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From class-society to a democracy in permanence. Petr Uhl's *"Program of social self-management"**

The paper deals with the normative democratic theory of the Czech dissident Petr Uhl (born in 1941), a revolutionary Marxist and Trotskyite. It describes the ambitions and analyses the problems of his main political work "*Program of Society's Self-Organization*" written in the late 1970s. In this work Uhl attempted to describe, interpret, and criticize the existing political system in Czechoslovakia but also in the Western world and designed a normative democratic theory. The article also discusses the question of who influenced his thinking and answers two further questions: How was his "Program" perceived? and Did Uhl change his political point of view in the years following the publication of his program?

Key words: Petr Uhl; normalization; Czechoslovakia; Czechoslovak dissent; democracy; democratic theory; soviet system; Trotskyism; Marxism; history of political ideas; political philosophy; Eastern Europe; Western Europe; New Left

Political theories are usually built around three classical operations. First, statements about political facts, i.e., about what really is. Second, statements about causal relations, combined with predictions about what will be. Third, conclusions about desirable developments and reflections about what should be (Beyme, 2007: 11). These three operations can also be found in the political thinking of the Czech dissident movement in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the late 1970s, "at the height of the hardening of the Czechoslovak communist regime following the Soviet military invasion after the Prague Spring" (Gümplová, 2014: 401) the mechanical engineer *Petr Uhl* wrote the "*Program of Society's self-organisation*", issued in samizdat in 1979 and published first in French (Uhl, 1980), then in German (Uhl, 1981), and finally in Czech (Uhl, 1982).[1] In this work, Uhl initially seeks to analyse the society, the economic and political system and the cultural development under the Czechoslovak normalization regime from a Trotskyist and Marxist position. Further, he takes a closer look at the political systems in the Western

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[1] It is necessary to point out that Uhl wrote this book in conjuction with Jaroslav Suk and in cooperation with prominent Czech dissidents including Václav Havel. But it is almost impossible to detect to what extent they cooperated (Suk 1981). In the first part of his essay *"Alternative society as revolutionary avant-garde"*, written and published in 1979, Uhl (1979) outlined his main thoughts later published in his book.

liberal democracies and briefly touches on the future prospects of the normalisation regime in Czechoslovakia, suggesting what is to be done in the future to create a better society. Finally, influenced by Marxist, Jacobinical and the New Left's views, he outlines the concept of new political order, a permanent democracy, as an answer to the challenges of his time. He searches for a political alternative or a third way between the hitherto Czechoslovak political system and the Western liberal democracies, for in his views neither of them is acceptable to the East. Here, one can see the reason why of the two systems, Uhl more harshly criticizes the latter than the political system he lives in; the critique of the Czechoslovak political system is taken for granted.

Petr Uhl, "the most active and intellectually influential extreme left-wing, radical democratic theoretician of the Czech dissident movement" (Kopeček, 2002: 3) was born on 8 October 1941 in Prague. It was his combination of Marxist, Trotskyist and also anarchist ideas that "put him well to the left of the Communists in the political spectrum" (Bolton, 2012: 58, 120). In the late 1960s, he was a leading member of the Movement of Revolutionary Youth (Hnutí revoluční mladeže) (Pažout, 2001). This radical socialist group was inspired by extreme left-wing ideas such as Anarchism, Che Guevaraism, Maoism and Trotskyism as well as by the Western New Left Movement and the May 1968 events in France. From 1984 to 1992, Uhl was a member of the Fourth International composed of the followers of Leon Trotsky. These are some of the reasons why Uhl is often perceived as a Trotskyist (Skilling, 1989: 124; Skilling, 1981: 168; Bolton, 2012: 58; Pečinka 1999: 22), even though he describes himself as a revolutionary Marxist (Uhl, 1998: 3, 6; Uhl, 2013: 109 – 125).[2] In the 1960s, he was in contact with the French and German radical student movement, with the Socialist German Student Union (Sozialistischer deutscher Studentenverband) and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a French-German student leader of the unrest of May 1968 in France.[3] In the late 1970s, Petr Uhl got involved in the Charta 77 movement and also in the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Persecuted (Výbor na obranu nespravedlivě stíhaných) and was very critical of the Movement for Civic Freedom (Hnutí za občanskou svobodu) founded in 1988. Uhl was also a representative of the radical left-wing group The Left Alternative (Levá alternativa), founded in spring 1989. In the 1970s and 1980s, Uhl served a long prison term on political charges.

After the Velvet revolution in November 1989, he was a member of the Civic Forum (Občanské forum) and later of the Civic Movement (Občanské hnutí). From 1990 to 1992 he was a member of the Federal Assembly. At that time, he also served as the Director and later editor of the ČTK (Czech News Agency). Between 1999 and 2001, he served as the Czech plenipotentiary for human rights and from 2002 to 2007 he was a member of the Green Party. While never a member of the Communist Party, Uhl has always been an active, energetic and controversial publicist.

The paper's objective is not to prove if Uhl's "Program" presents a complete political theory. The aforementioned three operations of political theories are taken as guidelines for the description and analysis of his still-widely-unknown political ideas. Nor does it intend to extensively describe and examine every detail of Uhl's "*Program*". The paper deals solely with its political

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[2]   Uhl (1995) also wrote the epilogue to the 1995 Czech edition of Trotsky's "The revolution betrayed".

[3]   In the 1960's Uhl repeatedly visited Western Berlin and Western Germany, where he established contacts with the mentioned Student Union (Pažout, 2008: 217 – 219). Uhl first got in touch with the French radical students while hitchhiking to Paris in 1965 (Bolton, 2012: 58). He met Daniel Cohn-Bendit in person in 1968. To Uhl, Cohn-Bendit was "a prominent representative of the non-Stalinist, initially non-Marxist Left", who had influenced his thinking (Uhl, 2016). Yet, one can find no references to Cohn-Bendit in his writings.

aspects, aiming to describe the author's ideas and offers a critical review of his critique and his aims. It focuses on Uhl's critique of communism and liberal democracies of the 1970s and 1980s, describes the main attributes of these systems, their similarities and differences and Uhl's objections to them. Second, the paper deals with the political outline of his program, the type of democratic society he strove for and discusses the types of institutions Uhl wished to establish or abolish. Third, the paper is aimed at the analysis of his understanding of the election process, division of power, participation, political parties, parliamentarianism and democracy, which, taken together, could be characterised as a participative democracy and a Soviet system. The article also attempts to answer the question of who influenced his political thinking. Last but not least, it aims to answer two further questions. First, how was his "Program" perceived? Second, did Uhl change his political views in the years following the publication of his program?

