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# Fostering Communist Elites: Cold War Czechoslovakia's Foreign Student Program

Emily Hackett

*Connecticut College*, [emihackett@gmail.com](mailto:emihackett@gmail.com)

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The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

Fostering Communist Elites:  
Cold War Czechoslovakia's Foreign Student Program

An honors thesis presented by  
Emily Hackett

To the Department of Slavic Studies  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
Honors

Connecticut College  
New London, Connecticut

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Advisor: Petko Ivanov  
First Reader: Laura Little  
Second Reader: Eileen Kane

## **Abstract**

During the Cold War, educational policy became a strategic and consequential avenue of soft power. Countries on both sides of the East-West divide developed travel and study exchanges to cultivate relationships with other countries, and to prepare future generations for work in an increasingly internationalized world. Despite supporting a fear of foreigners and isolating people from travel outside of the Communist bloc, the Soviet Union sponsored select students from other countries to study in its institutions of higher education.

This thesis aims to provide insight into the structure and events of the Czechoslovak foreign student program with the Soviet Union between 1946 and 1970. The goal is to exemplify how transnational education was used as a diplomatic tool for constructing a new Communist elite that would remain loyal to the continued expansion of the Soviet internationalist project. The Czechoslovak foreign student program shows how education took on a bureaucratically complicated, yet strategic role in the westward expansion of the Soviet Union. While not always successful in producing ideologically driven Communists that supported Soviet hegemony, this educational contact between the two countries is an example of how the USSR used soft power to lock in its control over the Eastern bloc.

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## Contents

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	ii
Introduction.....	1
Scholarly Literature on Soft Power and Cross-Border Exchange.....	3
Background Research .....	6
Sources and Future Research .....	9
Chapter 1: Launching the Foreign Student Program .....	12
Reforms in Soviet Higher Education .....	13
Sovietization of Czechoslovak Higher Education.....	16
The Growth of the Foreign Student Program.....	19
A Conditional Ticket to the USSR.....	25
Chapter 2: The Foreign Student Program on Trial: Monitoring Life of Students in the USSR .....	31
Arriving in the USSR .....	35
The <i>Zemliachestvo</i> .....	39
Zimmerman On Trial.....	43
The <i>Zemliachestvo</i> on Trial .....	48
Chapter 3: Forming the New Elite .....	56
The Placements.....	58
“Future Functionaries and Future Screwups” .....	61
The Functionaries.....	62
Dušan Spáčil .....	62
Václav Malý.....	64
The Screw-Ups .....	65
Zdeněk Mlynář .....	65
Radoslav Selucký.....	68
Luděk Pekárek.....	70
From the 50s to the 70s .....	73
Profiles of Graduate Students During <i>Normalizace</i> .....	73
Keeping the Peace.....	81
Conclusion .....	83
Appendix.....	86

Document 1 .....	86
Document 2 .....	90
Bibliography .....	91
Archives .....	91
Primary and Secondary Sources.....	91



## Introduction

Students have held large amounts of power in history as surrogates of change. Educational institutions and the people that ensure their functioning, have always possessed a unique ability to shape not only the intellectual development of a society, but also the values and ideologies that get passed down through the generations. In the deeply divided political landscape of the Cold War, when ideology was one of the most consequential weapons employed between East and West, education was unsurprisingly capitalized upon. And in the context of this international ideological conflict, cross-border scholarly exchange and the movement of young people across borders took on a newfound meaning and importance.

In March of 1946, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill formalized the Cold War understanding of the divide between East and West with the “iron curtain.” Countries on both sides of this ideological divide recognized the power of encouraging their populations to use different kinds of weapons in this war: their minds, their intellect, their human connections. Less than six months after the Iron Curtain speech, in August 1946, the USSR passed the resolution for their foreign student program, which was the same month that the United States launched its flagship Fulbright program.<sup>1</sup> As the main superpowers on either side of the iron curtain, the United States and the Soviet Union were committed both to restoring order across the European continent after WWII and to spreading their ideologies. This ideological conflict made “soft power” an essential tool in the competition for global dominance. In particular, the United States and Soviet Union saw an opportunity

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<sup>1</sup> Applebaum, Rachel. 2019. *Empire of Friends Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 53.

in cross-border education to cultivate influence and power in the countries they wanted as their allies.

To export the Soviet model of thinking and living, the USSR created educational agreements with its so-called “satellite countries” in Eastern Europe. These agreements enabled students from these countries to study in Soviet institutions of higher education. One year after the launch of the USSR’s foreign student program, influential Soviet politician Andrei Zhdanov would further solidify the ideological divide with his two “camps” (September 1947).<sup>2</sup> As the divide between East and West grew, and with it, the Soviet regime’s policies for isolating people from travel outside of the Communist bloc, these new transnational education programs gave young people the opportunity expose themselves to the life and political system of the USSR, which they were supposed to use as their model for implementing socialist reform at home.

The USSR set out to build its bloc of Eastern European allies after driving out Nazi forces, an act which it framed as a liberation. Soviet-aligned governments implemented educational policies to strengthen national ideological agendas of Communist indoctrination and cooperation within the “empire of friends.” The USSR also used its foreign student program as a tool to expand Soviet control over the wider international community. Apart from expanding their empire on the European continent, the Soviet Union also actively sponsored students from countries in Africa, Asia, and South America, with the goal of spreading socialist revolution to these parts of the world as well. The focus

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<sup>2</sup> Zhdanov, Andrei. "New Aspects of World Conflict: The International Situation." Seventeen Moments in Soviet History, University of Michigan.

of this thesis, however, will be on the foreign student program with the socialist bloc, specifically with Czechoslovakia.

### Scholarly Literature on Soft Power and Cross-Border Exchange

Educational exchange, as it is presented in this work is only one of the ways in which “soft power” manifested itself in the Cold War. The role of soft power in the Cold War is a relatively new subject of study, and while the scope of the research for this project could not cover all the literature on this topic, I will discuss here the scholarly works that contributed to my understanding of how education and diplomacy intersected during the Cold War.

“Soft power” can be understood as any effort, policy or larger initiative that attempts to assert influence and control in a way that is not violent. The creativity and oftentimes subtleness of a country’s soft power efforts are quite remarkable. One of the background texts for this project, *Cold War Crossings: International Travel and Exchange Across the Soviet Bloc: 1940s-1960s*, presents different accounts of strategic cross-border encounters that were meant to facilitate cooperation on, or export of, certain information. The volume includes accounts of Polish peasants visiting Soviet collective farms as “observers,” East German specialists being sent to Albania as “foreign specialists,” and a failed attempt at a US-Soviet film project.<sup>3</sup> All of these accounts are presented as examples for better understanding two central questions posed at the introduction of this book: “What were the consequences of attempts to homogenize the [Soviet] bloc and to export its

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<sup>3</sup> Babiracki, Patryk, Kenyon Zimmer, Vladislav Zubok, Michael David-Fox, Nick Rutter, Elidor Mëhili, Constantin Katsakiroris, and Marsha Siefert. 2014. *Cold War Crossings International Travel and Exchange Across the Soviet Bloc, 1940s-1960s* College Station: Texas A&M University Press.

“soft power”?” and “How did the gap between the realities and expectations about “real socialism” affect both the pilgrims from outside and the people inside?”<sup>4</sup>

Many of these accounts reveal shortcomings in what Michael David Fox discusses in his chapter as the “Stalinist superiority complex” that assumed and advertised all things Soviet (industries, culture, political education, etc.) as being the best to follow and replicate. A key idea of this superiority complex was the stress on higher culture, which had its origins in the mid-1930s Soviet *kul'turnost* campaigns. Translating to “culturedness” it encapsulated governmental efforts for improving the education system and making it more accessible to peasant and worker classes of Soviet society. A major success of this campaign was the mass increase in literacy. Important also was the “cult of literature and high culture”. Overall, these efforts were meant to combat “backwardness” to raise Soviet society to a higher level, thus perpetuating the so-called superiority complex that would become central to the USSR’s relations with the Eastern bloc after World War II.<sup>5</sup> David Fox also points out that cross-border encounters played a crucial role in “self-understandings throughout the communist second world.”<sup>6</sup> Applying this idea to educational exchange, this thesis begins to answer how Czechoslovak students were pushed to realize these “self-understandings” by studying in Soviet higher education institutions.

Two of the authors that have done relevant research on the greater foreign student program with socialist countries are Patryk Babiracki and Benjamin Tromly. In *Imperial Heresies: Polish Students in the Soviet Union 1948-1957* Babiracki presents the foreign

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<sup>4</sup> Babiracki, et al., *Cold War Crossings*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Babiracki, et al. *Cold War Crossings*, 14-35.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

student program as a project that inadvertently undermined Soviet-Polish relations because it failed to “maintain a uniform, positive and convincing vision of empire” for students.<sup>7</sup> After providing many accounts of how Soviet officials and citizens alienated Eastern European students, Benjamin Tromly also concludes in *Brother or Other? East European Students in Soviet Higher Education Establishments* that “despite the propaganda tropes of socialist internationalism, the reception of East European students in Soviet higher education highlighted division rather than unity within the bloc.”<sup>8</sup>

While there is less literature focusing specifically on the Czechoslovak foreign student program with the Soviet Union, Rachel Applebaum provides perhaps the most comprehensive account of the Czechoslovak experience in her book *Empire of Friends Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia*. The inspiration for this thesis stems from this book. Applebaum, as many other scholars have, frames the foreign student program as a part of the greater “friendship project” in which the Soviet Union aimed to create loyal socialist allies, with the greater goal of creating a “cohesive socialist world.”<sup>9</sup> Applebaum uses archival research that brings greater visibility to personal accounts from students in the Czechoslovak foreign student communities. And some of these students went on to be well-known members of the Czechoslovak political and intellectual elite.

Applebaum similarly recognizes many shortcomings in the Czechoslovak foreign student program, “ranging from the material, to the intellectual, to the social” that

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<sup>7</sup> Babiracki, Patryk. 2007. "Imperial Heresies: Polish Students in the Soviet Union, 1948–1957", 234.

<sup>8</sup> Tromly, Benjamin. 2014. "Brother or Other? East European Students in Soviet Higher Education Establishments." *European History Quarterly* 44, 94.

<sup>9</sup> Applebaum, *Empire of Friends*, 2.

prevented students from learning what they were meant to learn while in the USSR, such as “how to build Soviet-style factories or run Komsomol (Soviet Youth League) meetings.”<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Applebaum argues that “it was the very points of exclusion that provided the students with the unexpected opportunity to construct themselves as loyal subjects of Stalin’s new empire.”<sup>11</sup> The main evidence for this argument is presented through the denunciation and self-criticism practices that students engaged in while studying in the USSR, which is a central part of this thesis as well.

### Background Research

Applebaum’s investigation of the friendship project through the lens of the Czechoslovak student community in the USSR prompted the following research questions to be developed for this thesis: How did educational policy in the 1940s and 1950s influence study abroad to the Soviet Union from Czechoslovakia and how did that, in turn, shape these students’ positions in society leading up to 1968? What were the different approaches, designs, and ambitions of this program? How did the Czechoslovak and Soviet governments manage security and indoctrination in regard to these programs? And how well did the foreign student program help to create the new elite in the socialist countries upon students’ return?

After Nazi forces were driven out by Soviet forces in May 1945, Czechoslovakia entered the relatively short era of the Third Republic, during which there was a coalition government comprised of four Czech and two Slovak political parties. The KSČ

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

(*Komunistická strana Československa*) or Czechoslovak Communist Party had the greatest power and began to develop close alliances with Moscow, including on cultural and educational fronts. As the relationship with the USSR intensified, so did leader of the Soviet Union Joseph Stalin's push for "sovietizing" institutions across the Eastern bloc for the purpose of controlling these countries' governments and ensuring their acquiescence to Soviet hegemony.

In Chapter 1, the sovietization of Czechoslovak higher education is discussed. The information presented on this process heavily relies on John Connelly's *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech and Polish Higher Education*. Here it will be argued that the Czechoslovak foreign student program served as a tool for exporting the sovietization process to Czechoslovakia. Then, the launch and growth of the foreign student program will be explained, as well as the notion of a "conditional ticket," which refers to the responsibilities that young Czechoslovaks had as recipients of a joint scholarship from the Soviet and Czechoslovak governments.

In February of 1948, the KSČ assumed full control of the Czechoslovak government. The conditions under which the so-called "friendship project" developed seemed to become more and more intertwined with mechanisms for controlling and monitoring anything that might undermine the takeover of Communism and Soviet power. The foreign student program was developed in a period of high political skepticism from Moscow, which resulted in the implementation of Stalinist terror tactics. The implementation of this terror was at its peak in Czechoslovakia from 1948 until Stalin's death in 1953. In line with this volatile political environment, there were clear control mechanisms for monitoring

Czechoslovak students' lives when they were in the USSR to ensure that they were fulfilling their duties both as students and as young ambassadors of their country.

Through an examination of correspondences between the Czechoslovak embassy in Moscow and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague, Chapter 2 examines how the foreign student program was just as much a matter of education as it was of politics and diplomacy. Documents outlining an interrogation of the main student officer for the Czechoslovak students, as well as a self-criticism trial in the Czechoslovak national student association help to shed light on how political circumstances in Czechoslovakia negatively affected the relations between Soviet officials and Czechoslovak students in the USSR.

In support of Applebaum's argument however, the denunciation and self-criticism tactics that embassy workers and students employed to counteract the accusations against them, point to the underlying success of the foreign student program to make Czechoslovak students more 'Soviet people'. Being a foreign student forced young Czechoslovaks to learn how to use Soviet monitoring and control tools to check the political and ideological loyalties of other students. These were practices that they were able to bring back with them to Czechoslovakia and implement in their workplaces, thus bolstering the network of monitoring that was crucial for Communist governments' survival across the socialist bloc.

Building off this argument, Chapter 3 analyzes some of the fields of study pursued by Czechoslovak students and discusses the further success of the foreign student program in systematically placing Soviet graduates of higher education into career positions that aided in the "sovietization" of Czechoslovakia's institutions and industries. Next, while included biographies of some well-known Czechoslovak graduates of Soviet higher education reveal that the foreign student program often failed in creating *loyal* Communist



elites, it still provided an initial level of prestige or ‘symbolic capital’ that allowed these graduates to rise to some of the highest positions in their careers.

Chapter 3 ends with an analysis of the screening profiles of some graduate students sent to the USSR in 1970, after the 1968 Prague Spring undermined the Soviet-Czechoslovak friendship project. These profiles emphasize how sending students continued to be utilized as an important tool for ‘keeping the peace’ between the two countries. People who had proven themselves to be loyal cadre workers amongst the “right-wing opportunistic and counterrevolutionary forces” could be sent to the USSR to prove that Czechoslovakia was still committed to a socialist society and their alliance with the USSR.

### Sources and Future Research

This project added to the scholarship on the Czechoslovak foreign student program with the inclusion of previously unanalyzed archival sources from both the Czech National Archive (*Národní archiv*) and the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Czech Republic (*Archiv ministerstva zahraničních věcí*, hereafter MZV), for which I traveled to Prague in the summer of 2022 and winter of 2023, respectively. Documents used from the National Archive provide lists of Czechoslovak graduates of Soviet higher education institutions, including their courses of study and subsequent career placements. Included also are agreements between the Czechoslovak and Soviet governments for the foreign student program. While similar documents from the National Archive were used by Applebaum in her work, this thesis deviates with the analysis of a “Proposal for the placement of graduates of Soviet higher education institutions,” as well as the full translation of the booklet of the “Rights and Responsibilities of Czechoslovak scholarship

recipients in the USSR and people's democratic republics" (See Appendix). Additionally, I analyze in the depth the screening profiles of Czechoslovak graduate students sent to the USSR in 1970. These sources come from the archive's Ministry of Education collection.

From the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the transcript of the Moscow *zemliachestvo* plenary meeting overlaps with Applebaum's research. My analysis of Jaromír Zimerman's reports provides more detailed information about the process of preparing and monitoring the foreign student program, as well the system of communication between embassies in Prague and Moscow and the students at the university. Documents on Jaromír Zimerman's interrogation and his self-criticism are also new additions. To provide a clear picture of what the Soviet government envisioned the role of the *zemliachestvo* being, a full translation of the "Temporary status of the *zemliachestvo*" outlining the purpose of the organization, is also provided in the Appendix. Finally, in addition to names of Czechoslovak students provided in *Empire of Friends*, I pulled the names of two Soviet graduates from the archival documents— Luděk Pekárek and Václav Malý, people for which I was able to find brief and credible biographies online that outlined their career trajectories as graduates of Soviet higher education institutions.

Further research that would strengthen this project would be the incorporation of interviews with graduates of Soviet higher education institutions, which would provide lived experience to the information about the program. Furthermore, this project lacks official quantitative data that indicates how many of the elites in Czechoslovakia were graduates of Soviet higher education. Additionally, while the research process did include an excursion to the Slovak National Archive in Bratislava, the project in its current form was not able to incorporate the sources from this archive. Thus, a continuation of this

project should provide a fairer representation of both the Czech and Slovak perspective by utilizing these sources.

