Generations of change or »birds in a cage«

1968 and the problem of generations in Slovak civic dissent

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I consider the years 1968 to '69 to be a generation-forming experience because of the civic liberation from fear and the liberalisation (cultural, political) that they brought. Those who stood up for freedom through demonstrations and general strikes in 1989 grew up with it (Budaj 2010).

Hl'adali sme pravdu

Juraj Kuniak (Urbanec 2005: 133)

Introduction[1]

As is well known, the year 1968 has symbolic meaning in the West as well as in socialist countries, although this meaning certainly has different undertones. Nevertheless, one can say that the generational issue unites the two experiences of 1968: in both the West and Czechoslovakia, it was a time when young people felt that it was possible to create their own social realities, and in both places their ideas were informed by a leftist, Marxist ideology (Franc & Holubec 2009: 11-14). But whereas in the West 1968 is now mainly perceived as a year of student revolutions, the peak of hippie culture, the symbol of the triumph of freedom and love, in the socialist camp this year was marked by the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, when the building of »socialism with a hu-

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1 I would like to thank Peter Križan, who suggested the idea of the paper, and also Ján Budaj, the leader of the Tender Revolution and one of the most famous dissidents of the described period, to whom I will refer to quite often.

man face« came to a violent end. As Martin Franc argues, the protest movement after 22nd of August 1968 was comprised mostly of young people (Franc & Holubec 2009: 17). Jacques Rupnik generally sees more differences than parallels between 1968 in Europe and 1968 in socialist countries, as based on evidence from participants (Rupnik 2008). The most obvious similarity is the aspirations to freedom that were common to East and West; however, if the atmosphere in the West was defined by students, often with anarchist views, then in the East the social climate was defined by people who already had a certain social and political status. It should be also emphasised that, partly because of this fact, the reforms in Czechoslovakia took place within the socialist paradigm – or at least, this was what those who carried them out believed. These events left their mark on all who witnessed them and had an impact on the entire subsequent historical period. Historians and memoirists often use ›Generation 1968‹ as shorthand: in relation to the West, it refers first and foremost to those who participated in student unrests, that is, those who were at university at the time and were born between 1940 and 1950. At the same time, if for Czechoslovakia we use the term ›Generation 1968‹ to refer to all of those people for whom this year's experience proved decisive, it ends up being a much higher figure (since the main actors in 1968 Czechoslovakia were people who had already achieved a certain degree of professional success and had therefore been born in the 1930s at the latest), but even those who were children at the time, such as the priest Jozef Roman (*1960) have a heightened perception of the significance of this year.[2]

Until 1989, August 1968 remained the most recent historical milestone in Czechoslovakia, the reference point from which the current situation derived. The Prague Spring of 1968 was the result of a process of rapid weakening of the political and social regime that took place after Alexander Dubček replaced Antonín Novotný as General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCz) on 3rd of January 1968. In

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2   Father Jozef Roman's lecture at the seminar on church history, Moscow
     State University, 20.5.2011. Audio recording in author's archive.

April 1968, the CPCz launched its »action programme«, which purport-edly was based on the XX. Congress of CPSU. This programme called for abolishing the centralised economic policy; adopting a new, more democratic constitution, allowing people to associate according to their interests; guaranteeing freedom of speech and freedom of enterprise; limiting the functions of the State Security. It also denounced one-party leadership (Rok 1969: 103-146). Even before that April, censorship in the media had in fact disappeared, and journalists were actively taking advantage of this state of affairs to become more and more radical. A text by writer Ludvík Vaculík, »'Two Thousand Words«, appeared in June 1968 in one of the major newspapers, calling for the eradication of the existing communist leadership. Alexander Dubček quickly lost control over the situation and Moscow could not have been happy with this fact.

One should not forget that one requirement *was* satisfied in the autumn of 1968: the federalisation of the country, a demand that was supported by Gustáv Husák.

After the invasion by the Warsaw Pact armies on August 21ˢᵗ, the coun-try gradually entered a phase of ›normalisation‹. Party purges took place, and any who had taken action during the Prague Spring were excluded or ›scratched out‹ (an important difference) from the CPCz and often lost their jobs, especially in the larger Czech cities. These ›ex-communists‹, as they were called in Czechoslovakia, formed the basis of the dissident movement for the subsequent two decades – at least in Czech lands, where the persecution was more severe than in Slovakia.

The second-largest group in the opposition movement in Czechoslova-kia was made up of young people who in 1968 had been studying at the universities or just passed their A-level exams and for various reasons had subsequently been excluded from educational institutions or simply did not wish to continue their studies with the prospect of living and working in the newly established system. This is the group that will receive the most attention in this article.

The Prague Spring is a very popular research topic, and the publications and documents related to it, as well as studies on its various social movements, number in the hundreds.[3] But German researcher Peter Birke contends that more attention is paid to 1968 in Germany than in the Czech Republic, and this gap cannot be filled by these scientific publications (Franc & Holubec 2009: 20-21). I believe that this fact is most likely connected to the different role that neo-Marxism and leftist ideology plays in the West and in post-socialist areas. In any case, the generational aspect of this issue has so far been largely the lot of memoirists, but now the situation seems to be slowly changing thanks to the work of Goltz (2011). There is one recent article I am aware of that deals with the generational issue in connection to 1968: Vrzgulová (2009), which examines the generation of people born between 1938 and 1950, both those who were political activists and those who were not. Vrzgulová observes that her interviewees often called themselves »the lost generation«, one that »lost its ideals and its opportunities to bring its own plans for the future into reality« (Vrzgulová 2009: 526).

