of the Sokol’s performances into the Spartakiads. While the Turners Movement was never restructured into a nation-wide development in either the Federal Republic of Germany or even the German Democratic Republic, the Sokol movement was consciously employed in a thoroughly different political and ideological system, and for radically different objectives. At the same time, while mass gymnastic displays represented an important but by no means crucial part of propaganda in Soviet Union, Hungary, Romania or Yugoslavia, they played a key role in

⁷ Ibid., 236.

⁸ Orsolya Dano and Petr Roubal, eds., *Bodies in Formation. Mass Gymnastics under Communism*, 6.

the propaganda activities of communist Czechoslovakia.⁹ The Spartakiads embodied a new level of enforced collective performance of an ideological message through publicly-shared athletic/aesthetic discourse. They became quite literally a matter for all people, as a popular communist slogan would have it. Because of their overwhelming impact on the organization of public life in Czechoslovakia, the Spartakiads were presented as the quintessential historical and cultural events of the thriving socialist state. The Spartakiads were “a central point towards which unrelenting efforts of the entire country are directed,” as the second communist president Antonin Zapotocky declared in 1954.¹⁰

4.2 The Rise of Exercising Masses

Sport is an essential factor in the creation of the mass man.¹¹

Since mass gymnastics represented an ideal setting for large-scale production and consumption of symbolic imagery, they became an important tool for many European nationalist movements in the 19th century. The successful employment of mass gymnastics was certainly aided by a general rise of interest in sports activities, a direct consequence of the industrial revolution and the concomitant increase in leisure time among the general population in developed countries. The massive profusion of the post-Industrial Revolution forms of leisure, such as organized sport

⁹ See Orsolya Dano and Petr Roubal, eds., *Bodies in Formation. Mass Gymnastics under Communism* (Budapest: Open Society Archives at Central European University, 2001).

¹⁰ Vladimir Macura, *Stastny Vek. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)* (Prague: Prague Imagination, 1992), 77.

¹¹ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (London: Random House, 1971).

and gymnastics, was facilitated by a growing concentration of population in industrial towns. New spaces for physical, social and political massing of people emerged.¹²

At the same time, industrial modernization widened the gap between the developed and underdeveloped world, leading to new forms of social injustice especially within the former. Industrial towns became overcrowded, with thousands of workers forced to endure inhumane working and living conditions.¹³ In the period when national revival and social justice were at the centre of the people's attention, public displays of exercising bodies offered a new means of communication. According to Petr Roubal, this new language "surpassed the other communication systems such as music or literature in its capacity to address 'physically' the key topics of that time."¹⁴ The communicative strength of mass gymnastics lay in their ability to demonstrate the power of the desired community and the key concepts of class or nationalist struggle, such as strength and solidarity, through widely accessible and extremely legible codes of body movements. At a relatively low cost, mass body displays reached almost immediately vast numbers of people, with even the poorest and the least educated able to decipher their messages instantly.

By the end of the 19th century, mass gymnastics were already a powerful social element throughout Europe. Significantly, the German Turners and the Czech Sokol Movement were the two most influential European nationalist organizations that were both founded exclusively on the premise of constructing a new national imagery through representations of young, healthy and strong bodies, built by rigorous and regimented exercise. Turners and Sokol attracted large crowds of participants and audiences: as Richard A. Woeltz points out, while it was still

¹² For further discussion of the impact of the industrial revolution on the social tendencies of the masses see Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

¹³ See, for example, Peter N. Stearns, *European Society in Upheaval* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967).

¹⁴ Orsolya Dano and Petr Roubal, eds., *Bodies in Formation. Mass Gymnastics under Communism*, 5.

unthinkable around 1914 to see huge crowds attending a soccer game, crowds over 50,000 regularly attended the Turnfest mass gymnastic displays in Germany.¹⁵ Similarly, Sokol's regular performance assemblies – 'Slety' – attracted around 300,000 spectators as early as 1912.¹⁶

Whereas the Turners focused on emphasizing ethnic and racial superiority of its members and openly declared their hostility to anything and anybody alien, such as the Poles, the French, clerics, and Jews,¹⁷ the Sokol movement propagated inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness. Its goal was to consolidate the nation weakened by centuries of oppression; therefore, every supporter was eagerly needed and welcomed. 'Every Czech a Sokol' became the central slogan of the movement, which not only allowed among its members Jews and Germans (except for the supporters of the fascists) but also strived to reach new members as far as in Russia, Bulgaria, and among the Southern Slavs.¹⁸ To emphasize the open and democratic character of Sokol, one of its founding members, Jindrich Fugner, suggested that its members address each other as 'brother' and 'sister,' which caused a real sensation among the general population of the Czech lands in the 1860s.¹⁹ Furthermore, after a brief initial hesitation, Sokol also included women among its members, thus departing radically from the strictly masculine ideology of the Turners.

The Turners emerged out of a confident and prosperous environment, which sharply contrasted with the conditions under which Sokol was founded. Unlike the financially strong and government-supported Turners, Sokol was an organization promoting the physical, cultural

¹⁵ Richard A. Woeltz, "Sport, Culture and Society in Late Imperial and Weimar Germany: Some Suggestions for Future Research," *Journal of Sport History*, March 1977, 295-315.

¹⁶ "Seznam Sokolských sletů" ("List of Sokol's Assemblies throughout History"), *Informační leták Československé Obce Sokolské (Information Bulletin of the Czech Sokol Gymnastic Movement)* (Prague: Czech Sokol Gymnastic Movement, 1994).

¹⁷ Petr Roubal in Orsolya Dano and Petr Roubal, eds., *Bodies in Formation*, 6.

¹⁸ Petr Roubal in Orsolya Dano and Petr Roubal, eds., *Bodies in Formation*, 8.

¹⁹ Pavel Kosatik, "Sen o fyzické dokonalosti" ("A Dream of the Physical Perfection"), *TYDEN Magazine*, March 2003, 73.

and intellectual rebirth of a small and rather insecure Czech nation, continuously suffocating under the supervision of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Sokol was barely tolerated by the Austro-Hungarian official structures, often suffering from severe organizational restrictions and financial problems. When Sokol leaders tried to set up a national union of all local Sokol organizations in 1868, and organize through it a mass gymnastics performance with other international Slavic sports clubs in Prague, the Ministry of the Interior in Vienna permitted neither the nation-wide organization nor the event, claiming that it would provide a space for undesirable nationalistic activities. However, Vienna fully supported a similar unification between ethnic German Turners in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the national Turner organization in Germany.²⁰ Clearly then, Sokol's goals and methods of achieving them were radically different from those of the Turners. While striving for Czech national independence, it became a necessity for Sokol to stress friendship and cooperation among different nations, especially those with Slavic populations.²¹ The idea of Slavic togetherness was particularly popular among the Czech sokols fighting for national independence for whom these alliances stemmed naturally from the similar ethnic backgrounds of Slavic nations and their shared history of oppression by other, mostly Germanic, powers.

4.3 Every Czech a Sokol

The importance of Sokol reaches far beyond the tremendous influence it had on its members. Founded in 1862, when the Czech lands were still deeply embedded in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Sokol played a significant role in the Czech national revival movement and remained a powerful political and cultural force until the end of the Second World War. Sokol's founder,

²⁰ Julius Dolansky, ed., *Sto deset let Sokola (Hundred and Ten Years of Sokol)* (Prague: Olympia, 1973), 20.

²¹ See, for example, Miroslav Schutzner and Jiri Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion's Force)* (Prague: Maj, 1948).

Miroslav Tyrš was strongly inspired by the Greek ideal of *kalokagathia*,²² which he declared to be the new movement's goal. Coining the slogan 'In a healthy body dwells a healthy mind,' Tyrš decided to use physical exercise as a means of not only physical but also moral and spiritual rebirth of the nation that had suffered under the hegemony of the Austro-Hungarian rule. Tyrš knew that the ideas of freedom, equality, brotherhood, an independent Czech state, or Slavic togetherness could not be promoted through a strictly political program – the Austro-Hungarian authorities would immediately intervene. Instead, it was through public mass exercise that the humiliated, distrustful, and demoralized nation was going to unite and 'toughen itself up.'²³

With the goals set and strategy in place, the next step was to choose an appropriate name that would symbolically represent the movement's definition of typical Czech qualities. Eventually, the founders selected the name 'Sokol,' the Czech word for falcon. According to Pavel Kosatík, there are at least three hypotheses for this name choice: it might have been originally derived from a title of a Slovak student magazine that the students chose as a symbol of pride, courage and endurance. Another theory is that it was inspired by a Southern Slavic freedom movement of the same name. Alternatively, the Czech gymnasts selected it themselves because it represented most adequately a typically 'Czech' animal: strong despite its smaller size, intelligent and brave when facing difficult situations, and eternally free. Significantly, the falcon has always been described as winning a struggle not because of its strength alone, but also because of its intelligence and skills.²⁴ Such a portrayal suited well the ideology of the Sokol movement that had to turn the obvious disadvantages of the Czech nation, such as its small size

²² Developed by Plato, the idea of *kalokagathia* (*kalos* – beautiful, *agathos* – good, noble) promoted the harmony between mind and body and was considered the final goal of education.

²³ The Czech phrase 'Tuzme se!' i.e., 'Let's toughen ourselves up!' was also created by Tyrš to represent one of the main slogans of the Sokol movement. The meaning of the phrase in Czech is far from any militaristic or macho connotations; rather, it implies the continuous process of building an ideal physical and mental condition.

²⁴ Pavel Kosatík, "Sen o fyzické dokonalosti" ("A Dream of the Physical Perfection"), *TYDEN Magazine*, March 2003, 73.

and lack of political influence in Europe, into a potentially beneficial situation. The small Czech nation therefore had to only train its minds better, and rely more on unique talents than on its obviously strong and overconfident neighbors.

Sokol's goal of uniting a geographically, politically, and socially divided nation was achieved with amazing speed and effectiveness. The movement was unique in its ability to attract members from a wide social spectrum; as a result, it rapidly became the largest voluntary organization in the country. Contemporary and later observers praised the organization for "strengthening the ties between the city and country as well as different social classes and age groups."²⁵ Furthermore, and unlike other temporary nation-wide events, such as rebellions or revolutions, the Sokol gymnastic movement lasted exceptionally long and therefore had an immense impact on several generations. As Petr Roubal points out, many Sokol's Slets (General Assemblies), for example in 1938 and 1948,²⁶ marked "the turning points in the history of the Sokol as well as of the whole nation."²⁷ Unlike music, opera, or theatre that affected much smaller numbers of rather passive audiences, Sokol's mass gymnastics actively involved thousands of exercising individuals in (re)creating national symbolism for themselves and by themselves. Such cultural and political impact of mass physical exercise on the formation of national identity in the Czech lands has been unmatched by any similar national revival movement.

²⁵ Miroslav Schutzner and Jiri Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion's Force)*, 43.

²⁶ Both of these years were crucial and extremely painful for the Czech nation: 1938 as the last year before the Nazi occupation when fears of war reached the highest level, and 1948 as the year of the Communist takeover.

²⁷ Petr Roubal in Orsolya Dano and Petr Roubal, eds., *Bodies in Formation*, 7.

Although other sports clubs and movements²⁸ existed alongside the Sokol movement, their popularity could never match that of Sokol. Sokol's membership rose from 75 in the founding year 1862 to 1,004,987 members by 1947²⁹ – an astounding success in a country with a total population of 12,000,000 citizens.³⁰ The Sokol-financed and built gymnasiums could be found in little towns and villages in even the most remote areas. Sokol also sponsored the building of other sports-related facilities, such as swimming pools, racing tracks, river docks, and horse-riding centers. Finally, the movement eagerly supported Czech cultural and social activities, such as music, opera and theatre performances, but also nationalist balls and parades.³¹

Participation in Sokol's Assemblies in an independent Czechoslovakia, i.e., during the period of the so-called First Republic between 1918 and 1938, expressed for many people their joy from newly gained civic and state freedom. Sokol's significance, however, extended far beyond mass exercising. Its ideals represented a wholesome way of life for the majority of the Sokol members, who thus openly and genuinely accepted the ideological goals of the movement. Even today, many former sokols talk enthusiastically about their absolute dedication to the organization's ideals and methods.

Sokols were always expected to lead an ethical life, working for the education and prosperity of their families, local communities, and nation. Many of them therefore regularly “spent their vacation walking around mountains marking tourist paths,”³² or “devoted all of their free time to exercising in Sokol, playing in a local amateur theatre company, singing in an

²⁸ One of them was a small workers' sports organization that later transformed itself into the Federation of the Workers' Sports Unions (*Federace delnických telocvicných jednot – DTJ*). After 1948, the communist government used this organization's public exercise activities as supposedly original models for the later Spartakiads, conveniently omitting a much greater influence of the Sokol movement. See, for example, *Czechoslovak Sport – Czechoslovak Sport*, issues published in 1953, 1954, 1980.

²⁹ Miroslav Schutzner and Jiri Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion's Force)*, 83.

³⁰ Czech Statistical Office, Prague, 1947.

³¹ Miroslav Schutzner and Jiri Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion's Force)*

³² Pavla Frydlova, ed., *Vsechny nase vcerejsky (All of Our Yesterdays)* (Prague: Centre for Gender Studies, 1998), 126.

amateur orchestra, and reading and singing Czech tales and songs to their children.”³³ The connection between Sokol’s ideology, its exercise activities and its involvement in civic community seems much more genuinely and effectively accomplished than in the case of Spartakiads, where, as I will show, a severe dislocation emerged between ideology, its mechanical manifestation through exercise, and the disembodied, externally-organized public life.