1. The state of affairs and its critique

Petr Uhl wrote his "Program" when two political systems stood against each other in the world politics: liberal-democratic capitalist systems in Western Europe and Northern America and Soviet-controlled communist systems in Eastern Europe. Uhl first described, analysed and criticized the political, economic and cultural systems of either camp. He aimed to prove that both the Western and the Eastern political and economic systems were defective and unsuited to the current situation of the time.

Uhl labelled the economic system of the West "a capitalist society" and its political system "a liberal bourgeois democracy" (Uhl, 1982: 82). By the same token, he termed the economic system existing in Czechoslovakia "bureaucratic centralism" and its political system "bureaucratic dictatorship". In his opinion, the latter system arose out of revolutionary denial of the capitalist production process and of the bourgeois political system. However, the social revolution was distorted from its very beginning by Stalinism (Uhl, 1979: 188-189). Thus, within the interpretation of Leon Trotsky, Uhl views the normalization regime as a Stalinist bureaucratic dictatorship (Trotsky, 1936).

As stated by Uhl, these two main political systems differed from each in a number of ways; the main differences were to be found in the functioning of the economic system, mostly with regard to the question of who controls the means of production: In the capitalist systems, it was the bourgeoisie. In Czechoslovakia, by contrast, following the nationalisation of the means of production, it was the state, or more precisely, the state-bureaucracy, which owned the latter (Uhl, 1982: 31). Alongside the differences, Uhl recognized some common features shared by the two systems. In either of them, the owner of the means of production ruled politically. In this respect the political and economic powers were intertwined. As a result, the exploitation relationship in Czechoslovakia was almost identical to that in the West (Skilling, 1989: 147).

Uhl also identifies a number of other common features in the economic sphere and in the working process such as superiority and subordination, alienation of the workers, mechanisms of humiliation, authoritarianism, and paternalism (Uhl, 1982: 30 – 32; Uhl, 1979: 188). The most prominent attribute of both liberal democracy and bureaucratic dictatorship is the dichotomy between two social classes. However, while the main class antagonism in the West is represented by the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the working class, the main class antagonism in Czechoslovakia was that between the ruling bureaucratic centre and the workers.

In the latter, the existence of social classes evidently contradicts the official vision of a classless society. It is necessary to mention that to Uhl, neither of the social systems was a homogeneous block, but each was to a great extent divided into a number of subgroups (Uhl, 1982: 21; Uhl, 1979: 188).

According to Uhl (1982: 21), workers were oppressed both in Czechoslovakia and in Western democracies. In his home country, the local bureaucracy had a leading position in all spheres of society, including the production process. The role of bureaucracy was to decide, to supervise and to control. Yet, as Uhl (1982: 19) pointed out, since bureaucracy did not act publicly, it was neither controllable nor steerable. Inspired by Leon Trotsky's critique of the Stalinist regime and also by Jacek Kuroń's and Karol Modzelewski's (1964) "Open letter to the Party" (Uhl 1982: 21 – 22), he described the Czechoslovak bureaucracy as a powerful social class oppressing all other classes. Consistent with this, the main distinction between these two classes is the presence or absence of the right to participate in political decision-making, which is contingent on membership in the party and in the bureaucracy and/or the ownership of capital in terms of means of production. So, in the bureaucratic dictatorship, and in the liberal democracy, too, the working class is excluded from the decision-making process, despite accounting for more than fifty percent of the employable population (Uhl, 1982: 21).

In theoretical terms, Uhl described both systems from the Marxist perspective as dualistic elitist models characterised by superiority and subordination, where political autonomy of the citizens, especially of the working class majority, is restricted and where the state is an instrument of the ruling propertied class. Economic constitution dominates all the other spheres of society. Accordingly, politics only follow antagonistic interests of the two classes with laws tailored to serve the interests of the ruling class (Uhl, 1982: 151). Likewise, the standing army, the police and political organizations are all the instruments of the state power. Apparently with Max Weber in mind, Uhl pointed out that politics are understood primarily as a vocation and as a battle for power (Uhl, 1982: 9, 18). Yet, compared to Western democracies with its political pluralism, the group of people struggling for power in the bureaucratic dictatorship is limited in size. To Uhl, the ruling class in either of the systems aims to conserve and preserve the economic and political Status quo (Uhl, 1982: 151). From this point of view, both systems can be termed conservative regimes.

To illustrate the political similarity between bureaucratic dictatorship and Western democracy, Uhl worked with some interesting contradictions. On the one hand, he was aware that democratic institutions in Czechoslovakia were under dictatorial rule. On the other hand, however, he claimed that liberal democracies were not really democratic. Yet even if there were some democratic institutions in Czechoslovakia such as elections, national patriotic fronts, parties, labour unions or a nationwide assembly, appearances were deceptive (Uhl, 1982: 109). In Uhl's words, these were transmission belts of bureaucratic power. For instance, elected deputies, tied by the regulations of the bureaucratic regime and the Communist Party, had to comply with their directives. Once the elections were over, voters lost all their influence.

This description is to be viewed in the context of Uhl's definition of the Czechoslovak state as totalitarian and centralist. In his understanding, the state wanted to enforce uniformity in thinking, behaviour and lifestyles (Uhl, 1982: 28). There was no chance to live an autonomous life (Uhl, 1982: 82). As a result, there were no independent media, political organisations or social groups. Contrary to the West, workers in Czechoslovakia did not even have the right to form associations. Thus, the working class had fewer political rights than their counterparts in the West.

