

Writing Underground

Reflections on Samizdat Literature
in Totalitarian Czechoslovakia

Martin Machovec



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3. CHARTER 77 AND THE UNDERGROUND

It is now a generally accepted, although not always sufficiently emphasised fact that the so-called trial of the Czech Underground in 1976 was one of the main impulses for the founding of Charter 77. The nineteen people arrested in March 1976, seven of whom (Havelka, Skalický, Stárek, Jirous, Zajíček, Karásek and Brabenec)¹ were convicted the following September, received the unequivocal support of the future leading Chartists, such as professor Patočka, Jaroslav Seifert, Václav Havel, Petr Uhl, and Zdeněk Mlynář.² And yet, Ivan Martin Jirous was the only defendant to have had a certain, albeit not very close, contact with one of the Charter founders, namely Václav Havel.³ And it is also a well-known fact that, thanks to the solidarity of leading Czechoslovak dissidents – some of them famous abroad as well as at home – not only did a number of underground artists and activists receive much milder sentences than the despotic regime authorities had prepared for them, but also dozens and dozens of entirely unknown friends and supporters of the underground were prepared, a year later, not to leave their colleagues in the lurch, and on their account they abandoned the proverbial “merry ghetto” of the underground and joined the wider community of people working to “improve human affairs” (Comenius), even under the conditions of Husák’s totalitarian “normalization” regime.

1) See “The Plastic People Of The Universe v datech”, in RIEDEL, Jaroslav (ed.), *The Plastic People Of The Universe: Texty*, 2nd edition, Praha: Maťa, 2001; see also “The Plastic People Chronology” in the English translation of the book: *The Plastic People Of The Universe*, Praha: Maťa, 1999.

2) See two samizdat editions of “*Hnědá kniha*” o procesech s českým undergroundem, compiled and published in 1977 by Jaroslav Kořán and Václav Vendelín Komeda and in 1980 by Jaroslav Suk (Libri prohibiti collection); see its printed, enlarged, commented edition: “*Hnědá kniha*” o procesech s českým undergroundem, Praha: ÚSTR, 2012.

3) In the documentary film *The Plastic People of the Universe*, directed by Jana Chytilová (Czech TV 2001), Václav Havel states that he knew Jirous “a little bit from previous years, from the sixties”, and only became better acquainted with him and the activities of the underground sometime around the end of 1975 and beginning of 1976, i.e. just prior to the “Second Festival of the Second Culture” held at Bojanovice and their arrest in March 1976. Before Havel met Jirous in person it was apparently František Šmejkal who recommended him to take an interest in the activities of the underground.

Before trying to elucidate the fairly complex relations that the underground established in 1976 and 1977 with the emerging community of Charter 77 signatories, I would like briefly to recall the history of the Czech cultural underground, which will make it easier to understand the mutual solidarity established in the crisis years.

Ivan M. Jirous probably provided the best explanation in his “manifesto text” entitled *Zpráva o třetím českém hudebním obrození* [Report on the Third Czech Musical Revival] dating from February 1975.⁴ Jirous’s *Report* is not addressed to “his own ranks” (i.e., poets, artists, and particularly rock musicians, and of course also their supporters), so much as to the wider community of Czech dissent, which was very fragmented in the mid-1970s. Being himself an intellectual he described in terms understandable to intellectuals what had been happening spontaneously for a number of years. Jirous’s *Report* is also an attempt to appraise the author’s own work, because it was **chiefly due to him** that one of the many groupings of the “rock and roll youth”, that generation of very extravagant, non-conformist, young rockers, who, at the end of the 1960s wanted to fulfil their artistic ambitions irrespective of regime change, transformed itself by the mid-1970s into a richly structured community, which was initially pushed into the cultural underground by the doltishness of cultural policy during “normalization”, but then reflecting the new situation is a given, and one that was liberating in a sense. So before 1975, the activities of the “psychedelic rock-band” The Plastic People of the Universe, a band which was then and still is a direct incarnation and synonym of the Czech cultural underground of the 1970s and 1980s, attracted the support of many creative people and intellectuals, who would hardly have been expected to have an interest in the rockers’ primitivist art. Thanks to Jirous, a number of artists, particularly representatives of the so-called “Křižovnická škola” [Crusaders’ School], including Karel Nepraš, Zorka Ságlová, Eugen Brikcius, Otakar Slavík and Olaf Hanel, were already interested in the Plastic People and had already taken part in some of their events, at some of which rock concerts merged into happenings organized by Brikcius

4) See *Magorův zápisník*, Praha: Torst, 1997, pp. 171–198 (in English published last in *Views from the Inside. Czech Underground Literature and Culture (1948–1989)*; 2nd edition, Praha: Karolinum Press, 2018. See also the last chapter of this volume.

and Ságlová, and somewhat earlier by Milan Knížák who although soon distanced himself from events organised by Jirous, continued to have a lasting spiritual and artistic influence on the underground community as it came into being. The “plastic underground” received a further very significant intellectual boost when that community became friends with the Catholic-oriented philosopher Jiří Němec and his wife, the psychologist Dana Němcová, and through them with a number of people connected with the defunct *Tvář* journal. It was Jirous who introduced the members of the Plastic People band at the beginning of the 1970s to the poet and non-conformist leftist thinker and philosopher Zbyněk Fišer alias Egon Bondy, whose verse from the 1950s and 1970s, as performed by the Plastics would be written in letters of gold in the annals of the Czech underground. Jirous also inspired the creation of several other underground bands or art and music ensembles in the early 1970s, some of which created works of lasting worth. We particularly have in mind the band DG 307, founded by the poet, musician and artist Pavel Zajíček. And it was also via Jirous that the Plastics community became close to graduates of the Protestant faculty of divinity such as Vratislav Brabenec or Svatopluk Karásek, and somewhat later Jan Kozlík, Aleš Březina or Miloš Rejchrt. And Jirous’s above-mentioned *Report* was a reflection on that colourful underground community which had come into being quite unexpectedly and unprecedentedly.

