

GWZO Studies on Central and Eastern Europe:
Interdisciplinary Approaches to Culture, History, and the Environment

THE MAKING OF A SOCIALIST NIGHT

Society, Imagination,
and Everyday Life in
Czechoslovakia 1945–1960

Lucie Dušková

 CEU PRESS

The Making of a Socialist Night

GWZO Studies on Central and Eastern Europe: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Culture, History, and the Environment

GWZO Studies on Central and Eastern Europe: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Culture, History, and the Environment aims to deepen our understanding of processes of cultural, political, and social change in Central and Eastern Europe. Located at the intersection of different disciplines in the humanities, the series is a space for works of cultural and literary studies as well as history reaching from pre-modern times to the present. It seeks to offer new, differentiated, and multifaceted insights into the region against the backdrop of global (dis)entanglements.

The series' focus reflects the main areas of specialization of the Leibniz Institute for History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO): (1) transcultural approaches to politics, society, and the economy (2) culture, art, and architecture in the present and in the past (3) environmental humanities (4) the history of knowledge. It reflects the institute's transdisciplinarity, broad temporal scope, and methodological openness in the humanities.

Series editors

Julia Herzberg, Deputy Director of the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO) and Professor of Eastern European Cultural History, Leipzig University

Maren Röger, Director of the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO) and Professor of Central and Eastern European History, Leipzig University

Editorial Board

Adéla Gjuričová, Director of the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague

Béla Tomka, Professor at the Department of History, University of Szeged

Karin Friedrich, Professor in Early Modern History, University of Aberdeen

Victoria Frede, Associate Professor at the Department of History of the University of California at Berkeley

Anna Artwińska, Professor of Slavic Literary and Cultural Studies, Leipzig University

Kristina Jõekalda, Associate Professor, Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn

The Making of a Socialist Night

*Society, Imagination and Everyday Life
in Czechoslovakia 1945–1960*

Lucie Dušková

Translated by Ashley Davies



Central European University Press
Budapest–Vienna–New York–Amsterdam

Published with the support of the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO) e. V. in Leipzig. This measure is co-financed by tax funds on the basis of the budget adopted by the Saxon State Parliament.



Cover illustration: Czech Republik, Prague. Vencel tér (Václavské náměstí). 1955. Fortepan.
Photo: Donor: Csaba László örökösei, 287844

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 96 3386 858 4

e-ISBN 978 96 3386 859 1 (pdf)

e-ISBN 978 96 3386 860 7 (accessible ePub)

<https://doi.org/10.5117/9789633868584>



An electronic version of this book is freely available thanks to the libraries supporting CEU Press's Opening the Future model. More information and links to the open access ebook can be found at CEU.openingthefuture.net.



Creative Commons License CC-BY NC ND (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>)

© L. Dušková / Amsterdam University Press B.V. | Central European University Press, 2026

Some rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, any part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise).

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems.

For Dirk, Linda Marleen and Lisbeth Dorothea

Table of Contents

Foreword	11
Introduction	13
The Night as a Topic for Social Science Research	13
Imagination and Everyday Life under a Modern Dictatorship	18
<i>Methods</i>	18
<i>Sources</i>	21
Structure of the Book	29
 Part 1 Symbolism of the Night in Post-war Czechoslovakia	
 1. Night, Darkness and War	35
War as a Grim Drama	37
The Border Stolen in the Night	40
Darkness	44
War as an Imaginative Constant	49
 2. Socialism as Light	53
The Twilight of Capitalism and the Dawn of Socialism	54
The Coding of Key Principles	55
<i>Revolution</i>	57
<i>Knowledge</i>	58
<i>Technology</i>	59
<i>Man</i>	61
<i>Time</i>	62
 Part 2 Imperatives of the Night	
 3. Vigilance	69
The Stalinist Concept of Vigilance in Czechoslovakia	72
Saboteur Films	76
Meanings of the Imperative for Everyday Life	82
Vigilance between Ideological Purity and Audience Popularity	88

4. Working Night Shifts	97
Night Shifts in Context	100
Motivations for Working Night Shifts	103
Night Shifts in Film Narratives	105
<i>Patriotic Mission</i>	105
<i>A Source of Joy and Happiness in Building a New World</i>	107
<i>Female Emancipation</i>	109
<i>Rites of Passage</i>	111
<i>Proof of the Modernity of Socialism</i>	114
Explicit Representations and Ambiguous Practices	115
The Disenchantment of Night Work	121

Part 3 Lights in the Night Space

5. Street Lighting	135
Street Lighting within the Communist Doctrine	136
The Sovietisation of Street Lighting in Czechoslovakia	139
A Paradigm Shift?	143
6. Neon Lighting	151
The Difficult Restoration of Neon Lights	152
Socialist Neon Lights	156
Problems with Neon Lights	161
7. Lights of Socialist Festivities	169
Socialist Night Festivities?	170
A New Calendar of Festivities	174
Festivities or Entertainment?	182

Part 4 Living in the Night

8. Having Fun	189
The Structure of Entertainment after the War	191
In the Name of Temperance, Work and State	196
New Laws and Regulations	200
Images of Model Communist Entertainment	204
Between Continuity and Adaptation	207

Other Unexpected Consequences	211
<i>A Peculiar Organisation</i>	211
<i>Jazz and Swing as the Mainstream</i>	213
<i>Rediscovered Venues</i>	216
<i>Counterproductive Estrada</i>	217
9. Wandering through the Night, Transgressing Rules	221
The Post-War Underworld: The Imagination	222
Criminals in the Night City	226
In the Name of a Virtuous Society	228
The Parallel World and the Specifics of Night Crime under Communist Rule	230
<i>Prostitutes</i>	233
<i>Brawlers and Adventurers</i>	236
<i>Vagabonds and Con Artists</i>	237
<i>Car Thieves</i>	239
<i>Safe-Breakers and Burglars</i>	240
How to Reflect the Merciless Reality?	243
How to Control the Night?	247
Conclusion: A Socialist Night?	251
Abbreviations	259
Selected Sources	261
About the Author	267
Index	269

Foreword

I conceived this book as an endeavour to open up the field of the history of the night in an authoritarian regime, not only to a narrow circle of academics but also to a wider readership among the general public. I have attempted to write so as to make the text as accessible as possible, but also so that it can serve as a source of information for potential follow-up studies and analyses. The history of the night is a broad, diverse and until now only rarely investigated subject, which raises an endless number of current questions and issues. Many of them potentially touch on such topical challenges as the relationship and balance between freedom and security, economic growth and environmental protection, labour rights and the ethics of technological development.

Researching and writing this book would not have been possible without a scholarship from the Czech-German Fund for the Future / Deutsch-Tschechischer Zukunftsfonds, the Czech-Bavarian Academic Agency (BAYHOST), the Collegium Carolinum in Munich, and the International Visegrad Fund programme. I want to thank my colleagues from the Graduate School for East and Southeast European Studies at the University of Regensburg, where I was able to fully devote myself to my writing, for providing the necessary facilities for me to work on this project. I want to thank my colleagues from the Institute of History at the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava, with whom I was able to consult on questions relating to Slovak issues. I must also thank my colleagues from the Institute of Economic and Social History at Charles University (now the Institute of History), with whom I have enjoyed many fruitful discussions. In the final phase of the book preparations, I received invaluable support from the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO) in Leipzig. The GWZO also provided the support for translating the manuscript into English, thus making this work accessible to an international audience and agreed to include it in this new series. And most of all, I thank my partner Dirk and our two wonderful daughters, Marleen and Dorothea, for their support and patience.

Introduction

Abstract: This chapter presents night as a subject of research and poses the central question of the book (whether the socialist system created a socialist night). The text outlines the research methods and presents the sources used to answer the research question. It points out the advantages and disadvantages of the methods and sources employed in the book. Then, it refers to the shifting boundaries of nighttime and notes that darkness is a key characteristic of night. Finally, the chapter outlines the structure of the book and explains it.

Keywords: night, socialism, film, police archives, imaginary, everyday life

The Night as a Topic for Social Science Research

At the beginning of *The Proud Princess* – one of the most historically successful and to this day universally familiar and popular Czechoslovak films, first screened in cinemas in 1952 – King Miroslav sets out to the Kingdom of Midnight. His goal is to lure away Princess Krasomila, who is in thrall to wicked counsels.¹ At the border between the kingdoms, he is immediately “welcomed” by a vulture, a desolate landscape and a darkened sky. At the very next moment, a ragged cobbler runs up to the boundary stones, and without noticing, the traveller leaps over them, sings and dances, before returning completely drained and crestfallen to his side of the border. He explains to King Miroslav, with whom he subsequently swaps clothes in his shoemaker’s shop, that singing is prohibited in the Kingdom of Midnight

¹ Bořivoj Zeman, Bořivoj Zeman – Henryk Bloch – Oldřich Kautský, *Pyšná princezna* (Československý státní film, 26 September 1952). The film citations in this book are presented in the following format: Director’s name(s), screenwriter(s)’ name(s), *film title* (producer, premiere date) and, if applicable, concerned minutes. All the translations in this book are by the translator Ashley Davies.

because it is said to distract people from their work. Gradually, as King Miroslav, disguised as a cobbler, becomes acquainted with the neighbouring land, the audience discovers that the people there are very poor. They are impoverished by tax collectors, who act more like thieves than officials representing the public authority. The king of the land is old and weak and completely dominated by his counsels, who not only disregard the law but also shamelessly embezzle the taxes they have collected. There is no safety, and the law protects only the powerful. However, thanks to King Miroslav and the love that he awakens in Princess Krasomila, justice eventually triumphs. The counsels and tax collectors are taken to prison, and prosperity gradually returns to the land. In the final scenes, the kingdom is bathed in sunshine, and joy abounds. The people are allowed to dance and sing again, their choir proclaiming that henceforth all shall be “forever free”.

Although it was based on a nineteenth-century fairytale, and even though it is mostly not perceived this way by viewers, the film adaptation of *The Proud Princess* employs a series of updates related to the time of its making. Even though it is built upon universal values such as justice, honest work, the professionalism of officials and equal opportunities, it also bears the imprint of meanings from the period around the late 1940s and early 1950s, when Czechoslovakia (together with other states of Central and Eastern Europe) had embarked upon the path of building socialism. The gloomy Kingdom of Midnight, with its ragged paupers and corrupt elites symbolises what, in the prevailing view of the time, was the vanquished world of liberal capitalism. By contrast, the blossoming, sun-drenched, prospering land of King Miroslav populated by smiling citizens and presented to the viewers at the very beginning of the story, is a reference to the ideal socialist society. Nevertheless, the symbolic message is transmitted on a more subtle level and does not disrupt the viewing experience.

Within this setting of symbols and metaphors, the film's creators were not offering anything essentially new but were rather merely making use of already existing and socially accepted symbolic codes. Symbols and metaphors of the night have long been integral elements in the representation of various phenomena and ideas within the public space. The very oldest narratives relating to the creation of the world and the birth of civilisation set their beginnings in the night, thereby, among other factors, lending the stories a dark and ominous atmosphere.² Nocturnal metaphors undoubtedly

2 For example, Egyptian, Celtic or Gallic mythology. See Jean-Luc Nahel, “Les nuits d'ailleurs”, in *La nuit en question(s)*, eds. Catherine Espinasse, Luc Gwiazdzinski, and Edith Heurgon (Hermann, 2005), 34–37. For the Greek mythology, see Hésiodos, *Theogonia*. For Christianity

acquire their potency from the compelling experience of darkness, dating back to the time when humans lived in caves. In the dark, even familiar surroundings are transformed into an unexplored and mysterious terrain, out of which danger may suddenly appear. In this sense, fear of the night is a deeply rooted anthropological constant, just like the survival reflex, for example.³ Philosophers of antiquity and religious thinkers from ancient Greece to the present have drawn on night-day semantics to explain their key ideas. They frequently placed “night” in opposition to “day”, to which they gave preference as a time conducive to reason.⁴ Literati and fine artists have similarly made use of the symbolism of the night in order to enhance the effect of their artworks and stories with a hint of mystery.⁵ The Catholic Church and the Middle Ages presented a suspicion of the night, denoting it as a time given over to evil and witchcraft.⁶ The time around the turn of the eighteenth century saw the birth of the European Enlightenment. The metaphorical name indicates its main goals: to triumph over the darkness of superstition by enlightening society through reason, specifically and above all by means of secularised education for broad swathes of the population, restricting the power of the church and opening to science and technology. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many of these visions were developed further (and some were realised). Essentially, every epoch, ideology or philosophical current has attributed negative connotations to the night, and its various metaphors have been used in the same sense within the public space.⁷ Socialism was no exception, including the form of socialism that was established in Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1960. It combined the more general symbolic coding of socialist doctrine and the social context given by historical evolution.

and Judaism, see Bible, Genesis, chapter 1, verses 1–5. According to the New Testament, Jesus Christ was born at night, and his arrest took place at night. For Islam, see Koran, Sura 44 and the legend of the founding of the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

3 Bernard Millet, “L’homme, animal diurne?”, in *La nuit en question(s)*, 65–67.

4 Plato’s parable of the cave, for example. The term “night of the ages” is also used to refer to a distant period of time about which nothing is known, and indeed which it is not essential to know anything about. For example, the “Dark Ages” were coined by Renaissance thinkers to refer to the period between the end of the Roman Empire and their present, which would be best left out of the historical narrative altogether.

5 For an overview, see Matthew Beaumont, *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London – Chaucer to Dickens* (Verso Books, 2016).

6 See especially Alain Cabantous, *Histoire de la nuit XVII^e–XVIII^e siècle* (Fayard, 2009), 132–159, 307–312; Carlo Ginzburg, *Storia notturna. Una decifrazione del sabba* (Adelphi, 1989); Jacques Le Goff, *Le Moyen Âge et l’argent* (Perrin, 2005); Beaumont, *Nightwalking*.

7 For further enumeration see Luc Gwiazdzinski, *La nuit, dernière frontière de la ville* (Hermann, 2005), 25–37.

However, at the same time, the darkness of night can provide us with a certain amount of freedom in both our actions and our thoughts. In relation to this, the philosopher Michaël Foessel wrote that the night is the only time in which it is possible to live without witnesses. In his view, the night is a democratic time, open to all, providing refuge.⁸ The night weakens the control of the ruling power and the cogency of social rules. In the Middle Ages, the social order was temporarily overturned during carnivals, which took place at night when most norms ceased to apply. It was also a time when several revolts against the church and the aristocracy were sparked.⁹ For a substantial part of the Middle Ages, an explicit curfew was enforced in a number of countries, which in some cases persisted until the nineteenth century.¹⁰ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the institution of the police was established, with predecessors that included nightwatchmen tasked with maintaining order during the night.¹¹ In some European states, the Catholic Church long resisted the introduction of public street lighting in an effort to maintain the taboo on leaving one's dwellings at night and to foster the notion of its impenetrable danger.¹² According to the historian Alain Cabantous, it is precisely because of its subversive potential that the ruling elites cultivated a fear of the night. They propagated the myth that city streets at night were full of danger, even though they were fully aware that this was not true, precisely because it helped ensure social order and discipline.¹³

Both this symbolism and the practical aspects became materialised in the advancement of public street lighting, the professionalisation of the police and the advent of modern technologies, which progressively enabled an extension of daylight hours at the expense of the night. The historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch demonstrated how the technical inventions of the nineteenth century, and above all the widespread adoption of electricity, awakened a feeling among the people that nothing but a bright

8 Michaël Foessel, *La nuit: Vivre sans témoin* (Autrement, 2017), 13–18.

9 See for example Emmanuel Leroy-Ladurie, *Le Carnaval de Romans. De la Chandeleur au mercredi des Cendres 1579–1580* (Gallimard, 1979); Francois Furet and Denis Richet, *La Révolution* (Fayard, 1965); Michail Bachtin, *Rabelais and His World* (MIT Press, 1984).

10 See Michael Ray, “Curfew”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed May 12, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/curfew>.

11 Paolo Napoli, *Naissance de la police moderne. Pouvoir, normes, société* (La Découverte, 2003).

12 Cabantous, *Histoire*, 254.

13 See for example the book by Eloise Moss, which shows that, despite popular belief, no more robberies took place at night. Eloise Moss, *Night Raiders: Burglary and the Making of Modern Urban Life in London, 1860–1968* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

future awaited them in an illuminated world, whatever that might mean.¹⁴ Technical expansion was presented as a symbolic and practical victory of humanity over time and over nature, which had hitherto subjugated humanity through the alternation of day and night.¹⁵ Darkness began to disappear from the city streets. Thanks to lighting, factory working hours were extended and even night shifts could be introduced. With this came continuous industrial operation, which presented a series of economic, political and social challenges for the future. For those who had leisure time, an incipient entertainment industry emerged, based on the concentration of people in controllable venues and on the spending of money.¹⁶

At the end of the twentieth century, the night progressively became the subject of research by urban geographers, sociologists, biologists, psychologists, anthropologists and historians. The sociologist Murray Melbin likened it to a spatial boundary beyond which lies an unexplored territory, which every ruling power nevertheless attempts to overpower and control.¹⁷ In the same spirit, the urban geographer Luc Gwiazdzinski termed the night “the last frontier of the city”.¹⁸ Schivelbusch referred to the aforementioned processes as a “disenchanted night”. And in the words of the American essayist Jonathan Crary, the advent of twenty-first-century global capitalism has ultimately brought about the 24/7 society and “the ends of sleep”.¹⁹

This book investigates the symbolic meanings of night in conjunction with nighttime activities at a time when the new socio-economic system of state socialism was being progressively established in Czechoslovakia. Within the metaphors of *The Proud Princess*, the country was transformed from the Kingdom of Midnight into the land of King Miroslav. During this period, Czechoslovak society underwent a profound transformation in reaction to the previous events of the Great Depression, the Second World War and

14 See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (Blackwells, 1988), 50–78.

15 See for example, Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted*, 1–78; Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain 1800–1910* (University of California Press, 2008), 8–19; Luc Gwiazdzinski, “The Urban Night: A Space Time for Innovation and Sustainable Development”, *Articulo – Journal of Urban Research* 11, no. 2 (2015): 2–3.

16 Gwiazdzinski, *The Urban*, 1–14; Gwiazdzinski, *La nuit*, 101–140.

17 Murray Melbin, “Night as Frontier”, *American Sociological Review*, no. 43 (1978): 3–22.

18 Gwiazdzinski, *La nuit*, 144–173.

19 Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (Verso Books, 2013), 4–25.

the defeat of National Socialism. In its endeavour to create a new, different social order, it cast aside the market economy in favour of a centrally planned socialist economy and abandoned the liberal parliamentary political regime in favour of a one-party dictatorship. Riding on the wave of the post-war transformations and exploiting political symbolism, in February 1948, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) established its monopoly on power in the state. There followed an uncompromising application of the doctrine of Stalinism (1948–1953), during which the Communists pushed through their efforts to build socialism and transform society, with radical consequences. They attempted to seize complete control of time, space and people's thinking, again employing metaphors associated with the night, while endeavouring in their own specific manner to extirpate the natural night entirely. The end of Stalinism nevertheless also meant the end of this campaign. The second half of the 1950s was marked by a partial shift in approach and represents a period in which the Communists were more inclined to adapt their rule to current developments. Metaphors of night, as well as actual nighttime activities, were partially transformed, often manifested in a variety of paradoxical consequences brought about by the social developments of the time. In July 1960, the Czechoslovak National Assembly declared a new constitution, which officially stated that Czechoslovakia had successfully completed its path to socialism (and could now embark on the process of building communism).

Within the context of these transformations and the nature of the night outlined above, we find ourselves faced with a quite clear question: were any specific symbols, narratives, activities or institutions established during that time, which, taken together, may have given rise to something we could refer to as a socialist night? And if so, how could it be characterised?

Imagination and Everyday Life under a Modern Dictatorship

Methods

The questions raised and the chosen time frame are directed towards the realms of the imagination and the everyday life of a society operating within the conditions of a modern dictatorship. These realms also represent the basic methodological starting points of the study. As for the imagination, the philosopher Cornelius Castoradis conceived it as the universally shared notions that constitute the driving force of all events. He claimed that these notions are contained in the founding myths of every society, be it traditional or modern. They provide the foundation for its values and norms. They

determine the form of its institutions and laws, which at the same time are justified by various stories and long-term narratives. The imagination thus represents a framework that contains these deeply rooted symbols, which every member of the society understands seamlessly, with which everyone's thoughts automatically operate, and according to which people act in their daily lives. It is this imagination that is the source of the norms and rules that appear logical, and which are often perceived by the respective society as dictated by a natural order. The imagination can be shaped by those who are in power, though only to a limited extent. On the contrary, in principal meanings, it rather presents a structure that is both distinctive and universal, and by comparison, the period of a single political regime is only, in the words of Fernand Braudel, of medium or even short-term duration.²⁰ In this regard, the film *The Proud Princess* illustrates contemporary influences on the longer-term narrative of the founding myths of modern Czechoslovak society, which date back to the nineteenth century.

The history of everyday life is also conceived from a long-term perspective, and with regard to its continuities. The historian Alf Lüdtke presented this history as an endeavour to interconnect everyday activities with long-lasting and more general social and economic processes. He observed how everyday practices of people interact with these processes and how they function within the framework of existing institutions and norms.²¹ For many years, he reflected on the problem of how to investigate everyday life under a modern dictatorship. In his texts, he attempted to provide an answer to the urgent question of his day, namely why German workers, though they were traditionally organised within social democratic parties and associations, did not protest or in any way revolt against the Nazi putsch or even against the subsequent dictatorship, and that, on the contrary, they adapted relatively quickly to the National Socialist rule. He came to the conclusion that this was a result of their *Eigen-sinn*, a process by which individuals find their own meaning in the introduced norms and in their peculiar understanding of them. He noted that their reactions incorporated a whole range of approaches, depending on how the person in question perceived the system. Some participated actively, which may, in some cases, have been driven by conviction and, in others, sheer self-interest, while others adapted

20 Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (Seuil, 1999), 171–248; See also Évelyne Patlagean, "L'histoire de l'imaginaire", in: *La Nouvelle histoire*, ed. Jacques Le Goff (Complexe, 1990), 307–308, 321–327; Fernand Braudel, "Histoire et Sciences sociales: La longue durée", *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 13, no. 4 (1958): 725–753.

21 Alf Lüdtke, *History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton University Press, 1995).

pragmatically. Lüdtke emphasised that many may have been outwardly loyal, while in practice vacillating or distancing themselves in various ways or engaging in passive resistance. Some may even have seen resistance where others saw compliance. But whatever the reaction on the part of the workers, and whatever motivations they may have had for their actions, in Lüdtke's view the *Eigen-sinn* of the workers contributed to a stabilisation of power relations during the period of the National Socialism in Germany, however fragile this stability might have been. He emphasised that although it may not appear so at first glance, a constant process of bargaining was taking place between those in power and the workers, and so the relationships remained dynamic. This interactive character may have resulted in pressure from below for a transformation of the norms, values or institutions enforced from above, mostly due to apolitically formulated and frequently seemingly unnoticed demands. In addition to this, he demonstrated that norms set down on paper were something quite different from their application in practice, which may often bring unexpected results with paradoxical consequences. The applicability of this concept was subsequently tested and developed by Thomas Lindenberger who, this time, applied it to an analysis of state socialism.²² He also drew attention to a further characteristic of the concept of *Eigen-sinn*, which in his view is also an advantage: he argued that it was not possible to define the concept with complete precision because it encompasses a broad spectrum of approaches and actions, some of which may even stand in absolute opposition to one another. This in itself, then, precisely captures the obscurity and complexity of what it denotes.²³ *Eigen-sinn* thus places the normative level alongside the individual and often spontaneous agency of everyday living.

In principle, the concept of *Eigen-sinn* is identical to the concept of strategies and tactics, as formulated in parallel to Lüdtke by the philosopher and historian Michel de Certeau. In his conception, strategies represent a summary term denoting mechanisms determined by institutions, laws and norms, or by language. By contrast, tactics refer to the everyday actions of people within these mechanisms, whether conscious or unconscious. The form of tactics is determined by personal ambitions and motivations, chance happenings and spontaneous individual decisions, or a particular perception

22 Alf Lüdtke, "Ouvriers, Eigensinn et politique dans l'Allemagne du XX^e siècle", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, no. 113 (1996): 91–101; Thomas Lindenberger, "Eigen-Sinn. Domination and No Resistance", accessed 14 April 2024, <https://docupedia.de/zg/Eigensinn>; *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur* (Böhlau, 1999); *Volkspolizei. Herrschaftspraxis und öffentliche Ordnung im SED-Staat 1952–1968* (Böhlau, 2003).

23 Lindenberger, "Eigen-Sinn".

of the given rules. De Certeau notes that it is within human nature to act spontaneously and opportunistically, without the individual considering the broader contexts and the consequences of one's actions.²⁴ This book, therefore, examines people's nightly activities from this perspective. It observes how they manoeuvred within the delineated "strategic" space determined by the institutions and norms of the socialist dictatorship.

If we then subsequently join together the levels of the imagination and everyday life it is possible to assert that, in the resulting entanglement, the imagination serves as a starting point for studying agency. At the same time, to a considerable extent, the imagination reflects human activities, and its contents often change unobserved and in accordance with them. If we attempt to illustrate these principles using the metaphors of *The Proud Princess*, we see that the representations of the Kingdom of Midnight as the world of liberal capitalism are derived not only from the context of the building of socialism in the post-war period, but also from long-held notions in society concerning what kind of values and norms (such as greed or lying) are undesirable. This mentality, in turn, exerted a strong influence on the post-war social and economic development. On the other hand, in their everyday lives, people nevertheless retained a set of customs and activities that they considered expedient, but which may have resisted efforts to replace capitalism with socialism, although they may not have been aware of any antagonism towards the new system inherent within these customs and activities. This, then, also retrospectively influenced the (self-) representation of socialism and enforced social order and rules, primarily from the second half of the 1950s onwards. And it is this tension and ambiguous intermingling that this book sets out to explore.

Sources

In this book, the key to conducting an analysis of the web of imagination and practices lies in popular culture and its main post-war vehicle: the feature film. Its characteristics are appositely summarised by the theoretician Francesco Casetti, who drew attention to the fact that this medium has "the capacity to create 'public' images which speak to all strata of society".²⁵ Ultimately, he was proven right on this point by the boom in cinema attendance starting in the 1930s. The popularity of film springs primarily from the fact that it is both intellectually and financially accessible to a broad audience. It is usually an undemanding form of entertainment, which is

24 See Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du Quotidien. Vol. 1, Arts de Faire* (Gallimard, 1980), xi–xxiv.

25 Francesco Casetti, *Filmové teorie 1945–1990* (AMU, 2008), 333.

also attractive thanks to its combination of sound and image, drawing the audience into the plot.²⁶ After the war, a ticket to the cinema was relatively cheap, so virtually everyone could afford to visit it at least occasionally. Moreover, since the inter-war period, Czechoslovakia had hosted a dense network of cinemas. Almost every county town had its own cinema, so people did not have to travel especially far to see a film.²⁷ According to a sociological survey conducted in 1946, 32 per cent of the Czechoslovak population attended the cinema at least once a week, while a further approximately 20 per cent did so even more frequently. Approximately 14 per cent visited the cinema once a fortnight, and 35 per cent of the population of Czechoslovakia occasionally.²⁸ Feature films shown in cinemas thus represent a key to the imagination of Czechoslovak society before the (in many ways similar) expansion of television.

Through the medium of what were then contemporary stories, films also presented and unified lifestyles and common practices of everyday activities. Conversely, however, they also reflected them and captured their transformations. In this regard, Francesco Cassetti notes that film stories have the capacity to “reflect the behaviour and development of society. Film is considered a valuable witness that can present a testimony on the ways of acting and thinking that appear in the given society; as a mirror (perhaps idealised, perhaps distorted, but no less credible for it) of the actions, customs, desires, convictions and values that create the given culture. [Social scientists] appreciate its ability to record events and the way in which the given society perceives them; similarly, they appreciate its ability to allow reality to speak for itself, but also to embody desires and visions.”²⁹ Furthermore, in addition to these abilities, various backdrops and camera shots – either in an exterior setting or in the studio – provide us with a view of the (nocturnal) urban and rural space, of streets, houses, household furnishings, shops or public places. For this book, film has also provided a valuable insight into the state of public lighting in the city,

26 The founders of the Frankfurt School were the first to point this out in their critique of the film industry. See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford University Press, 2002, first published in 1944), 94–136; Sigfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton University Press, 1947), 35–188. See also texts by mass culture critics from the 1960s, Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem.

27 Jiří Havelka, *Československé filmové hospodářství 1945–1950* (Český filmový ústav, 1970), 81.

28 See “Cinema Attendance: How Often Do You Go to the Cinema?” Sociological survey accessed 11 October 2021, <http://nesstar.soc.cas.cz/webview>.

29 Cassetti, *Filmové*, 333. On the power of film as a medium see also Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (McGraw-Hill Education, 2002).

which would otherwise have been difficult to uncover. In addition, it has provided a glimpse into the operation of cafés, pubs, dancehalls, cinemas, and factories. And it has presented the life of various strata of society, from elites, through to students, workers and the criminal classes. Film stories and their characters introduced new phrases into the everyday vernacular of the time, presenting audiences with specific visions of and perspectives on domestic and international politics as well as everyday and working life. Therefore, the films are approached through the method of contextual analysis, in which the film material constitutes the basic “text” that requires further research in order to arrive at a proper analysis. Other sources, such as statistics, legal sources, police records and other expressions of popular culture, allow film narratives to be placed in the context of their time and social environment.

However, there are also spheres of human life associated with the night that have been captured in film only to a limited extent or not at all. These include sleep and the informal economy, which are mirrored rather sporadically. Sleep is often present only as a context or an unpleasant necessity that hinders more important activities, while the informal economy is often associated with criminality. There is a danger that one might overlook these activities or succumb to the viewpoint of the film, which, according to the situation, trivialises, stylises or stereotypes them. It is also true that readers will not find a detailed analysis of these two activities in this book. It would be necessary to open up a further line of research and add further types of sources, even though an analysis of films has nevertheless made it possible to provide at least an outline of these subjects.

Czechoslovak politicians had been aware of the power of film since the 1930s, when the first proposals for the nationalisation of the cinema industry began to emerge. This eventually occurred in August 1945, when cinema became the first branch of industry to be nationalised. From then on, subsequent Czechoslovak governments endeavoured to transform its function. Rather than light entertainment, it was intended to become a public service, an all-encompassing instrument to cultivate society and promote desirable values and norms. A cinema school was launched with these purposes in 1946.³⁰ In the same year, the Ministry of Information, headed by the Communists, launched a programme of “*cinefication*”. The term marked the process of supplying the population with film performances in the greatest possible number, even in the most remote places. It was

30 On the form and the history of the film industry nationalisation see Petr Bilík, *Československá kinematografie 50. a 60. let (mimo novou vlnu)* (Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2013).

taken from the Soviet Union of the 1920s, where, together with the terms “electrification” and “radiofication”, “cinefication” established the idea of the promise of a revolutionary transformation of thought and life in society through modern technology. Cinefication consisted of the building of an even denser network of cinemas with the goal of establishing a cinema in every larger municipality, industrial plant and railway station, so that there would be one cinema seat for every ten viewers.³¹ Emphasis was placed on building cinemas in the Czech border regions, as well as in hitherto neglected rural areas of Slovakia. In case of necessity, the issue was to be resolved here by means of travelling cinemas and in settlements that had not yet been electrified, by connecting them to a generator.³² Film festivals were founded, many of which had their own thematic focus and function.³³ Large summer cinemas were also built, for example, at the ice rink in Ostrava, capable of accommodating over 10,000 viewers, or at Bratislava Castle Amphitheatre, which, according to contemporary data, could accommodate as many as 85,000 spectators.³⁴ Specialist and popular periodicals about film also emerged, serving as platforms for evaluating the work of filmmakers and educating audiences in the craft of film.

Film also played an important role internationally. From 1946 onwards at the latest, it became a focus of the rivalry between the incipient Eastern and Western blocs. It became a firmly fixed element in the symbolic and foreign policy of the individual powers, via which the Soviet Union and the United States of America attempted to build up a positive image of themselves and of the political-economic doctrine they espoused. This also naturally influenced the programming of cinemas.³⁵ Between 1946 and 1948, Czechoslovak cinema programmes favoured Western films, while the share of Soviet films showed a steady downward trend. Upon the establishment of the Communist Party dictatorship and the Sovietization of Czechoslovakia,

31 See Pavel Skopal, “The Cinematic Shapes of the Socialist Modernity Programme: Ideological and Economic Parameters of Cinema Distribution in the Czech lands 1948–1970”, in *Cinema, Audiences and Modernity: New Perspectives on European Cinema History*, eds. Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby, and Philippe Meers (Routledge, 2011), 83.

32 Václav Macek and Jelena Paštéková, *Dejiny Slovenskej kinematografie* (Slovenský filmový ústav, 2016), 121.

33 For example, Karlovy Vary Film Festival, Film Spring in the Village, Film Summer in the Village, Film Evenings in the Village, Film Autumn and, after 1948, the Workers’ Film Festival in all regional towns of Czechoslovakia.

34 See Ad. KUBA, “Naše kina se stávají místem intenzivního kulturního života a osvěžení. Péče o dokonalé, moderně technické vybavení čs. Kin”, *Kino. Čtrnáctideník čs. státního filmu*, 3 March 1949, 33; Macek and Paštéková, *Dejiny Slovenskej*, 121.

35 See Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (Vintage, 2005), 200–229.

this trend was reversed. However, statistics, press coverage and various personal testimonies show that films produced in the Eastern bloc did not achieve the expected success with Czechoslovak audiences. With a limited supply of Western films, audiences went mainly to see Czechoslovak films. Immediately after the war, the production of Czechoslovak films began, building on the pre-war and wartime numbers. Given the long tradition of Czechoslovak cinema since the inter-war period, and hence the craftsmanship, as well as the filmmakers' efforts to communicate with the audience, they represented a good compromise. They occupied a steady third of the screenings and an above-average number of visits. And if one had the chance, one would visit films produced in the Western bloc.³⁶

When the Czechoslovak film industry was nationalised, it may have appeared that, thanks to its potential, whoever had control of it would also be able to exercise decisive power over people's thinking. Nevertheless, as the film historians Pavel Skopal and Petr Szczepanik have highlighted, even during the harshest period of the dictatorship, 1948–1953, the influence of politicians on the film industry still had its limits.³⁷ The artistic dimension of film, which is built upon the ability of filmmakers to creatively narrate their everyday experiences, their *Eigen-sinn*, when deciding how to comply with the established rules, their interaction among themselves and their interaction with the audience, evaded total control by the Communist leaders. Despite all kinds of restrictions, the filmmakers succeeded in asserting their own visions at least within a limited scope, creating certain things their own way in order to accommodate their audiences to the maximum possible extent. They were, after all, respected professionals who were very difficult to replace, and audiences were highly sensitive to the artistic standard of the films. The limits of control manifested themselves, for example, in attendance rates, as people simply voted with their feet and did not go to see certain films. In addition, many people gradually stopped attending the cinema altogether. The antagonisms between divergent visions concerning the function of the medium of film held by the representatives of power, the filmmakers

36 Havelka, *Československé filmové*, 228, 81.

37 Pavel Skopal, *Filmová kultura severního trojúhelníku: Filmy, kina a diváci Československa, NDR a Polska, 1945–1968 – srovnávací perspektiva* (Host, 2014), 103–110, 139–210; Petr Szczepanik, *Továrna Barrandov: Svět filmařů a politická moc 1945–1970* (Národní filmový archiv, 2017), 157–337; “Machři a ‘diletanti’: Základní jednotky filmové praxe v době reorganizací a politických zvratů 1945 až 1962”, in *Naplánovaná kinematografie: Český filmový průmysl 1945 až 1960*, ed. Pavel Skopal (Academia, 2012), 27–101; “The State-Socialist Mode of Production and the Political History of Production Culture”, in *Behind the Screen: Inside European Production Cultures*, eds. Petr Szczepanik and Patrick Vonderau (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 113–134.

and the audiences culminated in a paralysis in 1951, when for the entire year Czechoslovak cinematography produced no more than seven films (in comparison with 18 in 1947, before the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia seized state power monopoly), and cinema attendance rates also fell to an all-time low.³⁸ Furthermore, each viewer takes something slightly different away from the given story and interprets it in a unique way. As the historian Jakub Machek has noted, even the most powerful propaganda comes up against its limits at the moment when it clashes with lived experience.³⁹

For these reasons, the sphere of the imagination requires other types of sources. This concerns literature, poetry, songs, posters or newspaper reports which are well suited to an analysis of representations of more abstract concepts. Other useful sources are laws and regulations, as well as names and functions of institutions. It is important to trace their development, context and the rationale for their establishment and abolition. And of course, it is also necessary to analyse the sources that open up the path to everyday practices and their interactions with public images.

The selection of sources for the analysis of night practices was inspired by the book by the medieval historian Emmanuel Le Roy-Ladurie. Using interrogation protocols from the Inquisition, which served as a de facto police force in the Middle Ages, he reconstructed the complexity and multi-layered character of everyday activities in the southern French village of Montailou.⁴⁰ It is often stated that this book laid the foundations for microhistory or history from below.⁴¹ The present book also makes maximum use of police and court documents (deposited in the Archive of Security Forces, ABS), albeit in a different historical context. They provide a wealth of information, above all, when they are read “against their intended meaning”, thus similarly to the way in which Le Roy-Ladurie approached his sources. In this respect, service books from the stations of the Public Security service (VB) were used here in order to provide an overview of everyday events within the given police district. Thorough use was also made of interrogation protocols and investigation files of the VB. On the one hand, these opened up a path to the world of those on the margins of society and the underworld, who have traditionally been associated with the night. Although police and

38 Jiří Havelka, *Československé filmové hospodářství 1951–1955* (Československý filmový ústav, 1972), 87.

39 Jakub Machek, “Populární kultura a státní socialismus”, *Forum Historiae* 7, no. 1 (2013): 67–74.

40 Emmanuel Le Roy-Ladurie, *Montailou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Folio, 1975).

41 See also Carlo Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi* (Einaudi, 1976); Carlo Ginzburg, John Tedeschi, and Anne C. Tedeschi, “Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It”, *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (1993): 10–35.

judicial materials cannot reconstruct nighttime events in their entirety, the police records frequently number several dozen pages featuring an in-depth recapitulation of the events before the suspects were detained and a wealth of witness testimony. As a result, they also provide access to events that did not involve any conflict with the law, thereby highlighting the diversity of nighttime activities. Moreover, thanks to their rigorousness in their attempt to reconstruct the entire past life of the individual under interrogation, including information about the person's age, employment, social origin and that of their parents and any likely accomplices, they enable us to observe various personal fates, sometimes dating back to the pre-war period, and to grasp even living conditions and means of subsistence that do not appear in official documents. In this respect, although they mediate only fragments of reality, they represent a genuine key to the life of people. These sources, therefore, often enable us to trace in substantial detail life stories that would otherwise have remained unknown to us, as well as activities that would otherwise have gone unrecorded. Besides, they enable us to observe the continuities and ruptures in the activities of a whole range of people spanning the different political and economic regimes that followed one another in Czechoslovakia during the first half of the twentieth century. As a result, they allow us to discover the specifics of a socialist dictatorship in practice.

Conversely, when working with these sources it is also necessary to keep in mind that the events may have been recorded rather haphazardly. In some cases, people may not have reported at all, others may have been overzealous. This may distort our view of nighttime events by making them appear full of sinister acts. But sometimes the motive for reporting may have been revenge, personal grievance or antipathy, or merely a momentary caprice on the part of the person reporting the incident because the offender had crossed their path or otherwise irritated them. In summary, in the words of the historian Jean-Marc Berlière: "‘Police files’ are by their very nature full of random accusations, groundless or false accusations and slander of a base character. Just like the letters from the informants and denouncers who thrive in turbulent times, these archives are much rather genuine ‘dustbins of history’ than a home of truth."⁴² This is even more true in the case of a dictatorship. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this book, this is to the advantage of the analysis. There is a wealth of material available that

42 Jean-Marc Berlière, "Archives de police/historiens policés?", *Revue d'histoire moderne & contemporaine* 48, no. 5 (2001): 57–68. See also Jacques-Guy Petit and Frédéric Chauvaud, "Archives de police: du fantasme au mirage", *L'histoire contemporaine et les usages des archives judiciaires 1800–1939* (Champion, 1998), 291–304.

can reveal a great deal about social norms or personality traits of those being interviewed, making it possible to approach the sources critically.

Another drawback when using this material lies in interrogations. The recorded questions and answers ensue from institutionalised notions of crime and the criminal environment, or of how these phenomena ought to appear. In other words, they are presented as objective, but as historian Dominique Kalifa has pointed out, they essentially depend on the imagination and ideas of the experts concerned.⁴³ A second problem is that interrogators can ask misleading questions, and, depending on the situation, the detainees in their answers can deny their actions or alternatively confess to offences they did not commit or agree with their interrogators just to be freed from the VB station as quickly as possible and on the best possible terms. They sometimes cover for their friends and relatives, and so “an indictment, a police report, an administrative report, an interrogation or a statement made pursuant to a court order – all these documents are, it should be recalled, interpretations, reconstructions resulting from negotiations or arrangements”.⁴⁴ As a result, a part of reality remains hidden or is distorted. Those under interrogation also often subconsciously adopt the language of the interrogators even though they would speak differently in their everyday lives; in other cases, their answers may be transcribed into the language of the interrogators. This results in a loss of authenticity. Moreover, we are operating here within the context of the authoritarian regime – a socialist dictatorship – the language of which always requires decoding before use.⁴⁵ Further authenticity is lost because it is not possible to record gestures, facial expressions, and the overall appearance that could complete the image of these people and their lives. Fortunately, some of the files contain photographs and medical reports, allowing for at least a partial picture to be formed.⁴⁶

It would have undoubtedly been of enormous benefit to be able to interview the individuals involved in person, but due to the age of the files,

43 On the fabrication of so-called expert discourses on the criminal underworld at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Dominique Kalifa, *Les bas-fonds: Histoire d'un imaginaire* (Seuil, 2013), 269–372.

44 Berlière, “Archives”, 57–68.

45 On the language of socialist dictatorship, see for example Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (University of California Press, 1995), 198–237; Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Cornell University Press, 2010).

46 For difficulties with police and court sources and reconstructing reality according to them, see also Victoria Skelton, “Parasites, Prostitution, and Everyday Vigilance in Socialist Czechoslovakia: An Interview with Dr. Christiane Brenner”, *Central European Yearbook* 2 (2020): 52–58.

this was no longer possible. The analysis of nightly activities is therefore supplemented with personal documents, above all published memoirs, as well as literary works and newspaper reports. Also available are more general situational reports, summary criminal reports and reports originating from the headquarters of the National Security Corps (SNB), which in the post-war period acted as an umbrella organisation of the security forces, as well as from the National Committees that performed the function of bodies of municipal local government, and also from the Ministry of the Interior. These documents provide a general summary of the nighttime activities of the population, while also conveying the viewpoint of those in power.

Structure of the Book

Between 1945 and 1960, the Czechoslovak film industry produced approximately 320 feature films. An analysis of them has enabled this book to establish a framework, together with more general motifs and major themes that came to the forefront within the public space in relation to the night. The themes that emerge from the analysis of these films thus form the basic axis of the text. These are representations of the Second World War and socialism, the imperative of vigilance and night work, three types of night lighting, entertainment and criminality. The chapters then reflect upon and examine these distinct themes in greater detail with the aid of further sources. They also trace their chronological development and place them within the necessary context.

The first part, therefore, focuses on the public image that shaped the development of post-war Czechoslovakia. The second part consists of two significant imperatives that ensued from the post-war development, namely vigilance and night work. The third section concentrates on the spatial aspects of the formation of the socialist night, which were characterised by the specificities and paradoxes of the nighttime lighting of towns. The fourth part then concentrates on activities that spontaneously spring from the feeling of anonymity and freedom that the darkness of night offers, but which, at the same time, the Czechoslovak communists wanted to deeply transform, namely, entertainment and petty crime.

Finally, one matter still requires clarification – what, in fact, is the night? Is it the time when nighttime quiet hours apply, which in most of the world is set between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.? It is frequently noted that nighttime quiet hours are merely a construct, with little direct influence on ordinary life, even though, to a considerable extent, they approximate the chronobiological

rhythm of most of society.⁴⁷ Hypotheses have even been put forward that no such thing as the night exists. There is only evening, which also incorporates the first hours of night, approximately up to midnight, and then morning slowly begins. Or is night the part of the day from dusk till dawn, which in most of the world varies depending upon the earth's trajectory around the sun? Is it, therefore, a natural rhythm that sets the tone after all? Perhaps everyone can agree that the night cannot be defined by fixed hours. However, according to most authors who have dealt with the night, it is ultimately darkness that best characterises it. Consequently, this book conceives of the night as the time of darkness, which varies depending on the season of the year.

47 Gwiazdzinski, *La nuit*, 48–56.

PART 1

Symbolism of the Night in Post-war Czechoslovakia

The dark, elliptical god of battles must illuminate the long days of order, labour and peace.

(Michel Foucault)¹

The first part of this book is devoted to the metaphors of the night in the public arena after the Second World War. In Czechoslovakia, as in much of Europe, night and various representations of darkness and gloom initially functioned as metaphors for the war and National Socialism. They intersected with the recent experience of the blackout and the curfew, which lent the night an air of impenetrability and threat. Moreover, in the final months of the war the lighting infrastructure had completely ceased to function due to military operations. A highly symbolic moment was then the capitulation of Germany in the night of 7–8 May, which took effect at midnight the following night, thus ending the war in Europe. As in ancient myths and religious tracts, night here symbolises the death of an old world and the birth of a new one. By contrast, the post-war era was depicted mostly in bright colours and through the metaphor of the arrival of radiant light or sunrise. Although these representations were often abstract and hyperbolic, they also evoked powerful and concrete emotions.

For this reason, the first part of this book focuses on two narrative trajectories that shaped the identity of post-war Czechoslovak society. The first sought to come to terms with the recently lived experience of war, whose roots in contemporary perception seemed to stretch back to the early fifteenth century. The second presented a vision of the future and a new order, firmly linked to Soviet socialism.

Czechoslovak society was grappling with the trauma of the government's 1938 surrender without a fight of the border territories inhabited by ethnic Germans, annexed by the Third Reich. The government was forced into this withdrawal following a meeting in Munich between Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, Neville Chamberlain and Edouard Daladier, without Czechoslovak representatives present. The handover of the so-called Sudetenland marked the beginning of Czechoslovakia's disintegration, which continued in March 1939 with the declaration of an independent Slovak fascist state and the subsequent German occupation of the rest of the Czech lands. While the Czech experience was ubiquitous in post-war narratives of the war, the history of the Slovak state (1939–1945) was largely neglected.

1 Michel Foucault, *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (The New Press, 1997), 62.

1. Night, Darkness and War

Abstract: The history of Czechoslovakia has been shaped by the concept of darkness and night as a tried-and-tested communication device. In post-war Czechoslovakia (as well as in the rest of Europe), night and darkness were associated with war and the horrors it brought. This chapter examines how this symbolism served to legitimise the actions of post-war governments in expelling members of the German minority, excusing their cruel treatment and massacres, and how it also served to legitimise the establishment of the Communist monopoly on power.

Keywords: night, darkness, film, Munich Conference, German minority

After over six years of foreign enslavement, the time has come when the sun of freedom is rising above our severely tested homeland. On its glorious, triumphant march westwards, the Red Army has liberated the first part of the Czechoslovak Republic. Thus, thanks to our great ally the Soviet Union, it has now been made possible for the President of the Republic to return to our liberated territory, and for a new Czechoslovak government to be formed here once again on home soil. The new government is to be a broad National Front of Czechs and Slovaks, composed of representatives of all the social groups and political movements that both at home and beyond our borders have waged the national liberation struggle to overthrow the German and Hungarian tyranny. The new government considers it its mission to follow this struggle through to its ultimate conclusion, side by side with the Soviet Union and our other allies, to the complete liberation of the republic, to contribute with all the strength of the Czech and Slovak nation to the total defeat of Hitler's Germany, and to take the first steps towards building a new, happier life for our nations in our liberated homeland.

(Košice Government Programme, 1945)¹

¹ Košický vládní program: Program československé vlády národní fronty Čechů a Slováků (Unie, 1945), article I.

These are the first sentences of the *Programme of the National Front of Czechs and Slovaks*, officially declared in April 1945, also known as the Košice Government Programme (because it was announced in the then newly liberated city of Košice), which laid the foundations of the conception of the post-war state. It was approved in March 1945 at a joint meeting of the Czechoslovak government in exile in London and members of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) exiled in Moscow.² The introduction to the programme depicted the new epoch with the metaphor of the rising sun, bringing freedom, happiness and a new order, while the past six years of war and National Socialist rule over the country were summed up implicitly as night. The metaphorical introduction was followed by more concrete plans summarised in a total of sixteen points. The immediate future consisted of an active engagement in military operations alongside the Soviet Union until the war's end, the strengthening and reform of the army (articles II–III) together with a subsequent foreign policy orientation towards the Soviet Union (articles IV, VII). It also involved the building of a “people’s democracy” founded on a system of National Committees (article V), improving and equalising relations between Czechs and Slovaks (article VI), and the establishment and maximum safeguarding of the state’s national independence. The latter was to be achieved by expelling members of German and Hungarian national minorities who had sympathised with National Socialism and confiscating their property. It also included holding a trial to prosecute the so-called Protectorate government, the puppet regime installed after the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, which followed the state’s disintegration after the annexation of the borderlands by the Third Reich in 1938 (articles VIII–X). Land reform was to be introduced to support smallholders, while industrial production, infrastructure and economic life were to be restored in the country in such a manner as to benefit the broadest – and above all the lower – sections of society (articles XI–XIII). The foundations were also to be laid for a “munificent social policy”, under which quality education would be made available to the lower social classes, “fair wages” guaranteed (article XIV) and a “cultural purge” carried out (article XV), with priority always given to the public interest over the individual (article XVI).

2 For further details on the elaboration and adoption of the programme see Jan Kuklík, *Vývoj československého práva 1945–1989* (Linde, 2009), 11–15.

War as a Grim Drama

The metaphor of “the rising sun of freedom” from the introduction to the Košice programme took hold quickly within the Czechoslovak public domain. It was employed on postcards, posters, in poems, political speeches, press articles and, naturally, also in films. In 1946, when the resumption of national film production brought the first tangible results, Czechoslovak viewers could see a total of twelve feature film premieres, five of which dealt with the experience of war. (The remaining films produced that year were comedies and crime films.) The war dramas were making abundant use of both metaphorical representations and practical human experiences of darkness. In the overwhelming majority of cases, these works depicted war and the Nazi rule over the Czech lands as a grim drama with a gripping story and a tragic ending. Most of the pivotal scenes from these films were set at night or in dark scenes that accentuated the oppressive atmosphere of these stories.

An illustrative example is provided by the first of these war films, *Thunder in the Hills*, which premiered in August 1946.³ Its plot follows the tragic fate of the cobbler Skýva, who shelters in his cottage an airman shot down during the Liberation battles that took place close to the village. The cobbler does not divulge his secret to his friends and family, so as not to endanger them, even at the cost of being suspected of collaborating with the Nazis. He ultimately pays the price with his life. Paradoxically, he dies at the moment when the village is liberated at the break of a new day. His death is thus placed in contrast with the rising sun above the liberated landscape, which is also the last scene of the film. The message of the story is both urgent and metaphorical. On one hand, it highlights the injustice of the cobbler's fate. On the other, it shows that his sacrifice was worthwhile now that the oncoming bright future is in sight. A similar conclusion can be seen in the film *The Heroes are Silent*, which premiered less than two months later.⁴ This film presents the story of two brothers, one of whom is engaged in the resistance movement, while the other hides his brother at home. However, they are betrayed, and the brother fighting in the resistance dies during his interrogation by the Gestapo. This scene is witnessed by his fiancée, who subsequently commits suicide. Before the interrogation, the

3 Václav Kubásek, Josef Mach, *V horách duní* (Česká státní výroba celovečerních filmů, 16 August 1946).

4 Miroslav Cikán and Vladimír Tůma, J. Z. Novák, *Hrdinové mlčí* (Česká státní výroba celovečerních filmů, 4 October 1946).

brothers deny knowing one another, and this is the last time they see each other alive. In this story, night serves primarily as a time when it is possible to engage in resistance activities from a hiding place. But the feeling of security that night provides is treacherous, since it is during the night that the Gestapo carries out its house searches. The fate of resistance fighters is also the subject of another drama entitled *Men Without Wings*, which was first screened at the end of October 1946.⁵ This time, the plot is set in the aviation repair shops next to Prague-Ruzyně airport, where a resistance group is operating. The climax of the story once again takes place during the night: the resistance fighters rely on the cover of darkness to provide them with a safe time and space for their plot. Nighttime plays a key role also in another film that appeared in Czechoslovak cinemas in the autumn of 1946. *Supermen* narrates the tragedy of a family of a ferryman who joins the resistance immediately after the occupation of the Czech lands in 1939 and helps a number of politically exposed individuals to escape. However, he is betrayed to the Gestapo by an informant from a nearby village, which leads to the murder of the ferryman and almost his entire family within the course of a single night.⁶

In these narratives, night therefore manifests as the moment of climax and tragedy in the grim drama that is war. It symbolises defeat and death, and in these stories, it often appears as if the sun will never rise again. These films were successful with audiences. The most popular ones attracted more than three million viewers, thus placing them among the most successful post-war premieres.⁷ This was indisputably because, for Czechoslovak society, they could serve as a kind of collective therapy.

At the same time, these films shaped a myth that progressively laid the foundations for the official, generally accepted interpretation and perception of recent history. They were all similar in their format. They focused on the experiences of ordinary people, whom they presented as suffering, dissenting victims who were either passively or actively engaged in resistance activities, which they then paid for with their lives. Although recent analyses have shown that the population often behaved in a compliant fashion, and in certain respects even profited from National Socialism, representations of Czechs and Slovaks as antifascist, suffering victims remain widespread

5 František Čáp, Bohumil Štěpánek, *Muži bez křídel* (Zplnomocněnec ministra informací pro výrobu celovečerních filmů, 25 October 1946).

6 Václav Wasserman, Josef Neuberg, *Nadlidé* (Československá filmová společnost, 26 November 1946).

7 Pavel Skopal, *Filmová kultura severního trojúhelníku: Filmy, kina a diváci Československa, NDR a Polska, 1945–1968 – srovnávací perspektiva* (Host, 2014), 189.

to this day.⁸ Another feature that the films had in common was that they focused exclusively on the Czech experience, whereas the Slovak fascist experience was completely ignored. This was partly due to the fact that the Slovak film industry was in its infancy at the time, and partly because presenting the Slovak experience of life in a fascist state was more complex and controversial.⁹

In 1947, the Czechoslovak film industry produced a total of eighteen films. A third of them consisted of war dramas. The remaining films were light comedies, social dramas or allegories. Several films with social themes used the war as a reference point or as a starting point for a return to normal life and work (*Three Comrades*, *Don't You Know of an Unoccupied Flat?*).¹⁰ These film narratives also began to incorporate the broader contexts of pre-war international events, as well as allegorical elements referring to the more distant past. This was also the year in which the first-ever colour feature film, *Warriors of Faith*, was made.¹¹ It tells the tale of the last commander of the so-called Hussite movement, which arose from the ideas of the Protestant preacher Jan Hus (1369–1415) in the fifteenth century and his struggle against the Catholic armies. The film offered an allegorical reinterpretation in a contemporary context and closely resembled other resistance narratives with tragic endings. The Hussites here were depicted as authentic, pure and unbroken Czechs who defended their honour to the last breath, even though they knew their struggle was in vain. The Catholics were identified with German ethnicity and clearly presented in a negative light. Here too, the filmmakers made use of scenes set at night whenever they wished to emphasise a certain image or idea, lend the story a sense of urgency, instil terror in the audience and remind them of recent events. The night served as a backdrop, particularly for highlighting images of opulent banquets held by wealthy aristocrats whose German origins were accentuated, in contrast with the scenes of the ascetic life of the Hussite warriors. During these nightly banquets, the wealthy German aristocracy

8 See for example Benjamin Frommer, "Denouncers and Fraternizers: Gender, Collaboration, and Retribution in Bohemia and Moravia during the Second World War and After", in *Gender and War in 20th-Century Eastern Europe*, eds. Maria Bucur and Nancy Wingfield (Indiana University Press, 2006), 111–132.

9 See Václav Macek and Jelena Paštěková, *Dejiny Slovenskej kinematografie* (Slovenský filmový ústav, 2016), 83.

10 Václav Wasserman, František Sádek – Vladimír Tůma, and Jan Gerstel, *Tři kamarádi* (Československá filmová společnost, 25 December 1947); Bořivoj Zeman, *Bořivoj Zeman and Ján Kadár, Nevíte o bytě?* (Československá filmová společnost, 14 November 1947).

11 Vladimír Borský, Sonja Špálová – Otakar Růžička, and Vladimír Borský, *Jan Roháč z Dubé* (Československá filmová společnost, 28 March 1947).

conspired and discussed how to increase the obligations of forced labour and how best to suppress the rights of their subjects, thereby showing audiences a parallel with the forced labour imposed during the war. The film was enormously successful with audiences, perhaps also because it featured several famous actors. By 1960, its screenings had been attended by over four million viewers.¹²

By contrast, in the years of 1946–1947, only two comedies dealing directly with the war were produced. Whereas *A Big Case* (1946) was lauded by critics as a welcome ridiculing of the (German) Protectorate's elites, *Nobody Knows Anything* (1947) was met with disapproval.¹³ This film follows two tram drivers who try to dispose of an SS officer who has accidentally been knocked unconscious and who had planned to inform on their neighbour, the fiancée of a resistance airman. Eventually, all three manage to flee the country in an Allied aeroplane. Reviewers objected to the film's portrayal of the Czechs as muddle-headed. They also derided the fact that the three were saved by an Allied plane, which was completely at odds with any conceivable historical reality.¹⁴ Particularly those who wrote for publications with close links to the KSČ or the security forces accused the film of trivialising the experience of war and excessively imitating English and American slapstick comedies. In addition, they disparaged its insufficient mockery of the occupying forces. Others noted that it seemed as if the attempt at levity was a bad joke.

The Border Stolen in the Night

The power of the experience of war – and its metaphorical identification with night and its threats forging the founding myths of the Czechoslovak

12 Jiří Havelka, *Československé filmové hospodářství 1956–1960* (Československý filmový ústav, 1973), 206. Unless otherwise stated, the total number of viewers in this publication is always given for the year 1960, for which these statistics have been published. For more detailed statistics, however, it would also be necessary to compare this with the number of weeks a given film was shown and, if necessary, to discern to what extent the number of tickets purchased corresponds to the number of actual visitors, given that tickets for some films were massively distributed without being used. However, this is a topic in itself. See Skopal, *Filmová kultura*, 139–242.

13 Václav Kubásek and Josef Mach, *Velký případ* (Československá filmová společnost, 20 December 1946); Josef Mach, Josef Mach and Jaromír Pleskot, *Nikdo nic neví* (Československá filmová společnost, 11 November 1947).

14 The National Film Archive (hereafter NFA), collection (hereafter f.) Collection of the Separates, inventory number (hereafter inv. č.) IIf-0022.

society – is well illustrated by the 1947 film *The Stolen Border*.¹⁵ It was directed by Jiří Weiss (1913–2004), who before the war worked as an assistant to the popular writer, director and later member of the anti-Nazi resistance Vladislav Vančura (1891–1942), and whose Jewish-Czech-German background led him to flee to Great Britain in 1939.¹⁶ In his film, Weiss investigates the pre-war and international contexts surrounding the fate of Czechoslovakia. The film deals with the events that led to general mobilisation, which was declared by the Czechoslovak government on 23 September 1938 in response to the demands of the Third Reich to cede territories with a population that was more than 50 per cent German (so-called Sudetenland).

The Munich Conference, held on the night of 29 to 30 September 1938, brought together the political leaders of France, Great Britain and Italy and led to Czechoslovakia being forced to agree to these demands and comply with them, as well as subsequently retreat from the disputed territory. These events represent a great historical trauma, sometimes referred to in the historical narrative as the ‘Munich Betrayal’ of Czechoslovakia by France and Great Britain, who had supposedly been Czechoslovak allies. While from their perspective the Czechoslovak concessions were intended to satisfy Hitler and prevent or at least delay the war, from the Czechoslovak perspective the German occupation of the Sudetenland meant the loss of approximatively 21 per cent of its historical territory, containing important infrastructure, and the beginning of the state’s disintegration, which culminated in the declaration of an independent fascist Slovakia and the occupation of the rest of the country by Nazi troops in March 1939. The fact that the representatives of Czechoslovakia were not invited to the meeting in Munich was also seen as a great humiliation, hence its outcome is sometimes referred to as the ‘Munich Dictate’. The question of whether or not the political leaders of Czechoslovakia should have obeyed the decision, and what the consequences of not obeying would have been, remains a controversial topic that periodically recurs in public debates to this day.¹⁷

This ‘great history’ is illustrated in the tale of an ethnically mixed border village with both Czech and German populations, which can be viewed as a microcosm of inter-war Czechoslovakia and the problematic coexistence of individual nationalities on its territory. Tensions in the village continually

15 Jiří Weiss, Jiří Weiss – Miloslav Fábera, and Bohumil Štěpánek, *Uloupená Hranice* (Československá filmová společnost, 14 March 1947).

16 For more details about his life see Jan Šulc, *Věrní zůstaneme. Anotace k dokumentu Jiřího Weissse*, accessed 19 June 2019. <https://www.csfd.cz/film/43538-vern-zustaneme/komentare/>.

17 See Jan Tesař, *Mnichovský komplex. Jeho příčiny a důsledky* (Prostor, 2000).

escalate, leading amongst other matters, to a tragedy in one mixed family. The key scenes are again set during the night. The German paramilitaries (*Sudetendeutsches Freikorps*) smuggle weapons from the Third Reich into Czechoslovakia and prepare in secret for an attack. The pivotal moment is the declaration of general mobilisation on the evening of 23 September 1938 and the subsequent preparations for a potential ground attack from Germany. The film's climax is set a few nights later in a battle between the German paramilitary forces and units of the Czechoslovak army, the financial guard, and the gendarmerie. Although the Czechs are outnumbered (less than twenty soldiers pitted against approximately seventy German paramilitary forces), they successfully fight off the attack. Despite incurring losses of life, they are prepared to fight on. However, at dawn on the day after the battle, the order comes to abandon the village and retreat inland. This is the outcome of the political negotiations in Munich on the night of 29 to 30 September 1938. As a result, the border – in the words of the film title – is “stolen” in the night. The film portrays the Munich Conference as a catastrophe, which, in the course of a single night, succeeded in undermining the preparations and resolve of both the army and the general population. In the morning, the commander of the gendarmerie laments over the grave of those fallen in the battle for the village: “It was all in vain, this is our Munich.” But the local woodcutter Srbek answers him in a firm voice: “Not at all, we shall return.”¹⁸ These are the last words of the film, and they therefore resound with great intensity.

The film is full of contemporary references and messages aimed at post-war society. In keeping with the opening sentences of the Košice Government Programme, the film also portrays the German population as an alien element that metaphorically brings the night. Despite having lived within the territory for centuries and contributed significantly to the state's economic prosperity, they were now depicted as a subversive element actively attacking the state from within its borders. The Czechoslovak Germans were now identified as fanatically radicalised, arrogant and ruthless tyrants with a natural propensity for National Socialism. By contrast, the ethnically Czech villagers are depicted as calm, hardworking, principled and down-to-earth people who welcome the fact that mobilisation has finally been declared. Their attitude is expressed by the son of the woodcutter Srbek: “Dad, I don't say all that much, but we should have driven those Krauts out long ago.”¹⁹ The Czechs here are tenacious and brave, and they never give up, even when

18 NFA, f. Scenarios, inv. č. S-1580-DL, 40.

19 Weiss, *Uloupená*, 00:32:30–00:32:36.

vastly outnumbered. This is incidentally noted by the local postmaster, who, the moment mobilisation is declared, wavers in his loyalties between his German ethnic origins and his profession as a Czechoslovak civil servant. So, through its story, *The Stolen Border* contributes to the justification of the expulsion of more than three million strong German minority between 1945 and 1947 as a logical fact in order to guarantee the state's sovereignty and security for the future. The demand for the expulsion of Germans was unanimously supported across the political spectrum, present in the press, political speeches and literature.²⁰

Another contemporary reference is the image of the Soviet Union, portrayed as a distant ally waiting for the opportunity to come to the aid of the Czechoslovaks. It is also expressed by one of the essential characters at the moment of general mobilisation, Sergeant Vrba, a volunteer in the International Brigades from the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). He appears together with other mobilised Czechoslovak soldiers at the break of day following the declaration of mobilisation, and seems to have just arrived from Spain, from where he also brings fresh news about the international situation. The locals then turn to him as an informed authority, asking for his assessment of the situation, to which he responds with an anxious shrug of the shoulders: "Yeah, until the Russians get here it's going to be tough, mate." And when the commander of the gendarmerie station asks him: "And what about the West?" – referring here especially to France and Great Britain – in response, Vrba just gives another sad and sheepish shrug and despondently repeats the words: "The West".²¹ It is as if he already knows how events will transpire a week later. Therefore, from a strategic perspective, the story illustrates that it would have been best for Czechoslovakia not to surrender but instead to mobilise for battle, rely on its own resources, and await the assistance of the Soviet Union. Although the representation of the Soviet Union – as a warrior against the darkness of occupation – was new in the Czechoslovak post-war public arena, it was nonetheless linked to older ideas of certain intellectuals from the Czech National Revival, particularly notions of pan-Slavism dating back to the nineteenth century. Through the semantic shifts that associated light with liberation and the advent of democracy, the Soviet Union came to be regarded as a power that also guaranteed these values.

20 See Christianne Brenner, *Mezi Východem a Západem. České politické diskurzy 1945–1948* (Argo, 2015), 142–152; Matěj Spurný, *Nejsou jako my. Česká společnost a menšiny v pohraničí 1945–1960* (Antikomplex, 2011), 31–36.

21 NFA, f. scénarios, inv. č. S-1580-DL, 19–20.

The story also captures pre-war hopes. Following the first clash with German commandos, when the sergeant and the commander are assessing their prospects at the gendarmerie station, another member of the local garrison runs in to inform them of what he has just heard: "That's more like it! The English navy is mobilising. So they're not all Chamberlains. That's cause for celebration!"²² However, throughout the entire film, this character gives the impression of being a dreamer, forever immersed in English detective novels. He is eventually killed in a night battle for the village just before the results of the Munich Conference are announced. His character thus serves to show Great Britain and France ("the West") as unreliable partners in whom only dreamers have any faith, and his death is a metaphor for the death of any hope of assistance from them.

The film *The Stolen Border* was attributed public political significance. This is clearly reflected in the date of its premiere – 14 March 1947 – the anniversary of the country's final disintegration in 1939. The premiere was attended by the then Minister of Defence, a war hero from the liberation battles on the Eastern Front, General Ludvík Svoboda (1895–1979). The premiere was also accompanied by an important media campaign. The film was seen by 3.4 million viewers, ranking it among the top fifteen most successful films of the immediate post-war period, in addition to winning several national awards.²³

Darkness

In Czechoslovakia, the metaphor of night quickly became linked to the metaphor of Darkness, which in the Czech lands in particular, evoked strong emotions. It was usually presented in capital letters to refer to the period following one of the first battles of the Thirty Years' War, the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, at which the Protestant troops of the Bohemian nobility, asserting greater autonomy for the country within the Habsburg Empire, were defeated by the Catholic troops of the Habsburgs. This was followed by the Catholic Reformation, led mainly by the Jesuit Order, and the closer adherence of the Bohemian lands to the Habsburg Empire. In the post-war period, this was interpreted as a national catastrophe comparable with the occupation of 1939, and many drew parallels between the two periods. For example, in September 1946, recalling the period of the war, an article written

²² Weiss, *Uloupená*, 01:05:02–01:05:07.

²³ Havelka, *Československé*, 210.

in the weekly journal *Dnešek*, which was close to the Czechoslovak Socialist Party, did not hesitate to identify society as a whole with the Protestant preachers of the seventeenth century. The article stated literally that the “Czech Brethren from the time of darkness [sic] were brought back to life in the times of [Reichs Protector Reinhard] Heydrich’s rule.”²⁴ Here, this referred primarily to people meeting secretly in small, private groups, where they offered one another consolation, motivation, and strength. According to the article’s author, the Czechs were sustained in their endurance by the legacy of Jan Hus’ preaching and self-sacrifice, as well as by the teaching and exile of another Protestant preacher, John Amos Comenius (1592–1670), whom the article indirectly likened to President Edvard Beneš (1884–1948) and his broadcasts from London exile. The post-war expulsion of the German population was therefore interpreted also as recompense for this earlier defeat and as the only way to prevent “another Munich” or a symbolic “next White Mountain”.²⁵

The metaphor of Darkness required no explanation. In the Czech lands, its dissemination was aided by the eponymous bestseller from 1915 by Alois Jirásek (1851–1930). The metaphor had even a state-building dimension and was employed when announcing the establishment of the independent state of Czechoslovakia in 1918. The Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence concluded that: “Democracy has defeated theocratic autocracy. Militarism is overcome – democracy is victorious; on the basis of democracy, mankind will be reorganised. The forces of *darkness* have served the victory of light – the longed-for age of humanity is dawning. We believe in democracy, we believe in liberty – and liberty evermore.”²⁶ Although the metaphor of Darkness was oriented primarily towards the Czech context, in Slovakia it could also resonate with the notion of the “Thousand-Year Slumber”, which referred to the period before Slovak national emancipation, when Slovakia was part of the Kingdom of Hungary.²⁷ Both metaphors symbolised life under the domination of a foreign power and another nation, an existence depicted as passive, oppressed and impoverished. Nonetheless, with reference to the

24 Gustav Kozák, “Traktát o nezávislém tisku”, *Dnešek*, 5 September 1946, 370.

25 See articles in the contemporary press.

26 Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Milan Rastislav Štefánik, and Edvard Beneš, *Declaration of Independence of the Czechoslovak Nations by Its Provisional Government* (The Marchbanks Press, October 1918), 7–8. Highlighted by L. D.

