

## Archive of Freedom

H. Gordon Skilling<sup>1</sup>

The Czechoslovak Documentation Centre for Independent Literature (Československé dokumentační středisko nezávislé literatury, or ČSDS) in the Schwarzenberg Castle in Scheinfeld, Germany, was much more than an archive for the collection and preservation of Czech and Slovak *samizdat* writings. It was an indispensable link between those at home who were striving to defend human rights and the outside world and an important element in a broader transnational system of support for the struggle for freedom. Even though located abroad, it can be regarded as an integral part of the independent civil society which Charter 77 and its advocates were striving to build. It helped to prepare the ground for the revolutionary transformation of the Velvet Revolution at the end of the eighties and was, therefore, an important factor in modern Czechoslovak history.

In attempting to document these statements, this essay cannot escape dealing with the personal life of Vilém Prečan, the initiator and director of the Centre, with which it was inextricably linked. From the first days of his life in exile he was determined to maintain the bonds with the independent activists in his homeland, to give them aid and support, and to inform the outside world of their work. Struggling against what seemed to be overwhelming odds, he brought the Centre into existence and infused it with purpose and life.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> [This article by Gordon Skilling was originally published in English as 'Archive of Freedom' in the festschrift *Acta contemporanea: K pětadesátinám Viléma Prečana* (Prague, 1998) pp. 377–99. Skilling very much wanted the article to be published in Czech as well, and I promised him that I would see to it that 'Archive of Freedom' was included in *Ročenka ČSDS*, the yearbook planned by the Czechoslovak Documentation Centre. Skilling agreed that the Czech version should include any corrections to the original. The article was kindly translated into Czech by Zdena Brodská of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in the autumn of 2001. Skilling, however, died before he could authorize the translation. In keeping with the wishes of Skilling, who had done so much for the return of freedom to Czechoslovakia, the Czech translation of 'Archive of Freedom' was indeed published in *Ročenka ČSDS*. Also in keeping with his wishes, I edited the definitive Czech version, making corrections to any factual errors. Originally Czech quotations have been compared with the original documents in my personal archive. Any footnotes that are not originally Skilling's appear here in square brackets. Vilém Prečan.]

<sup>2</sup> Much of the following is based on my correspondence with Prečan from 1976 to the present, available in the University of Toronto Archives, under H. Gordon Skilling Fonds, B1993-0028, Boxes 005 and 006. The file is also available at the Documentation Centre in Scheinfeld, Germany, and in Prague, since 1995. In April 1997, I explored the Centre's archives and had extensive conversations with Prečan, and in Prague conducted interviews with Pavel Tigrid, Ivan Medek, Karel Jan Schwarzenberg, Jan Kavan, and Jiřina Šiklová. Jiří Pelikán was kind enough to give me written answers to questions. For Prečan's own account, see the conclusion to his collection of essays, Vilém Prečan, *V kradeném čase*, ed. by Milan Drápala (Prague, 1994), pp. 586–602.

Vilém Prečan, historian, a member of the Historical Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Science, first became well known as co-author (with Milan Otáhal) of the Black Book, the instant documentation of the Soviet bloc invasion of Czechoslovakia at the end of the Prague Spring. This bold effort to document the occupation was officially sponsored by the Academy but was withdrawn by the government after intervention by the occupation authorities after a protest by the Soviet government. As a result Prečan was removed from his position in the Institute and spent some years as a stoker in a large Prague hospital and in other menial jobs. He devoted much effort to documenting the fate of Czech and Slovak historians during the period of normalization, in particular bringing their cause before the World Congress of Historians in San Francisco in 1975. As a result of this action and his own personal appeal for help to his colleagues abroad, the Czechoslovak authorities decided to get rid of this troublesome person by permitting him to leave the country.

### *The First Years – Edemissen*

On Sunday, July 11, 1976, Vilém Prečan, with his wife, Helena, and three children, arrived in Germany for what was to be more than thirteen years in exile. The family settled down in the little village of Edemissen-Eddesse (population 1,000) not far from Hanover, in northern Germany. Thanks to a German colleague, Helmut Lippelt, they were able to live, without rent, in a large old house, sharing the kitchen with the owner, an elderly lady. The children had to go to school by train to nearby Hanover. As they settled in their new home, they came to realize that this was not just temporary, but the beginning of a new life. His immediate plan, he wrote me, was to rest, to read as much as possible in order to catch up, to await the arrival of his personal archives from Prague, to help his children in their schooling, to improve his knowledge of German and of English, and to think about what to do next. He wanted to establish contact with his colleagues in Germany, and also in England, the United States and Canada and gradually to decide on the future. He hoped that after an almost seven-year interruption he could eventually resume research on Czechoslovak history. He had a modest monthly stipend of 2,100 German marks, with a supplement for the children, from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, administered by the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich.

A few days after his arrival (July 16, 1979) Prečan wrote me the first letter in a correspondence which was to last almost twenty years, in which, in Czech, he gave me almost every week a detailed report of his thoughts and his actions. They were, he wrote, 'still full of Czechoslovakia, tired and often sad', but 'we had to think all the time of those at home whom we had left behind and who

expected from me that I shall be of some benefit and use to them'. For the present he did not want to make a break with Prague or make any public statement which the Czechoslovak authorities could consider political activity. His children were anxious to go home for a visit and he did not exclude the possibility that he himself might return. He was ready to work with Czech groups abroad as a historian and publicist, but only on the condition that his activity remained concealed. He realized that this could not last for long and that his existential needs might force him into more open action (August 13, 1976). It was not excluded, he wrote, that he would succeed in creating some kind of documentation and information centre for Czechoslovak history of the twentieth century (a kind of clearing house), even though this would leave him little time for his own historical writing and might precipitate an open split with Prague.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> [To clarify my initial motivations, further quotations from that letter of 13 August 1976 are required. I told Skilling at the time: 'One of the difficulties of my status, which also complicates my writing commentary pieces, consists in a certain ambiguity of that status. I cannot afford for the time being to provoke a break with Prague, which would result in their taking away my Czechoslovak citizenship. I am thinking mainly about my children, particularly David, who has a fixed idea that he will again see his friend in Prague during the next vacation (that means in October); it also has to do with my mother, for they could refuse to let her visit me.

It is still [too] early to talk about all of that today, but it is also necessary to consider whether it is practical for me to make a "break" with Prague, and whether it would not really be worth a try – later – to ask for permission to do research in the archive, to visit friends in Prague and Bratislava, simply *not to accept the fact of excommunication*, but to find out whether the authorities could be forced into a game in which I would live abroad as a man who was not permitted to work as a historian at home, but who is at home in Czechoslovakia. I say this in the belief that the régime is not completely immobile, that there will be an international meeting in Yugoslavia in a year, where the results of Helsinki, among other things, will be assessed. I also have to think about not complicating the lives of my colleagues, friends, and possibly other people who intend to move out of the country or to ask for permission for long-term study-stays abroad.

On the other hand, the price that I would [thus] pay should not be too high. It would be silly to insist on 'neutrality', if that meant even less freedom for me than I had at home. Obviously, I cannot write articles for *Svědectví* or *Listy* [...] I cannot presume to write about any of my experience of 'consolidation', about 1968, or at least not under my own name.

[...] I would like to try and see whether I could live here as a historian. At the same time of course help for my country and working together with it, in the form of absolutely clandestine and conspiratorial help, is my priority or, rather, one of my priorities and aims. In that sense, there are two things that matter: (a) passing on information, literature, periodicals, and study materials of all kinds; (b) financial and material assistance to the group of historians who have decided to continue in their scholarly work in the spare time [...].

