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English-Speaking Communists, Communist Sympathizers and Fellow-Travellers and Czechoslovakia in the Early Cold War

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Little by little, after the Second World War finished, two rivalry blocs led by former allies came into being. One, headed by the United States, represented the capitalist West and championed “freedom,” the other was led by the Soviet Union and campaigned for socialism and “peace.” Not surprisingly, the two camps were mutually incompatible. In the early Cold War years, they both created images of their adversary as “the Other.” In the East, the West was labelled an “imperialist warmonger,” among other epithets, while in the West, the East was the anti-democratic, totalitarian camp.¹ When reading about the early years of the Cold War, one sometimes conjures up a mental image of an actual physical curtain made of iron on the border separating the two opposing sides, surrounded with barbed wire, electric fencing, and heavily armed frontier guards ready to shoot would-be escapees and intruders alike. One visualizes a virtually impenetrable barrier between the “good” West and the “bad” East, which only a few lucky souls managed to cross in the right direction – westwards. However, is this picture adequate? Or has our image of the period under scrutiny and the questions it raises been influenced by the perspective of the Cold War winner more than we are prepared to admit? Was everything really only black and white?

Over the years, an enormous number of books have been printed about the early Cold War period, East–West relations and confrontations, proxy wars fought elsewhere in the globe, political developments in the two camps, the different forms of repression within both, the fears, stigmatization, and malaise engendered as a result, as well as corresponding cultural and social issues. The Second World War is for many a watershed in world history and indeed the expression “post-war” itself often seems to carry with it the notion that study of the early phase of the Cold War should focus on post-1945 developments, with only cursory attention paid to what went before. This, too, seems to be the pattern for the teaching of history at all levels and has a marked effect upon our understanding of the Cold War itself.

By the same token, when one looks at the question of visitors to the Soviet Union who were in sympathy with the socialist experiment, a field that is also well-documented by experts, almost all works on the topic finish with the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. Understandably, it would have been difficult to visit the “home of socialism” during the war years, but what of the early Cold War period? What of those communists, fellow-travellers, news reporters and simply adventurers who journeyed to the Soviet Bloc at this time to see the Soviet Union or the newly created people’s democracies for themselves? What, too, of the strategies developed by the Soviet Union in the 1930s to promote a positive image of itself and its system among those who travelled there? Did the new satellite states start from scratch in this regard or was the proven Soviet model rolled out in the capitals of the new Soviet allies, with suitable modifications made where necessary for specific features of the individual countries? These questions are worth asking inasmuch as the generation of die-hard Western supporters of the Soviet system did not disappear overnight, but rather they, together with very many who were well-disposed towards socialist ideas in general, were inspired and fortified in their beliefs by what they saw as the steadfast endurance of the Soviet people during the war

¹ Krakovsky Roman, *The Peace and the War Camps: The Dichotomous Cold War Culture in Czechoslovakia 1948–1960*, in VOWINCKEL Anneté – PAYK Marcus M. – LINDENBERGER Thomas (eds.), *Cold War Cultures: Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies*, New York – Oxford, Berghahn Books 2012, pp. 213–234, here 213.

and by the heroic exploits of the Red Army. Time and circumstances, however, would in due course take their toll on numbers.

Of course, geopolitical realities changed profoundly after the war with the jockeying for position that accompanied the two-bloc rivalry. Czechoslovakia, formerly part and parcel of Western Europe economically and politically, was wedged into the Eastern camp and, as such, actively followed the instructions and fraternal advice that emanated from the bloc's taskmaster, the Soviet Union. Like the other satellites in the region, Czechoslovakia took part in the various USSR-led campaigns directed against the mortal enemy, the West. While the majority of such endeavours were targeted at the domestic audience, the goal of some was to win over and mobilize those in the West who were sympathetic, or potentially so, to the Soviet cause. Among them were many from the intellectual élite, academics, scientists, writers, artists, clergymen, as well as ordinary men and women. Some were troubled by the development of the atomic bomb and the nightmare scenario of a nuclear holocaust. Others were disturbed by the persecution of communists, particularly in the United States, and by increasing American hegemony in Europe and the wider world. Still more had been alienated from the capitalist system entirely because of the ravages of the Great Depression in the 1930s and the concomitant rise of Fascism.

