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HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE SOVIET
UKRAINE AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA
IN THE 2ND HALF OF 1970S

The signing of the final act of the Helsinki Conference on 1 August 1975 has united the dissident movement in the Communist bloc in a new sense. The new commitment of the USSR to respect human rights gave a fresh impetus to the opposition movement and moved it to a new direction – the protection of human rights. In the second half of the 1970s, the so called Helsinki groups emerged within the USSR (and were successively founded in Moscow, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, Lithuania) and abroad: in Czechoslovakia, The Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Persecuted (Výbor na obranu nespravedlivě stíhaných – VONS) based on Charter 77 and in Poland the ROPCiO (Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela). This study presents a comparative analysis of the human rights movement in the second half of the 1970s in Ukraine and Czechoslovakia. It uses the examples of two Helsinki groups, the Ukrainian Helsinki Group (UHG) and the Czechoslovak VONS. They can be perceived more broadly: as a comparison of specific features of the human rights movement in the Communist bloc within and outside the USSR.

During the 1970s and 1980s, when VONS was most active, it had forty-four official activists, seventeen of whom became signatories of the VONS constitutive proclamation in April 1978. This study shall focus on ten VONS members, the so-called Prague Ten, who were arrested right after the first wave of repressive actions in 1979. UHG had up to 29 members, ten of whom were its founders; all have been persecuted in different ways. This makes it possible to identify ten leading representatives in the Soviet Ukraine and Czechoslovakia. The comparative analysis is based on the sociocultural context, direct activities of the groups and biographies of twenty human rights activists in the two countries.

Socio-cultural context

The social and cultural situation in the Soviet Ukraine and Czechoslovakia in the 1970s was quite similar. Stability and full employment were the key terms in the Brezhnev era. The driving principle was that if one didn't show excessive activity in political issues, he or she was able to provide, inconspicuously, for their own good. Different kinds of corruption¹ and widespread Soviet principle of *blat*² have been the levers in everyday life. Such privileges enabled Soviet citizens to proceed in queues for goods or access certain services. The government tried to implement a policy based on the principle of socialist consumerism. Though it is obvious that, in Soviet case, it is difficult to speak of welfare in Western terms, the tendencies helped to stabilize society in a sense. In general, the population of the Soviet Ukraine focused on the issue of welfare and everyday life of average person. The Khrushchev Thaw in the early 1960s intensified national and democratic life in Ukraine. Yet the subsequent, repressions and mass arrests that came along with the Brezhnev administration in mid-1960s and early 1970s (known as the General pogrom) effectively oppressed the opposition movement.

Raisa Rudenko, a prominent human rights activist of the 1970s, described the situation in the Soviet Ukraine as follows: “The society was like a living corpse. The general masses were so orthodox – except of course, the intelligentsia. If, for example, something was written in *Pravda* or *Izvestiya*, it simply could not be a lie! People believed these party newspapers more than the Bible. They really believed in it. Political information worked in every organization. And if they claimed on the basis of such political information that someone was arrested for espionage, everyone believed it. Intelligentsia of course understood what was going on. There were enough people here who listened to the so-called hostile voices; they understood who and why was arrested.³ They knew there was no news in *Pravda* and there was no truth in *Izvestiya*.⁴ Yet, in general, people did not understand and lived according to Soviet standards. They were obedient and polite. That is why intelligentsia is the intelligentsia – to see a little further and more than the average people.”⁵ Myroslav Marynovych, one of the founders of the UHG follows the same line: “For example, when we tried to collect signatures for a document, and I tried to get as many people as possible. It was virtually

¹ Млечин, Л., *Брежнев*, Москва 2008.

² Fitzpatrick, S., *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, Oxford 1999, 62.

³ Hostile voices was a common reference to the Western media such as the Radio Free Europe or BBC.

⁴ Raisa Rudenko uses a pun: the two biggest official newspapers were entitled *Pravda* (Truth) and *Izvestiya* (News): “There is no truth in news, and there is no news in truth.”

⁵ Interview with Raisa Rudenko, Kyiv 24. 7. 2015.

a superhuman task. In this sense, the public was deaf. [...] There was indeed a wall within the society – people did not want to sacrifice themselves. They tried to avoid situations that could harm them.”⁶ Such moods within the Ukrainian public were of course no comfort for the opposition movement. That somewhat explains why only ten people founded the UHG in 1976.

Similar trends can be identified in Czechoslovakia. The Gustáv Husák administration was installed after the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. It is referred to as *normalization* – the reinstatement of orthodox Communist régime. The intention of the puppet Communists in Czechoslovakia was in line with that of the Brezhnevite masters: to ensure some degree of welfare and to reduce political activity of public. Czech historian Lenka Kalinová points out that “supporting the public effort to achieve material welfare was to dull their interest in political and social issues. The ideal of a higher standard of living, better housing, ownership of a holiday cottage, car and other goods prevailed in value orientation ...”⁷ Another historian, Milan Otáhal, also traces the same tendencies: “The tactics of the power centre was to give the public a chance to satisfy itself in economic and social terms. People focused on satisfying their material interests, building homes; they started building family houses to a much greater extent.”⁸ This tactic was much more successful in Czechoslovakia and the level of welfare was incomparably higher than in the Soviet Ukraine.⁹

Public repression was a common feature in the USSR and Czechoslovakia. Whoever was deemed not to be sufficiently loyal to Communism, he or she could have been removed from all their posts and replaced by someone more malleable. That is how the system of social corruption has spread. “In the aftermath, there largely middle-aged professionals at their peak of productive age were being replaced *en masse*. Those dismissed were replaced by less competent staff, as loyalty to the régime mattered much more than qualification.”¹⁰ This was how the élites were being replaced during the era. Moreover, the distinguish part of the intelligentsia has moved across the borders. L. Kalinová refers to data on education: “53 professors, assistant professors and junior lecturers, 13 researchers have left the Faculty of Medicine at the Charles University Prague. After 1968, a total of 1 300 medical doctors have emigrated; 56 professors and assistant professors were fired from the Faculty of Arts in 1968; 470 staff members of

⁶ Interview with Myroslav Marynovych, Lviv 9. 7. 2015.

⁷ Kalinová, L., *Konec nadějí a nová očekávání. K dějinám české společnosti 1969–1993*, Praha 2012, 214.

