Allyssa Bruce

Professor Wildemuth

Czech Librarianship

3 April 2014

After experiencing the horrors of fascism during World War II, Czechoslovakia acted in national self-interest by adopting socialism and allying itself with the Soviet Union. As a result, the country positioned itself behind the Iron Curtain and, from 1948-1989, was governed by a totalitarian communist regime. A socialist system was implemented that had significant impact upon what information was promoted and suppressed. Like most communist systems, censorship and propaganda were practiced as methods to influence and control the opinions of the Czechoslovak people. *The Oxford Dictionary* defines censorship as "the practice of officially examining books, movies, etc., and suppressing unacceptable parts." Propaganda is defined as "information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view." In order to understand how information was controlled through censorship and propaganda, the marketplace of ideas will be explored by examining the state publishing industry and the social institution of ideas will be explored by examining the role of libraries.

Transition from Nazism to Communism

Before communism came to dominate the political landscape in Czechoslovakia, information was by no means open and accessible. In fact, to understand the nuances of the socialist system that controlled information, a brief history of Czechoslovakia's transition from Nazism to Communism must be considered. In 1945, at the end of the war, U.S. troops were only

50 miles away yet the urgent calls for help that were radio broadcasted by Czech patriots were left unanswered "while an estimated 1,693 Czech (and 935 Germans) were then needlessly killed in the street fighting and in the SS-run prison camps" (Heiman 148). For Czechoslovaks, this went down in history as a "shameful betrayal" by the Allies. Prague was inevitably liberated by the Soviet army and exactly three years later, "the Czechoslovak Republic adopted the constitution that set the seal on the country's fate as a totalitarian police state" (150). The war devastated Czechoslovakia's faith in the Western world while also paving the way to a more homogenous nation with hopes of unification.

Czechoslovakia voluntarily allied itself with the Soviet Union and placed itself behind the Iron Curtain. Western alliances had weakened, ethnic hatreds ran deep, and the need to protect the nation from any possible future German offenses compelled Czechoslovakia to eradicate the right wing of the government and expel Germans, Hungarians, sympathizers and eventually anti-socialists from Czech lands. During the war, most Czech Jews and Gypsies had been killed. Afterward, 660,000 Germans were expelled from the country and anywhere from 19,000 to more than 30,000 were killed. The government insisted that the "German and Hungarian populations were not being expelled as detested ethnic groups, but rather as Fascists, traitors and war criminals" (161). So began the increased homogenization of Czechoslovakia and the beginning of socialist rhetoric.

After the war, Czechoslovakia found itself more united against Germans, Hungarians, and right-wing politics. While ethnic hatreds were by no means quenched, many Czechoslovaks found themselves united behind the ideals of socialism. By 1948, the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ) had approximately two and a half million card-carrying members out of a population of approximately 11 million people; this meant that a third of the adult population

was an official member of the Communist Party. This was a huge proportion of the population and in fact "in proportion to the total national population', [it was] the largest Communist Party 'in the whole world and of all time'" (153). The popularity of Communism among the Czech people was incredible not only because it was proportionally the largest Communist Party ever in the world, it may have even been, proportionally, the largest political party in the world and Czechoslovakia was a country with deep ethnic hatreds and significant differences between the Czech and Slovak regions.

The end of Nazism provided means and motivations, not all good, to unite Czechoslovaks under the common ideal of socialism. Much of the younger population was eager to join the Communist Party because it had known no other way of life other than existence in a police state. The middle class had already been silenced under Nazism and the working class was eager to acquire their own portion of lands that were confiscated from expelled Germans and Hungarians. Emerging from a horrific past, Communism provided the remaining Czechoslovak people with hopes for their individual futures and, most importantly, it provided a common vision that would unify the population and establish how to move forward as a country.

Although Czechoslovakia aimed to distance itself from the German influences that were forced upon the nation during the war, many policies regarding information control were maintained with only slight alterations. Policies that upheld censorship were kept and only slightly adapted to allow for the glorification of socialist ideals and figures, which was a change from promoting popular literature as the Germans had done in order to provide the common reader with an "escape from 'reality' – in this case, arduous wartime living conditions – and consequently to channel a possible social rebellion" (Smejkalová 92). Another socialist reverse to the censorship that occurred during Nazism was that Czech fiction and poetry were no longer

persecuted. Instead, many translations of works from non-Slavic writers and their translators themselves were kept out of the public sphere. Nevertheless, while the motivations behind censorship and propaganda altered, the practices of controlling information remained prevalent in Czechoslovakia.

