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**The Role of National Memory in the Breakdown of the Communist Regime in Czechoslovakia;
Jan Palach, Martin Šmíd and the Collapse of Communist Czechoslovakia**

‘History Matters: Spaces of Violence, Spaces of Memory’

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Abstract:

The weekend following the violent clash of students with police on ‘Narodní třída’ a rumor about the death of Martin Šmíd spread, mourning and grieving his supposed death led to the nation-wide show-up of discontent with the existing regime; the first stance of discontent on the national scale exposed since the events following the tragic self-imposed death of Jan Palach in 1969. The events of 1989 in Czechoslovakia are considered to be an example of an outburst of traumatic effects clearly related to the collective memory of Jan Palach’s desperate self-destructing act. This tragic and traumatic motive of student death as sacrifice connecting the events of 1989 and 1969 is audaciously considered to be a “last drop” factor in the collapse of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. Still, it is suggested that this factor carries the indispensable key to the unresolved mystery behind the surprisingly smooth and essentially non-violent collapse of this refined single party power system with extensive, well-organized and privileged repressive structures. How it happened that classically understood power - as associated with party state and its institutional structures and the political echelon holding control of this state - could have been contested, disregarded and at the end forced to its knees? What social mechanisms and occurrences were in play which have made this flawlessly constructed network of power and grip on society irrelevant and with it associated threat insufficient for inflicting finally even a minor deterrence?

Despite the strong and decades-long closure tendency as persuaded through the all-inclusive means of the totalitarian state which can be described as ‘organized forgetting’ (Connerton 1996, 14), in Neal’s vocabulary (1998, 8) ‘the degree the nation dwelled upon the trauma’ of the 1969 events turned out to be unprecedented. Resurfaced memories and trauma of nation sweeping happenings in 1969 made - the means of crumbling apparatus of Breznev imposed clan regime as confronted with legitimacy eroding perestroika - irrelevant and negligible.

On the occasion of the 14 anniversary of the November 17th clash of the students with police on 'Národní třída,' the newly elected president of the Czech Republic Václav Klaus published a front page article in the best-selling Czech Daily Mladá Fronta. In the article he claimed that in spite of the activities of 'communist intellectuals oppositionist groups', common citizens' 'withstanding, inefficiency, substitute individual activities, atomization of society, merely passive live in the scenery of propaganda which was not believed any more' were the most decisive factor in the collapse of the communist regime and that is why it is highly inappropriate to speak of 'common citizens' at that time in terms of collaboration with the totalitarian regime.

This controversial claim carrying an unpleasant smell of populism infuriated an extensive discussion of the social sources of the changes in 1989 and caused renewed interest into the dynamics and actors of the events in 1989. The discussion, involving contributions from the most prominent figures of the 'Civic Forum', including the leader of this movement that provided the roof to the nationwide protest - Václav Havel, later longtime president of the Czech Republic, then, however, ended again in an usual set of issues that embody the frame through which the events of the 'Velvet Revolution' in the former Czechoslovakia 1989 are usually grasped.

The core of this frame tends to be attached to the issue of the course of negotiation between the representative of communist government (Prime Minister of the federal government Ladislav Adamec) and Civic Forum represented by the leading dissidents and the smooth transfer of power that followed those negotiations. Thus the coining dynamics of the 1989 events are attributed to the process of negotiating the demands as voiced by Civic Forum, installing the interim government and finally gaining the president's seat, the happenings in a wider societal milieu which those political acts and negotiations were representations of are rather omitted in the usual picture of political drama of the 1989. The outside viewer ends up watching the sequence of setting up positions and concluding negotiations on the backstages of theatres and in the regime politicians' cabinets in down-town Prague accompanied by the disquiet of countless and safely anonymous crowd in the streets of Prague. Is this the real picture of November events in Czechoslovakia though?

Even literally - in terms of space - the most accounts of the key events in 1989 Czechoslovakia - particularly from the foreigner point of view, are hopelessly restrained to a very limited number of locations¹ in Prague. Essentially the images of 'Velvet Revolution' are confined firmly to the down-town Prague.

¹ Thus the spatial sequence of the most prominent locations in the first 7 days of the 'Velvet Revolution' would be mostly put as follows 'Národní třída' (the spot of the crash of the students with police), 'Činoherní klub'(theatre in which Civic Forum was declared), Laterna Magica (theatre-headquarters of Civic Forum), Venceslav Square (mass protest meetings first addressed by Václav Havel from the balcony of Socialist Party daily 'Svobodné slovo'), and the cabinets in which two first meetings of Civic Forum representation with Federal Premier Ladislav Adamec took place.