As I will argue, secondary literature on this topic, memoirs, as well as archival documents from the Czechoslovak government reveal a carefully planned out system for using education as a tool for strengthening national ideological agendas of Communist indoctrination. From its foundation, the program was seen by the Czechoslovak communist state as a tool for creating a new and politically conscious elite that could pass on Soviet technical know-how, political ideologies, and societal values. The policies, rules, and tactics of control that were attached to educational opportunities in the Soviet Union, as well as the human connections that were forged, reveal how study abroad was used to catalyze the formation of the socialist society that the USSR aimed to lock in across the states in the Eastern bloc.

## Chapter 1: Launching the Foreign Student Program

There is extensive scholarship on the process of “sovietization” of Czechoslovak higher education, and the foreign student program played a role in this process. Far from being a smooth transition, Czechoslovakia’s higher education system was at first frequently at odds with the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (*Komunistická strana Československa*, hereinafter KSČ). The universities were some of the most uncooperative institutions when it came to Communist reform, and the consequences for such disloyalty came as a drastic blow to the autonomy of education throughout the Stalinist period. Postwar changes in the Czechoslovak educational system reflected Soviet approaches to higher education in the preceding decades. Czechoslovakia’s foreign student program can be understood as an extension, even an enhancement, of Soviet reform policies that dominated the world of Czechoslovak higher education in the years following World War II.

Understandably, the government would seek a solution to the rocky start that universities had when refusing Communism into its ranks. If enough pressure and control was exerted, the university was the perfect place to collectively influence those members of society that, through their choice to study, would eventually go on to make up the elite strata of society. Since the Soviets’ goal was to internationalize the spread of socialism, creating student surrogates through the foreign student program was a strategic step to achieving this goal. Considering that the program was established at the height of a more isolationist regime however, it was necessary to implement strict policies of control. Although in some ways effective, such restrictive policies also posed problems to the effective growth of a project so international in nature.

This chapter will first provide a brief overview of the nature of Czechoslovak higher education at the time of the foreign student program's launch. The reforms that Soviet higher education underwent in the 1920s and early 1930s when Stalin rose to power will be paralleled with the reforms that altered the nature of Czechoslovak higher education twenty years later, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The foreign student program was born during a time when the Stalinist regime was figuring out how to ensure the loyalty of Eastern European governments to the Soviet government. Foreign students' educational training in the USSR thus became a tool for the export of Soviet models to countries across Eastern Europe.

### Reforms in Soviet Higher Education

Following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Soviet higher education underwent years of trial-and-error reforms. Education was to be made more accessible to people from worker and peasant backgrounds, which prompted initial policies like abolishing admission requirements and getting rid of titles and rank distinctions between professors. It also led to the establishment of "worker faculties" (*rabfaki*) which allowed people from worker backgrounds to gain a high school education in three to four years.<sup>1</sup> While this sentiment was admirable, the reform process was periled by contradictions. The reintroduction of admission requirements in 1923 led to the increase of students from "bourgeois backgrounds," in 1924 students from those unwanted backgrounds were

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<sup>1</sup> Connelly, John. 2000. *Captive University the Sovietization of East German, Czech and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 24-27.

purged, but in 1925, new centralized admission requirements were reintroduced, thus alienating the working classes again.

Coupled with the need to strengthen education, was the desire to purge both the unwanted class backgrounds, as well as the disciplines considered to be counterproductive to the economic growth of the country. To oust the disciplines classified as bourgeois and potentially dangerous to the implementation of Marxist-Leninist theory, disciplines like law faculties were replaced by broader “social science” faculties, while many humanities and social science professors were also purged from their institutions.<sup>2</sup>

In his review of Soviet education policy up until 1935, Jon Lauglo analyzes this named process of ‘routinization’ or the increase of bureaucratic controls as an inevitable product of revolutionary efforts to reorder society around Marxist-Leninism and the hyper industrial nature of Stalinism. “Leninism implied a conscious and complete reordering of society by a small elite, the Communist Party. This implied centralized control.”<sup>3</sup> And the fact that the local Soviet Education Department gained the authority to dismiss teachers in 1923, was only the beginning of what would come to be a very utilitarian and exclusionary approach to Soviet higher education policy under the leadership of Joseph Stalin.<sup>4</sup>

With the rise of Stalin in 1924 and the beginning of the First Five Year Plan in 1928, the government completely redefined what it meant to get a university education. In an environment of rapid industrial growth, the need for technical specialists increased, and with it, the policies for controlling how the education system would facilitate that. This did

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<sup>2</sup> Connelly, *Captive University*, 24-27.

<sup>3</sup> Lauglo, Jon. 1988. "Soviet Education Policy 1917-1935: From Ideology to Bureaucratic Control ." *Oxford Review of Education* 14 (3): 285-299.293.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 294.

lead to a boom in educational institutions, but with a clear focus on areas of study that would support this industrial project. Quite remarkably, in 1929-30 there were 152 higher education institutes and by 1931-32, an impressive number of 701.

John Connelly argues that Stalin's policies in this era were counterproductive for educational reform "because of [their] radicalism and amateurishness."<sup>5</sup> Over the course of the first Five Year Plan, many of the policies that gave preference to the working class were abandoned, the hierarchy of professors was returned, and some universities recovered as well. These universities mostly only taught pure sciences however, while humanities and social sciences were housed in separate special institutes.

Perhaps the greatest indicator of how bureaucratic control permeated into the educational sphere were the purges of professors and students who were considered to have the wrong views or social backgrounds. On paper, the Soviets were most interested in transferring the power in society to the working class, which called for policies that would incentivize this class to enter educational programs. At the same time however, the radical policies for building up the composition of universities was counteracted by a push to oust untrusted faculty. Between 1929-30, 219 of 1,062 professors were ousted from their position, despite a growing need for educators, and many were subjected to public trials of self-criticism. Self-criticism was a significant mechanism of control during Stalin's rule, one that will be talked about later in relation to the foreign student program as well. <sup>6</sup>

Despite all these changes, by the mid-1930s, the Soviet higher education system had become characterized by "central direction, subordination to state planning for the needs

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<sup>5</sup> Connelly, *Captive University*, 294.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

of cadre training, thorough politicization, and promotion of upward social mobility (*vydvizhenie*).<sup>7</sup> These characteristics of the Soviet higher education system strongly influenced the Czechoslovak higher education model when the Soviets started intervening in 1945.

### Sovietization of Czechoslovak Higher Education

As the KSČ gained power in Czechoslovakia after 1945, it began to address the affairs of educational institutions. Czechoslovak universities' attitudes to Communism were very rocky in these postwar years. While many in Czechoslovak society, as well as in the Czechoslovak intelligentsia were ready for a socialist revolution as a solution to the problems in the post-war environment, universities were slow to align themselves with the Communist Party. In 1947, this led to what Connelly terms as "assaults" on universities. In this year, Czechoslovak Minister of Information, Václav Kopecký, said in his speech to students at Charles University,

After the revolution we made the mistake of admitting practically everybody to universities. Now we must enroll people who have a positive attitude to the government and to the new order.

...For the sake of progress, it is necessary that the worldview of dialectical materialism take first place at universities.... Our universities often give less education than a worker received from reading Communist newspapers. You are welcome to your opinion but do not oppose us, for anticommunism is high treason.<sup>8</sup>

Universities would become "shop floors" and students and professors would be required to "work".<sup>9</sup> While Kopecký's words came at a time when Czechoslovakia still

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<sup>7</sup> Connelly, *Captive University*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 115; Today Kopecký is notorious for his demagogic cultural and ideological policies and is considered one of the major criminals of the postwar Communist government.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.



possessed a democratic constitution, the government did very little to counteract his scarily authoritarian words. The students, however, were still in the spirit to fight back because as Connelly puts it “like the earlier generation that took to the streets of Prague in November 1939, they thought of themselves as the nation’s conscience.”<sup>10</sup> In response to Kopecký’s words, the student union in Brno staunchly stated,

University students have always fought against Nazism and fascism and will continue to stand up against every kind of totalitarianism, no matter in what form. Our patriotism is not identical with membership in a political party. Similarly, we do not consider opposition to any political party to be high treason ... Students will decide their worldview themselves. Are we no longer living in a democratic state?<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, the people defending these democratic ideals would end up losing the fight. After the February 1948 coup d’etat in the Czechoslovak government that allowed the Communist Party to come to full power, universities, with their background of dissent, became one of the main targets for forced reform. The main totalitarian structure that worked to establish Communism across all Czechoslovak institutions were “action committees” or political bodies of influential people appointed by the Communist government to remove “reactionaries” from institutions. The leading people in these university committees were students themselves. In Prague, the Central Action Committee had “more than a dozen students, several workers and five Communist professors.”<sup>12</sup>

Central control was of particular significance in the Czechoslovak case of transferring the Soviet education system. Much of the reform work fell on local Czechoslovak functionaries who had absorbed both the logistical and the ideological

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 127.

knowledge for the task through their own first-hand experiences in the Soviet Union during the war. These functionaries were dedicated to transferring the Soviet model of education, but since their knowledge in this sphere was not up to date, they had to create contact with the Soviet Ministry of Education to understand what the model actually was.<sup>13</sup>

While gathering materials such as curriculum plans or textbooks was an important part of this export, so was the scholarly exchange of the actual people leading scholarship in academic disciplines. Thus, many Soviet academics were invited to visit institutions in the socialist bloc. Unsurprisingly, socialist bloc academics did not receive a reciprocal invitation. The students from these countries, however, considered to be the young and malleable idealists, did have the option of securing tickets to the USSR.

Throughout these turbulent reform years, when the Czechoslovak government was in an ideological power struggle with universities, the Soviet Union was shaping its foreign student program with Czechoslovakia and other socialist bloc countries. Even though the Stalin regime employed isolationist policies that included an overall suspicion towards foreigners, students from socialist bloc countries possessed the potential of an idealistic youth seeking guidance on how to implement socialism in their own country. Training in Soviet educational institutions would give them the firsthand experience of Soviet society that would solidify their loyalty as qualified cadre workers. And the Czechoslovak government, motivated to prove its allyship to the Soviet role model and guided to believe that Soviet institutions provided the best training for its students, took advantage of the opportunity to send their citizens to gain a prestigious education.

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<sup>13</sup> Connelly, *Captive University*, 47.

Upon their return, Soviet educated students could ultimately provide a solution to the ideological predicament with educational institutions at home. Between 1951-1954, many Soviet-educated Czechoslovak citizens were strategically sought after by the Ministry of Education to be placed in higher education institutions throughout Czechoslovakia. Alongside broad areas of study important for education such as psychology, pedagogy, physical education, and mathematics, Czechoslovak students were sent to study dialectical materialism, the history of Soviet nations, as well as the lingua franca of the Soviet Union: Russian language and literature.<sup>14</sup> These were strategic disciplines, meant to expand the knowledge of Soviet ideology, culture and language amongst Eastern bloc populations.

### The Growth of the Foreign Student Program

The Soviet Central Committee passed the resolution for its foreign student program in time for the first post-WWII students from abroad to arrive in the fall of 1946.<sup>15</sup> Small numbers of students from the Eastern bloc piloted the program in the 1946-47 school year, and between 1947 and 1948, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania and Albania were amongst the first countries from the Eastern bloc to sign official agreements for sending their students to the USSR.<sup>16</sup>

On December 10th, 1947, representatives from the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Bureau of Accounting, and Ministry of Education and Enlightenment met to discuss the negotiations with the Soviet government for formalizing

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<sup>14</sup> Národní archiv (NA), kart. 1709, sig. 26, Ministerstvo školství a kultury, Praha, "Seznam absolventů z SSSR" [List of graduates from the USSR], 1951-1954.

<sup>15</sup> Applebaum, Rachel. 2019. *Empire of Friends Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 52.

<sup>16</sup> NA kart. 1708, sig. 26, Ministerstvo školství a kultury, Praha. "Dohoda o studiu čl. občanů v SSSR" [Agreement for the study of Czechoslovak citizens in the USSR, 26 April 1948], č. 87.731/I-3/48

the growth of their foreign student program.<sup>17</sup> Part of what was being negotiated was the proposal for the agreement with the USSR on Czechoslovak scholarships recipients. This proposal states that the very first cohort of 20 Czechoslovak students that were sent to the USSR in the fall of 1946 were chosen by a “selection committee” and that scholarships were awarded based on the “numbers and academic fields recommended by the Soviet government.”<sup>18</sup>

The Soviet government ultimately expected to have the last word when it came to scholarly exchange between the two countries. Not to mention that in these early years of the program’s development, exchange was only part of the conversation on paper. In 1946, the two governments initially came to an agreement of reciprocity that would have enabled twenty students to travel from the Soviet Union to Czechoslovakia, as well. Yet the Soviets ended up fully supporting the first cohort of Czechoslovak scholarship recipients without sending their own students, thus gaining nothing explicit in return.

Patryk Babiracki and Rachel Applebaum have both written about the risks that cross-border scholarly exchange posed in the late 1940s and early 1950s at the height of Stalinist isolationism and policies of xenophobia. In a society weakened by WWII, the Soviet government had to be extra careful to ensure that they would live up to the expectations fueling the main Czechoslovak propaganda slogan at the time: “The Soviet Union is Our Model.” Cross-border travel would allow for an experiential education that

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<sup>17</sup> NA, kart. 1708, sig. 26, Ministerstvo školství a kultury, Praha, “O poradě konané dne 10. Prosince 1947 o 10. hod na ministerstvu školství a osvěty v Praze [About the meeting held on 10 December 1947 at 10 o’clock at the Ministry of Education and Enlightenment in Prague] č.j. A 289.603/47-VI/4

<sup>18</sup> NA, kart. 1708, sig. 26, Ministerstvo školství a kultury, Praha, “Návrh dohody mezi vládou Svazu sovětských socialistických republik a vládou Československé republiky o studiu občanů Československé republiky na vysokých školách v SSSR a jejich vydržování” [Proposal for the agreement between the USSR and Czechoslovak Republic about the study of Czechoslovak citizens in higher schools of the USSR and their sustainment, 12 November 1947, pg. 1] č.j. A 294.879/47-VI/4

facilitated the eventual export of this model to the Eastern bloc, but it also enabled something more dangerous: comparison.

Nonetheless, in the report from a December 1947 ministry meeting, the Czechoslovak government admits that sending Czechoslovak students “must be perceived as our own interest since in the current circumstances it cannot be expected that the Soviets would be interested in solving the question of reciprocity.”<sup>19</sup> This meeting was taking place at the end of 1947, two months before the February 1948 coup d’etat. In the months building up to this turning point in Czechoslovak-Soviet relations, it would have been especially dangerous for Soviet students to be studying in a country that had still not fully committed to Communism.

The language that the report uses shows a strong belief in foreign education’s power to strengthen the unstable relationship with the USSR: “Sending students to the USSR especially for the study of technical fields but also for language is relevant not only for our domestic need in the context of constructing our state and Slavic course in our foreign politics, but also in the interest of our students for getting to know our biggest Slavic ally.”<sup>20</sup>

After the initial 1946 cohort, the Czechoslovak government got to work to formalize the agreement with its “biggest Slavic ally.” While moves to strengthen Communist power in the country were well underway, this educational policy that was born before the KSČ’s assumption of power was initially motivated by a greater diplomatic interest in a common Slavic identity, rather than in a common socialist one.

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<sup>19</sup> NA, kart. 1708, sig. 26, Ministerstvo školství a kultury, Praha; “Mezistátní dohoda o čs. stipendistech SSSR - zápis o poradě” [Intergovernmental agreement about Czechoslovak scholarship recipients in the USSR - minutes of the meeting, 19 December 1947, pg.2] A 289.603/47, VI, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

In the initial negotiations, the Soviet government agreed to take in 60 students for each academic year until a maximum of 240 Czechoslovak students was reached over the course of the next four years. There is conflicting data in terms of the exact numbers of students that were studying in Soviet higher education over the years, but Valerii Aleksevich's book "The Training of Personnel of Foreign Countries in Soviet Universities" provides comprehensive data about the numbers of students entering and leaving Soviet higher education institutions. Combining these numbers from those provided by reports from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the estimated growth of the Czechoslovak foreign student program can be followed in the table below.

Year	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	Total growth over 5 years
Czechoslovak students admitted/graduated	-	20/8*	60/	61/	103/17	126/10	370/27
Total number Czechoslovak students in country <sup>21</sup>		20 <sup>22</sup>	72 <sup>23</sup>	133	236	324 <sup>24</sup>	----
Total number of students from entire socialist bloc in USSR	10	504	1265	1981	3686	5287	----

<sup>21</sup> Calculated by me based on accepted/released numbers by Belov in first row and numbers determined from Czechoslovak reports.

