

# **Open Letters: Substance and Circumstances of Communication Processes in Late Socialist Czechoslovakia and Poland**

by  
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## **1 Introduction**

Open letters are appeals in the political spectacle and must be understood in the context of increasing communication between governments and citizens. An open letter addresses both the addressee, usually the government or a member of it, and the public. It is the statement of a particular person, often well-known and usually male, pointing emphatically at his own interpretation of a controversial topic by taking the position of a politically responsible member of society. In his protest against a certain policy, he claims to know the topic in question better than the addressee or to be on the right side of a given question. While posing a new and authorized version of the topic, the writer is also an actor who might change common interpretations. As in a theatre play he directs his speech to the other actor(s) and to the spectators simultaneously. The sender is thus the one who puts the deed on stage. By doing so, he is in the position of an actor on stage. The addressees are on the one hand the other actors on the stage, such as the government or the representatives of an institution, and on the other hand the observers. In the event of the sender addressing the message not only to the addressee but also to a wider public, there are also side-stages and multiple audiences. This opens up the communication process to various observers who are invited to follow the play. This kind of underlining and spreading one's own interpretation is an act of self-empowerment. Against the backdrop of censorship, writing and publishing open letters proves to be a suitable form of appealing to the public which means that the letters might not be published officially but can be circulated in another way. But although the sender is the one to take up this powerful position, he cannot foresee the response. In any case, the observers will witness the response, too; and this is what makes the 'game' dangerous for the sender but also for the government accused of misunderstanding political essentials.

Open letters are thus a very profound vehicle for reinterpretations of political concepts and have often led to revolution.<sup>1</sup> This also applies to the revolu-

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<sup>1</sup> ROLF-BERNHARD ESSIG: Der offene Brief. Geschichte und Funktion einer publizistischen Form von Isokrates bis Günter Grass, Würzburg 2000, pp. 331-362.

tionary processes in the Eastern bloc in late socialism.<sup>2</sup> Open letters thereby had a certain function for alternative communication processes. On the one hand, opponents to official politics used the given tradition of intellectual reflection on governmental politics; on the other hand, they created a specific sphere of sub-socialist communication by suggesting action that was independent from the regime. Thus, there is an obvious ambivalence in turning to the government and at the same time ignoring its power over the people; this ambivalence will be analysed in the following by also taking the audiences into consideration.

First reform socialists and then the so called ‘dissidents’ used the medium of the open letter to make their ideas known. For the Soviet case, Serguei A. Oushakine examined the rhetoric of open letters during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>3</sup> In opposing older approaches to dissident literature by perceiving them to be the same as the outcomes of an ideological struggle against the dominant political structure, he argues that the dissidents acted within the framework of given power relationships. He rejects the idea of ‘hidden transcripts’ (James Scott), and shows that the dissidents were trying to inscribe themselves and their interpretations into the political discourse.<sup>4</sup> While they developed a mimetic strategy towards the regime in the 1960s, Oushakine suggests a fundamental shift in the use of rhetoric after the proclamation of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Declaration, CSCE) in August 1975. By use of the term ‘mimetic strategy’ Oushakine shows how the dissidents used the terms and the arguments of the regime to strengthen their position in a common discourse in the 1960s and early 1970s. After the Soviet Union and its satellite states had signed the Helsinki Declaration (which declared among several other tasks of future cooperation that ‘the participating States will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion’<sup>5</sup>) the dissident movements in Eastern Europe concentrated on human rights as the lowest common domi-

<sup>2</sup> ANTONIO GRAMSCI: Sozialismus und Kultur, in: IDEM: Gedanken zur Kultur, Köln 1987, pp. 7-11, here p. 9; OTTO BRUNNER, WERNER CONZE et al. (eds.): Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon der politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland, 8 vol., Stuttgart 1972-1997; LYNN HUNT: Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution, Berkeley 1984; TONY JUDT: Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945, New York 2005, pp. 559-584; CZESŁAW MIŁOŚZ: The Pill of Murti-Bing, in: IDEM: The Captive Mind, New York 1981, pp. 3-24 (first published in 1953); KATHERINE VERDERY: What Was Socialism, and Why Did It Fall?, in: VLADIMIR TISMANEANU (ed.): The Revolutions of 1989, London 1999, pp. 63-85.

<sup>3</sup> SERGUEI A. OUSHAKINE: The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat, in: Public Culture 13 (2001), 2, pp. 191-214.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, pp. 201-204.

<sup>5</sup> The Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, part a, paragraph VII, URL: <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/osce/basics/finact75.htm> (24.05.2015).

nator<sup>6</sup>, and addressed their open letters more and more frequently to a Western audience. In Oushakine's perception, that went along with a change of 'symbolic market', meaning that the writers changed their use of concepts. The statements of the Soviet dissidence were now mimetically addressed towards the West.<sup>7</sup>

Applying Oushakine's findings to the Polish and the Czechoslovak contexts, I assume that the dissidents here did not only follow mimetic strategies towards the regime, but that the communication processes were more complex. Mainly the change of symbolic market is not that clear. In fact, it seems as if there were often manifold audiences. This will be shown by analysing the content and the form of some prominent political appeals, trying to follow the interrelations and the reflectivity between authors, addressees and observers. Therefore, I use the idea of performativity<sup>8</sup>; open letters are perceived as reality forming actions in the political play. While an open letter is on the one hand a text, on the other hand, it counts on the presence of several actors and observers; it is of course a political act, with unforeseeable progress. In the event of it reaching its audience and causing reactions it unfolds transformative power.<sup>9</sup> So, I am not talking about spectacles in the public space or about dramatized political events, as Berenika Szymanski does in her work about the 'decade of Solidarność' (1980-1989).<sup>10</sup> Rather, I am focusing on the dramaturgy of the given communication processes. The advantage of this approach is that it does not present the protagonists as opponents as in a football or a tennis match, but it directs the spotlight onto the ways they reacted to one another and the ways they interacted with both observers and the setting and, in doing so, it shows the communication process at least as a shared spectacle.

Against the described backdrop, this article argues that the 1960s and 1970s produced specific forms of negotiating meanings in the Czechoslovak and Polish public and their further audiences, for example the West. I examine the dissidents' basic sources in a wider context of late socialist communication processes. Focusing on open letters, I argue with Oushakine that the dissident discourse was not separated from the official one, but that it was a

<sup>6</sup> BARBARA FALK: *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe*, Budapest 2003, p. 252.

<sup>7</sup> OUSHAKINE (as in footnote 3), pp. 209-214.

<sup>8</sup> DORIS BACHMANN-MEDICK: *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2009, pp. 104-143; PETER L. BERGER, THOMAS LUCKMANN: *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, New York 1966, pp. 49-61; MICHEL FOUCAULT: *The Political Technology of Individuals*, in: MARTIN H. LUTHER, HUCK GUTMAN et al. (eds.): *Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, London 1988, pp. 145-162.

<sup>9</sup> ERIKA FISCHER-LICHTE: *Performativität. Eine Einführung*, Bielefeld 2012, pp. 46-47, 176.