⁸ Otáhal, M., *Opozice, moc, společnost 1969–1989: příspěvek k dějinám „normalizace“*, Praha 1994, 32.

⁹ Kaplan, K., *Sociální souvislosti krizí komunistického režimu v letech 1953–1957 a 1968–1975*, Praha 1993, 63.

¹⁰ Otáhal, M., *Opoziční proudy v české společnosti 1969–1989*, Praha 1994, 61.

the Academy of Science emigrated from the Czech Republic and 163 from Slovakia.”¹¹

It is estimated that some kind of persecution affected about every fifth person in Czechoslovakia. The historian Karel Kaplan argues that “the consequences of persecution have affected the social status of all victims and their families (over 2 million people) to varying degrees and in different ways. All victims of persecution were affected by a ban on public activity. Most of them had to change occupation, which meant a noticeable decrease in living standards, loss of qualifications, change in lifestyle, jeopardising their future and employment of their offspring.”¹²

Intelligentsia remained the main target of the persecutions in Czechoslovakia (similarly to the Soviet Ukraine). The intellectual circles focusing on human rights have become the foundation of dissent. The prevailing part of the society was uninterested in political activism. Czech historian Jan Rychlík points out that most members of the lower and middle strata, namely workers, cooperative farmers, lower technical staff, etc., did not strongly feel the lack of intellectual freedom and the impossibility to express views. They essentially did not need to express themselves publicly, and the régime was indifferent to how they expressed their view privately.¹³

Human rights movement: Ukrainian Helsinki Group

The beginning of institutional activity of human rights movement in the Soviet Ukraine can be linked to the foundation of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group on 9 November 1976. The ten signatories to identify with the first UHG proclamation were Mykola Rudenko (UHG leader), Oles Berdnyk, Oksana Meshko, Lev Lukianenko, Ivan Kandyba, Oleksa Tykhyj, Petro Hryhorenko, Nina Strokata, Mykola Matushevych, and Myroslav Marynovych.

Even though the UHG was officially a human rights organization, its activities had a clear political focus from the outset. L. Lukianenko, one of the UHG co-founders reflected later: “In a sense it was all about politics. I am quite sure that the members of the Charter 77 also understood very well that, given the dictatorship, the defence of human rights is also a matter of politics. This was an all-encompassing process, as it was the same in Spain and Portugal: human rights

¹¹ Kalinová, L., *Konec nadějím a nová očekávání. K dějinám české společnosti 1969–1993*, Praha 2012, 68.

¹² Kaplan, K., *Sociální souvislosti krizí komunistického režimu v letech 1953–1957 a 1968–1975*, Praha 1993, 74.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 34.

have become something like the spirit of an era. These issues have been discussed at different meetings and conferences. The battle of democracy has been waged more than ever. We had the *Human Rights Declaration* of 1948, which was the pledge of rights and freedoms. Then came Helsinki 1975. The West made Moscow publish the *Declaration* and only then, for the first time, the *Declaration* was published in *Izvestiya*. It had something about nine million copies [...] It was everywhere instantly. The issue of the human rights was raised on the highest level, it became en vogue. So, why should not ride on the wave of the spirit? We wrote the memorandum. All of our documents breathed politic: to us it was clear – we were writing about human rights, but we were thinking about the national issue. In 1975–1976 it was about the advancement of democracy, it was the fight for the freedom of speech, freedom to speak about our independence to the whole world.”¹⁴

Indeed, from its very first declarations in 1976, the UHG made it clear that, in addition to human rights directly, the national issue would be important to the group. In his first open letter on 14 November 1976, the UHG leader M. Rudenko tried to explain the key position of the founders. He pointed out that the Soviet Union (according to Lenin’s principles) was a voluntary organization. Along the same line, the UHG members also declared the right for all citizens to act in the same manner. The most unjustly prosecuted prisoners of conscience in Ukraine were prosecuted precisely on the grounds of allegations of nationalism “only because they believed that we were voluntary allies”¹⁵.

Therefore, human rights in the Soviet Union were closely linked to the rights of nations. Other official UHG declarations continued along the same. One of the first UHG statements, *Ukraine in the Summer 1977* that was sent to participants in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe held in Belgrade in October 1977, pointed out: “The best ideas of the Ukrainian revolutionaries, as well as Lenin’s ideas about national issues have not been implemented. During the subsequent years, the spirit of imperialism has not been defeated and ‘the spirit of Catherine and Peter’ has come to life in the sinister activity of Stalin [...] We will not play hide and seek: our statehood is just an illusion on paper. It is time to call things by their right names and to end the incessant and insidious game of our sovereignty, as well as that of all other republics within the USSR.”¹⁶ In general, the question of oppression of national rights was often associated with Stalin’s crimes against the Ukrainians. Perhaps the sharpest UHG statement in this sense is in its *Memorandum No 1*. It states openly that Ukraine has become

¹⁴ Interview with Lev Lukianenko, Kyiv 24. 4. 2015.

¹⁵ *Український правозахисний рух. Документи і матеріали*. Упор. О. Зінкевич, Балтимор 1978, 15.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 22.

Stalin's "stage for ethnocide and genocide".¹⁷ This is a reference to the man-triggered famine in Ukraine in 1932–1933. UHG unequivocally linked the national issue with human rights violations and Stalin's policy that became among the main targets of criticism. In the same memorandum, UHG members argued: "Yet where do we look for the root cause and the beginning of all the horrors the Ukrainian peoples have experienced? In our view, we can look for the answer that, in the three decades of the Stalinist dictatorship, the rights of man, proclaimed in the *Declaration of the Rights of the Working and Exploited People* and the *Declaration of the Rights of the Nations of Russia* were altogether ignored. In result of the bureaucratic destruction of the principles of the *Declaration on the Foundation of the USSR*, national rights of the Ukrainians have ceased to be reality."¹⁸ *Memorandum 7* also stated that: "The imperialistic past of Russia sheds shadow on the allied nations and does not allow to speak of their own constitutional rights. Therefore, the cult of personality, in its worst sense, that repeats Tsarist authoritarianism, is replaced by another cult: it is called 'the Union' from the tribunes, yet in fact it means 'Russia.'"¹⁹