By contributing significantly to the building of the Czechoslovak sports and cultural infrastructure, and by defining and embodying some of the most desired physical, intellectual and moral qualities, Sokol moved beyond the significance of a mere sports movement, and established itself as one of the symbols of the independent Czech nation. As the second Czechoslovak president Dr. Edvard Benes said, “The rise of our nation is unimaginable without Sokol.”³⁴ In the minds of many Czechs, including their first president Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, Sokol even represented the very concept of democracy. “Every real and committed sokol will be a guard, a political and social worker in service of our republic, our democracy,” wrote Masaryk.³⁵ Similarly, K. J. Benes argued that “Sokol’s idea of brotherhood and humanism, and the harmony between an individual and a group that it builds...are a perfect expression of a quintessentially democratic character of a Czech man.”³⁶ Other contemporary observers described Sokol and its activities as “a stunning manifestation of the nation’s will towards freedom and independence,”³⁷ and “a magical spring rejuvenating the nation from its past malaise.”³⁸ Sokol was therefore for many Czechs both the expression of an ideal Czech character

³³ Ibid., 89-90.

³⁴ Dr. Edvard Benes in Miroslav Schutzner and Jiri Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion’s Force)*, 88.

³⁵ Tomas Garrigue Masaryk in Schutzner and Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion’s Force)*, 88.

³⁶ K. J. Benes in Schutzner and Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion’s Force)*, 77.

³⁷ Schutzner and Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion’s Force)*, 76.

³⁸ Ibid., 59.

and a way of reaching it. It represented the salvation of a subjugated nation as well as its final victorious condition.

4.4 Individualized Collective vs. Collectivized Individual

During the Spartakiads, the separation between the publicly summoned and controlled body, and autonomous, if silenced, mind increased. While the Sokol representatives claimed that in the case of Sokol the body and mind worked almost in unison as Sokol's ideology was consciously accepted by the movement's members, Spartakiads' participants exemplified a wide spectrum of the body/mind separation. Typically, this separation resulted in an almost schizophrenic condition of a totalitarian subject, whose body and face displayed in public do not correspond to the private, potentially uncontrollable, mind.

Although Sokol and its communist successor the Spartakiads were both collective endeavors, only the Sokol movement preserved the individual element within the mass of exercising bodies. Whereas Sokol's collective consisted of voluntarily united individuals, Spartakiads' collective reduced the individual aspects of its performances to the bare minimum. In fact, its main goal was to eliminate individuality completely and replace it with an organized mass of non-distinguishable subjects – the socialist People. The Spartakiads represent a new type of collectivity: the all-encompassing mass that includes, and does not distinguish between, the exercising individuals and their audiences. This declaration of absolute unity of “everything and everybody, of Czechs and Slovaks, men and women, children and adults, working class and working intelligentsia,” emphasizes above all, as Vladimir Macura argues, “the undividable union of people and the Party, the People and their regime.”³⁹

³⁹ Vladimir Macura, *Stastny Vek. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)* (Prague: Prague Imagination, 1992), 82.

Every sokol (i.e., the individual member of the movement) was a disciplined member of an organized group, but in contrast to Spartakiads' participants, s/he nevertheless always retained a certain amount of personal autonomy within that group. The ideas of brotherhood/sisterhood and complete equality among all members (including women) of the organization were constantly highlighted in Sokol's internal documents, but also in its bulletins, posters, and other publicity materials. The purpose of proper Sokol exercising, according to Ferdinand Pujman, was to "create a performance that does not suppress the individual element despite the perfect unity of the movements."⁴⁰ Poems and speeches written about Sokol often directly addressed the readers as brothers/sisters.⁴¹ A sokol, as an individual addressed singularly, often appeared depicted in poems and articles as fighting with his Slavic brothers for the national freedom.⁴² Similarly, the slogan "A sokol has a brother everywhere" was used to imply the movement's goal of world-wide dissemination of Sokol's ideas. As Jar. B. Zyka wrote in 1912, "While 'Every Czech a Sokol' used to be Tyrš's ideal, we now extend this slogan to include all Slavic nations – 'Every Slav a Sokol.'"⁴³ Furthermore, unlike the Spartakiad participants, who would meet only once in 5 years for the sole purpose of practicing for the final performance, most sokols personally knew each other (particularly in smaller towns), and met regularly even outside exercising.

Sokol's emphasis on equality needs to be distinguished from the Spartakiads' theatrical displays of egalitarianism whose only goal was a reduction of everybody to the status (symbolic or real) of the working masses. The purpose of the Spartakiad exercises was to show the

⁴⁰ Ferdinand Pujman in Schutzner and Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion's Force)*, 66.

⁴¹ Schutzner and Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion's Force)*, 92, 128; also a poem by Eugen Muzik in Jar. B. Zyka, ed., *Sokolsky slet ve Svetozoru (Sokol's Assembly in Svetozor)* (Prague: J. Otto Publishers, 1912), 1.

⁴² Eugen Muzik in Jar. B. Zyka, ed., *Sokolsky slet ve Svetozoru (Sokol's Assembly in Svetozor)* (Prague: J. Otto Publishers, 1912), 1.

⁴³ Jar. B. Zyka, ed., *Sokolsky slet ve Svetozoru (Sokol's Assembly in Svetozor)* (Prague: J. Otto Publishers, 1912), 2.

multiplicity of the participants in the context of their complete homogenization as unified masses, the People of Czechoslovakia. The most important issue at these displays was, as the contemporary press claimed, that they communicate “the simple and mighty ‘WE’ whose power (the people) have now fully realized.”⁴⁴

Contrary to such an interpretation of equality, Sokol declared as its goal the achievement of democratic and harmonious relationships among its members, and eventually in the whole country. In a discussion of Sokol’s objectives, K. J. Benes wrote that the ‘Sokol-style harmony’ was to be reached through voluntary participation of all Sokol members in rehearsals, but also in working together for the organization, for example in helping to build new sports facilities.⁴⁵ Benes, together with many other contemporary writers, believed that individual service to the needs of the many was possible without compromising a person’s subjective freedom. Josef Kopta believed the power of the Sokol movement lay in the voluntary and temporary unification of people’s diverse individual characters as opposed to the frightening strength of the rolling unidentified masses of people.⁴⁶ Similarly, Jan Masaryk, the son of the first Czechoslovak president and foreign minister of Czechoslovakia, emphasized the voluntary aspect of Sokol: “People’s absolutely voluntary involvement in Sokol’s activities is what always interests and touches me...Sokol is always spontaneous, simple and truthful.”⁴⁷ Jan’s father, President Masaryk, portrayed the Sokol’s discipline as “anything but a mechanical discipline; rather, a sum of ideas, and Sokol’s and national spirit.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Petr Roubal in Orsolya Dano and Petr Roubal, eds., *Bodies in Formation*, 16.

⁴⁵ K. J. Benes in Schutzner and Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion’s Force)*, 76-78.

⁴⁶ Josef Kopta in Schutzner and Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion’s Force)*, 54.

⁴⁷ Jan Masaryk in Schutzner and Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion’s Force)*, 13.

⁴⁸ T.G. Masaryk in Hana Najmanova, *Sokolske slety: 1882 – 1994 (Sokol’s Assemblies: 1882 – 1994)* (Prague: Internal publication of the Czech Sokol’s Union, 1994), 27.

Times of generally perceived danger would be the only exception to the movement's self-proclaimed obligation to protect individuality of its members. Sokol representatives approved of temporary suppression of individual differences, but only for the sake of protective measures taken on their members' behalf. After the German invasion in 1939, for example, the Sokol leaders implemented (for a Sokol, the highly atypical) strategy of a 'total merging of individuals within the masses' in order to protect the lives of many Sokol members, Sokol property, or documents and information of strategic value. Evzen Koppl described the Sokol's strategy as follows: "We have to count on the worst things happening. Therefore, Sokol's and national property 'disappears' and is hidden in safe places. ... The acquaintances become strangers, individuals merge with the crowd. They lose their names and cease to exist. A wide underground Sokol network develops, dense and strong."⁴⁹ Although Germans forcefully closed the Sokol movement down in 1941, and executed over 3,000 of its members, Sokol's underground network nevertheless continued to operate throughout the entire war. The adoption of the strategy of blending individuals within the crowd successfully saved lives of many members and non-members, as their detection and identification became much more difficult.

Of course, such strategy is not new – it has been used extensively by various people and groups throughout history and in different cultures (spies, terrorists, rebel organizations, etc). Spies or rebel groups regard crowd blending as a defining and indispensable feature of their existence – an aspect that protects them and actually enables them to acquire a peculiar version of individual freedom. In contrast, the Sokol movement considered the total merging of individuals within crowds as fundamentally restricting their freedom, and approved of such temporary measures only under the extreme, life-threatening, circumstances of national occupation.

⁴⁹ Evzen Koppl in Schutzner and Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion's Force)*, 74.

In addition to ideological and political reasons, there is also a cultural and social rationalization of Sokol's emphasis on organized individuality versus Spartakiads' obsession with organized mass collectivity. Despite the relatively wide social stratification of Sokol's members, most Sokol's leaders and members (especially in bigger towns) came from a middle-class bourgeois environment. Their social and cultural situation sharply contrasted with the living conditions of members of the communist-organized Workers' Sports Unions (DTJ) that were later used as models for the Spartakiads.⁵⁰ Protection of individuality and individual democratic rights was extremely important to the bourgeois middle class. Sokol's performances therefore resonated with both the spirit of the rising free nation and the entrepreneurial progress of a rapidly developing democratic country. The suppression of individual elements in the Spartakiads reflected a dramatic social change in post-1948 Czechoslovakia. Specifically, a rapid and enforced leveling of society through nationalization of private property, elimination of wage differences, and general homogenization of people's lifestyles occurred in the early days of the new regime. Individuality became an unattainable, but also somewhat unimportant, concept in a society structured by the collectivistic policies of a centrally organized state.

Yet the difference between Sokol and the Spartakiads in regard to their interpretations of individuality should not be perceived in black and white terms. Despite its strong emphasis on protecting individuality, Sokol did not abandon the idea of collective action altogether; in fact, its emphasis on individuality coordinated within collectivity often reached levels where it might have seemed suspiciously aligned with the later communist ideology of Spartakiads. For

⁵⁰ The name 'Spartakiad' was used for the first time in 1921. Its creator, J. F. Chaloupecky, who was also a founder of the Workers' Sports Unions, argued that "all medieval and modern history of workers' movement does not offer any person, whose name would connect three ideas: proletariat – social revolution – physical education. Only antiquity offers such a name: Spartakus, gladiator, it means trained wrestler, the slave and awakener of the first organized proletariat revolution." Quoted in Petr Roubal in Orsolya Dano and Petr Roubal, eds., *Bodies in Formation*, 9.

example, although strongly inspired by the classical ideal of exercise, and frequently making references to sports in ancient Greece, the Sokol movement went through a brief period of a somewhat ambivalent, sometimes even detached, attitude to the modern Olympic movement. This was the result of a tension felt between the original Tyrs' emphasis on collective endeavors as the only appropriate and effective sports activities, and the Olympic celebration of accomplishments of individual athletes. This period of distance towards the Olympic disciplines lasted only briefly; since 1920s the Sokol athletes started to participate in the games, many of them successfully.⁵¹

Similarly, many communist writers, who after the 1948 putsch eagerly supported the idea of the Spartakiads, criticized the mass performances of the Sokol movement precisely for their collective image. Sokol's Assemblies, they claimed, projected a distorted image of an ideal collective. Commenting on a Sokol's Assembly in the 1930s, Marxist journalist Ladislav Stoll wrote:

Prague will again become a stage of large nationalistic rallies ... the assembly of the thousands of healthy gymnasts, trained with military precision, will thrill the watching crowds. The illusion of the fleeting image of the mechanically flawless performance ... will stick in the minds of the audience and disguise the reality of the anarchy and class struggle in society.⁵²

⁵¹ Pavel Kosatik, "Sen o fyzicke dokonalosti" ("A Dream of the Physical Perfection"), *TYDEN Magazine*, March 2003, 73.

⁵² Cited in Vladimir Macura, *Stastny Vek. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)* (Prague: Prague Imagination, 1992), 81.

In the eyes of the communist ideologists, the socialist society was devoid of any class struggle and problems. Consequently, the concept of collectivity in such a society could not be deceiving. In fact, the communist propaganda touted the collective way of life as its ideal.

As these examples showed, the collective and collectively shared ways of life remained extremely important for both Sokol and the Spartakiads, even though each of them interpreted collectivity very differently. Participation in the socialist collectives, of which the Spartakiads were an important manifestation, implied a tacit agreement on the part of the citizens to suppress their individual qualities and personal needs. Unlike the communist organizers of the homogeneous exercising masses, the Sokol's leaders always emphasized the individual qualities of their members, but at the same time expected them to willingly suspend their individuality for the sake of a national rebirth. For example, sokols were advised to wear the same uniforms at official gatherings, and to follow specific rules regarding their public and private behavior, their free time, written correspondence, and even furnishing their houses.⁵³ A book by Karel Jaroslav Obrátil published in 1898 recommended that the Czech sokols should furnish their houses in a "distinctly Czech style" with Czech-made furniture and paintings depicting scenes from Czech history or Czech national heroes. The sokols were also expected to correspond with official places exclusively in Czech language, including letters abroad, and to refuse all materials written in German.⁵⁴ Such intervention into public and private behavior and lifestyle is reminiscent of the situation in the totalitarian system of public privacy which I discussed in the previous chapter.