<sup>10</sup> BERENIKA SZYMANSKI: *Theatraler Protest und der Weg Polens zu 1989. Zum Aushandeln von Öffentlichkeit im Jahrzehnt der Solidarność*, Bielefeld, 2012, pp. 18-23.

part of it. I also argue that the change of symbolic markets after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act was ambiguous. The process under examination could be described as 'doing dissidence' in an intertwined national and international framework.<sup>11</sup> By using the term 'doing dissidence' I would like to underline the fact that there is no 'natural' difference between the regime and the dissidents, but that the given social reality is constructed through performative acts. Dissidence is hence a product of social interaction, resulting from the idea of an essential difference. Dissidents were not naturally different from the regime, from socialist society or from the opportunists; they were made different from the others by discourse.

For my analysis I used above all materials from a Western (German) paper clipping archive.<sup>12</sup> Much of the material is made up of printed open letters, declarations, speeches and interviews, but there are also articles from Western, exile and local newspapers and journals, as well as loose, unbound samizdat documents. In reading the material, one can assume, at first glance, that it reflects a quite ambiguous communication structure. It was not only the case that the 'opposition' appealed to the regime and, especially after 'Helsinki', to the 'West', but the party also obviously studied samizdat and the Western press and reflected upon it in the official organs. Samizdat was a form of self-publishing, circulated alongside the official censored press.<sup>13</sup> But political samizdat statements were not completely clandestine or unrecognized. Open letters sometimes appeared in officially published newspapers and sometimes in a samizdat version; the same documents might also be printed in the Western press and in the exile journals. The authors always signed them and often tried to offer a personal view on the present political stage. As I will show, these open letters were also reflected in the official press. Furthermore, there is no clear cut difference between official and unofficial statements. On the contrary, we have to focus on the overlapping of different publics and on the use of several forms of circulation. It is also im-

<sup>11</sup> This happens in loose reference to the idea of 'doing gender', see: CANDACE WEST, DON H. ZIMMERMAN: *Doing Gender*, in: *Gender & History* 1 (1987), 2, pp. 125-151.

<sup>12</sup> Paper clipping collections provide good evidence of the practice of the 1960s and 1970s when the circulation of information on both sides of the Iron Curtain increased. The press archive of the Herder Institute in Marburg (Germany) is one of the richest collections in Europe. I used the material concerning 'human rights' (signatures T 221, P 221), 'multilateral relations, relations to international organizations' (T 44, P 44) and *Solidarność* (P 55) for the given countries and period.

<sup>13</sup> FRIEDRIKE KIND-KOVÁCS, JAN C. BEHREND: *Vom Untergrund in den Mainstream. Samizdat, Emigrationsliteratur und Tamizdat und die Neuerfindung Mitteleuropas in den achtziger Jahren*, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 45 (2005) pp. 427-448; DIETRICH BEYRAU: *Die befreiende Tat des Wortes. Dissens und Bürgerrechtsbewegungen in Osteuropa*, in: WOLFGANG EICHWEDE (ed.): *Samizdat. Alternative Kultur in Zentral- und Osteuropa. Die 60er bis 80er Jahre*, Bremen 2000, pp. 26-37; GORDON H. SKILLING: *Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, Oxford 1989.

portant to point out that the presence of different audiences (such as, for instance, co-inhabitants and an abstract West) changed and also sometimes confused interpretations.

## 2 Distribution, Participation and Communication in Late Socialism

In spite of the fact that formal restrictions on negotiation processes between the state and its citizens or between the party and society did exist in late socialist societies, their specific textures and specific spaces did not necessarily aim to achieve what came after 1989. Late socialism in the following text is identified with post-Stalinist socialism and with the idea of a developed socialist society, which also marks a significant change in the conception of past and future.<sup>14</sup> The time after the repression in the Prague Spring is thereby a period of increasing communication between the members of socialist societies, between ‘East’ and ‘West’ and between socialist citizens, the regimes and their opponents—even if it hindered it. This specific type of developed socialism was also marked by increasing social welfare and consumption, which should also be understood against the backdrop of competition with the West about well-being, distribution and higher ideals.<sup>15</sup> Economic problems led to the emergence of a second economy (organizing goods, private exchange of services, subsistence farming etc.)<sup>16</sup>, which in turn led—as will be demonstrated below—to manifold public discussions and also to a convergence between the public and private. The problems of distribution were often compared directly with obstacles to free communication and the political development of socialist societies in general. In that sense it has often been suggested that samizdat and dissident ideas created a second public which had its own values, much as the second economy did. But both dichotomies are more a rhetorical figure than a description of an empirical “reality”, as the official and the unofficial spheres contributed to both the

<sup>14</sup> STEFAN PLAGGENBORG: Über das Zeitverständnis im real existierenden Sozialismus, in: MARTIN SCHULZE WESSEL, CHRISTIANE BRENNER (eds.): *Zukunftsvorstellungen und staatliche Planung im Sozialismus. Die Tschechoslowakei im ostmitteleuropäischen Kontext 1945-1989*, München 2010, pp. 19-31; REINHART KOSELLECK: *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, Frankfurt a.M. 1989.

<sup>15</sup> MALGORZATA MAZUREK, MATTHEW HILTON: Consumerism, Solidarity and Communism. Consumer Protection and the Consumer Movement in Poland, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 42 (2007), 2, pp. 315-343, here pp. 316-320; LUMINIȚA GĂTEJEL: The Common Heritage of the Socialist Car Culture, in: LEWIS SIEGELBAUM (ed.): *The Socialist Car. Automobility in the Eastern Bloc*, Ithaca 2011, pp. 143-156.

<sup>16</sup> PAULINA BREN: Looking West. Popular Culture and the Generation Gap in Communist Czechoslovakia, 1969-1989, in: LUISA PASSERINI (ed.): *Across the Atlantic. Cultural Exchanges between Europe and the United States*, Bruxelles et al. 2000, pp. 295-321; DAVID CROWLEY, SUSAN A. REID (eds.): *Socialist Spaces in the Eastern Bloc*, New York 2002; JANINE WEDEL: *The Private Poland*, New York 1986.

functioning and dysfunction of the planned economy and party leadership.<sup>17</sup> Even if the private sphere was important here, gender issues were thus not openly discussed. I would even state that they were systematically hidden; but this would be a question for further investigation. In the discussed sources the private sphere does not appear to be gendered.

Focusing on the years 1967 till 1981, the article examines the period from the Prague Spring to the temporary end of *Solidarność* after the proclamation of martial law. This is because reform socialists in Poland and Czechoslovakia, the signatories of the *Charta 77* in Czechoslovakia, the founders of the Workers' Defence Committee (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*, KOR) and the activists of *Solidarność* in Poland, had a strong voice in the discussions about the nature of democracy, socialism and society. These voices were also an important part of the international late socialist public sphere. Even if the belief in socialism's ability to reform itself—as the technical formulation went—significantly decreased all over Europe after the suppression of the Prague Spring, an analysis of the statements from those years shows that socialism was treated as a political fact, as a model and as an everyday reality. So in the given period a new socialist future was still thinkable. Much of what was then thought was defined and reflected upon in Czechoslovakia and in Poland, whereas the impulses of the 1980s came from Soviet *perestroika*.<sup>18</sup> By leaving out the 1980s, I also intend to avoid falling into the trap of assuming that the collapse of socialism was inevitable. In other words, although we observed a revolutionary process in the 1960s and 1970s that in a certain way led to the revolutions of 1989,<sup>19</sup> post-socialism did not fulfil the expectations that went along with undermining the late socialist order.<sup>20</sup> The question thus concerns what the late socialist visions consisted of. In de-constructing the idea of a coercive development we cannot draw a complete picture, but we can gather and combine some pieces of the puzzle.

