

**FIVE WEEKS  
IN  
CZECHOSLOVAKIA**

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the single clenched fist lifted  
and ready.  
or the open asking hand held  
out and waiting,  
choose  
for we meet by one or the other

Carl Sandburg

**PART I - SUMMARY REPORT**

## INTRODUCTION

This report describes my work and observations as a process consultant during a five-week mission to Czechoslovakia, April 13 May 16, 1992. Process Consulting is the active interaction between consultant and clients, focusing on specific problems or questions in an attempt to evolve a process leading to solutions. In the cases of interactions involving disputes having political antecedents such as those I encountered in Czechoslovakia process consultation can become a form of shock therapy since active intervention of a non-partisan third party can quickly re-focus and re-energize the debate, leading the way to a greater opportunity for compromise and reconciliation. This was my hope and the principal reason for my trip

The trip was sponsored by Peaceworkers, Lafayette, California funded by Peaceworkers and other private donors to provide services to the Psychology Department of Charles University and its outreach program known as the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center, both located in Prague.

My specific mission was to provide process consultation training in conflict resolution, and to act as a facilitator in opening dialogues between individuals and organizations, as determined by Sonia Hermochova, Chairwoman of the Psychology Department, Charles University. In addition, and based on my experience as a management consultant, my work also included

Assessing the present and future needs of the Psychology Department and the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center and to explore further ways Peaceworkers might be of assistance.

Assessing the commonalty of interests and possible relationships between the Psychology Department, the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center and similar organizations in other countries.

Exploring ways the United Nations could apply its peace working services to assist the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center such as the placement of UN volunteers to provide training or services in the field of alternative dispute resolution).

### SERVICES PERFORMED

I presented a series of seminars and workshops sponsored by the Psychology Department on subjects as broad ranging as: collaboration, group processes, cooperation, compromise, brainstorming, organizational development, mediation and problems of the "market economy." I also engaged in direct process consultation sponsored by the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center, working with a variety of groups and organizations, including: The Psychology Department (students and faculty); Prague Municipal Government Training Institute; Confederation of

Environment; National Institute of Public Health; Institute of Management; Environmental Partnership for Eastern Europe; School of Social Work; Ministry of Labor; Ministry of Social Services; Family Social Workers Union; and other various social science and industrial organizations, both governmental and private

From my interactions with this cross section of Czechoslovakian organizations, a pattern of behavior emerged having to do with their misunderstanding of how democracy is practiced in the industrialized world. All of my observations and recommendations derive from this inability to understand certain fundamental behaviors--behaviors I too often take for granted

### OBSERVATIONS

The details of the disputes I listened to and participated in were unimportant compared to the fact that the disputants not agreed on a process of resolving their disputes. I am convinced that every one of the disputes I listened to and participated in could be resolved if the disputants realized some fundamental facts--facts we take too often for granted such as: in a democracy you "win" some and "lose" some; that the disputants have responsibilities to report events honestly; there are more than two options to every issue; that the management of decision making processes, such as brainstorming sessions, can be free form and free from politics

Based on my observations, here is what I believe to be barriers to democracy in Czechoslovakia

## 1. Understanding

There is very little understanding of Freedom and Democracy. Fifty years of repression has been suddenly blown away with powerful repercussions. Very little is understood about the commitment and responsibilities accompanying democratic reforms. Most of those I interacted with had a very naive view of democracy and its responsibilities. The following story personifies this:

A reporter for an important Czechoslovakian paper interviewed an influential woman for a lengthy article, but the printed story bore no resemblance to the interview. When the woman confronted the reporter and demanded to know why his words did not reflect the actual interview in any form or manner, she was told that he had written not what she had said, but what he thought she was thinking. "Anyway," he added, "this is a democracy; now I can write anything I want."

## 2. Compromise

There appears to be no room for compromise when groups disagree, as though they each believe that compromise is ideologically impure democracy. This is probably the reason for so many political parties: instead of building coalitions when they disagree, people split up and go

separate ways. It was possible to coalesce against a regressive government, but once the government dissolved, the collaboration dissolved.