However, as Pavel Kosatik points out, it is unlikely that many of these strict rules were actually followed, perhaps with the exception of a few excited years during the national revival.

⁵³ Pavel Kosatik, "Sen o fyzické dokonalosti" ("A Dream of the Physical Perfection"), *TYDEN Magazine*, March 2003, 72.

⁵⁴ Karel Jaroslav Obrátil in Pavel Kosatik, "Sen o fyzické dokonalosti" ("A Dream of the Physical Perfection"), 72.

Sokol's instruction books, for example Obrátil's manual, were published and certainly read with respect, testifying to the immense influence that the Sokol movement had on the lives of ordinary Czech people.⁵⁵ But in contrast to the communist ideology of collectively shared public and private life, Sokol's publications and initiatives never aimed at a complete elimination of individuality or an absolute opening of the private spaces to public supervision.

4.5 The Glory and Agony of the Spartakiads

One of the most memorable depictions of the Czechoslovak Spartakiads comes from Petr Roubal, who wrote about the 1975 spectacle. In his essay, he describes vividly the atmosphere at the Strahov Stadium completely filled with two hundred thousand spectators, including the Czechoslovak president Gustav Husak:

Twelve thousand and ninety six women dressed in blue miniskirts holding white clubs performed gymnastic exercise symbolizing the beauty of the country. After 24 minutes of the performance parents, carrying their three to six year old children, filled the stadium. ... During the eight minutes of the performance, the children 'exercised' with their mothers, jumping around them, marching with them, dancing with them and riding on their backs. Accompanied by a passionate applause, the children left the stadium on the (right) shoulder of their mothers waving to the crowd with white scarves. Husak wiped away a tear. When they had left the stadium, a few seconds of silence followed. Suddenly it was broken by three units of jet aircraft flying right over the stadium. Through the three gates of the stadium, the first lines of sun-tanned male bodies appeared dressed only in 'snow-white'

⁵⁵ Pavel Kosatik, "Sen o fyzické dokonalosti" ("A Dream of the Physical Perfection"), 72.

shorts. Salvo. With a roar the soldiers ran to fulfill the order described a reporter from the Herald Tribune who was present on that day: “As one wave sank, another rose and a third was forming. Then suddenly, when this living ocean had covered the 60,000 square meter field, the soldiers stopped dead in their tracks, then, seconds later, launched into a performance, which drew gasps of admiration – and sometimes fright – from the crowd.”⁵⁶

Historians writing about Czech national identity often emphasize a strong feeling of egalitarianism common among Czechs long before the Communist takeover in 1948. In his influential study of the Czech mentality, Ladislav Holy argues that Czechs tend to construct their national identity around the ideal of commonness: the Czech nation is believed to have survived the centuries of oppression not because of its heroes but because of ‘everyday heroism’ of ordinary, unexceptional Czechs.⁵⁷ The Czech tradition of egalitarianism is different from its meaning within the system of Western democracy, where it usually implies equality of opportunity. Czech egalitarianism is perhaps best expressed by a common saying “Everybody has the same stomach” – everybody should be on the same level, not exceeding the average socially, economically or culturally. This social demand for sameness has deep roots in the Czech lands. According to Holy, its origins go back to the counter-reformation of the 18th century that strived to eradicate the Czech nobility, as well as to the strong anti-nobility, and anti-capitalism mood among the Czech working classes in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁵⁸ For example, it was significant for his immense popularity and respect among the Czech people that

⁵⁶ Orsolya Dano, Petr Roubal, eds., *Bodies in Formation. Mass Gymnastics under Communism*, 1.

⁵⁷ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 60-65.

⁵⁸ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation*

the first Czechoslovak president Masaryk “behaved as an ordinary man...every school child knew that he slept in a simple, iron, military bed and ate simple peasant meals.”⁵⁹ Czech writer Arnost Lustig illustrates this particular form of Czech egalitarianism by pointing to one of its rather unfortunate consequences: a shared sense of envy of anything or anybody exceeding the average. “My friend Skvorecky,” writes Lustig, “explained to me some of the regrettable qualities of the Czech nature as follows: when a Czech farmer has a goat, his neighbor does not wish a nice goat for himself; instead he wishes that the first farmer’s goat died.”⁶⁰ The pervasiveness of this particularly Czech ‘way of thinking’ is demonstrated by the fact that there exist several variations of this saying: if a farmer’s field gives better crop than his neighbor’s, the latter does not wish for a better luck next time, but rather for a destruction of the first farmer’s crop. Similarly, if a woman buys a new fur coat, her female neighbor does not want the same fur coat, but rather wishes that her neighbor’s nice fur coat is destroyed by moths.⁶¹

As a result of this specific type of egalitarian thinking, suppressing individual differences and personal autonomy under the Communist regime did not meet with the resistance that would be normally expected. In fact, the ideal of collective identity, while certainly enforced by the state through formal socialization activities (e.g., collective work, celebrations, or vacationing) and through keeping all wages around the same level, would probably have been calmly accepted by most people anyway, and in some cases even welcomed.

This culturally ingrained propensity for egalitarian collectivism also helps to explain the ease with which the ideologically loaded Spartakiads were quite effortlessly and quickly accepted by much of Czech population as a replacement of the Sokol movement. The need for a tangible expression of collective unity preceded the communist ideology, and thus made it much

⁵⁹ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation*, 143.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation*, 72.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*.

easier for the Communists to gain attention and influence through their organized mass activities. Mass gymnastics were ideal in this respect – all cultural, regional, or ethnic differences disappeared in the multi-headed, disciplined unit. An *imagined community* emerged.

Even though massive sport performances were immensely popular in the pre-communist Czechoslovakia,⁶² only a few of these sports organizations were able to survive in the new political environment of the totalitarian regime. In the eyes of the communist government, they could not reflect accurately the newly sanctioned image of the masses. Through an open identification of the masses with the working classes, the communist rhetoric after 1948 purposefully altered the definition and public understanding of the masses. As I argued in the chapter “Public Collective Identity,” after 1948, the masses became almost exclusively represented by the working class people, who represented the center of the socialist state. The work heroism of the working class was celebrated in speeches presented at mass meetings, on banners carried in the parades, and in songs that were played or sung at rallies. The official propaganda began to refer routinely to *all* Czechoslovak people as ‘the working people,’ while the occasional more detailed descriptions always followed the established hierarchy of listing the workers first, agriculture workers second, and intelligentsia third.⁶³ In his study of communist semantics, Vladimir Macura quotes several communist poets, whose work demonstrates the obligatory working-class qualities of the new masses: “the Party equals every Man...a Man whose name is working class (J. Noha)...Every man is our Proletariat (J. Pilar).”⁶⁴

⁶² See, for example, Ladislav Holy. *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*

⁶³ Examples of this pattern can be found in all contemporary newspapers and magazines, such as *Rude Pravo*, *Mlada Fronta* (The Young Front), *Prace* (Work) or *Mladý Svet* (The Young World).

⁶⁴ Vladimir Macura, *Stastny Vek. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989* (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989), 20.

Sokol was not an exception in the communist meltdown of organizations that did not reflect this new image of the masses – it continued to exist only briefly after 1948, mainly because the new communist government simply could not dismiss its nation-wide popularity. But the communist propaganda system wasted no time and money in constructing a vicious image of Sokol, portraying the organization as corrupt, reactionary and, above all, anti-working class. Sokol was banned shortly after its last Assembly in 1948,⁶⁵ and its much-appreciated strategies for engaging thousands of people in an enjoyable and controllable form of mass activity were expropriated by the communist Spartakiads.

The pinnacle of both the Sokol's Assemblies and the Spartakiads is the public mass physical display of exercising bodies.⁶⁶ The goal of continuous practicing and training is therefore not so much *just* to get the individual bodies stronger or healthier,⁶⁷ but to exhibit these (strong and healthy) bodies in their organized multiplicity as representations of a particular ideological discourse. Unlike admiring the beauty or performance of a single athlete's body, whether of a real sportsperson or a marble statue in a museum, the emphasis of the Sokol's Assemblies and the Spartakiads is on the beauty and performance of a disciplinary polyphony of bodies, to use Foucault's terminology.⁶⁸ In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault outlines the 18th century's disciplinary transformation of the individual body reached, among other methods, through physical training and exercise.⁶⁹ As Foucault points out,

⁶⁵ The communist media, however, continued to rally against Sokol many years after the movement had been officially banned. See, for example, *Ceskoslovensky Sport*, issues published in 1954.

⁶⁶ Besides the mass exercise performances, Sokol's Assemblies and Spartakiades also included individual sports competitions, and cultural and social activities, such as parades, balls, or theater and opera presentations.

⁶⁷ Although improvement of an athlete's strength, health or even mind is also strongly supported and encouraged, especially by the Sokol movement.

⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 159.

⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Foucault claims that the technique of bodily control changed in the 18th century in three significant ways. First, the scale of control moved from treating the body *en masse*, as an indissociable unity, to a detailed control of individual movements, gestures and attitudes.

this new type of bodily discipline dissociates power from the body in that “on the one hand, it turns it into an ‘aptitude,’ a ‘capacity,’ which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection.”⁷⁰

Sokol’s Assemblies and the Spartakiads represent strongly ceremonial performances, combining public observation and public displays of discipline. But Foucault’s observations resonate more with the totalitarian Spartakiads than the Sokol movement. Whereas Sokol still incorporated some exemplary features in its ideology, Spartakiads were exclusively following the principle of elementary discipline. As I argued earlier in this chapter, Sokol’s ideology was based on creating a community out of organized, but distinctly individualized citizens, who voluntarily unite in order to create a stronger, healthier and morally elevated nation. Most Sokol’s members in a particular town or city knew each other personally, and all sokols actively participated in electing their leaders, who were always outstanding trainers and teachers. Finally, Sokol was a way of life – it defined not only the physical exercise itself but also many other parts of one’s existence.

In contrast, the Spartakiads’ disciplinary effect lasted for about 20 minutes of the actual performance and possibly throughout the training period. Outside of the actual event and a bit of the preparation, the ‘Spartakiad spirit’ had little real or lasting effect on the minds of ordinary Czechs. The ideology of the Spartakiads eliminated all that was personal or exemplary, and put forward the masses of anonymous subjects, who often literally saw each other for the first time at

Second, the object of control changed from the behavior or the language of the body to the efficiency of its movements. Third, a new modality of control emerged – a constant, uninterrupted supervision of the process of the bodily activity rather than its result. Disciplined bodies were also distributed and organized in space differently than before – the most important factor became their constant visibility and immediate responsiveness. The visibility of disciplinary power diminished as the visibility of the exercised bodies increased; consequently, the rule of the exemplary performance was replaced by the principle of elementary training.

⁷⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 138.

a rehearsal for the performance or at the final performance itself. There were no ‘leaders’ in the Sokol meaning of the term – among the aerial photographs of the masses, a snapshot of a person with her/his name written underneath might have appeared, but the reason for choosing this particular person was not her/his specific qualities, experience or respect by others. Instead, this particular individual signified the considerable beauty of ‘our women,’ the strength of ‘our military,’ the skill of ‘our men,’ or the youth of ‘our children.’

On a symbolic level, Sokol and the Spartakiads utilize the imagery of the docile athletic body as a manifestation of a new social discourse. Contemporary commentators of the Sokol’s Assemblies and the communist Spartakiads even used similarly elaborate phrases to describe these exercises as “a triumph of the mass organized by exact numbers,”⁷¹ or “thousands of disciplined moving bodies.”⁷² Nearly identical pictures of rows of smiling exercising men and women, excited audience members, and endless lines of perfectly organized participants document both the Sokol’s Assemblies and the Spartakiads. Yet there is a significant ideological difference between the two types of disciplined bodies. For Sokol, the geometrically organized athletes symbolized the discourse of the sovereign power of a free nation. For Spartakiads, the bodies represented the discourse of the sovereign power of a monolithic totalitarian state. Not only were the exercising Spartakiad bodies carefully distributed in space, individually trained and coded, and combined together through a precise system of command, but all of these disciplinary activities were simultaneously presented as the ultimate representations of the participants’ firm resolution to actively participate in the common goal: the building of a socialist utopia. In the words of Petr Roubal: “The body of the gymnastic trainee offered a model of an

⁷¹ A remark made by a famous Czech writer Karel Capek at a Sokol’s Assembly in 1932, cited in collective of authors, *Pamatník 9. Sletu* (*Sourcebook of the 9th Sokol’s Assembly*) (Prague: Czechoslovak Sokol’s Union, 1932), 25.

⁷² Vilem Mucha in *Ceskoslovensky Sport*, October 1953.

exemplary citizen who stands in complete subordination in front of his leadership in his proper place ready to execute any demanding task in harmony with the indefinite mass of others.”⁷³ At the Spartakiads, performing men and women did not signify themselves as individuals, but as the unanimous masses: as President Zapotocky declared in the opening speech at the 1955 Spartakiad: “Today, the masses will speak at the Strahov stadium.”⁷⁴ Writer Sergej Machonin spoke of “sixteen thousand boys and girls...as one being,” and poet Jarmila Urbankova wrote about exercising women as “a blue tide flooding the Strahov stadium... (where)...it is pointless to look for your beloved, who had drowned in the ocean of women.”⁷⁵ As Vladimir Macura points out, topics of ‘losing one’s beloved,’ ‘drowning,’ or ‘disintegration’ that are normally considered to be quite distressful are here transformed into a different perspective, which compensates for the loss of identity with the promise of reaching a new, higher horizon⁷⁶ of standardized uniformity.