Such concerns coalesced in the post-war, Soviet-promoted peace campaign. While the enemy was now the warmongering United States and its Western "lackeys" rather than Hitlerite Germany, nevertheless the peace campaigners could draw on experience from the earlier era. The goals and actual course of the post-war peace campaign were different, resonating as they did with developments in the contemporary political world, and, in addition, there was no one of the stature of Willi Müzenberg to direct proceedings, but there were also similarities. Compared to the period that went before, too, accounts by Westerners who travelled to the USSR in the early Cold War years, many of whom were already active in the peace campaign or would soon be willing conscripts, are relatively few, and those that do exist, generally tend to be isolated and idiosyncratic. No attempt has been made to co-ordinate and collate these disparate narratives or to take stock of visitors' reports of trips to the new people's democracies. Such a study, it seems to me, as well as examining the scale of such activities in their own right, would not only illumine the internal functioning of the "peace" camp but would also shed fresh light on the dynamic of the larger, bipolar conflict.

Given the fact that so many excellent works are already available on the Cold War and on Czechoslovakia's internal development after the communist coup of 1948, these topics are not explored in any great depth in this work but are referred to when appropriate. Rather, the primary focus is on Czechoslovakia's relations with the communist movement in the English-speaking world and the associated peace campaign in the early Cold War years. As was the case with other Soviet satellites in the region, the Czechoslovak Communist Party forged bonds with corresponding national communist parties in the West and these were strengthened by personal contacts. On the other hand, Czechoslovakia's role was exceptional in that it lay at the cutting edge between East and West, a likely battlefield should hostilities erupt in earnest. The country had been a popular destination for foreign visitors long before the 1948 communist coup. Nor did it suffer the WWII devastation that Poland and Hungary experienced, for example, but rather belonged among the more financially secure states in the region and the standard of living among the general population was higher than that in the other people's democracies. The same

holds true for the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia itself. The Party had pretty solid financial resources and Party leaders were not averse to dipping into the coffers for the benefit of foreign comrades, many of whom would be known in person and, very often too, so would their language.

During this period, too, Czechoslovakia provided a haven for many persecuted communists from abroad, most notably perhaps, Greeks and anti-Tito Yugoslavs. Among other immigrant communities who found a home among the Czechs and Slovaks, some temporarily, others permanently, Italians and Spaniards were probably the most prominent, but English-speakers, francophones, and indeed Iranians should not be overlooked either.² Many aspects of this wider topic, however, still await investigation. At the same time, Prague was where the headquarters of several international communist organizations were located, the International Union of Students and the World Peace Council being probably the best known.³ All such institutions employed foreign staff, both from the East and the West.⁴ Prague was also the centre for worldwide radio broadcasts of communist propaganda, with, unsurprisingly, many of those taking part coming from the targeted countries.⁵ Mention should likewise be made of the numerous young people, especially from colonial regions in Africa and Asia awaiting independence, who came to pursue studies in different fields. However, it must be borne in mind that communist Czechoslovakia was a closed society. All those who wished to enter or leave had to have the requisite visa and a not inconsiderable amount of time was spent by the communist authorities in assessing letters of recommendation and proposed activities when processing entry visa applications. Nevertheless, with so many foreigners inside its borders, notably from the West, the bulk of whom were there to serve the Czechoslovak and Soviet

² For example: HRADEČNÝ Pavel, *Řecká komunita v Československu: Její vznik a počáteční vývoj (1948–1954)* [The Greek community in Czechoslovakia: Its creation and early development (1948–1968)], Prague, Ústav pro soubodé dějiny Akademie věd 2000; TSIVOS Konstantinos, *Řecká emigrace v Československu (1948–1968): Od jednoho rozštěpení ke druhému* [Greek immigration in Czechoslovakia (1948–1968): From one split to another], Prague, Fakulta sociálních vědy Univerzity Karlovy – Dokořán 2011; KRÁLOVÁ Kateřina – TSIVOS Konstantinos et al, *Vyschly nám slzy: Řečtí uprchlíci v Československu* [Our tears dried up: Greek refugees in Czechoslovakia], Prague, Dokořán 2012; DANFORTH Loring M. – BOESCHOTEN Riki van, *Children of the Greek Civil War: Refugees and the Politics of Memory*, Chicago – London, The University of Chicago Press 2012; VOJTĚCHOVSKÝ Ondřej, *Z Prahy proti Titovi! Prosovětská jugoslávská emigrace v Československu* [From Prague against Tito! Pro-Soviet Yugoslav immigration in Czechoslovakia], Prague, Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy 2012; ZÍDEK Petr, *Češi v srdci temnoty: Sedmadvacet historických reportáží o prvním čtvrtstoletí vlády komunistů* [The Czechs in the middle of darkness: Twenty-seven historical reportages on the first 25 years of communist rule in Czechoslovakia], Prague, Euromedia-Group – Knižní klub 2013; HRUBY Peter, *Dangerous Dreamers: The Australian Anti-Democratic Left and Czechoslovak Agents*, Bloomington (Indiana), iUniverse 2010, published also in Czech as: IDEM, *Nebezpeční snílci: Australská levice a Československo*, Brno, Stilus 2007.