Generally, there is a certain historical and historiographical tradition: when authors speak of Czechoslovakia, they mean mostly Czech lands. But Slovakia and the later Czech Republic lived separate histories for hundreds of years, so that even while they were united under one government and one name, their respective developments still proceeded differently. My paper is dedicated to Slovakia, first because this area is often overlooked in the literature, and second because it seems that a number of milestones in Czech history might look different from this perspective – this is particularly true for the period starting in November 1989.

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3   Among the recent publications on the history of 1968 one should mention at least: Karner et al. (eds.) 2008; Londák et al. (eds.) 2009; Stoliarik (ed.) 2010.

In his article on the »forgotten generation« of dissidents, Slovak philosopher Fedor Blaščák demonstrates that a history of the »normalisation« period is »nonexistent« in the modern Slovak historiography and states that:

> The change in our social environment in 1989 brought with it, among other things, the insight that that which we are presently proud of is the result of the activities of very small sectors of society, sometimes even of lone individuals. It is strange that these social sub-structures – in sociology they would be, quantitatively, on the same level as statistical errors – represent almost the whole of those segments of our recent past to which we can relate, because we still understand them (Blaščák 2008: 555).

In Slovak historiography, there is a well-known expression to characterise Slovak resistance to the communist regime: »islands of positive deviation« (Bútora & Bútorová 1993: 123). This phrase emphasises the paucity of the dissident movement in this country, but it describes only civic, secular opposition and the human rights movement in its most pure form. However the Catholic Church in Slovakia also played a huge role in the ideological resistance, while acting in the underground. The human rights movement in Slovakia, as well as strictly political opposition, was dominated by a small group of intellectuals who were former communists, most of them from Bratislava (Dominik Tatarka, Miroslav Kusý, Jozef Jablonický etc.). In Bratislava and in Košice (in spite of geography, independent-minded people from Košice were connected primarily with people in Prague and not with those in Bratislava), young underground artists organised their unofficial performances and exhibitions, but they themselves did not overestimate their role in the struggle against the regime.

In other former Soviet bloc countries the history of opposition to the Communist regime is one of the most popular topics within national history (for example in Poland and the Czech Republic). In Russia there are at least some institutions interested in the subject (primarily Memorial International). Against this background, the unpopularity of this subject in Slovakia seems odd, and my essay should be seen as an attempt to

contribute to changing this. My main sources will be personal accounts, oral history sources, interviews and published memoirs by members of the different generations.

The methodological base for my paper is Karl Mannheim's theory of generations. Mannheim introduced into scientific use such terms as ›age cohorts‹ and ›generational units‹ which are formed by historical experience that is shared by a group of people the same age (Mannheim 1964: 547-548).[4] I present some examples here that confirm this observation, arguing that if one examines this broad 1968 age range in more detail, it becomes clear that although in Czechoslovakia this year made a significant impression on all generations who experienced and actively participated in it, different generational units have been influenced by it in different ways. In the present article I focus mostly on two generational units and their reaction to the challenges of 1968: I call these the ›Post-War Generation‹ (1945-1950) and ›Generation 52‹ (1950-1954) and emphasise the latter as less is known about it. Moreover, I will narrow my subject to those members of these generations who in some way became part of the »islands of positive deviation« (Bútora & Bútorová 1993: 123), explicitly those who practiced dissent or were part of the anti-communist resistance. Older people who had been able to enter higher social and political strata before 1968 often were removed from their positions afterward and pushed underground, but they remained communist nevertheless. The younger generation, in contrast, experienced their psychologically formative years during the ›golden sixties‹; when ›normalisation‹ came, they were already much more independent from communist ideology. Using material on the most ›radical‹ of these cases, I will show in this article how important 1968 was for these generations, even in their later ›underground‹ life. In the last part of the article, I will talk about some generational issues in the discourse of the Tender Revolution of 1989.

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4   More about Karl Mannheim's generational theory can be found in the introduction.

The ›golden sixties‹ and their harsh end for young people

In Czechoslovakia, the second half of the 1960s was a period of ›thaw‹ that arrived late in comparison to other socialist countries, a time of social and political transformation during which the borders were at least partly opened. Literary critic and publicist Milan Šimečka, who was kicked out of the Communist Party after 1968, earned his living through manual labour, and became a well-known *samizdat* author, wrote of 1968:

> Then almost in a single moment public life was born and many people for the first time in their lives began to see politics as human business and not as tedious and infinitely boring […] bullying coming from somewhere above (Šimečka 1990: 10).