27 Andrej Findor, “Tisícročná poroba?”, in *Mýty naše slovenské*, eds. Eduard Krekovič, Elena Mannová, and Eva Krekovičová (Premedia, 2013), 75; Karol Hollý, “Historická narácia jako politický program: Analýza obrazov minulosti v programových textoch slovenského národného hnutia z rokov 1848 a 1861”, *Forum Historiae* 3, no. 2 (2009): 10.

dominance of Czech culture, the concept of Darkness also prevailed within the Slovak public space and began to incorporate Slovak history.

It soon became clear that those able to exploit the metaphor of Darkness for their own benefit would also be able to control Czechoslovak symbolic space.²⁸ The Communists quickly found their bearings in a heated atmosphere and a public sphere charged with emotions and symbols. They also enjoyed an advantage thanks to the political constellation and the distribution of posts within the government, where the power of the ministries of information, education, and the interior was evident. In the public domain, it was the Communists who sought to present themselves as the continuators of the symbolic legacy of the Protestant preachers, Hussite warriors and – in the words of the then Minister of Education (Zdeněk Nejedlý) – more generally as the “heirs of the great traditions of the Czech nation.”²⁹ After the Communists had definitively seized power in February 1948, they built a considerable part of their symbolic politics upon this very image of Darkness. The eponymous novel and other symbolic works were published in tens of thousands of copies, often with prefaces and epilogues penned by Communist intellectuals.³⁰

A significant event was the film adaptation of the novel *Darkness*, which the film industry began in 1950 and premiered in August 1951. It tells the story of the hunter Machovec and his children, who secretly practise the Protestant faith within the context of the Catholic Reformation after the Battle of White Mountain. Through the lives of Machovec's son and daughter, it describes the practices of the Catholic Reformation and glorifies the resistance of ordinary people against it. While the son remains firm in his original faith, the daughter momentarily falters. Notable contemporary references appear as early as the opening credits. Viewers were told that “at the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, the Bohemian aristocracy lost the independence of the Czech state because it did not cater to the needs of the people but instead defended only its own feudal interests. The people were subjected to unbearable oppression. The imposition of forced labour was increased. The people were deprived of their language and their faith.

28 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 42–65, 163–170.

29 See Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Komunisté, dědici velkých tradic českého národa* (Sekretariát ÚV KSČ, 1946). See also Bradley Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 89–103; Brenner, *Mezi Východem*, 64–73.

30 See for example Petr Šámal, “Znárodněný klasik: Jiráskovská akce jako prostředek legitimizace komunistické vlády”, in *Zrození mýtu. Dva životy husitské epochy*, ed. Robert Novotný (Paseka, 2011), 457–471.

The Jesuits, in alliance with the foreign government, attempted to destroy the great revolutionary traditions of the Czech people. An age of Darkness descended.”³¹ These lines are not included in the original novel. In the film, the Battle of White Mountain is again presented as an allegory of the Munich Conference of September 1938. Here again, a connection is drawn between a “foreign” power and the metaphor of night. Another new element was the extension of blame for these events to include the inter-war political and economic elites – referred to in the film’s language as the “Bohemian aristocracy, defending its own feudal interests.” In the following scenes, viewers witness the consequences of losing independence. The narrative moves to a quarry where exhausted, ragged paupers break and carry massive stones under the lash of a master’s whip. This is followed by a scene in which noblemen, during the ostentatious coronation ceremony of Emperor Charles VI (1685–1740), discuss the need to increase the obligations of forced labour. The contemporary references here also carried a social dimension, according to which “Darkness” fell primarily on the lower social classes. “Oppression” and “forced labour” were then still vivid in the collective memory.

Some of the film scenes were stylised to the point of depicting an outright class struggle. In this conception, the representatives of the Protestants bore a resemblance to the Communists. The Protestant masses in the film are conceived in the spirit of preaching the socialist doctrine of the equality of all people and opposition to the hierarchical society imposed by the Catholic Church. They represent the avant-garde of the second Hussite revival and harbingers of the arrival of the nation’s moments of glory, in which it was the Czechoslovak Communists who were stylised in the role of its leaders after the war. Deprivation of one’s language and faith in the film alluded both to nationalism and the banning of left-wing political parties, including the KSČ. Later, the film also employs far more overtly nationalistic references in the form of the characters’ reminiscences of the distant, glorious past, when “only Czech was spoken at the Castle”, again contributing to the construction of the myth of the illustrious Hussite past. The final sentence of the opening text implicitly identifies the Jesuits with the wartime elites, while “the great revolutionary traditions” refer to the Communist movement.

Another of the many period references is presented in the story’s conclusion. In contrast to the novel, the film has an optimistic ending. The main characters do not flee but take refuge in a Protestant bastion in East Bohemia, from which they intend to continue spreading the Protestant faith. The

31 Karel Steklý, *Temno* (Československý státní film, 24 August 1951), 00:02:10.

final scenes of the film then present a direct call to arms, again in a clear allusion to the Hussite movement. After the secret nighttime mass that concludes the story, Machovec declares to the congregation: "But it is not enough merely to read, to philosophise and wait for enslavement to end by itself. We have to go among the people. To rouse them! And to ignite within them the flame of the Hussite struggle against the nobility! Go, sharpen your scythes and forge your flails!" At that moment, Machovec's children in the background open the door of the barn where the gathering is being held, beyond which a red sunrise can be seen. Machovec bids farewell to the members of the assembly, shaking their hands and exhorting them in the words attributed to the Hussite commander Jan Žižka: "Do not fear your enemies. And take no notice of their numbers."³² He then turns around and, together with his children, walks out into the sunrise. We are thus presented with a pictorial linkage between the dissemination of the doctrine, the direct call to arms and the arrival of brighter tomorrows, in which the audience can again see references to the events of 1938–1939 and the refusal to give up without a fight.³³ This optimistic ending was thus intended to serve to mobilise engagement in the building of socialism, presented as a battle towards its ultimate triumph.

Parallel to the call to arms, the final scenes of the film depict the illustrative transformation of Machovec's daughter. Once a weak-willed girl who briefly showed a proclivity for Catholicism, she re-emerges as a convinced Protestant who actively supports her father. In the final scene, this transformation is symbolically reinforced by her change of clothes: whereas she has worn a brown dress or an embroidered bonnet throughout the entire film, in the closing scene, she appears in a blue skirt and white blouse, with a red shawl draped over her shoulders. This ensemble closely resembles the uniform of the members of the Czechoslovak Union of Youth, whose role at the time was to serve as missionaries of communism among young people.

In the film *Darkness*, however, nighttime has also another function: the night provides the backdrop against which the fires lit for the purpose of – in the words of one of the characters – "burning Czech books" and stand out. It is also the time when the upper social classes are shown depicting leisure pursuits. As in *Warriors of Faith*, this constitutes a stark contrast to the scenes

32 Steklý, *Temno*, 01:53:40–01:53:45.

33 Kamil Činátl, "Filmová paměť stalinismu, obrazy minulosti jako stabilizátor paměti a sociálních rámců kolektivního vzpomínání", in *Film a dějiny 3: Politická kamera – film a stalinismus*, eds. Kristian Feigelson and Petr Kopal (Casablanca – ÚSTR, 2012), 304–320.

of asceticism and labour of the lower – therefore Czech – classes. This also contrasts with the secret nocturnal masses, the clandestine meetings of movement members, the smuggling of books and escape plans that often resemble scenes from war films. And it is at night that the deputies burst in upon a secret mass. However, thanks to the darkness of night, most of those present manage to flee. In *Darkness*, as in the aforementioned films on the theme of the war, in certain cases, night represents a weakening of surveillance, and therefore an opportune time for open resistance activity, but also for raids and repression, which highlights its treacherous nature.

Perhaps also because *Darkness* was only the second Czechoslovak colour film, produced by filmmakers with experience in the pre-war film industry and featuring a famous cast, it was seen in cinemas by 2.8 million people, making it one of the most successful films of the period of 1945–1960. However, it did not achieve the same level of success as dramas of the immediate post-war era and its success cannot be related to the whole of Czechoslovakia, since it met with only a marginal reception in Slovakia due to the fact that it dealt primarily with a Czech experience.

War as an Imaginative Constant

The films made extensive use of darkness and night as established communicative devices. In some cases, these metaphors appeared directly in the titles; in others, key scenes were set at night. The image constructed by these narratives was flattering and thus went unquestioned, with little reason for deconstruction or criticism.³⁴ They often served as a form of collective therapy, providing a kind of alternative history. Millions of viewers saw these films in cinemas and, through them, absorbed and reinforced actualised, adapted, and alternative narratives. These were often unwittingly converted into indisputable truths. At the same time, the films often served to legitimise certain political decisions.

Between 1948 and 1950, war films accounted for approximately one-quarter of film production. In the following years, at least one film was made based on the theme of war each year. The production share increased regularly around the anniversaries of the war's end. The presentation of war, the Munich Conference, the resistance movement, oppression and tragic ending became constant motifs in Czechoslovak film production in the

34 In the 1960s, some of the so-called New Wave films attempted this, such as *Kočár do Vídně* (*Carriage to Vienna*) or *Obchod na korze* (*The Shop on Main Street*). However, these were exceptions.

years that followed. The subject of war was further expanded with stories of the liberation struggles, such as *Silent Barricade* about the Prague uprising of May 1945, and *The Marksman* about the liberation of the steelworks in the Ostrava region.³⁵ In August 1948, the film *White Darkness* about the Slovak National Uprising of 1944, which in the post-war period served to prove the Slovaks' antifascist character was released.³⁶ In this period, the Holocaust also emerged as a theme in film production. In Alfréd Radok *Distant Journey* (1948), the director reflected on his own fate and that of his family.³⁷ However, the film's portrayal, which also highlighted the role played by the Czechs in the Holocaust, challenged the prevailing myth of the natural (or at least passive) resistance of the Czech (and Slovak) population. As a result, screenings of the film were restricted and largely unofficial. In response, filmmakers avoided the subject until 1959, when Jiří Weiss directed a film adaptation of a short story aptly titled *Romeo, Juliet and Darkness*.³⁸ Allegories about weapons of mass destruction also appeared – for example, the film adaptation of Karel Čapek's *An Atomic Fantasy*.³⁹ In addition, new film stories emerged about the resettlement of the border regions after the expulsion of the German inhabitants. For example, *Border Village* premiered in February 1948.⁴⁰

Most of the war films from the period discussed in this book were made to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the end of the war, specifically in 1959, when war-themed films accounted for nearly a third of total production. In that year and the next, Weiss's *Romeo, Juliet and Darkness* was one of the most widely viewed films in Czechoslovak cinemas. Filmmakers also revisited the themes of betrayal and resistance (*A Higher Principle*), or the Slovak National Uprising (*Captain Dabač*).⁴¹ The theme of homecoming

35 Otakar Vávra, Otakar Vávra and Jan Drda, *Němá barikáda* (Československý státní film, May 6, 1949); Jiří Weiss, Milan Rusínský, *Poslední výstřel* (Československý státní film, 4 August 1950).

36 František Čáp, František Čáp and Leopold Lahola, *Bílá tma* (Československý státní film, 27 August 1948).

37 Alfréd Radok, Alfréd Radok – Mojmír Drvota, and Erik Kolár, *Daleká cesta* (Československý státní film, 3 June 1949).

38 Jiří Weiss, Jiří Weiss and Jan Otčenášek, *Romeo, Julie a tma* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 15 April 1960).

39 Otakar Vávra, Otakar Vávra and Jaroslav R. Vávra, *Krakatit* (Československá filmová společnost, 9 April 1948).

40 Jiří Krejčík, Vladimír Tůma and František Dvořák, *Ves v pohraničí* (Československá filmová společnost, 20 February 1948).

41 Paľo Bielik, *Kapitán Dabač* (Slovenská filmová tvorba, 6 November 1959); Jiří Krejčík, Jiří Krejčík – Jan Drda, *Vyšší princip* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 23 November 1960).

maintained a constant presence (*The Last Return*).⁴² By contrast, no war comedies were produced during these years – or in those that followed. In the interim period (1954–1957), a popular subject matter had been historical allegories, often returning to the Hussite theme (*Jan Hus*, *The Dogheads*, *Jan Žižka* and *Against All*). These films reinforced the myth of the Hussites as the precursors of the Communists and, at the same time, as builders and defenders of the independent state. They were lavishly staged, shot in colour, and, unsurprisingly, highly popular with audiences.

Another huge hit of the post-war period was the allegorical fairytale *The Princess with the Golden Star*, which was seen by almost three million people during the course of a single year following its premiere on 18 December 1959.⁴³ Once again, the fate of inter-war Czechoslovakia is presented through allegories, along with idealised narratives linked to both pre-war and post-war events. The kingdom in which Princess Lada with the Golden Star lives serves as a metaphor for Czechoslovakia. The elderly king is helpless in the face of threats from his powerful neighbour King Worldwrecker, whose insignia include a cross that conspicuously resembles the German war cross. In addition, his salute of a raised right arm is reminiscent of the Nazi salute. King Worldwrecker's offer of marriage to the princess can be interpreted as an allegory of the Third Reich's attempt to annex Czechoslovakia, initially by peaceful means. After the princess refuses his hand, the king no longer conceals his warlike intentions. Princess Lada's nighttime escape to the kingdom of Prince Radovan then points to a parallel of exile in the Soviet Union. The love between Lada and Radovan, whose name has its origins in the word "joy", can be interpreted as the alliance of Czechoslovakia with the Soviet Union, or, more precisely, the incorporation of Czechoslovakia into the Soviet Bloc. Radovan's kingdom symbolises an ideal socialist world. It is bathed in blazing sunlight, everything blossoms, and the people indulge in refined pleasures in the form of ballet and spirited discussions. Even the cooks are cultivated, and, furthermore, they perform their work with love, since they know it is appreciated. Radovan's ultimate triumph in a duel with Worldwrecker then illustrates the defeat of Hitler's Germany by the Soviet Union.

Thus, the basic narrative line became established. Although it lost its idealisation of the Soviet Union after the Prague Spring in 1968 and the collapse of the regime in 1989, it continues to appear in various forms in popular culture today.

42 František Kudláč, *Posledný návrat* (Slovenská filmová tvorba, 21 February 1959).

43 Martin Frič, Martin Frič and K. M. Walló, *Princezna se zlatou hvězdou* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 18 December 1959).

2. Socialism as Light

Abstract: This chapter examines how the significance of night and darkness extended to the market-economy system that prevailed in Czechoslovakia between the wars, and how socialism was framed in opposition to it as a bright future capable of ensuring social and economic justice. After the war, this interpretation was broadly shared across the political spectrum. The chapter then analyses the internal symbolism of socialist doctrine, which is important for understanding communist politics.

Keywords: capitalism, socialism, man, revolution, technology, time

*The sun is shining, the land is fragrant,
We dance upon it with glee,
Forever we are free.*

(Song from the film *The Proud Princess*, 1952)¹

From the end of the war onwards, metaphors of the night also encompassed earlier events – first and foremost the period of the Great Depression in the 1930s. From here on, the symbolism spread to the entire system of the liberal market economy. According to the widely held conviction of the time, this system had not only facilitated crisis, but then also failed to deal with it effectively. This shift in meanings, which seemingly occurred more or less automatically, was publicly noted by several observers. Thus, the renowned inter-war journalist Ferdinand Peroutka, in his article, appropriately entitled “When the Sleeper Awakens”, mercilessly laid out the charges against liberal market economy: “But there is no return. Even if capitalism might be able to

¹ Bořivoj Zeman, Bořivoj Zeman – Henryk Bloch – Oldřich Kautský, *Pyšná princezna* (Československý státní film, 26 September 1952), 01:26:34–01:26:46.

play a beneficial role in economic revival, even if in many cases it probably worked faster and more effectively than socialism, which is only in its incipient, experimental stages, the decisive fact is that it has lost the battle politically. And that means irredeemably. In many countries a substantial part of the bourgeoisie has compromised itself through its sympathies with the aggressive creed of fascism.” In response to the pre-war events, he presented the inevitability of the post-war turn to socialism, supporting his argument with powerful metaphors: “For a long time, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it might have been clear that whoever did not want socialism on a small scale would have it on a large scale. You, who today assiduously promote all the advantages of capitalism, tell me: how did you address the social issue under your system? Though all those who were sufficiently sensitive as observers of public affairs realised that the social issue could potentially be as explosive as dynamite, you were unable to overcome your indifference. This lies upon you like a cloud of guilt.”² This view was expressed even more explicitly in September 1947 by a colleague of Peroutka in response to the ongoing nationalisations in Great Britain: “Yes, even the cradle of liberalism has turned its back on liberalism, and is also directing and planning. Directing and planning has become the latest fashion in the world today. Liberalism is in a desolate state; its splendour has dimmed pitifully. The poverty of the world is guaranteed to be cured by a planned economy. A new epoch is beginning.”³

The Twilight of Capitalism and the Dawn of Socialism

These and similar articles illustrate how obsolete market economy appeared at the time. In contrast, socialism was often portrayed through metaphors of sunshine, light and radiance, and presented as the project of a new future. To contemporaries, it appeared to offer the solution to all the social and economic challenges of the day. Socialism was regarded as a progressive doctrine – a “modern project for society, capable of resolving all the problems of the day”. It would “abolish wars and the subjugation of nationalities and bring about social justice”, and, more generally, usher in a better future.⁴

In 1945, consensus prevailed in Czechoslovakia that poverty was to be primarily resolved through the nationalisation of key branches of industry

2 Ferdinand Peroutka, “Když spáček procitne”, *Dnešek*, 27 March 1946, 1.

3 Josef Beneš, “Stíny americké finanční pomoci”, *Dnešek*, 19 September 1946, 402.

4 Milena Nyklová, *České rozhovory Jiřího Lederera po dvaceti pěti letech* (Prostor, 2001), 212.

and the redistribution of income. As in Great Britain and France, the banks and mines were nationalised. In Czechoslovakia, large and medium-sized industrial enterprises were also nationalised. Nationalisations were officially proclaimed on the first post-war anniversary of the 1918 declaration of independence (28 October 1945), thereby symbolically linking modern statehood with these socio-economic measures. Following these nationalisations, the state sector accounted for 75 per cent of industrial production and employed 61.2 per cent of industrial workers. The nationalisation of industry was preceded and accompanied by the confiscation of large landed estates, especially those owned by the aristocracy as well as Hungarian and German proprietors, which were subsequently redistributed to small farmers or transferred to state ownership.⁵

The effective functioning of the economy was to be ensured through planning. Here, the Soviet Union served as a reference not only to the Czechoslovak, but also to other European governments, particularly because it had avoided the Great Depression. In July 1946, the Czechoslovak National Assembly approved the principle of economic planning in the form of a two-year plan, scheduled to be implemented in early 1947. The introduction of socialist elements into the economy was accepted even by Christian-oriented voters and the press. Although some had reservations regarding the methods of nationalisation and planning, they nevertheless saw these measures as first steps towards the realisation of a Catholic social doctrine.⁶ After the KSČ established its monopoly on power, a system of five-year plans was introduced, which remained in effect, with a few interruptions, until the regime's collapse in 1989.

The Coding of Key Principles

Czechoslovak Communists skilfully exploited the contemporary inclination towards socialism and its symbolic associations. Their victory in the first post-war elections of May 1946 was due in no small part to their metaphorical self-representations. These symbolic connotations helped them consolidate their hold on power in February 1948 (see chapter 3). As a system of metaphors and representations, the socialist doctrine was highly

5 Václav Průcha, ed., *Hospodářské a sociální dějiny Československa 1918–1992 II*. (Doplněk, 2009), 71–106.

6 See for example articles from the weekly *Obzory*, especially within the context of the debates on nationalisation and on the anniversary of the October Revolution in Russia in 1945.

elaborate. The public symbols promoted by the Czechoslovak Communists thus combined universal metaphors characteristic of the doctrine as a whole with specifically national elements.

Representations of the Soviet Union in Czechoslovakia were vividly conveyed through war films and allegorical cinema. War films often depicted the arrival of the Soviet army on Czechoslovak territory bathed in brilliant sunshine. Allegorical films, meanwhile, portrayed the Soviet Union as a sunlit, prosperous and progressive land, inhabited by happy, hardworking and yet refined people. This is the kingdom of Miroslav (*The Proud Princess*), and of Radovan (*The Princess with the Golden Star*). Both realms enjoy perpetual fine weather; in the kingdom of Radovan, balmy summer evenings provide the backdrop for cultivated festivities, including ballet performances and learned discussions – activities in which even the cooks take part.

The self-perception of the Czechoslovak Communists was reflected in their emblem. It featured variations of a five-pointed star adorned with linden leaves – the symbol of the national tree – displayed in bright colours either inside or around the star. For example, the version adopted for the cover of one of the KSČ's daily newspapers placed a rising sun in the middle of the star, above which was the inscription "Honour Labour".

In general, their self-representation was based on the general symbolism of communist doctrine, whose key elements were drawn from a jumble of sources: antiquity, Christian and Jewish religious and philosophical elements, Russian and Western European utopian thought, as well as folk traditions. They were continually reshaped by various historical events and processes. The historian Richard Stites, who examined the symbolism of the Bolshevik Revolution and the worldview of the Soviet Bolsheviks, summarised the underlying mechanisms as follows: "light was a metaphor for everything good, just as darkness represented poverty, evil and prejudice."⁷ Such metaphors reduced the complex ideas, principles and tenets of the socialist doctrine to a simplified form that could be understood by the broadest possible strata of society. At the time, they were most strongly associated with the concepts of revolution, time, knowledge, technology and Man. Together, these concepts created a long-term narrative and a long-lasting framework, explaining both the past and the present and predicting the future. The following pages will provide a brief outline of the content of these concepts in their Czechoslovak context.

7 Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 49.

Revolution

In the communist imagination, revolution marked a major turning point in history. As the historian Igal Halfin points out, it functioned as an equivalent to the Christian concept of Judgement Day.⁸ Revolution signified the end of a time, symbolised by the darkness of night, from which a new epoch, bathed in sunlight, would be born. For the Czechoslovak Communists, the end of the war represented the beginning of such a revolution, and in the immediate post-war period, they sought to intensify it – whether through further confiscations and nationalisations of property or through the consolidation of control over the media and culture as tools for reshaping people's thinking. Ultimately, they exploited the symbolism of revolution to discredit their political opponents in the eyes of the public, both before and, especially, after they obtained a monopoly on power (see chapter 3).

The Communist encoding of the revolution spread throughout the public sphere via popular culture. After 1948, several films about the history of the workers' movement were produced. For example, *The Struggle Will End Tomorrow* depicted a railway strike in Slovakia during the period of economic crisis, *Steel Town* focused on a mass strike of steel workers in 1931 during the Great Depression, and *Anna the Proletarian* portrayed the founding of the KSČ in 1920–1921.⁹ Beyond their central narratives, these films included the anthem of the workers' movement (and until 1944 also the anthem of the Soviet Union) the *Internationale*, whose final verse announces that after “the final struggle [revolution] the blessed sunlight then will stay”.¹⁰ Revolutionary reminiscences were further supplemented by historical references to the revolutionary year of 1848 – as in *Matouš the Cobbler*, *The 1848 Revolutionary Year* – a legacy that the Communists claimed to be continuing.¹¹

From 1950 onwards, readers of the postscript to the novel *Darkness* were informed that: “even today *Darkness* has much to tell us. Yes, today, at a time when we are concerned not only with forms of the national life, but

8 Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 2–52.

9 Miroslav Cikán, Ivan Bukovčan and Vladimír Mináč, *Boj sa skončí zajtra* (Československý státní film, May 19, 1951); Karel Steklý, Karel Steklý and Jaroslav Balík, *Anna Proletárka* (Československý státní film, 20 February 1953); Martin Frič and Otakar Kirchner, *Zocelení* (Československý státní film, 27 April 1951).

10 Eugène Pottier, *L'Internationale*, 1871, translated by Charles H. Kerr, accessed 13 January 2025, <https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/sounds/lyrics/international.htm>.

11 This could be seen for example in the films *O ševci Matoušovi* from 1948 (*Matouš the Cobbler*) and *Revoluční rok 1848* from 1949 (*The 1848 Revolutionary Year*).

with the very character of our people, a new, socialist character, perhaps even more so [...]. It shall greatly illuminate and fortify us in the struggle against the Darkness of today, which still lingers on in our people, even though victoriously overcome by the light of [the 1917] October [Bolshevik Revolution]".¹² This message was given visual form in the film adaptation whose final scenes depict the huntsman Machovec at the secret mass in the barn announcing the end of "Darkness" and the dawn of a new, better world. The closing image shows his children opening up the barn doors to reveal a red sun rising on the horizon.

Halfin nevertheless points out that, in contrast to Christians, Marxists are their own saviours and need not wait for the coming of Christ. At first, it is members of the intelligentsia, functioning somewhat like prophets, who enlighten the proletariat through their knowledge and understanding. In turn, the proletariat itself assumes the role of prophet and saviour, redeeming itself through its own consciousness.¹³ This idea is echoed in the film adaptation of *Darkness*, where the intelligentsia, as the disseminators of knowledge, were represented by the Protestant ministers, who figure as precursors of the communist intellectuals.

The same ethos was reflected in the Communist Party's broader educational mission, which materialised, for example, in compulsory Marxism-Leninism courses, the establishment of people's universities and the mass circulation of selected literary works. The novel *Darkness*, for instance, was republished a total of nine times between the establishment of the KSČ's monopoly on power and the adoption of the Socialist Constitution (1948–1960) – effectively a new edition almost every year.

Knowledge

Education and knowledge also represented the instruments of the liberation of all and the vector of progress leading to the achievement of revolution and the establishment of a communist society. According to Halfin, within the Marxist vocabulary, "darkness" denoted the rudimentary, unreflecting state of the worker's mind, which was to be illuminated precisely by the acquisition of knowledge.

In Czechoslovakia, this narrative was embodied allegorically by references to the Protestants or Hussites, in which the ethos of education was intertwined with national identity. For example, in the film *Darkness*, viewers

12 Zdeněk Nejedlý, "Doslov", in *Temno: historický obraz*, by Alois Jirásek (Melantrich, 1950), 652.

13 Halfin, *From Darkness*, 6–7.

encounter allusions to the burning of Czech books by (German-speaking) Catholics, contrasted with the Protestants, who are shown bringing “many books”. Here the books serve as weapons in the struggle against the enemy, and these scenes thus underscore another significant motif in the Czech and Slovak imagination: language as a marker of national sovereignty.¹⁴ The film’s final scenes culminate in this symbolism: During his children’s absence, the hunter Machovec becomes a Protestant minister. When preparing for a secret mass in the barn, he carries a pile of books to his hiding place. Reunited with his daughter, he informs her: “Just look how many books we’ve brought. The people are hungry for them. They crave books in which they can find the truth. They are searching for the light that will guide them out of this terrible Darkness.”¹⁵ The “light of truth” is the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism, and its dissemination was intended to restore a sense of bygone national glory, as well as to establish a new social order that only the Communists claimed to embody.

The concept of knowledge as a source of light drew on multiple traditions: ancient Gnosticism, the Enlightenment and strands of pre-Marxist socialism such as Owenism, Saint-Simonism and the visions of Thomas More and Tomasso Campanella, all of which emphasised the ideal of a cultured society. In practice, the metaphor of the “light of knowledge” rested on the widely shared belief that education and learning would enable workers to improve both their working and living conditions.¹⁶

Technology

Technological progress was designed to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and a leap forward in time. This perspective was embodied in the pervasive techno-optimism that filled the public sphere after the Czechoslovak Communists seized power. Initially, technological progress was understood primarily as a means of transforming the mindset of the individual; later, it was also conceived as a tool for improving living and working conditions (see chapters 4 and 5). In the 1960s, this culminated in the proclaimed triumph of the so-called scientific-technical revolution. The notion of governance by technical experts (technocratism), coupled with faith in technological optimism and progress through the application

14 On language as a vehicle of national emancipation see for example Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

15 Steklý, *Temno*, 01:52:58–01:53:10.

16 See the respective author’s books and Edward Palmer Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1963), 867; Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor: The Workers’ Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (Temple University Press, 1989), 147.

of technologies, remained one of the central motifs in Communist thought throughout virtually the entire period of their rule.¹⁷

Films once again played an important role in shaping representations of technology. Many of them recast the grand narratives of technical progress leading to a radiant future in a distinctly nationalistic way. A case in point is the 1951 historical film aptly titled *The Herald of Dawn*, which presents a familiar Czech tale of a visionary from the lower social classes, denied social mobility due to his humble Czech origins.¹⁸ As a consequence, he dies in poverty, and only after his death are his inventions recognised as functional – bringing him belated acclaim.

More often, however, the theme of rural mechanisation appeared, as in the 1951 film *Way Leading to Happiness*.¹⁹ Here, the tractor served as the symbol of technological progress – popular among the Communists as an emblem of the contrast between the old and new worlds, the arrival of a new order in the countryside, and even as a symbol of initiation. Under Communist rule, the tractor became a genuine pop-cultural icon, portrayed as a miraculous machine capable of solving all the problems of agriculture.²⁰ Other popular motifs included demonstrations of various technological processes in heavy industry, as in *The Z-8 Case* (1949) or *DS-70 Does Not Move Off* (1951), which will be discussed later in connection with the imperative of vigilance.²¹ The construction of dams likewise captured the Communist imagination, inspiring several stories, including the Slovak film *The Dam*.²² Technology was also frequently associated with female emancipation, whether in *Way Leading to Happiness*, which introduced audiences to the figure of the female tractor driver, or in the comedy *The Village Revolt* (1949), which centred on the automatic washing machine.²³

17 On technocratic optimism in Czechoslovakia see for example Vítězslav Sommer, ed., *Řídit socialismus jako firmu: Technokratické vládnutí v Československu 1956–1989* (Nakladatelství lidové noviny, 2019), 5–114.

18 Václav Krška, Václav Krška and Jaroslav Klíma, *Posel úsvitu* (Československý státní film, 28 September 1951).

19 Jiří Sequens, Jiří Sequens and Roman Hlaváč, *Cesta ke štěstí* (Československý státní film, 19 October 1951).

20 Alessandro Catalano, *Rudá záře nad literaturou. Česká literatura mezi socialismem a undergroundem* (Host, 2008), 141.

21 Miroslav Cikán, Miroslav Cikán – Jiří Marek, and Bohumil Štěpánek, *Případ Z-8* (Československý státní film, 26 February 1949); Vladimír Slavínský and Martin Frič, Otakar Kirchner and Vladimír Borský, *DS-70 nevyjíždí* (Československý státní film, 9 November 1951).

22 Paľo Bielik, František Žáček and Ondrej Jariabek, *Priehrada* (Československý státní film, 23 August 1950).

23 Josef Mach, Josef Mach and Ivan Osvald, *Vzbouření na vsi* (Československý státní film, 16 April 1949).

In the late 1950s, technological optimism extended into the domains of aviation and space exploration, symbolised by the jet plane and the space rocket – nicknamed “the great socialist lights”.²⁴ These too carried the promise of approaching prosperity. For example, the New Year edition of the *Rovnost* daily newspaper from 1958 proclaimed that thanks to technology, in the coming year, “the sun of socialism will blaze even more brightly.”²⁵ A classic symbolic representation of advancing prosperity was a recurring illustration of a worker holding up the rising curve of economic production, set against a landscape filled with headframes, industrial chimneys and ripe ears of corn. From behind a cloud, the sun emerged to illuminate both the worker and the scene.²⁶ Such images often appeared in the first issues of printed journalism at the start of the new year, accompanying articles forecasting progress and economic success and sometimes also celebrating recent achievements.

Man

The final element in the historical development towards Communism was represented by the individual capable of uniting manual and intellectual labour at a high level.²⁷ This ideal, which also appeared in the imagination of Christian utopians, was embodied in Communist thought by the figure of the improver: a worker who, thanks to his practical experience, devised some kind of technical innovation to accelerate the labour process.²⁸ Such a figure not only excelled in manual work, but also applied theoretical knowledge and engaged his mind. He was able to think theoretically and coherently, and, above all, to calculate and design technically. Because of his proletarian background, his improved designs were both effective and useful, and genuinely capable of increasing productivity. It was above all in the films released during the first Five-Year Plan that the figure of the improver became a ubiquitous motif (*Karhan's Team*, *May Events*, *Katka*, *The Peasants Have Moved On*; see chapter 4). These films frequently employed humour, which helped present the movement for improvement – and the building of socialism more generally – as a form of light-hearted play, culminating in a happy ending.

24 VP, “Světla nad metropolemi světa”, *Večerní Praha*, 24 December 1959, 2.

25 Unsigned, “Ještě jasněji bude zářit slunce socialismu”, *Rovnost. Orgán krajského výboru KSČ v Brně*, 1 January 1958, 1.

26 Oldřich Syrovátka, “Republice do nového roku”, *Naše pravda. List Komunistické strany Československa. Deník zlínského kraje*, 1 January 1948, 1.

27 Halfin, *From Darkness*, 115–121.

28 Thomas More, *Utopie* (Mladá fronta, 1978), 64; Tommaso Campanella, *Sluneční stát* (Mladá fronta, 1979), 16–17.

This principle also found allegorical expression in fairy tales and historical films. In *The Proud Princess*, for example, King Miroslav works as a gardener and even teaches a flower to sing. At the same time, he is a wise and successful administrator of his country, which is literally flourishing under his rule. In a certain respect, the film resonates with another allegory, *The Emperor and the Golem*, which premiered in Czechoslovak cinemas only a few months earlier, in January 1952. Here, the union of intellectual and manual labour is conveyed in the closing song, whose refrain declares: "This one does this and that one does that, and altogether we do a lot."²⁹ The film presents this principle through the image of a community functioning as complementary and cooperating parts of a single organism, governed by another wise ruler, the baker Matěj. In both films, the division of labour emerges as the foundation of a well-functioning state.

Time

Naturally, the realisation of these goals and the establishment of an ideal communist society were understood to require time. As Halfin points out, the communists viewed time as a linear process, moving in a direction towards the end of history – just like Christians or Jews. At the end of history, class differences would cease to apply, all people would be equal, the state, the laws and money would lose their purpose.³⁰ Within this framework, original dispossession corresponded to the original sin, the advent of the educated proletariat to the arrival of the Saviour, and revolution to the eschaton or Judgement Day. The present, therefore, was of little importance – more precisely, it was regarded as a necessary and not always pleasant transitional stage on the path towards the higher ideal of the future. This ideal was consistently represented – rhetorically and visually – bathed in blazing light, underscoring its beauty, harmony and universal appeal.³¹ One of the doctrine's crucial elements was thus its orientation towards the moment when Communism would finally be achieved. As Minister of Information and leading KSČ figure Václav Kopecký declared in 1946: "we see our future as beautiful and bright. Pessimism and despair we shall leave to the defeated fascists, collaborators and traitors locked in Pankrác prison awaiting the rope. And we shall leave any gloomy predictions to

29 Martin Frič, Martin Frič – Jan Werich, and Jiří Brdečka, *Císařův pekař a pekařův císař* (Československý státní film, 4 January 1952), 01:57: 26–02:00:39.

30 Halfin, *From Darkness* 2–52.

31 Stites, *Revolutionary*, 31.

the reactionaries, who try in vain to impede and turn back the wheel of historical progress.”³²

The notion that time was inexorably approaching its end was most strongly expressed in Czechoslovak mass culture between 1949 and 1953, when the first Five-Year Plan coincided with the height of Stalinism. This vision was concretised in various slogans, posters and songs, popularised not only via radio, but also through film. For example, the 1950 labour-agitation film *Karhan's Team* featured a song linking socialism with the arrival of bright new tomorrows: “Our living is joyful, our age is radiant, the future beats within our hearts, our dreams are winged, today our life is wonderful, tomorrow shall be glorious.”³³ In *Goat's Milk*, from the same year, a film which presents nighttime volunteering teams of locals installing public lighting in rural Slovakia, workers erect electricity pylons while singing “Let a new, better world be born”.³⁴ Similarly, *The Great Opportunity*, also from 1950, included the “Song of the Young Workers”: “[...] we build roads, we build lanes, on the path of youth we build a tunnel, a bridge, we build for joy, a life of happiness, we build a better future.”³⁵ Both the opening and closing sequences of the film also featured the song “Come Build with Us”, with its exhortation: “Come build with us the world we have dreamed of [...]. Step out with us on this journey. The path is straight and clear.”³⁶ Performed by choirs, such songs evoked an almost transcendent sense that joining in collective singing and labour directly contributed to accelerating the progress of time towards the promised radiant future. This imagery was actively used by the Czechoslovak Communists, for example, in labour mobilisation campaigns, to persuade workers to accept overtime and night shifts (see chapter 4).

In relation to the linear and future-oriented communist conception of time, historian Stephen Hanson advanced the thesis that the communists created a form of “charismatic time”. He was inspired here by Max Weber's typology of political authority, applying it to temporal conceptions. As Hanson explains, “the charismatic view of time might best be understood as

32 Václav Kopecký, Výsledky kulturního budování republiky, in *Můj poměr ke KSČ. Projevy z řad pracujících inteligence* (KSČ, 1946), 13.

33 Zdeněk Hofbauer, Jaroslav Hulák and Jan Kaplan, *Karhanova parta* (Československý státní film, 23 March 1951), 00:44:25–00:44:41.

34 Ondrej Jariabek, Ondrej Jariabek – Bořivoj Zeman, and František Žáček, *Kozie mlieko* (Československý státní film, 5 January 1951), 00:17:00–00:18:07.

35 K. M. Walló and Martin Gazda, *Veliká příležitost* (Československý státní film, 14 April 1950), 00:47:08–00:47:24.

36 Walló, *Veliká*, 01:24:00–01:24:30.

the view that ordinary time is transcended for those accepting charismatic domination.”³⁷ In other words, its adherents were imagined as capable of controlling and governing time. This mastery enabled them to participate in the creation of a new world, a new order, and ultimately a new tempo of time.³⁸ Throughout their rule, the Czechoslovak Communists never abandoned this idea. It was at its most powerful during the period of “building socialism”, culminating in the adoption of the Socialist Constitution, whose preamble functioned almost as an incantation, projecting Czechoslovakia towards the end of history. Protecting this project, however, required adherence to two imperatives: vigilance and (night) work.

37 Stephen Hanson, *Time and Revolution: Marxism and the Design of Soviet Institutions* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 12.

38 Hanson, *Time*, 19.

PART 2

Imperatives of the Night

Over Prague a new day is dawning. Perhaps bringing new battles.

New victories, perhaps new happiness.

Only in one window the light still burns.

Only Comrade Gottwald does not yet sleep.

(S. K. NEUMANN, *Song of Love and Hate*, 1952)¹

The imperatives of vigilance and night work were to provide the tools for resisting the symbolic danger that the night metaphorically represented. They also interacted with the economic, political and social needs of the state, and the consequences of their application were projected onto the everyday lives of all. One of the most visible impacts of these imperatives was their incompatibility with sleep. Czechoslovak experts conducted experiments on sleep, thus pursuing a trend dating back to the nineteenth century.² They concentrated primarily on the controlled inducement, shortening, prolonging and timing of sleep, aiming to enable humans to make the most efficient use of their time. They also investigated the effect of sleep on the treatment of psychological disorders. In the 1950s, experiments were conducted on the Black Sea coast in the Soviet Union, where the sound of lapping waves during sleep was intended to aid patients suffering from psychological complaints.³ However, this time attention was also directed toward how sleep could be effectively utilised to reinforce the aforementioned economic and social imperatives. As a result, the concept of “night sanatoriums” established in large industrial enterprises was implemented. In these facilities, sleep was intended to treat nervous and physiological complaints, to have preventive effects against further illnesses and, at the same time, provide workers with adequate rest away from all external influences – without requiring them to leave the factory premises.⁴ These experiments were generally conducted under academic auspices, in Czechoslovakia primarily within the framework of the Institute for Public Nutrition Research, and later also under the Institute of Physiology at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. The researchers focused especially on experiments involving the prolongation or direct “induction of medical sleep with the aid of a direct electric current.” The theory was that “sleep

1 Stanislav Kostka Neumann, *Song of Love and Hate* (Mladá fronta, 1952), 78.

2 See Hannah Ahlheim, *Der Traum vom Schlaf im 20. Jahrhundert: Wissen, Optimierungsfantasien und Widerständigkeit*. (Wallstein, 2018), 373–464.

3 Unsigned, “Léčba spánkem na mořském pobřeží”, *Rudé právo*, 26 July 1953, 4.

4 Jiří Knapík and Martin Franc, eds., *Průvodce kulturním děním a životním stylem v českých zemích 1948–1967* (Academia, 2011), 495.

induced in this manner is calm and deep, and the patient experiences no unpleasant sensations whatsoever upon awakening.” Experiments were also carried out by the Institute for the Care of Mother and Child in Prague, in an effort to achieve the most efficient possible functioning of family life.⁵

However, detailed information about the results of sleep experiments and research was largely absent from the public sphere. By contrast, the imperatives of vigilance and night work were omnipresent and impossible to ignore. Accordingly, it is these phenomena that shall be the focus of the following two chapters.

5 EX, “Elektrický proud pro spaní”, *Večerní Praha*, 1 January 1957, 1.

3. Vigilance

Abstract: The first chapter of the section on imperatives associated with night deals with the concept of vigilance. This old concept, associated with the French Revolution, took the form of political trials in the Soviet bloc and contributed to international tension during the culminating Stalinism. Drawing on popular films as examples, the chapter illustrates the mechanisms through which the imperative was applied, its impact on everyday life as well as the reasons for its relative success among citizens, especially in the first half of the 1950s. After Stalin's death, some of its meanings faded while others changed. In the second half of the 1950s, the imperative began to focus inwards on society, particularly against people who were perceived as maladjusted.

Keywords: vigilance, film, sabotage, repression

*It's midnight in February.
Raindrops beat down on the streets of the Lesser Town.
In this time-honoured, historical town
The factories are watched by the eyes of the faithful militia.*
(Josef ZÁBOŘÍK, *From Odes to February 1948*, 1949)¹

Since antiquity, the concept of vigilance has encompassed a range of virtues associated first with the ideal of the good citizen, later with the ideal of the good Christian, and, in a socialist society, with that of the good worker. It channels the attention of individuals towards goals defined by higher authorities. It has progressively been appropriated by philosophy, medicine, psychology, didactics and law, but has ultimately found its most enduring

¹ Josef Záborkík, "Z ódy na únor 1948", in *Podivuhodní kouzelníci. Čítanka českého stalinismu v řeči vázané z let 1945–55*, ed. Antonín Brousek (Rozmluvy, 1987), 35–36.

anchorage in the sphere of governance. Over time it has incorporated elements of perceptiveness, the attentive self, concentration, observation, recognition, responsibility, reliability, precision, meaningful action, resistance to temptation, vigour, consistency, and the single correct reaction to a given observation.² The historian Arndt Brendecke has noted that specific meanings and forms of vigilance are culturally and socially determined. The culture and history of a given community serve as backdrops upon which a spectrum of potential security threats is projected. Variations in obligations, models of citizenship and forms of co-operation are continually negotiated and maintained between individuals and institutions. This cooperation is frequently internalised to such an extent that individuals no longer reflect on it. The dissemination, internalisation and use of the imperative of vigilance is enabled by an infrastructure composed of language, popular culture, institutions and the law. These, in turn, mobilise and instrumentalise the imagination, which is itself a constitutive element of vigilance.³

The imperative of vigilance emphatically entered the Czechoslovak public domain immediately with the end of the Second World War in May 1945, with the bestseller *Notes from the Gallows* by the Communist resistance hero Julius Fučík, who had been executed in 1943. After the war, his book was published in several editions, with a circulation of tens of thousands of copies, frequently mentioned and paraphrased in the press, and thus became thoroughly familiar to contemporaries of the time. Fučík concludes this text, which describes his resistance activities and subsequent imprisonment leading up to his execution, with the following appeal: “People, I have loved you. Be on your Guard!”⁴ Although he did not specify what he had in mind, in 1945, the call to be on guard acquired a clear meaning as a state of watchfulness against Germany and against any recurrence of the events that had led to the pre-war dismantling of Czechoslovakia.

Immediately after the war, Czechoslovak Communists materialised the imperative of vigilance above all in their rhetorical shorthand “the dark

2 See Arndt Brendecke, “Attention and Vigilance as Subjects of Historiography: An Introductory Essay”, *Storia della Storiografia* 74, no. 2 (2018): 18–26. On this notion see also Irena Vaňková, *Nádoba plná řeči. Člověk, řeč a přirozený svět* (Karolinum, 2007), 233–234; Lewis T. Charleton and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary: Founded on Andrews’ Edition of Freund’s Latin Dictionary: Revised, Enlarged, and in Great Part Rewritten* (Oxford University Press, 1879), 1990.

3 See Arndt Brendecke and Paola Molino, “The Cultures of Vigilance: Historicizing the Role of Private Attention in Society”, *Storia*, 12–13. See also Ana Ivasiuc, Eveline Dürr, and Catherine Whittaker, “Introduction: The Power and Productivity of Vigilance Regimes”, *Conflict and Society* 8, no. 1 (2022): 58–60.

4 Julius Fučík, *Reportáž psaná na oprátce* (Československý spisovatel, 1980), 122.

forces of reaction", a phrase that referred to anyone who, in their view, sought to halt or even reverse the course of post-war changes. Over time, this became a widely used expression that served Communist politicians, journalists and intellectuals as a convenient label for anyone who disagreed with their conception of the new state. They swiftly deployed it to disparage all political opponents – whether those who criticised the drive for further nationalisations of industry and the redistribution of agricultural land, questioned the manner in which the German ethnic minority was expelled, or challenged cultural policy, as well as anyone who in any way diminished the aura of the Soviet Union. All who were so labelled risked being accused of sympathising with National Socialism, longing for a return to the Great Depression, or – above all – committing potential treason against the state.

It proved difficult for the Communists' opponents to defend themselves against such accusations. Only the young journalists gathered around the Christian Democratic weekly *Obzory* and its editor-in-chief, Pavel Tigrid – who had gained renown during the war thanks to his contributions to BBC radio broadcasts from exile – had the courage to challenge this label in public.⁵ They, and eventually several journalists from Ferdinand Peroutka's *Dnešek*, emphasised the importance of consensus in the state's post-war development but criticised its abuse by high-ranking Communist politicians. Eventually, however, beyond these occasional protests, the Communists continued to use this rhetoric largely unchallenged.⁶ As a result, they harnessed the phrase "the dark forces of reaction" and transformed its underlying call for preventive vigilance into a powerful weapon.

The imperative of vigilance thus became one of the central ideological tenets of Communist power building and consolidation, even before the party gained a monopoly on power in February 1948. In the culminating government crisis of February 1948 that paved the way for their seizure of power, the Communists used this concept unscrupulously. In reaction to the resignation of non-Communist ministers – except for those representing the Social Democrats – amid the protracted conflicts and crisis, the then Prime Minister and long-standing Chairman of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), Klement Gottwald, summarised the Communist view of these events: "Dear citizens, dear friends, I call upon you to be vigilant and prepared, I call upon you, all good Czechs and Slovaks, all of

5 Pavel Tigrid, "Ministr školství a reakce", *Obzory*, 23 February 1946, 116.

6 Ferdinand Peroutka, "Co jest reakce", *Dnešek*, 1 August 1946, 289–290; Pavel Tigrid, "Kde je reakce?", *Lidová demokracie*, 1 February 1947, 1; "A ještě. Kde je reakce?", *Obzory*, 22 February 1947, 121.

you – workers, peasants, tradespeople and intellectuals – to show unity and solidarity! [...] To strangle at birth any provocation from the agents of reaction. Be united and resolute – and your truth shall prevail!”⁷ From this perspective, the resignation of part of the government appeared almost as an act of state treason. Gottwald’s speech, delivered on Prague’s Old Town Square – perhaps the most symbolically charged site at the time – was likely known to everyone who took even the slightest interest in public affairs. It was broadcast around the entire country by Czechoslovak Radio, its sense of urgency and drama heightened by the sound of a packed and emotionally roused Old Town Square. The speech was published, in full or in part, by the overwhelming majority of daily newspapers, alongside photographs from the scene, and featured in newsreels screened in cinemas before every film. This, too, helped anchor the concept of vigilance in the minds of ordinary people.

On the occasion of the adoption of the Ninth-of-May Constitution in 1948, Prime Minister Klement Gottwald again offered his interpretation of the preceding events: “The dark forces of reaction, both at home and abroad, have worked assiduously to prevent the creation of a new people’s democratic constitution. [...] Those dark forces of reaction, both at home and abroad and many of the same people who robbed us of our country at [the September 1938 Conference in] Munich [...], who wished to strip our republic of the most reliable guarantee of its security, independence and freedom, ultimately wished to lead it to a new Munich. Well, these evil intentions and plans of the reactionaries both at home and abroad have been swept away by our people this February like a house of cards. And so today, on the third anniversary of the liberation of Prague by the Soviet army, we are able to pass a new, people’s democratic constitution of the republic, secure in the knowledge that this republic is firm and consolidated not only in terms of its internal politics, but that it is also internationally safeguarded like never before.”⁸

The Stalinist Concept of Vigilance in Czechoslovakia

After the establishment of the KSČ’s monopoly on power, the imperative of vigilance began to acquire previously unimagined dimensions as it absorbed

7 Klement Gottwald’s speech of 21 February 1948, accessed 24 November 2021, http://www.totalita.cz/txt/txt_o_gottwaldk_1948_02_21.pdf.

8 Klement Gottwald’s speech at the meeting of the Constituent Assembly on 9 May 1948, accessed 24 May 2019, <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1946uns/stenprot/114schuz/s114002.htm>.

Stalinist principles. The version of the concept used in Czechoslovakia derived from that of the French Revolution, subsequently modified and updated in line with the international and Soviet domestic political developments of the 1920s and 1930s: "In the socialist state, revolutionary vigilance has significance for the whole state. Directed against the subversive actions of the imperialist bourgeoisie and its agents, it helps to suppress hostile actions that harm the socialist system. To have revolutionary vigilance means not to be caught by surprise, to perceive in time a trend toward the rise of phenomena dangerous to social progress, and to plan in advance measures that prevent or overcome these phenomena. Calling on the Soviet people to display revolutionary vigilance, Lenin said: 'The first precept of our policy, the first lesson which must be learned by all workers and peasants, is to be on the alert to remember that we are surrounded by people, classes, governments who openly express the utmost hatred for us.'"⁹ The historian Sheila Fitzpatrick notes that this concept of vigilance grew out of a sense of omnipresent threat and siege, dating from the period when the Soviet Bolsheviks were still a narrow group of conspirators rather than a force capable of seizing real political power. They then translated this sentiment into their practices of government. It reached its height during Stalin's consolidation of power, when the concept was expanded to include the premise of an escalating class struggle. And just as its uncompromising application culminated in the Reign of Terror in France in 1793–1794, in the Soviet Union it reached its climax in the Moscow show trials of 1936–1938. In the years that followed, attention shifted to the war, but in the late 1940s, the imperative of vigilance once again became a key principle of Soviet society. The concept now drew on the gradual polarisation of the world into two opposing economic and geographical blocs, and on the rhetoric of the Cold War. This process intensified further after the rift that emerged between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in 1948, which prompted a renewed search for spies, traitors and all those deemed capable of jeopardising the building of communism.¹⁰

The Stalinist concept of vigilance fully entered the Czechoslovak public sphere in November 1948, when the Central Committee of the KSČ officially adopted Stalin's premise of escalating class struggle. The party's general

9 "Revolutionary Vigilance", in *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 3rd Edition, ed. Aleksandr Mikhailovich Prokhorov, accessed 13 January 2025, <https://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Revolutionary+Vigilance>.

10 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 14–39.

secretary, Rudolf Slánský, declared in his speech: “it is necessary, comrades, to be aware that our path to socialism is dogged by the aggressive activity of the class enemy, whom we must successfully face down and whom we shall be able to paralyse only when our party members adopt a stance of revolutionary vigilance.”¹¹ In his speech at the 9th Congress of the KSČ in May 1949, Slánský further accentuated the need for vigilance and elaborated upon the idea of precisely how its application would take place. This concerned four domains: foreign espionage, which captured the classic Cold War conception of the world; “Bolshevik vigilance”, directed against all those who might have joined the KSČ merely for the sake of personal enrichment; the related “vigilance over the ideological purity of the party”, connected with its doctrinal teaching; and, finally and added most recently, the imperative of vigilance was to govern all those who worked in industrial plants, “often poorly guarded by old-age pensioners and invalids, negligent gatekeepers and unwatchful security guards.” Slánský elaborated further upon this area of vigilance: “We must teach the entire party, the workers and technicians, our armed forces and all our people that it is necessary to maintain state secrecy with regard to production, military affairs, all that may be of interest to enemy spies, that we must not speak about these things to anyone, and that it is necessary to distrust anyone who inquires into such matters.”¹² In other words, people should keep a close watch on one another, while not divulging what they were actually doing.

Social and cultural historians have pointed out that one of the presumed effects of individual vigilance exercised in the service of the community is power. The vigilant individual reports to (central) institutions what they believe to be potential threats to the life and functioning of the community. Individual reports are gathered in the central institution(s), and this aggregation provides those in power with the appearance of omnipotence and omniscience. At the same time, in practice, the accumulation of information and this semblance of omniscience enable surveillance and control over individuals, often expressed through the metaphor of the all-seeing eye or Foucault’s panopticon. People come to feel that they are under constant scrutiny, which contributes to an internalisation of mutual surveillance and (self)control. Within this process of internalisation – through which people report to institutions, that, in turn, relay information to the centre

11 Rudolf Slánský, *Nové úkoly: Projev na zasedání Ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 17. listopadu 1948* (ÚV KSČ, 1948), 39.

12 Rudolf Slánský, *Jak zajistit budování socialismu v naší vlasti: Referát na IX. řádném sjezdu Komunistické strany Československa v Praze dne 26. května 1949* (ÚV KSČ, 1949), 57–58.

– the circle is completed. Vigilance functions as an instrument of power wherever authority is fragile, institutions are weak and technologies that might otherwise enhance vigilance are inadequate. The less advanced these instruments are, the more power must rely on individual attentiveness. In consequence, vigilance constitutes a relatively effective tool of governance – one capable of covering up cracks, of building a new political order or maintaining the existing one.¹³

For the imperative to be effective, the KSČ mobilised all the available infrastructure in order to familiarise every citizen of Czechoslovakia with the concrete forms of the current threats. As early as February 1948, the so-called People's Militia – a paramilitary organisation composed of workers whose primary task was to guard factories and publicly demonstrate support for the KSČ – was established. At the turn of 1950s, the State Security Service (StB), acting as the regime's secret police, recruited thousands of new members and became a genuinely powerful institution, virtually independent of the state. With the strengthening of the police apparatus, in May 1950, the Ministry and Commission of National Security was separated from the Ministry and Commission of the Interior. In 1952, the Public Security Auxiliary Guard (Pomocná stráž Veřejné bezpečnosti, PS VB) was established for the most dedicated citizens. Regular political speeches, training sessions for rank-and-file party members and the presentation of statements at party meetings around the turn of the 1950s were all devoted to reinforcing the imperative of vigilance.

Calls for vigilance appeared regularly in newspapers, on posters, and even on matchboxes and other items of everyday use. The imperative of vigilance became one of the central slogans of the May Day celebrations in 1950, displayed, for example, in allegorical carnival floats. It was also incorporated into the legal system. In July 1950, when a new criminal law came into effect, it introduced the offence of sabotage, which could carry the death penalty. Sabotage was defined in the broadest possible terms, meaning that virtually anyone could be labelled a saboteur.¹⁴ Films naturally played a major role in anchoring and disseminating the imperative of vigilance. Between 1949 and 1960, around one film on this topic was produced every year, and, in some years, such films accounted for up to a quarter of total production. These works can be divided into several types, each of which more or less explicitly highlights different potential social threats, saboteurs and the imperative itself.

13 See Brendecke and Molino, "The Cultures", 11, 15–16 and 20–24; Ivasiuc, Dürr, and Whittaker, "Introduction", 57–67.

14 See "Trestní zákon ze dne 12. července 1950 č. 86/1950 Sb.", paragraph 84.

Saboteur Films

One of these types was made up of social dramas presenting the Communist monopolisation of power in February 1948 as an act of revolutionary vigilance. These narratives represented a template according to which the masses wished to take power, while the representatives of the upper social classes – either factory owners or landowners – did everything within their power to prevent this from happening, often conspiring at night. Ultimately, however, the workers or peasants uncovered and thwarted their plans, and, at the break of dawn or in blazing sunshine, they were able to celebrate their victory over these “dark forces of reaction”. One example from an industrial setting is *Mr Habětín is Leaving* (1949), a film about the owner of a chemical glass factory who had collaborated with the Nazis, and whose subsequent attempts to reclaim his confiscated property were thwarted by the “Victorious February”.¹⁵ A similar theme characterised the film *Two Fires* (1950), set in a brickworks, and *A Warning* (1954), which takes place in a factory producing synthetic petrol.¹⁶ The Communist seizure of power in rural Slovakia was depicted as a pivotal moment in preventing a return to the pre-war order in two Slovak dramas from 1955 and 1956: *The Wooden Village* and *Woman from the Mountains*.¹⁷ The culmination of this revolutionary theme was represented by the somewhat more philosophically oriented film *Citizen Brych* (1959), focusing on the inner conflicts of an individual deciding which side to join during the February 1948 demonstrations and the subsequent purges of political opponents.¹⁸

However, a key trend in the promotion of vigilance was constituted by so-called “saboteur” films. These works focused on contemporary events following the KSČ’s seizure of power and depicted various types of saboteurs and their activities. At the same time, they provided practical guides on what to do in case of suspicion. The first of these films premiered in 1949, and the genre reached its peak between 1949 and 1954. Because only a limited

15 Václav Gajer, František A. Dvořák, *Pan Habětín odchází* (Československý státní film, 28 October 1949).

16 Václav Kubásek, Květoslav F. Sedláček, and Bohumil Štěpánek, *Dva ohně* (Československý státní film, 17 February 1950); Miroslav Cikán, Marie Majerová, *Výstraha* (Studio uměleckého filmu, 4 June 1954).

17 Andrej Lettrich, Jozef Alexander Tallo, and Ján Mináč, *Drevená dedina* (Československý státní film, 18 February 1955); Vladimír Bahna, Vladimír Mináč, *Žena z vrchov* (Československý státní film, 3 March 1956).

18 Otakar Vávra, Otakar Vávra and Jan Otčenášek, *Občan Brych* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 20 February 1959).

number of films were available in cinemas at the time, these titles were seen by millions of viewers.¹⁹

The first film of this cycle was the drama *The Z-8 Case*, which symbolically premiered on 26 February 1949 – almost exactly one year after the KSČ's seizure of power. In the opening credits, the filmmakers dedicated the work to Czechoslovak steelworkers, and almost the entire story unfolds within a steelworks. Specifically, the plot centres on an attempted act of sabotage in the Z-8 sintered-metals department of a steel plant in Kladno near Prague. Set in 1947, the film portrays “members of the reactionary parties” and their sympathisers with links to a German spy network, trying to damage Czechoslovak industry. They seek to obtain information about new technology for pressing powdered metal, invented by local engineers to reduce waste. The saboteurs plan to steal the technical notes by manipulating the plant's employees, intending to use the stolen knowledge to undermine national industry and justify a return to the pre-war economic and political order. The climax and denouement take place at night. The agents decide, under the cover of darkness, to break into the plant to carry out the sabotage and steal the documents in the ensuing confusion. However, the vigilant and prepared night-shift workers uncover their plans and repel them through their own strength and initiative. The film ends with a message broadcast across the factory by the resonant voice of the plant radio: “You know that nationalised industry belongs to the people. Our national engineering plants are fulfilling the plan and are the most powerful linchpin of the state. And so again we call upon you. Fight against reaction. Increase your output. Defend your plants against the saboteurs.”²⁰ The story concludes with the foreman of department Z-8, who played an important role in catching the saboteurs. He reflects that the workers are not yet fully skilled at detecting spies, but will soon learn. In final scenes, members of the People's Militia march through the plant and the streets of the town, echoing the verses at the beginning of this chapter. The film's message is clear: workers are urged to remain suspicious, to volunteer for night shifts or factory security, and to join the People's Militia, where they can acquire the necessary skills of vigilance.

The Z-8 Case belongs to the “industrial saboteur film” genre. Other settings for similar plots included mining, infrastructure and construction projects,

19 Jiří Havelka, *Československé filmové hospodářství 1956–1960* (Český filmový ústav, 1970), 205–211.

20 Miroslav Cikán, Miroslav Cikán – Jiří Marek, and Bohumil Štěpánek, *Případ Z-8* (Československý státní film, 26 February 1949), 01:18:48–01:18:04.

commercial enterprises, agriculture and the security services. All were portrayed as sectors of crucial significance to the economy. Among these, mining occupied a particularly central place: the entire Czechoslovak economy depended on the supply of coal, as did the heating and lighting of homes and factories. One example is the film *DS-70 Does Not Move Off* (1951), which centres on the invention of a giant excavator designed to fundamentally improve the speed and efficiency of mining.²¹ The excavator is damaged by a saboteur posing as a worker. He is backed by a band of conspirators, intent on destroying the excavator completely before fleeing to West Germany. Their attack, naturally carried out at night, is foiled thanks to a workers' night patrol and the intervention of the security forces. The saboteurs are caught, and their plot ends in failure. Another example, *We Love* (1952), follows miners who dig a corridor between two mines in order to join them into a single complex.²² However, the plant engineer's behaviour makes apprentice miners suspicious. As a result, they watch him during the night and discover that the plant advisor – a holdover from before February 1948 – has forced the engineer to route the corridor through a flooded area, which would destroy the mine. The apprentices alert their fellow miners and the security forces, and these succeed in catching the two culprits. A further example, *Young Hearts*, which premiered on New Year's Eve 1952, tells the story of a saboteur who incites the iron ore mine engineer to delay mining as much as possible so that the mine fails to fulfil the quotas.²³ The final act comes when the engineer is ordered to plant dead mineral samples in the expert's report, which would lead to the definitive closure of the mine. However, thanks to the vigilance of the miners, the conspiracy is uncovered at the last minute, and the saboteurs are apprehended.

Another type of environment towards which the imperative of vigilance was directed involved large industrial and infrastructural buildings connected to mining, or imbued with symbolic significance. The first of these settings appeared in the aforementioned *The Z-8 Case*, and the second in *The Great Opportunity* (1950), which takes the audience to the construction of a railway by youth volunteers.²⁴ This is a narrative that includes retrospective scenes from the 1930s, when the Bata shoe company attempted to build a

21 Vladimír Slavínský and Martin Frič, Otakar Kirchner and Vladimír Borský, *DS-70 nevyjíždí* (Československý státní film, 9 November 1951).

22 Václav Kubásek, Jaroslav Novotný, *Milujeme* (Československý státní film, 12 September 1952).

23 Václav Kubásek and Maximilián Nitra, Karol Krška and Vladimír Holpuch, *Mladé srdcia* (Československý státní film, 31 December 1952).

24 K. M. Walló and Martin Gazda, *Veliká příležitost* (Československý státní film, 14 April 1950).

railway here – an episode presented to discredit the company in the eyes of viewers.²⁵ Another story, suggestively titled *The Nuremberg Express* (1954), unfolds on a night train travelling from the West German city of Nuremberg and carrying saboteurs whose mission it is to blow up a Czechoslovak dam.²⁶ The plot is thwarted thanks to the suspicions of a teacher who notices the men exchanging plans of the reservoir on the train and alerts the StB, as well as to the bravery of a Prague taxi driver, who later that night refuses to obey the saboteur's commands even under threat of being shot.

The film *Northern Harbour* (1954) focused on attempts to disrupt Czechoslovak commercial interests in Western Europe. This time, the sabotage is depicted as being directed by the US Secret Service. Strange incidents occur at the enterprise during the night, but the crucial fact is that the saboteur has been installed in a managerial position. As a member of management, he therefore has access to information about export shipments, which he exploits for his subversive activities, all the while masking them by loudly proclaiming the need for vigilance. Eventually, however, his actions become clear to the other employees: "What did Šubrt say? The fundamental prerequisite of vigilance is distrust of the population. No party member would say such a thing", one of the employees reflects in a discussion over who could have been responsible for the acts of sabotage. When Šubrt is finally exposed and apprehended at the end of the film, the same employee comments to a colleague: "I imagined the enemy as something completely different. It's only now that I realise what vigilance is. It's not just an empty word. But if I ever forget that and start blabbing about something I shouldn't, give me a good thump on the back."²⁷ *Northern Harbour* thus demonstrated that the enemy could occupy even a high-ranking position and that, therefore, everyone had to remain vigilant – regardless of employment or social status – and refrain from discussing their work. This message directly echoed the appeal made by Rudolf Slánský in his 1949 speech.

25 The company was founded in 1894 and progressively became one of the largest world shoe producers. Its founder was inspired by Fordism and applied it in its factories. After its expansion, the Bata company established factory towns around the world with all the relevant infrastructure and embarked on a number of other activities. In 1945, the company was nationalised, with frequent references to the family's ambiguous relationship with National Socialism and the company's production of goods for the Wehrmacht. See more details in Martin Jemelka and Ondřej Ševeček, *Tovární města Baťova koncernu: Evropská kapitola globální expanse* (Academia, 2016).

26 Vladimír Čech, Vladimír Čech, *Expres z Norimberka* (Československý státní film, 26 March 1953).

27 Miloš Makovec, Miloš Makovec – Miloš Velínský, and Jiří Brdečka, *Severní přístav* (Československý státní film, 28 May 1954), 01:12:00–01:16:00.

Another prominent subject for saboteur films was collectivised agriculture. In these narratives, it was typically the local landowners who did everything in their power to obstruct agricultural production. A somewhat atypical example of this theme is the comedy *The Hen and the Sexton* (1951), in which the saboteur (the main character) – a sexton and a stooge of the local landowner – never manages to accomplish any sabotage, continually undermining himself through his own clumsiness and confusion.²⁸ By contrast, the Slovak film *The Peasants Have Moved On*, released in 1952, offers a more conventional take on this theme: a group of wealthy landowners conspire to resist attempts to establish a collective farm.²⁹ They resort to lying and blackmailing the local smallholders, even attempting to sabotage a village meeting. Eventually, however, when their true intentions are revealed, those who were previously undecided are convinced to join the collectivisation effort. A similar narrative structure appears in *The Smiling Country*, released the same year.³⁰ Another film, pointedly titled *They Come from the Dark* (1954), depicts the young son of a landowner – himself serving a sentence in a labour camp – setting fire to bales of straw outside of the village during the night in an attempt to destroy the crops, and perhaps even some of the village, and thereby prevent the formation of a cooperative.³¹ He then devises another sabotage scheme together with his older brother, who emigrated to West Germany after the KSC's seizure of power and has secretly returned to Czechoslovakia under the cover of darkness. Thanks to the vigilance of the villagers, however, the sabotage plot is thwarted and the collective farm is successfully established.

The last thematic circuit of the saboteur films was set within the environment of the security forces, where vigilance formed an explicit part of the job description and was existentially connected to the very survival of the state.³² The notions of universal threat and the struggle against it were graphically combined in the film *Operation B*, a film that also carried the ideal vigilance to its ultimate conclusion.³³ This was a genuinely pivotal

28 Oldřich Lipský, Jan Strejček, Vladimír Bor, and Jaroslav Zrotal, *Slepice a kostelník* (Československý státní film, 6 April 1951).

29 Paľo Bielik, Paľo Bielik, *Lazy sa pohly* (Československý státní film, 1 May 1951).

30 Václav Gajer, Josef Neuberg, and František Vlček, *Usměvavá země* (Československý státní film, 5 June 1952).

31 Václav Gajer, Miloslav Fábera, *Přicházejí z tmy* (Československý státní film, 18 June 1954).

32 See Iva Kvapilová, "Organizační vývoj SNB v 50. letech se zaměřením na jeho veřejnobebezpečnostní složku", in *Sborník Archivu Ministerstva vnitra 2* (2004): 26.

33 Josef Mach, Eduard Fiker – Martin Frič, and Otakar Kirchner, *Akce B* (Československý státní film, Praha, 22 February 1952).

work within the saboteur-film genre, its position in the symbolic politics of the KSČ comparable to that of *The Stolen Border* in the immediate post-war years. The film's significance was underscored by the timing of its premiere – 22 February 1952 – almost exactly on the anniversary of the KSČ's seizure of power. Furthermore, the security forces made a direct contribution to the film's production, providing numerous extras from their ranks.