Political opposition and democratic discussion were restricted or even outlawed (Uhl, 1982: 109). Instead, the state bureaucracy, hand in hand with the Communist Party, controlled the entire society in a dictatorial power position (Uhl, 1982: 82, 29), while the parliament in Czechoslovakia was only a submissive instrument of the totalitarian power. Its unique function was to express the (alleged) unity of sentiment between the deputies and the people (Uhl, 1982: 102). In reality, however, the electorate, forced to vote for the candidates approved by the bureaucracy, had few positive feelings for the state. Uhl claimed that the Czechoslovak totalitarian regime was built on the Soviet Union model loyal to "conservative neo-Stalinism" (Skilling, 1989: 147). Totalitarianism and centralism were distinctive features of the ruling regime in Czechoslovakia and even though, according to Uhl (1982: 28 – 29), these two attributes were also encountered outside the Soviet bloc, the latter brought them to perfection.

While organized democratically, Western world was not really a democracy. Uhl padded his claims with typical New Left's arguments, formulated, among others, by Gabriel and Daniel Cohn-Bendit (1968: 103 – 112).[4] First of all, as mentioned above, it is the property-owning class which disposes of the state, not the people. Second, democratic principles of decision-making are restricted exclusively to the political sphere while capitalistically organized economy and the cultural sphere are dominated by authoritarian structures. In Marxist terms, restriction of democracy to the political sphere appears to be an effective form of the bourgeois class rule (Schuon, 1986: 99; Teodori, 1970: 36 – 37). To Uhl, this kind of democracy theoretically allows progressive changes; in practice, however, such changes are unrealistic. Thus, this purely politically organized democracy appears meaningless (Meyer, 2009: 56). Third*,* bourgeois-liberal democracy is only a representative, and, to some extent, an outdated, form of democracy. After unmasking the Western democracies as class-ruled, undemocratic states, Uhl took a look at the political institutions such as parliament and political parties, separation of power, opportunities for political participation and political pluralism.

To Uhl, the presence of a parliament has a dual meaning. First – empiric, where its existence is characteristic of an indirect – representative – democracy. Second – normative, where the parliament ensures the conservation of the existing class division in a given society. In a Marxist sense, the parliament is a typical instrument and a very effective form of the bourgeois class rule (Bermbach, 1991: 53). Based on this assumption, Uhl examined its features and functioning. Initially, he condemned the free mandate of the deputies, typical of representative democracies, which entails, like in their Czechoslovak counterparts, loss of connection with their voters or of responsibility (accountability) towards them. Uhl viewed this as betrayal of democratic principles. In addition, he recognized another, even more essential problem. The deputies are closely tied to the party and its leaders (Uhl, 1982: 110). This again has two effects. First, members of parliament are, as in Czechoslovakia, controlled by the party leaders. Here he obviously admitted representation from a cognitive point of view: the interests of the deputies and their voters are

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[4]   In their "propaganda pamphlet" (Cohn-Bendit, 1968: 13) "Obsolete communism: The left wing alternative", Gabriel and Daniel Cohn-Bendit (1968) mainly dealt with contemporary problems of the French student movement in 1968 and with the question of how to organise a revolution. In addition to this, they briefly outlined some of the general problems facing French society in the late 1960s (Bohn-Bendit, 1968: 103 – 112). They combined a left-wing critique of Stalinism, the French Communist Party and the trade union establishment with an analysis of the events of May 1968. These events are interpreted "in the light of the author's 'Leftist' conviction' (Cohn-Bendit, 1968: 17). Naturally, they did not discuss the problems or the state of East European societies.

not identical (Weber, 2012: 231). In this sense, the parliament serves as a mouthpiece of the party leaders or the bourgeoisie, but does not express the interests of the general public. Second, the parliament is composed of parties. In Uhl's opinion, the representative mandate and the ties between the deputy and the party leader result in virtual incapacitation of the voters. Non-identity between those who rule and those who are ruled leads to the alienation of the (ruled) majority from politics.

Moreover, Uhl (1982: 102) pointed out that parliamentary elections remain a burlesque. Due to the representative mandate and the interconnection between the deputy and the party, elections, which take place only once in a few years, are a sheer illusion of political participation. Furthermore, evidently following Rousseau's argumentation, the voter is only free in the election act and has no power to influence the subsequent events. Due to the free mandate, the once elected deputy cannot be withdrawn by the electorate.

Alongside illiberal parliamentary critique, Uhl offers critique of the party system, probably under the influence of Johannes Agnoli (1968). First, he believes that parties express the political and economic interests of social classes (Uhl, 1982: 108). From a theoretical perspective, parties aggregate and articulate the interests of social classes. As stated, Uhl criticised interconnection between deputies and parties, particularly party leaders, typical of modern parliaments, which leads to the weakening of ties between the deputies and their voters. While in parliament, deputies cannot act as individuals or, and this is even more important, on behalf of their voters, to whom they are no longer accountable, despite their representative mandate. In this context, Uhl also points out that parties are not controlled by the general public. Instead, they seem to be states within a state. Uhl's party critique also pertains to his criticism of political pluralism. In his words, political pluralism is associated exclusively with political parties. Thus, Western pluralism to him implies the acting of, and within, political parties only (Uhl, 1982: 110 – 111). To be exact, there seems to be no chance to express one's own political beliefs or act politically beyond the membership in a political party or participation in the election act. In this context, pluralism means mediation of particular interests. This, however, contradicts Uhl's critique according to which politics and policy only reflect the interests of the ruling bourgeoisie (Scheuch 1968: 110 – 111). Finally, Uhl severely criticizes the separation of powers. In his view, separation of powers means division of labour between the legislative, the executive and the judiciary branches. More specifically, division of powers means that the legislature has no influence on the executive branch (Uhl, 1982: 102). This subsequently provokes political and social autonomisation of the executive power, because it counterfeits the interests of the voting public (Bermbach, 1991: 66). To Uhl, this leads to alienation between the legislative and the executive branches and also between people and political decisions (Uhl, 1982: 117).

To conclude, Uhl criticises „real socialism", which is not in line with the Marxist theory. On the other hand, he condemns liberal mass democracy of the West, which is not a real democracy but rather an indirect, representative form of democracy. He claims that, in a Marxist sense, this kind of democracy disguises the real structure of power in the bourgeois class society, which prevents it from forming a fundamental, real opposition.