I am ready to help all serious endeavours by various Czech groups abroad, if they need me as a historian or a commentator, on the sole condition that my activity will be concealed from the Czechoslovak secret police [...]. For now I am not particularly worried about that. It will all be decided relatively soon, probably by the end of this year.'

My illusions that the Czechoslovak authorities would let me impose some game on them of my own choosing were soon dispelled in the autumn of 1976. And as soon as Charter 77 came into existence, I ceased entirely to consider another game of hide and seek.]

The return of Helena and the children from a brief visit to Prague in October 1976 put an end to all wishful thinking. They were followed by the police wherever they went, and on their departure, at the border with Austria at Bratislava, they were subjected to a five-hour search of their automobile and all their belongings, and even their persons. They arrived in Vienna exhausted and 'profoundly humiliated'. Never did she want to see this country again, said Helena, as long as such a repulsive regime was in power. Vilém had learned from friends at home that in their interrogations the police had treated him as an enemy of the state. He realized that, even if he got permission to return for a visit, he would not be able to do so. The children, however, still could not shake free of their ties with the homeland and in spite of Vilém's concern, made a second trip at Christmas – they were interrogated but suffered no serious consequences.<sup>4</sup>

Prečan was assailed with doubts about his own personal future. After a hiatus of six years would he be able to resume scholarly work? Would he be able to adapt to life in Germany? Was this 'a kind of [ultimate] crisis after which he would regain his spiritual and creative powers'? When he received my book on the interrupted revolution and began to read it line by line, he 'wondered why he and his contemporaries had failed so completely and whether they would ever live to see the moment when it would be possible to live in a humane way and to breathe freely in the land in which they had been born'. But by November (November 2, 1976) Prečan reported that he had overcome 'the heavy burden of depression of the first weeks'; a month or two later he began to feel as though his 'wings', which he thought had been broken for ever, had grown a little. Certainly, he wrote, 'we are still utter failures (*ztroskotanci*), we people of great hopes in 1968, but as long as we keep our head above the water, and construct a temporary raft [...], there is still hope'. As luck would have it, he had at this time a serious automobile accident in which his car was completely destroyed but he escaped without injury. With a loan from the bank he was able to purchase another car so indispensable for life in the village of Edemissen and to recover from the trauma of the accident.

### *After Charter 77*

The issuance of the Charter 77 declaration in January 1977 removed all reasons Prečan had for limiting his activities and for remaining silent. He prepared an article on the Czechoslovak situation for the London *Times* and a longer one for *Index on Censorship*. He concluded a contract with Fischer publishers in Germany for a book containing his correspondence with Milan Šimečka during

---

<sup>4</sup> [That came later, in 1977. Afterwards, our children's visits to Czechoslovakia came to an end.]

the years of normalization<sup>5</sup> and one with a Czech publishing house in Cologne for a book on opposition documents from 1970 and 1976, eventually published in part as *Kniha Charty: Hlas z domova 1976–77*.<sup>6</sup> At this time the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior, citing in particular his article in the *Times*, cancelled his citizenship on the grounds of his 'hostile activity and of his harming important interests of the Republic'.<sup>7</sup> Fortunately, although they had requested his passport, he had not sent it and, therefore, was able to use it for travel abroad. The Czechoslovak consul, at the time of granting the visa for his children's trip home, complained that their father was using his passport illegally. Soon afterwards Prečan received asylum, with right of permanent residence in Germany.

Prečan became more and more involved, 'almost like full-time employment', in organizational work for the purpose of helping the people at home. He was in constant communication, by telephone or by smuggled letters, with historians at home and sought to help them in their effort to continue their historical scholarly work, including the regular publication of a typewritten historical journal. He was able to arrange some shipments of books and materials to them as well as money. He was anxious to aid them in their plan to prepare a volume of writings to be presented to the World Congress of Historians in Bucharest in 1980. As a result of his editorial and organizational work, this was eventually published as *Acta Creationis*<sup>8</sup> and distributed to the congress delegates from the West.

Prečan was receiving a great deal of Charter 77 materials and other *samizdat* writings and began to send me regular shipments. This laid the basis of a special collection of Czechoslovak *samizdat* in our Rare Books Library, at the University of Toronto. Prečan was dependent on payments received for these shipments to Toronto and other foreign libraries but sometimes had to dip into his own meagre resources to cover the costs.

When I began to write my book on Charter 77 Vilém was assiduous in providing me with documents as they came to him and in trying to answer my questions about Charter developments. When I was getting ready to go to Czechoslovakia in 1977, my task, he said, was 'to take the pulse of a nation which was seriously ill'; he was 'groping in the darkness'. We laid out detailed plans as to whom to see and I carried messages to his friends. He informed the people at home of my coming and they in turn arranged meetings for me with Chartists. In 1978 I was able to visit him in Edemissen and had a chance to see at first hand his

---

<sup>5</sup> Vilem Prečan (ed.), *Die sieben Jahre von Prag, 1969–1976* (Frankfurt, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> Vilém Prečan (ed.), *Kniha Charty: Hlas z domova 1976–77* (Cologne, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> Vilém Prečan, 'Czechs: Still in the Grief of the Graveyard', *The Times*, 13 April 1977.

<sup>8</sup> Vilém Prečan (ed.), *Acta Creationis: Independent Historiography in Czechoslovakia, 1969–1980* (Hanover, 1980).

embryonic documentation centre. I was impressed by his intense activity, carried on with minimum funds and without secretarial help, and by his utter devotion to the self-imposed tasks of keeping in touch with the homeland and keeping the West informed.

Vilém was also anxious to arrange the publication of major books which appeared in *samizdat*, e.g. Petr Pithart's book on 1968<sup>9</sup> and Milan Šimečka's *The Restoration of Order*.<sup>10</sup> He published a second book on the Charter, *Křesťané a Charta '77*.<sup>11</sup> Together we were able to publish selected political essays by dissidents in a special issue of *International Journal of Politics* entitled *Parallel Politics: Essays on Politics from Czech and Slovak Samizdat*.<sup>12</sup> Prečan also sought to arrange the publication of Charter 77 materials, and in particular the bulletin, *Informace o Chartě*. We made an arrangement with Freedom House in New York City to publish selected documents, and also assisted in the publication of some documents by the Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in Washington, D.C. We discussed at length the project of making Toronto a translation and publication centre for *Informace* and were given financial support from the Ford Foundation – a project we had to give up for lack of human resources. Prečan was, however, able to provide copies of Charter 77 documents and other materials to Radio Free Europe in Munich and the Voice of America in Washington, to Jiří Pelikán in Rome and Pavel Tigrid in Paris, for their journals, *Listy* and *Svědectví*, and to many other people abroad. All the while Prečan was determined to remain a historian. His stipend was extended for twelve months and then followed in 1978 by a new grant, under which he shifted his area of specialization from Slovakia to an entirely new theme – Czechoslovakia between East and West, 1938–48. In spite of his other work he managed to prepare a draft outline of his topic, focusing on the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty of 1943. This satisfied his sponsors in Munich and guaranteed him a minimum income for two and a half years (until the end of 1980). In 1981 he received a research grant from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. He continued to experience doubts as to his ability to work as a historian and sometimes referred to his effort to make current Czechoslovak affairs his priority a kind of 'suicidal fanaticism, self-destruction for his scholarly work'. In fact, although he continually tried to find time for his research, he was not able to complete his study during his years in exile. Nonetheless, his

---

<sup>9</sup> Petr Pithart, *Osmadesátý: Pokus o kritické porozumění historickým souvislostem* (London, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> Milan Šimečka, *Obnovení pořádku* (London, 1984); published in English as *The Restoration of Order: The Normalization of Czechoslovakia, 1969–1976*; translated from the Czech by A. G. Brain; with a preface by Zdeněk Mlynář (London, [1984]).