³ One of the British employees of the International Union of Students was, among others, John Prime. An interesting interview with him where he talks about his personal experience in Czechoslovakia and the functioning of the IUS in the early Cold War years can be found in: National Sound Archive, British Library, F 7857 (tape 8), F 7919 (tape 9), F 7921 (tape 11), F 7922 (tape 12), F 7924 (tape 14), F 7925 (tape 15), F 7855 (tape 16).

⁴ Among the other international communist organizations, one can mention the International Organization of Journalists, the World Federation of Trade Unions, the Christian Peace Conference, and the International Radio and Television Organization. For more information see for example: STAAR Richard F. (ed.), *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs*, Stanford, Hoover Institution Press 1990.

⁵ See for example: COOKE Philip, “Oggi in Italia”: The Voice of Truth and Peace in Cold War Italy, *Modern Italy*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (June 2007), pp. 251–265; RECCHIONI Massimo, *Itenente Alvaro: la Volante Rossa e i rifugiati politici Italiani in Cecoslovacchia*, Italia, Derive Approdi 2010.

cause in one way or another, the question inevitably arises as to just how impenetrable the so-called “Iron Curtain” actually was.

The work presented here is a study of some of those people, Party members and well-wishers for the most part, who journeyed behind the Curtain to see for themselves what life was like in the new people’s democracy. To be more precise, the research focuses on Czechoslovakia as a tourist destination, so to speak, for a surprising number of anglophones in the early years of the Cold War. Particular emphasis is devoted to those with Communist Party affiliations and to fellow-travellers, those who were “willing to work with and associate with Communists,” but were not *bona fide* Party members.⁶ In this context, however, it is important to stress that even devout communists often eschewed formal membership of their home Party for tactical reasons.⁷ Of course, the impressions gained from a short visit to a country may differ markedly from those formed by long-term residents. The attitude of some of these in turn may have been influenced by the belief that their exile in Czechoslovakia, or elsewhere in the Soviet Bloc, was merely a prelude, a period of marking time until, following the logic history, the Party assumed power in their home country, a prospect that seemed to grow ever dimmer as the months rolled into years.

A contrastive analysis of conditions prevailing in early communist Czechoslovakia embarking on its vaunted programme of Sovietization and those in the pre-war Soviet Union proper, as it constructed its giant engineering complexes in Magnitogorsk and elsewhere, shows clear dissimilarities, not least in terms of size, population, and industrial development. The international environment had changed dramatically, too. Sovietized Czechoslovakia looked out on a world divided into two competing blocs, each seeking to outdo the other in inventing and amassing weapons of devastating mass destruction. Recruiting adherents from outside their borders was high on the political agenda of both antagonists, as was making much of those already committed. In this respect, several striking parallels are evident in the approach of the authorities in the pre-war Soviet Union and in communist Czechoslovakia to streamlining short-term Western visitors to their lands, in our case the English-speakers. It is clear that the Soviet experience served as a best practices model for officialdom in Prague. This was modified where necessary to take into account the lessons learnt, national particulars, and the new geopolitical context. In both situations, foreigners were evaluated in terms of importance and potential as far as the communist cause was concerned, and, when the results were positive, the facilitators swung into action. Bureaucratic hurdles were sorted, the ground smoothed, and the purveyors of the wide range of tailored treats attuned their services in line with the hospitality techniques developed in Moscow. It had taken the Soviet Union several years to polish the necessary persuasive skills. Their application in Czechoslovakia in the early years of communist rule was sometimes imperfect, and there were occasional glitches, but this improved with time.