The 'Civic Forum' openly established itself and regarded itself as essentially 'post-event' representation of general public nation-wide voicing the discontent with the communist regime². Is not it then a delusion to keep establishing the dynamics of the November events in Czechoslovakia purely on the course and conduct of this 'post-event' political representation as it is commonly done in the current predominant framing of the November happenings³? This seems to be a fundamental question as it comes to establishing the point when the regime was defeated; the moment when the far obedient general public got to make the single decisive step for each of the individuals it consisted of which become the point of no recourse in the dynamics of the November happenings.

The Event

The weekend following the violent clash of students with police on 'Národní třída' on Friday November 17th, a rumor about the death of Martin Šmíd spread, mourning and grieving his supposed death led to the nation-wide show-up of discontent with the existing regime; the first stance of discontent exposed on the national scale since the events following the tragic self-imposed death of Jan Palach in 1969.

Historic Context

Advancing liberalization tendencies as an overwhelming factor in the second half of the 80's in East-Central Europe only minimally coined the political developments in Czechoslovakia. This peculiar status of the political change in Czechoslovakia was the logical result of the socio-political arrangement - established at the beginning of the 70's as the consequence of reversing the liberalization process in 1968 through the Warsaw Pact armies' intervention. Established order somehow corresponding to and drawing its legitimacy from the Breznev regime in the Soviet Union was normatively based on the refusal of any elements of reform (certain exception was the law on establishing the federation from 1969)⁴. Another crucial factor in view of the prolonged persistence of the regime in its decisively stiff form was directly attached to the fact that still - until the regime's break-down - the power core of the regime was essentially associated with the figures which played substantial roles in the betrayal of 1968 reform agenda and the passage to the "normalized" order at

² Dissidents were not involved at all in organising the student protest which sparked the November events and hardly took a notice of this well in advance planned event. Václav Havel similarly as his communist counterparts was spending the weekend at the cottage-retreat. Petr Uhl, the head of dissident allied press agency who released later unconfirmed news about supposed death of Martin Šmíd, was at the party held by an US diplomat.

³ For example, the most recent account of the events titled 'Through the Labyrinth of the Revolution' (Suk 2003), the non-fiction book of the year (Czech 'Magnezia Litera Price') is, while having an ambition of the most detailed and worked-through account of the sweeping change of 1989, entirely focused on Civic Forum activities and its internal workings

the beginning of the 70's. This "pantheon" has been constantly reminding of the spoiled nature of the regime in place and the tragedy of the 1968-1969 events as culminating in the desperate self-destructive move of Jan Palach - a moment deeply suppressed in the memory of a subdued society.

Neal's Anatomy of National Trauma

Both tragic events mentioned above stand as good examples of national trauma particularly if their symbolic and history demarcating potential is taken into account. Undertaking the concept of national trauma (Neal 1998) the more general frame of social trauma is specified and narrowed down.

National trauma is shared collectively and has a generally cohesive effect. Similarly to an individual victim (for example of rape) the society is somehow permanently affected and changed or tends to be in some way or another alternated in the consequence of national trauma (Neal 1998, 3-5). The immediate crucial response to national trauma is a widespread fear and sense of vulnerability. The further consequences of national trauma are decay and disintegration of borders and boundaries between crucial social categories such as order and chaos, sacred and profane, good and evil⁵. As those borders and boundaries became fragile, 'people individually and collectively see themselves as moving into uncharted territory' (Neal 1998, 6). Frequently, the integrity of the social order is called into the question and shared values threatened (Neal 1998, 6)⁶. Two basic types of social disruption were distinguished by Neal (1998,5): the acute type of crisis and the 'chronic, enduring and long lasting crisis'(lacks the dramatic beginning). Somehow similarly Neal is distinguishing traumatic situations in terms of consequences; one type is characterized by permanent changes and the other one by 'less lasting effects, but still intense emotional effects' (Neal 1998, 7)⁷.

⁴ The canonical text in the regime iconography describing this fundamental premise of the Czechoslovak "normalised" communist regime for two decades following the 1968-1969 events was titled 'Reassessment and Enlightening as drawn from the Crisis Development'.

