

The Solitude of Revolution. Invasion as Trauma and Solidarity in the 1968 Dissident Culture in Eastern Europe and Beyond

FINAL REPORT on the Visegrad scholarship at the Vera & Donald Blinken Open Society Archives October 19 – December 15, 2023

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Focuses of the research in the Blinken OSA Archives

One of the greatest crises in the history of communism, the Czechoslovak occupation by the Soviet army and its East-European allies, has been regarded as the defining experience of the generation of 1968, which led to a radical rejection of official ideologies and a demand for parallel existential and career models. Given the current condition of the Russian-Ukraine war, my research proposes a focus on the historical examples of resistance, activism, and gestures of solidarity around the 1968 Czechoslovak invasion, which could provide some contemporary conclusions and inspiration for our present situatedness. Also, this research serves as a contextual background for my long-term research, which consists of analyzing, conceptualizing, and critically reflecting on the dissident program of the internationally renowned neoavant-garde artist Tamás Szentjóby, which has been framed in the context of the symbolic year of 1968.

According to my initial hypothesis, the resistance of the oppressed was an inspiration for those not directly affected by the trauma, so the trauma of the intervention triggered the emergence of new social and artistic models, inspired by everyday strategies manifested in the microhistory of the period. In my research conducted at the Blinken OSA Archives, I was specifically interested in reactions to the shock of the invasion from the victims' perspective, the forms of everyday resistance in Czechoslovakia, in the context of the international revolutionary spirit of 1968. Beyond the well-known tragic and symbolic example of Jan Palach,¹ what other manifestations of individual and collective resistance can be detected? Was Szentjóby's parable about the political creativity of the Czechoslovak people a poetic legend, or are they documented actions? What did modes of creative resistance look like from a gender or class perspective? Were there specific groups that tended to take ownership and responsibility for protest? I was also interested in gestures of international, especially East-European solidarity, which often took place in defiance of their country's official stance, with intellectuals who made the gesture of standing up for the Czech people at the risk of political and existential retribution. Is the web of solidarity around the Prague intervention of 1968 woven from a series of solitary, individual gestures? Are there other collective actions similar to the declaration of solidarity issued in Korcula,² Yugoslavia, which, through the efforts of critical or dissident intellectuals, questioned the validity of the Soviet intervention?

My research at the Blinken Osa Archive consisted of two phases: in the first half of the period, I examined the archive materials that were directly related to Tamás Szentjóby's activities. This phase, more limited in terms of the number of documents found, was followed by a group of documents directly related to the events of the occupation of Czechoslovakia, mainly Radio Free Europe's reports from the period. From the first day of the Soviet occupation, 21 August 1968, the Central News Room of Radio Free Europe reported

¹ <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/ILo7161O>

² <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:22e99b96-594e-4e87-8a38-ed3edb14dca8>

intensively on the events and the international reactions to them, and this group of sources was the most important element of the research. In addition to the original, typed documents, I also had the opportunity to study the digital resources of the website created by Blinken OSA in 2018 for the 50th anniversary of the invasion, which consisted of around 4,000 news pages. The parallel use of traditional and digital sources has greatly facilitated the processing of the sources, while I have also made hundreds of photographs of the documents in sub-themes related to the research focus.

I. Documents related to Tamás Szentjóby in Blinken OSA Archives

1.1.1. Visual materials

Tamás Szentjóby Home Movies [1966]

HU OSA 320-1-2:322/1

The archive contains three film clips, originally included in the Blinken OSA Catalogue as amateur films by Tamás Szentjóby. As they were not added to the collection by the artist, their identification needed to be clarified, and I was pleased to be able to assist the archive staff in providing a more accurate collection description of the footage and the events it captured.

The first film is a recording of the first Hungarian happening (Gábor Altorjay – Tamás Szentjóby: The Lunch. In memoriam Batu Khan, 1966), which is prominently featured in Hungarian neo-avant-garde chronologies, and was originally shot by artist László Gyémánt.

The second film was a documentary about an art event that took place in 1972 at the Ganz Mávag Cultural Centre in Budapest (The Wolf is Coming!), in which Tamás Szentjóby, Miklós Erdély and art historian László Beke participated.

The exact identification of the third film documenting a possible Fluxus event, dated 1977, was not possible due to the poor quality of the recording, but it does contain the performative realization of some Fluxus scores. However, in 1977 Tamás Szentjóby was no longer in Hungary, so the recording could only have been made at another location.