Uhl's idea of political alienation is reminiscent of Karl Marx's (1844) first type of alienation, that of the worker from the product of its labour. In the West, every few years the voter, as an element in the political process, has the right to vote for a deputy. Because of the representative mandate following the election act, the voter has no possibility to influence the deputy elected by him. Despite the representative mandate, he is not independent in his action or decisions in

a classical liberal sense but is rather subjected to restrictions by the party-leader. Thus, the voter is alienated from the product of his election, losing direct contact with his own political decisions. It is worth noting that political alienation is exacerbated by the division of powers, mainly by the separation of legislative and executive branches. The legislative power cannot execute its own decisions, i.e., laws. This implies that the legislative power in general and the deputy in particular are alienated from the product of their labour. The legislature has to give up the product of its labour (the laws) to the executive, which executes them. Hence, the voter is politically alienated in two respects. First, he has no leverage on the deputy elected by him. Second, the deputy as part of the legislative power cannot influence the behaviour of the executive, which implements the laws.

Critical remarks

By analysing Uhl's political thinking one should not overlook that his "Program" was a political program, rather than a specialised scientific study. Still, it deserves critical analysis. As pointed out, while Uhl did not glorify Western democracies, his book demonstrates a lack of knowledge of their diverse forms. On closer examination, Uhl's illiberal critique of Western liberal democracy reveals a number of flaws, one of them being that he lumped all Western democratic systems together, without distinguishing between the presidential and the parliamentary forms of (representative) democracy, common to the West. This is curious, given that he has repeatedly visited France and West Germany, which exemplify different forms of (representative) democracy.

When criticising the separation of powers, Uhl had an ideal type of strict separation of powers in mind, which in reality hardly exists. His critique would be most appropriate to the political system in the USA, which is presidential, characterized by a more or less complete separation of powers, with the existing system of checks and balances between them. The central principle in a presidential system is that the legislative and the executive branches of government are separated from each other. In this system of democratic governance, the executive and the legislature derive their legitimacy directly from the electorate, which consequently elects both the parliament and the president. The president is the head of the state and also the head of the government, directing the executive, which is separate from the legislature. The president is elected to office for a fixed term. S/he is not accountable to the legislature and cannot, apart from extreme cases, be dismissed by it. Additionally, the president does not need to choose cabinet members commanding the support of the legislature. On the other hand, s/he cannot dissolve the parliament. The legislature is constituted for a set term of office, and cannot be dissolved ahead of schedule. From this it follows that the executive and the legislative branches are separated from each other. To reiterate, Uhl's critique of the separation of powers is a critique of the presidential system.

By contrast, a system of responsible government is a system of democratic governance in which the executive and the legislative branches are interconnected. The executive derives its democratic legitimacy from, and is also held accountable to, the legislature, i.e. the parliament. In parliamentarianism, the executive is led by a council of ministers, headed by a Prime Minister, who is directly accountable to the legislature. Quite often, he or she has a background in the legislature as well. For this reason, such system is referred to as "responsible Government". This type of government leads "to a fusion of powers in the hands of the cabinet". The best definition

of a responsible government is that of "a regime in which legislative and executive powers are fused together in a cabinet that is accountable to an assembly of the people's elected representatives". This means that a responsible government makes the parliament "the ultimate authority for both legislative and executive action" (Malcomson/Myers, 2009: 42). Thus, Uhl's critique of the separation of powers does not apply to the system of responsible government.

On the other hand, when Uhl criticises the interconnection between the deputy and the party, his objection is aimed at the system of responsible government. Here, political parties doubtlessly play an important role, being a crucial factor in the process of ruling. The voter first and foremost votes for a political party and the candidates reach the parliament as party representatives. This means that legitimation of the deputy is only indirect, which, as already stated, is what Uhl criticised. The head of the government depends on the parliamentary majority of his own party, which supports them. In Uhl's words, political parties not only have a significant influence on the entire society; they *rule* society (based on a certain ideology).

By contrast, in the presidential system, due to the logic of the system itself, political parties only play a secondary role. Their part is limited to the process of candidate nomination for the parliament and for the presidency. They do not participate in the decision-making process between the elections, and their influence on the presidential policy and administration is very small. Members of the parliament are in close contact with the constituency. Contrariwise, their obligation to the party is marginal. In other words, they are more loyal to their voters than to the party agenda and strategy. Subsequently, the deputy is more concerned with particular interests of the electoral district than in the system of responsible government, which Uhl would approve of. In such a system, the president cannot command the majority in the parliament, even within his own party. Moreover, the person of the candidate is more important than their party membership (Meyer, 2009: 90 – 91). To sum up, when criticising the separation of powers, Uhl has the presidential system in mind. When criticising the power of political parties, he refers to the system of responsible government.

2. Permanent democracy

Uhl was anxious to resolve the problems and deficiencies of the existing political systems, the bureaucratic dictatorship and Western liberal democracy. Instead of the non-democratic bureaucratic dictatorship and purely political liberal democracy, in his "*Program*" Uhl called for direct democracy, self-determination, self-administration, and self-governance in all spheres of the social system (Uhl, 1982: 113 – 123). Yet how was this to be accomplished, given that the bureaucratic dictatorship had been consolidated, and obstructed all efforts to build an emancipated society in social, political, cultural and economic terms? To Uhl, an anti-bureaucratic, but primarily political, *revolution*, "driven by a united movement of workers, students and employees" would provoke reforms and improvements (Uhl, 1979: 189; Uhl, 1982: 76, 84 – 85).

