Peter Bugge

A WESTERN INVENTION?

The Discovery of Czech Dissidence in the 1970s

In most contemporary scholarship on Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, "dissent" and "dissident" appear as mainstream terms in need of no definition. In his fine 2010 account of the history of Communism, Archie Brown offers a "standard" interpretation of the evolution of dissidence: "What became known as the dissident movement – though its size was scarcely large enough to be regarded as a movement – emerged in the Soviet Union in the earliest post-Khrushchev years,"[1] he writes, arguing that the 1966 trial against the writers Andrey Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel, and more generally the elimination of criticism of Stalinism, were key catalysts for the emergence of the phenomenon. Dissidence, he adds, came to depend on and find its main mode of expression in the expanding sphere of *samizdat* and, to a lesser extent, *tamizdat*.[2]

Brown identifies several different types of dissent. Dissidents advocating human rights and civil liberties attained the highest visibility abroad, but national and religious dissent were perhaps more problematic from the perspective of the Soviet regime. He also mentions intra-systemic dissent, which could easily turn into overt dissent depending on the response of the party-state, however. Brown's only non-Soviet example is Charter 77, which managed to organize a "small dissident movement" by bringing together former Communists and non-Communists. Significantly, Brown uses a different vocabulary in his account of how Polish activists in the 1970s – in particular the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) – were able to develop into "a serious opposition movement."[3]

Though not universally shared, Brown's semantic division of labour between "opposition" and "dissidence" is by no means exceptional. Petr Blažek has pointed out that Czech and Slovak historiography uses the term "dissent" far more frequently than its German and Polish counterparts. He explains this trend with the specific social and intellectual composition of the oppositional groupings in the Czech lands along with the entrance of the term into the discourse of the Charter 77 environment.[4] Other scholars use the two concepts essentially as interchangeable

---

[1] *Brown,* Archie: The Rise and Fall of Communism. London 2010, 405.

[2] *Ibid.* 406. See also *Komaromi,* Ann: Samizdat and Soviet Dissident Publics. In: Slavic Review 71 (2012) 1, 70-90. On *tamizdat,* see *Kind-Kovács,* Friederike: Written Here, Published There: How Underground Literature Crossed the Iron Curtain. Budapest, New York 2014.

[3] *Brown:* The Rise and Fall 405-407, 411, 424-425, 463-464, 539 (cf. fn. 1).

[4] *Blažek,* Petr: Typologie opozice a odporu proti komunistickému režimu: Přehled koncepcí a limity bádání [A Typology of Opposition and Resistance to the Communist Regime: A Survey of Concepts and the Limits of Research]. In: *Blažek* (ed.): Opozice a odpor proti

synonyms.[5] In her substantial 2003 study *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe*, Barbara J. Falk uses "dissidence" and "dissident political theory" to characterize the acts and writings of "citizen intellectuals and philosopher kings" who participated in what she also refers to as "opposition movements" in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. It is noteworthy that Falk never defines her key term "dissidence" and merely mentions Václav Havel's famous discussion of the concept in his seminal 1978 essay *The Power of the Powerless* in an endnote, misrepresenting his position on the subject. Falk's lack of a terminological clarification of "dissidence" in a volume including *A Note on Nomenclature* can probably be considered a testimony to the status of the term as an entirely commonplace label for the activities covered in her work.[6]

This current status of "dissident" as a well-established and accepted term today contrasts markedly with the scepticism that Czech and other intellectuals originally felt regarding the label. When discussing the word and the phenomenon in 1979, for example, the Charter 77 co-founder and prominent reform Communist of 1968, Zdeněk Mlynář, used "dissident" and "dissidence" ("disidentství") only in inverted commas, and he began his analysis with a categorical statement:

> The term "dissident" is one of the least precise in the contemporary political vocabulary. It was introduced by Western journalists with the assistance of those critics of the Soviet regime who had not found a more precise description of themselves than the term "other-thinkers" ("inakomysliashchie").[7]

One year earlier, Václav Havel – who would later become one of the major icons of dissidence – had insisted in *The Power of the Powerless* that "the term 'dissident' was chosen and generally accepted by Western journalists."[8] Havel was deeply scep-

---

komunistickému režimu v Československu 1968-1989 [Opposition and Resistance against the Communist Regime in Czechoslovakia 1968-1989]. Praha 2005, 10-24; see in particular 20-21. See also *Vilímek,* Tomáš: Solidarita napříč hranicemi: Opozice v ČSSR a NDR po roce 1968 [Solidarity across Borders: Opposition in Czechoslovakia and the GDR after 1968]. Praha 2010, 37-45, for a discussion of typologies in Czech and German scholarship on "anti-regime activities."

5 For a German example, see *von Plato,* Alexander / *Vilímek,* Tomáš / *Filipkowski,* Piotr / *Wawrzyniak,* Joanna: Opposition als Lebensform: Dissidenz in der DDR, der ČSSR und in Polen. Berlin 2013. For a similar Czech use, see Miroslav Vaněk's 2005 definition of "dissent" as a term covering individuals who publicly and repeatedly declared themselves "in opposition to the ruling regime…" alone or in groups, movements or civic initiatives: *Vaněk,* Miroslav / *Urbášek,* Pavel (eds.): Vítězové? Poražení? Životopisná interview [Victors? Defeated? Biographical Interviews]. Vol. 1: Disent v období tzv. normalizace [Dissent in the Period of So-Called Normalization]. Praha 2005, 14.

6 *Falk,* Barbara J.: The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings. Budapest, New York 2003, xxiv-xxviii, xxix-xxxii ("A Note on Nomenclature"), 2, 447, note 25. In a later article, Falk discussed the relationship between "open" or "outright dissent" and "the larger category of resistance to communist rule." *Falk:* Resistance and Dissent in Central and Eastern Europe: An Emerging Historiography. In: East European Politics and Societies 25 (2011) 2, 318-360, here 320-322.

7 *Mlynář,* Zdeněk: "Disidenti" na politické mapě dneška ["Dissidents" on Today's Political Map]. In: Svědectví 15 (1980) 60, 659-672, here 659. Mlynář originally wrote the article for a joint Czech-Polish anthology published in 1979 in *samizdat* in Prague.

8 *Havel,* Václav: Moc bezmocných [The Power of the Powerless]. In: *Havel:* Eseje a jiné

tical of the term because, as Jonathan Bolton sums up his argument, it "systematically obscures much of the dissident's life and behaviour at home."[9] Bolton offers a penetrating and highly convincing reading of Havel's criticism of the notion of the "dissident," demonstrating that what Falk had held to be Havel's own definition of dissidence was in fact a deliberately "jury-rigged and ad hoc" description of how Western observers tended to apply this unfortunate concept in Havel's view.[10]

Bolton's study is a valuable and innovative contribution to the defamiliarization and cultural contextualization of the idea of dissent. As for the concept itself, he points out that the term is found in texts only rarely before 1977, i.e. before it began to boom alongside the establishment of Charter 77. There was, Bolton argues, a widespread perception among those labelled from abroad as "dissidents" that the term was inaccurate, problematic, and – as suggested by Havel and Mlynář – a Western invention.[11] Blažek likewise presents the "Western invention" hypothesis as a given,[12] though like Bolton he does so without any study of the genealogy of the concept itself as an applied term in Czech "regime-critical" discourse before 1977.[13] This paper will therefore examine whether the transformation of what was perhaps only a casual observation by Havel and others in the late 1970s into a seemingly self-evident historical "truth" is empirically tenable. It will trace the origins and eventual consolidation of the terms "dissidence" and "dissent" in their various permutations in Czech political discourse throughout the 1970s, and in so doing will attempt to explain why – despite all initial reticence – they became a common mode of self-description among Czech critics of the Communist regime within a few years.