1.2. Documents, Press release

The neo-avant-garde scene in Hungary was linked to the groups of the later democratic opposition at several points, mainly through issues such as human rights or a critical approach to the theses of traditional Marxism. Tamás Szentjóby was connected to the future democratic opposition not only through his happenings affecting human rights issues, but also through his friendship and intellectual ties, such as with Miklós Haraszti, who started as a poet, or the writer György Konrád. The cases of Haraszti, György Konrád, and Iván Szelényi, who were at the centre of the repressive cultural policy events of the early 1970s, also seriously affected Tamás Szentjóby. From an archival point of view, therefore, it was worthwhile to look not only at the collection units directly associated with Szentjóby, but also at these intellectual connections. These documents help us to better understand the intellectual-political milieu of the period, in which Tamás Szentjóby is only mentioned in passing, but their fragmentary nature reveals the group dynamics of the dissident culture of the period.

HU OSA 301-0-3:222/1

Europe and Central Asia: Hungary: Arts, 1974 – 1980

In this dossier on Hungarian art, contrary to my assumption, I found no document relating to Tamás Szentjóby.

HU OSA 301-0-3:222/2

Europe and Central Asia: Hungary: Arts: Haraszti Miklós, 1969 – 1973

In addition to the so-called philosopher's trial of 1973, which concerned the followers of Georg Lukács, the trial of the writer and poet Miklós Haraszti signaled the crisis of the post-1968 political climate. An ultra-leftist circle of young intellectuals emerged in the sixties in Budapest, with an anti-governmental critical approach, for which Haraszti as a young poet was an important representative at that time. His emergence as an important figure of the dissident circles is heavily documented from 1970 (around his poem *The Faults of Che*, 1969, in which he defended Che Guevara against Marxism) till the history of his trial from 1973. Haraszti's sociography, *Darabbér. Egy munkás a munkásállamban* (A Worker in the Workers' State), written in 1972, was inspired by his personal experiences in the Red Star tractor factory, and presents the central motif of socialism, the coercive nature of self-exploitation through the use of concrete tasks, the factory environment, the work culture and the functioning of the trade union. Szentjóby's involvement can be captured in the fact that, among his works with a New Left influence, his film *Centaur*, which critically deconstructs the concept of work, was made in 1973, and explains why the author dedicated *Darabbér* to him.

HU OSA 301-0-3:223/4

Europe and Central Asia: Hungary: Human Rights, 1973 - 1980

Documents of the so-called Konrád-Szelényi case from 1974 (4437 image): arrest, but no trial

In an article written by Gabriel Ronay Hungarians protest over jailings in Prague (Times, 11. 12. 1979), there are referred four open letters of solidarity, one compiled by János Kenedi, György Bence, and János Kis written on the occasion of the trial against six human rights activists in Prague. The authors stated: „We cannot remain indifferent to the persecution of those who struggle for human rights in any East European country. As citizens of a state that participated in the occupation of Czechoslovakia, we feel particular responsibility for what has happened there since 1968”

HU OSA 300-30-14 Box 18

Since the first happening in 1966, Tamás Szentjóby had been observed and harassed from time to time by the police, which was further reinforced by the above two intellectual confrontations with the state apparatus of socialism. Finally, as a result of the Konrád-Szelényi case, like the two other authors under arrest, Tamás Szentjóby was offered an emigration passport by the authorities, which he, unlike György Konrád, used to emigrate to Switzerland in 1975. In addition to other press materials in which his name is mentioned, there is also a report that on 15 December 1975 Szentjóby emigrated to Western Europe via Vienna.

II. The Czechoslovak invasion from a microhistorical perspective

From the perspective of contemporary hegemonic political constructs, so-called "illiberal" societies, the legacy of 1968 is increasingly worthy of critical reconsideration, as several recent academic works have shown. According to Vladimir Tismaneanu in the foreword of his edited book *Promises of 1968: Crisis, illusion, utopia*, 1968 was "a transnational moment of revolt against the status quo beyond the East-West divide", which had two important consequences. The first is that in 1968 the systemic crisis of communism became clear in the countries concerned, and the second is that the crisis paved the way for the transformative role of civil society. He concluded, „The events, regardless of the East-West divide, reaffirmed the capacity of individual action. They caused a shift from revolution as collective action to designing a new project of universal human agency. The latter aimed at the founding of a political and of a culture resting on the heteronomy of their creators.”³ In this sense, the occupation of Czechoslovakia was not only a peak of the crisis of communism in Eastern Europe but also an example of the self-organization of civil society beyond Eastern Europe.