Continuing to point out that Ukraine is a formally sovereign state and one of the founders of the UN, emphasizing the need to realize Ukraine's real independence, however, has not remained the only political demand of Ukrainian human rights activists. *Manifesto of the Ukrainian Human Rights Movement*, written by O. Berdnyk in November 1977 and published as a recapitulation of the first year of activity of the UHG is a helpful document to understand the UHG political vision. It is divided into several chapters, while the third part, *Our Proposition*, focuses primarily on global political transformation of the Soviet system. Yet, most of the requirements were totally incompatible with the very essence of the USSR. Analysing the principles of the new Soviet constitution, the author on behalf of UHG claimed: "We believe that law must guarantee the primacy of a person and the inferiority of the state, because a person is practically the only reality, the value of being and the only value of law. The state, as we have said, must only become a sponsor of the freedom and sovereignty of the person and nations that are part of the USSR. It is also unconditional to eliminate the principle of centralization, as the indisputable fulfilment by lower instances the decisions made by higher instances. Every person, like every organization, must have their sovereignty and make every decision only in the interests of that person or organization."²⁰ Such attitudes would undermine the quintessence of the political foundations of the USSR, where the principle of centralization and sovereignty

¹⁷ Ibidem, 66.

¹⁸ Ibidem, 71.

¹⁹ Ibidem, 109.

²⁰ Ibidem, 40.

of the state was a matter of course. Furthermore, the authors of the manifesto demanded to “rescind the state’s entitlement to ownership, because in practice this right is abused by bureaucrats and officials in their own interest and for their own good”²¹. In this document, UHG also offered an alternative organization of government in the Soviet Union. As a way out of the situation, human rights activists saw the establishment of various councils for the different areas of the society that would stand above the state and coordinate different spheres of life at the level of individual republics. Clearly, these demands can hardly be identified as directly linked to human rights activities. Likewise, they hardly support the argument that UHG “has no political aims in any way”.

Nonetheless, the UHG did not forget about the main area of its activity, the specific cases of human rights violations and its prevention. In *Letter No 2*, M. Matushevych listed specific cases of the most frequent violations of human rights, in particular:²²

1. Violation of the right to register for residence on the example of a former prisoner Nadiya Svitlychna and Olexandr Nazarenko: the former prisoners were not allowed to register for residence in Kyiv after being released from the jail. Ivan and Myroslava Dyki were not allowed to register for residence in the same city. Mykola Breslavsky was registered in the small apartment, where several people have been living already;

2. Violation of rights of the imprisoned under political articles. The most frequent recurrence was the restriction of the right to meeting (an example is the avoidance of a meeting of the imprisoned Yevhen Sverstiuk with his wife, and the same case of Valentyn Moroz);

3. Psychiatric treatment: According to a local court decision in Berehovo, Yosyp Terelia was forced to undergo treatment in a psychiatric clinic. He was later released as a completely healthy person;

4. Exile as a way of punishment: exile was often used as an additional punishment for prisoners of conscience who were already sentenced to prison, the traditional punishment given to human rights activists was seven years in prison and five years in exile. Yet, the conditions of exile were often very similar to those in prison. This was a “prison without a convoy” where those exiled often had no housing or work available. M. Matushevych presented concrete examples of human rights restrictions of these prisoners (people were forced to work in mines, etc.) in cases of V. Vasylyk, M. Kots, V. Stus, and B. Chuyko.

Some people were persecuted on the grounds of their link to the UHG or because they were involved in the human rights movement. Vasyl Barladianu was persecuted because of his conviction: he was expelled from the Communist

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Ibidem, 136.

party, fired from his job, denied the opportunity to defend his dissertation, and was subsequently arrested. Illegal house searches were also used as the instrument of pressure. Such searches took place in the homes of human rights activists, or their friends and families (illustrated by the cases of M. Matushevych and M. Marynovych). An essential part of such searches was confiscation of all documents that could at least be remotely regarded as proof of evidence of the alleged offence. The *Memorandum No 7* also highlighted such cases on the example of M. Rudenko. It described his house search, when the literary and scientific archive was plundered. His wife Raisa, son Yuri and another member of the group, O. Tykhyj, had been subjected to body search. Similar house searches took place in the town of Drohobych with the mother of another member of the group, M. Marynovych, but also with N. Strokata in the Russian city of Tarusa. Some UHG documents also addressed mass human rights violations: in February 1978, the UHG pointed to the persecution of members of the Christian Baptist Church.²³

The Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Persecuted

VONS in Czechoslovakia was founded on 27 April 1978. The founding memorandum was signed by seventeen people, all of whom were earlier members of Charter 77. Unlike the UHG, VONS focused on the violation of human rights and criminal law. The extent of its work is well illustrated by the following data: from April 1978 until the Velvet Revolution in November 1989, VONS issued 1 204 documents, of which 1 125 concerned individual cases of human rights violations. Anna Šabatová, one of the VONS founders, explains the purpose and aims of VONS: “The Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted was essentially created as we realized that when they close a publicly known and respected figure, these cases are followed even abroad. Many people, naturally and spontaneously, were interested in the fate of such a person, both at home and abroad. That helped him or her mentally, as well as objectively by increasing their chances of lower sentence or even earlier release. This seemed unfair to us, even though those respected and well-known were certainly not responsible for such situation. This was not only annoying to us, but also to others. Hence, so we have founded VONS so that anyone we find out about would have at least some identification and protection from being non-entity.”²⁴ VONS founding statement,

²³ Ibidem, 185.

²⁴ Pažout, J. et al., *Výbor na obranu nespravedlivě stíhaných 1978–1989. Edice dokumentů*, Praha 2014.

the first document issued by the Committee on 27 April 1978 confirms her point: “The aim of this Committee is to monitor cases of individuals who are prosecuted or imprisoned for their beliefs, or who are victims of police and judicial arbitrariness. We will inform the public and authorities about these cases and, if possible, help the prosecuted. We want to cooperate with everyone, both at home and abroad, who is interested in cooperation.”²⁵ Indeed, VONS pursued these goals in its activities. The overwhelming part for VONS deal with the specific cases of human rights violations – these documents were officially called “communications”. Still, there were also other forms of activities, similar to UHG.