However, Jirous was one of the first to be arrested in the critical year of 1976, and one of the first to be sent to prison, with the longest sentence of all: 18 months. So in addition to Jirous’s *Report* there was a need for someone else to speak to people organising support for the imprisoned members of the underground community, and later to those who were coming up with the idea to found Charter 77 (to a great extent the same people), a vibrant personality who was relatively still at liberty. At this point one should stress the role played by three people above all: Václav Havel, Jiří Němec and Dana Němcová. Thanks to their personal contacts and their intellectual capabilities the latter two were able to convey the message about the underground into a language understandable not only to Václav Havel, but also to such diverse people as Ludvík Vaculík, Jan Patočka, Jaroslav Seifert, Jiří Hájek, Karel Kosík or Ladislav Hejdlánek, and persuade them that it was not just worthy of their interest, but also

of their involvement; that in the case of the trial of the Plastics et al., "*tua res agitur*". And **that** was successful as we know.

Now, let us explore the mutual relations between the initially underground community and the loose community around Charter 77 that was coming into being in the course of 1977. First, a couple of comments:

1) Unlike the later Charter 77 community, the underground community was essentially a group of close friends, and friends of friends, who were attracted to each other partly by a desire to "live differently", in their case as a non-conformist collective, in defiance of the "real socialism" of the "normalization" regime. It truly was a brotherhood and sisterhood of mostly young people who came together at rock gigs, concerts, festivals, seminars in private homes, poetry readings, or exhibitions, and also - quite frequently - in friendly company in pubs. Undoubtedly they were linked by a marked commitment to "passive resistance" and opposition to the world of politics reflected in adopting an anonymous lifestyle on the fringes of society. In contrast, the Charter community gradually came into being more as a fairly loose grouping of separate circles, united chiefly by their courage to stand up for human rights at a time of totalitarian tyranny. Obviously it was not possible prior to 1989 to hold a meeting for **all** of the Charter signatories, so it is highly probable that they did not know each other very well, and sometimes they had no interest in mutual acquaintance. Well, it is hard to imagine someone like the quasi-satanist underground pioneer of punk rock and a drug addict Josef "Vařák" Vondruška, by profession a wall decorator, in discussion about the aims and orientation of the Charter with professor Václav Černý, Václav Benda or Pavel Kohout, for instance! Although they were all in the "same boat" so to speak, they were linked solely by the **civic courage** to enter the arena of their own *polis*, at a time when such an act was automatically regarded as criminal by those in power at the time. But it is evident from the above that social value preferences of the underground inevitably underwent considerable changes when that community was incorporated to a certain extent into the Charter 77 community.

2) When studying the structure of the Charter and trying to assess its social make-up, it is necessary to bear in mind that spe-

cific data about the number of signatories can be very deceptive. The point has been made on numerous occasions that each signatory represented two, three or more non-signatories, who were *de facto* in total agreement with the activities of their signatory relatives. I have in mind, for instance, family members of signatories who often did not sign simply so that someone in the family should not be prevented from obtaining normal employment. In addition there were many people, particularly students, who were willing to sign the Charter, but refrained from doing so for their own safety at the request of "collectors of signatures" or rather after they had been warned by them. There were also cases of "non-signatories" who were active "Chartists" – dissidents, oppositionists. The following are three specific instances:⁵

a) Of the members of the Plastic People band at the end of the seventies, four (Hlavsá, Janíček, Kabeš, and Vožniak) never signed the Charter, while three (Brabenec, Brabec, and Schneider) did, although there was no difference of opinion among them, at least about this issue.

b) Jiřina Šiklová, one of the most active members of Czechoslovak dissent, and of the Charter 77 community above all, did not sign Charter 77 until the spring of 1989.

c) In January 2007, the historian Petr Blažek⁶ finally published an article revealing the background to the collection of signatures in first wave after January 1977. It brought to light a whole num-

5) As far as the variety of such "non signatories" is concerned, see DRDA, Adam, "Ti, kteří nepodepsali (O lidech v opozici, ne-signatářích Charty 77)", in *Revolver Revue*, 33, 1997, pp. 215–224; MACHOVEC, Martin, "Polopatická impertinence", in *Kritická příloha Revolver Revue*, 8, 1997, pp. 231–235; MANDLER, Emanuel, "O hrdinech a o těch druhých", *ibidem*, pp. 218–231; HRDLÍČKA, František – BRATRŠOVSKÁ, Zdena (eds.), *Jak chutná nezávislost. 33 životních ohlédnutí*, Praha – Olomouc, Czech Republic: Votobia, 1998; ČERNÁ, Marie, "Ti, kdo Chartu 77 nepodepsali", in *Lidové noviny*, 17th January 2017, p. 18. Concerning the case of Josef Mundil, see Anna Marvanová's article in JECHOVÁ, Květa (ed.), *Lidé Charty 77. Zpráva o biografickém výzkumu*, Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2003, p. 106. The overall survey of the variety of oppositional trends in Czechoslovakia after the Soviet invasion of 1968 is found in OTÁHAL, Milan, *Opoziční proudy v české společnosti 1969–1989* [Oppositional Currents in Czech Society 1969–1989], Praha: ÚSD AV ČR, 2011.