Comparing the Czechoslovak and the Polish cases, two aspects should be mentioned before going into detail. Firstly, the discussions in Poland were above all an inner-Polish affair and much more pluralistic than in Czechoslovakia. Secondly, the situation in both countries was the most similar in the mid-1970s after the Helsinki Declaration, and began to differ more and more

<sup>17</sup> PADRAIC KENNEY: The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland, in: *The American Historical Review* 104 (1999), 2, pp. 399-425; ESTZER BARTHA: Welfare Dictatorship, the Working Class and the Change of Regimes in East Germany and Hungary, in: *Europe-Asia Studies* 63 (2011), 9, pp. 1591-1610.

<sup>18</sup> MICHAL PULLMANN: *Konec experimentu. Přestavba a pád komunismu v Českoslovenku* [The End of the Experiment. Reconstruction and Fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia], Praha 2011, pp. 41-73; ALEXEI YURCHAK: *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More. The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton—Oxford 2006.

<sup>19</sup> KRISHAN KUMAR: The Revolutions of 1989. Socialism, Capitalism, and Democracy, in: *Theory and Society* 21 (1992), 3, pp. 309-356, here pp. 317-327.

<sup>20</sup> KAROL JAKUBOWICZ: *Rude Awakening. Social and Media Change in Central and Eastern Europe*, Cresskill 2007, p. IX.

directly before and after the successful Polish protests in 1980. Of course this is due as much to the strong position of the workers and the weakness of the Party in Poland as to the nature of normalization<sup>21</sup> in Czechoslovakia<sup>22</sup>. With these differences in mind I will demonstrate the very specific nature of the discussions surrounding the fundamental means and needs in the given context by examining four basic moments of shift in substance and circumstances of communication: firstly, 1968 as period of searching for a new kind of socialism and of the depression after the suppression of the Prague Spring; secondly, 1976 as the moment when human rights became crucial, and a matter of distinction; thirdly, the escalation and the end of the dialogue in Czechoslovakia after 1978; and fourthly, Solidarność as a late socialist phenomenon. 1968 in Czechoslovakia and 1980/81 in Poland were also phases with almost no censorship.<sup>23</sup>

### 3 1968: The Search for a New Kind of Socialism and the Depression After the Suppression of Prague Spring

In 1965 two Polish students distributed an open letter to the leaders of the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR) among different audiences. Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski were at that time still members of the party. In their letter they demanded the 'abolition of bureaucracy' and proposed a new method of production and distribution, based on truly democratic structures within socialist enterprises.<sup>24</sup> After a period of economic catching-up, characterized by the young Marxist-Leninists as 'production for production's sake' (which means Stalinist methods), they called for an adjustment between accumulation and consumption. In the period of de-Stalinization this was a necessity in all socialist regimes. Nevertheless, the given conclusion was a provocation towards the apparatus: The only way to make the demanded adjustment possible would be if the party elite, described by Kuroń and Modzelewski as a 'class', were to give up its privileges.<sup>25</sup> Both were expelled from the party and its student organisation

<sup>21</sup> This is the phrase the regime used to describe the suppression of the ideas and the institutions of the Prague Spring.

<sup>22</sup> JOUNI JÄVINEN: *Normalization and Charter 77—Violence, Commitment and Resistance in Czechoslovakia*, Helsinki 2010; JAN KUBIK: *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power. The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland*, Pennsylvania 1994.

<sup>23</sup> GRZEGORZ EKIERT: *The State against Society. Political Crisis and Their Aftermath in East Central Europe*, Princeton 1996, pp. 236-243; HANS RENNER: *A History of Czechoslovakia since 1945*, London—New York 1989, p. 60.

<sup>24</sup> JACEK KUROŃ, KAROL MODZELEWSKI: *The Kuroń-Modzelewski Open Letter to the Party*, in: GALE STOKES (ed.): *From Stalinism to Pluralism. A Documentary History of Eastern Europe since 1945*, New York—Oxford 1991, pp. 108-114, here p. 112.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 109-110.

immediately<sup>26</sup>—a reaction which must be read as a response from the government, and which was also observed internationally. At that time their open letter was not published in Poland, but it soon appeared in several Western publications and also in the Polish exile press.<sup>27</sup>

So, the given interpretation was ‘in the world’, and the apparatus behaved as could be expected after the given description; the students’ interpretation appeared to be true. This was how the authors became two of the most important dissidents in Poland. Their letter was clearly a presumption, as the students tried to explain the core issues of socialism to the leaders of a socialist country. In that respect it can be considered a model for future open letters. The letter was addressed to the party, but obviously even at that early stage it was also provided to the Western public. It became one of the best known reform socialist documents. It took a mimetic stance neither towards the regime nor to the West, as it claimed to belong to international communication between communists; Kuroń and Modzelewski were communists, and they saw the problem they were reflecting on as a universal problem in the further development of socialism, not only in their own country, but all over the bloc and even behind the iron curtain. Two topics are at the core of their argumentation: the face of de-Stalinized socialism and the common obligation to meet the people’s needs; which means consumption and distribution. In that respect, their open letter struggled with the same problems as the party did. Surely also in the spirit of the time<sup>28</sup>, the authors gave a very radical version of a better future: a future without—in a variation of their words—power for power’s sake.

This vision was quite similar to the idea of ‘socialism with a human face’. The Czechoslovak attempt at a new variant of socialism was based on the harsh history of Stalinism in the country.<sup>29</sup> The Prague Spring spread from within the party, but it had strong support in the population.<sup>30</sup> It was Ludvík Vaculík who wrote at the highpoint of the crisis, at the end of June 1968, the so-called 2000 Words Manifesto, a letter devoted to ‘Workers, Farmers, Scientists, Artists, and Everyone’, defending the reform socialist course of democratization and economic reforms.<sup>31</sup> Much like the Kuroń-Modzelewski

<sup>26</sup> FALK (as in footnote 6), pp. 17-18.

<sup>27</sup> For example JACEK KURON, KAROL MODZELEWSKI: *Lettre ouverte au parti ouvrier polonais*, Paris 1969.

<sup>28</sup> JERZY HOLZER: *Triumf i kryzys kounizmu—1968* [Triumph and Crisis of Communism—1968], in: *Rocznik Polsko-Niemiecki / Deutsch-Polnisches Jahrbuch* 18 (2010), pp. 42-58, here p. 49; see also KAROL MODZELEWSKI: *Zajeżdżymy kobyłę historii. Wyznania poobijanego jeźdźcy* [Riding on the Horseback of History. Commitments of an Involved Rider], Warszawa 2013, p. 120.