Appeals to state authorities were the core VONS activities. An example is a letter of 29 May 1978 from the Charter 77 spokespeople Ladislav Hejdránek, Marta Kubišová and Jaroslav Šabata addressed to the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Bureau of the Federal Assembly that addressed the kidnapping of Ivan Medek and Bohumil Doležal. The document also described the general approach of the government towards the Charter signatories, who have been constantly bullied since the foundation of the movement. In conclusion, the letter directly accuses the government of crimes: “We are addressing, in particular, all officials of the three top institutions: you are politically and legally responsible for these acts of terrorism because you are *de jure* or *de facto* superiors of their perpetrators.”²⁶

VONS also appealed to state authorities in connection with specific human rights violations. In August 1979, Charter 77 spokesman together with a committee, sent a letter to the Attorney General of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic Jan Feješ demanding to act in the case of Petr Cibulka. He was convicted and imprisoned, where he “became target of some physical assaults by some fellow prisoners”. VONS asked the Attorney General to remedy the situation. Similarly, Ladislav Lis in his letter to Lubomír Štrougal, Czechoslovak Prime Minister, protested against the deprivation of citizenship of the author and playwright Pavel Kohout. Such letters did not differ significantly from the same statements and public calls issued by the UHG. The themes were even more common: violations of similar rights of prisoners can be found in similar letters of the UHG.

VONS members have also placed great emphasis on international cooperation. There has been an effort to cooperate with human rights movements outside Czechoslovakia, either by expressing mutual support or by trying to integrate into wider community. In July 1978, VONS, together with Charter 77 spokesmen, have published an open letter to the mother and wife of Anatoly Shcharansky, Alexander Ginzburg’s wife, about their arrest. VONS expressed its solidarity

²⁵ Ibidem, 3085.

²⁶ Ibidem, 3088.

with the Moscow Helsinki Group and appealed “to similar civic initiatives, as well as to interested and political groups, believers, religious, humanitarian and free-thinking communities all over the world seeking democracy and rights for the broadest population, to take effective action to liberate Anatoly Shcharansky, Alexander Ginzburg, Yuri Orlov, Viktor Fiacus, and other Soviet human rights defenders”.²⁷ Such activities on the part of VONS are illustrated by a letter addressed to the International Human Rights Congress concerning the case of Rudolf Bahr, which had been held in West Berlin since 6 November 1978: “We consider R. Bahr a prisoner of conscience who is being jailed for his conviction. The Committee for the Protection of the Unjustly Prosecuted had already expressed its solidarity to him in August. Also, in a joint letter, the fourteen signatories of Charter 77 with seven members of the Polish Committee of Social Self-Defense (KOR), listed R. Bahr among those imprisoned in Eastern Europe for opposition or defence of human rights.”²⁸

Major part of VONS communications in the late 1970s concerned either the cases of initiation of criminal prosecution against certain individuals or those who had already been convicted. Vast majority of the cases concerned an article of the Criminal Code on sedition or subversion of the Republic.

The case of Jan Zmátlík is highly illustrative. Proceedings were launched against him for alleged subversion of the Republic. VONS members were scrupulous about legal aspect of their activities: their statements contained all the legal details of the reasons for initiating the prosecution, etc. Such statements largely followed the same style: “As we have already announced in the Communication of 30 January, Jan Zmátlík, born 1948, sociologist, signatory of Charter 77, resident in Prague, Stroupežnického street No 28, employee of the Research Institute of Criminology at the Office of the General Prosecutor of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, has been imprisoned since 31 August 1978 in the prison of the Ministry of Justice in Prague-Ruzyně following a decision of the StB²⁹ investigator dated 2 September 1978. He was prosecuted ‘for preparing the crime of subversion of the Republic’ (§ 7/1 to § 98/1 of the Penal Code), on the grounds that, from the end of 1977 until detention, he had produced, reproduced and prepared written materials...”³⁰ Furthermore, the authors of the communication stated in the document what provisions of the law have been violated and there were also calls for interference for the release of the defendant.

²⁷ Ibidem, 3096.

²⁸ Ibidem, 3124.

²⁹ Státní bezpečnost, Czechoslovak political police during the normalization, „State Security“.

³⁰ Pažout, J. et al., *Výbor na obranu nespravedlivě stíhaných 1978–1989. Edice dokumentů*, Praha 2014, 148.

Citizens could be accused of sedition for various reasons. VONS dealt with cases, such as for example, that of O. Tomek. According to a court decision, he had committed crime by writing a letter to the Regional Passports and Visa Department (KOPV) in Hradec Králové in March 1977 and to the office of the General Prosecutor in March 1977: the content of these letters outraged at least three KOPV officers and at least two prosecutors at the General Prosecutor's Office.³¹ Another characteristic case of "outrage" was that of V. Říha. According to the official version, V. Říha, "guided by the intention to evoke mistrust and hostility against the socialist social and state establishment of the Republic" had prepared a written document entitled *Record of my interrogation in Ruzyně*, in which he allegedly "gave a deliberately false and tendentious interpretation of the social and economic conditions of the Republic, the activities of the StB. . ."³² Another similar trial, the one of J. Brychta and P. Novák, who were convicted of outrage, was also symptomatic: these individuals were alleged of sedition, because of their "hostility to the socialist social system, they wrote and passed on documents related to Charter 77 and other materials identified as tendentious against the current political developments in our country".³³

There were dozens of similar cases during this period. Most often, VONS communications pointed out that these were the cases of persecution of individuals on the grounds of their beliefs. Some VONS communications also concern cases of mass persecution, such as the arrest of citizens during the Brezhnev visit in Czechoslovakia in 1978, or the police intervention against Catholic activists and independent Catholic literature.³⁴

The ways to dissent: acting forces in human rights movements

The emergence of human rights groups, such as the UHG and VONS, was set in motion by the signing of the Helsinki Agreement on 1 August 1975. Socio-cultural conditions for the emergence of these groups were quite similar (particularly in terms of overall atmosphere in the Communist "welfare" society and general obliviousness of political issues by average citizens). At the same time, however, there were several fundamental differences. UHG involved people who were previously in conflict with the state and engaged in opposition activities. In the

³¹ Ibidem, 85.

³² Ibidem, 90.

³³ Ibidem, 205.