As a consequence of this revolution, a society would arise where all humans live in dignity. In contrast to the hitherto bureaucratic system, everyone, but first and foremost workers, would have the right to express their thoughts and beliefs. To Uhl, the new society is a society with clearly defined individual and collective rights that liberate the man from fear and misery. What he had in mind primarily was freedom of speech, which enabled one to express their own Weltanschauung. Furthermore, he demanded freedom of the press (Uhl, 1982: 164), freedom of as-

sembly, academic and artistic freedom, i.e. freedom of expression in the arts and entertainment, freedom of movement and the right of abode. Allowing for the benefits for particular classes, he stressed the importance of political equality of all citizens. Politics should be part of everyone's life and everyone should have the right to act politically. Finally, Uhl (1982: 115) also called for minority rights. In addition to the liberal rights, typical of Western democratic societies, he also demanded social rights: the right to alimentation, education, work and fair wages, to social security, to health, and to cultural self-realization (Uhl, 1982: 9 – 10). Civil and social rights should not be separated from each other; for Uhl, they are equal in significance. Both have to be implemented simultaneously. In this manner, he wanted to prevent social and political exclusion and coevally materialise social and political equality.

His new society had more attributes than the liberal or social rights mentioned above. What was essential was that all political actions and all political life were to be under public control (Uhl, 1982: 114). This demand apparently came in response to the criticised secret political doings of the bureaucratic centre in Czechoslovakia. Based on the inhomogeneity of the working class in particular and society in general, Uhl assumed the existence of different political organisations and factions. Autonomous individuals were to have the right to build associations such as political parties and labour unions (Uhl, 1982: 168 – 169). This demand is to be viewed firstly as a reaction to the experience of totalitarianism and centralism in Czechoslovakia, which did not allow the formation of associations unattached to the state. To Uhl, parties would not be static or unchanging in a classical sense. Rather, people would organize themselves around particular problems or opinions on social questions. In keeping with this, parties ought to turn into forums, where people would have the chance to discuss problems in public: "political parties, which would function more as political clubs or movements, would present proposals but would not actually run society, as they do in the bourgeois democratic system" (Uhl, 1979: 191; Uhl, 1982: 112).[5] This suggestion is closely related to the liberal rights he demanded, such as freedom of assembly. Here, it is important to point out Uhl's conviction that democratic freedom can only be guaranteed if multiple independent groups control each other. These associations should give the individual a real chance to make political decisions. Along with this, he called for political pluralism. Unlike in Western democracy, his concept of pluralism is not exclusively tied to political parties, which he criticized for their ambition to rule society. Pluralism to Uhl (1982: 110) implies the possibility to express one's personal (political) beliefs in public, independent of political organizations.

One of the most important principles of Uhl's new society is that the right to decide about a given problem is to be exercised by those directly concerned (Uhl: 1982: 114, 117 – 118). Based on this, Uhl (1982: 120 – 121) distinguished two levels of decision making: a working level and non-working level. On the working level, only workers should have the right to participate in making decisions about their own problems. For instance, production issues should only be decided by the producers. On the non-working level, all citizens should have the right to participate, to decide, and to manage their specific problems and issues. Here, at least one point of criticism can be levelled against Uhl's suggestion. For instance, decisions in the production process affect those who are not directly involved in this process, such as noise levels or environmental damage. Similarly, a decision on the blocking of a road for public traffic does not only affect

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[5]   These notions are obviously influenced by Václav Havel (1978: 93)

those living nearby. Traffic will be redirected elsewhere, which in turn will affect those living next to this road (Möllers, 2008: 67).

Further, Uhl distinguished two decision-making levels. First, direct decisions on factual issues at grass roots level, such as referendums or plebiscites. They are an institutional alternative to the criticized indirect liberal-parliamentary democracy. The right to participate should be vested in those concerned with the problem. Direct decisions should be made in a specific factory or commune or in a specific industry or in the entire society (Uhl, 1982: 121). The second decision-making level is constituted by personal decisions in specific elections to self-governing bodies. Yet, instead of a classical representative system typical of Western democracies, he wanted to establish a structure emulating the Soviet system. As a reaction to the centralized Czechoslovak society, Uhl aimed to build a political decentralized society with many political centres as close to the basis as possible.

Self-governing bodies were to be established at three levels, at the base, at an intermediate level and at a society-wide level, with each of the levels further subdivided into two sub-levels: the working level and the non-working level. At the base level, all workers of a particular factory and all citizens of a particular community, district or village would have the right to elect deputies to plenary assemblies in that particular factory or community (Uhl, 1982: 121, 118; Weber 2012: 242). At the society-wide level, Uhl suggested a council of all workers as a representative body of all workers, and a second chamber for non-workers as a representative body or council of all citizens. Between these two main levels, Uhl wanted to establish an intermediate level, where some of the base-level councils such as food industry or some neighbouring communes would form associations. These intermediate levels would either have full authority or would play a coordinating role. Fearing the emergence of a powerful bureaucracy, he proposed to restrict the number of these intermediate-level councils (Uhl, 1982: 121 – 122).[6] The most important level in his project of building a decentralized and self-governed society is undeniably the base level, as it is best acquainted with the problems and needs of both working and non-working people. What is more, the existence of these three levels should guarantee the broadest possible participation of workers and society at large (Uhl, 1982: 100, 157). Self-governed democracy in this context means decentralization of administration and strengthening of local political entities, combined with the reduction of bureaucracy.

The term self-administration was very common in the Western democracy of the 1970s, especially in France, where the so called "deuxieme gauche" frequently used the term "autogestion". However, the concept itself appeared in the 1960s. Theoretically, "autogestion" "was supposed to describe and prescribe a new, anti-bureaucratic form of democracy directed as much against state-socialism in the East as against the traditional Social Democracy in the West" (Müller, 2011: 207).