⁵ In the context of the 1969 events in Czechoslovakia, transition from 'good to evil' is personified by Jan Palach's figure and the changing perception of his martyr's act. The nice example of reversed 'evil into good' transition represents Charta 77 and the development impersonated by the figure of Václav Havel.

⁶ The swift and accelerated decomposition of the Czechoslovak regime in November 1989 appears as showcase for this claim. Shared "values of national compromise" as in place since the 70's "normalisation" (reestablishment of 'the rules of the game' after 1968 invasion) - meaning 'you accept the invasion and resign on political and public activity' (unless in clearly stated support of the regime) in exchange for certain space and autonomy to develop your private sphere ('cottage culture', plus the other forms of consumer lifestyles prevalent in "normalised" Czechoslovakia).

⁷ Of course the theme of trauma could be approached in terms closer to the original psychoanalytic concept. It would be then necessary to turn attention to Freud's identification of trauma as 'a foreigner body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work'. In this sense and in the line with Smelser 'the memory and effect associated with the event is subsequently repressed from consciousness, and consigned to a statue of prolong latency or incubation (Smelser, 3). In Freud's understanding, traumas of childhood tend to be more momentous because they occur in times of incomplete development and are for that reason liable to have traumatic effect. This is crucial for the psychological - cultural (social) analogy - as it implies that at a later developmental stage or in a different context, the traumas may not be so severe (Smelser, 4). This creates space within the context of the analogy for explanation of occurrence of cultural/social trauma just in some circumstances.

It seems that both types of social crises as distinguished by Neal are unavoidably interwoven in the Czechoslovak case. The acute type of crisis - January 1969 events (Jan Palach's self-sacrificing act and following nation-wide reaction) evolves into the second type - 'chronic, enduring and long lasting crisis' which at the end after two decades ('normalized regime' in the 70' and 80's described usually in terms of crisis and decline) leads to a sudden explosion (acute type of crisis) in connection with violence directed against protesting students and the supposed death of one of them (immediate associations with the death of Jan Palach). However, the crisis or interconnected crises, so to speak, have dynamics which do not coincide too much with characteristics attached to Neal's distinction.

Splitting the traumatic situations into those with less lasting effects, though still carrying 'intense emotional effect' and those characterized by permanent social changes attains a questionable status for the Czechoslovak context since it is very hard to assess how the traumatic situation in 1989 resulting in the permanent changes differs from 1969 events that had, euphemistically described, 'less lasting effects, but still intense emotional effects'. Perhaps such distinction can be made in hard terms, but in softer dimension, the effects of the 1969 developments may have had as far-reaching significance as the changes after 1989 (the long-lasting social break-down of society and various social structures in moral sense as characteristic for the 70's and 80's Czechoslovakia - the residuum of which still affect and shape even contemporary happenings in the Czech and Slovak society). This is closely related to Neal's point about 'the degree of dwelling and degree of closure' (1998, 8). Despite the strong and decades long closure tendency as enforced through the all-inclusive means of totalitarian state which can be described as 'organized forgetting' (Connerton 1996, 14) 'the degree the nation dwelled upon the trauma' of 1969 events turned out to be unprecedented and, at the end, had the devastating consequences for the whole communist regime socio-political structure. The answers to the questions about substantial inconsistency of the Czechoslovak context with Neal's analytic frame likely rest in the qualitatively different circumstances the analytic frame is confronted with - the USA - Western society, and Czechoslovakia - paradoxically, not existent any more - with its complex Central European history and substantially larger external interference with internal social happenings.

Preconditions for Public Protests in 'Real Socialist' Czechoslovakia

In more immediate account of November 1989 street happenings as related to the unconfirmed news of Martin Šmíd's death it is necessary to note at the first place that 'the group survivor's responses are not just to the actual death and the loss it signifies, but as well are a response to others' responses' (Rando 1998, XIX). Clearly witnessing the grieving behaviors may lead to catalyzing grief responses. Rando exemplifies this somehow paradoxical phenomenon on the example of reaction to the Princess

Diana's car crash and lists variety of reasons for this occurrence⁸. Responses to 'trauma, death, loss' taking a form of collectively shared experiences can thus contribute to creating the sense of community. Such collective behaviors and effect of the newly recreated sense of community apparently took place also in the instance of the supposed death of Martin Šmíd and neither routinely functioning repressive machine nor communist political leadership was able to confront such an occurrence - totally beyond usual acting against dissident opposition and street protests invited by the usual oppositions circles.