This inability to compromise is most clearly seen in the Psychology Department where personal antagonisms, dating before 1989, bear little resemblance to problems being addressed, and appear to be politically motivated. I picture the department as 35 people in a lifeboat shipwrecked at sea, with some of the people drilling holes while others are frantically trying to plug them.

Hand in hand with the failure to compromise goes a lack of understanding about alternative points of view. For any given issue, there appears to be only two points of view, either YES, NO or RIGHT, LEFT. You either believe in the "market economy" or you are a "communist

### 3. Free Form Solutions

The idea of "brainstorming" multiple options in a free-for-all give and take open environment is a new concept and seldom a part of any problem solving discussion. A special brainstorming session might be set up, but is a formal process with little or no spontaneity. The very simplest rules of brainstorming, such as suspending judgment about correctness or appropriateness, are difficult to communicate. The free flow of ideas is not an integral part of normal discussion. It is too new.

#### 4. Management of Group Processes

Managing or leading a group attempting to focus upon a problem and directing group processes as part of a problem solving strategy is thought of as undemocratic.

While attending a one-and-one-half hour meeting between students and faculty of the Psychology Department called to discuss mutual problems, I observed people talking as though filibustering, attempting to negate any chance of ever coming together. Complaints were not directed at specific problems but were dealing with peripheral issues. There were tedious discussions about whether the students were being aggressive or cooperative and discussions about whether outside professional psychologists who wanted to become associated with the faculty, were having a disruptive influence upon the students

Meanwhile, the specific complaints of the students went unreported. No one asked and no one said what the specific student complaints were. No action was decided upon, no decisions were reached. There appeared to be no requirement to bring this agenda item either to action or conclusion.

I later had the opportunity to lead a meeting between faculty and students. In part because I was a third party to the discussions, with no hidden agenda, and in part because I've led hundreds of similar meetings, I was able to get the parties to agree to find out if the faculty was

indeed interested in understanding and addressing student complaints and problems. If so, a subcommittee of faculty could be created to investigate and report back to the full faculty with their recommendations

The meeting went on to divide student complaints into categories:

Those associated with the normal educational process: class size, curriculum, fees, etc.

Specific complaints between one student and one faculty member which would be addressed directly either with or without third party assistance (ombudsman).

Unspecified complaints about fundamental issues, to be presented at a full faculty meeting.

Complaints generated by outsiders.

With these categories in place and with a method of reporting created, the means now exists to begin to resolve the complaints. Whether or not this can happen depends upon how well the disputants understand that they are part of a flexible process of change

## CONCLUSIONS

I've been told that the direct process management consultation services I provided during my five weeks mission were the only direct management services ever provided to any organization within Czechoslovakia by any outside Western individual or organization. If this is true, and I believe it judging by the reaction, then there is a critical need for more of this.

Sonia Hermochova favors a service mode where short intensive services are provided by knowledgeable hands-on volunteers who do have to give up their own professional and family lives in order to help. This dovetails perfectly with my own ideas.

It very much interests me that the Psychology Department is taking a lead in conflict resolution by establishing the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center. The Department is the appropriate place for the Center to have been born because there is a tremendous psychological problem in Czechoslovakia having to do with trust. I feel that direct process consultation would go a long way to introducing the idea of trust into disputes in a that is both natural and organic.

The current need of the Center is to develop a curriculum that could be used for post-graduate degrees for professionals from a variety of fields. The Center already has a contract with Partners for Democratic Change (Ray Shonholtz, San Francisco) to

develop such a curriculum. Peacemakers could be called upon to fill in details, such as direct process consultation, that are not being addressed by Partners for Democratic Change.