In conjunction with these remarks, Uhl described the principles and rules of the elections and the rights and responsibilities of the deputies, which, while largely harmonise with the election principles and rules of Western liberal democracies, show significant disparities that bring them closer to the preferred Soviet system. Elections were to take place before the end of the period of office. To guarantee consistency of the decision- making process, only a quarter of the deputies

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[6]   Members of councils with full authority were to be elected directly. Members of councils with a co-ordinating role where to be elected indirectly by members of the base-level councils (Uhl, 1982: 121 – 122).

were to be elected (Uhl, 1982: 115). Uhl (1982: 118) considered secret elections to be the most democratic, with deputies to be elected directly at all levels.[7] He refused the institution of electoral delegates and advocated the rotation of offices and functions as this prevented the accumulation of offices and bureaucratization of the political decision-making process. A term of office was to last from three months to one year, with the vocational adjustment period between one month and three months, depending on the duration of term of office. Besides, the elected deputies would only earn worker wages. As mentioned above, active suffrage depended on whether the candidate was a worker or a non-worker. While workers had the right to vote for the working and non-working councils, non-workers were just allowed to vote for the non-working councils. With regard to passive suffrage, Uhl pointed out that every worker or citizen was to have the right to contest a seat in the council in his factory or commune (Uhl, 1982: 115 – 118). The social composition of all councils was to reflect the social structure of society. Especially the proportion of the working class representatives was to correlate with its percentage in the population (Uhl, 1982: 169). The suggestion of proportional representation seems right only for non-working councils as working councils, being elected solely by workers, did not include non-workers

The fundamental difference to the liberal-democracy is identified in the mandate of the deputy. While in the Western liberal tradition, deputies possess a free mandate, Uhl favours the imperative mandate. Since the free mandate to him means betrayal of democratic principles (Meyer, 2009: 82), leading to political alienation between the electorate and the deputies, secretly and directly elected deputies were to execute the will of the electorate, which had the right to recall the former unless they act in its will. Uhl admits the liberal conscience clause, which states that the deputy is not free to act according to his conscience, but is bound by the will of the electorate (Bermbach 1991: 19). Hailing the imperative mandate, Uhl wanted to improve the relations between the deputy and the voter, which in Western democracies were very loose and therefore dysfunctional. In addition to the difference concerning the mandate of the deputy, one can recognize some more attributes that distinguish Uhl's idea of democracy from Western liberal models. The first dissimilarity is his position on the separation of powers, where he advocates the fusion of the legislature, the executive, and the judicial branch in an attempt to emulate the Soviet system. This is implied by his critique of the separation of powers in Western democracies, which leads to political alienation. To prevent this, everyone was to have the right to participate in the legislative, executive and judicial processes (Uhl, 1982: 118). In other words, Uhl cannot see any difference between the executive and the legislative authority. This is in stark contrast to *Charles de Montesquieu's* doctrine of the separation of powers, which is one of the fundamental principles of modern Western democracies. To Uhl, undivided powers secure the efficiency of the councils and reduce administration and bureaucracy.[8]

The next feature distinguishing Uhl's idea of democracy from the existing Western models is that democratic rules should apply to all spheres of the social system: to the political and economic system, to the system of justice and, last but not least, to culture. Taking into account his objections to the Western liberal democracy as merely a political and therefore limited form of democracy, this demand is legitimate and consistent with his wish to enable broad participation

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[7]   With one exception: if an intermediate-level council had a coordinating role, then indirect mandate would be adequate (Uhl, 1982: 122).

[8]   In the future, ministries, governments, and embassies will be replaced by councils, connecting all branches of power (Uhl, 1982: 122 – 123).

to working people, who had been excluded from the political arena (Uhl, 1982: 100, 157). To Uhl, they should have the right to influence decisions not only in political, but also in economic, social and cultural affairs, i. e. in the "prepolitical" sphere (Bieling, 2009: 394). A last important point is Uhl's desire to disestablish the standing army, the political (i.e. the secret) police in particular and the police in general. In anarchist terms, these institutions are the worst thinkable instruments for preventing antisocial acts (Uhl, 1979: 191; Diefenbacher, 1996: 58).

In summary, Petr Uhl called for the dismantling of the bourgeois state, for participation and an active citizenship, for a permanent grass roots democracy (referendums and plebiscites), decentralization and multiplicity of structures and actions (councils), direct methods of self-government at different state levels, rather than delegated authority and responsibility (parliamentarism), reduction of institutionalised political bureaucracies and of the division of political labour between leaders and those who carry out the leadership's policy. In Uhl's view, the new direct, self-governing and decentralized democracy may yield a number of positive effects. It leads to gradual removal of alienation and to the reduction of hierarchies. It brings about decentralization of administration and thus prevents bureaucratization by limiting but not removing bureaucracy. Finally, the new democratic order would also pave the way for a new morality that differs from the petty bourgeois morality prevailing not only in Western but also in Eastern Europe (Uhl, 1979: 190; Uhl, 1982: 161).

To sum up, Uhl's negative critique of the current Western democracy as a temporary culmination of the history of democracy and his positive program of a new democracy correlates with his general view of the evolution of democracy. Democracy to him is as old as the history of mankind itself. In this sense, it is the most natural form of government. The negative counterpart of democracy is dictatorship. Thus, Uhl distinguishes two main forms of the government: dictatorship and democracy. In his words, over the centuries, democracy has changed its form, from direct democracy in ancient Greece to indirect representative democracy characterized by parliament in the modern era. This evolution of democracy into a class system is consistent with successive stratification of societies into social classes such as workers and bourgeoisie. Yet, according to Uhl, this is a democracy exclusively for the ruling class, for those who own the means of production; it is the rule of the capital. All the other social classes can only participate in less important political decisions (Uhl, 1982: 99). To Uhl, democracy, as a positive counterpart of dictatorship, has two forms, the liberal-bourgeois and the self-governed – permanent – democracy. So, Uhl advocates the transition from representative (parliamentary and presidential) systems to the system of soviets and direct democracy.

Interpretation and perception

To Petr Uhl, democracy mainly means governance *by* the people. In the foreground stands the input, i.e. politics. In contrast, the output or policy is less important. To this effect, Uhl demanded the broadest and most effective participation of the people. All individuals should have the right and possibility to influence political decisions in a given society directly, unmediated by representatives. In addition, he demanded equal participation; everyone was to have the same chance to influence the process of political decision-making. Furthermore, participation was not to be restricted to the political sphere. Summarised, Uhl defines the following forms of participation:

common legislation, execution and implementation as well as common civic work. Political acting to him means taking part in local self-government.