<sup>22</sup> NA kart. 1708, sig. 26, Ministerstvo školství a kultury, Praha. "Ministerstvo financí: Mezistátní dohoda o československých stipendistech v SSSR" [Ministry of Finance: Intergovernmental agreement about Czechoslovak scholarship recipients in the USSR, 13 May 1948] č. 102.246/48-I/6

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí (hereinafter AMZV, Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, Czech Republic), TO-SSSR Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17 o. 18. "Zpráva o čs. stipendistech v SSSR" [Report on čs. scholarship recipients in the USSR, 30 April 1951]

Year	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	Total over 5 years
Czechoslovak students	164/39	304/64	330/99	235/103	210/171	1243/476
Total number Czechoslovak students in country <sup>25</sup>	478*	743*	1009*	1145*	1252*	----
Total number students from socialist bloc in USSR	7425	9889 <sup>26</sup>	12045	13628	15002	----

**Table 1**<sup>27</sup>

According to a 1948 report by the Ministry of Finance, 72 Czechoslovak students studied in the USSR in the 1947-1948 school year (12 remained from the previous year), and 120 were projected to study between 1948-1949.<sup>28</sup> Belov's research shows that 133 students studied in the USSR in 1948. Financial projections for how much it would cost the Czechoslovak government to send its students based on the agreement that each government would pay 50% of the scholarships, were estimated on the assumption that by 1950, there would be 240 scholarship recipients in various stages of their four-to-five-year studies.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, by 1949, Belov's data shows that around 236 Czechoslovak students were in the USSR. Based on a report given by scholarship recipients' main embassy

<sup>25</sup> Calculated by me based on accepted/released numbers by Belov in first row and numbers determined in Czechoslovak reports.

<sup>26</sup> Rest of row recalculated by me. Calculations in Belov's book determined to be wrong. See: Белов, В. А. 2003. *Подготовка Кадров Для Зарубежных Стран В Советских Вузах*. Kaliningrad: Издательство Калининградского государственного университета, 212-213.

<sup>27</sup> Белов, В. А. 2003. *Подготовка Кадров Для Зарубежных Стран В Советских Вузах*. Kaliningrad: Издательство Калининградского государственного университета, 212-213.

<sup>28</sup> Most likely the 8 students from the first 1946/47 cohort were sent back and it was expected that similarly not all 60 students in 1947/48 would continue on, making the projection of 120 students an estimate of students across all three academic years. Students were sent home for personal, academic and/or ideological reasons, which will be talked about in more depth later.

<sup>29</sup> NA kart. 1708, sig. 26, Ministerstvo školství a kultury, Praha. "Ministerstvo financí: Mezistátní dohoda o československých stipendistech v SSSR" [Ministry of Finance: Intergovernmental agreement about Czechoslovak scholarship recipients in the USSR, 13 May 1948] č. 102.246/48-I/6

representative at the Czechoslovak embassy in Moscow, by the end of the 1950-1951 school year, there were 324 students enrolled in Soviet higher education institutions. Students' monthly stipends helped to cover the costs of their educational materials, daily living expenses, as well as their journeys back home during their semester breaks.<sup>30</sup>

The initial strategic generosity that the USSR showed in fully supporting the first cohort of Czechoslovak students was replaced by a certain power struggle in the negotiations for the new agreements with the Czechoslovak government. During the final stages of negotiations, on April 25th, 1948, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was grappling with the financial demands posed by then Soviet Ambassador to Czechoslovakia Valerian Aleksandrovich Zorin. Zorin already had an influential hold over the Czechoslovak government, as he had helped to organize the coup d'état two months prior.<sup>31</sup> In this report Zorin is urging the Czechoslovak government to accept the exchange rate (rubles to Czechoslovak crowns) offered by the Soviets as quickly as possible, while the advisor in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to express concern about the financial disadvantage of this rate.

The foreign student program was developed under a microscope in the environment of socialist reform and growing Soviet power in Eastern Europe. What is interesting about this exchange is that Zorin informs the ministry that this exchange rate had "already been signed by the Bulgarians, Romanians and Albanians", making Czechoslovakia and Poland the only ones remaining. Thus, the ministry's representative recognizes a political

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<sup>30</sup> Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí (hereinafter AMZV, Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, Czech Republic), TO-SSSR Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17 o. 18. "Zpráva o čs. stipendistech v SSSR" [Report on čs. scholarship recipients in the USSR, 30 April 1951]

<sup>31</sup> Hertl, David. "Valerian Alexandrovič Zorin, Stalinův Soudruh V Praze." Český rozhlas., last modified Feb 15, 2018.



disadvantage in further negotiations, exemplifying how the Soviet Union was able to leverage the wide breadth of its political power over Eastern Europe to win in such disputes.<sup>32</sup>

Belov's research also shows that by 1952, which, as will be shown, was a consequential year for the Czechoslovak student program, there were close to 10,000 students from socialist bloc countries in the USSR. The growth trends that continued after these pilot years of the student program point to the Soviet government's continued investment in the overall expansion of its international education project. Over the course of this decade, it is worth noting that while the Eastern bloc foreign student program grew exponentially in the early 1950s, this expansion slowed in the early 1960s. The environment of resistance to Soviet policies developing across the bloc played a role in this matter. But in the crucial years after Czechoslovakia's and other Eastern European countries' entrance into the socialist bloc, the Soviet race to establish power across Eastern Europe facilitated the mass mobilization of strict bureaucratic practices that made this educational program possible under the Stalinist regime. This included the screening and selection of students based on certain criteria about their background.

#### A Conditional Ticket to the USSR

A students' ticket to the USSR was by no means an unconditional invitation. The very word used to describe students in the governmental documents, *stipendisté* or "scholarship recipients" already carried the connotation of a subsidized person that owed

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<sup>32</sup> NA kart. 1708, sig. 26, Ministerstvo školství a kultury, Praha. "Mezistátní dohoda o československých stipendistech v SSSR" [Intergovernmental agreement about Czechoslovak scholarships recipients in the USSR, 3 May 1948, pg. 2], A 91.313/48, VI/4

something to the government. Beginning with their ascribed role, Czechoslovak students were constantly reminded that their Soviet education and political duty to represent Czechoslovakia were made inextricable with the reception of their scholarship.

The 1959 booklet outlining the “Rights and Responsibilities for Czechoslovak scholarship recipients (*stipendisté*) in the USSR and people’s democratic republics” explicitly states that during their studies in the USSR and other socialist countries, scholarship recipients were required to study the subject “designated by the ministry of education” and “act in such a way that is proper for the conscious, politically developed citizens cast from our democratic people’s republic.”<sup>33</sup>

Young people chosen to study in Soviet higher education institutions throughout the 1950s usually had a very specific profile. Starting with their family’s socioeconomic background, the selection criteria for the foreign student program was intertwined with the dominant Communist ideology of creating a new and loyal elite from the working class. In 1948, when the foreign student program was gathering momentum, the KSČ General Secretary Rudolf Slánský proclaimed that:

We will now regulate the selection of students to high schools and especially to universities and higher technical schools. We will mercilessly purge high schools and higher schools of reactionary students and we will be at pains to recruit the majority of students for high and higher schools from worker’s families of the laboring strata. The working class is the most numerous, and the governing class and the social composition of students must reflect this.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> NA, kart. 1710, sig. 26, Ministerstvo školství a kultury, Praha. “Práva a povinnosti čs. stipendistů v SSSR a lidově demokratických zemích [Rights and Responsibilities of čs. Scholarship recipients in the USSR and people’s democratic republics, effective 1 September 1959] č. 46852/59-VII/5 (For full translation, see Appendix).

<sup>34</sup> Connelly, *Captive University*, 249.

Students nominated by regional committees were then approved by a selection committee within the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia's Secretariat. In addition to information like previous education, age, gender and place of birth, the May 1948 government agreement indicated that within one month of its signing, Czechoslovakia would send "lists of names of those being sent with the precise indication of their field of study within the framework of the *nomenklatura* in force in the USSR".<sup>35</sup> In this context, *nomenklatura* is referring to the literal translation of "classification system", making it clear that the Czechoslovak foreign student program would be driven by the rules of the Soviet education system.

Basic information about students was complemented by more ideologically charged screenings of the candidates. In 1951, five years into the foreign student program, when there were students across all academic years of the four-to-five-year Soviet education, "80 percent of the students were coming from worker and peasant families, all were active members of the KSČ's youth league and 70 percent were also party members."<sup>36</sup> On paper, these students represented the loyal, idealistic generation that would strengthen and solidify Communism in Czechoslovakia. Young people were the key to the bottom-up approach for ensuring Czechoslovakia's acquiescence to a Soviet imposed Communist society.

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<sup>35</sup> NA, kart. 1708, sig. 26, Ministerstvo školství a kultury, Praha; "Návrh dohody mezi vládou Svazu sovětských socialistických republik a vládou Československé republiky o studiu občanů Československé republiky na vysokých školách v SSSR a jejich vydržování" [Proposal for the agreement between USSR and Czechoslovak Republic about the study of Czechoslovak citizens in higher schools of the USSR and their sustainment and, 12 November 1947, pg. 1] č.j. A 294.879/47-VI/4

<sup>36</sup> Applebaum, *Empire of Friends*, 54.

The KSČ youth league, which was the Czechoslovak equivalent of the Soviet youth league (Komsomol), was a foundational state-controlled organization for the foreign student program that provided it with ideal candidates. In 1954, an article about the Czechoslovak youth league (*Československý svaz mládeže - ČSM*) was translated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the the Great Soviet Encyclopedia (*Bollshaia sovetskaia enciklopedia*) and was sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for translation.<sup>37</sup> This article outlines the “fight” (*boj*) of ČSM leading up to the ultimate “victory of the working peoples over the reaction of 1948” so that the organization could become a united front in 1949. ČSM was composed of youth between the ages of 14 to 26, with the core of the organization coming from “worker and peasant” backgrounds.<sup>38</sup>

This article, released by the Department of Propaganda and Agitation, stated that ČSM “led the youth to the acquisition (*osvojování*) of political and professional knowledge and to a cultural life, bringing them up in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism”, and created “new people, strikers (*úderníci*) and workers (*pracovníky*)”.<sup>39</sup> ČSM also oversaw the Pioneer organization (*Pionýrská organizace*) for children between the ages of nine to fourteen, which was meant to “expand in children a love for knowledge, work, develop in them characteristics of a socialist person”.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> This encyclopedia was published between 1926 to 1990 in the Soviet Union and is one of the largest encyclopedias in Russian.

<sup>38</sup> AMZV, TO-SSSR Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 5, “Statě k heslu “Československo” pro VSE, *Československý svaz mládeže*” [Articles on the subject “Czechoslovakia”, Czechoslovak Youth League, pg. 1]3 September 1954],128.453/54-SO/2

<sup>39</sup> AMZV, TO-SSSR Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 5, “Statě k heslu “Československo” pro VSE, *Československý svaz mládeže*” [Articles on the subject “Czechoslovakia”, Czechoslovak Youth League, pg. 2]3 September 1954],128.453/54-SO/2

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

This language that instilled in children and youth the Marxist-Leninist values for unity, education and work were in line with Slánský's stated goals for the reform of Czechoslovak higher education. Such organizations were part of the system of ensuring that as the younger generation got older, they would be committed to their intellectual and political development in the framework of Communist goals, and the youth organizations proved to be the necessary place from which to choose students to be sent to the USSR for further education. Instilling in students this obligation to a community that was controlled by the government would also prove to be helpful when sending them to form such communities in their Soviet institutions. Youth organizations were the first step in a young loyal Communist's life and the ways in which they chose to engage after this initial stage were even more important.

The Czechoslovak youth leagues were direct replicas of the same types of organizations in the Soviet Union, where there were *Pionery* (Pioneers) and the *Komsomol* (Soviet youth league). The Soviets called these places of congregation and collective education "public organizations" (*obshchestvenie organizatsii*) and they were hubs for building civil society around the values of Marxism-Leninism. Such organizations existed in the context of the foreign student program as well, acting as both unifying and control bodies for ensuring that foreign students were active in their political education and adhering to Soviet social norms and laws. Foreign students had *zemliachestva* or "national student associations," which will be the focus of the next chapter. Although the *zemliachestvo* was meant to strengthen students' identity as 'Soviet people', a scandal within the Czechoslovak student community provides insight into students' lives while they

were in the USSR, and into the shortcomings that Soviet bureaucracy posed for the functioning of the program.

In 1952, a scandal broke out in the foreign student office of the Czechoslovak embassy in Moscow, as well as in the Czechoslovak *zemliachestvo*. These events present a case of students that thought they would strengthen their loyalty to the Communist cause but instead found themselves in trouble for having expressed opinions that suggested the exact opposite.

## **Chapter 2: The Foreign Student Program on Trial: Monitoring Life of Students in the USSR**

In the early 1950s, the Czechoslovak and Soviet ministries were continuing to negotiate improvements to the foreign student program so that it would operate in its best form. While screenings and selection committees in Czechoslovakia helped to ensure that the most loyal and useful citizens were sent abroad, there was no way of knowing how students would behave when immersed in Soviet society. In the environment of ongoing political show trials in Czechoslovakia in the early 1950s, which were employed by the KSČ to counter the high level of distrust coming from Stalin's government, it was especially important to ensure that the ranks of foreign students were comprised of the most loyal Communists. With ongoing purges and violence against those who dared to speak out against Stalinist control tactics at home, a parallel environment of skepticism developed amongst the university officials overseeing the Czechoslovak students in the USSR.

The Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs was still smoothing out the wrinkles of this new cross-border project with the USSR. Aside from just the logistics of picking students based on their academic background, choosing students for their 'correct' ideological beliefs proved to be difficult in selection processes across the socialist bloc countries. For example, according to Babiracki's research, the student selection process in the Polish case often faltered in its goals. Student committees tasked with choosing the students that were to be sent abroad were often not given enough time to do the necessary screenings, resulting in students being accepted into Soviet higher education institutions without the ideological discipline required to succeed in the environment. This is how one

Polish student was found to be praying in her dorm room, telling the Soviet students that walked in on her that “in Poland all communists pray” and “only the Jews do not”.<sup>1</sup>

Czechoslovak students had a slight advantage over other students, in that Czechoslovakia was known for its higher level of communist idealism in the post-war years. In contrast, Soviets reported that students from Poland, Hungary, Romania and Germany were “hostile to the USSR from the outset.”<sup>2</sup> According to Zdeněk Mlynář, who studied law at MGU and would later become a well-known secretary in the Central Committee of the KSČ, the students he was studying with in Moscow “belonged to the elite of the young generation of Communists who had already worked for years as functionaries in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.”<sup>3</sup> These young Communists were seeking to not only improve their career prospects, but also to confirm for themselves that the Soviet model was ideal for Czechoslovakia’s future.

And while this young idealism seemed promising for establishing a strong socialist revolution and political allyship to the USSR, the situation in the Czechoslovak government in the years of the foreign student program’s development was far from ideal in Soviet eyes. The KSČ’s takeover in 1948, was in line with a change in Stalin’s foreign policy in the late forties and early fifties. To speed up the process of establishing Soviet-aligned governments in Eastern Europe, Stalin’s “gradualist approach” to socialist revolution was replaced with a vigorous instatement of terror tactics across governments in the socialist

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<sup>1</sup> Babiracki, Patryk. 2007. "Imperial Heresies: Polish Students in the Soviet Union, 1948–1957." *Ab Imperio* (4), 212.

<sup>2</sup> Mlynář, Zdeněk. 1980. *Nightfrost in Prague: The End of Humane Socialism*. trans. by Paul Wilson ed. New York: Karz Publishers, 85

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



bloc.<sup>4</sup> Czechoslovakia was by no means an exception to this process. In fact, the KSČ's response to political pressure from Moscow to crack down on any displays of anti-Communism led to some of the worst cases of political show trials of any of the Eastern bloc governments.

According to a Soviet report in 1948, Czechoslovak Communists were exhibiting "liberal-pacifistic" attitudes toward "leaders of bourgeois parties" because by August 1948, around 8,000 of them had been allowed to emigrate. The Soviet Communist Party wanted such people to be arrested and showed their disappointment in Czechoslovak Communists' failure to not "conduct big political trials which would have unmasked them as enemies."<sup>5</sup> Political show trials had their roots in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, when Stalin directed an entire campaign against "wreckers" that were accused of undermining the development of socialism in Soviet society with their bourgeoisie ideology. Political show trials were characterized by a lack of palpable evidence for the accusations, coupled with a targeted effort to make the trials extremely visible to the public eye.<sup>6</sup>

The first Stalinist political show trial, the Shakhty Trial, occurred in 1928. Engineers from the town of Shakhty were accused of sabotaging the Soviet economy by conspiring with former coal mine owners, who were now living abroad. The trial was covered by the party newspaper and accrued international attention. While party leaders in the economic sectors tried to downplay the trial to minimize speculation of what effect it would have on the national economy, Stalin framed the Shakhty affair as political evidence of prevailing

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<sup>4</sup> Tromly, "Brother or Other?", 82.

<sup>5</sup> Hopf, Ted. 2012. "Stalin's Foreign Policy: The Discourse of Danger Abroad 1943-53." In *Reconstructing the Cold War: The Early Years, 1945-58*. New York: Oxford Academic., 85.