If Sokol emphasized heterogeneity and spontaneity, the communist Spartakiads were characterized by the strictly homogenous masses and order. Individual *people* from Sokol’s voluntary sports and communal activities were replaced in the Spartakiads by the monolithic masses, consisting of units of thousands of identical *bodies* exhibited only temporarily and without any previous social or cultural connection. The individual character of the ‘communist bodies’ on the sporting ground became less significant in comparison to their main function as *embodiments* of the communist ideology of equality.

Individuality is *representational* in Sokol – the exercising athletes stand unanimously as numerous individual symbols of the new Czech people. They represent the physically and

⁷³ Petr Roubal in Orsolya Dano and Petr Roubal, eds., *Bodies in Formation*, 10.

⁷⁴ *Rude Pravo*: May 5, 1955, 1.

⁷⁵ Quoted in: Vladimir Macura, *Stastny Vek. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)*, 81.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

morally strong Czechs, eager to live a fulfilling life working for their nation. Contemporary writers often compared the sokols to other strongly representational figures or groups in Czech history: “awakened modern Hussites,”⁷⁷ to classical heroes: “the new Hellenians are rising,”⁷⁸ or even to the Czechoslovak Republic itself: “These thousands of sokols ... embody the very Republic.”⁷⁹ Sokol’s performances retain a strong *ethical* component: emphasis is on building moral integrity, love towards one’s country and its people, and willingness to make sacrifices for the good of the community: “(Sokol’s community) is not strong simply because of its numbers, but because of the moral qualities that *every single sokol* brings with him/her.”⁸⁰ These principles are cherished within Sokol as foundations of a relationship between an individual and a collective, and ultimately also between a nation and a state.

Yet, while a sokol is a well-trained and disciplined person, devoted to his/her country and community, s/he also keeps fighting with her/his own mistakes and mishaps of nature. Sokol publications and photographs mention or show organizational and personal mistakes, such as the incident during the Assembly in 1932, when several women marching into the exercising field could not find their correct location. The following chaotic reshuffling took place right in front of the eyes of President Masaryk, whose comment on the matter emphasized his appreciation of

⁷⁷ Schutzner and Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion’s Force)*, 152. Hussites were followers of Jan Hus, a Czech preacher, who criticized the Catholic Church for its secular wealth and political influence. Hus was arrested, condemned in an inquisition trial, and burned as a heretic in 1415. His death led to the Hussite Revolution, which gradually affected the whole Kingdom of Bohemia. Christian Europe regarded the Hussites as heretics and organized five crusades against Hussite Bohemia but they all ended in failure. Eventually, the movement was defeated, but it became a symbol of national patriotism and defiance to external manipulation. The communist propaganda later presented the Hussites’ demands for social equality as a sign of their ‘revolutionary’ qualities, and emphasized their apparent connection to the workers’ movement. Even the communist state insignia contained Hussite elements: a Hussite pavise replaced the original coat of arms of the Bohemian Kingdom in the state badge.

⁷⁸ Schutzner and Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion’s Force)*, 153.

⁷⁹ K. J. Benes in Schutzner and Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion’s Force)*, 77.

⁸⁰ Schutzner and Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion’s Force)*, 54, emphasis original.

the genuine effort with which the women tried to correct the mistake.⁸¹ The public recognition and discussion of mistakes signals that the organizers and athletes are aware of their individual differences as well as their inability to remain fully in control of events and people. At the same time, it presupposes individual responses to a changed situation which are unprepared and outside the plan. A Sokol athlete therefore always remains somewhat unpredictable which differentiates her/him from a perfectly docile Spartakiad participant, who is reducible, in the words of Petr Roubal, to “an analytical unit, an intersection of axes x and y which could be directed, controlled and analyzed from one center.”⁸²

In contrast to the Sokol’s Assemblies, mistakes did not and could not happen in the perfect world of the communist-controlled Spartakiads’ reports. The Spartakiad represented an event reaching in its importance beyond a mere sports or nationalistic goal – it was an event symbolizing a new way of life. The Spartakiad participants embodied their regime and its unbreakable unity with the people. Consequently, nothing, even horrible weather, could ruin a Spartakiad performance – the new regime was unbreakable, and so were the Spartakiad athletes *and* their audiences: it was expected that they would face the elements to the extreme. The photographs of mud-wrapped soldiers exercising during their 1985 Spartakiad performance are perhaps the most famous depiction of the absurd heights attained by collective discipline. It is evident from the soldiers’ facial expressions that theirs is not a joyous physical activity, and yet they keep going, as there is clearly no possibility of stopping to wait until the field is dried.

During a similar rainstorm incident at a Sokol’s Assembly in 1907, all 2,304 exercising women left the field after a brief struggle with the rain. Their performance was later rescheduled, and took place the next day in front of hundreds of thousands of visitors, who came

⁸¹ Rudolf Prochazka in *Pamatnik 9. Sletu (Sourcebook of the 9th Sokol’s Assembly)* (Prague: Czechoslovak Sokol’s Union, 1932).

⁸² Petr Roubal in Orsolya Dano and Petr Roubal, eds., *Bodies in Formation*, 11.

especially for this rescheduled exercise.⁸³ With the Spartakiads, there was no space or time for rescheduling that might indicate a potential weakness of the exercising gymnasts, their audiences and, ultimately, even the system. One of the most important goals of the Spartakiads was to demonstrate the absolute preparedness of the country and its people: “readiness of everybody to work and to defend our country” as the central sign on the main gate of the Strahov stadium proclaimed in 1955.⁸⁴ Unlike the Sokol’s Assemblies, Spartakiads did not represent simply the fitness and strength of a new nation, but more specifically a different state of mind of the socialist masses. Spartakiads were manifestations, not celebrations, of people’s determination and unity.

At first glance, Sokol’s rows of gymnasts appeared superseded by the increasingly more complex Spartakiads’ geometrical patterns with intersecting lines, multiple colors and swiftly changing arrangements. However, I argue that with attention shifting away from the exercising individuals to the patterns that their bodies create, the concept of the individual changed in the Spartakiads. In other words, and reflecting Pierre Bourdieu’s thoughts, even though the sporting practice itself remained almost unchanged, the dominant social meaning attached to it changed.⁸⁵ Sokol’s ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ were replaced by the Spartakiad’s ‘comrades,’ as the idea of a national revival was replaced with a doctrine of state socialism. The Spartakiads eliminated the ethical and communal component of Sokol’s performances and replaced it with an esthetic and state-imposed imperative. The strictly corporeal application of this imperative was the reason for its efficiency and relatively unopposed success. Whereas the minds of the Spartakiad participants might have retained the potential of uncontrollability, their bodies were fully and

⁸³ Schutzner and Simacek, eds., *Lvi silou (With Lion’s Force)*, 117-118.

⁸⁴ Description of the Strahov stadium during the 1955 Spartakiad in Tereza Petiskova, ed., *Ceskoslovensky socialisticky realismus 1948 – 1958 (Czechoslovak Socialist Realism 1948 – 1958)* (Prague: Gallery, 2002).

⁸⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, “Program for a Sociology of Sport,” *Sociology of Sport Journal*, May 1988, 158.

visibly in and under control. Bourdieu talks in this respect about a link between the body and what is called in French *l'esprit de corps*: "If most organizations – the Church, the army, political parties, industrial firms, etc. – put such a great emphasis on bodily disciplines, it is because obedience consists in large part in belief, and belief is what the body (*corps*) concedes even when the mind (*l'esprit*) says no."⁸⁶

The Spartakiad's bodies were disconnected from their minds: in contrast to the Sokol gymnasts, very few Spartakiad participants were strongly and independently motivated to their exercise activities; they lacked sokols' nationalistic zeal as well as any other kind of commonly shared aspiration. If Sokol's members participated out of voluntary excitement, most Spartakiads' participants did so out of cynical obedience or just to avoid 'greater evils,' such as various disciplinary practices at work, school, or in the army. The communist government therefore needed to pay great attention to ensuring that the mass spectacles functioned, and were interpreted, in the correct way. As the willingness of many people to participate continued to drop from the 1950s on, sports instructors, physical education teachers as well as local Communist party officials were lectured on different ways of motivating people to join the rehearsals. During the Spartakiad years, newspapers, magazines, radio and television tried to produce as many Spartakiad-related articles and programs as possible, and to discuss the political and cultural significance of the mass activities in general. In an article called 'The Ideological Question of the Mass Exercises,' the head of the Institute of Physical Education and Sport, Dr. Ladislav Serbus, argued: "it is necessary that the qualities typical of the mass physical exercises become also the qualities of an ordinary socialist citizen."⁸⁷ Serbus claimed that this goal could only be achieved if all physical exercise and sports activities were consciously connected with

⁸⁶ Ibid., 161.

⁸⁷ Ladislav Serbus, "Ideologická otázka masových cvičení" ("The Ideological Question of the Mass Exercises") *Telesná výchova a sport (Physical Education and Sport)*: June 1954, 12.

the ideological goals of socialist development. As he said, each sportsperson must understand that “the more and better s/he practices during the Spartakiad rehearsals, the better a worker s/he becomes and the better prepared s/he is to fight for the defense of their country.”⁸⁸ Serbus also argued that the audiences must view the performances as breathtaking presentations with a massive ideological force, since it is through the esthetic experience that the audience’s minds can be reached. Everybody – exercising people as well as those watching – must become convinced that “such beauty and excellence is only possible because of socialism and the new progressive environment that it creates.”⁸⁹

Individuality in the Spartakiads is merely *functional*, and thus radically different from Sokol’s *representational* gymnasts. A Spartakiad participant is an element, a building block, an anonymous particle, whose existence matters as long as it fits perfectly into the mechanism of the pattern. Namelessness was even celebrated in Spartakiad poems and articles: “If thousands of people who do not even know each other’s name can all form a pattern on a single command, then there is no reason to fear the most demanding tasks of our future.”⁹⁰ Spartakiads reached organizational perfection through the precise organization of the bodies-units according to a common rhythm, which made the bodies fully controllable and legible. As Petr Roubal points out, this rhythm was a rhythm of order, not of music, even when the performance was intended as dance: “Common rhythm allowed the composition to be performed not only exactly in unison, but also to attribute to every gymnast a different task to be carried out simultaneously, without losing the sense of order.”⁹¹ The rhythm of the exercising masses represented the rhythm of *all* new socialist people. In addition to intentionally blurring the differences among the Spartakiad

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Poem by a famous communist poet Vitezslav Nezval, published in Julius Dolansky, ed., *Sto deset let Sokola (Hundred and Ten Years of Sokol)* (Prague: Olympia, 1973), 77.

⁹¹ Petr Roubal in Orsolya Dano and Petr Roubal, eds., *Bodies in Formation*, 11.

gymnasts, journalists, writers and poets also challenged the borders between them and their audiences: "...the heartbeat of the audiences is synonymous with that of the exercising" declared poet Frantisek Kozik.⁹² The official vision of the collective life thus united the gymnasts and their audiences into one homogeneous entity.

4.6 Conclusion

The Spartakiads were organized with the ambition to reach far beyond the exercising field and influence the organization of everyday life. Many communist politicians demanded that Spartakiad-style discipline be applied to other spheres of life. They claimed that "it is after all a matter for all people to know how to march properly, keep in step, and form the ranks."⁹³ Yet, as this chapter demonstrated, the mass involvement in organized gymnastics affected people's minds differently – temporarily separating them from their bodies – and on a level that was far from the everyday communal involvement of the Sokol's activities.

For the communist government, the Spartakiads provided a model for discipline that helped to "purify one's movements from undesirable involuntary habits" and restored a 'natural' sense of order that was supposed to come from the innermost parts of a person's self and that the everyday life often distorted.⁹⁴ The perfectly synchronized mass gymnastics symbolized the victory of the socialist regime over the non-socialist qualities of disorder and difference. Replacing the exemplary and representational with the elementary and functional, the Spartakiads reinforced the official image of controlled collectivity. The organized Spartakiad gymnasts mechanically followed the imposed rhythm and order, and performed anywhere and

⁹² Cited in Vladimir Macura, *Stastny Vek. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)*, 79.

⁹³ Cited in Petr Roubal in Orsolya Dano and Petr Roubal, eds., *Bodies in Formation*, 10.

⁹⁴ Vladimir Macura, *Stastny Vek. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)*, 82.

under almost any conditions. Paradoxically, as Vladimir Macura points out, the hundreds of thousands of these seemingly identical bodies exercising in a perfectly organized unity were presented by the communist regime as a powerful sign of people's spontaneous involvement in the building of the common future. It seemed "almost impossible that such immense numbers of people could be brought to the Strahov stadium by force – their participation therefore clearly testified to their voluntary decision."⁹⁵ Even foreign observers were amazed at these spectacular events, and wrote excited reports about them, completely unaware of the perfectly orchestrated illusion they fell victim to. Dadaist Tristan Tzara, who visited the 1955 Spartakiad, declared elatedly: "I feel I am in the very middle of free and happy people who are aware of their splendid perspectives."⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ibid., 81.

⁹⁶ Cited in Petr Roubal in Orsolya Dano and Petr Roubal, eds., *Bodies in Formation*, 15.

5.0 THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS IN A SOCIALIST PARADISE

Education of children within a collective and for a collective is the most significant part of the socialist ideological plan.¹

Youth embodied the collective future of the socialist society. Children and young people represented ‘new socialist citizens’ born into an improved society detached from its bourgeois past. They stood as symbols of health and of a vital new era that departed from the harmful habits and corrupt lifestyles of the former regime. At the same time, through their nationwide participation in the communist-run Pioneers movement and the Czechoslovak Youth Union, they functioned as showcase collectives, displaying attitudes and behavior of responsible socialist citizens.