As is known, the short history of the Prague Spring is regarded as an experiment in democratic socialism, introduced by Alexander Dubcek, First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, to liberalize the economy, politics, media, and culture. As the historical sources show, this liberalization process, whose smaller-scale counterpart in Hungary would have been the so-called "New Economic Mechanism", was carried out with the consent of the Soviet Union and the support of other Eastern European countries. János Kádár, General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party of Hungary, for example, assured his Czechoslovak partner of his support two weeks before the invasion. International public opinion was even more shocked by the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies on August 21, 1968, and the complete lack of preparation defined the Czechoslovak military and party leadership. Although in the political practice of the Soviet Union, the invasion of annexed countries was by no means an outrageous event, the Dubcek administration considered it unthinkable precisely because of the proximity of the invasion of Hungary 12 years earlier. The example of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, which appears as a parallel or on the contrary, a counterexample in the sources I analyzed, was used as an important reference in the discourses that determined both the identity of the Czechoslovak resistance fighters and the position of international actors.

According to the literature, due to the unpreparedness of the Czechoslovak side and the weakness of the military forces, the government did not consider armed resistance realistic but encouraged the population to passive resistance. It is also worth mentioning, that the Warsaw Pact forces were roughly twice as numerous as the Soviet forces in Hungary in 1956.⁴ The notion of "passive resistance" was introduced on Radio Prague on 21 August, around 11 p.m., and later became a key concept of occupation, but other forms of resistance were also observed, as I will describe in my typology later. There is no doubt, however, that the leadership tried to control the mechanisms of resistance through television and radio and to control the movement of the masses who had come out of the trauma to avoid bloodshed.

³ Vladimir Tismaneanu (ed.): *Promises of 1968. Crisis, illusion, utopia*. Ed. by, CEU Press, 2011, p. 6.

⁴ Windsor, Philippe: *Czechoslovakia, 1968: reform, repression, and resistance*, London: Chatto & Windus for the Institute for Strategic Studies, 1969. p. 100.

Philippe Windsor in his 1969 book argues that there is much evidence that the Soviet authorities would have preferred a more conventional and violent response to the occupation, but I have found no conclusive evidence of this in the documents I have examined.⁵ The most serious violence on occupation occurred on the first day, when people built barricades and set fire to at least three Russian tanks. Later on it was astonishingly disciplined and peaceful, and much more creative or communicative forms of resistance prevailed, but all in all there were still hundreds of casualties. For this reason, and because of the large number of documents, I have concentrated on the first days of the occupation, and have tried to capture the features of the resistance that defined the political-aesthetic nature of the 1968 event in Czechoslovakia as a significant historical moment of civil resistance.

From a methodological perspective, my research was guided by the micro-historical approach associated with the name of Carlo Ginzburg⁶, i.e. I tried to get as close as possible to the former actors, the participants in the occupation, from a perspective of more than 50 years. I was concerned with those layers of the narrative of the occupation of Czechoslovakia that represented grassroots organization, dialogue, or even confrontation. Therefore, although I was also concerned with the political assessment of those in power, particularly concerning external interpretations such as the reaction of the leadership of Romania, or Yugoslavia, which had already moved away from the Soviet Union, I was not primarily interested in these perspectives. From the focus point of my research, the occupation of Czechoslovakia was primarily a face-to-face conflict between local civil society and the soldiers of the occupying Soviet army, with many human aspects that go beyond the master narrative of the occupation. Without wishing to relativize the losses of the Czechoslovak people, I also consider important the details that show the cluelessness and desinformedness of the Soviet army soldiers in an unacceptable political maneuver of which to some extent they can be also considered victims. Micro-scale analytical approach recovers marginalized figures and phenomena of the past, that can create alternative histories replacing already well-known master narratives for 1968.

Primary Sources: original and digital files

1. Visual materials

HU OSA 391 Photographs of Gabriel Bodnar on the 1968 invasion of Kosice

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⁶ Carlo Ginzburg: *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, Einaudi, 1976

