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Propaganda stories in Czechoslovakia in the late 1980s: Believe it or not?



Denisa Hejlová, David Klimeš*

Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Marketing Communication and PR, Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

The collapse of the communist totalitarian regimes in Eastern and Central Europe and the end of the Cold War is one of key historical milestones in the history of the 20th century. However, the process itself and the consequences differed immensely from state to state: e.g., from peaceful so-called Velvet Revolution in former Czechoslovakia to the brutal civil war in former Yugoslavia. Our aim was to analyze the preconditions of the political and societal change in the Czechoslovak media – were there any signs of the change? How did the ruling party present the Soviet perestroika, which signaled a step towards democratization? The nomenklatura (ruling elite) was rather surprised by Gorbachev's plans and feared the resemblance with the Prague Spring 1968. Nevertheless, they had to comply with the official Soviet dictate. We used Wodak's discursive–historical approach to analyze official propaganda reports and press agency news. We found that the Czechoslovak official nomenklatura used several argumentation and persuasive strategies to present perestroika not as a political change, but as an ongoing path towards Communism. Perestroika was presented as an accelerated path towards a classless society, however, the words were often vague or meaningless. We show that the nomenklatura welcomed perestroika verbally, but the disparity between the words and actions was omnipresent. Citizens could “read between the lines”, which meant that they revealed inner inconsistencies and problems of the regime from discursive strategies. The aim to communicate perestroika thus served merely as an evidence of the inner disintegration of the system.

1. Introduction: defining propaganda in communist Czechoslovakia

When it comes to the collapse of the communist totalitarian regimes in Eastern and Central Europe in 1989, there is one question which is often asked in the case of Czechoslovakia: why did it collapse so smoothly? 'The rise of a socialist system in the former USSR and Eastern Europe and its collapse are two of the greatest historic events of the twentieth century'. (Adam, 1995: xi). After 17 November 1989, the ousting of the Communist Party from power became known as 'The Velvet Revolution', and was symbolized by the clinking keys of thousands of people protesting against the regime on Wenceslas Square in Prague. Four years later, Czechs and Slovaks separated peacefully in a national divorce, forming the independent Czech and Slovak Republics (both established on 1 January 1993). This event contrasted with what happened in the former Yugoslavia, which was ravaged by civil war after the fall of the former Yugoslav communist regime. The aim of our article is to examine the discourse and narratives of official texts produced in Czechoslovakia shortly before the communist regime collapsed in 1989, focusing particularly on the phenomenon of *perestroika* or restructuring (known as *přestavba* in the Czech language). Were there any signs of future societal and political change that were

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: hejlova@fsv.cuni.cz (D. Hejlová), david.klimes@fsv.cuni.cz (D. Klimeš).<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2018.08.005>

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visible in advance? How did the media react to the relaxation of the policies of the tightly-controlled Czechoslovak communist regime in response to *perestroika* in the Soviet Union? What language and narratives transmitted the ideology of ruling power and validated its legitimacy—until it fell apart like a house of cards?

For decades, Czechoslovakia, like the other states under Soviet influence, worked to pave the road to the 'bright future' of a communist society. The political elite used both repression and ideological tools to keep social order and crush any protest against the oppressive communist regime. After February 1948, when the Communists gained power in a coup d'état supported by the Soviet Union, there followed a decade of servitude to Stalinist ideology that was accompanied by strident propaganda (Feinberg, 2017; McDermott, 2005; Ranwlesley, 1999). Although the form of propaganda and mass persuasion changed over time, as they were used in Czechoslovakia they can be defined as the control of the flow of information, the management of public opinion and the manipulation of individual behaviour (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2014: 47). Recognising that there were differences among the countries of the former Eastern bloc, four eras of Communist propaganda, especially as used in Czechoslovakia, can be distinguished:

- 1) Cold war propaganda (late 1940s and 1950s), was based on Stalinist ideology and terror, and was accompanied by show trials (Feinberg, 2017; Formánková & Koura, 2009; McDermott, 2005).
- 2) The Prague Spring (1960s) brought about a slow loosening of restraints and controls, leading to a cultural upswing (Bischof et al., 2010; Reisky de Dubnic, 1960; Stolarik, 2010; Williams, 1997)
- 3) Normalization (1970s) entailed 'purifying processes' and the so-called *prověrky* (loyalty tests, where citizens were asked about their attitude toward the invasion and the presence of the Red Army in their homeland (Beyme, 1996; Černá & Cuhra et al., 2012; Eidlin, 1980; Kamusella, 2012)
- 4) *Perestroika* and *glasnost* (late 1980s), a program of reform in the Soviet Union introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev (Bednařík, Jirák, & Köpplová, 2011; Hejlová & Klimeš in Somerville, Hargie, Taylor and Toledano, 2017; Šimečka, 1990; Yurchak, 2006)

