

Fools and Heroes

THE CHANGING ROLE OF COMMUNIST
INTELLECTUALS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

PETER HRUBY

Western Australian Institute of Technology



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Abbreviations

CC	Central Committee
C.I.A.	Central Intelligence Agency
CPC	Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
CPI	Communist Party of Italy
CPS	Communist Party of Slovakia
ČS.	Československý (Czechoslovak)
ČSAV	Československá akademie věd (Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences)
ČSM	Československý svaz mládeže (Czechoslovak Youth Association)
ČSR	Československá Republika (Czechoslovak Republic)
ČSSR	Československá Socialistická Republika (Czechoslovak Socialist Republic)
Cz.	Czechoslovak
KSČ	Komunistická strana Československa (Czechoslovak Communist Party)
KSS	Komunistická strana Slovenska (Slovak Communist Party)
OKN	Okresní národní výbor (District National Committee)
RFER	Radio Free Europe Research
ROH	Revoluční odborové hnutí (Revolutionary Trade Union)
TV	Television
U.S.	United States
U.S.S.R.	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
ÚV	Ústřední výbor (Central Committee)
VLP	Vydavatel'stvo politickej literatúry (Publishers of Political Literature)
VSAV	Vydavatel'stvo slovenskej akademie vied (Publishers of the Slovak Academy of Sciences)

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In Perth (W. A.) on 27 December 1978

P. H.

¹ "Czechoslovakia between East and West. The Changing Role of Communist Intellectuals, 1948-1968," University of Geneva, Switzerland, 1978. The text was here abbreviated and the references to sources shortened.

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Introduction

Aims of the work, its methods, and contribution

Interest

TWENTIETH-century European history is an unfinished story of wars, upheavals, revolutions, and destruction as well as creation of empires. The carefully kept balance of power of the nineteenth century definitely disappeared. The crucial age not only of the masses and of efficient methods of communication but, alas, also of manipulation brought into existence modern totalitarian and imperialist states, industrially developed, heavily armed, and buttressed by aggressive ideologies. Small or middle-sized countries had lost their security and repeatedly also their independence. Internal and external peace has been permanently threatened and often shattered.

In all of the upsetting history of modern times, Czechoslovakia was deeply involved. Its statesmen's creative efforts to master the unsettled European affairs have been, in the long run, mostly discouraging. A few times they served as decisive warnings of dangers present. During the last sixty years, this small state in the heart of Europe, at least four times, played a pivotal role — in 1918, 1938, 1948, and 1968. It was worth watching as a sensitive barometer of hopes, tensions, and dangers on the European continent.

Of these dates only 1918 was ever celebrated in Czechoslovakia by the majority of the population with joy, and for some time appeared to have beneficial influence on world developments. An attempt was made then to transplant the peaceful condition of the Republic of Geneva to the center of Europe by creating there a new state, which on several occasions during the war was discussed and prepared on the lovely shores of Lake Léman. The effort continued throughout two decades at the League of Nations, but in 1938 the principle of collective security, after repeated disasters, failed also for this new Republic. The fairy-tale of a philosopher-king on the Hradčany Castle, who would have liked to reproduce Switzerland in Central Europe, and of his capable foreign minister, who was distinguishing himself in disarmament and other talks in the Palais des Nations, could not survive unscathed the Nazi and Fascist drive to power, when France and England did not feel obliged to keep their arrangements of Versailles.

The first of the three terms by which Czechoslovakia enriched the contemporary political vocabulary was then coined — the *Munich appeasement*. A useless sacrifice of a small but well-armed state, which until then was the only one in Central and East Europe which managed to keep and develop liberal rights and a democratic system of government, became a warning against attempts to satisfy expansionist powers by concessions made at the expense of small allies.

Unfortunately, in the 1940s it took too many years before that lesson would be

heeded in international politics by the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and by the establishment of NATO. Again, what helped was the next alarming signal coming from Prague in the form of a bloodless *coup d'état* carefully prepared in advance and executed by the Communist party against divided, dispirited democrats and with a manifest lack of interest on the part of Western powers. The second future cliché of international politics of Czechoslovak provenience was born — the *coup of Prague*. Watching recent developments in Portugal and in Italy, foreign observers were often mentioning the 1948 experience and pondering its tactics and dangerous implications.

Finally, when someone thought about calling the speeding up liberalizing and democratizing evolution in Czechoslovakia of 1968 the *Prague Spring*, the term quickly caught the imagination of both domestic participants and foreign sympathizers. Another terminological short-cut for complicated historical events entered the realm of international politics.

All three trite expressions of Czechoslovak origin — Munich appeasement, *coup of Prague*, and *Prague Spring* — concern questions of independence, human rights, and democracy threatened or trampled on by an expansionist great power. Only the last one was positive and inspiring. Its promise had to be crushed by invading tank divisions, making it in its consequences another symbol of a tragic lack of decent prospects for a country squeezed in Eastern Europe between great powers. In all three instances the small state was left abandoned, without any help from Western democracies, as a prey to the appetite of international bullies, always just serving as a strong warning.

Although all three historical dates involved a sharp clash between opposing sets of values (democracy versus dictatorship), especially the last one had created a stir in intellectual circles, since thanks to the creative energy of the Czechoslovak intelligentsia a totalitarian system was almost dismantled and a new variation of communism, “socialism with a human face”, was replacing the often brutal and stupid neo-Stalinist order. It helped to focus attention on questions of humanism or the lack of it in Marxism and in movements claiming its heritage. Czech lands, which once before in European history initiated a reform movement on a large scale (fifteenth-century religious reformation), might have again encouraged a process of reformation of a twentieth-century political faith. The fashionable discussions of Eurocommunism would have been impossible without the impetus of Prague.

Thus, it is not a limited local history of a small Central European state which is the topic of this work. Even the problem of Czechoslovakia's international relations, basically a result of its geographic position between the West and the East, is not peculiar to this country. On the contrary, it is now the foremost actual problem of the world. In addition, from the beginning of the Khrushchevian coexistence policy, whose name was in the Brezhnev era changed into *détente*, the Kremlin ideologues have been stressing that the main battles between the two camps are, and will be, taking place on the ideological front. Therefore, it should be instructive to follow their development and results. In this ideological warfare the intellectuals either become tools in the hands of political manipulators, spreading their slogans, or create an atmosphere in which change for the better can take place.