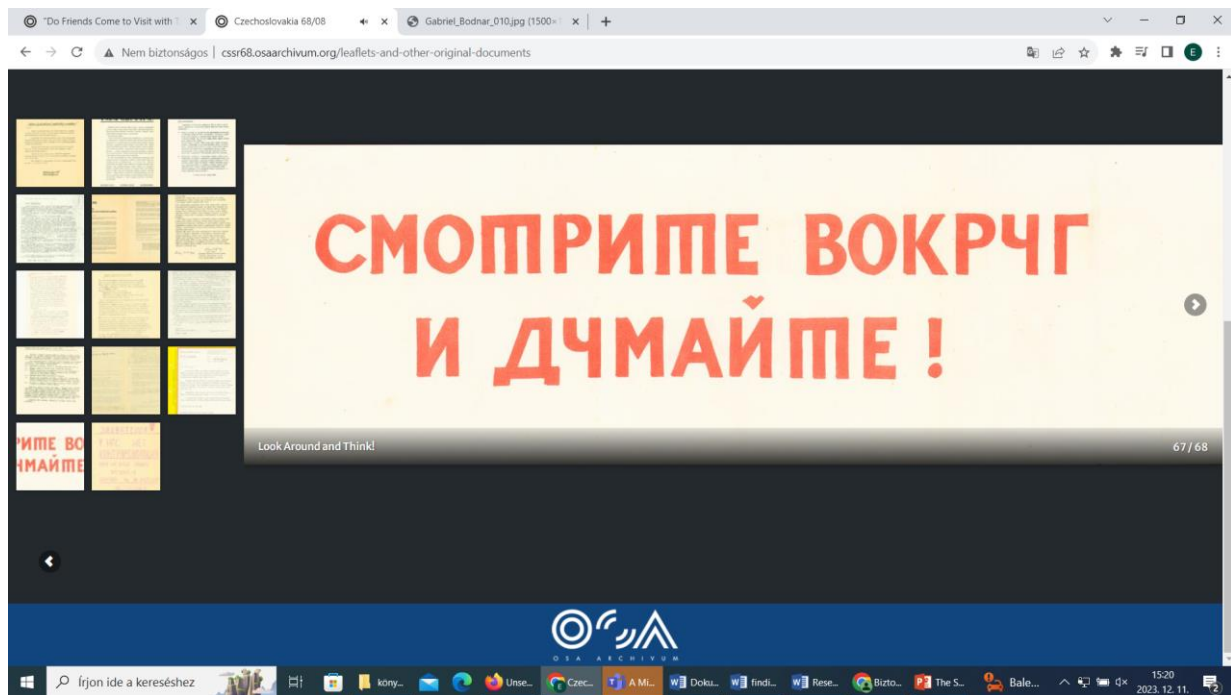


The Blinken OSA Archives preserves a unique photographic documentation of the Czechoslovakian invasion, which was added to the collection in 2005. The 39 photographs were taken by a professional photographer, Gabriel Bodnar from Košice. They are part of a larger set of pictures, the better part of which was seized by the Czechoslovak secret police after the August 1968 events. The photographs were buried in the ground by Bodnár and a friend of his, and thus survived. The images document the first moments of the invasion, when locals met the Soviet and Bulgarian forces, and reacted with different versions of passive resistance, from painting slogans on the pavement or buildings or painting swastika in white chalk on a military truck, reminding the community of a previous occupation of the country. The photographs also have a documentary value in decentralizing the narrative of the invasion and drawing attention to forms of resistance in smaller cities besides Prague.

2. Look around and think! – Documents from the Central Newsroom of the Radio Free Europe

The main source of my research was the archive of Radio Free Europe. From the beginning of 1951 until the moving of Radio Free Europe from Munich to Prague in 1995, the Central Newsroom (CN) was in charge of providing news pieces for the radio's programs. News agency reports were edited in the Central Newsroom and then sent out to the Czech, Hungarian, and Romanian newsrooms where they were edited yet again and broadcast in the hourly news programs. The Central Newsroom of Radio Free Europe closely followed the events of the occupation from August 20 to September 10, 1968, and published nearly 4000 pieces of news that are available both in paper format and on the website of Blinken OSA's collection.

During the occupation, a large number of leaflets were distributed on the streets throughout Czechoslovakia, mainly addressing the occupying Russian army in their language or in German with historical references. Other leaflets were produced by locals to strengthen their communities, or distributed by the Russian invaders to interpret the situation as a "counter-revolution". These documents have been transferred from the RFE headquarters in Munich to the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives in Budapest and are available online: <https://cssr68.osaarchivum.org/leaflets-and-other-original-documents>



„Reasonable assertively unheroic people” - Typology of the resistance

- **HU OSA 300-30-14 Box 17 - Collection of Documents on 1968, 21 – 22 August 1968**
- **HU OSA 300-30-14 Box 18 – Collection of Documents on 1968, 22 – 23 August 1968**

The Czechoslovak resistance was broad and, in its main features, mostly non-violent, involving all strata of society in collective action, but at the same time testing the population's resilience and discipline with the memory of the Nazi occupation experience. Radio Free Europe soon formed an image of a people fighting for freedom, described with the adjectives "noble Czechoslovak people", "Czech people freedom-loving, yet pragmatic", and "a civilized and ancient country" and endowed with historical virtues. And in the self-assessment of the Czechs, self-discipline during the occupation was a virtue that was also reflected in the reports of Radio Free Europe: We are too civilized to throw ourselves in front of tanks like the Hungarians” [one writer said]. We are not a brave people and we prefer to survive”.