<sup>6</sup> Bailles, Kendall E. 2015. "The Shakhty Affair." In *Technology and Society Under Lenin and Stalin: Origins of the Soviet Technical Intelligentsia 1917-1941*, 69-94: Princeton University Press, 75-77.

bourgeois elements in society that needed to be addressed and eliminated.<sup>7</sup> Stalin would later go on to put several leaders in the Soviet Communist Party on trial as well.

Less than thirty years after the very first employment of this type of political control, the same processes began to play out in Czechoslovak society. In response to Soviet pressure, the KSČ started to clean up its party ranks. By November of 1948, 600,000 Communist party members had been confirmed, and 65,000 expelled for their political views.<sup>8</sup> Along with the hunt for bourgeois supporters was the antisemitic targeting of the Jewish population. And the requested political show trials followed. One of the worst and most well-known cases of these trials in Czechoslovakia was the Slánský Trial, which would prove to weigh heavily on the community of Czechoslovak students abroad. In November of 1951, fourteen party functionaries, including second in command General Secretary Rudolf Slánský were arrested. Accused of “high treason” against the state and of being Titoists and Zionists, their scripted trial was broadcasted a year later on public radio. Eleven of them would be hanged, and three would be sentenced to life in prison. Ten of the defendants were Jewish.<sup>9</sup>

This event is significant in the context of the Czechoslovak foreign student program because as this environment of denunciation was playing out in the KSČ, the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí*, hereinafter MZV) was also receiving concerning reports about their young idealists abroad. The events that rocked the stability of Czechoslovak foreign student program in 1952, reflected the environment that the KSČ had been creating at home. The interrogation of the of the main embassy officer

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<sup>7</sup> Bailles, “The Shakhty Affair,” 75-77.

<sup>8</sup> Hopf, “Stalin’s Foreign Policy: The Discourse of Danger Abroad”, 85.

<sup>9</sup> Lukes, Igor. 1999. “The Rudolf Slánský Affair: New Evidence.” *Slavic Review* 58: 160-87.

who oversaw and reported on the Czechoslovak students at this time, as well as a scandal in the Czechoslovak national student association that prompted a self-criticism trial, reveal the mechanisms of control, weaknesses and contradictions in the foreign student program.

### Arriving in the USSR

While in the USSR, students were overseen by a special office (*agenda*) in the Czechoslovak embassy in Moscow, the head of which was an appointed officer for the students (*studentský referent*). This officer also had a supporting secretary who helped to ensure that all the stages of the students' journey were accounted for. By the time students arrived in the USSR, they had, in theory, been vetted by the selection process and had attended a "preparatory course" (*přípravný kurs*) in Czechoslovakia, which took place in the summer months before students embarked for the USSR.<sup>10</sup>

Older scholarship recipients worked in these preparatory courses, providing students with information about life in Soviet universities and society, helping with Russian language courses and acting as overseers of cadre training.<sup>11</sup> The course included presentations and meetings with "reminders about behavior and legislation with which students would come into contact during their stay abroad."<sup>12</sup> Such courses could be interpreted as supportive— a way of setting students up for success. They would have also

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<sup>10</sup> Archiv ministerstva zahraničních věcí České republiky (Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic; hereafter AMZV), f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Description of the work of the student officer J. Zimmerman].

<sup>11</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Additions to the proposal for the discussion of matters pertaining to Czechoslovak scholarship recipients] February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1952.

<sup>12</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, Negotiations with comrade J. Kopenc, 1952.

served as a reminder of the social and political expectations of students as recipients of a government scholarship.

When it came time to depart for their studies, the secretary of the head officer for the scholarship recipients ensured that all students had their visas and train tickets and that their luggage was weighed and searched for the “required” items. These items, while not explicitly specified in the available documents, were designated by an agreement put forth by the Ministry of Education. Before setting out for the two-day trip to the USSR, the students gathered and spent the night in Prague, receiving all the necessary information for their journey, as well as food to sustain this journey. All parts of this journey, from their hometown to their place of study in the USSR, were paid for by the Ministry of Education.<sup>13</sup>

Upon arrival in Moscow, students were ushered to the Czechoslovak embassy where embassy workers were waiting to welcome them into the country. After registering their passport, they were informed about the nature of their relationship with the embassy during their studies, namely what aspects of their student life the embassy was there to help direct and, as will be demonstrated, control. Once they had completed all necessary paperwork for confirming their predetermined city placement and area of study, the students familiarized themselves with an excursion of Moscow, led by Czechoslovak students already studying there. After their welcome in the capital, students then split off into their respective city groups and continued their onward journey.<sup>14</sup>

While measures were taken to try to make the transition from Czechoslovakia as smooth and intentional as possible for chosen students, by 1952, communications between

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<sup>13</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Description of the work of B. Janáčková] January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1951

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Soviet and Czechoslovak officials recognized that these measures had fallen short. According to these reports, the selection and preparation process were proving to be ineffective in these years because it was not ensuring that students were going into disciplines that were useful to Czechoslovakia's national interest, namely the formation of the national cadres of specialists (*nationalnie kadri spetsialistov*).<sup>15</sup>

Students were not being notified of their specializations early enough. Ideally, the report concluded, students were supposed to have meetings about their course of study with the ministries in charge of appointing them to a job (the respective ministry was based on the student's course of study) even before they departed for the USSR. This would make the process of appointing them to a specific job upon their return much easier.<sup>16</sup> Undergraduate students were especially not being set up for success. Prior to being approved to study in the USSR, undergraduate students had to complete at least one year of study in a Czechoslovak university before going on to the USSR. Sometimes even after this year however, students were assigned a course of study which their home education had not prepared them for. Often, students' low level of Russian was also a problem.

And the embassy workers' job was to look out for the signs that indicated that students were not living up to the standards expected of them. This is why Bohunka Janáčková, who was the secretary in charge of all logistical and personal problems related to the students in 1951, reported that the pressure of catching up to other students was affecting students' health: "Students are making up for gaps in knowledge and they are

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<sup>15</sup> Белов, В. А. 2003. *Подготовка Кадров. Для Зарубежных Стран В Советских Вузах*. Kaliningrad: Издательство Калининградского государственного университета.

<sup>16</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Description of the work of Bohunka Janáčková] January 24, 1951.

making up the cadre of our sick” (*studenti dohánějí mezery ve vědomostech a tvoří kádr našich nemocných*).<sup>17</sup> From the time that students accepted their scholarship and its stipulations, the course of their education and later career was closely monitored by the government.

The main embassy officer for the students between 1950 and 1952 was Jaromír Zimerman. Zimerman was initially tasked with being the head of the preparatory course before students left from Czechoslovakia. Upon arrival in the USSR, in addition to all his communication responsibilities, he also had to “screen” (*prověřovat*) the student Communists based on criteria set by the Central Committee of the KSČ. In the 1950/1951 school year, Zimmerman also drove RSŠ (*rok stranické školy*), or the “year of political education”, in which new scholarship recipients attended Marxism-Leninism groups (*kroužky marxismu-leninismu*).<sup>18</sup> Zimerman also traveled to all the cities in which Czechoslovak students were studying and evaluated the communities in each of them. In 1950-51, there were students in Moscow, Leningrad, Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, Saratov, Kazan, and Sverdlovsk.<sup>19</sup> Zimerman’s report recognizes that traveling to each city for the purpose of evaluation was very demanding, but he claims that “the experiences of this past year showed that they are necessary.”<sup>20</sup>

The “experiences” that Zimerman is referring to, while not explicitly stated, were most likely in reference to the problems that would culminate in a scandal in the Czechoslovak student community. The disputes that arose between the Ministry of Foreign

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Description of the work of the student officer J. Zimmerman]

<sup>19</sup> Today, Leningrad has been renamed to St. Petersburg and Sverdlosk to Yekaterinburg.

<sup>20</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Report on Czechoslovak students in the USSR] April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1951

Affairs and the workers in the office for Czechoslovak scholarship recipients in the embassy in Moscow shows that there were often miscommunications when it came to how scholarship recipients' lives should be monitored. Zimmerman's reports show a carefully constructed network of monitoring of the scholarship recipients.

Even with this network, however, certain aspects of the program were still unstable, including shortcomings in the selection process and the relationship between Czechoslovak students and Soviet officials. In the quest to establish stronger control, the bureaucratic aspect that slowed the progress of the program the most however, was the lack of trust from Soviet officials, along with their obsession with ascribing blame and making students go through processes of criticism and self-criticism for the sake of accountability and locking in Soviet methods of control even further. Less than a year after Zimmerman produced these reports, rhetoric present in the volatile political environment in the KSČ that were intensifying at the end of 1951 and beginning of 1952, started to make their way to the student office and the *zemliachestva*.

### The *Zemliachestvo*

Not long after the establishment of the foreign student program, the Soviet Ministry of Higher Education created *zemliachestva* or "national student associations."<sup>21</sup> According to a later 1952 provision by the Ministry of Higher Education of the USSR, the *zemliachestva* were organizations "uniting students and graduate students of a single

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<sup>21</sup> The word *zemliachestvo* is derived from the Russian word *zemlja* or "land". Rachel Applebaum used to "national student association" as the translation for *zemliachestvo* in the context of the foreign student program. In a broader context, *zemliachestvo* is understood as a group of people united by a shared place— city, county, province— and can also be translated as "fraternity". For this work, I have chosen to adopt the same translation as Applebaum. In Czech, the Russian word was not translated but rather transliterated to *zemljačestvo*.

country [...] that realize[d] a common connection between *zemljaki*, studying at institutions of higher education of the USSR.<sup>22</sup> The *zemliachestvo* brought together *zemljaki*, or “fellow countrymen” (which in this case were all students from one country at the university) into their own political organizations that were mainly meant to work in close contact with local Komsomol (Soviet Youth League) organizations. In agreement with officials from the university, as well as representatives from the respective countries’ diplomatic offices, a head or “elder” (*starshii zemljak*) was chosen to represent and report back to the students’ respective embassy, to the Soviet Ministry of Higher Education, and the directors of their respective university. Some students under the old *zemljak* were also elected as “helpers” (*pomoshniki starshikh zemljakov*).<sup>23</sup>

In theory, the leaders and members of local Komsomol groups, trade unions and other Communist organizations were tasked with ensuring that foreign students would be culturally immersed and receive a good political education while in the USSR. Officially, Soviet Communist party leaders at the university were supposed to write bi-monthly reports on students’ work, report on the political “moods” in the student party organizations and select important articles from the Soviet Communist Party’s newspapers for the students to read.<sup>24</sup> While many of the established Soviet organizations on campuses were supposed to be responsible for the political education of foreign students, many of the functionaries with the job avoided such work out of fear. The idea of being in contact with foreigners in the time of Stalinist terror was troubling, which led such functionaries to

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<sup>22</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Report on Czechoslovak students in the USSR] April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1951 [See Appendix]

<sup>23</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Soviet Ministry of Higher Education: Temporary status of the “zemliachestvo”] February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1952

<sup>24</sup> Applebaum, Rachel. 2019. *Empire of Friends Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press. 63-64.



isolate foreign students. In response, students thought that they were not trusted by Soviet authorities. And this lack of trust led to suspicions on both sides about what the others' intentions were.<sup>25</sup>

Tromly argues that this awkward and unproductive barrier between Soviet officials and Eastern European students was also a result of the lack of clear direction from the government– the party center only vaguely instructed educational institutions to treat the presence of Eastern European students 'diplomatically.'<sup>26</sup> And even though Soviet students were often encouraged to treat foreign students as "members of a common family of socialist nations" the 'diplomatic' organization of students largely prevented such assimilation.<sup>27</sup>

Setting the underlying political motives and control aspect of the *zemliachestvo* aside, national student associations seemed to provide a space for students to seek support and the familiarity of their common culture. The *zemliachestvo* had many tasks regarding supporting students through their studies. It served as a body where questions about students' studies, social welfare, and healthcare were answered. In addition to being a support network, the structure of the *zemliachestvo* as a construction of national identity helped to facilitate Czechoslovak–Soviet cultural exchange. Students engaged in "cultural work" (*kulturní práce*) and received training in their "social and and political upbringing" (*sociální výchova a politicko-výchovná práce*).<sup>28</sup> Included in this political and social education were excursions to *kolkhozes*, which were Soviet collective farms, as well as

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<sup>25</sup>Applebaum, *Empire of Friends*, 63-64.

<sup>26</sup> Tromly, *Brother or Other?*, 86.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

<sup>28</sup>AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [List of tasks of the *zemliachestvo*], January 18, 1952.

culturally focused evening events in collaboration with the local Komsomol and Pioneer groups or volunteering teaching in local schools.<sup>29</sup> Whether through linguistic, academic, or professional avenues, *zemliachestva* had the potential to strengthen the sense of a common identity centered around Communist values with both the Soviets and the students from other *zemliachestva*.

The trouble with a *national* student association, however, was that it codified a barrier between the Soviet and foreign students along national lines. On the surface, the purpose of national student associations was a straight-forward one. The two major goals of educating students from the socialist bloc was to introduce the true reality of Soviet life and to get rid of any preexisting ideological deviations.<sup>30</sup> As an organized collective, students would be more effective in their political and cultural work. For Soviet officials, it would be easier to establish contact with, and keep tabs on, an organized body of students. The structure of the *zemliachestvo* would ensure that students encountered Soviet citizens that were loyally Communist and committed to spreading Communist ideology.

Whether because of bureaucratic failures in communication or their suspicion of foreigners, however, Soviet officials often counteracted the progress in strengthening ties with foreign students. Students were then accused of isolationist behaviors, but the reoccurring question in such cases was whether these isolationist behaviors were a result of “bourgeois-nationalism”, which the Czechoslovak students were accused of, or whether Soviet officials had brought it upon themselves. And much like in the environment of

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<sup>29</sup> Tromly, *Brother or Other?* 90

<sup>30</sup> В.А. Хрипун. 2013. "Иностранные Студенты В Вузах Ленинграда в 1950-Е – Середине 1960-Х Годов." 284.

purges and show trials that was underway in Czechoslovakia, serious accusations followed these first signs of suspicion.

### Zimerman On Trial

In January of 1951, Jaromír Zimerman, the embassy officer for the students, was interrogated by Czechoslovak officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Reports started pouring in from the embassy in Moscow from workers who were suspicious of the way that Zimerman was going about his job. The letter from embassy worker Ladislav Katuščák accuses Zimerman of sending books, articles, and other needed supplies by the scholarship recipients via a diplomatic courier service directly to the Central Committee of the KSČ. Zimerman is reported to have done this so that students' materials would not be confiscated by Soviet authorities on the border when they traveled back home. This, Katuščák reports, was illegal and a cause for serious concern.<sup>31</sup>

As part of their studies abroad, Czechoslovak students were writing articles about their areas of specialization or about different aspects of Soviet life, which were then sent back to Czechoslovakia for publication. In a time of strict censorship, any travelling information had to be checked. The literature that was sent back for publication or any materials that were requested by students to be sent to the USSR had to be sent through the foreign student office of the embassy. Zimerman is also accused of receiving deliveries of newspapers from Czechoslovakia on his name, which he then distributed to various *zemliachestva* groups and thus spread across the USSR under the auspices of the Czechoslovak embassy (*pod egidou našeho velvyslanectví*). This, Katuščák writes, was

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<sup>31</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [The office of Czechoslovak scholarship recipients in Moscow – report for the minister] January 16, 1952, pp. 1

unacceptable because anyone who wanted to read Czechoslovak newspapers in the USSR could have ordered it directly through the office in the embassy, and Zimerman was not authorized to act as an intermediary.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, Zimerman was allegedly holding meetings for students in the building of the embassy itself, some of which went until midnight. This was suspicious Katuščák claimed because "I found out from the Hungarians and Poles that it has never happened, that their students would ask for permission to gather in the building of the embassy, for that they have their *obščežitja*<sup>33</sup> and designated rooms in the university."<sup>34</sup> On the surface, the allegations against Zimerman and his handling of his job as the student representative revolves around his stepping outside of the parameters of his job description, sending mail illegally and worst of all, undermining Soviet laws.

The conversation that Zimerman is then subjected to with the head of the Soviet branch at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague, Ivan Kopecký, reveals the underlying motives behind these accusations and subsequent insistence for Zimerman to produce a self-criticism report. Ivan Kopecký, to whom these reports were addressed, was the son of Václav Kopecký, Minister of Information in 1952. Václav Kopecký is a notorious figure in KSČ history, known for his antisemitic views, and support for the most serious punishments for undermining socialism, including the death penalty. He is considered one of the main mobilizers for implementing Stalinist terror tactics in Czechoslovak society.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [The office of Czechoslovak scholarship recipients in Moscow – report for the minister] January 16, 1952, 1-2

<sup>33</sup> This word is derived from the Russian word общежитие, meaning "dormitory".

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>35</sup> Československá filmová databáze. "Václav Kopecký Biografie."