³⁴ Ibidem, 474.

case of VONS, were activists involved in human rights movement did not come into direct confrontation with power prior to their signing the Charter in 1977. The examples of activities of both groups shows that the main goals of both movements differed, as personal motivation, life stories of the activists and political context (national question) were different.

In general, members of both groups coexisted in some ways with the Communist power: some were involved in Communist Party activities (at least at the level of youth party organizations) and mostly completed higher education. Even though each story or way to dissent was different, defining events influenced, in one way or another, the perception of the state in the minds of future dissidents. In the case of the post-war Soviet Ukraine, this is primarily the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the “secret” Khrushchev speech that undermined the foundations of Soviet power in the eyes of intelligentsia and the opposition, but also in general public.³⁵ The onset of Brezhnev administration prove to be the milestone for dissent in Soviet Ukraine, as it was associated with mass arrests and persecution of the opposition (particularly the waves of mass prosecutions in 1965 and 1971–1974). These developments virtually erased the opposition movement. On the other hand, they triggered upsurge of solidarity from those individuals who remained free, along with a determination to continue engaging in pro-democratic activities.

In the case of Czechoslovakia, the situation was somewhat simpler: although some actors in the human rights movement mentioned various events that influenced their perception of the Communist system, vast majority identified the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops in August 1968 and the subsequent imposition of normalization as the defining point.

Notwithstanding that the Helsinki Conference prompted the emergence of these two human rights groups, there was already some experience of human rights in both cases. In the case of Czechoslovakia, prior to the foundation of VONS, there was Charter 77, the platform that united opposition-minded activists. It also dealt with human rights defence. Even in the Ukrainian case, prior to the establishment of the UHG, there was already some experience among the opposition in human rights movement (although it entailed rather inconsistent initiatives that often relied on Moscow-based colleagues, especially the Human Rights Initiative Group founded in Moscow in 1969).

In terms of areas of activity of both groups, the situation of both UHG and VONS was similar. VONS was founded primarily by Prague-based activists, which meant that Prague was the base of the human rights movement in Czechoslovakia. It was from there that human rights violations in other parts of

³⁵ Jones, P., *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinists Past in the Soviet Union, 1953–70*, Yale 2015.

the country were monitored. The UHG consisted of people who came from different parts of Ukraine. Hence, although some members were influencing the content of some statements in ideological terms, it would be an exaggeration to speak of some region-specific features. UHG activities in the first year after its foundation were concentrated in Kyiv, as most of the UHG co-founders then lived in the Ukrainian capital. Other major cities in Soviet Ukraine, such as Odessa and Lviv, were also active. An important factor was also the connection of UHG (represented essentially by the general P. Hryhorenko with the Moscow-based dissidents). They had much more experience in human rights movement, plus were more influential – largely due to Sakharov.

Origin and family environment

The average age of UHG members was 49.6, in the case of VONS it was 40.1 years – the difference between these groups was almost half a generation. Most UHG members grew up in Soviet Ukraine in difficult social conditions of the 1930s and 1940s that was marked by the famine of 1932–1933 and World War II with its devastating effect on the territory of Ukraine. The vast majority (exactly nine members, except N. Strokata) were born in small villages across Ukraine. They either experienced hunger themselves (M. Rudenko)³⁶, felt its consequences (L. Lukianenko)³⁷ or were part of family memory (M. Matushevych). Hunger again tormented Ukraine in the first post-war year: these memories are articulated in the case of the families of M. Marynovych and O. Meshko.

Most UHG members came from ordinary peasant families who lived on modest salaries and worked in blue-collar professions such as labourers, chauffeurs, etc. The families were affected by significant ideological influence, especially in those of M. Marynovych³⁸ and L. Lukianenko: the families were patriotic, and the parents bestowed anti-Soviet sentiments to their children since childhood. Exceptionally, some activists grew up in families of intelligentsia, teachers or priests. In some cases it is difficult to identify the influence of the family. For instance, M. Rudenko was the first in his family to be literate. In such cases it is impossible to speak more precisely of family influence. In general, however, in the case of UHG, the influence of family and origin was important largely as social background for their further human rights activities.

³⁶ Руденко, М., *Найбільше диво – життя*, Київ 2013, 42.

³⁷ Interview with Lev Lukianenko, Kyiv 20. 4. 2015.

³⁸ Маринович, М., *Всесвіт за колючим дротом*, Львів 2017, 14.

Most VONS members grew up in altogether different circumstances. Most of them spent their childhood in post-war Czechoslovakia. Six out of ten members of the Prague Ten came directly from Prague, others from larger cities (Brno, Most, Kladno) and only Ladislav Lis has come from the village of Mláka in the region of Písek (but his family has soon moved to Prague). Most of them came from the families of intelligentsia and bourgeois strata (Václav Havel, Jiří Dienstbier, Petr Uhl and others). Cultured family background determined the education of future dissidents and their interest in public affairs and politics. In some cases, parents directly influenced their children's worldview (Petr Uhl,³⁹ Václav Malý,⁴⁰ Václav Havel,⁴¹ Dana Němcová⁴² mention this specific influence in their memoirs). The influence of the family in young age and adolescence was undoubtedly more important for VONS members than for those within UHG.

Education

In terms of educational attainment, the fate of UHG and VONS members is similar. All cofounders had either completed higher education or had some experience with it (with the exception of M. Rudenko, who entered university in 1939 but was drafted in the army in his first year).

Three UHG members studied in Moscow: L. Lukianenko graduated from the Faculty of Law of Moscow State University, O. Tykhyj studied history at the same university and P. Hryhorenko studied at the Frunze Military Academy. The rest of the Ukrainian human rights activists studied at various universities in the Soviet Ukraine: N. Strokata at the University of Odessa, I. Kandyba at L'viv State University, M. Marynovych at the Polytechnic University in L'viv, O. Berdnyk graduated in Theatre Studies at the Ivan Franko Theater in Kyiv.

Two UHG cofounders encountered barriers in their studies: O. Meshko was expelled from the Institute of Peoples Education in Dnipropetrovsk (chemistry) several times because of her social origin. She still did manage to complete her studies. M. Matushevych was expelled from the Kyiv State University (history department), officially for "academic failure". In fact, it was an act of persecution for the support he had given to the arrested leaders of Ukrainian intelligentsia in the early 1970s.

³⁹ Pavelko, Z. – Uhl, P., *Dělal jsem, co jsem považoval za správné*, Praha 2015.