6) See BLAŽEK, Petr, "Alchymie podpisové akce", *Lidové noviny* 20, no. 6 (8th January 2007), supplement Charta 77, pp. I–II; see also "Odpověď na nesvobodu. S Petrem

ber of oddities, but the most curious case of all that of the much revered and also vilified “guru of the underground” Zbyněk Fišer alias Egon Bondy, who would subsequently play a considerable role in the “underground fringe” of the Charter. Blažek clarifies a matter that was previously in doubt, and reveals that Fišer-Bondy **did** sign the Charter in December 1976, but at a meeting at Václav Havel’s, “Jiří Němec tore up the paper with Bondy’s signature, explaining that he did not regard him as legally competent. Uhl therefore created a duplicate, and made a note that it was to be held on deposit.”⁷ This fact allowed Fišer-Bondy in the following years to declare himself to be “an underground philosopher and poet”, a colleague, and maybe even a friend of Václav Havel, and even take part as an actual Charter activist in Charter meetings (the so-called Fora) where the organisation of the Charter and its policy was debated,⁸ while on other occasions he was an obdurate and hate-filled critic of the “shadow Charter establishment”, cursing the Charter almost as collaborators and secret police stooges.⁹

Uhlém o ideovém rozpětí chartistů” [Conversation of Filip Horáček and Lukáš Rychetský with Petr Uhl], A2 3, no. 1 (2007).

7) This was confirmed by Ivan Jirous in the documentary film *Fišer alias Bondy* directed by Jordi Niubo (ČT 2000), where Jirous added that he considered it “a serious mistake”. Jirous also evinced the opinion that the “censoring” of Bondy’s signature by Charter 77 was “the reason for his bitterness and animosity” towards it. See also the reproduction of the duplicate in question in *Lidové noviny* 20, no. 6 (8th January 2007), supplement Charta 77, p. VI.

8) Fišer-Bondy actively participated in the 2nd (on 28th November 87), 3rd (on 17th January 88), and 4th Forum (on 14th May 88) of Charter 77; he even wrote a poem about the police raid that ended the 4th forum (dated 11th September 1988); see also: MACHOVEC, Martin, “Ediční komentář”, in BONDY, Egon, *Bezejmenná*, 2nd edition, Praha: Akropolis, 2019, pp. 163–166.

9) Bondy added the following dedication to the heading of Part 8 of his samizdat *Poznámky k dějinám filosofie (Indická filosofie – pokračování)* [Notes on the History of Philosophy (Indian Philosophy – Continuation)] from 1981 (printed edition 1992 and 1997): “Dedicated to Petr Uhl and Václav Havel, who, while I was able to work, were held in prison.” Most likely in 1984, i.e. after Havel’s release, Bondy wrote the essay *Kritika substančního modelu* [Critique of the Substantial Model] for Havel’s philosophy anthology *Hostina* [Feast] (samizdat 1985, printed edition outside Czechoslovakia 1989). However, as early as 1985 Bondy’s verse collection *Tragédie u Dvořáků a jiné básně* (abridged in the two editions of his collected works under the title of *Petřiny*)

So was Jiří Němec right? And if he was, was he entitled to act the way he did in the case of Fišer-Bondy's signature? And was his motivation **really** what he said it was? When the Charter was signed in the spring of 1977 by Bondy's faithful pupil, the remarkable poet Fanda Pánek, however someone with a serious psychopathic disorder and whose personality was affected by drug addiction, no objections were raised. And there were most likely some other cases like Pánek's among the Charter signatories... So did Fišer-Bondy have grounds to be dissatisfied with the "leadership" of the Charter? These questions remain unanswered.

The above two comments give rise, among other things, to a more fundamental question, namely, who actually had or did not have the "right", even imply a "customary right" to take part in the shaping of the Charter, and subsequently who should or should not take

included a number of overtly rude texts about the Charter and Václav Havel, e.g. a poem dated 26th September 1985: "Prosrál jsem životní šanci / že jsem v letech padesátých / nezpíval k tanci / Prosrál jsem ji v šedesátých / že mi Literárky byly pro smích / Pak jsem ji prosral znova / že o Chartě jsem nenapsal / pochvalného slova / Proseru ji ještě do konce života / Jste pořád stejná holota" [I fucked up my chances in life / because I laughed at Literary News / Then I fucked them up again / when I failed to praise / the Charter / I'll fuck them up as long as I live / You're still the same rabble], or the poem dated 18th September 1985: "MLADÍKOVI OD DVOU SLUNCŮ L.P. 1985 // Čti - nečti / Dělej si co chceš / Nahnílost je sladká / to je tvůj život / Nadouvej si střeva důležitostí / osy světa od Hrádečku do Prahy a zpět / Čím míš let ti je tím dýl budeš moct blbnout / Už v sobotu pro tebe přijede aspoň Bundeskanzler / abys mu pomoh zařídit světovou politiku / neboť s Rusy už je amen / Američani je vymazali z mapy / Myslím / že alespoň celá střední Evropa na tebe čeká / pokud nedáš přednost zřízení Rakousko-Uherska / ovšem jen ruku v ruce se soudruhem Mlynářem ve Vídni". [TO A YOUNG MAN FROM THE TWO SUNS A.D. 1985 // Read - don't read / Do what you like / Rottenness is sweet / that's your life / Swell your guts with the importance / of the earth's axis from Hrádeček to Prague and back / The younger you are the longer you'll be able to act the fool / The Bundeskanzler is coming for you next Saturday at least / so you can help him regulate world politics / because the Russians are finished / the Americans have erased them from the map / I think the whole of Central Europe is waiting for you / unless you prefer establishment of Austria-Hungary / but only hand in hand with Comrade Mlynář in Vienna] (see E. B., *Básnické spisy III*, Praha: Argo, 2016, pp. 429, 435); however, Bondy had already made rude comments about the Charter in his prose work *677* (samizdat 1977, printed edition 2001) and most vehemently in his prose work *Bezejmenná* [Nameless] from 1986, which will be mentioned later.