The choice of source material will be explained below, but first I must address a specific alternative to the "Western press hypothesis" found in scholarly literature on the topic. Bolton argues in passing that the regime began to use the term "dissident" in its internal documents in 1977. He only mentions one such document, however: the notes on the interrogation of Jan Patočka, during which – as Bolton reports – Patočka is the one using the term, and does so with a critical distance.[14] His inter-

---

texty z let 1970-1989; Dálkový výslech [Essays and Other Texts from 1970-1989; Remote Interrogation]. Praha 1999 (Spisy 4) 224-330, here 272. The English translation of Havel's book was published as "Disturbing the Peace."

9 *Bolton,* Jonathan: Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism. Cambridge/MA 2012, 2.

10 *Ibid.* 224-225; compare to *Havel:* Moc bezmocných 272-278 (cf. fn. 8).

11 *Bolton:* Worlds of Dissent 218-219 (cf. fn. 9).

12 *Blažek:* Typologie opozice 20 (cf. fn. 4).

13 Bolton occasionally discusses the significance of the *absence* of the term in pre-1977 Czech texts, but he approaches his study on the pre-history of the Charter 77 as an investigation into what "dissent look[ed] like before the term existed," see *Bolton:* Worlds of Dissent 50 (cf. fn. 9). For Bolton, "dissent" is thus primarily a category of analysis, i.e. a term that he applies analytically to phenomena that were not necessarily labelled as such by contemporaries. By contrast, this paper focusses on "dissent" as a category of practice, i.e. on the actual use of the specific term by different Czech actors of the 1970s. See *Brubaker,* Rogers: Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe. Cambridge 1996, 15.

14 *Bolton:* Worlds of Dissent 219 (cf. fn. 9).

rogators never use the word.[15] Writing on the Soviet Union, Benjamin Nathans likewise argues that the label was first applied by Western journalists, "then by the regimes themselves, sensing an opportunity to stigmatize nonconformists by branding them with a foreign word," before those nonconformists themselves, despite their dislike, eventually had to accept it as virtually inescapable.[16] Friederike Kind-Kovács goes even further: "While the Soviet authorities originally used the term 'dissident' to refer to individuals that criticized the system, some individuals later identified with the term, while others rejected this politicized label."[17] Again, Kind-Kovács offers no references to primary or secondary sources to corroborate her claim. Later, she mentions that Tom Stoppard, the British playwright of Czech origin, claimed in a 1977 essay in the *New York Review of Books* that the Czechoslovak regime liked to "throw around the word 'dissident' – with its connotations of enemy of the state" in order to stigmatize Charter 77. Direct evidence is once again not provided, however.[18]

I find these claims implausible. In my own research, I have never come across the word "dissident" as a label for opponents of the regime, be it in officially published texts or in internal documents of the Secret Police or other state agencies. Besides the notorious "Failures and Usurpers" coined in the editorial in *Rudé právo* (Red Right) condemning Charter 77,[19] the regime used terms such as "anti-socialist elements," "reactionary forces," "enemies of our socialist order," "right-wing opportunists" or – in internal documents – simply "the adversary."[20] The term "dissident" did not, and I believe could not, have a place in Communist discourse of the "Brezhnev-Husák era." Unlike the actually used political and class concepts, the term with its

---

15 *Císařovská,* Blanka/*Prečan,* Vilém (eds.): Charta 77: Dokumenty 1977-1989 [Charter 77: Documents 1977-1989]. Vol. 3: Přílohy [Supplements]. Praha 2007, 39-52; see p. 46 for Patočka's own usage.

16 *Nathans,* Benjamin: Talking Fish: On Soviet Dissident Memoirs. In: The Journal of Modern History 87 (2015) 3, 579-614, here 581. As evidence, Nathans refers to *Shragin,* Boris: Mysl' i deistvie [Thought and Act]. Moscow 2000, 185.

17 *Kind-Kovács:* Written Here, Published There 13 (cf. fn. 2).

18 *Ibid.* 86.

19 Ztroskotanci a samozvanci [Failures and Usurpers]. In: Rudé právo, 12 January 1977, 2. The long editorial contains numerous other derogatory terms referring to the Charter 77 signatories, but not "dissident."

20 For the latter terms, see *Hošek,* Jakub: Základní pravidla hry kočky s myší: O opozičních manuálech pro styk se Státní bezpečnosti, obrazu správného disidenta, právním povědomí a o tom, proč se StB bála právníků [The Basic Rules of the Game Cat and Mouse: On Opposition Manuals for Contact with the State Security, the Image of the True Dissident, Legal Awareness and on Why the Secret Police Was Afraid of Lawyers]. In: *Michela,* Miroslav/*Sixta,* Václav (eds.): Rizika jinakosti: Kulturní opozice před rokem 1989 jako předmět výzkumu [The Risks of Being Different: Cultural Opposition before 1989 as an Object of Study]. Praha 2018, 29-53, here 45-46. I did not encounter the word "dissident" in the over two hundred pages of official documents on the 1979 trial against the activists of the *Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Persecuted* printed in *Blažek,* Petr/*Bursík,* Tomáš: Pražský proces 1979: Vyšetřování, soud a věznění členů Výboru na obranu nespravedlivě stíhaných: Dokumenty [The Prague Trial 1979: The Investigation, Trial and Imprisonment of Members of the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Persecuted: Documents]. Praha 2010.

etymology and connotations would have granted those labelled with it precisely the status the regime strove so hard to deny them – namely that of persons stigmatized or persecuted simply for "thinking differently." In the following, I will therefore focus exclusively on "regime-critical" texts.

An Etymological Aside

A brief philological clarification also seems appropriate here. Though largely synonymous and mostly used in similar contexts (already in pre-Cold-War times), "dissidence" and "dissent" have different etymological roots. "Dissidence" (and thus "dissident") derives from *dis+sedére*, to sit or settle oneself apart from, whereas "dissent" derives from *dis+sentîre,* to feel or think differently. Both words have been used to express disagreement, but "dissent" has a much longer history of referring to disunity regarding religious doctrine than "dissidence" and "dissident," which conversely came to be more narrowly associated with political protest during the 1960s.[21] In contemporary English, the conjunction of "dissident" and "dissent" appears to be the most common, even though the etymologically correct pairings would be "dissident – dissidence" or "dissenter – dissent." In the late 1970s, Havel and Mlynář used "disidentství" (dissidence), but the term has gradually given way to "disent" (dissent) in Czech as well – perhaps, as Bolton suggests, because the latter word is more sonorous.[22] Such etymological nuances prompt us to pay attention to the exact choice of words when studying processes of intellectual and linguistic transfer.

Early Cold War Usage and Users

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* use of the term "dissident" in the political Cold War sense began in the mid to late 1960s.[23] But presence is not necessarily proof of commonness, of course, and a search in *The Economist Historical Archive* shows that "dissident" in the sense discussed here was used only sporadically before 1977, and almost exclusively with reference to Soviet cases.[24] Nor is there any abun-

---

[21] *Crowley,* Tony: "Dissident": A Brief Note. In: Critical Quarterly 53 (2011) 2, 1-11, here 2-5.