Young people who were then just starting their lives grew attached to democratic (if perhaps social-democratic) ideals – their highest value was freedom; they believed that the development of the country and the state should be under the control of its people, and that all paths were open to talented youth. Milan Bočkay (*1946), who studied at that time at the School of Applied Arts in Bratislava, has the following memories of the period:

> It was a time of social fermentation that was later inaccurately defined as the ›golden sixties‹. It is said that one's basic life-orientation is formed in secondary school, that secondary education is the most important, and that other, later things are already only superstructure, a chiselling of the original decision. I and many of my peers can only confirm it […]. All alumni […] recall the School of Applied Arts fondly. Under the authoritarian regime it was one of the few islands of bohemian relaxation and local libertarianism (Valoch & Bočkay 2005: 133-134).

Here one should recollect Karl Mannheim's statement that the most important years for the formation of the self are the years of early adolescence (Mannheim 1964: 536-537). The 1960s were the heyday of Czechoslovak cinema; borders were opening to cultural influences from abroad, and everyone could listen to Rock & Roll and the Beatles. One of the members of Generation 52 recollects:

> The sixties were something so amazingly original in the global con-
> text. The world was totally changing. One could see this in science,
> outer space, in the arts. A completely new generation of rock, beat,
> jazz bands and what have you was coming; they were unhappy
> with the existing state of affairs and began to bring elements of
> theatre, mythology, sexuality to the scene, strengthening the expe-
> rience of music and light through different artistic elements. And
> since I had personal experience with the sixties, which produced
> several top music bands even in our corner of the world, I found
> that the freedom of expression has no limits (Kišová 2011).

Precisely because of this feeling of unity with the Western culture and
freedom, contemporaries sometimes conflate both ›Western‹ 1968 and
the Prague Spring:

> […] something of the sixties remained, and it changed the world. I
> think it was the fact that the era of the Cold War did not end in
> blood. It was the first time when the weapons produced were not
> used. And it was because of this very amalgam of hopes and illu-
> sions, this Beatles-esque fog in our heads (make love, not war),
> that when certain gentlemen – men of the same age as the Beatles,
> in fact – took power in the years afterward (power that included
> the notorious nuclear briefcase), they did not panic, and they al-
> lowed people to disassemble the Wall (Budaj 2009).

In addition, the Second Vatican Council took place from 1962 to 1965
and marked a new era in the life of the Catholic Church. The second half
of the 1960s was a period when new liberal trends were flourishing in
the lives of Slovak Catholics.[5] The spirit of freedom and renewal was on
the rise. The sixties in Slovakia were a period when a new paradigm was
being sought in both social and religious life. In some churches there
were special youth masses celebrated – with guitars – the so-called big
beat masses. In Košice, for example, these were held from 1968 to 1970
by priest Bartolomej Urbanec; young people arrived from all over Košice

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5   According to 1950 statistics, Catholics constituted almost 83 % of the
     population in Slovakia, cf. Pešek & Barnovský 1999: 13.

(Urbanec 2005). The year 1968 marks a sort of ›coming out‹ for many illegal priests and monks; the Peace Movement of Catholic Clergy (MHKD), a pro-regime movement, was demolished, and the former chairman of the Secretariat for Church Affairs was dismissed from his position (Váško 1999). But not all religious activists from the previous period really trusted »socialism with a human face«; some of them had survived more than ten years in prison and did not believe in any possibility of the regime's transformation. This was the position of the Salesian order in particular, as well as such figures as Father Stanislav Krátký and Felix Maria Davídek, the latter of whom was secretly consecrated bishop at the time (Krátký & Mazanec 2004: 64-65).

The 21st August 1968 invasion by the Warsaw Pact armies was a milestone, and the period of ›thaw‹ in social and religious life in Slovakia came to an end. Milan Bočkay, who returned to Czechoslovakia from a trip to the USSR on 22nd August 1968, described these days as follows:

> The return to occupied Czechoslovakia is sad. The week is full of impassioned statements, promises and resoluteness, but the week of dying has also just started. We join the previous generations with lifetime traumas (Valoch & Bočkay 2005: 134).

But this date was not a precise end as such; most of the consequences became clear only later, and the tempo of these changes was the slowest in church affairs: the guitar-led masses of Bartolomej Urbanec lasted until 1970. Nevertheless, for people sensitive to the socio-political atmosphere in society, it was already clear by the autumn of 1968 that the situation in the country was irrevocably out of the people's control; they had either lost all of their career prospects because of their previous activities or, if their young age meant that at 1968 they had not yet had time to be involved in any noticeable activities (the case of Generation 52), their possible professional careers would mean the rejection of notions of freedom and democracy. The older ones equated the situation to that of twenty or even thirty years earlier (the Stalin era and the Nazi occupation) and their conclusion was that there was not much difference between Soviet communism and Hitler's fascism (Šimečka 1990: 14).