<sup>29</sup> FALK (as in footnote 6), pp. 59-61.

<sup>30</sup> JAN PAUER: *Prag 1968. Der Einmarsch des Warschauer Paktes*, Bremen 1995.

<sup>31</sup> LUDVIK VACULÍK: *Two Thousand Words to Workers, Farmers, Scientists, Artists, and Everyone*, in: STOKES (as in footnote 24), pp. 126-130.



Open Letter, it blamed the party leaders for their abuse of power and appealed to the workers to build councils in their factories and in their residential areas: 'It's quite simple, a few people get together, elect a chairman, keep regular minutes, publish their findings, demand a solution, and do not allow themselves to be intimidated.'<sup>32</sup> Due to the new press law of 1967, the document was officially published with the signature of Vaculík and many others. It was put forward at a very dramatic moment, as the author exposed himself to a situation that was certainly dangerous; the document itself speculates about a Soviet intervention. Confronted with this appeal, the Soviet party leaders became now completely convinced that a counter-revolution was underway in Czechoslovakia. That gave them one more reason to launch the invasion of Warsaw Pact forces in late August 1968.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, in my view the 2000 Words Manifesto is one of the best documents to prove the assumption that open letters were political acts; it created reality. While Vaculík spoke to the Czechoslovak public he devoted the apparatus and the Soviets the role of an audience among others. But, as could be expected, they took their power back. It was only after the suppression of the Prague Spring that it became an oppositional paper and a matter of Western interest.<sup>34</sup> And again the regime appeared to be exactly as was described in the document. The post-Prague-Spring opposition was from that time on accepted as a group of political analysts, for example, in the German press—taking a morally higher standpoint. Vaculík remained a party member for several months after writing the document before being expelled. He had also been active in the Czechoslovak Writers' Guild, which was a forerunner in the reform socialist process.<sup>35</sup> Less than a year after the occupation of Prague by Soviet tanks, Vaculík declared 'passive resistance' with some other prominent figures, insisting that 'the armies which invaded in 1968 did not come because socialism was threatened—rather because people who had spoiled socialism for 20 years were threatened.'<sup>36</sup> The Financial Times reported that a letter with that message 'has come into the hands' of this newspaper. Besides the quoted inner-socialist argument, the signatories went on to claim that the occupation was 'infringing on international rights,' hinting at the 'sovereignty of another state.' In that case, the open letter was directed—maybe not only, but also—towards a Western public. It was not only signed by future dissidents like Vaculík, Václav Havel and Jan Tesař,

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 130.

<sup>33</sup> RENNER (as in footnote 24), p. 67.

<sup>34</sup> LUDVIG VACULÍK: Zweitausend Worte gewidmet den Arbeitern, Bauern, Angestellten, Wissenschaftlern, Künstlern und allen, in: KLAUS KAMBERGER (ed.): Der Fall CSSR. Strafaktion gegen einen Bruderstaat. Eine Dokumentation, Frankfurt a.M. 1968, pp. 116-123.

<sup>35</sup> FALK (as in footnote 6), pp. 65-68.

<sup>36</sup> MICHAEL SIMMONS: Passive Resistance Proclamation by Czech Intellectuals, in: Financial Times from 03.08.1969.

but also by such internationally well-known people as the athlete Emil Zátopek and the chess grandmaster Luděk Pachman.<sup>37</sup> The signatories and those who arranged for the translation and transmission of the protest letter risked much to send that clear signal to the world, which meant here, in fact, the West, and that was exactly the way they attracted their audiences.

#### 4 1976: The Human Rights Complex

Were those people only pretending to still be interested in socialism? The Warsaw Pact invasion of Prague evoked disappointment among reform socialists in Czechoslovakia, in the rest of the Eastern block and in the West. After the declaration of the so-called 'Brezhnev Doctrine' in November 1968, hope for an extension of socialism with a human face decreased dramatically. The Soviet party leader had declared that the Soviet Union would protect socialist countries against the intervening of 'imperialist forces' and herewith legitimized the Soviet action against the Czechoslovak variant of socialism.<sup>38</sup> The Brezhnev Doctrine was in that respect a response to the 2000 Words Manifesto and to the Prague Spring. The exponents of the latter were thereafter persecuted by the henchmen of the party bureaucracy, implementing normalization in Czechoslovakia. In other countries of the Soviet Bloc similar attempts were oppressed, too. This is why political appeals called no longer for a new variant of socialism, but agitated against the party bureaucracy and the way it strove to retain power.

This shift in the use of arguments can also be read as an answer to the Brezhnev Doctrine. It referred to the concept of sovereignty in two ways: as abused by imperialists and as a socialist sovereignty, which the Soviet Union would guarantee. According to this understanding, the signatories of the aforementioned proclamation published in the *Financial Times* had abused the term. Of course, they defended their own use of it. The struggle for the 'true' meaning of concepts started to be performed on national and international stages. On the international stage, former reform socialists defined their rights *ex negativo*; they tried to prove that the regimes had no right to persecute them; other 'nonconformists' joined them. This is the core of the struggle after the Helsinki Declaration, as it declared not only human rights to be substantial for international cooperation and peace, but promised also non-intervention in the sovereignty of the signatory states and accepted the partition of Europe into two political spheres as fact. This was the framework for the ongoing struggle about the nature of socialism, as well as the ongoing struggle increasingly concerning the true nature of the existing socialist order on national side-stages. In that context, critical open letters pointed out the fact that the system did not function properly. They tried to de-legitimize the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>38</sup> LEONID BRESHNEV: The Brezhnev Doctrine, in: STOKES (as in footnote 24), pp. 132-134.

system with three core arguments: firstly, that the current leaders were the henchmen of occupation regimes, violating human rights; secondly, they pointed out that the economy was ineffective and unjust; thirdly, they argued, the regimes were ‘still’, which refers back to the Stalin period, and were propagating lies and forcing the people to apply double-standards, saying one thing in private and another in official contexts. The use of those arguments will be illustrated by some prominent examples.

All of these points are evident in the discussion about the changes in the Polish constitution in 1976, proclaiming the leading role of the party and the membership of Poland to the Soviet bloc. The given changes were officially explained by the necessity to declare ‘the real structures of the political system, and to adopt the rights and duties of the citizens to the current state of socialist development, and primarily the direction of the foreign policy,’<sup>39</sup> which should also be explained as a realization of the Brezhnev Doctrine. For the counter-argument or the response from former Polish reform socialists, *Memoriał 59* and Edward Lipiński’s open letter to Edward Gierek were of certain significance. The memorandum was signed by 59 intellectuals, among them Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik, two of the best known Polish dissidents. It referred directly to the fact that Poland signed the Helsinki Declaration and called for compliance with the freedoms of consciousness and religious practice, of work, of word and information and of science. But more telling is the declared motivation: ‘We think that non-compliance with human rights could lead to a reduction in collective resourcefulness, to a break-up of social bonds, and to a step-by-step deterioration in national awareness in society and to an interruption in the flow of national traditions.’ The signatories invoked the ‘common responsibility for the fate of our society.’<sup>40</sup>

So, this was a typical rationale in the Polish context: the intellectuals, and also the church, competing with the regime over national tradition.<sup>41</sup> As everyone had in mind what the actual changes in the constitution were, the subtext was not difficult to decode: the speculation was that dependence on the Soviet Union was spoiling the nation. The memorandum was probably available in a samizdat version. In the Western newspaper clipping collection we find two Polish versions, one a print from Radio Free Europe,<sup>42</sup> which proves that the declaration was also broadcast, and the other from the German section of the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*, PPS). The

<sup>39</sup> Konstytucja [Constitution], in: *Fakty 8* from 21.02.1976, HIPA, P 22.