This self-conscious discipline, however, was not unconnected to the fresh collective experience fuelled by the hope of the Prague Spring. The Czech resistance was fuelled by a collective demand for the idea of democratic socialism within a socialist framework, and organized by the cohesion of social loyalty to the country's leaders. Thus, the resistance was not only the result of civil organization but also of official resistance, made possible to a large extent by the technical and telecommunication development of Czech society. As Windsor concluded, „Because communications survived, the Czech people had a vital breathing space in which they could work out the main lines of action, and in which they could build up a sense of mutual solidarity”.⁷

⁷ Windsor, p. 117.

In what follows, I will attempt to structure and illustrate the nature of the resistance with examples from the Radio Free Europe archive based on my notes. Although most sources emphasise the dominance of the concept of passive resistance, the losses suffered, the presence of proactivity and the diversity of methods would suggest a more complex approach, noting that the categories cannot be strictly separated:

1. **Direct resistance:** personal conflicts with the invaders (youth hurling Molotov cocktails), tank attacks, army provocation, and demonstrations
2. **Passive resistance:** messages in the public space: Russians go home! throwing paper (not stones) at the Russians, refusing cooperation with the invading forces, cutting the food supply, striking, hunger strike
3. **Communicational resistance:** radio broadcasting (radio workers defied an order to close down, call for radio amateurs to spread the news on real events in Czechoslovakia)
4. **Creative resistance:** interventions in the public space: changing street names and numbers to disorient the troops, giving wrong information
5. **Class and gender resistance:** student organizations in the revolutionary spirit of 68 demonstrated during international meetings, the role of factory workers, trade unions, and female presence during the actions

1. Direct resistance

C/S (,) Soviet impose Prague Curfew (For clear attribution only) F 87

Despite constant appeals for calm and nonresistance by the radio stations supporting the Dubcek regime, hundreds of youths built a barricade from two overturned trucks and a red trolley off the old town square. It took three soviet tanks to ram down the obstacle. ... Czechs, many of them weeping, shook their fists at the soviet troops and tanks. Nazi swastika signs were painted on several tanks.

F 171 – Struggles to form puppet regime – London, August 22

„There was no indication of the emergence of a new regime, while at least seven persons, mainly youth, were killed by soviet fire during the day. Most of the casualties occurred during the battle for control of the Prague Radio station.

The youth set on fire and destroyed at least two Soviet tanks. Four of them were killed by tank machine-gun fire and the soviet armour also used artillery to shell buildings around the radio station.”

F 178 – Bratislava occupation depicted by tourists

„The most panic-stricken was a Polish family, crowded into a small car. When a correspondent asked the driver his nationality, he replied: jew”.

„According to their account, the young people of Bratislava, a city of more than 250.000, were still standing around in the main streets this afternoon, jeering and occasionally throwing pieces of wood and stone at the Russian soldiers, some of whom did not appear happy with their assignment.”

CN 218 – Bratislava free radio: six dead, 38 injured in Kosice on August 22

F 168 – Russian tank on fire in Prague – Two young people, one a girl were killed today by Russian fire outside the building

CN 264 Free radio Prague: Seven dead, 243 injured in Prague, 22 August

F-85 Prague scene – Angry Czechoslovaks battled the Russian occupiers of their nation in the streets of Prague Thursday night. The underground broadcasting station Radio Free Prague said 60 persons had been killed in Cz since the occupation. Among the dead were two men, killed when a tobacco shop was destroyed by a soviet fire in Liberec. Fire from a soviet tank also killed a girl at a staff hospital at Karlove University.

F-384 Shooting in Prague, Vienna, 23 – Many people in Prague were killed today in Prague when soviet troops opened fire at demonstrating youth marching to the CS CP central committee building.

2. Passive resistance

C/S (,,) Soviet impose Prague Curfew (For clear attribution only) F 87

„Another form of Prauge’s reaction to the occupation was a minute of stoppage observed by hundreds of thousands of citizens. Men and women stopped walking. Those who walked stopped in their tracks while motorists honked their horns. The Russians did not react.”

F 97 – People of Prague – Late this afternoon thousands of Czechs marched silently in a funeral procession down the midtown Vaclavske Namesti, the scene of the battle for the radio station behind a Czech flag splattered with blood.

The Russians acted at a time when Prague was overflowing with tourists, foreign businessmen, and academics. Shirley Temple on a tour.