Taking into account Rando's argument about generally growing degree of social complexity causing higher degree of traumatization due to high risks and unpredictability resulting from the modern social advances⁹ (Rando 1998, XX), it is suggested that the peculiar complexity of 'real socialism' and life in it was definitely carrying with it specific uncertainty and high risk factors. Even though, it is for sure to be suggested that even more so - 'real socialism' particularly in its Czechoslovak "normalized" form represented an enforced stability in economic and social life which was to reduce substantially uncertainty and high risk factors. Definitely, the 'real socialist' regime has not been reducing such kind of risks when it came to public protests and collective disclosures of critical stands towards the existing socio-political set-up¹⁰.

However, Možný (1991) while bringing up the question 'Why so easily...' the Czechoslovak real socialism collapsed - sociologically outlined the idyllic bipolar arrangement - of two lordships - communist nomenclature and dissidents and their cultural and social capital base in the sense of Bourdieu and described the 'real socialist world' between coined by slight sigh 'We can not be all dissidents ...'. Thus, neither of the two polarized groups and their public engagement activities are to be described in terms of traumatic reaction as such engagement represented practice fulfilling particular social functions.

Assessing the role of national memory and trauma in toppling down the communist regime it is necessary primarily focus on the category in between those two social poles - the one of 'common people' who 'could not be all dissidents ...' and the patterns of their public engagement. This pattern has been extensively discussed and described, initially by the expertise of the dissidents themselves

⁸ Among those belong - inviting imitation, disinhibiting one's grief, providing implicit legitimization of certain feelings and /or permission to engage in particular behaviors, stimulating unfinished business about other losses or important issues in one's past or present life, eliciting a contagion response or creating a sense of community via commonly shared experiences (Rando 1998, XIX).

⁹ in spite of growing control over biological and natural causes of death

¹⁰ Thus, when describing uncertainty and risks connected to that in the 'real socialist' system Rando's list of phenomena encountered perfectly applies for the context and apparatus of the communist police state as it

(Havel 1985, Šimečka 1979, 1984, 1990) and then by historians (Ash 1990, Otáhal 1994, 1995) and somehow overwhelmingly got described as taking the form of the unwritten contract between the ruling "normalization" elite and 'common people' which guaranteed the order better than the repressive mechanisms as usually understood. In exchange for guaranteeing autonomy of certain consumption lifestyle, people were supposed to go along with the system and pretend to a certain degree of political acceptance of the given system. This "normalization" originated arrangement has become very sophisticated and, in contrast to Poland and Hungary exposed to serious economic and consumption driven problems, remained functional essentially until the actual collapse of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. The successfully maintained arrangement guaranteed the regime unprecedented stability.

In this light, it is even hard to put up the label – 'common people' public engagement. In the second half of 1988 the number of people engaged in some autonomous activities started to increase, however, till November 1989 the number of autonomous initiatives has not gone beyond the number of the fingers on two hands and most of the initiatives have been overlapping as frequently personally interconnected since many activists were involved in more at a time. There was a growing number of people taking part in the street protests, peak in this sense represented series of the protest commemorating the twentieth anniversary of Palach's death in January 1989 (detailed accounts - Vladislav, Prečan 1990, Tůma 1994), but still they involved just thousands at the maximum which effectively meant that even this biggest outburst of public protests involved most likely only slowly expanding circle of traditional and experienced protesters. This character of the protests preceding November 17th had, however, key meaning for the crucial happenings of the November 17th student organized protest. Tůma, after detailed analysis of various sources (the internal records of police repressive apparatus at the first place) concluded that contrary to the stereotypical expectations putting the key burden of the street protests on young people, the crucial element of those protesters belonged to the cohort of 25 to 40 years of age. Also the opinion poll conducted at that time shows that cohort of 30-44 years old was most informed about the oppositional groups and their activities among all the age groups (Tůma 1994, 46).