In this article, we focus on the era of *perestroika*, when Czechs and Slovaks lived in a society divided between 'two parallel cultural and social spaces, with the official sphere, loyal to the regime on one side and colourful variations...on the other side' (Bednařík et al., 2011: 325). As we discussed in our previous research, Czechoslovak society was deeply divided in terms of communication, with official propaganda on one side and the clandestinely circulated 'samizdat' of the opposition/illegal movement on the other (Hejlová & Klimeš in Somerville, Hargie, Taylor and Toledano, 2017). However, it would be too easy simply to classify the society of that time only into those two groups: a mainstream that toed the line of official communication (or at least pretended to do so) and an alternative society that protested against the system. Propaganda affected not only political communication but all other aspects of life in Czechoslovakia. The dissident leader and later President, Václav Havel, used the term 'ritual intra-power communication' to describe the communicational dimension of outward adaptation to the political system. According to Havel, Czechs and Slovaks knowingly 'lived a lie' during the period of normalisation that followed the Prague Spring (Havel, 2012, p. 110). Normalisation was a time when social communication was merely staged theatre, in which everyone knew his or her role.

The divide between the official and the alternative was reflected in the use of language.

The language of propaganda in the late 1970s and early 1980s has been examined by Karel Palek, writing under the pen name Petr Fidelius. Fidelius stated:

As the parole of the Communist power, we perceive the compulsive monologue, which is produced by the political system as a means of self-justification.... Instead of being a device of persuasion, language becomes a device of power. It is not concerned with spreading any ideas; on the contrary, it is concerned with paralysing the ability to think. (Fidelius, 1983: 8)

Fidelius coined the term 'semantic inflation', which describes the contradictory nature of a language in which important terms are understood and used in totally contradictory or obfuscatory ways:

Such terms as *people*, *society*, *democracy* and *state* are typical examples of the terms which can be understood (and which also usually are understood) with a large number of various, often contradictory meanings. They can be used by practically anybody in a purposeful way—precisely because nobody exactly knows their real meaning (Fidelius, 1983, p. 24).

The era of *perestroika* in Czechoslovakia has been described by Pullmann (2011), Kolář and Pullmann (2017). Others, namely Bednařík et al. (2011), Bentele (1998) and Liebert (1998), have examined the role of public relations and propaganda in the former Eastern Bloc countries.

Communist propaganda is often viewed from two different standpoints, which reflect an ideological divide. First is the socialist perception that defines propaganda as the main tool for influencing public opinion in order to build a socialist society. 'Propaganda in a socialist society disseminates information of an ideological and political nature to unify the Party, the [working] class, and the society, because this unity is a condition for successful societal action that reflects the interests of the working class.' (Chlupáč, 1978: 11). Secondly, Communist propaganda is perceived from the 'Western' standpoint as a manipulative tool for enforcing social order (Fidelius, 1983; Reisky de Dubnic, 1960). Although communist propaganda ostentatiously differentiated itself from 'bourgeois propaganda', in many ways it was influenced by the knowledge and experience of Western thinkers (Hejlová in Watson, 2014). For example, in a collective volume by anonymous authors, *Communist Propaganda: Theoretical and Methodical Questions* (originally published in the Soviet Union in 1974, translated and published in Czech in 1977), we find a whole chapter that summarises the views of Western thinkers like Harold Laswell, Walter Lippmann, José Ortega y Gasset, Sigmund Freud and Paul Lazarsfeld. The chapter is safely entitled 'Criticism of Bourgeois Theories of Propaganda' (Komunistická propaganda, 1977).

Communist propaganda played a central role in the political and societal system of the Eastern Bloc countries. Its aim was not only

to disseminate and control political beliefs but to create a new man, 'one whose values and way of life would be appropriate to a future society in which there would no longer be class divisions' (White, 2001: 6). 'After winning the socialist revolution, the working class aims intensively and self-confidently to re-educate the people in the spirit of communist ideology' (Pavlů, 1984: 3). Communist propaganda was rooted in Marxist-Leninist ideology and relied on three core principles: (1) partisanship (that is, total devotion to the Communist Party, its orders and its ideas); (2) scientific principles of partisan propaganda ('scientific' here meaning (a) strategic, effective dissemination of propaganda to society and (b) ongoing theoretical research into propaganda and its implications); and (3) connection to real life (using the language and the interests of the working class to instil propaganda naturally into everyday life) (Schmalzová, 1976: 26–27). The communist understanding and use of propaganda therefore involved much more than just 'disseminat[ing] or promot[ing] particular ideas' (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2014: 2). The Communists adopted a holistic approach that embedded propaganda into all aspects of human life: politics, popular culture, professional life, leisure and even sports.