When it came to adding an extra, authoritative voice to the various Soviet-sponsored campaigns then underway, the visiting foreigners were ideal, above all when they could present themselves as neutral witnesses on their return home. Especially welcome were travel accounts,

⁶ POLENBERG Richard (ed.), *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer: The Security Clearance Hearing*, Ithaca (NY), Cornell University Press 2001, p. 59.

⁷ CAUTE David, *The Fellow-Travellers: Intellectual Friends of Communism* (revised and updated edition), New Haven – London, Yale University Press 1988, pp. 4–5.

booklets, newspaper articles, and radio interviews detailing the “real” conditions obtaining in the Soviet Union and the people’s democracies, which extolled the great strides made in eliminating poverty and unemployment in such a short period of time and explained away controversial aspects of the regimes in a fog of verbiage and half-truths. Western governments were aware of the dynamic such reports provided to their adversary and were acutely perturbed by the momentum the visitors generated for the peace campaign, as an instance in point. At the same time, consonant with the position and status they occupied in their homeland, prominent fellow-travellers and fraternal delegates would always be invited for briefing sessions with their opposite number in the host Party, or indeed officials higher up the ladder, where in a comradely atmosphere up-to-date information and analysis of the situation in their home countries would be passed on and the Party line propounded.

By and large, visitors to either the pre-war Soviet Union or communist Czechoslovakia tended to be motivated by commitment, curiosity, or simply a desire to avail of the good cheer and whatever else was on offer, or, indeed, in very many cases, a combination of all three. For the most part, they comprised Party members, trade unionists, writers, artists, and politicians, but holiday-makers of a “progressive” bent were to be found, too. At gatherings and festivals in the new people’s democracies, peace was the mantra, but much of the tub-thumping from the stage had been heard before. Many of the crackerjack orators and campaigners who mouthed the anti-Western flimflam from conference platforms would have cut their teeth at similar events a couple of decades earlier when the enemy was Nazi Germany. Hitler’s Reich had fallen but, despite the pealing bells, the tears of joy, the crowds dancing on the streets, there had been no happy ending, the speakers thundered. The guns still pointed east. The Trumans and Churchills had hoisted the flags and pennants of war once more and were making a mockery of the millions dead, the millions maimed.

Certainly in terms of numbers, visitors to the pre-war Soviet Union far outweighed those to early communist Czechoslovakia. Yet in the Czechoslovak case, figures were by no means negligible either. The representative sample of English-speaking people who visited the country in the early Cold War years, considered in this study, speaks for itself. The visits are particularly noteworthy when the milieu in which they took place is taken into account. This was “the time of the toad,”⁸ a time, one imagines, when even Stephen Crane’s classic tale of the American Civil War, *The Red Badge of Courage*, was being discreetly removed from bookshelves because of its title, a time when communists and communist sympathizers in the Western world were hounded and had their passports confiscated or stamped as invalid for travel to the Soviet Bloc.

⁸ Dalton Trumbo was one of a group of ten Hollywood screenwriters and directors who cited the First Amendment to the American Constitution and refused to answer questions about Communist Party membership at a hearing of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in October 1947. All ten, who became known as the Hollywood Ten, were convicted of contempt of Congress and, once the legal system had run its course, began one-year prison sentences in 1950. “Possessed of dossiers on millions of Americans,” Dalton wrote, HUAC was riding roughshod over the United States Constitution and had arrogated to itself the right to ask of those summoned before it the “single question – ‘Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist party?’ – a question to which thirty years of propaganda has lent a connotation so terrible that even the asking of it, regardless of the answer given, can imperil a man’s career and seriously qualify his future existence as a citizen free from violence under the law.” TRUMBO Dalton, *The Time of the Toad*, p. 7.

The work is divided into two main parts. The first is a short, introductory section which looks at travellers to the Soviet Union in the pre-war decades and how the hospitality techniques brought into play to gain their approval for the new socialist experiment were perfected. This is the context for the main focus of the research, which is an examination of how the skills learnt were then transferred to Czechoslovakia as the authorities in the new people's democracy set out to win the favour of corresponding visitors to their fledgling communist state. The analysis concentrates on native English-speakers, Party members and fellow-travellers for the most part, who ventured behind the Iron Curtain to see the newest member of the communist bloc, and the people whom Hitler had vowed to tear into little bits,⁹ for themselves. A sense of the whole is essential for our understanding of the parts,¹⁰ and, indeed as far as Czechoslovakia is concerned, "the parts can only be understood in reference to a whole,"¹¹ in this case Soviet suzerainty.