part in discussions about its policy? Who was “welcome” at them? Only undisputed signatories? It is clear that the growing circle of actual signatories can be projected – initially fairly rapidly and then more slowly – onto a circle that was possibly twice as big: onto the “latent Charter support base” of “non-signatories”. The same can undoubtedly be said about the underground community – or what in the 1980s should be referred to as **communities**. One sector of it overlapped with the Charter community, but its much larger support base never belonged to the signatories. The estimated **seven thousand** (!) readers of the underground magazine *Vokno*, a figure established ex post by František Stárek,¹⁰ its publisher, himself a leading Chartist, speaks for itself.

In addition to the above comments, the following is the result of our own “survey”, which could help to clarify not so much the breadth or narrowness of the Charter 77 community, or the breadth or narrowness of the underground community, but rather the “social make-up” of the Charter, or the “generational diversification” within it, which were subsequently aired in controversies in the late 1980s over the form and policies of the Charter. On this matter there are two very specific figures which are of interest: a) the 242¹¹ original Charter 77 signatories from December 1976; b) the approximately 1,000 signatories from 1976–79.¹² Four leading Chartists, Petr Uhl,

10) Stárek’s estimate is cited in Jana Růžková’s thesis on *Vokno*, published as “Samizdatový časopis *Vokno*” in *Kritický sborník* 19, (1999–2000), pp. 193–231 (Bibliography section – estimation mentioned on pp. 195–196).

11) The number of 242 “first wave” signatories is given in the publication: PREČAN, Viliam (ed.), *Charta 77, 1977–1989*, Scheinfeld – Bratislava: Čs. stredisko nezávislé kultúry – Archa, 1990, p. 13; the number of 241 signatories is given in the feature about Charter 77 in *Lidové noviny* 20, no. 6 (8th January 2007), supplement *Charta 77*, p. III. (The same issue of *Lidové noviny* reproduced photographs of a total of 256 original “cards” with the signatures of the first signatories, i. e. there are 242 cards of the first signatories + 14 “cards” of signatories whose signatures were not supposed to be published at first, including Uhl’s “duplicate” of the card signed by Zbyněk Fišer, i.e. Egon Bondy.)

12) From Charter 77’s statements from 1977–79 it can be established that during that period a total 1018 people signed it. Specifically: by the end of 1977 (statements Nos. 1, 5, 8, 11 and 14) there were some 832 signatories [242 + 208 + 167 + 133 + 82] (the net figure of 167 signatories for Statement No. 8 is achieved by deducting 242 + 208 from 617 = 167); in 1978 (statements Nos. 17 and 20) 106 signatories; in

Jiří Gruntorád, František Stárek and Ivan Martin Jirous, were invited to express their opinion about the **proportion of “people from the underground” in the numbers given.**¹³ It soon became clear, unfortunately, that a “survey” of this kind would not be possible without detailed preliminary research into the “personal histories” of the Charter 77 signatories, which has yet to be carried out. Only František Stárek has managed to make more extensive and specific comments on the matter.

People from the underground community were only represented minimally in the first wave of signatories of December 1976, and most of them were “underground celebrities” also known outside that circle. In addition to Jiří and Dana Němec, those signatories included Vratislav Brabenec, Věra Jirousová, Svatopluk Karásek, Jan Lopatka, Eugen Brikcius, Jan Šafránek, Aleš Březina, Olaf Hanel, and Jiří Daniček, in addition to some others who tended not to be known in dissident circles,¹⁴ and finally – let us suppose – Fišer-Bondy. That proportion was natural and understandable.

1979 (Statements Nos. 25 and 27) 80 signatories; this accounts for the total of 1018 signatories for the initial period. Comparison with the number of new signatories 1980–1986: 1980: 48 signatories, 1981: 44 signatories, 1982: 36 signatories, 1983: 37 signatories, 1984: 25 signatories, 1985: 28 signatories, 1986: 31 signatories. At the end of the 1980s the number of new signatories once more increased sharply: 1987: 69 signatories, 1988: 111 signatories, 1989 (to 30th September) 291 signatories. These numbers are certainly not definitive as they do not take into account revoked signatures, the signatures of secret police agents, the so-called “signatures held on deposit” from the first wave, etc.

13) Our criteria for this classification are as follows: 1) people who prior to 1977 were **entirely or mostly** active in the underground community, and not in the circles of the known dissidents who subsequently set up Charter 77, with whom they subsequently came in contact particularly through the intermediary of Jiří and Dana Němec, or Ivan Jirous; 2) people who might have had (or did have) such connections, but being largely old artist friends of Jirous from the 1960s, were **mainly** active in the underground community in the early seventies (e.g. Andrej “Nikolaj” Stankovič, Věra Jirousová, Eugen Brikcius, Jiří Daniček), they were essentially intellectuals, university graduates, and qualified artists; 3) *sui generis* cases, such as Fišer-Bondy, Jiří and Dana Němec, and Jan Lopatka.