Uhl's normative democratic theory evidently belongs to the family of participative democratic theories. In this respect, he contributes to the well-known dispute "between elitism and participation" (Carter/Stokes 1998: 2 – 3). Uhl combines two models of the participatory democratic theory: the model of democratization of subsystems of the social system and the model of political decentralization (Lindner, 1990: 19 – 24). In the first model, political participation means more than merely taking part in the election act once in a few years, where the voter only has the right and possibility to select and control deputies and political leaders (Weber, 2012: 223), which is typical of the criticized Western liberal democracy. Democratic participation should not be restricted to the political sphere but expanded to the non-political spheres such as commercial enterprises, schools, universities, theatres, which to date are not organized democratically. Uhl wanted to restore/reinstate a (civil) society with self-governed individuals, who have the right to associate, to discuss and to resolve their political problems at all spheres of the social system (Falk, 2003: 324). To this effect, democracy is a process involving the entire society. Uhl asked for a total politicisation of society. It should be noted however that this would lead to the restriction of freedom as everyone is obligated to act politically. The freedom not to take part in political acting is not given and non-political areas do not exist anymore. Uhl also strove for the abolition of separation of polis and oikos, typical of European societies since the antiquity (Böckenförde, 1973: 7). Additionally, he wanted to abrogate the division of labour that modern societies are based on. With regard to political decentralization, one should not omit Uhl's aspirations to build a soviet system, characterized by the imperative mandate of the deputies at three different levels (base, intermediate and society-wide level), the rotation of office, and the refusal of the separation of powers.

Uhl, as mentioned by himself as well, has been influenced by Daniel Cohn-Bendit. Thus it is not surprising that one can find in Uhl's program and thinking some parallels with Cohn-Bendits book "Obsolete Communism. The Left-Wing Alternative" mentioned above. In collaboration with his brother Gabriel, he gave a brief overview of his positive ambitions regarding a new political order. For instance, both strove for horizontal, rather than vertical, social relationships "between equal producers working in harmony" (Cohn-Bendit 1968: 106). Also, both wanted "to ensure that all delegates are accountable to, and subject to immediate recall by, those who have elected them, and to oppose the introduction of specialists and specializations at every step by widening the skill and knowledge of all". Moreover, they strove "to abolish all artificial distinction within labour, in particular, between manual and intellectual work, and discrimination on the grounds of sex". Lastly, they aimed "to ensure that all factories and businesses are run by those who work in them" (Cohn-Bendit, 1968: 254 – 255; see also 103 – 112).[9]

Uhl's positive program shows some interesting links to the Jacobinical idea of the popular assembly "in permanence" (Löwy, 1985: 1002 – 1003). Against this background, it is possible to characterise Uhl's program as a "democracy in permanence". As pointed out, political acting to him means participation in local self-government, which, however, is permanent. This permanence is expressed by frequent council meetings, continuous delegation and control of the elected representatives. All of this seems to be a kind of Jacobinism. Another Jacobinical

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[9]   In his interview with Sartre, Daniel Cohn-Bendit (1968a) explained in greater detail the aims of the French student movement. He mentioned for instance parallel education in technical and ideological subjects and anti-institutional movement.

component is the unlimited will of a classless mass of equal and emancipated citoyens, which is combined with their unceasing mobilisation (Wickel, 1955: 360). In contrast to Uhl, the most prominent and most controversial figure of the French Revolution, Maximilien Robespierre[10] (1793: 149), argued that democracy could comprise both direct and representative elements, which Uhl refused. However, Robespierre held the strings of the deputies very tightly. They were bound by the will of the sovereign, i.e. the people, and thus their independence is questionable (Maier, 1972: 859; Lottes 2002: 91), which Uhl, obviously, approved. He and Robespierre also concurred on the rotation of offices and functions. At the same time, they differed on the separation of powers, which Uhl admitted and Robespierre appreciated.

Above all, with regard to Uhl's desire to abolish permanent standing army and the police, to reduce bureaucracy, his wish to eliminate all economic privileges for deputies, his demand for worker wages, when one considers his demand for the imperative mandate, his aspiration to combine the three powers and the will to replace the authoritarian structure of leadership with forms of workers' participation from below, with cooperation and free self-determination as well as self-administration, one can conclude that he is clearly influenced by Karl Marx's interpretation of the Paris Commune of 1871. Based on this, his program of a permanent democracy can be described as monistic, direct and self-governed (Marx, 1871: 631 – 632; Schmidt, 2010: 154; Uhl, 1982: 105).

Uhl's "Program" gained little attention from the dissident world in East-Central Europe or from the Czechoslovak dissident-movement, or from Western left-wing circles. It was affirmatively discussed by Jean-Yves Touvais (1981) who wrote the introduction to the French edition, translated for the German edition. He, naturally, praised this book as a "unique" and "internationalist" document" only comparable to Kuron and Modzelewski's "Open letter". To him, Uhl's "Program" presents "a socialist alternative" to the Stalinist theory (Touvais, 1981: 12). As such, he does not view this book as theoretical. Apart from these, one can hardly find any other mention of Uhl's book. The aforementioned co-editor of Uhl's "Program", Jaroslav Suk, in his Essay on the Czech radical left expressed his hope that this work would have an impact not only on the radical left (Suk, 1982: 625). The Czech historian Milan Otáhal (2011: 196) mentioned Uhl's program in his book on the Czech opposition in 1970s and 1980s. H. Gordon Skilling (1989: 147) wrote a succinct résumé. After 1989, even Uhl (2013: 385 – 407; 1998: 23 – 83) himself only marginally mentioned his "Program" and his essay "Alternative society". To conclude, one can say that his "Program" was an interesting and remarkable intellectual achievement, even though it seems to be quite insignificant in the history of political ideas.

3. Further development

Until the Velvet Revolution in 1989, Uhl did not change his political attitude. He fiercely defended his ideas formulated in the "Program". One of the finest examples of this is his critical review of the Manifesto of the Movement for Civic Freedom (Hnutí za občanskou svobodu – HOS) called "Democracy for everyone", published on 28 October 1988, which he nevertheless described as "a single consistent political text since 1969" (Uhl, 1988: 69). Founded on 15 October 1988, this independent citizens' grouping became the first genuine political opponent

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[10] It is speculative to connect Uhl with Robespierre, for his writings make no direct references to him.

of the Communist Party. Members of the Movement demanded the establishment of pluralistic democracy and the licensing of small and medium private businesses (HOS, 1988: 25 – 34; Otáhal, 2011: 378 – 406).