<sup>11</sup> Vilém Prečan (ed.), *Křesťané a Charta '77* (Cologne, 1980).

<sup>12</sup> H. Gordon Skilling and Vilém Prečan (eds), *Parallel Politics: Essays on Politics from Czech and Slovak Samizdat*, special issue, *International Journal of Politics*, vol. XI (spring 1981) no. 1.

Munich sponsors approved his activities on contemporary affairs and assured him that he had fulfilled his responsibilities to them. In May, Prečan made a long-planned trip to England, and took up again a fellowship at St Antony's College, Oxford, which he had to interrupt in 1969. This enabled him to do research in the Public Record Office. As he wrote to his friend Šimečka, in Bratislava, he 'felt particularly at home in England' and that he 'belonged somewhere'. It also gave him back 'some self-confidence and a consciousness of the values and capacities' within himself. In late 1977 he was able to travel to the United States to attend as a special guest a conference of the American Historical Association in Dallas, and took advantage of the opportunity to meet American historians and fellow exiles, to publicize the fate of his fellow historians, and seek out sources of financial support for his activities. He came to Canada during that trip and spent several days in Toronto, during which we spent hours planning our common agenda. In 1979, with a grant from the Ford Foundation, Prečan was able to make a second trip to the USA, travelling as far as Stanford, as well as to Washington, D.C., and New York, and again Toronto. Once again he divided his time between research in the archives and contacts with his fellow historians and work on his 'Czechoslovak agenda', as he called it. His visit coincided with a big trial of dissidents in Prague. He gave several broadcasts on the Voice of America (VOA) and lobbied at the State Department concerning the trials and repression in Czechoslovakia.

### *A Search for a Solution*

Prečan still lacked an organizational base and had little money to carry on the work of a real documentation and information centre. In 1977, as an act of desperation, he wrote a long personal letter to Zbigniew Brzezinski, then National Security Adviser to the US President, appealing for support from Western governments for such an enterprise. Speaking on behalf of the many Czechoslovak social scientists who had been purged in 1969–70 and were vegetating on the margin of society as ordinary workers, Prečan warned that normalization, if continued, would liquidate an essential part of the intellectual capacity of two generations of intellectuals. These scholars who seek to continue their work in their free time need financial help, foreign literature, and the possibility of publishing their work abroad. He proposed the setting up of a modest coordinating and documentation centre, perhaps attached to an existing institution, to help these excommunicated scholars and to provide documentation and information on the Czechoslovak problem. Nothing came of this appeal. Prečan sent a similar letter to Willy Brandt, Chairman of the

Social Democratic Party of Germany, which led them to provide some support for *samizdat* work in Czechoslovakia.

In early 1979 Prečan began to have high hopes that his dilemma would be partly resolved by the proposed documentation centre at the University of Bremen, which would cover the whole of Eastern European dissent. For more than two years he was in touch with the director, Dr Wolfgang Eichwede, about a possible appointment as a Czechoslovak specialist, and participated in the planning of the future centre's work. Although he realized his historical work would suffer, he felt that such a post would give him a steady income and a solid basis for his actions on behalf of the dissidents of Czechoslovakia – 'which gave meaning' to his life. His appointment had the full support of fellow exiles, Jiří Pelikán, Zdeněk Mlynář, and Pavel Tigrid, as well as the Polish exile, Włodzimierz Brus, and the German scholar, Gotthold Rhode. In the end, in the summer of 1982, without warning, Prečan was dropped from consideration – a crushing blow, as he had been encouraged to assume that he would be appointed. In fact, what was his greatest strength – his intimate relationships with the Czechoslovak dissidents – turned out to be the main obstacle. Bremen University, influenced by the strongly left-wing politics of the city of Bremen and of the university faculty, feared that his appointment would damage their relationship with the official Prague regime.

Shortly thereafter Prečan was encouraged by Vladimír Kusín at Radio Free Europe to apply for a job there. In the end he was not appointed – due, it would seem, to pressure from some Czechoslovak exiles because of his former membership in the Communist Party. He thus lost the job for almost the opposite reasons to the Bremen fiasco. This was another bitter disappointment, but in many ways it was a relief, as such work would have damaged both his scholarly plans and his Czechoslovak agenda.

At the end of 1979 the Prečans moved from Edemissen to the nearby city of Hanover. There they found a comfortable apartment which afforded Vilém a study and a library for the ever increasing volume of materials accumulated. Helena was able to live a more independent life and 'to regain her spiritual strength'. Schools were within walking distance. At first they were not happy there, feeling foreign in the strange city, but they came to like the beautiful and historic German city and showed it off to me and my family during several visits. It was more expensive to live in the city and there was rent to pay. Vilém's stipend with the Ebert Foundation ran out at the end of 1981, and for the next four years (until March 1986) they subsisted on German unemployment insurance. There was a threat to this support when Prečan was offered a job as historian in the town of Hamelin (of Pied Piper fame), but he persuaded the unemployment agency that a foreigner was not suitable to write

the history of Hamelin during the Nazi regime. Hence the insurance continued and Prečan was free to devote his time and attention to his Czechoslovak agenda and to his historical work. During the next six years the activities of the centre continued along the same lines as before. Prečan received regular payments from Jiří Pelikán and also from František Janouch in Stockholm. Helenka found part-time work in a restaurant.

### *Creation of a Centre*

In 1983 Václav Havel was released from prison just when Prečan was preparing an edition of Havel's political writings from the years 1969–1979, eventually published in 1984.<sup>13</sup> It was at this time that he reached a fateful decision – namely, to postpone for better times his beloved historical work and to concentrate his time on the demands of the current Czechoslovak situation. He began to think again about the long-held idea of formally establishing a documentation and information centre. In August 1984 he drafted a first project which set out in detail the functions and the requirements of such a centre. Its main purpose would be the systematic collection, retrieval, and preservation of evidence and documentation of independent thinking and action in all spheres of life, with particular emphasis on literary, scholarly, religious, political, human and civil rights activities; it would also provide information about these activities to émigré and foreign publishers and to academic institutions as well as to the reading public in Czechoslovakia. He saw no prospect in the foreseeable future of an end of the strict limitations on freedom of expression at home, and noted that there had developed a complex unofficial structure of self-publishing activity which required increased support from abroad as a condition of its survival.

Meanwhile as a result of the mediation of Jiří Pelikán, there was a spark of hope of funding from the National Endowment for Democracy recently founded by President Reagan to support the cause of democracy throughout the world. In May 1985, Prečan prepared an application in which he described the main purpose of his centre as giving 'support to the democratic and independent forces in Czechoslovakia and promoting their development'. The centre would serve as a key link between those at home and the outside world, giving moral and material support to the former, thereby giving them a continuing feeling of 'belonging' to the democratic world, and helping them to act as catalysts of democratic development in Czechoslovakia. The application set forth the estimated costs of equipment and the activities of the centre, including a salary for its custodian – for a total of \$80,000.

---

<sup>13</sup> Václav Havel, *O lidskou identitu* edited by Vilém Prečan and Alexander Tomský (London, 1984).

In support of his project Prečan was able to make use of a letter which Václav Havel had written on June 19, 1985. He praised what Prečan had done for some years in 'assuring a continuous and systematic contact between independent culture at home and exile institutions as well as the world at large: he has built up an archive of *samizdat* literary production within Czechoslovakia and has distributed it to exile publishers and journals, scholarly institutions, communication media abroad as well as to interested scholars'. The creation of such a centre and material support for its work was a matter of fundamental importance for 'the preservation of the cultural identity of two civilized nations in the very centre of Europe'. And there was no one better able to direct it than Dr Vilém Prečan who had been fulfilling this task for years – 'almost like a private hobby'.