Within this wider framework, distinctive facets of the Czechoslovak situation are scrutinized. This is followed by an analysis of the English-speaking visitors themselves, their motives for travelling to Czechoslovakia and, where records exist, what impressions they formed during their stay. Shared characteristics enable most to be grouped in categories. Thus, beginning with the arts world, an assortment of cultural figures, musicians, poets, novelists, and the like, who made the journey in the early communist years, including those who came for the Karlovy Vary film festival, is presented. In this section, too, Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop tour of the country in 1948 is described as is Paul Robeson's performance at the Prague Spring Festival the following year. This is followed by a close-up of the lawyers and politicians of the left who arrived, in particular the British barrister D. N. Pritt, and then of the many transit passengers who used Prague as a staging-post in a journey whose terminal point was further east. Since the peace campaign was of major importance at the time, it is hardly surprising that the spotlight turns to how this impacted on Czechoslovakia and to the various activists who gathered in Prague to further the cause. W. E. B. Du Bois is to the forefront here, while the Paris-Prague Peace Congress of 1949 and the Second Congress of the International Union of Students which took place in the city in 1950, and related topics, are all treated in detail. Representatives of different Christian denominations had always made up a significant segment of visitors to Czechoslovakia and this continued during the early communist years. However, a major shift took place. Whereas in the past the Catholic Church had dominated the religious landscape of Czechoslovakia and the bulk of pious visitors had been priests and nuns from its ranks, this ceased to be the case under the communist regime. It was pastors from the Protestant churches who now came for the various spiritual occasions celebrated in the country. The Christian Festival of 1950 is carefully considered, with special attention paid to Hewlett Johnson, the Dean of Canterbury, and to his Australian counterpart, the Reverend Frank Hartley. This in turn leads to an exploration of parades and festivals and to selective communist appropriation of Czechoslovak and Russian history for commemorative displays, which the English-speaking guests would either have watched or participated in. Many of the spectators

⁹ STEED Wickham, Preface to HEISLER J. B. – MELLON J. E., *Czechoslovakia: Land of Dream and Enterprise*, Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Information 1945, p. 11.

¹⁰ TOSH John, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (5th edition), London – New York, Longman 2010, p. 36.

¹¹ PALMER Richard E., *Hermeneutics*, Evanston (IL), Northwestern University Press 1969, p. 118.

would have been British holidaymakers who made the trip with the London-based Progressive Tours company and they provide the next group to be investigated. Then the study moves to fraternal delegates and trade unionists from the English-speaking world, with the leader of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Harry Pollitt, specifically singled out.

As well as being interesting in its own right, providing a breakdown of the English-speaking travellers who reached Czechoslovakia in the early communist years also sets the scene for an exploration of how the hospitality techniques developed in the USSR were applied by those in control in Prague. A sizeable amount of money, time, effort and manpower was assigned to create positive impressions among the receptive visitors. Details of this expenditure and whether the investment was worthwhile are among the topics investigated and also what differentials existed in the treatment meted out to, say, an ordinary British holidaymaker as opposed to someone deemed to be higher up the communist scale of values in terms of propaganda potential. How the visitors spent their time in Czechoslovakia, where they stayed, their daily fare of meals, visits, and evening entertainment, are also among the questions addressed. So, too, are the results achieved, the impressions of Czechoslovak life that the guests left with and reported on to their fellow-citizens at home. At the same time, I try to view the points at issue against the backdrop of the international great power rivalry in all its complexity. The peace campaign and the anti-Western rhetoric were strategic weapons employed by the Soviet side in the conflict, and English-speaking visitors to Czechoslovakia were, wittingly and unwittingly, pressed into service to help shape public opinion not only in their own countries and in the West in general but also among the domestic Czechoslovak audience.