Uhl (1988) termed his critical review "Democracy for certain people". He sharply criticized the self-perception of HOS. He asked whether this organisation really was a democratic platform for people to discuss their own (democratic) ideals. He believed that HOS actually "distanced itself from real democracy", as it served exclusively apparently proven solutions. Moreover, HOS members would not allow any criticism or attempt to modify its conceptions (Uhl, 1988: 77). Another point of criticism was that the HOS ignored the political concepts discussed during the Prague Spring in 1968 (Uhl, 1988: 68 – 70). Perhaps the most significant objection was that the authors of the Manifesto did not use the word "socialism".

Against this background, one can identify two main points of criticism, which confirm his late 1970s ideas. First, Uhl (1988: 74) criticised that the authors of this manifest argued in favour of parliamentarianism i.e. of representative democracy. Furthermore, he refused the restitution of capitalist production. In this review, he also confirmed his attitude to political parties. To him, they are a natural phenomenon (Uhl, 1988: 76). Moreover, he remarked: "I do not avow myself a follower of socialism, Marxism, or of the idea of the revolutionary overcoming of the existing social and economic formations in the East or in the so-called Third World out of some doctrinarianism". The basis of his conviction was "cognizance" (Uhl, 1988: 73).

With hindsight, Uhl (2013: 389) pointed out that he had never defended the parliamentary system. On the other hand, according to his own statements, he advocated representative democracy in the 1970s and 1980s, albeit in the sense of governance by the soviets. After 1989, he could no longer enforce his ideas, because "society has already moved elsewhere, did not want it or wanted something else". As a result, he was ready to accept the parliamentary system in the Czech Republic, while striving for a parliament "as democratic as possible, i.e. with as few ties to particular economic, social and others interests as possible" (Uhl, 2013: 398). There are two reasons. First, he considered the parliamentary system as the base on which all could agree. Second, this system had some benefits, e.g. the rights of the ideological minorities (Uhl, 2013: 394). In the post-1989 development, direct democracy was not his major theme. Direct election of the mayor, governor or president of the republic is not a direct democracy to Uhl. In his view, decisions are not as important as a discourse on the problems facing society. The point of democracy lies in the debate preceding the decision. In this respect, he still advocates deliberative democracy. Also he confirms his critical opinions concerning the division of power, which to him is obsolete (Uhl, 2013: 396).

Uhl's critique of the HOS-Manifest "Democracy for everyone" attracted a lively discussion in Czech dissident circles. He faced a harsh critique for his ideological argumentation, which was labelled "ideological staleness" (Konečný, 1989: 202). What was criticized first and foremost was his argumentation against parliamentarianism, his defence of the direct democracy and of the term "socialism" (Hlušiková/Císařovská, 1994; Otáhal, 2011: 389-392).

4. Summary

The article presents an almost neglected topic: the normative democratic theory of the revolutionary Marxist and Trotskyist Czech dissident Petr Uhl (born in 1941). It describes the ambitions and analyses the problems of his main political work "*The Program of Society's Self-*

Organization" written in the late 1970s and published in the early 1980s. According to the three classical operations of political theories (characterization and critique of the current status, future prospects and the target state), Uhl attempted to describe, to interpret, and to criticize the existing political system in Czechoslovakia but also in the West, outlining his democratic theory.

Drawing on liberal democratic tradition, Uhl describes in a Marxist way both systems as dualistic elitist models. Both societies are divided into a ruling minority and an oppressed majority. While the ruling class (the bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie) owns the means of production, the unpropertied working class has only limited possibilities to take part in the political decision-making process, such as (more or less undemocratic) elections and referendums. Uhl's critical examination of the Czechoslovak system, which he called a bureaucratic dictatorship, was influenced by Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski, Leon Trotsky. He mainly condemned the power of the ruling bureaucracy, oppressing the entire society in general and the working class in particular. In addition, he criticized the local pseudo-democratic institutions such as elections, parties, labour unions or nationwide assemblies. To him, these were merely transmission belts of the bureaucratic power. Uhl's illiberal critique of the Western liberal democracy primarily weighed the functions of the parliament, the acting of the political parties and the separation of powers. In his view, the Western liberal type of democracy actually offers limited democracy and to some extent presents its elitist version, which, moreover, is already outdated.

Uhl's answer to both bureaucratic dictatorship in Czechoslovakia and the representative (political) democracy of the West is a self-organized society. His positive program, highly influenced by the Jacobinical idea of the public meeting "in permanence", by Marx's analysis of the Paris Commune, and probably by Gabriel and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, is a normative attempt to design a positive political counter-concept resolving the problems and deficiencies of both political systems. On the one hand, he wanted to prevent bureaucratization and class suppression. He also aimed to eliminate the existing power and exploitation relations. In a Jacobinical sense, he strove for a direct – permanent – democracy, a Soviet system with self-governing bodies at the base, intermediate and state-wide levels, participation and decentralization to the greatest possible extent. Furthermore, he wanted to expand the hitherto exclusively political, i.e., liberal, democracy to all spheres of the social system, especially to economy, but also to schools. This (new) kind of democracy to him was more appropriate for the end of the 20th century. One should note, however, that Uhl's program leads to a total politicization of society, blurs the line between polis and oikos and therefore destructs modern division of labour.

Uhl's positive program of permanent democracy generalises and substantialises the implementation of civil constitution ideals. It can be defined as a participative democratic theory, which combines two of its models: the model of democratization of the subsystems of the social system and the model of political decentralization. His democratic theory combines some achievements of liberal democracy (elections, parties and associations) with more radical (direct) forms of democracy (soviets, imperative mandate, elimination of the separation of powers), rather typical of third-way conceptions. Uhl's critique of the bureaucratic dictatorship in Czechoslovakia and Western liberal-bourgeois democracy, as well as his program, are also typical of the leftist thinkers of the latter half of the 20th century.

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