14) Jiří Mrázek, Jana Převralská, Miluše Števichová, Zdeněk “Londýn” Vokatý and Jan Schneider.

Some of the leading figures in the underground were still in prison, and none of the original "collectors of signatures" had any contact with the support base of the underground, that would require the assistance of Jiřous who was still in jail. (According to Petr Uhl, Jiří Němec, then the only "collector" to have contacts with people from the Prague underground, decided at the time that at least in this **first wave** there would be no attempt to get the signatures of **those people** - again for fairly obvious reasons.) The overall proportion of signatories from the underground in the first wave was scarcely **6-7 percent**.

The very next wave, however, includes the names of the most active members of the underground community. In addition to Ivan and Juliana Jiřous, they included Marie Benetková, Zbyněk Benýšek, Ivan Bierhanzl, Jan Brabec, Petr Cibulka, Jaroslav Kukal, Jan and Květa Princ, Miroslav Skalický, Karel Soukup, Andrej Stankovič, František Stárek, Ilja Storoženko, Petr Taťoun, Vlastimil Třešňák, Vladimír Voják, Dagmar Vokatá, Milan Vopálka, Josef Vondruška, Pavel Zajíček, and Jaroslav Hutka, who was getting much closer to the underground community at that time. But in addition there were dozens and dozens, possibly hundreds of supporters of the underground outside Prague, particularly in north and west Bohemia; these were people whose names meant nothing either then or now to the intellectuals who organized the Charter, and yet they showed solidarity with the Charter and deserve as much respect as the courage of the leading Prague dissidents. On the basis of the established criteria, František Stárek has managed to **identify** 164 signatories for the years 1977-79.¹⁵ Ivan Jiřous identified a fur-

15) The following is a list of **all** "underground signatories" from 1977-79 (i.e. including the seventeen in the first wave mentioned earlier), as provisionally identified on the basis of our "survey" by František Stárek (numbers in brackets refer to individual Charter statements where respective names are found: they are found only with the names that could be mistaken with other signatories of the same name found in other statements):

b) Constant police harassment also bore fruit subsequently. Some of the foremost underground artists, musicians and activists went into enforced exile, including Pavel Zajíček, Svatopluk Karásek, Vratislav Brabenec, Jiří Němec, Zbyněk Benýšek, Vlastimil Třešňák, Eugen Brikcius, Josef Vondruška, Karel “Kocour” Havelka, Miroslav Skalický, Karel “Charlie” Soukup, and Zdeněk “Londýn” Vokatý, as well, of course, as dozens of other less known people.

c) The last (albeit non-public) performances of the two best-known underground bands, The Plastic People of the Universe and DG 307, took place in 1979 and 1981. The country cottages where those final concerts were held were either confiscated and burnt down in terrorist operations by the secret police, StB (the Princes’ house at Rychnov near Děčín, and the house of Jiří Velát at Kerhartice near Česká Kamenice), or at least confiscated from their owners (the house of Miroslav Skalický, Karel Havelka, and their friends at Nová Víska near Kadaň).¹⁸ After Zajíček went into exile the band DG 307 fell apart; The Plastic People of the Universe continued to exist, but after 1981 gave no further performances under its name, not even in non-public venues.

d) A number of personalities who were very active in the underground community before March 1976 went into “internal exile”, chiefly as a result of relentless police terror. By 1976, the underground community was far from identical to the circle of Plastic People fans from around 1970. In the words of Ivan Jirous “the faint-hearted abandoned it”.¹⁹ But far more testing times were to arrive at the end of the 1970s. We hasten to add that there could truly be many more reasons for aversion to the “Chartist incorporation” of the underground. Perhaps it should be recalled here that aversion

18) See the section: “The Plastic People of the Universe v datech” in RIEDEL, Jaroslav (ed.), *The Plastic People of the Universe: Texty*, 2nd edition, Praha: Mafá, 2001, pp. 22-23; see also Jana Chytilová’s documentary film mentioned in Footnote 3.

19) In Chapter 5 of his *Report on the Third Czech Musical Revival* (Footnote 4; Paul Wilson’s translation) Jirous writes about specific changes in the band’s line-up at the beginning of the 1970s: “The group lost its professional status; weaker individuals left [highlighted by MM] and the core of the new Plastic People – around Hlavsa and Janíček – started off practically empty-handed with no equipment, only a few instruments and apparently nothing to fall back on [...]” That comment could apply *pars pro toto* for the whole of the underground community at that time.

to the Charter – at least at the beginning – particularly towards its ex-Communist leaders, was shared by former political prisoners of the 1950s.²⁰ For many “underground people”, however, it was rather the case that they had an aversion to the *de facto* politicization of underground cultural activity, or a suspicion that certain leaders of the Charter simply wanted to use the underground “masses” as their “navvies” to achieve their latent political ambitions. So for various reasons, at least outwardly, some of Jirous’ friends among the artists distanced themselves from the Charter-Underground community, such as Nepraš and Plíšková, as well as Milan Knížák, of course, who had adopted a critical stance towards the underground community much earlier, but also Jirous’s brother-in-law, the photographer and film maker Jan SágI, whose work before 1976 provided posterity with precious photographic documentation of underground art events.²¹ By 1977 Fišer-Bondy had also withdrawn into a kind of internal exile when he started work on the enormous task, planned several years in advance, of writing his own history of philosophy, publishable in samizdat, which he entitled with excessive modesty *Poznámky k dějinám filosofie* [Notes on the History of Philosophy] (1977–1990).²²

20) The author is grateful to Jiří Gruntorád for pointing out that the attitude of former political prisoners to Charter 77 can be gauged fairly objectively by the proportion of former members of K 231 club of the total number of signatories. Of particular interest is the discovery that in the first wave of signatures (from December 1976), which was in a certain sense “anonymous” as, apart from the “collectors” the first signatories did not know who their co-signatories were until the list was published, there was quite a high percentage of former members of K 231 club; this then fell sharply. Regarding the attitude of former political prisoners to Charter 77, see also the discussion “Byly to odlišné světy” [These were different worlds] (participants: Petr Blažek, Petr Koura, Petruška Šustrová, and Jan Wünsch), *Babylon 16*, no. 5 (2007), p. 8.