Other work to be done in association with the University includes:

Assisting Sonia Hermochova to evaluate how her Department compares to other psychology departments, particularly those in East Europe and the former Soviet states. I'm not convinced this is important at this time, beyond what they are already doing, because of the different experiences each of the states had under the old system of control. It seems to me that the Department would be better served, given its limited resources, by directing its programs internally, addressing the peculiar problems of Czechoslovakia before looking outward. (On November 24-26, Ms. Hermochova is planning to hold a Conflict Prevention Resolution conference in Prague. She expects about 200 people to attend from Czechoslovakia, Western Europe and the United States and would like Ray Magee of Peaceworkers to give a speech and for me to moderate a panel).

Investigating a computer program to translate English to Czechoslovakian to facilitate the translation of material.

Ms. Hermochova would like me to return twice a year (Fall and Spring) for a month at a time to provide on-line process consultations for the Psychology Department and other groups and

organizations. Ms. Hermochova and I have completed a two page listing of what direct service could be provided as possible outreach services of the Department (Appendix A).

The final task in my mission was to explore ways the UN could adapt, further develop and apply its peacemaking services to assist the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center and other similar organizations, in concert with Peaceworkers. I am not certain that the UN could play the role that I envision as a process consultant. I question that a flexible organizational base could be established within the UN for process consultation, and I am not certain that there is a sufficient pool of experienced volunteers. Volunteers drain energy from the administration of programs and are costly translation services, lodging, educating, etc. On the other hand, I have yet to visit UN agencies. Early in September I plan to meet with a representative of the United Nations Institute for Training and Resource UNITAR to discuss this matter. I will discuss the results of this meeting plus further elaborations of how Peaceworkers can assist in future efforts.

Ms. Hermochova's interest in involving the UN appears to be motivated by the possibility of obtaining UN funding or volunteers from UN Volunteers for the Center

**PART II - BACKGROUND**

## POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT - A Brief Overview

### Political

Czechoslovakian transition from a totalitarian government to democracy has not proved easy. Within Czechoslovakia are three parliaments and heads of governments: the Federal, the Czech and the Slovaks, each with a parliament and a head of government.

The first democratically elected federal parliament has just completed its last session in preparation for the new elections in June 1992. The parliament was unable to agree on a new constitution, so at present the Federation of Czechoslovakian Republics is operating without a constitution.

There is a real possibility that the Slovak Republic will declare independence after the elections. The nationalist movement in Slovakia is gaining ground. It has been very difficult to pass new laws due to the differing points of view and the naivete of understanding the responsibilities of democracy, that was discussed earlier in this report.

In the current elections to be held June 5 and 6, 1992, there are 47 political parties competing against each other. In order for a political party to be represented in the federal parliament, the party must receive 5% of the popular vote. This law has resulted in 20% of the population not being represented

in the federal parliament. The rest have fragmented representation from the myriad parties receiving more than 5% of the vote.

present government was held together by a very loose coalition of centrist parties known as the Civic Forum. This coalition has recently broken up due to differences in policy directions

Many of the laws passed by the federal parliament in the past two years are disliked.

privatization laws, for example, returning property to the original owners is felt to be undemocratic because the only people who have the money to purchase property are those who were leaders or members of the old Communist Regime. Under the old regime only members in good standing could obtain an education or a good paying job, so naturally they are the only people with the financial means to benefit from the privatization laws

Considerable corruption exists within the privatization process. Illegal under the table transfers of funds are common practice. Many bribes have been exposed and the Minister of Privatization has been recently fired from his position. A law forbidding leaders of the old regime from holding government positions for 5 years is ridiculed. Most of them have moved into the private sector and have utilized their connections and contacts to prosper under the new system. The head of the

Ministry of Industrial Production under the old regime, for example, is now President of the Industry Confederation of Czech Republic which is a private association of all the major industrial companies in the country (over 750 industry and company memberships), which actively participates in privatization and tri-party collective bargaining and negotiation with the government and the unions

Since it is impossible to fire the entire government, much of the bureaucracy remains in place.

The Federal Security and Information Services (FBIS) within the Federal Ministry of Interior recently prepared a list of all the journalists who worked in the old regime. It was confidentially given to the parliament, then subsequently leaked and published in the Telegraf. Fearing political repercussions, most Czech publishers fired the journalists accused in the list without any "due process." There is much public discussion over the government's role in exposing former collaborators in private sector.