In the end, on January 27, 1986, a grant of \$50,000 was made for the year 1986, and later renewed for several years. The funds were to be paid to, and administered by, an incorporated American organization, the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences, a provision which involved payment of overhead, and reduced the actual amount received by Prečan. This grant assured financial security for the centre, at least for one year, and opened the way for its actual founding.

The founding charter was approved at a meeting of prominent Czech exiles in Hanover in March 1986 – the founding members – Jiří Gruša, a Czech writer living in Bonn, Jan Vladislav, a Czech writer in Paris, František Janouch, in Stockholm, Pavel Tigrid, in Paris, Jiří Pelikán, in Rome, Ivan Medek, in Vienna, Karel Schwarzenberg, and others (later listed were Ivo Kunstýř, as treasurer, Josef Jelínek, as secretary, and Ľubomír Ďurovič, in Sweden). This was followed by the incorporation of the Centre as a charitable organization under German law.

The next step was to find a location for the Centre. Prečan had been conducting correspondence with Schwarzenberg about historical research on the nobility, which was already underway with a group of independent Czech historians. In a letter in January 1986 he raised the 'crazy idea' of whether there would be space in Schloß Schwarzenberg, Scheinfeld, for the Centre. Within days Schwarzenberg responded with a question: 'Why not?' It fitted in with the tradition of the Schwarzenberg family to house the largest archives in its castles in Bohemia and Moravia; he also saw the importance of the Czechoslovak archive and its support of the Czechoslovak human rights movement. It had the advantage of a location closer to the Czechoslovak border than Hanover and was near the main railway line from Frankfurt to Nuremberg. There followed discussion of the space required, and a visit in April to explore this further. Rent was to be 800 marks monthly. Since the Prečans

were unable to find suitable accommodations in the town of Scheinfeld, it was decided that they would live temporarily in two rooms in the Castle. Renovations, at Schwarzenberg's expense, began in September and were completed in six weeks; the Centre moved into its new quarters on November 11; written materials and books alone filled 200 large cartons. Prečan's hopes and dreams had at last been realized.

### *The ČSDS, 1986–90*

From 1986 to 1990 the Centre constituted a major entity of exile activity. Its organizational structure included a Board, headed by Jan Vladislav, Paris, and Vice Chairman, Jiří Gruša, Bonn, with Vilém Prečan as Executive Director and Curator. I served as Chairman of the Academic Council, with representatives from England, Germany, Austria, France, the United States and Canada. This council held its first meeting in 1987 in Scheinfeld, and discussed plans for the work of the Centre and the search for additional funding. Honorary members from Czechoslovakia were at first Václav Havel and Ludvík Vaculík, to whom were later added Milan Uhde (of Brno), and Dominik Tatarka, Miroslav Kusý and Milan Šimečka (in Slovakia). Prečan was the driving force but consulted the others constantly by letter and telephone.

The Centre received its main financial support from the NED. The grant was paid in US dollars which unfortunately suffered a steady decline in value due to depreciation. This required the keeping of a strict budget of income and expenditures, and annual submissions and reports. An additional source of funds was the Open Society of George Soros, paid through the Charta 77 Foundation in Sweden. The Centre also received substantial grants for specific translation and publication projects from the Central and East European Publishing Project in Oxford. It received fees for services rendered to other exiles and to foreign libraries and research institutions, and these fees covered part of their overhead. It was later able to employ a full-time secretary, a German specialist for documentation, with the financial support of the German government's local employment office in Scheinfeld. Much effort was expended on an attempt to establish a branch in the USA for raising money but this did not succeed.

It is difficult even to summarize the work performed by the Centre and its curator during the following three years. It was in the main a continuance of things done during the preceding ten years in Edemissen and Hanover, but, this time, with much improved infrastructure and financing. Prečan once described his work as Director as constituting being chauffeur, wrapper of parcels, secretary, clerk, proof-reader, librarian, archivist and research worker, all in

one person.<sup>14</sup> During my visits to the Centre, I was impressed, as always, by the hectic life of Vilém and Helenka, including a mad rush to the post-office every day before closing and the laborious wrapping of parcels of materials to be shipped to Czechoslovakia. The telephone was in constant use; Havel and others could be reached by pressing a button on a programmed system, and conversations could be amplified and taped.

The Centre's premises were a far cry from the makeshift arrangements of the Centre's previous accommodations in the Prečan's living quarters in Edemissen and Hanover. The Castle is a romantic turreted and walled structure, with a broad inner courtyard and a beautiful Baroque chapel. The former chambers of the Schwarzenberg family accommodate two schools. From the Castle one has a commanding view of the ancient town of Scheinfeld, the surrounding countryside and the adjacent woods. There is a spacious general office which was soon well equipped with filing cabinets and the latest technical equipment. There were rooms for the storage of *samizdat* materials, a general study room, a special despatch room for books to be shipped to Czechoslovakia, and several bedroom-studies for visiting scholars. Later, from April 1990, the Prečans had comfortable living quarters downstairs.

A primary function of the Centre was the collection of the ever growing quantity of *samizdat* and its storage and cataloguing. This included 190 manuscript volumes of the *Petlice* (Padlock) edition and other book series, and many *samizdat* periodicals (thirty in 1988, fifty in 1989), as well as video-tapes and audio-tapes, films and photographs. The archive also included a special collection of materials on 1968 and on the entire period from 1948 to the present, including press clippings, 150 newspapers, émigré and other journals, and books related to Czechoslovakia in many languages.

A second task was to provide the outside world and the Czechoslovak intellectual community at home and abroad with information about all aspects of intellectual life at home. This meant to disseminate photocopies of the original *samizdat* to Harvard, the British Library, Toronto and other libraries, to scholarly institutions and radio services, to human rights organizations, to exile Czech journals and publishing houses, and to individual researchers and journalists.

The Documentation Centre had its own publishing activities. The most noteworthy publication, from 1987, was the scholarly journal, *Acta* (edited by Jan Vladislav, assisted by Prečan and Gruša). The British scholar, John Keane, was responsible for an English version. This published information, texts and commentaries on important *samizdat* writings, a bibliography of the *Petlice*

---

<sup>14</sup> Prečan, *V kradeném čase*, p. 600.

series and a listing of *samizdat* periodicals. In a very large final issue<sup>15</sup> *Acta* published a chronicle of events and documents of the momentous days from January to March 1989, which presaged the Velvet Revolution.

The Centre had its own book series, *Acta Creationis*.<sup>16</sup> In 1987 the Centre published a commemorative volume to mark the tenth anniversary of Charter 77, in Czech, English and Swedish. It also supported scholars at home and in Vienna in the ambitious action of preparing a multi-volume edition in Czech of the complete works of Jan Patočka, the philosopher. It also published, or cooperated in publishing, books by Havel and others.<sup>17</sup>

The Centre also served as a mediator in the grants made to Czech and Slovak scholars by the Jan Hus Educational Foundation in the UK, and the Jan Hus Funds in the USA and Canada, recommending candidates and transmitting funds. It also played a part in conferences, for instance by preparing a special booklet of *samizdat* writings on T. G. Masaryk for distribution at the conference on TGM held in London in 1986. Occasionally it arranged exhibitions of *samizdat*, for example, in Bonn and Amsterdam.

### *The Network Abroad*

Prečan was, of course, not the only one abroad engaged in support of fellow citizens at home. In fact he was a newcomer, but soon established an important place in the network. His fellow exiles embraced a wide array of differing viewpoints, a kind of pluralistic society, mirroring the pluralism of the dissenters at home – including former reform Communists, socialists, political conservatives, Roman Catholics, and persons not belonging to any party. Each of them had special contacts with people of like mind at home. By chance they were resident in different European countries, as well as in the USA and Canada, so that they could exercise an influence in each of them.