Many memoirs about this period also mention national frustration and fear; it is easy to imagine how difficult this was to bear for the young people who remembered the recent atmosphere of unity and excitement. Now the time of disappointment had come, disappointment in everything and everybody, beginning with the ruling elite and including fellow citizens. Igor Kapišinský (*1947), now an astronomer and philosopher who back then had been a participant in Urbanec's »big beat masses«, recollects rather bitterly in a letter to the priest:

> Those were beautiful times, and even more beautiful ones were envisaged, but for that terrible August 1968. But that August definitely persuaded me that the euphoria of the youth and their desire for ›new spirituality‹ is unfortunately a superficial and rather emotional thing, not something intimate and solid […] (do you remember how few people participated in the youth mass on Wednesday, immediately after the arrival of troops?). I remember also other annoying and ugly moments that we, university students at the time, cannot boast of […] (Urbanec 2005: 120).

Fedor Gál (*1945) wrote on his web page:

> During those days I had a feeling that we were united and were not afraid of anything. It did not last long […]. Then most people shut up and kept quiet for decades. But the sixties vaccinated us with the smell and taste of freedom, and, on 21st of August 1968, with its cost as well. My generation lived with these emotions until November 1989.[6]

The political leaders who became symbols of the Prague Spring and of Generation 68 in its strictest sense signed the humiliating Moscow Protocol,[7] and others were silent. Young people who believed in the ideas of

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6   Fedor Gál (undated): *Srpen 68*. http://www.fedorgal.cz/srpen-1968.

7   Moscow Protocol, or the Protocol of the Negotiations of the ČSSR and USSR Delegations. A document signed by Czechoslovak leaders in Moscow, 26.8.1968. The document secured the necessity of purges in Czechoslovakia, especially in the media, as well as the prospects for closer cooperation in the field of international relations between Czechoslovakia

›humane socialism‹ had a feeling of betrayal, and some of them realised
that they could not anticipate help from anyone except themselves:

> It is understandable that my generation, which around the year
> 1970 was twenty years old, expected the older generation – which
> was not at secondary school but in public positions – that those
> people would express themselves and would stand in opposition to
> the ›normalisers‹. And afterwards seven years of silence came […].
> They were famous, great men. If he snapped his fingers, the West
> would listen to him […]. This was his story, he betrayed his story!
> We were angry at him, my generation, because when you become a
> national leader, you can't just start to care about your [own] garden
> […]. They threw me out from the university, and I was not Dub-
> ček; I just expressed a view.[8]

Ways to live freely: The artistic underground and Generation 52

The pressure of ›normalisation‹ in Slovakia was not as high as in Czech
lands and in Prague in particular; however, one certainly can speak about
dissident groups in Slovakia and the true resistance movement of Catho-
lics. People entered the underground in different ways: ›ex-communists‹
who had been thrown out of the party simply had no other choice since
no one would give them a decent job (Šimečka 1990). The same fate
often befell people from the Post-War Generation, such as former stu-
dents of the School of Applied Arts who were excluded from the artists'
union (Valoch & Bočkay 2005: 136). However, there were also those
who by their own decision chose the path of refusing the chance for a
›normal‹ life and intentionally went underground. Martin Milan Šimečka,
son of Milan Šimečka, recollects of some of these people:[9] »These were

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and the USSR. On the history of 1968 from the point of view of a high
party official, including the process of negotiation in Moscow (see for
example Mlynář 1980).

8   Interview with Ján Budaj, 4.5.2010. Author's archive. On Alexander
     Dubček and his life in the years from 1970 to 1989, see for example
     Dubček 2002.

9   The artists Vladimír Archleb (1953-2007) and Igor Kalný (1957-1987).

people who wanted to live freely, and some of them sacrificed their lives
for that. I became a dissident because I basically had no choice – I could
not study and so on. They had [this choice]« (Šimečka Martin Milan
2009). It is interesting to see how these people explained the logic of
their behaviour – in their explanations 1968 is mentioned again and
again:

> I belong to the generation, for which, I guess, the year [19]68
> meant the strongest challenge, because those who were older were
> already pursuing their careers. They took it rationally, but those
> who were 15, we who were painting on the walls against the tanks,
> we got hit directly in the heart, so to speak. It was as if you had put
> a bird into a cage.[10]

Oleg Pastier (*1952), a member of the Slovak artistic underground and
editor of the *samizdat* cultural periodicals *Fragment*, *Kontakt* and *Fragment
K*, recollects:

> I belong to a generation that in the critical years of 1968-1970
> went to high schools. We got our school certificates, and ›normali-
> sation‹ arrived. During our adolescence, during the most sensitive
> age, we became accustomed to a more open society. We could
> read great books, magazines, we could listen to any music; theatres
> staged perfect performances, directors shot wonderful movies and
> received international awards for them; and suddenly all this ended
> overnight. A grey, dull period came, and those older ones began to
> change coats. They stopped talking about things they had discus-
> sed quite openly a year or two earlier. Suddenly we found our-
> selves in a space that was awful. We understood it, but we could
> not accept it (Pastier 2007).

In another interview, Oleg Pastier describes why he became a part of an
»island of a positive deviation«:

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10   Interview with Ján Budaj, 4.5.2010. Author's archive.

> In my circle of people in Bratislava, we understood that if we
> wanted to feel at least a bit freer, we had to invent something. We
> wanted to read and listen to what we considered important. Thus
> our samizdat emerged – it was not an activity of dissidents, that is,
> people who had been banned and excluded from society for their
> views. We were not excluded from anywhere for our views; we just
> did not accept ›the play on normalisation‹ and created ›the second
> culture‹, which was self-sufficient and independent. We made our
> own exhibitions, published books and magazines, even shot fea-
> tured and animated films. And we endured like that until Novem-
> ber 1989 (Pastier 2007).