His son, Ivan Kopecký had himself received a law degree in Moscow before becoming the head of the Soviet representative office in 1951.<sup>36</sup> While his actions in this role are not as well documented, nor as notorious as his father's, his interrogation of Zimmerman shows that he was acting in line with what was going on in the KSČ government at the time. Kopecký opens the conversation by asking Zimmerman why he had been accused of "having a strange, even secretive mission" (*zvláštní, dokonce tajné poslání*). Zimmerman denies this outright, from which point the allegations continue.<sup>37</sup> The allegations that Zimmerman was sending mail via unauthorized diplomatic avenues directly to the Central Committee, was construed as evidence that he was a "helper of the apparatus" (*pomocník aparátu*) by which he means that Zimmerman was in some way conspiring with at least one of the high-ranking functionaries that were then in prison for high treason as part of the Slánský trial.<sup>38</sup> Zimmerman had been sending most of the mail to the Chief of the International Section of the KSČ because this had been customary, even before Zimmerman took the job.

Zimmerman also claims that the Ministry of Education, which Kopecký claims should have been the one to be involved with the mail issue, was incapable of carrying out even those tasks for which it was officially responsible. Zimmerman trusted the International Section more.<sup>39</sup> Although Zimmerman seems to have been carrying out a task that was supposed to make scholarship recipients' lives easier, and doing so according to prescribed rules, Kopecký ends the critical interrogation by saying "it was you that was connected to a

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<sup>36</sup> Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí. "Kopecký Ivan."

<sup>37</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Record of the conversation of comrade Kopecký and comrade Čech with comrade Zimmerman on 2/1/1952], 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

traitorous office, you were writing to them. Your correspondence went straight into the hands of Geminder [...] you completely knowingly oriented yourself towards the apparatus of the KSČ, not just the International Section and Geminder.”<sup>40</sup> Herein lies the real motivation behind the interrogation and removal of Zimmerman from his post. The office of the International Section of the KSČ to which he was accused of purposefully and secretly sending mail to, was headed by Bedřich Geminder, who was one of the fourteen defendants that were already sitting in jail awaiting trial.

The odds were stacked against Zimmerman for another reason as well. With ten of the convicted in the Slánský Trial being Jewish, it was as much an action of antisemitism as it was of political terror. While finding more information on Zimmerman’s background proved difficult, his name suggests he had a Jewish background. Both his background and his correspondence with this specific state apparatus turned him into one of the victims of the political purges that plagued this period in Czechoslovak history. Zimmerman even objects that everything that he is being accused of is a personal attack rather than a real problem with his performance. He tells Kopecký “from the first moment you acted in a biased way towards me” and “you are trying to make an enemy out of me.”<sup>41</sup> Despite being openly defiant in the moment, however, Zimmerman did produce a self-criticism report, a custom which was customary and necessary for continued societal survival.

The practice of self-criticism was another fundamental control tool which was galvanized under the Stalin regime. Its importance was solidified in Soviet society in 1928,

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<sup>40</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Record of the conversation of comrade Kopecký and comrade Čech with comrade Zimmerman on 2/1/1952], 5.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 5, 6..

when Stalin published an essay in *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In *Against Vulgarizing the Slogan of Self-Criticism*, he asserted that “without self-criticism there can be no proper education of the Party, the class and the masses.”<sup>42</sup> The main point of self-criticism was to develop self-awareness in people across society to “rid [them]selves as quickly as possible of [their] errors and weaknesses”. Even though Stalin ends his appeal in support of self-criticism by urging everyone to “criticize the shortcomings in our constructive work” but to “not pervert the slogan of self-criticism” nor “turn it into a weapon for witch-hunts against our business or any other executives,” self-criticism was turned into just that: a weapon for producing class enemies that could be punished both privately and publicly.<sup>43</sup>

In his own self-criticism letter Zimmerman states: “If I am evaluating myself, I did not do nearly enough in the first six months to deepen my comradely relations to [the other ministries] and took over too little of their valuable experience, that I was completely lacking.”<sup>44</sup> In his original job description, Zimmerman was required to correspond with the International Section of the KSČ. He also claimed that other ministries failed to fulfill their jobs even when he did try to engage with them. But once the higher ups in the Party decided that a person or an office would be targeted, the possibilities for what could have or should have been done instead of engaging with that person were endless. Thus, to satisfy the officials, Zimmerman also conjures up an explanation of why Geminder was suspicious from the onset: “I tried to explain to myself Geminder’s chronic “lack of time” that always prevented him from giving my reminders and recommendations most likely

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<sup>42</sup> Stalin, Joseph. 1928. "Against Vulgarizing the Slogan of Self-Criticism." *Pravda*, Jun 26.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17 [Jaromír Zimmerman: Self-criticism] January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1952.

just those few minutes, with everything possible, just not the suspicion that he could purposefully be solving or not solving the matters at hand”.<sup>45</sup>

In contrast to how he was answering Kopecký's questions in the interrogation, Zimmerman dutifully identifies how he could have personally been better in dealing with the situation and gives the ministry more criticism against Geminder. The change in perspective is forced, driven by fear of further accusation or worse persecution. At the end of his interrogation Zimmerman says that it is his wish to go into industry because everything that he knows how to do in working for the party, is now done differently. In producing his self-criticism, he absolves himself of the accusations against him, allowing him to disappear into a lower profile job.

Zimmerman was not the only one in Moscow being put on trial at this time. At the time that he was being interrogated, Czechoslovak *zemliachestvo* students were being monitored for being “isolationist” and exhibiting “bourgeoise-nationalism.” The self-criticism weapon was employed on the *zemliachestvo* next.

### The *Zemliachestvo* on Trial

From the preparatory course and the contents of their suitcase to their academic work and engagement in the *zemliachestvo*, Czechoslovak students were under the microscope of the student representative and their respective embassy office. Despite the many bureaucratic shortcomings in the program, Zimmerman also writes extensively of the work of the Czechoslovak *zemliachestvo*, praising its work in helping to facilitate good

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<sup>45</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17 [Jaromír Zimmerman: Self-criticism] January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1952.



results amongst the Czechoslovak student cohort. In his report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the 1950-1951 school year, Zimerman claims that:

Our group of scholarship recipients is the first amongst all foreign students in the USSR in terms of academic progress (*podle studijního prospěchu*). They achieved these results mainly through good political and organizational work of the *zemliachestvo* groups, established in all cities. Without their active help, the embassy work of the embassy officer for the students would not mean much, especially in terms of the organization and control of academics.<sup>46</sup>

The contradictory purpose of the *zemliachestvo* as a representation of national identity undermined its effectiveness, however, especially because it led students to express confusion about the true function that the *zemliachestvo* was supposed to play in their community. Soviet university officials accused Czechoslovak students of refusing help from the very organizations that were supposed to ensure that they would become 'Soviet citizens.'

On March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1952, at eight o'clock in the evening, a plenary meeting of the Moscow State University (*Moskovskii gosudarstvenii universitet*, hereinafter MGU) Czechoslovak *zemliachestvo* met to discuss serious accusations by Soviet university officials. The Czechoslovak students had been accused of isolating themselves, even refusing help from, Soviet organizations that were supposed to oversee their political education. The meeting was called by a leader of the *zemliachestvo* group, comrade (*soudruh*) Olma. On the agenda, lay the "self-criticisms of Olma and Zdeněk Mlynář,

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<sup>46</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Report on Czechoslovak students in the USSR] April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1951.

followed by a discussion evaluating the work of the *zemliachestvo* and finally, a resolution.<sup>47</sup> From the transcript of this meeting, the leaders of the group, Comrade Olma and Comrade Zdeněk Mlynář claim that they had misinterpreted the role of the *zemliachestvo* in their student lives. According to the testimonies, there was an advisory body (*poradní organ*) to the *zemliachestvo* made up of representatives from the Soviet public organizations and representatives from the *zemliachestvo* itself. In their confessions, Czechoslovak students refer to this advisory body as *Sověť cizinců*.<sup>48</sup> Olma admits that they were instructed to go from one place to another by this advisory body, but that he had never looked at it as a political matter. Mlynář also admits:

I thought that it is an organization, which has the job of securing for the *zemliachestvo* the opportunity to get to know the Soviet Union in the form of excursions, evening events, etc. and its other task is to the coordination of the world of the *zemliachestvo*. When the comrades came with the question that we are not consulting with them about the content of our meetings, and that we are not taking them to party meetings, I was saying to myself, why should we consult with them about things going on in the *zemliachestvo*.<sup>49</sup>

When one of the other students present says that Mlynář must have known from a previous meeting where it was said that it is necessary to assimilate to life in the Soviet collective, especially to the Soviet functionaries, Mlynář answers that he “didn’t realize the

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<sup>47</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Transcript of the plenary meeting of the *zemliachestvo* group Moscow IV, March 19, 1952], 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Sověť* in Czech is transliterated from the Russian word *sovjet*, meaning advice and *cizinci* are “foreigners”. According to Voronkov, one of the campus party leaders overseeing the Czechoslovak *zemliachestvo*, this was not the official name of this advisory body, he claims that there in fact was no official name, suggesting that this was a term that the Czechoslovak students thought of themselves.

<sup>49</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Transcript of the plenary meeting of the *zemliachestvo* group Moscow IV, March 19, 1952], 11.

importance of *Sověť cizinců* in educational work (*výchovná práce*).<sup>50</sup> Mlynář accuses himself of falling into outright “so-called *prakticism*”, meaning that he took care of everything in terms of organization, but was not giving enough thought to the political consequences of only ensuring that their own tasks for the *zemliachestvo* were coming to fruition. The task of the “Soviet collective” was “therefore staying on paper” (*zůstává proto na papíře*). Then Mlynář goes on to emphasize his failing on a personal level.

Mlynář had been objecting to Soviet involvement in *zemliachestvo* proceedings, claiming that they would be interfering, even “overstepping their competence” when they suggested that the Czechoslovak *zemliachestvo* should consult with them about the content of their meetings and their party work, how to lead their political schooling and other cadre questions. He goes on to contradict his previous view on the matter by saying that the Czechoslovak students are in fact being educated by the Soviet community, by Soviet organizations and the Komsomol, and that the *zemliachestvo* would need to orient itself around tasks that reflect their *political* status as students in Moscow.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, Mlynář criticizes his personal qualities that had affected his ability to be an effective leader. He criticizes his own “self-confidence” which often led him to stubbornly defend his position until the moment that he was proven wrong with “irrefutable facts.”<sup>52</sup> The structure of his self-criticism testimony is very similar to Zimmerman’s self-criticism testimony. There is a sudden change of opinion, in which Mlynář admits that he could have looked at the situation from a different perspective. Although he was steadfast in his belief

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>51</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Transcript of the plenary meeting of the *zemliachestvo* group Moscow IV, March 19, 1952], 6.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

that reporting back to the Soviets was an overstep, the official pressure from Soviet officials, as was the case with Zimmerman as well, prompts Mlynář to conform to the narrative that was insisted upon by Soviet officials.

Putting a lot of weight on the importance of engaging with Soviet citizens during their time in the USSR, Olma states: “I think it would be beneficial for me to meet with Soviet comrades, live in a Soviet community, and meet with party functionaries as much as possible so that I can get rid of my bad habits.” He then goes on to urge the *zemliachestvo* to absolve him of his responsibility of party leader until it is confirmed that he had indeed gotten rid of his faults.<sup>53</sup>

In her interpretation of the *zemliachestvo* hearings, Rachel Applebaum makes the argument that rather than interpret the scandal at MGU as an act of resistance, “the students instead used the criticism sessions that ensued to *assimilate* their position of subjugation vis-à-vis the Soviets.”<sup>54</sup> And while the self-criticism trials in the national student association do show that this very specific mechanism of control was diligently adopted and employed by the students, the pattern of sudden shifts of opinion still reveals the forced nature of the practice.

Zimmerman is the only one that calls his interrogation what it really is: an attempt to make him an enemy. In his memoir, Mlynář writes from a very different perspective about his experience as a victim of denunciation practices in 1952. He writes that “at the time I made a quite sincere self-criticism, I admitted to all these shortcomings but refused to

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<sup>53</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Transcript of the plenary meeting of the *zemliachestvo* group Moscow IV, March 19, 1952], 2.

<sup>54</sup> Applebaum, *Empire of Friends*, 72.

confess to any antiparty intentions or motivations.”<sup>55</sup> By the end of the second day of trial, which took place on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1952, Mlynář was absolved of his function as a leader of the *zemliachestvo*.<sup>56</sup> And unlike Zimerman, or the Slánský victims, the suspicions in the *zemliachestvo* were, in the end, dismissed as a misunderstanding in December of 1952, when two high-ranking KSČ Central Committee members came to the Moscow *zemliachestvo* and told students that they did not come to the USSR to write condemning letters about one another.<sup>57</sup>

The foreign student project, that was supposed to strengthen the loyalty of some of the already most devoted young Communists, was much too valuable to be undermined by the taxing control policies that inevitably created instability and animosity amongst Czechoslovak citizens. Even though Zdeněk Mlynář expresses that he had a true idealistic devotion to exporting the Soviet socialist system to Czechoslovakia, he was still singled out for having too many opinions about the way that Czechoslovak students were being controlled in their time in the USSR. It was another political witch hunt. Self-criticism trial aside, however, the prestige of his Soviet law degree and involvement in the *zemliachestvo* would still allow him to go on to hold one of the highest positions in the KSČ government.

As a well-known figure in Czechoslovak history, Mlynář also presents a special case because he played a key role in the Prague Spring and later helped establish Charta 77, a political movement that directly condemned the Czechoslovak government. While Mlynář

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<sup>55</sup> Mlynář, Zdeněk. 1980. *Nightfrost in Prague: The End of Humane Socialism*. trans. by Paul Wilson ed. New York: Karz Publishers.8.

<sup>56</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17, [Transcript of the plenary meeting of the *zemliachestvo* group Moscow IV, March 19, 1952], 42.

<sup>57</sup> Mlynář, *Nightfrost in Prague*, 9.

and a few other students that later joined these revolutionary ranks are interesting case studies in themselves, gaining an overall picture of the foreign student program requires an examination of the many other students that went on to live much more ordinary and still government-approved lives when they were filtered back into the Czechoslovak ministries after their studies.

The careers of Soviet-trained graduates were not just political, they stretched across economic, scientific and educational institutions. Another participant of the *zemliachestvo* hearing, Luděk Pekárek, a graduate student of physics, would go on to be a well-known physicist in the Academy of Sciences in Prague.<sup>58</sup> Radoslav Selucký, who was expelled from his studies in Leningrad was even permitted to return to the USSR in the 1960s to write articles on the Soviet economy.<sup>59</sup> And as the next chapter will show, despite all of the high profile political and bureaucratic troubles in the turbulent year of 1952, the system for increasing the number of Soviet-trained specialists would continue to operate and grow.

The Zimmerman case and *zemliachestvo* trial shows that as the KSČ was trying to prove its loyalty with its staged political trials, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was ensuring that this “sickness that was maybe rooted in what was happening at home” as Mlynář mentions in his testimony, would not undermine this project to produce loyally Communist specialists for upholding the socialist development of Czechoslovakia. The importance of upholding the commitment to this cadre work is reemphasized in documents produced by the embassy in Moscow after the *zemliachestvo* trial. The report urges for all the topics for

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<sup>58</sup> Pekárek, Luděk. "Životopis." Sisyfos Český klub skeptiků. 2018.

<sup>59</sup> Applebaum, *Empire of Friends*, 79-80.

course projects, theses and dissertations to be chosen according to criteria for Czechoslovakia's national development, emphasizing that the central ministries should provide the topics for these projects that would be "consulted with the best Soviet experts."<sup>60</sup> Finally, it ends with an appeal to the Ministry of Education to send Czechoslovak delegations into the Soviet Union in order to do intellectual reconnaissance on the system of Soviet schools across all levels. The work to export the Soviet educational model had to improve and continue.

"We believe that it is unconditionally necessary that the selection be driven by the political, economic, and cultural life of Czechoslovakia, regarding the general goal of building socialism in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (ČSSR)."<sup>61</sup> The foreign student program had not withstood the "sickness from home" as well as it could have, but the bureaucratic organization of the embassy office for Czechoslovak scholarship recipients, as well as the *zemliachestvo* ensured that workers and students alike were held accountable for their actions. Even if some of them only believed in the Soviet system in the beginning of their studies, their contact with Soviet officials, and participation in Soviet control practices, strengthened their ability to rise to high and respected positions in their careers in Czechoslovakia upon their return.

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<sup>60</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17 [Report for comrade dr. I. Kopecký, Soviet office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs]

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

### Chapter 3: Forming the New Elite

Between 1951-1954, ministries across the Czechoslovak government were placing the first cohorts of Czechoslovak graduates returning from the Soviet Union into their career positions. According to the previously classified 1954 “Proposal for the work assignments of Czechoslovak graduates of Soviet higher education institutions,” a committee comprised of representatives from the Ministry of Education, the State Planning Office and the Central Committee of the KSČ determined, in cooperation with the ministries to which students were being assigned, where students would be able to best “utilize and spread” (*uplatňovat a rozšiřovat*) their Soviet experience.”<sup>1</sup>

Students were first assigned to an “operational practice” (*provozní praxe*) so that they would familiarize themselves with the “Czechoslovak issues” (*Československá problematika*) in their field. In cases where it is was possible to do so, the preference of the student was also to be considered. But the overall verdict in 1954 was that most of the students should be assigned to the Ministry of Education for placement in higher education institutions where they were needed the most. In the beginnings of Czechoslovakia’s transformation to being a Soviet aligned state, it was necessary that the methods and ideology acquired by budding elites in the Soviet Union were passed along to the future generation of elites as well.