The Main resistance was centered at the National Museum and the radio building. To set soviet tanks afire with flaming rags, newspapers, and branches from fallen trees. Others tossed mattresses, wooden crates, and garbage cans onto the tanks. A young man went up to one of the tank crewmen and tried to hand him a leaflet demanding Czech liberty. The soldier angrily refused it but another took the leaflet and waved the youth away. Some of the crowd tried to engage the soldiers in conversation. „Why are you here?” demanded one youth. „There was no provocation”. The soldier looking no older than 18 said he was „a little man following orders”.

CN 238 Prague clashes – Both Reuters and United Press correspondents said that sirens and klaxons sounded before noon proclaiming a strike and Reuters said drivers threw pamphlets from passing cars calling for the observance of the strike.

CN 358 – Zatopek tells crowds to go home – Cz Olympic champion Emil Zatopek stood on a corner of Wenzel Square and told the crowd that gathered around him to go home. Wearing the uniform of a Czech army colonel, he said: „Go home, people. The Russians are afraid. They were already afraid when they crossed our borders because they feared our development.” He told the crowd: „Do you think that the Russians have ever heard anything about democracy?” Slowly the crowd drifted away.

F-80 Russians berated by Prague Throngs – „Banners and posters were in evidence everywhere. One poster said, „Russia-Czechoslovakia equals U.S.-Vietnam”. On some side streets leading into the square, the soviet star was scratched into the pavement, and inside the star a swastika. Writings on walls included almost every conceivable insult to the Russians, written in their language. Mimeographed sheets were distributed, telling Czechoslovaks to have nothing to do with those who wanted to collaborate with the Russians but at the same time urging them not to provoke the soviet troops. On sheet said that no weapons would be made available.

3. Communicational resistance

CN 105 – Rude Pravo distributed – the official party newspaper Rude Pravo was distributed by youth on battered ant tank-ringed Wenceslaus Square and neighboring areas urging Czechs not to collaborate with „occupying troops” and to beware of some form of alternative government Moscow might try to set up. „We must not let ourselves be collaborators. We shall show we are united and troop behind our elected representatives.”

C/S (,,) Soviet impose Prague Curfew (For clear attribution only) F 87

The occupation forces seemed unable to discover and silence radio stations loyal to the Dubcek regime. The stations switched broadcasting frequencies and moved to clandestine studios after their permanent installation had been captured.

CN 145 Czech Raio calls for jamming of soviet radio – The Czech radio station at Hradec Kralove today appealed to signal units of the Czech army to jam the radio frequencies of the occupying army. radio asked the army „to disturb their communication, and to broadcast to them, explaining the injustice of the occupation.”

CN 158 Cz TV on air in Ostrava – The speaker on the TV screen said some 8.000 residents of Ostrava have signed a petition calling for the departure of the invading army, and for the soviets to cease their actions against Czech and allow the cz organ to function normally and negotiate with the five top cz leaders to permit the national parliament to meet with the legal government, and to allow the population to maintain calm and order.

X/4 – Radio Free Plzen advises on behavior under occupation

„Nonviolent, but consistent and total resistance must arise in the entire republic. Even if you are not informed in the future on actions going on in our fatherland because of forced silence of the information media, preserve calm.”

CN 229 – Bratislava situation: The free transmitter of the cz radio in Slovakia said today that in front of the Komensky University in Bratislava, 26 boys and girls have been on hunger strike since August 22

CN 268 Czech amateur broadcasters – Radio Plzen quoted the north Bohemian radio as having warned all amateur radio operators owning transmitters that occupation troops are searching their flats and are confiscating the radios. A similar action may be expected in Prague and other cities, adding that all radio amateurs with their transmitters should move their apparatus and should not hand them over to the occupation units.

F 156 – Czechoslovak writers and artists appeal broadcasted on Radio Prague on 21 August

„Stand up not only for our country but also for yourselves, for everything that makes life worth living. Do not permit the hopes to be destroyed, also in your name, which has never been the hopes of the people of Czechoslovakia alone but of all the peoples of all nations.”

4. Creative Resistance

CN 244 – Plzen television says Prague arrests expected

„We ask the citizens of the capital to paint over and tear down the marking of streets and in other ways render impossible the orientation of occupation troops in Prague during the night arrest”

5. Class and gender resistance

The Czech trade union daily „PRACA” said in a special edition that „although occupied”, Czechs should „behave like a sovereign people, aware of its rights and its dignity”. The Paper also said „The great wrong which has been inflicted upon us must not lead to demoralization and despair. We are confident that this difficult trial will pass if we remain united, unbroken in our character, and resolve to go along our socialist road.”