There is little confidence in the federal government much of its work has been ridiculed. The current election seems to be polarized and will come down to a referendum between the extreme right and the extreme left. The centrist political parties seem to be dramatically losing support. The voter is being severely pulled to extremes

The current state of affairs is well summarized by Vaclav Havel.

"The return of freedom to a place that became morally unhinged has produced something that it clearly had to produce, and therefore something we might have expected. But it has turned out to be far more serious than anyone could have predicted: an enormous and blinding visible explosion of every imaginable human vice. A wide range of questionable or at least ambivalent human tendencies, quietly encouraged over the years and, at the same time, quietly pressed to serve the daily operation of the totalitarian system, has suddenly been liberated, as it were, from its straitjacket and given free rein at last. The authoritarian regime imposed a certain order - if that is the right expression for it - on these vices and in doing so "legitimized" them, in a sense). This order has now been broken down, but a new order that would limit rather than exploit these vices, an order based on a freely accepted responsibility to and for the whole society, has not yet been built, nor could it have been, for such an order takes years to develop and cultivate. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Vaclav Havel, *Paradise Lost*, translated by Paul Wilson, *The New York Review*, April 9, 1992.

## Economic

situation in Czechoslovakia is no worse than some, and better than most of the other states in Eastern Europe. The drop in industrial production or output since the heady days in 1989 of the "Velvet Revolution" is somewhere between 35 and 40 percent. Last year the GNP plummeted by 16 percent or more, due in large part to a halving of exports to the former Soviet Union. So far, many of the worst effects of this underlying deterioration in the economy have been disguised by subsidies but the day of reckoning is not far off.

overall unemployment is about 5% but in some cities in Slovakia it runs as high as 73%. Most of the industrial production of military equipment was placed in the east (Slovakia because the Communist regime felt that the invasion would come from the west. Heavy job losses overall have yet to hit hard in Bohemia while in Slovakia they are significant. Future job losses will be aggravated by the low levels of social security payments available. An unemployed Czechoslovakia worker receives about \$50 a month and will have grave difficulty in making ends meet now that rent and food prices have been freed. The conditions for widespread unrest are in place, and it is my belief that the situation is going to get much worse before it gets better.

Taxes have been lowered to 45% from 55% for both individuals and corporations. It is believed that lowering the taxes will assist in the development of individual initiative; however, high taxes are necessary to support the government and social services that will be required for the transition to a "market economy. Major cuts in education and health services are underway and more severe cuts are anticipated. The country is between a rock and a hard place

The unions of Czechoslovakia are in a quandary. They are faced with falling industrial output, soaring unemployment and worsening living standards, yet are unions without an adversary.

Private sector companies are few but they are usually under capitalized and struggling. Most employment still remains in the hands of the government, although they are trying hard to privatize their state-run industries as fast as possible. To exert trade union pressure on the "employers" would be both pointless and risky since a rash of strikes could push the country into economic and political chaos and endanger the fragile democracy. But the conditions for serious labor unrest are settling into place

### Social

Prague is a beautiful old city that was not destroyed during World War II (only three bombs fell on the city). The population of Prague is about 1.5 million, about 10% of the 15 million in

the Federated Republics of Czechoslovakia (Czech, Slovak, Moravia, Bohemia). The surrounding countryside is beautiful rolling hill farm land leading to the mountains, but everywhere there are major signs of environmental pollution. Tom Atlee, an environmental activist, summarized the state of the country as follows:

"The environment (both natural and human) is in bad shape. One third of the rivers have no fish and two thirds are heavily polluted . . . One third of the trees are dead or dying from acid rain. Hillsides have been clearcut or gouged with mines City air often stinks from low grade coal or chemicals, and buildings and buses are covered with ubiquitous coal dust, so even small towns look dingy. Cityscapes often seem old, dirty, in disrepair. Even Prague has to struggle to be beautiful. Centuries-old buildings and statues, blackened and streaked, are slowly dissolving in a few decades of acid rain . . . There is massive energy waste . . . One expert says the country could reduce its energy consumption by 50% by 2000; the World Bank says 23%.