In this chapter, I focus primarily on the Pioneers movement, which organized children between eight and fifteen years of age. I argue that to a much greater extent than their parents, children-pioneers symbolically exemplified one of the most desired qualities of a totalitarian subject: collective discipline. As official educational materials claimed, children who were actively involved in the Pioneers activities acquired the desired behavioral patterns and habits that would be difficult to enforce on their much more experienced and skeptical parents. Yet ironically, many young people who had been pioneers as children later became the most adamant challengers of the oppressive regime. The Velvet Revolution in 1989 was to a great extent initiated by university students, who were the first group of citizens to openly express their dissatisfaction with the political situation in the country on a mass scale.

¹ Collective of authors in the Pioneers’ Division of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Youth Union, *Prazdniny pionyru (Pioneers’ Holidays)* (Prague: SNP, 1952), 19.

In the first part of the chapter, I discuss the official images of youth, and the state glorification of children as model citizens. I examine the state models for children's education and entertainment as structured by an emphasis on the collective discipline. I also consider the construction of collectivity through the regular activities within the Pioneers movement, such as roll calls or summer camps, and through the symbols of the movement, such as the Pioneers flag, salute and motto. In the second part, I contrast the Pioneers ideology with the reality of children's perceptions of their collective involvement. In particular, I am interested in the pioneers' interaction with the imposed collective structures and events, and the ways in which they invested new, often very personal, meanings into their Pioneers membership. By replacing the official schemes with the unofficial communal values, these children arguably restructured the Pioneers movement from below. The Pioneers remained a government-imposed organization for children, but alongside its official status it contained elements of a community-building space with a strong potential to challenge, not support, the communist regime.

5.1 Youthful Socialist Paradise

Children and young people signified the optimistic future of the socialist regime. Although the official doctrine of 'scientific' socialism emphasized the rational and the logical, this future, as Vladimir Macura argues, resembled a mythological vision with almost sacral features.² The vision of a happy socialist paradise became "an imperative collective norm...that automatically precluded any other interpretations of the future or any diversions from the exclusive focus on the future."³ The only possible direction was forward, towards eternal communism, away from the capitalist past of grandparents' generation, and rushing through the present plight of parents.

² Vladimir Macura, *Stastny Vek. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)* (Prague: Prague Imagination, 1992), 9-20.

³ Ibid., 9.

The parents were still imperfect, unwillingly carrying the remains of past burdens in the form of shared memories of the First Republic. The only truly new people of the socialist Eden were therefore children, who, unlike their parents, were born fresh into this revolutionary era. In the words of a famous communist poet, “where you and I stumble a bit, still sighing back over a shoulder, there a multitude of pioneers runs ahead of us, lighting up our way with their red scarves.”⁴

The special status of young people in a socialist society was reflected not only in the official art production but also in countless social rituals, such as visits of communist apparatchiks to towns and factories, parades and organized celebrations, and sports events, including the Spartakiads. In these events, the presence of children and young people effectively reversed the real old age of the communist officials. Having surrounded themselves with young people, and wearing the symbols of the Pioneers movement – red scarves – even adults were granted an access to the paradise.⁵

Children’s games, magazine articles, books, songs, toys, and school curricula all created an image of young custodians of socialist morals, responsible builders of the country’s future, who exceeded even their own parents in enthusiasm for the common goal. Many toys, for example, focused exclusively on glorifying ‘socialist,’ i.e., collective and super-achieving, work. Czechoslovak children commonly played with tractors, models of agricultural and technical machines, or with replicas of train stations, agricultural cooperatives, dams or coal mines.⁶ A section on free time activities in a manual for pioneers’ summer camps recommended that

⁴ Stanislav Neumann in Vladimir Macura, *Stastny Vek. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)*, 16.

⁵ Vladimir Macura, *Stastny Vek. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)*, 9-20.

⁶ As early as 1931, Gareth Jones pointed out the same tendency in Soviet Russia by arguing that “technical and political toys are encouraged among children.” In “The Real Russia: Youth and the Future,” *The New York Times*, October 12, 1931, 4.

younger pioneers learn to create clay models of “various social motives depicted in a realistic manner, e.g., a train loaded with beetroot, tractor tilling a (collectivized) land, a mother bringing her child to a kindergarten, ... a miner pushing a loaded cart, or a hand with a hammer.”⁷ The same manual advised that older pioneers train their organizational skills and determination to fight the enemy in at least one night combat game. The game would focus on an ideologically significant task, such as detecting and destroying insects that were secretly placed on crops by imperialist saboteurs. The important part of the whole exercise, the manual argued, was that “children should initially think that they are dealing with a real situation, and only later realize that it is just a game.”⁸ The seemingly irrelevant, i.e., playful or experimental aspects of children’s free time activities and games were therefore replaced in the communist propaganda with the behavioral expectations for almost fully formed character traits of adults.

An important aspect of children’s games in communist Czechoslovakia was the emphasis on group sharing. Sharing toys, tasks within children’s collectives, and interestingly even gender roles was continuously highlighted by the experts as a key task in raising socialist children. An article about toys published in a weekly family magazine *Květy* explained that a toy is not an ordinary didactic tool. Instead, it should encourage children towards specific socialist qualities: love for work and for the working person. If at all possible, the article argued, the toy “has to be as realistic as possible and designed so that it can be shared within a collective – to avoid becoming selfish, children should share their toys.”⁹ Furthermore, “no toy should be exclusively for one gender, kindergarten teachers should support boys’ interest in playing with dolls and thus introduce them to various domestic tasks, while girls should be encouraged to investigate, and

⁷ Collective of authors in the Pioneers’ Division of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Youth Union, *Prazdniny pionýru (Pioneers’ Holidays)* (Prague: SNP, 1952), 95.

⁸ Ibid., 76.

⁹ *Květy*, October 14, 1951, 19.

play with, various ‘machines.’ A child has to learn to love working through a play.”¹⁰ To some extent, such recommendation reflected the official emphasis on gender equality. Another goal behind them however, was building a massive and very homogenous generation of future workers, who would perform dutifully regardless of their gender, or social and ethnic background.

Young people were not just an embodiment but also a guarantee of a happy future. *Rude Pravo*, a daily of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, continuously published articles emphasizing the need for the energy and élan of the young. The authors of these texts often declared that the country depended on “the vigor of young people for accomplishing the goals of the five-year plan,”¹¹ or that young people “have entered a new epoch of our society actively, and this active approach has made this new socialist era theirs.”¹² The young played an indispensable role in building socialism, because they stood “in front lines of peace fighters and builders of the republic.”¹³

Rude Pravo also often published articles that included letters allegedly written by children themselves in which they promised to learn at school fast but efficiently, collect recyclable materials, or even save their own money in order to lend it to their country.¹⁴ For example, imitating the rhetoric of outperforming ‘Stachanov-style’¹⁵ workers, children from an

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Rude Pravo*, January 11, 1948, 1.

¹² *Rude Pravo*, March 15, 1968, 2.

¹³ *Rude Pravo*, March 29, 1949, 1.

¹⁴ Letter of pupils from an elementary school in Prague-Liboc to the delegates of the 9th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Reprinted in *Rude Pravo*, March 31, 1949, 4.

¹⁵ In 1935, in the Donetsk Basin coal mines of the former USSR, a mining team led by Aleksei Grigoriyevich Stachanov produced fourteen times the monthly quota set by Soviet management for the retrieval of coal. The Stachanov production team then maintained this effort in the succeeding months, and by the end of the year had exceeded its quota by 700%. This heavily publicized performance prompted a rise of a nation-wide movement, with the most successful laborers in the Soviet Union being called ‘Stachanovites.’ These outperforming workers began to receive bonuses, special privileges and governmental honors. The Stachanov movement was imitated in

elementary school in Prague-Liboc declared to break their own initial targets and thus prove themselves “worthy of becoming the future leaders of the country.”¹⁶ In addition to *Rude Pravo*, other periodicals also presented youth-glorifying texts. For example, the family weekly *Kvety* published numerous articles focusing on the significance of young people for a successful future of society. According to one such article from 1951, “the Pioneers camps bring up new, beautiful children, guarantees of a happy future.”¹⁷ In 1974, the official rhetoric was almost unchanged: another article in *Kvety* was entitled “The word of the youth decides.”¹⁸ The article reported about national conferences of the Youth Union where the young “unanimously agreed to welcome the upcoming anniversaries (of the country’s liberation by the Red Army) with specific work achievements.”¹⁹ This and other texts made it apparent that the young people were expected to spread new healthy lifestyle and work habits.

Youth, élan, and health went hand in hand as the most natural attributes of a socialist society that departed forever from the past corrupt times. Because they were born into a new regime, young Czechoslovak people carried an authenticity that their parents did not have. Unaffected by the previous political systems, wars, and pessimism, they were the perfect symbolic representatives of a socialist collective unity. The future with which they were linked was also portrayed as a distinctly healthy era, and the improving health of the post-war population fit well into the plans of communist propaganda.

Czechoslovakia where workers’ collectives publicly declared their determination to exceed their work targets, often in a significantly shorter time-frame than originally planned.

¹⁶ Letter of pupils from an elementary school in Prague-Liboc to the delegates of the 9th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Reprinted in *Rude Pravo*, March 31, 1949, 4.

¹⁷ *Kvety*, February 4, 1951, 3.

¹⁸ *Kvety*, April 4, 1974, 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

5.2 Healthy Children in a Healthy New Era

Official rhetoric did not interpret the improving health of many children in the 1950s as a natural consequence of better living conditions characteristic of almost all post-war societies. Instead, the propaganda materials claimed that the healthier young population was a direct result of a new type of socialist care for the masses. Prime minister (and later president) of Czechoslovakia, Antonin Zapotocky, argued in this respect:

A third to a half of the total increase in children's height and a half of the total increase in their weight occurred in the short period of the last four years. In other words, in the last four years (1948-1952), our children have grown and strengthened as much as during the last 51 years combined. This bustling growth ...cannot be explained in any other way but ...by the rise of living standards of the masses in a people's democratic republic that enables proper nourishment and a healthy life of children. ... Among other significant factors belongs the growing awareness of the masses about proper nutrition habits, the success of organized meals in school canteens, and improved healthcare.²⁰

Healthy children equaled healthy regime; weak and ailing children (and adults) were to be treated in separate institutions, and the mentally or physically handicapped moved completely out of sight so that nothing would blemish the image of a perfect society. These children did not belong among the healthy and happy masses. While a certain separation of the sick and disabled had existed even before the communist putsch in 1948, it reached new levels under the socialist

²⁰ Collective of authors in the Pioneers' Division of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Youth Union, *Prazdniny pionyru (Pioneers' Holidays)* (Prague: SNP, 1952), 3.

regime. Before 1948, it was common for families to take care of their disabled children or relatives, who often participated in many private and public activities with their families.²¹ After 1948, most of these people were permanently housed in various institutions with limited possibilities for contact with even the closest relatives. It was not uncommon that parents were not allowed to visit their small child in such an institution for a long amount of time. Children were released into home-care only sporadically, usually for Christmas or other holidays. Visitors to socialist Czechoslovakia were therefore surprised to find no handicapped people anywhere. The expulsion of the sick and disabled from public spaces was also documented by the fact that public areas had no facilities or spatial arrangements for the disabled. Many activists argue that even today, problems with integrating the handicapped into public life reflect the perpetuation of the socialist objective to strictly separate the disabled from the rest of society.²²

The imagery of socialist youth was typically filled with sun, flowers, and smiling photogenic children walking hand in hand, often waving to the happy future. These model children also appeared in public ceremonies, walking in parades, greeting the visiting politicians, or standing on guard by the communist monuments. Socialist realist artists depicted these happy children throughout book illustrations, including school materials, and in poems, and songs. In addition, happy and healthy socialist children also appeared in mass media images, including propaganda posters and stamps. Children's public activities, such as the Pioneers summer camps, were organized only for "the healthy children, and those who deserved their stay in the camp through their hard work at school, in a local Pioneers organization, and by carrying out their duties for the republic."²³

²¹ Lidove Noviny, February 18, 2004, 4.

²² Ibid.

²³ Collective of authors in the Pioneers' Division of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Youth Union, *Prazdniny pionyru (Pioneers' Holidays)*, 8.

The connection of health and vitality with youth did not just provide ideal metaphors for a regime that distanced itself from the corrupt, ‘sick’ past. It also created an easily justifiable classification system of socialist society. The labeling of undesirable political opponents, former industrialists or landowners as ‘sick’ enabled the communist government to rhetorically and physically isolate them from the ‘healthy’ masses. The division of society into ‘sick’ and ‘healthy’ elements also applied to children. Only the Pioneers or Youth Union members stood as the embodiments of healthy socialist future, while the unorganized ones, or those belonging to undesirable clubs like Sokol, symbolized the unhealthy backwardness of the past.

5.3 Pioneers as the Ultimate Socialist Citizens

After the 1948 communist takeover in Czechoslovakia, two Soviet-style youth organizations emerged under the guidance of the Communist Party: the Pioneers (for children eight to fifteen years old) and the Czechoslovak Youth Union (ages fifteen to twenty-five). Both the Pioneers and the Czechoslovak Youth Union were structured as preparatory platforms for a future membership in the Communist Party. Additionally, Sparks, which focused on children between six to eight years old, served as an introductory organization for future pioneers.