The earliest émigré was Karel Jan Schwarzenberg, who came to Austria in 1948 as a child of eleven with his mother and grandmother. All members of the Schwarzenberg family had retained the Swiss citizenship which they had for three hundred years as residents of the landgraviate of Klege. This made it possible for Schwarzenberg to visit Czechoslovakia from time to time as a private person and later as Chairman of the International Helsinki Federation on Human Rights, an umbrella for nongovernmental organizations. Appointed to this post on the recommendation of Chancellor Kreisky of Austria, Schwarzenberg was not a figurehead but became an active representative of this organization and was later (1989) awarded the Peace Prize by the Council

---

<sup>15</sup> *Acta*, nos. 9–12, 1989, published in English as *Czechoslovakia: Heat in January 1989*, edited by Jan Vladislav with Vilém Prečan (Scheinfeld, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> A full listing is given in *Acta*, 5–8, 1988, pp. 93ff.

<sup>17</sup> For Prečan's publications, see Prečan, *V kradeném čase*, pp. 602–14.

of Europe for this activity. As a result of the Helsinki Final Act, the Federation had a certain legitimacy, even in the eyes of the Czechoslovak regime, so that Schwarzenberg, on visits to his homeland, was able to have contacts with the official Helsinki Committee in Prague. He took advantage of these visits to hold secret meetings with the Chartists.

Pavel Tigrid, in Paris, was a veteran exile, having left Prague in 1948, and after several years in Germany, the USA, and Belgium, took up permanent residence in Paris. There, from 1956, he published the influential intellectual quarterly, *Svědectví*, which was smuggled into the homeland and was widely read by Czech and Slovak intellectuals at home and abroad. For this activity Tigrid was charged with sedition and espionage and was tried and sentenced *in absentia* to fourteen years in prison. Tigrid published a number of books on 1968 and often contributed to newspapers such as *Le Monde*. With his wife, Ivana, he established the International Committee for the Support of Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia. Ivana also established the organization Help and Action. Having been active before 1948 in a Catholic party, Tigrid represented a somewhat liberal-conservative point of view. He was strongly anti-Communist, and had no belief in the possibility of the reform of Communism. Nonetheless, he was ready to cooperate with the former Communists in exile.

A later arrival in the West was the long-time Communist, Jiří Pelikán, who had been head of the International Youth League during the Stalinist days, and then an active figure of the Prague Spring. Setting up his base in Rome, in 1971 he began to publish the weekly journal *Listy* (Letters), which represented an independent socialist viewpoint. Identifying himself with the Craxi's Italian Socialist Party, he was able in 1979 to win a seat in the European Parliament on the Socialist ticket. This provided him with a valuable platform for publicizing repression at home and presenting the views of dissidents. He also had close contacts with Italian Communists and with Western European politicians, especially such leading socialists as Willy Brandt, François Mitterand, and Bruno Kreisky. Pelikán had his own channels for the shipment of materials to and from Prague through young Italian Socialists and others.

In England the most active exile was Jan Kavan, a university student activist in 1968, who was associated with what was called revolutionary socialism and was close to Petr Uhl and the small band of Trotskyites at home and the socialist left abroad. He was the son of a former Czech diplomat, a Communist, imprisoned during the fifties, and of an English woman. After 1968 Kavan made several trips to England. In March 1969, after a secret trip home (using a British passport with a different name), he decided to stay abroad, to study at LSE and to provide support to the people at home. In 1969 he set up the Solidarity Fund and, in 1976, Palach Press. Later he joined with exiles from other *East European*

*countries* to form the East European Cultural Foundation for joint action in their homelands. Kavan was also co-founder of the *East European Reporter*, a left-oriented monthly. He was also active in Western peace movements, acting as a spokesman for the Czechoslovak dissidents at their conferences. The chief sources of funds were private donations from the British public, but he eventually received a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy. A principal function of the Palach Press was to distribute Charter 77 and other materials to the British press, radio and television; he had close relations with leading publicists and thus had an influence on British public opinion and on the British left in particular. Its other principal function was to send home books, periodicals, copying machines and video-cameras, using automobiles and later camping vans with secret compartments. On the return trips the vans brought out dissident manuscripts and Charter 77 documents, clandestine films, and *samizdat* books and periodicals. His first shipment was made in January 1970 and this was repeated at regular intervals (at the high point five times per year). Each time the van was repainted and had new license plates and new drivers. The latter were at first always British, but later also French and persons of other nationalities, most of whom were committed left-wing political activists. This service was used by the other exiles; a stopover was made in Munich for the distribution of materials.<sup>18</sup>

After years of successful activity this conspiratorial action came to an abrupt end on April 28, 1981, when a police agent among the Chartists informed the authorities of the next shipment.<sup>19</sup> The van was stopped at the border, its contents confiscated, and the drivers detained for a short time; the materials awaiting return shipments were seized in a garage outside Prague. The shipments were resumed a year later, this time with passenger cars, which went more frequently but could not carry as much material.

Kavan also undertook conspiratorial trips to various East European Communist countries, where he met local oppositionists and dissidents from Czechoslovakia. In 1987 he decided to risk a trip to Prague, using the methods he had used in 1970, including a disguise; he repeated this twice more in 1988, each time meeting with leading dissidents, including Václav Havel. This action of his drew criticism from other leading exiles as involving too much risk for the dissidents and the system of illegal communications.<sup>20</sup>

František Janouch, a physicist, who had gone into exile in Sweden 1973, was able to pursue his scientific work at the Royal Academy of Sweden, and to

---

<sup>18</sup> For this, see Jan Kavan, *Spravedlnost s náhubkem* (Brno, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> [Though it was Pavel Muraško who collaborated with the StB (the Czechoslovak secret police) and it was his fault that Kavan's camper van was followed during a previous visit to Prague, the police discovery of the shipment on 28 April 1981 was probably just bad luck.]

<sup>20</sup> Kavan, *Spravedlnost s náhubkem*.

combine this with the support of the independent intellectual life at home. In 1978 he established the Charta 77 Foundation for the 'support of independent thinking' in Czechoslovakia and for 'publicizing independent Czechoslovak culture and thought in the West'. At first, he obtained financial support from writers' organizations of the three Scandinavian countries. Its main funding came from the Open Society of George Soros. The foundation became an important source of funds for the support of people at home (writers, Charter spokesmen, *samizdat* periodicals, families of prisoners, etc.), sending in some \$900,000 monthly. Through legal export channels it also delivered technical equipment such as lap-top computers, and video and audio machines. It gave support to exile activities abroad, including exile journals and publishing houses. The Foundation also sponsored a series of literary and peace awards for persons at home.

Ivan Medek, an active Roman Catholic Chartist, went into exile still later – in 1978, establishing himself in Vienna, Austria. There with his wife, Helenka, he set up a press and information service, sending to subscribers copies of Charter documents and other dissident materials. His contacts with the homeland were mainly by telephone and by letters sent through the ordinary mail to colleagues of his wife at the Vienna Conservatory of Music. He broadcast regularly on Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America, the latter unjammed, so that he had a wide audience throughout Czechoslovakia.