<sup>40</sup> JÓZEF PTACZEK (ed.): *Memoriał 59 i inne dokumenty protestu oraz list otwarty prof. dr Edwarda Lipińskiego do Gierka* [Memorandum of 59 and Other Documents of the Protest plus the Letter of Prof. Dr. Edward Lipiński to Gierek], Munich 1976, HIPA, P 55.

<sup>41</sup> MARCIN ZAREMBA: *Im nationalen Gewande. Strategien kommunistischer Herrschaftslegitimation in Polen 1944-1980*, Osnabrück 2001, pp. 309-313.

<sup>42</sup> *Memoriał pięćdziesięciu* [Memorandum of 59], in: *Na Antennie* (1976), 138, HIPA, P 22.

latter also includes Lipiński's appeal to Gierek, which was more explicit about the harmfulness of the regime and the needs of society. In Poland many more intellectuals had physically and mentally survived the Stalinist period and even kept their positions than in Czechoslovakia due to the general political circumstances in both countries. One of them was Lipiński. Born in 1888, he was a professor at the Warsaw Economic School and a member of the Polish Academy of Science. During the interwar period he had been a member of the PPS, which in 1948 was forcibly incorporated into the PZPR.<sup>43</sup> Several members of the PPS stayed abroad or went into exile, so that it had its 'independent' sections in the West.<sup>44</sup> Lipiński was expelled from the PZPR one year after he had signed the quoted memorandum and written his letter to Gierek. In that letter Lipiński addressed Gierek personally, using his authority to put his finger on the wounds of Polish planned economy. He claimed that he had learned much in the last 30 years. The basic thing he understood was that socialism was not to be achieved by 'the complete bureaucratization of the economy,' but that it had to rest on freedom and political pluralism. Here, we find again the combined argument for distribution and direct democracy; only new power relations would lead to better production and living conditions. A socialist society should not be ruled by a minority, because this caused 'totalitarianism'. Lipiński hints at what he considers the essence of socialist rule:

'The way to authentic socialism is long and hard, but possible. Socialism is namely not born out of ideology or belief, but it can only be an effect of deep economic changes [...], by the reconstruction of the hierarchical social and political structures to a structure of partnership and dialogue, by the realization of a real [...] and universal well-being, and also by an increase of value creation by work and of the beautiful in everyday life. Socialism is an economic system in which production serves the meeting of needs, and from that point of view the enterprises should be considered as the main task.'<sup>45</sup>

As in the Kuroń-Modzeleswki open letter, Lipiński puts the needs of the people at the centre of his argument. The concrete ideal was the creation of a society in which the nation would live well in both a material and spiritual sense. Production and consumption were not the goal, but only a precondition for well-being. To achieve this, economic reforms were described as necessary, but only possible if the *nomenklatura* disappeared and if the party gave way to a real democratization. In the context of the changes in the Polish constitution, the party and the dependence on the Soviet Union were blamed for the misery, so Lipiński still argued for a true socialist regime. But he clearly refused the regime's ability to realize such an idea. That means he used the

<sup>43</sup> ROBERT ZUZOWSKI: Political Dissent and Opposition in Poland. The Workers Defence Committee 'KOR', Westport 1992, pp. 29-34.

<sup>44</sup> Polska Partia Socjalistyczna [Polish Socialist Party], in: Wielka Encyklopedia PWN, vol. 21, Warszawa 2004, pp. 553-555, here p. 555.

<sup>45</sup> Memoriał pięćdziesięciu (as in footnote 42), pp. 51-52.

true idea of a socialist society against those who had the power while demonstrating the inability of the party elite in public; this was like winning the battle on stage. This kind of performance was obviously attentive to contemporary Eastern and Western intellectuals.

In Poland the economic crisis was much worse than in Czechoslovakia and massive worker protests spread in June 1976 (similar events had happened in 1956 and 1970). After the worker protests had been suppressed by the police, KOR was founded, first to defend the arrested workers and to support their families, and then to advise the workers as to further action in 1976. Human rights were a crucial argument for this foundation, but the Helsinki Declaration was only one motive among several others.<sup>46</sup> The West was well-informed about the discontent and was also attracted by KOR's performance, but it had a comparatively subordinate role in that process.

And what was the situation in Czechoslovakia? As shown above, the repression of the Prague Spring led to the conclusion that sovereignty and human rights were violated by the normalization regime, installed after the repression of the Prague Spring. After the human rights declaration had become Czechoslovak law in late 1976, some dissidents decided to declare Charta 77 as a group of independent citizens, blaming the regime for persecuting its supposed opponents, demanding regime compliance with civil rights, and offering the regime support in this task (in the so-called Charta 77 declaration). The declaration was first signed by 242 people. It called for a dialogue with the regime, but at the same time the document was too obviously directed towards the West. Three members of the group tried to bring the declaration to the party headquarters, but were arrested on their way. At the same time, versions in several languages were also being circulated among Western correspondents.<sup>47</sup> In this, the declaration of Charta 77 was therefore analogous to the foundation of KOR.<sup>48</sup> What was different were the above-mentioned nature of the normalization regime and the international recognition of these events. The Czechoslovak intellectuals tried above all to exercise their power on the international stage because they had limited possibilities of reaching the public at home.<sup>49</sup> In the following I will not focus on

<sup>46</sup> ZUZOWSKI (as in footnote 43).

<sup>47</sup> Die Charta '77, in: HANS-PETER RIESE (ed.): Bürgerinitiative für die Menschenrechte. Die tschechoslowakische Opposition zwischen dem „Prager Frühling“ und der „Charta '77“, Köln—Frankfurt a.M. 1977, pp. 45-59; „Charta '77“—Dokument 2-10 (1977), ibidem, pp. 259-261, here p. 259; Czech version: Prohlášení Charty 77 [Declaration of Charta 77], in: BLANKA ČISAŘOVSKÁ, MILAN DRÁPALA et al. (eds.): Charta 77 očima současníků. Po dvaceti letech, Brno 1997, pp. 295-298.

<sup>48</sup> THOMAS E. HENEGHAN: Civil Rights Dissent Spreads in Eastern Europe, RFE Background Report 22 from 28.01.1977, URL: <http://osaarchivum.org/files/holdings/300/8/3/pdf/116-2-395> (31.05.2015).