'Národní třída' and the Paradox of the Ignorant Student

In the context of 'real socialism' political routine presumably innocent commemoration meeting of the Nazi repression of the Czech students on 17th November 1939 turned out to be a protest which at certain moments included human crowd of - 50 000 protesters, an unprecedented event for the

consists primarily of suddenness and lack of anticipation at the first place; secondly violence, mutilation and destruction; and thirdly preventability and/or randomness. (Rando 1994).

previous 20 years. Its organization in cooperation with the official Communist Youth Organization allowed for 'common people' participation due to implied heaven from riot and identity checking police. This actually decisively contributed to the traumatic impact of the event as this time, not only "professional" routine protesters were exposed to usual police brutality¹¹ but at the first place young inexperienced students - the new comers were thrown into water of 'usual' and that night not particularly harsh practice of communist police repressive apparatus. Also this way an entire spectrum of thus far proper university students from all professional orientations got involved along with their organizing and intellectual potential as responding to the stress and vulnerability experienced face to face with the repressing machine of the regime. This way the exposure to arbitrary repressive force carrying tremendous shocking effect provoked among students similarly shocking response - arbitrary disregard for so far valid categories and principles of 'real socialist' social order and sense of what is possible. At those moments, acute trauma and self-help and self-defense reaction within the 'student body' essentially contributed to the disrespect for the existing political conditions, the extensive apparatus of the communist state started to be ignored. Already throughout the weekend following the clash on 'Národní třída' essential self-organizing structures necessary for upcoming student strike came into existence, although being - from the viewpoint of repressive apparatus' capabilities - rather laughable. In this sense, developments among students could be interpreted as the case of extensive collective trauma prompting an extraordinary non-routine reaction critically affecting the relevance of so far, in Giesen's wording 'culturally generated web of meanings' (Giesen 2001, 14474).

Jan Palach, Martin Šmíd and National Memory

Nonetheless, the trauma was not limited to student body and traumatic effects hit a wider social milieu. Supposed death of Martin Šmíd was being immediately connected to the memories of martyr Jan Palach and brought in the generation of protesting students' parents and the average passerby on the street. This recovery of Jan Palach's memory could be taken as the key moment of overcoming the latent period in this national trauma and moving into the crucial phase of 'speaking out and working through' (Giesen 2001, 14475). Of course here comes into play what Pynsent described as Czech martyr complex (Pynsent 1996), still the incident with alleged death of Martin Šmíd was closely perhaps the element which moved the change to previously uncharted territory and caused the change to really make it through as social trauma resulting from this alleged death and 'replayed' trauma of Jan Palach's death resulted in overcoming for long habituated "realist position" of the 'common people' towards the 'real socialist' social order.

¹¹ There was rather limited number of them as they have not taken notice of the Communist Youth Organisation run commemoration meeting .

Technology and Dynamics of Change; ‘Down-town Prague’ Frame versus Developments in the Whole Czechoslovakia

In terms of political power and influence position of Federal Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec and various equips in the Central Committee of the Communist Party were two very separate ‘power’ matters and the question is to what extent Ladislav Adamec - giving guaranties of peaceful treatment of unfolding protests - had any safe way to anyhow influence the functioning of power ministries and other parts of the repressive apparatus (‘Peoples Militias’). As later investigations have shown (Parliamentary Committee on Investigations of Events of November 17th – Bartuška 1990), the decisive political influence - even in the institutionalized form (the general secretary of the Communist Party Milouš Jakeš as the head of the Security Council) had been imposed by the Communist Party Committees at appropriate levels¹². In spite of perhaps sincere Federal Prime Minister Adamec assurances of the commitment to non-violent means of solving the political crisis the repression apparatus mobilized very substantial resources¹³ without any explicit undertakings from the side of the structures of federal government represented by Ladislav Adamec. As late as on Friday 24th, apparently, in the line with considerations of some crucial members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party or factual decision-makers at the power ministries, the designated units of the Czechoslovak Peoples’ Army were kept at the highest alert ready to fulfill the plan of confining more than 10 000 ‘oppositional figures’¹⁴ (long-before set up and continuously updated list) even though the decision-making about the implementing this highest alert had not formally gone through any institutional channels including the ”appropriate” decision-making bodies within the Communist party.

Only 10 days after the start of street protests and self-organizing activities when the general strike (27th November 1989) proved the nation-wide support to change and refusal of the hitherto ”normalized” arrangements this imminent danger of the use of power-means was somehow convincingly eliminated as it became clear that the happenings overcame the crucial ‘geographical’ limits and related media blockage that had been essentially determining the first ten days of the developments. To safeguard, at the first place, the peaceful and non-violent character of unfolding changes Civic Forum representatives spent those first 10 days establishing a dialogue with the representative of the Federal government (Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec). However, the head of Federal government Ladislav Adamec was hardly able politically and in terms of factual control in the

¹² Thus, for example, the secretary of the city Party committee in Prague - Miroslav Štípán, one of very few protagonists of the communist apparatus who was convicted for violent repressions in 1989, had an extensive influence on the performance of the repressive apparatus in Prague.

