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Occupation in 1968: We keep broadcasting!

The courage and professional character of editors and technicians who tried to maintain free broadcasting no matter what the cost and to inform their viewers and listeners about what was happening was admirable. It is one of the highlights in the history of broadcast media in Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovak Radio earned its moral credit in the early days of the Nazi occupation in 1939, and for its illegal broadcasts during the war and the Prague Uprising and liberation in May 1945, for CST, the occupation was its first major flashpoint, a sort of coming of age.

At 4:30am on 21 August 1968, the editors and directors launched a non-scheduled broadcast from the studio in Burgher Hall.¹ However, that lasted only until 8:30am, when the studio was attacked by a group of Soviet soldiers followed by Karel Kohout, the television's first managing director. The workers were forced to leave and the studio was shot to pieces.

First and foremost, the managing director Jiří Pelikán resolutely refused requests by the Prague occupation forces commander to interrupt broadcasting. Editors and technicians used the fact that CST was scattered across several places throughout Prague and they hid in the second CST studio located in the former Skaut Cinema.² From there, they could broadcast until 11:40. The group decided that it was necessary to split and broadcast from provisional spaces where they could not be reached so easily. One part drove to the Cukrák transmitter located near Prague,³ while the other

¹ Kamil Winter, Kamila Moučková, Pavel Vantuch, Přemek Prokop, Miroslav Sígl, Oldřich Čičatka.

² Olga Čuříková, Věra Kunderová, Petr Krul, Miroslav Tonninger, Tomislav Neklan, Julius Daněk were already in place, joined later by Miroslav Sígl, Jiří Kantůrek, Vladimír Tosek, Mátio Ilk, Jiří Svejkský, Jiří Škutina, Petr Ulrych, Jiří Hradecký.

³ Vladimír Tosek, Oldřich Čičatka, Alena Kejhová, Ivan Balaj, Josef Krejčí, J. Wackermann, Věra Hlinková, driver Gimboš, Libor Ševčík, Petr Krul, Ota Nutz.

groups headed to the Tesla factories, which produced television technology in Prague-Hloubětín and the A. S. Popov Research Institute in Prague 4.⁴ From there, they were able to broadcast for almost two days, until 23 August.

Nevertheless, the invaders were thorough and managed to discover their colleagues at the Cukrák transmitter. The last scenes from their broadcast showed tanks entering the area of the transmitter. This broadcast group managed to escape fully equipped to another transmitter in southern Bohemia at Klet', which belonged to the Czechoslovak People's Army. There, the local regional commander helped them disguise themselves as military officials and lent them uniforms. The Klet' transmitter, however, soon found itself under artillery fire and they had to be transferred to another transmitter, Krašov. This one was physically shot to pieces on 24 August and, under the cover of darkness, the group escaped to an apartment of the local gamekeeper in the village of Holubov. One part of the group then went back to Prague and the other joined a Czechoslovak military unit located at the Austrian border (Cysařová 2009: 308–309).

Their colleagues broadcast from alternative spaces in the research institutes in Prague before moving to an unfinished building in Prague at Na Petřínách. There they were even able to invite guests; actors, writers and ordinary citizens to speak on the screen. The memoirs of Jiří Svejkský, one of the main organizers at the time, tell of the improvised conditions as well as of the moment they acquired the footage from the streets of Prague:⁵

The question arose how to incorporate the footage into the broadcast. The technicians decided immediately, sat down to make a phone call, and soon after that somebody rang the bell and brought a projector. The film was projected onto a white table cloth, and they decided to film it with the studio camera. They tried it and it worked.

SVEJKOVSKÝ 2010: 57

This broadcasting was forcibly brought to an end on 26 August. Some members of the group managed to remain on air by using the broadcasting vehicle which was parked in the unfinished television complex at Kavčí Hory.⁶

⁴ Among those who broadcast from these alternative places were Miroslav Lang, Zdeněk Podskalský, Jiří Svejkský, Petr Krul, Vladimír Škutina, Vladimír Branislav, Olga Čuříková, Kamila Moučková, Heda Čechová, Jiří Kantůrek.