Methodology and Sources

There were several reasons why I decided to undertake a study of communist and fellow-travelling visitors from the English-speaking world, i.e., from the United States, the British Isles, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, to early Cold War Czechoslovakia. In the first place, this had never been done before. The people concerned did not form a single, unified whole but were often distinctly different in terms of background and personal experience. Even within individual English-speaking countries, there was no homogenous group but rather a pronounced diversity in respect to class, urban-rural origin, education, and employment, in addition to the travellers' own unique, idiosyncratic characteristics. However, despite this dissimilarity, they all spoke the same native language – English, no matter how unlike when it came to dialect and accent. My initial hypothesis had been that the hospitality techniques refined in the pre-war Soviet Union were recalibrated for Cold War purposes and transferred to communist Czechoslovakia. This was verified in the findings from the sample of English-speaking visitors analysed in my investigation.

All the English-speakers who were the subject of my inquiry belonged to the “freedom” camp led by the United States, whether they were happy to be in this position or not. Many were well-known to one another, having shared the same platform at congresses and peace gatherings over the years, and, incidentally, they provided a readymade market, although perhaps not necessarily readership, for booklets on the achievements of Czechoslovakia and other allied countries within the Soviet Bloc, as well as the struggle for peace and socialism,

when the travellers put pen to paper on their return home. Often visitors to Czechoslovakia were given such publications as gifts to ensure wider distribution and this, doubtless, contributed to making the names of the most prominent English-speaking Soviet apologists household names not only in leftist circles in the West but among the public at large and, perhaps as an unwelcome corollary, to having their own special folder in the filing-cabinets of the security services in their home countries.

When speaking of the early Cold War period, I have in mind the years that followed the ending of the Second World War, in the case of Czechoslovakia those after the communist seizure of power in February 1948, until Nikita Khrushchev's exposure of Stalin's personality cult in 1956 and the Hungarian Uprising the same year. However, no strict timeline is possible here. The managing of foreign visitors involved mechanisms and hospitality techniques that did not change overnight with the death of either Stalin or the Czechoslovak communist leader, Klement Gottwald, in 1953 or with the wide circulation of Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956 and the thaw in East-West relations. Although the notion of a historical continuum may be rejected as spurious by some commentators,¹² there is, nevertheless, as one British historian noted, a historical process evidenced in "the relationship between events over time which endows them with more significance than if they were viewed in isolation."¹³ While the term "early Cold War years" may seem imprecise and open-ended, it is necessary for classificatory purposes and to tease out "the relationship between events over time" without any artificial chronological constraint imposed from outside. On the other hand, it is undoubtedly the case that, this feature of the research notwithstanding, particular emphasis is certainly placed on the years 1949–1952 when the Cold War confrontation was at its hottest. It is noteworthy, too, that this timespan corresponds to the period when Czechoslovakia enjoyed the greatest vogue in popularity among the various left-leaning, English-speaking guests and, paradoxically, it was also the time when the regime was at its most repressive.

The purpose of my research was not to produce "a collection of snapshots of the past."¹⁴ Rather, it was to put together the pieces of a fragmented puzzle, a veritable jigsaw of bits and pieces, and produce an integral picture of a subject that had not been mapped before. It became clear at an early stage that the work involved more than simply formulating new questions and seeking answers in well-trodden source material. Indeed, what initially seemed to be a purely Czechoslovak topic, a survey of English-speaking communists, fellow-travellers, and others who visited the country during the early Cold War period soon proved to have far wider ramifications. New sources had to be ferreted out, most of which lay outside the Czech Republic. They were to be found in the English-speaking countries themselves, in Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In fact, this was the reason behind my decision to write the dissertation in English rather than in Czech. The force and immediacy of the material might well have been lost in translation. The trail also led to the Soviet Union, to the renowned experts on the topic of visitors to the USSR in the pre-war decade and to the study

¹² See, for example: GILLOCH Graeme, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations*, Cambridge, Polity Press 2002, p. 228.

¹³ TOSH John, *The Pursuit of History*, p. 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

of the hospitality techniques developed there.¹⁵ This served as a background against which my own tentative assumptions and hypotheses could be framed.