The story revolves around an operation against divisions of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, known as the Bandera movement, which took place in central Slovakia in 1947. After the war, these paramilitary units attempted to cross Czechoslovak territory to reach the American-occupied zone in Germany and thus evade capture by the Soviet forces.³⁴ The task of the Czechoslovak security forces was to prevent them from doing so. Once again, the night plays a crucial role in the film. The Bandera troops relocate during the night; their collaborators cross into Czechoslovakia from Germany, specifically from the Munich headquarters, while other of their accomplices infiltrate the Czechoslovak Army. At the same time, the security forces, above all members of the StB, act to capture some of their collaborators. The nocturnal activities of the StB serve as a counterpoint to those of the enemy and demonstrate the vigilance and preparedness of the Czechoslovak security forces. It is also during the night that the police arrest almost all remaining accomplices of the Bandera movement in Prague. However, a few manage to escape to Slovakia to warn their comrades and to plan an act of sabotage against the military intervention. Because nobody knows where the saboteurs have escaped to and are hiding, all members of the security forces must maintain a state of constant vigilance and preparedness. In the barracks before departure to engage in the operation, commanders instruct the troops not to reveal their mission to anyone, because "every word could be valuable information to the enemy." The film's ideal of vigilance is captured perfectly in a scene where an officer reprimands a private on basic service for answering a question about which garrison he belongs to: "You shouldn't have revealed that, you don't even know me. [...] That's precisely what vigilance is."³⁵ Even the simplest piece of information, therefore, is top secret. Furthermore, it comes to light that, on that very afternoon, a major, who was in fact an enemy spy, had attempted to extract details of their mission from the soldiers. Here was proof that the enemy had penetrated even the highest ranks of the army and acted with alarming boldness, in

34 During World War II they fought on the side of Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union with the motto "the enemy of my enemy is my ally". Their actions remain controversial to this day.

35 Mach, *Akce B*, 00:24:52–25:12.

broad daylight. Nevertheless, following a series of tense encounters, plot twists and battle scenes, *Operation B* concludes successfully thanks to the action of the rank-and-file soldiers: the Bandera troops are defeated, and the soldiers return home confident that they have defended their homeland and that more peaceful times lie ahead.

However, rather than recounting the events of 1947, the film reflects the political atmosphere of the early 1950s. Its victorious ending represents a triumphant closure of a specific epoch in Czechoslovak history. *Operation B* portrays the security forces in a positive light, presenting them as always prepared, efficient, dedicated, pure and dependable. The public could thus feel secure in their faith that the army and other security forces would protect them from danger. They could believe that they would never abandon the defence of the state, even in moments of crisis such as the battles against the Bandera troops or the Nazi invasion in September 1938. In this sense, the film continues the tradition of collective therapy embodied by *The Stolen Border* and other wartime dramas.

Meanings of the Imperative for Everyday Life

The story of *Operation B* perhaps offers the most vivid illustration of the universal ambitions of the imperative of vigilance in Czechoslovakia during the Stalinist era. The film articulated multiple lines of argument that defined the forms of the enemy and linked their representations with specific contemporary events. Within this narrative, an ideological shift becomes apparent: out of the postwar presence in Western Germany – the universally recognised external enemy – a new adversary emerges, namely the United States of America. In this context, the defence of Czechoslovakia's western border is presented as a matter of utmost importance. To ensure there is no ambiguity, the audience is given another lesson: Before their departure for Slovakia, two conscripted soldiers discuss what awaits them. One of them does not understand why they are fighting again, only a few months after the war's end. He would prefer to let the Bandera units pass through as they please and stay at home with his family. But the other rebukes him: "You know very well. They'll go over to the West, and, after a while, they'll be back. And they won't be alone." This dialogue alludes to German revanchism and, at the same time, leaves the audience to reflect upon the fact that this time the Germans would also have American support. This reveals the film's contemporary updating within the framework of Cold War tensions of the early 1950s, when tensions were further intensified by

the ongoing Korean War. These developments were reported on daily in the Czechoslovak press, on the radio and in weekly film broadcasts, making the prospect of another war, this time against the United States, seem entirely plausible to ordinary citizens.

Another line of argument developed in *Operation B* concerns the range of internal enemies. The film identifies five different types, several of which correspond to real individuals and institutions. Firstly, the Church figures prominently: its authorities provide the Bandera agents with shelter in a monastery, and they are their link with the “Munich headquarters”. They supply the insurgents with false documents and, through the figure of an unnamed Catholic bishop in Slovakia, exhort the population to help them.³⁶ The second type of internal enemy is represented by the members of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party. They make use of their party journal to support the enemy, calling for clemency towards the Bandera troops and portraying them as victims. The same applies to the next group, namely the members of the Slovak Democratic Party. Both these political parties had been among the main rivals of the KSČ in the immediate post-war period, and many of their members emigrated after KSČ’s seizure of power. Fourthly, the film targets the inter-war political elites more generally, portraying them as attempting to coordinate unspecified internal and external assistance for the Bandera troops. To complete this negative image, Slovak politicians in particular are depicted as direct heirs of Hlinka’s fascist Slovak People’s Party, which had governed Slovakia from 1938 to 1945. The final example of an internal enemy points to a faction within the army allegedly linked to these political circles.

The representation of night in these films follows on smoothly from its symbolic identification with war, occupation and “Darkness”. To accentuate this symbolism, filmmakers frequently gave saboteurs German or German-sounding names or explicitly portrayed them as sympathisers with (West) Germany or as coming directly from there. The films often linked the saboteurs with the city of Munich – a city whose role in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia required no explanation, and which, after the war, became associated with the US military command and Radio Free Europe. Within the logic of the endeavour to discredit anti-Communist opposition, saboteurs in the films are almost always recruited from immigrant communities or the upper social echelons: industrialists and former factory

36 The Bandera movement found support among some members of the Slovak Greek Catholic Church, which was, however, a marginal phenomenon in terms of the number of believers. But here they are portrayed in connection with the Church as a whole.

owners, non-Communist representatives of the technical intelligentsia, members of non-Communist parties, landowners, pub landlords or clerical dignitaries. They openly display their revanchist tendencies and pay in dollars. In these films, the imperative of vigilance suggests that, in the early 1950s, Czechoslovakia is once again faced with the creeping return of the Germans and their sympathisers, together with the overthrown pre-war order. The genre of saboteur films gives the impression that the war may not yet be over and could recommence at any time. Night is portrayed as impenetrable, dangerous and hostile – a temporal space that, like the saboteurs, must be metaphorically shackled and eliminated.

To prevent history from repeating itself, all inhabitants of Czechoslovakia had to keep watch on their surroundings – including their closest companions, and even themselves. At the earliest opportunity, it was necessary to report one's suspicions to the security forces, who would then take appropriate action. If this was not possible, individuals were encouraged to intervene personally to stop the saboteur, backed up by their trusted work collective, even at the risk of their own lives. This served as evidence of the individual's personal courage and devotion to the community. The imperative of vigilance, therefore, placed heavy demands on the individual, yet it also offered significant rewards. It provided a sense of purpose, and, above all, a substitute for battle – a means of overcoming the lingering trauma of the capitulation of September 1938.

The symbolic dimension within the imperative of vigilance also intersected with current and practical problems that arose after Czechoslovakia's incorporation into the Soviet economic bloc. The saboteur films offered audiences a justification for the economic difficulties the state faced at the turn of the 1950s, caused by the systematic overburdening of the economy and its one-sided orientation towards mining and heavy industry. Their plots typically revolved around specific problems affecting the domestic economy during its transition to the Soviet model. Within this framework, sabotage served as a convenient explanation for the chronic shortages of coal and other raw materials, the negative effects of the collectivisation of agriculture, the constant appeals to workers to redouble their efforts, the chaos and frequent stoppages in supplies to factories and households in connection with the general scarcity of everyday goods. All these hardships were attributed to the work of saboteurs.

The saboteur films legitimised not only the KSČ's seizure of power in February 1948 as a preventive act of vigilance – as proclaimed in the speeches of Communist leaders – but also the ensuing atmosphere of general denunciation, the political trials of opponents, purges within the security forces

and the closure and seizure of the monasteries. These films showed that the enemy could be hiding anywhere, and illustrated the consequences of the “dark forces of reaction”: who might belong to them, what their motivations were and what they might be capable of. In practice, the imperative of vigilance ultimately consumed its own advocates – most notably its chief proponent, Rudolf Slánský. In November 1952, only a few months after the premiere of *Operation B* in Czechoslovak cinemas, Slánský and further thirteen high-ranking Communist officials were put on trial, leading to eleven death sentences.³⁷ As during the Great Terror that followed the French Revolution – from which the imperative of vigilance took its revolutionary energy – and the Moscow trials in the 1930s, the logic of vigilance turned inward, devouring members of the very elite that had promoted it.

With regard to the reception of the political trials, it is difficult to evaluate the extent to which people believed the accusations and convictions. Although it is now common knowledge that the trials were fabricated and that the overwhelming majority of the accused were innocent, within the context of the recent post-war experience, the persisting fear of German revanchism and the international tensions and the massive publicity they received, large numbers of people may have truly believed the charges. It is also true that a number of accusations were clearly motivated by personal grudges or an attempt to appropriate the property of the accused, as had also occurred during the post-war denunciations of collaboration.³⁸ Nonetheless, people often genuinely heeded to the constant and urgent warnings and appeals for vigilance. According to the historian Václav Kaška, the number of accusations of internal-enemy activity sent to the central committee of the KSČ increased at the turn of the 1950s.³⁹ The confessions at the (often public) tribunals retrospectively legitimised the trials, and closed a kind of self-fulfilling circle. The writer and philosopher Egon Bondy (1930–2007), one of the most renowned figures of the Czechoslovak underground, recalled in his memoirs visiting the Communist poet and sculptor Zbyněk Sekal

37 It is also often stated that the revived antisemitism of the early 1950s played a significant role in the selection of the accused. Most of those accused and executed in these trials were Jews. For more on the trial of Rudolf Slánský, see Karel Kaplan, *Zpráva o zavraždění generálního tajemníka* (Mladá fronta, 1992).

38 Paola Molino and Arndt Brendecke also point out that there is a fine line between doing one's duty as a good citizen and denouncing others. On this, see also the treatment of cases of defamation deposited in the Prague City Archives (hereafter AHMP), f. Okresní soud trestní (pro přestupky) 1945–1949.

39 Václav Kaška, *Neukáznění a neangažovaní: Disciplinace členů Komunistické strany Československa v letech 1948–1952* (Conditio humana/ÚSTR, 2014), 55.

(1923–1998), “who together with his wife read the reports of the Slánský trial and snorted loudly with satisfaction at the exposure of those vipers.”⁴⁰ Similarly, one of the condemned Catholic intellectuals Bedřich Fučík (1900–1984) wrote in his memoirs that even after his release in the 1960 amnesty, his own son still believed that there must have been at least a grain of truth in the accusations.⁴¹ At the time, it seemed almost illogical for anyone to doubt the courts and the legal system entirely. Doing so would have meant denying the very foundation of the authority of the law and the entire judicial system – something that was alien to the prevailing mindset of society.⁴²

Although the mass culture exaggerated the situation, it must be noted that it nevertheless drew, to a considerable extent, upon specific events and responded directly to them. For example, the industrially based saboteur films could refer to a case investigated by the security commission of the Central National Committee of the capital city of Prague at the beginning of 1949, in which “in recent days 3 conveyor belts (transporters) were cut by unknown offenders” at the construction site of the Solidarita housing estate in the Prague district of Strašnice. Nothing was reported missing, and the act was evidently an attempt to damage or disrupt the construction. One member of the commission requested an increase in the number of security guards – “younger people with a more combative spirit” – since up to now the construction site had been guarded “primarily by older persons, often invalids, who lack resolve.” He also proposed arming the guards.⁴³ The commission again addressed similar problems the disruption at the beginning of 1950, stating that it was generally necessary to safeguard “important buildings against terrorists and espionage [...], it is necessary to emphasise constantly the issue of vigilance and alertness.”⁴⁴ As a result, in the early 1950s, industrial plants throughout Czechoslovakia started strengthening their security measures and introduced checks of personal documents at entry.

40 Egon Bondy, *Prvních deset let* (Maťa, 2003), 64.

41 Karel Bartošek and Bedřich Fučík, *Zpovídání. Pražské rozhovory 1978–1982* (Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1989), 92–93.

42 For more on the inherent authority of the legal order, see Jacques Derrida, *Síla zákona* (Oikomenh, 2002), 7–37; Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 42; Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France 1978–1979* (Seuil/Gallimard, 2004), 4–25. See also Zdeněk Kühn, “Ideologie aplikace práva v době reálného socialismu”, in *Komunistické právo v Československu: Kapitoly z dějin bezpráví*, eds. Michal Bobek, Pavel Molek, and Vojtěch Šimíček (Mezinárodní politologický ústav, 2009), 60–73.

43 AHMP, f. Komise, bezpečnostní komise, cart. 14.

44 AHMP, f. Komise, bezpečnostní komise, cart. 171.

For industrial workers themselves, the reception of the imperative of vigilance varied in form and intensity. Some may have felt important and indispensable in response to these appeals. They may have been happy to guard the plants, especially since it was their products being protected. They may also have felt that their work was finally being appreciated – that society now publicly recognised them as producers of essential values. For members of the KSČ, however, it resonated differently: it echoed their fear that the new political order might still collapse and with their own fate. Such anxieties were heightened by various anonymous writings on walls, doors and toilets, or by gallows suspended from door handles and similar threats.⁴⁵ As a result, security measures similar to those in industrial plants were introduced in party secretariats and other strategic buildings. On New Year's Eve 1950, for example, the security forces reinforced night patrols in the provincial cities and in Prague, tightening protection of the buildings of Czechoslovak Radio and the Central Committee of the KSČ; "guards at fixed stations were armed with submachine guns."⁴⁶ From 1951 at the latest, party members were authorised to carry weapons, were trained in security procedures and assigned to take turns guarding the secretariats. Yet, as Kaška states, despite all the appeals and stringent directives, the local Communist functionaries often neglected to guard the secretariats and other strategic locations, and sometimes even ignored their duties altogether. They lacked the time, the energy and probably also the motivation to persuade their colleagues of the need to keep watch over the security of these areas. In the end, the practice of vigilance was likely a deeply individual matter.⁴⁷

There was also a frequent lack of technologies that would enable the rigorous enforcement – or even automation – of vigilance, or the comprehensive guarding of industrial plants and the public space in general. Even the most basic infrastructure necessary for vigilance, such as street lighting, was often inadequate, as the Security Commission noted in the case of the Solidarita housing estate. On the contrary, archival materials suggest that everyday life on the streets followed its own rhythm. Service books from the Prague police drew official attention, both in the day and in the night, tended to be various vagabonds, beggars, drunks or prostitutes, who may have caused minor public disturbances, but had no intention whatsoever of engaging in sabotage. Meanwhile, entertainment frequently continued

45 Kaška, *Neukáznění*, 56.

46 Security Forces Archive (hereafter ABS), f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy I–1, inv. č. 1.

47 See more Kaška, *Neukáznění*, 51–79.

uninterrupted until morning in numerous drinking establishments (see chapters 8 and 9).⁴⁸

It therefore appears that in practice the reception of the imperative of vigilance depended both on the specific context and on the character of the individual concerned. For those who genuinely embraced the imperative, previously unimagined possibilities could open up. It offered a transcendent form of identification with the revolution, and, at the same time, an opportunity to participate in an imagined regeneration of society – one that promised to inspire the entire world.⁴⁹ In other words, such individuals could take pride in living in this very place and time, when a better society and world were being built. They could also enjoy a sense of belonging and a certain conspiratorial alliance with other like-minded people and feel that they were truly useful.⁵⁰ At the same time, in adopting the imperative, some sought to satisfy their desire for combat and adventure. Many joined the security forces, whether these were the StB, the Public Security Service (VB) or the Public Security Auxiliary Guard (PS VB), where they found unprecedented opportunities for social advancement and power previously beyond their reach. The frequent gross grammatical errors and uncertain spelling of foreign words or names in the VB's written protocols, especially after 1950, testify to the fact that these positions were often filled by less educated and socially lower ranked individuals

Vigilance between Ideological Purity and Audience Popularity

It is also necessary to differentiate between the reception of the imperative in everyday life and its success among film audiences. Several saboteur films of the Stalinist period achieved considerable popularity. *Operation B* attracted more than 3.4 million viewers, making it one of the most successful films of its time; *The Nuremberg Express* drew 2.3 million viewers, and even *The Z-8 Case* reached audiences of almost two million,

48 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Protokoly událostí I-1, I-1/1, I-2, I-2/1, I-6, I-7, I-10/1.

49 See also Matěj Spurný, "Očištěná společnost. Očista jako konstitutivní princip utváření poválečné české společnosti na příkladu českého pohraničí", *Soudobé dějiny* 2, no. 2 (2012): 209–226.

50 On the "positive offers" of Stalinism and Nazism, see Alf Lüdtke and Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Dynamika každodennosti. Utváření a rozpad sociálních vazeb v éře nacismu a stalinismu", in *Za obzor totalitarismu. Srovnání stalinismu a nacismu*, eds. Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (Academia, 2012), 357–403.

according to contemporary statistics.⁵¹ Several factors contributed to this success. One was the sharp decline in the production of new films and the limited cinema offer at the beginning of the 1950s. Western films had almost completely disappeared, while many films from the Soviet Bloc were of poor production quality. The absence of action, adventure and criminal films – genres deemed ideologically undesirable – also played an important role. Filmmakers found in the saboteur films a way to adapt these banned genres to socialist purposes, producing works that resembled thrillers or spy dramas.⁵² They were generous in their use of action scenes and frequently set them against the backdrop of night in order to heighten suspense and, with this, the appeal of the narrative. More broadly, all saboteur films shared a common stylistic feature: the use of the nocturnal setting to intensify tension, emphasise the importance of vigilance, evoke the danger and malevolence of saboteurs. This was a tried and tested literary and cinematic device: the night could always be relied on to have an effect on the reader.⁵³ For example, in *The Nuremberg Express*, audiences witnessed shootouts, leaps from moving trains, and nighttime car chases through the city; in *Operation B*, one of the central characters is a seductive female spy, and the story unfolds amid the beautiful scenery of one of Slovakia's many mountain ranges. In contrast to many war dramas which mostly had a tragic ending, however, these films invariably concluded with victory.

With the process of de-Stalinisation, which came progressively after the death of Stalin in March 1953, the imperative vigilance underwent a transformation. The major political trials were brought to an end (with the exception of the 1954 trial of Gustáv Husák and other Slovak Communists, labelled “Slovak Bourgeois Nationalists”).⁵⁴ The Ministry and Commission of National Security were merged once again with the Ministry and Commission of the Interior, which weakened the autonomy of the StB. Combative rhetoric was gradually toned down in the public space, while the younger generation became increasingly vocal.

This development is illustrated by another film story set in a military environment – *September Nights*, produced in 1956–1957. This was a film adapted from a successful stage play based on a witness testimony from

51 Havelka, *Československé filmové hospodářství 1956–1960*, 205–209.

52 See Milan Cyroň, “Expres z Norimberka. Vlak jako prostor pro ideologickou osvětu”, *25fs online časopis o filmu a nových médiích*, 17 November 2012, <http://25fps.cz/2012/expres-z-norimberka/>.

53 Matthew Beaumont, *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London – Chaucer to Dickens* (Verso Books, 2016), 1–12.

54 See more Michal Macháček, *Gustáv Husák* (Vyšehrad, 2017), 239–316.

compulsory military service, written by Pavel Kohout (born 1928), who had served between 1952 and 1954.⁵⁵ The film was directed by another young talent, Vojtěch Jasný (1925–2019). Unlike *Operation B* and other saboteur films, *September Nights* raises a series of questions concerning everyday life and the practical aspects of constant vigilance. The plot centres on a dispute between the young Lieutenant Zábrana and his superior Major Cibulka, who has been promoted to his position because of his working-class background and loyalty to the KSČ. Whereas Zábrana embodies the archetype of the young commander, who is capable but also empathetic towards his troops, Cibulka is a representative of the older generation – out of touch with the new demands of the time and for whom only regulations are the measure of a soldier's worth. Cibulka, in part out of personal animosity and in part due to his conflicting view of military duty, refuses to grant Zábrana any leave for several months, even as his wife is due to give birth. When it finally seems that the major will relent, an order for extraordinary military training arrives from headquarters, and all leave is cancelled. On the evening before the exercise, Zábrana, in a fit of anxiety, deserts the camp to check on his wife. Although Cibulka sends a patrol after him, determined to have him arrested and tried, Zábrana manages to evade capture under cover of darkness, visit his wife in hospital and, on the morning of the next day, return undetected to the military camp – just as his superiors begin discussing how to punish him.

As the title suggests, the key events in the story take place during the night in September. The choice of month is undoubtedly deliberate, recalling September 1938. At the same time, it allows the film to depict the harsh conditions of military service, in which soldiers face cold and damp weather in the camp on a daily basis. The story's first and last September nights show the troops engaged in nocturnal military exercises, demonstrating the strength of Czechoslovakia's defences against an external enemy – assumed, without question to be attacking from the west or southwest (thus from the Federal Republic of Germany).⁵⁶ The film's vision of national defence aligns with the configuration of global relations in the second half of the 1950s, when, despite the more peaceful rhetoric, the arms race between East and West persisted, accompanied by incidents that heightened Cold

55 Vojtěch Jasný, Vojtěch Jasný – Pavel Kohout, and František Daniel, *Zářijové noci* (Československý armádní film, 24 May 1957).

56 Identical assumption is presented in other films from the army milieu: Vojtěch Jasný and Karel Kachyňa, Lubomír Možný, *Dnes večer všechno skončí* (Československý armádní film, 18 February 1955); Karel Kachyňa, Jiří Beneš, *Ztracená stopa* (Československý armádní film, 15 June 1956).

War tensions.⁵⁷ The need for a vigilant army also continued to generate a social response. Even in the late 1950s, the memory of the Second World War remained vivid, including among the younger generation. Both creators of *September Nights* had grown up during the war, and personally knew people who had been executed during the Nazi occupation. According to Kohout, for the remainder of the war, his entire family had lived in fear of being executed themselves.⁵⁸ Jasný's father, as a member of the local elite, was arrested and transported to a concentration camp, where he died in March 1942.⁵⁹ These experiences explain why, in *September Nights*, vigilance against an external threat appears as a consensual, legitimate, universal and indisputable standard. Yet here it functions primarily as a backdrop to the plot, against which the arduous conditions of life during the cold nights of military service stand out.

However, unlike the saboteur films, *September Nights* presents the night as a space of freedom from the excessively rigid demands of military service. It offers Lieutenant Zábřana the cover he needs to escape unnoticed and attend to his personal concerns. More importantly, but the filmmakers also guide the audience to sympathise fully with Zábřana, and, conversely, to oppose the efforts to arrest him, even though by both contemporary and modern standards, his actions constituted a desertion and endanger the security and combat readiness of the state. Furthermore, his offence occurs during a period of extraordinary military training, for which he could have faced imprisonment of one to ten years.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, according to the story's creators, he does not deserve severe punishment. His escape appears as a logical response to the situation and the consequence of an overly dogmatic application of the rules.⁶¹ The film's message is therefore clear: while it remains necessary to guard the borders, vigilance no longer needs to be applied with the same zeal within society itself. Everyone can be replaced at least temporarily and there is no longer a perceived threat of betrayal from within. The night is now a welcomed refuge and release from strict surveillance.

The filmmakers themselves propose a resolution to this conflict in the film's final night, when the story reaches its denouement: Zábřana is

57 Especially the establishment of the Warsaw Pact (1955), the military intervention in Hungary (November 1956), the Suez Crisis (1956–1957), the Second Berlin Crisis (1958–1961), the Caribbean Crisis (1961–1962), etc.

58 Pavel Kohout, *To byl můj život?? (První díl) 1928–1979* (Odeon, 2005), 28–56.

59 Vojtěch Jasný, *Život a film* (Národní filmový archiv, 1999), 21–22.

60 See "Trestní zákon", paragraph 273, paragraph 274, paragraph 278.

61 Jasný, *Zářijové*, 00:43:00–00:43:27.

sentenced to twenty days of imprisonment as a punishment for his escape, but this punishment is rather symbolic. He retains his position as commander of the company because he is capable, intelligent and humane. In contrast, Major Cibulka is removed from his post, as the role requires qualities that the major clearly lacks. He is transferred to the supply division, where his rigid adherence to regulations will be an asset.

However, the narrative of *September Nights* goes further, directly parodying the speech patterns of the time and employing irony to show how the regulations can lose all meaning. The embodiment of this irony is Major Cibulka himself. At the beginning of the story, when he discovers that an army journalist wishes to write an article about his regiment, he replies: "We have everything that's prescribed: portraits, slogans, an accordion player, a magician and all that gimmickry."⁶² He pedantically insists upon political slogans being displayed at the prescribed height on walls and noticeboards, but has no interest in their actual content. One of the most absurd situations again occurs in a nocturnal scene, when the lieutenant who reported Zábrana's disappearance acknowledges the error of his ways and goes to see the major to persuade him to rescind the arrest warrant. He requests that the major grant him a frank conversation: "Comrade Major, could I speak to you as one Communist to another?" But Cibulka does not understand: "A plenary just for the two of us, is it? And are we supposed be all informal, or what?"⁶³ The story contains a whole series of similar blunders by Major Cibulka and his fellow officers.

The story was highly successful with audiences. According to Kohout's memoirs, when the theatre play was revived, it was accompanied by "liberating laughter or emotional sniffing into handkerchiefs evoked by the dialogues and stories from [my] military service." In his view, the text passed censorship because "the mass of the ruling Party and most of the Party apparatus was still made up of men and women who had become Communists before, during or shortly after the war, in a new historical version of the faith that they were helping to serve a severely tested society. It was these people who knowingly allowed the text of a critical play to pass through in the hope that it might help clear away the mud and uncover the original ideal."⁶⁴ *September Nights* can also be regarded as a voice raised by the younger generation and a call to engage in a discussion about the rigidity rules themselves. Lieutenant Zábrana's escape is presented as a

62 Jasný, *Záříjové*, 00:11:15–00:11:23.

63 Jasný, *Záříjové*, 01:09:30–01:09:43.

64 Kohout, *To byl*, 114–116.

natural consequence of a model situation, which can easily be transposed into everyday life as a logical consequence of blindly applied rules.

However, in contrast with the film's success among the public, the leadership of the state, party and army felt no sympathy for such a challenge. On the contrary, in 1957 an amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedure was passed, in which the crime of sabotage was preceded by the crime of terrorism, which also carried the death penalty.⁶⁵ The army command also criticised the portrayal of the character of Major Cibulka as a mark of intentional disrespect towards the army's senior officers and criticise the depiction of the conditions within the army as an incitement for civilians to ridicule the military.⁶⁶ In 1959, the film was entirely withdrawn from distribution.

In 1959–1960, a number of films were produced in response to this criticism, aiming to reaffirm the imperative of vigilance in its original ideological purity. In December 1959, *King of the Šumava* premiered, transporting audiences into the world of a mysterious smuggler operating in the moorlands of the Šumava mountains, on the border with Bavaria.⁶⁷ Despite returning to the familiar format of a traitor embedded within the local community, the film became a popular hit, attracting more than 3.5 million viewers and thus easily outperforming all the other Czechoslovak films released that year, including comedies.⁶⁸ In terms of audience numbers, it also far surpassed most films shown in cinemas in the second half of the 1950s, when the range of available titles was broader and their aesthetics – appreciated to this day – more diverse. Without doubt its success was the result of its compelling atmosphere full of suspense and adventure, enhanced by shots of a mysterious landscape. Once again, the backdrop of night helped heighten the film's pivotal moments. The filmmakers also used other classic devices such as a beautiful woman in one of the leading roles, a romantic subplot, dynamic action scenes, and a setting in the border regions, which, since the war, had been associated with fantasy and myth.⁶⁹ The following year, 1960, saw the release of the first Czechoslovak

65 "Zákon ze dne 19. prosince 1956, kterým se mění a doplňuje trestní zákon č. 86/1950 Sb. č. 63/1956 Sb.", paragraph 84.

66 Šaňo Fázik, "Okolo 'Zářijových nocí' živo", *Obrana lidu*, 22 June 1957; M. Langpaul, "Divák o 'Septembrových nociach'", *Obrana lidu*, 21 June 1957. NFA, f. Sbírka separátů, inv. č. IIf-1026.

67 Karel Kachyňa, Karel Kachyňa – Rudolf Kalčík, and František A. Dvořák, *Král Šumavy* (Československý armádní film, 25 December 1959).

68 Havelka, *Československé filmové hospodářství 1956–1960*, 211.

69 See Petr Kopal, "Film Král Šumavy ve světle (a v temnotě) symboliky zla", *Film a dějiny 2. Adolf Hitler a ti druzí* ed. Petr Kopal (ÚSTR/Casablanca, 2009), 214–240.

widescreen film, *Skid*. Similarly to *The Nuremberg Express*, for example, it operated with the motif of Western agents infiltrating Czechoslovakia under the cover of night. However, through the story of one such agent, it also offered audiences a view of Prague's vibrant night life, where bars and night-clubs served prestigious Western brands of alcohol and patrons engaged in philosophical debates about the meaning of life, family and friendship.⁷⁰ In its aesthetics, it resembled the emerging genre of "Bond films", only seen from the reversed perspective of the Eastern Bloc. *Skid* too was a resounding success, attracting approximately one million viewers within its first two months of release.⁷¹ The filmmakers thus managed to smuggle into their works many of the elements then captivating Western audiences, even as the films remained officially committed to shaping viewers according to socialist ideals.

To these films, it is necessary also to add a new genre that emerged in the second half of the 1950s: the so-called "Easterns", conceived as a counterpart to the then-popular genre of the "Westerns" set in the American "Wild West". The Czechoslovak Easterns focused explicitly on the border region with Germany, portrayed as a territory inhabited by all manner of dubious adventurers – often remnants of the inter-war system – whose main motivation was to obtain money and emigrate, though no longer to sabotage the local economy.⁷² The tales were rich in suspense and action, featured striking nighttime scenes and impressive natural landscapes. The characters also travelled on horseback.⁷³ Popular with audiences, they attracted close to 3 million viewers.⁷⁴ These films also corresponded most closely to the realities recorded in contemporary security reports. According to these, most of the people detained while attempting to cross the border were smugglers of consumer goods who had no political agenda.⁷⁵ Through the medium of such stories, audiences gradually absorbed these portrayals of the world and of the internal workings of the new, post-war Czechoslovakia. However, these hybrid narratives also demonstrated the distinctiveness of

70 Zbyněk Brynych, Zbyněk Brynych – Pavel Kohout, and Jiří Vala, *Smyk* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 28 October 1960).

71 Havelka, *Československé filmové hospodářství 1956–1960*, 209.

72 For further details see Kamil Fila, "Eastern dobývá Západ", *Film a doba*, 20, no. 1 (2001): 27–31.

73 Jiří Sequens, Jiří Sequens and Miloš Velinský, *Větrná hora* (Studio uměleckého filmu, 3 February 1956); Jindřich Polák, Jindřich Polák, Jiří Círk, *Smrt v sedle* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 27 March 1959).

74 Havelka, *Československé filmové hospodářství 1956–1960*, 209–210.

75 National Archives (hereafter NA), f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – politické byro 1954–1962, volume (hereafter sv.) 139, archival unity/point (hereafter a. j./bod) 182/16.

the imagination of the filmmakers and their audiences – an imagination which the KSČ leaders could not entirely control.

Finally, it is necessary to note that the concept of vigilance also possessed moral, gender and ethnic dimensions.⁷⁶ In Czechoslovakia, these came to the fore at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s when the search for (politically motivated) saboteurs declined. At that moment, other dimensions of the imperative of intra-societal vigilance emerged in the public space, directed towards people and institutions alike. The figures of saboteurs and terrorists began to be replaced as a social threat by those labelled as troublemakers or parasites – categories encompassing people who lived non-conformist lifestyles, lacked stable employment or engaged in excessively loud entertainment and nightlife (see chapter 9). In this spirit, there was also a change to Czechoslovak law between 1956 and 1958. New paragraphs were introduced into the Penal Code, and the Czechoslovak legal order incorporated an Act on the Permanent Settlement of Nomads, which primarily targeted the Roma community. The allegedly degenerate morals of these people, which mainly threatened to infect the younger generation, increasingly came to the forefront. This transformed conception of vigilance became deeply rooted in Czechoslovakia, especially after the establishment of the “normalisation” regime that followed the Soviet occupation of August 1968. In the 1970s and 1980s, these laws provided an effective means of suppressing even the slightest disruptions to the established order and of enforcing the state’s project of a “normalising” society.⁷⁷

76 Ivasiuc, Dürr, and Whittaker, “Introduction”, 58 and 65.

77 See NA, f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 155, a. j./bod 205/20. For further details see Matěj Kotalík, “Capitalist Relic in a Socialist-State? Coping with Hooliganism in Czechoslovak and East-German Penal Law (1956–1973)”, *Prague Economic and Social History Papers* 18, no. 2 (2013): 36–58; Victoria Skelton, “Parasites, Prostitution, and Everyday Vigilance in Socialist Czechoslovakia: An Interview with Dr. Christiane Brenner”, *Central European Yearbook* 2 (2020): 52–58.

4. Working Night Shifts

Abstract: The second imperative directed against the night was night work. For Czechoslovak Communists, key questions arose about how to fulfil promises to significantly reduce night work when the economy demanded the opposite. How could workers be motivated to want to work at night? And how could international commitments to ban night work for women in most industries be fulfilled? The chapter first analyses the mechanisms of symbolic motivation for night work and then how these were put into practice. It also provides an overview of some professions for which night shifts were typical. The chapter also introduces the issue of special night shifts, usually related to the hasty management of the economy.

Keywords: night shift, time, industry, film

*Hello Paul, we're not going to the theatre,
At ten I'm hurrying to my shift.
Do you really think I'll catch a cold there
And that night work's not for women?*

*You see, I like the night shift.
The lights burn like blazing candles,
You don't even feel as if
You're working in a factory at night.
(Night Shift, 1951)¹*

The second imperative in opposition to sleep was that of night work. In post-war Czechoslovakia, it gradually assumed unforeseen dimensions.

¹ Unsigned, "Pásmo 'Údernická směna' z prostředí závodu ČKD Sokolovo", in *Budovatelská estráda. Knihovna souborů lidové tvořivosti* (Osvěta, 1951), 13–14, translated by A. D.

Its “socialist” form developed out of a combination of historical legacies and the conditions of a centrally controlled economy. Perhaps the most significant of these legacies were a robust infrastructure of (light) industry, the experience of the Great Depression and the inter-war laws regulating night work, the wartime militarisation of the economy and its directive management during the Second World War and the subsequent decline of work discipline caused by the imposition of mandatory labour. To these legacies were added post-war changes. The expulsion of the three-million-strong German minority – which had constituted a substantial part of the qualified industrial workforce, technical experts, business owners and large farmers capable of supplying the state with essential crops and animal products – foreshadowed one of the new state’s most serious challenges: a shortage of labour and a lack of labour productivity.²

Political elites, public figures and journalists did their utmost to motivate people to intensify their work activities. Hard work was presented as a key value for the future and as an opportunity for each individual to contribute to building a new, better, post-war national community. “Work shall secure happy future for us: the first car produced after the war is presented to the President of the Republic”, proclaimed one of several motivational newspaper headlines that filled the newspaper pages after the war.³ In the months and years that followed, industrial labour in particular was transformed into a symbolic and patriotic mission – a moral obligation. The sense of contributing to a collective renewal was to serve as both reward and source of self-confidence. As President of the Republic Edvard Beneš declared in his Christmas speech of 1946, the future belonged to “the creative idealism of the new, national democratic [system] with a new moral content of labour, not only as a means of securing our material life but as a means of attaining the highest personal and collective happiness. This shall be what we Czechoslovaks bring at this crossroads of epochs.”⁴

Feature films in the immediate post-war period generally avoided the topic of hard labour, but documentaries engaged with it directly. One example is the docudrama *Life is Rising from the Ruins* (1945), which marked the debut of the future Oscar-winning director Ján Kadár (1918–1979). The film depicts the arduous effort to rebuild one of the 800 railway bridges

2 For further details see Václav Průcha, ed., *Hospodářské a sociální dějiny Československa 1918–1992 II*. (Doplněk, 2009), 107–146.

3 Unsigned, “Práce nám zajistí šťastnou budoucnost: první český automobil po válce odevzdán prezidentu republiky”, *Svobodné noviny*, 12 July 1945, 1.

4 Edvard Beneš, “President republiky národu”, *Svobodné Československo. List československé armády*, 25 December 1946, 3.

destroyed during the war in Central Slovakia.⁵ Despite difficult conditions, limited resources and a shortage of tools, the work brigades, thanks to their verve, succeeded in constructing a functional bridge from scratch, thereby restoring Central Slovakia's connection with the rest of the country. The closing shots of their smiling faces testify to the fulfilment that this work provided.

However, alongside symbolic and motivational appeals, post-war labour mobilisation also built upon some of the wartime legacies and soon turned towards more coercive mechanisms that became enshrined in the legal system. As early as June 1945, a government decree established the Labour Protection Offices, tasked with coordinating the workforce and incorporating into employment all individuals of no fixed abode – including returnees from concentration camps or forced labour in the Third Reich, persons deprived of rights and property because of convictions for collaboration with the Nazi regime and various vagrants – provided they were fit to work.⁶ Only a few weeks had elapsed since the abolition of the wartime Labour Offices, which had been a key institution in the administration of forced labour.⁷ In October 1945, a new legal measure came into effect, imposing a general obligation to work on all citizens of productive age and authorising their directive assignment according to the needs of particular industrial sectors. This measure built on the wartime obligation to work and the principle of centralised labour distribution.⁸ The two-year economic plan, adopted in the summer of 1946, followed these principles and set a target of increasing labour productivity by 10 per cent by the end of 1948 compared with 1937. The plan also precisely determined the number of employees to be allocated to work in each sector and specified the socio-professional categories in which

5 Ján Kadár, *Na troskách vyrastá život* (Slovenská filmová spoločnosť, 1945).

6 "Vládní nařízení ze dne 4. června 1945 o zatímní výstavbě úřadů ochrany práce č.13/1945 Sb.", Section 1, paragraph 1.

7 See Jaromír Tauchen, "Organizace a činnost úřadů práce v protektorátu Čechy a Morava", *Právněhistorické studie* 45, no. 1 (2016): 91–109; Henry Marx, "The German Labour Administration in the 'Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia'", in *War Employment and Social Policies in the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia 1939–1945*, eds. Jakub Rákosník and Radka Šustrová (Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2019), 34–54; Jakub Rákosník, *Sovětské sociální státní. Lidově demokratický režim a sociální práva občanů v Československu 1945–1960* (Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2010), 197–242.

8 On continuities in the obligation to work see also Lenka Kalinová, *Východiska, očekávání a realita poválečné doby: K dějinám české společnosti v letech 1945–1948* (Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR 2004), 66–77; Barbara Havelková, "Pracovní právo", in *Komunistické právo v Československu: Kapitoly z dějin bezpráví*, eds. Michal Bobek, Pavel Molek, and Vojtěch Šimíček (Mezinárodní politologický ústav, 2009), 478–512.

mobilisation efforts were to be concentrated.⁹ In May 1947, this system was further reinforced by another act of labour mobilisation.¹⁰

Although night work was not explicitly addressed in post-war public discourse or legislation, it was understood that it would be resorted to if the situation required it. For example, as early as the winter of 1945–1946, some enterprises had to transfer at least a part of their operations to night hours – when consumption of electricity was lower – in order to balance demand more evenly and prevent blackouts that could bring production to a halt. Overtime extending into the night also became increasingly common whenever urgent tasks required completion.

Night Shifts in Context

Night work in Czechoslovakia was regulated by a series of laws dating from the inter-war period. The Act on the Eight-Hour Working Day of 1918 defined the night shift as work “from ten o’clock in the evening until five o’clock in the morning” and permitted it for men “only in the case of enterprises with continuous operation, in which production cannot be halted for technical reasons, or in the case of breakdowns.”¹¹ The Act stipulated the right to a minimum of eight hours’ rest between shifts, thus making it possible to eliminate the practice of working long shifts and overtime late into the night – something that trade unions had long opposed.¹² However, the category of “continuous operations” covered a wide range of industries in which night work was considered necessary, including: “1. Ironworks; 2. Metallurgical plants; 3. Factories manufacturing enamelled goods; 4. Lime, plaster, magnesite, dolomite and cement works; 5. Brickworks, production of fireproof bricks and fired silicon carbide and emery abrasive discs; 6. Kaolin plants; 7. Manufacture of ceramics; 8. Glassworks; 9. Manufacture of carbon electrodes and other items produced from plastic coal; 10. Manufacture of containers from wood pulp; 11. Production of accumulators; 12. Manufacture of cork stone; 13. Manufacture of wood pulp, cellulose; 14. Water powered mills and windmills; 15. Malt houses and breweries; 16. Drying and sulphuring of hops; 17. Sugar production; 18. Production of liquorice juice; 19. Production

9 “Zákon o dvouletém hospodářském plánu ze dne 25. října 1946, č. 192/1946 Sb.”, Section 9.

10 “Zákon ze dne 9. května 1947 o některých opatřeních k provedení národní mobilisace pracovních sil č. 87/1947 Sb.”

11 “Zákon ze dne 19. prosince 1918 o osmihodinové pracovní době č. 91/1918 Sb.”, Section 8.

12 “Zákon ze dne 19. prosince 1918”, Section 4 and 12.

of syrup and grape sugar; 20. Drying plants for chicory, beet, potatoes, fruit and vegetables; 21. Production of preserves, fruit juices and salamis; 22. Distillation and refinement of spirits, production of compressed yeast; 23. Production of potato starch; 24. Extraction of natural mineral waters and their salts; 25. Chemical industry; 26. Grease industry; 27. Mineral oil refineries and manufacture of ceresin; 28. Production of gas for lighting, heating and traction; 29. Independent power stations, as well as electrical plants operating as an auxiliary part of a trade enterprise.”¹³ These were mostly plants where the work was done in three shifts of eight hours each.

The Act on the Eight-Hour Working day also permitted night work “where this is required by the public interest or the regular needs of the audiences”. This included a broader range of occupations, including: “1. Commercial horticulture for the purposes of night pest control in gardens in the period from May to October, also watering of plants and transport of goods to morning markets; 2. Agricultural, wine and fruit producing enterprises; businesses for the handling of livestock, for work in connection with the treatment and preparation of agricultural products and their supply to the market; 3. Paper mills; 4. Grain mills; 5. Dairies; 6. Power stations and gasworks; 7. Construction firms for work in connection with continuous water pumping; 8. Printworks of daily newspapers; 9. Newspaper dispatching offices; 10. Transport companies; 11. Theatres; 12. Entertainment enterprises, hostelries, hotels; 13. Musical performances; 14. Guarding of industrial plants, general security work; 15. Hospitals, maternity hospitals, institutions for the mentally ill, penitentiaries, compulsory labour institutions, detention centres.”¹⁴

In parallel, the Act on the Eight-Hour Working Day prohibited night work for women and young people under the age of sixteen. This prohibition was in line with the principles laid down in 1919 by the newly established International Labour Organization (ILO), as well as long-standing efforts of the political left to protect women and youth from this particularly exhausting form of labour.¹⁵ Czechoslovakia was one of the first states to ratify the convention in September 1920. But under pressure from employers and women themselves, some exceptions were introduced. Women’s night

13 “Nařízení ministra sociální péče ve srozumění se zúčastněnými ministry ze dne 11. ledna 1919 č. 11/1919 Sb.”, article II.

14 “Nařízení ministra sociální péče”, art. IV; “Zákon ze dne 19. prosince 1918”, Section 9, paragraphs 2–3.

15 On the development and history of the prohibition of night work for women, see *Anatomy of a Prohibition: ILO Standards in Relation to Night Work of Women in Industry*, accessed 23 August 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc89/pdf/rep-iii-1b-c2.pdf>.

work could be permitted “exceptionally, and temporarily for a short period” in factories and enterprises involved in “the processing of raw materials or highly perishable substances”, such as “[the] production of preserves, fruit juices, and drying of fruit and vegetables.”¹⁶ Women could also work at night for longer periods “if required by the continuous service of the undertaking or by special consideration for the public interest, and if the work of women consists of relatively light tasks.” This exception applied, in addition to agricultural enterprises, to the following sectors: “2. Dairies; 3. Hotels and kitchens in the catering trade; 4. Station ticket offices of transport companies; 5. Telephone and telegraph services; 6. Newspaper dispatch offices; 7. Theatres; 8. Entertainment enterprises; 9. Hospitals, maternity hospitals, institutions for the mentally ill, penitentiaries, compulsory labour institutions, detention centres.”¹⁷

The post-war period, however, was marked by a paradox. On the one hand, there was a declared desire to reduce or completely eliminate night work; on the other, the economic realities of the time led to its expansion and to the introduction of numerous exceptions to the ban on night work. The case of night work in bakeries is particularly illustrative. After lengthy discussions dating back to the inter-war period, the Act on the Prohibition of Night Work in Bakeries was passed by the National Assembly in 1946. However, it immediately set out a number of exceptions, such as the pre-heating of ovens or the kneading of dough.¹⁸

The contradictory tendencies between the idealistic ambition to restrict night work and its economic indispensability became fully apparent when Czechoslovakia, following the KSČ's seizure of power, was definitively incorporated into the Soviet economic system and adopted the principles of rigid five-year central planning from 1949 onwards. On the one hand stood the Marxist critique of night work as something that should disappear altogether; on the other, the economic demands of industrial production, which demanded its increase.¹⁹ Upon joining the Soviet Bloc, Czechoslovakia – together with the German Democratic Republic – was designated as the

16 “Nařízení ministra sociální péče”, art. IV; “Zákon ze dne 19. prosince 1918”, Section 9, paragraphs 2–3.

17 “Nařízení ministra sociální péče”, art. IV; “Zákon ze dne 19. prosince 1918”, Section 9, paragraphs 2–3.

18 “Zákon ze dne 13. září 1946 o úpravě pracovní doby v pekárnách č. 177/1946 Sb.”, Section 2, paragraph 3, Section 3.

19 See especially Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* (Hamburg, 1867), accessed 27 August 2024, <https://www.marxists.org/cestina/marx-engels/1867/kapital/Kapital1.pdf>, 135–165, 240–255; Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Leipzig, 1845), 150–209.

main producer of equipment for the industrialisation of the rest of the bloc. An economy that had previously focused on light industry was now forced to shift towards the production of heavy industry and machinery such as turbines, locomotives, rails, lathes and other types of factory equipment. This reorientation towards energy-intensive sectors exacerbated existing problems related to power supply shortages and labour deficits across a range of industries – from mining and coal processing to the construction of new power plants. These projects, in turn, required increased extraction and production of all kinds of building materials (involving the excavation of limestone and cement manufacture, metal processing and the production of machinery) as well as additional labour in factory catering services. As a consequence, many factories were compelled to shift entire or partial operations to night hours due to imminent power cuts. Tens of thousands of new workers were reassigned to politically prioritised sectors, while others had to work overtime and extra night shifts to meet the newly imposed economic targets.²⁰ In addition, exceptional night shifts were often announced shortly before the deadlines of economic plan.

Motivations for Working Night Shifts

The question of how to motivate workers without creating the impression that the Czechoslovak Communists had betrayed their commitment to building a social system superior to that of the inter-war period – and their own ideological principles – became increasingly urgent. The authorities experimented with several motivational strategies, often simultaneously. One approach was to offer one-off bonuses when work had to be shifted to night hours due to problems with the electricity supply (amounting to an additional 25 per cent or 50 per cent for each hour worked between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.). In cases of exceptional night shifts for other reasons, workers were entitled to a bonus only if the shift had been designated as unexpected, that is, announced less than 48 hours in advance. For regular night shifts established under earlier legislation, wage levels were stipulated by collective agreements within each plant.²¹ Another strategy to boost productivity

20 Lenka Kalinová, *Společenské proměny v čase socialistického experimentu. K sociálním dějinám v letech 1945–1969* (Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2007), 125–149.

21 “Vyhláška ze dne 22. listopadu 1949 o příplatcích ke mzdě za práci noční a nedělní, dojde-li k přesunutí pravidelné pracovní doby k usnadnění plynulého zásobování elektřinou a topnou parou v zimních měsících č. 1133/1949 Ú.l.l.” and the following ordinances; NA, f. Ústřední výbor

involved indirect coercion, particularly through the expansion of the piece-rate wage system or by raising work standards. The piece-rate system tied pay to output rather than the hours worked, which could benefit those who exceeded their assigned quotas or where norms were set low. However, in practice, production norms tended to be continually raised, echoing the practices of capitalist business owners. Among other effects, this enabled factories to avoid paying bonuses for overtime work. An institutional expression of the efforts to address the persistent shortage of labour productivity came with the government's 1950 decision to transform the Ministry – and its Slovak counterpart the Commission of Labour and Social Welfare – into the Ministry and Commission of Labour Forces, with the primary mission of recruiting workers for heavy and metallurgical industries.

However, from the available sources, it appears that the main priority for the KSČ leadership was to persuade workers to voluntarily take on night shifts without expecting any material reward. Their efforts focused primarily on symbolic motivations and creating positive associations.

Popular culture was to play a key role in communicating the “higher meaning” of night work – and unlike in the immediate post-war period, film now became its principal medium. Films often presented night work as a secondary theme or as a background setting, for example, in saboteur dramas, but in some cases it emerged as the main focus of attention. This was the case in one of the new currents that appeared in this context: labour agitprop films. These promoted the positive aspects of (night) work for both the individual and society, depicting its various forms. Their peak production occurred between 1949 and 1952, coinciding precisely with the introduction of the first Five-Year Plan, the transformation of the fundamental structure of the Czechoslovak economy, the introduction of the “steel conception” of economic development and the frenzied construction of the heavy industry sector. Labour agitprops accounted for approximately 25 per cent of Czechoslovak film production in 1949, increasing to around 50 per cent in 1950–1951, before declining again to one third of total production in 1952.²² Their plots typically immersed the audience in the factory environment and the collective work team. They developed several lines of argumentation, in which the symbolism of night work was intertwined to varying degrees with practical aspects of everyday life. These symbolic appeals engaged with urgent social themes and sought to stir emotions and ideals. Depending on which

KSČ 1945–1989, Praha – Politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 278., a. j./bod 360/6, “Zvýhodnění práce v nočních směnách”; Jiří Chyský, *Příručka pracovního práva* (Orbis, 1963), 82.

22 Jiří Havelka, *Československé filmové hospodářství 1951–1955* (Český filmový ústav, 1970), 81.

emotion or ideal framed the appeal to night work, the films can be grouped in several thematic categories: portraying night work as a patriotic mission, a source of joy and happiness in building a new world, a source of female emancipation, a rite of passage or a proof of the modernity of socialism.

Night Shifts in Film Narratives

Patriotic Mission

The night shift, as a demonstration of patriotism, was a recurring motif in depictions of labour within the security forces, as earlier representations of the imperative of vigilance had already shown. Several saboteur films from the industrial environment – *The Z-8 Case*, *DS-70 Does Not Move Off* – combined both the theme of vigilance and night work, presenting them as crucial elements in the protection of national economic interests. However, the labour agitprops approached the topic from the perspective of everyday work. One of the first films of this current, *Motorcycles*, centred its plot around the production of a new model of the Jawa 500 motorcycle. From the outset, disputes arise among the engineers concerning the materials to be used and the type of engine suitable to achieve the desired performance. Some figures in the factory favour American technology and British steel, while others prefer their Czechoslovak materials and designs. The central directorate, personified by an engineer who is visibly an admirer of the British-American lifestyle and behaves arrogantly towards his subordinates, decrees that the motorcycle will follow the American model. This is also the solution favoured by the unpopular, ruthlessly ambitious deputy chief design engineer at the factory, who, tellingly, speaks with a German accent. By contrast, the respected chief design engineer and the entire factory workforce favour the Czechoslovak model, arguing that a motorcycle constructed in this way will not only be of better quality but also cheaper to produce. Therefore, the workers on the factory floor ultimately vote to produce both models so that they can be compared in test rides. This decision doubles their workload, which, within already pressing deadlines, appears to be unfeasible. However, because the challenge concerns the production of a distinctly Czechoslovak motorcycle, the factory workers are filled with enthusiasm and voluntarily work overtime and night shifts. Through the collective effort, sacrifice and cooperation of all departments – from the design department and grinding and welding workshops to the apprentice section – both prototypes are completed on time. When the test rides take place, the advocates of the Czechoslovak model are ultimately vindicated.

The plot represents the metaphorical battle for Czechoslovakia. Audiences here were likely reminded of the September 1938 mobilisation, when orders from above commanded a surrender and retreat from the Czechoslovak border regions and the local fortifications – a parallel to the order in the film to abandon the Czechoslovak motorcycle model. This time, however, the workers refuse to obey; instead, they fight actively for their cause and make willing sacrifices. What is more, their product triumphs. The film demonstrates that Czechoslovak industry has not only highly qualified experts at its disposal, but also dedicated and skilled workers, as well as superior materials and products. This is something everyone can be proud of. In this way, *Motorcycles* offers an alternative interpretation of history. The story functions as a call to arms to all citizens to join the struggle for national production and to contribute to the patriotic, victorious mission undertaken by the industrial sector. Just as the soldier once did, the worker too fulfils his entrusted mission of defending the national interest up to the point where its successful conclusion is ensured.

Motorcycles was also one of the first films to contribute to the transformation of everyday vocabulary, popularising new expressions such as “counterplan” and “(socialist) competition”. In the film, the Czechoslovak motorcycle models are produced as part of the counterplan, following the initiative of the workers themselves, thus through overtime labour and exceptional night shifts.²³ In addition, the prototypes of the motorcycles are created as part of a socialist competition, a principle whereby state-owned factories, workshops or their individual work teams competed in terms of labour productivity. In this particular story, two factories vie for a contract to manufacture motorcycles. Within the nationalised and centrally planned economy, such competition was designed to replace the functions of market competition by stimulating greater productivity. Exceptional night shifts represent an integral part of this system, enabling workers to undertake tasks that enhanced the prestige of one nationalised enterprise or factory over another, and thereby secured orders for the serial production of a prestigious goods. In *Motorcycles*, these night shifts enable workers not only to win the competition but also to experiment with several designs. The notions of socialist competition and counterplan were also associated with the so-called “shock-work” movement, based on the idea that through intensified labour, workers could exceed planned productivity standards. This made it possible to fulfil economic plans. Shock workers portrayed as

23 Martin Frič, Josef Neuberg and František Vlček, *Pětistovka* (Československý státní film, 2 September 1949), 00:18:49–00:18:57.

individuals capable of transcending their physical limitations, even the need to sleep. This was ideally meant to motivate other workers and enable them to fulfil, or even exceed, the plan of the whole enterprise. The movement's inspiration and origin lay in the Soviet Union, where such workers were known as Stakhanovites, after Alexei Stakhanov (1906–1977). On 31 August 1935, during the first Soviet Five-Year Plan, Stakhanov reportedly exceeded his work norm more than fourteen times within less than six hours – a feat that captured worldwide attention and even earned him a cover feature in *Time* magazine in the USA. Calls to join the shock movement began appearing in Czechoslovakia shortly after the end of the war, but they intensified markedly after the KSČs consolidated its monopoly on power. Indeed, several filmmakers dedicated their works to the 9th Congress of the KSČ in May 1949, at which Rudolf Slánský emphasised the central role of shock workers in strengthening the Czechoslovak economy – most notably in *Motorcycles*, *Karhan's Team* and *Mr Novak*).²⁴

A Source of Joy and Happiness in Building a New World

The film *Motorcycles* also conveyed the idea that working at night could bring joy, happiness and a renewed energy in the effort to build a new and better world for the future. Through their success with the Czechoslovak technology and materials, the workers were shown as laying the foundations for a new direction in the industrial sector and, by extension, for the economy and society as a whole. As one character explains to a hesitant colleague: “We’re working on something new. We can’t just stand aside and wait for others to do the work for us.”²⁵ A similar message was vividly illustrated in the film *My Friend the Gipsy* (1953), set amid the construction of a metallurgical and engineering complex in the city of Ostrava. Here, the symbolic meaning of the night shift as a tool in building a better world is expressed through the construction of new industrial plants, conceived as the foundation of a strong heavy industry within the framework of the first Five-Year Plan. The film's protagonist is Gejza Fabián, an uneducated Roma welder. The audience follows his transformation from a poor and undisciplined man into a self-confident worker, successfully integrated into majority society. Even though Fabián's story is central, the film also portrays

24 Rudolf Slánský, *Jak zajistit budování socialismu v naší vlasti: Referát na IX. řádném sjezdu Komunistické strany Československa v Praze dne 26. května 1949* (ÚV KSČ, 1949), 13–22; Bořivoj Zeman, Bořivoj Zeman and František A. Dvořák, *Pan Novák* (Československý státní film, 10 June 1949).

25 Frič, *Pětistovka*, 00:22:16–00:22:22.

similar transformations among other workers on the construction site. Yet such progress demands sacrifice. When the structural engineer informs the workers that they must continue working through Christmas, he appeals to their higher purpose: "Young men, there are some things money can't buy. [...] I know you're looking forward to your Christmas dinner, to spending time with your wives and children at home, while here only night shifts await you. But I still believe that you'll stay. Because what we're doing here is a great thing, a common cause."²⁶ Joy and a sense of happiness thus arise from the conviction of contributing to the construction of a new, post-war world. Viewed in this manner, participation itself becomes a reward and a sufficient motivation to undertake the night shift. The message of joy derived from work closely echoed the post-war ideal of labour as a means of achieving "personal and collective happiness", a theme frequently emphasised in the speeches of President Beneš. Within the new context of Czechoslovakia's full incorporation into the Soviet economic zone, its meaning was redirected towards the objectives defined by the KSČ leadership.

A similar shift in meanings took place in the agricultural sector, exemplified by a film with the explicit title of *Way Leading to Happiness* (1951). The film tells the story of Vlasta, a young woman who aspires to become a tractor driver on a collective farm. Despite numerous obstacles, including her father's disapproval, she resolves to pursue her ambition. One night, she ploughs her father's field with the tractor, thereby sparing him long and exhausting labour. This act convinces him that his daughter is fit for such work, and that joining the agricultural cooperative is the right choice. Night work, therefore, reconciles father and daughter, while symbolically revealing the way to the future.²⁷ Beyond the personal narrative, however, the film carried broader ideological ambitions. Its message to the audience was that a new community was forming in the countryside, based on collective farming within the framework of a Unified Farming Cooperatives (JZD). In the final scenes, a line of tractors moves across the landscape on a bright autumn day, ploughing up the boundaries between private fields in order to create the vast collectivised fields of the JZD. This imagery is accompanied by a song about how the tractors are not only erasing the boundaries between fields, but also the boundaries within society and in people's minds. The film is thus a celebration of the tractor as a symbol of the modernisation of

26 Jiří Weiss, Jiří Weiss and Ludvík Aškenazy, *Můj přítel Fabián* (Československý státní film, 7 January 1953), 01:26:00–01:26:48.

27 Jiří Sequens, Jiří Sequens and Roman Hlaváč, *Cesta ke štěstí* (Československý státní film, 19 October 1951), 01:34:27–01:35:48.

agriculture, which Czechoslovak culture had adopted from the Soviet Union. Above all, in the 1950s, the tractor represented a genuine pop-cultural icon, a miraculous machine capable of solving all the problems of agriculture.²⁸ Moreover, Czechoslovakia produced several models, which it then exported to the rest of the Eastern Bloc. In practice, the tractor was one of the most effective tools for night work, since its headlamps allowed for the extension of the working day, especially during seasonal labour peaks. The mechanisation of agriculture and the intensification of labour were also intended to release additional manpower for the industrial sector.²⁹

Female Emancipation

The film *Way Leading to Happiness*, with its key scene in which the tractor driver Vlasta ploughs her father's field at night and thereby gains universal recognition, ultimately emphasises her emancipation from dependence on her father. In practice, the film sought to show women that they need not fear taking on physically demanding work, which had until recently been reserved for men. The Communist leaders hoped that an influx of women into these occupations would free up male labour for deployment in heavy industry.³⁰

Another example of female emancipation through work is found in the comedy *Katka*, which was released in April 1950.³¹ In contrast to the previous example, this film situates its story in the “typically female” sector of the textile industry. Its protagonist Katka comes from a remote village in the foothills of the High Tatra mountains in central Slovakia. Against her father's wishes, she runs away from home to find employment in a hosiery workshop that forms part of the Tatrasvit textile plant in the nearby industrial town of Svit near Poprad. At first, she faces a series of difficulties: she spoils some of the products, works slowly, and, through her inexperience and haste, even hinders her co-workers. She feels ready to give up and return home, but on the way back, she realises that despite her mistakes, she has learned something valuable. She can take pride in knowing the secret of producing such useful and tangible items as stockings with her own

28 Alessandro Catalano, *Rudá záře nad literaturou. Česká literatura mezi socialismem a undergroundem* (Host, 2008), 133–135 and 141.

29 Kalinová, *Společenské proměny*, 125–126.

30 Národní shromáždění republiky Československé 1948–1954, stenoprotokoly, 38. schůze, 19. prosince 1949, accessed 17 January 2024, <https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1948ns/stenprot/038schuz/so38001.htm>.

31 Ján Kadár, Ján Kadár – Ivan Bukovčan – Vratislav Blažek, and Maximilián Nitra, *Katka* (Československý státní film, Bratislava, 22 April 1950).

hands. Reinvigorated, she changes her mind, returns to the factory and earns her place among the other young women living in the factory hostel, gradually learning self-discipline, diligence and, above all, self-confidence. Her dedication to self-improvement – she trains her skills in her room in the evenings – bears fruit as, in time, she learns a more effective working technique. However, when the factory later faces difficulties, because a neighbouring knitting workshop falls behind the economic plan, Katka and her friends decide to form a brigade of shock workers, move over to the knitting workshop and challenge the lagging team to a socialist competition. Their decision effectively commits them to two consecutive shifts. Although they are not actually working on night shifts – in keeping with the effort to restrict women's night work under the revised convention of the International Labour Organization on the prohibition of night work for women and youth aged under 16 years from 1948, which Czechoslovakia re-ratified in 1950³² – they nevertheless work until eleven in the evening and rise again at five in the morning. Even in their dreams, work occupies their thoughts. It is, in fact, during the night that Katka conceives of her idea to reduce the spoilage of the knitting machines, a problem that has been slowing production. One night, when all the workers have left the plant, she decides to try it out. After several comedic reversals, her improving invention proves itself to be highly effective. Katka ultimately gains recognition, not only from her friends but also from her main rival and the best worker in the factory, and eventually even from the foreman. Moreover, she receives a monetary reward, freeing her from dependence on her father's financial support. Katka's journey thus symbolises the journey from a village girl to independent and self-confident proletarian woman.

Night work as a vehicle for the emancipation of women was also depicted in the film *A Woman as Good as Her Word*, which premiered in May 1953.³³ The story follows engineer Zach, a bachelor who disregards women and spends his days and nights in the factory working on the construction of a rail track bender. Driven by his zeal and a desire to promote collective solidarity, he compels the other employees to work nights, even going so far as wake them at home in the middle of the night and summon them

32 Convention concerning Night Work of Women Employed in Industry (Revised 1948) Co89, accessed 23 August 2024, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/-f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_ILO_CODE:Co89; Convention concerning the Night Work of Young Persons Employed in Industry (Revised 1948) Co90, accessed 23 August 2024, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/-f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100_ILO_CODE:Co90.

33 Jaroslav Mach, Jaroslav Mach – Jiří Karásek, and Oldřich Nový, *Slovo dělá ženu* (Studio uměleckého filmu, 29 May 1953).

back to the factory. Zach's excessive enthusiasm, however, soon leads to domestic conflict. The wives of the male workers complain that they barely see their husbands and that they themselves are left to shoulder all household responsibilities alongside their work in the factory. For this reason also, the female employees begin campaigning for the production of a dishwasher, but the male workers dismiss the idea as unnecessary. To show their wives how easy domestic chores are, the men decide to take them on themselves. Meanwhile, in an attempt to show that they are capable of "men's" work, the women decide to form a shock-work brigade at the factory and have themselves transferred to the men's workshops. Both parties to the dispute gradually learn to work together and complement one another. The night shifts are no longer a problem.³⁴ Ultimately, thanks to the night shifts and their cooperation, they complete the rail track bender, manufacture a dishwasher and contribute equally to the household chores. Night work thus not only serves as a means of female recognition, but also enables the production of a machine that promises to free women from the burden of household chores.³⁵

Rites of Passage

The film *Katka* also promotes another key concept of socialist labour ideology – that of "improving activity". The moment of invention and its successful applications functions as a kind of "rite of passage". This moment typically coincides with the decision of the film's characters to engage in socialist competition and form a shock-work brigade. Its culmination occurs when they succeed in inventing a new machine or procedure that enables them to speed up work across the board. This moment – specifically the successful use of the invention or innovation – marks a symbolic milestone in the transformation of the individual into the "New Man".

This dynamic is clearly illustrated in the film *Karhan's Team*, which premiered in cinemas in March 1951. The story centres on a father and son from the Karhan family, both employed in a grinding shop, manufacturing diesel engine components for locomotives. The work proceeds smoothly until one of the grinding machines breaks down. To prevent delays and

34 On the intrusion of the factory environment into family privacy see Vladimír Macura, *Šťastný věk (a jiné studie o socialistické kultuře)* (Academia, 2008), 74–84.

35 For further details on the theme of women's emancipation illustrated in this film see Petra Hanáková, "Marxova žena byla spořádaná manželka: Ženy, muži a domácí práce v českém filmu po roce 1948", *Dějiny a současnost* 27, no. 12 (2005): 33–36. On the topic of women's emancipation in this period more generally, see Denisa Nečasová, *Buduj vlast – posílíš mír! Ženské hnutí v českých zemích 1945–1955* (Matice moravská, 2011).

ensure fulfilment of the production plan, Karhan's son proposes announcing a socialist competition with a neighbouring workshop, intended to speed up the work rate and compensate for the loss of the machine. In practice, Karhan's initiative means introducing extra shifts. At a factory meeting, the workers unanimously agree to exceptional shifts and are happy to have the opportunity to contribute to them, welcoming the chance to demonstrate their capabilities. However, at the same time, a generational dispute breaks out over working methods. The younger workers, led by Karhan's son, advocate for new techniques, but the older generation, represented by his father, is reluctant to believe them and does not wish to accept the changes, preferring to rely on experience and established practices. Eventually, the young team challenge the older team to a competition to determine which approach yields better results. A rivalry develops between father and son, pushing both to remain in the workshop well beyond normal hours. As a result, they barely sleep, preferring to stay in the grinding shop to complete the task. It initially appears that the young team will win the competition, since the change of working technique is genuinely effective, but ultimately the older team wins thanks to the workers' experience and ability to make the best use of the tools and materials available to them. Nevertheless, in the process, the young team earn the recognition of their elders and, together, they realise that the best solution lies in combining innovation and experience. During these night shifts, all the workers without exception undergo a deep personal transformation, after which they become a strong and solid collective.

The transformation into the New Man is conveyed to the audience through the example of Karhan's son. When not spending his evenings in the factory, he retreats to the small private workshop that he has set up in the courtyard of his apartment building. There, he devotes himself to drafting designs and inventing various technical improvements, some of which he later applies in the workshop competition. His inventions genuinely improve and speed up the production process, resulting in an increase in a measurable increase in productivity. The young grinder thus embodies the ideal socialist man, capable of combining manual and intellectual labour to a high degree – a figure analysed in greater depth by Igal Halfin and Richard Stites in their studies of socialist imagery (see chapter 2).³⁶ This synthesis of physical skill and intellectual creativity is presented in the film as something entirely

36 Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 39–84; Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 145–165.

logical. As a manual worker, Karhan possesses an intimate familiarity with machinery and therefore knows best how to improve the pace of work. All he needs is diligence, concentration and space for experimentation – conditions provided by his small home workshop – and an opportunity represented in the film by the broken machine and the competition with the older workers. The figure of the “improver” came to be celebrated as a symbol of the new age. Exhibitions of technical innovations were held around Czechoslovakia, and even a specialised magazine *Zlepšovatel* (Improver), was established to promote the movement. In April 1952, a special law was passed to support the “improving activity”.³⁷

Indeed, almost every agitprop film contained an episode involving the invention of an improvement. Within these narratives, such moments were typically tied to night work, occurring usually at the last possible moment before the deadline for fulfilling the planned economic target. The plot line usually introduced difficulties with meeting the deadline and the need for a new impulse; the invention created on the night shift represented the solution.

Visions of night work as a remedy for time pressure illustrate the concept of charismatic time, as described by Stephen Hanson.³⁸ During night shifts, as well as in shock-work campaigns and improving activities, workers ceased to pay any attention to time, as if everything outside the plan had ceased to exist. Within this framework, the workers seemed to enter an alternative temporal realm, one in which all time was subordinated to the imperative of labour, or even where they themselves seemed to have power over time. On a symbolic and practical level, the ideal of the night shift, as presented in the films, suggested that it was possible to master time itself. In reality, however, these initiatives reflected a common productive practice of the era: the intensification of labour in the final stages of the planning period. This phenomenon was most typical of industry, where such bursts of intensified effort became an essential condition for fulfilling targets. Whereas the agricultural sector had long been accustomed to brief periods of seasonal intensity – during seeding, harvesting and ploughing – industrial acceleration took on a different, more symbolic character. It represented an aspiration to ignite production through a kind of miracle, as if by waving a figurative magic wand, socialist workers could surpass the economic performance of capitalist states.