2. The aim of propaganda: creating a new socialist person

William E. Griffith, a political scientist and consultant who specialised in Eastern and Central Europe, referred to propaganda and education interchangeably (Griffith, as cited in Lasswell, Lerner, & Speier, 1980: 239–258). Propaganda affected the whole upbringing of a man. For example, after entering elementary school, most Czech and Slovak children had to join Jiskra (Spark), an ideological-educational organisation, which was the precursor to joining the Pionýry (Pioneers, the Pioneer Organisation of the Socialist Youth Union). The aim of the Pionýry was to educate loyal socialists, who would value the ideas of socialism and its work ethic ('together, for the common good') (Linhart et al., 1977). After the Pionýry, there was the SSM (Socialistický svaz mládeže, Socialist Youth Union, 1970–89), which targeted politically engaged youth and motivated them to later seek admission to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ). The SSM also served as a platform for association according to interests, one that imbued most sports, hobbies and even youth travel with a common political ideology. The path of growing up through the youth organisations toward membership in the Party was well organised. It included rituals connected to Communist ideology that served as 'rites of passage', where symbolic promises were made, such as *šátkování* (receiving a red scarf and a pin upon joining the Pioneer organisation).

Propaganda was hierarchically and strategically directed by the political system, originating at the top of the Communist Party. Orders were announced once every five years at the Communist Party's congresses.

Scientific discourse about propaganda had an overall aim. Propaganda was taken seriously and was studied academically. It implemented actual research and findings in the social sciences. The ideology and philosophical background of communism was studied and taught at the University of Politics of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Vysoká škola politická Ústředního výboru KSČ), in which there existed a Department of the Theory of the Party and the Party's Leadership of Socialist Society (Katedra teorie strany a stranického vedení socialistické společnosti). The Faculty of Journalism of the Charles University in Prague, established in 1972, and the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences served as the main hubs for study of theoretical and practical approaches to propaganda and media communication. They were also the breeding grounds for 'cadres'—professionals skilled in persuasive communication. Many of the textbooks and collective volumes published during the era of normalisation reveal and explore the mechanisms and semantics of communist propaganda (e.g. Chlupáč, 1978; Hromadné sdělovací prostředky, 1970; Komunistická propaganda, 1977; Masová komunikace, 1975; Pavlů, 1977, 1978, 1983, 1984; Schmalzová, 1976; and Zrostlík, 1979). So do numerous diploma theses and dissertations (Bališová, 1981; Bišofová, 1977; Franěk, 1989; Jílek, 1978; Křížek, 1977; Kubík, 1987; Lacko, 1980; Rabušicová, 1982; Sabo, 1974; Sprock, 1985; Šup, 1974; Terynek, 1988; Tesař, 1980; Žalud, 1980)—to name just a few). The overall aim of propaganda after the Prague Spring was to create a new national personality, not just through political propaganda, but through complex, systematic educational, media and societal influence. Propaganda (or *propagace* in the Czech language) was used to

...[S]ignificantly influence the ways of public behaviour, both in the workplace and privately, at work and in leisure time; as a tool that helps to govern the public towards a meaningful life, rich in cultural impulses, towards a life, the aim of which is not consumerism, but harmonious development of the personality as a basic precondition and condition of the further development of socialist society. (Pavlů, 1984, p. 7).

Gorbachev's concept of *perestroika* came as a bit of a surprise to the Czechoslovak propagandists (Gorbačov, 1987). The *perestroika* program introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union in 1986 signalled a major shift in ideology. Lenin's vision of a distant but rosy future under communism was no longer; there was merely the 'planned, all-around perfection of socialism' (White, 2001: 4). *Glasnost* and *perestroika* transformed political and public communication. Control of the press and media slowly loosened (McNair, 1991), although the Soviet Union's propaganda and control institutions, Agitprop and Glavlit, retained their influence over government propaganda (Gibbs, 1999: 5). After the Chernobyl explosion, which was concealed by the Soviet media for three days, public trust in the media declined rapidly and the dissatisfaction of Soviet citizens grew. They called for more openness in the press and greater respect for human rights and the political opposition.

Notwithstanding, in Czechoslovakia the local political elite (the *nomenklatura*) did not welcome Gorbachev's reforms with enthusiasm. They feared uncontrolled change and social disruption, similar to the 'Prague Spring' of 1968, as they viewed it. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) therefore continued in its propaganda plans and its control of the media. To the Czechoslovak Communists, the ideas and keywords of *perestroika* uncomfortably resembled Dubček's ideas of 1968—and the Soviet Army that had originally come to fight those ideas was still present on bases in Czechoslovakia.