⁵ Miroslav Fojtík, Josef Krejčík, Oldřich Kábrt, Zdeněk Pokorný, Jaroslav Holeček.

⁶ Ivo Paukert, Jiří Fairaizl, Vít Holubec, Miroslav Suchánek, Karel Mikyska, Olga Čuříková, Otka Bednářová, Milan Volf, Mário Ilk.

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FIGURE 11.1 The CST staff tried to resist the occupation by keeping broadcasting at all costs. They were transmitting from a building under construction in Kavčí Hory (above), from transmitters Kojál and Cukrák, and from a military transmitter on Klet'. (Source: APF CT, 1968).



FIGURE 11.2 Jiří Svejkský and Kamila Moučková in the improvised studio at the television factory Tesla Hloubětín in Prague on 22 August 1968. (Source: Archives of Jiří Svejkský, 1968).



FIGURE 11.3 Věra Hrabánková and Jiří Svejkský while broadcasting from the makeshift studio in Skaut Cinema in Prague, 21 August 1968. (Source: Archives of Jiří Svejkský, 1968).

Naturally, such dramatic events were not unique to the Prague studio. For example, Lubomír Popelka, the documentary film maker, who recorded the first days of occupation in the streets of Brno, was denied access to the Brno studio by the occupation forces and thus he took his materials and left for Vienna, where they were broadcast by the ORF. In Ostrava, television employees⁷ left the studio the very moment the tanks were within sight and moved to a small studio in Zábřeh, where they created a provisional studio. From there, they were able to broadcast not just news, but also poetry and whole films, until 4 September even though the main Ostrava transmitter in Hošťálkovice was sealed – TV technicians found a way to overcome this obstacle and use it for their transmissions.

CST resumed regular broadcasting on 4 September 1968 at 7pm. The programming was patriotic and full of pathos, as the situation required. After the poem *Song to My Homeland*⁸ followed Bedřich Smetana's opera *Dalibor*, an opera about a medieval knight unjustly imprisoned in one of the

⁷ Luděk Eliáš, Miroslav Ulčik, Jiří Nedvěd and Jana Juráčková.

⁸ ['Zpěv rodné zemi']



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FIGURE 11.4 A plaque commemorating transmissions in August 1968, situated on the mountain of Ještěd above the town of Liberec. (© Martin Štoll, 2016).

towers of the Prague Castle. By the second day, iconic figures of TV journalism who had made their name during the Prague Spring returned to people's screens. Among them were Jiří Svejkský, Vladimír Škutina, and Jiří Kantůrek. 'We are back here and back with you', they said. It was a paraphrase of a famous declaration broadcast by Czechoslovak radio during the liberation from the Nazis in 1945. The poet Jaroslav Seifert (who went on to receive a Nobel Prize for Literature in the midst of the repressive normalization period) gave a poignant speech in which he claimed that 'in the same way we put on a pedestal the first tank that arrived in Prague in the May of 1945, we are going to display the last one to leave our country'. That is, a Soviet tank (Cysařová 2009: 311).

Reaction of power

Naturally, the situation had radically changed. Despite the abolition of censorship several months before, the Prime Minister's office issued an emergency measure at the end of August (30 August), establishing a new censor, the Office for Press and Information. The main duty of this office

was to regulate the activity of the press, radio, and television, while forbidding any kind of criticism of the Warsaw Pact countries or of the presence of the foreign armies. It was also forbidden to publish any information regarding the damage caused by the occupation, the number of injured people or casualties. It was prohibited to use the words occupier and occupation (Cysařová 2009: s. 310).

The re-imposition of censorship, not merely as an emergency measure, became official on 13 September. The National Assembly, which had abolished censorship on 26 June, now issued new law No. 127/1968, which created a new censorship institution, The Government Committee for Press and Information.