⁴⁰ Beránek, J., *Václav Malý: k hledání patří pokora*, Praha 2002.

⁴¹ Putna, M., *Václav Havel: Duchovní portrét v rámu české kultury 20. století*, Praha 2011.

⁴² Bárta, J., *Dana Němcová: lidé mého života*, Praha 2003.

The landscape of educational attainment was similar within VONS. Nine out of ten members were university graduates (Otta Bednářová graduated from secondary school in Prague). Four VONS members studied at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague: Dana and Jiří Němec studied psychology, Jiří Dienstbier journalism and Václav Benda held a doctorate in philosophy. Petr Uhl graduated from the Czech Technical University in Prague, Václav Malý graduated from the Cyril and Methodius Theological Faculty in Litoměřice, while Jarmila Bělíková graduated in psychology from the University of Brno. Two VONS members from the Prague Ten completed their studies as distance learners, meaning they studied while holding a job: Václav Havel at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, Ladislav Lis thus received his law degree.

Even in the Czechoslovak context there were cases of barriers to the educational path: Havel – because of his social background he wasn't allowed to study at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. For political reasons, another VONS cofounder, Anna Šabatová, was expelled from the university in the early 1970s (she wasn't member of the Prague Ten, and thus does not fall directly into the scope of this study; yet her case is illustrative within academic context and the pressure exerted on students on political grounds).

In UHG and VONS, there were certain tendencies common for the Ukrainian and Czechoslovak context. Human rights movement involved people with university degree (eighteen out of twenty cases examined) who often studied at prestigious universities – either in Moscow or in Prague. Several of them graduated with honours (N. Strokata, J. Dienstbier).

In both groups, humanities are the most popular (three graduated in law, three in psychology, two in arts, two in history). In both groups there is one founding member (P. Uhl and M. Marynovych) who have pursued technical studies.

Professional life

As in education, similar tendencies can be observed in both human rights groups in the case of further professional life. After graduation, the vast majority of activists successfully applied their skills in the fields they had studied. Humanities remained popular disciplines in which future dissidents were involved: by the mid-1960s, M. Rudenko and O. Berdnyk had established themselves as successful authors. The same went for V. Havel (though his works were primarily drama and stage pieces), J. Němec had his articles published, as did J. Dienstbier and O. Bednářová; L. Lukianenko and I. Kandyba were lawyers. There is also an academic and research element in professional lives of activists in Ukraine and Czechoslovakia: P. Hryhorenko and N. Strokata from UHG, and V. Benda and D. Němcová from

VONS worked, albeit briefly, in various academic institutions. O. Tykhyj and P. Uhl taught at schools. Apart from this main tendency (publishing, teaching, journalism and academic career have a similar basis and are often interconnected), there are also some specific disciplines: M. Marynovych was engineer, J. Bělíková social curator, V. Malý was ordained priest.

Difficulties in professional life for all participants in the human rights movement began shortly after they started to actively promote their political beliefs. In the case of the UHG, this was opposition activity of different kinds, and often well before the Helsinki Conference in 1975. Obviously, imprisonment made it impossible to continue professional life or at least complicated further career growth. O. Berdnyk and O. Meshko were arrested during the 1940s, L. Lukianenko and I. Kandyba in the early 1960s, P. Hryhorenko, M. Rudenko and O. Berdnyk were persecuted during the 1960s and 1970s. The last two authors were also excluded from the Writers' Association and were unable to publish. After serving their sentences, the fate of all of them was quite similar: they sought any job to earn a living. M. Rudenko worked as a night watchman, I. Kandyba repaired electronic equipment, O. Tykhyj changed a number of professions, and shortly served as firefighter.

The same pattern, although in a milder form, can be observed in the lives of many VONS founders. Most cofounders engaged in opposition activities after they manifested publicly after the August 1968 invasion (the only one who was a founder of VONS and has had a direct conflict with power because of his belief much earlier was L. Lis). That affected their professional life. The future dissidents who were dismissed from work on the grounds of disagreement with the occupation and the subsequent introduction of normalization included the journalists J. Dienstbier and O. Bednářová. Immediately after signing Charter 77 (and therefore just before the foundation of VONS), V. Benda and J. Bělíková came to face obstacles at work. In these cases, the fate of the Czechoslovak dissidents was identical to their Ukrainian counterparts: inability to continue to work according to their specialism. V. Benda worked as a stoker, J. Bělíková as a cleaning lady and J. Dienstbier joined the Association of Interiors Designers, L. Lis was support worker at a rolling mill.

Political beliefs and relations with the regime

On the political level, it is also possible to define certain common patters in both groups. In some cases, however, it is impossible to identify a single level of action of a specific activist, as there may be more motivations and factors affecting each person.

The first common thread in both groups is *reform communism*. This group may include supporters of the Communist Party or ideology who, over time, have distanced themselves from the ideology or the ruling party. In the case of the UHG, most distinctive cases were those of M. Rudenko and P. Hryhorenko: they described themselves as communists (even Stalinists) in their youth,⁴³ both worked for some time as political informants⁴⁴ in various institutions, and served different party functions and trade unions. Over time, under certain circumstances and based on personal experience, they abandoned their convictions. Similar pattern applies to VONS members, especially Ladislav Lis⁴⁵ and Otta Bednářová⁴⁶. P. Uhl described himself as Marxist and supporter of left-wing ideology. With some exaggeration, he may be added to this group, though he was sceptical of the ruling Party since childhood.⁴⁷ The change of views regarding ideology and Communist régime was determined by personal experience and specific historical events: the CPSU 20th Congress and subsequent de-Stalinization, show trials in the 1950s (L. Lis was the only one to also mention monetary reform in Czechoslovakia in 1953), or the military interventions in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. August 1968 has become in the Czechoslovak context one of the key points for re-assessment of the relationship to the Soviets. It also had a major influence in Ukraine as the end of illusions about the Soviet régime – an expression used by a number of Ukrainian dissidents.⁴⁸ It also directly influenced the UHG co-founders of UHG (M. Rudenko and P. Hryhorenko). The intervention in Hungary in 1956 also helped to raise opposition moods not only among the reform communists (P. Uhl),⁴⁹ but also among the members of other human rights movement groups (V. Malý, I. Kandyba). The group of reform communists further includes J. Dienstbier and L. Lukianenko. They became members of the Communist Party. At the same time they explained this step as the only possible tool to improve the situation in their countries. Significantly, they used almost the same words to explain their involvement in the ruling Party structures.⁵⁰

⁴³ Руденко, М., *Найбільше диво – життя*, Київ 2013, 6.