Thus the difference between the ›life stories‹ of Generation 52 and the
Post-War Generation consists primarily of the fact that those who were
born in 1945 and later had already to some extent been established as
individuals and chosen their life path when the ›normalisation‹ started,
while for younger people the experience of the Prague Spring and the
tanks that destroyed it often became decisive. Teens who grew accus-
tomed to living with a sense of freedom and enjoying a variety of cultural
experiences were not always able to adapt to the new social situation
when all of this ended before their eyes. The reality of the »normalisation
society« seemed to them unbearable: »to die in the socialist camp is to go
from grey to grey«.[11]

The influence of ›Western‹ 1968 led to the emergence of the hippie
movement and of communes in Czechoslovakia. A member of the Post-
War Generation, a prominent activist of the Catholic underground who
only resigned from his decently paid job in a scientific institute in 1983,
said the following about his friends from that group:

> These were people on the margins, but why I was attracted to
> them? They had the courage to reject the regime. They were very
> poor; they were stokers, meaning that in winter they worked and in
> summer mostly lived as tramps (Mikloško & Glushko 2010).

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11   Peter Kalmus, *Fragmenty z môjho života – Čiara smrti.* Undated [Praha
      1973]. Personal archive Peter Kalmus, p. 2.

In Czech lands, people of this generation[12] founded such famous under-
ground rock bands as DG-307 and Plastic People of the Universe; many
oppositionally-minded people from Košice and from eastern Slovakia in
general preferred to maintain contacts with the Prague artistic under-
ground, rather than the one in Bratislava. The Košice artist Peter Kalmus
(*1953) may serve as an example:

> I actively participated in everything that was happening at that
> time, and when in our country the conditions changed and ›nor-
> malisation‹ came, I lived practically every day in the underground
> environment. Step by step, I let this all ripen inside me, and I did
> not let them take away my freedom of expression. When I wanted
> to have long hair, I had long hair; when I wanted to have some-
> thing pink, I had something pink. During the twenty years of nor-
> malisation, through appearance and accesories a person could still
> differ from the crowd of manipulated, normalised, fearful, handi-
> capped people. The main theorist of the underground was Ivan
> Martin Jirous.[13] He even worked as an educated art critic, and he
> pointed out that we must make no compromises. When you don't
> feel something, don't do it; otherwise it will be the end, the trap
> (Kišová 2011).

Nevertheless, of course, unofficial, independent cultural activities used to
bring together members of different generations. For example, one ac-
tion that was to be an official triumph of underground art but ultimately
never happened was Three Sunny Days (3SD, 1980). Artists of different
ages were supposed to participate: from Stanislav Filo (*1937) and Július
Koller (1939-2007), through the Post-War Generation – Milan Bočkay,
Klára Bočkayová (*1948), Rudolf Sikora (*1946), Ľubomír Ďurček
(*1948), Dezider Tóth (*1947), to Generation 52 – Vladimír Archleb

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12   For example Milan Hlavsa and Pavel Zajíček (both *1951).

13   Ivan Martin Jirous (1944-2011) was a Czech poet, art critic and public
      figure; one of the most famous people of the Czech cultural under-
      ground during the socialist era.

(1953-2007), Jaroslav Štuller (*1954) and others. According to Ján Budaj, the thing which united them was »hope« (Rusinová 2001: 268-269).

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On the borders of art:
performances as a means of individual psychotherapy
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For those who worked as underground artists in socialist Czechoslovakia, ›art was more than art‹ – it is clear that they used to think about its nature, limits and borders. Quite logically, events and performances became an especially popular artistic genre at the time, as these allowed for balancing on the border of social activism and political protest.

In particular, Peter Kalmus from Košice was (and still is) quite attached to this genre. He was always quite sensitive towards political life in his country. In a memoir, he recalled how much hope and encouragement the emergence of the Charter 77 gave to him, and how much he was depressed by the persecutions of his friends who had signed it and by the passivity of his fellow citizens; and, moreover, the doubts he started to have about traditional forms of art:

> The year 1978, if we are to speak about the political behaviour of the population of Czechoslovakia, was terrible […]. 99 percent of those eligible to vote masochistically cast their ballot for political scoundrels. I was quite obviously disgusted. Naturally, in all this time (1968-1989) I never went to vote.

> […] In 1978, I became definitely sure that looking at people caused me more unpleasant than pleasant feelings. After that became clear to me, I walked the city streets with my head down, and preferred to search patiently on the ground for metal ›horseshoes‹ fallen from shoes or their fragments. So I was creating the reliquary. Reliquary I.