The communist regime in Czechoslovakia persisted despite its outer and inner deterioration. In 1989, Czechoslovak citizens could

hear (mainly from German and Austrian media just across the border but also by word of mouth) about the dismantling of communist power in other Soviet-bloc countries such as the German Democratic Republic and Poland. Nevertheless, there were almost no signs of dissatisfaction with the regime, nor any delegitimisation of the ruling power, polarisation between conservatives and reformers within the Communist Party, or activation of local opposition (Kabele, 2005, p. 286). In the 1980s, the 'outer' social consensus that supported the ruling regime in a society that lacked freedom was not primarily enforced by institutionalised violence, although some dissidents, signers of Charter 77, were still imprisoned. It depended on a system of communication that relied on coded signs that revealed one's degree of loyalty to the regime. For example, instead of addressing someone as *pán* or *paní* (Mr. or Mrs.), a loyal citizen used the word *soudruh* (comrade) in formal settings. Addressing someone simply as Mr. or Mrs. was a sign of political disobedience. Therefore, we find the era of *perestroika* extremely interesting as a subject for communication studies. Our aim is to explore the hidden structures of power in the language more deeply, as they were presented by mainstream media, and to uncover possible meanings that signalled either the aim of the Communists to keep control and power, or the opposite—resistance and a shift in ideology as revealed by 'reading between the lines'.

3. Methodology

To capture the change in the media's perception of *perestroika* and other ideological terms in the late 1980s, we could use quantitative and qualitative analysis (Berger, 2013). However, we find it necessary to expose more context than is explicit in the texts because the totalitarian regime's audience became skilled in 'oppositional reading' in reaction to censorship and even more, to self-censorship (Hall, 1980). We therefore explore the deeply rooted meanings that reflect the complex nature of the relationships among ideology, discourse and social change (Dijk, 2008; Fairclough, 2013; Thompson, 2013). In this analysis, we will in particular use Ruth Wodak's critical discourse analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2002; Wodak, in Wodak & Fairclough, 2013), and Wodak's 'discursive-historical approach' (Wodak, in Wodak & Meyer, 2002: 63–94; Reisigl and Wodak, in Wodak & Meyer, 2002: 22). Wodak uses an approach based on context that is comprised of four levels: (1) the immediate language or text, (2) the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres and discourses, (3) the extralinguistic social and sociological variables and institutional frames, and (4) the broader socio-political and historical context (Wodak, in Wodak & Fairclough, 2013: 193).

In her discursive-historical approach (DHA), Wodak suggests five discursive strategies:

- 1) Referential or nominal strategies, which are often metaphorical or metonymic and which describe people by the specific characteristics they share with others (such as women, workers, proletariat etc.). The research question is: How are persons, objects, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically?
- 2) Predicational strategies, which refer to citizens in a positive or negative way, using a wide range of specific linguistic forms, such as metonym, synecdoche or metaphor, and which construct the conceptual world that frames the situation. The research question is: What traits, characteristics and features are attributed to persons?
- 3) Argumentation strategies, which 'represent the typical common sense reasoning applied to specific issues' (Dijk, 2008: 97). These are the so-called *topoi* (e.g. the *topos* of abuse, *topos* of burden, etc.). The research question is: What arguments and argumentation schemes are used to legitimise the exclusion of others?
- 4) Perspectivation strategies (including framing and discursive representations), which aim to incorporate a voice into a text. This involves the relationship between reporting and an author's account. The research question is: From what perspective are naming, attribution and arguments expressed?
- 5) Intensifying and mitigation strategies, which create distance between the reader and a text, such as 'it seems, it appears that...', and thus aim to modify the epistemic status of the statement. The research question is: Are utterances articulated overtly, are they intensified or mitigated? (Wodak, in Wodak & Meyer, 2002: 73).

We analysed an internal bulletin, a collective volume that was published as a record of a symposium held on 26–27 May 1987 in Rostěž, Czechoslovakia. The conference was organised by the Czechoslovak Union of Journalists and the Institute of the Theory and Practice of Journalism at the Faculty of Journalism of the Charles University. The aim of this symposium was primarily to present *perestroika* to journalists and prepare them to communicate the social-political change associated with it.

In each article in the bulletin we can see developing discursive strategies for handling a new term, *perestroika*, which lacked a clear meaning.

The bulletin was designed for journalism professionals and was meant to teach them how to promote *perestroika* among the people. We can detect the resulting discursive strategies in the media of that time.

We analysed reporting by the Czechoslovak Press Agency (Československá tisková kancelář, ČTK) from 1 January 1988 to 31 December 1989, that is, from the year after Gorbachev introduced the basic principles of *perestroika* until the end of the year in which the communist regime came to an end.

ČTK was the main tool for disseminating official propaganda to various media: newspapers, radio, television and also foreign news outlets. Besides its section for political propaganda, which communicated official ideology and political news (such as the proceedings of Communist Party committee meetings, jubilees, etc.), it also included a large section for economic propaganda and agitation. That section's goal was to 'strengthen awareness of the advantages of the socialist system, spread the positive values of socialist society, and simultaneously act offensively against all influences of bourgeois provinciality.' (Jílek, 1978: 2). The tasks of the economic editorial board were clearly stated in a set of prepared and prioritised topics and themes. The overall discourse was aimed at presenting Czechoslovakia's economy as booming, rapidly developing and working ever more effectively (Bišofová, 1977). Among

the topics covered were machinery, energy (including nuclear energy and coal mining), metallurgy, the chemical industry, consumer goods, and civil engineering. Each topic was described in detail and assigned to an editorial office. In such a well-functioning system of self-censorship, every journalist knew what to write and how to write it (Bednařík et al., 2011: 335).