Among these three key organizations, I concentrate on the Pioneers Movement, which was officially regarded as the most important, because it affected children during a crucial formative period. The Pioneers Movement served as a giant training center of the totalitarian subjects: the strict regimentation of the organization reflected future life in a disciplined socialist world. Children’s activities within the Pioneers often imitated those of adults in the public sphere. Living like responsible adults, pioneers were expected to adjust their games and leisure activities to the more important preparation for their future goal of serving the country.

By the late 1960s, 70 percent of all those eligible were members of the Pioneers.²⁴ They typically met on a weekly basis in order to participate in educational, sports-related, or social activities, many of which were presented as a ‘service to the country.’ Helping their country was presented as a paramount task; therefore, they often cleaned public spaces, collected recyclable materials, assisted the elderly, or produced propaganda materials. Although membership in the Pioneers was not compulsory, it was considered a necessary step for a successful future, especially in a combination with subsequent membership in the Youth Union. Therefore, even children from religiously-oriented, dissident, or otherwise ‘problematic’ families often joined the Pioneers.²⁵

Individual pioneers’ groups were highly organized, and maintained a distinct system of hierarchy: each group had its yearly-elected leader, financial, sports, and health care manager, and a chronicler. The weekly pioneers’ meetings followed prescribed patterns, including formal roll-calls and reports to the collective supervisors. In this way, the children partially imitated the world of the adults. At the same time, they also perfected the adult models of collective interaction through their own forms of organized public life. More than their parents, children and the young people were portrayed as active participants in the new period of social development. It was precisely “because of their active approach (that) this new period of socialism became *theirs*.”²⁶ Newspapers and magazines regularly described children involved in the Pioneers movement through an emphasis on their moral integrity: “the word of the pioneer stands,” work discipline: “a pioneer is persevering, hard-working and restrained” and collective

²⁴ Milan Otahal and Miroslav Vanek, *Sto studentských revolucí – Studenti v období padu komunismu (One Hundred Students’ Revolutions – Students during the Fall of Communism)* (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, 1999).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *Rude Pravo*, March 15, 1968, 2, emphasis original.

devotion: “a pioneer protects the honor of his collective and the Pioneers movement.”²⁷

Pioneers’ activities were designed to give their collectives the appearance of highly capable, determined, and responsible youths. The official guidelines of the movement emphasized the pioneers’ responsibility not just for their own future but also the future of the country and its entire ideological system. Alongside the older members of the Youth Union, the pioneers were expected to be constantly involved in defending, at least verbally, socialism and peace.²⁸ Their public espousal to work and revolutionary struggle was therefore presented as in many respects exceeding the zeal of their own parents.

The official symbols of the movement – the Pioneers’ flag, scarf, badge, salute, and motto carried strong symbolic and ideological connotations emphasizing pioneers’ unique place in a socialist society. The red flag reconfirmed the direct connection with the revolutionary qualities of the workers’ movement. On their uniforms, pioneers wore a red Pioneers’ scarf, and a badge in the shape of an open book (symbol of learning), with the Czechoslovak flag in the front and three red flames in the back. The three flames on the badge, just as the triangular scarf, symbolized a union of three generations of builders of socialism: pioneers, members of the Youth Union, and communists. The Pioneers’ salute – lifting a right hand with fingers tightly held together in the mid-forehead – symbolized the fact that a pioneer always puts the interests of the working people from all five continents above his/her own. Finally, the movement’s motto was expressed in a slogan ‘Always be ready for building and defending your socialist country’ that was customarily followed by a collective shout back ‘We are always ready.’²⁹ As representatives of the socialist future, the pioneers set the standards for the adults lagging behind.

²⁷ *Rude Pravo*, January 20, 1968, 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Frantisek Honzak and Marie Richterova, eds., *Rozum do kapsy – Mala encyklopedie (Wisdom in Your Pocket – Small Encyclopedia)* (Prague: Albatros, 1988), 447-8.

In the words of one communist poet, socialist “children shine like the Sun on the new world for us.”³⁰

5.4 Disciplined Children of Socialist Collectives

The imagery of children as disciplined and responsible new socialist people was particularly pervasive throughout the 1950s, and culminated with a frightening Soviet-propaganda child hero named Pavlik Morozov, whose ideologically-fuelled popularity also reached Czechoslovakia. Morozov, who denounced his own father as a traitor, was portrayed as a model socialist child working for the good of his country regardless of the adverse effect on his family life. During the 1950s political trials in Czechoslovakia, some Czechoslovak children, typically in elementary-school age, wrote letters imitating Morozov, demanding the hardest punishments for their parents. A son of Ludvik Frejka, a close aid to a Secretary General of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Rudolf Slansky (both of whom were tried for treason), wrote to the Chief Justice in 1952:

Comrade Chief Justice, I demand the highest sentence for my father – the death penalty. I can see only now that this person, hardly a human being...was my biggest and toughest enemy...hatred towards my father will always strengthen me in my fight for the communist future of our people. I demand that this letter is presented also to my father or that I am allowed to address him in person.³¹

³⁰ Jan Noha in Macura, *Stastny Vek. Symboly, emblemy a myty 1948 – 1989 (Happy Age. Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948 – 1989)*, 11.

³¹ Published in *Rude Pravo*, quoted in Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 26.

Discipline in a new socialist society became primarily a collective, not personal, matter; therefore, it acquired ethical as well as political dimensions: “in the old society, an undisciplined person was not considered to be unethical. In socialism, an undisciplined person acts against the whole society, and should be judged by formal, political and ethical standards.”³² In the case of children’s collectives, discipline was not just an educational instrument; it was also a desired final result of the educational process. The goal of socialist propaganda was to make its subjects understand why discipline was absolutely necessary for them. Pioneers’ highly staged public rituals and ceremonies included unified dress codes, gestures and verbal responses. Pioneers in public events therefore represented perfect examples of disciplined youth collectives that were quite distinct from the reality of most of their parents’ work collectives.

Pioneers’ summer camps provided the regime with an extremely efficient tool for reinforcing a collective mentality and discipline among children. The primary objective of these camps, as one instruction manual summarized it, was “education by a collective for a collective.”³³ The authors of the manual further argued that collective mentality was “a decisive factor in children’s upbringing within the communist moral standards, creating the most favorable conditions for a development of (socialist) personality.”³⁴

It is not so surprising that most activities in the pioneers’ summer camps – work, games, trips, eating, cleaning, or sleeping – were done collectively: many other children’s organizations, including the Boy Scouts of America, also organized their members with an emphasis on collective behavior. What is different in the case of the pioneers is the effort to clearly differentiate their collective and its discipline from the pre-socialist ones that were apparently too embedded in the unhealthy bourgeois habits. The organization of socialist camp life in

³² Ibid., p. 37.

³³ Collective of authors, *Prazdniny pionyrů (Pioneers’ Holidays)*, 19.

³⁴ Ibid., 18.

Czechoslovakia followed the Soviet example, which above all else, tried to replace the influence of ‘traditional’ family upbringing with new socialist morals. The primary focus was on self-dedication to the collective: “the routines of family life were replaced by the pioneers’ own routines, amongst which parades and campfires took central place.”³⁵ The main goal of children’s visit to the pioneers’ camp was improving their physical health and instilling the right social consciousness: “the transformative role, both physical and mental, of a sojourn at a camp was emphasized in press accounts that described children returning home tanned, fit, and yearning for the collective.”³⁶

Czechoslovak communist theorists defined the socialist collective discipline as an elimination of “unhealthy competition”³⁷ among individuals. Its necessary prerequisite was a full internalization of an absolute need to subordinate personal needs to the needs of the collective by all members of the collective. The collective was always organized externally, by supervisors, planners or leaders, and internally, by the collective’s members. As stated in one training manual for the pioneers’ camps:

Collective discipline is absolutely essential because it helps the collective to reach its goals faster, it enables all members of the collective to overcome obstacles, endure hard work and, if necessary, suffering, ... and it is a form of freedom, because it creates a much safer and enlightened situation. Discipline ... is only manifest if it requires hard or unexpected effort and if it is done because the

³⁵ Susan E. Reid, “Khrushchev’s Children’s Paradise: The Pioneer Palace, Moscow, 1958 – 1962,” in *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 144.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Collective of authors, *Prazdniny pionyrů (Pioneers’ Holidays)*, 35. The concept was also regularly referred to in official media, including daily press, such as *Rude Pravo*. See, for example, *Rude Pravo*, April 8, 1960, 2. *Rude Pravo*, January 10, 1968, 1. *Rude Pravo*, January 14, 1968, 1. *Rude Pravo*, January 12, 1985, 1.

disciplined person is absolutely convinced of its benefits for the whole collective, society and state.³⁸

Discipline in this and other documents was portrayed as essential not just for the society but above all for its individual members. Because of the collective discipline, it was argued, people were able to manage situations that would be too hard or dangerous for them as individuals. Living in a precisely delineated and controlled world was presented as liberating – it was a “form of freedom”³⁹ – because it provided everybody with reassurance about their exact place in society. In this sense, collective discipline seemed comforting, not oppressive.

As I asserted in the previous chapters, the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia created subjects more dependent on the authoritarian state than on each other. Hana Havelkova described Czechoslovak citizens as being “placed, in all but name, in the position of children, perceiving even small status differences very sharply and enviously.”⁴⁰ In a situation when it was ideologically and socially unacceptable to stand out, the need for exact rules and discipline as assurances of social equality was apparent. As the communist leaders insisted, collective discipline reinforced feelings of justice among people.

Even though the official doctrine of collective discipline was not necessarily accepted by all citizens, they nevertheless at least pretended to accept it and structured their public behavior accordingly. As I showed in chapter 1, most Czechoslovak citizens participated in the public mass ceremonies, which presented them as united and homogeneous units. Even if they privately criticized the ideology of disciplined egalitarianism, they nevertheless continued to

³⁸ Collective of authors, *Prazdniny pionyrů (Pioneers' Holidays)*, 37.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Hana Havelkova, “Women in and after a ‘Classless’ Society,” in *Women and Social Class*, ed. C. Zmroczek and P. Mahony (London: Taylor and Francis/UCL, 1998), 70.

apply its norms to their everyday public interactions. To some extent, the mass enforced egalitarianism modified some aspects of people's private experiences too, as I discussed in chapter 2, where I examined how social envy dominated private lives. The efforts of those, who tried to differentiate themselves from the homogenous masses, were perceived by their neighbors or co-workers with disparagement and envy. In such environment, many people tolerated the imposed collective discipline, because it promised the same (oppressive) treatment for everybody.

In the case of children, the process of adopting and accepting the collective discipline seemed even easier: they learnt more quickly and efficiently than adults and were therefore ideal recipients of the new discipline standards.⁴¹ Non-collective behavior was continuously condemned through children's upbringing in the kindergartens or at school.⁴² For example, children were rebuked if they refused to participate in the planned group activities. The need for children and young people to conform to the needs of the collective was continuously stressed in the mass media, educational materials, and official documents throughout the entire period of totalitarian rule in Czechoslovakia. Newspapers and magazines claimed that education, both within a family and especially at school, needed to be structured around the needs of the national collective.⁴³ *Rude Pravo* argued that school curricula must be unified so that "all groups of young people until 15-years of age are educated together in order to build a responsible nation-

⁴¹ Gareth Jones speaks about a distinct success of communist propaganda among young people and children in his article about education in Soviet Russia: "Children readily believe what is taught in the schools. A religious Leningrad mother bewailed the fact that her 10-year old daughter had recently returned from her class and had demanded: 'Show me God! You cannot. There is no God.' " In "The Real Russia: Youth and the Future," *The New York Times*, October 12, 1931, 4.

⁴² Hana Havelkova, "Women in and after a 'Classless' Society"

⁴³ *Rude Pravo*, August 19, 1948, 2. *Rude Pravo*, August 31, 1948, 1. *Rude Pravo*, March 9, 1960, 2. *Rude Pravo*, November 29, 1985, 3. *Kvety*, March 4, 1951, 23. *Kvety*, March 22, 1951, 23. *Kvety*, June 3, 1951, 19. *Kvety*, September 23, 1951, 19.

wide collective.”⁴⁴ Another article on education pointed out that it is necessary to “design education and training of young people so that they can adequately respond to the demands of the national collective.”⁴⁵ A whole series of articles in *Kvety* focused on raising small children in a collective spirit. As one author argued: “We do not raise our children just for and within their family; we need to raise them for the national collective, for the whole society.”⁴⁶ Another article praised the role of kindergartens in promoting the collective spirit: “In socialism, we do not need people who hate society; therefore, we need to extricate our children from an environment that would corrupt their character. The best way (to avoid these problems) is to put a child in a kindergarten where a child learns the collective way of life.”⁴⁷ Besides their subject matter, the rhetoric of these articles also emphasizes the ideal of disciplined collectivity – the extensive use of the pronouns “we” and “our” suggests speaking on behalf of the whole society, even if the article is written by a single woman talking about one child, as was the case of the last two quotes.

Not surprisingly, the content of children’s magazines and books also reflected the officially advocated collective spirit. A fairy-tale “How the Animals Built their House”⁴⁸ used the rhetoric of socialist planning to depict various animals building their common house—as you may have guessed, none of the animals were more equal than any of the others. Another fairy-tale “Cured Loner”⁴⁹ presented the story of an ant, who originally leaves his anthill in search of independence, but soon returns realizing that his life is meaningless without the others. The

⁴⁴ *Rude Pravo*, August 19, 1948, 2.

⁴⁵ *Rude Pravo*, August 31, 1948, 1.

⁴⁶ *Kvety*, September 23, 1951, 19.