¹³ ‘Peoples Militias’ (maintained directly by the Communist Party cells in single companies and enterprises), specially designated and prepared units of the Czechoslovak Peoples Army with heavy weaponry

¹⁴ This plan somehow resembled undertakings realized in Poland against Solidarnosc movement in December 2001 (confining 10 000 oppositional figures). However, it is necessary to note, that Czechoslovak plan was much

position to really effectively influence the undertakings of repressive apparatus and truly dictate the non-violent approach to the crisis from the side of hitherto political and power means controlling establishment.

These limits were the determining factor in the dynamics and the course of the November events. Here it is indispensable to distinguish various ‘frames of dynamics’ – one – generally predominating in depicting the November happenings as a run of Civic Forum representatives in between protest meetings of countless crowds in the streets and the political negotiations at the highest level resulting due to its ‘all-inclusive’ complementarity in the regime change¹⁵. This frame of depicting the November events, particularly in the sense of the first 10 decisive days, could be labeled as ‘down-town Prague frame’ as it essentially explains the November events in Czechoslovakia strictly in terms of happenings in down-town Prague which, even though involving some limited elements of highest communist echelons (negotiations with Ladislav Adamec) was due to effectively enforced media blockage representing, for sure, extraordinary but in nation-wide terms essentially at the given moment isolated phenomena of limited and even somehow dubious meaning. Thus, in more inclusive explanatory frame the fundamental question marks revolve around the fact of initial successful blockage of media coverage of the extraordinary happenings in Prague (electronic as well as printed media – printed media restriction to Prague limits etc.) and consequently limiting initially gatherings and street protests to down-town Prague and few instances of protests in single other big cities, frequently restrained to their university quarters. In this explanatory frame accentuating the developments in the whole Czechoslovakia, the decisive factor determining the social dynamics of the happenings is rather than the opened negotiations with Ladislav Adamec - one of the less important members of the Party Central Committee - overcoming gaps that were preventing people from engagement in the protests.

With the distance of 15 years, two gaps emerge as crucial. The one which comes to the forefront most obviously may be labeled as ‘geographical’. The pace, course and overall character of the November occurrences in most of the Czechoslovakia substantially differed from the dynamics of the Prague happenings. Thus, while in a view of a Prague participant in the protests or their organizer by Friday November 24th (7 days from the police clash with students) there was no recourse to even mild version of radically reformed socialist regime possible; in a small Bohemian town (the majority of the country consisted of) such perestrojka-like reform of the regime was very likely scenario to come as the result of ‘Prague disturbances’ and local individual activists and protesters could have even be getting ready to be possibly another ‘lost generation’ of stalkers, boilermen and cleaning-

more repressive as proportionally to the population 4 times more people were to be imprisoned compared to the marshal law implementation in Poland.

¹⁵ This frame is provoking array of discussions how far the sources of this regime change have been compromised by involvement with the communist establishment.

persons which got too much exposed in the course of the stormy days immediately following the November 17th.

This fundamental divide was, along with gaining step by step access to media¹⁶, factually bridged only on Monday November 27th as the general strike was undertaken nation-wide and emerged organizationally as a movement which could not be effectively contested through even massive use of repression means.

The other fundamental cleave – bridging of which decided about the fate of the ‘real-socialist’ regime was the overcoming of the ‘generation gap’. Parents under the ‘real-socialist’ regime involved in perpetuating the survival strategy ‘mind your own business and, at the first place, do not get involved’ (which was particularly valid canon for the university students) were directly exposed to the implicit violence on proper college youth. Figley and Kleber (1995) have gone ‘beyond victim’ and recognized ‘secondary traumatic stress’ as a legitimate diagnosis for persons in the immediate surrounding of primary victims. Alleged death of Martin Šmíd though transcended the matter far beyond ‘secondary traumatic stress’ and brought up a memory of self-sacrificing act of Jan Palach and the inescapable nation-wide mourning over his death in the minds of those parents who were at the time of Jan Palach’s shocking death in the same ‘young’ shoes as their offspring in November 1989. Exactly this motive of student death reconnecting the unfolding events immediately from the start with the memory of the tragic happenings of 1968-1969 made people to overcome the ‘generation gap’¹⁷ which in numerous instances of earlier student revolts and youth protests appeared crucial.