The unit of our research was one article. We worked with a database of 10,912 articles.

4. Findings

4.1. The propaganda of perestroika: analysis of the ideologues' aims

In 1987, Milan Kašík edited a collective volume focused on the implementation of *perestroika* through Czechoslovak propaganda, based on a symposium where ideologues, psychologists and journalists met to discuss *perestroika* reforms. The ruling party could not ignore *perestroika* because it was directed from the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, as we have described above, opposition to democratisation and the loosening of political restraints could not be fully repressed. Kašík's volume was published as part of a larger research project, *Aim for Excellence in Journalistic Creative Processes as a Precondition of More Effective Influence of Mass Media in the Making of the Socialist Social Mind* and is entitled 'Requirements for Faster Social-Economic Development of the Methods and Forms of Economic Propaganda' (Kašík, 1987). The latter title perhaps translates better as 'How to Update Propaganda in Order to Preserve the Communist Ideology and the Legitimacy of the Ruling Nomenklatura'. Josef Závada, a member of the KSČ, stated that *perestroika* would bring about not only political and economic changes but also changes in social life, culture, spiritual life, socialist democracy, etc. (Závada, in Kašík, 1987: 11). Despite calling vaguely for action in support of *perestroika*, Závada stressed that *perestroika* was not a transition from socialism to democracy, but a 'strengthening of socialism, for its further dynamic development' (Závada in Kašík, 1987: 12). He claimed that 'all the actions that are implemented because of *perestroika* arise from Lenin's principles of democratic centralism' (Závada in Kašík, 1987: 14). Kašík's linkage of Lenin's ideology with democracy is nothing less than a *contradictio in adjecto*, yet the aim of the propaganda he advocated was to persuade citizens that what they actually were experiencing was just another form of democracy—in fact, a more righteous form than that found in capitalist states.

The *nomenklatura* developed a specific language of symbols. The propagandists were aware that citizens were all too adept at seeing through their linguistic riddles. Use of the *nomenklatura's* language did not serve understanding or convey a real message, but was merely an ostentatious symbol of belonging to the Party and the system. Therefore, to speak the language of *perestroika*, it was necessary to change the outer language of politics as well: 'We must speak not in an official, artificial language, but with a human, simple language, so that everyone will understand' (Závada, in Kašík, 1987: 17).

However, the programme of *perestroika* was not clear—not even to the ruling propagandists. We can tell that from several of their texts. For example, Závada stressed that *perestroika* must be presented to the public as a coherent, clear strategic plan—while at the same time he noted that a strategic document was still being prepared (Závada, in Kašík, 1987: 17). A journalist from Czechoslovak Radio, Peter Kořenek, even suggested that information about *perestroika* (which he referred to as a 'strategy of acceleration') should be available in one coherent document, presented 'not to the wider public', but to the opinion-making elite (that is, journalists like himself) (Kořenek, in Kašík, 1987: 101). The term 'acceleration' is a crucial one: *perestroika* was not at all interpreted as an accelerated way to democracy or a change in the system, but on the contrary, as an accelerated pathway to the ideal socialist society.

Milan Čáp, an academic from the Faculty of Journalism at the Charles University, pointed out the discrepancies in the official propaganda, and argued that it was the aim of *perestroika* to overcome such differences: 'the basic question is the tight relationship [of economic propaganda] to life and the principle of not saying one thing and doing another' (Čáp in Kašík, 1987: 25). However, the slogan 'putting the human at the centre of our interest' was itself a cliché that replaced the by then outdated phrase 'the working people in the struggle for the socialist future of Czechoslovakia'. As we mentioned in our previous research: 'By being repeatedly used, the metaphor was gradually losing its meaning, and eventually became a mere repetitive verbal connection, adopted for propaganda.' (Hejlová and Klimeš in Somerville, Hargie, Taylor and Toledano, 2017: 185). The emptiness of the 'human-centred approach' is symbolised by this sentence: 'Nothing in this society, in this world happens without a man' (Čáp, in Kašík, 1987: 29). For Čáp, the ultimate goal of economic propaganda was not just to support the *perestroika* or reconstruction of an economic system; it was to support the *perestroika* of man himself (Čáp in Kašík, 1987: 31).

Still, in 1988 there was as yet no sign of the changing times in official propaganda. For example, Luboš Terynek graduated from Charles University with a diploma thesis that offers an interesting insight into communist propaganda (Terynek, 1988). In his thesis, titled *Propaganda in the Fight Against Ideological Diversion*, Terynek described a bourgeois propaganda that 'prefers pseudo-liberal and pseudo-progressive methods and thus creates an image of "truthfulness" or "objectivity", "represents the Western lifestyle to youth", and "masks the anti-human nature of the capitalist system"' (Terynek, 1988). Such strict propaganda accepted no exception. An updating and a slight relaxation in the style of propaganda took place, e.g. by introducing the concept of *polidštění* (humanisation) (Franěk, 1989). Humanisation aimed for more transparency, not to show the dysfunctionality of the system, but to help it accelerate the progress of *perestroika*. The role of the media 'is to reveal the imperfections, set the problems and come up with their solutions, spread truthful information about all aspects of social life' (Franěk, 1989: 72).

