

# Continuing Repression in Czechoslovakia

Vlastimil Hora and Michael David

THE INVENTORS OF GENOCIDE CZECHOSLOVAK-STYLE—a feature of socialist totalitarianism—recently reverted to a well-tried repressive weapon: a campaign of police raids on the homes of citizens tipped as oppositional in their views.

The imprisonment of numbers of dissidents—all democratic socialists and Communists—has not had the desired effect of aborting actual or potential oppositional opinion and activity; neither have the Party purges (begun in 1970-71 and still continuing) of over 600,000 persons, leading to mass dismissals from jobs of intellectuals, specialists in various fields, politicians, cultural and social workers, economists and technologists. (The number of persons affected far exceeds the number of expelled Communists, being augmented by their wives, children, parents, siblings and, in many cases, friends.) The even more heartless persecution of the children of dissidents, depriving them of higher education, has been only partially successful as a deterrent. (The political background of the families of these children is noted by the authorities from their early years and is scrutinized particularly carefully when they apply for secondary, vocational or higher education. Incidentally, this is the most effective and widely exercised means of manipulating citizens, of influencing their attitudes, behavior and deeds—exceeding even the imagination of the far-sighted George Orwell.)

The web of police surveillance, graphically described by Alexander Dubcek in his well-known letter to the Federal Assembly, has equally failed to prevent the rise and development of a political opposition—which elsewhere would be a natural component of the political scene. This web is by no means confined to Mr. Dubcek: it enmeshes tens of thousands of persons who refuse to conform to the present regime. The proportion of the State budget allocated to the Secret Service (STB) has never been higher. Bugging and phone monitoring devices have been installed in the homes of numerous “suspicious” citizens. (The Watergate conspirators might well envy the scope and the methods employed!) Numbers of citizens known to associate with suspected persons are interviewed or interrogated by the STB who offer them privileges, such as permission to spend a holiday abroad or higher education for their children in return for permanent “cooperation with the police,” i.e. for enlisting as informers. Refusal is met with the threat that a pretext for making a charge against them will be found.

THE PUBLICATION OF ALEXANDER DUBCEK’S LETTER on the Czechoslovak police State and of subsequent letters by writers Vaclav Havel and Ivan Klima, describing the deep political and moral crisis in the country, as well as a report about a comprehensive political analysis having been completed by Zdenek Mlynar, churned up suppressed political opinion in Czechoslovakia. Gustav Husak responded with a crude attack on Alexander Dubcek and outrageous threats against him and his supporters, followed by STB raids in the early hours of the morning of April 23 and the next four days. The police derived their authority for invading the privacy of 135 democratic socialists from a

decree issued by the investigation department of the STB, endorsed by the prosecutor general, which is worded as follows:

In accordance with a decree issued by the investigation department of the STB on 22 April 1975 . . . under the provisions of Article 1 of Paragraph 160, investigations (of the above-mentioned) were initiated on suspicion of the penal offense of subversion, the said offense having been committed in the manner set out in the said decree. The investigations gave rise to the suspicion that printed matter is concealed in the home of the above-mentioned, which has a bearing on and provides evidence of the said penal activity . . . Warning: With respect to the prior endorsement by the prosecutor general, and taking into account the provisions of Articles 2 and 3 of Paragraph 141, there is no appeal against this decree.

In Prague the following persons were affected: former Communist officials Zdenek Mlynar, Venek Silhan, Jaromir Litera, Bohumil Simon, Martin Vaculik, Vaclav Slavik, Ladislav Lis and Professor Lubos Kohout, historians Jan Kren, Vojta Mencl, Vilem Precan, writers Ludvik Vaculik, Ivan Klima, Karel Pecka, Karel Kastroun, philosopher Karel Kosik, well-known journalists Karel Dienstbier and Jaroslav Dobrovsky, Dr. Jirina Zelenkova (the physician who attended Josef Smrkovsky before his death), Karel Jaros, Alexander Dubcek's former secretary, former political prisoners Petr Uhl and Hana Sabatova, and Dr. Robert Horak (former director of the Socialist Academy) who helped Gustave Husak, in the sixties, to publish his articles and also sent them abroad, mainly to Paris, and many others.