> I started to realize very seriously and clearly that in such a situation, the making of art events had almost no meaning or purpose. The event in the given context, of course, should emerge from internal views. And what more important and meaningful action

could one imagine than the declaration of the ›Charter 77‹ signatories? At that time (and I believe this to this day) none.[14]

The artistic group founded and led by Ján Budaj at the turn of the 1980s, was called, characteristically enough, the »Temporary Society of Intense Experiencing« (Dočasná spoločnosť intenzívneho prežívania). The purpose of its actions was to achieve »the transformation of an individual's consciousness, purification and regaining of the lost reality« (Budaj 1981). Its activities combined the elements of art, social work and psychotherapy (ibid.) since in society of that time »an individual is not deprived of – let's say – freedom of expression, but of the need for freedom of expression« (ibid.). This work on the transformation of consciousness required a lot of accuracy and could be carried out only on an individual basis, exactly because of the trauma of 1968:

> Today attempts to change social consciousness on a mass scale are rather discredited. The atmosphere of disappointment and sobering disillusionment is the result of experience with the ›great leap‹ of the sixties – a collective leap for a new culture, behaviour, for a new social consciousness (ibid.).

Such a result, according to Budaj, could be achieved through performance. Mira Keratová, curator of two exhibitions based on Budaj's photographic archive, wrote an article on his performances in socialist times (Keratová 2008; Fotograf Gallery 2011). Already in the 1980s, however, Budaj had started to dedicate himself to openly political issues; some of his activities will be mentioned later.

The issue of generations in Tender Revolution discourse

The problem of ›intergenerational dialogue‹ during the regime change in Czechoslovakia in 1989 and subsequent years has still not been discussed sufficiently. In the present section I will argue that at that time, there was a father-son conflict taking place: the ›sons‹ belonged to the Post-War

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14   Peter Kalmus, Suicidálna performance sa nekoná (Nie som Anna Kareninová), Košice 1980. Personal archive Peter Kalmus.

and younger generations (it seems there was a certain tension between them as well), the ›fathers‹ to the ›ex-communists‹ whose triumph and decline was in 1968. November 1989 gave hope for the embodiment of all the liberal democratic values that were nurtured by Western-oriented younger generations; however, as will be stated below, their dreams were not destined to materialise. Nevertheless, for many people of these generations November 1989 has remained a symbol of the triumph of democracy and human dignity:

> November 1989 is undoubtedly one of the most important landmarks in Slovak twentieth century history. One can even say that it marks a watershed with no precedent in Slovakia's modern history. November 1989 represents primarily the transition from a totalitarian to a democratic regime. It represents the return of the human individual to history, the return to the individual of his humanity and dignity. It represents the return to natural diversity, to plurality, to the comprehension that we all form one universal human species, but at the same time we are different. In this sense, it represents a return to modern European civilisation as it develops in its historical mainstream, beginning with the eighteenth century. This respect for the fundamental characteristics of European culture – diversity of opinions, attitudes, interests, values – in November 1989 found its expression in the establishment of political pluralism, in the possibility to decide freely, to choose and elect freely, to participate in power and perceive the power itself not as the instrument to control others, but as a possibility to manage public affairs together with others (Zajac 2001).

An anti-communist public platform formed in November 1989 in Slovakia was called Public against Violence (abbreviated in Slovak to VPN) and had the same function as the Civic Forum in Prague. One should mention, however, that the branches of the Civic Forum were first formed elsewhere in Slovakia, first of all in Košice, places that were always ›closer‹ to Prague, in contempt of geography; only later were these transformed into VPN. Peter Kalmus was one of the founding members of such a Civic Forum in Košice (Kišová 2011).

VPN and analogous movements included members of all generations, but primarily those who had been born in the 1940s and 1950s. It seems that people who had time to get some experience ›inside the system‹ were better suited to political activities in the rapidly changing conditions after the Tender Revolution. A great many leading figures of VPN emerged out of the environmental movement – the Slovak Union of Defenders of Nature and Landscape (Slovak: SZOPK) – which in the 1980s was something in between an official organisation and an opposition movement. Nevertheless, Budaj stated that even among environmentalists, the attitude towards protest activities was far from positive (Antalová 1998: 68).

Although Ján Budaj, one of the most ›stubborn‹ Slovak dissidents, played an important role in SZOPK[15] and later on became the de facto leader of the VPN for some time, his closest associates and other heads of the movement had never lived in the underground, and during socialist times they found it perfectly possible to combine their ›protest‹ views with an official job, usually at different research institutes. Generally speaking, in socialist Slovakia »opposition was weaker, and the dividing line between supporters and opponents of the communist regime was less clear« than in Czech lands (Bútora & Bútorová 1993: 123). That some leading actors had such a background of course had a certain influence on the work of VPN and on Slovak political life in 1989 and later. As Vladimír Ondruš, an environmentalist, famous member of VPN and Deputy Prime Minister of Slovakia in the years 1989 to 1991 recalls:

> By January [1990], many activists had started to return to their civil employment and new career opportunities had opened up for some […]. For example, Peter Zajac took over the leadership of one of the research institutes of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Fedor Gál founded research centres […]. What was an advantage for the VPN civic initiative in November 1989 – its colourful, ar-

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15   In particular, in 1987 he was the initiator and editor of the famous *samizdat* edition *Bratislava/nahlas*, devoted to environmental issues in the Slovak capital.

tistically and humanistically oriented structure – came to be the cause of its destruction after the new year of 1990. Outstanding artists, scientists, professors and publicists were able at the right time to get people to protest, to speak out publicly against arrogant authorities. But they did not want to enter politics, to stand for parliamentary election and to build the organisational structure of a political movement. Few were willing to take personal responsibility in a political office, to give up their original occupations and way of life precisely when the possibilities to fully apply their talents and abilities were opening up (Ondruš 2009: 39-40).