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<sup>1</sup> NA kart. 1709, sig. 26, Ministerstvo školství a kultury, Praha. “Návrh na pracovní zařazení československých absolventů sovětských vysokých škol” [Proposal for the placement of graduates of Soviet higher education institutions], January 26th, 1954 č.j. 04398/54-D/2-taj.



While these first cohorts were returning, the growth of the foreign student program began to slow, however. Valerii Alekseevich Belov attributes the lull in the growth of the program to two factors. First, the gradual strengthening of socialist bloc countries' economic and scientific research potential, education systems, as well as their sense of "enlightenment" suggested that many of them could satisfy further cadre development on their own. Indeed, the systematic allocation of Soviet-trained graduates across Czechoslovakia's ministries points to a successful effort to reform the country's institutions and industries in line with Soviet models. The second reason that Belov points to is the environment of resistance that developed across the socialist bloc, but especially in countries such as Poland, Hungary and the German Democratic Republic in the second half of the 1950s. Events like the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, as well as anti-Soviet protests in Poland and the GDR also deterred Soviets from accepting as many foreign students, affecting the expansion of the greater foreign student project.<sup>2</sup>

The fluctuating policies and criteria for the participants of the Soviet foreign student program reflect that this project was as much a project of diplomacy as it was of education. Czechoslovakia's major turning point would come with the 1968 Prague Spring, in which mass demonstrations and calls for liberalization were suppressed by the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops, as directed by the Soviet government. To the foreign student project's great failing, some of the Soviet graduates that were meant to strengthen the allyship

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<sup>2</sup> Белов, В. А. 2003. *Подготовка Кадров Для Зарубежных Стран В Советских Вузах*. Kaliningrad: Издательство Калининградского государственного университета, pp. 83-84.

between the two countries would end up being the very reformers that were then exiled after the invasion.

And indeed, the language of the archival documents from the late 1960s and early 1970s for the student selection process demonstrates a clear political alignment with the era of “normalization” (*normalizace*) in which efforts to return to the “status quo” included removing reformers from government and the reestablishment of policing and other control policies.

This chapter will show the successes of the foreign student program in producing a foundation of qualified Soviet-trained specialists across all institutions in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s, even despite the ideological and bureaucratic hurdles demonstrated in the previous chapter. While these ideological hurdles did not pose a threat to the establishment of elites, the biographies of some of the students present at the *zemliachestvo* show that it did often fail in producing *loyal* elites. Finally, jumping ahead to the 1970s, the selection criteria during the era of “normalization” shows a targeted effort to send and train those most loyal to the Party, namely those that exhibited clear alignment with the Soviet government and opposed moves towards liberalization in the years leading up to 1968.

### The Placements

It was not just the politicians in the KSČ that helped train the future generations tasked with locking in this Soviet-modelled system. It was also the historians, writers,

economists, journalists, artists, and actors. Apart from humanities and social sciences, it was the chemists, mathematicians, engineers, laboratory assistants, and sport trainers. A look at the types of specializations that people assigned to the Ministry of Education were sent to pursue paints a picture of what was prioritized as important for the Czechoslovaks to be passing on in the following years. In addition to standard specializations such as medicine, physical education, or theoretical physics, the first Soviet graduates between 1951-1954 that were appointed to jobs overseen by the Ministry of Education pursued specializations that were strategic for the strengthening of the Czechoslovak-Soviet relationship.<sup>3</sup>

Vladimír Barnet, born 1924, studied the Russian language in Leningrad, graduating in 1951. When he returned, the Ministry of Education appointed him as a graduate assistant in the department of philology and he later went on to write several books on the linguistics of Slavic languages, even publishing Russian language-learning textbooks.<sup>4</sup> Another 1952 graduate of Russian language and folklore, Eva Vrabcová went on to work as a scholar in the Higher School of Russian Language and Literature in Prague (*Vysoká škola ruského jazyka a literatury*).<sup>5</sup> In these formative years of Soviet intervention, this school

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<sup>3</sup> NA kart. 1709, sig. 26, Ministerstvo školství a kultury, Praha. "Seznam absolventů sovětských vysokých škol" [List of graduates of Soviet higher education institutions], 1954

<sup>4</sup> Ibid; Večerka, Radoslav. 2008. *Biografickobibliografické Medailonky Českých Lingvistů: Bohemistů a Slavistů*; Bibliografie české lingvistiky. "Barnet, Vladimír, 1924-1983." Ustav pro jazyk český AV ČR.

<sup>5</sup> NA kart. 1709, sig. 26, Ministerstvo školství a kultury, Praha. "Seznam absolventů sovětských vysokých škol" [List of graduates of Soviet higher education institutions], 1954.

was explicitly established in the early fifties to fulfill the need for Russian-speaking specialists.<sup>6</sup>

Jiří Kment, a 1953 graduate, studied dialectical materialism and was then appointed to the Department of Social Sciences directly in the Ministry of Education. As a Marxist theory that concerns itself with the conflict of social forces, dialectical materialism was a widely studied subject in Marxist-Leninist curricula. Two others from this list of Soviet graduates, studied the histories of the Soviet Communist Party and of nationalities in the USSR, knowledge from which they were then appointed to pass on in the pedagogy department in the Slovak University in Prešov. Many of the economic specialists who acquired expertise in the Soviet way of thinking about the “economics of work” and “financing and planning of industry” were appointed to the Higher School of Economics in Prague.

Each ministry received its share of Soviet-trained graduates. Whether it was the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Transportation, or the Ministry of Culture, each one had Soviet-trained specialists reserved for them. The scholarship recipients were appointed as assets to the state. The Czechoslovak and Soviet governments had invested in them and given them the privilege of familiarizing themselves with the Soviet societal model and now they had to give back in their respective professions. Most of the graduates really did give back. They went on to live their everyday lives in their professions, utilizing their skills and

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<sup>6</sup> Ptejte se knihovny. "Vysoká Škola Ruského Jazyka a Literatury v Praze.", last modified Feb 24, 2015.

adhering to the rules in the socialist system. Those that returned from their studies to educate future generations helped to engrain Soviet work methods and values into the Czechoslovak system.

This chapter will go on to show that while the foreign student program was in theory part of a greater “friendship project”, it did not always succeed in making staunch Soviet allies of Czechoslovakia’s young and budding Communists.<sup>7</sup> It did make strides however, in ensuring that these students continued to engage with Russian and Soviet questions in their career and academic pursuits. Specialists did return with valuable expertise to contribute to the Czechoslovak government, academic institutions, and industries, but they were often unable to provide the shining review of their time in the USSR that the Soviets wanted them to.

#### “Future Functionaries and Future Screwups”

In his memoir, Radoslav Selucký writes that students who were exposed to the political practices in the USSR either became “future functionaries or future screwups.”<sup>8</sup> Applebaum presents Dušan Spáčil as one of the “functionaries.” He became ambassador of Czechoslovakia to the United States. Another individual from the archival documents had a similar path: as a Soviet graduate, Václav Malý went on to be ambassador to the Netherlands and Zambia.

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<sup>7</sup> Applebaum, *Empire of Friends*, 51.

<sup>8</sup> Selucký, Radoslav. 1972. *Východ Je Východ*. Cologne: INDEX, 37.

Applebaum also showed how two well-known alumni of Soviet institutions, Zdeněk Mlynář and Radoslav Selucký, were two of these screw-ups. Another screw-up that was present at the Moscow *zemliachestvo* meeting was Luděk Pekárek, who would rise to some of the highest positions as a physicist, but inevitably lose his position as director because of his political views.

Whether graduates became functionaries or screw-ups, their experiences with Soviet citizens and institutions ensured their engagement with many different aspects of the Soviet system, no matter their opinions on Stalinism and subsequent objections to Soviet influence over the Czechoslovak government. All of them, whether they ended up opposing the system or not, contributed to the bolstering of the elite formed around Communist ideologies, which all of them at least started out being loyal to.

### The Functionaries

#### **Dušan Spáčil**

Dušan Spáčil had been loyal from the very beginning– he joined the KSČ directly in June 1945. Starting his law studies in 1948 at Charles University, he went on to continue them in Kyiv, finishing in Moscow. He held a very different view of the culture of the foreign student program in the USSR, claiming that there had not been any of the accusations or spying that became such a problem for the other *zemliachestva*. Spáčil had also been the head of his *zemliachestvo* in Kyiv, describing everyone as being “committed Communists

and friends of the Soviet Union.”<sup>9</sup> The Kyiv *zemliachestvo* still worked as a disciplinary body however, as Spáčil also describes how cases of poor student behavior were discussed, with the worst-case being student expulsion. After his studies in Kyiv and Moscow, Spáčil went on to hold a number of diplomatic posts within the KSČ until 1990.<sup>10</sup>

As the diplomatic elite, Spáčil held several positions that contributed to Czechoslovakia’s relationship with not just the USSR, but most of the rest of the world as well. His career started in the United Nations where he was one of the secretaries to Czechoslovakia’s permanent mission to the UN between 1956-1960. After a post at the Czechoslovak embassy in Moscow between 1964 and 1967, he returned and was one of the founding members of the Union of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship (*Svaz československo-sovětského přátelství*). Between 1971 and 1975 he was the ambassador to the United States, after which he led or worked for different missions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including on relations with the USSR and other socialist bloc countries. Spáčil ended his career as ambassador to the German Democratic Republic and finally, served as the last Communist director of the Institute of International Affairs (*Ústav mezinárodních vztahů*).<sup>11</sup>

Spáčil, in contrast to Mlynář or Selucký, reflects on his time in the USSR fondly, viewing it as a formative experience for the development of his political views and loyalty to Communism. He is the poster person of a qualified and *loyal* cadre worker. Spáčil’s career trajectory demonstrates the diplomatic power that the foreign student program had

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<sup>9</sup> Applebaum, *Empire of Friends*, 79.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Dejmek, Jindřich. 2013. *Diplomacie Československa, Díl II. Biografický Slovník Československých Diplomátů (1918-1992)*. Prague.

in producing national specialists that increased Czechoslovakia's relevance and competitiveness on the world stage, while remaining closely intertwined with the USSR.

### **Václav Malý**

Between 1948 and 1953, Václav Malý, one of the people on the list of Soviet graduates in the archival documents, studied in the Department of International Relations. While there aren't accounts of his days as a student in Kyiv, Malý's career also followed a prestigious course, much like Spáčil's. In the context of the great need for teachers and professors in the early fifties, Malý was first appointed to the department of international relations at Charles University, but he was soon transferred directly to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There, his expertise from his time in the Soviet Union was utilized in the department of Soviet affairs and he eventually became the head of the department.

After 1957 his regional focus was shifted to countries in Africa, through which he worked for the embassy in Cairo, Egypt and then Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. He proved to be a loyal cadre worker in the wake of 1968, or a "verified cadre" (*prověřený kádr*), which allowed him to obtain the position of ambassador to the Netherlands. The end and peak of his career was when he served as ambassador to Zambia. Another part of the Soviet Union's foreign policy pursuits was investment in relations with African, Latin American and Asian countries. Much like with the socialist bloc, the USSR invested in bringing students and industry specialists from these countries to the USSR for the same type of career and ideological training. As a graduate of Soviet education, Malý would have been



able to familiarize himself with these special relations. The fact that he worked in both direct Czechoslovak-Soviet affairs and Czechoslovak affairs with Egypt, Ethiopia and Zambia, exemplifies how he, as a trained and “verified” cadre worker, contributed to the greater international project for the USSR.<sup>12</sup>

## The Screw-Ups

### Zdeněk Mlynář

After MZV absolved him of the accusations against him, Zdeněk Mlynář received his law degree from MGU and returned as a high-ranking functionary in the KSČ. In Mlynář’s case however, he went from being a functionary to a dissident, and thus, a screw-up. Reflecting on his time in the USSR, Mlynář points out in his memoir that, “Studying in Moscow [...] meant more than just meeting real Soviet people, it also meant coming in contact with real Soviet institutions, with the day-to-day operations of the gigantic all-controlling bureaucratic machinery of the Soviet state.”<sup>13</sup>

These lived experiences held a lot of power for the young Communists like Mlynář of the time, who were seeking guidance on how best to implement socialism in the Czechoslovak system. Mlynář serves as an example of just how high one could rise in the Communist Party with a Soviet degree. In his memoir, he reflects on his outlook on the Czechoslovak-Soviet relationship in 1952 when he was about halfway through his studies at MGU:

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<sup>12</sup> Dejmek, *Diplomacie Československa*, 483 -484.

<sup>13</sup> Mlynář, *Nightfrost in Prague*, 15.

It was not until years later that I came to understand how special my situation was in 1952. At that time, I belonged to a group of elite young party members in which the party leadership itself had placed so much hope that it set us apart from the consequences of its own policies. This up-and-coming generation was not to be split into accusers and the accused just yet, and it remained for the future to decide who would be given what role. In the meantime, we were to study.<sup>14</sup>

Although Mlynář got a taste of the era of accusations as a student in the *zemliachestvo*, he first went on to take his prestigious Soviet law degree to become a department head in the Office of the Public Prosecutor in Prague and continued to rise through the ranks of society from there. In 1956, he began a position in the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences at the Institute for the Study of the State and Law. There he researched political theory, after which, in 1964 he became secretary to the legal commission of the Central Committee. Finally, in the consequential year of 1968, Mlynář was elected to the secretariat of the Central Committee.

Mlynář rose to the very top of the political body of the KSČ, and as a staunchly believing Communist, fulfilled his duty of giving back as a civil servant. Eventually, however, the doubts that he began to have as a student in Moscow came out in his work as a party functionary. Mlynář even admits that, more so than the terror that developed out of the Stalinist time, it was the firsthand experiences that he had as a member of Soviet society that gave way to his first ideological doubts. Mlynář writes at length about his disappointment during his studies in the state of Soviet affairs and the attitudes of Soviet people towards their way of life.

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<sup>14</sup> Mlynář, *Nightfrost in Prague*, 10.

Whereas we [Czechoslovak students] considered devotion to public causes as an almost fundamental characteristic of the “new man” and never questioned the need to use our entire personal life with the struggle for grand social goals [...] most Soviet people whom we came to know tried to keep politics utterly separate from their personal lives.”<sup>15</sup> He describes his life living with six other Soviet students in one dorm (*obshezhitie*) room. According to him, it was usually at night, when vodka had entered his and his fellow Soviet peers’ systems, that the truth about Soviet citizens’ lives really came out, driving them to be “introspective” about their lack of power in making their own decisions. It led them to ask questions such as “am I a human being or not?”<sup>16</sup>

At the core of many of the policies and proceedings with students, there is a question of whether they are, in any given situation, being treated as people with free agency to make decisions and direct their own lives, or as controlled assets of a greater state apparatus. Here Mlynář presents how the realization of the lack of free agency was evident even amongst the Soviet students with which he was came into contact with. The lack of energy and hope that Mlynář experienced firsthand, had an impact on his belief in the USSR as the ideal model. And he corroborates the failure of the foreign student program to fulfill its ideological goals in this regard:

What the party leadership had sought by sending young party hopefuls to study in the Soviet Union for the most part did not work out. Instead of being even more faithful and highly-qualified Stalinists, the returning people, though still Stalinists, carried within them the seeds of future heresies; they were beginning to doubt the party’s most powerful incantations: the mandatory authority of the “Soviet model.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Mlynář, *Nightfrost in Prague*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

Ideologically, Mlynář was right. Many accounts from graduates of Soviet higher education institutions show that their time in the USSR did not necessarily make them fonder of the hegemon as a model for Czechoslovakia's socialist future. At the same time however, Mlynář still contributed greatly both on the intellectual front and later the political one because of his training in the Soviet Union. The Czechoslovak government was still able to capitalize on his training before he resigned from his posts in the Party in November of 1968 and became a founding member of Charta 77. And despite recalling his disappointment with the ideological weakness in many of his fellow Soviet peers, he would come to be very close friends with Mikhail Gorbachev, who he met during his studies at MGU. Such relationships, even if they did stem from a personal connection, were extremely valuable to the state and can be considered a political asset of the foreign student program. By capitalizing on their young peoples' day-to-day activities, conversations, and resulting relationships, the Czechoslovaks and Soviets used its people to advance their diplomatic goals.

### **Radoslav Selucký**

Radoslav Selucký, who became a leading Marxist reform economist in the 1960s, was also one of the students that studied in the USSR in the 1950s. As determined by Applebaum's research on Selucký, he was sent to the USSR by a local party functionary who convinced him that it would boost his career prospects "to get to know the land that had

become our [Czechoslovakia's] destiny."<sup>18</sup> Selucký would become one of the biggest troublemakers, and was even expelled from his studies from the USSR as a result of his vocal views on the state of Communism in the USSR and for expressing his doubts about Stalinist policies. Much like Mlynář, Selucký was put on the spot by his fellow peers studying in Leningrad with him, who brought attention to his anti-Stalinist and "individualistic" behaviors.