⁴⁴ *Politinformacija* was an official political and ideological work that took place in factories, school, universities etc. by holding lectures and meetings at different institution. Several members of UHG at least briefly took part in this kind of activities.

⁴⁵ *Ladislav Lis, disident, zповěd'*. [online: <https://plus.rozhlas.cz/ladislav-lis>, cit. 2017-01-06].

⁴⁶ Cysařová, J., *Já prostě nemohu žít jinak: česká publicistka Otka Bednářová*, Praha 2010.

⁴⁷ Pavelko, Z. – Uhl, P., *Dělal jsem, co jsem považoval za správné*, Praha 2015.

⁴⁸ Литовченко, Л., *Вранці 21 серпня 1968 року ввели в Прагу півмільйонну армію Варшавського блоку. У той день реєтки моїх ілюзій щодо соціалізму облетіли – згадує Євген Свєрстюк*. [online: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/906900.html>, cit. 2017-01-06].

⁴⁹ Pavelko, Z. – Uhl, P., *Dělal jsem, co jsem považoval za správné*, Praha 2015.

⁵⁰ Mikolaš, R., *Jiří Dienstbier: Žít naplno*, Praha 2012, 48.

The second group includes people who opposed the dominant ideology since childhood, albeit for various reasons. There are two quite distinct streams within the groups themselves: in the case of the UHG, it was primarily a nationalist belief and historically formed opposition to the Soviet state. In the case of VONS similar group inclined towards Christianity.

In some public circles Ukraine's historical experience with Soviet repression – whether it was violent collectivization and famine in the 1930s or the historical memory of the UPA liberation struggle during World War II – led to the refutation of the Soviet régime as a whole. Often, awareness of these events was passed on from parents (L. Lukianenko, M. Marynovych, M. Matushevych); in some cases, it was historical experience added by personal experiences (O. Meshko)⁵¹. Some activists gradually formed their positions under the influence of nationalist organizations and activists (N. Strokata, O. Tykhyj). All of them (perhaps with the exception of L. Lukianenko) did not treat nationalism as a strict political and ideological doctrine. Instead, they perceived it as a matter of general anti-Soviet approach and patriotic ethos. Their conviction deepened over time not least in response to the policy of Russification of Ukraine.⁵² It was reflected in their activities: the most important part of UHG activities was the defence of national rights. In this sense, it was opposition to Soviet power long before the establishment of the UHG: eight out of ten UHS members were prosecuted prior to the establishment of the group.

In the case of VONS, there was also a group opposing the ruling Party and the situation in society, though driven by a completely different attitude: by religious beliefs. This group includes V. Benda, J. Němec, D. Němcová and V. Malý. Their worldview and their political beliefs were strongly influenced by their social context and family. Their activities prior to the emergence of the human rights movement were closely linked to religious issues and became an important factor for their involvement in VONS. In the case of UHG, religion played a role in a few cases (M. Marynovych and M. Rudenko), but it was not a decisive factor in their activism.

Another pattern to be identified in both groups is the ethical-moral stance. This applies to the activists who did not have a single specific motive for involvement in the human rights movement. Instead, they were driven by their humanistic worldview, an effort to improve the situation in the society, to rectify the injustices inflicted upon the prosecuted. This group also includes those activists who had already joined other groups, whose rhetoric often focused on issues of general justice and conscience. These include, *inter alia*, V. Havel, whose

⁵¹ Мешко, О., *Не відступлюся*, Харків 2005, 24.

⁵² The process of the Russification of Ukraine during the sixties was deeply analysed in I. Dziuba contemporary work *Internationalism or Russification?* published in 1968.

conviction was anchored in the thesis that man's actions influence world affairs and bear responsibility in face of the world. J. Bělíková perceived involvement in human rights movement as "the application of human interest in people and effort to help them"⁵³. P. Uhl named the book of his memories *I Did What I Thought Was Right*.⁵⁴ The same rhetoric was also present in UHG: M. Matushevych explained that he "just defended human dignity"⁵⁵. To O. Berdnyk the human rights movement was an instrument for his idealistic effort to build cosmopolitan society.

Summary

Elements of human rights activities in the Soviet Union as well as in the countries of the Communist bloc emerged throughout the post-WWII period. The signing of the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on 1 August 1975 led most opposition groups to a shared objective and provided them with the same tools. The opposition movement focused on the defence of human rights.

These movements emerged in the 1970s under different historical, cultural and social conditions in the USSR and abroad. Yet there were similar patterns: the Brezhnev administration in the USSR and the Communist Party leadership in Czechoslovakia attempted to introduce socialist consumerism to secure a certain level of public welfare and to prevent their involvement in politics. In both countries the degree of success of these experiments was different. People in Czechoslovakia were much better provided for at least in terms of basic food and needs. Still, the logic of Party leadership was the same. The Brezhnev era was marked in the Soviet Union by the slogan of "stability" (more accurately identified in historiography as the era of stagnation). Normalization was established in Czechoslovakia. In these circumstances, political activity of average citizens didn't matter. Yet there were still groups of disenchanted opposition activists who decided to engage in human rights movement in the second half of 1970s.

The motivation of these activists varied. In various republics of the USSR, Helsinki groups were established and declared their goals as the defence of the rights of citizens. Still, they focused essentially on the protection of national rights. This trend was quite strong in the Soviet Ukraine, where the Ukrainian Helsinki Group was *de facto* actively involved in the struggle: if not about the independence of Ukraine, at least in the opposition to the Russification of Ukraine.

⁵³ Kantůrková, E., *Sešli jsme se v této knize*, Praha 1991, 126.

⁵⁴ Pavelko, Z. – Uhl, P., *Dělal jsem, co jsem považoval za správné*, Praha 2015.

⁵⁵ Костюк, Б., *Микола Матусевич. Рядовий війни за гідність*. [online: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/28111050.html>, cit. 2017-01-06].