Many years later, Jiří Pelikán remembers how provocative the August broadcasting must have seemed to the Soviet communists.

The fact that the materials reached Vienna through different routes made it possible for the whole world to watch what was happening in our country. During the Hungarian uprising in 1956, only photographs leaked from the country, also with a delay, but it drove Brezhnev mad that the invasion of Czechoslovakia appeared on TV screens.

CYSAŘOVÁ 2003b: 46

Pelikán's destiny was now sealed. He was branded a counter-revolutionary.

We can understand now that television was used to broadcast a number of programmes on a daily basis which intended to create an atmosphere of political anxiety in the country, stir up waves of nationalism and anti-Soviet moods. This was the logical conclusion of Soviet journalists in their so called *White Book*, a propaganda piece whose main goal was to discredit the CzCP and the counter-revolution.

CYSAŘOVÁ 2009: 312

Pelikán was given the position of culture councilor at the Czechoslovak Embassy in Rome, which was nothing other than a one-way ticket out of Czechoslovakia. He left, deciding never to return, and started the life of an exile, convinced he could better help his country from abroad.⁹ He founded the emigré magazine *Listy*, which became one of the most important platforms of Czech culture and politics in exile.

⁹ In Rome, Pelikán survived an assassination attempt orchestrated by the Czech Secret Police (StB) and became a key target of the secret services and propaganda actions. He lived in the Italian metropolis until his death in 1999. He received Italian citizenship, became a member of the European Parliament for the Italian Socialist Party (1979–1989), where he became 'the voice of the Prague Spring in Strasbourg Parliament', (Pelikán 2003) and after the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia he was a member of Václav Havel's advisory board.

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In CST the government replaced Pelikán with a government commissioner, Bohumil Švec. He was not able to suppress the intense effort of TV staff to maintain continuity with the free atmosphere of the Prague Spring. In the programme *We Are with You, Be with Us*,¹⁰ Jiří Kantůrek and Vladimír Škutina kept on inviting Dubček and Smrkovský to their studio, as well as artists such as Marta Kubišová who had also become an icon of the Prague Spring. Kubišová's song *Prayer for Marta*¹¹ was an anthem of the times, a symbol of the struggle against occupation with Petr Rada's lyrics such as 'Let peace remain in this country (. . .) When the power that you have lost is returned, it returns to you, the people,' it went.¹² It was not a coincidence that this song was resurrected to become a symbol of the 'Velvet Revolution' in 1989, bridging the twenty-one years of freedom lost and found. Other discussion programmes continued, such as *Talks with People*,¹³ *How Are You*, and *What Are You Up To?*,¹⁴ but they were gradually cancelled.

At the end of the year, the managing director Švec, as a person linked to Dubček's administration, was removed and replaced by Josef Šmídmejst. His time in office, however short, represents a kind of coda to the second, free decade of CST existence.

On 16 January 1969, an Arts Faculty student, Jan Palach, burned himself to death on Wenceslas Square in Prague in protest against the occupation.¹⁵ Although the Federal Committee for Press and Information¹⁶ instructed all editors to publish only the official government and party news in relation to his tragic death, TV journalists used the power of a live broadcast to spark a national period of mourning. Eleven journalists and documentary film makers, all well-known TV personalities from the Prague Spring, held a minute of silence in front of the whole nation to commemorate the dead student before going on to discuss the matter.¹⁷

¹⁰ ['Jsmě s vámi, buďte s námi']

¹¹ ['Modlitba pro Martu']

¹² It is actually a paraphrase of one of the greatest Czech thinkers and philosophers, Jan Ámos Komenský (Comenius), the protestant pastor and educator in the 17th century.

¹³ ['Hovory s lidmi']

¹⁴ ['Jak se máte-co děláte?']