We can see a clear effort by the communist regime to form a new discourse around the term *perestroika*. Czechoslovak propaganda offered new referential, predicational, argumentational, perspectival and intensifying strategies for how to talk about *perestroika* in Czechoslovak media landscape.

Journalists in official media had to use that discourse and adapt it to policy proclamations by the regime.

4.2. Discursive-historical analysis of Czechoslovak press agency news, 1988–89

1) *Referential or nominal discursive strategies* are recognisable. These strategies were aimed at quickly stabilising the language that would be used to describe *perestroika*. We have shown above that even among the ideological *nomenklatura* there was no common understanding of the principles and details of reconstruction (the word for which in the Czech language is '*přestavba*'; the Russian word *perestroika* was commonly used in private, spoken discourse with obvious sarcasm). Some understood that economic reforms and a slight political loosening allowed more freedom to the media, but there was growing concern about the psychological impact of more liberal, but still not very clear conditions. It was necessary to express gratitude for *perestroika* and not criticise it too much, because it was, after all, coming from the Soviet Union. At the beginning of 1988, Miloš Jakeš, the general secretary of the Central Committee of the KSČ, had to thank Michail Gorbachov for his 'overall cooperation in realising the strategy of acceleration of socio-economic development of our countries, and the revolutionary reconstruction and democratisation of social life' (ČTK, 1988a). Acceleration of socio-economic development, the democratisation of society and other similar terms were very often used when describing *perestroika*, so that the Party would not lose its symbolic power over aspects of *perestroika* other than the economic ones. The word 'acceleration' was used to emphasise that the society was still on its way to building a classless society, just faster than before.

Throughout 1988, Jakeš slowly admitted between the lines of his pronouncements that Czechoslovak society (and the Party as well) had never really consented to *perestroika*.

Every day we can see that *perestroika* is a demanding process, which requires enormous and enduring effort and overcoming various obstacles and difficulties. It cannot avoid conflict, either. However, that cannot discourage us. The most dangerous thing is half-heartedness and inconsistency when implementing reforms.' (ČTK, 1988b).

By October 1989, shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall, even Jakeš had to admit that *perestroika* was not well-accepted. In fact, *perestroika* served as a symbol of the ruling regime, which was trying to re-legitimise itself. Jakeš felt the menace of the end of the socialist era (although some thought that the Communist elite actually wished for it, in order to gain more economic power). He decided upon a strategy of threatening those who were 'not with us'.

Also, we must not fear attacks from our enemies. Our aim while pursuing *perestroika* is and will be to develop and consistently realise the big ideas and values of socialism. Whoever thinks and will think differently, whoever speculates about the destruction and destabilisation of our socialistic system, is leading to perdition (ČTK, 1989a).

However, the 1980s were not the 1950s, when such threats had to be taken more seriously because they were accompanied by Stalinist terror. The semantic power of Jakeš's words mainly expressed his inner fear that his Party would lose its ruling power. Jakeš's speech at the Cervený hrádek, largely ridiculed and laughed at, became a symbol of deterioration of the ruling party (Jakeš, 1989).

The shift was absolutely clear at the end of the revolutionary year 1989. A few days before being elected President, Václav Havel talked about 'halfway so-called *perestroika*' (*přestavba*) with real scorn.

It is extremely important to have six months until free elections, when parliament has to be reorganised, a lot of new laws adopted, and the government reorganised. It is necessary to transform the halfway so-called *perestroika* (*přestavba*) prepared under the previous regime into a real economic reform without social disruption.

(ČTK, 1989b)

2) *Predicational discursive strategies* are demonstrated mainly by the effort to create an atmosphere of 'consent' by society to *perestroika*. As we described above, the Communist leaders were aware of persuasive strategies and techniques of manipulation. Their reference to the 'engineering of consent', a concept introduced in an article and later a book on public relations by the American public relations theorist and practitioner Edward Bernays (1947, 1955), was more than symbolic. The media were trying to manufacture consent among two constituencies: the Communist Party and the 'general population'. *Perestroika* was associated with a positive, desired, modern and fresh atmosphere. Journalists did not oppose the use of official propaganda. On the contrary, they called for propaganda to be used as a tool for communicating with the public: 'The most important aim of our propaganda these days is to clarify the meaning and importance of *perestroika* and how it can be realised in our conditions.' (ČTK, 1988c). The excessive use of the pronoun 'our' was a common habit of journalists, the Party, and the people.