<sup>49</sup> JAQUES RUBNIK: The Legacies of Dissent. Charta 77, the Helsinki Effect, and the Emergence of European Public Space, in: FRIEDERIKE KIND KOVÁCS, JESSIE LABOV

the declaration itself, but on several open letters which appeared in this context and which show the internationalisation in staging Charta 77.

Five months before the declaration of Charta 77, an open letter to the German writer Heinrich Böll was published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ).<sup>50</sup> It was signed by famous writers and intellectuals such as Havel, Pavel Kohout, Jaroslav Siefert, Ivan Klíma, Jan Patočka and Václav Černý. They were openly using their own popularity and the protection of Böll and other Western intellectuals to draw attention to the trial against the members of the rock-group Plastic People. The group and the trial became famous because of the persecution of young, unadjusted people—as the open letter stated—‘just for [showing] their aversion to established values,’ and the regime’s ‘hypocritical morality’ also became a basic thrust of the Charta 77 declaration. It is obvious that some of the signatories had been in contact with Böll since 1968 at the latest when his speech ‘Language as a Refuge of Freedom’ was published in the Czechoslovak Writers’ Guild magazine *Listy*, which appeared openly at that time.<sup>51</sup> Böll was one of the main actors in East-West contacts between intellectuals during the Cold War.<sup>52</sup> In that context in 1976, together with Günter Grass and Carola Stern, he started a journal under the title *L 76*, later *L 80*, with the subtitle *Demokratie und Sozialismus* [democracy and socialism]. In that journal intellectuals from East and West wrote on different topics; here we find something like a common platform for non-dogmatic leftist oppositionists in East and West. In the fourth volume of the journal, Havel described the trial against Plastic People. The article was also widely circulated in Czechoslovakia, and a first English version appeared in 1978.<sup>53</sup> So it had high efficiency, and everywhere it was published it had its own political reference frame.

It portrayed the trial as the moment when former ministers first became familiar with long-haired young people and when everyone felt that the persecuted were in the right: the regime had broken the rules and had violated their rights. Havel presented this moment as changing something in him, as he could no longer try to reach an accommodation with the system. That was very convincing and it could be easily understood in the West, as it showed a vivid example of solidarity between the generations and presented Havel and the dissidents as nonconformists. While Havel presented himself as changed by the event, he gave an interpretation that strove to change the viewpoint of

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(eds.): *Samizdat, Tamizdat & Beyond. Transnational Media During and After Socialism*, New York—Oxford 2013, pp. 316-332, here pp. 320-328.

<sup>50</sup> Ein offener Brief an Heinrich Böll, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) from 30.08.1976, HIPA, T 55.

<sup>51</sup> HEINRICH BÖLL: Jazyk jako záštita svobody [Language as a Refuge of Freedom], in: *Listy* 1(1968), 2, p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> ESSIG (as in footnote 1), pp. 297-298.

<sup>53</sup> VÁCLAV HAVEL: The Trial, in: PAUL WILSON (ed.): *Václav Havel. Open letters. Selected Prose*, London 1991, pp. 102-108, here p. 102.

the readers and finally the readers themselves. The story Havel told was more about morality than about rights; the human rights discourse was used as a key for his understanding of universal moral. The way it was written and the way it was published created a community of people who were refusing adaptation to bad rule, who were on the right side, who devoted themselves to 'the truth'.<sup>54</sup> In that respect it was very similar to the open letter to the Czechoslovak Party leader Gustav Husák Havel had written a year before as one of his first attempts to describe what he perceived as a post-totalitarian society.<sup>55</sup>

This was the way Havel 'did dissidence', meaning that he created an essential difference between the regime and the dissidents, and he was—on the national and on the international level—certainly one of the main actors in this kind of performance.<sup>56</sup> Simultaneously, we perceive the Czechoslovak opposition becoming closer to Western audiences and further away from the regime and thus inevitably from the Czechoslovak public. We find Czechoslovak dissidents in a widespread communication process, exposing themselves as a group somewhere in-between the regime, the nation and the West.<sup>57</sup> Although, and to a certain degree because, there was more official restriction in communication in the 1970s than in the 1960s, the process opened up for more audiences and it became more ambiguous. The simultaneous play on different stages confused the use of concepts. It became more and more unclear who spoke to whom, and how to measure the positioning of the speaker towards the particular message in question. Statements often lacked their contextualisation; co-players and audiences understood them in completely different ways. To be sure, the secret police and Western audiences read the same documents, but they were not discussed in the form of a dialogue. The regimes answered via their official organs, and the Western audiences—largely ignorant of those declarations—had their own ideas of dissident movements using them for their own political purposes.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> VÁCLAV HAVEL: *Der Prozess*, in: L 76 (1977), 4, pp. 85-90; DERS.: *Versuch, in der Wahrheit zu leben. Von der Macht der Ohnmächtigen*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1980 (Czech samizdat version from 1978).

<sup>55</sup> DERS.: 'Dear Dr. Husák', in: WILSON (as in footnote 53), pp. 50-83.

<sup>56</sup> WILLIBALD STEINMETZ: *Political Languages in the Age of Extremes*, Oxford 2011, pp. 26-29; FALK (as in footnote 6), pp. 215-225.

<sup>57</sup> ZDENĚK MLYNÁŘ: *Prag nach der Charta 77*, in: L 76 (1977), 4, pp. 63-83; Zdenek Mlynář über die Unterdrückung der Menschenrechte in der CSSR, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* from 07.10.1977, HIPA, T 221; *Gemeinsame Erklärung polnischer und tschechoslowakischer Regimekritiker*, in: FAZ from 16.08.1978, HIPA, P 55.

<sup>58</sup> MICHAL KOPEČEK: *Charta 77 očima Západu. Co přinesl disent politice a politickému myšlení* [Charta 77 with the Eyes of the West. What Dissident Politics Brought in for Political Thinking], in: *Dějiny a současnost* (2007), 2, pp. 30-33.

## 5 1978: Escalation in Czechoslovakia

In the given sense, the regimes responded to the accusations published in Western newspapers and in the samizdat. In both the Polish and in the Czechoslovak official press we find several articles concerning the human rights complex. Most often those articles argue that human rights were a tool of the bourgeois revolution and that they were useless for the working class. If the bourgeois conception perceived them as rooted in natural law and as universal, the socialist worldview knew no rights having a higher justification than the collective. The socialist comprehension of ‘fundamental rights’—this was the term they were using instead of human rights— was the right and the duty to work, whereas the Western conception was considered far too abstract.<sup>59</sup> And now we find several quite concrete accusations towards Western rule with respect to the non-compliance with human rights. Women’s emancipation, they argued, was not a reality in western societies because women’s participation in the job market was low and they got lower wages. Secondly, several articles hinted at high unemployment rates and reported on growing poverty in the West. And thirdly, they drew attention to the discrimination of Blacks in the USA and to the limits on democratic participation there.<sup>60</sup> The discursive abuse of the misery of the Blacks—in 1973 the UN had declared the Apartheid Convention<sup>61</sup>—was even reflected by the Charta 77 declaration,