21) When working on his contribution to the publication *Alternativní kultura* (ALAN, Josef, ed.; Praha: NLN, 2001) the author spoke about this question with Jan SágI, who said regarding his aversion to the linkage between the underground community and dissident circles something like: “Václav Havel came in one door and at that moment left by another.” A similar formulation is found in SágI’s book *Tanec na dvojitém ledě* / *Dancing on the Double Ice*, Praha: KANT, 2013.

22) Bondy’s *Poznámky k dějinám filosofie* [Notes on the History of Philosophy] were published in samizdat in the years 1977–1987; initially the author divided the work into thirteen samizdat instalments, the last of which, hypothetically the 14th instal-

e) The only further and relatively ongoing recording of underground activities, which was once so rich and varied, was left to samizdat (and "magnitizdat") projects, particularly, the magazine *Vokno*, which was first published in July 1979 predominantly due to the efforts of his editor František Stárek.²³ However, the secret police had some success here, as well. Stárek and his fellow editors were jailed from 1981 to 1985, and the magazine was not published during that period.

Thus at the beginning of the 1980s, the situation for the Charter and for the associated and non-associated underground communities seemed particularly hopeless. The underground community was *de facto* fragmented and shattered. The people who had most influenced underground activity were suddenly gone, the flock was scattered, biblically speaking, without a shepherd.

Things eventually changed in 1985 when *Vokno* resumed publication, Jirous was released from prison for the fairly lengthy period of three and a half years, and above all "the younger Czech underground generation" came on the scene, namely those associated with the newly founded magazine *Jednou nohou*, the future *Revolver Revue*. During that final phase of the Communist totalitarian regime, when unofficial events gained increasing momentum with each passing year, the Czech underground adopted a position distinct from that of the Charter. In a series of polemics on the pages of *Vokno*, *Revolver Revue*, *Infoch* and other samizdat periodicals it was again just Egon Bondy who attempted to draw a kind of "demarcation line" between the "young people in the underground", whose spokesman he seemingly felt himself authorised to be, and Charter 77, which he mockingly described as the "shadow Establishment".

ment, was never produced at the time in that form, because it was not completed until 1990. It was subsequently published as a printed edition in six volumes in the *Vokno* book series in 1991–1997.

23) In her aforementioned work (Footnote 10) Jana Růžková gives some specific data: issues 1 and 2 of *Vokno* came out in 1979, issue 3 in 1980, issues 4 and 5 in 1981. Issue 6 was confiscated in November 1981 and was never subsequently reconstructed and issued. Issue no. 7 then came out in spring 1985, i.e. after Stárek's release from prison in 1984, when he was still under so-called "ochranný dohled" [protective surveillance].

That phase of relations between the Charter and the underground community was recently studied by Luboš Veselý²⁴ and somewhat earlier by Martin Palouš²⁵. To summarise the facts as we know them so far, of which the most important elements are (i) a controversy sparked in 1987 by the publication of *Dopis signatářům k 10. výročí Charty 77* [Letter to the Signatories on the 10th Anniversary of Charter 77], which, among other things set out the problems between the so-called “active core” of the Charter and its “passive majority”, reflected on the Charter’s “generational problem”, and issued a call for the convening of a “Charter Forum”²⁶; (ii) Anna Šabatová’s unsuccessful attempt to have František Stárek appointed as one of the Charter 77 spokespersons, which was opposed by Petruška Šustrová, Václav Benda, and Rudolf Slánský, among others;²⁷ (iii) the so-called *Dopis 40 signatářů Charty 77 mluvčím* [Letter from 40 Charter 77 Signatories to Charter Spokepersons] drawn up by in August 1987 by Stárek in collaboration with Fišer-Bondy;²⁸ and the subsequent polemic on the pages of *Infoch* between Martin Palouš and Luboš Vydra, among others;²⁹ (iv) finally, the fact that all this eventually led to an agreement between Havel and Stárek to organize the so-called 2nd “Charter Forum” that was held on 28th

24) See VESELÝ, Luboš, “Underground (Charty 77)”, in BLAŽEK, Petr (ed.), *Opozice a odpor proti komunistickému režimu v Československu 1968–1989* [Opposition and the Resistance against the Communist Regime in Czechoslovakia 1968–1989], Praha: Dokořán, Praha 2005.

25) See PALOUSH, Martin, “Poznámky ke generačním sporům v Chartě 77 v druhé polovině osmdesátých let”, in MANDLER, Emanuel (ed.), *Dvě desetiletí před listopadem 89* [Two Decades before November 89], Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR – Maxdorf, 1993.