State Owned Publishing

Typically, the mention of censorship conjures images of burning books, lists of prohibited titles, and severe persecution of writers but because Czechoslovakia was seeking a unified direction away from its past, there was what Jirina Smejkalová calls, in her article "Censors and Their Readers: Selling, Silencing, and Reading Czech Books," a social contract between the regime and the Czechoslovak people. There was oppression but there was also an agreement among much of the population as to how to reconfigure the cultural system of the country. Smejkalová noted:

> What is important to remember is that even without an explicit institution of censorship, post-1945 policy already promoted a notion of censorship as a planned and regulated institution aimed at the construction of a productive literary space unified under a common vision. (93)

A common vision was important because of the socialist ideology Czechoslovakia was determined to espouse in order to move past the horrors of fascism. In order to promote this common vision through culture, changes had to be made regarding how and what information was produced and how it was accessed.

Censorship in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSR) became an institutional practice of regulation that began to evolve again in 1948 when a list of libri prohibiti (prohibited books) was established for public libraries. Furthermore, all publishing companies were

eliminated and replaced by approximately 40 large publishing houses which were operated by the state. In her article, "Love for Books: Publishers and Readers in the Czech Republic, Alena L. Aissing stated:

> In 1949 the Czechoslovak publishing industry was nationalized by Act no. 94, which primarily related to the publishing and distribution of books, sheet music, and other non-periodical publications. The chief purpose of this law was to eliminate private publishers, control the distribution of all printed materials, and control publishers' access to outside information and publications. The right to publish was restricted to the state institutions and enterprises. The law also provided for a government agency, Ustredni publikacni rada (Central Publishing Council). (45)

By owning the publishing houses and instating an agency to oversee publishing activities, the government aimed to control and regulate the marketplace of ideas.

The elimination of all of Czechoslovakia's small publishing companies and the establishment of the Central Publishing Council of the Ministry of Information and Public Culture, were still seen as beneficial acts within the social contract between the government and the populace. The rhetoric surrounding these acts, without hindsight, seemed to serve the public interest. Vaclav Kopecky, the Minister of Information, defended Act no. 94 by stating that "there can be no doubt that we are making sure that publishing will, in future, serve higher interests than those of profit, that it will serve the interests of ideas, political enlightenment, culture, education, and so forth" (Lasky 234). Professor Julius Dolansky of Charles University in Prague also articulated the advantages that this law provided:

> We shall suppress and destroy only literary trash…pseudo-art of all varieties…. Everything that is valuable, creative, and vital, everything that is of significance for the community and society, will live in the socialist culture, live more fully and more finely than even before. (233-4)

It was believed that current publishing practices benefitted the wealthy, especially established, foreign authors whose works did not support the ideals of Communism and, therefore, did not serve the interests of society. To further validate the positions of weeding out "literary trash,"

paper was expensive and the supply was always low. It seemed logical that the government would control the supply and regulate the value of its use.

Although the government had taken control of publishing activities and had distributed a list of libri prohibiti, an explicit censorship office was not established until April 1953. The Main Board for Publishing Control (HSTD) was established by the government to provide "both preventative as well as postpublication interventions to both periodical and nonperiodical publications" (94 Smejkalová). A major consequence of the HSTD's activities was that there was a significant decline in the number of titles published. The most significant decline in the number of published titles occurred within the first two years of socialized publishing (1948 to 1950) "when the number of titles released annually fell from 6,640 to 3,797. Not until 1970 did that number rise above the 1948 level" (94). While the amount of titles publishing decreased dramatically, the number of printed copies almost doubled. As a result, "the whole system had the effect of reducing the variety of accessible texts, thus unifying, conserving and protecting canons" (97). These actions served to limit the diversity of publications and create less individual selection while increasing access and availability to government approved publications.