<sup>59</sup> Proti abstraktním pojetí humanismu [Against an Abstract Concept of Humanism], in: Tribuna from 17.10.1979, HIPA, 221; Život bez obav [Life without Fear], in: Tvorba from 27.04.1977; KBWE a práva člověka [The CSCE and Human Rights], in: Trybuna Ludu from 01.06.1977, HIPA, T 221; Ewolucja koncepcji prawa człowieka [The Evolution of the Concept of Human Rights], in: Fakty from 07.05.1977, HIPA, P 221; W imię humanitarnych idei (1). Pakty Praw Człowieka [In the Name of Humanitarian Ideas (1). The Conventions of Human Rights], in: Życie Warszawy from 21.03.1977, HIPA, P 221; Dobro człowieka – szacunek dla jego praw [The Well-Being of Man—the Appreciation of His Rights], in: Życie Gospodarcze from 10.07.1977, HIPA, P 221; Das sozialistische Polen hat Bedingungen zur vollen Verwirklichung der Menschenrechte geschaffen. Ansprache Edward Gierek im Sejm der VRP, gehalten am 30.6.1977, in: Polens Gegenwart from 13.07.1977, HIPA, P 221.

<sup>60</sup> Prawa człowieka. Obszary biedy (Kapitalizm we własnym zwierciadle) [Human Rights. Places of Poverty (Capitalism in Its Own Mirror)], in: Trybuna Ludu from 29.07.1977; Za reálná lidská práva [For Real Human Rights], in: Rudé právo from 10.07.1978, HIPA, T 221; Stav lidských práv v USA. Dívejte se domů, pane Carter! [The State of Human Rights in the USA. Look Homewards, Mister Carter!], in: Rudé právo from 05.08.1978, HIPA, T 221; Prawa do pracy i bezrobocie [The Right for Work and Unemployment], in: Trybuna Ludu from 17.04.1978, HIPA, P 221.

<sup>61</sup> International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid. Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 30 November 1973, URL: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201015/volume-1015-I-14861-English.pdf> (08.12.2015).



stating that ‘apartheid’—using that exact word even in the Czech version—prevailed against supposed anti-socialists in Czechoslovakia.<sup>62</sup>

The regime’s argumentation that socialism was the better system was thus based on the achievement of common well-being, of social justice and of egalitarianism. Additionally, the Czechoslovak regime started a campaign against the signatories of the Charta 77 and collected signatures of artists and other prominent personalities for a document that became known as ‘Anti-Charta’. Under the title ‘For New Productive Deeds in the Name of Socialism and Peace’ it referred in the first sentence to the ‘liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Army,’ meaning here in 1945 a formal motive for a very rigid interpretation of Soviet and socialist achievements.<sup>63</sup> This was of course a response to the Charta 77 declaration. The signatories of the ‘real’ Charta were persecuted even more than before and some were put on trial for anti-socialist agitation because they had published in the West. By defining their opponents as hostile to the system and estranged from society, the regime ‘did dissidence’; it thus created an essential difference by defining the other, too. Both sides, the regime and the dissidents, did everything they could to strengthen their position and their arguments.

## 6 1980: Solidarność as a late socialist phenomenon

1980 was the moment when the workers began to play their part in the political spectacle.<sup>64</sup> The core clientele of the Communist Party began to move not only for higher wages as they had often done before, but also for certain civil and social rights. In this setting they not only went on strike, but also contributed new perspectives in negotiating meanings. A process like this was unique to Poland among the Eastern bloc countries. The fact that in 1980 intellectuals and workers stood together against the *nomenklatura* was often emphasized and underwent different staging. It is perfectly expressed in the handy formula of a fight ‘For Bread and Freedom’. The use of this slogan in socialist Poland went back to the student revolts of 1968. As the regime tried to still the desires of the workers by fulfilling their material needs, the intellectuals insisted on the interrelation between material and ideal goods, meaning that social and civil rights belonged together. In 1968 they had failed to convince the workers of this relationship. But to a large extent, the exact same intellectuals founded KOR in 1976, and when the workers revolted again in the summer of 1980, the regime could no longer placate them by taking back

<sup>62</sup> We find the expression also in an open letter by Pavel Kohout, protesting the refusal to grant him permission to travel to the premiers of his theatre play: Dokument des Tages: Kohout über ‘Apartheid’ in der CSSR. ‘Jeder Gewalttäter ist besser dran als ich’, in: Die Welt from 04.11.1976, HIPA, T 55.

<sup>63</sup> Za nové tvůrčí činy ve jménu socialismu a míru [For New Productive Deeds in the Name of Socialism and Peace], URL: [http://totalita.cz/txt/txt\\_ch77\\_antit.php](http://totalita.cz/txt/txt_ch77_antit.php) (01.06.2015).

<sup>64</sup> SZYMANSKI (as in footnote 10), pp. 61-93.

price increases as they had done before.<sup>65</sup> Even though the events of summer 1980 and the foundation of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union (Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy) 'Solidarność' marked a clear loss of legitimacy for so called 'real socialism' and, in retrospect, would appear to have presaged the systemic collapse of the late 1980s, it is misleading to interpret this as anti-socialist. Indeed it referred to the state as socialist, being responsible for the well-being of the nation in a material and in an ideal sense. Solidarność was not against those roles for the socialist regime. It was only against the way it was put into practice by the party bureaucracy, and implicitly against the leading role of the party as a rationale.<sup>66</sup>

I would like to demonstrate this with a closer investigation of the 21 demands put forward by the Gdansk Interfactory Strike Committee in August 1980. The time between then and the declaration of martial law in December 1981 was marked by democratic participation and discussions within socialist enterprises and Solidarność itself, referred to as 'The Long Summer of Solidarność'. The most dramatic event was the occupation strike at the Lenin-shipyard in Gdansk. The workers and their intellectual advisers summoned the leaders of the party bureaucracy to the shipyard for negotiations. And indeed, the 21 demands were published in the official newspapers and were accepted by the government delegation on 31 August 1980.<sup>67</sup> All this happened under the eyes of the Western media. The 21 demands can be divided into demands for political, civil and social rights.<sup>68</sup> The political and civil demands were the ones usually cited: the acceptance of free trade unions, which led to the founding of the Solidarność, the right to strike, freedom of speech, press and publications, the rehabilitation of convicted workers and the release of political prisoners. After demanding this, the document came to what can be described as a section about the good life and the proper organisation of society. And here it is remarkable that the authors of the statement did not distinguish between work and family issues. Accordingly, they called for a free discussion of the economic crisis, for increased wages and wage guarantees, for the fair distribution of food and other goods and for filling posts according to qualification and not party membership. Finally the document referred to social policy, demanding the 'lowering of the retirement age to 50 for women and to 55 for men,' an increase in old age pensions, better health care, more available nursery school places, paid maternity leave and faster access to housing.

<sup>65</sup> FALK (as in footnote 6), pp. 22-27, 45-51.

<sup>66</sup> MODZELEWSKI (as in footnote 28), pp. 275-276.

