

AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE TO THE
REVOLUTION OF 1989?
MILAN OTÁHAL'S LATEST STUDIES

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In his treatment of the history of the period 1969–1989, Milan Otáhal draws an unembellished picture of Czech society and criticizes the method of opposition against the policy of normalization. A substantial part of dissident opinion, especially the Charter 77, sought a dialogue with those in power and up until November 1989 preferred submitting written protests against the régime. In this “non-political politics” Otáhal identifies an important reason for the lack of communication between the Czech dissidents and society in general, which led to the turnaround in the ČSSR, instead of being directed by the dissidents, starting as a student movement. In the approach of the so-called “realistic group” around Emanuel Mandler, which sought, by a step-by-step policy of small changes, to alter everyday life in Real Socialism, Otáhal sees an alternative to the conception of the Charter. His interpretation was polemically attacked by Vilém Prečan. The controversy is mainly about the assessment of the opposition, the effect of which for Otáhal was principally a moral and symbolic one. Furthermore, it is about whether the policy of the Charter was appropriate in the given circumstances. This question is answered by Prečan, quite in contrast to Otáhal, in the affirmative. Finally the argument between Otáhal and Prečan touches upon more general questions about the tasks and the limitations of writing contemporary history.