[22] *Bolton:* Worlds of Dissent 218 (cf. fn. 9).

[23] In the second edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) from 1989, a new definition was added to the adjectival use of "dissident" to include "disagreeing in political matters; voicing political dissent, usu. in a totalitarian state." A similar addition appeared in the definition of the noun. OED citations for this new usage include a 1966 quote for the adjectival use and one from 1969 for the noun. *Crowley:* "Dissident" 4 (cf. fn. 21).

[24] See https://www.gale.com/intl/c/the-economist-historical-archive (last visited 12.08.2019). Some examples: Russia: The dissidents strike back. In: The Economist, 31.05.1969, 34; The Ukraine stirs: Mr Brezhnev is arresting Ukrainian and Baltic dissidents because he is afraid they will form an active alliance with the human rights movement that is already worrying him. In: The Economist, 26.02.1972, 18; Dissidents in diaspora. In: The Economist, 09.03.1974, 51. At rare occasions, the journal also applied the term to oppositional intellectuals in Latin America and elsewhere. A distinct quantitative increase in appearances of the term begins in 1976.

dance of early scholarly works on Eastern Europe and the USSR dealing explicitly with dissidence or dissent. The *Harvard Library Catalogue* has only a handful of pre-1977 books with a form of either word in the title, including works by Vojtech Mastny, Peter Reddaway, Abraham Rothberg, Rudolf L. Tökés and F. J. M. Feldbrugge.[25]

Many of these authors, we notice, have roots in the eastern half of Europe. This fact alone relativizes Havel's and Mlynář's assumptions about ignorant Western journalists as creators or key propagators of the terms – and even Mlynář himself went on to modify his own categorical opening statement in the essay cited above. He states that it was "no coincidence that the term 'dissidence' appeared in the countries of the Soviet bloc at a specific time – roughly in the 1960s,"[26] concluding that "'Dissidence' in the societies of the Soviet bloc is thus a political phenomenon sui generis."[27] This once again suggests that despite the inverted commas, Mlynář's main issue with "dissidence" was less with the term as such than with the lack of precision in its application.

Our findings regarding the origins of authors of early books about Soviet and Eastern European dissent correspond well with an observation by Barbara J. Falk in her study on the genealogy of academic interest in resistance and dissent:

> [M]uch of the early attention to resistance and dissent did not come from the academic community, but from émigré communities […]. By the 1970s and 1980s there were literally dozens of expatriate and indigenous language journals, and newsletters that often discussed dissent […].[28]

Falk's statement points to Czech émigré journals as a particularly relevant set of sources for investigating the origins and spread of the term "dissidence" in its various permutations in Czech independent intellectual discourse during the 1970s. The Western-based but nevertheless Czech editors and contributors of these periodicals strove to preserve strong ties to their former homelands, and they monitored developments in the Eastern bloc as well as Western responses to them while simulta-

---

[25] See https://hollis.harvard.edu/primo-explore/search?vid=HVD2&sortby=rank&lang=en_US (last visited 12.08.2019). *Mastny,* Vojtech (ed.): East European Dissent. 2 Vols. New York 1972; *Reddaway,* Peter (ed.): Uncensored Russia: Protest and Dissent in the Soviet Union: The Unofficial Moscow Journal: A Chronicle of Current Events. New York 1972; *Rothberg,* Abraham: The Heirs of Stalin: Dissidence and the Soviet Regime, 1953-1970. Ithaca/NY 1972; *Tökés,* Rudolf L. (ed.): Dissent in the USSR: Politics, Ideology, and People. Baltimore/MD 1975; *Feldbrugge,* Ferdinand J. M.: Samizdat and Political Dissent in the Soviet Union. Leyden 1975. A similar search in the catalogue of the *Bayerische Staatsbibliothek* (https://www.bsb-muenchen.de/; last visited 12.08.2019) found five relevant titles with the word "Dissidenten" in the title from the period 1965-1979, with the first two from 1971 and all five focussing on the Soviet Union. This indicates that German usage of the term developed largely in parallel to its English usage.

[26] *Mlynář:* "Disidenti" 659 (cf. fn. 7).

[27] *Ibid.* 671.

[28] *Falk:* Resistance and Dissent 325 (cf. fn. 6). The only pre-1977 scholarly work discussed in detail by Falk is *Skilling,* H. Gordon/*Griffiths,* Franklyn (eds.): Interest Groups in Soviet Politics. Princeton/NJ 1971. As Falk acknowledges, however, this volume did not define the described phenomena as "resistance" or "dissent." *Ibid.* 323.

neously seeking to influence Western debates on developments in the Communist countries. Émigré journals thus represent eminent embodiments of the transnational entanglements that were a central aspect of non-conformist cultural production in the Communist countries during the 1970s and beyond,[29] and they make excellent sources for studies on linguistic and ideational exchange and transfer. Consequently, this study focuses on what were probably the two most influential Czech-language journals published in exile before 1989: *Svědectví* (Testimony) and *Listy* (Pages). In them, we find contributions from within Czechoslovakia, from Czechs and Slovaks in exile, and from a variety of Western and Eastern European authors. Their choice of terminology and the contexts in which different terms are used can therefore help us to test the veracity of the "Western press hypothesis."

Svědectví versus Listy

Svědectví had firm roots in the post-1948 anti-Communist émigré community. From the journal's foundation in 1956 until the fall of Communism, *Svědectví* published eighty-eight book-length issues, i.e. two and a half per year on average, first from New York and then from Paris starting in 1960. Its editor throughout its entire lifespan was Pavel Tigrid (1917-2003), an emigrant during the Second World War and again from 1948. Among the early post-war émigré journals, *Svědectví* stood out in that it was aimed primarily at readers in Czechoslovakia. Until the invasion of August 1968 made further such attempts futile, Tigrid's aim was to stimulate gradual improvement of the conditions in his home country. Having maintained ties to the Catholic People's Party before 1948, he kept the journal open to all voices supporting democracy and pluralism, including domestic contributors. *Svědectví* covered a broad range of political and cultural issues and closely followed developments in the USSR and other Communist states.[30]

By contrast, *Listy* was established and run by reform Communists who had gone into exile when the Prague Spring was suppressed. The journal's editor was Jiří Pelikán (1923-1999), director of Czechoslovak Television in 1968. Published in Rome from 1970, *Listy* – whose ideological stance was expressed in its subtitle *Journal of the Czechoslovak Socialist Opposition* – soon settled into a publishing rhythm of six or seven issues per year, each typically featuring between 48 and 64 pages. Like *Svědectví, Listy* was primarily written for readers at home, and although largely devoted to political news, it also covered literature and culture. Despite the very different backgrounds of the core editorial staff of the two journals – some of the reform Communists involved in Listy had contributed to driving the anti-Com-

---

[29] *Kind-Kovács:* Written Here, Published There, in particular chapter 2 (cf. fn. 2).