37 “Zákon ze dne 28. března 1952 o vynálezech a zlepšovacích námětech č. 6/1952 Sb.”

38 Stephen Hanson, *Time and Revolution: Marxism and the Design of Soviet Institutions* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 13.

Proof of the Modernity of Socialism

A further powerful message conveyed by the film narratives about night work was the idea that the very need to announce an exceptional night shift symbolised the modernity and progressiveness of the KSČ's rule. This modernity was captured by the abundance of work, evidenced by the announcement of night shifts. Films commonly reported on the mass unemployment of the Great Depression. They evoked memories of hungry queues of unemployed workers and the threat of their return should socialism ever be defeated. The films constantly compared the socialist and capitalist worlds of work. In these narratives, the accompanying attributes of the latter were unemployment, the struggle to find employment and the exploitation of those who were in work under the constant threat of sacking. By contrast, under socialism, there was plenty of work, in fact a surplus, and therefore also a reserve for the future. Full employment thus became one of the cornerstones of Communist social policy and a source of legitimacy for the KSČ.³⁹ The right to work (though not the right to freely choose one's profession, since professional allocation was centrally directed) was enshrined in the Ninth-of-May 1948 Constitution. Furthermore, unlike in a market economy, night work under socialism was not performed for the benefit of a single factory owner but for the whole community, embodied by the state, which acted as sole proprietor and administrator. Following the so-called second wave of nationalisation in 1948, private property almost completely ceased to exist in Czechoslovakia. Audiences were repeatedly reminded that nationalisation had transformed the factories into the property of all, and that it was precisely this collective ownership that guaranteed there would be sufficient work for everyone.

The second point of the argument of modernity rested on the assumption that more work meant more products and therefore higher living standards. In the words of the young grinder Karhan: "In short, we must produce more if we want to raise our standard of living."⁴⁰ This reasoning reflected a

39 See more Lenka Kalinová, "Změny sociálního systému v Československu po druhé světové válce v kontextu vývoje ve vyspělých zemích", in *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu*, eds. Zdeněk Kárník and Michal Kopeček (Ústav pro Soudobé Dějiny AV ČR, 2003), 119–155; Katarína Kožáková, "Sociální stát a sociální politika v Československu v letech 1945–1948", *Historický časopis* 63 (2015): 81–111; Sandra Hrachová, "Social Security and National Insurance Act in Postwar Czechoslovakia (1945–1948)", *Prague Economic and Social History Papers* 13 (2011): 30–44; Jakub Rákosník, "Kontinuita a diskontinuita vývoje sociálního státu v Československu (1918–1956)", *Soudobé dějiny* 20, no. 1–2 (2013): 15–39.

40 Zdeněk Hofbauer, Jaroslav Hulák and Jan Kaplan, *Karhanova parta* (Československý státní film, 23 March 1951), 00:22:55–00:23:02.

quantitative understanding of prosperity, in which living standards were measured by the volume of goods produced and sold rather than by their quality. Such an approach was characteristic of socialist economic thought and of the statistical methods used to evaluate progress and modernity.

However, in everyday practice, night work served a far more prosaic function. It was often used to compensate for the stoppages caused by the breakdown of machines or their underperformance. The night shift *de facto* represented an attempt to use manual labour to offset the insufficient productivity of machine work and the lack of technological modernisation – a task that was, of course, impossible. The fact is that the machines with which Czechoslovak factories were equipped in the 1950s often dated back to the nineteenth century and, as a result, they were slow, outmoded and frequently broke down, which further delayed production.⁴¹ Night shifts were therefore often used for repairs or to make up for lost time following the breakdown of machinery. In the cinematic representations, such difficulties were often romanticised, imbued with an aura of excitement or adventure. The drive to improve and shock work was thus presented as a symbol of technological modernisation. However, even when workers' inventions could lead to an acceleration of the work process or an increase in output, they rarely brought about real innovation or an improvement in quality, since this would have required far more thorough innovation and large-scale investment.

Explicit Representations and Ambiguous Practices

In summary, the labour agitprop films depicted night work as a meaningful, transcendent and fulfilling activity. At the same time, they emphasised that signing up for night shifts should be a voluntary decision. Only then could the “magic” work. However, a question remains as to what practical repercussions these narratives had. Anyone seeking to emulate the cinematic heroes would inevitably face a profound intrusion into their private lives, since insufficient or irregular sleep has harmful effects on health – a fact which was already well known.⁴² Working at night also meant sacrificing one's social life and disrupting family routines, forcing the entire household to adapt to the

41 NA, f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – Politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 225, a. j./bod 304. See also Roman Krakovský, *Réinventer le monde. L'espace et le temps en Tchécoslovaquie communiste* (Publications de la Sorbonne, 2014), 54.

42 Hannah Ahlheim, *Der Traum vom Schlaf im 20. Jahrhundert: Wissen, Optimierungsphantasien und Widerständigkeit*. (Wallstein, 2018), 373–464.

rhythm of night and overtime shifts. This probably also played a role in the establishment of the aforementioned night sanatoriums in large industrial enterprises at the beginning of the 1950s. These facilities, offering massages, special diets, baths and medical care, were intended to restore concentration at work thanks to their establishment on the factory premises and the fact that workers, therefore, did not have to travel any great distance. However, their success was limited, and they remained rather a marginal experiment.⁴³

When evaluating the responses to the calls for night work, it is important to differentiate between the influence of films on everyday practice and their reception by cinema audiences. Many labour agitprop films were quite popular with audiences: *Motorcycles* attracted approximately 1.7 million viewers, *May Events* almost 3 million and *Mr Novák* over 3.1 million.⁴⁴ They also received positive feedback from the very social groups they portrayed.⁴⁵ The source of this popularity lay, indisputably, in their high artistic quality. They were made by experienced directors who had been renowned since the inter-war period, or by young, talented filmmakers. Furthermore, many of them were comedies, sometimes verging on the genre of slapstick. They starred popular actors and comedians, whose casting was, in itself, a guarantee of audience satisfaction. Supporting roles were often filled by popular personalities, upcoming stars and contemporary sex symbols. Moreover, these films addressed themes familiar to audiences, depicting recognisable settings. The large viewership was also the product of cinemas giving the films priority in their programming and tickets being handed out in workplaces. One must also consider the limited selection of films available at the time, which made these comedies, together with the saboteur films, a pragmatic choice when putting together a programme. However, when such films lacked humour, skilful directing or charismatic actors, they failed to attract audiences. A telling example is *The Great Opportunity*, which was described as suffering from a “striking lack of interest among the youth.”⁴⁶

Still, it is difficult to determine the precise influence of agitprop films on workers’ actual decisions to volunteer for night shifts. A rigorous analysis would require more detailed research. In addition, it is certain that the

43 Jiří Knapík and Martin Franc, eds., *Průvodce kulturním děním a životním stylem v českých zemích 1948–1967* (Academia, 2011), 598.

44 Havelka, *Československé filmové hospodářství 1956–1960*, 205–207.

45 Unsigned, “Od žiaľu a biedy k novému životu”, *Slovenka*, 7 February 1955, 13; Jaroslav Simandl, “K filmu pětistovka: dopis Jaroslava Simandla býv. Mistra prototypové dílny ‘JAWA’”, *Svět motorů*, September/October 1949, 357.

46 See, NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, box 5168; Unsigned, “Velká příležitost”, *Pravda*, 12 May 1950.

reactions were highly individual and variously nuanced according to personal perceptions of night work. It is nevertheless possible to at least outline the spectrum of potential reactions to the ideological arguments the films advanced. Alf Lüdtke's concept of *Eigen-sinn* and Michel de Certeau's distinction between "strategies" and "tactics" enable us to grasp these possible reactions and get glimpses of their rationales.

First of all, it is important to note that the initial impulses to promote labour mobilisation did not originate in film. As the historian Peter Heumos has pointed out, as early as 8 May 1945, in their euphoria following the end of the war, mining engineers in Ostrava announced a shock workers' movement in the local coal basins. According to Heumos, during the subsequent months and years, approximately 50,000 enterprises throughout Czechoslovakia voluntarily joined these early forms of work competitions.⁴⁷ Similarly, the historian Roman Krakovský notes that, in the spring of 1948, workers at ČKD voted, on their own initiative, for the introduction of exceptional night shifts in order to meet the indicators of the Two-Year Plan.⁴⁸ Heumos shows that after the launch of the first Five-Year Plan, the positive response to calls for labour mobilisation continued to grow. He documents this with reference to general statistics regarding the number of employees engaged in work initiatives. At the beginning of 1949, statistics show that 5 per cent of industrial workers had been incorporated into the shock workers' movement. By the end of 1949, this proportion had already increased to 30 per cent and in 1952, almost 48 per cent of the industrial workforce was engaged in the shock workers' movement.⁴⁹ This upward trend can unequivocally be considered a success, and although no precise data is yet available on the direct contribution of workers to exceptional night shifts, it is reasonable to assume that the proportion was comparable to that of engagement in the labour initiatives more broadly.

However, there were workers who deliberately sought to avoid night shifts. At the beginning of the Two-Year Plan in April 1947, representatives from the Ministries of Social Welfare, the Interior and Information, as well as the Central Council of Trade Unions, conceded that above all workers in the coal basins, including even those temporary employees who had volunteered for

47 Peter Heumos, "Vyhříme si rukávy, než se kola zastaví!": *Dělníci a státní socialismus v Československu 1945–1968* (Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky, 2006),

42. See also, "Noční směna na dole 'Partyzán Slánský'", *Partyzán. Týdeník Sdružení českých partyzánů*, 17 January 1947, 4.

48 Krakovský, *Réinventer*, 39.

49 Heumos, "Vyhříme", 41 and 46.

work, preferred to spend their evenings in the pub.⁵⁰ It is almost certain that this practice persisted during the first Five-Year Plan because the demand for labour in the coal mines and related sectors of industry was met with chronic labour shortages. This situation placed workers in an advantageous position, since they could easily change their employer and travel all over the country if dissatisfied with their working conditions or the allocation of shifts. This was reflected in a high level of staff turnover, which caused concerns to the KSČ leaders for many years.⁵¹

From this perspective, it seems that the first agitprop films primarily served to reflect examples of good practice, upon which subsequent arguments were built and developed. For example, the depiction of night work as a source of happiness, a means of participation in the building of a new world or as a genuinely useful activity is documented by the artist Vladimír Boudník (1924–1968) and the writer Bohumil Hrabal (1914–1997), who joined work brigades in the Kladno steelworks in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In a letter to a friend, Boudník described how his other friend “Bouše went to Ostrava – they also wrote about him in the *Mladá Fronta* newspaper, and he was featured in a newsflash. I gained the feeling that I was of no use to society, and so I decided to go and work in a factory.”⁵² However, others may have signed up for night shifts for non-activist reasons, which the agitprop films also captured. At night in the factories, singing and interesting tales were common; there was no shortage of jokes and friendly banter. Films usually presented the factory collective as a solidary, welcoming and open community. This is precisely what workers might have been seeking, or they could have joined night work out of solidarity with their friends. They might also have been seeking companionship or belonging. Several studies, independently of one another, have demonstrated that these emotions are stronger during the night.⁵³ Furthermore, the management was not present in the factory at night, so one could feel freer then. Workers could enjoy a greater sense of autonomy and peace, as well as more time for informal contact with their colleagues and other activities.⁵⁴

50 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, Unsigned, “Zavedte pořádek v ulicích”, *Lidová demokracie*, 17 April 1947.

51 Dalibor Státník, *Sankční pracovní právo v padesátých letech: Vládní nařízení o opatřeních proti fluktuaci a absenci č. 52/1953* (Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky, 1994), 15–28.

52 Vladimír Boudník, *Z korespondence I: 1949–1956*, ed. Vladislav Merhaut (Pražská imaginace, 1994), 70.

53 Sophie Body-Gendrot, “Les nuits américaines”, in *La nuit en question(s)*, 221.

54 See for example a literary reflection of this by Bohumil Hrabal, *Jarmilka* (Pražská imaginace, 1992), 88–151.

Somewhat paradoxically, another motivation for night work could be the promise of entertainment or various other activities entirely unrelated to work itself. For example, the artist Vladimír Boudník, mentioned above, organised art performances for the workers in the Kladno steelworks. At these, he made creative use of the machines and residues of used materials from the factory to create graphic art.⁵⁵ According to Heumos, it was not unusual for employees, instead of working, to hold parties, play cards or indulge in amorous affairs in the more secluded corners of the factory. They had no need to worry too much about punishment. Not only was the factory supervision weak at night, but the omnipresent shortage of labour placed them in a privileged position. For the workers, the likelihood of dismissal was minimal, and wage cuts, loss of vacation time or other financial penalties posed little deterrent. In a context where consumer goods were scarce on the official market and unaffordable on the black market, monetary incentives and penalties had limited practical significance for most workers.⁵⁶ This constituted a persistent dilemma for plant management. They could either tolerate such behaviour and keep the workers to show at least some productivity before the central government, or they could dismiss the undisciplined workers, which required recruiting more workers and training them, without any guarantee that the replacement workers' discipline would be better.

As more time passed since the end of the war, positive motivations faded. The revolutionary fervour dissipated, and people began to feel more intensely the impacts of the KSC's economic policy on their living and working conditions. This included the lack of even basic consumer goods to purchase, while working long and intensive shifts in arduous conditions. Strikes against poor living and working conditions, including protests against night shifts, had proliferated since 1951. As Heumos points out, they were often led by so-called workers-farmers – industrial workers with modest agricultural assets. These people oscillated between agrarian and industrial environments, and their daily rhythm was determined by work in the factory in the first half of the day, by agricultural activity in the second half and social life and family in the evening. In Czechoslovakia in 1956, this stratum accounted for more than a third of the 1.3 million industrial worker households.⁵⁷

In the spring of 1953, another wave of strikes broke out, but the main outbreak came with the monetary reform of June 1953. The architects of

55 Vladislav Merhaut, *Zápisky o Vladimíru Boudníkovi* (Revolver Revue, 1997), 16–21.

56 Heumos, "Vyhrňme", 23; Státník, *Sankční*, 22–28.

57 Heumos, "Vyhrňme", 29–30.

the reform kept it secret until the last moment and set highly unfavourable exchange rates. This mainly affected small savers, 41 per cent of whom were manual workers and employees in the priority sectors of industry. According to the historian Karel Bartošek, in practice, the currency reform meant that the price of basic foodstuffs increased overnight to 290 per cent of the original price on the ration market, while the price of other consumer goods increased to 185 per cent. According to official calculations, the real incomes of workers decreased by 12 per cent as a consequence of the reform, whereas the cost of living rose by an average of 29 per cent. Bartošek points out that the reform most affected families with two or more children, whose standard of living dropped by more than a third.⁵⁸ The KSČ leadership expected that the currency reform would increase “the interest of working people in improving quality and increasing production”, and restore the value of money.⁵⁹ However, in the eyes of workers, it represented a huge injustice and fraud. The reform triggered another wave of strikes, and tens of thousands of workers took to the streets to protest against the economic policies of the KSČ in cities throughout the country. In Pilsen, where the protests were the strongest, the workers occupied the town hall, and the security forces managed to get the situation under control only after reinforcements had arrived from Prague.⁶⁰

It might have seemed that films could nevertheless serve as an entertaining source of inspiration. But even this could not work in the long term. If employees spent the entire day or night at work, they would not, for long, respond to appeals to return there in their free time presented in film narratives, nor emulate the actions of the film’s heroes. Films are, by definition, products of the entertainment industry and therefore need to offer an escape from everyday mundanity. Yet if they instead returned viewers to their workplaces, they logically lost their function in the long-term. Nevertheless, an assessment of the scope of night work activities would undoubtedly merit further research and would require additional sources.

58 Karel Bartošek, “Ouvrier et gréviste à Prague 1953. Témoignage présenté par Karel Bartošek”, *Communisme. Revue d’études pluridisciplinaires*, no. 1 (1986): 27.

59 Bartošek, “Ouvrier”, 27.

60 Kevin McDermott, “Popular resistance in Communist Czechoslovakia: The Plzeň Uprising, June 1953”, *Contemporary European History*, no. 4 (2010): 293–298; Bartošek, “Ouvrier”, 28. See also Jakub Šlouf, *Spříznění měnou: Genealogie plzeňské revolty 1. června 1953* (Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2016), 98–339.

The Disenchantment of Night Work

It took almost the whole of the remainder of 1953 to calm the situation following the currency reform. The initial response of the KSČ leaders was repression, but in the longer term, they had to make concessions. As early as September 1953, the Czechoslovak government announced a reduction in the prices of consumer goods, and by the autumn of 1956, there had been six further price reductions, while wages and old age pensions gradually began to rise.⁶¹ Instead of introducing a second Five-Year Plan, “transitional” economic plans for the years 1954–1955 were announced, permitting the allocation of more resources to the production of everyday consumer goods. This resulted in a gradual increase in the manufacture of items such as refrigerators, washing machines, radios, televisions and cars. KSČ leaders launched a search for an economic reform that would allow greater investment in the modernisation of the economy. In July 1957, the Ministry and Commission of Labour Forces were abolished (although the Ministry and Commission of Social Welfare were not reinstated).

Labour agitprops disappeared from the public arena almost overnight, while representations of types of night work other than in heavy industry or collectivised agriculture began to permeate the public space. This transformation was communicated primarily through the local press, which, in numerous reports, presented readers with images of night shifts in such professions as firefighters, telephone operators, paediatricians and nurses – or in various activities associated with ensuring the smooth running of everyday life, such as in bakeries, or among workers operating newspaper presses and typesetting machines.⁶² The press also increasingly turned its attention to night shifts in consumer industries and activities linked with the consumerist aspects of life. Reports on the reduction of consumer goods prices were popular among journalists. Over the course of a single night, shop workers had to rewrite all the price tags so that goods could be ready for display in shop window displays and outlets the next morning.⁶³ For years to come, this ritual symbolised the improvement of

61 McDermott, “Popular”, 20–21; See also Unsigned, “240 minut nákupu za nižší ceny. Rozhovor reportéra Večerní Prahy s ředitelem Perly”, *Večerní Praha*, 1 April 1955, 1; JS, “Nákupy jak na zlatou neděli”, *Večerní Praha*, 25 April 1960, 1.

62 Jiří Hás, “Noc nad telefony”, *Večerní Praha*, 23 September 1960, 2; Vladimír Vrána, Bezesná noc, *Večerní Praha*, 14 October 1960, 2; JS, “Noční směna na bratislavské”, *Rovnost. Orgán krajského výboru KSČ v Brně*, 12 November 1959, 4; Vítězslav Houška, Milan Korej, “Praha jde spat”, *Květy*, 22 July 1954, 8–9.

63 JA, “Šest tisíc výloh se převléká za noc”, *Večerní Praha*, 24 April 1960, 2.

living standards within the socialist economy. Ever more often, reporters took to the city streets to find stories about how work progressed to make urban life as pleasant as possible. In several cases, the daily press published brief reports on the maintenance of city streets or on the repair of transport infrastructure.⁶⁴ Another theme that gradually gained popularity was work connected with night life and entertainment. For example, newspapers ran reports on mobile sausage vendors, night shop assistants in the *Pramen* network of food stores, and staff supplying so-called standing self-service buffets – 24-hour canteens offering food during the night.⁶⁵ Reporters also featured taxi drivers and mobile coffee vendors, who carried containers full of coffee strapped to their backs.⁶⁶ On the occasion of the second Spartakiada mass exercise in Prague in July 1960, the press also informed readers about work in the various municipal service enterprises tasked with ensuring the event's smooth operation.⁶⁷ For example, this might concern the night maintenance of neon signs or supplying the hosting stadium with food and drink the following day.⁶⁸ Within the context of persistent problems with the electricity supply, the press sought to lend some glamour to the profession of lamplighters: in the event of an electrical power cut, all responsibility for keeping the streets lit fell on their shoulders.⁶⁹ In parallel, it continued to heroise night work in the energy sector. It reported with passion how, in February 1956, one month after the introduction of the second Five-Year Plan, workers were called in for exceptional night shifts in order to repair a breakdown at the heating plant in the Vršovice district of Prague. The intensive works lasted for forty hours without interruption.⁷⁰

From 1957 onwards, films began to offer reflections similar to those of newspaper reporters. However, unlike the press, they narrated their stories more dispassionately, situating them within broader social and economic contexts. They portrayed the professional duties of teachers, clerks, engineers or scientists (*School of Fathers, Breach, The Case Is Not Yet Closed*) as part of

64 RÁ, "Pod rouškou noci proti nečistotě", *Večerní Praha*, 25 June 1960, 2; RÁ, "Noční výpad proti špině. Noční putování našeho reportéra po ulicích vnitřní Prahy", *Večerní Praha*, 1 September 1960, 3; Sylva Groszová, "Noc se sněhem", *Večerní Praha*, 16 December 1960, 2; Unsigned, "Noční klid", *Večerní Praha*, 20 July 1960, 1; Václav Vopička, "Noční koncert", *Večerní Praha*, 23 August 1960, 2; Unsigned, "Rušná noc – nové koleje", *Večerní Praha*, 14 December 1960, 1, etc.

65 KÝ, "Občerstvení až do rána", *Večerní Praha*, 2 July 1955, 2.

66 MK, Untitled, *Večerní Praha*, 11 May 1955, 1.

67 On this topic see also Petr Roubal, *Spartakiads: The Politics of Physical Culture in Communist Czechoslovakia* (Karolinum, 2020).

68 František Kaucký, "Noc na Strahově", *Večerní Praha*, 25 June 1960, 2.

69 ŠK, Untitled, *Večerní Praha*, 11 February 1956, 1.

70 KÝ, "Teplárna Vršovice opět v provozu", *Večerní Praha*, 13 February 1956, 2.

mundane daily activities or took a more critical stance.⁷¹ One of the first films to present such a critique was *Breach*, a film about a young couple who have little time to spend together because of their heavy workloads.⁷² The woman is a clerk and her husband an engineer; both work overtime late into the evening and cannot even find time together for a shared holiday. Their situation is compounded by the shortage of housing: they live in a single room in the husband's parents' apartment, with almost no privacy. This leads to a series of conflicts and ultimately to a serious marital crisis, resolved only by them finding a new dwelling and reducing their working hours. The story points to a widespread problem within Czechoslovak society in the second half of the 1950s – the encroachment of work upon personal life, combined with the protracted housing crisis that had plagued the country for several decades. Indeed, residential construction became another popular subject of newspaper reports. At the beginning of 1954, the KSČ leadership announced a plan for the construction of 40,000 new apartments to help alleviate the crisis.⁷³ The local press followed with reports on night work in the construction industry, meant to show that vigorous efforts were being made to resolve the problem. In tone, these reports resembled the ritualistic coverage of price reductions: the improvement of living standards was once again at the centre of attention.⁷⁴ However, the narrative of *Breach* suggested that this improvement had not come as quickly as expected, and that housing construction was not progressing at the pace promised in 1954.

The representation of night work among security forces also changed. As the imperative of vigilance evolved in the context of the post-Stalinist thaw, the detective genre began to re-emerge. It typically depicted the night work of criminal investigators as a normal part of police routine, serving to heighten suspense, add momentum and provide the viewer with a sense of adventure (*The Case Is Not Yet Closed*, *A 105% Alibi*). Night work was

71 See Ladislav Helge, Ladislav Helge and Ivan Kříž, *Škola otců* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 8 November 1957); Václav Krška, Oldřich Daněk, *Zde jsou lvi* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 8 August 1958); Ladislav Rychman, Miloslav Drtílek and Edvard Valenta, *Případ ještě nekončí* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 19 September 1957).

72 Miroslav Hubáček, Miroslav Hubáček – Zbyněk Brynych, and Jiří Mucha, *Roztržka* (Studio hraných filmů, 15 February 1957).

73 Kimberley Zarecor Elman, *Utváření socialistické modernity. Bydlení v Československu 1945–1960* (Academia, 2015), 290–375.

74 SK, Na staveništi 320 bytů. Jednadvacet čtyřpatrových panelových domů, *Večerní Praha*, 19 July 1955, 1; OŠ, "Rudé hvězdy opět svítí", *Večerní Praha*, 10 April 1956, 1; OŠ, "Proč nesvítí hvězdy", *Večerní Praha*, 17 April 1956, 1; OŠ, "Čtyři hvězdy září na Žižkově", *Večerní Praha*, 9 June 1956, 2; OŠ, "Proč nesvítí hvězda na Žižkově?", *Večerní Praha*, 6 September 1956, 1; PŘ, "Rudá hvězda nad stavbou", *Večerní Praha*, 16 December 1958, 2.

even portrayed critically in the mining industry – as a dangerous practice that could lead to catastrophe, as shown in *Scars of the Past*. This film was condemned by the KSČ leaders and withdrawn from distribution in 1959.

In reaction, by 1960 popular culture once again attempted to assign a higher purpose to night work, briefly reviving the tradition of labour agitprops. This time, however, they focused on environmental issues, which had deteriorated rapidly as a consequence of the emphasis on heavy industry. *Three Tons of Dust* tells the story of a night shift manager who reassigns workers responsible for regulating fly ash emissions to other tasks because of a labour shortage on night shifts. As a result, the factory releases all its fly ash into the air under the cover of night, causing severe health problems for the local population. A similar theme appeared in *Fitters*, where a worker on the night shift designs an improvement to attach a “torch” to the chimney of a steelworks plant. This is intended to burn off sulphur dioxide and prevent its release into the atmosphere. The innovation saves the plant half a million crowns for the construction of a crane.⁷⁵ Both films again underscored the persistent shortage of night workers and appealed to audiences to contribute to night work, suggested that, in the second half of the 1950s, Czechoslovakia still faced the same fundamental problems as it had during the first Five-Year Plan.⁷⁶

Although, after the protests against the monetary reform, the Czechoslovak Communists attempted to introduce an economic reform that would have allowed enterprises to obtain more funds to invest in modernising their equipment and thus increase labour productivity, in the end they applied only a fraction of it.⁷⁷ As a result, Czechoslovakia continued to expend large resources on buying raw materials it did not possess, on producing heavy industry products ill-suited to its economy and on maintaining old and malfunctioning machinery. The result was a decline in quality. In addition, by the end of the 1950s, other Eastern Bloc countries were producing similar products, so Czechoslovak ones were no longer in such demand and began to accumulate in warehouses. In 1958, a report for the Politburo of

75 Oldřich Daněk, *Tři tuny prachu* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 30 September 1960); Jaroslav Mach, Josef Neuberg, and František Vlček, *Rychlík do Ostravy* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 28 October 1960).

76 See KRT, “Ve dne i v noci na svých místech. Pracovníci v energetice se scházejí na II. celostátní konferenci”, *Večerní Praha*, 15 September 1955, 1; KRT, “II. Celostátní konference čs. Energetiků. Více kWh republice!”, *Večerní Praha*, 16 September 1955, 1; Unsigned, Untitled, *Večerní Praha*, 24 September 1955, 1.

77 On the continuity in economic policy see for example Martin Myant, *The Czechoslovak Economy 1948–1988: The Battle for Economic Reform* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 65–89.

the Central Committee of the KSČ stated that the frequent breakdowns and obsolescence of machinery had created a situation in which it was impossible even to produce printing paper without difficulties – incidentally one of the few Czechoslovak export goods with higher added value.⁷⁸ Because of the need for constant repairs and to compensate for stoppages, some engineering plants of the country's biggest enterprise, ČKD, exceeded their annual overtime quotas by as much as 80 per cent.⁷⁹ Moreover, the outdated machinery consumed more energy, creating further strain on electricity supplies. Power cuts persisted throughout the second half of the 1950s, forcing factories and plants to move part or all of their production to night hours.⁸⁰ Although “consumption curves” were introduced in order to help coordinate and, if possible, ensure a more even distribution of energy use, and the press regularly called upon enterprises and households to save energy, the effects were minimal. Problems in the energy industry were further exacerbated by frequent breakdowns in power stations and heating plants. Their shutdowns and the repairs of malfunctioning machines required additional shift transfers and further labour. It became increasingly evident that Czechoslovak industry could not function without night shifts, yet these could no longer be presented as part of a nation-building ethos for workers.

In 1958, the idea of introducing a uniform financial bonus for night work appeared for the first time. After several months of discussions, it was decided that, as of 1 October 1960, workers would receive a bonus under certain conditions (e.g. that the entire shift was completed and at least five working hours fell between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.). If it was necessary to extend the day shift into the night hours, the worker in question would automatically receive a 50 per cent bonus on the hourly rate. The government briefly considered shortening or eliminating night shifts, since according to available statistics “the greatest decline in performance occurs in the final hours of the night shift and on the last shifts of the week”, due to fatigue and loss of concentration.⁸¹ However, the idea was soon abandoned, as it would have caused chaos in the scheduling of other shifts, transport and related sectors. Moreover, workers may have perceived it merely as another form of exploitation, since, in reality, it would not have reduced overall demands for work outputs.

78 National Archives (hereafter NA), f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – Politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 225, a. j./bod 304.

79 Krakovský, *Réinventer*, 54.

80 NA, f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – Politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 262–263, a. j./bod 347/6, “Zásady pro zvýhodnění práce v nočních směnách”.

81 “Zásady pro zvýhodnění”.

The introduction of financial bonuses essentially demonstrated that the Czechoslovak Communists had finally abandoned the notion of a higher mission of night work and accepted the fact that they could not do without it. The arguments for financial rewards were presented on several levels. The first of these was medical: night work places a great strain on the human body, as it “requires greater physical exertion and leads to a certain disruption of lifestyle on the part of workers.”⁸² In this respect, there was a consensus with the conclusions of experts in the Western world, where the enterprise managers, social scientists and economists were also seeking ways to minimise the impact of night work on workers’ lives and their immediate surroundings.⁸³ Another argument concerned increasing economic productivity. In addition to financial compensation, it was to be enhanced through parallel improvements in working conditions designed to increase concentration and reduce industrial accidents.⁸⁴ Plans included improving the ventilation of workshops and factory halls, increasing the flow of fresh air and providing workers with access to hot food at night to maintain energy levels. Lighting in workplaces was to be fundamentally improved. Productivity was also to be increased through experiments with the placement of service technicians, fitters, auxiliary workers and skilled operators, optimising the flow of service and the supply of materials, tools, diagrams and gauges. Together with this, the government also planned to increase the number of supervisory technicians on night shifts and to send photographers to workplaces to strengthen surveillance, reinforce control and prevent workers from engaging in other activities or being absent from work.⁸⁵ However, based on reactions to previous efforts to strengthen labour discipline during night shifts, it is safe to assume that these measures quickly failed.

A further justification for bonuses was symbolic – what might be termed political marketing. Bonuses were introduced in response to demands for better working conditions and were described as “a political measure whose implementation was demanded in numerous comments from workers.” They

82 “Zásady pro zvýhodnění práce”.

83 Ahlheim, *Der Traum*, 373–464; Malte Müller, “Disrupted Times – Continuous Shift Workers in Societal and Sociological Debates between Boom and Crisis”, in *Working at Night: Modernity, Night Shifts and the Temporal Organization of Labour Across Political and Economic Regimes*, eds. Lucie Dušková and Ger Duijzings (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022), 105–130.

84 “Zásady pro zvýhodnění práce”.

85 “Zvýhodnění práce v nočních směnách”.

were expected to provide a motivational component to wages, as requested both by workers and by reform-minded economists.⁸⁶

The final set of arguments related to individual branches of industry. The range of eligible professions was wide: the first phase of supplementary payments, unsurprisingly, covered manual and technical-economic workers in the priority sectors – fuel and energy, metallurgy and mining, heavy and general engineering, the chemical and construction industries, the food sector and the exploration and extraction of radioactive raw materials.⁸⁷ In addition, bonuses abolished in 1954 were reinstated for night work on rail, water and municipal transport. These mainly applied to employees of locomotive and train crews, sleeping-car staff, boat crews, drivers, guards and conductors on national and municipal transport, as well as workshop mechanics.⁸⁸ A new feature was that within these sectors, the bonuses now also applied to experts, supervisory technicians, specialists, foremen and control-centre employees. It is worth noting that these professions were classified as intellectual labour and thus theoretically fell outside the working class, making them in principle ineligible for such benefits. It is also necessary to emphasise that this viewpoint applied only to technical sectors. By contrast, fields in which intellectual labour constituted the core activity – such as education, culture and science – were excluded from the bonus schemes. In these areas, only manual workers were eligible, for example film technicians, maintenance staff and cleaners. This distinction underscores the technocratic character of the Communist view of society.⁸⁹ In other selected sectors, supplementary payments for night work were to be introduced from 1 January 1961. These covered telecommunications, radio, television, healthcare, gatekeepers, factory security guards and fire brigades. Bonuses were also introduced for labourers employed in seasonal work in agriculture such as harvesting, threshing and autumn ploughing. Labourers in construction, who manufactured panels and insulation, were to be entitled to bonuses, as were bricklayers and concreters. In the commercial sector, manual occupations such as night cleaners and night shift workers “in central catering facilities”, factory canteens in three-shift

86 “Zásady pro zvýhodnění”.

87 “Zvýhodnění práce v nočních směnách”.

88 In these cases, the KSČ leadership agreed to provide extra pay for each hour worked so as to avoid deliberate shift adjustments to the detriment of the efficiency of the sector in question. See “Zvýhodnění práce v nočních směnách”.

89 See more in Vítězslav Sommer, ed., *Řídit socialismus jako firmu: Technokratické vládnutí v Československu 1956–1989* (Nakladatelství lidové noviny, 2019), 191–198; Michal Kopeček, ed., *Architekti dlouhé změny. Expertní kořeny postsocialismu (1980–1995)* (Argo, 2019), 103–184.

operation, as well as in accounting and night goods delivery were eligible.⁹⁰ On the other hand, bar staff and waiters in bars, restaurants, night clubs and station restaurants and receptionists and porters in hotels and hostels were excluded, although maintenance technicians and cleaners in these enterprises were entitled to benefits. The work of the security forces, where higher wages for night work automatically applied and which was subject to a different regime, was also excluded from the scheme. According to 1960 statistics, the measure affected approximately 460,000 blue- and white-collar workers in total, representing almost 13 per cent of workers in the sectors concerned (industry, selected non-industrial sectors and transport).⁹¹

The government wished to announce the introduction of bonuses on the occasion of the declaration of the new Czechoslovak constitution in July 1960, which officially proclaimed Czechoslovakia a socialist state and asserted that it had completed the first stage on the road to communism. The measure was meant to restore the declining prestige of the centrally planned economy, serving as proof of the Party leaders concern for workers and of the modernity of the system they had created. Each employee was to receive an extra 0.80 Czechoslovak crowns (Kčs) per hour for night work, representing an extra 50–90 Kčs per month. However, these sums were insufficient to significantly improve people's purchasing power. According to the prices of the time, they were enough for between one third and a half a kilogram of tea, between 15 and 28 packets of *Partyzánek* cigarettes or roughly one bottle of the local rum. Saving for a bicycle priced at 540 Kčs would thus have required six to eleven months of disciplined saving, while household appliances like washing machines or radios remained out of reach.⁹²

The negligible effect of these bonuses among the targeted groups is confirmed by statistics. In 1959, before their introduction, 73.5 per cent of employees worked the morning shift and 7.1 per cent the night shift. By 1965, the night shift staff had increased to 7.5 per cent.⁹³ A closer look at available sources also shows that their composition was changing. Instead of skilled male workers in heavy industry, mining and energy, night work was increasingly carried out by prisoners – both criminal and political – and

90 "Zvýhodnění práce v nočních směnách".

91 Calculated according to the data from: ČTK, "Příplatky za noční směny v průmyslu a dopravě", *Rudé právo*, 30 September 1960, 1 and *Stručný statistický přehled 1945–1960* (SNPL, 1960), 169.

92 Calculated according to *Statistická ročenka Československé socialistické republiky* (SNTL, 1960) 30, 32 and 397.

93 *Stručný statistický*, 84.

by women.⁹⁴ The first Czechoslovak unified Labour Code, which came into force in 1966, essentially preserved the same principles of working hours as the legislation from 1918–1920. Throughout the 1960s, and likely up to the regime's collapse, issues surrounding dependence on night work, the shortage of night-shift workers and the negative side effects of such work continued to be discussed within this framework. No financial incentive, regardless of its size, could resolve the fundamental problem of the Czechoslovak economy: excessive energy consumption and a chronic shortage of labour in industrial production. Although, at the turn of the 1960s, the KSČ leadership considered further reducing the working week to 42 hours – and to 40 hours in mining – experts warned that this would merely increase overtime and night shifts.⁹⁵ The mechanism established during the first Five-Year Plan, whereby night shifts were used to fulfil production quotas and artificially compensate for insufficient productivity, remained unchanged. The contradiction between the regime's intended goals and economic reality only deepened, and the attempt to motivate workers through patriotic or nation-building ideals was abandoned in favour of a far more prosaic and now indeed the sole motivation – money.

94 See Lucie Dušková, "The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic's Resolution on the Benefits of Night Shift Work: Its Context, Contradictions, and Realities", *International Labor and Working-Class History* 107 (2025): 184–197. See also Peter Heumos, "State Socialism, Egalitarianism, Collectivism: On the Social Context of Socialist Work Movements in Czechoslovak Industrial and Mining Enterprises 1945–1965", *International Labor and Working-Class History. Labor in Postwar Central and Eastern Europe*, no. 68 (2005): 60.

95 "Zvýhodnění práce v nočních směnách".

PART 3

Lights in the Night Space

*What is in fact the colour of night? The ultramarine of the sky,
 the brownish contours of the facades and portals,
 the golden green drapery of the gardens.
 But darkness adds its purple shadow to everything.
 And yellow, the yellow of the lanterns breaks up this nocturnal composition.
 If I were a painter, I would despair. At this moment you should be in the streets.*
 (Vítězslav Houška – Milan Korej, *Prague Goes to Sleep*, 1954)¹

The symbolic representation of socialism as a system destined to bring about a resplendent future, in combination with the huge demands placed on the energy sector, also left a profound mark on the appearance of Czechoslovak streets at night and their lighting. For every ruling power, regardless of ideology or historical epoch, night lighting represents a crucial tool in the effective management of the night space and life within it: artificial lighting expresses a victory over the rhythm of nature by prolonging the day into the night. Furthermore, the contrast between light and darkness renders the nightscape beautiful and majestic.² At the same time, artificial light brings greater direct control over space, more thorough fulfilment of the task of vigilance and, therefore, also the reinforcement of order and discipline. People become aware that they are being watched, both by one another as well as by the police.³

There are various types of lighting, differing in their function, form, technical parameters and history. The oldest is festive lighting, introduced on the occasion of religious festivals in the city-states of Mesopotamia. Later, it was employed to mark important milestones in the history of ruling dynasties or military victories, and, eventually, festivals in connection with modern states.⁴ The next type is systematic street lighting, which European cities began to introduce from the second half of the sixteenth century

1 Houška and Korej, "Praha jde spat", *Květy*, 22 July 1954, 8–9.

2 Luc Gwiazdzinski and Gilles Rabin, *Si la ville m'était contée* (Eyrolles, 2005), 125–135; Nurcin Ileri, "Allure of Light, Fear of the Dark: Nighttime Illumination, Spectacle, and Order in Fin-de-Siècle Istanbul", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, no. 2 (2017): 282–289; Simone Delattre, *Les douze heures noires: La nuit à Paris au XIX^e siècle* (Albin Michel, 2000), 91–126.

3 Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City: Paris, Berlin, London 1840–1930* (Reaktion Books, 1998), 67–105.

4 See for example Johann Beckmann, *A Concise History of Ancient Institutions, Inventions, and Discoveries in Science and Mechanic Art I* (G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1823), 244–246; Alain Cabantous, *Histoire de la nuit XVII^e–XVIII^e siècle* (Fayard, 2009), 266; Ladislav Monzer, *Osvětlení Prahy, Proměny sedmi století* (FCC Public, 2003), 125–126, 129–130.

onwards. This was intended to improve the ruling power's surveillance over the nocturnal space, and it gradually became a symbol of the modern era and its technological prowess.⁵ At the beginning of the twentieth century these two types of lighting were joined by advertising lights, which made use of colour contrasts in an attempt to attract the gaze of passers-by. Advertising lights underscored the glory of technical progress, as well as the rise of consumer culture and entrepreneurship.⁶

In short, lighting is a matter of capital, technical innovation, economic capacity, socio-political modernity, with each social system imprinting its own distinct character upon it. Therefore, when a radically different social, political and economic order was established in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War, night lighting presented itself as an opportune and visible means by which to demonstrate this change. In other words, to paraphrase the question posed by the theorist of space Henri Lefebvre: Did socialism as a social system produce a specific night space through its use of lighting? In Lefebvre's view, space is primarily a social construct, shaped by the specific political, economic and social constellation of the given system whose internal logic, configuration and values it expresses.⁷ Lefebvre also asserts that "a revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential; indeed it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses."⁸ For this reason, it is instructive to examine how Czechoslovak society, on its path towards socialism, treated the night space, and what its lighting practices specifically can say about it. What kind of space did the people inhabit after dark? And what role did nighttime illumination in their perceptions and imagination? The following chapters address these questions by analysing three types of lighting: street, advertising and festive. To illustrate these phenomena through concrete examples, particular attention will be devoted to urban spaces, primarily Prague, whose status as the capital made it a trendsetter in these developments.

5 Cabantous, *Histoire*, 249–262; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (Blackwells, 1988), 114–134; Ileri, "Allure", 282–286.

6 Patrik Groma, Milan Novák, Miroslav Pfliegel, and Peter Štanský, *Žilina vo svetle lámp: (ne)zabudnutá história energetiky* (Georg, 2015), 63.

7 The geographer Luc Gwiazdzinski also uses the term "symbolic spatialisation". See Gwiazdzinski and Rabin, *Si la ville*, 36.

8 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 54.

5. Street Lighting

Abstract: The Sovietisation of street lighting in Czechoslovakia after the launch of the first Five-Year Plan in 1949 resulted in a paradox: while in the public imagination street lighting was an important symbol associated with modernity, in everyday reality it was an unreliable or even non-existent artefact, or a kind of abstract dream far beyond the horizon of the time. Czechoslovak towns and villages were often plunged into darkness due to outdated infrastructure, constant overloading of the electricity grid, and the lack of resources available to local authorities to address the situation.

Keywords: street lighting, darkness, light, gas, electricity

As with other spheres of life, the approach to street lighting in post-war Czechoslovakia was initially shaped by the legacy of the war. The lamps and electrical supply systems were corroded because the lighting had barely been used in the years 1939–1945. In some cases, they had been entirely destroyed by the fighting. This also applied to the power stations and gasworks. As a result, the post-war priorities of local authorities included at least a provisional restoration of street lighting and all it entailed. Street lighting was an essential condition for orientation within the night space and provided a feeling of safety.¹

Another baseline condition was the transformation of the entire framework within which the economy functioned. In contrast to the inter-war period, when street lighting and energy supply facilities were owned and operated by private firms or municipal corporations, of the “energy companies and facilities serving for the production, provision, distribution and supply energy of all types, which can be distributed to a broader

¹ See for example Unsigned, *Budovatel'ský program mesta Žiliny k 28. októbru 1946* (Žilina, 1946).

section of consumers, in particular electricity, gas and steam”, were now transferred to the jurisdiction of the state.² In 1946, the České energetické závody (ČEZ) company was established. In Slovakia, an amalgamation of energy companies had already taken place as early as 1942 into the company Slovenské elektrárne (SEAS), renamed Energetické závody na Slovensku in 1946. In December 1946, supplies of energy for “the lighting of streets, public pathways, town squares, public parks and similar locations” were fully exempted from sales tax, with an attendant price reduction of 3 per cent.³ The post-war governments hoped that these measures would ensure more effective management and faster regeneration. The two-year economic plan subsequently stipulated the minimum number of kilowatt hours of electricity and cubic metres of gas to be produced in 1947 and 1948 to ensure restoration at least to the standard of 1937.⁴

In the following years, the approach to street lighting was determined by the stance of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), in which the technical imagination came up against economic constraints. Generally speaking, the Communist approach embodied a curious combination of contradictions and paradoxes, where symbolic meanings clashed with the harsh realities of everyday life. Within this context, Lefebvre’s idea concerning the shaping of a specific space that would express the changes after 1945 and 1948 often acquired quite unexpected meanings.

Street Lighting within the Communist Doctrine

The position of the Czechoslovak Communists was rooted in the fact that street lighting was initially part and parcel of Lenin’s dream of the modernisation of the Soviet Union. Lenin firmly linked this issue with the task of the universal electrification of Russia, which he championed in 1920–1921. The oft-cited statement concerning the relationship between electrification and communism – “Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the entire country” – originates from this period. Electrification was intended to initiate the process of industrialisation, which would in turn lead to urbanisation. Street lighting, along with the illumination of schools

2 “Dekret prezidenta republiky ze dne 24. října 1945 o znárodnění dolů a některých průmyslových podniků 100/1945 Sb.”, paragraph 1, section 2.

3 See “Vládní nařízení ze dne 10. prosince 1946, jímž se provádí zákon ze dne 21. února 1946 č. 31 Sb., o dani z obratu č. 233/1946 Sb.”, article 6, section 3.

4 See “Zákon ze dne 25. října 1946 o dvouletém hospodářském plánu 192/1946 Sb.”, paragraph 2.

and other public educational institutions, was to be one of crucial elements in transforming the predominantly uneducated Soviet peasantry into cultivated and qualified industrial workers. In addition, it was intended to be a visible expression of the approaching revolution, which would effectively elevate the Soviet Union to a realm beyond time and natural laws.⁵ To this end, Lenin declared his intention “to transform every power station we build into a bastion of enlightenment, in order to make the masses electrically conscious, so to speak”, and to enlighten the “peasants’ darkness.”⁶ In the case of street lighting, the vision of a revolution realised by individuals liberated through knowledge made possible by technology (see chapter 2) was perfectly embodied.

The Bolshevik imagination was also strongly stimulated by the fact that the implementation of electrification required specialist experts. These experts were to serve as the professional guarantors of modernisation, and their status as professionals conformed to the vision of the thoroughly apolitical, expert – and therefore efficient – management of the state. Within this context, “electrification contained the promises of technocratic thinking, planning and societal transformation that constituted the mindset of Communists and non-Communists in revolutionary Russia. In the uncertain time of 1917–1920, electrical engineers emerged as the only group with a solid plan for the future that went beyond the level of the government rhetoric.”⁷ Jonathan Coopersmith notes that during this period a significant number of electrical engineers also entered government service, where they enjoyed considerable success with their ambitious plans for the electrification of the whole of Russia. It seemed that the ultimate moment was approaching when politics would recede into the background, replaced by technology and science, which would render the entire state apparatus superfluous. The notion that technology could de-politicise politics and ensure the universally competent and just administration of public affairs accompanied the entire period of

5 Stephen Hanson, *Time and Revolution: Marxism and the Design of Soviet Institutions* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 19–21; Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (University of California Press, 1995), 27–145; Joshua Freeman, *Behemoth: Dějiny továrny a utváření moderního světa* (Host, 2019), 187–226; Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 46–52.

6 Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Sebrané spisy. Sv. 42., listopad 1920–březen 1921* (Svoboda, 1989), 208–209. See also Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 39–84.

7 Jonathan Coopersmith, *The Electrification of Russia, 1880–1926* (Cornell University Press, 1992), 261.

Communist rule – and still continues to appear, in various forms, even today.⁸

However, the idea that electric light automatically brings modernity carries no particular ideological message; rather, it stems from the Enlightenment conception of humanity and society in opposition to the Catholic Church. The historian Alain Cabantous notes that the Church long opposed the introduction of public lighting because “light served only to make visible the wicked and obscene”. By contrast, the Enlightenment rested upon the conviction that the development of humanity was founded on continuous technical progress, which inevitably would bring intellectual, moral and institutional advancement. This subsequently enabled humanity to control nature and time.⁹ In essence, the thinking of the Soviet Bolsheviks did not differ in any significant way from the visions of British or American liberals, French or Czechoslovak secular conservatives or Italian futurists.¹⁰ In short, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, electrification and the attendant introduction of public lighting became a domain that embodied widely shared notions of the just administration of the state – through a government of experts and technologies presumed to operate independently of politics.¹¹ In inter-war Czechoslovakia too, the question of lighting and electrification was increasingly articulated as a matter of public interest. The nocturnal city was not only fascinating, but also a demonstration of life, economic prosperity, technological sophistication and the aesthetic sense of those who shaped it. This is illustrated also by a short time-lapse film entitled *Prague Shining in Lights* (1928), commissioned by the Electrical Enterprises of the Capital City of Prague from the acclaimed director Svatopluk Innemann. Condensed into twenty-two minutes, the film depicts the course of an ordinary night from dusk to dawn, presenting the city’s lights, inhabitants and typical nocturnal activities. It represents an attempt to show Prague as a vibrant, radiant metropolis that never sleeps – with blazing lights that never fade.¹²

8 Lenin, *Sebrané*, 208; Lenin, *Stát a revoluce* (Svoboda, 1982), 46–52, 108–126; Coopersmith, *The Electrification*, 264. See also Vítězslav Sommer, ed., *Řídit socialismus jako firmu: Technokratické vládnutí v Československu 1956–1989* (Nakladatelství lidové noviny, 2019), 14–51; Freeman, *Behemot*, 191–221.

9 Zdzisław Krasnodebski, *Zánik myšlenky pokroku* (Pavel Mervart, 2006), 9–74; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (Blackwells, 1988), 123–134.

10 See Alain Cabantous, *Histoire de la nuit XVII^e–XVIII^e siècle* (Fayard, 2009), 254.

11 On the acceptance by British political elites of the idea of the technologisation and expertise of the civil service, see Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain 1800–1910* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 10–19.

12 Svatopluk Innemann, *Praha v záři světla* (Elektrické podniky hlavního města Prahy, 1928).

The construction and distribution of electricity networks, including public lighting, were gradually taken over by the state administration, governed by special legislation and financed from public resources.¹³ When private companies decided to construct public lighting, they could claim tax relief or receive funding directly from the state. The main phases in the introduction of electric street lighting in Czechoslovakia occurred during the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁴ Thanks to government initiatives, public lighting became part of the standard equipment of most Czechoslovak towns and villages, even though marked regional differences persisted. By 1947, almost 75 per cent of Czechoslovakia had been electrified, with an estimated 87 per cent of the population living in municipalities where electricity had been introduced. Slovakia lagged somewhat behind in this respect, with just over 40.2 per cent of municipalities electrified by that year. By the transition from the Two-Year Plan to the first Five-Year Plan on 1 January 1949, nearly 83 per cent of Czechoslovakia had been electrified – 51.9 per cent in Slovakia and 91.4 per cent in the Czech lands.¹⁵

The Sovietisation of Street Lighting in Czechoslovakia

After the launch of the first Five-Year Plan in 1949, parallels emerged with the changes in the approach to lighting that had followed Stalin's rise to power in the Soviet Union in 1922. At that time, electrification had gradually come to be identified exclusively with support for the development of heavy industry and the mechanisation of agriculture, while the introduction of public lighting disappeared from the modernisation project.¹⁶ Without doubt, this was partly due to the fact that the construction of lighting entailed additional costs within already financially demanding industrialisation and mechanisation projects, prompting the state to economise wherever

13 For a comparison of the electrification process in Europe, see Jan Mikeš, *Elektrifikace Československa do roku 1938* (PhD diss, Charles University, 2016), <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11956/83800>, 48–142.

14 “Zákon ze dne 22. července 1919 o státní podpoře při zahájení soustavné elektrisace č. 438/1919 Sb. a jeho novelizace z let 1924–1932”; “Zákon ze dne 1. července o finanční podpoře elektrisace venkova č. 139/1926 Sb. a jeho novelizace z let 1928–1946”. See also Jan Mikeš and Marcela Efmertová, *Elektrina na dlani. Kapitoly z historie elektrotechniky v českých zemích* (Milpo Media, 2008), 64–81; Marcela Efmertová, *Elektrotechnika v českých zemích a v Československu do poloviny 20. století. Studie k vývoji elektrotechnických oborů* (Libri, 1999), 28–57.

15 See, Václav Průcha, ed., *Hospodářské a sociální dějiny Československa 1918–1992 II*. (Doplňěk, 2009), 232.

16 Coopersmith, *The Electrification*, 7.

possible. As a consequence, at the beginning of the first Five-Year Plan in Czechoslovakia, state financial support for public lighting was withdrawn. Responsibility was transferred to the National Committees, which acted as city, municipal and local governments.¹⁷ This effectively marked the end of its systematic development. Under conditions in which everything was governed by central planning and the priorities of heavy industry, local government lacked both the authority or the resources to construct anything so costly.

As a result, in places where electricity had been introduced but public lighting was not yet functioning, its implementation depended primarily on the skill, organisational and negotiating abilities, and even the luck of the representatives of the relevant National Committee – as well as on the willingness of the local population. A certain model for how street lighting could be established was offered in 1951 by the Slovak film *Goat's Milk*. In this classic tale of rural collectivisation, the construction of street lighting serves both as the framework and the catalyst of the plot: the backdrop to a love story and the means of defining the individual characters. The introduction of lighting is made possible thanks to Peter, the son of a local smallholder, who also works in a factory in a nearby town. Every Sunday, he returns to his native village with a group of volunteers to carry out all the work required to construct the lighting infrastructure. Together with some of the local inhabitants – often working in the dark – they manually dig pits for the lampposts and cables of the public lighting system. The first illumination of the village then becomes a great celebration in the form of a village ball. The film thus presents a recipe for introducing street lighting in remote regions: the voluntary work brigade, in which the majority of the work is carried out by the villagers themselves, through their own efforts and in their free time. The state provided only basic electrification necessary for the mechanisation of agriculture; the rest was left to the local population. Nevertheless, *Goat's Milk* remained the sole cinematic example of such a portrayal. In popular culture, electricity was far more often associated with the construction of large power plants, hydroelectric dams and reservoirs – and, of course, with industry.

In the towns as well, the issue of public lighting fell under the jurisdiction of the National Committees, which, like their counterparts in rural areas, had only limited authority and budgets. Although public lighting had mostly been introduced in urban settings, its condition had either remained unchanged

17 "Zákon ze dne 19. prosince 1949 o soustavné elektrisaci venkova 273/1949 Sb.", paragraph 2.

since the immediate post-war period or had deteriorated.¹⁸ The introduction of lighting to newly built districts proved to be a substantial problem. For example, in October 1956, a resident of the newly constructed Ružinov housing estate in Bratislava complained in the press that, after nightfall the entire area was so dark that anyone unfamiliar with the neighbourhood found orientation nearly impossible. In addition, the complainant noted that the darkness provided opportunities for various thieves, who could easily burgle flats, and that the residents were plagued by voyeurs who “watched women undressing for bed” under cover of darkness. The author also pointed out that this situation contradicted the purported endeavours to make Ružinov the most modern housing estate of its time.¹⁹

Even where electric street lighting had been installed, there was no guarantee that it would actually function after dark. The heavy demands placed on the energy sector led to frequent power cuts, which also affected street lighting and other public illumination. As a result, gas lamps often remained the only source of nighttime light. In an effort to present this situation in a positive light, the press waxed lyrical about the magical appearance of the streets in the glow of the gas lamps and extolled the great responsibility of lamp lighters. For example, in February 1956, when a power failure occurred in Prague-Vršovice, the local press reported: “Especially on winter days, [this work] is devoid of all charm. One of the lamp lighters, Božena Hátková, who you can see in our picture with her typical bamboo rod, sets out on her route through her allocated streets in winter around five or six in the evening, in summer at around half past nine. In the winter the lights go out at seven in the morning, and in summer – a pleasant awakening – sometimes as early as three!”²⁰ One might be forgiven for thinking that such reports came from the early twentieth century, when gas lighting first became standard in Czechoslovak towns.²¹

The contradiction between the vision of a modern, electrically lit future and the lived reality of gloomy, outmoded gas lamps was accentuated by the fact that such lamps were found only in the historical centres of towns and in older residential districts. Thus, in the event of a power cut, other areas remained in complete darkness. Moreover, gas was unreliable, especially when temperatures dropped below zero. The lamps often failed to ignite

18 This is indirectly evidenced by numerous camera shots of films from the early 1950s.

19 Karol Weiss. “O tme, zlodejoch a koze v kúpeľni”, *Večerník*, 10 October 1956, 2.

20 Šk, Unitled, *Večerní Praha*, 11 February 1956, 1.

21 See Patrik Groma, Milan Novák, Miroslav Pfliegel, and Peter Štanský, *Žilina vo svetle lúč: (ne)zabudnutá história energetiky* (Georg, 2015), 13; Ladislav Monzer, *Osvětlení Prahy, Proměny sedmi století* (FCC Public, 2003), 39–86.

despite all the efforts of the lamp lighters, as the gas condensed in the cold.²² Since electrical power cuts occurred mostly in winter, when energy consumption was higher due to the cold weather and longer nights, and gas lamps could not be relied upon, it is indisputable that Czechoslovakia was frequently plunged into darkness, following the rhythm of nature. And even when it the gas lamps did light, they were far less effective than electric lighting. The result was a paradox: in the collective imagination, public lighting remained an important symbol of modernity, whereas in everyday reality it was an unreliable, non-existent artefact or an abstract dream receding beyond the horizon of time.

Another unintended consequence of this discrepancy was the freedom of movement that darkness afforded – something unthinkable during the day. It was appreciated by all kinds of individuals living on the margins of society. This is also documented in the memoirs of people who later became prominent figures in Czechoslovak public life. For example, Egon Bondy described how, in the early 1950s, he wandered through the darkened streets of Prague, moving from friends' apartments to nighttime entertainment venues where he experienced a series of adventures. Václav Havel recalled nocturnal walks and debates with friends after evening classes, as well as late night visits to the poet Vladimír Holan – encounters that would have been impossible during daylight.²³ The fact that politics had sidelined the night streets may, paradoxically, have enabled at least a temporary escape into the realms of fantasy and adventure.

The darkness of night also played into the hands of drunkards, robbers and adventurers (see chapter 9). Records in the Public Security Service (VB) service books reveal several cases, including the story of the hospital attendant Antonín Šebek of Prague in 1955. Šebek was on his way home from the cinema at around 11 p.m. When he unlocked his front door, a figure ran up behind him and “hit him twice on the head with a hard object.” It is probable that someone had been following him for most of the evening, because when he stopped by a snack bar before attending the cinema he had been seen carrying a substantial amount of cash. He was ultimately fortunate enough to resist the robbery when a passer-by responded to his call for help. However, the assailant was never caught, disappearing unseen

22 Šk, “Lampář rozsvěcující ...”, *Večerní Praha*, 11 February 1956, 1; Monzer, *Osvětlení*, 101.

23 Egon Bondy, *Prvních deset let* (Maťa, 2003), 25–46, 60–73; Martin C. Putna, ed., *Rozhovory '36. Stříbrný vítr. Výběr z tvorby šestatřicátníků* (Knihovna Václava Havla, 2010), 26–36; Jan Zábřana, *Celý život. Výbor z deníků 1948–1984* (Torst, 2001), 145–164. See also Pavel Kosatík, *Ústně více. Šestatřicátníci* (Host, 2006), 98.

into the darkness.²⁴ A whole series of similar cases were documented within the Prague alone – and it is certain that many more went unreported.²⁵

A Paradigm Shift?

Despite the difficulties, the night space slowly began to transform in the second half of the 1950s. The partial reorientation of economic policy towards everyday problems following the protests of 1953 began to take effect. In December 1956, the Prague press reported that between 1950 and 1956 the output of municipal public lighting had increased by almost 72 per cent, with the greatest improvement reportedly achieved between the spring of 1955 and the autumn of 1956, when the temporary economic plans of 1954–1955 began to yield results.²⁶ Some journalists considered it a success that during the winter of 1955–1956 “it was not necessary to switch off entire districts as in other, previous winters.”²⁷ Some journalists attributed this achievement to intensive night work in the energy sector, which was accordingly celebrated in the press.²⁸ At times, journalists even called upon workers directly to volunteer for night shifts at their plants, thereby helping to “further ensure the even distribution of consumption over all three shifts”, in the spirit of the government decrees that encouraged transferring part or all of production to the night hours whenever there was a risk of a power cut. At the same time, readers were repeatedly urged to economise and to follow the “consumption curves” designed to ensure a smoother use of energy throughout the day.²⁹ Most journalists, however, ascribed the improvement in lighting to technical progress (the replacement of weaker lightbulbs by stronger ones and of gas lamps by electric ones, the addition of missing street lamps and expansion of public lighting network). They also invested further hopes in the announced mechanisation and automation of

24 Security Forces Archive (hereafter ABS), f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, spisy F/I–2, cart. 1.

25 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, spisy F/I–2, cart. 1, 3, 4, etc. See also Prague City Archives (hereafter AHMP), f. Okresní soud trestní 1949–1960, “Josef Dvořák a spol.”.

26 VP, “Ze zasedání rady Ústředního národního výboru. Jak jsme na tom s proudem”, *Večerní Praha*, 11 December 1956, 1.

27 SK and MK, “Vítězové nad mrazy. Náš dík patří zaměstnancům elektráren a plynáren”, *Večerní Praha*, 13 March 1956, 1.

28 Unsigned, “Ke thesím ÚV KSČ a vlády republiky Československé o dalším technickém rozvoji čs. průmyslu”, *Večerní Praha*, 24 September 1955, 1.

29 DT, “Bude dost elektřiny?”, *Večerní Praha*, 11 November 1957, 1; MK, “Kde a jak”; VOV, Energetici v pohotovosti, *Večerní Praha*, 24 December 1960, 1; VP, “Ze zasedání”; RU, Botič zmizí pod zemí. Roste nová plynárna, *Večerní Praha*, 26 September 1955.

the energy industry. And in November 1956, the press even entertained the idea that electricity might one day be generated from solar energy, though this remained purely experimental.³⁰

Despite these plans, street lighting continued to face against serious problems. In 1956, the total number of functioning street lamps required to ensure sufficient lighting for the capital city of Prague was estimated at 35,000 – ideally only electric – although many believed that even this figure was insufficient for a city of nearly one million inhabitants. In reality, the streets of Prague were lit by approximately 27,000 electric lamps and 7,000 gas lamps.³¹ Although there were now more electric lamps, at least one thousand street lamps were still missing. When the lamps were spaced too far apart, they often heightened rather than reduced the surrounding darkness by casting deep shadows. Moreover, the existing lamps could not be fully relied upon. A certain proportion were constantly out of operation for various reasons – power cuts, extremely low temperatures (in the case of gas lamps), breakdowns or vandalism. Spare parts were missing; materials were scarce and resources for maintenance were insufficient. Assembly and maintenance technicians frequently lacked the necessary supplies and often failed to meet deadlines. The most visible problem, however, was the immense consumption of lightbulbs. They were weak and of poor quality and therefore broke frequently. As early as 1956, it became clear that the situation was alarming. The plan envisaged an annual consumption of 65,000 lightbulbs, an average of almost 2.5 bulbs per street lamp. If the lamps had functioned without breakdowns and the lightbulbs had been of good quality, this might not have posed a problem. However, by early October it was already apparent that the authorities had gravely underestimated the situation. Although nearly three months remained until the end of the year, on 10 October the press reported that “the last 200 replacement bulbs were taken this morning”, and it was entirely unclear where maintenance technicians were supposed to find more.³²

The problems persisted. The 1957 Act on the Production, Distribution and Consumption of Energy merely reiterated the principle of public lighting that had applied since the period of Stalinisation: “The executive bodies of the National Committees shall be responsible for the establishment and operation of facilities serving or designated for the lighting of public spaces (facilities for electric public lighting). The energy utilities are not

30 Unsigned, “Energie ze slunečního světla”, *Práce*, 4 November 1956, 6.

31 Monzer, 102–106. See also KÝ, “Praha”.

32 KÝ, “Praha a záře velkoměsta”, *Večerní Praha*, 10 October 1956, 2.

investors in these facilities and shall not cover their construction, operation and maintenance costs.”³³ As a result, the main burden of the construction, maintenance and reconstruction of lighting systems remained with the National Committees, which struggled to secure sufficient financial resources and labour for such a costly enterprise. On a national level, they had little influence over broader economic decisions. For 1958, the central plan set Prague’s annual consumption of replacement lightbulbs at 70,000, though the actual figure was three times higher.³⁴ As early March 1958, the council of the Central National Committee of the Capital City of Prague appealed to the relevant ministries to delegate greater powers to local authorities. This would give them a better overview of the distribution of resources and labour, more flexible coordination and enable faster progress. This request, however, went unheard.

In the second half of the 1950s, therefore, the issue of public lighting reached a paradoxical state. While the central government neglected it, it became a popular topic in local newspapers and films. In the press, it was often discussed when reviewing the previous winter or preparing for the upcoming one.³⁵ In cinema, the nocturnal city increasingly served as a backdrop for stories of everyday life or crime. The streets at night became an essential setting for the plot, appearing in longer and more frequent shots. Filmmakers concentrated mostly on Prague – and primarily on Wenceslas Square – which functioned as the notional nocturnal centre and was unrivalled as the best-lit space in Czechoslovakia.³⁶ Lights, often accompanied by shots of crowds in the streets at night, evoked Prague’s desired status as an enlightened and vibrant metropolis (*September Nights*, *The Forgery*, *The Circle*).

Local public institutions developed further plans to improve street lighting. These included the complete removal of gas lamps from the streets of Prague, which was to be achieved by 1963, and an increase in the intensity

33 “Zákon ze dne 19. prosince 1957 o výrobě, rozvodu a spotřebě elektřiny (elektrisační zákon) 79/1957 Sb.”, paragraph 8.

34 VP, “Bude v Praze více světla?”, *Večerní Praha*, 18 March 1958, 1.

35 SK – MK, “Vítězové”. MK, “Kde a jak spořit elektřinou”, *Večerní Praha*, 19 January 1957, 1.

36 Miroslav Hubáček, Miroslav Hubáček – Zbyněk Brynych, and Jiří Mucha, *Roztržka* (Studio hraných filmů, 15 February 1957); Vojtěch Jasný, Vojtěch Jasný – Pavel Kohout, and František Daniel, *Zářijové noci* (Československý armádní film, 24 May 1957); Ladislav Rychman, Ladislav Rychman and Jindřiška Smetanová, *Kruh* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 20 November 1959). A number of films have also been set in urban spaces outside of Prague, such as *Mezi nebem a zemí* (1958) from Pelhřimov, *Tři tuny prachu* (1960) from Ostrava, *Šťastie príde v nedel’u* (1959) from Bratislava.

of existing electric lamps.³⁷ The campaign gained momentum with the approach of the fifteenth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and, above all, in anticipation of a major event for the Communist government: the second national Spartakiada mass exercise festival, scheduled for June and July of 1960. The event was expected to attract not only hundreds of thousands of participants and spectators to Prague, but also journalists from both the Eastern and Western blocs, representing an excellent propaganda opportunity.³⁸ At the turn of 1959, a rapid installation of mercury-vapour lamps was launched across the streets of Prague. These lamps were more economical and had a higher luminous intensity, and they were already commonplace in Western cities.³⁹ The intention was for the streets of Prague to impress visitors and (Western) journalists as bright and radiant, for the entire city to appear as a brilliantly illuminated modern capital, unparalleled in its prestige by any other European metropolis.⁴⁰

However, the disappearance of gas lamps from the streets of Prague proceeded only slowly. In comparison with 1956, when 7,000 gas lamps were in operation, 6,231 remained in 1959, and, as late as August 1960, there were still 6,000 gas lamps functioning.⁴¹ Had their replacement continued at this rate, they would have disappeared only in the 1980s rather than by 1963. As early as August 1959, representatives of the Prague Central National Committee and municipal corporations had conceded that they would most likely be unable to fulfil the new street lighting project on time for the second Spartakiada.⁴² There were also delays with the repairs of broken lightbulbs and lamps and with the installation of discharge lamps. The country was kept in suspense throughout the whole of the following autumn

37 HS, "V Neklanově ulici konečně pořádné osvětlení", *Večerní Praha*, 17 May 1957, 2; VOV, "Vítězná cesta výbojek", *Večerní Praha*, 28 May 1960, 1; KÝ, "Praha a záře velkoměsta", *Večerní Praha*, 10 October 1956, 1–2; VP, "Bude v Praze", 1; VOV, "Stín a tma dostává výpověď", *Večerní Praha*, 10 October 1958, 1.

38 Petr Roubal, *Spartakiads: The Politics of Physical Culture in Communist Czechoslovakia* (Karolinum, 2020), 273–305; Vladimír Macura, *Šťastný věk (a jiné studie o socialistické kultuře)* (Academia, 2008), 147–165.

39 P. P., "Zářivky vítězí", *Květy*, 25 March 1954, 6; KÝ, "Praha a záře", 1; VP, "Bude"; KOŘ, "Ve světle rtuti?", *Večerní Praha*, 19 May 1958, 1; VOV, "Stín"; MK, "Světlejší výlohy i ulice", *Večerní Praha*, 30 January 1959, 2; VP, "Světlo opět na programu", *Večerní Praha*, 17 March 1959, 2; HV, "Světelná lázeň – výbojky v houfech", *Večerní Praha*, 15 September 1959, 1.

40 Jan Zelenka, "Epištola třetí: všem světloňošům", *Večerní Praha*, 23 November 1959, 3.

41 ÍK, "Světla nad večerní Prahou", *Večerní Praha*, 31 August 1960, 1.