¹⁵ He had several followers whose immolation remained, however, unreported. On 20 January 1969, a twenty-five-year old worker, Josef Hlavatý, set himself on fire in Pilsen on the monument of first president T. G. Masaryk; another eighteen-year old student, Jan Zajíc in Šumperk followed on 25 February, and on 9 April, a thirty-nine-year old worker Evžen Plocek immolated himself in Jihlava. A chart of selected cases of political self-immolation in the Soviet Bloc lists at least 17 cases in the years 1968–1989 (Blažek 2012: 250–339).

¹⁶ [Federální výbor pro tisk a informace]

¹⁷ Vladimír Branislav, Ladislav Daneš, Jindřich Fairaizl, Arnošt Frydrych, Jiří Kantůrek, Karel Kyncl, Zdeněk Lavička, Karel Pech, Jiří Svejkský, Vladimír Škutina, and Jiří Tonninger.

This demonstration of independence was the last drop in the proverbial cup of the authorities' patience. The programme was analysed by the government (24 January) and the Central Committee of the CzCP (27 January), and, in line with their decisions, the Federal Committee for Press and Information issued the directive *Immediate Measures for Television, Radio, and Press*.¹⁸ It founded an ideological corps 'composed of politically stable representatives of the CzCP's Central Committee apparatus, government, and the National Front', which would evaluate programmes and discuss the future. The directive also proclaimed that 'TV screens will not feature' any of the journalists and speakers who participated in the *Relay Race* program, while the document goes on to outline future plans for them: 'Škutina is to leave television, [...] Kyncl and Daneš will be sent abroad [...] Moučková will take a one month sabbatical and her continued employment will be reviewed upon her return'. Finally, it was decided that all broadcasters 'will receive a special training regarding the political line of television broadcasting as well as the correct form of introducing programmes and news on the screen', and a necessary mechanism would be installed 'allowing for the preliminary inspection of programmes and the responsibility of those in charge will be strictly defined' (Daneš 2005: 118). A year later, when the new and completely changed management of CST looked back, it diagnosed the *Relay Race* programme as '[a] typical demonstration of the coercive methods and tactical maneuvers of several right-wing journalists, which were a common practice of Czechoslovak Television in the course of 1968. The programme was supposed to create a psychosis that would result in a crisis following Palach's death. It contributed to the undermining of trust in the rule of the Party and the government'.¹⁹

A chill set in at CST. It was clear that the hopes of the Prague Spring had dissolved, and by the fall of 1968 an international agreement regarding the 'temporary' stay of the occupying forces had been signed. In April 1969, Alexander Dubček, the symbol of the Prague Spring, was removed from his post as the CzCP's First Secretary and replaced with Gustáv Husák. Television was included in the list of counter-revolutionary forces and the brave August 1968 broadcasting was declared illegal (Růžička 2015a: 73). All demonstrations of free thinking, authentic television broadcasts and passionate debates were gone, as were the courageous TV adaptations of formerly censored literary works.

Managing director Šmídmajer did not obey orders dictated from above and merely transferred a number of people to work in different departments. Although they ceased to appear on TV screens, they participated in the

¹⁸ ['Okamžitá opatření v televizi, v rozhlasu a tisku']

¹⁹ *Evaluation of the Work of the CT Prague Party Organization in the Years 1968–1969*. ['Hodnocení práce stranické organizace ČT Praha za období let 1968–69']. January 1970. p. 10 (Cysařová 1998b: supplement).

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preparation of a second channel which was to be launched in the coming years. He only terminated the contracts of those employees who were abroad, thus enabling them to stay there, or of those who wanted to leave television of their own accord. But this was not enough for the regime. Šmídmajer himself was subsequently removed on 6 August 1969 and replaced by Jan Zelenka. He was instructed to keep a tight rein on television, which he did, and he served in this post for the next twenty years.

Fear of the first anniversary and reflections on the Prague Spring

For the situation to 'consolidate', mechanisms were employed which would ensure television's functioning as the main communication tool of political power. For this, three steps needed to be taken.