At the beginning of 1968, Czechoslovakia experienced a period of liberalization that has become known as the Prague Spring. In January, Alexander Dubček was elected first secretary of the KSČ. In order to ensure his hold on power, Dubček recognized that "it was possible, simply by judiciously removing restrictions on censorship, to mobilize enough public and party opinion to topple even the first secretary of the KSČ" (Heimann 230). In March, the party Presidium (executive committee) abolished the 1966 decree that made the Central Publication Administration (CPA) the supervisor over periodicals, radio, and television. This move effectively abolished "preventative censorship, a move unheard of in the Communist world"

(324 Suda). Censorship was "explicitly abandoned" in June when an amendment was made to article 17, law no. 81/1966, which had officially established the legality of all prior censorship activities and renamed HSTD the Central Publishing Administration (UPS). The original wording was replaced with:

> - Censorship is inadmissible.
>
> - Censorship means the imposed infringement, by any state authority, of the freedom of expression in speech and/or in pictures, and of the dissemination of ideas through the media of mass information. Thereby, the judiciary of prosecutor and the courts are not affected. (Smid 3)

These actions encouraged the Czechoslovak population that the government was taking a new policy making course.

Unfortunately these reforms did not last and, in August 1968, the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia. The period that followed the Prague Spring was known as Normalization. The amendment to article 17, law no. 81/1966 was revoked and a new censorship office was established. The Office for Publishing and Information was responsible for ensuring that published materials and news broadcasts "would not deviate from the party line" (Heimann 271). Normalization restored the conditions that existed before the Prague Spring; however censorship only worsened after the failed reformations. The Czechoslovak people became increasingly outspoken in their dissatisfaction with the Communist regime. In the 1960s, many students had become passionate about the oppression and injustice imposed on the country by the KSČ. While many students joined in peaceful protests, a few students made the ultimate sacrifice in order for their voices to be heard. The most famous of these students was Jan Palach who, in January of 1969, immolated himself in Wencesles Square. Before self-immolating, Palach sent out letters, one of which was addressed to the Czechoslovak Writer's Union and stated:

> Given that our nations have found themselves on the brink of hopelessness and resignation, we have decided to express our protest and to awaken the national conscience….
> Our demands are: 1) the immediate abolition of censorship 2) a ban on the distribution of Zprávy [the official newspaper of the Soviet occupying forces]. As you can see, our demands are not extreme, rather the opposite. (Faculty of Philosophy & Arts, Charles University)

Palach died believing that the only way that uncensored truth could be heard was by self-immolation. His primary concerns lay in the dangers of communist censorship and propaganda, which only worsened as the Normalization period progressed.

During the early 1970s, new actions increased the severity of the government's censorship activities. The work of over 150 writers and translators were erased from publishing houses, bookstores, and libraries when their names were "issued by the Czechoslovak authorities… [in effect] expelling them from the writers union, which in practical terms meant losing the license for having their work published" (Smejkalová 99). Furthermore all of the country's literary journals were eliminated and in the publishing houses "over 80 percent of the editors and executives, including 2,000 journalists (that is, half the members of the journalists union), lost their positions" (99). Many professionals and intellectuals found themselves in the labor force or exile. During the first 2 years of Normalization, approximately 140,000 people emigrated from Czechoslovakia.

In order to remain in compliance with the Communist government, the publishing industry had to follow a particular process. The members of publishing institutions risked "torture and harassment for not following the prescribed guidelines" (95). First, publishing houses had to provide the Ministry of Culture with preliminary plans for books that they intended to print. Then, the Books Department at the Ministry of Culture would consult with publishers and revise the plans and, most importantly, it was responsible for:

> [dividing] the supply of paper assigned by the Ministry of Industry to the printing companies. The amount of available paper – strictly limited by the five year state plan of production – dictated in a way the number of produced books. Even the authors' royalties, legislatively unified in the 1950s for all types of books, were contracted per page in the case of prose, per verse in the case of poetry. (96)

Much of this process was an attempt to insulate culture from the marketplace. Socialism's utter disdain for a market economy not only affected the process of publishing materials but also for providing access to them.

Beyond the publishing houses, Communism caused changes in the processes of distributing publications to readers. Booksellers were required to work within increasingly stringent boundaries. Publishers provided booksellers with bulletins that included the titles and brief descriptions of works that were currently going through the previously mentioned publication process. Unfortunately, these bulletins were provided and orders were required long before the works' publication. Using only the brief information provided by these bulletins, "the bookseller was supposed to guess the expected interest of the customers one to two years before the book actually appeared on the shelf and to order a certain number of copies from the district distribution authorities" (96). Publishing had been so thoroughly insulated from the marketplace, there was no longer any consideration given to supply and demand.