Selucký's doubts in Stalinism also stemmed from his conversation with Soviet friends. He countered Soviet hegemony, expressing his "doubt about the idea that the annexing of various European and Asian countries to Russia was a progressive historical action" and he "did not leave anyone in doubt that [he] interpreted proletarian internationalism as the complete equality of the various Communist countries and peoples, but not at all, however, as the subordination of their national interests to the Soviet Union's."<sup>19</sup> In an investigative report, which Applebaum included in her account of Selucký, it stated that "Comrade Selucký has not learned during his three year stay in the USSR how to free himself from individualism, capriciousness, undervaluing of others, lack of discipline."<sup>20</sup> In the third year of his studies, Selucký was thus expelled from his studies in the USSR.

In contrast to the harsh sentences or terror tactics that were employed against such outspoken critics, Selucký got off easy in the end. After some time in the army and working

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<sup>18</sup> Applebaum, *Empire of Friends*, 55.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>20</sup> Applebaum, *Empire of Friends*, 75.

odd jobs, he returned to his studies in Prague and would go on to be a well-known author, writing on Marxist ideologies in economics and sociology, including titles such as: “For everyone bread, for everyone roses: readings about Communism” (*Každému chléb, každému růže: čtení o komunismu*), and “A Person and His Free Time” (*Člověk a jeho volný čas*). In terms of relaying Marxist-Leninist values, Selucký still turned out to be a valuable alum in terms of his work as an elite in society. Even if he did not agree with its hegemonic foreign policy, he still went on to write several articles about the Soviet economy, exhibiting continued engagement with the questions and ideas that he had encountered as a student abroad.

### **Luděk Pekárek**

The case of Luděk Pekárek supports the idea that while the USSR’s agreement with Czechoslovakia did produce highly qualified elites, it failed to strengthen these workers’ loyalty to the Communist state in many respects. Pekárek, who was one of the questioners at the March 1952 *zemliachestvo* meeting, left for his studies in the USSR in 1951 to get his graduate degree in physics. He had previously received his bachelor’s degree from Charles University in Prague. Pekárek reflected on his time as a graduate student in the USSR with a certain degree of disappointment:

It sometimes happened that a student or aspirant sent by a friendly country to study in the USSR was so disappointed by the behavior of the officials in charge and the conditions offered upon arrival in the USSR, that he complained to his country's embassy about the poor provision for his studies (and one Hungarian student even returned home from Moscow shortly after his arrival, describing the

conditions of his temporary accommodation in a poorly heated gymnasium in freezing weather probably truthfully, but apparently so dramatically that the Soviet side found it necessary to change them).” Such complaints were very unpleasant for the officials in charge and often had concrete consequences.<sup>21</sup>

Pekárek experienced the hurdles of being a foreigner. Soviet academics’ suspicion of foreign students hindered the success of his academic opportunities: “I understood from the wording of the dean's repeated refusal to accept the position as my supervisor (i.e., from the wording ... *for reasons well known to you*) that the risk was that of contact with a foreigner, and that this risk was considerable for Soviet scientists.”

Nevertheless, Pekárek was able to finish his degree in the USSR and upon his return from Moscow in 1954, he received a well-respected position at the Institute of Physics in the Academy of Sciences, later becoming the director. In his position as director, he would often be allowed to go abroad and send back information on new developments in his field. As the environment of resistance began to heat up across Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and 70s however, Pekárek eventually proved to be politically unfit for this role as director. In the spring of 1968, most of the workers in the Institute of Physics, including Pekárek, aligned themselves with the route towards democratization, which led to the institute being classified under “*Prague workplaces most affected by rightwing opportunism.*” “Rightwing opportunism” was the term used for those that supported decentralization and liberalization of the government.

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<sup>21</sup> Pekárek, Luděk and Jelínek, Lukáš. "Životopis." Sisyfos Český klub skeptiků, 2018.

As one of these rightwing opportunists, Pekárek was absolved of his role as director and was at risk of losing his job at the institute completely. In this period of his career, between 1970 and 1971, the Stb (*Státní bezpečnost*), which was the Czechoslovak secret police, tried to get Pekárek to cooperate in a case against workers of the institute. These workers were accused of burning “cadre materials,” in the institute during the 1968 uprisings. Pekárek led the StB on a false trail, and the perpetrators were never found out. In another attempt from the StB to get Pekárek to cooperate, he protected fellow coworkers that were accused of expressing questionable views against the invasion or that returned from academic trips abroad.

Pekárek ended up being able to keep his job at the institute, but the research topics that he was dealing with were cancelled, he was barred from teaching at universities or leaving the country for twenty years and his name had to be omitted from books that he co-wrote in order for them to be published. After the fall of Communism, Pekárek would go on to hold a position at the main Hygienic station of Prague, becoming a regular lecturer at Charles University, an advisor to the Czech Ministry of Health and well-known name in the World Health Organization.

So, while Pekárek did become part of the academic elite after his studies in the Soviet Union, he certainly did not meet the expectation of becoming a loyal cadre member. His ideological journey was not what the KSČ envisioned when they sponsored his scholarship– he went from being a questioner in the *zemliachestvo* self-criticism trials, to becoming a reformist that led the secret police down false trails.



## From the 50s to the 70s

In the early 1950s, the Czechoslovak Communists led by Klement Gottwald underwent rapid reforms to prove their loyalty to the Soviet model. Twenty years later, in the early 1970s, the KSČ led by Gustav Husák was implementing policies in line with the period of so-called “normalization” (*normalizace*). This was the aftermath period of the 1968 Prague Spring and invasion of tanks from Warsaw Pact countries. During this time, the Czechoslovak government recognized the need to be stricter about the selection criteria and ensure that those being sent to the USSR were truly committed to upholding and strengthening Communism and relations with the USSR. As mentioned above, prospective students like Václav Malý were thus vetted as part of the “verified cadre.”

The fact that people like Mlynář and Pekárek, who were in such high positions in the *zemliachestvo*, ended up rebelling, and in Mlynář's case, even implementing reform against the Soviet model, is a testament to the ideological failings of the foreign student program. Czech archives have extensive numbers of detailed profiles of *aspiranti* (graduate students) that were sent to the USSR in the 1970s to study in institutions directly affiliated with the Soviet Communist Party. These reveal how the culture of the foreign student program in the 1970s was again directly correlated to the political events of the time.

### Profiles of Graduate Students During *Normalizace*

The Czech National Archive has extensive documentation of profiles of selected students from the 1970s. The foreign student program was developed during the years of Stalinist terror, and these profiles come from a time in which Czechoslovakia regressed *back* to a period of stringent controls. Thus, the language and criteria in these profiles are

indeed important for further understanding how developing political circumstances in Czechoslovakia affected the foreign student program over time.

The profiles analyzed here are specifically of people being sent for graduate study, or *aspirantura*. Many of those being sent for *aspirantura* in the seventies, would have completed their undergraduate education in the late fifties and early sixties, as part of the generation of young Communists that grew up in WWII, and were then faced with the decision of Communism or societal alienation as they pursued higher education. As has been demonstrated, those sent to Soviet higher education institutions in their undergraduate years, later chose whether they would remain loyal or choose the reform path. In this period of *normalizace*, the Czechoslovak population was forced to accept the upturn in economic conditions as relations with the USSR forcibly improved, but freedom was sacrificed to reinstated censorship and purges of anti-communist thought.

In a report of the 85th meeting of the Central Committee on June 22nd, 1970, the Central Committee was noticing a “significant shortage of cadres in the apparatus of the party and in the newly developed institutes of Marxism-Leninism in higher schools.” Yet the report also admits that “if the political and ideological attitudes of individual candidates are not able to be evaluated it is not possible to recommend them.” The government was constantly reconciling the need for more specialists for filling elite positions, with the hunt for ousting those disloyal to the Communist cause. The report therefore assures that those being recommended in the subsequent pages are “politically firm and enlightened workers of the party organ.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> NA, 85/9/48, KSČ ÚV 1945-1989, Praha - sekretariát 1966-1971, “Usnesení 85. schůze sekretariátu ÚV KSČ [Resolution of the 85th meeting of the Central Committee 22 June 1970, pg. 9] č.j. S 7725

The Czechoslovak government was approving a request of the Soviet government to send *aspiranti* to the Soviet Communist Party's Academy of Social Sciences, both for regular courses of study, but also for two-year studies to complete and defend graduate dissertations. Those recommended at this meeting are all between thirty and forty years old. The first part of the profiles described the candidate's age, marital status, current profession, family background, nationality, and details of party membership. One was also judged based on the categories of general education, language knowledge, party education, and work and function within the party.<sup>23</sup>

The distinction between general education and party education is important here. General education referred to degrees from long-established state universities, whereas party education referred to institutes created by the KSČ specifically for training Party functionaries. Many of the candidates recommended in this report have both a general education and a party education as part of their backgrounds. Amongst the Party-affiliated institutions mentioned in the report are the Higher Political School of the Central Committee of the KSČ (*Vysoká škola politická ÚV KSČ*), the Military Political School of J. Haken (*Vojenskopolitcké učeliště J. Hakena*), as well as the Institute of Social Sciences of ÚV KSČ (*Institut společenských věd při ÚV KSČ*).

These institutions served the KSČ directly and their role in creating new Communist elites within Czechoslovakia is thus well documented. Graduates of these institutions focused more on the Soviet-affiliated discipline of "social science", even receiving a special title of RSDr. or "doctor of socio-political sciences" (*doktor sociopolitických věd*). At the

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<sup>23</sup> NA, 85/9/48, KSČ ÚV 1945-1989, Praha - sekretariát 1966-1971, "Usnesení 85. schůze sekretariátu ÚV KSČ [Resolution of the 85th meeting of the Central Committee 22 June 1970, pg. 9] č.j. S 7725, 12.

Higher School of Politics for the Central Committee of the KSČ (*Ústřední výbor KSČ*), for example, students “were paid for their studies, but were subject to a firm discipline, including boarding accommodation; despite this, the course of study held a low amount of credit and the acquired degree of RSDr. did not have much academic weight.”<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, in a time when the Party infiltrated every aspect of education, these institutes were a clear way to ensure career growth and to show one's loyalty to the Party. Not to mention that these institutes mirrored their mother institutes in the USSR. In some of these cases, candidates received their “party education” from one of these institutions in Czechoslovakia before being approved for study in the model Soviet institution. In other cases, students had completed their undergraduate study in Soviet institutions and were returning for graduate study after robust engagement in Party positions.

Jaroslav Tlapák was the head of the economic division of the party in 1969. He had completed his undergraduate studies at the Leningrad Financial Institute between 1951-55. In 1969 he requested to return to Leningrad to complete his graduate studies and his request was fulfilled by the Central Committee with the reasoning that there was a “constant need for increasing the qualifications of party workers.”<sup>25</sup> Clearly the preferred place for increasing qualifications was in Soviet institutions.

Jan Cvik, although not as far up in the party, also returned to the USSR to study in his graduate years. In 1970, Cvik was a thirty-five-year-old Slovak from a worker's background. For one year between 1954-1955, he studied at the philosophical faculty in

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<sup>24</sup> Zdeněk R Nešpor. "Vysoká Škola Politická ÚV KSČ V Praze (1965–1990)." *Sociologická Encyklopedie - Sociologický ústav AV ČR.*, accessed Feb 25, 2023. “

<sup>25</sup> NA, KSČ-Byro ÚV KSČ pro řízení stranické práce v českých zemích, Praha 11, 28/16/11 “Povolení externího studia aspirantury s. Jaroslavu Tlapákovi” [Approval of external study for Jaroslav Tlapák, 7 August 1969], č.j. B365/31

Charles University, before continuing his undergraduate education at Leningrad University in the USSR. Cvik's career trajectory after his first degree from a Soviet institution made him a poster candidate for the government's effort to use Soviet education as a means for elite transformation. After completing his studies, he became a faculty member (*odborný asistent*) in the pedagogical institute in Košice, Slovakia. Between 1963-1965 he served as a secretary of the Czechoslovak Youth League before returning to be a lecturer in the ideological bureau of a regional branch of the Slovak Communist Party. He is described as:

.... a conscious worker and a disciplined member of the Party. Has rich experiences with propaganda work, actively engages into public political activities. In 1968-1969 he supported correct attitudes and opinions (*správné postoje a názory*). Advocated for our strong alliance with the USSR and with other countries of the Warsaw pact. Accepted the entrance of allied troops as the only guarantee for thwarting (*zmaření*) of plans of right-wing opportunistic and counterrevolutionary forces (*plánů pravicově oportunistických a kontrarevolučních sil*) in Czechoslovakia.<sup>26</sup>

Cvik was presented as a staunch supporter of Communism and Soviet control and was therefore sent to study "academic communism" so that he could complete his dissertation on "party leadership roles between 1945-1948". His membership in the party since 1954, education in the USSR, knowledge of Russian and cadre involvement made him a perfect candidate for strengthening both his own knowledge, and the ties to the USSR through his acquisition of this knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

Jan Kamenický, a 44-year-old married Party functionary from Slovakia gained his Communist education from the Higher Political School of ÚV KSČ before becoming a

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<sup>26</sup> NA, 85/9/48, KSČ ÚV 1945-1989, Praha - sekretariát 1966-1971, "Vyslání soudruhů na studia aspirantury v Moskvě [Sending comrades for graduates studies in Moscow pg. 12] č.j. S 7725

<sup>27</sup> NA, 85/9/48, KSČ ÚV 1945-1989, Praha - sekretariát 1966-1971, "Vyslání soudruhů na studia aspirantury v Moskvě [Sending comrades for graduates studies in Moscow pg. 12] č.j. S 7725

worker for the Bratislava regional branch of the Communist Party of Slovakia. He is evaluated as being on the correct side of things after 1968, having “not lost faith in the USSR and to other socialist countries” and being “convinced of the correctness and need of the measures of our allies”. Furthermore, Kamenický was approved to be sent for “completing his graduate studies in scientific communism and in his dissertation he [worked] on the issue of implementing the party’s role in the economy.”<sup>28</sup>

Kamenický, who “takes initiative and is prudent” was additionally mentioned to have been one of the first workers who contributed to creating connections with representatives of the allied forces and allies of the USSR. His membership in the ČSM, as well as the ROH is noted as part of his profile. ZV ROH was the “Revolutionary labor movement” (*Revoluční odborové hnutí*), acting as the main labor union in Czechoslovakia. Workers were often required to be members. According to an ROH membership card, the union “actively participate[d] in the building of a developed socialist society in our country, [fought] for peace and progress in the whole world”.<sup>29</sup> Kamenický is also presented as a perfect candidate to be sent to the USSR- he was involved in a wide range of Party affiliated organizations, spoke Russian, English and German. From his worker background beginnings, he had clearly worked his way up to his elite role in the national economic sector of the city of Bratislava party office.

These candidates are being sent to improve their expertise well into their established careers. Barbora Sabršúlová, a 39-year-old Slovak and classified as an “activist” of the city council of the Communist Party of Slovakia, was being sent to the Academy of

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> *Revoluční Odborové Hnutí, Členský Průkaz; Majetková, Alžběta. [Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, membership card of Alžběta Majetková] 1984.*

Sciences in Moscow to complete her dissertation on the “meaning and function of research on public opinion in socialist society.” Sabršúlová, also from a worker’s background, was praised for her research and writings on public opinion, which are noted to “have proven her interest in correct Marxist-Leninist points of view.” Although she had not had any Party-affiliated education, her participation in the Party and scholarly views propelled her to the upper echelons of Czechoslovak society, and the government wanted to ensure that this training would continue to be strengthened.<sup>30</sup>

Sabršúlová’s presence in this report also brings gender dynamics into question. Out of the eight people being recommended for graduate study in this report, only one of them is a woman. This was part of a larger trend in Czechoslovakia at the time, in which women were less likely to be found in positions of leadership despite the strong push for equality between genders in the socialist system. Great progress was made to increase representation of women in education in general. Between 1945 and 1975, the percentage of women represented in higher education grew from 18.5 percent to 41.0 percent.<sup>31</sup> But studies from the 1970s showed that there was reluctance amongst those in power to elect women to positions of political leadership and that women were very uninvolved in political matters. Since those being sent to the USSR had to have shown promise for returning and taking leading positions in their fields, it was less likely that women would have been chosen to be sent to Soviet institutions.

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<sup>30</sup> NA, 85/9/48, KSČ ÚV 1945-1989, Praha - sekretariát 1966-1971, “Vyslání soudruhů na studia aspirantury v Moskvě [Sending comrades for graduates studies in Moscow pg. 16] č.j. S 7725

<sup>31</sup> Wolchik, Sharon L. 1979. “The Status of Women in a Socialist Order: Czechoslovakia, 1948-1978.” *Slavic Review* 38 (4).

Both men and women were sent to the USSR, but the fields that were prioritized, namely the technical and sociopolitical ones, were fields that were dominated by men. Therefore, selectiveness and elitism attached to a degree from the USSR bred male dominated cohorts coming out of Czechoslovakia. Božena Šabršulová is an outlier, especially because she also possessed no party-affiliated education. Her profile shows that she worked her way up from her position as an administrative assistant in the Slovak Communist Party, to a candidate for a Soviet degree.