"In the meantime pollution of air, water, food continue. Pesticides and chemical fertilizers are in heavy use even in private gardens. Few smokestacks have scrubbers . Highly toxic mixtures pour out of factories into rivers

"Social change movements in Czechoslovakia are primarily concerned with environmental issues. There are two reasons for this: the environment is seriously threatened and `nature

protection was more tolerated by the Communists than other forms of activism. Environmentalists managed to evolve grassroots structures, leaders and communications . . . "2

Economic concerns, materialism and greed have taken over the debate on environmental issues. Recently it has become the stated policy of the Civic Democratic Union and the Civic Democratic Alliance (formerly part of the Civic Forum but moving rapidly to the Right), that environmental issues will have to be delayed until after the economic issues have been sorted out. The federal government, it is believed, will take little action on the environmental issues during the next few years.

Luckily, due to the great number of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs in the environmental field, a considerable investment in these issues is being forged by some major U.S. foundations. Susan Cleveland of the Environmental Partnership for Central Europe (a budding Czechoslovakia non-profit NGO, being funded by the German Marshall Fund, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation and other major Western European and Japanese Foundations), has given grants of up to \$5000 to over 129 Czechoslovakian NGOs. It is my clear impression that the environmental education endeavors within Czechoslovakia are considerably further developed than those in the U.S.A.

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<sup>2</sup>Tom Atlee: Notes on Czechoslovakia Grass Roots Activism Findings and Recommendations, May-July 1991.

PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT - CHARLES UNIVERSITY

The Psychology Department of Charles University has 700 students and 35 faculty members. It is one of the largest departments of the University.

Sonia Hermochova was elected Chairperson of the Department approximately two years ago by a vote of the faculty and students. It was the intent to rid the University of the Communist influence. The previous chairman, Jaromir Janousek, continues to be a faculty member and a distinguished scholar and educator in Cognitive Psychology.

The new facilities are located in two places, one called Celetna in the old town in Prague central, the other in Hradcanske near the Castle. There are two classrooms, two old manual typewriters, no computers, no fax and one secretary for the entire department. The faculty has a few small offices shared by five-ten members each. The library is about 20 feet x 20 feet, most of the books are very old with very few up-to-date periodicals.

The budget for the department is minimal. The salaries are \$135/month for each member of the faculty. Salaries have not been raised in over 15 years. Sonia receives an extra \$15/month for her responsibilities as Chairperson. The entire research budget for the Department is \$1,000 per year. Another \$350/year is budgeted to cover all travel expenses to conferences and

meetings, as well as paper, postage, etc. Only in-city telephone calls are allowed, not even to other colleges such as Comenius University, Bratislava. Only one telephone line is available for the entire faculty. There is increasing pressure to reduce faculty and the other expenses as educational funds for the University are being cut severely

Research projects include surveys of people's needs, the psychology of accidents, and one paper on the use of simulators for drivers education. The work of Carl Rogers, Maslow, and even Jung are being studied for the first time. I saw no evidence of any transpersonal psychology being practiced or studied

All tests are given verbally in 15 minute - 30 minute talks with the instructor. There are no written examinations but receive a degree a written thesis is required

The department has three major curriculums:

Clinical - for practicing psychologists doing mostly individual family social service work;

Educational - for teachers of psychology and guidance counseling in secondary schools;

Industrial - mostly concerned with location of lighting, accident prevention, and similar occupational activities. I could find no evidence of organizational development, group facilitation or personnel work

Sonia would like to add a fourth major in conflict prevention and resolution, collective bargaining, and negotiation plus the addition of a post-graduate doctoral program for people in different fields and careers. At present there is no time or funds available for this program

The organization is not departmentalized either between bachelor/masters degrees, in the different fields of study, or by function. Everyone works for Sonia directly.