42 HV, "Světelné úsměvy a vrásky", *Večerní Praha*, 12 August 1959, 1; ZM, "Zlatý kříž v lesku?", *Večerní Praha*, 9 September 1959, 1; MK, "Výbojky na Příkopě příští týden kompletní?", *Večerní Praha*, 20 October 1959, 1; HV, "Injekce pro pražské světlo", *Večerní Praha*, 2 February 1960, 1; HV, "Proud světla – s háčkem", *Večerní Praha*, 7 March 1960, 2.

and winter until, finally, in the spring of 1960 – shortly before the opening of the Spartakiada – the authorities succeeded in resolving at least the most visible deficiencies. Through immense effort on the part of installers, who worked continuously “from four in the morning until nightfall, [including] on Sundays and state holidays”, it was eventually possible to modernise the lighting of most Prague streets expected to host visitors to the event.⁴³

In general terms, the manner and pace of lighting modernisation mirrored the operation of industrial production itself and the crucial role of night work within it. Systematic investment proved impossible, as basic resources (both financial and human) were lacking. Shortages persisted in the development and production of distribution networks, cables, lampposts and lightbulbs. Problems also continued with the quality of material, and there were not even sufficient raw materials or funds to purchase them from abroad.⁴⁴ The continual demand for workers in manual professions led to a shortage of employees available to install and maintain public lighting. The workers engaged in technical development were insufficiently qualified to devise solutions that might have enabled effective modernisation, the acceleration of assembly or the production and conservation of energy. Besides, there were too few of them.⁴⁵ Rigid economic centralisation caused chaos in decision-making and coordination. State bodies and local authorities failed to communicate with one another, and perhaps even more seriously, this also applied to individual enterprises. It was therefore often unclear who was responsible for development, who for assembly and who for design. For example, workers in one firm prepared lamps for the replacement of lightbulbs with discharge lamps, only to discover later that the transmission networks had not yet been replaced by more efficient ones that could handle new demands. At other times, companies supplied only a fraction of the necessary discharge lamps, or deliveries of essential components were delayed.⁴⁶

In August 1960, after the nationwide Spartakiada had concluded, workers at ČEZ were still completing the unfinished but long-planned installation of discharge lamps. The press celebrated the project, claiming that Prague had risen “in the international rankings in terms of public lighting from its previous 31st place to eleventh.”⁴⁷ According to reports, the city now “finally

43 In total eighty kilometres of streets. VOV, “Vítězná”, 1; HV, “Injekce”, 1.

44 The problem was for example the lack of silicon. See Monzer, *Osvětlení*, 105–108.

45 Unsigned, “Celá Tesla do školy?”, *Večerní Praha*, 22 January 1960, 1.

46 HV, “Světelné”, 1.

47 ÍK, “Světla”, 1.

resembled a metropolis", whose glitz and splendour could now show the world "the other face of twenty-four-hour life, with new features and a new beauty."⁴⁸ The eyes of residents and visitors reportedly "lit up" as they walked through streets that no longer created a "gloomy impression", while the streets of Prague glittered from above like a "string of pearls".⁴⁹ The outcome of the Spartakiada campaign and the promotion of nocturnal Prague was later reflected in the feature film *Waltz for a Million*, which premiered in March 1961.⁵⁰ Against the backdrop of a romantic plot involving a musician and a gymnast who meet in Prague during the Spartakiada and fall in love, the film showcased both the atmosphere of the Strahov Stadium – where the mass exercises were performed – and of Prague lit up by night. The film shows the city full of life, where a nighttime stroll in the glow of the streetlights is an entirely ordinary experience.

Nevertheless, the films of the late 1950s did not avoid less well-lit locations. In many of them – primarily those with a more quotidian subject matter – the streets of Prague outside of the main thoroughfares of the city's various residential districts provided a fitting backdrop. These scenes inadvertently highlighted the stark contrast between the brightly illuminated city centre and the dimly lit peripheries. Indeed, even at the end of the 1950s, complete darkness often reigned in many outlying parts of the city. Lighting there was often temporary, with streetlamps spaced as far as seventy metres apart, and even then, they did not always function.⁵¹ In the newly built housing estates, the situation from the early 1950s frequently repeated: when faced with official inaction, residents took matters into their own hands, digging pits for lampposts and cables in an effort to speed up the introduction of public lighting, at least to some extent.⁵²

In this process, socialism effectively abandoned any ambition to create its own distinct night space. Instead, it chose Western cities as its reference point for what urban illumination should look like – both visually and technically. Certain film clips from the late 1950s even recalled Innemann's 1928 film in their attempt to evoke an image of Prague as a radiant city

48 VOV, "Stín", 1; HV, "Injekce", 1.

49 VP, "Světlo", 2; Dušan Tomášek, "Výboj výbojek", *Večerní Praha*, 1 December 1959, 2; HV, "Injekce"; ÍK, "Světla", 1.

50 Josef Mach, Josef Mach and Jan Procházka, *Valčík pro million* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 10 March 1961).

51 HV, "Světelné", 1; VOV, "Trpělivost pro světlo", *Večerní Praha*, 19 October 1960, 2.

52 VP, "Posvítili si na světlo", *Večerní Praha*, 21 November 1960, 1. On these problems see also VOV, "Svítání na sídlišťích?", *Večerní Praha*, 18 November 1960, 1; SCH. M, "Park plný tmy", *Večerní Praha*, 5 October 1960, 2.

that never sleeps in the Western mould. Even the focal point of cinematic and journalistic attention – the lower part of Wenceslas Square, known as the Golden Cross – remained unchanged. The image of the socialist city ultimately merged with that of the inter-war city, which belonged to a very different political and economic regime. In effect, the socialist imagination harked back to its inter-war – capitalist – counterpart, as if no alternative form or spatial reference for modernity could be conceived. By comparison, the socialist city appeared merely as a dim reflection of its capitalist predecessor. Even at the moment when Czechoslovakia officially proclaimed the completion of the “first phase of the building of communism”, notions of modernity, urbanism and technical progress frequently remained on the level of rhetoric. The local press was filled with statistics and plans, which editors constantly adjusted, reduced and then increased, whereas the reality lagged behind due to insufficient resources and lack of coordination. Street lighting thus occupied a paradoxical position: efforts to lend cities splendour stood in sharp contradiction to the actual systematic neglect of this realm, itself a direct consequence of the energy policy of the KSČ. The unreliability of lighting deepened the darkness of Prague’s streets at night – and it may be assumed that the situation was similar in all the other cities and villages throughout Czechoslovakia. In answer to Lefebvre’s question regarding the issue of street lighting, therefore, it is possible to conclude that a specific night space was indeed established in post-war Czechoslovakia – one that could be described as socialist. However, this was the consequence of unwanted dysfunctions and paradoxes and was characterised by frequent darkness. In its impacts on everyday life, it was marked by moments in which those unafraid of the dark and familiar with their surroundings could move unseen and unobserved – experiencing, in those intervals, a rare and fleeting form of freedom.

6. Neon Lighting

Abstract: At first, it seemed that neon lighting would disappear in the socialist economy. It was traditionally associated with capitalist advertising, so there was no justification for it. Gradually, however, it became one of the accompanying phenomena of socialist consumerism and thus acquired new functions and its own characteristic content and form. However, it faced frequent technical problems, which meant it was often only partially functional. This was also one of the typical features of socialist neon lights.

Keywords: neon lights, consumerism, dysfunctions, capitalism

*When Prague at night
Is bathed in neon light,
I cannot resist the call
To spring to life.*

(Song from the film *Men About Town*, 1969)¹

In the inter-war period, neon lights had been an integral feature of the nocturnal landscape of every medium-sized town in Czechoslovakia. They were also occasionally used experimentally by artists and architects.² Their subsequent fate, however, was determined by the war. Although the frameworks often remained on some buildings, the tubes themselves, once filled with inert gases that had illuminated the city in bright colours, were often broken, or the gas had escaped. Moreover, the constructions were often corroded. Economic changes also left their mark on the state of neon lighting:

1 Vratislav Blažek and Evžen Illín, “*Když Praha za noci zazáří neónem*”, principal song from the movie *Světáci* (Men About Town), Filmové studio Barrandov, 10 October 1969.

2 Eva Bendová, *Neony a světla reklam* (Paseka, 2018), 27–84.

beginning with the Great Depression, continuing with the Aryanisation of property in 1939 and culminating in the post-war confiscations and nationalisations. Neon lights had primarily served advertising purposes, yet many of the businesses that had once owned them had either ceased to exist or changed names amid the economic and political upheavals of the 1930s and 1940s.

The Difficult Restoration of Neon Lights

After the war, demand for neon lights increased. As orders grew, companies specialising in their manufacture and assembly gradually resumed operations.³ However, under the given conditions this renewal was arduous and slow – after all, this sector of the economy was not among the priorities of post-war reconstruction. In Brno, for instance, one local resident counted a total of 200 neon advertisements at the end of 1947 – a number she considered desperately small in comparison with the inter-war period, serving only to accentuate the city’s “sleepy evening and night life”.⁴

As this comment suggests, in their time neon lights had been popular precisely because of their ability to lend the city a vibrant and interesting atmosphere after dark. In the field of advertising and artistic lighting, they had replaced the incandescent lightbulbs that had so captivated the bohemians, intellectuals and flâneurs of the nineteenth century.⁵ From the very beginning of their installation in the twentieth century, coloured neon lights drew attention to the firms and enterprises that resided or conducted their business in the city. More lights meant more activity, commerce and prosperity. Neon lights illuminated shop windows, signalling that a business was well stocked and up to date with the latest trends. Other neon signs lit up the entrances to restaurants, cinemas and nighttime entertainment venues,

3 See for example Unsigned, “Reklama na podnik Neon”, *Naše pravda. List komunistické strany Československa. Deník zlínského kraje*, 18 October 1947, 7.

4 Blanka R., “Továrna na krásu velkoměst. Reportáž čtenáře”, *Naše pravda. List komunistické strany Československa. Deník zlínského kraje*, 24 December 1947, 1.

5 See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedmann (Belknap Press 2002), 446; Giampaolo Nuvolati, “Le flâneur dans l’espace urbain”, *Géographie et cultures* no. 70 (2009): 7–20, <https://journals.openedition.org/gc/2167>; Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain 1800–1910* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 5–7; Simone Delattre, *Les douze heures noires: La nuit à Paris au XIX^e siècle* (Albin Michel, 2000), 119–127, 192–202; Matthew Beaumont, *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London – Chaucer to Dickens* (Verso Books, 2016), 402; Patrik Groma, Milan Novák, Miroslav Pfliegel, and Peter Štanský, *Žilina vo svetle lámp: (ne)zabudnutá história energetiky* (Georg, 2015), 63.

attracting visitors and showcasing the range of opportunities available. As night fell, the multicoloured glowing or flashing letters, figures and shapes created a luminous spectacle that must have enchanted and fascinated every passerby. One had the impression of entering a space brimming with experiences, opportunities and surprises.⁶ Film production shortly after the war partially gave cinema viewers the chance to succumb to the magic of illuminated neon signs – at least for a while. In addition, some of the films attempted to show not only the splendour but also the desolation of the city at night.⁷ People from various social strata mixed together in the glow and shadows of the nocturnal city lights, including those who ranked among the lowest echelons or belonged to the criminal underworld. For example, the mysterious *Sign of the Anchor*, which reached cinemas in October 1947, presented a sequence of neon lights that was fundamentally more modest, since the story was set in the streets of a marina on the Danube in Bratislava, inhabited mainly by the urban underclass. By contrast, the neon signs flashing on the façade of the Esplanade Hotel, the entrails of which were home to a large variety hall, appeared to signify an entrance to the big world. The lights of the city nightlife functioned in a similar manner in the drama *When You Return*, which premiered in January 1948 and offered viewers a montage of various neon lights of Prague immediately in its opening scene. The plot then followed the fortunes of an escaped convict who was hopelessly in love with a chanteuse, while the night city provided their story with a compelling backdrop.⁸

However, the changes brought about by the KSC's seizure of power and the launch of the first Five-Year Plan soon started to manifest themselves. The second wave of nationalisation in 1948–1949 and the subsequent pressure for a fully nationalised economy finalised the transformation of the structure of ownership and the running of the economy. The competitive battle for customers now became meaningless. Essentially, all enterprises found themselves under state ownership, and many of them were amalgamated

6 On the scenery of night lights as symbols of the colourful night life of a given city, see among Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City: Paris, Berlin, London 1840–1930* (Reaktion Books, 1998), 45–47, 109–135; Nurcin Ileri, “Allure of Light, Fear of the Dark: Nighttime Illumination, Spectacle, and Order in Fin-de-Siècle Istanbul”, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, no. 2 (2017): 286–289; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (Blackwells, 1988), 137–154; Delattre, *Les douze*, 91–126.

7 František Čáp, František Čáp and Jan Drda, *Znamení kotvy* (Československá filmová společnost, 31 October 1947).

8 Václav Krška, Václav Krška and Václav Řezáč, *Až se vrátíš* (Československá filmová společnost, 23 January 1948).

into single conglomerates that frequently enjoyed a monopoly in their branch of industry. And if some enterprises continued to operate therein, their role was to cooperate and complement one another, or to engage in socialist competition. In any case, all their earnings now went to the state, which subsequently redistributed them. Moreover, the economy began to orient itself exclusively towards heavy industry and the energy sector. As neon advertisements were not designed for ordinary consumers, their products became irrelevant. From the point of view of the Communist leaders, neon lights were simply a vulgar “advertisement for mutually destructive commerce and an enticement for the sale of poor-quality goods” – thus a fraud committed against customers that was, in fact, the essence of market economy.⁹ Also to the detriment of neon signs was the unrelenting reality of the constant shortage of electricity, in which even minimal extra consumption represented a huge problem. Not only did the notion of lighting up neon signs at a time when people were having to adjust their working hours due to electricity blackouts appear as an unjustifiable luxury, but any plan to allocate investments for their manufacture or development seemed wholly inappropriate. In brief, in aesthetic, ethical and practical terms, neon advertisements fundamentally made no sense within a state-socialist economy. A paradox resulted from the absence of neon lights in the night space – deeper darkness which provided opportunities for freer movement around the nocturnal city.

On the other hand, at the beginning of the 1950s, Czechoslovak towns and villages received a new type of lighting in the form of five-pointed red stars and various signs announcing economic planning, shock work, five-year plans and Communist congresses. Most of them were assembled using incandescent lightbulbs, but in a few cases neon lights were used (probably from surplus material).¹⁰ They were installed on the gates of industrial plants, mines, construction sites and farming cooperatives, or on the façades of public institutions. However, the stars were lit up only once the enterprise in question had fulfilled the economic plan. To a certain extent, they thus influenced the lighting of Czechoslovak streets. Above all, though, they communicated the company's fortunes to the factory staff and the public. They were supposed to represent a further motivating factor for shock work and accelerating the working rhythm – when the star was not shining, this indicated a problem within the firm. When it was illuminated, this was a

9 Alois Kubíček, “Výkladce a krámy”, *Večerní Praha*, 11 November 1955, 2.

10 J. J. Ferra, “Plzeňská hvězda a neon”, *Pravda. Deník Komunistické strany Československa*, 16 July 1946, 3.

reason for celebration and congratulation. The stars thereby also promoted state-socialist economics and the principles of planning. They gradually became an integral component of the landscape of the nocturnal city, and a specific expression of Communist rule. For example, in September 1956, the Prague press celebrated the fulfilment of the nationwide plan for agricultural production, which was announced by the illumination of the red star on the building of the Ministry of Agriculture in the centre of Prague.¹¹ In December of the same year, the red star was lit up above the Tatra plant in the Smíchov district of Prague, which, according to the author of the piece, was the first time since 1951 and therefore merited special attention.¹²

For a while it even seemed as if the red stars would gradually replace neon advertisements and thereby fundamentally transform the character of the nocturnal environment – or, more specifically, of its lighting. They weathered the changes that led to protests against the currency reform of 1953 and the transitional economic plans of 1954–1955. They also began to assert themselves on construction sites for new apartments. A shining or alternatively unlit star informed citizens of the pace at which the solution to the housing problem was proceeding (which essentially remained one of the central themes until the collapse of the regime in 1989).¹³ In connection with efforts to increase the availability of consumer goods, reports also appeared in the press about the Koh-i-noor school supplies factory in the Prague-Vršovice district, where a red star was installed “above the façade of the plant, facing National Security Corps street”. It was of a considerable size, with “110 incandescent lightbulbs in its glass construction”, and was to be lit up for the first time on the occasion of the May Day celebrations of 1960.¹⁴ Nonetheless, as with night work, the recurring theme in both the use and the representation of the red stars remained energy production, mining and heavy industries.¹⁵ Red stars therefore continued to promote the economic policy of the KSČ as established in 1949, privileging key industrial sectors and reinforcing working discipline.

11 Unsigned, “Výkup splněn”, *Večerní Praha*, 24 September 1956, 1.

12 Unsigned, “Hvězda nad Tatrou září. Třináct vagonů nad plán – Úspěch po pěti letech”, *Večerní Praha*, 20 December 1956, 1.

13 OŠ, “Rudé hvězdy”; OŠ, “Proč nesvítí hvězdy”; OŠ, “Čtyři hvězdy”; OŠ, “Proč nesvítí hvězda”; PŘ, “Rudá hvězda”; Kimberley Zarecor Elman, *Utváření socialistické modernity. Bydlení v Československu 1945–1960* (Academia, 2015).

14 KÝ, Hvězda nad Koh-i-noorem, *Večerní Praha*, 29 April 1960, 1.

15 See for example “Rudá hvězda a kahan”, *Večerní Praha*, 10 December 1959, 1; Michal Bako, “Aby zazářily hvězdy nad šachtami”, *Pravda. Orgán krajského výboru KSČ v Plzni*, 29 August 1957, 3.

Socialist Neon Lights

De-Stalinisation and the promise to raise the population's standard of living nevertheless brought about a reversal in the realm of neon advertising. In 1955, the magazine *Reklama* (*Advertising*) was launched, signalling a change in the KSČ's attitude towards the objects represented in the public space by neon lights – namely commerce, consumption and leisure. The subsequent return of neon advertisements to the streets of Czechoslovakia was sudden, swift and triumphant. From late 1956 onwards, a massive campaign of installations began, as if to compensate for all that had been neglected during the first ten post-war years. The local press attentively followed, recorded and evaluated its progress. Reporters often enthusiastically described the new neon signs and greeted almost every installation with a new article. They also offered future projections, and drew comparisons with other cities and with the inter-war period.

But how can such an abrupt reversal be explained – one in which an almost completely repudiated form of lighting, furthermore associated with a despised socio-economic system, suddenly became a central theme? The answer was offered by a series of conceptual articles published in *Reklama*, which diligently explained the vast gulf between socialist and capitalist neon lights. As one editor put it: "In the capitalist world neon, like other means of advertising, is to a large extent a tool in the competitive struggle. But in socialist advertising it has a different mission. Its goal is to promote and inform."¹⁶ For example, it was written that in Brussels the neon signs were tasteless, oversized and purposeless.¹⁷ In contrast, in Prague, nocturnal pedestrians could enjoy them "like a lover of fine art enjoys a fine painting."¹⁸ According to reporters, the streets at night in socialist Prague provided a fascinating theatre and a "flowering garden".¹⁹ However, there were also dissenting voices. Some argued that the development of neon lighting was too hasty, resulting in "a mere imitation of the night-time appearance of the big cities of the capitalist West." These voices advocated more intensive planning in the installation of advertisements and argued that socialist neon signs should be characterised by order, rationality and

16 Bohuš Häckl, "Praha ve světle neonů", *Reklama*, 1 September 1960, 195.

17 Unsigned, "Bruselské neóny", *Reklama*, 1 January 1959, 10.

18 Jiří Hás, "Neónový efekt", *Večerní Praha*, 21 April 1960, 2.

19 Unsigned, "I v noci kvete město", *Večerní Praha*, 2 April 1957, 1.

informative value.²⁰ In their view, they should embody organised, rational – and therefore socialist – modernity. Such voices, however, were rare.

Neon lights also had a practical purpose: to help illuminate the streets at night. It was mainly the white neons of shop window displays and stands that were intended to aid street lighting.²¹ Neon lights suddenly appeared indispensable, above all for Prague, since “without them the metropolis is disqualified not only from the competition in terms of beauty, but also in its ranking among the commercial and industrial centres of the world.”²² Reporters emphasised the fact that “without them the streets would be sad and desolate, as we can see for ourselves in the example of Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina, where the advertisements are not illuminated until 10 in the evening due to the shortage of electricity.”²³ Neon signs were also deployed fairly quickly for public service purposes, either in the form of illuminated clocks or news panels, which displayed about forty to fifty reports every evening.²⁴ These sometimes served as a backdrop for photo reportages and films. A popular event was the weekly draw of the State Lottery, the results of which were also shown on these illuminated panels. Crowds of people gathered regularly on these occasions, as reflected, for example, in the film *Luck will Come on Sunday* from March 1959.²⁵

Despite the use of different languages, the neon lights represented much the same thing in the East as in the West. Yet several aspects distinguished “socialist” neon advertisements from their “capitalist” counterparts. The first difference concerned the names of the advertised enterprises, since many firms, brands and businesses from the inter-war period had ceased to exist or changed their names, while new enterprises had been established.

20 JCH, “První vlaštovka”, *Rovnost. Orgán krajského výboru KSČ v Brně*, 10 October 1959, 4.

21 See for example, OZ, “Pro barevnou”, 1; MK, “Neon”, 1–2; ŠK, “Více obchodů v Praze 3”, *Večerní Praha*, 4 October 1957, 2; EX, “Nové obchody ve středu Prahy”, *Večerní Praha*, 7 January 1958, 1; VP, “Bude v Praze více světla?”, *Večerní Praha*, 18 March 1958, 1; JS, “Stoupl prodej novin”, *Večerní Praha*, 12 November 1959, 2; Zdeněk Florián, “Reklama v Paříži”, *Reklama*, 1 January 1957, 102. On the subject of shop windows see also Jiří Knapík and Martin Franc, eds., *Průvodce kulturním děním a životním stylem v českých zemích 1948–1967* (Academia, 2011), 1033–1034. See also OZ, “Pro barevnou krásu noci”, *Naše pravda. List krajského výboru KSČ v Gottwaldově*, 15 June 1959, 1.

22 Bohuš Häckl, “Barevná světla velkoměsta”, *Reklama*, 1 January 1957, 49.

23 Häckl, “Barevná”. See also Unsigned, “I na starém nízkém”, *Večerní Praha*, 17 May 1960, 1; Unsigned, “Tunel smutku v jasu”, *Večerní Praha*, 8 November 1960, 2; Unsigned, “Tři v jednom”, *Rovnost. Orgán krajského výboru KSČ v Brně*, 13 June 1959, 3; Unsigned, “Nejen v noci”, *Reklama*, 1 March 1959, 56.

24 Knapík and Franc, *Průvodce*, 907.

25 Ján Lacko and Ivan Bukovčan, *Šťastie príde v neděľu* (Studio hraných filmov Bratislava, 27 February 1959). See also Miroslav Hubáček, Miroslav Hubáček – Zbyněk Brynych, and Jiří Mucha, *Roztržka* (Studio hraných filmů, 15 February 1957).

Another difference, more connected with the economic policy of the KSČ, involved the types of enterprises being advertised. Eventually, even firms in heavy industry started advertising with neon signs, often with no spatial relationship to their headquarters or manufacturing plants. For example, the wave of new installations around the turn of 1957 was to include a large advertisement in the centre of Prague promoting the “products of the DEZA metalworking cooperative” from the distant town of Valašské Meziříčí.²⁶ This trend was consistent with the purpose of socialist neon signs: they were not intended to highlight the enterprise itself – which in any case usually held a monopoly in its field – or even its products, but rather to promote an entire branch of industry. As with the red stars, their aim was to showcase the prestige of the nationalised industries and their products, and thereby also the prestige of the socialist economic model. Sometimes, neon advertising even had an educational function, another feature that distinguished it from capitalist advertising. For example, instead of an advertisement for a banking or financial institution, in December 1956, a slogan was installed above the building of the savings bank on Wenceslas Square declaring that “a savings book should be part of every family”.²⁷ In November 1959, on the occasion of the celebrations of the anniversary of the 1917 October Bolshevik Revolution, an image of a Soviet rocket was installed on another building in the city centre, bearing the inscription “For Peace”, reminding passersby of the values promoted by the socialist system.²⁸

By the second half of the 1950s, however, neon signs also began to advertise products for everyday consumption as well as luxury goods. Neon lights scattered around Wenceslas Square and its surroundings announced that “Mineral Waters”, “Crystal”, “Fine Porcelain”, “Art Glass” or “Electro” products were available.²⁹ It therefore seemed that neon lights had almost fully returned to their original purpose. Socialist neon lights now differed from the capitalist version only in that it was not the brand that stood at the centre of attention, but the product itself. The purpose was to inform the public that this product existed and was available. Sometimes, however, socialist neon advertisements also promoted the brand – typically when drawing attention to a new, renamed or Soviet-bloc enterprise, and thus also to the socialist model of economics; for example, razor blades produced by the

26 Unsigned, “Více neonových světél”, *Večerní Praha*, 18 December 1956, 1.

27 Unsigned, “Více”, 1.

28 Unsigned, “Sovětská raketa”, *Večerní Praha*, 7 November 1959, 1; Karel Schmidt, “Včera večer se rozzářil nový neon Na můstku, jehož symbolika mile překvapila chodce po Václavském náměstí”, *Práce*, 7 November 1959, 6.

29 MK, Untitled, *Večerní Praha*, 21 August 1956, 1–2.

nationalised Zenit company. In some cases, socialist advertisements also promoted the activities for which the products were intended. For example, a 25-metre-long sign on Wenceslas Square, together with the name of the nationalised optics manufacturer Meopta, announced “We Photograph – We Film”.³⁰ On another building, passersby could see a paraphrase of the Marxist slogan about the proletariat: “Radio and Television Unites the Nations”, which was supplemented by an eight-metre-high neon transmission tower with the logo of the nationalised enterprise Tesla at its centre.³¹

Another turnaround that occurred in the mid-1950s was the renewal of neon advertisements for large department stores. Some of these continued the inter-war tradition. However, they no longer bore the names of their owners on their neon signs, as had previously been customary, but the names of the nationwide chains they now belonged to or the products that could be purchased there. In the second half of the 1950s, entirely new department stores also began to open across Czechoslovakia. After several postponements, July 1956 saw the ceremonial opening of the “House of Fashion”.³² By 1960, a whole range of neon advertisements, images and slogans had been installed there: lines of light framing the entire building; an “exclamation mark about 8 metres high, consisting of the coloured letters House of Fashion”; and a 30-metre-long neon company logo with letters one and a half metres tall on the roof. Plans also envisaged that “neon rainbow bands would shine on the apaxite panelling”.³³ In June 1957, also following delays, the newly built “House of Food” opened as a counterpart to the Soviet GUM. Installed on its façade was the striking neon sign “Delicatessen”, with other lights to be added soon after.³⁴ Other new or reopened department stores likewise boasted the most lavishly designed and carefully planned neon decoration.³⁵

Neon advertisements accompanied the rise of socialist consumerism, which had several distinctive features. Strictly speaking, the promotion of a given product, shop or company was not necessary, because these were often the only ones available. Instead, the neon signs communicated that

30 Unsigned, “Více”, 1.

31 MK, “Neon”, 1–2.

32 See RU, “Zatěžkávací zkouška Domu módy. Rozhovor s ředitelem V. Plachým”, *Večerní Praha*, 9 July 1956, 1.

33 Unsigned, “Více”, 1; Unsigned, “Kronika”, *Reklama*, 1 June 1957, 144; RÁ, “Dům módy bez problémů?”, *Večerní Praha*, 2 March 1960, 2.

34 The opening was originally scheduled for November 1956. KÝ, “O Dům potravin stále boje”, *Večerní Praha*, 7 May 1957, 1–2.

35 Unsigned, “Hvězdy září nad neóny”, *Večerní Praha*, 17 December 1959, 1.

goods were plentiful. They signalled to nocturnal pedestrians that they were part of a system in which they had the opportunity to satisfy their needs as consumers, including their desire for luxury. They served as evidence that prestigious and prosperous companies were operating within the centrally planned Czechoslovak economy – companies capable of producing sufficient high-quality goods to meet domestic demand.³⁶ The glow of the lights further enhanced the prestige of shops, companies and products, pointing to an improving standard of living and seemingly heralding an imminent era of abundance. Lit up at night, they appeared to move Czechoslovakia one step closer to a resplendent future.³⁷ As visible evidence of rising living standards, they also served as a response to the protests against the currency reform of 1953 and fulfilled the role of a political marketing tool in the KSČ leadership's attempt to demonstrate the validity of its economic policy. Within this context, even the queues that regularly formed in front of shops when prices were reduced or during the pre-Christmas period were interpreted as signs of prosperity, high purchasing power and the attractiveness of the products on offer.³⁸ Local reporters became almost obsessed with recording

36 National Archives (hereafter NA), f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – Politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 156, a. j./bod 207, Usnesení 207. schůze politického byra ÚV KSČ ze dne 29. října 1957. More about this phenomenon, Paul Betts, "The Politics of Plenty: Consumerism in Communist Societies", in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, ed. Stephen A. Smith (Oxford University Press, 2014), 424–438; Patrick Hyder Patterson, "Risky Business: What Was Really Being Sold in the Department Stores of Socialist Eastern Europe?", in *Communism Unwrapped*, eds. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger (Oxford University Press, 2012), 116–139; Patrick Hyder Patterson, *Bought and Sold: Living and Losing the Good Life in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Ithaca, 2011), 49–196; Beth Greene, "Selling Market Socialism: Hungary in the 1960s", *Slavic Review* 73, no. 1 (2014): 108–132; Annina Gagyiova, *Vom Gulasch zum Kühlschrank* (Harrasowitz Verlag, 2020); Fruzsina Müller, *Jeanssozialismus: Konsum und Mode im staatssozialistischen Ungarn* (Wallstein, 2017); Elza Ibroscheva, "The Unbearable Lightness of Advertising: Culture, Media and the Rise of Advertising in Socialist Bulgaria", *Consumption Markets & Culture* 16, no. 3 (2012): 290–310, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2012.668365>; Anne Kaminsky, "'True Advertising Means Promoting a Good Thing through a Good Form': Advertising in the German Democratic Republic", in *Advertising in Twentieth-Century Germany*, eds. Pamela Swet, Jonathan Wiesen, and Jonathan Zatlin (Duke University Press, 2007), 262–286.

37 Jan Zelenka, "Epištola třetí: všem světloňošům", *Večerní Praha*, 23 November 1959, 3.

38 The report about the queues in front of the Perla department store was also the first report in the first issue of the then newly published newspaper *Večerní Praha*. Unsigned, "240 minut nákupu za nižší ceny. Rozhovor reportéra Večerní Prahy s ředitelem Perly", *Večerní Praha*, 1 April 1955, 1. See also JS, "Nákupy jak na zlatou neděli", *Večerní Praha*, 25 April 1960, 1; Unsigned, "Zlatá neděle – zlatá tržba", *Večerní Praha*, 19 December 1955, 1; Unsigned, "Opět jedna stříbrná", *Večerní Praha*, 10 December 1956, 1; JS, "Stříbrná neděle v miliónech", *Večerní Praha*, 14 December 1959, 1; JS, "Nákupy pro radost druhým", *Večerní Praha*, 19 December 1960, 1; Unsigned, "Na 35 000 lidí", *Večerní Praha*, 19 December 1960, 1, etc.

the numbers of sales, customers and new products in any given shop. For example, the daily press announced that the House of Food had served almost ten million customers between its opening in 1957 and the end of 1959. In 1959 alone, this figure reportedly reached four million, and in the same year, the department store introduced 21 new products from the Czechoslovak food industry onto the market.³⁹

Neon lights became visible symbols of a socialism that had abandoned its earlier goal of promoting individual happiness and satisfaction on a foundation of values other than consumerism. During the period of high Stalinism, when goods were scarce and money had lost its meaning as a motivation to work, socialism may have come closest to its ideal of transforming people's priorities. By contrast, the second half of the 1950s marked a return to measuring satisfaction and living standard by what one could buy and display. Planned economy thus entered into competition with market economy on its own terrain and, in the end, became its mirror image. Nevertheless, the press remained scrupulously careful to continue to maintain a distinction between capitalist and socialist neon advertisements.

Problems with Neon Lights

Nevertheless, despite all the attempts to differentiate them, socialist neon lights inevitably invited comparisons with the inter-war period, which was still within living memory for the majority of the city's inhabitants.⁴⁰ Now they were only a fraction of their former number. One reader of the daily newspaper *Práce* mentioned in a letter to the editor that, in the inter-war period, there had been 1,600 neon signs shining on Wenceslas Square. By contrast, in March 1957, he counted a total of only 200.⁴¹ Some reporters wrote in a similar vein, while others criticised the insufficient illumination of the arcades.⁴² In their eyes, Prague could not escape comparison with the capitals of Western Europe.⁴³ For example, in 1957 Paris reportedly "surely had more neon signs on some of its main boulevards than the entire

39 JS, "Sedm dní úklidu v Domě potravin", *Večerní Praha*, 31 December 1959, 1.

40 ŠK, "Proč nesvítí neony?", *Večerní Praha*, 19 March 1957, 1; RU, "Co bude se 'zlatým křížem'", *Večerní Praha*, 23 March 1956, 1; MK, "Neon"; ŠK, "Aby Pražské neony svítily", *Večerní Praha*, 11 April 1957, 1.

41 HČ, "Bude Praha v záři neonů?", *Práce*, 20 March 1957, 3.

42 Ivo Hlubinka, "Výstava potmě", *Večerní Praha*, 18 November 1959, 2.

43 Unsigned, "Nové neonové reklamy na prodejních pražského obchodu potřebami pro domácnost", *Reklama*, 1 September 1957, 204.

city of Prague.⁴⁴ The gloom of Prague was also frequently remarked on by foreign correspondents reporting on events in Czechoslovakia and its economic situation. Public institutions were aware of these criticisms, and so the neon signs were concentrated mainly in the capital, particularly in its imagined nighttime centre – the so called the “Golden Cross”, formed by the lower end of Wenceslas Square and the adjacent boulevards.⁴⁵ As early as 1957, reporters from Brno, the country’s second largest city, lamented their situation and expressed the hope that “within the next 3 to 4 years, two or three large outlets of every firm would be furnished with neon signs.”⁴⁶ In the same period in Ostrava, the capital of the country’s largest industrial region, great care was taken to prepare the illumination of the Ostravica department store – but the campaign ended there.⁴⁷ In Pilsen, home to the steelworks giant Škoda, there were not even illuminated shop window, and up until 1959, the only neon light in the city was a red star installed in 1946.⁴⁸ In the same year, a local reporter counted just over 50 neon advertisements in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. Reporters at least appreciated this small number, remarking that they “lend the city an almost festive air”.⁴⁹ The press preferred not to mention other Slovak towns at all.

The intensive installation of neon advertisements usually took place on the occasion of significant events expected to attract large numbers of foreign visitors, since it was necessary to present the venue in the best possible light. As a result, Brno was illuminated in 1958 as it was to host the first international engineering trade fair, with an expected attendance of 2.5 million visitors, the following September. In prestige, it was intended to rival the traditional trade fairs of Leipzig.⁵⁰ Even so, the local population complained about the slow pace of installation and the insufficient number

44 Unsigned, Untitled, *Reklama*, 1 January 1957, 7.

45 HV, “Neony nad Prahou”, *Večerní Praha*, 14 January 1958, 1.

46 Bohuslav Filip and coll., “Neonové osvětlení v Brně”, *Reklama*, 1 December 1957, 272–274.

47 Unsigned, “Obchodní dům Ostravica”, *Reklama*, 1 September 1957, 218; Unsigned, “Obchodní dům Ostravica”, *Reklama*, 1 October 1959, 230.

48 Unsigned, “Světelné reklamy”, *Pravda. Orgán krajského výboru KSČ v Plzni*, 5 April 1958, 4; Unsigned, “Další neon září”, *Pravda. Orgán krajského výboru KSČ v Plzni*, 31 October 1959, 1.

49 František Kováč, “Nočná Bratislava”, *Reklama*, 1 July 1958, 151.

50 EL., “Pohlednice z Lipska”, *Reklama*, 1 November 1957, 247–248; Jarmila Kratochvílová, “Zvýšit kvalitu aranžování”, *Rovnost. Orgán krajského výboru KSČ v Brně*, 23 September 1958, 3; JP, “Za rok 125 nových neónů”, *Rovnost. Orgán krajského výboru KSČ v Brně*, 13 January 1959, 1; Josef Lesovský, “V záři neonů. Procházka předveletržním Brnem”, *Naše pravda. List krajského výboru KSČ v Gottwaldově*, 15 August 1959, 3.

of neon lights.⁵¹ In Prague, the installation of lights accelerated from 1958 onwards in preparation for the approaching Spartakiada.

However, as in the case of street lighting, this endeavour also encountered the typical problems arising from the economic realities of central planning and its inability to respond effectively to changing circumstances. Even in the second half of the 1950s, the manufacture and assembly of neon advertisements were regarded as an unwelcome burden. Their production, development and connection to the electricity network were hampered by shortages and the poor quality of materials. Quality glass, fluorescent powder and gas for the discharge tubes had to be imported from the German Democratic Republic, but the supplies failed to satisfy demand and were crippling expensive.⁵² In 1958, Czechoslovakia launched its own production of neon signs. However, the newly built factories suffered from a lack of skilled workers capable of developing new technologies independently.⁵³

In addition, the long-term neglect of this sector had left its mark. Distribution networks were outdated and did not have sufficient power. The constructions for neon lighting sometimes exceeded the load-bearing capacity of building roofs, and assemblers were often unable to install lightning conductors. Enterprises and institutions were accustomed to centralised decision-making, but the centre was uninformed about local conditions. Communication was poor and the approach uncoordinated.⁵⁴ Components were produced in different cities, without individual companies knowing what type of product and how much to supply where. This sometimes resulted in incompatible components or a complete absence of essential parts. Everything might be prepared for installation, but the connecting cable, transformers or switches for the lettering and patterns might fail to arrive. Many neon signs were installed but could not be illuminated, a fact noted by both readers and reporters. The latter did not hesitate to indulge in caustic remarks, writing that “it was as if they had built a hydroelectric power plant and only then started searching for a river to power it” or “as if

51 JP, “Za rok”; JCH, “První”.

52 Viz ŠK, “Proč”; HV, “Mnoho ‘proč’ kolem neonů”, *Večerní Praha*, 27 March 1958, 1; HV, “Neony nad”.

53 HV, “Záře a stíny neonů”, *Večerní Praha*, 14 July 1959, 1; HV, “Neon v dentacrylu”, *Večerní Praha*, 22 July 1959, 2; Unsigned, “Světelná reklama”, *Reklama*, 1 March 1959, 54.

54 See HČ, “Bude Praha v záři neonů?”, *Práce*, 20 March 1957; Unsigned, “Bude Praha v záři neonů? Ohlas na kritiku”, *Práce*, 29 March 1957, 4. See also Unsigned, “Nové typy neonů ve Francii”, *Reklama*, 1 July 1957, 168; ŠK, “Proč”; HV, “Mnoho”; HV, “Záře”; Miroslav Dusil, Untitled, *Květy*, 3 March 1960, 16; RÁ, “Neony bijí do očí”, *Večerní Praha*, 30 November 1960, 1.

we were still living in the blackouts.”⁵⁵ In Prague alone, issues surrounding neon lights involved the Prague Electricity Company, the deputy mayor, the Electricity Distribution Plant, the nationalised enterprise Neon and several architects. To this must be added the firms responsible for production, development and transport. Approval and funding were required from the KSČ leadership and/or relevant ministries for all of this. Meanwhile, chaos reigned within the enterprises themselves.⁵⁶ This was the case despite the fact that the Prague Electricity Company underwent a reorganisation in 1958 in an attempt to clarify the situation.⁵⁷ As a result of this confusion, by August 1959, the neon advertisements for the engineering giant ČKD, proclaiming it was a “world class brand” and the nearby advertisement for Mineral Waters – both presented as *faits accomplis* in 1956 – had still not been installed.⁵⁸ Furthermore, at the end of February 1960, scaffolding in Prague ran out completely, delaying work even further.⁵⁹

To add to all this, there were also problems with the existing neon signs. As in the case of street lighting, their high breakdown rate, the lack of coordinated maintenance and the insufficient resources devoted to it constituted a serious issue.⁶⁰ Sometimes, a neon sign was damaged by façade workers, but no repairs followed. A considerable number of neon lights functioned only for a few weeks, in some cases merely days, before ceasing to operate either wholly or in part. In July 1959, almost one third of the installed neon lights at the Golden Cross were out of service, and the situation had not improved significantly by January 1960.⁶¹ Of the 125 neon

55 HV, “Neónový paradox”, *Večerní Praha*, 25 September 1959, 1; Unsigned, “Neon Ve smečkách”, *Večerní Praha*, 10 January 1958, 2.

56 On the chaos at the Neón enterprise see RÁ, “Podivný pořádek v Neónu, aneb neóny každý po svém”, *Večerní Praha*, 24 May 1960, 2.

57 For more details see Ladislav Monzer, *Osvětlení Prahy, Proměny sedmi století* (FCC Public, 2003), 104.

58 MK, “ČKD na Václavském náměstí”, *Večerní Praha*, 20 August 1959, 1; MK, “ČKD”; HV, “Neónové kapky”, *Večerní Praha*, 27 October 1959, 2.

59 HV, “Neonová nemocnice odložena”, *Večerní Praha*, 1 March 1960, 2; A. Srkala, and Jindra Plchotová, “Máme 120 polámaných neónů – nemáme 1 vysunovací žebřík”, *Rovnost. Orgán krajského výboru KSČ*, 18 August 1960, 4.

60 SOB, “Pražské neony”, *Lidová demokracie*, 3 February 1956, 3; ŠK, “Proč”; ŠK, “Neony stále zlobí”, *Večerní Praha*, 19 September 1957, 1; HV, “Kde jsou nesnáze neónů?”, *Večerní Praha*, 29 September 1958, 2; HV, “Neónové”; RÁ, “Neóny se rozsvěcují a zhasínají”, *Večerní Praha*, 28 June 1960, 2; L. Kříž, “V Kobližné ulici se rozsvítil dosud největší neon. Část ho vidíte na obrázku, ale část té části nesvítí. Copak tak brzy?”, *Rovnost. Orgán krajského výboru KSČ v Brně. Zvláštní vydání k brněnskému veletrhu*, 6 September 1957, 2.

61 Unsigned, “Tvář noční Prahy”, *Večerní Praha*, 9 July 1959, 1; HV, “Záře”; HV, “47 neonových hříchů na Zlatém kříži”, *Večerní Praha*, 28 January 1960, 1.

lights supplied to Brno in 1958, by the following January, 40 no longer worked at all, and another 80 were only half illuminated – meaning that just five worked properly.⁶² Nothing seems to have changed until at least August 1960.⁶³ Articles in the daily press that had once expressed enthusiasm about the installation of the new neon lights soon gave way to reports of disappointment at their failure. There were no human or financial resources for the timely replacement of defective lettering and parts, let alone for the repair of other components. As *Reklama* magazine informed its readers, in Paris, for example, neon sign maintenance was a standard occupation. It was reported that on every street there were at least three teams of such workers, and that each manufacturing enterprise had its own breakdown service.⁶⁴ By contrast, in Czechoslovakia, unless an enterprise belonged to the heavy industry sector, such a maintenance worker was literally an exotic phenomenon.⁶⁵ A number of them appeared only in connection with the approaching second nationwide Spartakiada.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, they lacked even the most basic equipment needed to reach the signs, such as scaffolding and ladders.⁶⁷ Attempts to coordinate the work ran up against the vagaries of overlapping jurisdictions and a lack of cooperation between enterprises and institutions. Eventually, through considerable effort and numerous improvisations, the neon advertisements were more or less ready for the Spartakiada.⁶⁸ The film *Waltz for a Million* also featured these lights, but the end of the event brought a sense of relief. From August 1960 onwards, neon signs could also be supplied to other cities. At least some advertisements finally appeared in Pilsen, essential repairs were carried out in Brno and neon signs even reached Gottwaldov (Zlín), where the plan was to illuminate 50 new advertisements “above the administrative building of Svít (former Bata) and above shops” by 1961.⁶⁹ Olomouc and several spa towns in Moravia were also included in the plans, though the extent to which these projects materialised remains uncertain.⁷⁰

62 JP, “Za rok”.

63 Srkala and Plchotová, “Máme”.

64 Unsigned, Untitled, *Reklama*, 1 March 1957, 7; HV, “Neony nad”; HV, “Záře”; RÁ, “Neóny”.

65 HV, Neonová nemocnice odložena, *Večerní Praha*, 1 March 1960, 2.

66 František Kaucký, Noc na Strahově, *Večerní Praha*, 25 June 1960, 2.

67 HV, “Neonová”; Srkala and Plchotová, “Máme”.

68 Häckl, “Praha”.

69 OZ, “Pro barevnou”. See also Unsigned, “Záře neonů v našich městech přibývá”, *Naše pravda. List krajského výboru KSČ v Gottwaldově*, 2 February 1960, 1.

70 RÁ, “Neóny na pokračování”, *Večerní Praha*, 13 July 1960, 2; Karel Vendler, “Ať září neony”, *Pravda. Orgán krajského výboru KSČ v Plzni*, 28 July 1960, 2; GT, “Další neóny v Brně”, *Rovnost. Orgán krajského výboru KSČ v Brně*, 13 November 1960, 4.

Many observers criticised the drabness of the neon lights. In September 1959, one reader of *Reklama* magazine wrote a letter to the editor expressing the view that “the neon lights that are installed have virtually nothing in common with original advertising. They are static illuminated devices with a high breakdown rate. In aesthetic terms it appears to me that most of those installed in Prague were thought up by the same person.”⁷¹ Perhaps, though, this reflected the idea of organisation and rationality of socialist neon signs were meant to embody – in contrast to the chaotic and oversized “capitalist” neon lights, as some reporters had demanded. Probably in response to this criticism, in April 1960, the Prague House of Food received four new flickering neon signs, supplementing its “one distinctive neon sign”.⁷² Another neon sign, reportedly the first of its type in Europe, which did not flash but instead progressively lit up and went out, was added soon afterwards. The installation was hugely successful, and it was reported that “for three days the citizens of Prague admired this neon miracle as it was being tested.”⁷³ Two months later, these neon signs were further enhanced by a rainbow effect and a multicoloured pattern culminating in a pyramid. During the summer, another moving neon sign appeared along the right side of the lower part of Wenceslas Square, displaying coloured images of coffee beans and tea leaves accompanied by the slogan “From all over the world for you.”⁷⁴

Despite the great optimism, however, neon signs could not rid themselves of their most persistent problem – the tendency to break down. In November 1960, a local reporter summarised the view of Wenceslas Square in Prague, the location with the highest concentration of lights in the whole country, as follows: “Yesterday evening we stood on the terrace of the National Museum. Wenceslas Square spread out before us – festooned with discharge tubes and neon signs. These are striking – in their colours and also partially in their ideas. But there are few of them. Or rather – few of them that shine. It is enough simply to descend from the terrace and walk from building to building, along the whole length of both sides. On the left: the neon sign on the Leather shop now only flickers, on the Blaník 24/7 canteen it has disappeared altogether, Filmexport and the Hvězda cinema have also been lost ... On the right: the Photo Apparatus and Mineral Waters are hidden in the gloom of night, the Czech News Agency only “REP RTS”, and Luxor has

71 F.J., “Dopis redakci”, *Reklama* 5, no. 216, 1959, 216. On the criticism of product homogeneity, see also Jaromír Hořec, “Světlo pro dva”, *Večerní Praha*, 16 December 1960, 2.

72 Unsigned, “Další Neón”, *Večerní Praha*, 13 April 1960, 1.

73 Hás, “Neónový”.

74 RÁ, “Neóny se”.

quite vanished. It is a shame that even the new addition – the neon sign on the reopened milk bar – did not last long.”⁷⁵ The breakdown of advertising signs led to a whole series of linguistic distortions and unintended puns that became part of the nocturnal cityscape throughout the 1960s. Neon signs even became a popular source of humour, reflected in film – most notably in *Men About Town* (1969).

The unwittingly comic element became another defining feature of socialist neon lights. As with street lighting, advertising too was marked by accidents and oversights rooted in paradoxes: an excessive focus on heavy industry and purely technical indicators, rigid centralisation and incompetent decision making. On the other hand, socialist neon signs were by no means an original invention. They may have differed in lettering, but their basic function – to sell goods and create an impression of prosperity – remained unchanged. Their spatial layout also stayed largely the same. What was specific, perhaps, was that they coexisted with red stars and together formed a kind of advertisement for socialism itself. Yet what people most often remarked upon was their dysfunction and smaller numbers compared with those of the inter-war market economy.

75 RÁ, “Neony bijí”.

7. Lights of Socialist Festivities

Abstract: Festive lighting has an important symbolic function, as it draws attention to places and events that are key to the ruling power. By illuminating selected buildings and spaces, the Czechoslovak Communists manifested their desire to inscribe their rule into national history as its continuation and achievement. Conversely, the timing of festive lighting was used to reshape the calendar so that significant days would be associated only with events tied to communist ideology. However, the inhabitants of Czechoslovakia tended to ignore these political dimensions. More important to them were the entertainment programmes and consumer opportunities that the festive days offered.

Keywords: festive illumination, calendar, space, fireworks, dancing

"If the people of Prague, who attended the unveiling of the monument to J. V. Stalin on the Letná escarpment last night, had lined up and marched through Wenceslas Square, we would have overlooked the parade that lasted several hours. So many people gathered on the waterfront of Prague's Old Town on the first evening in May. A wreath of people from the old and time-honoured Charles Bridge to the new Švermův Bridge. Already around seven o'clock the waterfront was filling up. The crowds grew thicker, and soon no one could reach the railings by the River Vltava. On the Mánes Bridge, spectators young and old occupied every platform on which one could sit. The great glory of May Day brought thousands and thousands of citizens here. Wherever the majestic monument could be seen, there were people standing everywhere."

(Report from the unveiling of the monument to J. V. Stalin on 1 May 1955)¹

¹ Unsigned, "Pomník J. V. Stalina včera slavnostně odhalen. Památník upřímné vděčnosti", *Večerní Praha*, 2 May 1955, 1.

The third type of lighting to have a significant influence on the organisation of nocturnal space in Czechoslovakia was associated with holidays and festivals. Here too, the war left its mark, although the transformations in the symbolic politics of the KSČ were far more pronounced. After the war, the organisation of festive illuminations was not among the chief priorities of the government or local authorities. While it could have served the purposes of symbolic politics, its high energy demands did not permit additional consumption. Although local dances, various open-air performances and celebrations of the end of the war were illuminated, these did not amount to any systematic policy. A consistent programme of festive illumination was not resumed until 1955.²

Socialist Night Festivities?

In principle, festive lighting is closely linked with the politics of time and space. It draws attention to selected events, while relegating others – those considered undesirable or unimportant – to the background. Similarly, in spatial terms, it accentuates certain locations, buildings or other structures, while leaving others in darkness and therefore virtually unnoticed. Illuminated events and spaces thus embody specific values, norms and institutions that the government of the day seeks to promote. This mechanism was summarised by Alain Cabantous: “Transforming events important for the state or ruling dynasty into a nocturnal celebration represents another way of manipulating time. [During the celebration] darkness augments the symbolic power of light and those who wield it, and contributes to the formation of the political culture.”³ What is important, therefore, is specifically *what* is festively illuminated and *when* – for this determines where people’s attention is directed. Modern states have typically organised their festive lighting to mark anniversaries connected with their founding – whether the declaration of a republic, independence or the ratification of a constitution – or on the occasion of a victorious battle. In inter-war Czechoslovakia, systematic festive illumination was introduced on the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the independent state (on 28 October

2 Ladislav Monzer, *Osvětlení Prahy, Proměny sedmi století* (FCC Public, 2003), 136.

3 Alain Cabantous, *Histoire de la nuit XVII^e–XVIII^e siècle* (Fayard, 2009), 263; See also Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 33–59; Luc Gwiazdzinski and Gilles Rabin, *Si la ville m’était contée* (Eyrolles, 2005), 129–132 and 159–166; Henry J. Rutz, *The Politics of Time* (American Anthropological Association, 1992), 1–17.

1928), and, from that time on, illuminations were repeated every year until 1938, when the dismembering of the state began. Buildings evoking glorious periods of national history, the Czech and Slovak national movements or republican values were illuminated. In Prague, for example, these included the Charles Bridge, Prague Castle, the National Museum and the National Memorial to the Czechoslovak World War I legions on Vítkov hill.⁴ After the establishment of the Nazi Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, these illuminations were, naturally, discontinued. Instead, the first anniversary of the Protectorate was celebrated with a nighttime military parade through Prague and other towns, lit by flaming torches. The performance was accompanied by the decoration of building façades with banners bearing swastikas.⁵ This copied the celebrations organised in Berlin after Hitler seized power in 1933, when inhabitants were also required to place a switched-on radio in their windows at maximum volume during the Chancellor's speech. All of this served to reinforce the impression that Hitler possessed immense power.⁶

When systematic festive lighting returned in 1955, it came fully under the direction of the KSČ and, in the spirit of its symbolic politics, was planned for May Day – the most important communist festivity – and renewed in grand style. The evening part of the celebrations was launched in the park on Letná Plain, at the foot of the Stalin monument, which had been completed only a few days earlier. In the following years, this monument literally became the focal point of the evening section of the May Day celebrations, which were enacted according to a rigorously prepared script. First came a festive lantern procession that arrived at the site. Then speeches were made and broadcast through loudspeakers, while floodlights illuminated the monument in white light from three sides. This was followed by the national anthems of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union and by ceremonial cannon salutes. The festivities continued with a fireworks display launched from the Seminary Garden on Strahov Monastery hill (Petřín). Afterwards, bowls of oil were set alight along the flanks of the Stalin monument.

4 Monzer, *Osvětlení*, 96 and 134–136.

5 See Photo Archive of the Czech Press Agency (ČTK), “Praha, Václavské náměstí, průvod, pochodeň (fotografie)”, accessed 18 October 2021, <https://multimedia.ctk.cz/foto/document/10353258/35>.

6 Gwiazdzinski and Rabin, *Si la ville*, 140. See also Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City: Paris, Berlin, London 1840–1930* (Reaktion Books, 1998), 315–320. Footage of torchlight processions at various important events for Nazi regime also appeared in Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*.

The festive illuminations of May Day in 1955 indeed demonstrated the height of the KSČ's ambitions. Viewed from below, the spectacle reportedly offered a truly fascinating performance. In the words of a local reporter: "Cannon salvos thundered, music played, the statue of Stalin and the figures around him shone out of the darkness like a white apparition."⁷ And finally, under the lamplight, a great dance event began on the plaza beneath the monument.⁸

Every year, the evening part of the celebrations followed essentially the same pattern, accompanied by an additional programme. In the early evening of May Day, various lantern processions passed through the city, some of which ended at the Stalin monument. However, the festivities were not limited only to this space. The dancing that always followed the fireworks and cannon salutes was complemented by night cruises on illuminated boats along the darkened River Vltava. This was a particularly popular attraction, and the river also offered an excellent view of the monument – a feature which suited the KSČ leadership because the statue drew attention to the values associated with their governance. Later in the evening, further entertainment events took place across the city: concerts, open-air film screenings and dances. A second notional centre of events was the Prague Exhibition Grounds in the Holešovice district and the adjacent Stromovka Park, renamed in 1955 after the communist resistance hero and author of the notorious *Report from the Gallows* – becoming the Julius Fučík Park of Culture and Leisure. Visitors could also enjoy a variety of fairground attractions. The entire complex was lit up by lanterns and other lights, and its main boulevard was lined with colourfully lit fountains.⁹

The arrangement of the May Day celebrations, therefore, appeared to demonstrate that the Czechoslovak Communists had thoroughly conceived their symbolic politics of festivities in both temporal and spatial terms. Yet, on closer examination, it becomes evident that, particularly with regard to spatial symbolism, their approach was limited. They merely expanded upon the inter-war period system of illumination by adding a single new landmark – the Stalin monument – and by renaming a few other sites. Furthermore, at the time of its unveiling Stalin's monument was already an anachronism, since the Soviet bloc was then entering the period of

7 Unsigned, "Pomník", 1.

8 Unsigned, "Prvomájová noc", *Večerní Praha*, 2 May 1955, 2.

9 On the course of the May Day dance party in Stromovka in the early 1950s, see Martin Frič and Václav Berdych, Josef Neuberg and František Vlček, *Bylo to v máji* (Československý státní film, 1 June 1950), 00:06:59–00:07:50.

de-Stalinisation.¹⁰ The remaining illuminations closely followed inter-war traditions. Prague Castle, for example, was again lit on the left bank of the River Vltava, forming a spatial counterweight to the Stalin monument. Other illuminated monuments included the Charles Bridge, the Old Town Bridge Tower, the Powder Tower, the National Theatre, the Old Town Hall, the Old Town Water Tower on the Novotný Footbridge, the National Museum and even the Church of St. Francis of Assisi, the Church of St. Nicholas and the tower of the Church of Our Lady Before Týn – all located in the city centre.¹¹ In total, some 16 buildings, mostly the same as in the inter-war period, were lit up during May Day and other communist festivities.¹² Although, from a Marxist perspective, these monuments theoretically symbolised outmoded and repudiated ideas – feudalism, nationalism or Catholicism – their illuminations were refurbished or even improved. This also applied to the National Museum in 1958, while from 1959 onwards, together with the Old Town Hall, it was lit in a white and yellow colour scheme, and in 1960 the National Theatre obtained permanent lighting.¹³ If the ambition to transform values and ideas through the symbolic politics of nocturnal illumination had been taken to its logical conclusion, then all of these buildings should have remained in darkness. Instead, it appears that the Communists used their festive lighting programme to situate their rule as a logical continuation of the long history of the Czechoslovak state.¹⁴ Thus, Prague Castle was described as a “monument to the masterful skills of our ancestors”, while the “time-honoured Charles Bridge” as testimony to the “quality work of ancient builders”, and the National Theatre was “a superb jewel of Prague architecture”.¹⁵

10 The Stalin monument was removed only upon the insistence of the Soviet Communist Party in 1962, when de-Stalinisation was already well under way in the Eastern Bloc.

11 Monzer, *Osvětlení*, 155.

12 HV, “Světlo k svátku. Praha ve chvílích před 1. májem”, *Večerní Praha*, 30 April 1959, 2.

13 Unsigned, “Národní divadlo po zahájení letošní sezóny opět zazářilo do večerní Prahy”, *Večerní Praha*, 31 August 1955, 1; RÁ, “Světelná kaskáda uprostřed města”, *Večerní Praha*, 29 March 1960, 1; Unsigned, “Národní divadlo”, *Večerní Praha*, 6 August 1960, 1; HV, “Světelné šaty na míru”, *Večerní Praha*, 6 May 1960, 1.

14 On this effort see Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Komunisté, dědici velkých tradic českého národa* (Sekretariát ÚV KSČ, 1946); Bradley Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 89–103; Christianne Brenner, *Mezi Východem a Západem. České politické diskurzy 1945–1948* (Argo, 2015), 64–73; Jan Randák, *Vzáří rudého kalicha: Politika dějin a husitská tradice v Československu 1948–1956* (Nakladatelství lidové noviny, 2016), 79–97.

15 See for example Vladimír Kalina, “Světla nad Vltavou”, *Večerní Praha*, 20 February 1957, 3; KÝ, “Pražský hrad v novoroční kráse”, *Večerní Praha*, 30 December 1959, 1; Unsigned, “Národní divadlo”, *Večerní Praha*, 6 August 1960, 1.

A New Calendar of Festivities

Festive illumination as a means of integrating Communist rule into the nation's historical narrative was further emphasised by the celebrations marking the tenth anniversary of the KSČ's seizure of power in the so-called Victorious February of 1948. The series of festivities began with the ceremonial illumination of all the aforementioned historical buildings, which remained lit from dusk until midnight. The moment of lighting was accompanied by ceremonial fanfares played by the trumpeters of Prague from the gallery of the Old Town Hall Tower.¹⁶ The launch of the celebrations could therefore hardly have had a more traditional backdrop. In contrast to this traditional spatial layout, however, the temporal cycle of the festivities was significantly transformed. It was now entrusted with the transformation of the political culture, values and self-identification of Czechoslovak citizens. The new calendar of festive illuminations was based on events drawn from the history of socialism or that of the Soviet Union.

Following the May Day celebrations, the second highlight of the festive cycle was the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917, which, owing to the different calendar in pre-revolutionary Russia, fell on 7 November. In Prague, a tradition was established whereby, on the evening before the anniversary, soldiers fired a cannon salute from various location around the city (between 7:30 and 7:40 in the evening). Then, as on May Day, a fireworks display was launched from the Strahov Monastery Hill. To accentuate the effect of the cannon fire and fireworks, public street lighting was switched off for the duration of the show.¹⁷ When it ended, the same buildings and objects as on May Day were illuminated, followed by lantern processions through the city.¹⁸ During the 7 November celebrations, campfires were lit around the city, concerts and dances were held. Instead of Stromovka Park, however, the main programme took place in the Old Town Square, which was ceremonially illuminated for the occasion.

The autumn festivities were somewhat more formal than their spring counterparts. The open-air film screenings that had been a popular part of the May Day programme were replaced by theatre and cinema performances, and a greater number of classical music concerts were also included in the

16 HS, "Praha obléká sváteční šat", *Večerní Praha*, 21 February 1958, 1.

17 Unsigned, "Zítra salvy a ohňostroji", *Večerní Praha*, 5 November 1956, 2; Unsigned, "V hlavním městě republiky", *Večerní Praha*, 7 November 1956, 1.

18 Unsigned, "Světlo na cestu!", *Večerní Praha*, 8 November 1955, 1; VOV, "Lampióny v ulicích", *Večerní Praha*, 7 November 1958, 1; Unsigned, "Světélka dětské lásky", *Večerní Praha*, 6 November 1959, 1.

programme.¹⁹ Each year, a commemorative concert was held in the festively illuminated National Theatre, along with a performance of a Russian opera “attended by representatives of the Party and government.”²⁰ Although the festive illuminations once again drew attention to traditional landmarks such as Strahov Monastery, the National Theatre or the Church of Our Lady Before Týn on the Old Town Square, they were now embedded within a new calendar and rituals oriented towards the Soviet Union.

The period between the spring and autumn twin peaks of the socialist calendar was filled with other significant festive days – or rather, evenings and nights enlivened by programmes of illuminations and entertainments. May was closely associated with the celebrations of the end of the Second World War, held one week after the May Day festivities. However, they did not take place on 8 May, the official day of the war’s end, but on 9 May, commemorating the entry of the Red Army into Prague. Although more formal than the May Day celebrations, the evening programme again featured fireworks, cannon salvos and open-air dances. In the intervening period between the two national holidays, the public could watch the nighttime drills in preparation for the annual military parade held on 9 May on Letná Plain.²¹ The day after May Day also marked the start of the Peace Race – established as a socialist counterpart to the Tour de France and other major cycling competitions in Western Europe. The race concluded one week after the celebrations of the end of the Second World War with a closing ceremony. It always began and ended in either Prague, Warsaw or Berlin, and thus, almost every year, the citizens of Prague could attend the ceremonial start or finish, or at least watch one of the race’s stages live.²²

Another traditional May celebration was the Prague Spring festival of classical music, the origins of which dated back to 1946. It traditionally opened on 12 May, the anniversary of the death of the nineteenth-century national renaissance music composer promoted by Communists – Bedřich

19 Unsigned, “Oslavy Říjnové revoluce”, *Večerní Praha*, 6 November 1956, 1; JS, “Dny velkých svátků před námi”, *Večerní Praha*, 3 November 1958, 1; JS, “36 dní svátku přátelství”, *Večerní Praha*, 21 October 1960, 1.

20 National Archives (hereafter NA), f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 156, a. j./bod 207, “Usnesení 207. schůze politického byra ÚV KSČ ze dne 29. října 1957”; sv. 201, a. j./ bod 275, “Návrh směrnic k 42. výročí Velké říjnové socialistické revoluce a Měsici čs.-sovětského přátelství”.

21 KÝ, “Úspěšná noční zkouška”, *Večerní Praha*, 3 May 1957, 1; HS, “Rušná noc na Letné”, 3 May 1958, 1; VP, “Výročí osvobození se hlásí”, *Večerní Praha*, 6 May 1959, 1; KÝ, “Noční generálka vojáků”, *Večerní Praha*, 6 May 1960, 1.

22 Karolína Kašparová, *Historie cyklistického Závodu míru od roku 1948 do roku 1967*. (MA. Diss., University of South Bohemia, 2017).

Smetana.²³ The 11th annual festival held in 1957, was an exceptional occasion. For the first time, the house in which Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had briefly resided was ceremonially illuminated on the occasion of the 170th anniversary of his first visit to Prague.²⁴ The organisers also experimented with a floating illuminated stage for the closing concert.²⁵ Although the event was a great success with audiences, the acoustics were poor and the idea was not repeated in subsequent years.

The first three weeks of May thus became a period of festivities in which references to wartime events intertwined with socialist traditions and elements of the national culture. The combination of folk entertainment, sporting events and high culture aimed to attract all sections of the population. This entanglement of references and activities – filling public space and brought to prominence through the evening festivities and their illuminations – surely merits further attention and could provide ample material for analysis.

The calendar was also supplemented by occasional festivities. For instance, in June 1959, one of the dams on the Vltava River was inaugurated. This event, too, was accompanied by a fireworks display and dances that lasted two days. People were invited to attend official lottery draws, competitions and concerts in the centre of Prague. The climax of the festivities was a night cruise on the Vltava for the lucky winners.²⁶ The importance attributed to the dam again reflected the privileged status of the energy industry in Czechoslovakia. It is highly probable that this celebration was intentionally held on Construction Workers' Day – another key date in the socialist calendar – which visually reinforced the drive to recruit new workers for construction projects, especially housing, which was already falling short of the promises made after the 1953 currency reform.

Despite these attempts to create a new conception of time, the socialist calendar nevertheless overlapped with older traditions and practices. This applied above all to folk festivals previously associated with the church calendar or local customs. Between May and October, markets, circuses and fairs were held across the country. Brightly lit marquees and stages complemented the evening illuminations and created a festive atmosphere.

23 Bedřich Smetana (1824–1884) was a composer during the period of the so-called national revival. The man and his music were propagated by the Communist musicologist Zdeněk Nejedlý (1878–1962), who came from the same town and after 1945 held the post of Minister of Education and Culture.

24 On this occasion, a concert of *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* was held.

25 Unsigned, Untitled, *Večerní Praha*, 27 May 1957, 1.

26 Unsigned, "Ohňostroj na Orlíku", *Večerní Praha*, 19 June 1959, 1.

Dancefloors and fairground attractions lit by lanterns offered opportunities for entertainment. The Communists sought to imprint a folklore character on these festivities, evoking time-honoured rural customs (see chapter 8).²⁷ Other recurring events included the Spartakiada, held every five years in June and July, which featured a varied evening and nighttime entertainment programme.²⁸ The 1960 elections to the National Assembly were also marked by music and light.²⁹ In addition, the summer months hosted various student congresses, youth festivals and similar events.

In September, the cycle of festive illuminations continued with Miners' Day, celebrated annually on 10 September from 1949 onwards. This day illustrated the Communists' effort to promote mining and related work in the energy sector as heroic occupations. Czechoslovak People's Army Day followed on 9 October. As with the May Day and October Revolution festivities, it was usually accompanied by cannon salvos, and on the 10th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, "the firing of 12,000 signal rounds." This was followed two days of festive illumination "from dusk until 11 p.m. on all the city's monumental buildings and the J. V. Stalin monument". The celebrations also included a lantern procession, dances and open-air concerts.³⁰ Since it was a celebration of the armed forces, the festivities also featured military tattoos and concerts by army bands, as well as open-air film premieres and theatre performances.

The inter-war climax of the autumn festivals – the end-of-October commemoration of the foundation of the independent Czechoslovak state – had now been reduced to a single episode in a long chain of celebrations, as if it were merely a small fragment of a greater history. It was immediately

27 See also stories of films recalling folk festivities: Martin Frič and Václav Berdych, Josef Neuberger and František Vlček, *Bylo to v máji* (Československý státní film, 1 June 1950); Vladimír Vlček, Vladimír Vlček – Božena Šochová, and Pavel Kohout, *Zítřka se bude tančit všude* (Československý státní film/ Studio uměleckého filmu, 24 October 1952); Josef Mach, Josef Mach and Ivan Bukovčan, *Rodná zem* (Československý státní film Bratislava, 24 February 1954); Miroslav Cikán, Josef Mach – Jiří Karásek – Vladimír Kabelík, *Muž v povětrí* (Studio uměleckého filmu, 20 January 1956); Pavel Blumenfeld, Pavel Blumenfeld and Miloš Velínský, *Zlatý pavouk* (Studio hraných filmů, 22 February 1957); Václav Krška, Pavel Kohout, *Cesta zpátky* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 10 April 1959); Vladimír Vlček, Vladimír Vlček – Colette Audry – Josef Pícek – Pierre Laroche, *V proudech* (Filmové studio Barrandov, Le Trident, Nino Constantini Paris, Christian Falaize Paris, 16 May 1958); Zbyněk Brynych, Zbyněk Brynych – Pavel Kohout, and Jiří Vala, *Smyk* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 28 October 1960), etc.