There were many, many other persons who occupied important niches in the exile community in different countries and with whom Prečan was in constant touch. In Germany there were Adolf Mueller and Bedřich Utitz: their publishing house *Index* in Cologne became an important agency for publishing the books of exiles and dissidents. There was Abbot Anastasius Opasek, who had spent twelve years in prison, and then, in exile after 1969, lived in a Benedictine abbey in Rohr, Bavaria, and set up a lay Roman Catholic organization, Opus Bonum. The latter organized an annual conference in Franken which brought together exiles of diverse viewpoints including former Communists, for discussions. There were Czech scholars such as Karel Kaplan, in Munich, and Pavel Reimann, in Berlin, Jiří Gruša, the writer, Ota Filip, of the Fischer Publishing House, Milan Horáček, who was elected deputy for the Greens in the Bundestag, Josef Jelínek, an engineer working for Siemens in Erlangen who performed miracles of photocopying for Prečan, and Vladimír Kusín and Agneša Kalinová, both at Radio Free Europe.

In Austria there were Zdeněk Mlynář with whom Prečan developed close friendly relations, as well as the Austrian historian, Anton Staudinger, a close friend of Prečan's since 1965. There was also the exiled historian, Josef Hodic,

who had close ties with Mlynář<sup>21</sup> and other exiles but later returned home and revealed himself to be a Czechoslovak police agent. In France there were Jan Vladislav, the Czech poet and novelist, and Antonín Liehm, a journalist, who published the Czech periodicals, *150,000 slov*, which came out three times a year, containing only translations of articles into Czech, and *Lettres* in French and several other language versions. In Basle, Switzerland, Karel Hrubý, editor of the quarterly *Proměny*, was a member of the Committee of the Social Democratic Party in Exile. *Proměny* was published in the USA by the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences. In Italy there was Karel Skalický, professor at the Lateran University and publisher of *Studie*.

Prečan was in frequent contact with Czechs in England who were leading figures in Amnesty International (George Steiner) and *Index on Censorship* (George Theiner), Igor Hájek, professor of Czech and Slovak literature at Lancaster and later Glasgow University, Jacques Rupnik and others at the BBC, Alexander Tomský, at Keston College, who published Czech literature in his Rozmluvy publishing house, Harry Hanak, at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London, other British scholars such as Roger Scruton and John Keane, and others active in the Jan Hus Educational Foundation which made grants to individual Czechs at home. Prečan was also in close personal contact with Johann Wolfgang Bruegel, a German Social Democrat from Czechoslovakia, a scholar active in the study of Czech-German relations. Further afield, in North America, there were exile organizations such as the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences (SVU), made up largely of older exiles from the 1940s, whose journal, *Kosmas*, edited by Zdeněk Suda, began to publish dissident literature. Another important cog in the machine was Vilém Brzorád, one-time secretary to Hubert Ripka, of the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party. His International Literary Center in New York City, supported by funds from the United States Congress, secretly distributed multiple copies of books and journals, including émigré periodicals, to all Communist nations. Prečan served as a distributor for Czechoslovakia: he had personal contacts with George Kovtun of the Library of Congress, Professor Erazim Kohák, a philosopher, at Boston University, František and Larisa Silnický, at the Voice of America, Martin Kvetko, a leading Slovak political figure, and Anna Faltusová, of the Czechoslovak Council in America, who supplied members of Congress, US government departments and the American Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe with Czechoslovak materials and information. In Canada, in Toronto, there was Sixty-Eight Publishers, run by Josef Škvorecký and his wife, Zdena, née Salivarová, which published several hundred books in Czech, primarily fiction, by leading dissidents and exiles. There were others,

---

<sup>21</sup> [Josef Hodic had the task of following Zdeněk Mlynář and writing reports on him.]

such as Paul Wilson, translator of Havel and Škvorecký, and distributor of alternative music recordings; I was active in support of Charter 77, and Chairman of the Jan Hus Fund; and there was Rudolf Fraštacký, financier of Slovak origin and one-time head of the Czechoslovak National Council, who contributed financially to the *samizdat* collection at the University of Toronto Library. In British Columbia, there was Professor Markéta Goetz-Stankiewicz, of the University of British Columbia, specialist on independent Czech drama, who often visited Czechoslovakia and had close personal contact with the dissidents.

The relations of these persons and groups and organizations with each other is a subject which would require fuller study than is possible here. The leading figures – Tigríd, Pelikán, Prečan, Medek, Mlynář and others met from time to time in a kind of strategy session. All of them were founding members of the Documentation Centre. Some of them had their own channels of communication with the homeland but they relied primarily on the shipments organized at first by Kavan and later by Prečan (see below).

The relationship of the exiles was not all sweetness and light. Prečan himself was subjected to sharp attacks by strongly anti-Communist and anti-Chartist exiles who suspected him for his onetime Party membership and even accused him of being a police agent. But he enjoyed good relations with most of the other exiles. He had his warmest relationship with Pelikán; he attended meetings of the *Listy* group and wrote articles for *Listy* on the situation at home. Pelikán was instrumental, through his contacts with the German Foreign Minister, Genscher, in initiating Prečan's cooperation with the German diplomats.

With Pavel Tigríd Prečan's relations were warm and friendly. Prečan wrote occasional articles for *Svědectví* and arranged for articles to be sent from home for publication. Tigríd sent money to cover the cost of the shipments, for copying expenses and for postage. Prečan also prepared a document on the suppression of human rights in Czechoslovakia which the Tigríds distributed at the Madrid Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Janouch provided Prečan with substantial sums of money for the work of the Documentation Centre and gave him his first computer. His son visited Scheinfeld to instruct Prečan in its use and helped him to introduce desktop publishing. With Ivan Medek, Prečan enjoyed close friendly relations from their first meeting in 1978. They exchanged materials and cooperated in organizing clandestine contacts with Charter 77 activists.

Kavan was a more controversial figure. At first the other exiles worked closely with him and depended on him for shipping materials home. There was, however, perpetual quarrelling with Kavan who ran this vital system on his own

without consulting others as to the contents of each shipment and in what they thought was a careless and dangerous way. For reasons hard to define, Kavan gradually lost their sympathy and earned their mistrust. Prečan cooperated closely with Kavan for several years and offered him the services of his own courier connections through the German Embassy. Their relationship, however, deteriorated into outright hostility. In 1980 Prečan broke off all relations with Kavan.

### *Contacts with the Homeland*

Prečan was in constant communication with people at home. After Havel's release from prison in 1983 Prečan began to exchange frequent letters with him, and they talked often on the telephone. With his close friend, Milan Šimečka, in Bratislava, he spoke every week. He exchanged letters constantly with Jiřina Šiklová, a leading activist at home, about their day-to-day activities. Prečan was also in frequent contact with Ludvík Vaculík and many others. Later he began to communicate with Charter 77 spokespersons, thus becoming, as I once wrote, 'a veritable Chartist' (March 1984). His telephone calls were no doubt monitored by the secret police, but that did not prevent relatively frank yet discreet conversations. The letters used code-words and were usually sent through secret channels. These contacts made Prečan feel almost as though he were at home and gave him an unrivalled source of information. His own broadcasts over Radio Free Europe (RFE) and VOA provided the people at home with news and interpretation.<sup>22</sup>

The shipment of Western literature and the return of *samizdat* materials were more difficult. After the catastrophe on the frontier in 1981 the exiles sought other means of shipment. In the course of time Prečan and Šiklová developed a new system of transport through certain foreign diplomats willing to cooperate. With the help of Wolfgang Scheur, a German diplomat in Prague, letters and lighter materials were sent through the German Foreign Office to its Embassy in Prague, through the diplomatic post, a system which became so reliable that it amounted to a regular courier service on certain days of the week. For heavier shipments the Germans used their immunity from customs inspection at the frontier to carry loads of *samizdat* documents in the trunks of their cars and to return laden with Western books and periodicals. For several years Prečan met Scheur almost every month at Vohenstrauß, a small German border town, where they exchanged their precious cargoes.

---

<sup>22</sup> Prečan's voluminous correspondence and taped telephone conversations are available in the Centre archives.