It thus advocated the issues of nationality. In Czechoslovakia, the situation was different. The foundation of Charter 77 formed the basis for further establishment of the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted. It identified and pursued two main objectives: mapping specific cases of human rights violations and defending the unjustly prosecuted.

Both groups were established in different countries and have connected people with different world views and personal stories, as well as motivation to act. The differences between these movements consisted mainly in the fact that, for most Ukrainian activists, this was just another logical chapter of their opposition activity: vast majority had already been prosecuted and some of them had been placed in labour camps long before the establishment of the UHG. In the case of VONS, these were relatively younger people who, for the most part, were in conflict with official power for the first time. Ukrainian dissidents came from peasant families and largely grew up in deprived material conditions. Their Czechoslovak counterparts lived in Prague as the capital city or other larger cities. Most of them came from secure middle- or upper-class background.

There were also common features between the two groups: both in Czechoslovakia and Ukraine, they were educated people who had graduated from prestigious universities, with a definite inclination towards humanities. All members of the groups had worked, for some time, in their professions. In this sense they were professionally successful, and their human rights activities earned them career obstacles. They were eventually forced to change profession: writers and teachers become cleaners and stokers.

Within the groups themselves, common threads are discernible: there were dissidents who first genuinely believed in the positive role of the ruling Communist Parties. It was only after certain personal experiences and historical events that they changed views on the régime (M. Rudenko, P. Hryhorenko, L. Lis, O. Bednářová). Yet there were also those who joined the Communist Party only to be able to influence social events and improve social conditions (J. Dienstbier, L. Lukianenko). Nonetheless, many opposed the Communist leadership from the very beginning, albeit for various reasons: in the case of the UHG, it was a nationalist-patriotic motive (N. Strokata, M. Marynovych, L. Lukianenko, O. Meshko, O. Tykhyj). In the case of VONS it was religious belief (V. Benda, D. Němcová, J. Němec, V. Malý). A number of activists joined the groups on the basis of moral-ethical conviction and humanistic values (O. Berdnyk, M. Matushevych, V. Havel, J. Bělíková).

The differences between power within the USSR and beyond its borders in Czechoslovakia were best reflected in further prosecution of human rights activists. In 1977, a number of UHG members were arrested and subsequently sued under Article 62 of the USSR Penal Code (anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda). The five UHG cofounders (M. Rudenko, L. Lukjanenko, O. Tykhyj,

M. Marynovych and M. Matushevych) were given the highest possible sentence – seven years in prison and five years of exile. Two years later, other UHG members O. Berdnyk, J. Lytvyn and V. Ovsienko were arrested. The repression had not stopped the Helsinki process in Ukraine: in the Spring of 1979, another human rights group emerged in the prison camps in Mordovia. It helped to implement the Helsinki treaties in prisons, which included already imprisoned UHG members. The human rights movement continued after the activists were released. By the end of the 1970s, additional individual joined the group, including Vasyl Stus (leader of the group), Vyacheslav Chornovil, Zenovy Krasivsky and Jaroslav Lesiv. Some UHG members were given the opportunity to emigrate and gradually have used it: P. Hryhorenko left with his family to the United States, M. Rudenko followed later. On the contrary, several UHG members did not survive in prison: in August 1984 J. Lytvyn died under unclear circumstances. In September 1985, V. Stus, one of the greatest talents of Ukrainian post-war literature and, by then, UHG leader, died in a working camp in Perm. In 1984, the cofounder of UHG O. Tykhyj and V. Marchenko died in prison.

At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, the incessant activities of the UHG were rather symbolic. Actual restoration of the group came in the second half of the 1980s by establishing the Ukrainian Helsinki Association (UHA), which carried on the legacy of UHG. L. Lukianenko was elected chairman. Just before the collapse of the USSR, the association was transformed into the Ukrainian Republican Party and several of its members became deputies in the first Ukrainian parliament. In 1991, V. Chornovil and L. Lukianenko ran for Ukrainian Presidency.

The situation around VONS developed similarly. In 1979, the Prague Ten co-founders of VONS (and another member of the group Albert Černý) were placed in prison. They were all sentenced to three to five years of imprisonment (with the exception of D. Němcová, who received a suspended sentence). As in the case of UHG, VONS was also joined by new members after the first wave of arrests: Karel Freund, Zina Freundová, Zbyněk Hejda, Martin Hybler, Jan Pavelka, Jan Ruml, Petruška Šustrová, and others.

In the Czechoslovak case, emigration cases were much more widespread. First, it did not necessarily have to be perceived as a definitive step. Second, the Czechoslovak administration was much more loyal on the issue of emigration (so-called Asanation action). At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, I. Medek, J. Tesař, V. Malý left Czechoslovakia.

As in the case of Ukraine, greater activity took place after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the USSR: in 1986 new members (P. Cibulka, S. Devátý, L. Marečková, P. Pospíchal) have joined VONS. At the same time, the Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee (CHC) was established. Before the fall of the USSR and the Velvet Revolution, there were different perceptions of the essence of these groups. While the UHA gradually transformed itself into a political party and engaged in

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the process of proclaiming the independence of Ukraine, CHC (including former VONS members V. Havel, L. Lis, V. Malý and P. Uhl) saw the main task of the organization in the immediate defence of human rights. After the Velvet Revolution, when V. Havel became Czechoslovak President, many dissidents became parliamentarians. Some of them still engage in human rights issues: A. Šabatová, who stood at the birth of VONS, served as the Public Defender of Rights in 2014–2020.

ABSTRACT

Human Rights Movement in the Soviet Ukraine and Czechoslovakia in the 2nd Half of 1970s

Radomyr Mokryk

The study focuses on human rights movement within the Eastern Bloc after the 1975 Helsinki conference. It examines two particular groups, the Ukrainian Helsinki Group and The Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted in Czechoslovakia. It compares them from different perspectives: social and cultural context in both countries, and main goals and activities of each movement. It explores, in particular focus, the lives of the members of human rights movement, by analysing the modes of dissent by particular individuals and their driving forces. The material traces common features within the two human rights groups. It can be perceived in a broader context as an attempt to identify specific features of the dissident movements inside the USSR and further afield – within the Communist bloc.

Key words: Human Rights, Dissent, Helsinki Groups, USSR, Opposition Movement, National Minorities, Imperialism.

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