28 See especially Petr Roubal, *Spartakiads: The Politics of Physical Culture in Communist Czechoslovakia* (Karolinum, 2020), 273–279, 319–345.

29 VP, "Jednotně k volbám – úspěšně k dalším cílům", *Večerní Praha*, 11 June 1960, 1.

30 Unsigned, "Čepobití, ohňostroji a salvy. Radostné oslavy Dne československé lidové armády", *Večerní Praha*, 6 October 1955, 1.

followed by the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution and then by the Month of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship, first celebrated in 1949.

The autumn festivities were particularly spectacular in 1957, marking the 40th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in the Soviet Union. The celebrations merged into one extended festival lasting from early September to the beginning of December. The first weeks of September saw light shows with illuminated boats on the River Vltava, and, by the end of the month, a neon number forty was lit up in the city.³¹ The October celebrations of Army Day constituted the first theoretical highlight of the season. Then, at the beginning of November, the aforementioned neon Soviet rocket bearing the inscription "For Peace" was illuminated in the centre of Prague. During the Month of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship, "gala evenings with a Czechoslovak-Soviet cultural programme culminating in entertainments, variety shows and academies" were held in cities, factory clubs and houses of culture. These were organised by employees from branches of the Association for Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship, together with members of the National Committees and organisations of the National Front. Soviet films premiered in cinemas, and numerous older Soviet productions were also shown, for which the Association for Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship arranged mass viewings. In addition, a wide array of exhibitions and lectures took place – on themes such as the cosmos – alongside classical music concerts, festive meetings, lantern and occasionally torchlit processions, military parades, campfires, evenings for the awarding of honours, book launches, public discussions with representatives of cultural and political institutions, and ceremonial theatre performances in Prague, Bratislava and regional towns.³²

At the beginning of December, the Month of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship usually flowed smoothly into the preparations for Christmas, which – especially from the second half of the 1950s onwards – became one of the most prominent manifestations of socialist consumerism (see chapter 6). Christmas was followed by the New Year celebrations, which featured firework displays and the festive lighting of the usual city landmarks. In the new year, the festive calendar began in February with celebrations marking the KSČ's establishment of its monopoly on power.

31 DT, "Veselá noční plavba", *Večerní Praha*, 2 September 1957, 1; Unsigned, Untitled, *Večerní Praha*, 23 September 1957, 1.

32 NA, f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 201, a. j./ bod 275, Návrh směrnic k 42. výročí Velké říjnové socialistické revoluce a Měsíci čs.-sovětského přátelství; Usnesení 207. schůze politického byra ÚV KSČ ze dne 29. října 1957.

These were often interwoven with the observances of Lent, International Women's Day and St. Joseph's Day, which the KSČ attempted to imbue primarily with the character of a folk festival. Throughout February and March, numerous dances and fairs were organised, in which the church calendar and local customs – much like the summer festivities – were combined with efforts to impart a socialist, or at least a popular, character. This was followed in April by the commemoration of Lenin's birthday, after which the annual cycle of festivities came to a close, only to begin anew on May Day.³³

The cycle of spring and summer festivities in 1960 was particularly spectacular. Attention centred on the fifteenth anniversary of the end of the war, the Spartakiada and the proclamation of the new Socialist Constitution. At precisely 20:58 on 9 May, all lights were to be turned off, and "the number fifteen in Roman numerals, created by beams from spotlights" was to appear above Prague Castle in honour of the anniversary of the end of the war. The evening celebrations were then to continue according to the following scenario: "At exactly 9 p.m. fifteen salvos from 48 cannons shall be fired at 45-second intervals. At the same moment a great firework display will be launched above the Seminary Garden [on the Strahov hill]. A total of 180 staff under the command of officer Pugner will maintain it in all colours for a period of 10 minutes. After the end of the fireworks, the numeral XV shall blaze for a further 30 minutes."³⁴ The light show was therefore to last for a total of three quarters of an hour.

Public attention was once again directed towards Prague Castle, even though the display could just as easily have taken place above the Stalin monument. In fact, the latter would have been more appropriate, since it was under Stalin's leadership that the Soviet Union had won the war and liberated most of the territory of Czechoslovakia. Moreover, the monument was perfectly situated, standing on an elevated and highly visible site outside the dense urban fabric. The choice of Prague Castle as the dominant landmark of the celebrations demonstrated once again a certain spatial conservatism within socialist festivity. The continuing post-Stalinist thaw that had gradually reached Czechoslovakia probably played a part in this, as did a lack of invention on the part of the organisers. Conversely, there may also have been a deliberate intention to place the liberation of

33 On the occasion of the celebrations, for example, a concert was held on 22 April in the Smetana Hall of the Municipal House, where Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* was performed.

34 KÝ, "Salvy a ohňostroj nad setmělým městem", *Večerní Praha*, 6 May 1960, 1; Unsigned, "15 dělových salv", *Večerní Praha*, 10 May 1960, 1.

Czechoslovakia by the Soviet army within the longer historical narrative of the state.

In any case, as with the celebrations of the October Revolution in 1957, the commemoration of the end of the war in 1960 represented one of the high points in a longer season of festivities. It was preceded by ceremonial receptions, theatre performances, thematic evenings, exhibitions, variety shows and performances by ballet troupes, opera soloists and gymnasts. For this occasion, the municipal administrations in Prague and Bratislava also prepared large, illuminated maps of the Czechoslovak Republic to be displayed “in well-frequented locations”, in order to “illustrate the advance of the liberation battles of the Soviet army and the Czechoslovak army corps” to passersby. The anniversary of the end of the war also became a theme of the Peace Race, which started that year in Prague and ended in Berlin, and of the Prague Spring music festival.³⁵ In June, the celebrations continued with the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Pioneers – the Communist organisation for children and youth – which featured a varied programme.³⁶ In Prague, these festivities were accompanied by other ceremonies in which “fluorescent lighting and coloured spotlights illuminated beneath the [newly installed] fountain [and garden recess in the city centre]”.³⁷ This provided a backdrop to the then ongoing elections to the National Assembly.³⁸ The festivities then flowed smoothly into summer and the opening of the second Spartakiada on 23 June 1960. On this occasion, bonfires were lit throughout the city, and one of Bedřich Smetana’s operas was performed on the festively illuminated courtyard of Prague Castle. Traditional landmarks remained lit up for the duration of the Spartakiada, and classical music concerts were held in the gardens beneath Prague Castle.³⁹ The entire event became one great celebration, drawing crowds to dance events in (Julius Fučík) Stromovka Park and even into the streets, as shown in scenes from the film *Waltz for a Million*. The streets seemed filled with dancing, music and all-round revelry. The Spartakiada festivities were followed by the commemoration of the anniversary of

35 NA, f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 201, a. j./bod 275, Usnesení 66. schůze politického byra ÚV KSČ ze dne 8. srpna 1959 k bodu Oslavy 15. výročí osvobození ČSR sovětskou armádou.

36 KY – JS – OŠ – VP, “V sobotu a v neděli budou v celém hlavním městě roztančená náměstí i ulice”, *Večerní Praha*, 10 June 1960, 1–2.

37 Unsigned, “Včera večer”, *Večerní Praha*, June 20, 1960, 1.

38 VP, “Jednotně k volbám – úspěšně k dalším cílům”, *Večerní Praha*, 11 June 1960, 1.

39 Unsigned, “Národní divadlo málo známé”, *Večerní Praha*, 28 June 1960, 1; JAP, “Hudba v pražských zahradách”, *Večerní Praha*, 30 June 1960, 3.

the 1948 merger between the Social Democratic and Communist parties, traditionally held on 27 June. On 9 July came the ceremonial opening of the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival also dedicated to the end of the war.⁴⁰ The entire cycle of festivities that year was then crowned by the announcement of the new constitution on 11 July, which Czechoslovakia declared a socialist state.

The spring of 1960 was thus characterised by an almost continuous three-month-long sequence of festivities, as if there were to be no return to ordinary routine. Once again, the celebrations combined references to war and peace and other political events and both folk and high culture. The programme was designed to appeal to everyone without exception – from sports enthusiasts and culturally minded individuals to those who simply wanted to indulge in carefree entertainment. These festivities also vividly illustrated another goal of the KSČ leadership: they were intended to follow one another almost seamlessly as parts of the socialist calendar. It was as if the cycle of celebrations was to have never to end, as if new opportunities to celebrate were constantly emerging. Space and time alike were to be filled with one continuous, unbroken celebration, which is how the Communists envisioned the future.⁴¹ Ultimately, it may even have seemed that perpetual festivity had become the everyday reality of the system.

Just as in the temporal symbolism of the socialist calendar, in terms of spatial symbolism, the Communists drew upon existing infrastructures, seeking to infuse them with new meanings. Not only did they attempt to redefine the symbolic significance of historical buildings, but also to enrich them with new lighting techniques and sound effects. The illuminations thus produced a diverse spectacle, ranging from floodlights and fireworks to lanterns, campfires, coloured fluorescent lights and neon signs. Here we also cannot overlook the red stars atop industrial plants and enterprises, whose illumination signalled the fulfilment of a plan by a certain anniversary or event – an achievement in which considerable energy was invested. The resulting effect was a complex synthesis of both traditional and newly promoted values, intertwined within the festively illuminated nocturnal landscape of the Communist state. They were cast together within a specific mixture endeavouring to provide and establish a sense of ceaseless celebration and of which the backdrop – and ultimately, the chief protagonists – were the illuminated buildings.

40 Usnesení 66. schůze politického.

41 See Roman Krakovský, *Rituel du 1er mai en Tchécoslovaquie, 1948–1989* (L'Harmattan, 2004), 138–142.

Festivities or Entertainment?

Illuminated festivities were also practical for those in power because, as has been observed, “festive lighting expresses the power of political authority; it represents and shapes its power and at the same time establishes control over people.”⁴² The lights of public celebrations enabled the non-violent disciplining of the crowd. Organised light shows, concerts and dancing events attracted people to a predetermined time and place in an unobtrusive form, allowing them to release their accumulated energy. This controlled concentration enabled the authorities to prevent spontaneous gatherings in out-of-sight locations or at random times – occasions that could otherwise develop into unpredictable chains of events, much as carnivals and charivari in pre-modern times.⁴³ In Communist Czechoslovakia too, it was above all the evening section of the socialist festivities that enjoyed immense popularity. In Prague, firework displays regularly drew crowds large enough to fill the riverbanks, bridges and every elevated point along the River Vltava, even despite the bad weather that threatened in the autumn.⁴⁴ According to the local press, for example, the May Day celebrations of 1956 attracted some 300,000 people in Prague alone.⁴⁵ May Day celebrations were especially popular because they coincided with the arrival of the spring and warm weather, which encouraged people into the streets. Furthermore, during this time, shops and refreshment stands were generally better stocked. But reportedly even the autumn celebrations of the October Revolution in 1957 attracted a crowd of 200,000 to the Old Town Square.⁴⁶

According to the historian Roman Krakovský, the KSČ leaders took pride in the voluntary yet mass participation in these festivities, presenting it as an expression of the population’s endorsement of the political order and as proof

42 Cabantous, *Histoire*, 263.

43 See Mikhail Bachtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 192–263; René Hardy, *Charivari et justice populaire au Québec* (Septentrion, 2015), 17–55; Claude Gauvard and Altan Gokalp, “Les conduites du bruit et leur signification à la fin du Moyen Âge. Le charivari”, *Annales. Économies, sociétés, civilisations*, no. 3 (1974): 693–704; Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le Charivari, Actes de la table ronde organisée à Paris (25–27 avril 1977) par l’Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales et le Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (Mouton, 1981). On a carnival which escaped this control see e.g. Emmanuel Leroy-Ladurie, *Le Carnaval de Romans: De la Chandeleur au mercredi des Cendres, 1579–1580* (Gallimard, 1979).

44 Unsigned, “V hlavním městě republiky”, *Večerní Praha*, 7 November 1956, 1; Unsigned, “Světlo na cestu!”, *Večerní Praha*, 8 November 1955, 1.

45 Unsigned, “Taková byla Praha”, *Večerní Praha*, 2 May 1956, 1.

46 VP, “200,000 na Staroměstském nám.: S vámi na věčné časy!”, *Večerní Praha*, 7 November 1957, 1.

of the legitimacy of their monopoly on power. But even if attendance was indeed on a massive scale, for most participants, the political symbolism of the celebrations was secondary.⁴⁷ This is undoubtedly why the programmes always included evening entertainment such as dances, film screenings in the open-air and campfires. Outdoor festivities were naturally appealing: For young people, they offered an opportunity to stay outside longer, away from their parents' supervision;⁴⁸ for unmarried couples, a romantic space; and for single people, the chance to meet potential partners. For the middle generation, the days off work that typically followed the most prestigious holidays provided a welcome respite.

By contrast, whenever local KSČ leaders sought to foreground the political message of the festivities and force them to take part, they often met with incomprehension or even open protest. Peter Heumos recounts an example from Ostrava in 1952, when Party functionaries suspended the buses that normally took industrial workers home to the nearby villages after the morning shift, hoping to ensure mass attendance at the celebrations of the 35th anniversary of the October Revolution. When the workers learned of this, they angrily berated the Party officials and eventually, almost without exception, went home on foot.⁴⁹ Politics, therefore, had to appear incidental – present only in the background. The festive lights were thus meant to lend a lustre and prestige to the commemorated events and holidays, while framing the accompanying entertainment. They serve to concentrate public attention on the places and dates central to the regime's symbolic politics, while simultaneously providing popular amusement – so long as the enjoyment remained within controllable limits. Yet the symbolic space itself remained remarkably conservative in its ordering. It is precisely this phenomenon that Henri Lefebvre referred to in his study on space, when he argued that a revolution that fails to create its own fundamental spatial order has not truly fulfilled its potential.⁵⁰

47 Roman Krakovský, *Réinventer le monde. L'espace et le temps en Tchécoslovaquie communiste* (Publications de la Sorbonne, 2014), 191–280; See also KÝ, “32 dnů před májovou přehlídkou”, *Večerní Praha*, 29 March 1960, 1.

48 Juraj Šebo, *Budovatel'ské 50. roky* (Ikar, 2010), 46; Unsigned, “Oslavy VŘSR. Ohňostroj, lampiony a první polibky”, *E15*, accessed 9 July 2019, <https://www.e15.cz/magazin/oslavy-vrsr-ohnostroj-lampiony-a-prvni-polibky-843003>. On the success of lantern parades see also Jiří Knapík and Martin Franc, eds., *Průvodce kulturním děním a životním stylem v českých zemích 1948–1967* (Academia, 2011), 492.

49 Peter Heumos, “Výhrňme si rukávy, než se kola zastaví!": *Dělníci a státní socialismus v Československu 1945–1968* (Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky, 2006), 33.

50 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 54.

PART 4

Living in the Night

"Humans are showing a trend toward more and more wakeful activity at all hours of day and night. The activities are extremely varied. Large numbers of people are involved. And the trend is worldwide. A unifying hypothesis to account for it is that night is a frontier; that expansion into the dark hours is a continuation of the geographic migration across the face of the earth."
(Murray Melbin, *Night as Frontier*, 1978)¹

The sociologist Murray Melbin likened the night to a spatial boundary, beyond which there lies an unexplored territory. The ruling power is able to govern this realm only to a limited extent, if at all; social boundaries become blurred, and individuals are less subject to control.² Regardless of the epoch, this unsettles every ruling power authority, which subsequently seeks to breach this boundary and conquer the territory beyond it – either through the imperative of vigilance, the imposition of various bans or the creation of specialised institutions such as police or by technologies. In antiquity, for example, anyone who ventured onto the streets at night was automatically suspected of involvement in some kind of conspiracy. In the medieval and early modern periods, curfews were enforced in many European countries. In addition, the Catholic Church further reinforced these constraints by portraying the night as a time filled with danger – a domain of witches and devils – thus discouraging people from contemplating nocturnal adventures.³ Although secular societies later rejected most of these prohibitions and religious notions, ruling elites continued to perceive the free movement of people after dark as a potential threat, as a space in which dissent and revolt might take root. As a consequence, they sought to assert control over the nocturnal city through lighting, specialised legislation and the institutionalisation of policing, while continuing to depict the night as a time of lurking danger. In the twentieth and twenty-first

1 Murray Melbin, "Night as Frontier", *American Sociological Review*, no. 43 (1978): 3.

2 Melbin, *Night as Frontier*, 5–19. See also Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain 1800–1910* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 99–134, 214–251; Luc Gwiazdzinski, *La nuit, dernière frontière de la ville* (Hermann, 2005), 144–173.

3 Alain Cabantous, *Histoire de la nuit XVII^e–XVIII^e siècle* (Fayard, 2009), 132–159; Carlo Ginzburg, *Noční příběh: Sabat čarodějnic* (Argo, 2003), 82–108; Jacques Le Goff, *Peníze a život* (Argo, 2005), 32 and 46; Matthew Beaumont, *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London – Chaucer to Dickens* (Verso Books, 2016), 15–42.

centuries, governments have extended this control through the use modern surveillance technologies.⁴

Nighttime activity and the issue of its controllability is inextricably linked to both entertainment and criminality. Although they may appear distinct at first glance, the two share a common denominator: spontaneity, the blurring of social boundaries and a certain degree of uncontrollability.⁵ The line between them is often fine. Both are commonly subsumed under term “nightlife”. It is well-known that nearly all the utopian visions that prefigured socialism emphasised the ideal of a virtuous society and of entertainment channelled towards doctrinal education. This raises a question of what form nightlife took in Czechoslovakia when the country embarked upon the path to build socialism. The Communists made no secret of their ambitions to transform the thinking and everyday life of the Czechoslovak population from its very foundations. However, in order to achieve this, they also needed to gain maximum control over the night. To what extent did they succeed in this effort? Or, conversely, did particular forms of entertainment and criminality arise as people adapted to the prevailing social, economic, political and institutional conditions? The following two chapters explore these questions by examining the efforts to regulate the realms of leisure and crime, tracing their development and distinctive features as they emerged through the intersection of institutional policies and everyday practices of fun and transgression.

4 See for example Paolo Napoli, *Naissance de la police moderne. Pouvoir, normes, société* (La Découverte, 2003), 121–182; Pavel Himl, *Pozorovat, popsat, stvořit: Osvícenská policie a moderní stát 1770–1820* (Argo, 2019), 123–197; Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City: Paris, Berlin, London 1840–1930* (Reaktion Books, 1998), 82–267; Gwiazdzinski, *La nuit*, 162–185. See also, Michel Foucault, *Dohlížet a trestat: Kniha o zrodu vězení* (Dauphin, 2000), 275–404; Otter, *The Victorian*, 2.

5 Michaël Foessel, *La nuit: Vivre sans témoin* (Autrement, 2017), 93–158.

8. Having Fun

Abstract: This chapter maps the structure, types, and functioning of entertainment businesses and the people who made a living from entertainment. It examines their struggles with new rules driven by efforts to transform entertainment into a tool for educating and cultivating society in the spirit of communist ideals. It points to some of the paradoxes that led, for example, to the emergence of cultural platforms that undermined the authority of the Communist Party. It also outlines the functioning of certain businesses that served as venues for informal transactions falling within the sphere of the grey or black economy.

Keywords: nightlife venues, entertainment, music, theatre, dancing

*When misfortune suddenly crosses your path,
Just laugh, keep on laughing.
Even if you're burned by love,
Just laugh, keep on laughing.
Nobody's luck can last forever,
Far better off is the one who can laugh about it.
Even if misfortune plagues you again and again,
Let there be no shadow, no sorrow,
Just laugh, just laugh,
Just laugh, keep on laughing.*

(Lyrics to the closing song from the film *A Star Travels South*, 1958)¹

The *Concise Czech Language Dictionary* compiled in the period of 1935–1957 defines entertainment as an “activity or state providing diversion, pleasure,

¹ Oldřich Lipský, Oldřich Lipský – Vladimír Škutina, and Jiří Sila, *Hvězda jede na jih* (Filmové studio Barrandov/ Lovčen film Budva, 15 May 1964).

amusement; [it is] a pastime.” The authors include a wide range of examples indicating that entertainment primarily refers to social occasions involving dancing, fairs, travelling theatre performances and other “enterprise arranged for the purpose of amusing people”, but also ordinary “convivial conversation”.² Although the examples are diverse in nature, the great majority share five fundamental traits that place entertainment within a characteristic temporal, spatial and social framework. Firstly, it always occurs in the company of others; secondly, it takes place in hospitality venues. Whether indoors or in the open air, it invariably concerns a publicly accessible space. The third common feature is the purpose of the entertainment itself – to take the participants out of their ordinary routine and enable them to forget about their everyday cares. The fourth trait associates entertainment with the evening and the night, situating it temporally within leisure time, after the completion of the daytime work duties. The fifth characteristic connects entertainment with music or some form of audiovisual performance. These shared features thus also define the basic framework within which this chapter operates. At the outset, it is also important to note that the possibility of modern nighttime entertainment as we know it today – with cinemas, theatres and entertainment venues open to the wider public, often until the early morning – was made possible by the development of lighting, as well as by transformations in the organisation of labour. Whereas the spread of artificial lighting enabled people to inhabit the night space more intensively, the transition to an industrial society meant that most individuals became employees with more or less fixed working hours, thereby establishing a clear boundary between work and leisure. For those who did not work at night, entertainment could thus become a part of everyday life. The diversity of nightlife, together with the degree and variety of illumination, became a mark of prestige. The more numerous the entertainment venues and the wider the choice, the more attractive was the nightlife – and the more interesting the city itself.³

2 Oldřich Hujer, Emil Smetánka, Miloš Weingart, and coll., eds., *Příruční slovník jazyka českého 1935–1957*, Prague 1953–1955, accessed 16 October 2024, https://psjc.ujc.cas.cz/search.php?hledej=Hledej&heslo=z%C3%A1bava&where=hesla&zobraz_ps=ps&zobraz_cards=cards&pocet_karet=3&numchange=no¬_initial=1.

3 Simone Delattre, *Les douze heures noires: La nuit à Paris au XIX^e siècle* (Albin Michel, 2000), 91–126; Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City: Paris, Berlin, London 1840–1930* (Reaktion Books, 1998), 45–47 and 109–135; Nurcin Ileri, “Allure of Light, Fear of the Dark: Nighttime Illumination, Spectacle, and Order in Fin-de-Siècle Istanbul”, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, no. 2 (2017): 286–289; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (Blackwells, 1988), 137–154; Luc Gwiazdzinski, *La nuit, dernière frontière de la ville* (Hermann, 2005), 101–140.

The Structure of Entertainment after the War

Nightlife in post-war Czechoslovakia tended to evolve spontaneously from its pre-war counterpart. Folk and dance events reappeared, and many venues that had been forced to close for various reasons during the war reopened, including pubs, dance cafés, wine bars, night clubs and similar establishments. Films and plays that had been prohibited during the occupation returned to cinemas and theatres. In addition, there were various celebrations of the end of the war, shows, gatherings and civic celebrations in parks and on the streets, lantern parades or performances by army bands. Practically every day, the press carried announcements and invitations to entertainment events throughout Czechoslovakia. Inter-war traditions continued through carnivals, processions and fairs, featuring performances by travelling actors, acrobats, singers, puppeteers and jugglers, circuses and fun houses, fairground attractions and shooting galleries – forms of entertainment that had previously been among the most widespread.⁴ As a rule, they were combined with dance parties, either outdoors or in local pubs. This was a cheap form of entertainment – broadly accessible, often cementing local communities – and, as a result, it was also highly popular. In the institutional language it was referred to summarily as folk entertainment or folk-technical entertainment.

An insight into the world of the protagonists of folk entertainment was offered by one of the first post-war film premieres, the comedy *Just Getting Started*, which opened in cinemas in November 1946.⁵ It took audiences behind the scenes of the travelling theatre company Variété Borneo, against the humorous backdrop of a dispute between the owner, Sidonie Vosáhlová, her husband and their friendship with a rather hapless market trader, František Diviš. The film portrayed the everyday lives of the performers as those of ordinary people with ordinary cares. Through the story of Variété Borneo and its staff, the film evoked the atmosphere of the fairs and markets of Central Bohemia. With nearly 4.9 million tickets sold, this film was one of the most successful post-war releases, even outselling war dramas.⁶ The success of this film and other comedies shows that, after the war, despite the trauma and popularity of dramas, comedy was

4 On these attractions in Czechoslovakia, see for example Filip Herza, *Imaginace jinakosti. Pražské přehlídky lidských kuriozit v 19. a 20. století* (Scriptorium, 2020).

5 Vladimír Slavínský, František Vlček and Josef Neuberg, *Právě začínáme* (Československá výroba dlouhých filmů, Praha, 8 November 1946).

6 Jiří Havelka, *Československé filmové hospodářství 1956–1960* (Český filmový ústav, 1970), 208.

still the most popular genre and that people went to the cinema primarily to laugh. It also confirms that going to the cinema had become a popular way of spending one's evenings. Screenings usually began at 9 p.m., and the immediate post-war years in particular offered a broad range of both older and more recent Czechoslovak films, as well as foreign productions from the Soviet Union, the United States, Great Britain, France and Italy.⁷ In terms of popularity, cinema was perhaps rivalled only by dancing, especially among younger people.

Another form of evening and nighttime amusement for the Czechoslovak population was visiting the various hospitality and entertainment establishments. These differed in their focus and programmes, in the social status of the desired clientele and in their legally mandated closing hours. Probably lowest in the hierarchy were taprooms serving spirits. These were required to close at 7 p.m., and on Saturdays and before national holidays at 5 p.m. Their offerings were limited: patrons came mainly to drink beer and spirits, sometimes to play cards. Since these venues were frequented mostly by manual workers, people returning home from morning shifts and members of the lower classes, the early closing time was meant to prevent them from spending all their wages on alcohol and to ensure that drinking would not interfere with their work duties.⁸

Another type of hospitality venue comprised pubs, inns and restaurants. These existed on various possible levels, from the simplest and cheapest on the outskirts of towns and in small villages to grand luxury restaurants that were mostly part of adjoining hotels in city centres, mountain resorts or spa towns. These businesses were required to close at midnight, except on New Year's Eve, during the last three days of the Lenten carnival and on Kermesse.⁹ However, they could apply for an extension of their opening hours, which was granted fairly often as these venues frequently hosted dance parties and other social events. For example, in October 1947, the

7 See the various surveys by the Czechoslovak Institute for Public Opinion on gallery, concert and theatre attendance, accessed 16 October 2024, <http://nesstar.soc.cas.cz/webview/>. See also reports on the number of events held for example within the territory of Prague in 1947–1948. National Archives (hereafter NA), f. Ministerstvo vnitra II – Noskův archiv, Praha, cart. 29, “Hlášení Prvního oddělení Ředitelství národní bezpečnosti v Praze”; cart. 35, “Zpráva o bezpečnostních poměrech a stavu bezpečnostní služby v hlavním městě Praze”.

8 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, “Směrnice ministerstva vnitřního obchodu ze dne 5. ledna 1945 č. 120.099/1945–1/4 o udělování hostinských a výčepnických koncesí”; “Z referátu v. o. r. Dr. Doubka na schůzi Stálého poradního sboru pro boj proti alkoholismu”.

9 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, “Opatření za účelem potírání alkoholismu v rámci úpravy policejní hodiny uzavírací v živnostech hostinských a úpravy pořádání tanečních zábav”.

police in Prague alone granted an average of 14 exemptions from closing time per day to pubs, inns, cafés and wine bars for dance evenings – a total of 391 for the month.¹⁰ Above all, ordinary pubs and inns formed the backbone of social, civic and political life. In addition to holding dance evenings, they also provided premises for associations and political parties to hold meetings. People also came to play cards or dice and to talk with friends and neighbours or simply to eat, whether in company or alone. This type of establishment attracted the broadest cross-section of the population, although different social classes tended to frequent different types or rather categories of these venues. However, there were also occasions when these social boundaries were blurred – such as at association meetings or local festivals. Pubs and restaurants also occupied a significant place in popular culture, often serving as an important backdrop for narrative action. Many films depicted their interiors in detail, using them as realistic settings to illustrate both plot and character. In this manner, one could visit various establishments from both notional ends of the social hierarchy. This included the so-called “the quietest pub in Prague” (*Don't You Know of an Unoccupied Flat*).¹¹ But the filmmakers were especially drawn to venues where the marginal and criminal classes gathered, which they often contrasted with the establishments of the social elite. Stories for instance featured folk pubs and grand mountain restaurants, beer joints in darkened backstreets on the edge of town and river harbours, as well as prestigious cabarets in the city centre and luxury hotels (*Avalanche*, *When You Return*, *Sign of the Anchor*).¹² In all cases, the filmmakers took great pains to present a faithful picture of the social composition of each clientele.

The next type of entertainment venue – in order of their mandatory closing time – were (dance) cafés and wine bars. These were required to close at one o'clock in the morning, though they enjoyed exceptions for New Year's Eve, the last three days of the Lenten carnival and Kermesse. They too could apply for an extension of opening hours, which was often granted since their evening programmes typically featured dancing to

10 Hlášení Prvního.

11 Bořivoj Zeman, Bořivoj Zeman and Ján Kadár, *Nevíte o bytě?* (Československá filmová společnost, 14 November 1947).

12 Miroslav Cikán, Miroslav Cikán – Josef Trojan, and Jaroslav Mottl, *Lavina* (Nationalfilm/Státní výroba celovečerních filmů, 5 July 1946); Václav Krška, Václav Krška and Václav Řezáč, *Až se vrátíš* (Československá filmová společnost, 23 January 1948); František Čáp, František Čáp and Jan Drda, *Znamení kotvy* (Československá filmová společnost, 31 October 1947).

live music.¹³ It was precisely in these establishments that jazz, Dixieland and swing quickly returned to the repertoire of night life, often performed by pre-war bands.¹⁴ In addition, because these venues were concentrated mainly in the centres of larger or wealthier cities, their clientele tended to come from the middle and upper classes – those who could afford to stay out late, pay for more expensive refreshments and take taxis home. These nightspots also frequently appeared as backdrops in film narratives, such as *No Surgery Hours Today*.¹⁵ The filmmakers often incorporated scenes of live swing and jazz performances, as in *A Dead Man Among the Living and Three Pals*.¹⁶

When the cafés and pubs had closed and the theatre and cinema programmes had ended, there was still the option of visiting a variety show, cabaret or dance venue. These establishments typically opened around eight in the evening and closed at three in the morning.¹⁷ Audiences were treated to various performances by acrobats, dancers, magicians or short theatre sketches and performances by chansonniers. Dancing to the sounds of jazz, swing or Dixieland groups and orchestras was again an integral part of the experience. Many of these venues also offered paid female companionship and sexual services. After brothels were banned in 1922 by the so-called Abolition Act, prostitution had moved into these venues. Some of them were directly connected to hotels renting rooms by the hour. In such places, the “high world” of the upper classes mixed together with the demimonde – from occasional or professional prostitutes and their pimps to racketeers, thieves

13 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, “Opatření za účelem potírání alkoholismu v rámci úpravy policejní hodiny uzavírací v živnostech hostinských a úpravy pořádání tanečních zábav”.

14 For further details see Tomáš Mozr, *Fenomén instituce baru jako součást životního stylu za “První republiky”* (Bc. Diss, Charles University, 2012), 20–47 and 61–63, <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/40324>; Josef Kroutvor, *Pražská nároží 1890–1940* (Uměleckoprůmyslové muzeum Praha, 1988); Josef Vomáčka, “Kavárenský fenomén Václavského náměstí”, *Za starou Prahu. Věstník Klubu Za starou Prahu* 44, no. 1 (2014): 14–16; Vratislav Preclík, “Emil Ludvík, leader jazzové hudby, hudební aranžér a skladatel, předseda a zakladatel MDH”, *ČAS. Časopis Masarykova demokratického hnutí*, 17, no. 86 (2009): 4–7.

15 Vladimír Slavínský, Jan Gerstel, *Dnes neordinuji* (Československá filmová společnost, 5 March 1948).

16 Bořivoj Zeman, Bořivoj Zeman and Elmar Klos, *Mrtvý mezi živými* (Československá filmová společnost, 14 February 1947), 00:48:40–00:54:50 a 01:12:18–01:15:00; Václav Wasserman, František Sádek – Vladimír Tůma, and Jan Gerstel, *Tři kamarádi* (Československá filmová společnost, 25 December 1947).

17 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, “Opatření za účelem potírání alkoholismu v rámci úpravy policejní hodiny uzavírací v živnostech hostinských a úpravy pořádání tanečních zábav”.

and petty traffickers. These establishments provided a vivid backdrop for numerous film narratives, often used to evoke an atmosphere of big-city nightlife and to draw audiences into its simultaneous glamour and squalor. A significant proportion of the post-war comedy *Three Pals*, a story about the economic hardships of men returning from the war, which premiered in December 1947, was set in a cabaret precisely to highlight the milieu of the upper classes that the protagonists aspired to join. One of the principal roles was played by the chansonnier Manon Chafour (1914–1970), a major star in her day.¹⁸

Cabarets, dance shows and variety performances were the last entertainment venues to remain open at night. However, even after they closed at three in the morning, further amusement could theoretically be sought in station restaurants or in the bars and restaurants of certain hotels, which were open all night. In principle, entry was permitted only with a valid travel ticket or proof of accommodation at the hotel, though it is an open question how strictly such rules were enforced – especially if a discreet tip was offered. In some cases, people reportedly purchased train tickets simply to gain access to the station restaurant. The entertainment available there, however, was limited to drinking and the company of men and women drawn largely from the criminal underworld and urban underclass, referred to in public discourse as “riff-raff”.¹⁹

In the summer, the first tap rooms, pubs and cafés opened again at five in the morning, and in the winter at six, thus beginning a new cycle in the daily rhythm of the hospitality trade. Some cinemas even operated around the clock.

Traditionally, the richest and most varied nightlife was concentrated in the capital's nocturnal centre: the lower part of Wenceslas Square and the adjoining streets from Na Příkopě, via Můstek to the National Theatre on the River Vltava. This area was home to numerous cinemas and theatres, as well as dance halls, late night establishments and taprooms tucked into the side streets. For those with the means and the inclination, it was quite possible to spend entire nights wandering around this area. The diversity of venues also encouraged the mingling of social classes, giving Prague's nightlife its distinctive vibrancy and variety.

18 Wasserman, *Tři kamarádi*; Čáp, *Znamení kotvy* and Krška, *Až se vrátíš*.

19 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, “Opatření za účelem potírání alkoholismu v rámci úpravy policejní hodiny uzavírací v živnostech hostinských a úpravy pořádání tanečních zábav”.

In the Name of Temperance, Work and State

However, in the eyes of many public officials after the war, regardless of their political persuasion, the rapid resumption of nightlife represented an obstacle to the post-war regeneration of the country and the building of a better society. The preference of the younger generation for cinemas and dancing over theatres, lectures or classical music concerts – despite their vigorous promotion – was a particular source of concern for state institutions. Issues of cinema attendance, film distribution and the film content therefore became subjects of constant debate, as did the fact that people preferred to spend their evenings at dance parties. This gave rise to a dilemma: how to attract audiences to the cinema without abandoning the ambition to influence viewers through film, and how to encourage a more “cultivated” taste in dance and music. These were objectives that could not be easily achieved.²⁰ Critics of nightlife and popular entertainment often reduced them to mere symptoms of alcoholism, which they then colourfully depicted as an immense threat that could lead to a new “Darkness”, another “Thousand-Year Slumber” or even the return of the “dark forces of reaction” (see chapters 1 and 3). They argued with an appeal to patriotism or from a medical point of view, but also in an endeavour to differentiate Czechoslovakia from the “degenerate” and now alien West.²¹ The campaign against nightlife – and more precisely against alcohol consumption – gradually evolved in public discourse into a kind of revolutionary instrument for social transformation, a means of opening the nation to new ideas and orders. Sobriety came to be portrayed as an existential issue for the survival of the post-war state itself. It appeared that much of society agreed on the urgency of the cause: in 1947, a survey from the Institute for Public Opinion Research found that 76.2 per cent of respondents supported the establishment of a systematic campaign against alcoholism (5.9 per cent

20 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, Dohled na veřejnou mravnost a ochranu mládeže; NA, f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 89, a. j./bod 107/30, “Zpráva o zajištění dalšího rozvoje čs. Kinematografie”. See also Pavel Skopal, *Filmová kultura severního trojúhelníku: Filmy, kina a diváci Československa, NDR a Polska, 1945–1968 – srovnávací perspektiva* (Host, 2014), 141–195.

21 See NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, various press extracts. See also “Dopis panu poslanci Ú.N.S. V. Noskovi, ministru vnitra Čs.R. at.d., Praha VII., Belcrediho tř. 69”; “Projev Dr. Ladislava Jurkoviče, předsedy Slovenského abstinetního svazu na poradě sociálně-zdravotnických činitelů a ústředních úřadů konané na Povereníctvu zdravotníctva v Bratislavě dne 22. května 1947.”

were opposed, and 17.4 per cent were undecided).²² However, when asked one year earlier whether the price of spirits should be increased, 49 per cent of respondents were against, 40 per cent in favour and the rest undecided.²³ The impression was that the public supported strict measures – provided they applied to others.

Critics of the thriving nightlife unanimously demanded radical institutional action. Some accused the police of passivity or even cowardice. Proposals circulated suggesting that unemployed drunkards should be sent directly to forced labour or interned in labour camps. Others called for raising the legal drinking age from 18 to 20, or for imposing a total ban on card games and gambling. Another frequent suggestion was to publicly shame those who disturbed the peace at night – by posting their names on notice boards in town squares, on street corners or in the daily press. Some local National Committees responded by immediately moving the closing time of all establishments to 11 p.m. before every working day, and completely banning taprooms serving spirits. There were also proposals for a review and reduction of pub licences, closing “problematic” venues, limiting dance parties or reinforcing supervision over their programmes, performers and audiences. Others advocated stricter enforcement of the prohibition on the consumption of spirits at dance event.²⁴

Although the press and certain reports from the National Committees depicted post-war nightlife in Czechoslovakia as excessively lively, uncontrolled and at the very least inappropriate, the available data suggests that the situation was far less dramatic. According to statistics from the Ministry of the Interior, post-war alcohol consumption per capita was in fact lower than after the First World War, despite the flourishing black market in alcohol.²⁵ Moreover, the consumption of spirits at dance events was often artificially inflated by the poor quality of the beer produced after the war, which drove people to seek out alternatives.²⁶ Based on their calculations, most of National Committees concluded that, with only a few exceptions,

22 “Opinion on the movement against alcoholism”, accessed 16 October 2024, <http://nesstar.soc.cas.cz/webview/>.

23 “Do you agree or disagree with the increase in liquor prices?”, accessed 16 October 2024, <http://nesstar.soc.cas.cz/webview/>.

24 “Zákon ze dne 17. února 1922, kterým se omezuje podávání alkoholních nápojů č. 86/1922 Sb.”, paragraph 1–4.

25 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, “Odpověď vlády na interpelaci posl. Zeminové ve věci boje proti alkoholismu”, 5; “Z referátu v. o. r. Dr. Doubka.”

26 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, “Zpráva kriminální ústředny ministerstva vnitra ze 7. října 1946”.

there was no significant excess in the number of establishments licensed to sell alcohol.²⁷

Nevertheless, the police received numerous reports complaining about overly “vivacious” dance parties with liquors, as well as frequent violations of closing hours.²⁸ When Public Security (VB) officers were called, they typically carried out routine inspections without finding any serious disturbances.²⁹ Field investigations, in which both the police and the National Committees took part, confirmed that the number of dance events was not substantially higher than before the war and that, in the great majority of cases, no disorder occurred. In industrial regions, VB officers were reluctant to intervene at all because, as they themselves admitted, they did not want to cause resentment among workers and thereby further undermine their authority – already weakened by the collaboration of state security forces with the Nazi administration between 1939 and 1945.³⁰ Nonetheless, the police, at least in part, succeeded in silencing press criticism, and, in October 1946, the Prague VB organised a high-profile raid on several nighttime entertainment venues in the Old Town of Prague and invited representatives of the press.³¹

Archival sources also reveal that hostility towards nightlife had a pronounced generational dimension. Critics were generally middle aged or older, and their disapproval was directed primarily at young people. Yet from the younger generation’s perspective, the situation appeared entirely different. What their elders condemned as delinquency was, for many young people, simply the release of pent-up energy and stress accumulated during the war years. The writer Josef Škvorecký (1924–2012) – one of the most prominent representatives of that generation – captured this atmosphere in his novels and short stories, which can also be read as a form of generational testimony.³² Škvorecký spoke for those born in the 1920s and early 1930s.

27 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, “Sdělení ministerstva vnitřního obchodu dle směrnic vydaných ministerstvem vnitřního obchodu dne 5. ledna 1945 čís. 120.099/1945-1/4 o udělování hostinských a výčepnických koncesí”; “Z referátu v.o.r. Dr. Doubka”.

28 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, various press extracts, reports and proposals deposited in the box.

29 See, for example NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra II – Noskův archiv, Praha, cart. 35, Zpráva o bezpečnostních poměrech a stavu bezpečnostní služby v hlavním městě v Praze v lednu 1948.

30 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, “Zaveďte pořádek v ulicích”.

31 Jiří Tunkl, “S brigádou SNB noční Prahou”, *Partyzán. Týdeník Sdružení českých partyzánů*, 11 October 1946, 8.

32 See Josef Škvorecký, *Zbabělci* (Československý spisovatel, 1958); Josef Škvorecký, *Konec nylonového věku* (Československý spisovatel, 1967); Josef Škvorecký, *Franz Kafka, jazz a jiné marginálie* (Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1988); Josef Škvorecký, *Mezi dvěma světy a jiné eseje* (Ivo

When the war ended, they were around 20 or younger, having spent their formative years during the Great Depression and the Second World War. After graduating from high school in 1943, Škvorecký was sent to forced labour in an aircraft engine factory – an experience he later evoked in his 1948 novel *The Cowards*. This generation loved jazz. Their musical models were the inter-war big bands, and Škvorecký himself played in a Dixieland group. But during the war, they could play and socialise only in secret daytime rehearsals and local clubs. Meanwhile, they could only dream about performing a concert, because jazz and swing concerts were prohibited, many establishments were closed and curfews and blackouts strictly enforced. Dance events that did take place were tightly controlled according to the principles of National Socialist aesthetics and featured mostly waltzes.³³ Alcohol, which might have promised at least some relief from the monotony of wartime life, was difficult to procure.

It was therefore natural that, after the war, members of this generation wished to enjoy themselves and compensate for the years they had felt had been stolen from them. Furthermore, what temperance campaigners denounced as “alcoholism” was often the consequence of post-war economic realities: many industrial firms short on cash, paid their workers – especially those employed in manual and overtime work – with vouchers for alcohol and tobacco. Alcohol was also one of the few consumer goods on which wages could actually be spent, and shop window were attractively decorated with various types of liquor and spirits. As a group of Social Democratic and Socialist Members of the National Assembly emphasised in their interpellation, much of what some critics denounced as a lack of patriotism or insufficient commitment to post-war reconstruction was, in fact, a projection of their own guilty conscience for passivity and conformity during the war – displaced onto the behaviour of the young.³⁴

Železný, 2004); Lubomír Dorůžka, *Tvář jazzu. Paměti, dokumenty, vzpomínky* (SHV, 1964) and many others.

33 Škvorecký, *Franz Kafka*, 93–115; Josef Škvorecký, Boris Mědílek, Miloslav Zachoval, *Swing na malém městě. Vzpomínky na orchestr Miloslava Zachovala, významný amatérský swingband protektorátní éry* (Ivo Železný, 2002), 22–109; Josef Škvorecký, *Prima sezóna* (Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1975), 114–153. See also Petr Koura, *Swingři a potápky v protektorátní noci: Česká swingová mládež a její hořkej svět* (Academia, 2016), 639–740.

34 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, “Z referátu v. o. r. Dr. Doubka”; “Interpelace skupiny poslanců za Českou stranu národně sociální, poslankyně Zeminové, Žáčkové-Batkové, Šmejcové, Uhlířové, dr. Horákové, Kleinerové, dr. Kácla a Lesáka vládě republiky Československé v záležitosti nutného soustavného potírání alkoholismu v celém státě a další”.

New Laws and Regulations

After the war, it was the middle and older generations who held the upper hand in the public arena and in decision-making positions. Their outlook was soon reflected in the drafting of new laws and regulations. Legislators often took the inter-war regulations as a model, tightening them where possible. The establishment of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) monopoly of power in February 1948 had no immediate effect on them. As early as the autumn of 1946, the National Assembly began to prepare a new act to combat alcoholism, which was eventually passed in April 1948. It was based on the inter-war law restricting the serving of alcoholic beverages but increased certain penalties and introduced criminal liability for drunkenness and intentional inebriation. In addition, the act granted new powers to the National Committees, which could, for specific days or occasions and until further notice, decree that “with regard to alcoholic beverages, only beer or wine may be served in public houses, cafés or taprooms in publicly accessible locations.” (Such restrictions had already been assertively implemented in the Slovak town of Snina in August 1947). On the other hand, the law slightly raised the limit for what was defined as an alcoholic beverage – from 0.5 per cent to 0.75 per cent alcohol.³⁵ Some provisions of this act were later incorporated into the Criminal Code of 1950. Around the turn of 1947, the National Assembly also started drafting legislation on the Musical and Artistic Centre (HAÚ), which entered into force in the Czech lands in March 1948 and in Slovakia in April 1949.³⁶ This act was intended to define the organisational principles governing entertainment programmes and artistic performances in the future. A further measure followed in February 1948 when the Ministry of the Interior issued a regulation expanding the list of administrative misdemeanours to include “disturbance of the peace at night in publicly accessible locations, or other behaviour in these locations that offends good morals and decency, or which causes public offence, especially by persons under the influence of alcohol.” Such offences were punishable

35 “Zákon ze dne 15. dubna 1948 o potírání alkoholismu č. 87/1948 Sb.”, paragraph 5–6, paragraph 9–15; “Trestní zákon ze dne 12. července 1950 č. 86/1950 Sb.”, paragraph 186 and 187. See also Pavel Trousil, *Alkoholismus v Československu. Ke společenskému myšlení o alkoholismu* (Bc. diss., Charles University, 2009), <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/18756>.

36 NA, f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 125, a. j./bod 160, “Návrh zásad k provedení osnovy zákonného opatření o koncertní a jiné hudební činnosti, o činnosti estrádní, artistické a o provozování zábavních technických zařízení v oblasti hudebníků z povolání”; “Vládne nariadenie zo dňa 27. apríla 1949, ktorým sa určuje začiatok účinnosti zákona o hudobnej a artistickej ústredni na Slovensku č. 113/1949 Sb.”

by fines of 50–200 Kčs.³⁷ This regulation elaborated upon and partially replaced the earlier decree on disturbing public order and committing public offence, which had been in force since 1927.³⁸ These provisions too were eventually incorporated into the Criminal Code of 1950.

Together, these new laws established the framework for the regulation and supervision of entertainment activities. The first institutional step was the creation of the HAÚ, which introduced the principle of a central register of performers and entertainment programmes. In principle, this was a complex yet partly well-intentioned plan designed to provide professional musicians, actors and other artists with greater stability. By registering, they could acquire the status of employees or professional artists, granting them job security, regular earnings, health and social insurance, paid holidays and access to unemployment benefits.³⁹ On the other hand, this register was to enable central decision-making in the assignment of performers to entertainment venues to exercise control over them.⁴⁰ The establishment of the HAÚ was followed at the beginning of 1949 by the creation of the People's Entertainment Centre, which had a clearly coercive function aimed at forcing all independent small-scale market and variety show operators, circuses and folk entertainment attractions to cease their trades and join the state sector. Its task was to register and issue licences for fairs and markets. From that point on, market traders and artists wishing to take part in fairs or local festivities also had to apply for permission from the relevant National Committee, and they were not allowed to travel to villages on church holidays if a state-organised event was taking place there, despite the fact that such occasions had traditionally formed one of the main sources of their income.⁴¹ Musicians were to be subjected to control through the abolition of the profession of bandleader. Until then, such individuals had typically acted as both leaders and managers of musical bands.⁴² From now on, musical

37 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, “Oběžník ministerstva vnitra ze dne 25. února 1948 č. 3504/4–20/2 1948”, 7.

38 “Zákon ze dne 14. července 1927 o organisaci politické správy 125/1927 Sb.”, article 3.

39 “Zákon ze dne 25. března 1948 o hudební a artistické ústředně č. 69/1948 Sb.”, paragraph 2. An illustration of the problem that the HAÚ was supposed to solve can be found in the film by Vladimír Vlček and Ivan Olbracht, *Komedianti* (Studio uměleckého filmu, 16 April 1954).

40 “Zákon ze dne 25. března 1948 o hudební a artistické ústředně č. 69/1948 Sb.”, paragraph 15 and paragraph 16.

41 Jiří Knapík and Martin Franc, eds., *Průvodce kulturním děním a životním stylem v českých zemích 1948–1967* (Academia, 2011), 687–688.

42 See “Výnos ministerstva průmyslu č. j. 186. 311/1949 – V – V – 2 ze dne 27. prosince 1949”; Svatopluk Vrbka, “Mikulovští hudebníci – Alois Gruber”, *RegioM. Sborník Regionálního muzea v Mikulově*, January 2015, 85.

groups had to be incorporated under the management of various public institutions – most often the factory clubs of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement (ROH) or the clubs of the Unified Agricultural Cooperatives (JZD), or directly under the National Committees or one of the nationalised enterprises.⁴³ The organisation of the dance evenings was also about to change. In 1951, a new act ordering the review and their re-registration of associations led to the demise of most of them.⁴⁴ As these had usually been the main organisers of fairs, dances and folk entertainments, this activity now came under the jurisdiction of educational associations, National Committees, nationwide organisations and operators of establishments.⁴⁵ As part of the HAÚ, the Entertainment and Concert Agency was established to assist in the organisation events. This completed the basic structure of the model for the new system of socialist entertainment.

Another important change following the establishment of the KSČ's monopoly on power came with the transformation of the structure and operation of hospitality and nighttime venues. The National Committees began to pay greater attention to complaints regarding disturbances of the peace at night. As early as March 1948, they issued an instruction to compile an inventory of establishments "of ill repute", based on the initiative of citizens and local residents. The owners of these businesses were subsequently ordered to rectify the situation. If they failed to do so, the venue was closed, and the owner's catering licence revoked – unless the business was deemed useful despite the complaints. If the pub was under national administration, the national administrator was typically replaced. Whereas, in the immediate post-war period, institutions often responded to citizens' calls for closure of an establishment by stating that there were no legal grounds for doing so, a new act passed in July 1948 provided such grounds.⁴⁶ Another measure that transformed the operation and structure of entertainment venues came with the next phase of nationalisation in the spring and summer 1948, which nationalised businesses with 50 or more employees – even when this meant several businesses operating in one building under different owners. These were typically dance cafés, wine bars, as well as variety shows and cabarets, since they traditionally employed their own musicians and artists and often

43 "Návrh zásad".

44 See "Spolkový zákon ze dne 12. července 1951 č. 68/1951 Sb."; Knapík and Franc, *Průvodce*, 509–510, 855.

45 "Návrh zásad".

46 "Zákon o úpravě některých poměrů na ochranu veřejných zájmů č. 213/1948 Sb.", paragraph 1.

shared premises.⁴⁷ This led to a situation in which smaller entrepreneurs were systematically disadvantaged. From the autumn of 1948, for example, they were excluded from the rationing system, meaning that they had to procure raw materials for their operations at much higher prices on the open or black market, and they also faced higher taxes. The intention was to pressure them into giving up their trade or joining the state sector. The nationalised venues were subsequently incorporated into the networks of newly established nationwide and municipal hospitality chains such as Czechoslovak Hotels (established in May 1948), Hotels and Restaurants (renamed Restaurants and Canteens (RaJ) after 1953) or placed under the administration of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement (ROH), government ministries, the Czechoslovak Youth Union (ČSM), the National Committees or the Central National Insurance Company. Variety shows and cabarets were mostly incorporated into the newly established state enterprise Czechoslovak Circuses and Variety Shows. Station restaurants were collectivised.⁴⁸

In terms of their function, hospitality venues were now meant to serve as facilities for the cultivation of society. This idea dated back to 1945, when education councils were set up under National Committees and the first institutional foundations were laid for the construction of cultural facilities in villages, towns and cities, whose purpose was to ensure that entertainment had an educational function. The Communists continued this policy.⁴⁹ In line with it, in 1950, they launched an extensive programme for building houses and clubs for education, which were often established on the premises of pubs, sports halls or larger shops.⁵⁰ Ideally, the venue had a large room with a stage. In district and regional towns, new Houses of Education were also built, with the cinema serving as the centre of activity. As part of this process, even the waiting rooms of some train stations were transformed into so-called Education Rooms.⁵¹

47 "Zákon o znárodnění některých hostinských a výčepnických podniků a ubytovacích zařízení č. 124/1948 Sb.", paragraph 1.

48 For further details see Jan Čermin, *Socializace pohostinských živností v Brně: Sonda do dějin komunálního podniku Pohostinské podniky města Brna* (Bc. diss, Masaryk University, 2013), <https://theses.cz/id/t9s107/?lang=cs>; Pavel Marek, *České živnostnictvo 1945–1960. Likvidace živnostníků, řemeslníků a obchodníků v českých zemích* (Doplňek, 2006), 136–180; Knapík and Franc, *Průvodce*, 1015.

49 "Dekret prezidenta republiky ze dne 26. října 1945 o státní péči osvětové 130/1945 Sb.", paragraph 2.

50 "Vládní nařízení z 5. července 1950 o zrušení soustavy osvětových rad a přenesení jejich působnosti na národní výbory č. 101/1950 Sb". See also Knapík and Franc, *Průvodce*, 455–456, 466–469, 473, 640–641.

51 F. Urban, "Dohoda o využití kulturně-osvětových zařízení na železnici", *Reklama*, 1 August 1959, 190.

Images of Model Communist Entertainment

In parallel with the creation of the new structures, the public arena became filled with images of model entertainment. Especially during the first Five-Year Plan, the entertainment industry ultimately perfected the interlinking of work and leisure. A series of songs sung or played on the radio or at dances featured lyrics urging people to work hard, while cinemas showed films about work in the army, agriculture and industry. Poems, works of fiction, dance parties and art exhibitions were likewise often centred around the theme of work. Labour agitprops even presented work itself as a form of entertainment. In these stories, factories and workshops were depicted as places where there was never any shortage of jokes, interesting stories and friendly chatter, where workers sang and sometimes even danced together. The image of work as entertainment was also presented in allegorical films such as both cinema hits of 1952, *The Proud Princess* and *The Emperor and the Golem*. At other times, films portrayed entertainment as a reward for meeting Five-Year Plan targets in industry – for example, accelerating the production of diesel engines for trains (*Karhan's Team*), completing a section of railway (*The Great Opportunity*), fulfilling a plan at the lathe (*Mr Novák*) or achieving coal mining quotas (*Young Hearts*). Similar images also appeared in collectivisation narratives, where a frequent motif was the ploughing up of the boundaries between fields – a symbolical act representing the collectivisation of land (for example, *Way Leading to Happiness* or *The Hen and the Sexton*). In *Goat's Milk*, a village party celebrates the completion of public lighting works.

The films of the first Five-Year Plan also document the Communists' efforts to transform the calendar of festivities. The traditional timing and programme of popular celebrations were usually determined by the agricultural or church calendar, or by locally significant events and anniversaries.⁵² After seizing power, the Communists began grafting new motifs onto these occasions, transforming them into celebrations of labour connected with the building of socialism (see chapter 7). This is best illustrated in the depictions of dance and entertainment evenings. For example, what is presented at the end of the film *Mr Novák* as a celebration of the fulfilment of the economic plan is, in fact, an image of a traditional St. Joseph's festival, which usually takes place in March. However, in the film it has become a celebration of the achievement of the first quarter's targets within the framework of the

52 On the functioning of attractions of folk entertainment and folk technical entertainment, see Knapík and Franc, *Průvodce*, 504–505, 509.

economic Five-Year Plan. Moreover, audiences hear the “Song of Labour”. To ensure that nobody is left in doubt about the meaning of the entertainment, the entire programme takes place in a factory canteen.⁵³ In the collectivisation films, the harvest festival is transformed in a similar manner. Whereas previously the celebrations marked the end of the harvest and the preparation of the fields for winter, in the collectivisation films – illustrated, for example, by *Way Leading to Happiness* – they were turned into celebrations of the ploughing up of the field boundaries and thus the reintegrating of the land, or of meeting the targets of the Five-Year Plan. Dancing typically took place to folk or socialism-building songs, such as the “Tractor Song”.⁵⁴

Films also vividly presented the model entertainment programmes, particularly in those set in rural regions of Czechoslovakia. Images of the new format of dance events often appeared as displays of folk heritage in an updated environment. Practically all film scenes of village festivities featured performances by professional troupes of folk dancers dressed in traditional costumes. Everything was thoroughly professional and accomplished. Audiences could admire perfectly danced polkas, and sometimes waltzes or foxtrots, traditional circular dances and various other folk choreographies. Jazz, swing, Dixieland and any form of musical experimentation disappeared completely, as they were now considered “products of Western decadence”.⁵⁵ Some films even resembled folk collages without any real narrative (*Tomorrow, People Will Be Dancing Everywhere, Homeland*).⁵⁶ These films promoted the newly established folklore festivals and schools, and uniformly celebrated folklore as a fundamental trait of national heritage and the sole authentic form of dance and general entertainment.

Another crucial element in the images of model entertainment was abstinence regarding alcohol, reflecting the immediate post-war demands. Hard liquor is entirely absent from most of the films, while in rural regions of Moravia and Slovakia only slivovice occasionally appears. Even beer and wine are consumed only sparingly. Local pubs and social venues were

53 Bořivoj Zeman, Bořivoj Zeman and František A. Dvořák, *Pan Novák* (Československý státní film, 10 June 1949), 01:17:55–01:18:10.

54 Jiří Sequens, Jiří Sequens and Roman Hlaváč, *Cesta ke štěstí* (Československý státní film, 19 October 1951), 00:23:32–00:25:32.

55 Škvorecký, *Mezi dvěma světy*, 54–60.

56 Vladimír Vlček, Vladimír Vlček – Božena Šochová, and Pavel Kohout, *Zítřka se bude tančit všude* (Československý státní film/ Studio uměleckého filmu, 24 October 1952); Josef Mach, Josef Mach and Ivan Bukovčan, *Rodná zem* (Československý státní film Bratislava, 24 February 1954); Jaroslav Mach, Jaroslav Mach and Jiří Karásek, *Ještě svatba nebyla* (Československý státní film, 27 August 1954).

transformed into spaces for discussions about work, where successes were celebrated without alcohol.⁵⁷ In sharp contrast, unsavoury characters in these stories are often shown drinking – mostly cognac – which gradually became a symbol of decadence, sabotage and collaboration with enemy (*Border Village, Mr Habětín is Leaving, The Great Opportunity, In the Penalty Area*).⁵⁸ Images of different types of businesses followed the same symbolic pattern as the depiction of alcohol consumption. While farmers and workers typically made merry in pubs or in the open air, mostly in rural settings, their adversaries were usually portrayed in cafés and wine bars in the city. These establishments represented sites of hostile conspiracy, frequented by those clinging to the old order. They were inhabited by members of the former upper classes, plotting a return to capitalism, whereas pubs belonged to “honest ordinary people” who discussed and planned the shape of the new order.

Another important attribute of the new model entertainment was the active participation of the public in shaping it. For example, in *The Great Opportunity*, it is the shock brigade workers themselves who perform the traditional dances (although these scenes were, in reality, performed by professionals). In *Holiday with an Angel*, a popular 1952 comedy about a collective holiday, all the participants must contribute to the evening's entertainment programme.⁵⁹ Roles were thus transformed: audience members became performers and vice versa. For instance, in the closing dance party in *Way Leading to Happiness*, a choir from the local tractor station and a musical group based around the National Committee alternate in the roles of audience and performers, singing and playing for one another as people dance. In the military spy-saboteur drama *Everything Ends Tonight* (1954), during a dance event organised for soldiers by the local National Committee in a village pub, the soldiers themselves join in and perform several choral songs. Once again, the harvest is presented as a festive occasion, but, in this case, it is a celebration of the local farming cooperative – “the first in the county to harvest the hay”.⁶⁰

57 Jiří Krejčík, Vladimír Tůma and František Dvořák, *Ves v pohraničí* (Československá filmová společnost, 20 February 1948); K. M. Walló and Martin Gazda, *Veliká příležitost* (Československý státní film, 14 April 1950); Ondrej Jariabek, Ondrej Jariabek – Bořivoj Zeman, and František Žáček, *Kozie mlieko* (Československý státní film, 5 January 1951; Vlček, *Zítřka se bude tančit všude*.
58 Miroslav Hubáček, Jiří Beneš and Miloslav Koenigsmark, *V trestném území* (Československý státní film, 12 January 1951).

59 Bořivoj Zeman, Bořivoj Zeman, *Dovolená s Andělem* (Studio uměleckého filmu, 3 April 1953).

60 Vojtěch Jasný and Karel Kachyňa, Lubomír Možný, *Dnes večer všechno skončí* (Československý armádní film, 18 February 1955), 00:06:38–00:07:49.

Between Continuity and Adaptation

How were the above regulations and promoted forms of entertainment reflected in the practical operation of nightlife in the 1950s? Although providing a comprehensive answer to this question lies beyond the scope of this chapter, the available sources at least allow us to outline general trends and the range of responses by those involved. We can observe a variety of ways in which people coped with the new rules – sometimes by interpreting and bending them in peculiar ways, at other times by evading, ignoring or deliberately misunderstanding them. In this respect, the practices of nightlife provide a wealth of examples of what Alf Lüdtke referred to as *Eigen-sinn*, or what Michel de Certeau described as tactics. Moreover, during the course of the 1950s, entertainment activities underwent dynamic development. The following pages will therefore be limited to outlining a few illustrative examples that may serve as probes into possible trends.

According to the records of the VB station books, the number of people detained for disturbing the peace under the influence of alcohol appears to have increased at the beginning of the 1950s. For example, within the territory of the District Department of the VB in Prague 1, an average of two to three and sometimes as many as six people were detained per night – compared with approximately six cases per night across the entire city of Prague before February 1948.⁶¹ The police dealt with the largest number of cases between midnight and five in the morning, when people were returning home after the closing time of various establishments. However, cases of drunkenness causing offence during daylight hours were not unusual. The increase in detentions may have been due to greater activity on the part of the Communist police or more vigilant reporting by passersby. Yet it is also possible that more people genuinely roamed the streets at night, perhaps as a way of coping with political changes. In addition, it is highly probable that only a portion of such cases were ever recorded, while countless others were unreported. At the beginning of the 1950s, the VB did not conduct regular street patrols and usually discovered incidents of drunkenness only through reports or by chance. Nevertheless, the service reports suggest that the police were neither surprised nor alarmed by the increasing number of arrests for drunkenness.⁶² Disturbances of the peace during nighttime hours took various forms. Some drunks behaved aggressively towards passersby and were undeterred even by police uniform; others “merely”

61 Security Forces Archive (hereafter ABS), f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Protokoly událostí I–1.

62 Protokoly událostí, I–1, I–1/1, I–2, I–2/1, I–6, I–7, I–10/1.

sang obscene songs or shouted abuse at random targets, including government ministers. At times, people returning from nighttime entertainment “started urinating in full view of passersby”, or for instance, fell asleep on the pavement in mid-January.⁶³ VB Officers usually let those detainees sleep off their intoxication in a cell and released them the following morning. However, in cases of repeated misconduct or more serious offences – such as verbal abuse of state officials, physical assaults on VB officers or other legal transgressions – cases were referred for investigation as misdemeanours or criminal offences, punishable by imprisonment of three months to three years, or even up to five years.⁶⁴

Motivations for disturbing the nighttime peace and engaging in physical altercations may have varied, though in most cases the behaviour likely stemmed from a need to vent frustration after work. The individuals involved were generally from lower social strata and manual professions – often railway workers – and the majority were men.⁶⁵ They were people with physically demanding jobs and low wages, for whom the new regime had promised improvements that failed to materialise. However, their aggression may also have had other causes entirely. In terms of age, they represented all generations, from twenty-year-olds to those over fifty. Thus, press assertions that only young people disturbed the peace at night were demonstrably false.

A more concrete image of such scenes of nocturnal drunkenness can be gleaned from a case that occurred on 2 January 1950. Around 9 p.m., one Bohuslav Prokš was returning home from an unnamed public house in Prague's Lesser Town, “bawling obscene songs [and] causing public offence to the citizens within the vicinity.” A patrol was called, which detained Prokš and took him to the local VB station, where he was placed in a separate cell to sleep off his drunkenness. However, there Prokš began to “shout abuse at the police officers and struggle to such an extent that the man had to be shackled by his hands and feet.” The description of subsequent events is missing, but the record from the following morning states that when the cleaner entered his cell, she found “the broken door from the closet placed under the bunk bed.” It is unclear what happened during the night, and there is no record of his punishment. However, the same man reappears in the station's records only five days later: on the night of 7 January 1950, he

63 Protokoly událostí, I–1, I–1/1, I–2, I–2/1, I–6, I–7, I–10/1.

64 As a rule, people were charged with “sedition against the Republic” under the Act of 6 October 1948, No. 231/1948 Coll., for the Protection of the People's Democratic Republic, paragraph 3; or under the paragraph 186, paragraph 187 of the Criminal Code from 1950.

65 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Protokoly událostí, I–1.

was again arrested for drunkenness and “indecent conduct”.⁶⁶ After that, he disappears from the records – most likely detained elsewhere and later sentenced to imprisonment and convict labour.

Somewhat more detailed information survives about another case that occurred on the night of 15 April 1951. That evening, after finishing work at a branch of the Meopta enterprise, foreman Karel Šalom visited the cabaret U Fleků. According to his testimony, he consumed approximately eleven half-litres of twelve-degree beer and four measures of cognac, staying until 3 a.m., when the establishment closed. He then boarded a tram home but was so inebriated that he missed his stop. The fatal incident followed: a visibly drunk Šalom directed obscene remarks towards the (female) conductor, who “gave him two slaps” and called a sergeant, who happened to be in the second carriage, returning from a dance party. Šalom then started shouting foul abuse at the sergeant, declaring that he had “slapped the German cops, and now I’ll slap you too.” When taken off the tram, he resisted, waving his arms and shouting obscenities, and continued to behave in a similar manner at the local VB station. A doctor later measured 2.387 milligrams of alcohol in his blood. Following an investigation, in November 1951, Šalom was charged with the offence of drunk and disorderly conduct (under Section 187 of the Penal Code), as well as with abuse of a public official (Section 180) and assault on a public official (Section 177), and was sentenced to one month’s imprisonment without probation. After an appeal and another six months of proceedings, the court increased his sentence to three months, which he served from November 1952 to February 1953.⁶⁷ Incidentally, the severe punishment of similar minor offences – often mere manifestations of foolishness or vulgarity – would become a serious problem for Communist rule in later years (see chapter 9). The case of Karel Šalom also illustrates that, in stark contrast with the depictions of nightlife and alcohol consumption in contemporary films, manual workers evidently had no aversion to expensive beverages and hard liquor, or to visiting more luxurious venues and indulging in entertainment on the margins of respectability.

According to these and other similar cases recorded in the Prague VB service books and protocols, nightlife continued to flow at its own pace. Even during the time of the most intensive efforts to transform the nightlife, a number of establishments described as “places of ill repute” continued to operate. Many did not observe the mandatory closing times, let alone officially request extensions. For example, in the early 1950s, live entertainment at the brewery

66 Protokoly událostí, I–1.

67 Prague City Archives (hereafter AHMP), f. Okresní soud trestní 1949–1960, cart. 18.

pub U Šenfloků on Wenceslas Square repeatedly continued until at least 3 a.m., despite the requirement to close at midnight.⁶⁸ The same applied to many other cafés, wine bars and pubs – often renowned since the inter-war period. According to VB records, U Vedralů and U Vocílků were frequently rowdy, with gambling and frequent fights. As in the inter-war years, prostitutes loitered around the restaurant U Šmelhausů.⁶⁹ Several of these establishments caused disturbances for years, despite repeated police raids.⁷⁰ Pubs, cafés and wine bars also served as hubs for black-market trading, the buying and selling of stolen goods and thefts of all kinds. Different social groups mingled in these places.

It appears that public institutions were either powerless to deal with them or allowed them to continue, for pragmatic reasons – perhaps considering them the lesser evil. Although the operators of these pubs and wine bars were no longer their owners, they generally continued as caretakers or administrators under the supervision of public institutions. They were difficult to replace and maintained extensive informal networks that included waiters who also served as bouncers, guards, thieves and traffickers; waitresses who doubled as escorts and sex workers; and musicians who performed without any official notification. Former pub or wine bar managers and their acquaintances often formed the clientele. Together, they constituted a kind of informal social stratum operating on the periphery of the official economy and the black market, with fluid boundaries between the marginal and criminal classes. A common practice was for the manager to close officially at the designated time, but then hold a “lock-in” for regulars, friends and acquaintances. Thus began an evening’s entertainment provided by unofficially employed staff. A detailed glimpse of such an evening is offered by the example of the Zrinský wine bar. After closing time, the wine bar transformed into an improvised nightclub and brothel. While selected guests enjoyed music and dancing, the manager and waiting staff identified a wealthy patron. They first plied him with alcohol, after which a waitress performed sexual services in one of the side booths; the staff then “settled his accounts” and ultimately robbed him of more.⁷¹ Notably, this

68 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Protokoly událostí, I–1.