[30] *Janoušek,* Pavel et al.: Dějiny české literatury 1945-1989 [A History of Czech Literature 1945-1989]. Vol. 3: 1958-1969. Praha 2008, 122-124*; Janoušek* et al.: Dějiny české literatury 1945-1989 [A History of Czech Literature 1945-1989]. Vol. 4: 1969-1989. Praha 2008, 154; *Tigrid,* Pavel: Úvodem [Introduction]. In: Svědectví 23 (1990) 89/90, 3-5. Impressively, persons associated with Charter 77 edited two issues of the journal – no. 59 of 1979 and no. 62 of 1980 – from Prague. In 1990, the journal returned to Prague, where Tigrid decided to end its publication in 1992.

munists of *Svědectví* into exile during their youth – relations were amicable to the point where the two periodicals assisted each other in smuggling their respective issues into Czechoslovakia.[31]

Tigrid and Svědectví Discover Dissidence

To demonstrate the conceptual transformation occurring in the 1970s, let us begin with a text from a later period: Pavel Tigrid's *The Intelligent Woman's Pocket Guide to Her Own Fate* of 1988. Framed as a fictional dialogue between the author and a young Czech woman when they meet on vacation in Yugoslavia, the book offers an account of Czech history in its international contexts from the founding of Czechoslovakia in 1918 to the end of the Prague Spring. Throughout the text, Tigrid frequently uses the words "dissident" and "dissidence" ("disidence") to describe non-conformists and intellectual protest after 1956.[32] In the course of a long discussion about the sad fate of Soviet dissidence, Tigrid attaches the labels not only to Sinyavsky and Daniel, Bukovsky, Sakharov and others commonly described as dissidents in the Western press, but also to writers such as Vasily Aksyonov, Andrei Voznesensky and Bella Akhmadulina. He also uses the term "intellectual dissidence" to characterize reform Communist or non-Communist criticism in the GDR, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, with Jaroslav Seifert's and František Hrubín's speeches at the Second Czechoslovak Writers' Congress in 1956 serving as his prime examples.[33]

In the eyes of Tigrid in 1988, "dissidence" was thus a term requiring no particular explanation. He used it in a broad sense that included several cases of what Brown called "intra-systemic dissent," an understanding corresponding well to Tigrid's open-minded interest in all attempts from inside the Eastern bloc to soften or change Communist rule. *Svědectví* had actually been addressing many of the issues discussed in the *Pocket Guide* since 1956, but this coverage had used a noticeably different vocabulary. In 1966, an anonymous author had referred to Sinyavsky and Daniel simply as "Soviet writers," and an open letter written by Tigrid in 1969 to Larisa Bogoraz, the wife of Yuli Daniel, in which he thanked Bogoraz for her demonstration against the invasion of Czechoslovakia on the Red Square on 25 August 1968, included no special term for her or other "Soviet people" daring to

---

[31] *Janoušek:* Dějiny české literatury. Vol. 4, 152 (cf. fn. 30); *Vančura,* Jiří: Lidé kolem zakladatele [People around the Founder]. In: Listy: Dvouměsíčník pro kulturu a dialog (2011) 1, available at http://www.listy.cz/archiv.php?cislo=111&clanek=011106 (last visited 12.08. 2019); *Tigrid,* Pavel: Mně se nestýskalo [I Was Not Homesick]. Praha 2010, 84-85.

[32] *Tigrid,* Pavel: Kapesní průvodce inteligentní ženy po vlastním osudu [The Intelligent Woman's Pocket Guide to Her Own Fate]. Toronto 1988. The anonymous peer reviewer of this essay perceptively suggested that Paris-based Tigrid's use of "disidence" rather than the more common "disidentství" may have been influenced by the French "dissidence." I am grateful for this and many other useful comments from the reviewer. Tigrid's title is a paraphrase of *Shaw,* Bernard: The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism. London 1929.

[33] *Tigrid:* Kapesní průvodce 74-84 (cf. fn. 32).

protest.[34] The events in Poland in December 1970 were designated a "rebellion" ("vzpoura") or popular revolt ("lidová revolta"), and a brief report from 1972 summarized how Mikhail Zand, a Soviet emigrant to Israel, analysed the structure of what was called "the Soviet opposition" or "the democratic movement in the USSR." In the same issue, Tigrid published a second open letter to Larisa Bogoraz in which he condemned the Soviet abuse of psychiatry and praised the courage of Bogoraz and like-minded Soviet citizens without once referring to them as dissidents.[35]

The word "dissident" made its first appearance on the pages of *Svědectví* in 1974 in an unsigned report on the campaign against Alexander Solzhenitsyn and other critics of the Communist regime. The anonymous author mostly referred to these critics as "opposition," but at one point Andrei Amalrik is suddenly referred to as a "Soviet dissident."[36] Another anonymous report in the same issue included the first linking of the term "dissident" to Czech affairs:

> In several countries of the Soviet bloc, speakers of the inner opposition have embraced some of the methods and tactics of the Soviet dissidents. In Czechoslovakia, two authors, Ludvík Vaculík and Pavel Kohout, have embarked on this risky road of critics of the repressive regime.[37]

We immediately notice that both the concept of dissidence and the "methods and tactics" associated with it are linked to the Soviet Union. This association with Soviet individuals and practices grew even stronger in the following issue. Under the headline "Conversation with a Dissident," *Svědectví* printed an interview with Soviet writer Vladimir Maximov in which both Maximov and the journalist spoke of "dissidents."[38] The interview was taken from the British journal *Encounter,* which supports the idea of the defining power of Western journalism, but another article in the same issue of *Svědectví* entitled "Soviet Dissidents: A Discussion of the Direction of Reform" was written by Jiří Kovtun, a Czech who had emigrated to the USA in 1948. Kovtun repeatedly used "dissident" as a noun and an adjective ("disidentní"), and in his attempt to exhibit the diversity of Soviet dissidence through portraits of Sakharov, Solzhenitsyn, Roy Medvedev and Nadezhda Mandeľstam, he drew parallels between the Russian "dissident movements" of the

---

[34] Před soudem světa [Before the Court of the World]. In: Svědectví 8 (1966) 126-131, here 131; *Tigrid,* Pavel: Vám pozdrav, paní Larisso [A Greeting to You, Ms. Larissa]. In: Svědectví 9 (1969) 34/35/36, 119-126.

[35] Revolta dělníků proti "dělnickému" státu [The Revolt of Workers against the "Workers'" State]. In: Svědectví 10 (1971) 40, 499-506; Opozice v SSSR [Opposition in the USSR]. In: Svědectví 11 (1972) 43, 377; *Tigrid,* Pavel: Druhý dopis Larisse Danielové [Second Letter to Larissa Daniel]. In: Svědectví 11 (1972) 43, 385-393. Tigrid used the term "opposition" once, but he seems to have had no established label for this group of individuals at the time.

[36] Osamělí neumlčitelní [The Lonely Ones Who Cannot Be Silenced]. In: Svědectví 12 (1974) 47, 394-397, quotation at 397.

[37] Opily v tramvaji [A Drunkard in the Tram]. In: Svědectví 12 (1974) 47, 397-398, quotation at 397.