This 'great miracle',<sup>23</sup> as Prečan called it, lasted for three years but was interrupted with Scheur's return to Germany. There began a desperate search for a replacement, leading finally to success with Peter Bakewell, a Canadian diplomat.<sup>24</sup> From September 1986, Bakewell resumed the practice of meeting at a German border town. He performed these tasks largely on his own personal responsibility and ran the risk of expulsion in case of detection. This somewhat improper use of the diplomatic system had to be kept a close secret but worked successfully without interruption for several years.

Prečan thus became, as he joked, a postman, like his grandfather under Austria-Hungary, but his grandfather wore a uniform, carried a sword and received a salary! His wife, Helena, was an indispensable helper, preparing letters for mailing and parcels for shipment and acting as hostess for visitors to the Centre from Czechoslovakia and the entire world. She also conceived the idea of regular shipments of clothing for the families of imprisoned persons and others in need at home.

### *The Underground Network at Home*

It is impossible to exaggerate the role played by Jiřina Šiklová for many years as the pivot of the network of relationships between home and abroad. Although she was neither the first nor the only link with the outside, she did become the main one and the longest functioning, according to her own testimony. For more than a decade she sent materials regularly, at least once, sometimes several times, each month. She even sent the occasional message of greetings or birthday card from her prison cell! She was detained for questioning for the first time in 1972, and in 1981 she was jailed for eleven months. On her release she immediately resumed her work as 'a carrier pigeon', as she called it.<sup>25</sup> In late 1969 and early 1970, Šiklová reports, there had been some tenuous links between Petr Pithart (pseudonym George) who had visited England and had met Ivan Hartl and Jan Kavan. At home he began to send out thin materials through tourists who carried them on their own persons and to receive letters by ordinary mail sent to agreed addresses. Jiřina (Kat, or K2, or Kateřina, as she

---

<sup>23</sup> [For Scheur's work, see *Im Dienst der gemeinsamen Sache: Wolfgang Scheur und Prag 1981–1989 = Ve službách společné věci: Wolfgang Scheur a Praha 1981–1989*, edited by Vilém Prečan and Milan Uhde with Ludger Udolph (Brno, 2001).]

<sup>24</sup> [A great part in the establishing of this Canadian contact was played by Professor Markéta Goetz-Stankiewicz of Vancouver, who worked closely with the Czechoslovak Documentation Centre and was a member of its Academic Council.]

<sup>25</sup> The following is based both on a special report prepared by Šiklová and sent to Prečan in 1986 and on an explanatory letter written in November 1996 – neither as yet published. The former included a long list of pseudonyms or code-names. See Jiřina Šiklová, 'Zpráva o části opozičního hnutí v letech 1971–1981 v Praze', in *Ročenka Československého dokumentačního střediska 2004–2007* (Prague, 2008), pp. 279–304.

was called) joined the group in the fall of 1971. Working in the hospital at the Prague district of Krč as a gerontologist, she was often visited there by persons who brought materials to send abroad. She worked closely for some years with Petr Pithart who, however, after he signed the Charter, withdrew from active cooperation. Jiřina's signing of Charter 77 was intentionally kept secret, so that her conspiratorial work would not be endangered. Her apartment was bugged and her telephone confiscated so that all her contacts had to be made on foot or by metro, tram or bus.

At first she and her fellow activists were not accustomed to conspiracy, Jiřina reported, but gradually they recognized the need for covering their tracks. They developed a system of code-names and techniques for receiving and shipping the growing amount of materials coming and going abroad. Meeting places had to be arranged, sometimes outside the Japanese Embassy in the Lesser Town of Prague, or by the bust of Kafka in the Old Town, or in private houses. Jiřina called London, Vienna and Rome from public phone booths, or Kavan sent postcards from London and Vienna with coded references to dates and meeting places. When they met with couriers, code-words or style of dress (Jiřina wore polka-dot blouses) had to be used for identification.

For a year or two after 1977 she was able to use the services of a Swedish cultural attaché, who was given the code-name Vasco da Gama. Later she was helped by people working for the French airlines, who sent in materials on regular flights. Channels were also opened up through certain German diplomats – at first Bedřich Lowenstein, a Czechoslovak citizen, who worked for the German Commercial Mission in Prague, and then other employees of the German Embassy, and finally the more permanent and lasting cooperation with Scheur and Bakewell. Other embassies, such as the American, were not willing to perform such tasks.<sup>26</sup>

Various storage and meeting places (code-named *Vokovice*) had to be arranged where foreign cars could unload their cargoes and load on the outgoing shipments. Sometimes this was done at the St Nicholas Church in the Lesser Town. Or the operation took place at certain private houses or nearby locations. For instance, Bakewell parked his car in a dark street near Jiřina's apartment; Czech cars then came and loaded and unloaded materials. Materials were already divided into bags for delivery to different groups, and these in turn had to be passed on to others.

Before going into exile Prečan had been in close touch with Jiřina for several years, sending and receiving materials through her. Later he became deeply

---

<sup>26</sup> [The Americans explained their reluctance by saying that the Czechoslovak secret service was keeping an extraordinarily close watch on them, and so their help would probably just be counterproductive.]

involved in conspiratorial work, using his own house, under construction, as a *Vokovice*. During a house search in 1975 the police discovered large quantities of exile periodicals, especially *Svědectví*. Prečan was known as František and eventually the term 'to do as František' was used to describe anyone who performed this function. Before he emigrated, he and Jiřina met to discuss details of future collaboration. The two established a coding system to identify persons or places, using a certain book and citing page, line and word by number, which was known only to those two.

### *Conclusion*

In the years since the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe there has been a tendency to neglect or underestimate the role of the independent dissident activities in promoting the democratic revolution. Even where this is recognized the part played by external or transnational factors in contributing to this result has been almost totally ignored. In a recent article the role of transnational factors in political change in Eastern Europe was given special attention, but only in the form of foreign social movements, such as the Western peace movements, which offered moral and other support. Nothing was said of the even more crucial role of the exiles and their organizations in supporting independent activists at home.<sup>27</sup>

There is no doubt, of course, that the main stage of opposition to the Communist system was at home in each of the countries, and the main actors were the dissidents and other independent activists. But a crucial part in the movement for change and reform was played by their fellow citizens abroad who encouraged and assisted them. These external actors did not arrogate to themselves the task of pressing their own ideas and programmes of change upon the domestic actors, and were certainly not primarily responsible for the ultimate revolution which took place. But without the transnational support of the exiles the dissident movement would have been much weaker and less successful. Needless to say the exile activities also depended on the activists at home, including the underground organization for distribution, and would have been powerless to affect the course of history without them.

In the case of Czechoslovakia the support of the exiled community and its outstanding persons and organizations has been largely neglected or ignored,<sup>28</sup> and deserves thorough research and study. In this article we could give only a

---

<sup>27</sup> See Patricia Chilton, 'Mechanics of Change: Social Movements, Transnational Coalitions, and the Transformation Processes in Eastern Europe', in Thomas Risse-Kappen (ed.), *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-state Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 189–226.