⁴⁷ *Kvety*, March 4, 1951, 23.

⁴⁸ *Rudé Právo*, July 25, 1948, 5.

⁴⁹ *Rudé Právo*, September 19, 1948, 5.

children's section of 1949 *Rude Pravo*⁵⁰ included a poem "Pioneer" describing pioneers walking side by side with the factory workers and singing in unison, while an article called "The Most Beautiful Competition" celebrated competing in work productivity as the only appropriate form of rivalry in socialism. More than 20 years later, an article about pioneers in the 1968 *Rude Pravo* argued that one of the most distinguishing characteristics of being a pioneer is that "a pioneer always puts the interests of a collective above his/her own"⁵¹ Two decades later, in 1985, an article about summer pioneers' camps presented an interview with children on topic 'What is happiness?'. 10-year old pioneers apparently reacted with adult-style phrases reflecting the socialist rhetoric of collective work: "Happiness to me means love, peace and satisfaction from the work that I could contribute to the society."⁵² From an early childhood through kindergarten and school, children were constantly surrounded by images of collective life. As these examples showed, the collective spirit reached far beyond the public performances of pioneers; it also influenced many activities normally associated with private life, such as the content of fairy-tales or fiction which children read at home. At the same time, the example of the 10-year old pioneers from the summer camp illustrates how during public events children dutifully reproduced the official rhetoric of responsible socialist citizens. Even though the expressions that they uttered were thoroughly incompatible with their age and experiences, they fit well the image of children, and especially the pioneers, as the responsible builders of the socialist future.

⁵⁰ *Rudé Právo*, January 9, 1949, 7.

⁵¹ *Rudé Právo*, January 20, 1968, 5.

⁵² *Rudé Právo*, September 14, 1985, 11.

5.5 Transforming the Imposed Collective: Private Meanings of the Pioneer Movement

The Pioneers Movement remained the most significant social organization for children during the reform era of the 1960s when the regime eased its ideological grip. It also continued to define children's collectivity throughout the 'normalization' period of the 1970s and 1980s during which the political monopoly of the Communist Party solidified, but the ideological pressure weakened. Almost all children attending elementary school in the 1970s and 80s were at the same time also members of the Pioneers.⁵³

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed various forms of public behavior of Czechoslovak citizens and the ways in which the constant intrusion of the public sphere into private lives of people structured their private habits and goals. For reasons of personal and family security, work promotion or access of their children to university education, most people participated in staged mass activities, even though in private they criticized the ideology behind these events, and ridiculed it through humor and sarcasm. This strong separation between the parents' staged activity in public and cynical passivity in private was often transferred to the behavior of their children. Just as their parents, many children distinguished sharply between the imposed ideological motives and their own incentives for joining the Pioneers.

For example, after the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, many young people admitted that during their childhood, they attended the weekly Pioneers' meetings despite the fact that they were uninteresting.⁵⁴ As Milan Otahal and Miroslav Vanek showed, the number of children, who even as children considered their participation in the Pioneers a purely formal

⁵³ Milan Otahal and Miroslav Vanek, *Sto studentských revolucí – Studenti v období padu komunismu (One Hundred Students' Revolutions – Students during the Fall of Communism)* (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, 1999).

⁵⁴ Otahal and Vanek, *Sto studentských revolucí – Studenti v období padu komunismu (One Hundred Students' Revolutions – Students during the Fall of Communism)*

activity, was substantial.⁵⁵ When discussing their motivation to join the Pioneers, many young people conceded that their membership was often a conscious political move decided on their behalf by their parents. For the parents, sending their child to the Pioneers organization equaled securing a smooth entry way of their children into a quality high school or university. It was therefore not unusual for children to enter the Pioneers for these purely pragmatic reasons, often in the last year of an elementary school: “I entered the Pioneers in the eighth grade,⁵⁶ I had been avoiding it until then through excuses that I was too busy. ... Then they pretty much forced me to join the organization, (because) they explained to me at school...that if I wanted to go to a high school, I had to join.”⁵⁷

Many others joined only to participate in organized sports and cultural activities, oblivious to the underlying ideological implications of these games which were sometimes further downplayed by adult organizers. In fact, one of the few reasons for many young people to describe their pioneer years positively was that they met with a charismatic and/or well-organized adult supervisor, who ignored politics and focused on the children themselves.⁵⁸ During the normalization years, i.e., from the late 1970s on, the regime indirectly supported the increasing trend of de-politicization of the Pioneers weekly activities. What mattered was that the citizens and their children focus on enjoying their free time, often characterized by consumer lifestyle, rather than on criticizing the dysfunctional regime. At that point, even the communist ideologists agreed that it was wise not to bother the masses with too much politics and

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ The eight grade was the last grade of elementary school system in socialist Czechoslovakia.

⁵⁷ Otahal and Vanek, *Sto studentských revolucí – Studenti v období padu komunismu (One Hundred Students' Revolutions – Students during the Fall of Communism)*, 81.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 79.

ideology.⁵⁹ Consequently, most children, who joined the Pioneers during those years, did not immediately connect their membership with political or ideological concerns, but rather saw it as a free-time activity addressing their extra-curricular interests. Many former pioneers described their experiences in the Pioneers as “not exactly political...more about playing games, having fun,”⁶⁰ or “spending time with other children.”⁶¹ Emphasizing the informal and non-political atmosphere in his local Pioneers organization, one interviewee even claimed that the weekly Pioneers meetings were “something I was always looking forward to.”⁶²

For others, their membership in the Pioneers seemed to be just another annoying but matter-of-fact requirement for other group or team memberships, such as sports teams or hiking groups. A university student, who later became actively involved in organizing anti-regime demonstrations in 1989, explained that Pioneers membership was a condition for his membership in the local hiking group, and so he joined: “...it was necessary for me to become a pioneer ... everybody was making fun of it, yet we still considered it important, so I joined, even though I knew that it would be a totally meaningless experience for me.”⁶³

At the same time, other children, who, unlike their parents, remained oblivious to any future career benefits, demanded that their parents allow them to join because they did not want to be excluded from the dominant collective of children, who were already pioneers. As one former pioneer put it: “The whole class (at school) went there, so in the end my parents did not

⁵⁹ Ladislav Holy discussed this trend of the Czechoslovak normalization governments in Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso, 2002).

⁶⁰ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*, 78.

⁶¹ Ibid., 78.

⁶² Ibid., 79.

⁶³ Ibid., 76.

oppose my membership.”⁶⁴ While there were some children, who resented their participation in the organization, many others, including those involved in anti-regime activities during their university years, fondly remembered their pride in belonging to the privileged collective. As one respondent said: “Of course I was a pioneer, I loved being the guard of honor by the Pioneers flag, I was really proud to be a pioneer.”⁶⁵ The pressure of the existing collective was clearly a key factor in this case; many children simply wanted to participate in order to avoid stigmatization as potential social outcasts. From that point of view, their membership was meaningful, while at the same time, it remained meaningless to them from a political or ideological perspective.

Despite the continuing, if weakened, presence of official ideology in the movement, many children participated in the Pioneers collectives enthusiastically. Some entered for purely pragmatic reasons, for example to gain access to a sports team, but the majority took part in the collective activities, because the Pioneers functioned as the only available model of community for children⁶⁶ at that time. Whether their membership resulted from their own decision or not, whether they supported or ignored the political and ideological functions of the Pioneers, most socialist children accepted their pioneer collectives as a regular part of life.

I find it interesting that most of the students, who later initiated the Velvet Revolution in 1989, had been the members of the Pioneers. To some extent, this was inevitable, because of the pragmatic reasons that I have discussed. Yet their participation in an organization with strong formal qualities did not turn them into compliant and cynical subjects of their parents’

⁶⁴ Ibid., 81.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 79.

⁶⁶ The Youth Union represented the only available platform for young people between fifteen and twenty five years of age.

generation. Instead, these young people became some of the most radical critics of the communist regime.

Many Czechoslovak dissidents and anti-regime activists would at this point raise an objection that there had in fact existed many unofficial groups and movements which resisted the system openly, and did not compromise themselves by being a part of the official organizations. Until the mid-1980s, however, the active involvement in the activities of the groups like the band Plastic People of the Universe or the civic organization Charta 77 was limited to Prague. Additionally, these groups drew membership from mostly the older generations of dissidents. Many people of course knew about the existence of these groups. But through a systematic persecution of the leading dissidents, the government successfully isolated them from the masses.⁶⁷

Young people, as Otahal and Vanek point out, only began developing spontaneous initiatives focusing on ecological and pacifist activities, and various alternative music, film and theatre projects in the mid-1980s. Yet “these activities were understood as an alternative, not an opposition, to the regime’s ideology.”⁶⁸ Significantly, while there emerged several new ‘subcultures,’ such as the punk or rock movement for young people in the 15-20 years of age category, none of these developments affected the Pioneers-age children. For these children, interacting within the Pioneers-organized activities therefore remained crucial, providing them with a sense of community that was otherwise missing.

Unlike their parents, young people – former Pioneers – became open critics of the regime in 1989, because they did not experience the trauma of 1968 when the transformation of society

⁶⁷ Otahal and Vanek, *Sto studentských revolucí – Studenti v období padu komunismu (One Hundred Students’ Revolutions – Students during the Fall of Communism)*, see also Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁶⁸ Ibid., 15.

into “socialism with human face” was halted by the invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies. While many parents of these young people really believed in the ideology of reformed socialism, their children “were touched by socialism and its ideology only marginally.”⁶⁹ Otahal and Vanek summarize the situation as follows:

Considering the specific situation in socialist Czechoslovakia, the only parts of the society that expressed dissatisfaction with the normalization regime were some groups of intelligentsia, especially artists, scientists, and a few journalists. The most important role however was played by the university students, who at the turn of 1988 became the political subject: they were the part of a young generation that did not live through the rebirth process (of the 1960s) and therefore did not suffer from the ‘syndrome of 1968.’ Socialism stopped being an ideal for them, and their goal and motto was to ‘fight the Bolshevik.’⁷⁰

Young people were also not affected by a popular intimidating tactic that the regime employed against their parents: discriminating against the children of those who did not comply with the established rules. Many people did not get involved in anti-regime activities for fear of an official retaliation that would affect not just them but also their children, who would not be admitted to a university or offered a good job. This threat of course did not apply to young people, who did not have their own children yet.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ibid., 16. See also Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*

⁷⁰ Otahal and Vanek, *Sto studentských revolucí – Studenti v období padu komunismu (One Hundred Students’ Revolutions – Students during the Fall of Communism)*, 19.

⁷¹ Ladislav Holy discusses this phenomenon in detail in Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*

It is significant that only a very small number of the 1989 student leaders grew up in families of dissidents. Most remembered their childhood as not particularly anti-regime oriented.⁷² It seems paradoxical that the overwhelming majority of these young people attended one of the best ideologically designed collective organizations – the Pioneers – and yet also grew up almost unharmed by the imposed ideological principles. One part of an answer to this apparent contradiction lies in the fact that the official ideology of the Pioneers movement did not correspond to its reality. Most pioneers did not attend the meetings because of their deep belief in the collective discipline but because of their deep need for communal interaction. Of course, the separation of the ideological model from the individually experienced reality was the case of the majority of ideologically designed mass events. Yet while the pioneers also participated in these mass events, such as parades or the Spartakiads, they did not develop the same helpless passive attitude as their parents' generation which experienced a total collapse of their hopes and beliefs in 1968.

Like their parents, young people in 1989 often challenged the regime through humor and mockery. For example, an unofficial poster made by Pardubice University students ridiculed the rhetoric of the police squads that arrived to crush student demonstrations. In the poster, the police chief declares: "Students! We are with you!" through the megaphone, while the row of heavily armed policemen stands by.⁷³ The real police chief probably never said that line,

⁷² Otahal and Vanek, *Sto studentských revolucí – Studenti v období padu komunismu (One Hundred Students' Revolutions – Students during the Fall of Communism)*, 71

⁷³ A poster made by the students of Pardubice University during the nation-wide strikes in November and December 1989. Cited in Vaclav Riha et al., "Studentska stavka v Pardubické univerzitě v listopadu-prosinci 1989" ("Students' Strike at University of Pardubice in November-December 1989") *Zpravodaj Pardubické univerzity (Newsletter of Pardubice University)* (Pardubice: Univerzita Pardubice, 2000).

although it sounds suspiciously reminiscent of the official speeches emphasizing the collective unity of the nation – even with its police.

Unlike their parents, these students did not stop at the cynical and passive criticism of the regime through privately shared humor. They extended their challenge into a public confrontation with the regime. Their participation in the Pioneers organization therefore failed to equip them with the desired qualities of socialist citizens, while it potentially enabled them to interact with others in a community-building environment. Unlike their parents who were the pioneers in the ideologically rigid 1950s, children in the 1980s were able to invest different, perhaps more independent, types of community images into their Pioneers experience. That, combined with their disconnectedness from the regime's ideals as such, fostered their confidence to initiate changes, which led to the collapse of the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia.

5.6 Conclusion

The Pioneers' collectives were designed as the ultimate showcase collectives of the communist regime. Through their willing or unwilling participation in the Pioneers' organizational structure, children inadvertently reproduced the ideological models of collective discipline that were also forcefully imposed on their parents. The pioneers learned to perform in public events in a required manner, and to react to specific situations in a standardized way. Their lives, like the lives of their parents, became homogenized through their mass participation in the Pioneers movement. Arguably, in the case of the pioneers, their homogenization as new socialist citizens through the official imagery reached new levels. By wearing pioneers' uniforms at various public events, reciting the words of the Pioneers' Oath when needed, saluting at a command, and through their regular participation in communist public rituals (walking in

official parades, standing on guard by the national monuments, greeting international visitors or exceptional citizens alongside the government and the Communist Party officials), children-pioneers acquired an instantly recognizable symbolic status of the regime's representatives. Where their parents' collectives might have struggled in embodying a unified socialist society, the pioneers' collectives remained almost picture perfect. Even when the Pioneers depoliticized many of its activities in the late 1970s when general support for the regime fell dramatically, the movement still preserved most of its public rituals.