Firstly, the first anniversary of the occupation, or of 'brotherly assistance', as it was described by the regime, had to be handled with special care. By now, television was paralyzed by the regime's interventions in its governance, so that it was unable to repeat the situation of August 1968. Nevertheless, the communists truly feared this anniversary. The mass protests against the occupation which took place from 17 November 1968 were still fresh in their minds: students and many workers went on strike while scientists and artists gathered in Slovanský Dům to denounce censorship. Likewise, the authorities could not forget the spontaneous demonstrations of joy which followed the broadcast of the two-round World Ice-Hockey Championship in Stockholm in March 1969. There, Czechoslovakia beat the USSR 2:0 and then 4:3. Fans' excitement at the victory over the Soviets was immense and it led to various incidents. Vehicles at the Soviet military headquarters in Ústí nad Labem were set on fire, while in Mladá Boleslav, people directly clashed with Soviet soldiers and a shop of the Soviet airline Aeroflot in Prague was broken into and destroyed. However, in Prague it is known today that this attack was a pretext for the aggression of the power rulers and a targeted provocation of the Secret Police (StB) (Kalous 2002).

It was crucial to ensure that the first anniversary of the 21 August occupation passed off without a hitch. Party leaders moved the armed forces closer to Prague and the security apparatus was put on high alert. The army provided 20,000 soldiers, 310 tanks, and more than 200 armoured vehicles. The Frontiers Guard²⁰ and People's Militia²¹ were also on alert.

In the same way, television management was also prepared. It declared a special state of emergency, decided on a special protection of the CST

²⁰ [Pohraniční stráž]

²¹ [Lidové milice]

buildings by the police,²² and those who were not directly related to CST broadcasting (namely 'foreign reporters and correspondents from capitalist states'²³) were to have their access to the building restricted. In a backup studio with its fallback crew, which was ready to switch on to a live broadcast of Gustáv Husák's meeting, all broadcast equipment was checked on CST director's order, and additional security was provided. Most importantly: the news and the whole programme were pre-recorded. There were to be no live broadcasts (Růžička 1999a).

Therefore, the broadcast material from that day has been preserved (Růžička 2003: 24–25). On the eve of the anniversary, the announcer assured all citizens in a pre-recorded session that even though 'there have been minor attempts yesterday and the day before at Wenceslas Square in Prague', the security units had 'handled the disruptors energetically and reinstalled order within a short time'. The official proclamation stated that 'we will use all means to maintain peace, security, and public order' (Růžička 1999a: 24). On the day of the anniversary, the announcer only read the official report of the Czechoslovak News Agency and then informed the public that comrades Husák and Štrougal (the federal government's Prime Minister) had received a delegation of farmers from northern Bohemia about an ongoing archaeological excavation in Hungary. Further items included the news that a sea dragon had attacked divers in Mauritius, and an update about the well-being of a whale in Sydney (Růžička 1999a: 24). One day later the announcer read a communiqué from the session of the Central Committee of the CzCP which 'was happy to announce that the energetic measures against counter-revolutionary elements ... were successful and had unanimous support of the majority of the citizens' (Růžička 1999a: 25).

Secondly, it was the task of the new TV management to deal with the '1968 Prague Spring' and to defame it by portraying it as the wrong path, thus legitimizing the political status quo and the occupation.

Between the years 1969 and 1971, a large number of programmes sought to discredit the supporters of democratic reforms in the CzCP and any divergent opinions in society. *Patriots Unmasked*²⁴, aired on 5 September 1969, interpreted the demonstration on Wenceslas Square to commemorate the first anniversary of the occupation as a 'presentation of reactionary elements who are trying to mar positive developments in our country'. According to the commentary, it was a 'long-prepared event of counter-revolutionary forces which intended to steer our country into a deep crisis'.

²² [Veřejná bezpečnost]

²³ CS Television Management Measures for Securing Peace and Order during the Broadcasting in the Days of 15–22 August, 1969. ['Opatření vedení Čs. televize k zabezpečení klidu a pořádku při vysílání ve dnech 15–22. 8. 1969'] (Růžička 1999a).