The work is based on extensive archival research. With regard to Czech archives, I conducted my enquiries mainly in the National Archive of the Czech Republic (NACR) in which the fund of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was especially useful. I also consulted sources in the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic and the Archive of the Czechoslovak Security Services (ABS), but came across little of relevance there for my purposes. On the other hand, I discovered a substantial amount of interesting material in the reports prepared by the British Embassy in Prague for the Foreign Office in London, which are located in the London-based National Archives (TNA). The People's History Museum (PHM), where the Labour History Archive is housed, and the Working Class Movement Library, both located in Manchester, also turned out to be a truly valuable resource. In the United States, I had the opportunity to access personal estates and records. Most profitable in this regard were the letters written by Eleanor Wheeler, an American defector who moved to Czechoslovakia with her family in 1947 because of her husband's activities and beliefs.¹⁶ The Wheeler Papers 1947–

¹⁵ For example: HOLLANDER Paul, *Political Pilgrims: Western Intellectuals in Search of the Good Society*, New York, Routledge 2017; IDEM, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba 1928–1978*, New York – Oxford, Oxford University Press 1981; DAVID-FOX Michael, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941*, Oxford – New York, Oxford University Press 2012; IDEM, *Origins of Stalinist Superiority Complex: Western Intellectuals inside the USSR*, Washington DC, National Council for Eurasian and East European Research 2004; FITZPATRICK Sheila – RASMUSSEN Carolyn (eds.), *Political Tourists: Travellers from Australia to the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1940s*, Victoria, Melbourne University Press 2008; MARGULIES Sylvia R., *The Pilgrimage to Russia: The Soviet Union and the Treatment of Foreigners, 1924–1937*, Madison – London, The University of Wisconsin Press 1968; KULIKOVA G. B., Prebyvaie v SSSR inostrannykh pisateley v 1920–1930-kh godakh, *Otechestvennaya Istoriya*, No. 4 (2003), pp. 43–59; ORLOV I. B., Stanovlenie instituta gidov-perevodchikov v SSSR (1929–1939), *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2004), pp. 205–227.

¹⁶ George Shaw Wheeler and his wife Eleanor came to Czechoslovakia with their four children in November 1947. Wheeler had been an economist with the government in Washington until being posted to the American zone in Germany in 1945 to take charge of de-Nazifying former Reich labour officials. He was removed from his position in 1947 when his political reliability came under scrutiny (GRIFFITH Robert, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate*, Amherst (MA), University of Massachusetts Press 1987, p. 34). Wheeler arrived in Czechoslovakia with a letter of recommendation from former American Vice-President, Henry Wallace (Archive of the Czechoslovak Security Services (ABS), fund 638164 MV, George Shaw Wheeler – findings, 1949); and also a note from the Soviet Envoy in Prague, Mikhail Bodrov, to Rudolf Slánský, Secretary General of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (National Archive of the Czech Republic (NACR), fund the International Department of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, 100/3, ar. j. 5, sv. 19, Note from Bedřich Geminder, the Head of the International Department, to Oldřich Papež, 3 January 1950. Geminder's message is a translation of Bodrov's Cyrillic script. Bodrov's original note is also enclosed). Wheeler became a lecturer in economics at the University of Economics in Prague and also worked as a newspaper correspondent. So, too, did his wife Eleanor who was a stringer for the *Religious News Service* (NACR, fund the International Department of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, 100/3, ar. j. 5, sv. 19, Letter from the Wheelers to the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 20 March 1950). In 1950 the Wheelers applied for political asylum and remained in Czechoslovakia until 1969 when they returned to the US. Eleanor Wheeler died in 1981. Before his death in 1997, George Wheeler returned to Prague to join his two daughters. For further details, see: WHEELER George Shaw, *The Human Face of Socialism: The Political Economy of Change in Czechoslovakia*, New York, Lawrence Hill 1973, pp. xii-xiv; SCHMIDT Dana Adams, *Anatomy of a Satellite*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company 1952, pp. 209–211; DAVIDSON Eugene, *The Death and Life of Germany: An Account of the American Occupation*, London, Jonathan Cape 1959, pp. 37–38. See also: Library of Congress, Martha Dodd Papers, ID No. MSS80875, Letter Frank Wheeler to Martha and Alfred Stern dated 18 October 1983. For information on the Wheelers' asylum request in Czechoslovakia, see: GEANEY Kathleen, *At Home among Strangers: The Extraordinary Year 1950 in the Life of*

1957 are stored in the University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA (UWSC). Another truly remarkable fount of information is located in the Special Collections of Cornell University, Ithaca, NY (CUSC). It might be noted in passing that materials prepared in Prague by the International Union of Students during the early Cold War period can only be retrieved outside the Czech Republic. In addition to the sources mentioned, I also found significant data in the Library of Congress in Washington, DC (Martha Dodd Papers) and in the National Sound Archives of the British Library, as well as its Humanities Section, in London.

