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INTERVIEW WITH VÁCLAV HAVEL

The Czechoslovak playwright Václav Havel, recently released from jail (Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. VIII, No. 3, March 1983, p. 1), granted an interview to Antoine Spire, member of the Paris-based Arthur London Committee. Below is a slightly abridged version of the Czech text prepared by Václav Havel (the interview was conducted in English).

A.S.: You were recently released after four years in prison. What is your actual legal status now?

V.H.: I was granted a so-called temporary court suspension (i.e., one without any deadlines) for reasons of health. Theoretically, the moment that the government physician finds me fit [I may be ordered to complete the balance of my prison term—I still have 10 months left]. But I do not believe that the Czechoslovak authorities intend—at least in the foreseeable future—to send me back to jail. In the long run, however, this will depend as usual more on the general political conditions than on me. I try to act cautiously, though. I am not eager to go back to jail, but naturally I do not plan to relinquish my views or change my attitudes.

A.S.: Your country's authorities insist that nobody in Czechoslovakia is jailed for his opinions.

V.H.: Not for his opinions but for airing them. However, what does it mean to have an opinion but not be allowed to express it? Don't opinions have to be expressed?

A.S.: You spent almost a month in hospital and you have been home now for a month. How have the police behaved in your regard?

A.S.: Have you ever felt hatred for your jailers?

V.H.: I do not know how to hate and I am thankful for it Hatred obscures insight and prevents the search for truth.

A.S.: You went to jail in the spring of 1979. We are now in 1983. You may thus be able to make more acute comparisons than those who were uninterruptedly out in the world during that period. How does the situation in your country seem to you?

V.H.: I do not dare to make a general evaluation or judgment for the time being. I can only speak of my initial and entirely subjective impressions and feelings. They—and I wish to emphasize this—surpass all my expectations. Charter 77 survived six and VONS five years of persecution. They continue to be active (even though their documents do not get the earlier publicity for many reasons). I am highly impressed by the number of unofficial cultural activities and the high level of private philosophical seminars, the large amount of samizdat literature, typewritten publications, etc. [Havel spoke of the "official" culture where increased pressure by the regime is indicative that "something is stirring" as in the 1960s when the process of "self-realization" and "self-liberation" started "somewhere between the official and unofficial culture" which "culminated in 1968, when the political authority was forced to accept . . . the state of the society and its spirit."] After 14 years in power, the regime is tired. Occasionally it shows—through some senseless acts—an almost inordinate phobia of any gust of fresh air I should also say that during my time in jail the licentiousness of the corrupt ruling circles increased, not to be compared with the life of the Roman aristocracy before the fall—Czech conditions are too confined for that—but with life under the Gierek regime [in Poland] in the final years of its rule. This licentiousness is in sharp contrast with the actual economic situation and the worries of ordinary consumers.

A.S.: You are viewed as the foremost Czechoslovak dissident or opposition activist. What do you think of this?

V.H.: I am not—and have never been—a politician, a professional revolutionary, or a professional "dissident," and never had any ambition to be one. I am a writer. I write what I want and not what others wish me to write. If I commit myself to a cause I do so because I feel it my natural human and civic duty I have specific views on many things, but do not follow any concrete ideology, doctrine, or even a political party or faction. I do not worship any icon, and even less any authority. If I serve anything it is my conscience. When I criticize my government, it is not because it is communist but because it is bad. Likewise, I would criticize a Social-Democratic, Christian-Socialist, or any other regime if it were to govern badly. I am not partisan to any establishment. . . . I am on the side of truth against untruth, on the side of sense against nonsense, on the side of justice against injustice.

A.S.: What is your opinion of the present peace movement in the West?

V.H.: As of now I do not have enough facts to be able to make an informed judgment. I can merely say that the young, long-haired people who demonstrate in various Western cities for peace and whom I had the opportunity to watch almost daily on the obligatory television newscasts are my brothers and sisters: They are not indifferent to the fate of the world Admittedly, their activities are probably superficial as are their slogans. They are overly bound by

local perspectives, not willing enough to think the question through, of what peace actually is, what it means, what its conditions are, what makes peace possible and what endangers it The question of war and peace is much discussed in Charter 77 circles and some intelligent things have been written about it [see Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. VII, No. 6, June 1982, p. 2; and No. 7/8, July/August 1982, p. 1]. It is an issue I became interested in when I was still in jail and the matter interests me even more now.

A.S.: Don't you have the impression that the U.S.S.R. is using the Western peace movement for its own purposes?

V.H.: When somebody in the West opposes Western armaments it would be utterly silly for the Soviet leadership not to applaud it. It seems to me, however, that the issue of who is right is more important than who applauds whom. This at least is my guiding line.

A.S.: What are your plans?

V.H.: Returning from jail is not an easy matter. Some even say that it is more difficult than entering it. I have to look around first, to adjust, to understand the world better . . . to speak with many people, read important texts, listen to music, see various plays—in brief, to learn to breathe the air of our times. Without that it is impossible for me to write. I would like to write a play. For six years I have not written any.

A.S.: Will your writing be influenced by your experience in prison?