69 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra II – Noskův archiv, Praha, cart. 58, “Návrh na operační plán pro zabránění hodinových hotelů”.

70 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Protokoly událostí I–1 and f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Spisy I–11, cart. 33.

71 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Spisy F/I–2, cart. 4; Spisy I–11, cart. 33. See also Egon Bondy, *Prvních deset let* (Maťa, 2003); Boudník, *Z korespondence I*, 8–77 and *Z literární pozůstalosti* (Pražská imaginace, 1993), 7–9; Bohumil Hrabal, *Něžný barbar* (Odeon, 1990); Josef Hiršal, *Let let* (Torst, 2007), etc.

entire episode came to light only because a nocturnal wanderer, seeking a place to sleep, later gave testimony.

Station restaurants also continued to serve as the last refuges of the nocturnal city. In Prague, the most notorious were those at the Main Station and Prague Central. Despite various measures, they continued throughout the 1950s, to attract “representatives of the ‘riff-raff’ after the night bars had closed.” These establishments were typically still bustling at four in the morning, with “dozens of people” present.⁷² At night, railway stations also often provided shelter for those without documents or a space to stay (see chapter 9).⁷³

Other Unexpected Consequences

According to the historian Jiří Knapík, at least until 1952, small market traders and folk-entertainment operators managed to avoid registration and obtain licenses for their activities from the National Committees without much difficulty.⁷⁴ The drive for centralisation and a new systematisation of the entertainment programmes led to the decline in their activities and, more generally, in entertainment offerings. For example, in the city of Brno, by 1952 these changes resulted in a 54.3 per cent drop in the number of hospitality venues compared with 1948.⁷⁵ Dance parties, fairs and other folk entertainments were affected by the abolition of the profession of bandleader and the dissolution of associations.

A Peculiar Organisation

The sharp decline in programmes started to cause concern at the Ministry of Information. As a result, in March 1952, it issued a decree increasing the autonomy of operational hospitality venues and allowing them to organise entertainment on their own initiative. This was intended to enable a more “flexible procuring of musical ensembles with reference to their operational requirements.”⁷⁶ In practice, the rule gave many operators a tool to take

72 D. Čulík, “Skrývají se pod pláštěm tmy. Noční záťah proti příslušníkům pražské ‘galerky’”, *Lidová demokracie*, 3 March 1956, 3.

73 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Spisy I–11, I–11, cart. 2.

74 Knapík and Franc, *Průvodce*, 687–688.

75 Čermin, *Socializace pohostinských*, 21–26 and 32.

76 Viz NA, f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 125, a. j./bod 160, “Návrh zásad k provedení osnovy zákonného opatření o koncertní a jiné hudební činnosti, o činnosti estrádní, artistické a o provozování zábavních technických zařízení v oblasti hudebníků

entertainment into their own hands – often with consequences quite opposite to those intended by public institutions. To a degree, acknowledging “operational requirements” reintroduced a commercial principle into the organisation of entertainment. As a rule, the needs of these venues continued to be governed by their earnings, now referred to as the “revenue plan”. It was therefore in the interest of operators to provide sufficiently attractive programmes in order to draw the largest possible audiences and thus meet and exceed the “attendance plan”. Although programme concepts had to be approved by an educational commission at the relevant National Committee – since part of the income from admission fees flowed into the local coffers in the form of an entertainment contribution and other levies – commission members logically had an interest in permitting as much as possible. They also shared a common interest with promoters, who automatically received 8 per cent of the fees from each performance. Within the central decision-making system, admission fees provided venues with a rare opportunity to earn independent income for operations and equipment. Consequently, in 1956, for example, 80 per cent of entertainment programmes were organised by hospitality facilities for commercial purposes, while the remaining 20 per cent by the nationwide Communist organisations such as the ROH, Unified Agricultural Cooperatives or Union of Youth, which had originally been intended to take the main initiative. Moreover, fragmented administration among different public institutions and their sub-departments made effective control virtually impossible. The number and variety of programmes therefore grew. Organisers also preferred to adapt to audiences rather than actively attempt to shape public taste. Profit as the primary motivation and accommodation to popular taste were two unintended consequences identified by the Ministry of Information when evaluating the role of musical ensembles.⁷⁷

Another consequence of what the KSČ regarded as counterproductive tendencies was the trend towards reducing the size of musical ensembles “in order to gain greater revenues”. Fewer musicians in the band meant higher earnings per head. This reportedly went hand in hand with declining quality: musicians played simple melodies suitable for dancing rather than more complex music or listening. In addition, musicians themselves showed little willingness to change their repertoires; they “[had] adopted from previous times an inveterate willingness to play anything for anyone, as long

z povolání”; “Vyhlaška ze dne 3. března 1952 o zřizování a vedení hudebních souborů č. 54/1952 Ú.l.”.

77 “Návrh zásad”.

as they are paid for it.”⁷⁸ According to Peter Heumos, after the profession of bandleader was abolished in 1949, “local professional musical, theatre, singing and dancing ensembles, as well as other clubs and associations [...] were transferred by their management, mostly without political ‘vetting’, to factory clubs. They then exerted a fundamental influence over the future development of these clubs.”⁷⁹ In short, they did not change their focus, repertoire or cultural orientation, while systematic control was impossible due to the fragmentation of the system among multiple state administrative organisations – as members of the Central Committee of the KSČ themselves admitted.⁸⁰

The outcome, as the members of the District National Committee of Prague 1 stated in June 1958, was that within Prague 1 alone, “approximately 25 restaurants and canteens organise musical and cabaret programmes of frequently dubious quality [from the perspective of model entertainment]”.⁸¹ It thus appears that after an initial decline, a revival took place, and although these now functioned within different structures, performers gradually found ways to adapt to these structures and at the same time exploit them to their maximum advantage.

Jazz and Swing as the Mainstream

A second effect of attempts to revive organisational activity was the transformation of the jazz and swing scene. This was influenced by the relaxation that followed the end of Stalinism, when public institutions decided to accept jazz and swing as music which, despite its Western origins, belonged to the poorer sections of society.⁸² A degree of public rehabilitation came in May 1955 with the film *Music from Mars*.⁸³ In the story, the chairman of the works council of the Mars furniture-making cooperative prides himself on his ROH factory club, which hosts a broad range of entertainment and cultural events. Before a delegation from the Deputy Minister, he foolishly – and indeed untruthfully – declares that the dance-orchestra players are amateurs from the firm. Furthermore, in a rash moment, he enrolls the orchestra in a nationwide competition of amateur factory ensembles. But the problem

78 “Návrh zásad”.

79 Peter Heumos, “*Vyhrňme si rukávy, než se kola zastaví!*”: *Dělníci a státní socialismus v Československu 1945–1968* (Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky, 2006), 33.

80 “Návrh zásad”.

81 AHMP, f. Komunistická strana Československa – obvodní výbor Praha 1, fascikl 180, “Schůze 11. června 1958”.

82 Škvorecký, *Mezi dvěma*, 57.

83 Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos, *Hudba z Marsu* (Studio uměleckého filmu, 27 May 1955).

here is that he has in fact hired professionals, while the factory workers cannot play. To save face, he decides to assemble an orchestra at any cost, hiring a volatile former music teacher. After a series of comic reversals, the orchestra wins the competition thanks to the accomplished performance of a swing number. The comedy plot, upbeat rhythms and popular actors made the film a huge hit with audiences, attracting approximately 3.7 million viewers. Thanks to the film, jazz and swing began to return to mainstream entertainment.⁸⁴

By the mid-1950s, jazz jam sessions and Dixieland concerts were being held fairly regularly under the given conditions. They usually featured musicians employed in theatres or large orchestras who had gained renown in the inter-war or immediate post-war period. These evenings occupied something of a grey zone: not entirely illegal, but not promoted either. Jiří Suchý (born 1931), one of the most distinctive figures of the young post-war swing scene, recalled: “It was actually quite evident that the times were hostile to jazz, and these evenings had the flavour of a kind of secret ceremony or peculiar sect. They weren’t even intended for the public and had no promotion – everything was spread only by word of mouth.”⁸⁵ Suchý and the young scene around him played an important role in the return of jazz and swing to the musical mainstream and in developing Prague nightlife. An illustrative and probably best-known example is the Reduta club, whose beginnings date to early 1957. It arose because its founders both adapted to institutional frameworks and exploited them to their advantage. Their first “trick” was that Suchý and his friends had civilian professions (as graphic artists) and did not earn their living from music. As amateurs they were not required to register with the HAÚ and were thus not fully under state control. Secondly, they used the KSČ’s exhortations that people contribute to educational activities. At the beginning of 1957, they hired a cellar space vacated by a cabaret closed as a venue of ill repute, to hold occasional events previously staged in studios and in private apartments that had become too small. They first hosted a party for a few friends and acquaintances, playing cover versions with lyrics written by Jiří Suchý. Encouraged to repeat the performance, they drew growing audiences, at first gradually and then sharply. In autumn 1957, the creative team was joined by Ivan Vyskočil (1929–2023), a psychology student and teacher at young offenders’ institutes, who brought elements of absurd theatre and improvisation – then a contemporary phenomenon.⁸⁶

84 Jiří Havelka, *Československé filmové hospodářství 1956–1960* (Český filmový ústav, 1970), 206.

85 Jiří Suchý, *Vzpomínání: od Reduty k Semaforu* (Melantrich, 1991), 50.

86 Škvorecký, *Mezi dvěma*, 68–72.

The individual musical sequences were interwoven with brief sketches, and the evenings often ended in jam sessions lasting into the small hours, featuring jazz, swing and increasingly also rock 'n' roll.⁸⁷

By the end of 1957, Reduta had become a successful enterprise. "The Reduta used to be really full, even too full – like in a nightclub. Relatively well-paid people came there from the Jáchymov [uranium] mines, officers who came home on a Saturday to let their hair down – and the [amateur band] Akord-klub played them hits known from Radio Luxembourg 'for dancing and listening'."⁸⁸ Sometimes, the songs were left with their original English lyrics; at other times, Suchý composed his own lyrics.⁸⁹

The educational commission of the National Committee that managed the space and officially permitted events there either did not know or chose to tolerate them.⁹⁰ Several factors combined to make the venture a success. First was the administrator of the space, "the enterprising Mr Kotula", who made everything happen. He offered musicians weekly performance slots, wanted more theatre, secured promotion and promised performers 150 Kčs per head. He had a "lubricated – not bribed! – inspector for culture. Lubrication consists in alcohol consumed directly inside the venue. The inspector was a good man who liked to present himself to Mr Kotula and us as the only one who stood in the way of the comrades immediately strangling our enterprise [...] and with his tacit consent Mr Kotula had invitations printed and distributed." The second factor in the success of the Reduta was the enthusiasm of the young people involved, who furnished the venue themselves, finding old chairs and building a stage from some old wooden boards. They bought props and instruments with their own money. They were not at all demanding and were happy just to have somewhere to play in their free time. Only around the end of 1957 did they sit the HAÚ examinations required for registration and gaining a professional status. They failed at first: "And so we continued to work on improving ourselves. After a while we had the feeling that we were better, so we went to the HAÚ again. And they gave us a certificate of permission, even if it's true that we were classified in the worst category. But we didn't care."⁹¹ In 1960,

87 Suchý, *Vzpomínání*, 47. See also Lubomír Dorůžka and Zbyněk Mácha, *Od folklóru k Semaforu* (SHV, 1964), 101–107; Přemysl Rut and Ivan Vyskočil, *Vždyť přece létat je o hubu* (Portál, 2001), 31–46.

88 Rut and Vyskočil, *Vždyť přece*, 32.

89 Suchý, *Vzpomínání*, 47.

90 VP, "Reduta, Dixieland a jak to skončilo", *Večerní Praha*, 13 September 1960, 3; VP, "Začíná nová kapitola Reduty", *Večerní Praha*, 28 September 1960, 3.

91 Suchý, *Vzpomínání*, 52–53.

Reduta's core staff formed the Semafor theatre, which became one of the most popular theatres in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and an important cultural-social platform.

Thanks to the collaboration between young filmmakers and young musicians – who themselves performed in a series of films – jazz and swing also progressively permeated into films and thereby also reached the wider public. Beset by conflicts with filmmakers and poor cinema attendance, the KSČ leadership eased pressure on the film industry, liberalised its approach to previously censured genres and opened up more space for youth culture. While the first film (*An Easy Life*, October 1957, set among university students) was still affected by censorship, with the hit “Moving in Together” cut, later films allowed audiences to see and hear, for example, the Dixieland hit “Girl from the Moon” (*The First Prize*), the Louis Armstrong-style trumpet solo in “Luck Will Come on Sunday” from the eponymous film and rock ‘n’ roll rhythms (*Awakening*).⁹² Even the Spartakiada film *Waltz for a Million* was set entirely to jazz and swing rhythms. By contrast, stylised folklore images disappeared from films during this period.

Rediscovered Venues

Film clips increasingly transported audiences to nighttime entertainment venues and parties. Essentially, every film made in the second half of the 1950s that drew on contemporary life contained at least one scene showing a lively social occasion and brought viewers into a hospitality venue – a taproom, pub, dance café or wine bar. The range of entertainment venues ultimately did not differ a great deal from the immediate post-war period, even if there were fewer of them and they often operated under new names and owners.

Films no longer set these establishments in stark opposition. Pubs in the films of the second half of the 1950s are natural places for socialising after work. Over a beer one learns local news, debates, plays cards and discusses neighbourly disputes; naturally, dance events are also held here (*Close to the Sky*, *Football Fans Offside*, *Great Solitude*).⁹³ Some of the narratives still

92 Miloš Makovec, Helena Tobolová and Jiří Brdečka, *Snadný život* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 18 October 1957), 00:32:04–00:34:48; Ivo Novák, Ivo Novák and Otto Zelenka, *Hlavní výhra*, Filmové studio Barrandov, 15 May 1959, 01:04:46–01:06:50; Ján Lacko and Ivan Bukovčan, *Šťastie príde v nedeľu* (Studio hraných filmov Bratislava, 27 February 1959), 00:06:26–00:08:50; Jiří Krejčík, Otakar Kirchner, *Probuzení* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 12 February 1960).

93 For example, see *Mezi nebem a zemí* (1958), *Skalní v Ofsajde* (1961), *Rychlík; do Ostravy* (1960), *Škola otců* (1957), *Velká samota* (1960).

portrayed pubs as spaces for people on the margins (*Today for the Last Time, A 105% Alibi*; see chapter 9).⁹⁴ However, most commonly represented were dance cafés, wine bars and garden restaurants where swing was played for revellers (*A Local Romance, Golden Spider, House at the Terminus*). These establishments were frequented by protagonists who were now respectable members of the higher social strata – engineers, officials, doctors and scientists – replacing the miners, machine operators, Czechoslovak Youth Union members and security officers of earlier years. In the spy film *Skid*, audiences were taken to the bar of the luxury Yalta Hotel (built in 1957). In crime films, 24-hour canteens played an important role as places where various social groups mixed and as favoured haunts of those on the margins, since they were open long into the night (*A 105% Alibi, The Case is Not Yet Closed*).

The streets at night also became an important element in representations of entertainment. Film screens often depicted them as brightly lit and bustling, reflecting the variety of opportunities for enjoyment in the socialist city after dark. Neon signs featuring the lights of bars and night venues were presented here as something everyone should experience at least once. Vibrant nightlife appeared as something ordinary, regular and, above all, a stable element of everyday life (*The First Prize, The Young Lady from the Riverside*). Space was also given to establishments of dubious repute on the sparsely lit periphery, their presence signalled by a flickering neon sign – or none at all (*Safebreakers, Cubs*).⁹⁵

Counterproductive Estrada

A fourth unintended consequence of the KSČ's attempt to boost entertainment programmes manifested in the genre of the so-called Estrada shows. Established in the early 1950s, they were intended as model socialist entertainment: brief presentations and sketches, songs, acrobatics and fashion shows, often interspersed with dance sequences – all directing audiences towards socialist values, politics and economics.⁹⁶ Generously supported by official circles, variety shows became highly lucrative for organisers and performers alike. Thanks to their often amusing programmes, they gained popularity and, over time, Estrada shows attracted far larger

94 For example, see *Dnes naposled* (1958); *A 105% Alibi* (1959); *Kasaři* (1958); *Křižovatky* (1959).

95 Ivo Novák, Ivo Novák and Miloš Forman, *Štěňata* (filmové studio Barrandov, 21 March 1958); Blumenfeld, *Kasaři*.

96 Norbert Pitthard, ed., *Mládežnická estrada* (Osvěta, 1951); Jorge Amado, ed., *Mírová estrada* (Osvěta, 1951); Unsigned, *Budovatelská estrada* (Osvěta, 1951); Miloslav Bureš, *Estráda nového života* (Osvěta, 1952), etc.

audiences than theatres. In addition, they started to feature a range of successful actors, comedians, acrobats, magicians and other professionals. Many of these performers even prioritised Estrada appearances over permanent engagements. It was more profitable for them to travel from place to place with the Estrada show than they could tailor to their own requirements.⁹⁷ The genre progressively shed its political mission and became pure distraction.

A telling case is that of the singing and dance star Rudolf Cortés. In a 1958 report, a KSČ leader stated that Cortés “has his group with whom he travels by car around the Czechoslovak Republic, and according to his declaration to workers at the television, where he refuses to perform for 400 Kčs, his variety show activity brings him earnings of 20,000 Kčs per month”⁹⁸ – approximately eight times the average monthly wage in heavy industry. The musicians around Cortés played mainly Dixieland, Charleston and rock ‘n’ roll, with rigorously apolitical lyrics or playful wordplay. Cortés also starred in the swing musical *A Star Travels South* (from which the introductory verses of this chapter are taken), a Czechoslovak-Yugoslav coproduction that was controversial given Yugoslavia’s non-alignment. The film was not released in cinemas until the further liberalisation of Czechoslovak cultural policy in 1964.

Other reports observed a general trend: informal groups of actors formed in theatres and “create their own variety show programmes, which they then sell outside of their place of work. In several theatres there is an [informal] organiser (agent) who arranges the entire event.” Thanks to their constant movement and dealing directly with hospitality venues – keen because high public interest guaranteed strong takings – variety shows offered performers far greater freedom. As a consequence, the genre drew in musicians, artists and actors who had found no engagements in more established, formal programmes. In January 1959, the KSČ leaders noted: “Whereas in the pre-Munich [inter-war] republic we had 40 private theatre companies, today we have a number of groups practising their trade clandestinely or under the patronage of a House of Education.” The musicians, actors, performers and others “associate in groups and travel with an unchecked programme, mainly around smaller towns and villages. [...] For example, Raoul Schráníl, who has been sentenced for activities against the state, performs with

97 NA, f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 201, a. j./bod 275, “Zpráva o situaci v Pražské estrádě”.

98 “Zpráva o situaci v Pražské estrádě”.

his group in spa towns under the patronage of the Ministry of Health.”⁹⁹ Nonetheless, essentially, these artists were merely exploiting the space that the official structures provided, much as in the Reduta case. It resulted from a combination of the enterprise and initiative of the performers and the operating venues, their manoeuvring within the regulations, their popularity with the public and an accommodating approach on the part of the representatives of the state institutions.

By contrast, established variety artists often flopped. For example, at the beginning of 1959, the regular Sunday youth variety show at Prague’s Lucerna reportedly had a dismal reputation and was “something to be avoided [from the KSČ’s point of view] by quality variety show performers.” Although promoted, such events were shunned by leading artists since audience incidents were not uncommon: “Přemysl Kočí sang a cheerful song, during which a youth threw a lit cigar at his head.” Another problem arose when “boys threw ink cartridges during an appearance by Josef Bek.”¹⁰⁰ Variety shows thus became counterproductive for the KSČ – effectively a generously subsidised platform for programmes the KSČ did not want.

Because of loopholes in the regulations, the unfeasibility of absolute supervision and the tactics of individual actors, it became clear that entertainment could not be steered in a single direction. From 1954 at the latest, despite its own promotion, according to the KSČ leaders, the HAÚ was “condemned to the mere issuing of contracts and collection of fees.”¹⁰¹ Registration activity became its sole source of income – insufficient even to cover the costs of the operation of the bureaucratic apparatus in which the centre had been cultivated. Despite reorganisations aimed at strengthening its influence and control, the situation remained unchanged. At the end of 1957, the HAÚ was abolished entirely and replaced with specialised institutions. But these did not significantly alter the situation. The principle remained: regulations could be circumvented by self-organising a performance or by contacting organisers directly.¹⁰²

99 “Zpráva o situaci v Pražské estrádě”.

100 “Zpráva o situaci v Pražské estrádě”.

101 “Návrh zásad”.

102 See “Zákon o koncertní a jiné hudební činnosti ze dne 19. prosince 1957 81/1957 Sb”, paragraph 6, section 2, paragraph 11; “Zákon o estrádách, artistických produkcích a lidové zábavě z 19. prosince 1957 82/1957 Sb.”, paragraph 7, ods. 2, paragraph 10. See also “Vyhláška ministerstva školství a kultury ze dne 13. června 1958, kterou se stanoví povinné zprostředkování pro některé obory umělecké činnosti č. 89/1958 Sb.”, paragraph 2; “Vyhláška ministerstva školství a kultury ze dne 8. července 1960 o zřizování a činnosti souborů lidových hudebníků z povolání a souborů

As a consequence, alternative scenes gradually emerged – operating within existing official structures and sometimes as informal associations.¹⁰³ Meeting with enthusiastic audience responses, over time, these small groups became a genuine phenomenon of the 1960s. Their repertoires were mostly apolitical and often based on wordplay. But within the context of the KSC's attempts to mould society politically, this had a paradoxically considerably subversive effect. In the second half of the 1960s, they became a potent platform for quite direct criticism of contemporary politics.

lidových hudebníků č. 112/1960 Sb.” On the history of the HAÚ see also Petra Wiedermann, *Hudební a artistická ústředna*, accessed 17 October 2024, <https://www.ceskyhudebnislovník.cz/slovník/index.php> and Knapík and Franc, *Průvodce*, 367–369 and 711.

¹⁰³ On the paradoxes that arose in this way, see also Gleb Tsipursky, *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, and State-Sponsored Popular Culture in the Cold War Soviet Union, 1945–1970* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016); Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 189–278; Alexander Vari, “Nocturnal Entertainments, Five-Star Hotels and Youth Counterculture: Reinventing Budapest’s Nightlife under Socialism”, in *Socialist Escapes: Breaking Away from Ideology and Everyday Routine in Eastern Europe 1945–1989*, eds. Alexander Vari, Cathleen Giustino, and Catherine J. Plum, (Berghahn Books, 2013), 197–200.

9. Wandering through the Night, Transgressing Rules

Abstract: This chapter focuses on the activities of people associated with the night: various criminal figures and characters (prostitutes, thieves, vagrants). It shows that while most people associate the night broadly with crime, this perception depends more on the type of crime. The chapter outlines various forms of behaviour that violated the laws of the time and offers examples of destinies of people who engaged in such activities. It also points out some paradoxes – whether it was the relative freedom of movement afforded by the darkness of night, the repression of those who did not fit into the “new” society through rather unoriginal legal tools, or the striking poverty of many who inhabited the night.

Keywords: crime, nightlife venues, welfare, theft

As dusk descends and night begins, all those spiders' webs and entanglements come to life with a feral, ominous stirring, as if toads and scorpions were starting to crawl out of their holes, and a brood of night owls, moths and bats were flying through the air! This vermin, the “scum of Prague”, sprawls out every night in abundance even in the elegant inner town of Great Prague, when the lights of the window displays, theatres and cinemas go out, and darkness spreads through the streets! [...] But this is nought in comparison with the “Black India” on the outskirts, beginning with the Jewish furnaces over Žižkov hill and Invalidovna to Libeň, and round and round through Nový svět, Košíře, Radlice, Bráník, Podol to Pankrác, Chuchle and Bohdalec ... with their unknown and impenetrable depths, holes and hideouts!
(Karel Ladislav Kukla, *Prague Scum*, 1927)¹

¹ Karel Ladislav Kukla, *Pražské bahno 1. díl pražská prostituce* (Levné knihy, 2001, reprint of the 1927 edition), 218.

The notion that the night is conducive to crime – perpetrated by all kinds of shadowy figures from the underbelly of society – has been a constant in the popular imagination. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the burgeoning genre of crime and detective stories helped cement this idea as a self-evident truth. Rapid industrialisation in Europe swelled the ranks of the urban proletariat, inspiring both fear and fascination among the middle and upper classes. Crime stories – first in the form of novels and reportage, and later in films – offered readers and viewers an imagined glimpse into this world. In addition, they supplied a secularised explanation for material and moral poverty, while reassuring the bourgeoisie of its own moral superiority. Yet as the historian Dominique Kalifa noted, these stories often embellished and stylised the realities on which they drew. They represented the underclass as a homogenous social entity, despite the diverse and complex fortunes of its members. As Kalifa writes, to a considerable extent, this milieu was a construct of the imagination of the police, experts, journalists and novelists, who in their stories and records sought answers to questions about the origins of human evil.²

The Post-War Underworld: The Imagination

In inter-war Czechoslovakia, crime stories were immensely popular. In the form of court reports, various pieces of reportages and short novels, they were a regular feature of almost every newspaper. After the Second World War, however, they began to disappear, as the genre came to be regarded as sensationalist – appealing to base human instincts – and as an unwanted source of inspiration. When reports on the underworld did appear in the press, they were now written with the intention of provoking moral panic among readers and calling for the eradication of such people. Accordingly, a reporter accompanying the Prague police on a raid of nighttime venues in 1946 described how the “dark and narrow streets of old Prague and its nocturnal establishments are a second home for individuals who shun the light of day.” This environment, he wrote, had an irresistible lure for ordinary citizens, who could not resist the temptation to experience “something of the romance of the Prague underworld in the pubs and bars of this district.” Despite its obligatory moralising tone, the reporter’s description betrays a mixture of fascination and romantic idealisation mingled with apprehension. The article concluded with a suitably admonishing statement and

2 Dominique Kalifa, *Les bas-fonds: Histoire d’un imaginaire* (Seuil, 2013), 25–142.

an eloquent metaphor: "Outside, dawn is breaking. We've accomplished a decent amount of good work tonight. But we must still battle unrelentingly for a new, better world."³

In general, the post-war press adopted a suspicious stance towards people living on the margins of society and took on the role of popularising coercive measures. Particular attention was focused on prostitutes. They represented an eye-catching topic across the political spectrum, serving as convenient symbols through which to illustrate the supposed moral degeneracy of the post-war era. The authors of such articles accused prostitutes of indolence and refusing to join in the post-war regeneration of the republic. They vilified them for undermining public morality, describing them as women who had chosen their profession simply because they did not wish to do "real work". One such article published in August 1947 offered a crude calculation: each prostitute, it claimed, had ten clients per night at the price of 200 crowns per client and therefore earned 2,000 crowns per day – two and a half times the average monthly wage of an industrial worker in 1948.⁴ The author even invited readers to calculate how much such a prostitute could earn in a week or a month, while emphasising that these women did not pay taxes on their income.⁵ In his view, prostitution was therefore a lucrative and effortless activity that provided nothing but benefits – and was, moreover, tax-free. No mention was made of the fact that this profession was rarely a matter of free choice, that the turnover rate was wildly unrealistic or that prostitutes could not pay taxes on their earnings because the law offered no means for them to do so. Nor was it acknowledged that prostitution could hardly exist without demand.⁶ Reporters did not hesitate to depict the situation in apocalyptic terms, as if post-war Czechoslovakia had become a paradise for prostitution. Newspapers competed to produce ever more sensational calculations and lurid images of the scourge that prostitution allegedly represented. The author of another article published in April 1947 reported that Prague now had one working prostitute for every 100

3 See Jiří Tunkl, "S brigádou SNB noční Prahou", *Partyzán. Týdeník Sdružení českých partyzánů*, 11 October 1946, 7.

4 *Stručný statistický přehled 1945–1960* (SNPL, 1960), 176.

5 National Archives (hereafter NA), f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, Miroslav Krimpl, "Kdo proti nim zakročí?", *Bratrství* 25, 1947, no. 34, unpaginated.

6 On the issue of not granting the status of a trade to prostitution see Lujó Basserman, *Nejstarší řemeslo. Kulturní dějiny prostituce* (Mladá Fronta, 1993), 268–293; Milena Lenderová, *Chytíla patrola, aneb prostituce za Rakouska i republiky* (Karolinum, 2002), 195–210; Lucie Hrdličková, *Prostituce jako živnost* (MA diss., Palacký University Olomouc, 2016), 67–73; Barbara Havelková, "Blaming All Women: On Regulation of Prostitution in State Socialist Czechoslovakia", *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, no. 165 (2016): 165–191.

inhabitants – approximately 10,000 in total – apparently a tenfold increase since 1919.⁷ However, the author did not cite the source of his information.

Film adopted a far more vivid approach to the subject. One of the first post-war films, the detective thriller *Guard 13*, which premiered in March 1946, introduced audiences to characters from the dregs of society.⁸ Centred on the murder of a former safebreaker by one of his accomplices, the film takes viewers in long passages through the winding streets of the fictional 13th police precinct of Prague at night, where the streetlamps cast more shadow than light – if they worked at all. It leads the audience into the depths of the U Matky Klouzandy brothel, where a motley crew of painters, small-time con artists and dealers in all manner of goods, thieves, murderers and women of ill repute gather in the evenings. The film also depicts their dilapidated dwellings – more like dens hewn into rock – and their squalid interiors. The film belongs to the genre of *film noir*, which was immensely popular in the 1940s and 1950s. It appealed to audiences by striking a sensitive social chord and offering both philosophical reflection and compelling stories. Although its roots lay in Hollywood, Europeans made a significant contribution to the genre's development. German and Austrian filmmakers fleeing Nazism brought elements of expressionism to it, while classic detective fiction and the American "hard-boiled school" – shaped by the experiences of the Great Depression – added further layers. The genre also emerged from a broader need to reflect the anxieties provoked by the Second World War. *Film noir* narratives conveyed a deep distrust of official institutions, often portraying an intertwining of the police world with the criminal underworld, and highlighting the relativity of moral norms. They typically unfolded in a bleak atmosphere, heavy with tension, where murders were an everyday occurrence and protagonists treated them as such. The plots usually ended tragically, as if fate offered no escape. The settings were equally grim – usually a big city prone to cold and damp weather, emphasising a sense of disorientation and abandonment. The locations of crucial scenes, plot twists, climaxes and denouements were bars, night clubs, gambling dens and occasionally detective's offices. Almost all the stories unfolded at night, as if to suggest that the sun would never rise again. The plots often revolved around some exotic object, occupation or character, whose foreignness symbolised an unfamiliar and threatening world which

7 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, VK, Praha bojuje proti prostituci, *Právo lidu*, 9. 4. 1947, no pagination.

8 Martin Frič, Karel Steklý – J. A. Holman, and Eduard Fiker, *13. Revír* (Nationalfilm/Státní filmová výroba, 8 March 1946).

the old, familiar world is defenceless.⁹ Containing all these ingredients, *Guard 13* enjoyed enormous success with the Czechoslovak public. It was seen by over 3 million viewers, making it one of the ten most popular films of the immediate post-war years.¹⁰

Alongside *Guard 13*, elements of the *film noir* also appeared in other post-war Czechoslovak films with criminal themes. For example, in the 1946 drama *The Avalanche*, the plot revolves around the murder of a famous actress by her husband, a lawyer. Nocturnal scenes filled with reflections on guilt, punishment and conscience recur throughout.¹¹ The film also provides a glimpse into the upper social classes and relativises morality, showing that even a lawyer – someone expected to uphold moral standards – can become a murderer. The mysterious drama *Sign of the Anchor* (1947) transported its audience to rain-soaked nights in the dark, winding alleys of an old Danube port inhabited by prostitutes, sailors, madmen and thieves.¹² The drama *When You Return*, which premiered in January 1948, took viewers on a cinematic journey through the various layers of society – from the upper classes, including the elite that frequented Prague's prestigious nightspots, to the lowest, represented by thieves, prostitutes and soldiers gathering in a pub beside a half-ruined tenement on the city's outskirts.¹³ This film also raised questions about guilt and justice, accusing the upper classes of cynicism and moral indifference, while criticising the legal system's unjust treatment of those on society's margins. These narratives sought to address social issues in a complex manner. They focused on depicting the wretched living conditions of the urban poor rather than on judging them, and focused on their psychology to foster understanding. In doing so, they aimed to bring social issues to the forefront of public consciousness.

9 See, for example *They Drive By Night* (1940), *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Casablanca* (1942), *Gilda* (1946), *The Big Sleep* (1946), *Dark Passage* (1947), *The Third Man* (1949). See more about the *film noir*: James Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (University of California Press, 2008), 18–40; Alexander Ballinger and Danny Graydon, *The Rough Guide to Film Noir* (Rough Guides Limited, 2007), 177–230; Nicholas Christopher, *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City* (Free Press, 1997), 33–66; Mark Bould, *Film Noir: From Berlin to Sin City* (Wallflower Press, 2006), 13–49; Miroslav Petříček, *Filosofie en noir* (Karolinum, 2018).

10 Pavel Skopal, *Filmová kultura severního trojúhelníku: Filmy, kina a diváci Československa, NDR a Polska, 1945–1968 – srovnávací perspektiva* (Host, 2014), 189; Jiří Havelka, *Československé filmové hospodářství 1956–1960* (Český filmový ústav, 1970), 210.

11 Miroslav Cikán, Miroslav Cikán – Josef Trojan, and Jaroslav Mottl, *Lavina* (Nationalfilm/ Státní výroba celovečerních filmů, 5 July 1946).

12 František Čáp, František Čáp and Jan Drda, *Znamení kotvy* (Československá filmová společnost, 31 October 1947).

13 Václav Krška, Václav Krška and Václav Řezáč, *Až se vrátíš* (Československá filmová společnost, 23 January 1948).

Criminals in the Night City

The question of who populated the streets at night and what activities they engaged in is best answered by police records. For example, according to one report from the directorate of the National Security Corps (SNB) for the Central National Committee of the City of Brno from the beginning of 1947, typical nocturnal offenders were found in a milieu composed mainly of “vagabonds, prostitutes and their pimps, notorious alcoholics, suicide cases, prisoners released on bail, convicts and sentenced individuals, persons without means of subsistence and shelter, pregnant women without shelter and without anyone to care for them, persons who avoid work, persons in destitution and poverty through no fault of their own, who have no means of subsistence or funds to travel home, persons discharged from hospitals and mental institutions.”¹⁴ According to police reports, these were often socially deprived individuals, but also sometimes repeat offenders. Police experts attributed their turn to crime to various causes: some had grown up in delinquent families, others had lost their families completely and had no other support network; some had been robbed of their already meagre possessions, others had lost important documents and money; some had nowhere to return after the war, while others had long become accustomed to struggling through life as best they could, taking advantage of gaps in institutional oversight.

The category most frequently mentioned was that of prostitutes. Statistical data for Brno indicated that between May 1945 and August 1946, their numbers had increased by 70 per cent. According to official figures, more than 1000 prostitutes – whether professional or occasional – were active in the city, which at the time had a population of approximately 260,000.¹⁵ Those engaged in prostitution were generally drawn to other industrial and regional centres, towns with military garrisons and, of course, the capital. There was steady demand for their services, combined with the relative anonymity of larger urban environments, as well as a plentiful supply of nocturnal venues and pubs in which to take shelter and wait for clients. It was to such venues that prostitution largely shifted after the abolition of brothels in 1922.¹⁶ Street prostitution was then concentrated mainly around

14 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, “Prováděcí nařízení všem složkám národní bezpečnosti konajícím službu ve Velkém Brně a všem oddělením ředitelství národní bezpečnosti v Brně ze dne 17. ledna 1947”.

15 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, “Oběžník ředitelství národní bezpečnosti v Brně ze dne 22. srpna 1946”.

16 On the consequences of deregulation for prostitution see Basserman, *Nejstarší*, 268–293; Lenderová, *Chytla*, 195–210.

hotels renting rooms by the hour, near railway stations and in underpasses and arcades.

In February 1948, the police carried out a large-scale raid – likely prepared for several months – on Prague's nightspots notorious as centres of prostitution. These were primarily establishments and hotels “with their own bars” and other venues located near hotels renting rooms by the hour. In total, 100 women were arrested. Depending on their age, criminal record and place of origin, some were deported from Prague to their place of permanent residence; minors were handed over to social institutions; and the “incorrigible” were assigned directly to forced labour. A closer look at police records reveals that prostitution was, for many, a long-term occupation. Sex workers were often women with experience from the war years or former concubines of the wartime elite. However, their ranks were also joined by younger women – and occasionally men – seeking quick and reliable (extra) income or some kind of personal advantage.¹⁷ With their pasts and criminal records, they had little chance of finding better employment, even amid the post-war shortage of labour, or they simply failed to adapt. Within this context, one can mention the case of Libuše Soukupová, a former prostitute who was active between 1940 and 1949/1950, and who found more stable employment only after she married.¹⁸

Another large group frequently appearing in police reports consisted of thieves, burglars and safe-breakers. In October 1947, a police report stated that the darkness of night provided favourable conditions for those who “take advantage of the autumn season and in dark, unlit streets and locations to rob both women and men, above all those who are returning home drunk.”¹⁹ In most cases, they stole money, though sometimes also personal belongings or clothing. The police struggled to deal with the situation, since darkness made it difficult to catch the culprits. Victims often failed to recognise – or even see – the perpetrator, and there were rarely witnesses. Police also reported difficulties with thieves operating “mainly in the night, breaking into shops and window displays.”²⁰ Again, the lack of street lighting made it difficult to catch the offenders. Perhaps an even more serious problem was posed by safe-breakers, who mostly worked in groups and were well

17 “Oběžník ředitelství”.

18 Prague City Archives (hereafter AHMP), f. Okresní soud trestní 1949–1960, “Libuše Soukupová”.

19 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra II – Noskův archiv Praha, cart. 29, “Zpráva o bezpečnostních poměrech a o stavu bezpečnostní služby v hlavním městě Praze za říjen 1947”.

20 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra II – Noskův archiv Praha, cart. 35, “Zpráva o bezpečnostních poměrech a stavu bezpečnostní služby v hlavním městě Praze v lednu 1948”.

organised. When caught, they did not hesitate to resort to violence. Not only did they find it easy to escape, but it was usually the case that once one group was apprehended, another quickly appeared elsewhere.²¹ From the fragmentary information in police reports, it appears that the milieu of thieves drew individuals from across the social spectrum. After the war, property crime had become a genuinely lucrative activity. It served both to satisfy the individual's own personal consumption and to generate goods that could easily be sold on the black market. In the context of the post-war shortages, almost anything could be traded – from consumer goods such as meat and flour to textiles, clothing, shoes, watches, cigarettes, various small items for household furnishings or food coupons and even gold coins or jewellery. The police exercised almost no control over these activities, partly because police officers themselves, along with representatives of other local public institutions, were often complicit. As with prostitution, a relatively stable and safe environment for these individuals was provided by various nighttime establishments – wine bars, cafés and pubs – whose staff frequently played an active role in the criminal underworld.²²

In the Name of a Virtuous Society

However, within the context of the post-war aspiration to build a better, or even virtuous society, the continued existence of such marginal groups posed a substantial challenge. Over the years, Czechoslovak institutions alternated between several strategies in pursuit of this goal. The first post-war strategy rested on the general assumption that the cause of (nocturnal) criminality lay in squalid living conditions. This was in line with the contemporary theories of criminal sociology, which drew upon the ideas of Émile Durkheim. According to Durkheim, criminality was above all to be considered a social phenomenon, arising from impoverished living conditions and low levels of education.²³ He argued that crime had social causes rooted in the transition to industrial society and in the refusal, by

21 “Zpráva o bezpečnostních poměrech a stavu bezpečnostní služby v hlavním městě Praze v lednu 1948”.

22 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra II – Noskův archiv Praha, cart. 33 a 35, various reports on the security situation. See also the 1946–1947 survey of the Czechoslovak Institute for Public Opinion Research, the question “In your experience, what is most often sold on the black market?”, accessed 30 October 2024, <http://nesstar.soc.cas.cz/webview/>.

23 Karl Marx, *Ekonomicko-filozofické rukopisy z roku 1844* (Státní nakladatelství politické literatury, 1961), 8–9 and 40.

certain individuals and groups, to accept the division of labour enforced from above. It was also associated with disillusionment and a loss of the security once provided by the earlier social order. According to this theory, some individuals grew up on the margins of society and consequently lived in poverty; in turn, because they were poor, they remained on the margins. Poverty led them into crime, which resulted in punishment, total exclusion from society and deeper poverty.²⁴ The post-war Czechoslovak state aimed to break this vicious cycle and to resolve the problem primarily through social care. Every member of the VB was now expected to adopt a socially engaged attitude towards people on the margins of society and the lower social classes. This meant, above all, referring such individuals to the Department of Protective Social Care, established at police headquarters. Alternatively, patrols could hand the person directly into the care of one of the public welfare institutions operating in Czechoslovakia. Each member of the VB was also expected to know how to advise those in need, to provide legal aid, where necessary, even immediate financial assistance, as well as basic clothing.²⁵ This approach to social care largely followed nineteenth-century social theories that had criticised states and public institutions for failing to provide systemic assistance or a way out of poverty. The same idea underpinned the National Insurance Act then in preparation, which aimed to replace the earlier system of poor relief with an effective safety net preventing individuals from falling into absolute poverty.²⁶

However, concurrently with this approach, Czechoslovak institutions increasingly promoted the conviction that these individuals should also be judged according to their usefulness and contribution to society – specifically to its post-war revolutionary transformation. In the context of the time, this meant above all whether they were engaged in socially recognised employment, since work was considered the key to post-war reconstruction and social transformation, and a central value that must be rigorously upheld. As stated in an internal communication between the municipality and the police in Brno in 1947, “a high rate of criminality could seriously jeopardise our two-year [economic] plan.”²⁷ Consequently, those who did not work and

24 See for example Paul Rock, *Understanding Deviance: A Guide to the Sociology of Crime and Rule-Breaking* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 1–2; Paul Rock, “Sociological Theories of Crime”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, eds. Mike Maguire, Rod Morgan, and Robert Reiner (Oxford University Press, 2002), 52–53 and 65–68.

25 “Prováděcí nařízení”.

26 Jakub Rákosník, “Kontinuita a diskontinuita vývoje sociálního státu v Československu (1918–1956)”, *Soudobé dějiny* 20, no. 1–2 (2013): 15–39.

27 “Prováděcí nařízení”.

were deemed fit for employment were to be handed over directly to the Labour Protection Offices, which would assign them to productive work. In cases of repeated apprehension, individuals were to be punished immediately – either by incarceration for vagrancy or for an offence against the universal obligation to work, carrying a sentence of up to one year in prison and a fine.²⁸ Police were instructed to send “hopelessly incorrigible” individuals who showed an “aversion to work” directly to labour camps, without court proceedings. If the offenders were minors, they were placed in specialised re-education institutions.²⁹ Once again, attention centred on vagabonds, prostitutes and their pimps. Assigning them to productive work, including forced labour, was intended as both a practical solution to a social problem and a means of punishment and correction, while also contributing to post-war reconstruction amid an acute shortage of labour. In contrast, the system of social benefits and the network of social care institutions were to serve as a safety net not only to those officially recognised as unable to work.³⁰ In institutional practice, the prevailing tendency was to assess individuals according to their usefulness for work in combination with a repressive approach. This outlook continued the older belief – familiar since at least the nineteenth century – that the problem of criminality could be resolved through work, an idea embodied by the creation of reform schools and workhouses.

The Parallel World and the Specifics of Night Crime under Communist Rule

In line with this strict approach, the VB decided to carry out raids against prostitutes in early February 1948. They were conducted under the direction of the KSČ members within the police force. All police officers who were not KSČ members were excluded from taking part already in the preparatory phase, as it was reportedly such individuals through whom the police had been “very often compromised by warnings before raids.”³¹ The commanders

28 See “Dekret prezidenta republiky ze dne 1. října 1945 o všeobecné pracovní povinnosti č. 88/1945 Sb.”, paragraph 23.

29 “Prováděcí nařízení”.

30 See for example Katarína Kožáková, “Sociálny štát a sociálna politika v Československu v rokoch 1945–1948”, *Historický časopis* 63 (2015): 81–111; Sandra Hrachová, “Social Security and National Insurance Act in Postwar Czechoslovakia (1945–1948)”, *Prague Economic and Social History Papers* 13 (2011): 30–44.

31 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra II – Noskův archiv, Praha, cart. 58, “Návrh na operační plán pro zabránění hodinových hotelů.”

of the operation even ordered the monitoring of telephone lines throughout the entire evening preceding the raid to detect any potential leaks. The effort to ensure that the measure was rigorously implemented, as well as the decision to entrust the task exclusively Communist officers, foreshadowed that, after the seizure of power in February 1948, Czechoslovak Communists intended to approach the issue of prostitution – and, by extension, crime in general – systematically and without compromises.

The Party's policy was to rest on several pillars. Firstly, the complete socialisation of the economy and the guarantee of the right to work for everyone, enshrined in the Ninth-of-May Constitution (of 1948), were expected to ensure that no one would be left without means of subsistence and thus driven to criminal activity. Secondly, the new criminal law system was to be simplified and thus also reflect a more accommodating approach towards the lower social classes, as envisioned by Karl Marx.³² The Communists also introduced a form of "people's justice". In accordance with this principle, they established the office of people's judge, a position that could be held by anyone elected at a public meeting of a District National Committee. The supposed public authority of such individuals in their local community endowed their votes with the same weight as that of a professional judge.³³ Court proceedings began to take into account the defendant's "class origin" and "relationship towards the people's democratic order [preceding the socialism]".³⁴ Most hearings were to be public, in order to act as a deterrent for others and at the same time to reinforce the social-educational function of the law. In 1950, new penal codes were introduced in Czechoslovakia, intended to be straightforward and to emphasise preventive deterrence. These codes also reflected the broader effort to modernise and unify the legal systems of the Czech and Slovak lands.³⁵ In the final stage of this

32 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifest Komunistické strany*, accessed 24 August 2024, <https://www.marxists.org/cestina/marx-engels/1848/manifest/choi.htm>. On the perception of justice and law among the lower social classes in the Czech lands, see also Lukáš Fasora, "Sociální demokraté a měšťanská justice. K vnímání spravedlivého soudního procesu v dělnickém prostředí", in *Zločin a trest v české kultuře 19. Století*, eds. Peisertová, Petrboš, and Randák, *Zločin a trest v české kultuře 19. století*, 71–82.

33 See Jiří Přibáň, "Na stráž jednoty světa. Marxismus a právní teorie", in *Komunistické právo v Československu: Kapitoly z dějin bezpráví*, eds. Michal Bobek, Pavel Molek, and Vojtěch Šimíček (Mezinárodní politologický ústav, 2009), 47.

34 Security Forces Archive (hereafter ABS), f. Hlavní správa SNB, Spisy F/I–2, F–2/1, I–3/1, I–5/1, I–6, I–6/1, I–11.

35 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura, cart. 5168, "Zpráva ředitelství národní bezpečnosti v Brně z 29. května 1948". For further information on the reforms in Czechoslovak law see Kuklík, *Vývoj československého*, 106–120.

vision, citizens were expected to internalise the prescribed social norms so completely that criminal law itself would become redundant. In line with certain Marxist theoretical sources, the institution of criminal justice was thus envisioned as something that would eventually wither away.³⁶

Thirdly, the representation of (night) crime was transformed to the extent that detective stories and ordinary reports of petty crime disappeared from the public sphere. The prevailing assumption seemed to be that if such phenomena was not discussed, they would cease to exist in reality. Reports of criminal activity now concerned only political crimes, discussed in the context of maintaining vigilance. A thematic current of films about property crime emerged, whose narratives always centred around the upper social classes in connection with market economy and their presumed political motivations. The stories were typically set in the inter-war period or the immediate post-war years and depicted corrupt city councils awarding public contracts to favoured businessmen (*Raptors*), the pursuit of historical treasures by former intellectual elites (*The Three of Clubs*) or the machinations and criminality of private construction magnates and entrepreneurs who did not hesitate to commit murder (*Today at Half Past Ten, In the Penalty Area*).³⁷ Such films, once again served to condemn the pre-socialist order and legitimise the rule of the KSČ and, of course, to provide a direct argument for the necessity of nationalising the environments in which these stories unfolded. In doing so, all the stories made use of traditional cinematic conventions – murky plots, murder and other sinister acts were committed under the cover of night – to enhance the impact of the narrative.

However, the practice and reality of night crime under the KSČ's rule differed markedly from its representations and the Party's expected outcomes. According to police protocols, the night continued to belong to various vagabonds and petty criminals from the lowest strata of society. The following pages, therefore, introduce some of the figures from this underworld, focusing primarily on Prague. Here, the concentration of such individuals was probably the greatest, and their fates most diverse. Their

36 Tommaso Campanella, *Sluneční stát* (Mladá fronta, 1979), 27–42; Thomas More, *Utopie* (Mladá fronta, 1978), s. 27–53. See also Přibáň, “Na stráží”, 41–56.

37 Jiří Weiss, Jiří Weiss and Josef Mach, *Dravci* (Československá filmová společnost, 30 April 1948); Václav Gajer, Vladimír Tůma and František A. Dvořák, *Křížová trojka* (Československý státní film, 21 October 1949); Jiří Slaviček, Jiří Slaviček – Roman Hlaváč – Jiří Sequens, and Lubomír Možný, *Dnes o půl jedenácté* (Československý státní film, 25 November 1949); Miroslav Hubáček, Jiří Beneš and Miloslav Koenigsmark, *V trestném území* (Československý státní film, 12 January 1951); Miroslav Hubáček and Géza Včelička, *Kavárna na hlavní třídě* (Studio uměleckého filmu, 22 January 1954).

lives frequently intersected in the capital, even though they had come from different parts of Czechoslovakia – some seeking a new start, others hoping to lose themselves in the crowd.

Prostitutes

Despite police raids, prostitution remained among the most frequent offences dealt with by the police in the early 1950s. For example, in one of the central precincts of Prague, it was common for officers to detain as many as three women during a single night shift (from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.).³⁸ These arrests usually took place on the street, often in areas around pubs and nightspots. Some venues had a long-standing reputation, such as U Šmelhausů, where a raid had already been conducted in February 1948. Nevertheless, the venue remained a hive of activity even at the beginning of the 1950s. Officers also sometimes found women living from prostitution sleeping on benches in parks or on the streets; in other cases, they were reported by their own clients, usually after having stolen something from them. Since prostitution was not defined as a criminal offence in the penal code, these women were typically prosecuted for theft or disturbing the public order.

The fortunes and profiles of these women were often strikingly similar. According to police records, most were around 35 years old and had experience of prostitution during, and sometimes even before, the war. Most of them had grown up poor and lived in impoverished conditions as young adults and had made a living from unskilled manual labour or as auxiliary workers. Their meagre earnings were often insufficient to support themselves, especially if they had children. Some were escapees from forced labour camps seeking food and accommodation in exchange for sexual services, and occasionally, opportunities for petty theft. Others, who had been married and had children, often turned to prostitution after leaving their husbands in search of financial independence. Many divorced women also engaged in prostitution because their former husbands paid child support either irregularly, inadequately or not at all.³⁹ Their situation was further exacerbated by the broader economic context. In the early 1950s, social welfare expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product was in systematic decline, which had a pronounced impact on these women because it affected funding for childcare. In 1950, the Department of Protective Social Care at the National Security headquarters was abolished and the following year, the Ministry of Social Care was dissolved completely. Symptomatically,

38 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Protokoly událostí I–1, inv. j. 1.

39 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Protokoly, Spisy I–2, cart. 12, 13.

it was replaced by the Ministry of Labour Forces. The social policy of the KSČ had not accounted for the possibility of broken families or excessively low wages.⁴⁰ As a consequence, prostitution appeared to many women as a quick and effective solution to their pressing circumstances. This reveals the extent to which the KSČ leaders were detached from the everyday reality of these women. While the Party considered their existing living conditions as adequate and their choice of profession as a moral failing, these women often found themselves in situations from which there was no escape. Not only were they unable to resolve their financial troubles, but once they had served their sentences, most returned to prostitution because they had little choice. Elsewhere they would have earned far less – and, above all, their criminal record and reputation as prostitutes meant that few employers were willing to hire them. In contrast, the repressive measures had virtually no effect on their clients.⁴¹

The difficult post-war living conditions swelled the ranks of prostitutes with younger women, including those who had grown up after the establishment of the Communist dictatorship. Like their older colleagues, many of them came from troubled family backgrounds and had only rudimentary training as seamstresses, shop assistants or print workers – education they often had failed to complete. They also made a living as auxiliary workers or did not work at all. Prostitution offered them a way to supplement their income: their wages were low, and they were eager to enjoy their youth.⁴²

An illustrative example is that of Anna Černá, born in 1927 into the family of a smallholder in East Bohemia. After her widowed father remarried, he sent her to live with her grandmother due to a strained relationship with her stepmother. Lacking educational qualifications, Anna supported herself through casual labour, temporary jobs, prostitution and petty theft from shops or from the apartments of acquaintances and clients. Her grandmother was unable to control the young girl's temperament, and in 1943 Anna was first arrested for prostitution and petty theft. Her favourite pastime was attending dance parties, which enjoyed a boom after the end of the war. She was later sentenced several more times for theft. After her release, she returned again to prostitution and, together with her lover and pimp of

40 Lenka Kalinová, *Společenské proměny v čase socialistického experimentu. K sociálním dějinám v letech 1945–1969* (Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2007), 148; Jakub Rákosník, *Sovětizace sociálního státu. Lidově demokratický režim a sociální práva občanů v Československu 1945–1960* (Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2010), 335–369.

41 On prostitution under socialism, see also Sándor Horváth, *Stalinism Reloaded: Everyday Life in Stalin-City, Hungary* (Indiana University Press, 2017), 247–257.

42 For some such destinies, see ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Spisy I–11, cart. 33.

similar age, Jan Urban – already known to the courts in Slovakia – she began to commit larger thefts. In January 1954, she was again detained by police in the town of Rakovník, where she was “loitering with intent”. Unfortunately, the police file does not mention her subsequent fate.⁴³ Whatever her final destiny, hers was the story of a girl from a difficult background whose own restlessness compounded her misfortune. With neither education nor qualifications, it was difficult for her to find work, let alone earn an income sufficient to support the lifestyle she desired. She thus paid a heavy price for her family circumstances and her temperament, remaining trapped in the cycle of poverty from which she could not escape.

Court sentences passed on these women often competed in their moralistic rhetoric and harshness, despite the fact that female prostitution had been decriminalised in 1922, the Marxist notion that it was a product of poverty and the KSC’s own post-war declarations about tackling deprivation. A telling example is that of Libuše Soukupová, a former prostitute tried in 1951–1952. Although she had married and started a family, she was charged with impersonating a member of the secret police, and yet the verdict placed her rhetorically within the category of prostitutes. She was said to be one of those women who “out of habit and bad character sometimes illicitly engage in this despicable, insulting degeneracy”. She was found guilty of “perversion” and “subversive activity”, and the judge recommended that such women be “disposed of”.⁴⁴ It was as if everything were her own fault.

Male prostitution, by contrast, was explicitly criminalised, following on the legal tradition from the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ Under the 1950 penal code, “sexual intercourse with a person of the same sex” was punishable by up to one year’s imprisonment, while those offering sexual service for payment faced between six months and three years. Unlike in the case of female prostitution, clients were also punished – more severely, with sentences ranging from one to five years.⁴⁶ According to police reports, the number of homosexual prostitutes was rising around the turn of

43 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Spisy I–11, cart. 1 a 3.

44 AHMP, f. Okresní soud trestní 1949–1960, “Libuše Soukupová”.

45 “Zákon ze dne 27. května 1852, trestní zákon o zločinech, přečinech a přestupcích č. 117/1852 ř. z.”, paragraph 125–130. See also Jan Seidl, “Homosexuálové v Československu v letech 1945–1989”, in *“Nechtění” spoluobčané: Skupiny obyvatel perzekvovaných či marginalizovaných z politických, národnostních, náboženských i jiných důvodů v letech 1945–1989* (TUL – ÚSTR, 2018), 154–164; Franz Schindler, “Život homosexuálních mužů za socialismu”, in *“Miluji tvory svého pohlaví”. Homosexualita v dějinách a společnosti českých zemí*, eds. Franz Schindler, Pavel Himl, and Jan Seidl (Argo, 2013), 271–386.

46 “Trestní zákon ze dne 12. července 1950 č. 86/1950 Sb.”, paragraph 241.

the 1950s. Many were driven by financial hardship. Most were young apprentice workers – perhaps those who had suffered from the shortened schooling and reduced vocational standards caused by regime's drive to expand heavy industry (see chapter 4).⁴⁷ With low education and limited skills came low pay. Unlike their female counterparts, male prostitutes tended to operate in and around Prague's major railway stations. During the day they were often seen at the municipal baths, and they could also be found in the same nightspots as female prostitutes, especially in the city centre.⁴⁸

Brawlers and Adventurers

Another group frequently associated with the night in police records comprised drunks, vagrants, adventurers and brawlers. The characteristics of drunks have already been mentioned above and need not to be elaborated further here. Adventurers and brawlers, by contrast, were mostly very young. In their search for excitement, they roamed the streets at night, sometimes visiting nighttime establishments and at other times attacking and robbing passers-by.⁴⁹ Police records repeatedly describe incidents in which individuals returning home from a nightspot encountered a group of youths, who either attempted to befriend them before robbing them, or mugged them immediately. These groups tended to operate in areas dense with late night venues and close to parks where the offenders could hide. They were rarely caught. When they were, however, their cases often attracted public attention and were widely reported on in the press sometimes even entering popular lore. One such case was that of the so-called Vyšehrad raiders, a group of about a dozen young people between the ages of 17 and 23 who prowled the Vyšehrad park and frequented the nearby pubs. Police reports suggest that similar groups existed in other Prague districts as well – and it is likely that many others escaped official notice altogether. The trial of the Vyšehrad Riders, held between 1953 and 1955, was heavily publicized and intended to serve as both a moral warning and deterrent example to other groups of young offenders.⁵⁰

47 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra II – Noskův archiv, Praha, cart. 35 a 62.

48 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Spisy F/I–11, cart. 3, 30–34.

49 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Protokoly událostí I–1, inv. j. 1, Spisy F/I–2, cart. 1, I–11, cart. 1; AHMP, f. Okresní soud trestní 1949–1960, “Josef Dvořák a spol.”.

50 See Jiří Zeman, “Skutečný příběh vyšehradských jezdců”, *Reflex* 12 May 2004, <https://www.reflex.cz/clanek/causy/73895/skutečný-příbeh-vyšehradských-jezdcu.html>; Vladimír Jaboud, *Trafouš, páskové, Vyšehradští jezdci a jiné vzpomínky* (Zdeněk Bauer, 2011), 90–96. See also AHMP, f. Okresní soud trestní 1949–1960, “Vyšehradští jezdci”.

Vagabonds and Con Artists

Another category of figures often featured in police records of the nocturnal underworld were all kinds of vagabonds and con artists. This, too, was not a homogenous group. Perhaps their only common denominator was poverty and the absence of stable housing. They included both young and old individuals, some with colourful criminal histories. Others were escaped convicts, gamblers, homeless labourers and itinerant (shock brigade) workers. They found shelter variously with acquaintances, but also in nighttime venues or railway stations. According to VB files, for example, the waiting room at Prague Central Station was transformed every night into an improvised dormitory. People would purchase the cheapest train ticket simply to gain access to the room.⁵¹ Others sometimes asked a random acquaintance to provide them with a roof over their heads, as Josef Linhart at the Koruna 24-hour canteen on Wenceslas Square, and then robbed his host of small valuables.⁵² Still others slept wherever they could – in cinemas, parks, cafés and wine bars. One such man was František Zelenka. One night with nowhere to stay, he turned up at an improvised party being held by the keeper and former owner of the Zrinský wine bar after closing hours, and was even paid a small amount of cash to keep quiet about the event.⁵³

Cafés and wine bars thus provided vagabonds and con artists with a relatively safe refuge where they could rest and conduct their small-scale dealings. These establishments allowed them to linger inconspicuously for long periods. Many made their living by offering a variety of goods for sale – in the 1950s, this could mean anything from gold coins and coal to clothing and watches or even forged property deeds. Others earned money by pretending to help patrons sell their items to pawn shops: they would take the item and simply never return.⁵⁴ In some cases, staff members may have matched them with “customers” for a share of the profits.

The fortunes of these individuals were often strikingly similar to those of prostitutes: they, too, had only survived on meagre means and came from unstable family backgrounds. An illustrative example is František Vaníček, whose case is recorded from 1954. Born in 1905, he had worked as a waiter in hotels during the inter-war and wartime periods, later taking positions in restaurants at railway stations in central and northern Bohemia. According to his testimony, his wife divorced him and forced

51 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Spisy I–2, cart. 14.

52 AHMP, f. Okresní soud trestní 1949–1960, “Josef Linhart”.

53 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Spisy I–11, cart. 33.

54 AHMP, f. Okresní soud trestní 1949–1960, “Juliana Hertelyová”.

him to move out, leaving him without a social anchor. After the war, he drifted through a series of temporary jobs in coal mining districts across Czechoslovakia, sleeping in workers' dormitories. During this time, his citizen identification card expired, and he did not apply for a new one – apparently due to his unstable accommodation. He therefore continued using his expired card to prove his identity until it was stolen from him around the beginning of 1953 when he was working as a temporary labourer in the Ostrava coal basin. Later, he relied on a certificate confirming its loss, but eventually also lost this document as well. Without any identification he could not be employed, and so he began to wander aimlessly around Prague's railway stations. He subsequently found refuge in a barn near one of the villages where he had previously worked as a waiter. From time to time, he returned to Prague, where he loitered around cafes, pubs and railway stations offering to sell people coal or even to arrange the allocation of housing in exchange for a deposit – after which he disappeared. He used the proceeds to buy food and, when his money ran out, he returned to Prague to repeat the scheme. He lived in this manner for over a year before being arrested in February 1954 and charged with ten counts of frauds.⁵⁵

Even more colourful is the case of Čeněk Henych, recorded in police files from 1957. Born in 1908, he had, in his youth, trained as a car mechanic, started a family and opened his own car repair shop, where he was initially quite successful. However, his fortunes changed during the Great Depression, which forced him to close his business and take far lower paid jobs in various firms. After the war, he gradually began to find his feet, but in 1948, he became involved in the illegal automobile trade. For this and related offences, he was sentenced in 1949 to forced labour in the Jáchymov uranium mines. After his release in 1952–1953, he again turned to petty fraud and theft. Together with accomplices, he burgled a pub and butcher's shop in Prague. He frequented pubs and wine bars, offering counterfeit coins to bar staff and customers. In 1954, he was arrested again and sentenced to forced labour, this time in the Pilsen steelworks. Around this time, his wife divorced him. He remained at the steelworks after serving his sentence, but found himself in increasingly dire circumstances. According to his own testimony, he reacted badly to the news that his ex-wife planned to remarry and turned to alcohol. Unable to secure housing, he fell ill and unsuccessfully applied for sickness benefit. Eventually, in what he described as an existential crisis,

55 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Spisy I–11, cart. 2.

he resumed selling counterfeit coins. In 1957, he was arrested once more and sentenced to four years' imprisonment.⁵⁶

From these and similar cases, it can be concluded that many of these individuals, under different circumstances, might have led ordinary, stable lives. Yet their destinies were profoundly shaped by major historical upheavals – the Great Depression, the Second World War and the establishment of the Communist dictatorship – with which they were unable to cope. They gradually sank to the bottom of society, trapped in a cycle of crime and punishment. Their criminal records made it nearly impossible to find legitimate employment, while their family and social relationships disintegrated irreversibly. These are tales of continuous personal decline into poverty, from which there was no way back. However, from a social perspective, people in such situations were precisely those who needed at least temporary institutional support rather than repression. Confronted with the absence of any functional safety net, it was paradoxically simpler for them to drift into a life of petty crime. And it is precisely this paradox that can be considered one of the defining characteristics of the nocturnal world of vagabonds under Communist rule.

Car Thieves

The nocturnal world of the second half of the 1950s was also home to various specialised thieves, safe-breakers and burglars. Many of them specialised in automobiles and spare parts – a form of theft that had its origins in the inter-war and immediate post-war years.⁵⁷ But it was in the 1950s that this “trade” reached its heyday, despite the police's growing efforts to monitor parked cars.⁵⁸ An illustrative example comes from the area around the Alcron Hotel near Wenceslas square. The hotel, which housed both a restaurant and a night bar, was among the few establishments permitted to accommodate foreign guests. Nearby, in the Lucerna arcade, was the renowned Drahňovský variety club, and the adjacent streets also boasted a dense network of other nighttime venues. The area thus presented an attractive location for potential thieves: it could safely be assumed that expensive cars would be parked nearby, promising lucrative pickings from both vehicle parts and the items left inside. At the same time, the district was well lit by street lighting and neon signs, and it was also more heavily

56 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Spisy I–11, cart. 29.

57 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra II – Noskův archiv, Praha, cart. 33 a 35, various reports on the security situation.

58 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Spisy F/I–2, cart. 20, 31, 32, Spisy F/I–2–1, cart. 13 a 14.

patrolled by the police. Nevertheless, VB officers had good reason to be concerned about the rising number of car thefts and break-ins. In May 1955 alone, two thefts were recorded within a single week at this location – and another two within one night. Naturally, the number of thefts increased in tandem with the growing number of privately owned cars.⁵⁹ Car thieves were rarely caught in the act, and only about half were apprehended afterwards. From the available sources, it transpires that the thieves often simply drove the cars until they ran out of petrol. Others specialised in stealing spare car parts or items from inside the cars, which they then sold. Sometimes the thieves used the vehicle to transport goods taken in larger burglaries.⁶⁰

Safe-Breakers and Burglars

The last prominent group of night criminals comprised burglars and thieves who specialised in shops, stalls and newsagents. Police records from the period between Christmas 1954 and the first three months of 1955 – the earliest records available – show that within the VB precinct of Prague 2 alone, thieves managed to break into seventeen retail outlets, representing an average of approximately one burglary per week. The perpetrators usually stole cash from the cash register or safe, as well as goods from the shelves. Depending on the type of shop, the stolen items included watches, fabrics, clothing, food, confectioneries, alcohol, furs, cigarettes or decorative objects. The value of the stolen property ranged from a few dozen crowns, in which case the damage caused by the broken window display or door of the shop often exceeded the value of the stolen goods, to several thousand of crowns. However, the average loss seldom exceeded one thousand crowns, suggesting that the culprits often intended to keep the items for personal use or to sell them opportunistically. In some cases, thefts were prompted by nothing more than drunken impulse, when an intoxicated passer-by returning from a bar was enticed by goods on display and smashed a window with a stone or paving slab.⁶¹

The police clear-up rate for these offences did not reach even half. Thieves were sometimes apprehended only when they attempted to sell the stolen goods.⁶² In one such instance, however, the VB uncovered an extensive network of youth gangs operating throughout Prague and Central Bohemia in

59 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Spisy F/I–2, cart. 2, 4.

60 NA, f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 139, a. j./bod 182/16, “Zpráva o výsledcích práce veřejné bezpečnosti za rok 1956”.

61 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Spisy F/I–2, cart. 1, 3, 4.

62 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Spisy F/I–2, cart. 1, 3, 4.

the 1950s. These groups specialised in burglaries and thefts from kiosks and newsstands. In this way, they uncovered the case of Emil Hříva, whose story is illustrative of a young man's path into a life of crime. Born in 1933, Hříva was the eldest of three children of a painter and a female labourer from the Libeň district of Prague. When Czechoslovakia launched its first Five-Year Plan and heavy industry began to absorb tens of thousands of new workers, he was among the many young men sent into accelerated apprenticeships to quickly learn a trade in high demand. He trained as a plumber – a low-skilled and therefore, despite wage levelling policies – poorly paid occupation. To supplement his income, he began committing petty thefts, for which he was arrested in 1952 at the age of nineteen and sentenced to two and a half years in prison. After his release, he found work as an unskilled labourer in the mines. In 1955 his father died, leaving him responsible for the funeral expenses, as his mother, employed as a washerwoman in a launderette, could barely support his two younger siblings. Although he caused no trouble in mines, Emil therefore turned again to theft and burglary, joining a gang of contemporaries he had met during his imprisonment. After several months, he was arrested once more by the police and sentenced to five years in prison for larceny and “theft of property in socialist ownership”.⁶³ In 1957, the remaining gang members were also arrested; in the meantime, they had been committing further thefts and spending their profits in bars and hotels. Following renewed investigations, Emil Hříva's charges were expanded, and he received an additional five-year sentence.⁶⁴

His younger brother was likewise unable to escape his socially predetermined fate. Trained in a similarly hasty manner as a locksmith, he embarked on a comparable criminal path. In the autumn of 1957, at the age of only seventeen, he was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment for the theft of sports equipment, a gramophone player and records from several shops in central Prague. Together with two friends, he had carried out these thefts on summer nights in June and July. They later took the stolen sports equipment on holiday to the popular tourist destination of Lake Mácha, intending to sell the remaining goods upon their return. In their own words, their aim had been to supplement their low wages with items and experiences beyond their reach. A medical report from an examination of the younger Hříva upon his incarceration, recording his malnutrition and physical weakness, also attested to his impoverishment.⁶⁵

63 “Trestní zákon”, paragraph 245.