<sup>67</sup> The 21 Demands put Forward by the Gdansk Interfactory Strike Committee, in: Open Society Archives, Budapest, URL: <http://www.osaarchivum.org/greenfield/repository/osa:2dda0228-f3f2-4898-abe2-6d53c55b3056> (16.07.2014).

<sup>68</sup> For definitions see THOMAS H. MARSHALL: *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays*, Cambridge 1950.

Although the 21 demands were not an open letter, they must be understood as a clear appeal to the socialist state. They illustrate perfectly the nature of the late socialist regimes and the real nature of socialism in practice. On the one hand, the state was responsible for almost everything. It regulated prices, it made social services available, it controlled the media, and it claimed to infiltrate almost every social institution. In the context of planned economy, the worker and the citizen had become identical. And now we see the working class demanding not only social but also civil rights. As in the socialist perception, social rights were crucial for them. But social justice meant in that moment more than feeding the people. Social rights were at the intersection between material and ideal concerns; they were only achievable with civil rights. On the other hand the 21 demands demonstrated the inability of the regime to fulfil even the material demands of the workers. And here it was again the party which was blamed for the misery, as it applied different standards to the *nomenklatura* and the ordinary people.

It should also not be overlooked that the PZPR began a reform process parallel to the economic and political crisis in 1980. In September 1980 General Secretary Gierek was replaced by Stanisław Kania. The latter promised 'authenticity and sincerity' to meet the principles 'of social justice and of the high moral norms in public life'.<sup>69</sup> In the eyes of the party the strikes of summer 1980 were an authentic expression of the working class, calling for a political solution in the sense of a 'return to the Leninist norms.' Accordingly, 500 party cadres were released from their posts.<sup>70</sup> One could describe this as a mimetic strategy of the party towards its rebellious citizens. But the members of the *Solidarność*—more than a million only a few months after its founding—were hardly interested in that. As the strikes went on and the demands became more and more subversive, the party began to alienate the members of the KOR, accusing them of anti-socialist propaganda. Kania tried to play the strongman, calling out the 'time of struggle'.<sup>71</sup> But this was only his last gasp. In October 1981 he was replaced by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who had already been leading the government since February of that year. Jaruzelski was a man of the military and when he restored order by the proclamation of martial law he did not restore the rule of the party. The government was transferred to the Military Council of National Salvation (*Wojskowa Rada Ocalenia Narodu*); which was done—as the proclamation claimed—to save the

<sup>69</sup> Socjalistyczna odnowa w warunkach normalnej pracy, ładu i porządku [Socialist Restoration under the Terms of Normal Work, Dignity and Order], in: *Życie Partii* (1980), 12, pp. 13-16, here p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>71</sup> Jest to czas walki. Fragment końcowego przemówienia I. sekretarza Stanisława Kania [This Is the Time of Struggle. A Fragment from the Final Speech of the First Secretary of the KC PZPR Stanisław Kania], in: *Życie Partii* (1981), 33, pp. 1-2.

nation from a catastrophe of political anarchy and dramatic undersupply.<sup>72</sup> Power was passed to the military and even though martial law was reversed in 1983, the party did not regain its former power. In that context, the proclamation of martial law in Poland was not a repetition of the repression of the Prague Spring; rather, it was the last act in a play that started in the reform socialist period.

## 7 Conclusion

In my interpretation of open letters in Czechoslovakia and Poland I can clearly show some significant differences from the Soviet case analysed by Oushakine. In both the countries examined we find a huge range of adaptations and audiences. There was neither a clear line that divided the pre- from post-Helsinki statements, nor the socialist statements from the earlier and humanistic movement and the bourgeois ones from after the final act; neither do we find the corresponding change of symbolic market. The analysis of open letters published between 1965 and 1981 in the mentioned countries offers a much more complex picture of the communications processes in late socialism. Even though one can consider an interrelation between concepts and audiences, we find that open letters were, even in the early years, at least in part directed at the West. This corresponds to the fact that the socialist governments and the socialist order played their parts in the spectacle even in later years; more or less with the exception of Czechoslovakia after the declaration of *Charta 77*; this was because the following escalation hindered the communication between the dissidents and the government and led to the fact that Western audiences became the main addressee of the dissidents. What we can observe in general is that the distinction between addressees and senders, and between speakers and observers is often not clear. This unsteadiness must be understood as a part of the play. The concept of performativity turns the spotlight onto the interactions between not only the regime and its opponents, but also between several actors who became involved in the deed, and it shows how one statement referred to another. The distinction between the members of the regime and the dissidents was thus created by the discussions themselves and by the self-positioning of the actors; this phenomenon can be described as ‘doing dissidence’. A deeper investigation into the content of the open letters shows that they were often focussing on the needs of the people, on economic principles and on consumption. Indeed the subtext of the sources considered shows that both sides—the regime and its opponents—argued for the well-being of the nation, for social justice and for fair distribution. This was what the struggle was about. If the reform socialists called in the early stages for the abolition of bureaucracy and for a reformation of the planned economy, this was in favour of direct democracy,

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<sup>72</sup> Obowiązek ratowania kraju [The Duty to Save the Land], in: *Trybuna Ludu* from 14.12.1981.

above all in enterprises. After the suppression of the Prague Spring this demand became weaker, as the dissidents had to defend themselves against persecution. Using human rights, they adapted arguments which were seemingly universal but indeed led away from socialist principles and rhetorics. But nevertheless, even the Czechoslovak dissidents still operated against the backdrop of the socialist organisation of the economy and of egalitarianism. Only the worker's protests in Poland went further in formulating and pushing through even political demands. During the 1960s and 1970s the actors were clearly grounded in the everyday experience of late socialism, presenting themselves as workers, socialist citizens and family members.

### Zusammenfassung

#### *Offene Briefe: Inhalt und Form von Kommunikationsprozessen in der Tschechoslowakei und in Polen im Spätsozialismus*

Der Artikel analysiert offene Briefe und andere Proklamationen als Teil eines spätsozialistischen Kommunikationsprozesses. Mit dem Augenmerk auf die Tschechoslowakei und Polen zwischen dem Prager Frühling und dem Langen Sommer der Solidarność (1967-1981) untersucht er, wie politische Appelle von unterschiedlichen Akteuren vorgebracht und aufeinander bezogen wurden, und analysiert dies als Performance.

Indem die Akteure bestimmte Interpretationen einer Idee – wie etwa das ‚Wesen‘ der sozialistischen Gesellschaft oder die Bedeutung von Menschenrechten – auf die Bühne brachten, versuchten sie politische Wahrnehmungen zu verändern. Dabei erweisen sich Inhalt und Form als miteinander korrespondierend. Die entsprechende Re-Interpretation von Schlüsseldokumenten zeigt den spezifischen Beitrag von tschechoslowakischen und polnischen Akteuren zur politischen Textur der Zeit und eröffnet zugleich eine neue Perspektive auf spätsozialistisches politisches Handeln im Allgemeinen.

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**Key words:** performativity, dissidence, public/private, reform socialist ideas, Solidarność, Prague Spring, Western audiences, late socialist society.