V.H.: Undoubtedly, but I do not know how yet.

A.S.: Do you think that our talk may have some undesirable consequences for you?

V.H.: I don't know. I really do not know.

CHARTER 77 ON THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY

Charter 77 sent its report on the state of the economic situation in Czechoslovakia to the federal prime minister, Dr. Lubomír Štrougal (Charter 77 Document No. 4/83, January 22, 1983). In their covering letter, Charter spokespersons Dr. Radim Palouš, Anna Marvanová, and Jan Kozlík drew attention to "danger signs" in the country's economic evolution. They also stressed the fact that their conclusions were based solely on data published in the official "Statistical Yearbook." "But for the public the state of the economy in Czechoslovakia is painted in rosy colors," the letter noted; "warning signs are covered up by an optimism that solves nothing. When 20 years ago the national income dipped for the first time [since World War II], the drop was smaller than in 1981 and Czechoslovakia was then less technologically behind and less indebted than now In 1963 the downward trend was reversed following wide-ranging discussion and changes. Such a discussion of causes and remedies is taboo now." The letter predicted a further deterioration without reforms in which qualified specialists should be involved. [Following the "normalization" after 1968 a large number of qualified persons in the economic sector were purged as everywhere else and replaced by loyal but unqualified party hacks.]

In its first part, the approximately 2,700-word report contains data comparing the economic results of 1980 and 1981: Unused purchasing power increased (nominal income, +2.6%; consumer goods production, +2.3%; nominal wages in industry, +1.8%; productivity, +1.9%; but in the construction sector productivity declined by 0.6%). Inflationary pressures increased (money supply, +4.1%; savings, +5.9%). The number of completed apartment units dropped by more than 26,000 (31%). The nutritional value of edibles deteriorated and so did the quality of social and medical care. Czechoslovakia's infant mortality rate was twice to three times as high as that in advanced countries of the capitalist world. "The decline in the standard of living, including a chronic and growing shortage of consumer goods and services, is just the visible tip of an iceberg." National income dropped by 19.7 billion crowns (4.5%) and in current prices by 23.5 billion crowns (5%). The technological level of factory equipment declined. The forcible switch to heavy industry [a legacy from aping Stalinist industrialization in backward Soviet Union] resulted in changing the composition of industrial output in favor of the "iron concept" (consumer goods production now represents only 32 percent of total industrial output). Labor-intensive industries, traditionally the foreign currency earners, were replaced by material-intensive industries. Capital investment declined by 7 billion crowns (4.6%). Neglected were investments in environmental protection programs. River pollution control in the Czech regions [Bohemia and Moravia] slipped by 38 percent between 1976 and 1980. The quality of agricultural products also declined. "Compared with West Germany with approximately the same soil and climatic conditions, our grain yield was 15 percent lower and the potato yield almost 50 percent lower."

A foreign trade deficit was avoided thanks to the small trade surplus with Asian and African developing countries. (The overall trade balance showed a surplus of 1.4 billion crowns, but there was a deficit with the Socialist countries, including a 1.5-billion-crown deficit with the Soviet Union.) The terms of trade deteriorated. "For the same physical volume of imports we had to export 4.2 percent more in 1981 than in 1980. For the same volume of imported crude oil we had to pay 30 percent more in 1981. On the other hand, for almost the same number of exported trucks we collected just about the same amount of receipts as in 1981."

1982

In spite of lower targets, planned productivity was not reached. The obsolete design of Czechoslovak equipment caused a further loss of foreign markets. "New products represented only 16 percent of total industrial output and only a quarter of these items were of first-rate quality." The volume of trade with the non-Socialist countries dropped 5.6 percent in the first half of 1982. The planned saving of fuel and materials (especially metals) was not realized. "Stagnation continued . . . 23 percent of enterprises did not fulfill their production plans. The volume of construction was 4.6 percent lower . . . Labor productivity dropped by 3.5 percent." Of the 39 capital investment priority projects to be completed in the first half of the year only 23 (59%) were put into operation. Consumer goods supplies did not improve. "Meat production was 8.2 percent lower in the first half of the year compared to the corresponding period of 1981." Inflationary pressure continued. "Per capita income rose by 3.4 percent while consumer goods supplies increased by only 2.3 percent. Money supply and savings again grew faster than production and services."

"Published information on the year 1982 indicates that imbalances are growing and stagnation of the economy is continuing . . . The danger of further decline is possible."

CZECHOSLOVAKS IN ANGOLA

"Bandits detained Czechoslovak citizens," Rudé právo reported on March 16. "Angolan counterrevolutionaries took captive a group of our experts, including their families with children." The next day the paper explained that "64 Czechoslovak citizens (25 technicians, 3 electrical engineers, a woman physician, 2 nurses, 12 housewives, and 21 children) were seized by UNITA [National Union for the Total Independence of Angola] guerrillas in Alto Catubela in Benguela Province, 340 km [211 miles] south of the Angolan capital, Luanda.