[38] Rozhovor s disidentem [Conversation with a Dissident]. In: Svědectví 12 (1974) 48, 598-600. Maximov emigrated in 1974 and settled in Paris; the interview was conducted after his emigration.

nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[39] Besides Kovtun's article, *Svědectví* also published (perhaps incidentally) a contribution by Zdeněk Hejzlar, a reform Communist post-1968 émigré and key contributor to *Listy.* Under the heading "The Soviet Politics of Detente and the Oppositional Forces" and with reference to the terminology of H. Gordon Skilling, Hejzlar discussed the relevance of distinguishing between an "integral" and a "loyal opposition" in the Communist countries.[40]

This alternating or competing usage became an increasingly regular feature in *Svědectví* for the remainder of the 1970s. "Dissidence" popped up occasionally in competition with terms like "opposition," "civic movement" or "movement for human and civil rights," most often in a Soviet context or with reference to the Soviet example. A 1975 report tells how Czechoslovak citizens harassed by the political police had begun to act in the same spirit as the Russian dissidents, while the following issue included a report on the fate of Leonid Plyushch and other Soviet dissidents.[41]

Inevitably, *Svědectví* gave extensive coverage to Charter 77. In 1977, Tigrid defined Charter 77 as a "civic movement," placing it firmly in the context of "previous struggles of citizens in the countries of the Soviet system for basic freedoms and a more dignified life." He termed Soviet activists "dissidents" and reported that the official Hungarian newspaper *Népszabadság* (Liberty of the People) had admitted that Hungary, too, had groups of active dissidents.[42] In the following issue, Tigrid retained the "civil movement" label for Charter 77 but now listed Patočka, Kubišová, Smrkovský and Havel as members of an international "*army* of dissidents and fighters for human and civil rights."[43] The same issue included a lengthy study by Josef Sládeček (a pseudonym for Petr Pithart) on the significance of Charter 77 entitled "Not Waiting for Godot." Written in July 1977, this essay was the first text in *Svědectví* written by an author based in Czechoslovakia to use "dissident" as a reference to Czechs expressing criticism of Husák's regime. Still, the term competed with "opposition," "civic movement" or simply "signatories" in Pithart's analysis,[44] and it would remain the only time it occurred in a text originating from Prague until

---

[39] *Kovtun,* Jiří: Sovětští disidenti: Rozprava o směru reformy [Soviet Dissidents: A Discussion of the Direction of Reform]. In: Svědectví 12 (1974) 48, 625-642. An index of the eighty issues of *Svědectví* published until 1987 documents that this was the journal's first article featuring "dissident" in the title; see *Kuneš,* Ilja: Svědectví: Jmenný a věcný rejstřík: Ročníky 1956-1987 (čísla 1-80) [Svědectví: A Name and Subject Index: Vols. 1956-1987 (Numbers 1-80)]. Pařiž 1988.

[40] *Hejzlar,* Zdeněk: Sovětská politika uvolnění a opoziční síly [The Soviet Politics of Detente and the Oppositional Forces]. In: Svědectví 12 (1974) 48, 614-624.

[41] Helsinky jako hůl [Helsinki as a Stick]. In: Svědectví 13 (1975) 50, 199-200; Nedostali ho! [They Did Not Get Him!]. In: Svědectví 13 (1976) 51, 426-431.

[42] *P. T.* [*Tigrid,* Pavel]: 500 proti realitě [500 against Reality]. In: Svědectví 14 (1977) 53, 3-20, here 18-19.

[43] *tgd* [*Tigrid*]: Spolu, ale ne ve spolku [Together, But Not in an Association]. In: Svědectví 14 (1977) 54, 163-166, here 164. Emphasis in the original. Tigrid listed eighteen names from the Soviet bloc, a third of them from the Soviet Union.

[44] *Sládeček,* Josef: Nečekání na Godota [Not Waiting for Godot]. In: Svědectví 14 (1977) 54, 193-207.

the critical analysis of the word in 1979 by the recently emigrated Zdeněk Mlynář. Pithart's ironic reference to "'prominent' oppositionists-dissidents" ("'prominentními' opozičníky-disidenty") seems to confirm that scepticism regarding the term "dissident" was widespread among Charter signatories at the time.[45]

In observations on political events written abroad, references to dissidents in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were common by this time, with only Poland considered in 1978 to have a true "opposition."[46] The most interesting novelty in the use of the term "dissident" came by way of a 1979 report on the independent literary journal *Metropol* published in Moscow in the same year. The author, a certain "mk" from Paris, portrayed this attempt at independent publishing as something that "wants to be neither 'official' nor 'dissident' [and which] is not limited to the Soviet Union only." He or she went on to wonder "for how long and at what price the post-Stalinist systems will tolerate this 'grey zone' between [officially sanctioned art] and its antipode, the dissident cultural-political production."[47] Here, "dissident" indicates exactly what Havel had warned against: a distinct and specific politicized stance or position.

In summary, from 1974 onward the term "dissident" appeared with increasing regularity in the columns of *Svědectví* – not exclusively or even predominantly in reports taken from Western media, but also in writings by Tigrid and other Czech or Eastern European émigrés. The concept was closely linked to contemporary Soviet protest, but authors increasingly used it by association to describe similar phenomena in Czechoslovakia or other countries within the Soviet bloc. By the late 1970s the concept was well established, but it was by no means hegemonic in the journal's vocabulary used to describe critics of the Communist regime.

Opposition vs. Dissent on the Pages of Listy

A similar trend can be discerned in *Listy*, albeit with a year's delay. Listy's political profile was narrower than that of *Svědectví*, and until the mid-1970s the journal almost exclusively analysed and described the world in reform Communist terms. Consequently, *Listy* writers labelled critics of the regimes of Czechoslovakia, the USSR or other Communist states as "opposition" in accordance with the term used in the journal's subtitle. Like *Svědectví, Listy* covered events in all socialist states, but it generally maintained a stronger focus on the Soviet Union. Soviet citizens like Sinyavsky and Daniel who openly criticized conditions in the USSR were referred to as "oppositionists" ("opositičníci"), while *samizdat* (which in a 1971 article appeared in inverted commas, perhaps because the term was still considered unfamiliar to Czech readers) was believed to serve the function of an oppositional press.[48]

---

[45] *Ibid.* 193.

[46] *Ossowski,* Zykmunt: Nepoddajné, unavené Polsko [Intransigent, Tired Poland]. In: Svědectví 15 (1978) 57, 10-14. *Svědectví* had borrowed and translated the text from the Polish exile journal *Kultura.*

[47] *mk* (Paříž): Metropol. In: Svědectví 15 (1979) 58, 216-217. The viewpoints expressed in the article suggest that "mk" may well stand for Milan Kundera.

[48] Hlasy, které nelze umlčet [Voices That Cannot Be Silenced]. In: Listy 1 (1971) 3, 24-25;

In a November 1971 editorial, Jiří Pelikán took pride in the fact that Czechoslovakia was the first country in Eastern Europe to see the creation of a "political, yet at the same time socialist opposition as a movement."[49] But when a series of arrests and political trials in 1971-72 put an end to all reform Communist attempts at creating an alternative political platform in Czechoslovakia, Pelikán's articles on the "opposition" became increasingly desperate.[50] Despite the self-applied label of "opposition," a certain shift of attitude was palpable in the April 1974 *Declaration of the Opposition at the Fifth Anniversary of the Accession of Husák's Regime* from Prague. The anonymous authors declared themselves only "one of the trends in the Czech progressive opposition," and they distanced themselves from "the unrestricted power of one party and from any kind of totalitarian regime."[51] The impact of the declaration was minimal, however, and the first sign of a truly new departure in *Listy* was the printing in July 1975 of Václav Havel's *Open Letter to Gustáv Husák* written on 8 April of the same year.[52]

The first use of the word "dissident" ("disident") in *Listy* followed in August 1975 when Přemysl Janyr, a former Social Democrat and émigré of 1968, reported on a visit to the USSR by Heinrich Böll. According to Janyr, Böll had met with Sakharov and other "dissidents."[53] Whether accidental or not, this enrichment of the *Listy* vocabulary coincided with the broadening of the journal's political platform. An editorial in the first issue of 1976 boasted about the journal having published the "important letter" by Havel and other citizens "who were not and are not Communists, and who today harmoniously work on reaching the common goal, which is the freedom and independence of our country […]." The current demarcation, the editorial continued, ran not between former Communists and all types of non-Communists, but between those striving for a freer and more equitable country and those who had chosen to live in conformity with the occupational regime.[54]

Although Pelikán likewise began to adjust his vocabulary, he still found it difficult to let go of the idea of a reform Communist avant-garde as the truly entitled repre-

---

Sovětská opozice o Československu 68-69 [The Soviet Opposition on Czechoslovakia 68-69]. In: Listy 1 (1971) 6, 22; *Dalimil:* O opozici a "kadarizaci" [On Opposition and "Kádárization"]. In: Listy 2 (1972) 3, 1-3.