²⁴ ['Vlastenci bez masky']

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The Soviet documentary *Czechoslovakia – the Year of Trials*,²⁵ was broadcast on 15 September, which explained the development of the first half of 1968 as the outcome of 'the influence of anti-socialist and opportunist forces'.²⁶ In a similar vein, on the next International Students' Day, television broadcast the programme *November 17 and Student Reality*²⁷ about 'disoriented and easily manipulated youth'. Television went on to redress some of its 'errors' broadcast during the Prague Spring. A three-part propaganda film *The Jan Masaryk Case: Facts about the Birth of one the most Significant Anti-communist Campaigns of Last Year*,²⁸ returned to the controversial topic of Jan Masaryk's death in 1948, attempting to drive home the idea that the former Foreign Minister had taken his own life.

With the same aim of immediate vindication of the new regime, utterly positive films were produced: *Ninety-nine Signatures*²⁹ (11 May 1970) about a petition from the ČKD Prague factory asking the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party to save socialism; *August Pastoral*³⁰ (10 September 1970) about a village which struggled to be called Brežněves (Brezhnev Village) where they had 'beautiful moments with the Soviet soldiers'; or *Living Together*³¹ (6 December 1970) about the cohabitation of Czechs with the Soviet soldiers, especially young girls who started to date them, explaining why they did so. These are only a few of many examples.

Initially, the TV management could not find any of the well-known journalists to participate in the realization of these programmes. Generally, there was an atmosphere of passive resistance among TV employees and some of them were not willing to serve these purposes. That is why all these programmes are signed by the few recurring names of Miroslav Hladký, Jaroslav Hužera, Miloš Pavlinec, Zdeněk Lavička, or the cameraman Antonín Kovács. Hladký became a leading figure in normalization era broadcast journalism and documentary journalism. In April 1969, he became the chief director of *TV News*; he also participated in the dissolution of the Main Editorial Office of Documentary Journalism and News. He signed the petition *Word to My Own Ranks*³² published in the chief communist daily

²⁵ ['Československo – rok zkoušek']

²⁶ <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/vse-o-ct/historie/ceskoslovenska-televize/1968-1969/1969/kalendarium/> (accessed 6 July 2017).

²⁷ ['17. listopad a studentská současnost']

²⁸ ['Causa Jan Masaryk'] Aired episodes: 19 December 1969 *The Campaign and Its Authors* ['Kampaň a její autoři']; 1 January 1970 *Witnesses and Witnesses* ['Svědkové a svědkové']; 6 February 1970 *Diplomat, Politician, Person* ['Diplomat, politik, člověk']. Directed by Miroslav Hladký.

²⁹ ['Devadesát devět podpisů']

³⁰ ['Srpnové pastorek']

³¹ ['Žijeme spolu']

³² ['Slovo do vlastních řad']

Rudé právo (17 May 1969), in which journalists publicly acknowledged normalization and repented for the errors they had committed.

Along with the report of a peaceful day during the occupation's first anniversary and apart from the questioning of the political developments prior to August 1968, there was yet another task: TV management had to complete the personnel purges inside CST. The editorial team of *Curious Camera* was dissolved as of 30 April 1970. Indeed, its output was 'rightist, revisionist, anti-Soviet, and anti-socialist', and its authors were deemed to be organizers of 'various coercive actions' (Růžička 2015: 73). Vladimír Branislav and Otká Bednářová were challenged to reflect critically on their previous work. Bednářová wrote in her reply:

I have always focused on backing my programmes with facts, on not distorting them and on not stirring up any passions or moods which could be in contradiction to objectivity. I have always tried to do my job honestly, conscientiously and in a respectable manner. That is why I cannot distance myself from the editorial activities required of me. To do so would be a denial of all my moral principles, and that I cannot do.

Branislav wrote his reply in a similar vein:

Today it would not be honourable to change my opinions which I expressed on air on Czechoslovak Television just for the sake of keeping the job I love. By doing so I would have to denounce myself, too.