Further complicating booksellers' abilities to acquire the appropriate supply for the anticipated level of demand, was the fact that there were penalties placed upon them for unsold books and their salaries were dependent on the number of books sold. If a bookseller overestimated the number of copies that would sell of a particular title, which was common due to the nature of the publisher's bulletins, she would be fined for the books that remained unsold after 180 days. Unless specific titles were popular, books could be difficult to sell because "any

physical contact with the books was limited. The buyer could not really open the book unless he or she asked the salesperson, whose counter was a barrier between the customers and the bookshelves. 'Browsing' was unknown" (96). Since there were so many barriers obstructing open access to published information (HSTD, UPS, state-owned publishing companies, the Books Department at the Ministry of Culture, limited paper supplies in the possession of the government, ordering titles and the number of copies a year or two in advance, and the absence of browsing) alternative methods of producing and distributing information inevitably emerged.

Used bookstores lay outside the official sphere and were somewhat autonomous from the strict regulations that governed new bookstores. Titles that were banned after 1968 and no longer available in libraries or new bookshops could be found in used bookstores. These shops also did not exhibit the same barriers between the merchandise and the buyer. The counters that separated customers from the books did not exist and the open shelves permitted browsing. There was one important aspect that "both new and used bookstores had in common [and that] was their involvement in the 'shadow market economy'" (97). The most significant form of dissident activity was the production and distribution of samizdat copies of texts.

Ideas that were not conducive to communist doctrine and works by authors who were prohibited from the official sphere could only be distributed through the underground press – samizdat. All technology to produce copies was held by the authorities. The Libri Prohibiti's (a library in Prague that houses over 11,000 samizdat publications) *Annual Report 2012* describes the process of producing samizdat:

> In an era of modern printing techniques, their works had to be typed by hand; 10-12 carbon copies were produced at a time. These were given to friends, who passed them on to other readers. Under these conditions, underground "publishers" still managed to put out hundreds of titles of the highest quality Czech literature as well as many works in translation.

Samizdat was an important source of information, which was not constrained by the government's restrictions on free speech.

While there were consequences for samizdat producers and distributors who were caught, "in legal terms, the *samizdat* was construed as nonexisting, and consequently, the border between what was allowed and what was forbidden, between 'official' and 'nonofficial,' remained undefined" (Smejkalová 98). Because the government was determined "to preserve the image of a legally controlled country," it did not have explicit laws to punish samizdat producers and distributors (98). To maintain an image of fairness and control, the government formulated a set of tangential laws to punish those engaging in samizdat activities. There were three criminal laws that were brought against samizdat activists in legal cases, "article 98, 'Subversion of the Republic,' article 118, 'Illicit Entrepreneurship,' and… article 100, 'Disturbing the Peace.' A person convicted of these crimes could have been sentenced to up to ten years in jail" (99). The communist regime controlled information and public perception not only by regulating the content of what was published and broadcast, it also manipulated perceptions through its rhetoric, which aimed to convince the people of the CSR that the government was serving the higher interests of the people.

By the 1980s, the entire communist system had begun to fail. The publishing industry had become increasingly ineffective and the majority of the populace had lost interest in upholding any social contract with the regime. There was no longer a sense of what the market for information was. Supply and demand was vastly out of proportion. Warehouses were filled with unsold books and the price of paper had continued to rise. Isolating ideas from the marketplace and limiting speech through publications had only expedited the downfall of state owned publishing companies and exasperated the Czechoslovak people.

Libraries: Vehicles for Propaganda

Propaganda and censorship are two practices that were essential for the communists to exert and maintain control. In the publishing sphere, censorship was more heavily employed. In social institutions, natural realms for socialism to promote its common vision, propaganda was the primary tool used to influence the dissemination of information. Although librarianship was wrought with propaganda and unique methods of thought control, it would be inaccurate oversimplification to argue that the KSČ did nothing to contribute to libraries in Czechoslovakia. Libraries are essentially socialist institutions, especially public libraries which is what all libraries essentially became when they were unified in 1959. Equal access to information and a sense of community are standard contributions that libraries provide to society and these values of equality and common vision were also standard messages of the Communist regime.