According to earlier reports the Czechoslovaks had been sent to Angola after its Marxist government concluded an economic cooperation agreement with Prague. With the help of Cuban technicians the Czechoslovaks were in the process of putting into operation and running a cellulose plant and paper mill (Companha de Celulose e Papel). The Czechoslovak media unleashed a campaign which included attacks against Washington and "its racist allies in Pretoria, who plan to liquidate the liberation movement in Namibia and seize the rich resources of Angola [by supporting] UNITA, an organization created in 1964 and led by the 47-year-old Jonas Savimbi, a paid CIA agent" (Rudé právo, March 16, 1983).

The Prague government alerted the United Nations, the International Labor Organization, and the International Red Cross. It has sought help from Indira Gandhi and Daniel Moi, Kenya's president and chairman of the Organization of African Unity. The Cuban government called for "coordinating measures to free the kidnapped individuals" (Rudé právo, March 21, 1983). "Why do they keep silent?" the Czechoslovak media complained, accusing the Western countries of failing to defend the rights of the Czechoslovak citizens. "When security organs in Poland detain some people disturbing the peace or somebody in Czechoslovakia is summoned to answer an indictment for violating the law, a flood of articles against alleged chicanery appears in the West guided by an invisible conductor" (Rudé právo, March 22, 1983).

At the time this Newsletter goes to press, the captives have not been released after the Luanda government refused to make an offer to UNITA to exchange them for Western hostages.

PEACE MOVEMENT

As was reported, a major peace rally is scheduled for June 15 to 19, 1983, in Prague (Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. VIII, No. 1, January 1983, p. 2). Invited individuals and organizations from the West are to meet the government- and party-controlled "peace movements" to protest against war (independent organizations in communist countries are banned and prosecuted).

On March 29 Rudé právo's correspondent in Bonn, Vítězslav Havelíček, published an interview with Klaus Manhardt, "representative of one of the most important elements of the peace movement in the German Federal Republic." Asked why the West German peace movement is sometimes accused of "subservience to Moscow," Mr. Manhardt replied that the strategy is to intimidate and divert the public from supporting the movement. "Not without success sometimes. But our ranks are growing: Almost 4 million people signed the Krefeld Appeal. Our ranks include Christians, high-ranking army officers, scientists, and artists, not only communists. Whoever reads the Soviet peace proposals carefully understands why we ask the FRG government to take concrete steps. It is the government of our country. As its citizens we have the right to ask it to react to these proposals, not to reject them We welcome the opportunity to demonstrate unity of opinion about the peace movement on the international level . . . especially during this year's peace rally in Prague."

The Conference of Slovak Evangelical Bishops issued a peace declaration welcoming the Prague peace rally, and the government-sponsored Catholic Pacem in Terris held a "working conference" in Žilina, Central Slovakia, "to evaluate the preparatory work for the world peace rally against nuclear war to be held in Prague in June" (Katolícké noviny, March 20 and 27, 1983).

NEWS FROM NORMALIZED CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Trials and Persecution

On March 3, a court in Ostrava, Northern Moravia, sentenced the writer Jaromír Šavřda to 25 months in jail and the teacher Vladimír Liberda to 20 months in prison for "incitement against the republic, its social order, and its friendship with other socialist countries, especially the U.S.S.R." Incitement was defined as "acquiring, duplicating, and disseminating Charter 77 materials and other writings with antisocialist content" (including Czech-language books published abroad and works by Solzhenitsyn). A plea to suspend the jail term for reasons of health (of Šavřda) was rejected.

In the closing days of March a number of Franciscan friars (OSM) were detained and interrogated in various parts of Czechoslovakia. Religious samizdat literature was seized. Among those detained were František Kubíček, rector of St. Egidius Church in Prague, Father Moc in Krč, Chaplain František Pometlo in Plzeň (Pilsen), and also a layman, Jiří Tůma, in whose apartment "a large amount of religious literature" was confiscated.

Mrs. Drahomíra Fajtllová, 55, a Charter 77 signatory and friend of the family of Václav Havel, was arrested on March 2 in the mountain resort of Pec, Eastern Bohemia, for "disseminating hostile literature" among her fellow workers in a hotel.

Economic Crimes

According to Rudé právo of March 21, 30,651 cases of "economic crimes" were discovered in 1982 in the Czech Socialist Republic (Bohemia and Moravia). "Our community cannot tolerate individuals who enrich themselves at the expense of the whole society Especially dangerous are the cases of illicit enterprises where active groups are formed They take advantage of the problems our economy faces, especially the deficiencies in repair services." On February 28, 10 persons were sentenced in Prague to jail terms ranging from 4½ to 15 years for "stealing socialist property and doing unauthorized construction work."

Economic Briefs

The automobile plant in Mladá Boleslav, Central Bohemia, plans to produce a cheaper car, the Škoda 100. It should cost 42,000 crowns (the Škoda 105 sells for 53,000 crowns), equal to two years' earnings of a blue-collar worker (Zemědělské noviny, March 12, 1983).

Private gardening used to be out of favor as subversive of a socialist economy. Not anymore. According to Mladá fronta of March 22, the purchase of fruit from private gardens is expected to increase from 1,447 metric tons in 1982 to 4,500 metric tons in 1983 and of vegetables from 3,700 to 5,550 metric tons.