F 168 – Russian tank on fire in Prague – Two young people, one a girl were killed today by Russian fire outside the building

CN 66 – Six dead and 47 wounded in Liberec alone, after the invasion. Radio Hradec Kralove reported that two boys were shot to death by the occupying forces on 21 August, while two more persons were wounded. „The soviet radio considers probably as an aggressor also the 17-year-old girl in Jilemnice (North East Bohemia), who was seriously shot and after four transfusions is fighting for her life because she wanted to take a photograph in her own country.

F-16 – Shirley Temple leaves Prague – August 23

Another girl in a convoy was a Czech-born Geraldine Vrba of Los Angeles, who said: „I took pictures of the Russians along with a hundred other people on Wednesday morning. Then the Russians suddenly opened fire from 20 tanks. They were shooting with riffles, too. I was so shocked. It came so unexpectedly that I just fell to the ground and rolled underneath a parked car. I saw how the tracks of a tank pushed another girl aside. I didn’t see whether she was hurt or not.”

Gestures of solidarity

Another important aspect of my research was the search for gestures of solidarity, which took on an international character and crossed class boundaries and the different groups of the old and new left, but the latter proved to be decisive in organizing the various solidarity actions:

1. The AFP journalists sent their fraternal greetings to the Czech journalists, expressing their sympathy and their professional service.
2. The executive committee of the Danish Federal Youth Council, representing all political youth movements, had decided given the Czechoslovak invasion not to send a delegation to Russia next month.
3. Young people, including members of the Communist youth organization marched throughout Stockholm city center with red flags and placards proclaiming support for the Czech people, declaring „freedom for Czechoslovakia”, „Stop soviet imperialism”, and „Soviets out of occupied Eastern Europe!”
4. Demonstration at the soviet mission in New York: some 90 people, mostly young students or members of the many left-leaning organizations who normally devote their efforts to protesting against the Vietnam War, were on the scene carrying signs that demanded that „Russia get out of Cz” and „Russian tyrants are no different than nazis”.
5. In the Swiss capital of Berne several hundred demonstrators showed up at the soviet embassy, the first time in years that the soviet diplomats had to face a sizeable demonstration here.
6. A large number of young people, estimated around 2000 gathered in front of the soviet embassy in Bonn protesting against the occupation of Czechoslovakia. The demonstrators hurled rocks and bottles against the embassy buildings, breaking several windows and smearing the front with paint. Many demonstrators carried posters with signs like „Freedom for Czechoslovakia”, „There is no room for Stalin in Prague”, „Down with soviet imperialism!”. Many others drove their automobiles back and forth on the narrow main road along the Rhine on which the embassy is located, blowing their horns and chanting „Dubcek, Dubcek”.

CN 221 – Alpbach Forum discusses Czechoslovakia – a meeting of 450 intellectuals, 35 of them from Eastern European countries meeting in Tyrol town of Alpbach, condemning the invasion, sending telegrams demanding the immediate withdrawal of the troops.

7. CN 341 Berlin – Students demonstrate at the Czechoslovak mission

3000 West Berlin students and members of political organizations are conducting a protest demonstration at the Czechoslovak military mission in West Berlin. Police said the marchers wished to conduct a sympathy demonstration at the mission. They're carrying posters saying „who has betrayed the revolution ... the red bureaucrats” and „down with Stalinism... socialism will win”. They carried red flags and shouted „Vivat Dubcek”.

8. CN 359 West German demonstration protest Soviet intervention

München: more than 10,000 demonstrators protested against soviet neo-colonialism. In Hamburg, more than 2500 persons participated in a student demonstration. In Moers, Bochum, Bielefeld, and Wuppertal more than 7000 persons took part in protest demonstrations. In Berlin, more than 2000 demonstrators started a protest demonstration in the early afternoon while in Bonn the demonstrations in front of the soviet embassy were continuing tonight.

9. Several hundred youths demonstrated in the Latin Quartier of Paris against the Czechoslovak invasion, where about 30 Czechoslovaks participated. They carried banners denouncing „The blood-stained imperialism of the Soviet Union”. Shouts of „Red Army”, „SS” and „Liberate Prague” were mingled with shouts of „Enough of violence”. The marchers carried one black banner and several portraits of Mao Tse Tung. The demonstration had been outlawed by the French interior ministry and police, wearing riot helmets, dispersed the youngsters. About 50 of them were taken to the police stations for interrogation.

10. Police stopped about 2000 yelling, placard-waving demonstrators from forcing their way into a soviet trade exhibition. Some demonstrators squatted on the road outside the exhibition hall in the west London district and burnt a soviet flag. Two women and a man were arrested. Leaders of the demonstrators – leftwing students, pacifists, and Czechoslovaks – scuffled with police as they marched from the embassy to the exhibition.