In order to provide an accurate understanding of the status of libraries as socialism swept across Czechoslovakia, a brief history of the years preceding the end of WWII must precede a discussion of the activities from 1945-1989. In 1918 the independent Czechoslovak Republic was established and a year later, "the Czechoslovak parliament passed its first library act, according to which each municipality was obliged to establish and operate a public library" (National Library 6). Until 1939, libraries thrived and "librarianship became an official field of study" (7). This progress reverted when the Nazis occupied Czech lands; "over 600,000 volumes were confiscated by the Nazi police and destroyed; valuable collections had to be dispersed throughout the country, and library service was virtually at a standstill" (Mostecky 105). WWII destroyed many public libraries and the remaining collections were devoid of anything that could be interpreted as being "anti-fascist, democratic, and progressive" (National Library 7). It seemed that conditions for libraries could only improve after the Nazi occupation.

Although there are varying accounts about the severity of Nazi weeding policies compared to those under Communism, there is no debate regarding the notion that libraries had a much higher value in Communist society. In his 1961 article, "Public Libraries in Czechoslovakia Under the Unified Library System," Francis J. Kase noted:

> It is perfectly natural that the idea of a free public library has been enthusiastically embraced by all Communist governments... The Communists have claimed that only they have devised methods for making the concepts of universal accessibility of public libraries a real fact… [The people's libraries of Communist countries] represent an integrated system of library services which would fill the hearts of many librarians in the United States with admiration and envy. (154).

The Communist regime established a new mission and organizational system for libraries in which outreach and interlibrary loaning became central to the roles that libraries played in society.

In May 1948, the First Congress of the Czechoslovak Librarians was held. During this meeting, the role that libraries played in the socialist community and how libraries would be organized and mandated was decided. Libraries, along with other local administrations, were subject to the authority of national committees, which were "ruled by radical left-wing parties among which the Communist Party dominated. Public libraries as agencies of the local government were entirely at the mercy of the Communists" (156). At the May 1948 convention, this was further instated with a resolution that "called for the abandonment of the dual system of research and popular libraries and [placed] all libraries under the direct administrative supervision of the local governmental organs" (157). Among other things, these committees had the power to control materials acquisitions and lending policies. The resolutions of the convention went further and formulated a new approach to librarianship:

> The librarian must be the foremost fighter on the ideological front. Every book loan must be an act of war against reaction and for the new socialist order. We cannot accept the

> librarian who thinks that his task ends with the purchase, cataloging, and lending of books. Today's librarian must be an educator of the masses. He must weed out all trash and refrain from buying books that obstruct the path to socialism. (Mostecky 106).

This new ideological purpose for librarianship was combined with serious efforts to unify all libraries; and the purpose was complete nationalization and centralization of all libraries in order to effectively exert complete control over the Czechoslovak people. Librarians were explicitly given the responsibility of indoctrinating the population with Communist ideology and propaganda.

Although the notion of libraries having served as vehicles for Communist propaganda has a serious negative connotation, in the minds of some individuals, the changes the Communists brought to the role of libraries in Czechoslovak society were positive. In 1978 Vincent Kutik, the Director of the University Library in Bratislava, and Mirko Veslinsky, the Head of the Division of Services and Special Departments of the State Library of the CSR in Prague, wrote for *IFLA Journal* and said:

> In the years after the liberation of Czechoslovakia, after 1945, and notably after the socialist advancement of the state in 1948, a great development of librarianship started. This did not concern only the quantitative growth of librarianship as such, i.e. the growth of the number of libraries, the volume of their collections, achievements and readers, but also striking qualitative changes.
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> Czechoslovak librarianship went through notorious changes in its conception as well as in its programme. The Czech and Slovak librarians entered the line of builders of the socialist society and fully applied the activity of their libraries to satisfy the needs of its successful development. And the socialist society spent much on librarianship, being very much interested in their libraries becoming active factors of social, economic and cultural progress. (92)

The Communist regime gave libraries an integral role in Czechoslovak society, which many library advocates can envy even today. Despite the deviation of library activities from what

Western society would consider democratic ideals, the Communists set up a remarkable system of librarianship.