<sup>28</sup> An exception was Jiří Pelikán in *Charter 77 očima současníků* (Prague, 1997), pp. 112–26. See also my earlier article in 1977 on the international context of Charter 77, reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 315–25.

brief sketch of the Documentation Centre and the international network of support. As Prečan put it, on receiving the Friedrich Bauer award on behalf of the Centre in 1993, the Centre involved many people at home and abroad, the courageous dissidents, the couriers and messengers, many Czechs in exile, and many foreign supporters in Europe and North America. It was 'a great network of solidarity and of material and spiritual aid to the independent intellectual community in Czechoslovakia'.<sup>29</sup>

Other exiles and domestic activists have acknowledged that the Documentation Centre was one of the most important coordinating and directing agencies, and had distinctive features and capacities no one else possessed. A unique feature of the Centre was its role as an archive, collecting and systematically preserving the record of the independent activity of Czechs and Slovaks in their resistance to the attempt of the Communist regime to control and distort intellectual activity. In a personal letter to me (April 1997) Šiklová wrote of the great psychological satisfaction which she and others felt when they learned that materials sent to the Documentation Centre had been received and would be passed on or published or at least safely stored for the future. 'It was a tangible denial of Orwell's memory hole'. This made us feel that what we were doing was worthwhile and encouraged us to continue our work. In the outside world the Centre was a reliable agency through which journalists, scholars and governments were able to secure authentic information and documents on Czechoslovakia. The Centre was thus not a mere administrative agency but a serious scholarly undertaking, not only in its archival work and in its publishing activities, but also in its promotion of scholarship and culture by people at home and abroad. It thus was important in nourishing the spirit of freedom at home and maintaining the continuity of Czechoslovak culture and history.

#### *Epilogue – After the Velvet Revolution*

With the freeing of the homeland the Centre's initial purpose was fulfilled. One of the primary functions of the Documentation Centre, supporting independent intellectual and dissident activity at home, ceased to be necessary. Although some of the other functions continued, the transition to democracy at home took precedence over everything else. It was important to make the Czechoslovak public and the intellectual community aware of the contribution of independent culture and scholarship during the years of Communist rule. There were interviews and programmes on radio and television on the resistance, in exile and at home, and the work of the Documentation Centre. A much longer version, 500 pages, of the volume published on the anniversary of

---

<sup>29</sup> The award was presented at the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts, Munich, October 13, 1993.

Charter 77 in 1987 was published for the first open meeting of Charter signatories in March 1990.<sup>30</sup> Also published were a collection of Havel's essays from 1983 to 1989<sup>31</sup> and a new edition of the Black Book from 1968.<sup>32</sup> In addition help was given to domestic institutions, e. g. supplying libraries with books from the Centre's holdings and photocopies of *samizdat* materials. In cooperation with the National Library, work proceeded on the preparation of a complete bibliography of *samizdat* publications. Exhibits of *samizdat* were arranged, especially the major exhibition, called 'V.Z.D. O. R.' (Resistance/Defiance) at Strahov, Prague, 1992.

The archive in Scheinfeld remained an invaluable repository of the documents of the independent life of Czech and Slovak society and the struggle for human rights and independence and attracted foreign and Czechoslovak scholars seeking to explore and understand this period of Czech and Slovak history. The collections grew steadily in size. Shipments of photocopies to Western libraries continued, including, for the first time, the Library of Congress. It was necessary to inform the outside world of the continuing struggle for democracy at home and the difficulties standing in the way. In this spirit, from 1992 onwards, conferences were held in the Schwarzenberg Castle, bringing together former dissident writers and German and other foreign participants.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile Prečan, early in 1990, was appointed Director of the newly founded Institute of Contemporary History in Prague, and he began the arduous task of running two institutes and commuting between Scheinfeld and Prague. In his dual capacity he assured the close cooperation of the two institutions. The Centre provided the new Institute with assistance in the form of books from its library and from its *samizdat* holdings and some technical equipment.

The original idea was that the archives in Scheinfeld, as a part of the cultural heritage of the Czech and Slovak nations, should be handed over to legitimate Czechoslovak institutions as soon as conditions made it possible. For a time, however, there emerged the idea of a new role for the Centre; it would remain in Scheinfeld as a kind of cultural outpost of Czechoslovakia in Germany and the West as well as a centre for research for Czechoslovak and foreign scholars. At the initial Schwarzenberg conference in 1992 an appeal for funds was issued to make it possible for the Centre to remain in Germany and fulfil these

---

<sup>30</sup> Vilém Prečan, ed., *Charta 77, 1977–1989: Od morální k demokratické revoluci. Dokumentace* (Prague, 1990).

<sup>31</sup> Václav Havel, *Do různých stran*, ed. Vilém Prečan (Scheinfeld, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> Vilém Prečan, ed., *Sedm pražských dnů, 21. –27. srpen 1968: Dokumentace*, with a preface by Josef Macek (1968; Prague, 1990).

<sup>33</sup> [From 1992 to 1999, a total of seven such conferences on single topics were held. They soon came to be called the 'Schwarzenberg Meetings'. The attendance varied from 60 to 130 people. The Schwarzenberg Meetings were partly funded by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.]

functions. The fund-raising campaign did not, however, bear fruit. Meanwhile the final grant from the NED covered the year 1991. With limited funds the Centre continued to carry on some activities in Germany.

As time passed and the possibility of funding the Centre in Germany vanished, Prečan revived the original idea of transferring the centre and its collections back to Bohemia and Moravia.<sup>34</sup> In collaboration with the Patria foundation, the new Foundation of the Czechoslovak Documentary Centre was established in Prague: its leadership included Prečan and Schwarzenberg, and representatives of Patria. In February 1994, an appeal was made to the Ministry of Culture for aid and support for a programme which would focus on the history of the spiritual resistance, opposition movements and civic initiatives at home, and of the Czech and Slovak democratic exile community, and the contribution both made to the return of freedom to Czechoslovakia.<sup>35</sup> With the help of Patria plans were worked out for the transfer of the Centre to a new location and for the renovation of a new headquarters.<sup>36</sup>

In 1997 Prečan drafted a detailed programme of interdisciplinary research for the Centre as a permanent base for scholars who wished to explore its huge documentary archive and study the history of the resistance, at home and abroad, to the Communist system. There is little doubt that such work would be a major contribution to the general understanding of this important but

---

<sup>34</sup> [This was on the agenda of the annual meeting of the Centre, in Prague, on 29 January 1994. It was decided there that the priority would be to ensure, in talks with Czechoslovak institutions (mainly the Ministry of Culture) the prerequisites for transferring the CSDS collections back home and its new task there to be an academic, non-profit organization. The talks at various levels, including the most senior members of government, did not, however, accomplish their aim. Just when it seemed that only some sort of compromise solution could be achieved, – namely, a fusion with some of the interested foreign institutions –, the head of the Prague-based Patriae Foundation came to the CSDS in February 1995 with an offer to help to solve the fundamental problem and prerequisites for the transfer of the collections to the Czech Republic – that is, the provision of a suitable building.]

<sup>35</sup> See Vilém Prečan's memorandum of November 1994, typescript at ČSDS.

<sup>36</sup> [Though the Krušovice project of the Patriae Foundation never became a reality, the Foundation did provide the newly established Foundation of the Czechoslovak Documentation Centre (which was changed, in December 1998, into a non-profit organization) with new offices and storage facilities in the archive of West Prague. Work could begin there in July 1997. The talks initiated by the then general director of the National Museum, Milan Stloukal, led to a solution carried out under the auspices of the Minister of Culture, Pavel Dostál, in 2002, when the Centre moved from the town of Dobřichovice to spaces reserved for the National Museum in a newly remodelled building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the Strahov district of Prague. In June 2002, all the CSDS collections, including all the material, the library, and the equipment that had been moved from Germany to the Czech Republic, in September 2000, were relocated to Dobřichovice. Since 2008, however, the CSDS, now as a non-profit organization, has been located at Oettingen House, in the Lesser Town, Prague. The new location houses the collections, which are now administered by the National Museum. The society in Scheinfeld still exists, with Vilém Prečan as Chairman and Karel Schwarzenberg as Deputy Chairman, and it helps to raise funds for the Prague-based non-profit organization.]

neglected phase of Czechoslovak history and would help Czechs and Slovaks in their search for national identity.