49 *Pelikán,* Jiří: Procesy a opozice [The Trials and the Opposition]. In: Listy 2 (1972) 5-6, 1-2. On the regime's interventions against the opposition, see *Otáhal,* Milan: Opoziční proudy v české společnosti 1969-1989 [Oppostional Trends in Czech Society 1969-1989]. Praha 2011, 62-69.

50 *Pelikán,* Jiří: Nová situace – nové možnosti [New Situation – New Possibilities]. In: Listy 3 (1973) 4, 5-9; *Redakce:* Na prahu IV. ročníku "Listů" [At the Ourset of the Fourth Volume of "Listy"]. In: Listy 4 (1974) 1, 4-6.

51 Prohlášení opozice k 5. výročí nástupu Husákova režimu [Declaration of the Opposition at the Fifth Anniversary of the Accession of Husák's Regime]. In: Listy 4 (1974) 3, 39-41. *Otáhal:* Opoziční proudy 86-89 (cf. fn. 49).

52 *Havel,* Václav: Dopis [Letter]. In: Listy 5 (1975) 5, 32-39. *Otáhal:* Opoziční proudy, 114-116 (cf. fn. 49).

53 *Janyr,* Přemysl: Malé zamyšlení k výročí [A Small Contemplation at the Anniversary]. In: Listy 5 (1975) 6, 13-15.

54 *Red.:* Do roku 1976 [Into 1976]. In: Listy 6 (1976) 1, 1-3, here 3. All mentioned persons were members of the Communist Party who had been expelled after 1968.

sentatives of the people. Both trends were displayed clearly in his April 1976 evaluation of the activism he had witnessed the previous year:

> The appearance of Dubček, Mlynář, Kriegel, Hájek, Vodsloň, Kosík, Kaplan and ranks of other individuals, along with the collective appearances of last year and this year, have the marks of a new quality: It is not the appearance of individual "dissidents" and intellectuals, but of leading representatives of the political life and the Communist Party, legally elected and supported in 1968 with the trust of a large part of the public.[55]

From this point on, Pelikán spoke of "dissidence" as one manifestation of protest against the regime, although he maintained his misgivings regarding the phenomenon. In another 1976 article, he mentioned "the Soviet historian Roy Medvedev, who as a Marxist has serious reservations about the political attitudes of Solzhenitsyn and other 'dissidents,' who do not believe in the possibility of democratic reforms under socialism."[56] Writing on Charter 77 in December 1978, Pelikán again insisted on the superiority of a genuine "opposition" with a positive programme and clear goals, calling for Charter 77 to take the necessary steps to abandon mere dissidence and become a "political force."[57] His statement to an Italian newspaper in 1979 on his recent election to the European Parliament, "My obligation in the European parliament will be to represent the voice of dissidence ["disidence"] in the Eastern European countries," may represent an attempt to adjust to a different audience.[58]

From 1976 onwards, Janyr and Pelikán were not alone in using the term "dissident" on the pages of *Listy.* In the first issue of 1976, Andrei Sakharov and František Janouch were referred to as "scholar dissidents,"[59] and the August issue provided a substantial introduction to the term in the shape of a lengthy interview from *Die Zeit* with Hungarian author György Konrád. Like Havel and Mlynář, Konrád called the "dissident" label a journalistic cliché, but he nevertheless offered a definition of the term:

> A dissident is not someone who wants to be one, but someone who has been made a dissident – in the sense Sartre put it: Anti-Semitism defines the Jew. In this sense, dissidents are intellectuals who in art and scholarship advance radically in the direction of their own strivings, wherefore they willingly or unwillingly place themselves outside of official culture.[60]

---

55 *Pelikán,* Jiří: Nová dělící čára [A New Dividing Line]. In: Listy 6 (1976) 2, 1-3, here 3.

56 *Pelikán:* Podmínky změn ve Východní Evropě [The Conditions for Change in Eastern Europe]. In: Listy 6 (1976) 5, 3-7, here 6. Medvedev himself was less disapproving of the term "dissident," which he defined broadly as openly expressed disagreement with the ideological, political, economic or moral foundation of the Soviet Union or other states during a 1977 interview conducted in Moscow by an Italian journalist. *Medvedev,* Roy: On Soviet Dissent: Interviews with Piero Ostellino. London 1980, 1-2.

57 *Pelikán,* Jiří: Pražské jaro není konec, nýbrž začátek [The Prague Spring Is Not the End But the Beginning]. In: Listy 8 (Dec. 1978) mimořádné číslo [special issue], 44-51. This, of course, was precisely what the Charter was programmatically designed not to do.

58 *J.S.:* Jiří Pelikán v Evropském Parlamentě [Jiří Pelikán in the European Parliament]. In: Listy 9 (1979) 4, 2-4, here 3. Pelikán was elected to the European Parliament twice on an Italian Socialist Party ticket.

59 Společenská rubrika [The Society Column]. In: Listy 6 (1976) 1, 48.

60 Prožít důsledky vlastních myšlenek [Experiencing the Consequences of One's Own Thoughts]. In: Listy 6 (1976) 4, 27-28, here 28.

Whether critical of the term or not, Konrád's statement thus contributed significantly to the growing impression that "dissidents" existed and had a specific social presence within Communist societies. And although his thoughts were first presented in a German weekly, a Czech émigré journal was happy to deliver them to Czech readers at home and in exile.[61]

A fictitious dialogue written by "Bohemicus" (a pseudonym often used by the reform Communist journalist and editor and later Charter 77 spokesman Jan Štern) and printed in *Listy* in October 1976 shows that the word resonated in Prague even before the publishing of Charter 77. In the dialogue, character "B" reads out to character "A" a number of quotations calling for merciless unmasking of the oppressive nature of the regime. "A" listens to the inflammatory sentences in horror before responding, "That was written by someone radical. It is almost scary. Our Vaculík is a purring cat in comparison. What kind of dissident is this? Is he still running around freely?" To this "B" replies that no, in fact the author is long since dead and buried in London; his name is Karl Marx.[62]

Throughout 1977, *Listy* closely monitored the developments surrounding Charter 77, but its activities were associated with dissidence only once in passing.[63] The term also appears in an article on the "opposition" in East Germany, first in inverted commas and then twice without, as a label for non-conformist activists.[64] We also encounter it in references to Soviet dissidents by Ota Šik and Mlynář, with the latter maintaining his use of inverted commas. The reform Communist scepticism towards platforms considered politically too inclusive was still very much present. In December 1977, "ZH" (Zdeněk Hejzlar) praised Willy Brandt for expressing his solidarity with Charter 77 while distancing himself from "the uncritical acceptance of everything that hides behind the label 'dissidents…'." Nationalism and "reactionary mysticism" remained unacceptable, even if formulated by "Russian exile dissidents."[65]

Starting in 1978, references to "dissidence" in *Listy* become too frequent to be individually discussed here. An event that contributed significantly to promoting the use of the term was the Venice Biennale in November-December 1977. In the words of its president Carlo Ripa di Meana, the Biennale would "be entirely devoted to the problem of 'dissent' in the art and culture of those European countries currently defined as socialist."[66] Antonín J. Liehm reported from the Biennale in the February 1978 issue of *Listy.* He pointed out that the Italian term "dissenso culturale" referred

---

[61] This was also the case with an interview in the same issue taken from the Danish daily *Information*, in which a journalist asked Zhores Medvedev about the situation of the "dissidents" in the USSR. Žores Medvěděv o opozici a emigraci [Zhores Medvedev on Opposition and Emigration]. In: Listy 5 (1976) 4, 43.