Whereas the Communist system of publishing was relatively inefficient and ineffective, the Communist system of librarianship was a relatively effective plan of censorship and propaganda. By 1959 the Law Concerning the Unified library System of July 9, 1959, Number 53/1959, "gave legal sanction to the persistent Communist demands for a complete integration of library services throughout Czechoslovakia" (Kase 157-8). This law sanctioned that all libraries be under the administrative supervision of a specialized industry and that these ministries were "required to take measures to insure that larger libraries provide adequate ideological and expert assistance to smaller libraries" (158). Furthermore, "libraries of the trade unions, technical libraries in various industrial enterprises, school libraries, museum libraries, public health libraries, and Communist Party libraries are public libraries with varying degrees of specialization" (159). All libraries may have fallen under the same administration, which was interested in influencing and policing the thoughts and perceptions of the populace; however this caused the libraries to fall into a single network, which made library activities more coordinated, cooperative, and effective.

Czechoslovak libraries employed various outreach activities that made information highly accessible to everyone in the country. First, there were rules about the minimum resources allocated to particular population sizes. One professional staff member was required for every 10,000 people, all libraries regardless of size had to "provide reference service and public reading-rooms," policy dictated that there should be branches established in all towns with over 15,000 people and larger cities needed to have "at least one branch for every 50,000 people" (Mostecky 106). Bookmobiles were utilized and one was intended for every 100,000 people.

These bookmobiles or "bibliobuses" were the "most pervasive library instruments" (108). These were equipped with movie projectors, loudspeakers, marionettes, and three to five staff members and they would travel to "the most remote mountain villages, participate in folk festivals, visit large construction sites, and call on youth clubs and camps" (108). Libraries were equipped to be accessible to everyone and to become an intrinsic part of Czechoslovak communities.

Each year the libraries participated in community reads. The country had been divided into sections and each section would select a book that would be promoted and discussed throughout the entire year. Mostecky described the extent of community involvement with community reads:

> Local bookstores and libraries then receive bulk shipments of the chosen book and launch a grandiose promotion drive, assisted by Party organs, community officials, schools, and all association and clubs. The book is exhibited in assembly halls, theaters, shop windows, and everywhere in the library. It is read publicly at Party meetings, in sewing and knitting circles, fields, and over public address systems…. When enough people have been persuaded of the significance of the book and have purchased or borrowed it, a series of meeting (for farmers, school children, adult readers) is held in the library, and the book is discussed and given proper interpretation. The meeting selects delegates who then represent the community at the district conference where the audience learns what practical lessons should be drawn from the book and applied to local conditions. Finally, in the annual readers' assembly, the librarian reviews the progress which has been made during the past year and announces the program for the next season. (161)

Libraries' involvement with the community was incredibly impressive and all-encompassing. Nevertheless, the motivation behind providing easy universal access to library materials and "programming" was not to foster education, innovation, and opportunities for the Czechoslovak people. Rather, the exemplary efforts of librarians to reach out to and involve everyone in the CSR was to ensure understanding, compliance, and agreement with Communist ideals.

Libraries' relationships with the schools and on-site library activities did not reflect current concepts in library practice because the Communists had only one goal – indoctrination.

Despite policy intentions, many of the librarians were underqualified and staffing libraries depended on part-time volunteers; furthermore, as Mostecky noted, "the professional competence of the librarian is secondary to his ideological fitness and attachment to the regime" (106-7). Compliance with Communist ideals was of primary importance because the mission of libraries was to provide, promote, and maintain information that convinced the population of the values and superiority of the Communist system. Schools and local libraries had close relationships. At the beginning of every year, students were expected to register at the library. Librarians would maintain a folder for every child in which he would document what the child was reading and for "any pupils whose reading he considers insufficient, unsuitable, or inappropriate, he reports to the teacher" (110). The political education of children was a top priority because "they have spent all their formative years under communism [and] the children provide excellent 'guinea pigs' for testing Pavlovian educational theories" (110). Librarians took on an important role in children's education by helping to control and monitor their access to information.

Activities within the library were also meant to propagandize and censor information. Larger libraries had organized and presented courses in public reading and story-telling in order "to train agitators and propagators of progressive literature" (108). Not only were librarians trained to promote the government's ideals, they were responsible for training others to effectively share their zealotry. Like bookstores, libraries censored their information by having closed shelves; "open shelves are restricted to those books which are especially recommended for their ideological contents" (Kase 160). Nevertheless there were many books that the libraries did not keep or acquire. Books on the subjects of philosophy, religion, certain social sciences, and non-Communist modern fiction, especially mysteries, westerns, and romances, were weeded

from library collections. In 1953, the Ministry of Education produced a list of subjects that were to be retained and developed in public libraries:

a) The classics of Marxism-Leninism and other political literature, especially timely pamphlets
b) Technical books on farming and agriculture
c) Literature on science, medicine, and public health
d) Books on Technology
e) Other scientific literature
f) Fiction, especially Czechoslovak and foreign classical works and contemporary writing of progressive authors, with special emphasis on translations from Russian
g) Foreign-language literature according to local needs (Russian, German, Hungarian, Polish)
h) Music literature, sheet music, records
i) Encyclopedias, dictionaries, collections of laws and statutes, atlases, and other reference works (Mostecky 107)