Ondruš holds that one of the factors that led to the subsequent crisis in the ranks of VPN was when Ján Budaj was eliminated from political life, thanks, among others, to his colleagues from the Post-War generation (Ondruš 2009: 41-43). In the atmosphere of agentomania that dominated the Czechoslovak public sphere in the first years after the regime change, Budaj's signature on the agreement on cooperation with State Security was the cause of his elimination.[16] It should be mentioned, however, that other participants in these events blamed the headquarters of VPN and Ján Budaj personally for a certain ›secretiveness‹: they did not permit other people to enter their circle where the decisions were made (Antalová 1998: 69-70).

After the first impulse towards unity, the contradictions within Slovak society naturally intensified, including conflicts between generations. Writer Anton Hykisch (*1932) recalls how he and his colleagues in 1990 went to talk to Budaj to establish the relationship between the VPN and the distinguished intellectual elite of Slovakia. Hykisch's presentation method is of particular interest here: »Before us, the veterans of 1968, a revolutionary is sitting – with dark places in his biography (who does not have them?), lively, energetic but rather troubled« (Hykisch 2004: 58). As

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16   In this article, it is not possible to go into the subject deeply. One should presume, though, that at that time the question of being or not being a State Security agent was a question of political success, not of facts. The best-researched book which deals with this issue remains at the moment the above-mentioned book by Vladimír Ondruš (2009).

one can see, on the one hand Hykisch somehow considers 1968 as ›belonging‹ to his generation, the generation that once in all honesty worked to build Communism, and at the end of the sixties tried to attach to it a ›human face‹. Hykisch's attitude towards the relatively young ›revolutionary‹ is a mix of respect, sympathy and condescension. To sum up the meeting, Hykisch says:

> An interesting meeting, a bit of a symbolic one. A meeting of 1968 with the year 1989. The meeting of two revolutions. But somehow an unfortunate one. Even though we all thought then that the same freedom was important for all of us, now in the first year of freedom it is already clear that the current takeover goes much further. I accept the point of Budaj's irate and painful comments on Čič[17] and Schuster,[18] the communists and ›covert communists‹ who still sit in parliament and want to continue to control Slovakia. However, on Pal'o Števček's[19] and others' faces I see that his words aggravate them. They have a different vision. ›Reformed communists‹ (even if they later finally leave the Communist Party of Slovakia) still have left-wing roots which date back somewhere to social democracy. The vision of a fair and influential state, of scientifically built society, of social equality, is still alive (Hykisch 2004: 60).

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17   Milan Čič (1932), was a Slovak lawyer and politician, 1961-1990 member of the Communist Party of Slovakia, 1990-1991 member of the VPN, 1988-1989 Minister of Justice of the Slovak Socialist Republic, 1989-1990 Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, 1993-2000 President of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic.

18   Rudolf Schuster (1934) was a Slovak politician, 1964-1990 member of the Communist Party of Slovakia, 1989-1990 Speaker of the Slovak National Council, 1999-2004 President of Slovakia.

19   Pavol Števček (1932-2003) was a Slovak writer, involved in cultural renewal at the end of the 1960s.

The conviction is generally rather widespread that the vision of a liberal-democratic society according to the Western European model (and introduced into Slovak politics by the narrow circle of dissidents) was extremely ill-suited to Slovak society.

Alexander Dubček quite logically became the symbol of 1968 in Czechoslovakia; the fact that he was ultimately not offered anything in the government except the representative function of Chairman of the Federal Assembly, along with his speedy death, lead Hykisch to conclude: »Simply speaking, the bridge between the years 1968 and 1989 was weakened and eventually collapsed, decayed, into the river of time«. But in the next sentence he had to admit: »Dubček did not have time or could not shout out the liberating word. (Perhaps he even did not have it, who knows?)« (Hykisch 2004: 63).

In an introductory remark to a series of memorial talks on the formation of VPN, sociologist Soňa Szomolányi describes the role of this older generation as follows:

> The political vision of this generation of ›68 people‹ remained for the most part at the level of the idea of ›socialism with a human face‹, the idea that socialism can be reformed. However, it must be said, in the first election their faces […] raised confidence in the continuity of development, and their political language was easier to understand at the level of social consciousness of the Slovak population. Thus the fact that VPN won the election in 1990 was not because of its programme, which was called liberal-democratic, but mainly because of the illusion and the belief that development would go towards a kind of ›socialism with a human face‹. The not very large group of liberal intellectuals in fact represented only a thin layer of society, and how thin it was we learned only too late after November. In November, this small group articulated the interests of society as a whole, and I see its greatest importance in the fact that it played the main role in opening up political space towards pluralism (Antalová 1998: 16-17).