[62] *Bohemicus:* Český rozhovor 1976 [A Czech Conversation 1976]. In: Listy 6 (1976) 5, 24-26, here 26.

[63] *Sviták,* Ivan: Poznámka k Chartě [A Note on the Charter]. In: Listy 7 (1977) 5, 20-21.

[64] *Müller,* Adolf: Opozice v NDR [Opposition in the GDR]. In: Listy 7 (1977) 1, 33-36.

[65] *ZH:* O čem Rudé právo nepíše [What Rudé Právo Does Not Write About]. In: Listy 7 (1977) 6, 16-18, here 17.

[66] *Ripa de Meana,* Carlo: News from the Biennale. In: The New York Review of Books 24 (1977) 14, available at http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1977/sep/15/news-from-the-biennale/?pagination=false (last visited 14.08.2019).

to a disagreeing, "other" culture existing within all civilizations and that another meaning of the concept was increasingly being heard through English, Russian and French translations: that of "dissidence" proper. This prompted discussions on where "other culture" ended and "dissidence" began. Liehm stressed that this was being debated in full awareness that "[d]issidence is of course a term from the political, not the cultural domain, wherefore one can use it in all manner of ways. And again: It depends on the authorities."[67]

In its September 1978 issue, *Listy* devoted a full thirty-nine pages to Czech and other Eastern European contributions to a Biennale symposium on *Dissidence and Literature* held in early December 1977. The journal printed contributions from Eduard Goldstücker, György Konrád, Josef Škvorecký, Arnošt Lustig, Efim Etkind, Karel Michal, Ota Filip, Stanislav Baranczak, Julia Kristeva, Ludvík Aškenazy, Andrei Sinyavsky, Andrzej Drawicz, Milan Kundera and Petr Král. Although several of the authors – Konrád, Filip and Aškenazy in particular – expressed their unease concerning the term "dissident," others used it as a descriptive and uncontroversial term or discussed its possible uses.[68] The inevitable impression arising from the entire debate and its extensive coverage was that "dissidence" mattered.

By 1980, "dissidence" and associated terms were being used so frequently that we can confidently consider them well-established words in the Czech "non-regime" vocabulary. I will therefore conclude this empirical study with but a few more examples of their use in *Listy* during the late 1970s. In a 1978 bulletin on an "underground" music festival held in Václav Havel's summer cottage in October 1977, an anonymous Prague-based reporter referred to as "M" wrote about how Jaroslav Hutka's song *Havlíčku, Havle* (You, Havlíček, you, Havel) was "dedicated to two Czech 'dissidents' – one from the nineteenth century and one from our present time."[69] Like Kovtun before him, the author thus interpreted contemporary dissent as part of a longer national tradition – a social practice already encountered at a time before it was designated as such.

In the same issue, prominent Charter 77 activist Václav Benda reported on how he had lost his job and subsequently told the management that it was up to them "if they want to make a professional dissident out of me."[70] Václav Havel expressed the same objection to being forced into a role that was not one's own choice in a 1978 interview with Austrian newspaper *Kurier.* Havel protested against the circumstance that he and his colleagues had ended up in the position of "some kind of 'professional dissidents', prominent oppositionists [opozičníků]" – two terms he equally rejected.[71]

---

[67] *Liehm,* A. J.: Jiná kultura – Biennale 77 [Another Culture – The Biennale 1977]. In: Listy 8 (1978) 1, 15-18, here 15.

[68] Naše kultura ve světě. Bienále 77 [Our Culture in the World: The Biennale 77]. In: Listy 8 (1978) 5, 4-42.

[69] *M* (Praha): III. hudební festival druhé kultury v ČSSR [The Third Music Festival of the Second Culture in Czechoslovakia]. In: Listy 8 (1978) 1, 45-46, here 45.

[70] *Benda,* Václav: Malá lekce z demokracie [A Small Lesson in Democracy]. In: Listy 8 (1978) 1, 56-57, here 57.

[71] *Havel,* Václav: Charta 77 a vývoj v roce 1978 [Charter 77 and Developments in 1978]. In:

In 1979, Mlynář wrote that while the regime had previously tolerated individuals defining themselves as "dissidents," now – with the Charter – "the whole problem of critical protest and opposition (albeit only on the basis of an effort to have valid laws and legal norms respected) has after all been kind of institutionalized."[72] Here we see again how organized "opposition" ranked higher than "dissidence" from a reform Communist point of view. Throughout the same year, several authors including Arnošt Kolman used the term "dissidents" in a descriptive sense without inverted commas, often with references to the USSR,[73] while Hejzlar in a brief report on the Soviet literary journal *Metropol* (the same one discussed by "mk" in *Svědectví*) talked about how the journal's contributors had stressed "that they do not rank among the 'dissidents'."[74] The term also featured in translated articles by Jan Kott, Jacek Kuroń and Andrei Sinyavsky. Despite the continued scepticism of Milan Šimečka and others,[75] the unmarked, descriptive use was clearly prevailing at this time, with the use in inverted commas on the wane. In less than five years since its first appearance in 1975 on the pages of *Listy*, "dissident" had thus become a largely non-controversial term of reference.

Conclusions

Our investigation shows that the "Western press hypothesis" was not entirely unfounded, but also that it needs to be modified and refined. The word "dissident" as a label for vocal critics of the Communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe had begun to appear in Western media and academic publications a few years before it found its way onto the pages of *Svědectví* and *Listy*, and many early occurrences of the term in the two journals were in material translated from Anglophone, German or other Western European media. Closer inspection reveals, however, that the authors or interviewees of these articles often had Russian or other Eastern European backgrounds. *Svědectví* and *Listy* also exchanged material with Polish, Russian and other exile periodicals, which made the crystallization of the concept and idea of "dissidence" a truly transnational endeavour. The term's appearance and eventual consolidation in Czech non-regime discourse was not the product of a one-way transfer or of Western discursive hegemony, but rather the outcome of a highly

---

Listy 8 (1978) 5, 63-65, at 64. Though he did not go as far as Tigrid, Havel eventually used the concept occasionally as a purely descriptive term, like when mentioning in his 1985-86 exchange with Karel Hvížďala the "time when we had meetings with the Polish dissidents on our common border." *Havel:* Dálkový výslech [Remote Interrogation (English edition: Disturbing the Peace)]. In: *Havel:* Eseje a jiné texty 699-917, here 849 (cf. fn. 8).

72 *Mlynář,* Zdeněk: Charta 77 po dvou letech [Charter 77 after Two Years]. In: Listy 9 (1979) 1, 1-6, here 2.