In communicating with society, journalists used vague sentences and clichés combined with several favoured keywords, but they were unable to formulate a clear message. Their main aim was to create the idea that *perestroika* was happily awaited by the whole of society.

People are more and more expressing their interest in the declared plan of *perestroika*. They expose their hope that it will move things forward, overcome new barriers of reluctance and passivity, and that it will strengthen the healthy, truly socialist ideological-ethical atmosphere of society (ČTK, 1988d).

The regime had long perpetuated the myth that the people were 'active builders of communism', even though the reality was often very different. Unsurprisingly, we can see this same theme in the bureaucratic talk about *perestroika*.

Pursuing *perestroika* (*přestavba*) of the economic mechanism cannot be done without human activity. ...Collectives may conclude a two-year socialist commitment aimed in particular at ensuring a high dynamic of year-on-year increases in qualitative indicators

and promoting intensification.

(ČTK, 1988e).

Moreover, the regime supported a cult of youthfulness in many aspects of its desired authoritarian society.

Regular personal contact with economic leadership, party and trade union organisations in enterprises and factories is essential for greater involvement of young people in *perestroika* (*přestavba*) of the economic mechanism. Boys and girls want to be more proactive in fulfilling tasks in state-owned enterprises, but they have to get the space. (ČTK, 1989c).

3) There were multiple *argumentation strategies* used to promote *perestroika*. (As we have mentioned before, *perestroika* was expected to cause acceleration, faster economic growth, and 'democracy', and was believed to be a further logical step in building a socialist society). We found one argumentation strategy especially interesting. It argued that the negative effects of *perestroika* were in fact positive. The entire discourse and reasoning supporting the legitimacy of communist ideology stressed the importance of science and rationality. Society was believed to be built on scientific principles, propaganda was based on science, the economy was managed rationally, etc. Communist journalists, writing about introducing democracy into the 'scientific' totalitarian regime, found it impossible to explain such a contradiction. For example, one of the impacts of the 'rationalisation of production' under *perestroika* was a certain amount of unemployment. However, it was unthinkable to write about 'fired' or 'dismissed' employees—so the media talked instead about 'freed workers'.

A consistent structural *perestroika* of Prague's manufacturing base will help to eliminate the negatives. It will naturally push away non-viable production lines. Freed workers will be then able to concentrate on specific, key development programmes." (ČTK, 1988f).

Notably, in argumentation strategy we can see the decline of propaganda and its persuasive power. Whereas questioning *perestroika* was impermissible at the beginning of 1988, by the end of the year it was possible to say that *perestroika* was unsuccessful, albeit in a very measured way: "Up to now, *perestroika* has been affected by many political counter-pressures, compromises, and political barriers." (ČTK, 1988g).

Although *perestroika* was on the whole unsuccessful, argumentation strategy was used to find success in insignificant details: "In most of the workplaces in the region, there are many opportunities to consolidate order and discipline. They [managers] are often waiting for *perestroika* (*přestavba*), and they have not done anything about orders, standards, calculations, or budgets." (ČTK, 1988h, 1988i).

4) *Perspectivation strategies* are mainly found in vigorous efforts to connect *perestroika* with Leninism, and in the Czechoslovak context with February 1948, when the Communists gained power. The preferred perspective rejected any interpretation that acknowledged liberalisation and thus threatened the most basic principles of the regime:

Comrade Jan Fojtík [the main ideologue of the Party – author's note] stressed that *perestroika* is the continuation of the revolution in Lenin's sense when it makes the power of the people stronger, as well as the political and economic system of socialism and its system of spiritual belief. (ČTK, 1988j).

Comrade Viliam Šalgovič [a Slovak Communist leader and pro-Soviet politician, who collaborated during the occupation by the Warsaw Pact armies in 1968 and who committed suicide after the Velvet Revolution of 1989 – author's note] recalled the continuity of the process of *perestroika* and the deepening of socialist democracy with the revolutionary changes of our society, which we began in February 1948 (ČTK, 1988g).

The framing was thus linear; *perestroika* was another logical stage in the process (despite the fact that it came as a surprise to the Czech Communist leaders). It was merely accelerating the development of society toward communism.

The logical consequence was the penetration of *perestroika* into all spheres of communist society, because *perestroika* was meant to be a whole-society process. Empty talk about *perestroika* did not even exempt, for example, theatres.

'Dramaturgical plans were created in new conditions in accordance with the principles of *perestroika* (*přestavba*) and economics in the theatre, emphasising the greater authority and responsibility of directors and theatre leaders for their particular artistic ideological program. (ČTK, 1989d).