CYSAŘOVÁ 2010b: 17

Both were fired by the end of the year. Bednářová earned her living as a cloakroom attendant and housekeeper and was active in dissident circles – later she signed the *Charter 77* proclamation, became a co-founder of the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted, was put on trial with Václav Havel and others, and in 1979 she was sentenced to three years in prison for subversion. Branislav worked under various pen names as a freelance scriptwriter and later as a sandwich maker and a junkyard worker.

Zelenka carried out a massive personnel purge in 1970, when the CzCP Central Committee issued its main ideological document *Lessons Drawn from the Crisis*.³³ This text, as Czech historian Kamil Činátl puts it,

³³ *Lessons Drawn from the Crisis Development in the Party and Society after the 13th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia* [‘Poučení z krizového vývoje; fully titled Poučení z krizového vývoje ve straně a společnosti po XIII. sjezdu KSČ’]. Issued on 14 December 1970 as a supplement to the *Rudé právo* daily, in 1971 as an independent brochure.

alists publicly acknowledged had committed. during the occupation's first of the political developments ask: TV management had to the editorial team of *Curious* deed, its output was 'rightist, its authors were deemed to be ůžička 2015: 73). Vladimír d to reflect critically on their

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'established the definitive, ideologically binding interpretation of the year 1968 and the events that preceded it' (Činátl 2010: 28). Political purges and cadre interviews were carried out all around the country, approving 1,508,326 Communist Party members. The key question asked in these interviews related to the person's approval of the invasion and their acceptance of it as necessary international military assistance.

In television, the purge was conducted using a questionnaire which asked things like: What were your attitudes towards the period August 1968 to April 1969? Did you engage in any political activities? How exactly did you support the new political course of CST as of August 1969? How do you want to contribute to the fulfilment of current political and economic tasks in television and society? Based on their answers, employees were divided into three groups:

- a) Those who were allowed to keep on working in CST with no change in their responsibilities.
- b) Those with prior problematic attitudes, but currently willing to use their positive understanding of the political developments in 1969 and 1970 in a different segment or in a different post.
- c) Those who could not work for Czechoslovak Television as the commission concluded that their activity either consciously went against the basic principles of socialism in Czechoslovakia or they were supportive of such activity.³⁴

The latter ones received a notice explaining that they 'had violated the socialist order by their activities and thus cannot be trusted to carry out the current post'. This campaign, formally justified by the replacement of old party membership cards, resulted in the departure of 56 people, one percent of the programming staff as well as technical employees.

In 1971, the central director Jan Zelenka looked back at these changes on the pages of the programme declaration of *Czechoslovak Television*.³⁵ He complained that 'in all those different historical reflections [...] you can hear that radio and television played a significant part in the destruction of the years 1968–69. They brought chaos to the minds of people and became a tool of the right wing which had created an open threat of counter-revolution, a total catastrophe'. He went on to add: 'When this destruction

³⁴ On 1 September 1970, the director issued *General Director's Decision No. 13* ['Rozhodnutí ústředního ředitele č. 13'] which included a questionnaire to complete a 'state and political audit in order to cleanse the staff of workers with right-wing opportunist, antisocial, and anti-Soviet attitudes' (Cysařová 1998b: 47).

³⁵ ['Československá televize']

affected television, it was not easy to get this huge and sensitive machine to run smoothly.³⁶

Gustáv Husák, the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communists had made a similar complaint. At a meeting in June 1970 he put it aptly:

Experience from the years 1968–69 has taught us the hard lesson that mass media cannot be considered as tools of mere propaganda, but rather as an exceptionally important tool of political power.³⁷

³⁶ Československá televize 1971, in Růžička 2015a: 74.

³⁷ *Rudé právo*, 27. 6. 1970, p. 3

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TELEVISION AND TOTALITARIANISM IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

From the First Democratic Republic
to the Fall of Communism

MARTIN ŠTOLL



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