73 *Kolman,* Arnošt: Tři nejnaléhavější úkoly [The Three Most Urgent Tasks]. In: Listy 9 (1979) 1, 36-38.

74 *Z. H.:* O čem Rudé právo nepíše [What Rudé Právo Does Not Write About]. In: Listy 9 (1979) 2, 21-23, here 22.

75 *Šimečka,* Milan: Společenství strachu [A Community of Fear]. In: Listy 10 (1980) 1, 36-42, here 41.

entangled, transnational dialogue in which Eastern Europeans in exile – in close contact with like-minded people at home – played a central role.

Another remarkable finding is the close association of the term among both emigrated Czechs and those remaining in the country with the ideas and activities of Soviet intellectuals protesting against the Brezhnev regime. It was perfectly natural not just for the reform Communist *Listy* but also for the non-socialist *Svědectví* to monitor events in the USSR closely and to view "the methods and tactics of the Soviet dissidents" – as *Svědectví* put it in 1974 – as inspiring examples for Czech critics of the Husák regime. Soviet dissent was a highly relevant and respected reference point for many who became associated with Charter 77 as well as for their friends in exile outside of Czechoslovakia. This strong Soviet connection has been almost entirely ignored in later Czech and Western scholarship on the history of Czech or East Central European dissidence, suggesting that the latter had only indigenous roots.[76] One might hypothesize in this regard that later discursive and (after 1989) political efforts to dissociate the Czechs – and by extension (East) Central Europe – from everything Soviet and Russian have affected historical framings as well.[77]

It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate whether the Soviet activists known abroad as "dissidents" used this non-Russian word to describe themselves, or whether they shared the Czech activist's initial reticence towards it. Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn rejected the label with arguments similar to Havel's, but Benjamin Nathans sums up the situation as follows: "'Democratic movement' was one of several terms, along with 'rights-defending movement' and 'dissident movement,' used by contemporaries to refer to the ensemble of groups seeking nonviolent reform in the USSR."[78] Further inquiries might investigate whether the spread of the Russian word *samizdat,* which likewise caught on internationally around 1970 and is symbiotically linked to the practice of dissidence, helped to propagate the latter term by association in the Soviet Union and abroad.[79]

The primacy of *Svědectví* in using the term "dissident" a year before *Listy* may be coincidental, but our sources clearly demonstrate that reform Communists, with *Listy* as their main platform, stuck to the term and idea of "opposition" much longer

---

[76] There is, for example, hardly any reference to Soviet dissidents in *Falk:* The Dilemmas of Dissidence (cf. fn. 6), *Bolton:* Worlds of Dissent (cf. fn. 9), or *Otáhal:* Opoziční proudy (cf. fn. 49). Czech historiography has substantial studies of transnational solidarity between Czechoslovaks and other East Central Europeans, such as *Vilímek:* Solidarita napříč hranicemi (cf. fn. 4), or *Kamiński,* Łukasz / *Blažek,* Petr / *Majewski,* Grzegorz: Hranicím navzdory: Příběh Polsko-československé solidarity [Despite the Borders: The Story of Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity]. Praha 2017. I was unable to find anything substantial on the significance of Soviet dissent for developments in Czechoslovakia.

[77] *Kundera,* Milan: The Tragedy of Central Europe. In: New York Review of Books 31 (1984) 7 (and numerous other journals) is probably the most influential example of these attempts at a radical dissociation of Czechoslovakia and its closest neighbours from anything Russian and Soviet.

[78] *Nathans:* Talking Fish 580, note 1, and 581 (cf. fn. 16). "Other-thinking" and "other-thinkers" ("raznomyslie" or "inakomyslie") etc. were also used.

[79] See *Komaromi:* Samizdat and Soviet Dissident Publics 77 (cf. fn. 2) for a short *Begriffsgeschichte* of *samizdat.*

than many non-Communists. As the reform Communists began to notice and comment on manifestations of dissidence, they made no secret of their view that it was a politically amorphous and therefore inferior form of anti-regime activity – a criticism also applied to Charter 77 in the late 1970s. Essentially, however, "dissidence" developed as a reaction to and rejection of the notion and practice of political opposition as a viable strategy for challenging the Communist regimes of the Brezhnev-Husák era. The universal individualism of human and civil rights offered a way out of the binary, Leninist *kto-kogo*? (who, whom?) embedded in the idea of a political opposition to the ruling Communist party that was increasingly beginning to look like a road to nowhere.[80] Tigrid's *Svědectví*, which advocated "non-political" activism based on the Masaryk tradition of "small-scale work" (*drobná práce*) for the good of the community and nation, may therefore have been more perceptive to this change in outlook and strategy – and with it to the new concept of "dissidence."[81]

Our study also shows that Havel was by no means alone among the Czech Charter 77 signatories with his criticism of the term "dissident" in the late 1970s. But for Havel and his associates, using the alternative label "opposition" was completely out of the question as well, as the Charter 77 declaration made clear:

> Charter 77 is not an organization; it has no rules, permanent bodies or formal membership. It embraces everyone who agrees with its ideas, participates in its work, and supports it. It does not form the basis for any oppositional political activity.[82]

The declaration defines the signatories only as "a free informal, open community of people."[83] This was too vague and long-winded to serve as a label, however, and "signatories" was too exclusive. In the interview quoted above, György Konrád suggested that the Communist regimes created "dissidents" by treating critical intellectuals in specific ways. There is a basic truth in this observation, as there is in the claim that the term "dissident" entered Czech discourse from abroad and was received with unease, but these two facts alone cannot explain why the term caught on and became "normalized" within only a few years.

Tony Crowley has argued that "a linguistic change *is* a social change," specifying that an "alteration in the use of the term 'dissident' is in and of itself a practice which is linked to, and which enables, other forms of practice."[84] This is a useful observa-

---

[80] Reform Communist terminology and evaluations found their way into post-1989 scholarship in the works on the history of opposition/dissent in Czechoslovakia 1969-89 by the historian, reform Communist and Charter 77 signatory Milan Otáhal. Otáhal argues that the Czechoslovak oppositional movement came in two major chronologically successive forms. Until 1972, he states, the "socialist opposition" dominated, whereas a "civic opposition" – which Otáhal also at times calls "dissent" – took over from around 1975. Like Pelikán in the late 1970s, Otáhal based his distinction between these two forms of opposition on the presence or absence of a political programme. *Otáhal:* Opoziční proudy (cf. fn. 49); *Blažek*: Typologie opozice 18-19 (cf. fn. 4).

[81] It might be worth examining whether this shift was also reflected in an increasing use of the term "prisoner of conscience" rather than "political prisoner" during the 1970s and beyond.

[82] English translation from *Skilling,* H. Gordon: Charter 77 and Human Rights in Czechoslovakia. London 1981, 212.

[83] *Ibid.* 211.

[84] *Crowley:* "Dissident" 1-2 (cf. fn. 21). Emphasis in the original.

tion. While Crowley's "linked to" helps us avoid a "chicken and egg" discussion about whether the word or the set of practices inviting its introduction came first, his "enabling" suggests why "dissidence" was taken up first by friends of the cause, then by its practitioners themselves as a replacement for the unproductive "opposition." No other moniker could do the job of "dissidence," and despite their reservations, Havel, Mlynář and their fellow activists at home and in exile thus eventually performed and talked "dissidents" and "dissidence" into a highly vital existence.