Another dynamic of those chosen for a Soviet degree are those that had military backgrounds. Václav Šípek was also from a worker's background and had contributed to the Party before his entry into basic military service by being a typographer for a regional weekly Communist newspaper.<sup>32</sup> After completion of the Military Political School of J. Haken, as well as the Higher Political School of the Central Committee of the KSČ, he became the principal of a regional political school (*Krajská politická škola*). With this political military training, Šípek was then assigned to work as a teacher at the military school itself, before moving on to training in the Institute of History and then becoming a principal of the regional political school. It is noted in his profile that in the consequential year of 1968 he ended his ties with the Institute of History because he did not agree with the "right-wing opportunistic focuses of many of the workers of this institute."<sup>33</sup>

Not only do these records exemplify the criteria by which people were being screened for being sent to the USSR, it also reveals the complex system of distributing those

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<sup>32</sup> NA, 85/9/48, KSČ ÚV 1945-1989, Praha - sekretariát 1966-1971, "Vyslání soudruhů na studia aspirantury v Moskvě [Sending comrades for graduate studies in Moscow pg. 17] č.j. S 7725

<sup>33</sup> NA, 85/9/48, KSČ ÚV 1945-1989, Praha - sekretariát 1966-1971, "Vyslání soudruhů na studia aspirantury v Moskvě [Sending comrades for graduates studies in Moscow pg. 17] č.j. S 7725.



people. All these candidates are going from one Party-serving role to the next, even completing their dissertations for the purposes of Czechoslovak national development and security. These reports from the 1970s emphasize just how much prestige the presence of a Soviet institution on one's record continued to hold even after the launch of the program in the early postwar period.

### Keeping the Peace

The urgency for Czechoslovakia to prove that it would still be loyal to the Soviet government in the 1970s, exemplifies the importance of this transnational education policy to 'keep the peace' between the two countries. Soviet training did ensure that Czechoslovak students returned with valuable skills to contribute to Czechoslovakia's socialist development. The daily life in Soviet society however, was entirely unconvincing for those young idealists that were encouraged to soak up all that they could from their experience abroad, and implement it back home.

Interactions with Soviet people were supposed to rub off on Czechoslovak students positively, yet in some cases these interactions fostered ideological doubts in the Czechoslovak students. In other cases, the Soviet monitoring practices in the *zemliachestvo* worked perfectly and only convinced individuals of the power of collective action. The fact that students like Mlynář, Selucký and Pekárek fought against the system does show weakness in the foreign student program's effectiveness, but the common thread amongst all the biographies, is that all of these people went on to lead prospering careers at the very top of their fields. The Soviet education provided graduates with what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu terms „symbolic capital“, which concerns a person's reputation as acquired through cultural recognition, rather than on the basis of more quantifiable economic

factors.<sup>34</sup> Students that had witnessed and experienced day-to-day life in the USSR were put on a certain intellectual pedestal upon their return, expected to relay their experience unto their fellow citizens who had not been given the same privilege. The prestige ascribed to the experience of living the daily life of the model socialist state was the symbolic capital that Czechoslovak graduates of Soviet higher education institutions possessed and carried with them into their careers.

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<sup>34</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. 1989. "The Forms of Capital." *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, 18.

## Conclusion

Even though Czechoslovak students did criticize Soviet life and power as a direct result of their Soviet university experiences, the foreign student program still served a powerful purpose for the Soviet internationalist project. From the onset of post WWII Czechoslovak-Soviet relations, the Czechoslovak government prioritized investment in the foreign student program as a tool for its goals in foreign affairs– first it was framed as a way of strengthening the relationship with the USSR as its “biggest Slavic ally”<sup>1</sup> and later it became part of the grander strategy for building and strengthening socialism in the country.<sup>2</sup> In both contexts, the foreign student program served both an educational and diplomatic purpose.

Students in Czechoslovakia had proven to be particularly strong civil society members even before the country’s closer relations with the Soviets. Having been perceived as the “nation’s conscience” as early as 1939, they fought, in vain, against the rising authoritarianism in Czechoslovakia after 1945.<sup>3</sup> When the KSČ rose to power, the youth that committed themselves to the socialist revolution started out as strong idealists, seeking out an experience that would confirm their visions for Czechoslovakia’s socialist future. In its quest to grow its imperial power, the Soviet Union capitalized on this idealism and used the foreign student program as a propaganda tool to create elites that were in support of Soviet influence across all parts of Czechoslovak society.

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<sup>1</sup> NA, kart. 1708, sig. 26, Ministerstvo školství a kultury, Praha; “Mezistátní dohoda o čs. stipendistech SSSR - zápis o poradě” [Intergovernmental agreement about Czechoslovak scholarship recipients in the USSR - minutes of the meeting, 19 December 1947, pg.2] A 289.603/47, VI, 4. el

<sup>2</sup> AMZV, f. TO SSSR-Obyčejně, 1945-1959, k. 17 [Report for comrade dr. I. Kopecký, Soviet office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs]

<sup>3</sup> Connelly, John. 2000. *Captive University the Sovietization of East German, Czech and Polish Higher Education, 1945–1956*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 118.

As was characteristic of the pragmatic approach to education under the rule of Stalin, the young people in search of a Soviet education became “subsidized people” that were chosen based on specific criteria pertaining to their familial background and political engagements. While in the USSR, students were expected to adhere to certain rights and responsibilities and continue to be active in the same types of public political organizations that had put them on the approved list for study abroad in the first place. All parts of their journey, as reported by representatives from the Czechoslovak embassy in Moscow, were carefully planned and reported on. The Soviet Union approved of this propaganda tool, but the culture of suspicion around foreigners also got in the way of the program’s smooth functioning.

The targeting of Jaromír Zimerman and the Czechoslovak *zemliachestvo* point to how the foreign student program was deeply intertwined with the political landscape around it. The culture of terror-driven political show trials implemented by the KSČ manifested itself in the denunciation and forced self-criticism testimonies in the Czechoslovak foreign student community. The *zemliachestvo* was as much a cultural and political hub, as it was a framework for monitoring students. Despite all this suspicion and awkwardness between Soviet officials and Czechoslovak students, the foreign student program did end up succeeding in strengthening Czechoslovak-Soviet relations by building a new elite. The KSČ also continued to uphold the importance of the program in a consequential diplomatic context following the Prague Spring, when an emphasis was placed on sending students that would prove the continued loyalty of Czechoslovak people to the USSR.

The systematic and prestigious career trajectories followed by graduates are the strongest indicator of how the foreign student program was successfully used as a political power tool by the Soviet Union. Soviet bureaucratic practices and control tactics that graduates brought back with them made it possible for the Soviet Union to continue to influence the culture of career environments across governmental, educational, and industrial institutions.

Whether students remained loyal to the KSČ and the Czechoslovak-Soviet relationship or not, the foreign student program served its purpose for providing individuals with high-ranking positions in their fields and ensured that they continued to engage with questions and issues about Soviet society through those careers. The foreign student program survived the political fluctuations that Czechoslovakia underwent from the 1950s to the 1970s and responded to these abovementioned shortcomings with a more targeted effort to send those who had clearly exemplified where their loyalties lie. The outcomes of the Czechoslovak student program in this regard show just how much power was vested in the continued interaction of Czechoslovak students with Soviet people and institutions. If the proper reform measures were implemented, the governments were determined to continue to use students as diplomatic tools that would ensure the continued *sblizhenie* or “rapprochement” of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union.

## Appendix

### Document 1

#### Ministry of Education and Culture

#### Rights and responsibilities

#### Of Czechoslovak *stipendisté* (scholarship recipients) in the USSR and people's democratic republics

The main task of Czechoslovak scholarship participants in the USSR and democratic people's republics are proper study and getting to know the country. Czechoslovak students will be supported in completing this task by the representative office (hereafter referred to as the RO) with the ambassador in the head role, who is the representative of Czechoslovak students in the respective country and whose instructions, orders and decisions must be unconditionally met by the Czechoslovak *stipendisté* (scholarship recipients).

During the completion of the main task, these rights and responsibilities are in effect:

#### Responsibilities of Czechoslovak scholarship participants

1. *Stipendisté* are required to study the subject designated by the Ministry of Education and Culture and to finish the course of study in the allotted time. Changing the course of study or an extension of studies is possible only after previous approval from the ministry of education and culture.
2. *Stipendisté* who are sent for a shorter study stay will specify their priorly planned out study plan immediately upon arrival and will present it with a statement from the school for approval from the RO.
3. *Stipendisté* are required to strive for the best results in their studies. Scholars are required to produce reports to the RO about their studies and life.
4. *Stipendisté* are required to abide by the laws and other regulations of the country in which they are studying.
5. *Stipendisté* must always present themselves and act in such a way that is proper for conscious, politically developed citizens cast from our democratic people's republic. They must serve as an example through completion of their study tasks and, with permission from the RO, must actively participate in public life.

6. Czechoslovak *stipendisté* must not receive or provide anyone with data or information about the structure, organization, or method of production etc., of organizations, offices, institutions, businesses, etc. of the country in which they are studying, and nobody is justified in requiring the retrieval of such data from Czechoslovak *stipendisté*. *Stipendisté* are required to immediately report every such case to the RO or ministry of education and culture.
7. Upon first arrival into the country, *stipendisté* are required to personally report to the RO. Furthermore, they are required to report to the RO the following:
  1. Their day of arrival from Czechoslovakia and departure from the country in which they are studying
  2. The address of residence in the place of study and all changes related to it
  3. The duration and address of stay for an internship outside of the place of study.
  4. More serious difficulties in studies
  5. Implementation of approved changes in specialization, higher education, and place of study
  6. The need to prolong studies.
  7. Change of name, status, the birth of a child
  8. More serious illness and recovery
  9. The day of studies ending
  10. The day of definitive departure to Czechoslovakia
8. It is necessary to request prior approval from the RO for departures to Czechoslovakia during the academic year due to academic and other reasons
9. All contact of *stipendisté* with offices of Czechoslovakia and the country in which they are studying occurs solely via the RO.
10. Within one month of finishing their studies, scholars are required to return to the homeland and immediately sign up at the central office or organ, to which they were assigned by the state plan for development of the national economy.

#### The Organization of Czechoslovak *stipendisté*

1. Assistance with the successful completion of tasks by Czechoslovak *stipendisté* in the USSR, is provided by organizations of the ČSM (Czechoslovak Youth League), whose activities are governed by the statutes of the ČSM and the guidelines of the Central Committee of the ČSM for the purpose of organizing the ČSM of =Czechoslovak *stipendisté* in the USSR.
2. In other countries assistance with the successful compilation of tasks is provided by the Groups of Czechoslovak *Stipendisté* Abroad, whose activities are driven by the decree from the Ministry of Education and culture 15.XII. 1958 čj. 55026/58-VII/5 about the activities of Groups of Czechoslovak *stipendisté* abroad

#### Material security of Czechoslovak *stipendisté*

1. During the time of study abroad, *stipendisté* receive a scholarship in the currency of the respective state. The amount of the scholarship is determined separately for each country.

2. For the duration of the stay in Czechoslovakia, e.g., during the summer break, students receive a scholarship based on the guidelines for providing scholarships to students of higher education and graduates based on the organizational and study order for research graduates, 42 announcement n. 73/1958
3. After completion of studies the *stipendisté* are entitled to a month-long scholarship, based on guidelines valid in Czechoslovakia, which are paid out in Czechoslovakia.
4. *Stipendisté* abroad are entitled to reimbursement for transport expenses in the following sums:
  - A. Students
    1. For 1 year of study .... 2 trips
    2. Study for two to three years .... 4 trips
    3. Study for at least 5 years .... 6 trips
  - B. Graduates

Graduates are entitled to reimbursement for 4 trips

In exceptional circumstances, for ex.

- a. The approval of an internship in the CSR for students
- b. Work trips for graduates
- c. Death in the family (parents, siblings, husband, wife, children)

The Ministry of Education and Culture will reimburse the transportation costs of both of these extraordinary trips. These trips are not counted in the designated number of trips. Scholars are entitled to the reimbursement of trips in the 2. class of fast trains

5. If exceptional costs arise for *stipendisté* (nutrition) or if they fall into financial hardship, they are entitled to ask for social assistance.
6. For the duration of studies scholars are insured on the basis of decree URO and SSZ from the day 15.V.1957, c.102U.1., regarding medical insurance and retirement securities of students and graduate researchers (U.1.z.23.V.1957, part 50). The responsibilities of the employer and administrative job connected with are carried out by the Ministry of Education and Culture
7. RO will allow scholars to visit Czechoslovakia even during the winter break on the condition that they completed their study responsibilities, that they will return on time to their place of study and that they will pay for both trips themselves
8. Scholars have the right to turn to the RO with questions, suggestions, and requests as via the ČSM organization or the Group of Czechoslovak *stipendisté* abroad, in justified cases even directly, and that either in writing or during a visit to the ZU
9. After being matched to a university abroad, scholars turn to respective organs at the university with general questions about their studies. If the scholars meet difficulties, they should put an effort into resolving them with respective organs of the school. In the case that it is not improved they turn to the ZU only after the ČSM organization or the Group of Czechoslovak *stipendisté* abroad.
10. Scholars can request a break from studies abroad in exceptional cases

#### Disciplinary order

1. Recognition for model fulfillment of responsibilities



*Stipendisté* that are fulfilling all of their responsibilities in an exemplary manner, can be honored by the ambassador with written or oral praise.

2. Violation of the foundational responsibilities of scholars.

Violation of the main responsibilities of scholars is punished as a misdemeanor. For the violation of the main responsibilities, the ambassador will issue an ordinary punishment based on the severity of the misdemeanor:

- a. Reprimand (*napomenutí*)
- b. A warning (*výstraha*)
- c. A more serious warning (*dotka*)

3. Violation of citizen responsibilities

Violation of citizen responsibilities (especially a criminal offense, e.g. unacceptable behavior) is punished disciplinarily as gross misconduct. For the violation of citizen responsibilities, the ambassador will decree the culprit a disciplinary punishment depending on the severity of the gross violation

- a. A serious warning
- b. A serious *dotka*
- c. In the most serious of cases the ambassador will suggest to the Ministry of Education and Culture the removal of the student from studies abroad

The designation of the disciplinary punishment must be delivered to the student in writing.

For removed students the preceding studies in Czechoslovakia will be decided by the rector of the university that suggested the student studies abroad

4) Correctional options

Before the orderly or disciplinary punishment is carried out, *stipendisté* will receive the opportunity to remedy the situation.

Against enacted orderly or disciplinary punishments, a remedial option is not allowed.

It is possible to request an appeal to the decision from the rector of the university in Czechoslovakia about future studies of a student removed from studies abroad 15 days after removal. Removal cannot be postponed

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1. Familial relations of *stipendisté* that are financially dependent on them are entitled to protections based on government decree from the day 17.VIII.1954. The request for family support must be given to the Ministry of education and Culture by the *stipendist*.
2. To finalize a marriage of a scholar with a person that isn't a state citizen of Czechoslovakia it is necessary to get approval from the Ministry of Domestic Affairs (1 law n 59/1952 Sb. about marriages with foreigners). The scholar is still required to announce the planned engagement to the Ministry of Education and Culture via the RO.

These guidelines come into effect on 1. September 1959

## Document 2

Approved by  
The Ministry of Higher Education of the USSR

### The temporary status of the *Zemliachestvo*

of foreign students and graduate assistants studying in institutions of higher education of the USSR

1. The *zemliachestvo* is a voluntary public organization uniting students and graduate students of a single country and that realizes a common connection between *zemljaki*, studying at institutions of higher education of the USSR.
2. With the assistance of public organizations and the diplomatic entities of their country, students and graduate students of each country appoint a senior *zemljak* (the head of the *zemliachestvo*) that heads the *zemliachestvo* and bears responsibility for the work of the *zemliachestvo*.
3. In each city, where foreign students and graduate assistants study, assistants are chosen to support the senior *zemljaks*: a board of the *zemliachestvo* is elected in cities where the number of foreign students exceeds 20 people.
4. The senior *zemljaks* are obligated to inform the diplomatic entities of their country, the Ministry of Higher Education, the directors of the institutions of higher education, and community organizations with which the *zemliachestvo* is connected in their daily work, about the work of the *zemliachestvo*

Their information should mainly include the following questions:

- 1/ academic performance
- 2/ cultural and educational work
- 3/ material and domestic issues

5. The board of the *zemliachestvo* and the helpers of the senior *zemljaks* in the cities, are obligated to regularly convene general meetings of *zemljaki* (at least once a month). At the general meetings of *zemljaks*, issues provided in the work plans are discussed.
6. *Zemliachestva* take the initiative to mass cultural work among among *zemljaki* for which they convene special evenings dedicated to the most important historical events from the life and history of their country, organize visits to museums, lectures, cinemas, theaters and take care of the systematic supply of newspapers and magazines to *zemljaki*
7. Directors and public organizations of universities provide assistance and help to *zemliachestva* of foreign students.

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