26) See Charter 77 Document 3/87 (of 6th January 1987); see it also in PREČAN, Vilém (ed.), *Charta 77, 1977–1989*, Scheinfeld – Bratislava: Čs. středisko nezávislé kultury – Archa, 1990, pp. 307–322; see also OTÁHAL, Milan, *Opoziční proudy v české společnosti 1969–1989*, Praha: ÚSD AV ČR, 2011, pp.294–299.

27) See Luboš Veselý’s above-mentioned study, pp. 115–116 (Footnote 24); see also KUČEROVÁ, Lenka, “Vokno do undergroundu” (“Cyklus Charta: rozhovor s Františkem Čuňasem Stárkem”), *Nový prostor* 4, no. 130 (2003), pp. 36–37.

28) See *Informace o Chartě 77* 10, no. 10 (1987), pp. 8–10.

29) See Luboš Veselý’s above-mentioned study, p. 118. In hindsight it may seem almost unbelievable that *Dopis 40 signatářů*, whose tone was friendly and almost deferential, could have provoked such a panic reaction among some of the leading Chartists.

November 1987, at which, as Veselý emphasizes, the influence of the radical "youth wing" – i.e., de facto the part of the underground supporting Stárek and Vokno – prevailed to a certain extent. To quote Veselý: "In the controversy over whether Charter 77 should convene public gatherings, the view of the more radical younger generation prevailed and a recommendation was made to the Charter spokespersons, Jan Litomiský, Libuše Šilhánová and Jan Vohryzek, that they should inform the appropriate authorities that a demonstration would be held to mark Human Rights Day on 10th December 1987."³⁰

To these familiar facts, which nevertheless tend to be forgotten these days, it only remains to add a reflection on what role Egon Bondy, the self-appointed "shadow spokesperson" of the underground Chartist "faction" or wider underground support base, actually played in them. In his study, Luboš Veselý cites a source with the title *Výkaz preventivních opatření provedených útvarem čs. kontrarozvědky* [Report of preventive measures undertaken by Czechoslovak counter-intelligence],³¹ which confirms the fact that in the second half of the 1980s Fišer-Bondy was repeatedly coerced by the secret police (StB) into a certain degree of collaboration, and was placed into the category of "důvěrník" [confidant] with the code-name "Oskar". Veselý also quotes from that source the sentence: "In June 1987 OSKAR was directed to compile some material capable of creating controversy to be disseminated among Charter 77 circles. In July the text was prepared by OSKAR and was disseminated in August 87 by Charter 77 signatory František Stárek." Veselý also points out that by the 1980 a good number of underground and Charter activists realized that during police interrogations

30) See *ibidem*. The number of participants in what was in fact the first public appearance by the Chartists, albeit without official permission yet, which took place on the Old Town Square in Prague, was estimated at almost three thousand by František Stárek in the above-mentioned interview with Kučerová (Footnote 27), and he evidently considered that he and likeminded people in the Charter should take the credit for its organization.

31) In this connection Veselý refers to "a document produced by the 3rd section of Department 1 of Administration X of the National Security Corps (SNB) of 17th October 1987"; he does not state where the document is archived however, or whether it can be accessed by the public; see Veselý's above-mentioned study p. 117.

Fišer-Bondy “committed many indiscretions, although they knew nothing about his direct collaboration with the secret police”. He concedes, however, that the *Letter from 40 Charter 77 Signatories* was truly Stárek’s initiative, that Fišer’s “controlling officer” could simply have “taken credit” for it, and most importantly, that if the StB were planning – particularly as part of “Operation Wedge”³² – to sow dissension in the Charter community by using Fišer-Bondy, for instance, or by taking advantage of Stárek’s enthusiasm – **they failed in their aim**, and in fact had the opposite effect. At its “2nd Forum”, the Charter was markedly radicalised, and the “passive majority” became active. So it would only be a slight exaggeration to say that for the second time underground activists provided the dissident intellectuals with a stimulus that gave rise to major events – the events of 1987–88 that culminated in November 1989.

By now it is clear that Fišer-Bondy’s actual contribution to those events will never be totally clarified, because part of his file, which documented his collaboration with the StB in that final period, was allegedly shredded. However, in this connection it is worth recalling a number of lesser known facts.

It is possibly no exaggeration to say that in the second half of the 1980s Bondy was the most active member of the old underground guard, being the only remaining underground intellectual who still felt like theorising about the “mission of the underground”. Jirous simply didn’t have the time or space to do anything like that, and all the others who could and should have had something to say about it were in exile. And it is undeniable that “Bondy the poet” enjoyed truly enormous authority among the younger underground generation, in spite of the fact that even in the period 1976–77 (when, as would eventually emerge after 1989, he really didn’t collaborate with the StB, and on the contrary was classified as a “hostile person”) he was willing to divulge far too much during police interrogations.³³ It was due to his natural plebeian behaviour, and

32) Regarding it see ŽÁČEK, Pavel, “Celostátní projekt ‘Klín’ [Nation-wide Operation ‘Wedge’] *Securitas imperii*, 1, Praha 1994, pp. 60–87.