Yet alongside the official symbolism, there also existed other interpretations of the Pioneers experience. For most children, the importance of their Pioneers collectives lay in the fact that these collectives substituted for the lacking community-building structures. Most pioneers were not bonding in the name of the Pioneers' ideological goals, but they were bonding under the Pioneers' wide-open wings because of no other alternative space. The meaning of the Pioneers movement both validated and extended beyond the communist-planned training of the perfect future citizens. On the one hand, the Pioneers collectives represented distorted versions of children's communities imposed from above. On the other hand, these collectives often diverged from their original functions through genuine transformations of their activities from below – by their own members. The Pioneers collectives therefore became some of the most recognizable icons of the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia, and at the same time, and rather unexpectedly, its most powerful challengers in 1989.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the ideologies and realities of the socialist masses in Czechoslovakia. It showed that the traditional Western evaluative frameworks for the mass phenomena cannot be fully applied in the specific context of the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia. In contrast to the classical interpretations of mass mentality, the communist theories did not consider the masses a threatening, but rather a fundamentally positive element in society. At the same time, neither the traditional theories of the Western masses nor the theories of the totalitarian masses in the Soviet society can be used for interpreting the specific forms of mass collectivity in Czechoslovakia, such as the Spartakiads or the homogenized vacationing patterns in the weekend houses. The official ideal of collective life in the Soviet-inspired system of public privacy was not compatible with the specific social and cultural conditions in Czechoslovakia. Consequently, the divide between the public and private spheres was pushed further than in the democratic systems. People's awareness of the ideological invasion of their lives led to an increase in personal protection of the remaining spaces of privacy and intimacy.

The masses had a different significance for the communist regime and for ordinary people. While the regime exploited the mass imagery for political and ideological purposes, most citizens ignored the political messages and participated for much more pragmatic reasons, such as protecting their families, careers, and even their personal safety. Walking in a state-organized parade was ultimately an *apolitical* activity. The politically motivated individuals were not those who regularly attended elections and mass meetings but those who avoided them. Vaclav Havel¹ and later Timothy Garton Ash² both noted this particular feature of totalitarian

¹ Vaclav Havel, *Living in Truth*, ed. Jan Vladislav (London: Faber and Faber, 1986).

² Timothy Garton Ash, *The Uses of Adversity: Essays on the Fate of Central Europe* (London: Penguin Books, 1989).

regimes of Central and Eastern Europe in their works. Again, such understanding of political involvement completely reverses the meaning of mass political activism within the dominant western theories.

The totalitarian masses therefore consisted primarily of the apolitical participants. At the same time, the public parades, collective vacations, Spartakiades, or the Pioneers events were practically the only visible manifestations of a shared sense of the nation. Following Benedict Anderson's theory of 'imagined communities,'³ and risking the probable critiques of many established Czech academics, I argue that the mass events in totalitarian Czechoslovakia to a large extent supplied the otherwise missing or weakened imagery of national identity as communal identity. Czech national identity had been defined throughout history by means of strong emphasis on group collectivity and egalitarianism. Experiences of oppression under the Austro-Hungarian Empire and threats to national identity during the two World Wars created a sense of the permanent need to 'stick together' in a tight collective formation. According to sociologist Miroslav Hroch,⁴ the sense of belonging to a national community was tied to the general construction of this community as something that was formed from below, i.e., among the 'ordinary folk.' It was through the emancipation of the masses that "the cult of 'commonness' originated as the basis of the national existence."⁵

The communist propaganda replaced some of the traditional constructions of national community with new and 'revolutionary' definitions of collectivity. These images continued to emphasize the commonness of national belonging, especially through the connection of the

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁴ Miroslav Hroch, "Narodni tradice a identita" ("National Tradition and Identity") in *Sbornik analytickych studií pro Strategický program sociálního a ekonomického rozvoje České republiky* (*Anthology of Analytical Studies for the Strategic Program for Social and Economic Development of the Czech Republic*) (Prague: Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2000).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 219.

masses with the proletariat. At the same time, the new definitions weakened the original constructions of national communality by emphasizing socialist internationalism and denying the relevance of national developments during the First Republic.⁶

In such situation, the officially sanctioned mass events were the only available expressions of national and communal identity. They provided distorted images of mass collectivity, but still resonated with the traditional sense of protective and celebrative togetherness. They also provided a sense of Anderson's community, as a 'deep horizontal comradeship.' The communist regime in Czechoslovakia constructed the masses precisely through such horizontal integration of regionally, socially and culturally diverse groups along generally shared motives of mass collectivity. Participation in these meetings also required the capacity to 'imagine' most of the defining characteristics of the mass community. Of course, most of the communal interaction at these events was controlled or otherwise restricted, but as the case of the Pioneers demonstrated, some semi-independent spaces remained even within the staged activities. Moreover, the physical closeness of many people tangibly demonstrated the generally shared communal togetherness, the sense of (Anderson's) comradeship that was eagerly generated by the regime's ideology, but possibly also resonated with a need for community among the participating masses.

It is therefore obvious yet ironic that the compulsory mass meetings were at some level important to the overwhelming majority of ordinary people. I do not want to suggest that the primary reason for people's attendance was their support for the official imagery of mass collectivity. However, I believe that their continued participation in these mass events reflected far more than just their concern for self-protection. Most Czechoslovaks tacitly tolerated these

⁶ Ibid. See also Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The First Republic was the period of democracy between 1918 and 1938.

official activities partially out of fear and partially out of their need for some form of communal interaction. Just like there was a Christmas Eve every year, there was also a May 1st parade, and the regular return of both perpetuated a feeling of security in the otherwise unbalanced life under the totalitarian regime.

In the Introduction, I mentioned my memories from the yearly celebrations of the Great October Socialist Revolution that I attended with my parents. For me and my parents (and millions of other participants), these celebrations gradually lost their ideological significance and turned into almost enjoyable fun parades with huge fireworks and family-style entertainment. Admittedly, one still had to spend the first twenty minutes of the evening listening (or more likely, pretending to listen) to an official speech loaded with ideological clichés. But the rest of the evening was devoted to walking and talking in the parade, carrying funny paper lanterns and watching the fireworks.

The communist organizers were very much aware of this unplanned but desired effect of such mass events on the population, and they exploited these rare moments of genuine communal or national feeling throughout their propaganda materials. These materials typically suggested a direct connection between a desired national community and carefully selected images from Czech history. Most of these images were manipulated out of their historical and cultural contexts in order to provide people with an almost palpable sense of nationhood. The peasant uprisings in the 16th century were therefore reinterpreted in relation to the working class protest movements of the 19th century in order to demonstrate the ‘tradition’ of revolutionary attitudes among the Czech people. Yet it was not the skillful communist propaganda that created the feelings of community. Rather, people were drawn to these events due to a general lack of spaces for communal interaction. As this thesis showed, the overwhelming majority of

Czechoslovak citizens felt extreme detachment from the official politics but continued to participate in the public rituals. Many criticized these rituals through private jokes and mockery, but many, especially the young generations in the 1970s and 1980s challenged the system through their own transformations of the official meanings of collectivity. In Chapter 4, I documented how the children-pioneers actively reinterpreted many of the imposed meanings of collectivity through their own non-political activities. Through their mass involvement in overthrowing the communist regime, young people in Czechoslovakia demonstrated that the seemingly unbreakable system can be destroyed, and that the potential for a democratic transformation exists in even the most rigid social structures.

After the fall of communism in 1989, the symbolism of the national community created through mass events disappeared. The communist celebrations were abolished, and government and media presented most mass phenomena negatively. For example, the mass demonstrations accompanying the summit of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in Prague in 2000 were almost exclusively covered as typical expressions of extremist behavior, dominated by foreigners. Similarly, the mass response of Czech citizens to the so-called crisis of Czech Public Television in 2001 was presented as a “support for the rebellion.”⁷ Even corporate team-building activities are now disdained due to the connotations of forced collectivization.

Official attempts at new definitions of Czech national identity distanced themselves from any connection with the masses and instead promoted ideals of individualism and social stratification. But these concepts were not easily transferable on a society characterized by egalitarian collectivity.⁸ The forceful elimination of the discredited, communist notion of mass ‘commonness’ from the concept of national identity weakened the feeling of national unity, as

⁷ Lidove Noviny, December 30, 2003.

⁸ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and Post-Communist Social Transformation*

Miroslav Hroch noted. Hroch added that because the Czech national identity is not being replaced by another form of communal togetherness, for example 'European' identity, more and more people in the Czech Republic will lose their ties to the communal/national identity and sink easily into asocial behavior. A society without a group identity, Hroch argued, is a deformed society: "national identity is the basic condition for group solidarity, and it represents the crucial requirement for mobilization of activities beneficial for society."⁹

Significantly, the need for mass affirmation of communal togetherness remained extremely strong in the Czech Republic. Recent research among the citizens of the Czech Republic¹⁰ revealed a strong nostalgia for communist times. According to this report, 20% of Czechs (56% of Czechs above 60 years of age) would welcome the return of the totalitarian regime as it had existed before 1989. While this longing for the old times among some citizens has been interpreted as a result of their inability to cope with the withdrawal of the social support provided by the paternalistic state, it is significant that many of these people specifically mentioned that they missed the mass events, such as the Spartakiads and May 1st parades. It is reasonable to assume that they did not miss these events because of the political messages they propagated, but rather the sense of communal unity they encouraged.

After the Czech Republic won the Olympic gold medal in ice hockey in 1998, hundreds of thousands of people flooded the squares and streets of Czech cities. The mass celebrations involved people of all ages and social groups, and exceeded the celebrations of similar sports victories in Western Europe or North America by number of participants and intensity and length of festivities. Many Czech commentators wrote cynical articles about the "flock exultation,"¹¹

⁹ Miroslav Hroch, "Narodni tradice a identita" ("National Tradition and Identity") 227.

¹⁰ Jana Blazkova and Lucie Frydecka, "Kazdy paty Cech by vratil totalitu" ("Every Fifth Czech Wishes for the Return of the Totalitarian System"), *Mlada Fronta Dnes*, November 11, 2004.

¹¹ Jan Culik in *Britske Listy*, February 23, 1998.

criticizing the Czechs for their apparent inability to articulate a sense of national togetherness in other ways than through mass euphoria over a hockey victory.¹² Yet several sociologists interpreted people's reactions as expressions of national collectivity.¹³ Josef Kandert characterized Czech ideas about their nation as a relatively self-enclosed and homogeneous group.¹⁴ Mass celebrations emphasizing the victory of Czech togetherness over the foreign pressure (even in hockey) therefore continued to be the favorite way to reconfirm Czech national identity even after 1989.

Jiri Musil wrote in this respect about a replacement of nationhood with ethnically or territorially oriented identity. As he claimed, the significant difference between an indifferent attitude towards the celebrations of state holidays, and the emotional expressions of national identity through the festivities following an important hockey victory pointed to a general skepticism about the role of the state among Czechs.¹⁵ As I showed in this thesis, most Czechs were skeptical about their participation in the state-organized mass events, but nevertheless tolerated these activities as the only available substitutes for communal interaction. While today, some long for the return of communist times, it is clear that most Czechs do not want to attend the same communist-style public events, and therefore do not perceive *any* official state ceremonies with enthusiasm. Even though these ceremonies take place in a democratic society, they are often tainted by the same organization methods if not the same dignitaries speaking on the podium, though perhaps on behalf of a new party.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See for example Josef Kandert in *Sbornik analytickych studií pro Strategický program sociálního a ekonomického rozvoje České republiky (Anthology of Analytical Studies for the Strategic Program for Social and Economic Development of the Czech Republic)* (Prague: Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2000).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jiri Musil, "Formování české statnosti" ("Formation of Czech Nationhood") in *Sbornik analytickych studií pro Strategický program sociálního a ekonomického rozvoje České republiky (Anthology of Analytical Studies for the Strategic Program for Social and Economic Development of the Czech Republic)* (Prague: Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2000).

In Czech society, characterized by underdeveloped patterns of civic interaction, there is an evident need for some forms of communal and national collectivity. Few alternatives outside the as always officially organized state celebrations are available. Consequently, mass participation in the celebrations of the victory in hockey should not be rejected as a simple fanaticism of hockey fans or a cheap version of nationalism. I perceive it as a manifestation of a much deeper need for some form of national communality. As Jiri Musil points out, such forms of national identification can lead to xenophobia, but they also have a potential to develop into thoroughly positive forms of civic interaction within a democratic state.¹⁶

This dissertation argued that the masses should not be automatically viewed with suspicion or fear. Collectivity and mass expressions of national unity were important to people under communism, although their own ideas of national community almost never coincided with the officially staged mass events. After the fall of the oppressive regime, Czechs struggled with finding new versions of public collectivity that would enable a mass experience of national and communal unity. History of the masses in communist Czechoslovakia and the democratic Czech Republic therefore demonstrates that the masses are not inherently destructive. The masses can function as supportive social structures for the oppressive regimes, but also as the expressions of the democratic civic interaction within and outside these regimes.

¹⁶ Ibid.

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