Alleged Death of Martin Šmíd as a Conspiracy

The news of the alleged death of Martin Šmíd as spread through the Eastern European Press agency had their origin in Drahomíra Dražská, the university dorms-janitor with drag problem who was on the payroll of the Interior Ministry. Drahomíra Dražská claiming that Martin Šmíd’s brother received the call about Martin’s death from the hospital convinced Petr Uhl to release the report even though not verified from the other source¹⁸. As the whole variety of official investigations of the November 17th events has shown, one of the undercover agents of the ‘StB’(secret police), who earlier infiltrated in the student circles, pretended (as supposedly instructed by his superior) to be seriously wounded during the November 17th and after laying stiff for some time on the scene of the clash was taken by

¹⁶ This trend gained the momentum with the full life TV-coverage of the mass protest meeting at ‘Letná’ on Sunday November 26th.

¹⁷ As before, when the clashes of the police with street protesters were at issue, the propaganda apparatus had used extensively and skilfully generation divides – arguing for a disregard for ‘reckless actions of young vagabonds’ (in spite of the fact that protests were attended overwhelmingly by middle-age participants). Prague Party secretary Miroslav Štěpán, while contesting the students’ demands, argued in his address to workers of Prague ČKD that the fate of Czechoslovakia can not be decided by ‘youngsters’. Gathered employees responded by chanting ‘We are not youngsters!’.

¹⁸ All the previous reports of Uhl’s press agency were always precisely correct and extensively used by foreigner broadcast for Czechoslovakia.

an Interior Ministry ambulance to the hospital (from which the supposed call about Martin Šmíd's death was made).

This fact along with the course of the action of police units involved in "restoring the public order" at 'Národní třída' on November 17th (instead of dispersing crowd, participating units ended up closing the crowd from both ends at 'Národní třída') may suggest that there were particular plans from the side of repressive apparatus, Interior Ministry or particular members of the higher echelons of the Communist Party regarding the effect of this specific event. The most reasonable consideration (which can not be though substantiated through investigation) evokes the possibility of a deliberate use of limited crash of police with students for the purposes of speeding the shifts within the ranks of the communist elite towards the group declaratively associating itself with the reform perestrojka-like agenda.

Conclusion

The national memory of 1968-69 events as connected through the desperate act of Jan Palach to the alleged death of Martin Šmíd on November 17th, 1989 has played the critical role in the course of 1989 developments in Czechoslovakia. The national trauma of 1968-69, reemergence and going through the long repressed memories of civic humiliation in the 70's and 80's directly contributed to the mobilization of citizens and violating of the routines and the basic modes of behavior in the population at large – overcoming of which was the basic precondition for gaining the social dynamics necessary for a peaceful and non-violent decomposition of the hard line communist regime in Czechoslovakia.

Both types of social crises as distinguished by Neal have taken place in Czechoslovakia. Still, the acute type of crisis - January 1969 events (Jan Palach's self-sacrificing act and following nation-wide reaction) evolved into the second type – 'chronic, enduring and long lasting crisis' which at the end after two decades of "normalized regime" overcame institutionally endorsed latent phase and moved into the phase of 'speaking out'. The outburst of the acute type of crisis in November 1989 that provoked the passage of previously described long lasting crises into 'speaking out' phase resulted in the fundamental change of Czecho-Slovak society. In Neal's distinction the acute type of crisis is to carry predominantly 'less lasting, but still intense emotional effects' in contrast to 'chronic, enduring and long lasting crisis' bringing permanent changes. For this particular example of the developments in Czechoslovakia thus this typology of the impact of particular types of crisis does not correspond too much as the second phase of long lasting crisis which may tend to carry fundamental changes was started by the acute type of outburst in November 1989. This corresponds to the fact that by 1989 the agenda of 1968-69 socialism with human face for which Jan Palach stood up have not represented fundamentally the key solutions determining the future of the change to be

undertaken and the up-coming agenda was drawn selectively from contemporary Western inspirations.

Václav Klaus has got the point - the 'common people' were crucial for the unfolding events of 1989, however, not for 'withstanding, inefficiency, substitute individual activities, atomization of society, merely passive live in the scenery of propaganda' but precisely for the opposite – overcoming their 'real socialist' routines and disingagement, bridging the cleaves and gaps dividing them and finding the common cause through coming to the terms with repressed memories of 1968-69 and following sustained humiliation of the 70's and 80's and finally acting on them.

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