My search for relevant material led me to publications by the various international communist and front organizations headquartered in Prague, as well as to those of friendship with Czechoslovakia societies, including various articles and reports in Western left-wing journals and the mainstream press by peace activists and English-speaking guests who visited the country during the period. In terms of the contemporary Czechoslovak press, back issues of *Rudé právo*, in particular, were a prime source of information. I also had recourse to autobiographical accounts, written either during the early Cold War period itself or later by people who had spent time in the new Czechoslovak communist state. These were often of a self-serving nature as the authors sought to distance themselves from a system they had once passionately embraced. My quest did not end there. In order to better understand the mind-set of those who actively participated in promoting the advance of socialism and the Soviet-led peace campaign, not just in Czechoslovakia but internationally, the milieu in which they operated, and the repercussions their involvement in such activities had on them in their home countries, my reading of secondary sources was of major importance. I also drew on contemporary literary works where appropriate to illuminate areas under consideration.

I am conscious of the fact that there may well be other materials relevant to my chosen topic of which I am unaware. In this sense, my research, though extensive, is by no means exhaustive. Historical inquiry is a cumulative enterprise and it is my hope that other historians will, in due course, add to what I have begun. I know, too, that it is the task of historians to tease out the multifarious, causative strands that may have a bearing on the events being investigated and to impose order on complexity. In the narrative of the past, historical insight is achieved by an imaginative reconstruction of the episode in question and by simulating what happened.¹⁷ While history proceeds “from multiple causes and their intersections,”¹⁸ facts have to be established and substantiated.¹⁹

On the other hand, it is also my belief that historians are interpreters of the past, not just its mediums or chroniclers. While analyzing whatever sources I could get hold of in my quest for answers, I realized, like many before me have done, that not everything from the past is recoverable and that the study of history and our knowledge of former times is based only on the evidence that has survived.²⁰ In this context, the historian has to exercise judgement.

an Ordinary American Family in Communist Czechoslovakia, *Comenius: Journal of Euro-American Civilization*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2015), pp. 25–52.

¹⁷ GADDIS John Lewis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*, Oxford – New York, Oxford University Press 2002, p. 65.

¹⁸ GADDIS John Lewis, *The Landscape of History*, p. 65.

¹⁹ DRAY W. H., On the Nature and Role of the Narrative in History, in ROBERTS Geoffrey (ed.), *The History and Narrative Reader*, London – New York, Routledge 2001, pp. 25–40, here p. 29.

²⁰ ELTON G. R., *The Practice of History* (2nd edition), Oxford, Blackwell Publishing 2007, pp. 8 and 55.

Furthermore, no report is completely reliable but has to be sifted and evaluated in comparison with others, especially where politics is concerned. Authors, like everyone else, tend to change with the times, to trim their sails, consciously or unconsciously, in line with the prevailing wind. As former cadres look back over the heady days of their youth, for instance, and their then uncompromising rectitude, it frequently seems to the reader that the shoe they wore was good for either foot. There had never been any unequivocal identification with the communist side in the ideological divide, far from it indeed. Always, it now appears, a nagging element of doubt troubled their thoughts. In such cases there is seldom need for editorial comment. The words bear testimony against themselves. The writer doth protest too much.

The intrusion of the self is, of course, a feature of both ends of the reading process. Author and reader alike carry personal baggage. People's views, political and otherwise, have been shaped over time and this background inevitably influences the what and wherefore of recall and reception, what is spoken and what is heard, written and read.²¹ It is hardly possible to separate out completely the historical period under review from the historian's own present. Moreover, as we survey the past from the vantage point of today, with our knowledge of the trajectory history took and the results of action or inaction on the part of individuals and societies, the role of randomness and coincidence often becomes obscured. Sometimes, too, we tend to forget that what appear to be irrational decisions from our cognizant perspective were made in good faith and were based on what information those concerned then had at their disposal.²²

²¹ HOWELL Martha – PREVENIER Walter, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*, Ithaca (NY) – London, Cornell University Press 2001, pp. 60 and 69.

²² GADDIS John Lewis, *The Landscape of History*, pp. 49 and 59. Furet François, From Narrative History to Problem-Oriented History, in ROBERTS Geoffrey (ed.), *The History and Narrative Reader*, pp. 269–281, here 271.