33) The first person to draw attention to this was Ivan Jirous in 1979 in his essay “Zasadil jsem vám osiku, pane doktore!” [I’ve planted you an aspen tree, Doctor!] in which he writes specifically: “When they were ‘closing the file’ and I was reading the testimonies by over a hundred people, which it contained, the only testimony

his readiness to listen to absolutely anyone who visited him, even a totally unknown budding samizdat author, as Petr Placák, Jáchym Topol, and J. H. Krchovský, among others, have testified.³⁴ But it was also the legend about him, the legend of a poet who, as he himself said, was “in the underground since 1948”, his uncompromising stance on matters of art and publication, his gift of perceiving problems from a perspective that was broader than just a few years or decades, and, when all is said and done, his charm, spontaneity, and diligence. It was his poetry that truly influenced almost every author of the underground. The pages of *Vokno* were always open to Bondy, so that at one time it looked as if Bondy was willing to turn the magazine into something like his “notebook”; he was also welcome at *Revolver Revue*. However, as his resentment against the Charter’s “shadow Establishment” gradually increased and became almost paranoid, his “young friends” were no longer willing to mutely swallow it. Significant in this respect was his polemic with Ivan Lamper regarding just three chapters of Bondy’s prose work *Bezejmenná* [Nameless] (samizdat 1986, printed edition 2001)³⁵: “Na Žabinci” [In the Frogpond Pub], “Plovárna” [Swimming Pool] and “VOKNO”. In passages inserted into texts with totally different subject-matter, Bondy – not for the first time, but now with extreme passion and indiscriminately – attacked the “shadow Establishment” of the Charter, and in particular its “pro-American wing”; he also criticised “the detachment of the local dissidents” from the current

that shocked me was Bondy’s. He was the only one to betray every little thing to them. Not only did he tell them everything he knew, and everything they asked, he told them much more, and at that time I couldn’t find the words to qualify his treachery.” In the same essay, however, he had high praise for Bondy’s poetry, prose, and philosophical essays. Those reflections should still be regarded as the starting point for any further study of Bondy’s literary oeuvre. The essay is included in *Magorův zápisník*, Praha: Torst, 1997, pp. 419–430.

34) Bondy is spoken of in this way by Placák, Krchovský, Topol and several others, including in Jordi Niubo’s documentary film *Fišer alias Bondy* (see Footnote 7); Krchovský writes about Bondy’s intense influence on his work in the afterword to the publication of his juvenilia; see “Doslov (pokračovatele) autora”, in /KRCHOVSKÝ/, J. H., *Mladost - radost...*, Brno (Czech Republic): Větrné mlýny, 2005.

35) The 2nd printed edition (Praha: Akropolis, 2019) of the book contains detailed comments on the facts and pseudofacts found in the three discussed chapters.

problems of Czech youth, having promoted himself to be their tribune; elsewhere he mocked those who were attached to civil liberties, and he developed a theory – which was a fairly overt defence of the Soviet system – that the “age of freedom” – i.e. the age of human rights – is over”. Certain passages of those texts actually assume the form of pamphlets whose content is almost denunciatory. Lamper – under the pseudonym Horna Pigment – responded very vehemently on the pages of Issue 6 of *Jednou nohou / Revolver Revue* (1987) in an article “Zpívá hlasitě, ale falešně” [He sings loudly, but out of tune].³⁶ This was not only the first attempt to criticise Bondy by an author from the circle of underground journalists, but indeed **the first radical and detailed critique** of his attitudes to the Charter (and also his literary output of the previous years), which was possibly no less a shock for Bondy’s devotees than the *Letter from 40 Signatories* was for leading Chartists a year later. The polemic had three interesting ramifications:

1) About a year after his critique of Bondy on the pages of *Revolver Revue*, Lamper spoke at a meeting of Chartist writers at Ivan Klíma’s (1988),³⁷ where they discussed contributions to the samizdat magazine *Obsah*. Surprisingly, he criticised the writers as being elitist, attention-seeking, and inward-looking, using expressions that could have been borrowed from Bondy’s “ideological arsenal”. His arguments were suddenly fully in tune with the *Letter from 40 Signatories*.³⁸ These abrupt shifts of opinion in one of the most influential editors of the *Revolver Revue* are evidence, at the very least, of how rapidly and dynamically opinions about the actual mission of the dissident formations – the latent opposition in totalitarian Czechoslovakia in the late 1980s – started to polarize and be refined.

2) The text of the relevant passage (in the chapter titled “VOK-NO”) in Bondy’s *Nameless* certainly does beg the question: where did the author’s sudden hatred spring from, all that almost fren-

36) This article is included in the documentation section of the anthology ALAN, Josef (ed.), *Alternativní kultura*, Praha: NLN, 2001, pp. 550–556.

37) See the documentary film used in the 4th episode of Andrej Krob’s TV serial *Samizdat*, Czech Television, 2002.

38) It is worth noting that among those present Karel Pecka reacted with irritation, Ludvík Vaculík with irony verging on self-irony, while Václav Havel was the only one to respond dispassionately and with understanding.

zied detestation of the Charter's leaders? (It must be noted that Bondy had only conciliatory words for his old friend Petr Uhl.) It also unfortunately begs the question: *cui bono?* in respect of it all. But maybe the study even of documents such as these can help clarify something of the internal mental development, and ideological diversification in the history of Czech dissent in general and the Charter in particular.

3) It is also remarkable that some of the wording of the *Letter to the Signatories on the 10th Anniversary of Charter 77* reacts to a certain extent to some of the rebukes voiced by Bondy in *Nameless*, although there is naturally no specific reference in the *Letter* to the passages in question. We have in mind the reflections on the need for "generational renewal", the effort to involve more of the Charter's "passive majority", such as by means of the proposed organisation of "Charter Fora". It cannot be ruled out, of course, that Bondy helped through his work to create different currents of opinion in the Charter, albeit his original intention might have been something quite different, that his infamous text helped write the last chapter in the history of the remarkable and sometimes contradictory symbiosis of the Charter 77 and underground communities.

2007

Translated by Gerald Turner