11. CN 41 – Free journalists protest against force in CZ – The International Federation of free journalists in London issued a statement vehemently protesting against the forceful snuffing-out of the cz attempt at the freedom of expression: „On behalf of the international federation of Free journalists, uniting most journalists of central and eastern European origin now working in the free world, we vehemently protest against this new, patent use of force, whose first victim in unhappy czechoslovakia is the slender flower of press freedom only recently born under Dubcek regime.

12. CN 49 – West German demonstrations – the chief soviet trade mission in Cologne, Eugene Woltschow Wednesday night received a three-member delegation of more than 500 protesting students and discussed with them the events in CZ. In Hannover, more than 3000 demonstrators protested the soviet move at a rally and marched through the downtown section carrying placards denouncing the Warsaw Pact invasion.

13. CN 58 – Dr. Benjamin Spock, a world authority on baby care Wednesday joined a demonstration outside the soviet mission to the United Nations.

14. CN 62 – Demonstrations support Prague regime – A massive demonstration in Stockholm was among the highlights of a series of protests in the West last night against the invasion of cz. Thousands of people gathered in Stockholm’s city centre in the biggest spontaneous protest seen in in Sweden since the 1956 Hungarian uprising.

Crowds packed the newly-built „speakers corner” after marching through the streets carrying placards and Czechoslovak flags.

More than 5000 West Berliners headed by governing mayor Klaus Schuetz marched silently to the city hall to protest the invasion. „We were skeptical”, Scuetz said, „Because we know the Soviets and we know the Stalinists in East Berlin.” In Rome, 500 police blocked the streets surrounding the soviet embassy as more than 200 students shouted abuse at the Russians. Eggs were thrown at the embassy walls earlier by leftwing youths and girls. Some 10.000 Norwegians, mainly students, hurled bottles of red paint at the soviet embassy.

15. CN 197 – Sweden's radical leftists protest strongly

The handful of extremely radical Swedish writers and political activists who normally make harsh attacks on the U.S. for its Vietnam policy today are turning their rage against the USSR. They include „Red Anders” Karlberg, Peter Weiss, Jan Myrdal, and Sara Lindman.

16. CN 239 – Sartre calls for protest against Moscow, August 22

French philosopher and playwright, Jean-Paul Sartre and 10 other prominent French leftist intellectuals Thursday published an appeal to „the communists of all countries” to protest against present soviet policy. The appeal was signed by writers Simone de Beauvoir, and Roger Blin, Michel Bosquet, Jacques-Laurent Bost, Jean Daniel, Daniel Guerin, Michel Leiris, Dionys Mascolo, Maurice Nadeau, and Maurice Roche.

17. F 177 – Danish intellectuals protest CSSR invasion

18. CN 253 Suhrkamp cancels participation in Leipzig book fair – the publishing house which published largely left-wing writers, including Bertold Brecht, said its participation had been canceled because of the occupation in CZ.

19. F 264 – Bucharest and Belgrade population support for Czechoslovakia. A mass demonstration protesting against the soviet intervention and supporting Czechoslovakia took place on 22 August in Belgrade.

20. CN 322 – Anti-occupation demonstration in Benelux – Thousands of demonstrators are scheduled to parade through Dutch and Belgian cities tonight, voicing support of the Dubcek regime in Prague and demanding the withdrawal of the occupation troops.

Several thousand young leftists paraded through the streets of Amsterdam last night in a protest demonstration, but authorities reported no serious incidents.

Police are expecting 10.000 to 15.000 demonstrators tonight in the heart of Brussels, far from any of the invader's embassies. They do not expect any violence.

21. CN 346 – Belgrade demonstration – A crowd of more than 200.000 people staged a rally in Belgrade's city center today in support of Dubcek.

Conclusions:

- The various forms of resistance in Czechoslovakia and beyond did not question the legitimacy of the communist ideology, but it stood for the reformist, democratic version of it.
- The role of the radio as a tool and symbol of resistance was crucial during the invasion. (Soviet troops confiscated transistor radios from people in Bratislava.) The dignity of the resistance is connected with the creativity of the resistance.
- Unveiling the multiple faces of the aggressor: a microhistorical approach gives close insight into the interaction between the invaded and the invaders – in many reports soviet soldiers looked very young, humane, disoriented, and disinformed, reluctantly following orders. Microhistory can provide an alternative history of the invasion that respects the memory of the victims but goes beyond mainstream heroic narratives.

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