64 ABS, f. Hlavní správa SNB Praha, Spisy I–11, cart. 28.

65 ABS, f. Hlavní správa SNB Praha, Spisy I–11, cart. 34.

It was precisely such young offenders who formed a new element of the post-war underworld. Interrogation protocols from other cases reveal that they shared remarkably similar life stories. Most had grown up in poverty or unstable families and were almost exclusively of working-class origin. They had suffered the consequences of the rapid social and economic transformation brought about by Czechoslovakia's incorporation into the Soviet economic system, the ensuing construction of heavy industry and the accelerated education process (see chapter 4). After leaving school and completing just two years of training in a low-skilled trade, they entered full-time employment at the age of only sixteen.⁶⁶ With limited qualifications and correspondingly low wages, their opportunities in both work and life were severely restricted. Higher child benefits or better wages for their mothers might have improved their family situations, but the social policy of the KSČ seemed to move in the opposite direction – penalising rather than protecting those at the lower end of the social scale. As a consequence, tens of thousands of young people, together with working women employed in unskilled or semi-skilled labour, constituted a genuinely impoverished class within society – and therefore a fertile breeding ground for the underworld. As these young people matured, their desire for adventure and for the pleasures of youth often led them to their first misdemeanours. For these acts, they received harsh custodial sentences – often exceeding one year. In prison, they met others of similar age and background. Upon release, their criminal records limited their employment prospects even further. Many tried to add excitements to their lives by frequenting late night establishments and savouring the taste of the big city nightlife they had heard about, read about or seen in films. After a few days of such indulgence, they again found themselves in financial distress. Meeting their former cellmates, it was easy to plan new burglaries and thefts. Thus, they managed to survive for a few months until they were again apprehended, this time receiving an even harsher sentence. Upon release, the cycle repeated itself.⁶⁷ These young men became typical inhabitants of the urban night – the real-life counterparts to the marginal figures populating the imagined underworld of society under Communist rule.

It was therefore the state which, in attempting to bring about a virtuous society at any cost, created a class of felons. Its inability to secure a dignified standard of living for people from poor backgrounds intersected here with the imposition of draconian punishments. It was, above all, young

66 On the effects of under-education of the young see Kalinová, *Společenské proměny*, 149–182.

67 ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Spisy I–11, cart. 28 a 34.

people who bore the brunt of this contradiction: receiving long and harsh punishments for actions whose motivations could easily be understood and whose consequences they scarcely foresaw. Even with the best intentions, with a criminal record and the experience of a harsh prison environment, their reintegration into society was essentially doomed to failure from the outset. Indeed, their first sentence marked not the end but the beginning of their criminal careers. The result was the emergence of bands of young recidivists – a further defining feature of urban nightlife in Czechoslovakia on the path to socialism.

How to Reflect the Merciless Reality?

In the mid-1950s, the newly founded daily newspapers – *Večerní Praha* (in Prague) and *Večerník* (in Bratislava) – were intended to contribute to the public's "education towards virtue". Both featured recurring columns based on VB files, usually marked with a paragraph symbol so as to be easily recognisable at first glance. These texts were conceived as short stories with a moral message – *anti-examples* to be avoided. Yet, increasingly, they came to resemble the humorous short stories characteristic of the inter-war press, which had been condemned after the war as unnecessarily sensationalist, commercial gimmicks that set a poor example. Although these columns tried to be educational, they were manifestly written with a certain relish. To capture readers' attention, they frequently returned to a familiar and effective setting – the night. They presented detailed reports of parties, brawls and disorderly conduct in the nocturnal city, featuring as protagonists young people and prostitutes. Other recurring figures ("heroes") included con artists, card sharks, fortune tellers, swindlers selling non-existent goods, thieves and pimps. Initially published only a few times per week, these short stories soon appeared several times weekly. They undoubtedly contributed to the enormous popularity of both newspapers, whose print runs had to be repeatedly increased by the end of the 1950s.⁶⁸ The model spread rapidly to other regional dailies under titles such as "From the Public Security Files" or "Lessons from the Courtroom". By the latter half of the

68 See NA, f. KSČ-Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 76, a. j./bod 93, "Bilance papíru pro periodický tisk na rok 1956 /ve srovnání s rokem 1955 / podle jednotlivých vydavatelství"; "Využití papíru získaného ve prospěch periodického tisku z fondu papíru pro hospodářské a úřední tiskopisy"; "Úpravy v systému periodického tisku pro rok 1958"; "Usnesení k úpravám v systému periodického tisku na rok 1960".

decade, these columns offered readers of the daily press a vivid, if stylised, overview of the criminal underworld of nocturnal Czechoslovakia.

During the same period, the issue of (night) crime also returned to film. As in the press, these cinematic stories not only reflected socially urgent themes but also sought to titillate audiences. The form and structure of these depictions largely recycled familiar formulas. To attract large audiences, filmmakers once again relied on the proven visual appeal of the night city: its neon-lit streets evoked the allure of a cosmopolitan world of crime, while the dark alleys heightened the suspense. The films presented nightspots as meeting places for criminals or as hubs of glittering nightlife, where various social strata intermingled. Viewers were thus invited to glimpse the interiors of pubs, cafés, wine bars and 24-hour canteens, as well as more obscure dens. The films generally featured well-known actors, which further contributed to their success at the box office.

In terms of plot and characterisation, these post-1950 crime films can be divided into four broad categories.

The first type consists of political crime thrillers and spy films, which evolved in the second half of the 1950s from the earlier genre of saboteur films. These films tended to have more elaborate plots, and although they sometimes referred back to events from the immediate post-war period, they drew their subject matter from the present. The master criminals in these narratives still had a political motivation, but they no longer aimed to cause damage to socialism, society, the factory, the cooperative or the state. Rather, they sought to pursue their own personal gain. Their “domain” was typically fraud, black market trade or financial machination – for example, dealing in gold for dental fillings (*The Golden Spider*), forging documents and banknotes (*The Forgery*) or smuggling British pounds (*The End of the Road*).⁶⁹ These characters were often willing to commit murder, usually under the cover of night. Many of these films were loosely inspired by real criminal cases, which they then sensationalised for dramatic effect. They also portrayed the dazzling nocturnal cityscape: in some, panoramic shots of Wenceslas Square lit up created the impression of a resplendent metropolis with a vibrant nightlife rivalling Western cities. It was as if the filmmakers sought to compete with their imagined vision of the Western urban world.

69 Pavel Blumenfeld, Pavel Blumenfeld and Miloš Velínský, *Zlatý pavouk* (Studio hraných filmů, 22 February 1957); Vladimír Borský, Eduard Fiker, *Padělek* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 29 November 1957); Miroslav Cikán, Miroslav Cikán – Jiří Mareš – Bohumil Brejcha, and Otakar Kirchner, *Konec cesty* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 11 March 1960).

The second type of crime story presented criminality as a thing of the past. It is hardly coincidental that these plots frequently revolved around prostitution – for instance, *The Morality of Mrs Dulská, Who the Law Does Not Protect*.⁷⁰ These films were essentially social dramas, modelled on works written by left-wing writers of the nineteenth century and the inter-war period. Viewers were led to believe that the causes of prostitution had disappeared with the KSČ's rise to power.

A third group rediscovered the classic detective story. Unlike the previous two types, these films drew upon the experience of everyday life. Most focused on thieves and safe-breakers and, in doing so, they provided a fairly credible reflection of the practical workings of the socialist economy. The thieves in these stories were usually from the ranks of the urban underclass, and their motive was nothing other than to improve their living conditions. For example, *The Case Is Not Yet Closed*, set in the Institute of Experimental Medicine, the narrative unfolds after an employee discovers a tetanus vaccine and receives both recognition and a financial reward. However, during the night, the safe containing the vaccine and the bonus is broken into. The theft is revealed to have been the work of two pre-war safe-breakers known – and even grudgingly admired – by the investigating commissioner for their precision.⁷¹ The film thus underscores continuities in criminal practice, as well as the continuity of the individuals involved within the environment of criminal investigators. By contrast, an illustrative example of the specific type of criminality that the state-socialist economy attracted is provided by the film *A 105% Alibi*.⁷² Its plot revolves around the murder of an accounting controller of the Restaurants and Canteens enterprise (RaJ). The crime takes place during the night when, by coincidence, the controller is visited by two youths who ply him with drink and attempt to defraud him out of a lottery ticket that has won him a car – a fact of which he is aware. In the morning, the controller is found dead, and suspicion immediately falls upon one of the youths. However, the investigation determines that the controller was in fact murdered by the head waiter at the Black Rose hotel, who had an accounting deficit of 12,000 crowns and was being blackmailed by the victim. The entire story of *A 105% Alibi* reflects the operation of the hospitality sector at the end of the 1950s. The character of the accounting

70 See especially Jiří Krejčík, Jiří Fried, *Morálka paní Dulské* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 19 September 1958); Karel Steklý, Karel Steklý, *Mstitel* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 8 April 1959).

71 Ladislav Rychman, Miloslav Drtílek and Edvard Valenta, *Případ ještě nekončí* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 19 September 1957), 00:26:15–00:26:33.

72 Vladimír Čech, Karel Cop and Miloš Velínský, *105% Alibi* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 20 November 1959).

controller is especially striking – an alcoholic who abuses his authority. When he arrives in the local pub that fateful evening, already in a considerably intoxicated state, he orders the publican: “Oi, give me something to cheer me up, will you? Do your job and serve me, for pity’s sake. Or I’ll find such a hole in your accounts that you’ll fall right down it and never get out.” He also showers the publican with advice: “Meeting the sales plan, that’s the objective, [...] if you don’t know that you’re an idiot and you should get out of the business.”⁷³ Subsequently, the head administrator of the Black Rose hotel explains to the police investigators how to conceal such an accounting deficit: “If I might suggest, this is probably incomprehensible to the layman, [...] I run three businesses. The Black Rose, the restaurant in the Sokolovna and the Družina buffet. That means a monthly turnover of around 200,000. When placed against that, this twelve thousand, if you don’t mind me saying so, is like spitting in a river, it’s just peanuts.”⁷⁴ Through the characters of the accounting controller and the head manager, the film illustrates that this kind of fraud is essentially standard practice. This theme would later be developed extensively in the detective films of the 1960s, which dealt with the misuse of public property, embezzlement and corruption.⁷⁵

The fourth type addressed a new social phenomenon: juvenile delinquency. At the end of the 1950s, a total of three films appeared on this theme – *The Road Back*, *The Crossroads* and *Awakening*.⁷⁶ The films had an educational tone, expressing concern about the nocturnal wanderings of young people and their unrestrained energy, which was increasingly pathologized and criminalised in public discourse. They depicted groups of youths seeking excitement through nocturnal brawls and petty assaults, as also recorded in VB reports, and their delinquency was attributed to their family backgrounds (*The Crossroads*, *Awakening*) or social origins (*The Road Back*). Their motivation was presented as a desire to experience luxury and pleasure – to escape the monotony of their everyday existence. Yet the analysis went no further: the only solutions offered were for young people to voluntarily submit to state care institutions, which would then provide them with a solid upbringing and preparation for life or, for those deemed “incorrigible”, imprisonment. The term “hooliganism”, adopted

73 Čech, 105% *Alibi*, 00:03:56–00:04:51.

74 Čech, 105% *Alibi*, 00:55:16–00:55:40.

75 For example, the movies *Kasaři* (1958), *Černá sobota*, *Kde alibi nestačí*, *Bílá spona* (1961), *Mezi námi zloději* (1963), *Bílá paní* (1965), *Jak se krade milión* (1967), etc.

76 Václav Krška, Pavel Kohout, *Cesta zpátky* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 10 April 1959); Pavel Blumenfeld, Pavel Blumenfeld and Jiří Círk, *Křižovatky* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 18 September 1959); Jiří Krejčík, Otakar Kirchner, *Probuzení* (Filmové studio Barrandov, 12 February 1960).

from Soviet usage, became established within the public arena to refer to this phenomenon.⁷⁷

How to Control the Night?

In response to the rising property crime rate, as early as 1953 the criminal department of the police headquarters was divided into a department focusing on general crime and a department focusing on economic crime.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, this appeared to have little effect. The scant and unreliable street lighting provided an easy hiding place during and after the act. Police crews at VB stations were not reinforced during the night, and even regular patrols on the streets did not function properly.⁷⁹ Furthermore, well into the 1950s, police officers concentrated mainly on guarding political buildings, while they left other locations practically unsupervised. It was not until 1956 that more regular patrols were introduced on the streets and “outside [by the KSČ defined] politically exposed buildings”.⁸⁰ An illustrative example of the paradoxes to which this policy led can be provided by the above-described car thefts from the area around the Alcron Hotel. It is possible to assume that the streets were better patrolled here. Moreover, there was a large number of pedestrians and therefore potential witnesses, because the hotel was located close to Wenceslas Square – the most illuminated location in the whole of Czechoslovakia. Despite this, thieves sometimes had enough time to remove parts from vehicles, including bearings, petrol cans or tyres, directly on the spot, without being apprehended while stealing even such large items.⁸¹

Another attempt to control the population more effectively was the establishment of the Public Security Auxiliary Guard (PS VB) in 1952. This institution, composed of volunteer citizens, was entrusted with overseeing public order. Although it is not clear what their precise contribution was in reporting offences committed at night, the fact remains that their ranks often contained the most zealous moral guardians and that they undoubtedly formed a substantial part of the imperative of vigilance in everyday life. For example, thanks in part to their reporting, in 1954 one in nine citizens

77 See Matěj Kotalík, “Capitalist Relic in a Socialist-State? Coping with Hooliganism in Czechoslovak and East-German Penal Law (1956–1973)”, *Prague Economic and Social History Papers* 18, no. 2 (2013): 36–58.

78 “Prozatímní inventář k archivnímu fondu I. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy”, 1980, 16.

79 See ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy, Protokoly událostí I–1, I–1/1, I–2, I–2/1, I–6, I–7, I–10/1.

80 “Zpráva o výsledcích práce”.

81 See ABS, f. Hlavní správa SNB Praha, Spisy I–11, cart. 28.

of Czechoslovakia was punished for various misdemeanours by at least the imposition of a fine, and in 1953–1954, police investigations were launched against one in 32 citizens. However, this was a rather paradoxical result, since it created the impression that Czechoslovakia was a hotbed of crime. As police chiefs themselves admitted, such a practice was unsustainable. Not only would large numbers of people never have come into conflict with the law under a less rigid application of the norms, but furthermore, the degree of punishment and criminalisation provoked a publicly manifested “justified indignation against the Public Security service”.⁸² This could potentially have led citizens to contest the legitimacy of Communist rule and, ultimately, of the established regime.

The most effective strategy proved to be the amendment to the penal codes in 1956, which altered the classifications and punishments for certain offences. The VB now transferred minor property offences in particular to the jurisdiction of factory management for assessment, enabling the matter to be resolved mainly by agreement. As a consequence, crime statistics fell immediately by almost 8 per cent.⁸³ Punishments for the misappropriation of socialist property were also reduced. In principle, while the 1950 criminal law made such actions punishable by up to six months’ imprisonment, the amendment allowed petty theft to be punished by a “public reprimand” and reduced the prison sentence for more serious cases to a maximum of three months.⁸⁴ However, the same amendment to the Penal Code abolished the criminal offence of “gross indecency”, replacing it with the criminal offences of parasitism – covering those “who support themselves by dishonest means and avoid honest work”, carrying a sentence of imprisonment for three months to two years – and disorderly conduct – covering those “who cause public outrage by committing gross indecency or breach of the peace, which attests to a manifest disrespect towards society”, carrying the same sentence.⁸⁵ These two new paragraphs enabled a more precise targeting of the pressures of social control. Police institutions began to apply them above all to prostitutes, unemployed released convicts, vagrants and young people.⁸⁶

82 “Zpráva o výsledcích práce”.

83 “Zpráva o výsledcích práce”.

84 See “Trestní zákon správní č. 88/1950 Sb.”, paragraph 35, “Zákon ze dne 19. prosince 1956, kterým se mění a doplňuje trestní zákon č. 86/1950 Sb. č. 63/1956 Sb.”, article V, point 51 a “Zákon č. 14/1957 Sb., kterým se mění a doplňuje trestní zákon správní č. 88/1950 Sb.”, article IV, 1.

85 See “zákon ze dne 19. prosince 1956, kterým se mění a doplňuje trestní zákon č. 86/1950 Sb. č. 63/1956 Sb.”, article V, point 43–44.

86 See the very first post-amendment files handled by Public Security and the courts ABS, f. Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy I–2, cart. 14.

The amendment of 1956 had a direct impact on the socialist night. It essentially sent society the message that if one was in gainful employment, kept quiet and conformed to social norms, it was also possible to supplement one's income here and there to a limited extent. Conversely, those who failed to conform could find themselves in serious trouble. Indeed, the new paragraphs on parasitism and social disorder led immediately to conflicts. For example, in October 1957, a large scene took place on Wenceslas Square in Prague, to which the courts applied the "disorderly conduct" paragraph. At approximately 00:30 a.m. on Saturday, 13 October, the following occurred: "A supervising officer of the Prague force at the Družba Hotel was apprehending Private Jaroslav Šimák. Several youths were present at the scene and proceeded to form a crowd around the officer and the soldier, which grew rapidly in size. Within a short time, approximately 1000 people had congregated there. The youths then began to try to halt the investigation by noisily jostling and attempting to tear the documents from the officer's hands."⁸⁷ According to the police report, it was necessary to suspend the operation and call for backup. Several dozen individuals were detained, eleven of whom were subsequently convicted of sedition, disorderly conduct, abusing a public official and refusal to comply with an order from the public authorities, and were punished with incarceration ranging from two weeks to three years.⁸⁸ It is highly probable that the situation escalated largely because of the excessive behaviour of the security services. The conflict most probably began when a group of rowdy youths out on the town – incidentally all manual workers – decided to move to another late night venue or were preparing to go home when they encountered an overzealous guardian of the public order. It appears that the officer wished to exercise his authority, which the youths resented. They were then joined by further passers-by until a large crowd had gathered. According to a report for the KSČ leaders, similar situations occurred "especially in large cities and industrial centres". It was in these locations that young people spent "evenings and nights in pubs [...], in entertainment and nighttime establishments, and in highly frequented public places." As a result, they were sometimes rowdy. If they were unlucky enough to encounter the police, they could quickly find themselves charged with outrageous behaviour, such as "street rioting" or "hooliganism".⁸⁹

87 NA f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 156, a. j./bod 207, "Záznam z městského aktivu funkcionářů ČSM v Praze".

88 Unsigned, "Rozsudek nad výtržníky a 'pásky'", *Rovnost. Orgán krajského výboru KSČ v Brně*, 31 October 1957, 4.

89 NA, f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 155–156, a. j./bod 206/12, "Společná opatření bezpečnosti, prokuratur a soudů k zajištění rychlého a účinného

Conflicts and the criminalisation of nonconformity and rowdy behaviour represented a further characteristic of nightlife under Communist rule. The KSČ had no intention of abandoning the principle of strict discipline. Eventually, in 1961, the crimes of parasitism and disorderly conduct were incorporated directly as separate paragraphs into the new Criminal Code, where they remained in force until 1990.⁹⁰ In the 1970s and 1980s especially, they became an effective instrument for criminalising any young and nonconformist individuals who sought a means of escape during the night hours. This severe approach applied by the police provoked a series of protests, but most of society eventually adapted.⁹¹ As a result, in their approach to people on the margins, the Communists essentially contradicted the principles that underpinned socialism. The introduction of the criminal offences of parasitism and disorderly conduct meant the abandonment of any aspirations for a progressive transformation of society or modernisation of the criminal law. Precursors of these newly introduced crimes had already figured within the Habsburg Imperial Code of 1852 and in the Act on Workhouses and Reform Schools of 1885, both directed against those on the margins of society with the aim of recording, isolating, excluding and re-educating them through work. The Communists essentially made these laws more targeted and repressive. For most of the remainder of the twentieth century, society was judged through the lens of these century-old norms of the conservative and absolutist Habsburg monarchy.⁹² At the same time, their repressive approach completely negated theories of social solutions to crime, to which they ought to have been closest in principle.

postihu chuligánů a jiných výtržníků"; NA, f. KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – politické byro 1954–1962, sv. 155, a. j./bod 205/20.

90 See "Trestní zákon ze dne 29. listopadu 1961 č. 140/1961 Sb.", paragraph 203.

91 Christianne Brenner, "Život na úkor společnosti: 'Příživnictví' jako nástroj disciplinace mládeže v socialistickém Československu sedmdesátých a osmdesátých letech", *Marginalia Historica: časopis pro dějiny vzdělanosti a kultury Praha*, no. 2 (2012): 96–104; Christianne Brenner, "Líné dívky, lehké dívky?: Příživnictví a disciplinace mladých žen v době normalizace", *Dějiny a současnost*, no. 7 (2013): 19–22; Kotalík, "Capitalist Relic", 36–58.

92 See "Zákon ze dne 27. května 1852, trestní zákon o zločinech, přečinech a přestupcích č. 117/1852 ř. z.", paragraph 65, paragraph 68, paragraph 73, paragraph 74, paragraph 122, paragraph 283, paragraph 516; "Zákon ze dne 24. května 1885 o robotárnách a polepšovnách č. 89/1885 ř. z.", paragraph 1.

Conclusion: A Socialist Night?

Abstract: In Czechoslovakia, on the road to socialism, a phenomenon emerged that can be described as the socialist night. However, the Czechoslovak socialist night differed fundamentally from what communist leaders had imagined. It was characterised primarily by dysfunction, oversights, and paradoxes, as well as by the often peculiar behaviour of citizens, who adapted to the rules or understood them in their own ways. These attributes would likely be used to characterise the socialist night more generally, but it cannot be ruled out that Czechoslovakia represented only one of many possible types of socialist night. This, however, remains a question for further research.

Keywords: night, socialism, Czechoslovakia, paradoxes

Is it night?

That depends.

What does it depend on?

On us.

(Eugène GUILLEVIC, *Étier: poèmes 1965–1975*)¹

A question which the Czechoslovak public institutions continually asked themselves in relation to the night was how to control it, channel it and make the best use of it: how to present it while taking maximum advantage of its symbolic power; how to control the (public) space and the activity of the people within it, while at the same time ensuring that they did only what benefitted the economy and social order in a calm and orderly manner. However, these are essentially unavoidable questions that arise for every

1 Eugène Guillevic, *Étier: poèmes 1965–1975* (Gallimard, 2006), 335.

ruling power. Czechoslovak Communists brought their own answers, which were a result of an endeavour to transform society deeply and quickly, combined with a lack of technologies, the unsuitability of several legal, symbolic and institutional measures and people's responses. The unexpected consequences were manifested on several levels. One consisted in the combination of the visions of the ideal and the instruments intended to guide society towards the ideal socialist night. Another dimension resulted from attempts to achieve this ideal in practice, running up against individual tactics and the prosaic economic and social reality. In any case, it can be stated, in simplified terms, that a socialist night was indeed created, but that it took on a different form from that which had been originally intended. It was in fact relatively remote from its ideal, since it was characterised by a series of unexpected paradoxes. In its essence, it was highly complex, fluid and dynamic.

The ideal night was to be dedicated to sleep and work or, alternatively, orderly entertainment and, after the establishment of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia dictatorship, also to vigilance. In creating it, the Czechoslovak post-war public institutions applied a whole range of symbolic and legislative instruments, among which the most prominent were the use of rhetorical metaphors associated with a universally familiar reference to the age of "Darkness" and the "Thousand-Year Slumber", as well as various regulations directed at restricting the spontaneity of nightlife and securing work discipline. Public institutions were placed at the forefront of the ideal of a modern, virtuous, just and harmonious society, within a peacefully ordered space bathed in sunlight, whereas, in contrast, the night appeared to belong to the past and exist somewhere outside the new world. The Czechoslovak Communists used a variety of already existing, and often long-dated, symbolic tools to exclude the night from everyday life. Many of them were consensually accepted by the majority of the population even before the establishment of the dictatorship. Thus, the Communists often followed smoothly from proven strategies of previous historical periods.

The specifics of the socialist night were manifested in nightly activities. These were often at variance with what had originally been intended. It was precisely these that represented the defining characteristics of the socialist night. Despite promises to transform the world of work and the fact that night work in industry was associated mainly with capitalism, manual workers were forced to work more and take on an increased number of night shifts and overtime hours. Their reward was meant to consist in an intangible satisfaction from the work they performed and an uncertain promise of better tomorrows, which they were moreover expected to help bring about

through their revolutionary vigilance at the expense of their other activities. However, the promises of the imperatives contrasted on a daily basis with the undeniable complications of everyday life. Ultimately, socialist night work underwent a similar institutionalisation to its capitalist counterpart in the form of bonuses for night shifts and the open admission that night work in industry would represent the standard long into the future. The only difference lay in the fact that under the socialist system, night work, among other factors, functioned as a substitute for the lack of modernisation and served as a highly inept means of catching up with economic targets. From the perspective of most workers – and others affected – night work remained an unpopular phenomenon, which many successfully ignored or even boycotted. Vigilance became a prosaic matter of the need to guard the western border, and ultimately a popular way of framing adventure stories.

After the end of the war, the effort to establish a new ideal of entertainment led to an intensive transformation of institutions and laws. In a certain respect, however, it followed on from the wartime practice of centralisation under the state administration, which the Communists continued and further elaborated after achieving their monopoly on power. The measures were intended to subject exuberant entertainment to the most stringent control possible, to ensure that no instances of impropriety occurred that might even have subversive potential. Society was to be directed towards adopting the promoted ideals, if possible, in a quiet and orderly fashion. However, in practice, it soon became evident that even the most elaborately conceived rules could not fetter something that was ungovernable in principle. Socialist entertainment was characterised by its multi-layered nature, in which directed programmes –occasionally disrupted by open lack of interest or even protests on the part of the public – mixed with alternative activities that exploited loopholes in the complicated regulations. Inadvertent, apolitical subversiveness most probably represented the most characteristic feature of socialist entertainment.

Similar paradoxes also predominated among those on the margins of society and the criminal classes. The intensive attempts to establish a virtuous society of hardworking people who engaged in abstemious forms of entertainment – an ideal that fired the imagination of the post-war Communists – in combination with deep-seated economic problems, led not only to a situation in which individuals continued to pursue criminal activities, but also to the swelling of their ranks with a new generation of criminals. Nocturnal crime itself did not have distinct socialist features, except perhaps that thefts of all types were widespread, often involving only of small items, and that entertainment venues provided a characteristic environment for

selling stolen goods. It is perhaps the large number of property crimes and the mass scale of petty theft that characterise socialist night crime.

The night space also appeared quite paradoxical in post-war Czechoslovakia. Efforts to radically transform it were mingled with contradictory attempts to preserve its pre-war form and measure up to cities in the West. In parallel, the contrast between ideals and mundane reality was determined by economic opportunities. The ideal nocturnal socialist city was meant to be a shining oasis of modernity, in which the brightest street lighting, demonstrating technological progress, intermingled with sophisticated neon lights proclaiming economic accomplishments, and the ever-present red stars announcing how successfully the work of building the new socialist economy was advancing. Modernity was to be supplemented by tradition, intended to serve as evidence of socialism's deep roots in Czechoslovak society. This could be seen, for example, on state holidays, when the same historical buildings were illuminated. Nevertheless, this very fact represented a retreat from revolutionary ambitions. A further paradox was strikingly manifested in the second half of the 1950s, when the nocturnal socialist city began to imitate Western cities unabashedly and even attempted to compete with them. In doing so, it adopted their criteria but, at the same time, ran up against a series of economic limitations – power cuts, ageing street lamps and malfunctioning neon signs, the density of which lagged far behind both the socialist proclamations and Western standards. And it was indeed the weak glow of the lamps and the malfunctioning of the neon signs that gave rise to ironic wordplay and constituted another, again unintended, specific feature of the socialist night space. In addition, because of weak or absent lighting and power cuts, the nocturnal socialist city paradoxically became a space of freedom, in which everyone could go about their activities more freely under the stars. If there was one single trait that characterised the socialist city streets at night, then it was, without doubt, the unintended darkness.

The milestones in the shaping of the socialist night during the period in question here depend on which aspect we focus on. Ultimately, not even the end of the Second World War need be viewed as a milestone, since – as previously mentioned – a whole range of ideas, processes and practices demonstrated continuity despite all the political transformations. Nevertheless, the end of the war can be identified as the moment of initiation of a process of change intended to symbolically transport Czechoslovak society out of its dark past into a bright future and all that this entailed. Between 1949 and 1951, the economic measures introduced under the influence of the post-war transformations began to take effect more markedly on

both the domestic and international stage and the first Five-Year Plan was initiated. At this time, the public space was flooded with images of the blazing world of socialism, and the imperatives of vigilance, night shifts and the aspiration to transform nightlife were institutionalised. It was also during this period that representations of the night as a time that could be transcended and banished from the world by sheer force of will reached their peak – starkly contrasting with the everyday reality of those years, which were the most “unlit” compared with both the preceding and the following decades. Further transformations in the perception of the night came around the turn of 1955, when the relaxation of the imperative of vigilance, night work and model entertainment within the context of de-Stalinisation began to bear fruit, and more resources were provided for illuminating the night space. At that time, the night again came to be perceived as a time that promised adventure – both enticing and dangerous – but was no longer a time designated for elimination. A further milestone arrived in 1957, when, on one hand, penalties aimed at those on the margins of society, for whom the night often represented a shelter, were made harsher, while, on the other hand, their narratives came more prominently to the forefront in the public arena. During that time, the entertainment industry also definitively began to take off in its own direction, creating its own structures and practices. The last milestone came in the years 1960–1961, which marked the climax of the aspiration to transform at least Prague, as the capital of the socialist state, into a blazing showcase of modernity and vibrant life – in contrast with the prevailing despair caused by the protracted economic problems that culminated in an attempt to catch up with economic targets through the means of systematising bonuses for night shifts. In any case, the night remained a boundary beyond which the governing power was able to reach only within a limited scope.²

It is necessary to point out that each of the individual subjects analysed here would, in itself, merit a separate, extensive study that could deepen

2 In this connection, the philosopher Michaël Foessel speaks of the night as a time in which one can live without witnesses, and even – somewhat provocatively in the context of a dictatorship – of a truly democratic space-time, Michaël Foessel, *La nuit: Vivre sans témoin* (Autrement, 2017), 13–18. For the importance of night, see also Calla Cofied, “Losing Darkness: Satellite Data Shows Global Light Pollution on the Rise”, *Space*, 11 November 2017, <https://www.space.com/38872-light-pollution-increasing-globally.html>; Unsigned, “Why the Nights Are Getting Brighter – But Not in a Good Way”, *The Guardian*, 23 November 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/nov/23/nights-getting-brighter-but-not-in-a-good-way>; Amanda Petrusich, “Fear of the light: Why We Need Darkness”, *The Guardian*, 23 August 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/aug/23/why-we-need-darkness-light-pollution-stars>.

the investigation and reveal further complexities and nuances. Worthy of attention, for example, are the more detailed characteristics of the various social classes, individuals and spaces associated with the night. An issue that suggests itself for investigation is the nightly activities at selected police precincts viewed from different perspectives: from the VB members, through the context of the events taking place within the precinct, to the detainees at the station. Also worthy of deeper analysis are the social and economic histories of hospitality facilities, including the social and economic ties between their individual employees and customers – and, more generally, the role played by these facilities within the socialist economy. It would also be of interest to take a closer look at the subject of night work, which indisputably differed according to the branch of industry and region. Similarly beneficial would be a more detailed insight into the world inhabited by those on the margins of society or, alternatively, a deeper investigation into the institutions and establishments responsible for different areas of nightlife, as well as the paradoxes caused by their dependency on central planning and the specifics of the socialist economy. It would be appropriate to explore the topic of the informal economy further and open up the topic of the black market, which in its web of activities, covered both night and daytime hours, and involved not only figures from the margins of society but also those who held senior posts in the public administration. A more detailed analysis of the ideological sources of the labour-modernisation ethos, including its further impacts on daily life and shared values and norms, would indisputably also produce interesting results.

A field also opens up for a deeper analysis of the nightly practices within the individual regions of Czechoslovakia, which have been mentioned only fleetingly within this book due to attempts to focus more deeply and illustratively on certain characteristic phenomena. The events in the different regions undoubtedly had their own specific features, and an analysis thereof could indisputably uncover a range of other facts that have not been mentioned here. However, it would also be possible to pursue a different direction and instead to synthesise and focus more upon a comparison of the Czechoslovak night with representations and practices in other states of the Eastern Bloc. Finally, a space also opens up here for a more detailed comparison of the parallels and differences in the representations and experiences of the night in the Eastern and Western Blocs. It is possible to shift the timeframe and focus on an analysis of the night within a different period.

It remains to summarise how an ordinary night appeared in a city – for illustration, let us say in Prague – from the perspective of a disinterested, sober (and probably male) pedestrian after Czechoslovakia officially became a socialist state – for example, on an autumn night in 1960. By this time, there were fewer power cuts, so the streets were mostly lit by a mix of gas lamps, discharge tubes (though not always fully functional) and neon advertisements – most of them missing some lettering or part of the screen. The nocturnal pedestrian was undoubtedly attracted by the city centre, where he could find a diverse array of hospitality venues enticing him in with their illuminated windows and entrances. Upon entering one of them, he could essentially find anybody: he might meet soldiers on basic military service attempting to enjoy their leave and therefore sparing no expense on food, alcohol and female company, officers of the security services who were not currently on their shift or others engaged in some kind of surveillance work. At the next table, there could be a group of artists or intellectuals, manual workers or clerks, or even apprentices who had come for a drink straight after work – sometimes instead of work – and then stayed for several more. He might at a certain moment be approached by an unknown individual who then proceeded to offer him all manner of goods or services, or he might be accosted by a lady who suggested he buy her a drink. Back out on the streets, he might encounter people returning from the cinema, theatre or formally dressed couples returning from a concert; groups, pairs and individuals roaming from one hospitality venue to the next; staggering drunks attempting to find their way home while mumbling obscenities; lone women offering him company; curious figures offering a variety of goods and services; and here and there even a police officer. He might come across the same mixture of people on the tram home – for example, to a residential quarter on what were then the outskirts of town, where there were far fewer, if any, sources of light. When he disembarked from the tram, he was suddenly engulfed in darkness, (almost) alone on the street with only the stars visible above.

Abbreviations

ABS	Security Forces Archive
AHMP	Prague City Archives
a. j.	Archive unit
art.	Law article
no.	Number
Cart.	Archival carton
Coll.	Collection of laws
ČSM	Czechoslovak Youth Union
f.	Archival fund
HAÚ	Musical and Artistic Centre
ILO	International Labour Organisation
inv. č.	Inventory number
JZD	Unified Farming Cooperative
KSČ	Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
NA	National Archives
NFA	National Film Archives
PS VB	Public Security Auxiliary Guard
RaJ	Restaurants and Canteens
ROH	Revolutionary Trade Union Movement
Sb.	Law collection
SNB	National Security Corps
StB	State Security Service
sv.	Archival volume
Ú. l.	Government Gazette
ÚV KSČ	Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
VB	Public Security Service
Vol.	Volume

Selected Sources

Archives

Archiv bezpečnostních složek

Collection Správa SNB hl. m. Prahy

Archiv Dopravního podniku hl. m. Prahy

Archiv hl. m. Prahy

Collections:

Okresní soud trestní 1949–1960

Komise

Periodicals

Národní archiv

Collections:

Ministerstvo vnitra I – nová registratura

Ministerstvo vnitra II – Noskův archiv

ÚV KSČ 1945–1989, Praha – Politické byro 1954–1962

Národní filmový archiv

Collections:

Filmové scénáře

Separáty

Periodicals

Národní knihovna ČR

Digitální knihovna Kramerius

Univerzitná knižnica v Bratislave

Collection: Periodicals

Electronical databases

Český sociálněvědní datový archiv Sociologického ústavu AV ČR: <http://nesstar.soc.cas.cz/webview/>

Filmový přehled. Online databáze Národního filmového archivu: <http://www.filmovyprehled.cz/cs>

International Labour Organization (ILO): <https://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/index.htm>

Marxist internet archive: <https://www.marxists.org/>

Společná česko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna: <https://www.psp.cz/eknih/>

Published sources

Bartošek, Karel and Bedřich Fučík. *Zpovídání. Pražské rozhovory 1978–1982*. Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1989.

Bondy, Egon. *Prvních deset let*. Maťa, 2003.

Boudník, Vladimír. *Z korespondence I (1949–1956)*. ed. Vladislav Merhaut, Pražská imaginace, 1994.

- Budovatelská estráda. Knihovna souborů lidové tvořivosti.* Osvěta, 1951.
- Campanella, Tommaso. *Sluneční stát.* Mladá fronta, 1979.
- Dorůžka, Lubomír, and Zbyněk Mácha. *Od folklóru k Semaforu.* SHV, 1964.
- Fučík, Julius. *Reportáž psaná na oprátce.* Československý spisovatel, 1980.
- Havelka, Jiří. *Československé filmové hospodářství 1945–1950.* Český filmový ústav, 1970.
- Havelka, Jiří. *Československé filmové hospodářství 1951–1955.* Československý filmový ústav, 1972.
- Havelka, Jiří. *Československé filmové hospodářství 1956–1960.* Československý filmový ústav, 1973.
- Jaboud, Vladimír. *Trafouš, páskové, Vyšehradští jezdci a jiné vzpomínky.* Nakladatelství NZB, 2011.
- Jasný, Vojtěch. *Život a film.* Národní filmový archiv, 1999.
- Jirásek, Alois. *Temno: Historický obraz.* Melantrich, 1950.
- Kohout, Pavel. *To byl můj život??: První díl 1928–1979.* Odeon, 2005.
- Košický vládní program: Program československé vlády národní fronty Čechů a Slováků.* Unie, 1945.
- Merhaut, Vladislav. *Zápisky o Vladimíru Boudníkovi.* Revolver Revue, 1997.
- More, Thomas. *Utopie.* Mladá fronta, 1978.
- Nyklová, Milena. *České rozhovory Jiřího Lederera po dvaceti pěti letech.* Prostor, 2001.
- Projev Klementa Gottwalda ze dne 21. února 1948.*
- Slánský, Rudolf. *Jak zajistit budování socialismu v naší vlasti: Referát na IX. řádném sjezdu Komunistické strany Československa v Praze dne 26. května 1949.* ÚV KSČ, 1949.
- Slánský, Rudolf. *Nové úkoly: Projev na zasedání Ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 17. listopadu 1948, Ústřední výbor Komunistické strany Československa.* 1948.
- Stručný statistický přehled 1945–1960.* Státní nakladatelství politické literatury, 1960.
- Suchý, Jiří. *Vzpomínání: od Reduty k Semaforu.* Melantrich, 1991.
- Šebo, Juraj. *Budovatelské 50. Roky.* Ikar, 2010.
- Škvorecký, Josef. *Franz Kafka, jazz a jiné marginálie.* Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1988.
- Škvorecký, Josef. *Mezi dvěma světy a jiné eseje.* Ivo Železný, 2004.
- Škvorecký, Josef, Boris Mědílek, and Miloslav Zachoval. *Swing na malém městě: Vzpomínky na orchestr Miloslava Zachovala, významný amatérský swingband protektorátní éry.* Ivo Železný, 2002.

Monographs, articles

- Abrams, Bradley. *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation.* Rowman and Littlefield, 2004.
- Ahlheim, Hannah. *Der Traum vom Schlaf im 20. Jahrhundert: Wissen, Optimierungsphantasien und Widerständigkeit.* Wallstein, 2018.
- Bartošek, Karel. "Ouvrier et gréviste à Prague 1953: Témoignage présenté par Karel Bartošek", *Communisme: Revue d'études pluridisciplinaires* no. 1 (1986): 27–37.
- Basserman, Lujo. *Nejstarší řemeslo: Kulturní dějiny prostituce.* Mladá Fronta, 1993.
- Beaumont, Matthew. *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London – Chaucer to Dickens.* Verso Books, 2016.
- Bendová, Eva. *Neony a světla reklam.* Paseka, 2018.
- Berlière, Jean-Marc. "Archives de police/historiens policiers?", *Revue d'histoire moderne & contemporaine* 48, no. 5 (2001): 57–68.
- Bílík, Petr. *Československá kinematografie 50. a 60. let (mimo "novou vlnu").* Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2013.

- Bobek, Michal, Pavel Molek, and Vojtěch Šimiček. *Komunistické právo v Československu: Kapitoly z dějin bezpráví*. Mezinárodní politologický ústav, 2009.
- Bould, Mark. *Film Noir: From Berlin to Sin City*. Wallflower Press, 2006.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Braudel, Fernand. "Histoire et Sciences sociales: La longue durée", *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 13, no. 4 (1958): 725–753.
- Bren, Paulina. *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring*. Cornell University Press, 2010.
- Bren, Paulina, and Mary Neuburger. *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Brendecke, Arndt, and Paola Molino. "The Cultures of Vigilance: Historicizing the Role of Private Attention in Society", Special issue of *Storia della Storiografia/History of Historiography/Geschichte der Geschichtsschreibung*, no. 74–72 (2018): 11–16.
- Brenner, Christianne. "Líné dívky, lehké dívky?: Příživnictví a disciplinace mladých žen v době normalizace", *Dějiny a současnost*, no. 7 (2013): 19–22.
- Brenner, Christianne. *Mezi Východem a Západem: České politické diskurzy 1945–1948*. Argo, 2015.
- Brenner, Christianne. "Život na úkor společnosti: 'Příživnictví' jako nástroj disciplinace mládeže v socialistickém Československu sedmdesátých a osmdesátých letech", *Marginalia Historica: časopis pro dějiny vzdělanosti a kultury Praha*, no. 2 (2012): 96–104.
- Cabantous, Alain. *Histoire de la nuit XVII^e–XVIII^e siècle*. Fayard, 2009.
- Casetti, Francesco. *Filmové teorie 1945–1990*. Akademie Múzických Umění, 2008.
- Castoriadis, Cornelius. *L'institution imaginaire de la société*. Seuil, 1999.
- Catalano, Alessandro. *Rudá záře nad literaturou: Česká literatura mezi socialismem a undergroundem*. Host, 2008.
- Coopersmith, Jonathan. *The Electrification of Russia, 1880–1926*. Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Cyroň, Milan. "Expres z Norimberka. Vlak jako prostor pro ideologickou osvětu", *25fs online časopis o filmu a nových médiích*, November 12, 2012, <http://25fs.cz/2012/expres-z-norimberka/>.
- de Certeau, Michel. *L'Invention du quotidien. Vol. 1: Arts de Faire*. Gallimard, 1980.
- Delattre, Simone. *Les douze heures noires: La nuit à Paris au XIX^e siècle*. Albin Michel, 2000.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Síla zákona*. Oikomenh, 2002.
- Dušková, Lucie, and Ger Duijzings. *Working at Night: Modernity, Night Shifts and the Temporal Organization of Labour Across Political and Economic Regimes*. De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022.
- Efmertová, Marcela. *Elektrotechnika v českých zemích a v Československu do poloviny 20. Století: Studie k vývoji elektrotechnických oborů*. Libri, 1999.
- Espinasse, Catherine, Luc Gwiazdzinski, and Edith Heurgon. *La nuit en question(s)*. Hermann, 2005.
- Fila, Kamil. "Eastern dobývá Západ", *Film a doba* 20, no. 1 (2001): 27–31.
- Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*. Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Foessel, Michaël. *La nuit: Vivre sans témoin*. Autrement, 2017.
- Foucault, Michel. *Naissance de la biopolitique: Cours au College de France 1978–1979*. Seuil/Gallimard, 2004.
- Foucault, Michel. *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*. Gallimard, 1975.
- Freeman, Joshua. *Behemoth: Dějiny továrny a utváření moderního světa*. Host, 2019.
- Geyer, Michael, and Sheila Fitzpatrick. *Za obzor totalitarismu: Srovnání stalinismu a nacismu*. Academia, 2012.

- Ginzburg, Carlo, John Tedeschi, and Anne C. Tedeschi. "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It". *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (1993): 10–35.
- Groma, Patrik, Milan Novák, Miroslav Pfliegel, and Peter Štanský. *Žilina vo svetle lámp: (ne) zabudnutá história energetiky*. Georg, 2015.
- Gwiazdzinski, Luc. *La nuit, dernière frontière de la ville*. Hermann, 2005.
- Gwiazdzinski, Luc. "The Urban Night: A Space Time for Innovation and Sustainable Development", *Articulo – Journal of Urban Research* 11, no. 2 (2015): 1–14, <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01399557/document>.
- Halfin, Igal. *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000.
- Hanáková, Petra. "Marxova žena byla spořádaná manželka: Ženy, muži a domácí práce v českém filmu po roce 1948", *Dějiny a současnost* 27, no. 12 (2005): 33–36.
- Hanson, Stephen. *Time and Revolution: Marxism and the Design of Soviet Institutions*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Havelková, Barbara. "Blaming All Women: On Regulation of Prostitution in State Socialist Czechoslovakia", *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, no. 165 (2016): 165–191.
- Heumos, Peter. "Vyhrňme si rukávy, než se kola zastaví!": *Dělníci a státní socialismus v Československu 1945–1968*. Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky, 2006.
- Himl, Pavel. *Pozorovat, popsat, stvořit: Osvícenská policie a moderní stát 1770–1820*. Argo, 2019.
- Holly, Karol. "Historická narácia jako politický program. Analýza obrazov minulosti v programových textoch slovenského národného hnutia z rokov 1848 a 1861", *Forum Historiae* 3, no. 2 (2009), http://www.forumhistoriae.sk/FH2_2009/texty_2_2009/holly.pdf.
- Horváth, Sándor. *Stalinism Reloaded: Everyday Life in Stalin-City, Hungary*. Indiana University Press, 2017.
- Hrachová, Sandra. "Social Security and National Insurance Act in Postwar Czechoslovakia (1945–1948)", *Prague Economic and Social History Papers* 13 (2011): 30–44.
- Ivasiuc, Ana, Eveline Dürr, and Catherine Whittaker. "Introduction: The Power and Productivity of Vigilance Regimes", *Conflict and Society* 8, no. 1 (2022), 57–72.
- Judt, Tony. *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*. Vintage, 2005.
- Kalifa, Dominique. *Les bas-fonds: Histoire d'un imaginaire*. Seuil, 2013.
- Kalinová, Lenka. *Společenské proměny v čase socialistického experimentu. K sociálním dějinám v letech 1945–1969*. Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky, 2007.
- Kalinová, Lenka. *Východiska, očekávání a realita poválečné doby: K dějinám české společnosti v letech 1945–1948*. Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky, 2004.
- Kaplan, Karel. *Zpráva o zavraždění generálního tajemníka*. Mladá fronta, 1992.
- Kaška, Václav. *Neukáznění a neangažovaní: Disciplína členů Komunistické strany Československa v letech 1948–1952*. *Conditio humana/Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů*, 2014.
- Knapík, Jiří, and Martin Franc. *Průvodce kulturním děním a životním stylem v českých zemích 1948–1967*. Academia, 2011.
- Kotkin, Stephen. *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*. University of California Press, 1995.
- Kožáková, Katarína. "Sociálny štát a sociálna politika v Československu v rokoch 1945–1948", *Historický časopis*, no. 63 (2015): 81–111.
- Krakovský, Roman. *Réinventer le monde. L'espace et le temps en Tchécoslovaquie communiste*. Publications de la Sorbonne, 2014.
- Krekovič, Eduard, Elena Mannová, and Eva Krekovičová. *Mýty naše slovenské*. Premedia, 2013.
- Kuklík, Jan. *Vývoj československého práva 1945–1989*. Linde, 2009.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Le Goff, Jacques, ed. *La Nouvelle histoire*. Complexe, 1990.

- Lenderová, Milena. *Chytila patrola, aneb prostituce za Rakouska i republiky*. Karolinum, 2002.
- Lindenberger, Thomas. "Eigen-Sinn. Domination and No Resistance", *Docupedia.de* (2015), http://docupedia.de/zg/Lindenberger_eigensinn_v1_en_2015.
- Lüdtke, Alf. *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Lüdtke, Alf. "Ouvriers, Eigensinn et politique dans l'Allemagne du XX^e siècle", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, no. 113 (1996): 91–101.
- Macek, Václav, and Jelena Paštéková. *Dejiny Slovenskej kinematografie*. Slovenský filmový ústav. 2016.
- Machek, Jakub. "Populární kultura a státní socialismus", *Forum Historiae* 7, no. 1 (2013), 62–74.
- Macura, Vladimír. *Šťastný věk (a jiné studie o socialistické kultuře)*. Academia, 2008.
- Marx, Henry. "The German Labour Administration in the 'Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia'", in *War Employment and Social Policies in the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia 1939–1945*, eds. Jakub Rákosník and Radka Šustrová. Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2019.
- McDermott, Kevin. "Popular Resistance in Communist Czechoslovakia: The Plzeň Uprising, June 1953", *Contemporary European History*, no. 4 (2010): 287–307.
- Melbin, Murray. "Night as Frontier", *American Sociological Review*, no. 43 (1978): 3–22.
- Mikeš, Jan, and Marcela Efmertová. *Elektrina na dlani: Kapitoly z historie elektrotechniky v českých zemích*. Milpo Media, 2008.
- Monzer, Ladislav. *Osvětlení Prahy: proměny sedmi století*. FCC Public, 2003.
- Naremore, James. *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts*. University of California Press, 2008.
- Nečasová, Denisa. *Buduj vlast – posíláš mír! Ženské hnutí v českých zemích 1945–1955*. Matice moravská, 2011.
- Otter, Chris. *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain 1800–1910*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Petrusich, Amanda. "Fear of the Light: Why We Need Darkness". *The Guardian*, August 23, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/aug/23/why-we-need-darkness-light-pollution-stars>.
- Průcha, Václav. *Hospodářské a sociální dějiny Československa 1918–1992: 2. Díl*. Doplněk, 2009.
- Rákosník, Jakub. "Kontinuita a diskontinuita vývoje sociálního státu v Československu (1918–1956)", *Soudobé dějiny* 20, no. 1–2 (2013): 15–39.
- Rákosník, Jakub. *Sověťizace sociálního státu. Lidově demokratický režim a sociální práva občanů v Československu 1945–1960*. Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2010.
- Rock, Paul. "Sociological Theories of Crime", in *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, eds. Mike Maguire, Rod Morgan, and Robert Reiner. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Rock, Paul. *Understanding Deviance: A Guide to the Sociology of Crime and Rule-Breaking*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Roubal, Petr. *Spartakiads: The Politics of Physical Culture in Communist Czechoslovakia*. Karolinum, 2020.
- Rutz, Henry J. *The Politics of Time*. American Anthropological Association, 1992.
- Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*. Blackwells, 1988.
- Schlör, Joachim. *Nights in the Big City: Paris, Berlin, London 1840–1930*. Reaktion Books, 1998.
- Skelton, Victoria. "Parasites, Prostitution, and Everyday Vigilance in Socialist Czechoslovakia: An Interview with Dr. Christiane Brenner". *Central Europe Yearbook* 2 (2020): 52–58.
- Skopal, Pavel. "The Cinematic Shapes of the Socialist Modernity Programme. Ideological and Economic Parameters of Cinema Distribution in the Czech Lands 1948–1970", in *Cinema*,

- Audiences and Modernity: New Perspectives on European Cinema History*, eds. Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby, and Philippe Meers. Routledge, 2011.
- Skopal, Pavel. *Filmová kultura severního trojúhelníku: Filmy, kina a diváci Československa, NDR a Polska, 1945–1968 – srovnávací perspektiva*. Host, 2014.
- Sommer, Vítězslav, ed. *Řídit socialismus jako firmu. Technokratické vládnutí v Československu 1956–1989*, Nakladatelství lidové noviny, 2019.
- Spurný, Matěj. *Nejsou jako my: Česká společnost a menšiny v pohraničí 1945–1960*. Antikomplex, 2011.
- Spurný, Matěj. "Očištěná společnost: Očista jako konstitutivní princip utváření poválečné české společnosti na příkladu českého pohraničí", *Soudobé dějiny*, no. 2 (2012), 209–226.
- Státník, Dalibor. *Sankční pracovní právo v padesátých letech: Vládní nařízení o opatřeních proti fluktuaci a absenci č. 52/1953. Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky*, 1994.
- Sites, Richard. *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*. Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Szczepanik, Petr. "'Machři' a 'diletanti': Základní jednotky filmové praxe v době reorganizací a politických zvratů 1945 až 1962", in *Naplánovaná kinematografie: Český filmový průmysl 1945 až 1960*, ed. Pavel Skopal. Academia, 2012.
- Szczepanik, Petr. *Továrna Barrandov: Svět filmařů a politická moc 1945–1970*, Národní filmový archiv, 2017.
- Šlouf, Jakub. *Spříznění měnou: Genealogie plzeňské revolty 1. června 1953*. Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2016.
- Šulc, Zdislav. *Stručné dějiny ekonomických reforem v Československu (České republice) 1945–1995*. Doplněk, 1998.
- Tesař, Jan. *Mnichovský komplex: Jeho příčiny a důsledky*. Prostor, 2000.
- Thompson Kristin, and David Bordwell. *Film History: An Introduction*. McGraw-Hill Education, 2002.
- Tomeš, Igor. "Metamorfózy sociálního státu v Československu 1956–1989", *Soudobé dějiny*, no. 1–2 (2013): 65–88.
- Tsipursky, Gleb. *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, and State-Sponsored Popular Culture in the Cold War Soviet Union, 1945–1970*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016.
- Vari, Alexander. "Nocturnal Entertainments, Five-Star Hotels and Youth Counterculture: Reinventing Budapest's Nightlife under Socialism", in *Socialist Escapes: Breaking Away from Ideology and Everyday Routine in Eastern Europe 1945–1989*, Alexander Vari, Cathleen Giustino, and Catherine J. Plum. Berghahn Books, 2013.
- Vomáčka, Josef. "Kavárenský fenomén Václavského náměstí", *Za starou Prahu: Věstník Klubu Za starou Prahu* 44, no. 1 (2014): 14–16.
- Yurchak, Alexei. *Everything Was Forever until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton University Press, 2005.

About the Author

Lucie Dušková is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of History at Charles University. Her research brings together aspects of social and labour history in conversation with popular culture and economic history. Her work on night and night work have contributed to the dynamic development of *night studies* and to new approaches to the study of state socialism. She is co-editor, with Ger Duijzings, of *Working at Night: The Temporal Organisation of Labour Across Political and Economic Regimes* (2022). Her research has appeared in various international journals and books, including *European Review of History*, *International Labour and Working-Class History*, *Leibniz Magazine*, *Night studies: Regards croisés sur les nouveaux visages de la nuit*, and others. Her current research focuses on conceptualising decent work in post-war Europe from a transnational perspective. The findings are elaborated in her forthcoming monograph, provisionally titled *Creating the Ideal of Work between State Socialism and Post-Socialist Transformation: Thinking, Practice, and Contexts*.

Index

- A 105% Alibi* 123, 217, 245
 Act on Workhouses and Reform Schools 250
 alcohol 94, 192, 196–200, 205–207, 209, 210, 215, 238, 240, 257
 alcoholism 196, 199, 200
 black market 119, 197, 203, 210, 228, 244, 256
 Bolshevik, Bolsheviks 56, 58, 73, 74, 137, 138, 158, 174, 178
 border 13, 24, 33, 35, 36, 40–44, 50, 81, 82, 91, 93, 94, 106, 206, 253
 Bratislava 24, 141, 153, 162, 178, 180, 243
 Brno 152, 162, 165, 211, 226, 229
 café 23, 191, 193–195, 200, 202, 206, 210, 216, 217, 228, 237, 238, 244
 capitalism 14, 17, 21, 53, 54, 206, 252
 Catholic, Catholicism, Catholics, Catholic Church 15, 16, 39, 44, 46–48, 55, 59, 83, 86, 138, 173, 187
 charismatic time 63, 64, 113
 Christian 55–58, 61, 62, 71
 closing time 192, 193, 197, 207, 210
 Cold War 73, 74, 82
 Commission of Interior 75, 89
 Commission of Labour and Social Welfare 104, 121
 Commission of Labour Forces 104, 121
 Commission of National Security 75, 89
 Communist, Communists 17, 18, 23, 29, 41, 42, 47, 51, 55, 56, 59, 62–64, 71, 97, 103, 126, 136, 173, 174, 176, 216, 250, 252
 Communist Party 9, 13, 14, 18, 30, 36, 70, 89, 104, 133, 137
 con-artists 224
 consumerism 159, 161, 178
 control 16–18, 25, 46, 57, 64, 74, 95, 101, 120, 126, 133, 138, 182, 187, 188, 201, 212–214, 219, 228, 247, 248, 251, 253
 criminality 23, 29, 188, 228–232, 245, 253
 Criminal Code 75, 93, 200, 201, 231, 232, 248, 250
 criminal classes 23, 193, 195, 210, 224, 226, 228, 232, 253
 criminal environment 28, 153, 244
 criminal films 89
 criminal offence 208, 233, 248, 250
 criminal reports 29
 dance 23, 53, 170, 172, 174–177, 179, 180, 183, 191–199, 202, 204–206, 209, 211, 213, 216–218, 234
 dancing 172, 177, 180, 182, 190, 192–194, 196, 205, 210, 212, 213, 215
 darkness, Darkness 15–17, 29, 30, 33, 35, 37, 38, 43–50, 56–59, 77, 80, 83, 90, 133, 135, 137, 141–144, 148, 149, 154, 170, 172, 173, 196, 221, 227, 252, 254, 257
 dawn 30, 42, 45, 54, 58, 60, 67, 76, 138, 223
 day 15, 17, 30, 31, 37, 42, 44, 65, 66, 87, 100, 101, 108, 110, 116, 122, 130, 169, 171–184, 191, 193, 200, 207, 222, 223, 236
 daylight 16, 82, 142, 207
 daytime 190, 199, 256
 de-stalinisation 89, 156, 173, 255
 doctrine 15, 18, 24, 47, 48, 53, 55, 56, 59, 136
 dusk 30, 174, 177, 221
 Eastern bloc 24, 25, 94, 109, 124, 173, 180, 256
 Easterns 94
 Eigen-sinn 19, 20, 25, 117
 Eight-Hour Working Day 100, 101
 electricity 16, 24, 63, 67, 100, 101, 103, 122, 125, 135–144, 146, 154, 157, 163, 164
 emancipation 45, 60, 105, 109, 110
 Estrada 97, 217, 218
 evening 24, 30, 42, 112, 123, 141, 142, 152, 157, 166, 169–176, 178–180, 182, 190, 191, 193, 194, 196, 204–206, 208–210, 214, 249
 everyday 18–22, 23, 25, 26, 28, 69, 75, 82, 87, 88, 90, 92, 100, 103, 104, 116, 121, 122, 135, 142, 145, 149, 190, 207, 217, 245, 246, 252, 253
 fear 15, 16, 48, 85, 87, 91, 109, 222
 festivities 56, 169–183
 Film noir 224, 225
 Five-Year Plan 55, 63, 104, 106, 107, 113, 114, 117, 118, 121, 122, 124, 129, 136, 139, 154, 204, 241, 254
 forced labour 40, 46, 47, 99, 227, 230, 233, 238
 France 41, 43, 44, 54, 175, 192
 free (leisure) time 17, 48, 120, 140, 156, 188, 190, 204, 215
 freedom 16, 29, 35, 36, 72, 91, 149, 218, 254
 gas lighting 101, 135, 136, 141–146, 151, 163, 257
 German 19, 20, 35, 36, 39–45, 50, 51, 55, 59, 77, 79–83, 85, 90, 94, 98, 102, 105, 163, 209, 224
 Gottwaldov 165
 Great Britain 41, 43, 44, 54, 55, 192
 Great Depression 17, 53, 55, 57, 71, 98, 114, 151, 191, 199, 222, 238, 239
Guard 13, 224, 225
 Habsburgs 44
 Habsburg monarchy 250
 HAÚ 200, 215, 219, 259
 informal associations 220
 informal contacts 118
 informal economy 40, 256
 informal groups 218

- informal stratum 210
 International Labour Organisation 101, 102, 110
 Italy 41, 192
 Jan Hus 39, 45, 51
 jazz 194, 199, 205, 213–216
 Hungary, Hungarian 35, 45, 55
 Kladno 77
 Košice Government Programme 35, 36, 37
 KSČ 17, 35, 39, 45, 55–57, 64, 70, 71, 74, 77, 84, 86, 259
 labour 61, 98, 99, 103–106, 108, 109, 111–113, 115, 117–119, 121, 124, 128, 129, 131, 135, 147, 163, 165, 191, 204, 211, 213, 217, 218, 223, 227, 229, 230, 233, 234, 236, 238, 242, 243, 252, 253, 256, 264, 265
 labour mobilisation 63, 99, 100, 117
 Labour Offices 99
 lamp 109, 122, 140–142, 144, 146–149, 172, 254, 257
 lightbulbs 144–147, 154, 155
 margins of society 26, 222, 228, 250, 253 256
 market economy 18, 53, 54, 114, 154, 161, 167, 232
 Marxist 58, 59, 102, 159, 231, 253
 May Day 75, 155, 169–175, 179, 182
 Ministry of Agriculture 155
 Ministry of Health 219
 Ministry of Information 23, 211, 212
 Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare 104, 121
 Ministry of Labour Forces 104, 121, 234
 Ministry of National Security 75, 89
 Ministry of Social Care 233
 Ministry of the Interior 29, 75, 89, 197, 200
 midnight 13, 14, 17, 21, 30, 31, 69, 174, 192, 209
 monetary reform 119–121, 155, 160, 176
 morning 30, 42, 88, 90, 100, 101, 110, 121, 122, 128, 141, 194, 195, 207, 208, 254
 Moscow 36, 73, 85
 Munich 35, 41–43, 45, 47, 49, 72, 81, 83, 218
 myth 16, 18, 19, 38, 40, 45–47, 50, 51, 61, 93
 National Assembly 18, 55, 102, 177, 180, 199, 200
 National Committee 29, 36, 86, 140, 141, 144, 145, 147, 178, 180, 196, 197, 200, 202, 203, 206, 211, 212, 213, 215, 226, 231
 National Security Corps 29, 155, 226
 National Socialism, National Socialist 18–20, 33, 36, 38, 42, 71, 199
 neon 122, 151, 167, 178, 181, 217, 239, 244, 254, 257
 night shift 17, 63, 77, 97, 129, 143, 233, 252, 253, 255
 night work 29, 64, 67, 68, 97, 129, 143, 147, 155, 252, 253, 255, 256
 nightlife 95, 153, 188–190, 191, 195–198, 207, 209, 214, 217, 221, 242–244, 250, 252, 255, 256
 nightly activities 21, 29, 39, 252, 256
 nighttime 13, 17, 18, 27, 29, 38, 48, 51, 63, 89, 94, 134, 141, 142, 148, 152, 162, 171, 175, 177, 188, 190, 192, 198, 202, 207, 208, 216, 222, 228, 236, 237, 239, 249
 nightscape 133
 nightspot 194, 225, 227, 233, 236, 244
 Olomouc 165
 Operation B 80, 82, 83, 85, 88–90, 165
 Ostrava 24, 50, 107, 117, 118, 162, 183, 238
 parasites 95
 parasitism 248, 249, 250
 peace 33, 118, 158, 175, 178, 180, 181, 197, 200, 202, 207, 208, 248
 Pilsen 120, 162, 165, 238
 planned economy 54, 106, 128, 161
 Poprad 109
 Prague 38, 67, 68, 72, 79, 81, 86, 87, 94, 120, 122, 133, 134, 138, 141–149, 151, 153, 155–158, 161–164, 166, 169, 171–176, 178, 180, 182, 193, 195, 198, 207–209, 211, 213, 214, 219, 221–225, 227, 232, 233, 236–238, 240, 241, 243, 249, 255, 257
 Prague Castle 179, 180
 Prague Spring 180
 Prague Spring 1968 51
 Prague Uprising 50
 prostitute, prostitution 87, 194, 210, 221, 223, 225–228, 230, 231, 233–237, 243, 245, 248
 Protestant 39, 44–48, 58, 59
 Proud Princess 13, 14, 17, 19, 21, 53, 56, 62, 204
 pub 23, 84, 118, 191–195, 197, 202, 203, 205, 206, 210, 216, 217, 222, 225, 226, 228, 233, 236, 238, 244, 246, 249
 public arena 33, 43, 121, 200, 204, 247, 255
 public order 201, 233, 247, 249
 Public Security 26, 75, 88, 142, 198, 243, 247, 248, 259
 public space 14, 15, 29, 46, 87, 89, 95, 121, 144, 156, 176, 251, 255
 public sphere 46, 57, 59, 68, 73, 232
 Rakovník 235
 reaction (forces of, agents of) 71, 72, 76, 77, 85, 196
 reactionaries, reactionary 63, 72, 77
 revolution 56–59, 62, 69, 73, 85, 88, 134, 137, 158, 174, 177, 178, 180, 182, 183
 revolutionary 24, 47, 53, 73, 74, 76, 85, 119, 137, 174, 196, 202, 203, 229, 253, 254
 right to work 114, 231

- saboteur 75, 78–80, 84
 saboteur films 76–81, 84, 86, 88–91, 104, 105, 116, 206
 safe-breakers 224, 227, 239, 240, 245
Safebreakers 217
September Nights 89–92, 145
 shock-work 106, 107, 110, 111, 113, 115, 117, 154, 206, 237
 sleep, sleeping 17, 23, 53, 67, 68, 97, 107, 112, 115, 127, 133, 138, 149, 152, 208, 211, 233, 238, 252
 Snina 200
 social institutions 227
 social issue 54, 225, 230
 social care 229, 230
 Socialism 13–15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 29, 33, 48, 53–55, 59, 61, 63, 64, 74, 105, 114, 133, 134, 148, 161, 167, 174, 188, 204, 205, 231, 243, 244, 250, 251, 255
 socialist competition 106, 110–112, 154
 socialist doctrine 15, 47, 53, 55, 56
 Soviet bloc 51, 69, 89, 102, 158, 172
 Soviet Union 24, 35, 36, 43, 51, 55–57, 67, 71, 73, 107, 109, 136, 137, 139, 171, 174, 175, 178, 179, 192
 sovietisation 24, 135, 139
 Spartakiada 122, 146–148, 163, 165, 177, 179, 180, 216
 Stakhanov 107
 Stalin, Stalin monument 73, 89, 139, 169, 171–173, 177, 179
 Stalinisation 144
 Stalinism 63, 69, 161, 213
 Stalinist, post-Stalinist 72, 73, 82, 88, 123, 179
 star 51, 56, 154, 155, 158, 162, 167, 181, 189, 254, 257
 StB 75, 79, 81, 88, 89, 259
Stolen Border 41, 43, 44, 81, 82
 strategies and tactics 20, 117
 street Lighting 16, 87, 122, 133–135, 149, 157, 163, 164, 167, 174, 227, 239, 244, 247, 254
 streetlamps 143, 144, 146, 148, 224, 254
 Sudetenland 33, 41
 sun 14, 30, 35–38, 53, 56, 58, 61, 224
 sunlight 51, 57
 technology, technological 15, 16, 24, 53, 56, 59–61, 75, 77, 87, 105, 107, 115, 134, 137, 138, 163, 187, 188, 252, 254
The Z-8 Case 60, 77, 78, 88, 105
 thieves 14, 141, 193, 210, 221, 224, 225, 227, 228, 239, 240, 243, 245, 247
 Third Reich 33, 36, 41, 42, 51, 99
 Thousand-Year Slumber 45, 196, 252
 time 14–18, 30, 53, 56, 57, 59, 62–64, 97, 113, 115, 137, 138, 142, 156, 170, 176, 181, 182, 187
 Two-Year Plan 55, 99, 117, 136, 139, 229
 underworld 26, 153, 195, 222, 224, 228, 232, 237, 242, 244
 United States of America 24, 82, 83, 192
 Valašské Meziříčí 158
 VB 26, 28, 75, 88, 142, 198, 207–210, 229, 230, 237, 240, 243, 246–248, 256, 259
Večerní Praha 243
Večerník 243
 vigilance 29, 60, 64, 67–69, 95, 105, 123, 133, 187, 232, 247, 252, 253, 255
 welfare 104, 117, 121, 221, 229, 233
 Western 24, 25, 56, 79, 82, 89, 94, 126, 146, 148, 149, 161, 175, 205, 213, 244, 253, 254, 256
 work, female work 14, 39, 51, 61, 77, 79, 84, 87, 98, 99, 101, 102, 104–111, 114–120, 122, 123, 125–129, 140, 164, 165, 190, 196, 199, 204, 206, 208, 209, 216, 223, 226, 229, 230, 235, 241, 242, 248, 252, 257
 work brigade 99, 111, 118, 140
 work discipline 98, 252
 work obligation 40, 47, 99, 230
 worker 19, 20, 23, 55, 57–59, 61, 63, 67, 69, 72–79, 84, 87, 103–114, 116–122, 124, 125–129, 137, 143, 147, 163–165, 176, 177, 183, 192, 198, 199, 204, 206, 208–210, 214, 218, 223, 227, 233, 234, 236, 237, 241, 249, 250, 252, 253, 257
 workforce 98, 99, 105, 117
 workhouse 230
 working conditions 59, 118, 119, 126
 working day 109, 197
 working hours 17, 123, 125, 129, 154, 190
 working-class 90, 242
 workshop, workplace 105, 106, 109–113, 116, 120, 126, 127, 204, 218
 World War 17, 29, 33, 70, 91, 98, 134, 146, 171, 175, 177, 197, 199, 222, 224, 239, 254
 Yugoslavia 73, 218