In Brno the homes of the following were raided: Josef Spacek, former high-ranking Communist official, former political prisoners Alfred Cerny, Jan Schopf and Zdenek Vasicek, and others, and in Bratislava Alma Minzova, a Slovak translator of Marx and Hegel, Anton Smutny, former employee of the Institute of the Communist Party of Slovakia, journalists Milan Simecka and Ivan Kadlec, writer Dominik Tatarka, and J. Brinzik, Alexander Dubcek's chauffeur. In Bratislava the STB were particularly interested in people who had been visited earlier in the year by a group of writers from Prague, who, the STB claimed, had aimed at "inciting a mood of resistance among Slovak intellectuals."

The searches lasted between 5 and 12 hours and were conducted by 4 to 7 men. In nearly every case one of them showed distaste for his assignment and indicated that if he knew of another job he would not be in his present one. The degree of thoroughness varied: sometimes only bookshelves and writing desks were examined and fingerprints on typewriters were taken. In some cases the police ripped open mattresses, peered into ventilation shafts and up the open ends of drain-pipes and even pulled apart sanitary napkins and Tampax, looking for microfilms. The searches uncovered a quantity of samizdat; some of the dossiers contained as many as 240 items, correspondence being listed under one heading.

Similar searches were carried out in Ostrava and in smaller provincial towns—all in the same way and at the same time.

A substantial quantity of material was confiscated, whose content the STB claimed was "hostile toward the Czechoslovak political system," but the following incident throws doubt on the origin of this material:

Historian Dr. Vilem Precan's house was searched for at least 7 hours. Among other things the police found a box containing 22 copies of the Czech emigre journal *Svedectvi*, published in Paris. Dr. Precan had earlier discovered this box in his garden and had stored it temporarily in his cellar. At that time (shortly after Gustav Husak's anti-opposition speech) he was afraid that to take a parcel of *Svedectvi* to the police station would arouse strong suspicions, also he might easily have been stopped on the way for a routine police check and accused of intending to distribute the magazines. Dr. Precan therefore had decided to wait a while and then either destroy the magazines or hand them over to the police. The STB however acted quickly, and found what in all probability they had planted. The magazines were still in their original box with a Czech label.

Dr. Precan has already been interrogated; the box of *Svedectvi* may well form the basis of an indictment in a future trial. The STB were anxious to stage a trial with Dr. Precan—who is one of the authors of the Black Book—in 1972, but this was prevented by an international outcry, organized mainly by Western historians, some of whom knew Dr. Precan personally from his year at St. Anthony's College, Oxford (1968-69).

Dr. Precan has been harassed ever since and in January of this year lost his job as cloakroom attendant at the U Pastyrky restaurant in Prague. Dr. Precan wrote to complain about his dismissal to Dr. Husak, whom he has known personally for years; Dr. Precan was the main historian to compile documents on the Slovak Rising, in which Gustav Husak played a leading role. At the same time Dr. Precan asked Dr. Husak to grant him permission to emigrate. Receiving no reply, Dr. Precan sent an official request for an emigration visa to Minister of the Interior Obzina, to Vasil Bilak and Gustav Husak, at the end of March. Again he received no answer but a fortnight later the suspicious box appeared.

The following is a list of the materials confiscated during the STB raids:

Samizdat (the police also searched for manifestos and personal declarations of political standpoints intended for circulation among friends); manuscripts—even books on which the authors were working, without any hope of publishing in Czechoslovakia, including study materials and notes were taken away, for example over a thousand pages of Karel Kosik's comprehensive draft of two books, "On Praxis" and "On Truth," letters, reports and political analyses which could conceivably be sent abroad for publication or as background information; journals, such as *Literarni Noviny*, dating back to the early sixties, newspapers and official documents published in the years 1967-69, including the Communist Party's Action Program of 1968; books by Czech politicians, such as Tomas and Jan Masaryk, Eduard Benes and, of course, Josef Smrkovsky, and also early works by Professor Ota Sik, and Milan Machovec's book *Sinn des Lebens*.

In addition to Czech sources, original works by Western thinkers and their Czech and Slovak translations were confiscated, for example Herbert Marcuse, Eric Fromm, Roger Garaudy, Arthur Koestler, George Orwell, Erich Hoffer and Louis Aragon. The list included Western journals like the *New Left Review*, and translated speeches by Western politicians, such as Henry

Kissinger, President Ford, François Mitterand, as well as “unsuitable” speeches by Gustav Husak and Vasil Bilak from 1967-69 period. All books with passages underlined were treated with great suspicion, so that even Czech classics were carted away.