5) *Intensifying and mitigation strategies* that referred to Leninism and Lenin's legacy were more noticeable in articles dating from the beginning of our analysed data. 'There is only one concept of socialism—Lenin's. And there is only one concept of *perestroika* that corresponds to Lenin's concept of socialism as a construction of creative power of the masses, said Comrade Fojtík.' (ČTK, 1988h, 1988i). The Communists also attempted to connect *perestroika* with Karl Marx:

The Department of Propaganda and Agitation of the Central Committee of the Communist Party today organised a meeting for lecture groups on political economy, international economic relations and economic policy about the theoretical outlines of *perestroika* (*přestavba*) of the economic mechanism. The participants of the meeting heard a lecture about Karl Marx and the economy of socialism, information about problems in implementing the reorganisation of the economic mechanism and about the experience of the work of party organisations in experimental enterprises. (ČTK, 1988k).

The emphasis on a coherent meaning for the word *perestroika* was soon lost and propaganda could not manage to give one to the word. The word *perestroika* was omnipresent in the media all around the world, not only in the Soviet and Communist media. Western journalists often discussed the ongoing changes in the Eastern system in terms of its disintegration—a thought that was still

impossible to publish officially behind the Iron curtain. In the following quotation, we can see the contradictions and the helplessness of the communist propagandists, who could not discuss the full nature and scale of the changes that were already happening within the political system and society.

Most journalists are helping *perestroika*, so that the people will be interested in its realisation. National and international education must go along with it. In many presentations, there has been a demand for better quality political and professional briefing for journalists in the sense of public information and adopting of theoretical backgrounds of *perestroika*. (ČTK, 1988l).

The evident problems with *perestroika* were framed in terms of rivalry with the West. Criticism of *perestroika* could be seen as ideological deviance:

It is evident that the ideodiverse centre's effort is to shift the focus of ideological struggle to the individual socialist states. Significant hopes are being put onto the ongoing socio-political transformations in a number of socialist countries. In connection with the development of our propaganda and counterpropaganda, there is a need to use new, more effective arguments concerning, for example, *perestroika* (*přestavba*) of the economic mechanism. (ČTK, 1988m).

5. Conclusions

As we stated in the introduction to our research, language played a crucial role in the relationship between the ruling *nomenklatura* and the citizens they commanded in their authoritarian regime. Words bore many symbolic meanings, but they could also be perceived as meaningless—or purposely used as such. They could still be a reason for imprisonment, but more often they revealed the inner inconsistencies and problems of the regime, which was reluctant to accept the societal and political changes of *perestroika*.

As we have found out, the ideological task of preparing the propaganda of *perestroika* was fully under way long before our analysed data begins in January 1988. Several governmental departments worked on the specifications of *perestroika* and tried to present them via persuasive propaganda. However, the problem lay not only ineffective propaganda and vague language. It was embedded much deeper within the minds of the communist *nomenklatura*, which could not decide which way to go or which stands to take.

Wodak's discursive-historical analysis has proved to be an effective analytical tool that reveals deeper structures in the politically charged and often difficult to understand official news.

The communist regime developed a new discourse around the term *perestroika* in official media. We have identified the initial stages of the process of preparing propaganda in the texts of the Communist Party's ideologists. We have also found manifestations of the principles that underlaid that propaganda in the official media landscape. New referential, predicational, argumentational, perspectival and intensifying strategies were employed to defend *perestroika* as a logical step in the evolution toward communism.

6. Research limitations and discussion (originality and value)

We do not aim for a comprehensive, objective look at communist propaganda. We purposely selected only a limited amount of data, but it is data that is an important sampling from which we can analyse the struggle between the language of power and its encoded readings. The subject of communist propaganda itself deserves much more detailed and comprehensive analysis. Propaganda permeated the whole lifestyle of the nation, not only its political and public life, but also private, individual self-expression by citizens. There were hundreds, if not thousands of theoretical works and analyses of the impact and effectiveness of communist propaganda written during the era of normalisation. They had one goal: to make communist propaganda more persuasive in order to spread the ideology more effectively. Propaganda affected every aspect of human life, starting with childhood education and socialisation, and then culture and lifestyle in general: TV shows, popular music and even food choices. In an attempt to bolster the legitimacy of communist propaganda, the regime differentiated it from the 'bourgeois' practices of strategic communications and public relations. Because a comprehensive volume covering recent views and research on communist propaganda, free of the 'cold-war' optic, is still lacking, we examined only small details, regarding them as examples that offer a limited view of the topic.

7. Further research recommendations

We would certainly recommend that further research use critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013). It should analyse media content produced within Czechoslovakia, especially TV and print news, with due regard to the historical context. It should also categorise the main narratives and symbols that communist propaganda used in its attempt to preserve the totalitarian regime, explain its purposes, and create a meta-narrative that legitimised its existence. Another question is of course to what extent propaganda actually succeeded, and to what extent it was no more than staged theatre, in which everyone played his or her role without believing the words they were saying. That calls for focus on the treatment of 'truth'—how were events and facts presented by the dominant political ideology? It would be useful to employ sociological public opinion research to find out which stories or meta-narratives were actually trusted and which were deemed merely symbolic. This is especially important given the longing for 'retro' culture and nostalgia for normalisation now visible in the former Eastern Bloc countries.

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