There are 900 applications by prospective students for 35 openings for the fall term. Everyone, by law, must be personally interviewed and no screening of application or paperwork is allowed. The interviews are from June 15 - July 15 and are all conducted by teams of three faculty members

Under the old regime, only those people were allowed to study whose parents were well connected with the Communist Party. All others, regardless of their intelligence, were not allowed to participate in the educational system beyond the primary years of schooling (the first 9 or 10). This included any specialized technical or artistic training in secondary schools as well.

The faculty is appointed for life so many have taught for over 40 years with very few younger faculty members. The turnover is very small and, due to budget restrictions, if a faculty member retires, he or she cannot be replaced.

CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION CENTER

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promote academic courses on theory and practice of mediating processes in democratic societies and offer research and study opportunities with American universities.

In the past five months, 11 courses have been conducted in Prague. Six faculty members of the Psychology Department attended these training sessions and became trainers. The courses were given to:

Labor Ministry - (three-four courses) to train employers labor unions, and government personnel in tri-party contract agreement, and collective bargaining, negotiation, mediation. These were given by Tom Colosi, a Vice President of the American Arbitration Association in Washington, D.C.

Czech Prime Minister and his staff (one course) and other members of the national assembly in collaborative planning and problem solving skills. This course was given by Charles Wiggins, San Diego, California

Psychologists doing private consultations in family social service organizations and other practicing professionals (two courses). These courses were given by Interaction Associates Inc. of San Francisco/Boston by David Strauss, author of "How to Conduct a Meeting." Primary concerns were group processes and facilitation.

Environmental Institutions both government and private (two courses).

Civic government officials of Prague (one course given by David Strauss).

Secondary School Teachers on the introduction of democratic decision-making skills in school (one course).

Most of these courses taught basic techniques of cooperation, collaboration, communication and group processes; i.e. how groups are organized and managed to effectively focus and work towards an objective, how problems are solved through brainstorming and decisions made. Others concerned negotiation, collective bargaining, mediation skills and the ability to compromise.

budget for the Center in Prague is \$8000/year as follows:

\$2,500	Administration
5,500	Telephone, Fax, Xerox, Secretarial Assistance, Translation, Announcements, etc.
\$8,000	

\$2,500 is paid directly to Sonia Hermochova to administrate the program, schedule the trainings, select faculty to be trained, arrange for training facilities and market the program

The Center provides no direct process consultations mediation, collective bargaining, negotiation or facilitation services directly to any organization, i.e. only classroom training programs are conducted

A number of problems with the trainings were expressed:

The trainers come for three days then leave the country. There are no follow-up discussions or feedback on the trainings

No consideration is given to the specific cultural aspects of Czechoslovakia. When they have been requested to give consideration to specific cultural aspects of Czechoslovakia they seem to feel they are unimportant.

The trainers seem to have no interest in the real specific problems of the country. The trainers believe the skills required are common across borders.

(d Many faculty members believe that with a few three-day training programs, the trainers are not capable of going out on their own and conducting trainings without making many mistakes and thus giving the program a bad name.

(e The Management Institute, Czech Union of Industries and others have told me they are disillusioned by the results of many of the training programs due to their short duration and lack of follow-up.

The direct process consultation services I have provided during my five weeks here have been the only direct services ever provided to any organization within Czechoslovakia by any outside Western individual or organization. This has been confirmed by many people and organizations in Czechoslovakia.

Classroom training is only part of the learning process. Learning through participation in real-life situations is, I believe, more permanent in that it includes not only the head but the heart and body.

I hear and I forget,

I see and I remember,

I do and I understand."

Anonymous

During my process consultations and conflict resolution considerable training occurred, not only for the clients but for the observers. Process consultation and conflict resolution focuses on joint diagnosis, brainstorming, problem solving and decision making. The training occurs in the passing on to the client and the observers the consultant's skills so that they have learned the skills necessary to solve new problems as they arise.