However, Soňa Szomolányi also believes that, more than anybody else, those who moderated demonstrations on the squares in November 1989 contributed to the fact that regime change in the country was of a non-violent nature (Antalová 1998: 18).

The conclusion by Martin Bútora and Zora Bútorová in a collection of essays published on the occasion of Czechoslovakia's division into two independent states on 1st of January 1993 sounds like a requiem for the hopes of the Slovak Tender Revolution:

> We are inclined to believe that the breakup of Czechoslovakia is primarily the result of the failure of the first generation of post-communist elites, which was in power in the years 1990 to 1992. They were not able to cope with the difficult processes of changes that were taking place simultaneously at three levels of social reality: on the level of creating a new political system and new institutions, on the level of market economy foundations, and ultimately on the level of culture, meaning the creation of a new identity, of a new ›social cement‹, new cultural and socio-political ties, of new identities, including ethnic and national identities (Bútora & Bútorová 1993: 121).

Twenty years later

Now, more than twenty years later, there are two points in time to which the members of the Post-War Generation and Generation 52 always return – 1968 and 1989. The presence of 1968 in their recent writings is sufficiently illustrated by quotations in the paper at hand. They are inclined to perceive Communism as the worst possible regime in the world and to equate it with Nazism:

> Nazism and Communism were linked by the fact that both ideologies were criminal; both had been responsible for millions of lost lives, both benefited from fear and the restriction of people's rights and freedoms. Even if the one appealed to the National Socialist utopia and the other to proletarian internationalism and class struggle – Without psychopathic leaders, ready flunkies, hired

killers, without mendacious mass propaganda, without servile media, without corrupted intellectuals and without the so-called silent (mainly, however, timid and cowardly) majority, they would not have achieved anything (Gál 2010).

Like many people, I have real experience with obviously the worst political system ever devised in the history of this planet. This system not only suppressed religion, it suppressed sexuality, freedom, science, creation, every free expression of human activity. It was crazy and monstrous. Therefore, I am shocked when nowadays people perceive Hitler's National Socialism as a greater evil (Kišová 2011).

However, although November 1989 was indisputably the triumph of democracy, the development of the country during the years which followed did not satisfy the revolution's actors. Members of the Post-War Generation are still more or less engaged in the political and public life of the country (Peter Zajac, Fedor Gál etc.); all of them openly express their dissatisfaction with current state of affairs in the politic sphere. Many former dissidents from Generation 52 are now staying away from politics, and some of them openly state that »politics is crime« (Hoffman 2009):

If I had to answer the question of whether it is still possible to manage public affairs with the aid of political structures, I would say that it is not possible anymore. We have passed the point where there was still a chance to return a democratic dimension to politics. Politicians are useless to us, regardless of whether they are aware of it or not. In the best case they represent only themselves, in the worst – economic mafia.

Ivan Hoffman (*1952), an independent Slovak singer and *samizdat* author until 1990 and a Czech journalist after 1993, is an author of only one musical album of songs written during the Tender Revolution. His music became a hymn of these events. However, as he says: »already ten days after the upheaval I knew that I should not enter politics« (Kouřil 2008).

Oleg Pastier today is an author of educational radio broadcasts and of a few books of interviews with famous representatives of Slovak culture. His attitude towards contemporary political life in Slovakia is entirely negative:

> A politician must have several stomachs. I have – so far – only one. And I guard it as one must guard one's eyes. Politics are barren, inhospitable, grumpy. Even the steadiest succumb over time to compromises and evasive lies in the political arena, and they often treat us, their voters, as a hard-to-tolerate bunch of inferior idiots. Is there anything appealing about it? (Pastier 2010)

Peter Kalmus expresses the same attitude – however, he continues to merge art and direct political protest. For example, last year he protested against a statue by a Communist sculptor in the centre of Bratislava by dressing in red (Krempaský 2010) and against the social politics of the government by dressing in prison clothes (TASR 2010).

Among the members of the ›dissident‹ part of Generation 52, perhaps the only person who remains visible in politics is Ján Budaj. However, he is obviously the exception that proves the rule, and his story shows clearly that although democratic ideals are still highly valued in at least some segments of the public sphere in Slovakia, on the level of decision-making the country has definitely entered the era of »postdemocracy« (Crouch 2004), when economic elites define the fate of states and politicians.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have found that all of those who experienced the trauma of 1968, even as children, remained influenced by it throughout their lives. Many of them were led by this experience to an independent, ›underground‹ existence at the beginning of ›normalisation‹. The ›gulp of freedom‹ that Czechoslovak society enjoyed in the second half of the sixties was enough to sustain these ›islands of positive deviation‹ until 1989. The Tender Revolution of 1989 became, in a certain sense, a fulfilment of the ›Western 1968‹ ideal of a peaceful revolution leading to the

emergence of a harmonious and democratic society. In the long run, however, the hopes for the emergence of such a society did not materialise. In Slovak public discourse the current government's policies is still from time to time compared with the ›normalisation‹ regime (Zajac 2008), but today there is no underground in the sense used here. There is no longer an external enemy and internal boundaries between ›friends‹ and ›foes‹ are also blurred.

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