THE MANNER IN WHICH THE RAIDS WERE CONDUCTED and the type of materials confiscated suggest that the STB had several objectives: to ascertain ways and means employed to send certain of these material abroad; to intimidate possible and potential authors and distributors of uncensored reports and analytical studies; to prevent the publication of such information by any means whatsoever; to, prevent all free expression of nonconforming ideas in the fields of politology, history, philosophy, sociology and other social sciences as well as in creative literature (newspapers from 1966-70, including the CPC's daily, *Rude Pravo*, may be borrowed from a library only if their requirement for a thesis is certified by the appropriate authority); to destroy all individual sources of free and truthful information which, among a narrow circle of friends, compensates for the sterility of the public library stocks, newly published books, strictly censored mass media and so on; and, finally, to gather “evidence” and prepare files on which to base the eventual trials of selected dissidents.

The CPC's present policy poses some important questions. How can the suppression of basic human rights and the shameless persecution of honest people of genuinely socialist convictions be reconciled with the concept of European security? The Czechoslovak government's conception of European security means primarily security for neo-Stalinist bureaucrats and preservation of the status quo for an exceedingly undemocratic and intolerant regime. Should not the security of states be based on the security of all their citizens?

One is compelled to ask whether the Czechoslovak government's present restriction of the freedom to travel, of free exchange of information and experience can form the basis of good inter-state and international relations. Can it form a sound basis for lasting peace and security in Europe?

Considering the historical, geographical and political circumstances of the great-power confrontations which have resulted in loss of freedom for the Czech and Slovak nations over long periods, considering Czechoslovakia's importance in Europe today and this country's cultural potential, is it not high time that categorically critical conclusions were finally drawn from the Czechoslovak situation? Particularly the Socialist and Communist parties, pledged to the democratic and humanitarian principles of Marx and Engels' teaching, should adopt a completely open and unambiguous standpoint.

Will not peace and security become an empty phrase for millions of citizens of those socialist countries where democratization is still wishful thinking—yet an essential prerequisite of their internal development—if international agreements are concluded without certain preconditions at jovial gatherings of Heads of State?

Should not all democratic and progressive governments now treat the Czechoslovak regime as a regime conducting cultural and ideological genocide, and act accordingly, even to imposing certain sanctions? If Western democrats are affected so strongly by the cruel position of Soviet Jews, why should not economic and cultural contacts with totalitarian “socialist” states be made

conditional on the release of political prisoners, the abolition of "psychiatric quarantine," availability of jobs for qualified, democratically-minded citizens and equality of opportunity for tens of thousands of children in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere?

A wait-and-see attitude cannot be indefinitely excused on the ground that since the Czechs and Slovaks are not resolute enough in their own defense, it is difficult to support them outside. Under conditions of non-existence of public polemics, uncensored public information and public defense of individuals, let alone groups, self-defense on a large scale cannot be expected. It is possible only with the help of democratic and socialist forces outside.

Under a regime without social controls, genocide once set in motion, does not stop of its own accord. It goes on and on. Indifference to it smacks of Munich.

*VLASTIMIL HORA is the pseudonym of a Prague intellectual.*

*MICHAEL DAVID is the pseudonym for a journalist who is a member of the Czechoslovak Socialist Opposition.*

## **An Open Letter to Jean Paul Sartre**

**From Karel Kosik**

Prague, 26 May 1975

Dear Jean-Paul Sartre

THE MATTER WHICH I AM WRITING TO YOU ABOUT in this open letter is not exciting enough to appeal to the yellow press. In any case I am not turning to an anonymous sensationmonger but to you and through you to all my socialist, democratic and Communist friends who are also friends of Czechoslovakia; I am not addressing an appeal or a protest to you, but a single question which is of vital importance to me:

**Am I guilty?**

I have been preoccupied with this question since April 28 when the police conducted a seven-hour search of my home and confiscated over 1000 pages of my philosophical manuscripts. The justification given for the search was the suspicion that my flat concealed written evidence of the crime of "subversion." Therefore I must assume that I face the threat of a one to five-year prison sentence, as envisaged by Paragraph 98 of the Penal Code. I do not underestimate this threat by any means but I am more concerned about the fate of my manuscript.

For the past six years I have been existing in a peculiar dichotomy: I am and at the same time I am not. I am dead and yet I live. I have been reduced to a mere nothing as far as basic civil and human rights are concerned, yet I am endowed with an exceptional existence in regard to the care and attention of the