Although libraries under the Communist regime had designed a system to begin to provide universal access to information, the information itself was far from comprehensive. Information was limited and biased; and so were its classifications for access.

The card catalogs, which facilitated access to library collections before computers, were fascinating examples of political bias of information. A new Marxist-Leninist library classification system was established that consisted of 23 classifications in order of precedence – it began with Marxism-Leninism and ended with Religion. Even the subject headings served to propagandize. For instance, subject headings for the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. read as follows:

U.S.S.R. – Heroism of the people
U.S.S.R. – Policy of peace
U.S.A. – Imperialism
U.S.A. – Moral and cultural decay (114)

These subject headings would be useless to a serious researcher, especially one who was unfamiliar with Marxist terminology. The card catalog also had some artfully biased annotations. For example an annotation for Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* read: "Apart from its artistic value,

this books is important for its realistic picture of the life of English proletarians in the middle of the last century and of the dreary lot of children in the capitalist society (115). The card catalog had become and ideological weapon that served to further influence readers and provide political direction.

Communists had remarkable plans to integrate libraries into communities; however their motivations and the blatant disregard for diverse and "undesirable" information undermined their attempts for universal access. Mostecky noted that "the library no longer serves solely as a source of knowledge but as the focal point of a large-scale system of indoctrination" (117). Libraries were given powerful roles in society in order to promote limited and biased information, which was intended to brainwash the Czechoslovak people into believing in the righteousness of their system of government and as a result, maintain a willingness to remain in a social contract with the regime. Instead of promoting knowledge and a democracy of ideas, the Czechoslovak library had become a significant social construct that served as a vehicle for Communist propaganda.

Conclusion

Following WWII, Czechoslovakia was desperate to find its sense of equilibrium and to ensure that fascism would never return to the country. Czechoslovakia sought unification and socialism was the means by which the majority of the Czechoslovak people believed they could achieve that goal. Unfortunately, this common goal and social contract evolved in such a way as to allow censorship and propaganda to dominate the information landscape. The state owned publishing houses worked under the guidance of Communist committees to ensure that ideas endorsed by the regime were published while information and opinions that deviated from or did nothing to support Communist ideals were silenced, or at least banished from the official sphere.

Libraries were further employed to inundate the Czechoslovak population with government approved information and to help educate the people about the merits of socialist society. Information became subjective and henceforward it lost its truth.

In 1989, there was a non-violent transition from the KSČ, an event that became known as the Velvet Revolution. After 41 years, Czechoslovakia opened up to the rest of the world. Libraries began to flourish while publishing companies struggled through the transition from publicly owned institutions that served insulated marketplaces to private institutions that were dependent on free markets. In 1991 the *Charter of Fundamental Rights and Basic Freedoms* was enacted. Article 17 of this document was equivalent to the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

As the former CSR adapted to Western culture, the communist trends of censorship and propaganda diminished and changed; for Western society is not without its own versions of censorship. Maybe, to some extent, the same questioning of information still applies outside of communist regimes. In his 2013 article, "How Free is Free Speech?," William A. Cohn noted: "We are said to be living in the information era, but perhaps it is an age of disinformation. If it is indeed true that information powers ideas, and knowledge is power, then we must concern ourselves with the question: who controls the flow of information?" (27). In the CSR, a country that was governed by bias and untruth, the answer to Cohn's question was straightforward: the KSČ. In a free market the answer is ambiguous. Furthermore, Karel Hvížďala suggested in 2013 that Czech Republic, like much of the world, is facing a new kind of censorship: information without context. In a time of "media saturation," information is everywhere and without context, which allows for indistinguishable bias and inaccuracies. The trends of censorship and

propaganda in CSR were not as easy to detect in the 1950s and 60s as they are now. What current trends of information control and manipulation will become apparent in 50 years?

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